CHAPTER I

British Romantic Poetry and the Orient: An Introduction
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This chapter explores the relationship between the British Romantic poetry and the Orient. During the British Romantic period, the era between the publication of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and the death of John Keats in 1821 or of Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1822, the Orient seemed to appear as a place of wonder, mystery, magic and enchantment, which had caught the imaginative eyes of British Romantic poets. The Romantic poets gained knowledge of the Orient by travelling to the Eastern countries or by reading books on the Orient. Little wonder then that some of them are seen grappling with remarkable themes, landscapes, characters, cultures, customs, traditions, diction, imagery and allusions related to the Orient in their poetry.

Let us take up these influential British Romantic poets – William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), Robert Southey (1774-1843), Thomas Moore (1779-1852), George Gordon Byron (1788-1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), and John Keats (1795-1821) in order to study the Oriental material in some of their poems.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is regarded as the lodestar of the Romantic period. Some of his poems contain references to the Orient. His “Book V” of *The Prelude* (1850), presents some Oriental matter. In “Book V”, he describes that he was reading a story of the ‘famous history of the errant knight’ from Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* while sitting ‘in a rocky cave’ surrounded by a seashore. He was enjoying the
story fully with its exotic setting as well as its uniqueness and flavor. But suddenly ‘sleep seiz’d him, and he pass’d into a dream’ (70). In his dream he saw himself in a boundless plain of sandy ‘wilderness’. He imagined that an uncouth shape had appeared in his dream riding on ‘a dromedary’ and ‘mounted high’.

Wordsworth clarifies that the uncouth appeared in his dream was none but ‘an Arab of the Bedouin Tribes’. What he perceives in his dream about this Arab Bedouin’s life and skills is articulated in the following lines:

He seem’d an Arab of the Bedouin Tribes,

A Lance he bore, and underneath one arm

A Stone; and, in the opposite hand, a Shell

Of surpassing brightness. Much rejoic’d

The dreaming Man that he should have a Guide

To lead him through the Desert.

(Book V, 78-83)

In the above lines, Wordsworth depicts an Arab Bedouin. The lance that the Arab Bedouin bore in his hand “suggests the Bedouin Arab’s life of invasion and conquest, as well as the Arab’s historically - rooted habit of blood - feud and revenge when any harm touches them” (Abdelwahed 100). The allusions to the stone and the shell give a romantic touch to the poem, reflecting Wordsworth’s interest in the accomplishments of the Orientals, especially the Arab Bedouin’s contribution and achievements in the field of knowledge.
The stone, which the Arab Bedouin carries through the wasteful desert and terms the ‘Euclid’s Elements’, stands for a book of ‘geometric Truth’, as it provides him with the knowledge of ‘something of more worth’. The shell, on the other hand, is ‘so beautiful in shape’ and ‘colour’ that it articulates a ‘loud prophetic blast of harmony’ in his heart, and foretells the message about the destruction of the world by a deluge. He relates the shell also to a book of poetry containing “the sense of wonder with reality” (Oueijan, The Progress 78). Moreover, both ‘unknown tongue’ and ‘sounds’ which seem to be audible in his dream add a sense of horror to the description.

Wordsworth points out that the nomadic Arab’s step ‘to bury those two books’, symbolically represented by the ‘one to be a stone’ and ‘the other a shell’, haunts him with anxiety in his dream. He removes this anxiety by having ‘a perfect faith’ in these two books and makes an attempt to share the Oriental knowledge. His admiration for the nomadic Arab permeates the following lines:

By love and feeling and internal thought,

Protracted among endless solitudes;

Have shap’d him, in the oppression of his brain,

Wandering upon this quest, and thus equipp’d.

And I have scarcely pitied him; have felt

A reverence for a being thus employ’d;

And thought that in the blind and awful lair

Of such a madness, reason did lie couch’d.
In his dream Wordsworth notes the accomplishments of the Arab Bedouin. But the sudden disappearance of the nomadic Arab seizes him much and he escapes from the fancy of his dream into the real world. Now he sees only Nature before his eyes. He lies on the lap of this Arabian desert and begins to recollect the memories of his dream. His references to the vast desert, ‘districts, cities, towns’ and indigenous vales of Arabia and the Arab Bedouin underscore his keen interest in the Orient.

Wordsworth’s poem, ‘The Armenian Lady’s Love’ (1830) celebrates the love story of the ‘daughter of the proud Soldan’. In this poem, Wordsworth describes how this Armenian lady ‘loved a Christian Slave’. Despite the fact that the ‘Christian Slave’ was a married man; she made an attempt to flee with him and ultimately received the love and respect of his wife.

In his sonnet “Crusades”, included in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets (1822), Wordsworth speaks of Islam and Muslims. In this sonnet, he notes that the ‘turbaned’ Muslims conquered the land of Spain and made it ‘their haven of salvation’. The allusion to the ‘Crescent’ glittering ‘on the towers of Spain’ reflects the power and glory of the Muslims. Another sonnet, “Richard I”, included also in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets (1822), creates the Oriental ambience with its ‘Cyprus’ setting.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is one of the representative poets of the Romantic period. He is known as “the high priest of Romanticism” (Saintsbury 656). He produced a number of poems – namely “Kubla Khan”, “The Rime of the Ancient
In 1797 when Coleridge’s health worsened, he took a dose of opium, from the effects of which he fell into a gentle slumber reading the lines: “Here the Kubla Khan commanded the palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with a wall” (qtd in Mays 511) in Samuel Purchas’s travel book, *Pilgrimage* (1613). In his dream, he planned composing a poem, entitled “Kubla Khan” but his dream was interrupted by a visitor. However, he jotted down what he recalled about his dream on a paper in the verse form and named the poem as “Kubla Khan”. Although the poem was completed in 1798, it was not published until 1816 when Lord Byron (1788-1824) insisted on its publication. Coleridge published the poem with following note:

“The following fragment is here published at the request of a poet of great and deserved celebrity, and as far as the Author’s own opinions are concerned, rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed poetic merits” (Mays 511).

