Chapter V
Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Eastern Muse

The Anglo-centrism and Evangelism evident in the works of Southey is also remarkably present in the writings of his friend and collaborator Coleridge, and equally strong is the presence of the East in his poetry. Working in close tandem they influenced each other and their collaborative reading on the East bore fruits as they used the knowledge gained from their collaborative readings in their poetry. Although they worked with almost similar materials, the results were not identical. Whereas Southey wrote long narrative epics, Coleridge’s attempts at it were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, a large number of Coleridge’s poems, such as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, “Christabel,” “Kubla Khan,” “The Pains of Sleep,” and “The Lewtii” are clearly marked by an Eastern influence.

Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*\(^1\) has been conventionally interpreted as a spiritual autobiography—an inner drama of sin, punishment and redemption. It seems that the 1817 version of the poem published in *Sybilline Leaves* has dominated the critical discourses that centre on reading the poem as a spiritual autobiography. In 1817 Coleridge added the explanatory glosses to the poem, leading the reader’s attention to the sin-punishment-redemption trajectory. On the other hand, the new historicist readings of the text have focussed on the slave trade as its context and it has been interpreted as an “allegory of imperial expansion and the slave trade” (Attar 41). The poem has been regarded either as an example of Coleridge’s critique of the trade or as an evidence of his increasing distance from his early radicalism.\(^2\) Very few commentators have focussed on Coleridge’s enchantment with the Oriental tales and the Gothic writings, and how his reading of these genres had shaped the poem.
If we explore the formal and thematic elements of the poem and its imaginative nature it is revealed that Coleridge was largely influenced by the contemporary taste for the Oriental tales and the Gothic novels. The presence of the elements of the Oriental tales in *Ancient Mariner* was first pointed out by J. L. Lowes. He wrote that “the attempts to trace the prints of the *Arabian Nights*, and the *Seven Champions*, and *The Hermit*, and ‘Tom Hickathrift’ in ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ and ‘Christabel’ and ‘Kubla Khan’ were like seeking the sun and the rain of vanished yesterdays in the limbs and foliage of the oak. But the sun and the rain are there” (460). Following Lowes some recent critics have attempted to discover the “sun and the rain” in Coleridge’s poems.

Tim Fulford in “Coleridge and the Oriental Tales” points to two tales in the *Nights*: “Tale of the First Calandar Prince” and the tale of “The Merchant and the Genie.” He contends that from the first tale Coleridge got the frame narrative and the story of the shooting of the Alabatros. Fulford quotes a passage from the tale where the hero-narrator attempts to shoot a bird and misses it and happens to hit the vizier’s eye: “When I was a stripling I loved to shoot in [sic] a cross-bow; and being one day upon the Terrass of the Palace with my Bow, a Bird happening to come by, I shot, but miss’d him, and the Ball, by Misfortune, hit the Visier, who was taking the Air on the Terrass of his own house, and Put out one of his Eyes” (218). After this incident the vizier persecutes him. According to Fulford, the tale is characterised by an absence of logic or appropriate justice. The second tale is equally characterised by lack of causality. When the Merchant throws the shells of dates in the well it hits the genie’s son. The genie that springs up from the well an he must kill the merchant to avenge his deed. As Fulford points out, the dislocation of the conventional causality, the sudden appearance of the supernatural beings, the absence of narratorial moralizing, the enclosure of the voyage with a framing story, are all features of “The Merchant and the Genie” that give *Ancient Mariner* its nightmarish fascination (220). In fact
the whole collection of tales can be said to have the above characteristic features and it is needless to say that *Ancient Mariner* retains all these features.

It is the lack of causality or moral coherence in *Ancient Mariner* that Mrs Barbauld objected to and Coleridge in his reply remarked that the *Nights* should be the touchstone for a moral judgement on the tale:

MRS BARBAULD once told me that she admired the Ancient Mariner very much, but that there were two faults in it,—it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my own judgment the poem had too much; and the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the Arabian Night’s tale of the merchant’s sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! A genie starts up, and says he must kill the aforesaid merchant, because one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie’s son.

(qtd. in Fulford, “Coleridge and the Oriental Tales” 217)

The passage is an indication of the deep influence of the *Nights* upon Coleridge’s mind and on the poem. The *Nights* imbibes a different aesthetic principle which was alien to the aesthetic judgement of Mrs Barbauld. Coleridge’s incorporation of the ‘spirit’ of the *Nights* into the poem also resulted in Wordsworth’s criticism. Wordsworth pointed to three faults in *Ancient Mariner*: firstly, the Mariner “has no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being who having been long under the control of supernatural impressions might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural;” secondly, “he does not act but continually acted upon;” and thirdly, “the events having no necessary
connection do not produce each other”: and lastly, that “the imagery is too laboriously accumulated” (Mason 39). As Fulford remarks, “adapting the structure of the Nights’ narrative to a traditionally English genre (the ballad) Coleridge was able to unsettle British expectations about moral order” (“Coleridge and the Oriental Tales” 220). In a notebook entry April 1805, Coleridge comments on the unpredictable nature of the Oriental tales: “The favorite Object of all oriental Tales, & that which inspiring their Authors in the East inspires still their Readers every where is the impossibility of baffling Destiny, & that what we considered as the means of one thing becomes in a strange manner the direct means of the Reverse” (Perry 111). Wordsworth and Mrs. Barbauld failed to judge the poem because they were baffled by the imaginative leap Coleridge took in the poem. However, there is another issue that must be taken up: Coleridge’s view that the poem has “too much” of moral and it is an obtrusion upon the imaginative nature of the tale. Coleridge was making this observation in May 1830 and it would not be wild to surmise that Coleridge was thinking of the 1817 version of the poem where he superimposed the moral gloss upon the amoral spirit of the poem. Coleridge’s conception of the poem was based upon the world of the Nights, but inserted a Christian morality into the poem in 1817.

At various stages of his career Coleridge referred to the Night and his fascination with it. Coleridge wrote to Thomas Poole (9 October 1797) on the impact of the Nights on him:

I found the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, one tale of which . . . made so deep an impression on me . . . that I was haunted by spectres, whenever I was in the dark: and I distinctly remember the anxious and fearful eagerness with which I used to watch the window in which the books lay, and, I would seize it, carry it by the wall, and bask and read. My father found out the effect which these books had produced, and burnt them. (LSTC 1: 22)
It is no coincidence that Charles Lamb used the same language of enchantment while describing the effect of reading *Ancient Mariner* on him: “For me, I was never so affected with any human Tale. After first reading it, I was totally possessed with it for many days. –I dislike all the miraculous part of it, but the feelings of the man under the operation of such scenery dragged me along like Tom Piper's magic Whistle” (159). On another occasion, in one of his lectures in 1811 Coleridge wrote: “Give me the Arabian Nights’ Entertainments, which I used to watch, till the sun shining on the bookcase approached, and, glowing upon it, gave me the courage to take it from the shelf” (qtd. in Caracciolo 124).

By taking into consideration Coleridge’s enchantment with the *Nights* Samar Attar identifies three tales that, according to him, have exercised a considerable influence on *Ancient Mariner*: “Sindbad the Sailor,” “Tale of the Merchant and the Genie” and “Tale of the Porter and the Three Ladies of Bagdad.” The elements she traces back to the *Nights* are: the frame story and the power of narratives to change life; the Wedding Guest as a compulsive listener; the exclusion of women from a man’s life; the theme of predestination and the lack of causality; the killing of the albatross (30-37). For Attar, Coleridge is particularly indebted to the tale of Sindbad the Sailor:

Sindbad is a merchant; the Mariner is a lost soul. Both are condemned to a life of wandering. Both experience shipwreck and horrors. They deserve their misfortune, Sindbad because of his high greed for more wealth and excessively inquisitive nature about other people and their ways of life and the mariner for not only shooting the Albatros but also for harbouring some secret guilt. Providence plays some important role both in Sindabab’s and the Mariner’s life—almost every incident seems to be predestined. But although both men lose many years of sinful life, they seem to gain an eternity of bliss at the end of their adventure. (410)
Attar concludes that Coleridge undoubtedly borrowed from the *Nights* but “his Ancient Mariner emerged as something different from Sindbad the Sailor” because Coleridge has transformed his past and present experiences into literature “in his attempt to write the self.” Though the poet is not identical with the mariner, “he certainly shares many of his qualities” and “the ‘Rime’ is unconscious autobiography in disguise and an expression of Coleridge’s fears and anxieties” (41).

However, the poem is more than an “unconscious autobiography,” because it is rooted in the European enterprise of slave trade and commerce. Attar ignores the fact that *Ancient Mariner* like the tale of “Sindbad the Sailor” incorporates the element of greed; it is the greed for wealth that led European traders to the perilous seas and to the inhuman practice of the slave trade. Another driving force for the mariners and for European travellers, of course, was their curiosity, and this is a central motive behind all the journeys undertaken by Sindbad. The eighteenth and the early nineteenth century Orientalists and colonizers were deeply concerned with gathering knowledge about the life of the Other. The story of Sindbad, therefore, provided Coleridge the kind of model that was necessary for writing on the European enterprise of trade and commerce. The inter-textual reading of Attar fails to take note of this ‘worldliness’ of the poem. Therefore, her conclusion that it is an “unconscious autobiography” will remain an inadequate description of the poem, until the contemporary colonial and imperial discourses are considered a part of the spiritual autobiography.

Another problem with Attar and Fulford is that they do not explore how Coleridge’s interest in the Oriental tales is combined with his interest in the Gothic in *Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge was an avid reader of the Gothic novels and wrote a Gothic drama *Osorio*. David Punter has noted Coleridge’s use of Gothic images in many of his poems (*Literature of Terror* 105). In “Religious Musings” Coleridge describes the effects of commerce, war and sexual exploitation by using the Gothic images:
O thou poor wretch

Who nursed in darkness and made wild by want,
Roamest for prey, yea thy unnatural hand
Dost lift to deeds of blood! O pale-eyed form,
The victim of seduction, doomed to know

Polluted nights and days of blasphemy; (Complete Poems 109, 301-06)

That Coleridge could fuse together the Gothic and the Oriental tale can be glimpsed from these lines from the “‘Verses” (1796): “Mists in which Superstition’s pigmy band/Seem’d Giant Forms, the Genii of the Land!” (Complete Poems 11, 15-16). In his analysis of “Christabel” Fulford shows how Coleridge was engaged with M.G. Lewis’s works in 1797 and 1798. He observes: “‘Christabel’ is a corrective reply to popular 1790s taste, a reply in which Coleridge adapted aspects of the Nights so as to produce a more credible supernatural tale than that produced by contemporary Gothic writers—principally Matthew Lewis...” (“Coleridge and Oriental Tale” 224). If in “Christabel” elements from the Nights are incorporated into the Gothic, in Ancient Mariner he incorporated the Gothic in the structure of the Oriental tale. The element of wandering, the theme of guilt and punishment (undeserved), the spectre-bark (instead of the castle), the vicious woman (life-in-death), the ghostly atmosphere, scenes of death and horrors are all manifestations of Gothic found in Vathek, The Monk, Melmoth, the Wanderer or Gebir, Thalaba, the Destroyer, and The Curse of Kehama. Punter observes that in poems like “Pains of Sleep” the Gothic is a vehicle for expressing his personal fears and anxieties (Literature of Terror 104), but the use of the Gothic in Ancient Mariner seems to be political if not radical like that of the “Religious Musings,” since the Gothic images are used as a tool for exploring the horrors of the slave trade.
Helen Thomas discovers in Coleridge’s writing a tendency to move into the inner space, a move towards the form of spiritual autobiography beginning from the late 1790s. She claims that the spirit of Romantic poetry was shaped by combining the spiritual autobiography with the anti-slavery ideology: “Coleridge’s poetical schema prescribes both a revival and revision of spiritual autobiography, established by radical dissenting Protestantism, and reveals the subtle relationship between the emergence of anti-slavery ideology and the development of the Romantic genre” (Romanticism and the Slave Narratives 103). Coleridge was as interested in Robinson Crusoe as he was in the Nights. Defoe’s novel is a celebrated model of spiritual autobiography but Crusoe’s tale is not a simple spiritual autobiography. It is an expression of the enterprise of Protestant capitalism of the emerging bourgeoisie, and is equally concerned with the issue of colony and empire building. The inner space, therefore, is conflated with the outer space both in Robinson Crusoe and in Ancient Mariner. The poetics and politics cannot be separated. Defoe provided Coleridge the model for combining the personal and the political. In Robinson Crusoe Defoe seems to valorise Crusoe’s project, but in Coleridge’s poem fear and anxiety dominates. However, Robinson Crusoe and the spiritual autobiography was one element in the poem among many others—the Gothic, the Oriental tale, the ballad and the travelogue.

Coleridge fused together disparate forms in writing Ancient Mariner, and even though it was presented as a story of sin-punishment-redemption its wayward Oriental spirit could not be curbed. Therefore, the poem puzzled readers like Mrs Barbauld whose horizon of expectation was unsettled by the poem even after the glosses were added in 1817. It is also necessary to note that the technique of adding of glosses comes from the annotated Oriental tales, both prose and verse—from Vathek, Thalaba, the Destroyer or The Curse of Kehama. Coleridge appropriated the paratextual elements of the annotated tales to superimpose the
Christian moral upon the poem. Therefore, the journey of the poem from the 1798 version to the 1817 version was a journey from Orientalism to Anglicanism.

