Chapter II

The Oriental Tale, Gothic and Others

*The Arabian Nights* became famous throughout Europe with its translation into French by Antoine Galland. The first part of his twelve-volume *Les mille et une nuits* (*The Thousand and One Nights*) appeared in 1704. Its English version appeared between 1704 and 1717, and with its appearance the eighteenth century saw an explosion of Oriental tales in England. This large oeuvre of the Oriental tales has been analysed by Martha Conant Pike by sub-dividing them into four different groups based on their subject matter and mode of discourse: the imaginative group, the moralistic group, the philosophic group, and the satiric group (xxvi). The imaginative group includes *The Arabian Nights, The Persian Tales, The Turkish Tales, New Arabian Nights*, Collins’s *Persian Eclogues*, *African Eclogues* by Chatterton, *Oriental Eclogues* of James Scott, *Vathek* by Beckford, and *Charoba* by Clara Reeve, to mention some of them. Some of the tales in the moralistic group are *The Hermit* by Thomas Pernel, *Murad the Unlucky* by Maria Edgeworth. Works like *Vision of Mirza* by Addison, and *Rasselas* (1759) by Dr. Johnson form part of the philosophic group. In the satiric group there are tales like *The Persian Letters* of Montesquieu, *The Citizen of the World* by Goldsmith, Defoe’s *System of Magic*, and Horace Walpole’s *Hieroglyphic Tale*. This dissertation does not have the scope for a detailed discussion of these tales. Therefore, a very short discussion of some of the Oriental tales in the eighteenth century will be provided by dividing them into two categories: the translations and the pseudo-translations and/or the imitations. In the category of translations only those tales will be considered which were translated from original Oriental manuscripts by Western writers. Most of these tales were translated into English via their French versions. Some Western writers themselves authored
collections of Oriental tales and tried to pass them off as translations of some original Oriental manuscripts. These are considered as the pseudo-translations. However, some writers produced Oriental tales without pretending that they are translations and these tales are regarded as imitations. The difference between the pseudo-translations and the imitations is only external. The pseudo-translations are acts of literary disguise, and it is interesting to note that these literary disguises prefigured some of the infamous poetic forgeries by Macpherson, Chatterton and Ireland in the latter half of the eighteenth century.¹

Identifying the reasons behind the incidents of forgery during the Romantic period, Debbie Lee observes: “One of the things imposters and forgers make strikingly clear is the period’s idolatrous worship of authenticity and truth” (“Forgeries” 521). It was the same “idolatrous worship of authenticity and truth” about the East that led writers to forge authenticity for their tales and add additional notes to give an aura of verisimilitude to the description of the East. Beckford’s *Vathek*, for example, is presented to the readers as a translation and extensive notes are appended to the text (App. I., 163). Beckford had to take recourse to the notes because he wanted to achieve the effect of truthfulness. The notes also reveal the inability of the author to deal with an alien world. The narrative alone becomes inadequate to delineate the incidents depicted and, therefore, notes are added. In the same manner, Elizabeth Hamilton in *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796) included a hundred-page explanatory essay with a glossary to familiarize her readers with the history and culture of India.² This method of using notes appended to the tales will become a standard feature of the of the Romantics verse narratives dealing with the East. The pseudo-translators by their disguise achieved a dual purpose: firstly, they were able to produce the effect of realism in their description of the East, and secondly, as the readers were ready to devour anything Eastern, the disguise helped the writers to attract the attention of the readers.
Although the Oriental tales were very popular, they were not well accepted by the literati, because the eighteenth-century aesthetics based on the Enlightenment ethics of reason and rationality went against the imaginative and moral freedom taken by these writers. This attitude of the literati is reflected in the fact that the Oriental tales came to be mocked in parodies. Caylus’s *The Oriental Tales* (1745) and Horace Walpole’s *Hieroglyphic Tales* (1785) are two well known parodies. It was the same apprehension that led Horace Walpole to project the first Gothic novel as a translation from an Italian manuscript. In the preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* Walpole forged an extensive history of the origin of the text, but when the novel was well accepted he lamented this in the preface to the second edition and apologized to the readers: “it is fit that he should ask pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator” (xv).

Similarly, Elizabeth Hamilton did not acknowledge her authorship for *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* until after the work's initial success.\(^3\) The writers of the Gothic novel and the Oriental tale, therefore, had similar concern in regard to the publication and reception of their stories and both these forms were aesthetically different from the neoclassical texts of the eighteenth century. Accordingly, the development from the pseudo-translations to the imitations marks a change in attitude of the authors—they became courageous enough to acknowledge their authorship.

Any discussion on the Oriental tales must begin with *The Arabian Nights*\(^4\) which is regarded as a landmark in the history of the Oriental tale. Though the tales in the *Nights* are traditionally associated with medieval Arabic culture, they are rooted in several oral traditions, containing motifs from a variety of geographic areas and historical periods, including ancient Mesopotamia, India, early medieval Persia and Iraq, and Egypt of the Middle Ages. Scholars agree that the frame story is most likely of Indian origin. The first
identifiable written version of the *Nights* is a book of Persian tales called *Hazar Afsanah* (*A Thousand Legends*, written between 225 and 250 CE), translated into Arabic around 850 CE. Although the tenth-century Arab writer Al-Mas'oodi referred to this Arabic text, noting that it was known as *Alf Layla* (*A Thousand Nights*), it is now lost. The stories underwent considerable modification between the tenth and the sixteenth centuries, kept alive by professional storytellers, who would perform them in coffeehouses all over the Middle East.⁵ The title “Thousand and One Nights” was known in the twelfth century and likely to have originated from the Turkish expression ‘bin-bir,’ (“thousand and one”), which, like the Arabic ‘alf,’ simply indicates a very large number. There is no definitive Arabic textual source of the work, but there are a number of surviving manuscripts containing many of the stories.⁶ The *Nights* was very popular in the Middle East, but was never a part of the Eastern literary canon. However, when it reached Europe it became a representative Eastern literary text and an important document on the Eastern life. Kabbani Rana, therefore, rightly observes that Galland is not a “mere translator of these Arabic stories; he is the inventor of a western phenomenon, a circular narrative that portrayed an imaginary space of a thousand and one reveries” (24-25).

*The Arabian Nights* has a frame. The frame story concerns a Persian king and his new bride. King Shahryar is shocked to discover that his brother's wife is unfaithful and discovery of infidelity of his own wife proves more shocking. In his bitterness and grief he has his wife executed and he comes to the conclusion that all women are the same. Subsequently, the king begins to marry a succession of virgins only to execute each one the next morning, before she has a chance to dishonour him. Eventually the vizier, whose duty it is to provide them, cannot find any more virgins. Shahrazad, the vizier's daughter, offers herself as the next bride and her father reluctantly agrees. On the night of their marriage, Shahrazad begins to tell the king
a tale, but does not finish it. The king is forced to postpone her execution in order to hear the conclusion. The next night, as soon as she finishes the tale, she begins a new one, and the king, eager to hear the conclusion, postpones her execution once again. In her story telling Shahrazad is helped by her sister Dinerzad. It goes on for 1,001 nights and with Shahrazad the lives of thousands of other women are also saved. Shahrazad’s narrative, therefore, becomes her life and the lives of other women as well.

