Introduction

In a recent article in *The Guardian*, William Dalrymple draws our attention to the Oriental collection of the Powis Castle. He observes that the Powis Castle is "simply awash with the loot of India" and there are more “Mughal artefacts stacked in this private house in the Welsh countryside than are at display at any place in India—even the national museum of Delhi.” The description shows the immensity of the ‘loot’: “The riches include hookahs of burnished gold inlaid with empurpled ebony; superbly inscribed spinels and jewelled daggers; gleaming rubies. . . . There are talwars set with yellow topaz, ornaments of jade and ivory; silken hangings, statues of Hindu gods, and coats of elephant armour.”

These cultural artefacts were immensely valuable to the European connoisseurs, who prided themselves at having possessed such an exotic collection of Eastern goods. “The East is [was] a career” for the curators, artists, poets and historians during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. “Cultural capital” was shipped from the colony “to enrich metropolitan Enlightenment and Romanticism” (Franklin, “General Introdution” 13-14). The ‘shipment’ of the “cultural capital” from the East to Europe, as Raymond Schwab defines it, brought about an Oriental Renaissance in Europe.

Schwab argues that the Roman and the Grecian wave ruled the European mind since the fifteenth century, but Europe’s entire landscape changed as the Asian influence poured in during the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. A seismic effect was felt in European art, literature, and culture. The English speaking Orientalists were important contributors to this Oriental Renaissance. Consequently, English literature in the late-eighteenth and the early-nineteenth century harboured a passion for the Eastern themes. To give an example, between 1776 and 1800 twenty four plays or dramatic performances were staged in London based theatres on Eastern themes (Barfoot 73). The Romantic poets, who
were writing in the midst of the Oriental Renaissance, were influenced by the contemporary infatuation with the things Eastern in their poetic compositions. However, the Romantic poets’ engagement with the East was not simply an infatuation. As Raymond Schwab observes, the relation between the Orient and Romanticism is “less local and temporal than an essential one” (482). For the Romantic poets, the East with its antiquities, literature, religion, and mythology became a locus that inspired their creative imagination. Oriental tales, translations of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit literary, philosophical and religious works, tales of travellers in the East, diaries of the soldiers, reports of the diplomats, newspaper reports, and testimonies flooded the British print market and made an impact on Romanticism; it helped freeing the Romantic imagination. However, these “foreign factors,” as Andrew Warren defines them, also “played a role in creating a ‘Romantic imagination’ that forged the way for a new vision of British nationalism and imperialism” (Warren 9).³

This thesis, therefore, aims to explore the place of the East in early Romantic poetry, with a dual objective in place: firstly, understanding the nature and extent of Eastern influence on the early Romantic poetry; and secondly, exploring the politics of their engagement with the East. The dissertation is mainly preoccupied with the Romantic poets’ critical negotiations with Middle East and India and with the two Eastern religions Islam and Hinduism.

It has become very difficult to use terms like the East, Middle East, Near East and Far East because their definitions have changed over the ages. These terms are, however, unavoidable in any study of East-West encounter. Ewan Anderson’s explanation of the nineteenth century notion of the various parts of the East is very illuminating:

From the Great Age of Discovery in the fifteenth century it has increasingly become customary to distinguish between the Near East and the Far East. The Near East comprised essentially the Eastern Mediterranean and adjacent lands while the Far East was everything east of India. The Indian Subcontinent was
in terms of trade and military strategic thought the centre of the British empire and was, other than its most northerly and westerly approaches, located in the East but not the Near East or the Far East. Thus the Area in the Middle, the Middle East, was almost by default that lying between the Indian Subcontinent and the Near East or Levant. (12)

Although Anderson’s observations are very useful, the terms are reluctantly used in this dissertation, because the terms are very reductive and were often conceived in opposition to the West. Moreover, the area of the Near East or Levant as defined by Anderson is included within the broader idea of the Middle East. The label ‘Near East,’ therefore, is seldom used in this dissertation in relation to the Romantic poets; however, it is sometimes used in relation to the medieval or Early Modern period English literature, where the idea of the Near East is more relevant.4