The poem abounds in allusions to Oriental places, characters, images and events screened out through Coleridge’s mode of dream-like imagination. Amid the Oriental allusions, Coleridge first presents an account of Xanadu (present day known as Shantung province of China) which was the capital city during the reign of Kubla Khan (1162-1227), the great Mongol emperor of China, in the thirteenth century. He describes that Kubla Khan commanded that a ‘stately pleasure-dome’ to be built on the banks of ‘the sacred river’, the Alph which had its course in this Oriental city and flowed through ‘the caverns measureless to man’ and ultimately fell into a deep
‘sunless sea’. This city encompasses ten miles ‘of fertile ground’, with ‘gardens bright
with sinuous rills’, trees laden with fragrant flowers, and very ancient ‘forests’ and
‘sunny spots of greenery’. The expressions like ‘the caverns measureless to man’ and
‘sunless sea’ serve to create a haunted atmosphere in the landscape of the Xanadu and
hence provide a sense of wonder.

Coleridge offers next a description of the source and course of the Alph river
which symbolically represents the Alphesus, a river of Arcadia in Greece. He marks
the presence of ‘the hills’ with a ‘deep romantic chasm’, from which the Alph river
originates and flows down the slope, creating a ‘ceaseless turmoil’. The water of the
river rushes at such a high speed down its course that with every burst of the water
huge pieces of rocks are thrown up and down. The rhythm of rising and falling of
these big pieces of rocks in the course of the river seems to Coleridge that the ‘earth
in fast thick pants were breathing’. The river meanders five miles ‘with a mazy
motion’ through ‘wood and dale’ and lastly falls into ‘a lifeless ocean’ with a roaring
sound. The source and course of this Oriental river stir Coleridge’s imagination and
lend him with the atmosphere of magic and enchantment so characteristic of the
medieval period. In addition, Coleridge’s imagination is struck by a ‘woman wailing
for her demon lover’ on the bank of the Alph. This expression – ‘woman wailing for
demon-lover’ – thus conjures up the picture of a medieval woman wandering about,
moaning in search of ‘her demon-lover’ who had rejected her after having made love
to her in the dim light of ‘a waning moon’. The theme of the medieval woman
seduced by a demon in the human form also evokes mixed feelings of fear and terror
in the poem and highlights the significance of love, mystery, remoteness and magic of
both the medieval period and the Orient.
Coleridge’s depiction of the historical figure, Kubla Khan, lends the Oriental touch to this poem. He imagines how this Oriental king of the thirteenth century commanded that a ‘stately pleasure dome’ to be built in his capital city having a paradisal landscape. He recalls that his palace was located on the bank of a river, named Alph which came out of a hill with ‘deep romantic chasm’ and crossed five miles of distance through ‘wood and dale’, ultimately merging into a deep sea. In its setting, his palace was a wonder of human skill and seemed to be an earthly paradise in which he could have spent his life, full of vigour and romance. Meier notes that Kubla Khan becomes a “creative artist who gives concrete expression to the ideal forms of truth and beauty” (26-27). From the above discussion it emerges that Kubla Khan and his palace catch Coleridge’s imagination and transport him into a wonderful place of the Orient.

Coleridge creates an evocative atmosphere, consisting of the shadow of the ‘pleasure - dome’ falling on the gushing water of the river in the dim light of the ‘waning moon’. He takes note of how Kubla Khan heard his ancestral voices echoed through the bursting waters of the fountain and the deep caves near his ‘dome of pleasure’. These voices imply a message of war which Kubla Khan was to wage at the end of his knightly career. Kubla Khan’s ‘dome of pleasure’ and his ancestral voices thus supply to Coleridge a sense of mystery, tinged with horror and terror.

The last part of the poem highlights Coleridge’s vision of ‘an Abyssinian maid’ replacing the theme of Kubla Khan’s pleasure house by playing most ravishingly a song ‘of Mount Abora’ on her musical instrument. The charm of this Oriental girl’s ‘symphony and song’ captivates him so much that he promptly decides to build a spiritual dome in his fanciful imagination after the pattern of Kubla Khan’s ‘dome of pleasure’. The spiritual dome seems to him ‘a miracle of rare device',
because the dome is made of 'those caves of ice' and located on the sunny spots beside the Alph. He notes also that this spiritual dome would provide for him such food which is not the food of ordinary people but something exotic like 'honeydew' or some heavenly stuff which he calls 'the milk of Paradise'. His approach to create such a spiritual dome is thoroughly romantic, moving with its rapid succession.

Moreover, Coleridge's reference to the imagery of an Oriental mountain, named 'Mount Abora' on which the Abyssinian girl played her melodious song, reflects his association with the Orient. This mountain is perhaps a variation of John Milton's (1608-1674) 'Mount Amara' in *Paradise Lost* (1667) which is a fabled paradise in Ethiopia:

Nor where Abassin kings their issue guard,

Mount Amara, though this by some supposed

True Paradise, under the Ethiop line.

(*Paradise Lost*, Book 4, 280-282)

So on closer inspection, we can say that Coleridge harks back to the past for the depiction of an Oriental landscape, adding a romantic charm to the poem.

Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" displays a fusion of the Romantic spirit with the Oriental matter. This poem was published in *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 but was revised many times afterwards. The source of the story of the poem has been drawn from a travel book entitled, *A Voyage Round the World by the Way of the Great South Sea* by George Shelvocke (1675-1742) in which there is an incident of a sea captain shooting an albatross which hovered near his ship. In addition, some other themes, ideas, characters, landscapes and images of the poem resemble the tales
of the *Arabian Nights* which Coleridge had read admiringly before the composition of his poem.

The poem focuses on ‘an Ancient Mariner’, the central character of the poem. The Mariner has ‘long grey beard and glittering eye’. He meets three wedding guests on their way to a wedding ceremony and tells them a story of how his ship fell in a storm and was driven towards the south pole; how he and his fellow sailors fell in a series of sufferings after killing ‘an Albatross’ which hovered near the ship; and how he piloted the ship towards the north pole and ultimately returned to his native place. The course of his journey over the sea bears a close resemblance with “The Fifth Voyage of Sindbad the Seaman”, a tale in the *Arabian Nights* in which the hero, Sindbad the Seaman “sailed from city to city and from island to island and from sea to sea, viewing the cities and countries” of the Orient (Burton 48).