The influence of the *Nights* and other Oriental tales upon English literature, in general, and on Romantic poetry, in particular, had been immense and it has received much critical attention. The immediate impact of the *Nights* upon the readers can be gauged from the fact that it underwent nineteen editions by 1798. According to Pike, the “history of the Oriental Tale in England in the eighteenth century” is “an episode in the development of English Romanticism” (vii). She observes that “the strand of interest in the Orient is interwoven with other Romantic threads” (246). Almost every Romantic poet—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Keats—was an avid reader of the *Nights* and other collections of Oriental tales. Apart from the poets, the novelists and the essayists also borrowed from the *Nights*. Pike defines the *Nights* as “the fairy godmother of the English novel” (241). Similarly, Ross Ballaster in his essay “Narrative Transmigrations: The Oriental tale and the Novel in Eighteenth- Century Britain” traces the relationship between the Oriental tale and the English novel. With reference to *Nourjahad* (1767) by Frances Sheridan and *Charoba* (1785) by Clara Reeve, Ballaster shows how the Oriental fiction was domesticated these writers. The eighteenth- century novel, he argues, depicts the struggle between the pleasures of reading and the mission to ensure that it provides a vehicle for the transmission of virtue and *The Arabian Nights* is a “model in this struggle” (75).

Another important book that came to be translated into English at the beginning of the
eighteenth century was *The Persian Tales or Thousand and One Days* (1714). The frame tale here, as in *The Arabian Nights*, introduces and concludes the collection but here we find a female counterpart of King Shahryar. The central figure is the princess of Cashmere who in her dream sees an ungrateful stag forsaking a hind. After this dream she loses her faith in men and decides not to marry. She is very beautiful and is followed by multiple suitors. Her father is disappointed with her. The old nurse comes to the rescue deciding to tell her stories of faithful lovers to move her thoughts on marriage. The tales are continued to be told for thousand and one days but the princess remains obdurate. At last she is moved to marry the prince of Persia under the magical power and religious authority of a holy dervish.

In the first decade of the eighteenth century, *The Turkish Tales* was translated into English via its French version. The collection has the alternative title, *Malice of Woman*, and is concerned with the malicious passion of Queen Canzade for her step son who turns down the proposal of love from her and thwarts her scheme to murder the king. Being rejected the queen persuades the king to decree the death of the prince. Meanwhile the prince goes to a cave to observe forty days silence to avoid a calamity predicted by the tutor. The forty viziers successively plead for the prince by telling the king stories of wicked wives and virtuous sons. The queen on the other hand tries to win the king by telling him stories with opposite themes. Finally, the prince is saved. Structurally it is similar to the previous two collections, and proved equally influential. “The Santon Barsisa” one of the tales in this collection is a major source of *The Monk* of Gregory Lewis.

A philosophical tale *Hai Ibn Yaqzan* was translated from Arabic by Simon Ockley in 1708. Ibn Tufyal's (1110–1185 CE) novel tells the story of a child who is raised by a gazelle. The child (Hayy) lives alone on a desert island in the Indian Ocean. Without any contact with other human beings, Hayy discovers the ultimate truth of life through a systematic process
of reasoned inquiry. Later in the novel, he comes into contact with civilization and religion when he meets a castaway named Absal. He determines that certain trappings of religion and civilization, namely imagery and dependence on material goods, are necessary for the multitude in order that they might have decent lives. However, he believes that imagery and material goods are distractions from the truth and ought to be abandoned by those whose reason recognizes that they are distractions. Ibn Tufyal derived his ideas from earlier works by the eleventh century philosopher Ibn Sina (980-1037).

This philosophical novel (it is said to be the first novel in Arabic language) influenced many European writers and philosophers. Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1759) follows Tufyal’s narrative pattern. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) with its marooned hero resembles this narrative pattern. It is also imitated in *Emile: or, On Education* (1762) by Rousseau, which is a treatise on the nature of education and on the nature of man written in the manner of Ibn Tufail. Here we find the similar exultation of natural man. A variation of the same theme is found in the story of the ‘noble savage’ in *Oroonoko* (1688) by Aphra Behn. The emphasis on natural education as opposed to the nurturing of civilization, a shift from urban to the rural, from civilization to nature form the core of Romanticism. The tale *Hai Ibn Yaqzan* brings to our mind Wordsworth’s “Lucy Poems” and Lucy’s lonely life lived in closeness to nature, her nurturer.

These major translations of Oriental tales in the eighteenth century were followed by numerous pseudo-translations as there was an overwhelming response to these original translations. One of the first pseudo-translations, *Serendipity and the Three Princes, from the Peregrinaggio* which came to England in the second decade of the seventeenth century was a translation from the French of De Mailli who translated it from the Italian *Peregrinaggio*. The frame tale recounts the three gifted princes who in their various enterprises achieve
success. The events of their adventure were used by Voltaire in his philosophical tale *Zadig*. It also influenced Johnson’s *Rasselas*. This very tale was included in the first collection of tales, *The Soirées Bretonnes (Breton Nights, 1712)* by Thomas Simon Gueullette. Four other pseudo-translations by Gueullette were translated into English as *Chinese Tales or the Wonderful Adventures of Mandarin Fum-Hoam (1725), Mogul Tales or The Dreams of Men Awake; Tartarian Tales or a thousand and one Quarters of Hours and Peruvian Tales Related in One thousand and one Hours*. From the *Mogul Tales*, Beckford got the episode of the flaming heart of the sinners. Beckford, however, was more indebted to another pseudo-translation *The Adventures of Abdalla, son of Hanif* translated into English by William Hatchett from its French version by Jean Paul Bignon. Another important pseudo-translation was *The New Arabian Nights*, which came via its French translation made by Dom Chavis and M. Cazotte. It is presented to the readers as if it is a continuation of *The Arabian Nights*. The tale of “Maugrabby, the Magician” which is the source of Southey’s *Thalaba, the Destroyer* comes from this collection.

Another group of writings that is included within the category of pseudo-translations is the volumes of letters written by Western hands but purported to be original writings by an Oriental traveller. These volumes of epistolary literature involve elaborate fictional invention for creating a semblance of reality. On the one hand the fictional narrators could comment upon the European society and its customs, and on the other hand they had the capacity to give authentic description of the Eastern customs and manners as they originally belong there. There was no necessity to provide extensive additional notes. This tradition begins with *Letters Written by a Turkish Spy*, which is regarded to be only next in importance to *The Arabian Nights* in the history of the Oriental tales. It is agreed that the first volume of this work was written by Giovanni Paolo Marana, a Genoese political refugee to the French court.
of Louis XIV. The first volume (102 letters) was published in several parts between 1684 and 1686 in both Italian and in French. They were translated by W. Bradshaw into English in 1687 under the supervision of Robert Midgley who owned the copyright of the work. The remaining seven volumes appeared first in English between 1691 and 1694. The letters are supposed to be written by Mahmut, the Turkish spy. The fictional narrator is sent by Sultan Amurath (Murat IV) as a spy to report European affairs from Paris where he takes the disguise of an expert in Oriental languages as “Titus, the Maldivian.” *The Turkish Spy* is regarded as the pioneer of the genre of spy fiction and its influence is wide-ranging upon the literature of the time. It was so popular that in its own genre it was immediately followed by works like Edward Ward’s *The London Spy* (1698-1700); Charles Gildon’s *The Golden Spy* (1709); Captain Bland’s *The Northern Atlantis or York Spy* (1713); the anonymous *The German Spy* (1738); *The Jewish Spy* (1755). Together with this, we should remember, by 1776 there had accumulated at least twenty-six different editions of *The Turkish Spy* (Aravamudan, “Fiction/Translation/ Transnation” 59). Daniel Defoe was so attracted by it that he wrote *Continuation of Turkish Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy in Paris* (1718) and extended the narrator's account from 1687 to 1693.