In the current edition of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary one of the meanings of the term ‘Orient’ is: “the countries east of the Mediterranean esp. those of eastern Asia.” However, the notion of the East and the Orient in the nineteenth century can be better understood from the meaning of ‘Orient’ as provided in the 1896 edition of the Standard Dictionary of English Language: “those countries collectively that begin with Islam on the Eastern Mediterranean and stretch through Asia.” The East or the Orient for the Romantics was predominantly the Middle East and India, but China in the Far East was also an important part of it. A clue to the Romantic conception of the East can be found in Robert Southey’s Commonplace Book. The section entitled “Orientaliana, or Eastern and Mohammedan Collections” contains numerous references to the Islamic countries of the Middle East (Morocco, Egypt, Ethiopia, Turkey, Syria, Persia etc.) and to the Indian subcontinent; there are some references to China and Japan but these are limited in number.5 The Romantics’ notion of the East can also be inferred from Thomas De Quincey’s (1785-
1859) *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822) where in the section “Oriental Dreams,” his dreams take him to “China and Indostan,” and to Mesopotamia (‘Euphrates’); he dreams of Egypt where he is kissed by the “cancerous Crocodiles” in the “Nilotic mud” (80-82).

In Romantic imagination India and Hinduism were inseparably connected and these two terms were sometimes used (as in the writings of Blake) synonymously. The ‘discovery’ and the scholarly translations of the ancient Indian texts led by Sir William Jones (1746-94) were responsible for the growth of such ideas. “Britons like Sir William Jones believed that one of their historical tasks was to liberate Hindus from the effects of centuries of Mughal misrule and restore the glories of a classical, Upanishadic golden age”(Leask, “Rev.”). Daniel Sanjib Roberts explaining the growth of the idea of ‘Hinduism’ and of a “Hindu India” during the Romantic period notes that though the word ‘Hindu’ or ‘Gentoo’ was “largely geographical in origin,” courtesy to the British Orientalists and the imperialists by the end of the eighteenth century, “the term had been codified into an ‘ism’. ‘Hinduism,’ expressive of the actions or conduct of a class of persons, even if the precise nature of religious doctrine was hard to pin down, given the wetering array of religious practices and beliefs to be found in the region” (88). The Romantic poets did not have any firsthand experience of India and they were dependent upon the English or French Orientalists, travellers or administrators for their notion of India. India, therefore, reached the Romantics already ‘codified’ and homogenised as the land of ‘Hindooism’. Similarly, the Middle East for the Romantics was chiefly Islamic, with some exception in case of Egypt and Ethiopia. Egypt was often connected to paganism and Ethiopia to early Christianity. The rise of Islam in the Middle East followed by the Crusades and the powerful Turkish Empire under Muslim rulers consolidated the idea of the Middle East chiefly as the region of the Muslims or the ‘Mahometans’.
The identification of geographical areas with particular religions indicates that in the Romantic discourse religion became a major factor in the process of homogenization of the East; India and Hinduism, Middle East and Islam, China and Buddhism were often bracketed together ignoring the immense diversity of these bracketed units. It is only by the most reductive logic that India can be made synonymous with Hinduism and the Middle East with Islam, or China with Buddhism. Moreover, the differences and diversities among the Hindus in the Indian subcontinent, the Muslims in the Middle East or the Buddhists in China also were mostly ignored in Romantic discourse. The sweeping generalizations constitute an important aspect of Romantic period Orientalism, which this thesis proposes to critique.

Europe like the East was not a monolithic unit, though it was often conceived so. The concept of a uniform European identity had always been a myth and it was more so during 1790 - 1815. The fear of the Crusades (1096-1271) united much of Christendom, and after the Crusades were over the fear of the Turk loosely held together the idea of a Christian Europe as opposed to the ‘saracenic’ Middle East. However, the Turkish failure at the Siege of Vienna in 1683 and the subsequent treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, which resulted in the Turkish loss of Hungary to the Habsburgs and of the Aegean Coast to the Venetians, the fear of the Turk was greatly reduced. Subsequently, Turkey lost much of its European territory: the loss of Crimea in 1774 was followed by the occupation of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798.