Although Coleridge depicts the Mariner and his sailing in the mode of the Sindbad’s voyage, he identifies the Mariner with Christian values. He describes that the Mariner with his ‘long grey beard and glittering eye’ accompanies his fellow sailors to a sea voyage. His ship sails smoothly in the presence of a fair and good wind towards the equatorial region, but is suddenly driven by a strong tempest towards the South Pole, covered with ‘both mist and snow’ and ‘wondrous cold’. It is here that a sea-bird called albatross appears and the Mariner regards it as a bird of good omen, because it starts guiding the ship towards the northern pole. Once provoked by an evil thought, the Mariner kills this albatross with his ‘cross - bow’. Coleridge reports that as he commits a sin, he suffers a lot in the course of his voyage. The way he suffers provides an essence of mystery and supernaturalism, so characteristic of Romanticism.
Coleridge marks the Mariner's compassionate nature which is rooted in his awareness of God's mercy and in his love for all slimy creatures appearing before him on the boundless sea. The moment the Mariner starts feeling compassionate for God's creation, the dead body of the albatross suddenly drops from his neck into the deep sea, thus marking the end of his sin. At last he finds redemption from his sin of killing the albatross and triumphantly pilots his ship towards his native place. Bowra points out that the Mariner's triumph "presents a series of incredible events through a method of narration which makes them not only convincing and exciting but in some sense a criticism of life" (55).

In the poem the albatross plays a crucial role in the course of the Mariner's journey over the sea. The name of this bird is derived from the Arabic term _al-ghttas_, meaning a legendary sea-bird in the Arabic fables. Coleridge perhaps takes the name of albatross from "the list of Arabic loanwords in English" (Devereux 170) and shares his own interpretation of it in the poem. The albatross appears through 'fog and mist' at a time, when the Mariner's ship was diverted from the equatorial line to the southern pole by the heavy blow of a tempest and stopped sailing for a while. The albatross receives welcome from the Mariner, because there was no other life visible on the sea except the Mariner and his fellow sailors. It eats food provided by the sailors and guides the ship to the north. But the moment it is killed and hung around the Mariner's neck, it is a symbol of the Mariner's sin. The drop of the dead body of the albatross into the sea marks the end of the Mariner's sin. So, the stories of both the ancient Mariner and the albatross, which Coleridge associates with his thematic concerns, draw certain strands of the Oriental spirit in the poem.

His other poem, "Lewti; or, the Circassian Love - Chant" which was published first in _The Morning Post_ in 1798, celebrates a lyrical love-chant which Coleridge
composed for ‘Lewti’, a woman who appeared in his dream as the beloved. In this poem Coleridge marks the presence of ‘Lewti’ associated with a magical spirit of the medieval period. Moreover, scenes and images, including those of the moon shining over the ‘Tamaha’s stream’, the floating cloud, ‘a breezy jasmine bower’ and the nightingale’s sweet song echoing through the whole landscape in particular, provide an exotic atmosphere throughout the poem.

Coleridge’s another poem “Mahomet” (1799) contains references to Islam and Muhammed, the Prophet of Islam. In this poem Coleridge depicts the Prophet without any bias. He extols the nature of the Prophet’s ‘blessing’ which eradicated ‘the blasphemous rites of the Pagan’ and of the ‘idolatrous Christians’ in particular. In addition, the allusion to ‘Mecca’, the most sacred place in Islam, lends an authentic Islamic touch to the poem.

Robert Southey (1774-1843)

Robert Southey (1774-1843) is another influential poet of the British Romantic literature. He produced a number of poems namely, “Thalaba the Destroyer” (1801), “Chronicle of the Cid” (1808), “The Curse of Kehama” (1810), “Roderick, the Last of the Goths” (1814) and “Muhammed” (1845) which display his interest in the Orient. “Thalaba the Destroyer” (1801) is an epic poem in which the young Muslim hero, Thalaba of Arab descent defeats and kills the enemies of his relatives through a series of struggle. Southey represents Thalaba’s struggles in the mode of Islamic Jihad. He uses also references to the magic ring and magic boat etc. pointing to their association with the Orient. Yet he combines “his knowledge of Islam with his own religious precepts to construct an Orientalist fantasy rather than provide a realistic reflection of the Islamic faith or Arabian life” (Bolton).
"Chronicle of the Cid" (1808) is one of Southey’s heroic poems, which celebrates the history of Spain. It discusses how the hero Cid fought against the Moors and gained independence of his native land Spain. In this poem Southey exhibits to an extent a distorted image of Islam through Cid’s adventures and achievements.

"The Curse of Kehama" is another Oriental epic poem which Southey composed in 1810 and dedicated to his friend Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864). It has twenty four sections and deals with Hindu religion. The story starts with the funeral ceremony of Kehama’s son Arvalan whom the peasant, Ladurlad kills in order to save his daughter Kailyal’s honour. It relates the sufferings of Ladurlad caused by the curse of Kehama; and ends with Ladurlad’s release and Kehama’s sufferings. In this poem Southey depicts these figures – Casyapa, Camadeva, Yama, Indra, etc. from the Hindu mythology and uses allusions to Mount Calasy (Kailas), Padalon (the netherworld), Swerga (Paradise) which point to his interest in Hindu religion. Also he describes some Hindu ritualistic practices – Sati, ‘Jag-Naut’ – which the Indian Hindus performed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Southey’s next Oriental epic poem is “Roderick, the Last of the Goths” (1814). This poem is on the theme of the liberation of Spain. The story of this poem draws how the hero Roderick fights against the Moorish army, gets wounded by the Moors in the battle, liberates Spain by defeating the Moorish army, and finally enters monastery. It reflects Roderick’s “struggle to overthrow a powerful Oriental tyrant” (Al-Olaqi 391). In this poem Southey depicts a negative image of Oriental society as he describes the Muslims and the Moors who held their dominion over Spain.
“Muhammed” (1845) is an unfinished Oriental poem which reflects Southey’s respect for Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. In this poem Southey does two things: first he praises the life-style and leadership qualities of Muhammad, and second he draws a “view which seems to regard Muhammad as an originally biblical prophet, who, because of certain local necessities, made his religion depart from its precursor, Christianity” (Sharafuddin 90).