The use of the ethnographic observer in *The Turkish Spy* is imitated by Montesquieu in his *Letters Persanes* or *The Persian Letters* which appeared in French in 1721 and was translated into English in 1730. Here two fictional Persian noblemen, Uzbek and Rica are shown travelling through France recounting their experiences to people back home. The first English imitation of this form was by Lord Lyttentong’s *The Persian Letters* (1735). Horace Walpole then published *Letters from Xo-Ho* (1757). Here Xo- Ho is the fictional narrator writing letters to his friend Lien Chi. This is probably one of the influences upon Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* or *Letters from a Chinese Philosopher residing in London to his Friends*.
in the East. The Turkish Spy is also regarded as an influence on the genre of the periodical essay. Srinivas Aravamudan sums up the influence of Marana upon the literature of the eighteenth century in the following words: “Marana can . . . be cited as a common source for the Oriental tale and the Spectator papers; for epistolary satire and the periodical essay; for fiction and social commentary” (“Fiction/Translation/ Transnation” 62).

These volumes of epistolary literature and their success influenced another form of pseudo-translations that is written in the form of chronicles. Smollett’s History and adventures of an Atom, for example is purportedly an account of Japanese events chronicled by a personified atom. In fact it is an allegorical satire upon the English. Another example of this group is The Bramine’s Journal by Laurence Sterne. Most of the pseudo-translations were used for moral and philosophical reflections.

The pseudo-translations and imitations were not confined to prose literature alone. Oriental tales were also imitated in verse. The first of these imitations was done by William Collins. He wrote the Persian Eclogues (1742): “Selim or the Shepherd’s Moral,” “Hassan or The Camel Driver,” “Abra or the Georgian Sultana” and “Agib and Secander, or the Fugitives.” Collins presented these eclogues as translations and a long history of their origin was forged by him:

I received them at the Hands of a Merchant who had made it his business to enrich himself with Learning, as well as the silks and Carpets of the Persians. The little information I could gather concerning their Author, was, That his Name was Abdallah, and that he was a native of Tauris…the Time of the Writing them was probably in the Beginning of Shah Sultan Hosseyn’s Reign, the successor of the Sefi or Solyman, the Second” (Lonsdale, Poems 371-72).
The first of the eclogues is a celebration of virtue rather than the beauty of the Persian maids.
The second eclogue shows the conflict between the pleasure and peace at home and the desire
for wealth that drives men to undertake long and dangerous journeys. Hasan leaves his
beautiful beloved and peace of home, and begins his travel through the desert. The hardships
and the dangers on the way make him repent his decision of setting on such a journey for
money and wealth: “Cursed be the Gold and Silver which persuade/ Weak men to follow far-
fatiguing Trade” (378, 131-32). The third eclogue celebrates the love between a simple
shepherd girl Abra and the King Abbas. The fourth eclogue is a lamentation for the lost
happiness and peace as Agib and Secander fly from the ravaging Tarter:

Still as I haste, the Tartar shouts behind,

And shrieks and Sorrows load the sadd’ning wind:

In rage of Heart, with Ruin in his Hand,

He blasts our Harvests, and deforms our Land (384, 23-26).

It is a kind of war pastoral, and this form was imitated by Chatterton in his eclogues. The
desert journey described by Collins in the second eclogue foreshadows some of the passages
in Thalaba, the Destroyer by Southey. Collins’s eclogues are characterized by artificiality,
have no involvement of the author, nor are they capable of arousing much involvement from
the reader.

Chatterton’s first of the African Eclogues, “Heccar and Gaira” (written in January
1770) is a war pastoral like the last eclogue of Collins but Chatterton uses the form to express
an anti-colonial and anti-slavery attitude in the poem, and there is a greater emotional
involvement of the author in the poem. The difference between Collins’s eclogues and those
by Chatterton is well documented in the anthology The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-
American Anthology, which includes “Heccar and Gaira.” The “African Eclogues” uses the
exotic setting of Africa to pursue the themes of doomed love and martial glory. The dramatic backdrop is formed by the exotic nomenclature, the desert and the jungle. Although “Heccar and Gaira” “conforms to the late eighteenth-century stereotypes of African cultural misrepresentation, it is unusual in its construction of the Atlantic slave trade (Wood 72-73). The eclogue shows Heccar, an African chief, and his warrior Gaira reposing on the sand following a furious battle with European slave-masters. Heccar advises Gaira to talk about their desire for vengeance against the White slavers:

The Children of the Wave, whose pallid race,
Views the faint sun display a languid face,
From the red fury of thy justice fled,
Swifter than torrents from their rocky bed. (118)¹⁰

Gaira’s wife and children have been kidnapped by the slavers: ‘The pallid shadows of the azure waves / Had made my Cawna and my children slaves”(120). Heccar and Gaira vow unceasing vengeance on the slave traders:

When the loud shriekings of the hostile cry
Roughly salute my ear, enrag'd I'll fly;
Send the sharp arrow quivering thro' the heart
Chill the hot vitals with the venom'd dart;
Nor heed the shining steel or noisy smoke,

Gaira and Vengeance shall inspire the stroke. (121)

Chatterton strongly anticipates the anti-slavery attitude embodied in the poetry of William Blake and other Romantics. The African Eclogue “Narva and Mored” (May 1770) depicts the love between Nerva and Mored and their tragic end. The third eclogue, “The Death of Nicou” shows the tragic end of Nicau, and sings about his heroism.
This radical attitude of Chatterton and his anti-imperialism is echoed in John Scott’s *Oriental Eclogues* (1782), particularly in “Oriental Eclogues II. Serim; or, the Artificial Famine: an East-Indian Eclogue.” Chatterton’s Africa is here replaced by India. The eclogue depicts the cruel hands of the British colonizers in creating an artificially induced famine, which took place in the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in the year 1770. The Hindu sage Serim is shown bemoaning the fate of his country by the banks of the Ganges, and he becomes the voice of protest against the oppression of the natives by the foreigners. The poem begins with an invocation to the ‘Guardian Genius of this sacred wave’ to save the people from the cruelty of the Europeans: “Europe's fell race controul the wide domain, /
Engross the harvest, and enslave the swain” (9-10). The peace and happiness of the people are lost in satisfying the lust and avarice of the British: “‘Bring gold, bring gems,’ the insatiate plunderers cry; / ‘Who hoards his wealth by Hunger's rage shall die.’” (15-16). Serim surveys the damage caused by the rapacious Europeans, who have confronted the oppressed with a harrowing choice between famine and sacrilege. Serim describes the woe of the people as “tenfold tax the farmer forc’d to yield/ Despairs, and leaves unoccupied the field” (49-50). The farmers “Quit their sad homes, and mourn along the land,/A pensive, pallid, self-disabled band!” (57-58). Serim denounces the invaders and feels that the wrongly acquired wealth and luxury will bring curse upon the invaders: “Sad sounds shall issue from your guilty walls, / The widow’d wife’s, the sonless mother's calls” (160-62). While Serim goes on cursing the British: a “British ruffian” tumbles him headlong into the river. Through this final incident Scott depicts the extreme cruelty and inhumanity of the British. However, there is a difference between Chatterton and Scott in the matter of their treatment of the indigenous people’s opposition to the colonizers. Scott’s Serim is dependent upon the retribution of God for the punishment of the colonizers; it is seen only as “God’s prerogative” but “Chatterton’s
blacks do not require such divine retribution but are capable of bringing about their own
violent justice” (Wood 73). Even the advice from God in Serim is that of tolerance and
forgiveness: “Forbear, rash man! nor curse thy country's foes;/Frail man to man forgiveness
ever owes”(137-38).