The loss of the Ottomans was the gain for European powerhouses. Austria, Russia, France and England all had stakes in the decadent Ottoman Empire. Russia under the Czars had the aim to annex some part of the Balkans and the rest of Europe feared that Russia may occupy the whole Ottoman territory. The Habsburgs of Austria were the first to taste victory over the Turks and they wanted to increase their hold over the Black Sea, and so did Russia. England was more concerned with the growing empire in Asia, where it became the unrivalled European power after the defeat of the French in India in the Seven Years War
(1756-63). England’s policy towards the Middle East was directed by its concern with safe passage to its growing empire in the Indian subcontinent, which was always under the French threat. The rise of Napoleon and the fear of being invaded by his army put most of the European countries on tenterhooks. England had multiple problems with the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon—the fear of being invaded, the fear of their access to the colonies being blocked, the fear of losing dominance in India, and the fear of revolutionary forces rising within Britain, to mention a few. The situation led England to strengthen ties with the Turkish rulers in the Middle East.

These developments had larger implication for British reception of the East. Firstly, the partial decrement of the traditional enmity with Islam helped in interrogating the notion of the monolithic Christendom and increased the competition and conflict among the European nations. This partial loss of the Pan European Christian identity also helped in the consolidation of the national identity. In spite of the intra-national religious, political and ideological divisions in England, there was a consolidation of the British identity during the Romantic period. It was often English or British that stood in opposition to the East. Non-European and even the Europeans were compared and contrasted with the British. Secondly, with the improved relationship with the Islamic East cross-cultural negotiations with the Middle East became easier during the Romantic period. The conflict between the residual traces and a more ‘enlightened’ emergent notion of Islam and the Middle East resulted in a sort of ambivalence and confusion towards Islam and the Middle East in the Romantic imagination. Some of the early Romantic poets had Unitarian sensibility at the beginning of their career and this brought them closer to the Islamic theology. However, once the Unitarian phase was over, they rejected Islamic monotheism in favour of Trinitarian Christianity.
Although there was a partial loss of the idea of the European Christendom, it did not mean any significant loss to Christianity. On the contrary Christianity in some cases became the measure of everything, even when writers showed sympathy for other religious traditions. The idea of a Christian West as opposed to the Muslim East was there since the Crusades, but after the European encounter with Hinduism in India Christianity faced a new challenge and found a new opportunity. The challenge was to deal with a religion that was much older than Christianity and the opportunity was to convert the Hindus to Christianity. The superiority of the Mosaic religion was challenged by the ‘discovery’ of the ancient Hindu religious texts. The Orientalists were overawed and overwhelmed by these discoveries at the beginning, and there was a great enthusiasm for Hinduism in England and Europe. The West responded to the challenge posed by Hinduism initially by recourse to syncretism, as one Romantic poet would write: “All Religions are One.” Another response was to dismiss Hinduism altogether. The phase of enthusiasm for Hinduism was, therefore, very short lived and with the rise of Anglicanism it faded very quickly in England. The Orientalists valorised the ancient Indian philosophy and religion, but they condemned contemporary Hinduism and Hindu society as decadent, degenerated, priest-ridden and despotic. The Anglicists used this degenerated image of the Hindu society to show the evil of Hinduism. Therefore, to the equation of the Muslim East and Christian West was added a new equation of the degenerated Hindu India as opposed to an ‘enlightened’ Christian Britain. With the Hastings trial (1788-95) started the Anglicist-Orientalist debate which led to the ultimate victory of the Anglicists with the inclusion of the “pious clause” in the Charter Act of 1813. The whole debate is a proof that Christianity played a defining role in the politics of the time and in the reception, representation or the rejection of the East during the Romantic period. Moreover, the valorisation of Hinduism by the Orientalists during the East India Company’s rule under Warren Hastings was not merely a scholarly move; it was a trenchantly political gesture. The
transfer of power in India was chiefly from the Muslim rulers to the British. So there was a move to demonise the Mughals and the Muslims, who posed a threat to the growing power of the East India Company, and to valorise Hinduism. As Leask indicates, it was a part of the imperial strategy of the British in the 1780s (Rev). The early Romantic poets initially responded to Hinduism with Junesan syncretism, and there is a tendency to valorise philosophical Hinduism, but things changed very quickly for them with the rise of the Anglicist Clapham sect under the leadership of William Wilberforce and Charles Grant.