Tim Fulford traces the origin of the poems like *Ancient Mariner*, “Christabel” and “Kubla Khan” to a note by Coleridge in 1797: “The Sister of Haroun—beloved by the Caliph—Giafar’ and ‘Her verses to Giafar—Giafar’s answer,” Coleridge wrote, constituted “good subjects” for poetry (*Coleridge’s Notebook* 1:58). Coleridge was referring to the tale of Abbasa. In the tale of Abbasa the Khalif Haroun-al Raschid gets his half-sister Abbasa married to his vizier Giafar on condition that they would not consummate the marriage, because Haroun himself loved Abbasa. Abbasa, however, conceived a passion for Giafar and by writing verses to him she persuaded him to consummate the marriage and a child was born in secret. At the discovery of this the Khalif executed Giafar and all his followers. Fulford observes that Abbasa’s narrative “is about the power of narrative to create change.” So is the story of Shahrazad. Fulford connects Bard Bracy, the Mariner and the Abyssinian maid by identifying their common ability or desire to change the world through their narratives. According to him, the “Oriental tales provided, Coleridge, a model for poetry that is concerned with, and itself, exploits the power of its own fictional world to intervene in the real world of its audience.” Coleridge derived from them “a non-realistic aesthetic in which the poet does not aim, as most eighteenth century poets aimed, to offer accurate pictures of the ordinary world but seeks instead to create fantastical worlds which nevertheless affect our understanding of (and actions within) that ordinary world.” His “fresh interpretation of the Eastern tale helped him form the new poetry and new poetic that we have come to call Romantic” (“Coleridge and the Oriental Tale” 223).

“Christabel” is an instance of Coleridge’s “new poetry and new poetic” exemplifying his hybrid creativity. In “Christabel” Bracy “vowed with music loud / To clear yon wood from thing unblest, / Warned by a vision in my rest!” (528–30). However, the poem has
puzzled critics for generations, and until recently, little attention has been paid to the Oriental elements in the poem which may give us a clue to understanding what Coleridge defined as “nothing more than a common Faery Tale” (Biographia Litararia 345). It is important to note that it is the element of the fairy tales that might have puzzled the critics. The lack of causality that characterises the tales of the Nights and Ancient Mariner also found its way in “Christabel.” Another characteristic feature that might have resulted in the puzzlement is its hybridity of the genre. The poem is apparently a ballad, but it incorporates elements from Gothic novel, romance, Oriental tale, and travelogue.

The first part of the poem was composed in 1798 and the second in 1800. It was revised numerous times; and was not published until 1816, though circulated in manuscripts among his friends. The poem was finally published at the request of Byron, who worked magic with his own Eastern Tales. He was impressed with the poem and defined it in a note to Siege of Corinth (one of his Eastern Tales) as a “wild and singularly beautiful poem” (qtd. in Jackson 224). It was adversely received by critics at its publication. Hazlitt wrote that “the general story is dim, obscure, and visionary” (qtd. in Attar 54). The chief controversy was regarding the character of Geraldine. The Champion, for example, wrote: “What it is all about? What is the idea? is lady Geraldine a sorceress? or a vampire? or a man? what is she, or he or it?” (qtd. in Coleridge’s Poetry and Prose 159). Coleridge rejected the suggestion that Geraldine is a man or a witch.

To understand Coleridge’s presentation of Geraldine one needs to look into the Oriental tales and the Gothic among other things. There are elements and episodes in “Christabel” that can be traced back to the Oriental tales. Fulford traces two episodes in “Christabel” to Coleridge’s favourite “Tales of the Genii”: the story of Geraldine’s abduction and the scene where Geraldine tricks Christabel to bed. In one of the tales an enchantress attempts to deceive the sultan by telling a story about how she was abducted in the forest by
“four ruffians”, who led her to a castle where they imprisoned her and she escaped. In the tale of Urad the virtuous heroine is tricked into bed by a woman called Lahnar who undresses in Urad’s chamber and she discovers that Lahnar is not a woman (Fulford, “Coleridge and the Oriental Tale” 225-26). Samar Attar refers to a few other stories from the Nights as having influenced Coleridge and she points out that the seductive vampire or witch, the lesbian, the spirit of the mother, the large castle with secret passages, and the prophetic vision in a dream may be borrowings from the Nights. “The stock images that delineated the fantastic and the sinister, the realistic and the uncanny, seemed to have been engraved in Coleridge’s soul since he discovered the book The Arabian Nights in his childhood”(50).

However, the elements from the Oriental tales are transformed in “Christabel” and they enter the poem mediated by the Gothic. In his analysis of “Christabel,” Fulford marks the influence of M. G. Lewis’s The Castle Spectre. Coleridge, according to Fulford, adapted The Castle Spectre in “Christabel” “to make the action believably depend on human feelings and relationships.” Both “Christabel” and The Castle Spectre deal with the social and sexual power of the knightly patriarch over innocent women. The damsel Angela in The Castle Spectre is a prototype of both Christabel and Geraldine. Angela in Lewis’s story is the daughter whose resemblance to her dead mother makes Lord Osmond desirous of her. The Orient in the play is represented by the “four blacks” and Osmond himself might be a West Indian plantation owner or an Indian ‘nabob’ infected with the sexual profligacy of the Orientals (“Coleridge and the Oriental Tale” 224-25). Fulford, though he mentions it, ignores the influence of The Monk upon Coleridge. In 1797 Coleridge reviewed The Monk and its story was itself based on an Oriental tale “The Santon Barsisa.” Coleridge’s Geraldine resembles Matilda, Lewis’s heroine, in her beauty and behaviour. Matilda seduces Ambrosio and Geraldine seems to do the same with Sir Leoline. She is a devil in disguise and leads Ambrosio to the path of evil. Though Coleridge denied that Geraldine is a witch, the poem
suggests her supernatural power. She does “witchery by daylight” as Coleridge once said (Coleridge’s Poetry and Prose 160).

The Gothic novels have two types of female characters: the innocent heroine and the terrible (and sometimes also beautiful) woman. Christabel resembles the innocent type whereas Geraldine belongs to the second category of women with deadly devilish witchery at their disposal—the race of Maimuna, Khawla, Matilda or Carathis. Further, the issue of incest, which often forms a part of the Gothic, is an important element in The Monk and in Coleridge’s “Christabel.” Geraldine may not be the daughter of Sir Leoline, but the relationship between them verges on the incestuous. Sir Leoline’s pedigree goes back to the Oriental tales and once again his character seems to have been mediated through the Gothic. As it is discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the feudal lord and the figure of the Oriental despot merge together in the figure of the Gothic villain. Fulford is right to point out that the despotic sadistic patriarchs of the Gothic novels are modelled on the Caliph of the Nights (“Coleridge and Oriental Tale” 225). If we accept Fulford’s observation that Sir Leoline is modelled on Osmond, “who is either . . . a West Indian plantation owner (as Lewis himself was) or as a returned nabob” —someone having connection with empire, we may interpret Geraldine as the figure of the imperial Other infiltrating the domestic space. Empire comes home in Ancient Mariner in the figure of the Mariner and his haunting tale. The Wedding-Guest is held up from joining the domestic space and in “Christabel” Geraldine’s entry into the domestic space destroys the filial relationship. Michelle Levy in “Discovery and Domestic Affection in Coleridge and Shelley” proffers the argument that both Coleridge and Mary Shelley were fascinated with Oriental tales and texts of discovery and exploration but they were repulsed by the real discoveries and explorations as dangerous to the society and civilization. By making Bard Bracy promise to drive out the evil form the castle Coleridge seems to take up the task to purge the domestic space of the imperial infection. The
paradox is Coleridge’s and therefore, Bard Bracy’s belief in the power of his narrative itself comes from the East.

Coleridge in 1824 added some explanatory notes to the poem in the manner of the *Ancient Mariner* to remove the obscurity in the poem. However, long before this, inspired by “Christabel,” Southey (in December 1800) composed an episode for *Thalaba* of several hundred lines and wanted it to be the final book of *Thalaba*. Tim Fulford in his article “Coleridge’s Sequel to *Thalaba* and Robert Southey’s Prequel to *Christabel*” defines Southey’s composition as ‘prequel’ to “Christabel.” Southey’s narrative seems to develop the hidden implication of Coleridge’s poem. A clear cut distinction between good and evil is made by Southey and Geraldine is presented as an enchantress, a witch who turns Sir Leoline against his own daughter. In Southey’s version Thalaba brings Sir Leoline out of enchantment and father and daughter are reunited. Southey’s effort to write this prequel was the result of the renewed friendship between Coleridge and Southey in 1799 and their new effort to collaborate. What these affinities make clear is that “Christabel” should be read as an Oriental tale in the form of a ballad.

According to Fulford, Western Somerset “became a meeting point of Eastern fantasies” in 1799 (“Coleridge’s Sequel” 56). One of the fruits of the “Eastern fantasies” was Coleridge and Southey’s plan to compose an epic on Muhammad. By the autumn of 1797 Coleridge acquired extensive knowledge of the Islamic tradition. By this time he read Sale’s translation of the Koran, Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Thevenot, and Harris’s *Collection* and the *Universal Histories* (Shaffer 56). All this reading went into the conception of the epic on Muhammad. The proposed epic was to be named “The Flight and Return of Mohammed.” In 1799 Coleridge composed a fourteen-line fragment which was supposed to be the beginning of the epic. It was published only in 1834 with the title “Mahomet.” In the case of “Christabel,” Coleridge in the 1816 preface claimed
that he had a plan for three more sections but the plan is found nowhere in his writings, but a
plan for the failed epic on Muhammad indeed existed and Coleridge wanted to finish the
poem. He wrote to Southey on October 15, 1799: “Mohammed I will not forsake; but my
money-book I must write first” (*LSTC* 1: 310).

The plan of the epic was retrieved by Warren U. Ober from the Mitchell Library of
Sydney and it is reproduced by Humberto Garcia in the appendix to his book *Islam and the
English Enlightenment, 1670–1840* (233-35). The plan made by Coleridge and Southey
shows that the epic would have ten books. It would begin with the death of Abu Taleb and
Muhammad’s flight to Medina; would cover major events in his life and end with his return
to Mecca defeating his enemies. Ultimately, the epic was abandoned by both the poets and
the little fragments they composed were not published until very late, in Southey’s case
posthumously.

However, the question is why they attempted to write an epic on Mohammed. In the
previous chapter we saw that Southey had a plan to compose poems on each of the
religious/mythological systems. E. S. Shaffer points to a letter by Coleridge to Southey to
show that Coleridge was also interested in various religious systems. Coleridge wrote on 25
December 1799: “the oak of Abraham planted at Mamre, was still existing in the time of
Constantine and destroyed by his orders;--a famous mart being held there every summer,
persons of all religion both Jews & Christians &Asiatic Gentiles in general confluence doing
honor thereto|--what a delightful subject this for an eclogue, or a pastoral, or a philosophical
poem” (qtd. in Shaffer 35).

For Shaffer Coleridge’s fragment “Kubla Khan,” the unfinished epic “Mahomet” and
the unwritten epic “The Fall of Jerusalem” are examples of Coleridge’s syncretism. Shaffer
traces Coleridge’s development as a poet and thinker and argues that Coleridge turned into a
defender of Christianity from being a sceptic and this happened largely due to the influence
of German high criticism of Harder, Eichhorn and Klopstock. The high criticism interpreted the Bible (both Old and New Testament) as literature and the religion (Christianity) as myth. There was a parallel development that tried to disregard revealed religion as false; together with Muhammad, Christ and Moses came to be regarded as impostors. Shaffer argues that the lack of credibility of the Bible as history led to the construction of revealed religion as myth. Coleridge would write the “Fall of Jerusalem” in defence of Christianity with Christ as the prophet. To defend Christianity as true religion Coleridge had to defend Muhammad. Therefore, Coleridge and Southey thought of writing the epic on Muhammad (Shaffer 1-61). Humberto Garcia places the origin of the epic in the context of ‘Islamic Republicanism’, Romantic Unitarianism and Napoleon’s Egyptian expedition of 1798-1799—the “French campaign to bring Islamic liberty to Egypt” (Islam and English Enlightenment 158). The epic would be an expression of their Unitarian Jacobinism. Coleridge was greatly influenced by the Unitarians during the 1790s. As Daniel White argues, young Anglicans like Coleridge and Southey were drawn to Unitarianism “for its liberal appeals to free thought and for its anti-authoritarian association with political and religious liberty” (Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent 128). Coleridge looked forward to Islamic monotheism as a way of returning to primitive Christianity. As he argues in Anima Poetae the epic would be a "disputation between Mahomet as representative of unpersonal theism with the Judeo-
Christian machinery of angels, genii and prophets, an idolater with his gods . . . and a fetish -worshipper who adored the invisible alone” (290). Muhammad and Islamic monotheism, therefore, became the symbol of liberty, both religious and political.

Historically Muhammad was largely responsible for ending the pagan idolatry in the Arabian countries. In the fragment Coleridge presents Muhammad as iconoclastic: “Prophet and priest, who scatter’d abroad both evil and blessing/ . . . but crush’d the blasphemous rites of the Pagan/ And idolatrous Christians. – For veiling the Gospel of Jesus,” (Complete Poems
221, 2-4). The reference to the “idolatrous Christians” strengthens the argument that the poem “embodies a Unitarian critique of the Anglican establishment” (Garcia, *Islam and English Enlightenment* 159). The prophet is represented as the man who ended priestcraft. Such an iconoclast could stand for the Napoleonic force and the next few lines with rhetoric of war make it clear:

Naked and prostrate the priesthood were laid, — the people with mad shouts

Thundering now, and now with saddest ululation

Flew, as over the channel of rock-stone the ruinous river

Shatters its waters abreast, and in mazy uproar bewilder’d,

Rushes divious all –all rushing impetuous onward.

*(Complete Poems 221, 11-14)*

Muhammad is represented as a west-wind-like force sweeping away the rust. He becomes a Napoleonic figure heralding political reform. Garcia concludes that "Islamic teaching embodies an egalitarian form of Old Testament prophecy that can serve as a practical guidebook for practical dissenters battling against eighteenth century state priest craft”(*Islam and English Enlightenment* 168). “Mahomet,” Garcia contends, dramatizes this politicised Unitarian fantasy. Islam in the poem, therefore, becomes a tool in the hands of Coleridge –a tool to attack European corruption and false Christianity. In other words, Coleridge appropriates Islam to serve his Unitarian and radical purpose (Abbasi and Anushiravani).