In the head note to the poem it is pointed out by Scott that it is based on a real
“account of British conduct and its consequences, in Bengal and the adjacent provinces, some
years ago”(Poetical Works 145). Some contemporary reviews of the poem appreciated it for
its originality. The Critical Review, for example, observed that “amongst the Eclogues, of
which there are five, Serim, or the Artificial Famine, is the best written. . . . There is great
poetical merit in the whole of this Oriental Eclogue, which paints in the warmest colours the
various scenes of misery and distress brought on the natives of India by their cruel English
task-masters: there is too much truth, we fear, in this narrative”(Smollet 47). The description
of the cruelty of the British rulers in India, as the review betrays, proved quite disturbing to
the British. It is evident in John Hoole’s analysis of the poem:

The Eclogue of Serim, or the Artificial Famine, has much poetical merit; but
perhaps it were to be wished, that the philanthropy of the author had not led
him to make choice of a story so apparently disgraceful to the British name in
India, the circumstances of which have been, doubtless, greatly exaggerated,
while the enormities of a few individuals have been swelled, by designing
men, into a general and universal spirit of rapine, avarice, and cruelty.

(Critical Essays lxx).

Scott's third and final eclogue, “Li-Po; or, The Good Governor: a Chinese Eclogue” is set in
China and begins with a fantastic piece of landscape description, obviously modelled on a
Chinese porcelain and the poem praises the good authority and governance of the Chinese.
English rulers of the second eclogue stand in strong contrast to the Oriental rulers in China. The first eclogue by Scott is entitled “Zerad; or The Absent Lover: An Arabian Eclogue.” Its subject matter, as it is evident from the title, is the lamentation (and deplorable condition) of the lover due to the absence of his beloved. In the head note provided by the poet a reference is made to William Jones’s “Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations” to show how Arabian love poetry is marked the presence of the figure of the absent lover (126). One important aspect to be noted in the eclogues is the effort made by the author to prove the truthful and realistic nature of the events presented in them, and as in Beckford’s Vathek annotations are provided for the objects unfamiliar to the common Europeans. These rather short eclogues with their annotations form a part of the development of the annotated verse narratives of the Romantic period.

Johnson’s Rasselas (1759) is an important imitation of the Oriental tales in prose and before turning to the relationship between the Oriental tales and the Gothic novels, it would be relevant to have a discussion on Rasselas. First and foremost, it is necessary to note that Rasselas was written to raise a substantial sum of money within a week against Johnson’s own principle of writing for money (Schmidt 104). He exploited the fashion for Oriental tales to meet his economic ends, just as the Romantics would do a few years later. Rasselas is very important in the history of the Oriental tale because many of the preoccupations of these tales are combined in this philosophical novel. The novel begins with a travel account provided by Imlac who describes people and places as far as the Mughals and Surat. The narrative is followed by a journey by Rasselas, Imlac and the princess, and in the course of their travel the readers meet many exotic places and peoples—the merchants, the hermit, the robbers, and the mummies. The pleasure of the Oriental tale, as Ross Ballaster states, is “a game of fictional metamorphosis . . . where s/he can test out a series of ‘exotic’ roles, male and
female, safely distanced by being placed in a historically and geographically remote ‘East’ in order to adjust her or his own mental horizons” (“Narrative Transmigrations” 80). No other tale gives greater opportunity for experiencing this pleasure than *The Arabian Nights.* Similarly, Johnson’s *Rasselas* with its exotic setting provides the reader the opportunity of encountering myriad groups of people and characters and thereby allowing the readers to enjoy the pleasure of role playing. In *Rasselas* Johnson also hints at the anxiety of the British trading class through the character of Imlac. Imlac was appointed by his father for making profit by trade, but neglecting the assigned duty he follows his own desire for knowledge. British trading companies might have experienced similar sense of anxiety and fear. Men like Warren Hastings and William Jones who took an extra interest in the Indian civilization became the cause of worry to the British Parliament leading to the famous trial of Hastings.

The “anxiety of empire,” however, left a greater imprint on the Gothic novels. It is equally necessary, therefore, to turn to the relationship between the Gothic and the Oriental tales. *Vathek* (1786) will be the starting point, since it forms an intersection between the Gothic novel and the Oriental tale. Edith Birkhead in *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* classifies the numerous Oriental tales as ‘Anglo-oriental’ tales and observes that Beckford was extremely bored by the moral overweigh of these tales. He reacted against the superficiality of these tales by writing *Vathek,* an “Eastern tale of horrors” (95). The terms ‘Eastern tale of horror’ or ‘oriental gothic’ are very important because by using these terms critics try to emphasize the difference of *Vathek* from other Gothic fictions. No doubt the story of *Vathek* is similar to many of the Oriental tales, particularly to the “Adventures of Abdalla, the son of Hanif,” but *Vathek* is more than an Oriental tale. Pike finds in *Vathek* many passages similar to *Mysteries of Udolpho* and other “tales of terror.” Comparing the element of horror in *Vathek* with that of the tales of *The Arabian Nights* Pike observes “in the
latter it is more objective and lacks the psychological, uncanny quality found in *Vathek* and others [other gothic tales].” She defines *Vathek* as “a thoroughly Oriental tale of terror” (67).

Fredrick S. Frank points out that it will be wrong to dismiss *Vathek* as an Oriental tale only and he relates Mrs. Barbauld’s concept of the pleasure of the terror to Beckford’s novel (“The Gothic *Vathek*” 157-72). Mrs. Barbauld, commenting on the imaginative tales such as *The Arabian Nights*, observed that “the more wild, fanciful, and extraordinary are the circumstances of a scene of horror, the more pleasure we receive from it” (129). David Punter and Glennis Byron define *Vathek* not “really as a gothic but rather an orientalist tale.” In regard to *Vathek*’s use of the Eastern setting they point to *The Arabian Nights*, which “in complete contrast to the rational realism favoured by the eighteenth century” “offers a world of wonders where the supernatural repeatedly invades the realm of the natural.” They also point out *Vathek*’s debt to other Oriental tales as well as to the translation of the Koran. They recognize the fact that the Oriental tales helped in fashioning the eighteenth-century taste for the Gothic—for the “effulgence of Gothic” (181-84).  

Massimilliano Demata identifies in *Vathek* many of the elements which would become stereotypical features of the Gothic novel: “Beckford often uses dark, enclosed and claustrophobic spaces, while his attention to magic and necromancy would soon become stereotypes of the novel of horror.” Demata argues with reference to Beckford’s novel as well as to the extensive notes, provided by Henley and edited by Beckford, that in *Vathek* the author attempts to create “a narrative space” in which the ‘tale’ is intruded upon by the elements of ‘reality,’ a narrative space which discloses to the readers the dangers and proximity of the alien presence of the Oriental Other: “The East resurfaces in the West in shapes which are the domain of the uncanny.” Demata’s analysis is not confined to *Vathek* only. He uses the same argument to show that like Beckford, Maturin in *Melmoth, the*
"Wanderer" leads the reader to view the ‘fiction’ of the tales within a disturbing and tangible aura of reality” and concludes that both Beckford and Maturin express their “anxiety of imperial conquest and oppression” through the Gothic form “Discovering Eastern Horrors” (“Discovering Eastern Horrors” 20-25). It is interesting to note that the use of Gothic images in Romantic poetry reveal a similar sense of imperial anxiety of the Romantic poets.