Christianity and British nationalism, therefore, would play a very crucial role in defining the engagement of the early Romantics with the East. In this context one may recall Timothy Webb’s formulation in “Romantic Hellenism.” Web argues that the early Romantics like “Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey . . . preferred a northern and the Christian to a phenomenon they regarded as southern and pagan [the Hellenic]” (149). Webb argues that “those who subscribed to the values of the patriotic and the English,” Hellenism provided a challenge to them (149). Webb perhaps overstates the case when he says that the early Romantics ‘resisted’ Hellenism, but, as this dissertation would reveal, it is undeniable that Christianity and British nationalistic discourse played a dominant role in shaping the early Romantics’ response to the East.

The title of the thesis indicates that the East was a major source of poetic inspiration to the Romantic poets. The title is inspired by Robert Southey’s Commonplace Book, particularly, the section “Orientaliana” and Javed Majid’s arguments in Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill’s The History of British India and Orientalism. In the section, “Orientaliana, or Eastern and Mohammedan Collections” in his Commonplace Book, Southey collects different sorts of information on the East beginning with the mundane to the philosophical. There is one passage entitled “Oriental Wells.” Southey quotes this passage from Captain Thomas Williamson’s book Oriental Field Sports. It literally describes a well
from where water can be sourced quite easily, and Southey’s quotation shows that this water is used to nurture the crops. Men bind earthen or iron pitchers in ropes and dip them into the well and when the pitcher is filled the water is dropped into the channels that lead to the fertile fields. However, the wells that make the land fertile are also a source of danger:

From the insecure manner in which these wells are generally finished, as well as from the looseness of the soil in many places, they rarely last long. In such cases the peasant digs others, without doing anything to those which have fallen in. This is productive of considerable danger, not only to hunters, but to foot passengers; many of whom are precipitated into them. (Commonplace Book 414)

The wells, therefore, though they watered the land making it fertile, were also a source of peril and anxiety. Javed Majid discovers in Southey’s Thalaba and The Curse of Kehama, a preoccupation with images of “plumbing and probing depths” (49) as indicating, “a tentative exploration and probing of new sources of creativity and material made available by oriental renaissance” (50-51). The images of liquidity and flooding, according to Majid, reinforce the sense of tapping of new sources of creativity in Southey’s epics. However, often a sense of chiaroscuro and refraction are evoked in these images of depths and this according to Majid, “indicates the perilous nature of tapping of new source of creativity, as does the overwhelming sense of flooding in the epics.” As Majid explains it, the Oriental renaissance was not only a source of creative inspiration but it also posed a threat to the superiority and uniqueness of the Greco-Roman heritage which was central to the definition of European notion of cultural superiority (81-84).

The titular phrase ‘oriental wells,’ therefore, is indicative of the main concern in the thesis, namely, the relation between the East and Romantic creativity. The Romantic poets, we will see, turned to the East for their poetic inspiration and they used the easily available
materials on the Orient as their creative sources, but simultaneously, the East was also a source of anxiety for them. The anxiety was caused by a number of factors such as the fear that the domestic space may be infected by the empire, the fear and anxiety over preserving the sacredness and primacy of Christianity, the anxiety over preserving the primacy of the European as opposed to the Asian culture, and the fear of being infected with Oriental corruption, vice and diseases. The plural (‘wells’) is used, firstly, to convey the sense that the Eastern influence came from everywhere: the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and the Far East; and secondly, to indicate that though the East reached the West in its various forms and was pluralistic in nature, it often came to be homogenised in the Romantic discourse. Though the title of the dissertation refers to the early Romantic poetry, a selection has been made from among the poets writing during this time. The selection, however, is not random. All the poets included here started their poetic career in the last decade of the eighteenth century or before, when British Orientalism was in its early phase of enthusiasm, and they continued to write deep into the nineteenth century, when the initial phase of enthusiasm was over, and the nature of the Orientalist discourse changed significantly. William Blake (1757–1827) began his poetic career in the 1780s, and William Wordsworth (1770–1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), Robert Southey (1774–1843) and Walter Savage Landor (1775 –1864) in the 1790s. Though the dissertation begins its discussion of the early Romantic poetry with Blake, the earliest of the Romantics, it does not always follow any chronological pattern; Coleridge is discussed before Wordsworth or Landor before Southey because it makes better sense of the discourse presented in this dissertation. Before 1800 significant traces of an Eastern influence were notable on these poets. Most of the poems examined here were either written or begun before 1810. Except Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion almost all the works referred to in this dissertation were completed before 1810: Landor’s Gebir was published in 1798; Southey’s Thalaba, The Destroyer was
completed at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the composition of *The Curse of Kehama* was started; while Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was published in the *Lyrical Ballads* his “Christabel” and “Kubla Khan” were composed during 1798-99; the collaborative, but aborted epic on the life of Muhammad was also conceived during this time; and a version of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* was published in 1805. Though the emphasis is on the early phase of their poetic career, reference is also made to some later compositions particularly to mark the transition in these poets, which of course was a marker of the general transition in attitude towards the East.

