Chapter I
Beginning of Interest in the East in English Literature

The influence of Oriental thought and the presence of Eastern elements in European literary and philosophical writings have been traced back to the time of Plato and the Neo-Platonists, and even before. Raymond Schwab, who considers the translation of the Zend Avesta in 1771 by Anquetil Duperron as the first major breakthrough (7), quotes from Sylvain Levi to make the point clear that the East-West interaction begun long before that: “Plotinus, Porphyry and the entire school of Neoplatonists reflect the metaphysics of Kapila and Patanjali. Mani and the Gnostics introduced the Brahman and the Buddhist spirit into Christianity, while a colony of Nestorians brought the gospels to India” (qtd. in Schwab 3). John Drew’s study of the subject looks back at the “history of the metaphorical or metaphysical passage to India begun by the Greeks” (vii); for Drew India has been an inspiration for the Western mind since the ancient times. Edward Said traces the origin of the Western politics of representation back to the time of Aeschylus. He writes: “as early as Aeschylus’s play The Persians the Orient is transformed from a very far distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar( in Aeschylus’s case the grieving Asiatic women)” (21).

The Persians is set with Persian wars in the background. Eight years after the Battle of Salamis (472 BC) Aeschylus staged The Persians in Athens. It is argued that it was the Persian wars which had decisively shaped Greek conceptions of the Persians, and by extension of the East (Said 21). However, even before the Persian wars, in the Homeric poems the earliest signs of a distinction between “civilized” Greeks and “barbaric” peoples both legendary (for example, the Cyclopes) and real have been identified. In case of Homer it
has been argued that there is no negative representation of the Eastern people. *Histories* of Herodotus is another text, which, in the early stages, assisted in giving a shape to the representation of the East.¹

Augustan poet Virgil’s depiction of the battle of Actium in 31 BCE in *The Aeneid* is regarded as one of the classic instances of literary representation of the East in Western poetry of the ancient time. In Canto VIII of the epic, for example, Virgil while describing the Roman army of Augustus Caesar and the Eastern troops makes a distinction between Western heroes and Eastern cowards. He creates a contrast between the “little Gods of Home” and great “Gods of the [Roman] race” on the one hand and the ‘monstrous’ gods of the Egyptians (“Her Gods, monstrous shapes of every species”) on the other. He refers to “the wealth of the Orient” and the exotic weapons of the East (“arms of varied design”). Virgil’s description of the Eastern army in Canto VIII shows that the conception of the East in the epic is not confined to the immediate enemy, Egypt, but the he takes an imaginative leap to include “Indians”, and “every Arab” who fly in dread of the Romans and their Gods as part of the Egyptian army. One notes a marked bias against the East as well as some Orientalist constructions that came to be perpetuated in Western literature: the East as exotic, as opulent, and as weak and feminine as opposed to the strong and upright Romans (*The Aen.* VIII. 678-706).²

In medieval Europe the image of the East was shaped by factors like the rise of Islam, the Crusades, the Muslim occupation of Spain from 715 to 1492, and the Turkish invasion of Europe in the mid-fourteenth century. The unprecedented rise of Islam in the seventh century with its military and political repercussions moulded the literary interest of the Middle English period in the Near East and its Islamic population. The Islamic forces of Arabia launched their assault on Byzantium in the third decade of the seventh century and “[t]he Christian Church which had spanned the coastline found it powerless before the victorious
armies of the Arabs” (Rana 14). More the dominance of Islam increased in the eastern and the southern coast of the Mediterranean more the distance between the East and the West increased (Rana 14). The rise of the Islamic East was perceived as a major threat both to Christianity and to the European nations. It thwarted the growth and spread of Christianity and as a consequence religious polemic against the Islamic East was developed. This created a mental barrier in the Western perception of the East. The East came to be represented as a dangerous region where Islam flourished and “monstrous races multiplied and thrived” (Friedman 65). The representation of the East in Christian religious discourse was used as a political tool by the West. It helped the West, as noted by Norman Daniel, “to protect the mind of the Christians against apostasy and . . . gave Christianity self respect in dealing with a civilization in many ways its superior” (270). Europe at the beginning chose to keep its people in ignorance in regard to the East. Accordingly, R.W. Southern brands the period 700 to 1100 as the “age of ignorance” as far as the knowledge of Islam is concerned (Western Views of Islam 14).

The rise of Islam and its growing enmity with Christendom resulted in the Crusades (1096-1271), because of which the hostility towards the East and its people rapidly increased during the medieval age. However, the Crusades also brought about the West’s first face to face contact with the East. It established a cultural link between the East and the West and multiple aspects of Western life and civilization came under the Arab influence. Another fruitful interaction with the East resulted from Muslim occupation of Spain from 715 to 1492 CE. A host of European scholars have identified the nature and extent of the Eastern influence upon fields as diverse as mathematics, astronomy, logic, metaphysics, technology, music, and other arts and sciences. Dorothee Metlitzki points out a wide range of Frankish activities like military technique, vocabulary, food, clothing, and ornamentation coming under the Arabic influence during this period. C. H. Haskins has termed it “The Renaissance
of the Twelfth Century." Another major point of contact between the East and the West began in the mid-fourteenth century with Turkish forays into Europe and it continued till the Treaty of Karowitz in 1699 (Sicker 1–25). The hostility of the Crusades was sustained and continued by the fear of the Turk after the Crusades were over.