Whatever Vathek’s position may be within the tradition of Gothic novel it is undoubtedly clear that Vathek and other Oriental tales in the eighteenth century was a major impetus for the growth and development of the Gothic convention. Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick in *The Coherence of the Gothic Conventions* claims that the Gothic text is pervasively conventional. “Once you know that a novel is of the Gothic kind (and you can tell from the title), you can predict its contents with an unnerving certainty.” The important features are an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a catholic or feudal society, a heroine with trembling sensibility, the impetuous lover, the tyrannical old man with a piercing glance. Formally “it is likely to be discontinuous and involuted, perhaps, incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, or as such framing devices as found in manuscripts or interpolated histories.” It involves priesthood and monastic institutions; sleep like and deathlike states; subterranean spaces; unintelligible writings; the poisonous effects of guilt and shame; nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past; Faust-like or wandering Jew-like figures; charnel house and mad house (9-10).

If the most common features of the Oriental tales are placed beside these conventions of the Gothic it will become obvious that the Gothic tradition begun by Horace Walpole drank deep into the tradition of the Oriental tales. There are certain recurring features of these tales which are incorporated within the Gothic tradition. Almost every collection of the Oriental tales involves the following features: a frame story, a tyrannous ruler with fierce
anger, a wandering journey often into an abyss, an opulence of wealth and luxury, excessive violence and lust—the harem being the embodiment of it, magic and supernaturalism, horrible sinning and equally horrible punishment. Vathek fulfils almost all the characteristic features of the Gothic novel pointed out by Sedgewick, as well as of the Oriental tales: we have a violent tyrannical ruler with a fierce gaze in Vathek; he is a Faust-like figure who will do anything to satisfy his want—when the Giaour demands he sacrifices fifty children; he has a magician mother. Vathek lives in extreme luxury with “five wings or other palaces destined for the gratification of each of the senses—the last of the five palaces is designed to gratify his sexual desire: “The fifth palace, denominated The Retreat of Mirth, or The Dangerous, was frequented by troops of young females beautiful as the Houris, and not less seducing; who never failed to receive with caresses, all whom the Caliph allowed to approach them, and enjoy a few hours of their company” (3). He is also obsessed with gaining knowledge. When the grotesque Giaour visits Samarah he excites the curiosity of Vathek with the strange inscribed sabre he leaves behind. Vathek does all he can for the inscriptions to be deciphered, but does not succeed. Soon his curiosity leads to the return of the Giaour, who requests the blood of fifty children in return for an even greater knowledge to be permitted to enter the Palace of the Subterranean Fire beneath ancient Istakhar, where he will find the treasures of the pre-Adamite kings, and the talismans that control the world. But for this he will have to renounce his religion, and his faith in God. Vathek accepts this with ease, and the story progresses to his journey to Istakhar. On the way he breaks the orders of Eblis, and stops at a village, where he finds the beautiful Nouroniihar, who joins him in his journey. Vathek commits countless acts of violence in the course of his journey. Once they reach the Palace of the Subterranean Fire, Eblis betrays them and they discover
a vast multitude was incessantly passing; who severally kept their right hands on their hearts; without once regarding any thing around them. They had all, the livid paleness of death. Their eyes, deep sunk in their sockets, resembled those of phosphoric meteors . . . some shrieked in agony . . . whilst others, grinding their teeth in rage, foamed along more frantic than the wildest maniac. (109-10)

The Faustian Vathek faces the same fate with Nournihar and her evil mother Carathis: “their hearts immediately took fire, and they, at once, lost the most precious gift of heaven:—HOPE” (119). Violence, lust, guilt, sin, magic, ambition, supernatural horror, and wandering—all the motifs of the Gothic novels are present here.

Although Vathek has all the features of a Gothic novel, it is not regarded as the trendsetter of the Gothic genre, since it appeared nearly two decades after The Castle of Otranto. However, while writing The of Castle Otranto (1764) and his Gothic tragedy The Mysterious Mother (1768) Walpole’s taste for the Gothic was certainly moulded by the Oriental tales and it is not a coincidence that Walpole had interest in the Oriental tales and produced the Heiroglyphic Tales structuring his stories on a firm “fairy tale” foundation (Christensen). Kenneth Gross calls the tales representative of a tradition of “oriental fables” that also found expression in such works of the period as Voltaire’s Zadig, and Johnson’s Rasselas (Intro. x).

It is a parody of the genre of the Oriental tales, and doing a parody involves a deep knowledge of and interest in the subject involved. This repertoire of knowledge he used in producing the first Gothic novel.

There are a number of similarities between the ‘oriental gothic’ Vathek and first Gothic novel The Castle of Otranto: both the heroes are driven by their ambition and desire for wealth, Manfred wants to keep in the family the wrongly possessed title and Vathek wants
to possess the wealth of the pre-Adamite sultans. They are villain heroes and not entirely detestable because they are sublimely wicked. Both have anti-religious tendencies: Vathek is satanic in his ambition and joins hands with the satanic forces to fulfil his aim; Manfred tries to violate and defile the Christian morality by attempting to rape Isabella. Both the authors incorporate the element of irony and humour and the darkness of evil looms large over both the novels. Both the novels share most of the elements of Gothic pointed out by Sedgewick, and perhaps, not a single characteristic feature of the Gothic is left outside when we take the two novels together, except the tale-within -the tale, for which the Gothic is again indebted to the Oriental tales. When the element of horror is added to the existing structure of the Oriental tale it becomes the Oriental tale of terror and when the Eastern setting with mosques and palaces of the Oriental tale of terror is replaced with some medieval monasteries and haunted castles with claustrophobic spaces we get the formula for the Gothic novel. This becomes evident if we have a look at *The Monk* (1796), one of the representative Gothic novels where M. G. Lewis combines the elements from the Oriental tales, *Vathek*, and *The Castle of Otranto*.

In the advertisement to the novel Lewis acknowledges the fact that the “idea of this romance was suggested by the story of Santon Barsisa, related in the Guardian (xxi).” The tale “The History of Santon Barsisa” was published in the Guardian, No. 148, Monday, August 31, 1713. It is introduced by Richard Steele to the readers as having a moral “entirely Christian and is so obvious that I shall leave every reader the pleasure of picking out for himself. I shall only premise, to obviate any offence that may be taken, that a great many notions in the Mahometan religion are borrowed from the Holy Scriptures” (295). It is a story about Santon Barsisa who has been leading a pious life for a hundred years but succumbs to his sexual passion when the beautiful daughter of the king is taken to his cave for treatment.
He is tempted by the devil to violate the chastity of the lady and to kill her. His actions are discovered and he is to be punished by hanging till death. Moments before he is to be hanged he is once more tempted by the devil who offers to rescue him if he submits his soul to the devils. Barsisa agrees only to be betrayed by the devil.