The only Romantic poet who was born before 1780 and had a major contribution to Romantic Orientalism and is not included in this dissertation is Thomas Moore (1779 -1852). His *Lalla Rookh* constitutes an important example of Romantic Orientalism. Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* lavishly praised it as a specimen of “finest orientalism” and wrote: “It is amazing, indeed, how much at home Mr. Moore seems to be in India, Persia, and Arabia; and how purely and strictly Asiatic all the colouring and imagery of his book appears” (qtd. in Wright, *Ireland, India* 98). The rationale behind excluding Moore is the late appearance of his poem. Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* was written on Byron’s suggestion and was published only in 1817. Therefore, it is customary to consider Moore with Lord Byron (1788 – 1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) and Thomas De Quincey than of with the early Romantics.

Most of the poems introduced in this study, except those of Blake, can be classified as what is defined by Herman Fischer as the “Romantic verse narrative” in his book *Romantic Verse Narrative: The History of a Genre*. Landor’s *Gebir*, Southey’s *Thalaba, the Destroyer* and *The Curse of Kehama*, Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, and the two romances “The Armenian Lady’s Love,” and the “Egyptian Maid or The Romance of the Water Lily,” Coleridge’s “Christabel” and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* would fall under the category of the verse
Fischer mentions Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) as a major contributor to the development of the Romantic verse narratives and he considers the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* as a landmark poem. Fischer, however, considers *Gebir* as a forerunner of Scott along with the *Lyrical Ballads* and Southey’s narrative poems. Fischer moves to Scott’s later poems and to Thomas Moore, Byron and others to illustrate the growth of the Romantic verse narrative to its maturity. With the advent of Byron and Moore on the scene of literary Orientalism, Fischer contends, the uncertainties of the genre of the Romantic verse narrative were over. He considers the epic, the romance and the ballad as important contributors to the development of the Romantic verse narratives (11-35). He does not, however, grant any space to the large body of Oriental tales in prose and verse which, as would be seen, had been a major contributing factor to the development of the Romantic verse narrative.

Although Scott is considered an important figure in the development of the Romantic verse narrative, he is not included in this thesis. He produced a series of narrative poems such as *Marmion* (1808), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), *Rockby* and *The Bridal of Trierman* (1813) *The Lord of the Isles* (1815) etc, and chronologically he began his career in the early phase of Romanticism, but his verse narratives do not have any distinct Eastern strain. In Scott’s novels, however, the Islamic East often played a crucial role as many of his novels were set in the time of the Crusades. *Count Robert of Paris* (1831) was set in Constantinople at the time of the First Crusade; three other novels were set during the Third Crusade. *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *The Betrothed* (1825) were concerned with events on the home front, while the plot of *The Talisman* (1825) was set in Palestine and centred on the friendship between a Scottish knight and Saladin (Riley-Smith 65). Novels, however, are not within the purview of this dissertation.