However, one cannot ignore the element of ambiguity in the fragment. Muhammad is not straightforwardly perceived as bringing good, but the good he brings contains evil: “Choosing good from iniquity rather than evil from goodness” (*Complete Poems* 221, 8). Nigel Leask observes that Coleridge in “Mahomet” tries to balance good and evil in the figure of the prophet (“Road to Xanadu Revisited”). To understand this balancing act it would be good to consider this ambiguity first and then move on to the cause of the
abandonment of the project. If Muhammad is a Napoleonic figure, the ambiguity might be the result of Coleridge’s confusion regarding the French Revolution and the resultant events. His confusion over the French Revolution and Napoleon is revealed in “France: An Ode” which was published as “The Recantation: An Ode” after the French attacked Switzerland in March 1798. The poem is at once a celebration and condemnation of the French Revolution. It is not that Coleridge could outright celebrate Napoleon’s Egyptian invasion. The Egyptian expedition of France had an anti-England aspect since Napoleon’s invasion was to thwart the growing power of the British in India. In 1798-99 Coleridge might not have been a nationalist but later Coleridge advocated that England should occupy Egypt (Keane 60-62).

There might have been another cause for the ambiguity. Though Coleridge and Southey might have a positive opinion of Muhammad they could not ignore the residual traces, centuries of misrepresentation of Muhammad as an imposter. Muhammad in the fragment is conceived of as a warrior-hero not as a prophet-philosopher. Two years before Coleridge and Southey began working on the epic on Muhammad, Coleridge wrote his first play Osorio. In the final act of the play there is a dialogue between Alhadra, a Muslim Moorish woman and Maurice, a Christian. Francesco, an evil Catholic priest is brought by the Morescos to be killed, and Maurice pleads in the name of mercy. The theological debate is whether Islam preaches mercy. Maurice says that “Mahomet taught mercy and forgiveness. I am sure he did!” The Old Man (a Meresco) laughs at the word ‘mercy’ and ‘forgiveness.’ When Maurice replies that if Muhammad did not teach mercy “he needs it for himself,” Alhadra accuses Maurice of blasphemy and says that “the law of Mahomet / Was given by him, who framed the soul of man. /This the best proof — it fits the soul of man!” Vocabulary of war is used to characterise Islam: “Ambition, glory, thirst of enterprise, / The deep and stubborn purpose of revenge” (172). It teaches ‘ambition’, ‘glory’, ‘enterprise’ and ‘revenge’ as understood by Alhadra, and perhaps by Coleridge. As the scene goes on all the Morescos
want Francesco to be killed, though finally, Alhadra commands that he should be taken to the ship. The similarity in the vocabulary of “Mahomet” and Alhadra’s speech is striking.

In a notebook entry in 1805 Coleridge refers to the Unitarian years as a time of confusion: “Thinking during my perusal of Horsley’s Letters in Rep[ly] to Dr P[riestley’s] objections to the Trinity on the part of Jews, Mahometans, and Infidels, it burst upon me at once as an awful Truth what 7 or 8 years ago I thought of proving with a hollow Faith and for an ambiguous purpose, my mind then wavering in its necessary passage from Unitarianism. . .” He continues that “Unitarianism in all its Forms is idolatry” and compares Horsley and Priestley’s philosophy to the “the trick of Mahomet.” He asserted his absolute faith in Trinitarian Christianity: “my mind may be made up as to the character of Jesus, and of historical Christianity, as clearly as it is of the Logos and intellectual or spiritual Christianity – that I may be made to know either their especial and peculiar Union, or their absolute disunion in any peculiar Sense” (Perry 106). Coleridge compares Mohammed to Priestly and calls his religion idolatry. Therefore, it was not unlikely that he would have an ambiguous attitude to Mohammed and Islam in 1799-1800.

As Shaffer has documented it, Coleridge’s attitude to Christianity began to change after the failure of the Pantisocracy scheme and his visit to Germany (17-60). Coleridge was completely transformed after his self-imposed exile in Malta. In Malta Coleridge had the opportunity to see a mixed breed of people and had his experience in colonial government. Malta has been the site of East-West conflict since the Crusades and was under French invasion in 1798 but was ultimately retained by the British. In 1804, while residing in Malta, Coleridge collaborated with Admiral Alexander Ball on a series of papers that expounded an imperialist philosophy. Coleridge in the "Observations on Egypt” suggested that to prevent the French from occupying Egypt “we should take it ourselves” (qtd. in Keane 61). Erdman defines Coleridge's calculations in this paper as those of “a master race-economist” and
Donald Sultana comments that Coleridge was now “committed to the cause of imperialism” (qtd. in Keane 61).

Coleridge was an advocate of anti-slavery movement and opposed the racial argument of the slave trade lobby at the beginning of his career but with the passage of time he turned his logic upside down. The argument leads to the cause of the abandonment of the epic on Muhammad. Coleridge appropriates Mohammad and Islam when it was necessary and condemns him as he turns a Trinitarian leaving behind his Unitarian past. He wanted to use Mohammad for unveiling “the Gospel of Jesus.” He discovered new methods of “unveiling” and naturally the epic was abandoned; his political position changed and he turned to Anglicism. He could have completed the project before the change of his political position but a few problems were there. He became busy with “Christabel” and the “money-book.”

Critics have also argued that the “narrative epic” was not Coleridge’s genre (Fulford, “Coleridge’s Sequel” 59); he could only compose it with Southey, but Southey left for Portugal and became busy composing Thalaba. Southey used his knowledge of Islam and the Islamic Orient in Thalaba. Similarly, it is argued that Coleridge transferred his reading on Islam to “Kubla Khan.” The prime cause of abandonment of the project, however, was transformed ideological position, from Unitarianism to Trinitarian Christianity. Similar ideological changes are also perceptible in Coleridge’s approach to India and Hinduism.

Coleridge was born fifteen years after the Battle of Plassey and eight years after the Battle of Buxar, and seven years after the right of the East India Company as the official tax collector of Bengal was established. These are moments of history that would become grand originary moments of British empire in India. By the time Coleridge became a young man India was all around him and young British men went on fortune hunting to India. Together with the rich material India, the textual India was also a palpable presence as scholarly translations and research essays from Bengal were disseminated all over Europe. Coleridge
was an avid reader some of his readings on India included Wilkins’s *The Bhagvat-Geeta* (1785), Jones’s *Ordinances of Manu* (1796), Maurice's *History of Hindostan* (1795), Dubois's *Description of the Character, Manners and Customs, of the People of India* (1817). On the personal front he had an Indian link with two of his brothers joining the rank of the East India Company eventually dying there. Coleridge's elder brother John sailed to India in 1770 and died in 1787 in Kerala and his brother Frank died after being wounded in the siege of Seringapatam (1791-92). Wordsworth’s brother John also died in the sea travelling to China via India. Coleridge himself could have ended up in India as his family wanted to enlist him in the military. In one of his letters to Thomas Poole on 26 January, 1804 Coleridge wrote about his meeting with James who once offered him an Indian career: “My dearest Poole,—I have called on Sir James Mackintosh, who offered me his endeavours to procure me a place under him in India, of which endeavour he would not for a moment doubt the success; and assured me on his Honour, on his Soul!!” (*LSTC* 2: 454). All these events might have left some mark upon his mind.

Coleridge’s relationship with Indian theology and philosophy is normally divided into two distinct phases: the early phase of enthusiastic reception of Indian thoughts (1783-1815) and a later phase of rejection of everything Indian (1816-33). Natalie Tal Harries traces three different stages of Coleridge's involvement with Indian thoughts: a period consisting primarily of positive views (1793-1802), a second period where his opinion remains balanced (1802-21) and a third phase predominantly critical (1821 onwards) (131). The primary focus of this section will be on the early phase of enthusiasm. As early as 16 October, 1797 in letter to Thelwall he compared himself to the Indian Vishnu: “I should much wish, like the Indian Vishnu, to float about 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 a million years more” (*LSTC* 1: 172). The letter is a marker of the deep influence of India on
Coleridge. He refers to the image of the floating Vishnu on other occasions as well. In “The Night Scene: A dramatic Fragment” (The Collected Works 16: 653–56) Coleridge used the same image:

    The God who floats upon the Lotos leaf
    Dreams for a thousand ages; then awakening,
    Creates a world, and smiling at the bubble
    Relapses into bliss. (51-54)

In this fragment Sandoval mocks Earl Henry when he defines the pleasure he had with Oropreza in a bower of bliss as a “Deep self-possession, an intense repose.” Coleridge here speaks of a state of contemplation, as he does in the letter to Thelwal. The fragment was written in 1800-01 when Coleridge’s attitude to India was already undergoing transformations.

    Coleridge’s sources for this image might have been more than one, though it is customary to refer to Wilkins’s translation of the Bhagvat-Geeta. Thomas Maurice’s The History of Hindustan: Its Arts and Sciences (1795), John Holwell’s Interesting Historical Events relative to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan and William Jones’s “Hymn to Narayana” are three important works containing description of Vishnu or Narayana floating on the water. Refracted forms of these images are reflected in Coleridge’s image of the floating God, as Aparajita Majumdar claims in her article, “Coleridge, Vishnu and the Infinite.” Edward Moor’s The Hindu Pantheon is an unlikely source for Coleridge’s early images because it came out only in 1810. In Maurice there is a plate depicting Vishnu floating on the water on the hooded serpent (Sesh Nag symbolizing infinity) not on the lotus. The caption below the plate reads: "VEESHNU reposing during a CALPA, an Astronomical period of a thousand Ages . . . copied from a sculptured Rock in the Ganges" (401).
Maurice’s visual source was Holwell (Majumdar 36). In Jones’s Hymns Brahma is depicted on the Lotus, not Vishnu.

The reference to Vishnu in the letter to Thelwall comes in the context of Coleridge’s contemplation—his inability to comprehend the whole: “I can contemplate nothing but parts, and parts are all little! My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something great, something one and indivisible. And it is only in the faith of that that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns, give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity.” He inserts some lines from “The Lime Tree Bower my Prison” to explain a heightened state of contemplation where he feels the presence of ‘the Almighty’ in every living thing:

Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,  
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round  
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem  
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues  
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes  
Spirits perceive his presence. (Complete Poems 129, 38-43)

Coleridge laments that such states of thought seldom visit him: “It is but seldom that I raise and spiritualize my intellect to this height.” The letter shows the mark of the Gita and its idea of meditation as a means to understand the unity of all: “God all in all.” As Tal Harries puts it: Coleridge was “clearly attracted to the practice of meditative contemplation as a method of comprehending the ‘vast’ and achieving a sense of ‘something one and indivisible’ ” (132). Poems like “The Eolian Harp” (first published as “Effusion XXXV”), “Religious Musings,” “Ode on the Departing Year,” “The Destiny of Nations” written in 1795 contain similar ideas. In “The Destiny of Nations” the pantheistic belief of oneness runs through the lines:

Glory to Thee, Father of Earth and Heaven!
All conscious presence of the Universe!

Nature’s vast ever-acting energy!

In will, indeed, impulse of All to All. (Complete Poems 103, 459-62)

Similarly “Religious Musings “Coleridge writes that God is “Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole” and he defines it as the “Supreme Reality” (Complete Poems 106, ll. 130-134). The same sentiment is expressed in the very famous stanza Ancient Mariner:

He prayeth best, who loveth best

All things great and small

For the dear god who loveth us,

He made and loveth all. (Complete Poems 145, 645-50)

There are two aspects to these passages: a belief in the Oneness, and contemplation as a means to understand this Oneness. Tal Harries explains this with reference to the passages from the Gita:

According to Geeta ‘the tumultous senses hurry away, by force, the heart even of the wise man who striveth to restrain them’ but the ‘man of a governable mind enjoying the object of his senses, with all his faculties rendered obedient to his will’, ‘who hath all passions in subjection,’ possesses ‘true wisdom’ and ‘obtaineth happiness supreme’ (The Bhagvat-Geeta 1785, 42). These attributes are continually reinforced throughout the Gita and Coleridge's poetic expression of visionary meditation contains the same elements. (134)

The pantheism of Coleridge has been explained with reference to the philosophy of Spinoza, but Spinoza’s ideas were regarded as Eastern in origin (Libbrecht).

The most detailed engagement with pantheism and the philosophy of the Gita is perhaps seen in Osoria, Coleridge’s Gothic tragedy written in 1797, later revised and performed as Remorse. Coleridge quoted a few lines form Osorio in the letter to Thelwall
discussed above. The lines are spoken by a Moorish Muslim woman Alhadra. Her husband has been murdered by Osorio and she is burning in vengeance, but she simultaneously thinks of an alternative way of life:

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! (169, 5. 1)

The placing of these lines in the mouth of Muslim women is an indication that Coleridge might be thinking of contemplation as a common Eastern trait. However, in the play there are similar lines placed in the mouths of the Western characters as well and both the villain and the hero speak in similar vein.

The play is set in the years of the Spanish Inquisition (that started in 1418) when non-Catholic Christians, Jews and Muslims were persecuted by the Catholic army. There are three different groups of characters in the play: The Catholic oppression and cruelty is represented through Francesco, Osorio, Valez. Islam is represented as the heroic religion through Alhambra, Ferdinand and his Moorish companions (Morescos). The third group is represented by Albert, Maria and Maurice. Though they are Christians, throughout the play they speak the language of the Gita. They speak of one life and of universal love. Osorio speaking to Ferdinand about Maria says that she does not think like a Christian: “Her lover school’d her in some newer nonsense” (35, 2.1). The “newer nonsense” is the language of universal love and philosophical discussion of one life that Coleridge found in the Gita. However, it is not confined to these characters alone; even Osorio, the villain speaks the language. Arguing with his father about the sin of committing a murder Osorio says:

I kill a man and lay him in the sun,
And in a month there swarm from his dead body
A thousand — nay, ten thousand sentient beings
In place of that one man whom I had kill’d.
Now who shall tell me, that each one and all,
Of these ten thousand lives, is not as happy
As that one life, which being shoved aside
Made room for these ten thousand? (85, Act 3)

This can be compared to what Albert says when in the dark dungeon Osorio comes with a goblet of poisoned wine for him:

Yon insect on the wall,
Which moves this way and that its hundred legs,
Were it a toy of mere mechanic craft,
It were an infinitely curious thing!
But it has life, Osorio! life and thought ;
And by the power of its miraculous will
Wields all the complex movements of its frame
Unerringly, to pleasurable ends! (147, Act 4)

The reference to the insect as having thought and life and its comparison to the toy seem redundant, unless Coleridge intended to make it a philosophical statement emphasizing the concept of ‘One Life.’ Similarly the argument of Osorio that from the body of the dead man will be born thousands of other lives and they may be equally happy reminds us of the philosophy of the Gita. Maria expresses her abhorrence for the life in the convent and wishes to live among the beauty of nature. Recalling how she enjoyed the company of nature with Albert Maria says: “The voice of that Almighty One, who loved us, In every gale that breathed, and wave that murmur’d !( 121, Act 4). Maria offers an alternative way of living.
Away from the cloistered life of the convent, she would live in the midst of nature where the voice of the almighty can be heard in the ‘gale’ and the ‘wave.’