From the above discussion it emerges that Southey includes Oriental content and context in his poems by exploring “deeply ambiguous cultural cosmopolitanism that lay at the heart of ‘English’ romanticism” (Pratt xxvi).

Thomas Moore (1779-1852)

Thomas Moore (1779-1852) is another Romantic poet who never visited the Orient, but he received fame as “a better adapter of Oriental diction and theme to English verse” (Yohannan 155). Like many other Romantic poets, he depicts Oriental aspects in some of his poems. “Lalla Rookh” (1817) is one of his best known Oriental poems which he produced at the behest of his friend Lord Byron (1788-1824). In this poem Moore presents a prose narrative how the heroine Lalla Rookh undertakes her journey from Delhi to Kashmir in order to marry the king of Bucharia, and how she is diverted by the four Oriental tales – “The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan”, “The Paradise and the Peri”, “The Fire-Worshippers”, and “The Light of the Harem” - told by a Kashmiri poet named Feramoz, with whom she falls in love during her journey and who turns out to be her intended bridegroom king in disguise.

The four narrative tales of the poem exhibit Moore’s interest in Oriental characters, landscapes, customs, manners and traditions. The first tale is supposed to be taken from the “Islamic history and is based on the revolt of Al-Muqanna against
the third Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mahadi” (Yaqub 53). This tale deals with the veiled prophet Mokanna, who is “so called because of his habit of wearing a veil over his face in order to conceal according to his followers; its radiance, according to his opponents; its deformities” (Lewis 111). Mokanna is presented as a cruel Oriental despot. He has a ‘rich divan’ (a Persian word used for a palace). His voice resembles with ‘deep and dread’ voice of Monkar (in Islamic belief, Monkar is regarded as an angel who interrogates the dead in graves). His objective is to cause the battle of ‘Beder’ against the Muslim emperor Al-Mahadi and to wrest power. He uses beautiful women of his ‘harem’ (a secluded house used for Muslim women) for tempting the Muslim soldiers to join his side. He misguides these soldiers into fighting his battles. Gregory notes that Mokanna “mirrors Milton’s Satan, as, although venomous, he is portrayed as audacious, defiant and supreme exploiter of the evils of humanity”. When his followers come to know about his villainy, they attack his ‘harem’ and he commits suicide by drowning himself in a burning cauldron.

In this tale Moore presents the love story of Azim and Zelica. Azim is a Muslim soldier. He loves Zelica and accepts her as ‘his own dear maid’. His patriotic sense of duty compels him to separate from Zelica for time being and to join Mokanna’s forces. He fights in many battles for Mokanna. When he comes to know that Mokanna is the villain who had separated him from Zelica and misguided him, he joins the forces of Al-Mahadi and attacks Mokanna’s palace. He is shocked very much when he identifies the dead body of Zelica, and spends the rest of his life, seeking redemption for the soul of Zelica.

In this tale Zelica is the heroine whom Moore invests with some Oriental traits. She is a beautiful young Muslim woman. She uses ‘leaves of henna’ (a tropical shrub) for dyeing her hair and nails. She uses ‘Kohol’s jetty dye’ (a kind of eye
cosmetics used by women in the Orient). She makes up herself in a way that she appears to be one of the ‘Houris’ (a word used in the Quran to describe the virgins of paradise). Moore compares her beauty with that of Leila (a popular female figure depicted in Arabic and Persian literature). It is the charm of her ‘bright eyes’ by which she wins young Azim’s heart.

Zelica leads her life dictated by the traditional Islamic belief system. She is a devoted faithful beloved. When she feels uncertain of her lover Azim’s return from the battle, she does not shed any drop of tears but only invokes ‘Allah’. She believes that Azim was killed in the battle. She joins Mokaana’s palace as a maid in the hope of becoming the bride of her lover in the Hereafter. When Mokanna uses her “as a cynical combination of inspiring goddess-figure and sexual lure, in order to eroticize his cult of revolution” (Vail, Para12), she becomes aware about Mokanna’s real deceptive nature. She convinces her fellow maids and thus raises voice against the veiled prophet.

The second tale of the poem, entitled “The Paradise and the Peri” presents how the Peri (a term signifying a spirit in the Persian mythology) gets a chance of entering the gates of paradise by bringing ‘the gift that is most dear to Heaven’.

The third tale, “The Fire-Worshippers” recounts the story of the Arab ruler Al-Hassan’s daughter Hinda and the leader of the Fire Worshippers, Hafed. In this tale Moore describes how Hafed frees his homeland from the Arab Muslims led by the queen-like personality Hinda. The story is the pretext for relating the love affair of two Irish patriots, Sarah Curran and Robert Emnet. Yaqub points out the “analogy between the struggle of the Ghebers against the Arab tyrants and the struggle of the Irish people for religious and political freedom from the British rule. By attacking the
Arab rulers, Moore in fact condemns the oppressors of his own country and thus escapes the fear of censor” (60-61).

The last tale of the poem, “The Light of the Harem” portrays the story of the quarrel between Jahangir (1569–1627), the fourth Moghul emperor of India and his wife, Noormahal (popularly known as Noor Jahan) and their mutual understanding at the valley of Kashmir. The setting of this tale lends a real charm of the Orient to the poem. In this tale Moore alludes to legendary figures like Jamshid, Solomon etc, and exotic palaces, gardens and flowers.

All the above mentioned tales act as a connecting thread to the prose narrative of the poem. To sum up, these tales of the poem contain “the stock details of what the East was supposedly like: doe-eyed women in abundance, languishing with love and expiring of desire, wicked men who kept them in captivity, rich banquets gorgeous brocades and cashmeres, jewels, perfumes, music, dance, and poetry” (Kabbani 34). Moreover, Moore’s uses of footnotes, explanations, similes, etc. regarding the Oriental landscapes, characters, customs, traditions and manners in all the tales constitute his Orientalism.