By referring to the five Romantic poets the study aims to examine their Orientalism as well as the ‘orientalization’ of them. They were generously borrowing from the East in their
effort to re-orient the British poetic tradition, but simultaneously they were concerned with self-preservation—upholding the superiority of the British, the Christian and the European tradition. Summarizing the critical approach to Romanticism and Orientalism, Andrew Warren identifies three categories that have become “a staple in nearly every key study of the era’s relationship to Orientalism”: “the Romantic imagination, the foreign or exotic, and the emergent nation state” (9). Critics like Schwab, Samar Attar, John Drew, J. J. Clarke, Michael J. Franklin and Muhammad Sharafuddin emphasize the link between the East and the Romantic imagination. The focus of these critics is on the cultural exchanges between the East and West. Except Sharafuddin and Attar who pay attention to the Middle East, other critics have primarily in focus the link that was forged between India and the West in the Romantic period. Another interesting study that centres on the relationship between Romantic creativity and the Middle East is Emily Heddad’s Orientalist Poetics: The Islamic Middle East in the Nineteenth Century English and French Poetry. Heddad argues that the Islamic Middle East was a fertile poetic source for almost all the poets in nineteenth century England and France. Orient in Romantic poetry according to Heddad, functions as an alternative poetic space. Critics like Nigel Leask, Isaiah Berlin, Mary Louise Pratt, and Sareee Makdisi focus on the relation between empire, nationalism and Romanticism. Fulford and Kitson argue that Romanticism is defined by its desire to rule the exotic (“Romanticism and Colonialism” 47). Leask argues that British “national culture was as much a product of imperial expansion, as imperialism was the ‘expression’ or exportation of that culture” (British Romantic Writers 86). Similarly, Isaiah Berlin calls Romanticism a type of homesickness, “the daydreams of exiles and colonists” (16). Mary Louise Pratt also claims that “Romanticism originated in the contact zones of America, North Africa, and the South Seas” (138).
The three categories of critical voices on Romantic Orientalism are, of course, interrelated and one category runs into the other. This study, therefore, aims to connect the critique of Romantic Orientalism on the one hand and the critics who have attempted to delineate the relation between Romantic poetics and the East on the other. It follows the path laid down by critics like Samar Attar, Raymond Schwab, Garland Canon, Emily Haddad, and long before them J.L. Lowes in studying the Eastern influence upon the Romantic poetry, but it does so without dissociating poetics from politics. Taking a stimulus from Schwab’s observation that England, the ‘hearth’ of the Oriental Renaissance, could not be the ‘home’ because of its imperial concerns, the dissertation proposes to explore how the early Romantic poets’ response to the East was mired in contemporary imperial, political and religious discourses. Therefore, under the overarching discourse of Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) this dissertation explores the political and the poetical aspect of Romantic Orientalism.

Most of the studies on Romantic Orientalism have focussed on the Middle East and India in isolation, but the aim of this dissertation is to interconnect the two. This does not mean that the two Eastern spaces are considered a monolithic whole and that the Romantic reception and representation of India and the Middle East can be analysed on similar lines. However, the Romantic engagement with the East can be best understood when they are studied together because, as Said notes, “Europe’s involvement in the more distant parts” of Asia influenced their “interests in Near East, Islam, and the Arabs” (17). Moreover, the religious syncretism of the early Romantic poets can be properly analysed and made sense of when their approach to Islam and Hinduism are placed side by side. There was also a tendency to homogenize the East where one could easily connect an experience in Egypt to an experience in India. As Emily Heddad remarks, nineteenth century poets and readers “could perceive the oriental virtually anywhere between Greece and the Pacific ocean” (2).
The dissertation aims to look into, unravel and critique the sweeping generalizations and stereotypes of the East in Romantic poetry.

Islam and the Middle East had been familiar to the West for long and there had been regular presence of Middle Eastern elements in English literature since the Middle English period. The Indian themes came to dominate the British literary scene in the second half of the eighteenth century as a consequence of East India Company’s economic and political success, and due to the effort of some British men in Bengal under Hastings to translate and disseminate Indian philosophical, cultural and religious texts. The contact with Islam did not pose any major theological challenge to Christianity and Islam was often dismissed as deviant Christianity, a heresy, though it politically challenged Europe; the emergence of the knowledge on Hinduism and of the ancient Indian philosophical and literary texts towards the end of the eighteenth century, on the contrary, brought the Christian West in confrontation with a completely new and a very ancient theological tradition that posed a major threat to the primacy of Christianity. The Romantic poets’ response to this challenge needs critical attention. Each of the early Romantic poets responded to this in their own individual way, but there was also a pattern in their response. Syncretism was adopted initially, but later it was rejected and replaced by Christian-centrism.