The whole play is a theological and philosophical debate. The story of the play centres on Osorio’s villainy. Osorio wanted to kill Albert, his own brother, to marry Albert’s beloved, Maria. Ferdinand, a Moresco who was appointed to kill Albert, was moved by Albert’s goodness and did not kill him. Albert now lives in disguise. Even after this Maria is not ready to marry Osorio. Later in the play Ferdinand is killed by Osorio to wipe out the evidence of his crime. He has Albert (who is in disguise of a sorcerer) imprisoned in the dungeon below the castle. When Albert reveals his identity to Osorio, he prays for mercy and expiation of his sins. Meanwhile Ferdinand’s wife Alhadra and the Morescos come to destroy the house of Valez. However, they pardon everyone except Osorio whom they would take away. This could be a simple tale of revenge but Coleridge seems more interested in exploring the philosophical and theological ideas. The Spanish setting gives him the opportunity to explore the evils of Catholicism. Simultaneously, he uses the Spanish setting to accommodate different faiths, for Spain was also a country where people of several faiths and colours could be found. More importantly, Coleridge uses the play to showcase his new learning of the philosophy of the “potentates of Ind,” as he would later refer to it.

Coleridge’s pantheistic ideas have often been explained with reference to Western pantheism, neo-Platonism and the philosophy of Spinoza. Coleridge became an admirer of Spinoza and wanted to write an epic on him in 1799 and 1803 (Vallins 113). Spinoza’s philosophy was regarded by Coleridge as well as by his German mentors as Eastern in origin. Later in his career Coleridge would reject both the philosophy of the Gita as well as that of Spinoza. In explaining Coleridge’s pantheism and his concept of ‘One Life’ one must also take account of Hai Ibn Yakzan which was available in English translation. The twelfth century Arabic novel by Tufayl was first translated into Latin by Pico della Mirandola.
Spinoza is said to have translated or ordered a translation of this philosophical novel into Dutch. Philosophers in the Western Europe including Spinoza were greatly influenced by this book (Attar 8). If Coleridge was borrowing from Spinoza, his debt Huyy is undeniable.

Coleridge, however, became more insular in his thoughts at the beginning of the new century as he embraced Trinitarian Christianity. Tal Harries identifies a kind of vacillation in Coleridge’s work during 1802 to 1821 between sympathy and apathy to Indian philosophy. In poems like “The Pains of Sleep” and “Dejection: An Ode,” according to Tal Harries, Coleridge fails to achieve a state of meditative contemplation. In this period he was still attracted to the concept of divine unity, exemplified by his poem “God’s Omnipresence: A Hymn” (1814), but Coleridge by this time he had also started criticising pantheism. In Opus Maximum he criticised “Pantheism” as “the natural result of an imbecile understanding <producing indistinction> by half-closed lids, when all the hues and outlines melt into garish mist, [they] deem it unity” (The Collected Works15: 281). He was clearly criticising the Vishnu-like state of contemplation. On the Gita Coleridge observed: “If we consider the [Gita] as poetry; it has the mortal disease of all Indian poetry: the attempting to image the unimageable, not by symbols but by jumble of images...” (The Collected Works15:394). In “On the Divine Ideas” Coleridge condemns Hinduism as “Atheism in the form of Polytheism” (qtd. in Warren, “Coleridge, Orient and Philosophy” 118). Coleridge also criticised Jones who in his essay “On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India” argued that India had direct influence on ancient Greek thought (Vallins 120). Taking these late reactions into consideration Shaffer observes that of “all forms of oriental thought Coleridge had least sympathy with Hinduism, at least in his later years” (133).

The reasons behind Coleridge’s early reception and late rejection of Eastern traditions of thoughts have been variously explained. His growing Hellenism has been identified as one of the reasons behind this. He wrote that though many of the philosophical ideas can be
traced back to the East he would prefer the Grecian: “This is not Greek theology merely. It is fair account of the Egyptian, of the Indian, and of every other, but I speak of the Greece because it was the only country that dared to ask why” (The Collected Works 5: 58-59).

Andrew Warren explains Coleridge’s rejection of the Eastern and Indian philosophical ideas with reference to the changing philosophical position of Coleridge. The central text taken up by Warren in “Coleridge, Orient and Philosophy” is Coleridge’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy (1818-19). He discovers a triad in Coleridge’s philosophical ideas, which come from three different sources: Hebrew, Greek and the East. This triad is related to another parallel triad Will, Reason and Nature. In his mature years Coleridge rejected Nature/ East in favour of Will and Reason. According to Warren, Coleridge rejected Spinoza’s materialism in favour of Fichte’s idealism. Similarly, David Vallins argues that in Coleridge’s writing there is a conflict between the ideal on the one hand, and the material on the other. In his later writings Coleridge condemns Hinduism and pantheism as problematically identifying the human with the divine. Coleridge also blames the same idolatrous tendency in Catholicism—in their saint worship—where the human and the divine are confused.

Shaffer traces Coleridge’s evolution of ideas and concludes that Coleridge’s Orientalism is neither “affection nor antiquarian fancy nor an escape into the exotic.” Coleridge’s concern was “for the primitive spring of faith in one God for all mankind, and his special concern for the seed-time of European civilization.” Shaffer identifies Coleridge’s Christian-centrism, but she ignores the overarching nature of the Christian-centric discourse—the creation of a centre that would push all into the margins. Changes in Coleridge’s attitude towards India and Hinduism cannot be dissociated from the rise of the evangelical lobby and the Clapham sect led by Charles Grant and Wilberforce in England. Coleridge’s criticism of Hinduism, therefore, must be read in the context of the changing imperial policy of Britain towards India. Moreover, rejecting Hindu philosophy was an act of
assertion of the Western cultural hegemony. Shaffer argues in her book that one of the causes of the rise of the concept of the Bible as myth was the dissemination of the knowledge about Hinduism, which threatened the primacy of the Bible. As Shaffer observes, “in the context of Oriental history, the claim of the Bible to be the origin and pattern of religious civilizations was reduced to a moral and finally to a symbolic claim only” (56). The necessity to defend Christianity resulted in the condemnation of Hinduism.

Finally, it is time to turn to “Kubla Khan” which remains the most enigmatic of Coleridge’s poems. Its sources of inspiration have been traced to all the continents of the world. As J. L. Lowes observed in 1927, in “Kubla Khan” “with the kaleidoscopic swiftness of a dream, the scene shifts from Abyssinia to Cashmere” (379). Three distinct strands of source hunting of the images in “Kubla Khan” can be seen in critical circles leading to: China and the Far East, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East including North Africa. The source that Coleridge refers to in the 1816 preface to the poem has fuelled the critical imagination because Purchas’s book is very vast in its geographical and temporal scope as the very title of the book reveals:

Purchas his Pilgrimage Or Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered, from the Creation up to this Present. In Four Parts. This First Contains a Theological and Geographical History of Asia, Africa and America. Declaring the Ancient Religions before the Flood, the Heathnish, Jewish, and Saracenical in all Ages since . . . with brief Descriptions of the Countries, Nations, States, Discoveries, Private and Public Customs.

Purchas’s book maps a geography that extends through all the continents of the world. Similarly the geopolitical space in “Kubla Khan” runs through the Near East, Persia and North Africa to India and the Far East.
The poem has been read from different critical perspectives. Lowes follows the images of the poem and traces them to multiple sources. Though critical of Lowes, Shaffer also moves through different texts and contexts to contextualize “Kubla Khan.” She argues for the biblical root of Coleridge’s Orientalism. Quoting from Goethe, Shaffer observes that in speaking of “Oriental poetry we must speak of the Bible as the oldest collection” (106). She traces various influences on Coleridge including Jones’s translations of Eastern poetry and combination of various forms such as the ballad, the ode, the “oriental idyll,” the epic and biblical prophecy etc. and observes that “Kubla Khan,” “the apocalyptic epic is the apotheosis of a new form, the lyrical ballad”(95). She also cites a number of Islamic and proto-Islamic sources as influences on Coleridge.

In recent years new sources for the poem have been identified, analysed and discussed in the critical arena. Humberto Garcia, for example, argues that “Kubla Khan” is a miniature version of the “Arab-Islamic epic in which the Garden of Iram/Irem myth is the master trope for plotting the French revolution’s rise and fall” (Islam and English Enlightenment 184).

Coleridge had multiple sources for the story of the garden of Irem and its destruction: Southey’s Thalaba, Landor’s Gebir, William Jones’s “On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations” (1772) and Sale’s translation of the Koran. Jones wrote: “Mahommed, in his Alcoran, in the Chapter of the Morning [Al-Fajr], mentions a garden called Irem [or Iram], which is no less celebrated by the Asiatic poets than that of the Hesperides by the Greeks. It was planted, as the commentators say, by a king named Shaddad and was once seen by an Arabian, who wandered far into the desert in search of a lost camel” (Pachori138). In fact, throughout the Koran there are many references to paradise and paradisal landscapes. Coleridge read Sale’s translation of the Koran in 1797, and also studied the works of Jones. The Garden of Irem built by the Adites is destroyed by God through the prophet Hud when Shedad and his people
ignore God’s warning. Similarly, in Coleridge’s poem Kubla hears the ancestral voices prophesying war/destruction.

Apart from these purely Koranic descriptions of paradise there had been numerous other contemporary accounts on the Near East which might have equally influenced Coleridge. A book of particular interest to Coleridge was James Bruce’s popular *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790). Lowes argues that Coleridge adopted many striking images from Bruce and that his Xanadu resembles the area around the fountain from which the Nile originates, the Nile itself being the equivalent of the river Alph. Lowes links Mount Amara to Abola and connects Coleridge’s Abyssinian maid with Bruce’s narrative (371-73). In Purchas’s book there are numerous descriptions of seemingly paradisal landscape and one of such passages contain reference to Mount Amara, of which the Abyssinian maid, Coleridge’s muse, is singing. There is a detailed description of the hill anticipating what is there in the poem. The hill is a steep one, "dilating itself in a round form . . . with impassable tops thereof, many fruitful and pleasant vallies wherein the kindred of [Prester John] are surely kept . . . a mountain glittering in some places like the sun, saying all that was gold" (Purchas 672). Similar description of Amara Valley is provided by Johnson in his *Rasselas*. Like Purchas, Johnson also describes Abyssinia as the land of a "mighty emperor," where the Nile, "the Father of Waters, begins his course, and whose bounty pours down the streams of plenty, and scatters over half the world the harvests of Egypt" (qtd. in Jalaluddin 101).

European Christians believed in the legend of an earthly Paradise in the realm of a Christian monarch named Prester (or Presbyter) John, and it was thought to be somewhere in the East, possibly Ethiopia, also known as Abyssinia. The heavenly realm was believed to have been the land of four major rivers flowing out of it—the Nile, the Senegal, the Niger, and the Congo- whose origins explorers sought to find (Jalaluddin 100).
The source for Coleridge’s Abyssinian paradise has also been traced through Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Milton refers to “Abassin Kings,” “Mount Amara” and the “True Paradise under Ethiope Line / By Nilus head, enclosed with shining rock, *(PL IV, 280-83).* The Abyssinian maid has been related to the Egyptian goddess Isis. Coleridge in 1796 borrowed the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius which refers to goddess Isis as a “radiant figure carrying a timbrel of brass in her right hand, that produces a shrill and clear sound” and a boat shaped cup of gold in her left hand*(Beer, "The Language of Kubla Khan" 236–38).* During the Romantic period Yemen was another Middle Eastern locus for the earthly paradise. William Jones described Yemen as “the most secure” and “the most beautiful region of the East,” enclosed on the one side by vast rocks and deserts, and defended on the other by a tempestuous sea” “under a serene sky”*(Pachori 136).*