Islam was perceived as an enemy to Christian Europe and the Islamic people of the Middle East became representative of the East in general during the Middle Age. Islam and its prophet Muhammad were often subjected to criticism. In Canto 28 of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, for example, Muhammad is shown in the ninth ditch of the eighth circle of hell which is the realm for those who have caused schism. He is placed among the “Sowers of Religious Discord,” as one common allegation levelled against Muhammad during the Middle Ages was that he was an impostor who, in order to satisfy his ambition and his lust, propagated religious teachings that he knew to be false. Criticising Dante's depiction of Muhammad, Islam and the Orient, Said argues:

> What ... Dante tried to do in the *Inferno*, is ... to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are ... only for Europe. Hence the vacillation between the familiar and the alien; Mohammed is always the impostor (familiar, because he pretends to be like the Jesus we know) and always the Oriental (alien, because although he is in some ways ‘like’ Jesus, he is after all not like him). (71)

Similarly, Brenda Dean Schildgen in *Dante and the Orient* (2002) argues that Dante had textual knowledge of the East, as “Marco Polo or ministers like Frate Recoldo da Monte Croce, both [were] contemporaries of Dante,” but by “depicting a metaphorical journey in place of a real pilgrimage” he shifts the interest away from the material world, which helps him in his polemical zeal (12). Dante’s depiction of the East, and the observations made by Said and Schildgen are relevant to the reading of the reception and representation of the East
in the Middle English literature because a similar evangelical tendency and hostility towards Islam and Islamic East were central to the representation of East in the medieval age.³

The first images of the East in English literature can be found in the medieval romances. The romance form emerged during and after the Crusades, “in the effort to narrate [Europe’s] contact with Islam: the fictitious chivalric romances are a response to the failure of the crusades, acts of collective cultural fantasy that seek to take imaginative possession of the long and fluctuating border between Latin Christendom and Islam” (Robinson 4). Religious polemics affected much of the secular literature.⁴ The spirit of hostility of the Crusades left its mark on the English geste romances where Muslims are generally cast in the role of villains. In Song of the Roland, for example, the ‘Saracens’ are represented as worshippers of anti-Christ, Lucifer, Termageunt, and Diana. These heathenish worshippers, as is the suggestion here, are to be killed by the heroics of the Christian knight Sir Roland. The victory of the valiant Christian king Charlemagne against the Saracens in Spain is celebrated in the poem. It ends with Bramimonde, Queen of Saragossa captured and converted by Charlemagne after the city fell. Charlemagne also dreams of new war to be fought in defence of Christianity. The romance provides a model for overcoming the threat from the East as it recasts the French setback at Roncevaux two centuries earlier into an epic struggle between Christian and Muslim civilizations. The recasting, according to Mark Heberle, is also symptomatic of the “casualty of the objective understanding of Islam” (82). The poem defines the Muslims as morally evil despite their martial glory. Marked by the polemical intent of the author, the poem simply dramatizes Sir Roland’s battle cry, “Paynims are wrong Christians are right” (Song of the Roland 91).

Hostile representation of the East and Islam was not confined to romances alone. William Langland in Piers Plowman depicts Muhammad as a heretic. The story that tells us of a Muhammad who was a cardinal and being disappointed in his ambition to become Pope
fled from Rome and declared himself a prophet is repeated by Langland (Passus XVIII, 1165-67). Like Dante, Langland shows Muhammad among the infernal spirits (Passus XXI, 1295). 5 William Dunbar in Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins shows Mahoun (Muhammad) as master of the ceremonies in hell. Similarly, in Chaucer’s the “Man of Laws Tale”, the evangelical zeal is evident. The daughter of the emperor of Rome is shown marrying the sultan of Syria to convert him to Christianity. The tale contains lines that mark the hatred nurtured in the Christian West towards Islam: “That in destruction of Moumettrye/And increase of Cristes’ lawe dere” (Chaucer’s Major Poetry 236-37). 6 In the medieval Western imagination Islam was linked to sexual profligacy. Gerald of Wales writing in the twelfth century thought Muhammad’s teachings is concentrated on lust and thus particularly suitable for the Easterners as they lived in a climate of great natural heat (Daniel 270). R. W. Southern points to one popular tradition during the medieval period that attributed to Muhammad a plan for general sexual profligacy as an instrument for destruction of Christianity (14).

In fact, in medieval writings the Easterners in general are represented as characterised by uncontrollable desire of the flesh. This misconception about the sexual profligacy of the Oriental people resulted in one of the most recurring Eastern images in Western literary imagination—the harem or the seraglio. The harem has been employed by the Western writers to show the lewdness and licentious nature of the Easterners. One of the first descriptions of the harem is found in the romance Floris and Blanchefleur. The harem with its eunuchs and guards is described in detail in this romance. Beginning from Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra through the Letters of Lady Montague or Vathek to Devi Sing’s seraglio in Hastings’s trial speech by Burke (620-21), not to mention the harems of Byron’s Eastern tales, English literature, all through the ages, is replete with the images of the harem.
Another dominant stereotype of the Orient in the literature of the period is that of the Eastern woman, (mis-)represented as beautiful, but lustful and cruel. In the romances the Eastern heroines are characterised by their lewdness and lustful nature. Josian in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, for example, is depicted as swearing to Sir Bevis that she will embrace Christianity only if he satisfies her lust. Chaucer’s characterization of Dido and Cleopatra in *The Legend of Good Women* follows similar pattern. Presentation of Dido harps upon this point: "This fresshe lady"(1035), this queen "So yong, so lusty, with hire eyen glade"(1038), living in the epicurean splendour of Carthaginian court. It is what makes her "sely Dido":

    Ther gan to breden swich a fyr
    That sely Dido hath now swich desyr
    With Eneas, hire new gest, to dele,
    That she hath lost hire hewe and eke hire hele. (1156-59)

This image of the Eastern woman with her lascivious beauty and unparalleled cruelty continuously haunted the Western imagination, including that of the Romantics.