Another issue in studying the Romantic encounter with the East is that little attention has been paid to the Oriental tales as contributing to Romanticism. The relationship between the Gothic novels and the Oriental tales and how the combined features of the Gothic and the Oriental tales are incorporated into Romantic poetry are little discussed in critical circles. Elements from the Oriental tales migrated into Romantic poetry directly as the Romantics were avid readers of the collections of Oriental tales, and also indirectly, mediated by the Gothic. Though both the Oriental tales and the Gothic had a liberating influence on Romanticism, it is also imperative to examine how the Gothic Other and the Oriental Other is
conflated in Romanticism—the dark fallen world of the Gothic and the degenerated East are woven together in the works of Blake, Coleridge and Southey or Landor. The intimate connection between Romantic Gothicism and Romantic Orientalism remains to be explored. Similarly, the role of the scholarly writings, translations and creative pieces of Jones shaping the Wordsworthian poetic theory in “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, has not received adequate attention. The impact of Wilkins’s translation and publication of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* and its reception among the early Romantics also demands further critical attention.

Another lacuna in the study of the Romantic poets’ changing relationship and position in regard to the East is the lack of critical attention on the role of religion. The early Romantic poets creatively employed the theological ideas of Hinduism and Islam in the poems written in the early days of their career, and both Islam and Hinduism played a vital role in shaping the spirit of Romanticism. Christianity, however, played a neutralizing role in containing and controlling the Eastern influence. The early Romantic poets sacrificed their early syncretism and sympathetic approach to other religions in favour of Christianity. The use of the myths of Hinduism and theological ideas of Hinduism and Islam in Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey and their simultaneous privileging of Christianity create a complex web that must be closely examined.

Although the representation of, and interest in the Orient in English literature of the Romantic period is the main subject of this dissertation, it would be appropriate if it is placed in the wider context of awareness of the Orient in English literature since the medieval period. This introduction, therefore, is followed by an outline of the presence of Eastern elements in English literature since the medieval age to the seventeenth century. The next chapter proposes an analysis of the scores of Eastern materials that were available to the British reading public in the form of Oriental tales, travelogues, scholarly translations etc. that exerted their influence on the Romantic poetry. By referring to the various theoretical
perspectives on the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century Orientalism the
endeavour is also to understand the nature of the Orientalism practised during this time. The
next three chapters are devoted to Blake, Southey and Landor, and Wordsworth and
Coleridge, respectively, and are followed by a conclusion. The chapter on Blake is an attempt
to understand the place of the East in Blake’s symbolic world. Blake, though generally
considered to be the most insular among the Romantics, was well informed on the East, and
he incorporated Islamic and Hindu theological texts and ideas in his own mythological
system. Moreover, his engagement with the East was not confined to the theological world
for he included various Eastern countries as part of Urizen’s fallen world awaiting
regeneration. Blake condemned every form of organised religion and his approach to
religions followed the syncretism of the 1790s. It is very rewarding to explore Blake’s vision
of a liberated world and its relation to Christianity. The movement from Blake to Southey and
Landor is a movement form an oblique spiritual world to the material realities of the East and
empire. Landor deals with the Pre-Islamic pagan Egypt in Gebir. The reading of Landor is a
process of discovering the imperialist agenda of what Marilyn Butler defines as Landor’s
“anti-colonialist fable” (“Orientalism” 411). Southey uses Islam and Hinduism as the basis of
his epics Thalaba, the Destroyer and The Curse of Kehama, respectively. Southey’s
knowledge of the East was phenomenal and his negotiations with the two Eastern religions
offer a grand opportunity for studying his creative and critical engagement with the East and
the imperial politics of his day. In the chapter on Coleridge and Wordsworth some of the
canonical texts of Romanticism are analysed in reference to their Eastern sources. The
proposition is: the reading of “Christabel,” The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, “Kubla Khan”
by Coleridge or The Prelude by Wordsworth will remain incomplete if not read in relation to
their Eastern sources and their connections with the Oriental tales and the Gothic. Moreover,
the ‘manifesto’ of Romanticism, the “Preface” to Lyrical Ballads will be closely examined in
relation to the prefaces and essays by Jones in order to submit that Wordsworth’s “Preface”
would not have been possible without the writings of Jones and without the Oriental
Renaissance.
Notes

1 Dalrymple’s twentieth century gaze upon a collection of oriental goods cannot be compared to Orientalist exploitation of these cultural artefacts in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. However, it is very ironic that Dalrymple’s description seems to exoticize the artefacts for the modern Western readers, although he is critical of the ‘loot’ by the East India Company.