Ambrosio’s story in *The Monk* is almost similar to the story of Barsisa. Ambrosia is a paragon of virtue like Barsisa. His closest mate in the abbey is Rozario, who is revealed to be a woman, Matilda. Rozario/Matilda seduces Ambrosio releasing his confined passions. Dissatisfied with Matilda after a while he seeks new object of his lust in an innocent teenager Antonia, who is in fact his sister. With Matilda’s assistance he is able to seduce the girl. When the scheme goes wrong Antonia’s mother is murdered by Ambrosio and Antonia is carried to a crypt and raped repeatedly on her awakening. Later on she is murdered, and her murder is discovered during an anti-clerical violence. Ambrosia is captured and brought before the Inquisition but Matilda tempts him to sell his soul to the devils in exchange for freedom only to be betrayed by Satan. There is, of course, another story, the story of Don Raymond and Agnes, loosely connected to the main story of Ambrosio where the motif of lust and violence run on a lower pitch but it is there as well.

Unlike *Vathek*, *The Monk* is not set in the East, but in Spain and the backdrop is formed by church, monastery and abbey. The hero of the novel is modelled upon the character of Vathek. Ambrosio transgresses the laws of Christianity as Vathek transgresses the laws of Islam. The source story of *The Monk*, of course, shows the transgression against Islam. In *The Monk* there is no harem but Ambrosio creates his own harem in the crypt by kidnapping Antonia and continuously raping her. Lust and violence of the Oriental tales is concentrated in the character of Amborsio. The theme of incest is suggested in *The Castle Otranto* in the form of Manfred’s desire for Isabella and Frederic’s for Matilda and in *Vathek*...
through the relationship between Carathis and her son Vathek. Lewis leaves no space for suggestion as Antonia is revealed to be Ambrosio’s sister. Whereas Antonia seems to belong to the breed of Matilda and Isabella, the innocent sensitive heroines of the Gothic novel, Matilda of The Monk is a combination of Gulshenroz and Carathis the mistress and the mother of Vathek, respectively. Carathis, who has magical power, leads Vathek to the satanic world of the Giaour. In the same way Matilda is the instrument of transformation of Ambrosio from the pious monk to the devilish sinner. Moreover, the temptation of the devil in Lewis’s source story and the role played by Giaour in Vathek are also condensed into the character of Matilda.

A close look at the Gothic novels reveals that apart from the weak and innocent heroines, we find a second category of strong female characters that often help in the transgression of the Gothic heroes or become an accomplice of them. Carathis, Matilda, or Gulshenroz would fall into this second category. In fact, Carathis in Vathek or Matilda in The Monk look back, albeit with certain changes, upon the Eastern heroines of the Middle English romances —violent, cunning and lustful, and looks forward to the various manifestations of demonic female and the female magicians in the poems of the Romantics beginning from Landor’s Delica and Myrther in Gebir to Maimuna and Khawla in Southey’s Thalaba, the Destroyer, Coleridge’s Geraldine, Queene Mab in Shelley and Byron’s Gulnare in Lara or the mysterious lady in Keats’s “La Belle Dame Sans Merci.”

Two other elements that bind nearly all the novels in the Gothic tradition and the Oriental tales and go on to influence the Romantic poets are the element of journey or wandering and the villain-hero. The element of wandering transmigrates into Romantic poetry in its various manifestations. Southey’s oriental epic Thalaba, the Destroyer, Landor’s Gebir, Shelley’s Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound, Alastor, Queene Mab, The Witch of
Atlas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*, Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and the Eastern Tales, Wordworth’s *The Prelude*, Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and *Christabel*, to mention a few of the Romantic poems that contain the trope of wandering and journey. The gothic villain-heroes are the figures on whom the Byronic heroes are built: sombre brooding, haughty, scheming, an outcast, ambitious and demonic, suffering from a secret sense of guilt. Apart from the Byronic two other iconic Romantic heroes have affinities to the Gothic villain-hero, namely, the Satanic and the Promethean. One of the first satanic villain-heroes in Romantic poetry is Oswald/ Rivers in Wordworth’s *The Borderers* (written in 1796-97)

Andrew Smith and William Hughes in the introduction to *Empire and Gothic: the Politics of Genre* remark that in the Gothic, as in Romanticism in general, there is a challenge to the post -Enlightenment notions of rationality and “this challenge was developed through an exploration of the feelings, desires and passions which compromised the Enlightenment project of rationality calibrating all forms of knowledge and behaviours” (1). The releasing of passions that Smith and Hughes speak of began with the Oriental tales in the eighteenth century. Therefore, the Gothic novel, the Oriental tale and Romanticism share close affinities. As it is pointed out in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, the Oriental tales and the Gothic novels are but two strands of Romanticism: “Pleasurable terror and pleasurable exoticism are kindred experiences, with unreality and strangeness at the root of both” (“Romantic Orientalism: Overview,” par. 3).

Apart from the development of the Gothic novel and the Oriental tale two other factors enormously contributed to the Romantics’ interest in the East: the growing body of travelogues and the scholarly translations in the second half of the eighteenth century. During the eighteenth-century England’s relationship with and position in Asia was rapidly changing. After the siege of Vienna (1683) was thwarted by John Sobieski Turkey gave up further plan
of expansion on the Western front, and the Peace Treaty of Karlowitz marked the end of Turkish power in this part. Thereafter England maintained a very friendly relationship with the Turks, particularly beginning from the latter half of the eighteenth century, since Britain’s interest in India and other Asian countries would need the shield of the Ottoman Empire as it would safeguard Britain’s expansion in the East from the Russian and French design on the Balkans and west. As a consequence of this peaceful relationship travellers flocked to Egypt, Persia, Turkey and other countries of the Middle East and many of them wrote about their experience (Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism*, 113). W. C. Brown in his article, “The Popularity of English Travel Books about the Near East, 1775-1825” notes that there had been at least seventy travel books on the Near East during the years 1775-1825. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) wrote an account of her experience of the Eastern life in the *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1776). James Bruce (1730-1794) published his *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, In the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773* in 1790. His Ethiopian travel accounts are praised for its accuracy, and it is considered that he made a real addition to the geographical knowledge of his day. Other significant travel accounts include Alexander Russel’s *Natural History of Aleppo*, James Dalloway’s *Constantinople, Ancient and Modern* (1797), William George Browne’s *Travels in Africa, Egypt and Syria from the Years 1792 to 1798* (1799) and Edward Daniel Clarke’s *Travels in various Countries of Europe, Africa and Asia* (1810). A very important work that emerged during the period was Volney’s *Les Ruines* (1791), which was translated into English as *The Ruins: or a Survey of Revolutions of Empire* in 1792. The work was based on Volney’s visit to the ancient sights in Egypt and Syria. Every Romantic poet derived ideas and images from Volney. In 1793 William Hodges published an illustrated book, *Travels in India*. Lord Valentia’s *Voyages and Travels to India* was published in 1809 and Sir John Barrow’s *Travels in China* in 1804.
James Forbes’s *Oriental Memoirs* was published in two volumes beginning in 1813. Many of these travelogues directly influenced the Romantic poets. For example, William Hodge influenced early Romantics like Southey and Coleridge; and Wortley Montagu’s writings coloured the imagination of Byron.