The Middle English romances are not only preoccupied with condemning the enemy but they are also distinctly marked by a desire to conquer the enemy, and many of the romances are stories of exogamy and miscegenation that fantasize an erotic and material absorption of the East. *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, for instance, contains the prototype of a Saracen princess, Josian who is ready to embrace Christianity only if the knight would embrace her. He agrees with missionary zeal and the seductress becomes a ‘good’ Saracen. In the romance *The Sultan of Babylon (Swodne of Babylon)* Floripas, the Saracen princess forsakes her religion and betrays her father for the love of the knight imprisoned in her father’s castle. She lures Guy of Burgundy into her chamber and proceeds to seduce him despite his valorous protestations. In *The King of Tars* the pattern of the previous romances is reversed. Here we find a Christian princess (in place of the male knight) marrying an Eastern king to save her
country and her people from destruction. The king is shown as black and heathenish. After
their marriage a deformed child is born. However, when the mother is permitted to baptize
the child its deformities are miraculously corrected. Inspired by the miracle, the king himself
wishes to undergo the same process, and he too is transformed by it, and turns white.

Although Islam and the East were chiefly perceived as an enemy, and consequently
unsympathetically portrayed in Middle English literature, it was not always the case.
Chaucer, for example shows a good knowledge and appreciation of the Eastern people. In
many of Chaucer’s tales Middle- Eastern philosophers are mentioned with admiration. In the
“Pardoner’s Tale” Avycen (Ibn Sina 980-1037) is referred to: “But certes, I suppose that
Avycen / Wroot nevere in no canon no in no fen” (236-37). In the “Squire’s Tale” Alocen
(Ibn Al-Haytham) is mentioned in the same breath with Aristotle: “They spoken of Alocen
and Vitulon / And Aristotle that written in his lyves.” In the Book of the Duchess the
philosopher Arogus (Al-khwarizmi 780-850) is referred to: “That thogh Arogus the noble
contour.” According to Heffernan, Arabs were respected for their learning during the Middle
English period and Chaucer's praise of them is thus in keeping with the tradition of the time.
The Arabs were regarded as the mediators of the Greek and Byzantine civilizations
(Heffernan 5). In the Squire’s tale the Squire refers to a “noble king” “of so great renoun”
named “Canbyskan” (10-15). Apart from Chaucer’s there are other Middle English works
that are marked by an appreciative approach to the Eastern people. The author of
Mandeville’s Travels uses the virtues of the Saracens and their obedience to law as a stick to
beat the fellow Christians who neglect the law of Christ. Gower in Confessio Amantis
denounces the idea that it is legitimate to kill the Saracens. Aman, the lover enquires that if it
is right, according to Christian law to “slee [kill] the Sarasin.” To this the confessor replies
that Christianity only teaches to “preche and suffer for the faith”, but “for to slee that hear I
not” (Book III, 2487-93). Two different attitudes towards East, therefore, are seen in
medieval perception of the East: the prejudiced view of the Eastern Other was dominant, but there was the development of an alternative approach to the East and Islam that endeavoured to break free from such prejudices.

Another very important aspect of the East-West interaction during the Middle English period was the appropriation of various forms of Eastern writings into English literature. Martha Conant Pike refers to four great collections of Oriental tales that came to Europe in Latin translations in the medieval age: Sendebar, Kalila and Dimna or The Fables of Bidpai, Disciplina Clericalis, and Barlaam and Josaphat. Some of these stories also came to England and appeared as metrical romances, apologues, legends and tales of adventure. The Fableau of Dame Siriz, The Proces of Sevyn Sages, Mandeville’s Travels and Chaucer’s The Squire’s Tale, and possibly several other Canterbury Tales, according to Pike, owe their origin to the Eastern sources (xix-x). “The Squire’s Tale” is set in the central Asian town of Sarray, a prosperous town founded by Batu Khan. A.C. Baugh observes that “the charming story which the Squire begins to tell is one of those Eastern tales of magic which we associate with the Arabian Nights” (459).

The Middle English literature, therefore, marks some clear development in regard to the East. Certain stereotypes about the East and some misconceptions about Islam and Muhammad were nurtured. Islam was projected as false religion that preached sex; Easterners in general were misconceived as lustful; Eastern women were stereotyped as beautiful, but lustful and cruel; exogamy and miscegenation were propagated as means of conquering the Other. On the positive side we can note the development of an undercurrent that had an enlightened view of Islam and the East. During the Early Modern period there was a widening of horizon for the West, as there was an increased interaction with the East through travel, trade and exploration. While knowledge about the Near East flowed into Europe, the East was extended beyond the Middle East to include the Indian subcontinent.
Early Modern period started with some initial hostility between Europe and the Near East with Turkish forays into Europe. Towards the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, Soliman the Magnificent started a terrible assault at the heart of Europe. The Turkish attacks became more frequent with assault on Hungary and Malta and the siege of Vienna, but during Soliman I’s reign the Europeans also achieved their first victory in the sea battle of Lepanto in 1571. After the battle of Lepanto there was a gradual improvement in England’s relationship with Turkey. Several histories of the Turks and the Saracens made their appearance during this period, the most famous being Richard Knolle’s *History of the Turks* published in 1603, the year of the production of *Othello*. Simon Ockley’s *History of the Saracens*, Pierre Bayle’s *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical* (1737-41), Richard Peacocke’s *A Description of the East* (1743-45) and Alexander Russell’s *A Natural History of Aleppo* (1756) are later examples of this genre. The large number of books written during this period about the Turks led to an increase in knowledge about the Turks and the East. Gradually, fear of the Turks and anxiety over their aggression faded; trade relations increased; and English ambassadors took residence in Constantinople. Travellers returned with tales of justice, hospitality and tolerance that they experienced among the Turks.