Critics like Fulford and Attar consider “Kubla Khan” as chiefly growing out of Coleridge’s interest in Oriental tales. Fulford regards “Kubla Khan” as a ‘dreamscape’ shaped by a number of Eastern tales, particularly, “Tales of the Genii” and the Persian-Arabic collection *Bahar-Danush* or *Garden of Knowledge* translated into English by Jonathon Scott. The *Bahar-Danush* contains a description of a garden and the theme of poetic inspiration. A visit to the garden inspires the poet to creative ecstasy—“the Wijd of ecstasy.” Fulford observes that Coleridge “was introduced by Southey to Persian tales that identified the ruler/artist contrast as an Oriental topos. That topos, of course, is central to “Kubla Khan,” where the poet-figure, inspired by his Abyssinian maid-muse, will build in air the dome that the Khan wants to build on the ground *(“Coleridge and the Oriental Tales” 229).* Attar points to a few sources little discussed by earlier critics. In *Purchas His Pilgrimage* there is a detailed discussion of the Assassins’ paradise. Attar refers to the story related by Marco Polo about the master of Alamut’s fortress who used to hypnotize his self-sacrificing followers with the use of *hashis* and would introduce them into his false paradise with ladies and
damsels dallying with the entrants. Attar suggests that Alaodine, the leader of the assassins changed role with Kubla Khan in Coleridge’s opium induced dream. He connects the warrior king Kubla Khan, the excited Assassins of Alaodine’s paradise and the half-crazed narrator of the poem (46-47). In Purchas there is a passage describing Alaodine’s paradise: “Hee had in a goodly Valley betwixt two Mountaynes very high, mad a Goodly garden, furnished with best trees and fruits he could find, adorned with divers Palaces and houses of pleasure, beautified with gold Workers, pictures and Furnitures of silke” (qtd. in Lowes 329). Similar descriptions of gardens are there in the tale of Aladdin in the Nights. Attar quotes the relevant passage from the tale: “Build me a palace of finest marble, set with jasper, agate, and other precious stones. In the middle you shall build me a large hall with dome, its four walls of massy gold and silver, each side having six windows whose lattices, all except one, which is to be left unfinished, must be set with diamond and rubies” (46). “The Sixth Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor” might have inspired the river image in the poem and the image of the measureless caverns; the woman wailing for her demon lover might have drawn its inspiration from “The story of Young King of the Black Isles” where the wife of the king laments for lost Ethiopian lover in a wasteland. The Abyssinian maid might have come from the tale of Noureddin and the Fair Persian where there is an exquisitely beautiful lady who dances and sings. She is a symbol of poetic inspiration, and creative energy. Kabbani Rana has interpreted the figure of the “damsel with a dulcimer” with reference to the recurring image of the sensual East in Western literature. According to Rana, Coleridge drew his poetic muses from “imagination’s Orient.” “His Abyssinian maid is the spouse of his poetic fancy; like Southey’s ‘snowy-Ethiop’, she is exotic but familiar—being fair-skinned like Circassians of the Orientalist painting. She is a later version of the Circassian Lewti in the poem of that name, in which, Coleridge adopts the trappings of Persian poetry.”10 Both Lewti and the Abyssinian maid, according to Rana, are figures of sensuality (35).
The second strand of “Kubla Khan’s” source hunting leads us to India, and Cashmere becomes the focal point of this strand. It is argued that the image of Kubla’s garden might have been influenced by the contemporary writings on Cashmere, or the gardens from Indian myth might have made their way into the poem. Fulford suggests that Coleridge’s dream-vision of a paradise garden in “Kubla Khan” might reflect aspects of Jones’s “The Palace of Fortune: An Indian Tale” (1772) “in which a paradise garden is also viewed only in a dream-vision” (“Poetic flowers” 118). In Jones’s poem there are images of “living rills of purest nectar flow / O’er meads that with unfading flowerets glow” (65–66); “A rising fountain play’d from every stream”(83); and “a rock of ice, by magic rais’d, / High in the midst a gorgeous palace blaz’d” (99–100). Both Coleridge and Southey read Maurice, Bernier and Tavernier and their description of Cashmere as the earthly paradise. As John Drew notes, when the interest in Orient became centred in India in the 1790s, Cashmere rose in the English consciousness and Cashmere could be an “objective correlative for the highly-charged interior landscape of ‘Kubla Khan’” (205). Drew also traces the origin of the Abyssinian maid to Cashmere and sees her as the poetic equivalent of the Indian goddess Sarasvati (186-226).

If Cashmere inspired the image of the paradise, there were images of beautiful palaces and their ruination in William Hodges’s Travels in India that might have inspired the “ancestral voices prophesying war.” Deidre Coleman in her article “The ‘dark Tide of time’: Coleridge and William Hodge’s India” shows that Coleridge had knowledge of Hodges’s book and his paintings. Hodges’s paintings were exhibited in London and forty eight of his paintings were published between 1785 and 1788 entitled Select Views of India. Coleman argues that Hodge’s paintings with its depiction of the fall of grand Mughals “provided a sort of warning to eighteenth century imperial Britain. Colman identifies a number of issues common to Hodge’s book and “Kubla Khan”: the dreamy nostalgic evocation of the Miltonic
garden of Eden, the false paradise, territorial conquest, war and the loss of empire. Coleman argues that Hodge depicts Mughal life as characterized by contrasting images of energy and delight, twined with stasis and annihilation and it resonates in Coleridge’s poem in the contrasting images of “gardens bright” and “lifeless ocean” presided over by Kubla Khan’s “pleasure dome” (48). In the final part of the essay Coleman attempts to show how Hodge’s notion of the cave as discussed in *Dissertation on the Prototypes of Architecture, Hindu Moorish and Gothic* influenced Coleridge’s idea “Romantic sublimity.” The cave temples of Elephanata are linked to the “deep romantic chasm” of “Kubla Khan”—a place at once “holy and enchanted.” Coleman gives instances from contemporary writings on India to argue how the cave or cavern was connected to the Sanskrit text by the Orientalists. She cites from William Jones “Hymn to Surya” and from *Quarterly Review* to prove her point. The “dark caves” becomes “the dark caverns of Sanskrit literature.” Coleman points out how Jones’s syncretism becomes a cause of concern for Coleridge—the ‘holy’ caverns of Sanskrit literature for Jones become the demonic chasm for Coleridge (52-53). However, the residual impact of the ‘holiness’ remains in “Kubla Khan.”

When this interpretation of Coleman is linked to the issue of imperial anxiety in Coleridge’s poem and the contemporary British fear of another Mughal descendant Tipu Sultan and his depiction in the popular British media, Kubla becomes a very complex figure. He is not only the Chinese emperor but also the contemporary Tipu and simultaneously the British rulers who are following in the footsteps of the Mughals. The poem incorporates both the fear of empire as well as the fear of losing it, when read in the context of growing British Empire in India. The fear of losing the Indian empire becomes the immediate concern when we take into account Napoleon’s Egyptian invasion which was planned to curtail the British power in India. However, the failure of the Napoleonic invasion was also a kind of warning
to the British as were the pictures of the ruination of the Mughals in India in Hodges’s narrative.

The third strand of the sources of “Kubla Khan” takes us to China. David Vallins identifies China as the alternative space in Coleridge’s poetry. Vallins contends that in some of his earlier works Coleridge explored the possibility of uniting the divine and the human, the conscious and the unconscious, the material and the spiritual, the real and the imagined, the mundane and the divine. Coleridge tried to do this by locating his poems neither in the Christian Europe nor the known Orient (India/ Middle East) but by displacing the settings into some lesser known areas: China in “Kubla Khan,” South Pole in Ancient Mariner, and Circasia in “The Lewtii.” The vague geography of these settings, Vallins argues, allowed Coleridge in integrating the earthly and the spiritual, the mundane and the imaginative, the sensuous and the intellectual, the spontaneous and the philosophical. Finding an alternative space beyond the Judeo-Christian and the Hindu framework helped the poet in uniting the opposite poles of his mind beyond duality (119-30).

However, interpreting the poem philosophically ignoring the contemporary geopolitics concerning China would be an incomplete reading of the poem. Just as the Hastings trial brought India to the attention of the British the Macartney embassy of 1792-94 to China brought China to the forefront. The embassy was a failure but the ambassador and his companions produced books and journals on China, and these books changed the European perception about China. The cause of the failure of the embassy was narrated to be the refusal of the ambassador to ‘kowtow’ before the Chinese emperor. The ‘kowtowing’ became a widely known Chinese ritual during the Romantic period and, as Kitson notes, the ritual became a symbol of Oriental despotism: “The kowtow like the infanticide, the sati, the lingchhi, or cannibalism became a scandal in the nineteenth century British discourse, a marker of barbarism indicating lack of civilization” (“The ‘Kowt’ Controversy” 20).
Although the declared source of the poem is Purchas’s *Pilgrimage*, Sir William Chambers’s “Dissertation on *Oriental Gardening*” contained many passages describing Chinese gardens and the landscape of “Kubla Khan” seems to follow the discourse on the Chinese garden in Chamber. Two other sources for Coleridge might have been Macartney’s journals and George Staunton’s *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* (1797) as both of the authors dwelt in detail on the Chinese garden. Chambers argued that the Chinese artfully employed the “pleasing horrid and enchanted” features of nature in designing their garden. The pleasing aspect of the Chinese garden is seen in lines six to nine, the horrible in lines fourteen to sixteen and the enchanted in lines seventeen to twenty nine (Katsyuama 197-99). Extensive description of King Qianlong’s garden at Yuen-min-yuen and in Beijing, and also his summer palace at Zhe-hol is given by Staunton and Macartney. There are many passages with descriptions of Chinese landscape almost similar to “Kubla Khan.” One of such passages may be quoted here:

In many places immense woods, chiefly oaks, pines and chestnuts, grow upon almost perpendicular steeps and force their sturdy roots through every resistance of surface, and of soil, where vegetation would seem almost impossible. These woods often clamber over the loftiest pinnacles of the stony hills, or gathering on the skirts of them, descend with a rapid sweep, and bury themselves in the deepest valleys . . . a cataract tumbling from above, raging with foam and rebounding with a thousand echoes from below or silently engulphed in a gloomy pool or yawning chasm. (Macartney 132)

That Coleridge was following the development in China is evident from his writings. In his *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion* Coleridge he referred to the ritual of the kowtow: “I have . . . read in some eastern courts the ambassadors from Europe have their arms pinioned while they speak to the despot”(*The Collected Works* 1: 294).
Considering the possible Chinese influence on Coleridge “Kubla Khan” is interpreted by Nigel Leask as a “Chinese poem.” Leask argues that in “Kubla Khan” Coleridge is presenting a coded satire on George III’s government for his attempt to terrify the people into submission in the manner of the Chinese emperor Kubla and his contemporary descendant Qianlong(“Road to Xanadu Revisited”). A similar argument is forwarded by Kitson with reference to the ‘kowtow’ ceremony at Chinese court as a symbol of submission. The ‘holy dread’ is interpreted by Kitson with reference to the kowtow (“The ‘Kowtow’ Controversy”).

The interpretation of “Kubla Khan” changes with the change in its locus. In the context of India it becomes a poem concerned with the imperial anxiety. Read in the context of Egypt it is a critique of Napoleonic imperialism – a critique of his “commanding genius” as opposed to the “absolute genius” of the poet. China as a geopolitical space gets connected to Coleridge’s critique of despotism. In whatever way we chose to interpret the poem“The Orientalist exterior” as Fulford argues, “uncovers an occidental and psychological interior” (Fulford, “Poetic bowers” 118).

We may reach an interesting conclusion by taking a lead from Javed Majid who interprets the imagery of plumbing and probing depth in Southey’s Eastern epics as symbolic of the attempt to tap new sources of creativity made available by the Oriental Renaissance. Coleridge’s images of the river, fountain and the “damsel with a dulcimer” have been interpreted with reference to poetic inspiration in the Greco-Roman tradition, but the other Romantics, Coleridge was also trying to tap the new source of creativity. Tapping this new source of creativity, however, was fraught with problems. The Oriental Renaissance, as we have seen, challenged the superiority of the Greco-Roman tradition and the primacy of Christianity. Jones knew this even when he compared “Oriental Firdous” with Grecian Homer or wrote on the ancientness of the Hindu scriptures. The demonic aspect of Kubla’s pleasure garden reflects the anxiety and fear of the poet caused by the Oriental Renaissance.
The ‘sun’ and the ‘ice’ the ‘holy, and the ‘savage’, could co-exist only because both fear and fascination with the East gripped the Western psyche. The figure of the Abyssinian maid seems to be Coleridge’s solution for the anxiety. By locating the muse in Abyssinia Coleridge tries to steer clear of this anxiety. During the Romantic period Iran and Ethiopia were in contention for the seat of ancient civilization. Abyssinia was associated both with the East and the West as argued by Shaffer and Beer (*Coleridge the Visionary*). Shaffer has shown with reference to the writings of Jones, Lowth and Eichhorn that in the eighteenth century Abyssinia was regarded as the geopolitical centre of Oriental civilization with a Mosaic link. Further, Shaffer points out that India and Abyssinia might have been also linked in Coleridge’s imagination through the figure of the Egyptian goddess Isis and the Goddess who is known as Isani in Bengal (118-21). Abyssinia, therefore, provided the poet a perfect setting for domesticating the Oriental ‘springs.’

Finally, a point must be made about the preface that Coleridge wrote to introduce the poem in 1816. In the preface Coleridge presents the poem only as a “psychological curiosity.” In 1816-1817 Coleridge published “Kubla Khan” and “Christabel” and republished *Ancient Mariner*. All these poems were written in the late 1790s, and in 1816-17 he added the paratexts—prefaces and glosses—apparently to make the poems more intelligible to the readers. Tim Fulford in his essay “Coleridge and the Oriental Tales” draws our attention to the changes that Coleridge made while republishing *Ancient Mariner* in 1817. The 1797 version of the poem had a subtitle “A Poet’s Reverie,” “manifesting the structure of a waking dream” (221). In the 1817 version Coleridge omitted the subtitle. Similarly, “Kubla Khan” was conceived as another dream poem but Coleridge dismisses it as a psychological curiosity in the 1816 preface. The poems could no longer be projected as a ‘reverie.’ Fulford argues that it was the result of Coleridge’s compromise with his growing conservatism and
increasing distance from early radicalism. Coleridge tried to dismiss his earlier effort at syncretism, and tried to disown the Eastern influence.

From a radical, a ‘Jacobin’ and a Unitarian in the 1790s Coleridge became a supporter of the state and the Anglican Church after 1805; from opium addict and wayward genius he was trying to project himself as a rational poet and thinker. Coleridge attitude towards East, Egypt, and India, Hinduism or slavery also underwent drastic changes after the Maltan phase of his career. His gradual turn to nationalism and Trinitarian Christianity led the poet to contradict his earlier positions. Therefore, Garcia is right to define the preface to “Kubla Khan” as a “conservative act of self effacement” (Islam and English Enlightenment 181). In the 1790s Coleridge could think of a poem based on syncretism, but in 1816 he denied his earlier syncretism as a mere fancy.

Coleridge was involved in collaboration with two of his fellow poets. His collaboration with Southey led to the production of some famous specimens of literary Orientalism. The most celebrated collaboration of the Romantic period, however, was between Wordsworth and Coleridge and it gave birth to the defining moment for Romanticism with the publication of the Lyrical Ballads (1798). Coleridge read and had access to a large body of texts on and from the Orient. In the 1790s he read the Gita and the Koran and the works of William Jones and other Orientalists. The influence of the East is evident in his poems of the 1790s and one such poem, Ancient Mariner was included in the Lyrical Ballads. Therefore, it is natural to assume that Wordsworth soaked in the Eastern influence through his friend and collaborator Coleridge. Wordsworth was not completely unread on the Orient either. Apart from the Nights, he read the works of Jones and other Orientalists. However, his reading on the Orient is not comparable to that of Coleridge or Southey. His poetry does not contain extensive references to the East but there are poems by Wordsworth where there are distinct references to the East. Moreover, Wordsworth’s poetic
theory itself is indebted to the Eastern poetic customs. The “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* shows distinct marks of Jones’s writing on poetry and poetic diction. Jones was inspired by his reading of the Perso-Arabic and Indian literature to formulate an alternative theory of poetry.