2 Edward Said uses the expression “The East is a career” from Benjamin Disraeli’s 1847 novel *Tancred* as an epigraph to his book *Orientalism* (1978).

3 The phrase “foreign Factors” is used by Andrew Warren to define the influence of “non-Western cultures, such as translations from philosophical and poetic works in Sanskrit, Farsi, and Arabic, or scientific studies conducted across Africa, Asia, and the Americas” on Romantic poetry (9).

4 The geographical label WANA (Western Asia and North Africa region) as suggested by the Jordanian Prince El Hassan bin Talal in 2009 for the Muslim majority countries or broad Middle East is somewhat closer to the idea of the Middle East in this dissertation. Pakistan and Afghanistan are also included under the umbrella term WANA but here they are considered as part of the Indian subcontinent.

See Mohammed Hashas’s article, “Revisiting Historical Relations between Europe and the Islamic World: Three Fertilizing Periods, for discussion on WANA. The article is available at <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000022324>

5 See Peter J. Kitson’s *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760-1840* (2013). For the Western encounter with Buddhism one may also see Mark S. Lussier’s *Romantic Dharma: the Emergence of Buddhism into Nineteenth-Century Europe* (10-20).
Lussier’s is the most detailed treatment of the relationship between Buddhist tradition and Romanticism. The chapter “Coleridge: ‘Kubla Khan’ and the Rise of Tantric Buddhism” in John Drew’s *India and the Romantic Imagination* (183-226) is also very relevant in this respect.


7 Roberts traces the earliest use of the term “Hindooism” to Michael Symes’s *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava*, 1800: “the Shaster prescribes the whole world, and denies the cord of Hindooism to all mankind” (88).

8 During the medieval and the early Modern period the term ‘saracens’ and ‘Mahometans’ rather than ‘Muslims’ was used to refer to the followers of Islam. While the meaning of the term ‘Mahometan’ is easy to comprehend, the term ‘saracen’ has a complex history. The *OED* explains the meaning of the word ‘saracen’ in following terms: “Saracen: Among the later Greeks and Romans, a name for the nomadic peoples of the Syro-Arabian desert which harassed the Syrian confines of the Empire; hence, an Arab; by extension, a Muslim, *esp.* with reference to the Crusades.” The term was often used during the medieval and the early modern period to refer to a “non-Christian, heathen, or pagan; an unbeliever, infidel.” *OED* traces the earliest use of the word to 893 in translation of Orosius’s *Hist.* i. i.
9 A very interesting document in this regard is William Hodges’s *Travels in India: During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, & 1783* (1793). Hodges came to India in 1780 and lived under the patronage of Hastings, travelled widely and painted various aspects of life in India. He went back home and wrote his book. The core of Hodges rhetoric in travels is formed by a strong condemnation of the Mughals and the Muslims and a valorization of Hinduism and portrayal of the Hindus as feminine domesticable and docile.

10 Byron wrote to Moore in May, 1813: “Stick to the East. . . . The North, South and West have all been exhausted; but from the East we have nothing but [Southeys] unsalables. . . . The little I have done in that way is merely a ‘voice in the wilderness’ for you; and if it has any success, that will also prove that the public are orientalizing, and pave the path for you.” See *Byron’s Letters and Journals* III (101)


12 The poems referred to here are of different lengths, but as Fischer observes: “the length of a romantic tale in verse has hardly any influence on its qualification for the genre, which includes both poems of a few hundred lines to tales running to thousands of verses” (3).

13 Though there had been studies on the influence of *The Arabian Nights* on English literature, there is a lack of critical works focusing on the Oriental tales in general: how the popularity of the Oriental tales with its boundless imagination laid down the foundation for Romantic revolt against neoclassicism.