On another front, Elizabethan England took part in the contemporary adventures of exploration and trade. Though the first activities of Elizabethan commerce were confined to countries such as Persia, Turkey and Morocco, England was successful in making the Asian countries their trading posts as a result of their endeavours in sea explorations. A number of trading companies were established. The Muscovy Company was established in 1555 for trade with Russia and Persia; Cathay Company (1576) for trade with Asia via Canada; the Levant Company (1592) for trade in the Near East. The Levant and the North African trades were followed by the establishment of the East India Company (1599). The Company was
granted monopoly in trade in the East Indies with the formal restriction that it might not contest the prior trading right of any Christian prince.

As the volume of trade grew, a conflict of interest emerged among the European nations, which in turn resulted in a fissure in the conception of a homogeneous European identity that governed the medieval romance narratives. Another factor that contested this homogeneous identity was the religious conflict at home that began with the Reformation movement. Robinson rightly observes that the “fissure of religious conflict threatened any sense of shared Christian identity” (7). This, however, does not mean that the medieval misconceptions of the East vanished altogether but those misconceptions and prejudices appeared in a more complicated form in Early Modern literature. The literature of this age, according to Robinson, can be called “a sedimented history that layers both contemporary experience of contact and a longer literary history formed by the experience of contact extending back to the time of the Crusades”( 51). Naturally, while some old stereotypes about the Orient were repeated, some new stereotypes were created, and some prejudices were corrected.

Islam was still treated as an enemy by Christian Europe, and Elizabethan and Jacobean writers often followed the model of the medieval romances in representing Islam. Francis Bacon, for example, in his essay “Of Unity in Religion”, criticises Islam as a religion that has thrived on war. Illustrating the means of achieving unity in religion Bacon observes: “But we may not take up the third sword, which is Mahomet’s sword, or like unto it; that is, to propagate religion by wars or by sanguinary persecutions to force consciences. . . ” (Chaudhuri 102-03). The reference to the misconceived idea of the hanging tomb of Muhammad is found in the second part of Marlowe’s Tamburlaine: “Whose glorious body, when he left the world”, “hung on a stately Mecca’s temple roof” (1.1.137-39). However, these false notions were countered by some writers. Thomas Browne, for example, dismisses
the story of the hanging tomb as “fabulous and evidently false” and asserts that the “tomb is made of stone, and lieth upon the ground (Religio Medici 315). Thomas Fuller, for instance, in his The Historie of the Holy Warre (History of the Crusades) breaking away from the popular tradition concedes the virtue of tolerance to the Muslims. He writes, “To give Mahometans their due, they are generally good fellows in this point, and Christians among them can keep their consciences if their tongue be fettered not to oppose the doctrine of Mahomet” (8).

Fear and fascination characterized the Elizabethans’ gaze on the Eastern Other, and this duality is seen in Richard Hakluyt’s narrative. Richard Hakluyt in his three volume book, The Principal Navigations, Traffics and Discoveries of the English Nations (1589) highlighted the attempt of the British to discover a northeast or northwest passage to the Eastern nations. According to Heffernan, it was an “early modern substitute for the chivalrous adventure of the medieval romance”( 133). Hakluyt’s compilation includes narratives in prose that spans a period beginning from the time of King Arthur to the Spanish Armada. Many of the narratives in this compilation tell tales of travel to the Ottoman Orient and the narrative details reminds us of the medieval romances. The account of the voyage of Susan of London to bring William Harborne to Turkey as the first English Ambassador contains a description of Harborne’s reception at the Turkish court that is similar in its detailing to the medieval romances. Here the attention of the narrator is not confined to the diplomatic ceremonies, but it extends to observations of the customs and manners at a mosque, particularly one that is built out of a Christian church:

After this I went to visit the church of Santa Sophia, which was the chiefe church when it was the Christians, and now is the chiefe see and church of primacie of this Turke present. . . . The pillers on both sides of the church are very costly and rich, their Pulpets seemely and handsome, two are common to preach in, the third reserved onely for their Paschall. The ground is covered
with Mats, and the walles hanged with Tapistry. They have also Lamps in their
churches, one in the middle of the church of exceeding greatnesse, and another
in another part of the church of cleane golde, or double gilded, full as bigge as
a barrel. Round about the church there is a gallery builded upon rich and
stately pillers. (quoted in Heffernan 134)

Heffernan comments that the passage reflects “the Pre-empire Englishman’s reaction to a
Moslem culture—older wealthier and very different from its own” (134). Interestingly, the
reference to the mosque and other Muslim customs at the mosque do not reveal any apparent
feeling of hostility. A remarkable aspect of the passage or many other passages in the book is
the ethnocentric interest of the observer.

A strong sense of hostility towards the East is visible in Edmund Spenser’s The
Faerie Queene which follows the tradition of the medieval romances. The attitude shown
towards the East in the Faerie Queene, according to Mark Heberle, was peculiar to the
Renaissance epics, “a genre in which it might be said that Europe defined itself as civilization
marked by expansive nationalistic imperialism, whether of political organisation, ideology, or
culture” (81). This tradition, Heberle argues, began with Virgil’s Aeneid, where the internal
breakdown of the Roman state and its crisis is attempted to be overcome by representing the
external danger posed by the Asiatic power of Antony and Cleopatra that had been recently
overcome in the battle of Actium. Although Caesar’s victory is regarded as a culmination of
Roman history, the East remains a non-Roman Other, imaginatively unassimilated.
Nevertheless, the poem celebrates the transition from war to peace, and from republic to
empire, by outlining a vast cultural and political movement from East to West and back again
as Aeneas and his immediate descendants found a new Troy on the banks of the Tiber and
Rome, in turn, brings law and order to the East, while Virgil’s poem itself, in both
transmitting and transcending Homeric epic, duplicates culturally what Roman imperialism