Critics have pointed out the similarities between Jones and Wordsworth in their poetic theories. As early as in 1946 V. de Sola Pinto observed that the principle in which Jones finds the origin of poetry and the other arts is “a strong and animated expression of the human passions, of joy and grief, love and hate, admiration and anger, sometimes pure and unmixed, sometimes modified and combined.” It “anticipates (and probably influenced) the views of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, and it foreshadows the teaching of Benedetto Croce” (690). According to M. H. Abrams, the 1772 publication of William Jones’s *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatic Languages* and the two essays added to this, “On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations” and “Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative,” deliberately set out to revise the base of the neoclassical theory of poetry and poetic genres. Jones did this, Abrams suggests, by weaving together ideas drawn from Longinus, the old doctrine of poetic inspiration, and recent theories of emotional and imaginative origin of poetry, and a major emphasis on the lyric form and on the “primitive and spontaneous” poetry of the Oriental nations. What the "Asiatick" “primitive and spontaneous lyric” shows, according to Jones, is that Aristotle was wrong: poetry is not produced by imitation, but by a very different principle, “which must be sought for in the deepest recesses of the human mind.” Abrams concludes that well before *Lyrical Ballads* was published, “the association of the lyric with an expressive theory of culture complemented its abstraction in the new modern system of genre” (84–88). Similarly, Garland Cannon observes that both “philosophically and artistically, Jones early perceived the poor state of English poetry.” Canon comments that if the relevant questions asked by Jones in various books and
answers suggested to these are synthesized into a single critical essay, it would have
anticipated Wordsworth’s “philosophical essay” in the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*
(“Oriental Jones: Scholarship” 42).

None of above critics, however, has been bold enough to use the term ‘influence’
directly; they have spoken of a possibility. Javed Majid used the term ‘influence’ (171-73) for
the first time. The reason behind this ‘probability’ theory is, perhaps, the lack of evidence that
Wordsworth read Jones’s essays. However, Wordsworth had interest in the Orient and
Oriental literature; he read the *Nights* and had sustained interest in Oriental tales. The
catalogue of Wordsworth’s book prepared by his daughter includes several versions of the
*Nights, Arabian Tales or continuation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, The Thousand
and One Days or Persian Tales, and The Tales of the Genii*. Apart from these Oriental or
pseudo-Oriental collections of tales Wordsworth had a grammar of Arabic language by
Thomas Arpenius, translations of Sa’di’s works, J.D. Carlyle’s *Specimens of the Arabian
Poetry* and several other works on the Orient by European authors like Simon Ockley’s *The
History of the Saracens*, Jean Louis Marie’s *Travels through Barbary*, Purchas’s *Pilgrimage*,
Jean Antoine Dubois’s, *Descriptions of the Characters, Manners and Customs of the people
of India*, Lady Wortley Montague’s *Letters*, to mention a few of them. 13 Duncan Wu in
*Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799* suggests that Wordsworth read the review of Jones’s
*Institutes of Hindu Law* published in March in the *Critical Review* (1798) and Coleridge was
the reviewer. If Coleridge reviewed it, it is also possible that Wordsworth had read the works
of Jones, because Wordsworth worked in close tandem with Coleridge during 1797-98.
Coleridge and Southey were familiar with the works of Jones and their works from this
period were inspired by their readings on the East. It is possible, therefore, that Wordsworth
was familiar with the 1772 edition of Jones’s *Poems* or other works by Jones apart from the
*Institutes of Hindu Law*. Wordsworth’s interest in Eastern poetry during this period is also
proved by his reading of Ahamad Ardabili’s *A Series of Poems, Containing the Plaints of Consolations and Delights of Achmed Ardebeili, a Persian Exile* (1797). Wordsworth read the poems in 1797 (Wu, *Wordsworth’s Readings* 6). Moreover, once Wordsworth was advised by his uncle to go for a course in Oriental literature. He wrote in a letter to his friend William Matthews on November 23, 1791: “My uncle, the clergyman, proposed to me a short time ago to begin a course of Oriental literature, thinking that it was the best field for a person to distinguish himself, as a man of letters. To oblige him I consented to peruse the plan after my return from the continent” (*Letters of the Wordsworth Family* 38).

Wordsworth’s reading list also shows that he had read Sa’di’s works and other Perso-Arabic poets, upon whom Jones founded his poetics. An exploration of the themes and issues taken up by Jones and Wordsworth and the similarity in their argument make the case of Eastern influence on Wordsworth stronger.

Most of the critics have emphasised on the similarity between Jones’s theory that poetry is not imitative but expressive, and Wordsworth’s poetic theory in the “Preface.”

Prefiguring Wordsworth Jones wrote in his “Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative”: “poetry was originally no more than a strong and animated expression of the human passions of joy and grief, love and hate, admiration and anger, sometimes pure and unmixed, sometimes variously modified and combined. . .” (Pachori 13). In the same essay he wrote:

Thus will each artist gain his end, not by imitating the works of nature, but by assuming her power, and causing the same effect upon the imagination, which her charms produce to the senses: this must be the chief object of a poet, a musician, and a painter, who know that great effects are not produced by minute details, but by the general spirit of the whole piece, and that a gaudy composition may strike the mind for a short time, but that the beauties of simplicity are both more delightful, and more permanent. (Pachori 135)
The passages are remarkable not only for their emphasis on poetry as a vehicle of emotion but also for their stress on nature as inspiring the imagination of the poet, and for the rejection of the ‘gaudy’ in favour of the ‘simple.’ In similar vein, Wordsworth would reject the poetic diction of the Neo-Classical writers for their “gaudiness and inane phraseology” (“Preface” 163).15

In “Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations” Jones praises the ‘Asiaticks’ for the “liveliness of their fancy and the richness of their invention” (Pachori 135) and in the passage quoted above Jones writes that poetry is not merely expression of passion but the poet assumes “her (nature’s) power” “causing the same effect upon the imagination.” It is the imaginative power which helps poetry to act by a “kind of substitution,” and as Majid points out, the idea is repeated by Wordsworth when he writes that the poet has the “ability to conjuring up in himself the passions which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet . . . do more.” Majid comments that Wordsworth is more positive than Jones about what the later calls ‘substitution’: “The power of imagination to produce images in the absence of objects is crucial to Wordsworth’s own poetry and to his theory of it” (172).

Jones’s “Essay on the Arts Commonly Called Imitative” is more remarkable for incorporating observations on poetry that are later echoed by Wordsworth. Jones links poetic inspiration to nature; living in closeness to nature the Arabians drew their inspiration from the beautiful objects of nature: “they pass their lives in the highest pleasure, of which they have any conception, in the contemplation of the most delightful objects, and in the enjoyment of perpetual spring.” The Arabians took “all their notions of felicity . . . from the freshness and the verdure” (Pachori 138). Jones observes that “the Arabians being perpetually conversant with the most beautiful objects, spending a calm and agreeable life in a finer climate, being extremely addicted to the softer passions, and having the advantage of a language singularly
adapted to poetry must be naturally excellent poets, provided that their manners and customs
be favourable to the cultivation of their art” (Pachori 139). This observation on the
relationship between poetry and beautiful forms of nature is echoed by Wordsworth in the
“Preface.” For Wordsworth the elemental passions of men remain pure in people who live in
the midst of nature and in that life of simplicity the durable passions are incorporated.
Wordsworth considers the life of the people living in closeness to nature as the true subject
matter of poetry.

Regarding the language of prose and poetry Jones observed that “fine sentiments
delivered in prose were like gems scattered at random, but that, when they were confined in a
poetical measure, they resembled bracelets and strings of pearls” (Pachori 140). Wordsworth
expresses a similar view. For Wordsworth there is no essential difference between prose and
poetry except that of metre: “And it would be a most easy task to prove to him, that not only
the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must
necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differs from that of good prose”
(168). Jones concludes his essay with the observation on the lack of poetic inspiration for
English poetry and suggests:

That, if the principal writings of the Asiaticks, which are reposited in our
publick libraries, were printed with the usual advantage of notes and
illustrations, and if the languages of the Eastern nations were studied in our
places of education, where every other branch of useful knowledge is taught to
perfection, a new and ample field would be opened for speculation; we should
have a more extensive insight into the history of the human mind, we should
be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes, and a number of
excellent compositions would be brought to light, which future scholars might
explain, and future poets might imitate. (Pachori 144)
Wordsworth in the “Preface” seems to develop the full implication of Jones’s observations. He took the responsibility to revive English poetry following the suggestion of Jones, though he did not shift his poetic scene to the Orient. His ideas of poetic diction, poetic language, subject matter of poetry, view of Nature and man, view of poetry as expressive all are indebted to the writing of Jones. Needless to say Jones’s views were inspired by his reading of Eastern poetry. Wordsworth in writing the manifesto of Romanticism, therefore, was indebted to the Oriental Renaissance of the eighteenth century and to a large extent to ‘oriental’ Jones.

The dream of the Arab episode in Book V of Wordsworth’s The Prelude also seems to echo Jones’s idea that the home of impassioned poetry is the Middle East. Jones in his “Essay on the Arts” referring to the writings of the Arabians observes that among the Arabians “dramatic poetry of every sort is wholly unknown, yet, where the pleasing arts, of expressing the passions in verse, and of enforcing that expression by melody, are cultivated to a degree of enthusiasm” (Pachori 131). Wordsworth’s dreamer in Book V hears a voice from the shell that can be defined as a passionate “expression by melody.” The language of the voice is not known to the dreamer, yet it impresses upon him the meaning because of the passion contained in it:

And heard that instant in unknown tongue

Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,

Aloud prophetic blast of harmony. (Book V, 94-96)

Wordsworth seems to follow Jones’s dictum that “greatest effect [of poetry] is not produced by imitation but by a very different principle which must be sought for in the deepest recesses of the human mind” (Pachori 131). The “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” coming out of the “deepest recesses of the human mind” would cut through the linguistic borders. So, the “passions” uttered in an “unknown tongue” impresses meaning upon the dreamer.
The enigmatic dream of the Arab sequence in Book V of *The Prelude* has received much critical attention. Critics have tried to explain the meaning of the dream by using multiple critical perspectives. James Worthington Smyser in 1956 interpreted the dream of the Arab in Book V of *The Prelude* as derived from the three dreams of Descartes on November 10, 1619. In the last of these dreams Descartes beheld two books—a dictionary containing all scientific knowledge and a book of poetry. With reference to this Smyser interprets the stone and the shell as representing science and poetry, respectively. Many interpretations of the Arab episode have followed since and the central concerns of these interpretations have been: Firstly, whose dream it is; secondly, whether the dream is real or just an artificial strategy; and thirdly, what the dream does signify.

In all versions of *The Prelude* before 1839 the dream is attributed to a friend. Later Wordsworth removed the friend from the narrative and introduced it as his own dream. This has led to speculations about the dreamer. Smyser concedes that the friend Wordsworth refers to might be Coleridge but he argues in favour of Michel Beaupuy. David Chandler in “Robert Southey and ‘The Prelude’s Arab Dream” interprets the dram episode with reference to Southey’s dream of the deluge, and his intention to write a poem on it. Southey’s writings on the Arab and the Bedouin hero in *Thalaba* are linked to the presentation of the Arab in *The Prelude*. He concludes that the friend is none but Southey whose dream is delineated by Wordsworth. However, there are others who interpret the dream as Wordsworth’s own, and consider it a more logical explanation. In 1926 Selincourt defended the dream as Wordsworth’s own (Selincourt 526), but J Hillis Miller in 1972 interpreted the dream as a deliberate invention (138).

Most of the recent interpretations have focussed on the passage as an expression of Wordsworth’s idea of poetry and poetic creation. Galperin, for example, observes that we must regard Wordsworth’s account of the dream vision in Book V as self-reflexive: “Through
the Arab dream, Wordsworth – the resisting writer – depicts himself, the ‘Poet,’ for what he is: a crazed, deluded wanderer implicated in a mythic or representational structure that is uncompletable” (621-22). Gordon K. Thomas provides an almost similar perspective and Wordsworth according to him is concerned with the lasting quality of written language. For Thomas the dream is real, though borrowed from Descartes. Robert Philmus subjects the dream to Freudian interpretation. For Philmus “the real thought-content of the dream . . . dramatizes an anxiety about the destructibility, the mortality, of the dreamer, not about that of all humankind or of the embodiments of its spirit” (186). Whether the dream is real or imaginary or dreamed by Wordsworth or his friend one thing is clear: the dream is related to poetry and poetics.

Although there had been much source hunting for the dream episode in The Prelude, little or no exploration has been made into the possibility of reading the dream as influenced by the Nights, a book he repeatedly refers to in Book V of The Prelude. In the third Kalandar’s tale, the Kalandar relates his experience of shipwreck. The ship is wrecked near the Magnet Mountain as all iron nails of the ship fly towards the mountain. The prince is mysteriously saved from drowning and he finds a path leading to the summit of the mountain where he finds a dome and falls asleep and dreams:

Then I fell asleep under the dome, and heard in my dream a mysterious voice saying, “O son of Khazib! When thou wakest from thy sleep, dig under thy feet and thou shalt find a bow of brass and three leaden arrows inscribed with talismans and characters. Take the bow and shoot the arrows at the horseman on the dome top and free mankind from this sore calamity. When thou hast shot him he shall fall into the sea, and the horse will also drop at thy feet. Then bury it in the place of the bow. This done, the main will swell and rise till it is level with the mountain head, and there will appear on it a skiff carrying a man
of laton (other than he thou shalt have shot) holding in his hand a pair of paddles. He will come to thee, and do thou embark with him, but beware of saying Bismillah or of otherwise naming Allah Almighty. He will row thee for a space of ten days, till he bring thee to certain islands called the Islands of Safety, and thence thou shalt easily reach a port and find those who will convey thee to thy native land. And all this shall be fulfilled to thee so thou call not on the name of Allah.