Meanwhile there had been an unprecedented growth in Oriental scholarship, as the European efforts seeking new trading posts were not only bearing commercial and economic fruits, but also bore results in terms of knowledge of the Orient. Raymond Schwab identifies d’ Herbelot’s *Bibliotheque Orientale* (1697) as the point of beginning for Oriental scholarship and the translation of the *Zend Avesta* as a major breakthrough. This was the result of French endeavour to know the East since the last decade of the seventeenth century. However, during the second half of the eighteenth century it was the English speaking Orientalists who achieved major breakthrough in the discovery of the East, particularly in relation to the Indian subcontinent and China. The emergence of the Oriental scholarship in England was directly linked to the English commercial and imperial development in the East. Within two centuries of Thomas Roe’s success in arranging a commercial treaty with the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605 - 27), East India Company became the most powerful European agency in India, with their double victory—they won the Seven Years War (1756–63) against France and they came victorious in the Battle of Plassey (1557). After 1764, the Company became the ruling power in the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and a part of Orissa. The vast expansion of the Company’s power was seminally brought under the purview of the English government by the *Regulating Act of 1773* (also known as the *East India Company Act*) and Warren Hastings was made the first Governor General of Bengal. Under Hastings’s direct patronage Oriental studies flourished in Calcutta. Hastings’s ‘tolerant’ colonial policy encouraged the attempts by the British to learn, read and translate into English works of
Indian mythology, religion and law. The result was visible with the translations of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's *Codes of Gentoo Law* (1776) and *Grammar of the Bengalese Language* (1778). Indic study goes a long way back, and as early as 1718 the missionaries were invited by the French King to gather Indian manuscripts for an Oriental library he had decided to create (Schwab 29). A very important source of knowledge on India was the Jesuit missionaries and their important collection *Lettres edifiantes et curieuses* (1702–76). The earliest English works on India came from the East India Company soldiers John Z. Holwell and Alexander Dow, who wrote, respectively, *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal* (1765-1768, 3 vols.) and The History of Hindostan, Translated from the Persian; including a Dissertation Concerning the Customs, Manners, Language, Religion and Philosophy of the Hindoos (1768-1772, 3 vols.).

These earlier efforts underwent a sea change in the 1780s. After the establishment of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784, a series of translations and as well as some creative writings appeared in English. Schwab gives a chronological list of works published between 1784 and 1794 to show the eruption in Oriental scholarship during the last years of the eighteenth century after the Asiatic Society of Bengal was established (51-52). Of all the important figures from this period the name of William Jones comes first and foremost. Jones's interest in the East began long before his arrival in India in 1783, with the publication of the *Grammar of Persian Language* (1771), which contained the often reprinted translation of “A Persian Song by Hafiz” and Poems; Consisting Chiefly of Translations from Asiatick Languages. To which are added Two Essays (1772). “A Persian Song by Hafiz” was reprinted in this volume. The poem is regarded as the third most important English translation from the Persian, surpassed only by the *Rubaiyat* and *Sohrab and Rustm* (Pachori 13). The year 1774 marked the appearance of *Commentaries on Asiatic Poetry* (in Latin *Poeseos*
Asiaticae Commentatorum in six volumes), which provides Jones’s critical views on Middle Eastern metrics, imagery, subject matter, diction and views on a few individual poets (Pachori 4). In 1783 he produced “a dissertation On the Manners of the Arabians before the time of Mahomet, illustrated by seven poems, which were written in letters of gold, suspended in the temple of Mecca, about the beginning of the sixth century” (Pachori 5), and introduced Arabic Poetry to Europe with the publication of The Mollakat, a translation of the Arabic poet Imr-al-Qais.

In his Indian phase Jones translated the legal and religious texts of Indian antiquity from Persian and Sanskrit, and simultaneously directed his efforts in translating the Sanskrit literature into English and authoring his own creative pieces in imitation of the works translated by him. Among the literary translations the Hitopodesa, Jayadeva’s Gita Govinda (1789) and Kalidasa’s Shakuntala (1790) have remained most influential. Along with Sakuntala Jones published his nine hymns addressed to the nine deities of Hindu mythology. The Hymns anticipate the extent of impact Indian mythology is going to have on the Romantic literature from Blake to Shelley. Jones was the editor of the journal Asiatick Researches where the findings of the Society were put forward for the European metropolitan audience; information gathered in Calcutta was disseminated throughout Europe through this journal. Many of the preoccupations of Jones and his colleagues went on to influence the Romantic poets and the Romantic theory of poetry.

Raymond Schwab’s study recognises that India was frequently a topic of literary concern during the Romantic period. He argues that the Orient “served as alter ego to the Occident” and the two complemented each other, rather than competed with – or controlled – the other: “The writings deciphered by the orientalists made the world, for the first time in human history, a whole” (Schwab 4). India, he argues, “had worked to reunite the human
with a divine that is the Universe,” thereby locating Romanticism’s penchant for the mystic and pantheistic in the writers’ fascination with the subcontinent (Schwab 483). John Drew does a thorough analysis of Jones’s own poetic works and delineates how Jones’s works left their impact on poets such as Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Shelley. Kejariwal quotes Hewitt, who, commenting on Jones’s impact, said that “Jones altered the English conceptions of the Eastern world” (qtd. in Kejariwal 30). Michael J. Franklin observes: “The success of Jones’s contribution to the shaping of Romantic sensibilities lay in the cultural tact with which he augmented aesthetic possibilities, adjusting and extending contemporary taste by introducing the Other as unfamiliar but not alien” (“Accessing India” 59).

It is beyond dispute that Jones had a major impact upon the Western perception of the East. However, it is relevant to explore the attitude of Jones and his fellow members at the Asiatic Society of Bengal towards India and the East. To consider the Orientalists’ representation of the East we often fall back on Said’s pioneering study. Said’s theory makes it impossible to see any representation and cultivation of knowledge as disinterested. However, the issue is fraught with complications, as he himself points out:

I doubt that it is controversial, for example, to say that an Englishman in India or Egypt in the later nineteenth century took an interest in those countries that was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies. To say this may seem quite different from saying that all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somewhat tinged and impressed with, violated by the gross political fact—and yet this I am saying in this study of Orientalism. (11)

The complication indicated by Said has relevance to the analysis of the Jones era in India. The academic Orientalism practised by Jones and his friends in Calcutta cannot be condemned and dismissed simply as an imperial project, although it is undeniable that their
work helped British imperialist forces, and they were part of the colonial administration.

Richard Allen very cautiously makes the point that Jones’s and Hastings’s position in the history of Orientalism may be different: “to a considerable degree, both felt that the colonized society had a separate and autonomous tradition which was to be valued alongside that of the European colonizers rather than simply cast aside.” It is “just an accident of history—Jones and Hastings were part of an early period of colonization whose ideas were superseded” (38).