has done politically. By the end of *The Aeneid*, the entire world presented in the poem has become a stage that celebrates Roman supremacy, fulfilling what may be called an imperial cycle (Heberle 81-82). The medieval romances continued this practice with the Crusades in the background. When Spenser was writing his epic, England enjoyed a comparatively better relationship with the Islamic East, but as he was writing in the established tradition of the epic and the romance where the East was easily cast in the role of the enemy, he could not but made use of the traditional prejudices. Heberle concludes that *The Fairie Queene*,

the last major European imperial epic and an heir to a coherent Western epic tradition profoundly concerned with cultural and ideological anxieties and pretensions, presents these powerful distortion … in a peculiarly distinctive form, consistently employing its Islamic allusions as recognizably proto-orientalist tropes to validate its ethical and ideological deals. (Heberle 81)

*The Faerie Queene* is closer to another Italian renaissance epic, Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, though Chaucer’s the “Squire’s Tale” is the chief literary source of the epic. Heffernan has pointed to a number of episodes in Spenser’s poem which are sourced from Aristo’s epic, particularly its depiction of the Saracens. ‘Turks’ and ‘Sarazins’ are identified with militant Islam in Spenser. ‘Sarazin’ and its variant ‘saracen,’ a more general term for Muslims are used as an epithet in the poem very frequently. The term characterizes three ‘Sans brothers’ in Book I—Sans Foy (“Faithlessness”), Sans Loy (“Lawlessness”) and Sans Joy (“Joylessness”) as well as Pyrocles and Cymochles in Book II, who represent extremes of irascible and concupiscent passions, or anger and sensuality. The word pagan (or its variant ‘paynim’) is also applied to each of these figures and it seems that the pagan and Saracen are conceived as interchangeable (Heffernan 131-33).

The allegory of the Saracens and Pagans in the epic is representative of the Roman Catholicism. Duessa, for example, is identified as Babylonian whore, and she is characterised
by Persian luxury and extravagance. In Canto V Night is identified as the common mother of
Duessa and the three ‘Sans’ brothers. Heberle concludes from this that the East is now
Catholic Europe and it became the locus where Spenser could explore the crisis of the
Elizabethan regime—its struggle against Christendom itself. By associating Roman
Catholicism with Islam, Spenser “degrades, the former with the distorted image of the latter”
(Heberle 85). Otherness of the Orient is, therefore, used by Spenser to serve the domestic
agenda.

The theme of exogamy and miscegenation of the medieval romance reappears in the
Elizabethan drama, but with new ramifications. In medieval romances exogamy was possible
but in the Elizabethan and Jacobean plays the exogamous desire remains unfulfilled—
interracial love or marriage is rejected. In Middle English romances there was the zeal for
conversion of the non-Christians into Christianity. The Christian princess in the romance The
King of Tars, for example, turned the king both into a Christian and a White through
marriage, but no such miracle is possible Elizabethan plays which are characterized by fear of
miscegenation. The Merchant of Venice (a play with the most vivid description of trade with
the East) has a Jew as a villain, but there is also a Saracen prince, the Prince of Morocco, who
seeks the hand of Portia. He is described in the stage direction as a “tawny Moor” (2.10).8

The Prince desires Portia’s hand in marriage, but he is disliked by Portia for having the
“complexion of devil”: “If he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, / I
had rather he should shrive me than wive me (1.2.110-11). The Prince pleads before Portia:
“Mislike me not for my complexion” (2.2. 1). The complexion becomes a problem both for
Portia (who shares the common hatred for the ‘moors’) and for the Prince of Morocco who
tries to prove his worth despite being black. The Prince of Morocco’s desire to marry Portia
(and the possibility of miscegenation) is nipped in the bud as he chooses the wrong casket. In
Othello the ‘Black Moor’, goes one step ahead and is able to marry Desdemona but their
marriage ends in tragedy because of Iago’s villainy. One cannot forget Iago’s description of Othello and Desdemona making love: “an old black ram/Is tupping your white ewe (1. 1. 88–89). The employment of the beast imagery may be read as an indication of the White European’s perception of the ‘black’ during the period. The focus is here on lust and animal passion of Othello, and it reminds us of the Western convention of representing the Orientals as lust-incarnate that goes back to the Middle Age. However, the presentation of Othello as the hero, a ‘noble savage’ and Othello’s own acceptance of the White man’s assessment of him problematizes the discourse of Otherness in the play. In The Tempest, Caliban is presented as a savage, without the qualifying adjective and depicted as evil, a black monster. In the play the exogamy of the medieval romances is abandoned with the abandonment of Claribel to an African King. The marriage of Alonso’s daughter to the King of Tunis is celebrated by none in the play. On the contrary Caliban’s attempted rape of Miranda, a story of policing of race and sexuality, is strongly condemned. According to Kabbani Rana, the play “is suspended between two competing narratives, one that uses erotic intimacy to evoke Christianity’s global desires and another in which sexuality becomes an anxious ground of increasingly racialized identities”(20). In Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare takes up the theme of interracial love and marriage again and once again it ends tragedy.9