“Loves of the Angels” (1823) is another Oriental poem which Moore composed on the “Eastern story of the angels Harut and Marut, and the Rabbinical fictions of the loves of Uzziel and Shamchazai” (278). It contains the love story of the three fallen angels. It portrays how the three celestial angels fell in love with the three earthly women and how they recall their love for which they lost heaven. Jones H criticizes the story of the poem for its “blending of heavenly eroticism and theology” (218). In its Orientalized edition, Moore however changed “all Biblical allusions into Islam ones and supplied annotations which refer to the Quran and Prophet
Muhammad and these references in turn are themselves marred by a polemical note” (Siddiquee 217).

“Gazel”, “Cashmerian”, “Ode to the Sublime Porte” are other poems by Moore which contain comparatively lesser Oriental material. Moore wrote “Gazel” in the style of Persian lyric verse ghazal. This poem is addressed to ‘Maami’ and alludes ‘Yemen’s vale’ where the exotic roses bloom beautifully and the nightingale produces its sweet song. In “Cashmerian” Moore alludes to the air which blows over the valley of Kashmir. The “Ode to the Sublime Porte” deals with the ‘Great Sultan’ who announces his Oriental decree in his ‘state compositions’.

George Gordon Byron (1788-1824)

Among all the Romantic poets who possessed the first-hand knowledge of and had their familiarity with the Orient, the most significant one is George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) popularly known as Lord Byron. It is because he had made an extensive reading of “the books – particularly travel books written by people more experienced than himself – to get his ideas about the Orient in context” (Cochran 3). His study of the travel books prompted him to visiting many countries – Portugal, Spain, Malta, Greece, Belgium, Turkey and Albania. The experience which he had during the course of his journey stirred much his imagination. According to Oueijan:

Lord Byron was the only Englishman who truly experienced the Orient by assimilating himself into the culture...Unlike those who actually toured the East for merely political and/or religious propaganda and presented distorted images of the Eastern world and its peoples, or those who for purely academic reasons employed their time in recording their observations of its antiquities and archeology, Byron spent his time in living, enjoying, and studying...
Oriental life and culture for its own wealth as well as for its existing exoticism

(A Compendium 18).


During his tour to the Orient, Byron had witnessed an actual incident of the drowning of a Turkish girl into the sea for her involvement in an illicit love affair. This constitutes the framework of his poem, “The Giaour” (1813). He published the poem with a subtitle “A Fragment of a Turkish Tale”. In this poem he depicts the story “of a female slave, Leila, who loves the Giaour... and is in consequence bound and thrown in a sack into the sea by her Turkish lord, Hassan. The Giaour avenges her by killing Hassan, then in grief and remorse banishes himself to a monastery” (Drabble and Stringer 280).

In this poem Byron marks the presence of Leila, Hassan and the Muslim fisherman with some Oriental traits and of the Giaour with both the Eastern and Western creed. Leila, the heroine of the poem, embodies some conventional features of an Oriental female. She is a woman of fair complexion. She is described with the help of Oriental images. Byron compares her ‘eye’s dark charm’ with ‘that of the Gazelle’; the blush of ‘her fair cheek’ with the ‘young pomegranate’s blossom’; her beauty with the ‘purple wing’ of the butterfly found in the ‘emerald meadows of Kashmeer’. She has long hair and ‘her feet’ are more ‘whiter than the mountain sleet’.
It is her beauty which brings about her marriage with the Turkish lord, Hassan. Although she is a beautiful woman, she does not have any power to live her life. She feels herself to be exploited at the hands of her husband. Her beauty thus seems meaningless to her. She continues her life living passively in her husband’s harem, which stands for “the most prevalent symbol in Western myths constructed around the theme of Muslim sensuality” (Peirce 3). But her life turns her into a hope when ‘her fair cheek’s unfading hue’ attracts an attention of the Venetian man, the Giaour. She becomes aware of the Giaour’s love and chooses herself to live the rest of her life with the Giaour. However, when she makes an attempt to break the bondage of her husband and escape from her husband’s harem in a male dress for the Giaour, she is caught by her husband. She is condemned by the customs of the Turkish society for her relationship with the Giaour. Oueijan comments that to “the Giaour Leila’s love substitutes for the wine he does not taste; to Hassan her sin is the black spot which he must wash away” (The Progress 97). Byron points out that Leila is used as an object both by Hassan and the Giaour.

Byron depicts Hassan’s character with features of a typical Turkish man. Hassan is black in colour. He appears as ‘an Emir’ wearing ‘the garb of green’, ‘turban’, and ‘palampore’ in ‘flowing robe’, ‘calpac’, and ‘caftan’. He curls ‘his beard with ire’. He strictly follows the Islamic laws. His strong faith in his cultural tradition of honour becomes clear that when he finds his wife, Leila breaking the bondage and courting her Venetian lover, the Giaour, he drowns her into the sea with the help of the Muslim fisherman at night, thus proving himself to be a ‘true Osmanli’. He appears as a faithful Turkish Muslim and he hates the Giaour for his ‘vile faith’. ‘pallid brow’, and ‘evil eye’; ‘his eye’ glares ‘with fierce fire’ at the time his rage; his ‘frown and furious word’ are ‘dreaded more than hostile sword’ which metaphorically
reflects his 'stern' personality. However, he dies like a true Muslim calling 'the Prophet' and the 'Alla':

He called the Prophet, but his power
Was vain against the vengeful Giaour:
He called on Alla – but the word
Arose unheeded or unheard.

(The Giaour, 679-682)

The Muslim fisherman is another important character, for he had watched the Giaour killing Hassan:

Woe to that hour he came or went!
The curse for Hassan's sin was sent
To turn a palace to a tomb;
He came, he went, like the Simoom,
That harbinger of Fate and gloom,
Beneath whose widely-wasting breath
The very cypress droops to death –

(The Giaour, 279-285)

He calls the Giaour a 'false infidel' for having an illegitimate relationship with Leila. He 'abhors' the Giaour's race. He believes in the Oriental superstition of the 'evil eye' which he marks in the Giaour. He condemns not only the Giaour for his sin of
killing Hassan, but also Hassan for his ‘stern’ attitude, leading to the tragic death of Leila. Moreover, he despises Leila for her tendency to break the bondage of Hassan and to involve herself in an illicit affair with the Giaour. His disdainful attitude to the Giaour, Hassan and Leila thus provides a colour of personal and racial stereotype to the poem.