Concerning the representation of India in the West, Kejariwal observes that there were three distinct phases of the development of Western scholarly interest in India, and a new phase was reached with the translation of the Bhagvat-Geeta (1785):

> From a series of travellers’ tales, and attempts to decry Indian customs and manners, a stage was reached when the west began not only to make efforts to understand, but value India and her culture. In the first stage scholarship was of little importance; the emphasis was on the exotic, the mysterious, the fantastic. In the second there was no lack of scholarship, it was scholarship with a purpose, and vested interest. But now the western scholars approached India with the desire to learn. (21)

The attempt to “understand and interpret” India from outside, according to Amartya Sen, can be put into three distinct categories: “the exoticist approaches, the magisterial approaches and the curatorial approaches.” The exoticist approach “concentrates on the wondrous aspect of India”; the magisterial approach “sees India as a subject territory from the point of view of its British governors”; the third category “includes various attempts at noting, classifying and exhibiting diverse aspects of Indian culture” (Sen 141-42). The three approaches did not have any linear pattern of development and often existed together at a given point of time, and may be in the same man. Hastings, for example, is often praised for his encouragement of the
‘curatorial’ policy in India. However, what he wrote to the Chairman of the East India Company defending the utilitarian value of publishing Wilkins’ translation of the Bhagvat-Geeta betrayed his magisterial outlook. Hastings wrote: “Every accumulation of knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state” (qtd. in Kejariwal, 24). The Western approach to India during this period was dominantly curatorial. Jones projected India as a culturally rich territory and he had a ‘sunny’ view of Hinduism. The colonial policy under Hastings “sought the preservation rather than the transformation of otherness” but the irony is that this preservation of Otherness also involved “the ruthless annihilation of anything that impeded its intensive exploitation” (Makdisi, Romantic Imperialism 109).

The conflict between the Orientalists and the Anglicists emerged during the 1790s and within a few years India’s image underwent a major make over. India became an instance for classic despotism and Hinduism a priest-ridden religion of the despots. Charles Grant wrote in 1792 that “the people of Hindustan[are] . . . obstinate in their disregard of what they know to be right, governed by malevolent and licentious passions, strongly exemplifying the effects produced on a society by a great and general corruption of manners, and sunk in misery by their vices”(qtd. in Allen 41). The rhetoric used here is similar to what Macaulay said some forty years later in defence of the British rule in India: “To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have ruled them so as to have made them desirous and capable of all privileges of citizenship, would indeed be a great glory to all our own. . .” (qtd. in Allen 41). The imperial policy which necessitated the creation of an India ruined and degenerated started in the 1790s with the missionaries who wanted to cash in on the negative portrayal of India and Hinduism. Gradually the “myth of an innocent pre-
lapsarian India” (Franklin, “Accessing India” 52) vanished as the imperial logic of colonialism as a civilizing mission became dominant. India became a space governed by backwardness. The Hastings trial became a ground for a debate as to what would be the precise mode of governance in India. The matter is well summed up by Makdisi:

One of the issues that had brought the corruption charges against Hastings was the question of whether or not England ought to transform and “improve” India. Hastings himself, like this enemy Burke and his colleague Jones, opposed such a policy; and one of his principal accusers, Philip Francis, a Company official, argued strongly that Indian laws and institutions should be uprooted and replaced with more ‘rational’ and ‘advanced’ British laws. Even before the conclusion of the trial, such policies, which had been vigorously prevented by Hastings during his own administration, were put into effect by the Permanent Settlement of 1793, which, for instance, at one stroke transformed the zamindars -- the Mogul tax-collectors (over whom the Company now had power) -- into landlords in the capitalist sense, and their previous area of responsibility into their private property; so that the people under their control suddenly became their paying tenants. . . .

(Romantic Imperialism 24)

The trial was widely publicised and, as a result, the knowledge about the imperial developments in India became widespread. Burke in his trial speeches on the one hand evoked an image of Edenic beauty and innocence; on the other hand he depicted uncanny images of tortures under the aegis of Hastings. Burke used Holwell’s accounts in Interesting Events, Relative to the Province of Bengal (1766-67) to show how the native servants of the Company exercised innovative ways of torturing the people, particularly the women. The
speeches depicting the atrocities remind us of the cruelty and violence depicted in the Gothic novels (Burke 420-21).^{14}

This transition in attitude was not confined to India alone. Together with India the Western image of China also underwent a massive makeover during this period. Although Europe played with the idea of a sea route to the East as far back as 1300, it was not until three centuries later that this dream was brought to fulfilment. In 1488 Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope. Ten years later Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in India. A Portuguese ship reached China from Malacca in 1514. Although China did not allow foreigners into its territory, Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tried to infiltrate Chinese territories and gathered certain ideas about the Chinese civilization. Finally, the Chinese government expelled the missionaries in 1724. The Jesuits were Europe’s main source of knowledge of China. They found China akin to what they considered an ideal state, and they had reported so to Europe. The dissolution of the Jesuits in Europe destroyed the main carrier of Chinese thought and ended the era of appreciation of China in Europe.

Whereas at the beginning of the century the polite society in Europe spoke of the Chinese art and culture in familiar tone, by the end of the eighteenth century China ceased to influence European art and philosophy (Clyde and Beers 66). England’s hostility towards China increased after the failure of the British Macartney embassy of 1792-94. However, it brought China to the forefront and descriptions of Chinese gardens and landscapes flooded the British literary scene. According to Clyde and Beers, the symbolism of the Chinese garden influenced Europe’s ‘Back to Nature’ movement and the “sentimental nature-worship” (66). The emergence of this new attitude towards and the interest in China is analysed by the historians in relation to the new developments in Europe, particularly to the formation of the nation-state in the early nineteenth century (Clyde and Beers).
The development of the Oriental tales in prose and verse, the related development of the Gothic, the growing body of travelogues, the scholarly knowledge of the East and its people, the change in Britain’s dynamics of relationship with Turkey and the Asian countries, and the developments in China brought the East in close purview of the Romantics. Every Romantic poet responded to this development and their work is permeated with Eastern elements, being shaped and reshaped by the individual situations and circumstances.
Notes

1 Macpherson’s *Ossian Ballads* was published in 1760; Chatterton invented Thomas Rowley (1753-70) and William Henry Ireland committed Shakespearean forgery during the 1790s.

2 Hamilton’s brother Charles went to India as a cadet for East India Company. In 1786 Charles returned to England with a commission to translate a commentary on Islamic laws, the *Hedaya*, into English. Hamilton assisted him, thereby becoming familiar with the manners and customs of India. This resulted in the composition of the novel.

3 By 1813 Elizabeth Hamilton's novel underwent five editions.

4 Henceforth to be referred to as *Nights*.

5 For detail discussion of the coffee houses and the tradition of storytelling in the Middle East see Robert Irwin’s *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (110-12)


8 It should be noted that Oroonoko was published before English translation of Hayy Ibn Yakzan was made by Ockley. However, the story of Hayy, was known in Europe since the Middle Age.


10 Unless otherwise stated, all citations of Chatterton’s poems are from The Works of Thomas Chatterton, Vol. I (R. T.N. London: Longman and Cottle, 1803)

11 The essay “On the Pleasure derived from Objects of Terror” is attributed to Anna Laetitia Barbauld, though it appeared under the title “On the Pleasure Derived From Objects of Terror; with Sir Bertrand, A Fragment” jointly produced by Barbauld and John Aikin ( Clery and Miles 127).

12 The phrase “effulgence of Gothic” is taken from the title of Robert Miles’s essay “The 1790s: the effulgence of Gothic.”

13 See also the first chapter of O. P. Kejariwal’s book, The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India’s Past, 1784-1838, entitled “The Background,” which analyses the modern Western effort to know and discover India.

14 Michael J. Franklin quotes at length from the trial speeches of Burke to show how he used the deviant ways of the Easterners as infecting the company officials who behaved like some oriental tyrant. He observes that “the rehearsal of atrocities only serves to reinforce the stereotypes of the Oriental capacity for capricious and diabolically inventive cruelty” Franklyn further notes that Burke offered “the House and the country . . . imaginative and sensationalist discourses of the Gothic sublime” (“Accessing India” 53-54).