With Shakespeare’s Egyptian queen Cleopatra resurfaced the image of the Oriental woman as lasciviously beautiful, seductive and at the same time dangerous and cruel. In this East-West encounter, Egypt/Cleopatra represents danger, falsity and pleasure. Antony expresses his disgust that the “false soul of Egypt? This grave charm” has “Beguiled me [him] to the very heart of loss (4.10. 40-45).The unrestricted pleasure and danger of the East is contrasted with the security and stability of the West through Cleopatra and Octavia, respectively. Though Antony is deep in love with Cleopatra, she is described as the “most monster like” and as a “triple-turned whore” (4.10. 52; 4.10. 29). Commenting on the
interconnection between eroticism and the East, Kabbani Rana observes that in Elizabethan England “the luxury of East is associated with idleness. Easterners are seen as decadent languishers in rich Harems.”(17). Rana quotes from Thomas Dallam’s *Diary (1599-1600) of Voyage to Constantinople* to show how the Elizabethan writers linked the East, eroticism and luxury in the image of the harem:

> when I came to the grate wall was very thick and grated on both sides with iron very strongly; but through that grate I did see thirty of the grand Sinyor’s concubine that was playing with a ball in another court. At the first sight of them I thought they had been young men but on I saw hair on their heads hang down on their backs, plaited together with a tassel of small pearl hanging in the lower end of it, and other plain tokens. I did no know them to be women, and very pretty one indeed … I stood so long looking upon them that he which showed me all this kindness began to be very angry with me. He made a wry mouth, and stamped with his foot to make me give over looking; the which I was very loath to do, for that sight did please me wondrous well. (18)

The East not only was erotic but it was exotic as well—a fascination with the exotic East, an East of opulence, splendour and glory was invoked in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* provides us a clue to understanding the presentation of the East in the literature of the period. For the play-within—the play Hieronimo chooses an Oriental subject, and addressing the actors he says: “Assure you it will prove most passing strange /And wondrous plausible to the assembly” (4.1.84-85). Hieronimo’s emphasis is on strangeness. He insists: “You must provide a Turkish cap/A black mustachio and a fauchion” (4.2. 144-45). Kyd’s fellow University Wit, Christopher Marlowe was intoxicated by the exotic charms of Eastern cities like Samarkand, Baghdad,
and Babylon (Heffernan 134) and in his plays we often find a catalogue of the opulent Eastern cities:

Is it not brave to be a king, Techelles?
Usumcasane and Theridamas,
Is it not passing brave to be a king,
And ride in triumph through Persepolis? *(Tam. I, 2. 5. 50–54)*

Among Marlowe’s sources for his play about the Mongolian emperor Timur (1336–1405) was the atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1584) of Ortelius whose maps of Asia and Africa provided the playwright with geographic inspiration and mellifluous place names. Barabas in Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* refers to the exuberance and opulence of Eastern wealth as he extensively recounts the gorgeous Oriental life—from the luxury and wealth of the Arabians “who so richly pay/ The thing they traffic for with wedge of gold” to,

The merchants of the Indian mines,
That trade in metals of purest mould;
The wealthy moor, that in eastern rocks
Without control can pick his riches up,
And in his house heaps the pearl like pebble stones,
Receive them free, sell them by the weight. *(1.2.19-24)*

Another character of Marlowe, Dr. Faustus, has his imagination fired at the very thought of what necromancy can give him and he takes an imaginative possession of the riches of the East as thinks of making his spirits “fly to India for gold” or “Ransack the ocean for orient pearl” *(1. 1. 81-84)*. Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* *(2. 2. 93-94)* Philip Massinger’s *Roman Actor* *(2. 1)* and *The Bloody Brother* *(5. 2)* contain similar descriptions of Eastern wealth.

In Milton’s *Paradise Lost* there are numerous references to the East, but the image of the Oriental splendour and wealth are evoked to condemn the satanic. The geographical detail
of the poem includes places from Asia, Africa, Europe and America, as Milton refers to
different places like ‘Cambalu,’ ‘Samarchand by Oxus” Agra, ‘Mosco,’ “Mombazaand
Quila,’” ‘Melind,’ ‘Rich Mexico’ and ‘El Dorado’ (Book IX, 420-423). The worldly kings
and their luxuries are denounced to show the sovereignty and supremacy of God’s kingdom.
The images of Oriental splendour and wealth, kingship, despotism and barbarity are used in
relation to Satan and Satanic glory. Pandemonium is associated with the East (Book I, l 716-
21) and where Milton describes Satan’s regiment when a council is proclaimed in hell we can
see terms like ‘soldan’ ‘paynim’:

They anon

With hundreds and thousands trooping came

Attended: all access was thronged , the gates

And porches wide, but chiefe the spacious hall

(Though like a covered field , where champions bold

Wont ride in armed, and at the soldan’s chair

Defied the best paynim chivalry

To mortal combat or career with lance. (Book I, l 759-66)

Once again in Book I the devils are compared to obscure people somewhere in the East: they
look like “that pygmean race /Beyond the Indian mountain” (Book I, 180-81). In Milton, the
East is not only descriptive but also functional, and as G. Kenton argues that the East
functions as a symbol of tyranny as opposite of the West that symbolises liberty. The images
of exotic Orient are also used to describe the heaven as heaven’s balmy scents are compared
to “Sabean odours from the spicy shores/ Of Arabie the blest” (Book I, l 1162-63) India is
imagined as a locale for edenic profusion and abundance. Adam and Eve cover themselves
with leaves of “fig tree” “as this day to Indians known /In Malabars or Deccan spreads her
arms” (Paradise Lost, Book I, 101-03).
India was more or less absent from the Middle English literature but a remarkable number of references in Early Modern literature are to India and its exotic riches. Apart from the instances cited above, the metaphysical poets renowned for their use of images based on the knowledge of contemporary experience often referred to India to introduce an element of the exotic in their poetry. John Donne in his lyric ‘The Sunne Rising’ refers to “India’s spice and mine”( 17) and Andrew Marvell in ‘To His Coy Mistress’ refers to the Indian Ganges beside which he imagines his beloved plucking rubies. The sixteenth and the seventeenth century stage tended to treat India with awe, and as it is observed by Mackenzie, it was due to the influence of the European travellers, who had an “awful respect” for India’s wealth and riches (181). Significantly, Antony Parr commenting on Europe’s perception of the Asian kingdoms observes that the European emissaries “often felt belittled” at the imperial courts they visited (qtd. in Barbour 3). Another point that must be made here is that the reference to the Oriental opulence and wealth was inspired by the tales of the travellers but they in turn also inspired travellers, voyagers and navigators to explore the new territories. These descriptions of the Eastern wealth and opulence fuelled the imperial ambition of the Western colonizers.