Byron’s depiction of Giaour, a name given by the Muslim fisherman, has some threads of both the Eastern and Western creed. The Giaour appears riding his sable steed towards the Hassan’s palace. The movement of his ‘startled steed’ is compared with ‘the hurled on high jerreed’. He has black hair and ‘evil eye’. He is invested with the ‘Christian crest and haughty mien’. His physical presence near the Hassan’s palace is likened to ‘the Simoom’ making him “an agent of fate and a force of nature that changes irretrievably the order of things” (Kidwai, Orientalism 155).

The Giaour seems to be a worshipper of love and beauty. He is fascinated with Leila’s ‘eye’s dark charm’ and ‘her fair cheek’s unfading hue’. He proposes to Leila
for her hand yet this is dismissed by the honour code of Turkish society, for Leila is already a wife to Hassan. When he sees Leila being exploited at the hands of Hassan, he makes a plan for taking Leila away from Hassan’s palace. The news of his plan reaches Hassan and he is found guilty of his secret relationship with Leila. He is labelled as the ‘false infidel’ and ‘the accursed Giaour’ and ‘the faithless Giaour’ by the Muslim fisherman and the distraught Hassan. The Giaour speaks of his relationship with Leila as pure as Hassan’s. He passes a scornful remark against Hassan and calls Hassan as ‘ungrateful fool’. However, when he receives the news of Leila’s killing by Hassan, he prepares himself for avenging Leila. He enters Hassan’s palace wearing an ‘Amaut garb’ (a typical Albanian cloth) and kills Hassan with his ‘jet-black barb’. He confesses his sin of killing Hassan, for Leila was ‘a form of life and light’ to him. Hence it is noticed that his “method of attack is consistent with the Albanian practices” (Wiener 149). He pays this tribute to Leila:

But say, oh say, hers was not Guilt!

She was my Life’s unerring Light:

That quenched – what beam shall break my night?

Oh! would it shone to lead me still,

Although to death or deadliest ill!

(The Giaour, 1145-1149)

In this poem Byron displays his interest in Islamic traditions and culture. Amid all his references to the traditional perspectives of Islam, the most prominent are: ‘crescent’, ‘Rhamazan’ (the month of fasting observed by the Muslims) and ‘Bairam’ (the festival celebrated at the end of the Muslim month of fasting). He notes
that the Muslim fisherman looks at the ‘crescent’ moon appearing on the sky before
the Muslim month of fasting and the ‘Mosque’s high lamps’ through ‘the olive wood’.
He reports also that the Giaour joins the Muslims during the celebration of ‘the
Bairam’s feast’, thus adding local colour to the poem. In addition, Byron employs
‘Muftis’, ‘palampore’, and ‘salam’.

Byron’s “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” (1812-19) has an exotic colour with its
topographical representation. In the first canto Byron depicts the adventures of a
fictitious character, named Harold, in Portugal, Spain, Malta, Albania, Belgium,
Greece, Turkey, the Rhine, Jura and the Alps. More importantly, he “describes
Albania and its wild and exotically clad people and laments the lost liberty of his
beloved Greece” (Roodi 63). In the second canto he describes Harold’s journey
through Albania, Greece and parts of the Orient. In this canto Byron portrays Ali
Pasha, the Albanian leader whom he had met in 1809. He alludes to Hafiz, a great
Persian poet. He makes some other references to Islam and Muslim, underscoring his
interest in the Orient. The remaining cantos contain lesser Oriental material than the
first two cantos, yet these are remarkable for their Oriental setting.

“The Bride of Abydos” (1813) is another one of Byron’s Turkish tale. In it
Byron dramatizes a tale of the beautiful daughter of the ‘old Giaffir’, Zuleika who
loves Selim, son of her father’s brother Abdallah, and dies immediately after
receiving news of Selim’s killing by her father’s men. It is Byron’s only Turkish
poem in which “the characters and the costume and the tale itself…are Mussulman”
(Marchand 175).
“The Corsair” (1814) is the third poem, included in Byron’s Turkish Tales. *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* states: “Conrad, a pirate chief, is warned that the Turkish Pacha is about to descend upon his island. He leaves his beloved Medora, arrives at the Pacha’s rallying-point, and introduces himself as a dervish escaped from the pirates. His plans go amiss. He is wounded and taken prisoner, but he has rescued Gulnare, the chief slave in the Pacha’s harem, from imminent death. She falls in love with him and brings him a dagger with which he may kill the Pacha in his sleep. Conrad resists, whereupon she kills the Pacha. They escape and arrive at the pirate island to find Medora dead from grief. Conrad disappears and is never heard of again” (158). Like “The Giaour”, this poem also introduces characters, customs, diction, adventures, imagery, allusions and landscape pertaining to the Orient.

“Lara” (1814) is Byron’s another poem. In this poem Byron describes rebellious adventures of a non-Oriental hero, Count Lara having some resemblance with Conrad, the heroic figure in “The Corsair”. He talks about the Greek people who raise their voice against the Turkish rule.

Byron’s next Oriental poem is “The Siege of Corinth” (1816). He composed the narrative of this poem on the basis of a historical event which occurred in 1715. This poem highlights the nationalistic attitude of the Venetian people and their conquest over the Turks.

“The Tale of Calil” (1816), too reflects Byron’s view about the Orient. Its setting is a place called Samarkand that has some resemblance to the Central Asia. The theme of the tale is “vaguely Arabic or Persian; the political plot of the story, meanwhile, can be traced to contemporary accounts of decadent Moghul princes in India, and to Timur, their Mongol ancestor” (Almeida and Gilpin 55).
Byron’s “Beppo: A Venetian Story” (1818) also displays his interest in the Orient. He wrote this poem on the model “of the Italian Renaissance authors of burlesque epic, Luigi Pulci and Francesco Berni” (Daiches 928). It tells the story how a Venetian wife fell in love with a servant at a Venetian carnival in the absence of her husband, Beppo who was presumed dead in a shipwreck, and how her husband returned to her in an Ottoman garb and confronted the servant.