After he wakes up he performs the bidding of the mysterious voice:

[I] found the bow and arrows and shot at the horseman and tumbled him into the main, whilst the horse dropped at my feet, so I took it and buried it. Presently the sea surged up and rose till it reached the top of the mountain, nor had I long to wait ere I saw a skiff in the offing coming toward me. I gave thanks to Allah, and when the skiff came up to me, I saw therein a man of brass with a tablet of lead on his breast inscribed with talismans and characters, and I embarked without uttering a word. The boatman rowed on with me through the first day and the second and the third, in all ten whole days, till I caught sight of the Islands of Safety, whereat I joyed with exceeding joy and for stress of gladness exclaimed, “Allah! Allah! In the name of Allah! There is no god but the God and Allah is Almighty.” Thereupon the skiff forthwith upset and cast me upon the sea, then it righted and sank deep into the depths. (Burton 95-96)

Both, the dream, and what happens after the dream is relevant to the reading of the dream sequence in Wordsworth because the Bedouin in Wordsworth seems to be a combination of the horseman sitting at the top of the mountain “who rideth a horse of brass and holdeth in hand a lance of laton” and the mysterious boatman who brings the prince to safety but casts
him in the sea when he takes the name of Allah. Wordsworth’s Bedouin bears a lance (“A lance he bore, and underneath one arm”) like the boatmen, and looks like the saviour for the dreamer (“Much I rejoiced, not doubting but a guide/Was present . . .”); yet the boatman/horseman leaves the dreamer hopeless(“quickening then the pace/ Of the unwieldy creature he bestrode”). Both the dreams have the fear of the deluge and the sea shore as their setting. The two paddles in the hand of the boatman from the dream of the prince might have fused with the two books of Descartes. The similarities between the two dreams are so striking that one cannot but conclude that Wordsworth was inspired by the dream of the third Kalandar prince. The argument becomes stronger when we consider that Book V contains multiple passages describing Wordsworth’s enchantment with the Nights. In the fifth-book he devotes a large passage to sing a panegyrical to the Nights, and gives details of its effect upon his young mind. The “precious treasure” (460), “the tales that charm away the wakeful night in Araby” (520) had a lasting impact upon Wordsworth.

Smyser interprets the dream as expressing Wordsworth’s idea that poetry is more valuable than science. In the dream episode the Bedouin comments on the comparative value of the two books: “the Arab told me that the stone” was “Euclid’s elements” and the shell “said he” was “something more worth” (85-90). Theresa M. Kelley argues that Wordsworth does not mean to assert the dominance of poetry over science. For Kelley “the shell embodies a new kind of knowledge which is at once geometrical and poetic” (565). For Wordsworth “poetry is the impassioned expression which is in the face of all Science” (174). This interpretation is more acceptable since the Arabs were preservers not only of poetic tradition but also of the scientific tradition. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch’s observation, therefore, seems appropriate: “As an Arab he (the Bedouin) is one of a nation of preservers and transmitters who rescued Greek science and metaphysics from oblivion . . . and the Age of Wordsworth
also regarded Arabia as a fountainhead of romance and eloquence specially of figurative expression if not the originators of modern Romantic poets as such” (qtd. in Caracciolo 66).

Bernhardt-Kabisch’s observation leads to a recent analysis by Samar Attar, who traces the influence of the Arabian novel Hayy Ibn Yakzan on the dream of the Arab episode. According to Attar, Wordsworth must have heard of Hayy Ibn Yakzan as it was translated into English by Simon Ockley whose History of the Saracens was in his library. Attar argues that Wordsworth might not have read Ibn Tufayal’s novel, but a number of philosophers who influenced Wordsworth were influenced by the novel. Rousseau was one of the admirers of the novel and his Emile was inspired by it; Godwin admired Tufyal; Descartes was inspired by Hayy in whose figure reason is combined with imagination: “Hayy Ibn Yaqzan who introduced rationalism in Europe . . . also spoke about the significance of that mystic vision which was akin to ‘the sparks of fire in flints’” (93). At the end of his argument Attar, therefore, raises the question: “Is it possible that the uncouth stranger in Wordsworth’s poem, who is on mission to bury his ‘twofold treasure’, a stone and a shell that represent geometry and god, and science and imagination before ‘the fleet waters of the drowning world’ destroy them is none but Hayy Ibn Yaqzan?” (93). Attar further argues that the very design of The Prelude is similar to that of Hayy Ibn Yakzan. Hayy Ibn Yakzan is considered an early example of Bildungsroman; The Prelude is also a kind of Bildungsroman that narrates the physical and psychological development of the poet from early childhood (89).

In fact, there are other poems by Wordsworth where the influence of Hayy Ibn Yakzan or the Nights can be traced. The “Lucy Poems” in particular seem to be indebted to Hayy Ibn Yakzan. Lucy grows up in the midst of nature without any human help and is educated by nature: “She shall be mine, and I will make/A lady of my own.” Lucy seems to be the female counterpart of Hayy. She learns from the various activities and elements of nature: the “floating clouds,” “the motions of the storm” “shall mould the maiden’s form /By silent
sympathy” (218). Lucy, like Hayy will learn from nature without human intervention. According to Attar, similar relationship between man and nature is further developed in Wordsworth’s ode, “Intimations of Immortality from Recollection of Early Childhood” and in “Tintern Abbey.” In these poems Wordsworth, Attar argues, makes a journey from the “sensuous” enjoyment of nature to the “sublime,” “the heavenly life of the hermit as seen in the natural and moral man Hayy Ibn Yaqzan” (87).

Even though Wordsworth was influenced by Eastern literature and Jones’s discourse on Eastern poetry, he did not always endorse the Orient. Jones’s notion of fertile Arabian landscape and climate as the most favourable atmosphere for expressive poetry was rejected by Wordsworth. Emily Heddad points to the politics in Wordsworth’s Oriental poetics. Her argument focuses on how Wordsworth uses nature and landscape to build a contrast between the fertile West and the arid deserts of the Middle East. The Oasis is presented with its association to the unnatural rather than a place of natural abundance. She shows that Wordsworth associates Oriental art with artificiality (104-06; 155-57). She refers to poems like “Septimi Gades,” “The Haunted Tree,” and “The Solitary Reaper.” She follows Alan Bewell’s argument that in Wordsworth’s poetry the desert wastes of the Middle East indicated the enormous destructive power of the despotic governments to lay waste nature (Haddad 105; Bewell, *Wordsworth and Enlightenment* 241). Haddad argues that in “Septimi Gades” Wordsworth foregrounds the contrast between nature in Europe and nature in the Middle East. The first two landscapes in the poem are from Rhone region in France and Grasmere in England. This “aesthetic landscape empty of people” (Butler, *Romanticism in England* 54) is contrasted with ‘pale’ Arabia:

To him who faint and heartless stands

On pale Arabia’s thirsty sands,

How fair that fountain seems
Where last beneath the palmy shade
In bowers of rose and jasmine laid,
He quaffed the living streams. (258)

The speaker-traveller does not find the Arabian landscape pleasant or homely. In “The Haunted Tree” Wordsworth links art and the Middle East:

Couch beautiful as e’er for earthly use
Was fashioned; whether, by the hand of Art
That eastern Sultan, amid flowers enwrought
On silken tissue, might diffuse his limbs
In languor; or, by Nature, for repose

Of panting Wood-nymph, wearied with the chase. (258)

Haddad argues that Wordsworth associates art and the Middle East but he dissociates it from nature. Both “art and the Middle East are defined ontologically in terms of their opposition to nature.” The Middle Eastern landscape, therefore, cannot be the ideal aesthetic landscape for Wordsworth, though it has all the qualities of a typically Wordsworthian landscape (104-07; 155-57).

There are a number of other poems by Wordsworth that refer to the Middle East and some of these poems are marked by a sense of religious hostility, characteristic of medieval crusading romances. There are two sonnets in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* entitled “Crusades” and “Crusaders.”18 In the first of these sonnets Wordsworth represents Muslims as the fearful enemy of Christendom by referring to the Muslim occupation of Spain: “The crescent glitters on the towers of Spain; / And soft Italia feels renewed alarms” (508). The ‘scimitar’ (which has been repeatedly used in Western literature as a symbol of Eastern cruelty) is not resistible:

All Christendom: -they sweep along (was never
So huge a host!) - to tear from the Unbeliever

The Precious tomb, their haven of salvation. (508)

Interestingly, Wordsworth refers to the hanging tomb of the prophet Muhammad, a misconception already rectified by the Western writers. The other sonnet is a meditation upon the sad fate of the crusaders, but the crusader’s life is also represented as a glorious one: “the romance / Of many-coloured life the Fortune pours / Round the Crusaders” (512). In the sonnet “Scene in Venice” Wordsworth describes the “Successor” of Caesar “whose strong arm the orient could not check/ He, who had held the Soldan at his beck” (509). The sonnet reminds us of an earlier sonnet by Wordsworth entitled “On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic” where he meditates on the imperial glory of Venice and its subsequent loss: “Once did she hold the gorgeous east in fee; / And was safeguard of the west” but now these “glories fade” “titles vanish and that strength decay” (363).

In these poems Wordsworth seems to represent the Islamic East as the Other. The first two sonnets are set in the medieval period and sentiments expressed in them can be attributed to the subjects that Wordsworth writes about. However, in the third sonnet he writes on the contemporary Venice and laments that it has lost its sway over the East. When Wordsworth wrote the sonnet it was France and Austria who controlled the city. The status of Venice saw gradual decline after the discovery of the sea route to India (by the Portuguese) and other Eastern nations during the sixteenth century. The decline in importance of the city of Venice was more the result of the infighting of the European superpowers, but Wordsworth does not focus on it. On the contrary he looks back to the time when it commanded the Eastern nations. Two other poems, “The Egyptian Lady or The Romance of the Water Lily” and “The Armenian Lady’s Love” seem to incorporate similar concerns.

Both the poems were composed late in his career and were published in 1835. They are written in imitation of the medieval romances and are set in medieval times. The two
poems can be interpreted as Wordsworth’s ‘conversion’ poems. In the first poem
Wordsworth narrates how an Egyptian maiden is carried into the court of Arthur and is
married to one of the Knights of the Round Table, Galahad. The maiden is a ‘heathen’
Egyptian woman whose father was indebted to Arthur for saving his Kingdom, and as Arthur
narrates the king “plighted word /That he would turn to Christ our Lord,/And his daughter on
a Knight Bestow” (444). “Her birth was heathen” but she was meant to be converted like his
father in recompense to the debt to Arthur and when “fair Izonda” reaches Arthur’s court her
destiny is fulfilled.

However, the journey of the Egyptian maid is not hazard free. When “the ship to
Christ devoted/ From the land of Nile did go” Merlin, the magician wrecked the ship which
was carrying her to Arthur’s court. Merlin did this because he saw a ‘heathen’ symbol of the
“Egyptian Goddess with a Lily” (the Godess Nefertem or Nefertum). Merlin repents his
action when the ‘good’ sorceress Nina tells him that the ship carried “the wished-for bride”
meant for Arthur’s court. Nina and Merlin rescue Izonda, and Merlin carries her to Arthur’s
court in a chariot drawn by “two mute Swans.” The poem contains a number of elements
common to the Oriental tales and Romantic verse narratives: an Eastern setting, a journey, an
innocent heroine, a sorceress and a magician (both of whom turn out to be good),
supernatural intervention, and some magical carriages. However Wordsworth’s narrative is
rather short and he does not provide annotations as other writers of the verse narrative do.

While Izonda is a pagan heroine, the heroine of “The Armenian Lady’s Love” is the
“Daughter of the proud Soldan” who “loved a Christian slave,” an imprisoned knight. In
representing Izonda Wordsworth follows the Western prejudice as Izonda is represented as
sensual and cunning Oriental women. She approaches the Christian slave with some sensual
intent but the refusal of the slave to indulge in sex turns her lust into respect and love for him.
Wordsworth nurtures the misconceived notion that Islam encourages sexual profligacy: “she
shrunk from trust/ In a sensual creed that trampled/ Woman’s birthright into dust.” The lines at once take us back to the days of hostility between Islam and Christendom because compared to this “sensual creed” Christianity celebrates wedded love: “Wedded love with loyal Christians, / Lady is a mystery rare” (163). The sultan’s daughter escapes with the slave and reaches the deck of Venice, where the knight’s slave who waited long for his lord, welcomes him by falling on his knee. Wordsworth does not find anything wrong with this slavery. The “Christian slave” (now turned Lord in his country) orders his servant to bring his wife and asks him to inform her of the Armenian lady who is now described as “innocent and meek and good” (164). The Armenian lady might have been lustful and cunning but she has redeemed herself by embracing a Christian and Christianity: although “with misbelievers bred; but the dark night / Will holy church disperse, by beams of gospel light” (164). Once converted all the darkness of the previous faith is removed. The poem ends with a celebratory epitaph to the Knight who lived a peaceful life with two wedded wives. The religious polemic is almost like the medieval romances where marriage and miscegenation were envisaged as a means to triumph over the religious Other. This is also true of “The Egyptian Maid” where the Other is conquered through marriage.

It is not easy to understand the reason behind the crusading spirit of these poems. There was no atmosphere of conflict with the Islamic East and Britain; on the contrary Britain maintained friendship with the Turkish rulers. The only cause of concern for some groups of Britons was the Turkish sway over Greece and the Greek war of Independence that started in the 1820s. Britain did not lend much attention to the issue of Greek independence. Philhellenism accounts for the hostility of later Romantics like Byron and Shelley towards the Muslim Other. The Grecian war of independence against the Muslim rulers of Turkey was supported by them and consequently, they nurtured a sort of hostility towards the Muslim rulers of Turkey, and they often criticised the British government for not helping the
Greek cause. Wordsworth, however, does not refer to Greece; rather he refers to Venice and Rome and sets them in contrast to the East. This shows the validity of Webb’s argument that Wordsworth expressed the primacy of Christianity and Northern Christian European and English culture over the Eastern. The representation of Otherness in the non-Western pagan and the Islamic people and presentation Christianity as the better religion in “The Armenian Lady’s Love” and “The Egyptian Maid” was natural in an atmosphere of Anglicanism and Anglo-centrism.