Marlowe in Tamburlaine made the first move in introducing the tradition of writing about Oriental history in theatre and opened the theatre to its rich potentialities. Tamburlaine is a typical Marlovian hero who from a shepherd boy rises to become a great conqueror, but the cruelty he perpetuates upon his opponents is unparalleled by anything in Marlowe or Shakespeare. Marlowe, however, presents Tamburlaine as his hero and he is given the opportunity to defend his actions. After the killing of the virgins he is given a long speech which provides justification for the slaughter: “pity like the love of beauty must be subordinated to a still greater force: “virtue solely is the sum of glory/And fashion men with true nobility” (1.5.189-90). The Renaissance audience must have relished such a speech since
it is an expression of their own dream. They must have identified themselves with the imperial imagination of this Oriental ruler as there was immense possibility for them to achieve such a glory by entering the newly discovered terrains of the East.

Early Modern writers inherited much of the prejudices and stereotypes of the East from their medieval predecessors. Prejudices against Islam still sway over popular imagination; Orientals were conceived as lustful and cruel; Oriental women were still stereotyped as lasciviously beautiful but cruel. However, as there was a widening of horizon new images and stereotypes of the East also developed. The images of Eastern wealth and opulence dominated the imagination of the writers; India (often referred to as East Indies) became very popular Eastern location along with the traditional Middle East. One deviation from the medieval imagination about the Oriental Other was the rejection of the possibility of miscegenation in the Early Modern literature. It indicates that while the world was expanding for the Elizabethans and Jacobbeans there developed a sort of insularity of thought in relation to preserving the racial purity.

In the later part of the seventeenth century certain key changes took place which rapidly altered Europe’s relation to the East. Turkish power was ebbing slowly after the siege of Vienna (1683) was thwarted by John Sobieski and Turkey gave up further plans of expansion on the Western front. Edmund Waller recounts this victory over the Turks in his poem “Of the Invasion and Defeat of the Turks in the year 1683” (140-42). The Peace Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) marked the end of Turkish expansion in this part. English trade relations with Turkey increased and English literature of the period was free from fear and anxiety of the Turkish invasion. England had no hostility towards Persia as the Safawi dynasty begun to decline with Soliman III (1666-94).

The East India Company was increasing its trade and its wealth and power was growing in India and it was in war with the last of the great Mughal emperors Aurangzeb
(1658-1707) during 1686-90. The presence of India, therefore, became stronger during the Restoration period. Dryden wrote *Aureng-Zebe* on how the eponymous hero wrested power from his brothers and his father. The source of information on this subject was Tavernier’s *Travels in India*. In keeping with the heroic tradition the hero is presented as a figure of exemplary rationality, virtue and patience. The hero’s stepmother lusts after him and the father pursues the woman he is in love with. The play suggest a kind of anarchy supposed to be typical of the Eastern empires, and it contains most of the stereotypes of the Early Modern literature.

During this period Europe’s fascination with Islam continued and there appeared some biographical works on Prophet Mohammed and the translations of the Koran. Alexander Ross's version of the Koran was published in 1649 as *Alcoran of Mahomet*, (translated from Arabic into French by Sieur der Ryer). Lancelot Addison published *The Life and Death of Mahumed* in 1679. Humphrey Prideaux brought out his *The True Nature of Imposter fully displayed in the Life of Mahomet* (1697). Sir Paul Rycaut's *The Present State Of The Ottoman Empire Containing The Maximum Of The Turkish Politic, The Most Material Points of the Mahometan Religion* (1668) and Henry Stubbe’s *The Rise and Progress of Mahometanism* (1674) were two important works on Islam during this period. These works do have conflicting opinions about Islam and Orient, but Stubbe’s book is often referred to as the beginning of what Humberto Garcia in his recent book *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670–1840* defines as the subversive tradition of Islamic republicanism in Europe. These works made their impact upon the literary scene of their age. Paul Rycaut's *History of the Turks* was used as a source by many of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century dramatists. The examples include Mary Pix’s play called *Ibrahim the Thirteenth Emperor of the Turks* (1696); Eliza Haywood's *The Fair Captive, A Tragedy* (1721); and Edward Young’s *The Revenge* (1721).
A number of Heroic tragedies were written on subjects related to the Near East and Islam. Davenant’s opera The Siege of the Rhodes (1656), deals with the siege in 1522 by Soliman, the Magnificent. Dryden’s Conquest of Granada or Almanzor and Almacheide is concerned with the struggle between the ‘moor’ and the Christian with its superhuman hero who has an Arabic name Almanzor(al- Mansur, or the victorious). Dryden takes the plot from Scudery’s Almacheide. Though the Eastern characters are called ‘moors’ in the play there is no clear indication of their places of origin. Dryden’s Don Sebastian (1689) is set against the background of the battle of Alcazar fought in Morocco in 1578.