“Don Juan” (1819-24) is another famous epic poem which consists of sixteen complete cantos (I – XVI) and a fragmented canto (XVII). It presents the adventures and achievements of the heroic figure, Don Juan, and also demonstrates Byron’s interest in the Orient and its culture. In this poem Byron explores Oriental characters, setting, narrative and imagery. His Muslim characters are: Baba, Gulbeyaz, Sultan, and Leila. He employs Oriental material in order to explore political, social and religious issues of his time.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) is another representative poet of the Romantic era. Some of his poems, namely “The Indian Serenade” (1811), “Zeinab and Kathema” (1811), “Queen Mab” (1813), “Alator” (1816), “Revolt of Islam” (1817), and “From the Arabic: An Imitation” (1821) reflect his interest in the Orient. “The Indian Serenade” (1811) is a lyrical love poem in which he represents the Orient with reference to Champak (a word used to denote an evergreen Oriental tree with yellow-coloured flowers of sweet fragrance). He reports that the flowers of this Oriental tree bloom beautifully in the dark starlit night and spread their fragrance with the ‘wandering airs’. He draws the equation of the ‘Champak odours’ with the sweet song of the nightingale, a favourite image often used by most of the Romantic poets.
He describes that even the strong fragrance of these flowers fails to wake the lover from the dream of his beloved.

Shelley’s next poem, “Zeinab and Kathema” (1811) depicts two characters – Kathema and Zeinab. Kathema is the hero of this poem. He is seen standing on the sandbank of Cashmire (now known as Kashmir), recalling the ‘sweet memories’ of Zeinab, his childhood beloved. He felt excited by the past memories of ‘life’s unveiling morn with all its bliss and care’ in his youth. He thought that the ‘childhood’s moments’ shared with Zeinab gave him both ‘life and freedom’. But he fainted with ‘the veil of hope’ when he received the news of Zeinab’s abduction by the ‘Christian murderers’. He stood before ‘the world’s wide and drear expanse’ and imagined himself ‘so prompt to blight, so strong to save’ his beloved. He made a plan of journey, starting from his native Cashmire’s vale’ to ‘England’s shore’ for searching Zeinab. He felt weak with ‘cold and an unappeased hunger’ while steering his ship towards the ‘far England’s shore’. But he never lost his ‘hope’ of finding Zeinab. He overcame all the hurdles supplemented with the ‘gleams of baleful light’, the ‘pestilential mists, the darkness and the woe’. He reached the ‘wild heath’ of England on ‘an evening’ of ‘dark December’ and kissed ‘the soil in which his hopes were sown’. It was the ‘wild heath’ where he became more curious to seek Zeinab, yet his ‘strength; sensation failed in total languishment’. When he fell asleep on the ground, ‘a damp deathy smell’ suddenly awoke him. He wandered over the whole landscape and finally saw ‘a dead and naked female form’ hanging ‘from a gibbet high’. He identified the ‘shapeless visage’ of the ghastly dead body with that of Zeinab in ‘the fitful moonbeams’. He felt mentally disturbed and uttered the following lines:

Yes! In those orbs once bright with life and love
Now full-fed worms bask in unnatural light;

That neck on which his eyes were wont to rove

In rapture, changed by putrefaction’s blight,

Now rusts the ponderous links that creak beneath

Its weight, and turns to life the fruitful sport of death

(Zeinab and Kathema, 145-50)

The above passage hints also that Kathema became paralyzed without Zeinab and hanged himself next to Zeinab’s corpse in order to join her as ‘corruption’s prey, or Heaven’s happy guest’. Shelley depicts the image of a brave Oriental lover in Kathema.

Zeinab, a name which Shelley perhaps borrows from Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) has some Oriental traits. She is a beautiful young woman. She attracts the attention of Kathema with her beauty and Kathema falls in love with her. Her physical beauty is likened to the natural beauty prevailing in the ‘Cashmere’s vale’ during the autumn season. Moreover, it is her beauty that prompts Kathema to search for her after her kidnapping by the ‘Christian murderers’.

Throughout the poem Zeinab appears as an innocent as well as a brave woman. She led her life in her own style. When she was kidnapped by the ‘Christian murderers’ and taken ‘to grace the robbers’ land’, her ‘innocent habits were all rudely shriven’. She made attempts to fight with the ‘human race’ seeming ‘leagued against her weal’. But she fell in a ‘childish night of guileless love’ turning her later to ‘prostitution, crime and woe’. When she realized the real value of her ‘life and love’,
she waged ‘ruthless war’ with ‘arms of bold and bloody crime’ against the treachery. But she was killed and her dead body was attached with ‘a gibbet high swung to the sullen storm’.

True to the convention of literary Orientalism, the locale of the poem stands out for its exotic wealth. Shelley refers to the valley of Kashmir with its flora growing naturally in the autumn season. He points to the abundance of fair flowers and ripe fruits in the landscape. More significantly, he reinforces the halo of the locale with a reference to ‘Heaven and Earth are ever bright and kind’. Nevertheless, the sudden arrival of ‘chilling wind’ from ‘Albion’s changeful skies’ creates an obstacle and ‘natural spirits’ disappear from the vale of Kashmir and at the same time ‘forms unpinched by frost or hunger gripe’ appear on the landscape. In this poem thus “the East/West dichotomy teems with colonial implications metaphorically grafted onto a similar moral paradigm: the Indian ‘East’ is a vanishing utopia, the British ‘West’ the expanding world of sinfulness destroying an Indian Eden” (Johnson 223).

“Queen Mab” (1813) is Shelley’s first mature work that is somewhat a parallel to Sir William Jones’s “The Palace of Fortune: An Indian Tale” (1769) in its thematic context. Khan notes that “both poems tell of a sleeping maiden (Ianthe in QM), who is taken up to a fairy-court by a supernatural figure (the goddess Fortune in Jones’s poem; the queen of spirits Queen Mab in Shelley’s poem) and who is shown realistic visions by the supernatural figure, who seems to know all about mankind” (47). This poem introduces some Oriental vocabulary and the characters with the Oriental spirit. The locale of the poem is also important for its Oriental setting.