That Wordsworth gave primacy to Christianity and English culture can be seen in *The Prelude*. Forest Pyle in the chapter on Wordsworth in *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* tries to explain the Orientalism in *The Prelude* with reference to *Don Quixote*, which, according to Pyle is very important for understanding the representational politics in *The Prelude*. *Don Quixote* was written during the reign of Phillip II which saw the expulsion of the Moors and the Muslims from Spain and it was a part of the Catholic Spain’s cultural politics that excluded the Arabs in an effort to establish the Spanish identity. However, *Don Quixote* is presented to the readers as a translation from some Arabian manuscript. Pyle argues that there is a kind of duality in the novel—it appropriates a supposedly Arabian narrative, but the novel enacts an enshrinement of the Spanish cultural identity. *The Prelude*, Forest contends, enacts a similar kind of cultural enshrinement by appropriating and expelling the Arab Other in Book V. He argues that the “interpretative instability and the representation of an internal Arab Otherness are intertwined and transferred through Wordsworth's reading of the novel in Book V of *The Prelude* and re-inscribed there in an apocalyptic dream.” The “narrative instability” in both texts “is occasioned by the irruptions of the disturbing figure of Otherness” and it (Otherness) “serves ultimately to consolidate a sense of European cultural identity” (85). The process of consolidation of the European and British cultural identity is effected by gradual effacement
and appropriation of the Arab Bedouin in the poem. Not only is the Bedouin equated to Don Quixote by Wordsworth but the dream is followed by an invocation to the tradition of English poetry that includes the names of British cultural icons like Milton and Shakespeare (Book V, 152-65). Forest comments that the “logic of Wordsworth’s dream text, the double movement of consolidation and dissolution that the poet calls imagination, reveals how figures of the Other are preserved in the structures of European monuments of cultural self representation, such as The Prelude” (88). With reference to Hegel’s Aesthetics and his theory of dialectics, Forest argues that “Romanticism is the consolidation of a European community predicated on the expulsion of the Oriental Other” (86). The “double movement of consolidation and dissolution” can be interpreted as an expression of Wordsworth’s cultural anxiety—an anxiety that characterized the works of William Jones and Wordsworth’s fellow Romantic poets. The superimposition of the Quixote over the figure of the Bedouin is a marker of this ‘anxiety of influence.’

Another aspect of Wordsworth’s cultural and imperial anxiety in The Prelude is closely analysed by Saree Makdisi by drawing our attention to Wordsworth’s representation of the mob or the crowd in Book VIII. Makdisi notes that in The Prelude the crowd is nearly always an incipient mob, the embodiment of the dark side of Wordsworth’s London, expressing the constant threat of disorder, and his fear of the city as an unknowable, unfathomable, and almost unmappable abyss. The Prelude’s London crowd is, however, not only a crowd of Londoners or of Britons. What makes the city and its constitutive crowd so infinitely complex, unfathomable, threatening, and even terrifying to Wordsworth, is that all of Britain’s imperial relations and connections are also present and expressed in the teeming streets of London, and above all in the crowd scenes of Book VII. The crowd consists of all kinds of people: “all specimens of man / Through all the colours which the sun bestows, / And every character of form and face;” there are people of every nation and every climate
(233-51). London is simultaneously the “center of empire and a condensed or miniature version of the entire space (of empire) of which it is the center” (*Romantic Imperialism* 33). Perhaps most disturbing and threatening of all to a guilt-ridden William Wordsworth, is a stream of maimed, diseased, and crippled British soldiers and sailors – like the shadowy apparition in Book IV of *The Prelude* – now discharged and returned to haunt the island that sent them out to conquer (*Romantic Imperialism* 32). The metropole and the imperial periphery are not mutually exclusive—for the imperial periphery invade the metropole and destabilize the notion of order and purity. Wordsworth expresses his dislike for,

> All moveables of wonder, from all parts
> Are here – Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs,
> The Horse of knowledge, and the learned Pig,
> The Stone-eater, the man that swallows fire,
> Giants, Ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl,
> ..............................................................
> All freaks of nature, all Promethean thoughts
> Of man, his dullness, madness, and their feats
> All jumbled up together to make up
> This Parliament of Monsters. (655-61)

Wordsworth does not directly represent the East or empire but the contemplation on London itself becomes a meditation on empire. Thus *The Prelude* is marked by an imperial anxiety. The “Parliament of Monsters” is a site of infection. Wordsworth fears the infection of imperial centre by the periphery which poses a challenge to the very notion of Englishness.

Apart from the general concern with Britain’s growing empire, Wordsworth also suffered personal loss due to the greed that was fuelled by growing empire and trade. Wordsworth’s brother, John Wordsworth (1772-1805) joined the East India Company in the
capacity of sailor and wanted to make profit from the opium trade. Both Dorothy and William invested in the opium business of John. John’s first voyage was to Barbados and he made his voyage to China in 1790. Apart from doing his job of midshipman John wanted to make some private profit from the lucrative opium business and he hoped to support Wordsworth in his poetic career. In his first voyage to China he made some profit. After his return he began collecting money for his second voyage to China and by this time he became the captain of a ship, *Earl of Abergavenny*. Dorothy and William invested three hundred and fifty pound in John’s business hoping to gain profit which John boasted he would make (*Letters of John Wordsworth* 83, 93, 97-98). John, however, failed in his enterprise and he found himself in debt (*Letters of William and Dorothy* 517); but could not rest at home and made another effort to raise money and about twenty thousand pounds were raised for his third voyage to Canton. This time the ship would sail via the profitable route of India and he was able to get his place in the ship with the help of Charles Grant and William Wilberforce. John was desperate for profit not only to repay his debt but also to help William. As William wrote: “[h]e encouraged me to persist in the plan which I had adopted: I would work for you and you attempt to do something for the world” (*Letters of William and Dorothy* 563). John died in this voyage and his death had a major impact upon Wordsworth’s poetic career. Selincourt describes John’s death as “the most terrible blow that either William or Dorothy ever suffered;” it “signals decline of Wordsworth’s poetic power, his shift to Christianity, and his withdrawal into the isolation of Rydal mount” (187). To Selincourt’s list it may be added that this event also changed his attitude to empire and the East and turned him not only to Christianity but also to the celebration of the local and the national as opposed to the global. William mourned his death in “Elegiac Verses in Memory of My Brother John Wordsworth.” According to Stephen Gill, the course of *The Prelude* changed after his brother’s death as Wordsworth began working with a greater zeal (242). Nigel Leak points to the poem “To the
Daisy” to show how Wordsworth celebrates the imagined return of John. John is described quietly slumbering “Six weeks beneath the moving sea,” a process, Wordsworth implies is that of cleansing of John of his earthly cares and by implication of “eastern and commercial connections.” He is then taken to the burial ground where John’s loved flower the daisy grows. Kitson observes that although the poem “does not name China, India or the east in general, its emphatic stress on the ‘native shore’ that John now sleeps by and ‘the English earth’ the crew now stand on after returning from the voyage indicate that the orient must be the implied other . . .” (“The Wordsworths” 5).

Kitson also points to the representational politics and poetics of Wordsworth’s Chinese gardens/ landscapes. In contrast with his description of the metropolis (“the parliament of Monsters”) in Book VII as a sort of pandemonium, Wordsworth presents the ideal “organic communal wholeness of the life at Grasmere Fair.” According to Kitson, the communal life at Grasmere is privileged over the “commercial and tawdry business of the city” (Forging Romantic China 198). However, Wordsworth does not stop here as he compares his childhood home at the Lake District to the Qianlong Emperor’s summer retreat of Wanshu Yuan. He describes the artificially created landscape of the garden in contrast to the Westmoreland countryside:

Beauteous the domain
Where to the sense of beauty first my heart
Was open’d, tract more exquisitely fair
Than is the paradise of Ten Thousand Trees,
Chosen from the widest empire, for delight
Or Gehol’s famous Gardens, in a Clime
Of the Tartarian dynasty composed
(Beyond that mighty Wall, not fabulous
China’s stupendous mound!) by patient skill
of myriads, and boon Nature’s lavish help[... ] (qtd. in Kitson 7)

Elizabeth Hope Chang observes that the eighteenth and nineteenth century descriptions of
Chinese gardens, imaginary or real, “represent the first way that British literature came to
conceive of China as space of visual difference in the post-chinoiserie century . . . the space
of the Chinese garden . . . conveyed crucial meaning to the British viewers about a kind of
geography encoded as despotic excessive, fantastic, incoherent, illogical and exotic”(23)

Following Chang, Kitson observes that Wordsworth describes the famous pleasure garden as
“a false paradise of artifice and excess antithetical to the natural beauty of the peopled
Westmorland landscape.” “Wordsworth reads into the Manchu landscape the orientalised
forms of despotism, that are the origins of its existence, as opposed to the English landscape
grounded in an untainted British liberty” (“The Wordsworths” 7). The representation of the
Chinese landscape in The Prelude, therefore, bears similarity to the poetic use of the Middle
Eastern desert or oasis in poems like “The Haunted Tree,” “Septem Gedes.” Oriental
‘nature’ becomes artificial compared to the natural landscape of the English countryside. The
heterogeneous East is, therefore, homogenised by Wordsworth as he employs the Chinese
landscape and garden to the same purpose as the Middle Eastern desert or oasis.

In formulating his own poetic principles Wordsworth was undoubtedly influenced by
the Eastern poetry and poetic customs, chiefly via the works of William Jones, but also by his
own reading of the Oriental literature in translation. The fifth book of The Prelude bears a
proof of his enchantment with the Eastern literature, but it is also demonstrative of
Wordsworth’s method of transforming the Eastern elements. Wordsworth uses the tale of the
third Kalandar prince and his dream from the Nights, but transforms the dream and the
dreamer by superimposing the Western figure of Don Quite and relating it to the Western
poetic giants like Milton or Shakespeare. He overwrites the tale of the Kalander prince. Similarly, Wordsworth superimposes the British landscape upon the Eastern ones to appropriate the ‘expressive’ poetry of the East, which Jones argued was inspired by the beautiful forms of nature found there. Wordsworth does not stop there as he redefines the Oriental nature as ‘unnatural’ and artificial, while relocating the ‘natural’ in the English countryside. The relocation necessitated a redefinition of the Orient and this resulted in the hostile representation of the East. The relocation was also fuelled by an ‘anxiety of influence,’ a failure on part of Wordsworth to recognize his Eastern sources. This ‘anxiety of influence’ might have been caused by more than literary considerations as there was an accompanying imperial anxiety in Wordsworth which was strengthened after the death of his brother John. The insularity of Wordsworth might have grown due to his dissatisfaction with continental politics and an anxiety about Britain’s growing empire. The public debate over proselytising the non-Christians in India and other colonies of Britain which was supported and taken forward by his friends Charles Grant and William Wilberforce also contributed to Wordsworth’s hostility towards East. Kitson, therefore, is right to observe that it was “clearly a global village where Wordsworths lived and wrote” (“The Wordsworths” 11).
Notes

1 Henceforth will be referred to as *Ancient Mariner*.

2 For discussion of slavery and *Ancient Mariner* one may see William Empson’s “The Ancient Mariner” and Patrick Keane’s *Coleridge’s Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe*.

3 See also, Julia Briggs’s “The Ghost Story” in *A New Companion to the Gothic* (176–85).

4 Southey refers to the story in a note to Book III of *Thalaba the Destroyer*.

5 A. R. Kidwai and Vincent Newy made some changes to Ober’s version. See *Notes & Queries* (Mar1993, Vol. 40 Issue 1, p38)

6 See *Coleridge: The Early Family Letters* (70-104).

7 All references to *Osorio* will be to the version of the text of the play *Osorio* published in 1873 by Richard John Pearson, *Osorio: A Tragedy, as Originally Written in 1797*. Apart from act and scene number the page number of this edition is also provided in the parenthesis. In the parenthesis page number is followed by act and scene number e.g. 169, 5. 1. No line number could be provided because this edition does not have line numbers and no better edition could be found.

8 See Jalaluddin’s article “Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’: A New Historicist Study.”

9 The term ‘Wujd’ means ‘The mystic song and dance of dervishes’ (Fulford, “Coleridge and the Oriental Tale” 229).

10 John Beer refers to Robert Southey’s “snowy Ethiop” to explain the figure of the Abyssinian maid in “Kubla Khan” and comments that Coleridge must have conceived her as a White (*Coleridge, the Visionary* 236-37). Southey’s lines in the poem entitled “Romance” run like this:
The holy prelate owns her power;
In softening tale relates
The snowy Ethiop’s matchless charms
The outlaw’s den, the clang of arms,
And love’s too-varying fates; (Lovell and Southey 19)

11 See Beer’s *Coleridge the Visionary* (223-53); Heidi Thomson’s “The Integral Significance of the 1816 Preface to ‘Kubla Khan’” in *Coleridge, Romanticism and the Orient: Cultural Negotiations* (165–77).

12 See Elizabeth Schneider’s *Coleridge, Opium, and Kubla Khan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953)


14 The italics in quotations of Jones are reproduced as it is in Pachori. No italics have been added.

15 Unless otherwise stated, all citations of the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* are from the text reprinted in *English Critical Texts* (162-89) edited by Enright and Chickera.

16 Wordsworth read the *Nights* between 1779 and 1787 or before. He refers to his reading of the *Nights* in *The Prelude* first an abridged version of the tale, then a four volumes edition. Duncan Wu observes that this was probably Arabian *Nights Entertainment: consisting of One Thousand and One Stories . . . Translated into French from the Arabian MSS. by M. Galland of the Royal Academy; and now done into English from the last Paris Edition*; a four volume set published in Manchester, 1777, and frequently thereafter.
17 Unless otherwise stated, all reference to Wordsworth’s poem, except The Prelude, is to Wordsworth, William. The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1994). The page numbers are mentioned in the parenthesis.

18 The Ecclesiastical Sonnets are supposed to trace the introduction and development of Christianity in Britain. The sonnets are divided in Part I and Part II covering different historical period.