Apart from Dryden other writers of heroic plays also turned to the East for their subjects. Elkanah Settle wrote three heroic tragedies based on Eastern subject. The Empress of Morocco deals with the wicked queen who murders her own son to prepare the way to throne for her paramour. In his Ibrahim, the Illustrious Bassa the Christian hero Ibrahim is shown to conquer Persia for Sulyman but he becomes a rival of the Sultan for the love of Isabella. After much complication Sulyman permits Ibrahim and Isabella to return to the Christian lands. Another play by Settle on the Eastern theme is The Heir of Morocco, with the Death of Gayland. Nicholas Rowe took the history of the hostility between Tamburlaine and Bejazet to represent the conflict between William III and Henry IV in his Tamarlane. Roger Boyle, the Earl of Orrey’s Tragedy of Mustapha, the son of Solymen, The Magnificent (1668) is based on de Scudery’s pseudo-oriental romance “Ibrahim ou l’illustre Bassa.”

Scudery’s Oriental romances not only were useful sources for English plays during this period, but they also proved influential in inspiring English prose romances with Oriental themes. Roger Boyle wrote Parthenissa, the first English romance in the style of de Scudery. Many Eastern collections of tales and narratives made their way into Europe and at the beginning of the eighteenth century and English writers freely borrowed from them. Europe was flooded with Oriental literature. Some important preludes to the great era of Oriental tale
in the eighteenth century included L’strange’s version of *The Fables of Bidpai* and the
publication in eight volumes of Marana’s *Letters Written by a Turkish Spy*. The magical
moment, however, came just at the beginning of the eighteenth century with the publication
of Alf Layla wa Layla, *The Thousand and one Nights or The Arabian Nights
Entertainments*.¹¹
Notes

1 See Edith Hall’s *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* and Paul Cartledge’s *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others.*

2 See Huang Yang’s article “Orientalism in the Ancient World: Greek and Roman Images of the Orient from Homer to Virgil” (*The Historical Journal* 1:115–29)

3 After the publication of Said’s *Orientalism*, the academic world has witnessed a lot of critical debate regarding the representation and influence of Eastern writing upon the West. More importantly, although Said mainly concentrates on modern Orientalism many were inspired by him to focus upon the Medieval and Early Modern literary and non-literary texts to explore the politics of representations/misrepresentations of the Orient as well as to the reception of Oriental elements and resources and their use in the West. Jefrey J. Cohen edited *The Post Colonial Middle Ages* (2000) and Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Dean Williams edited *The Post Colonial Approaches to Middle Ages* are two other works in this field. Another very important recent contribution is by Conklin Akbari’s *Idols in the East* (2009). Even before the publication of Said’s book there had been works which looked at the interrelationship between European literary texts and the East. Some of these works are W.W. Comfort’s “The Literary role of the Saracens in French Epics” (1940), B.P. Smith’s *Islam in English Literature* (1937), Norman Daniel published his book *Islam and the West: The making of an Image* (1962), Dorothy Metlitzki’s *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (1977).

4 Some recent studies have explored the interrelations between the religious and the secular attitude. John Tolan’s study *Saracens: Muslims in Medieval Christian Imagination* is a very important contribution. Tolan also edited a book *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam.*
Another important book focussing on the subject is W. Montgomery Watt’s *Muslim Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions*.


6 All citations of Chaucer’s are from Albert C. Baugh ed. *Chaucer’s Major Poetry* (London, Rautledge and Kegan Paul LTD), unless otherwise stated.

7 Suleiman I (6 November 1494 – 5 September 1566) was the tenth and longest-reigning Emperor, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, from 1520 to his death in 1566. Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* is set in the background of Soliman’s attack on Malta and represents a Christian island’s battle against the Turks. The subject had interest for the British audience since almost every Christian land was facing danger from the Turks. Thomas Kyd in *Soliman and Perseda* dramatizes the attack on another Christian island, Rhodes, which was conquered by Soliman in 1522.

8 Robinson makes an interesting observation the use of the terms ‘Moor,’ ‘Saracen’ and the ‘Turk’ in the Early Modern theatre. According to him, these terms are used as the “privileged other” since the Crusades, and these “terms of romance alterity migrated with the migration of the English: the word ‘Moor’ found its way to places as remote as Malabar and America; while the word ‘Turk’ sprawled across the Islamic world from Morocco to India and beyond”(Robinson 6).

9 The romance tradition of representing the Oriental Other was carried forward with utmost zeal in the Early Modern theatre and consequently, it has remained most fertile field for the literary critics. In 1915 Luis Wann published a paper “The Oriental in Elizabethan Drama” and he made for the first time a list of Elizabethan plays that portray Turks, Moors and Persians. The pioneering work in the field of Early Modern representation of the Orient
has been done by Samuel Chew with his renowned work *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (1937). For a detailed discussion on the East and Early Modern theatre one may see works like Matthew Dimmock’s *New Turkes’: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England*, Jonathon Burton’s *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579–1624*, Nabil Matar *Britain and Barbary 1589–1689*. Gerald MacLean’s *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* etc. One of the popular title in this field is “Elizabethans and Foreigners” an essay by G.K. Hunter *(Shakespeare Survey, 17(1964) 37-52.*


11 *Alf Layla wa Layla* as a title had had different translations into European languages, and specially into English language. Antoine Galland translated it into French as *Les Milles et une nuit*, which appeared in Paris in 1704. Many English versions of Antoine’s translation appeared after this, and it underwent many editions in English. A four volume edition was published in 1706 with the title *Arabian Nights Entertainments Consisting of One thousand and One stories, told by the sultaness of the Indies, to divert the execution of a bloody vow...Tr. into French from the Arabian mss. by M Galland... and now done into English.*