“Alastor” (1816) is another long poem in which Shelley represents the Orient in the form of a speaker who recounts a series of journeys of the young fictitious
‘Poet’ to some Oriental countries, including those of Arabia, Persia, ‘the wild
Carmanian waste’, ‘the aerial mountains’ pouring down ‘Indus and Oxus from their
icy caves’ and ‘the vale of Cashmere’ (presently known as Kashmir). The ‘Poet’
undertook his journey to ‘seek strange truths in undiscovered lands’. He rejected ‘an
Arab maiden’ who secretly liked him and brought food for him ‘from her father’s
tent’. More importantly, he had a visionary dream in which he saw a ‘veiled maid’
singing a melodious song to him on the theme of ‘knowledge and truth and virtue’
and ‘lofty hopes of divine liberty’ and fell in love with her. When he awoke from his
dream, he found himself alone and was left with the question: ‘Whither have fled
The hues of heaven that canopied his bower / Of yesternight?’ (197 – 199). He started
searching for the ideal vision of the ‘veiled maid’. The scenery of the poem is
Oriental. Kidwai notes that this poem “shows the influence of Thalaba both in
employing Oriental mythology and in its imperialist tenor” (Literary 25).

Shelley’s epic poem “The Revolt of Islam”, originally appeared entitled as
“Laon and Cythna” in 1817. In this poem Shelley depicts the theme of the French
Revolution, though in an Oriental setting. Jones F explains that the “scene is supposed
to be laid in Constantinople and modern Greece, but without much attempt at minute
delineation of Mahometan manners. It is in fact a tale illustrative of such a Revolution
as might be supposed to take place in an European nation” (563-4).

In another poem, “From the Arabic: An Imitation” (1821) Shelley shows his
interest in the Orient by borrowing the material from Terrick Hamilton’s Antar, a
Bedoueen Romance (1819).
John Keats (1795-1821)

John Keats (1795-1821) is an important poet in the “group of second-generation Romantic poets who blossomed early and died young” (Daiches 915). He drew paradigms of the Orient in “To the Nile” (1818), “Book IV” of *Endymion* (1818) and “The Cap and Bells” (1819). His sonnet, “To the Nile” which he composed in 1818 is reflective of his interest in the Nile. He imagines that the Nile originates with ‘pleasant sunrise’ from the mountains of Africa and flows through a wide desert. The African farmers harvest the crops on the fertile lands of the river with hard ‘toil’, and the river becomes a subject of ‘honour’ in their life. In contrast, the river creates ‘a barren waste’ between ‘Cairo and Decan’ when it follows a long drought.

Keats’s imagination which rises from ‘the old Moon-mountains’ leads him to be an African traveler calling the fertile lands located by the Nile ‘fruitful’. The Nile acts as a muse for his sonnet, although its mysterious course halts his imagination at the time of making ‘a barren waste’. The discourse of his thought over Africa and the Nile demonstrates his creative imagination.

In this sonnet Keats makes an effort to identify himself with Africa and the ‘inward span’ of his poetic imagination with that of Nile’s journey into Africa. Wassil rightly comments that “Keats’s representation of the Nile in his sonnet “To the Nile” (February 1818) is a fusion of dichotomous perspectives, the pragmatic English and the fascinated French, and thus an attempt at reviving Oriental commonplaces but without the baggage of imperial intention” (432).

In “Book IV” of *Endymion* (1818) Keats represents the Orient in the form of “an Indian Maid, lonely and hungering for human love” (Bate 190). The Indian maid appears with
...No fair dawn

Of life from charitable voice? No sweet saying

To set my dull and sadden’d spirit playing?

No hand to toy with mine? No lips so sweet

That I may worship them? No eyelids meet

To twinkle on my bosom? ...

(Endymion, Book IV, 44-49)

From the above quoted lines it becomes clear that Keats marks her with humble nature. He illustrates further that her sudden appearance captures the attention of the shepherd hero, Endymion at a time when he, being in love with Cynthia (goddess of the moon) in his dream, falls under an attack of long-suffering, out of his love for Cynthia.

Keats identifies the presence of this Indian maid with vibrant nature of her ‘Fair Melody’, signifying some relief for Endymion. Her song that Endymion listens to reduces his intense sufferings and he addresses her: ‘I must be thy sad servant evermore’ (303). The course of his sufferings out of his love for Cynthia thereafter diverts and he finds himself in love with this Indian maid asking: ‘Wilt fall asleep? (320).

Keats points out that Endymion’s falling in love with the Indian maid stimulates anxiety in him for Cynthia, leading him to be in the divided soul. He relates the fact that when Endymion goes to the ‘Cave of Quietude’ in order to seek himself out of his intense sufferings, he feels the sensuous presence of the Indian maid. The
shepherd hero recovers from his search of being in Cynthia’s love and announces his acceptance of the earthly love of the maid. The moment he goes with a purpose of meeting the maid at a place filled with ‘the gloomy wood in wonderment’, he finds the maid suddenly transforming into Cynthia. Thus he reaches his ideal of union with Cynthia through his acceptance of earthly love.

Throughout the Book IV of the *Endymion* Keats states that the love between Endymion and the Indian maid provides sensuous space for his imagination. His allusions and references to ‘an eastern voice of solemn mood’, ‘Ganges and their pleasant fields’, ‘Indian streams’, ‘Asian elephants’, ‘Arabian prance’, ‘Osirian Egypt’, ‘Abyssinia’, ‘Old Tartary’, and the ‘swan of Ganges’ add Oriental touch to the poem. Moreover, the expressions like ‘dewy forest’, ‘air of visions’, ‘the monstrous swell’, ‘dove’s nest among summer trees’, ‘fairy fishes from the mountain tarn’, ‘amber shells’ and ‘enchanted wells’ reflect the horizon of his imagination related to an exotic world. The Indian setting acts as a “key to the specific enabling forces behind the joyous expressions of the final book” (Watkins 47). However, in this book Keats’s “Orientalism is primarily a question of style, an imperial heraldry uncomplicated by the anxiety of empire” (Leask 125).

In “The Cap and Bells” (1819) Keats introduces Oriental material with reference to the Indian court and its emperor. The locale and machinery also play a significant role in its Oriental context.


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