

English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832

Professor Pramod K Nayar

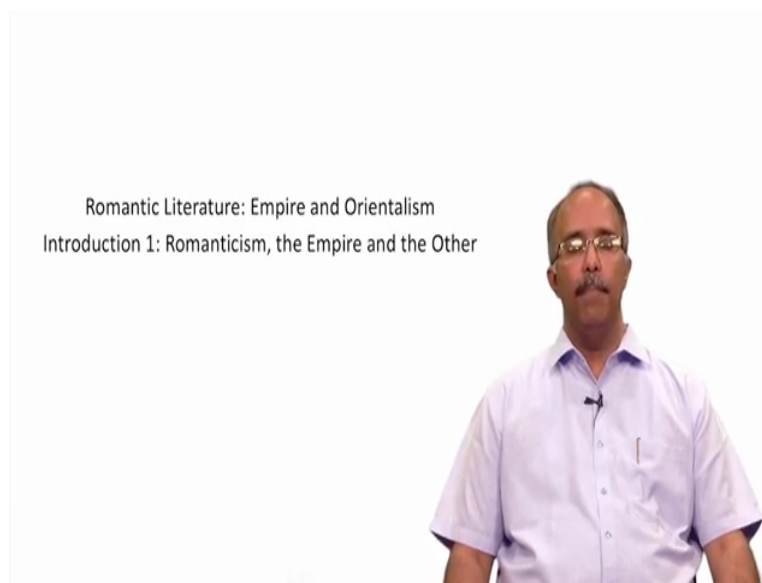
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Romantic Literature: Empire and Orientalism Introduction 1: Romanticism, the Empire and the Other

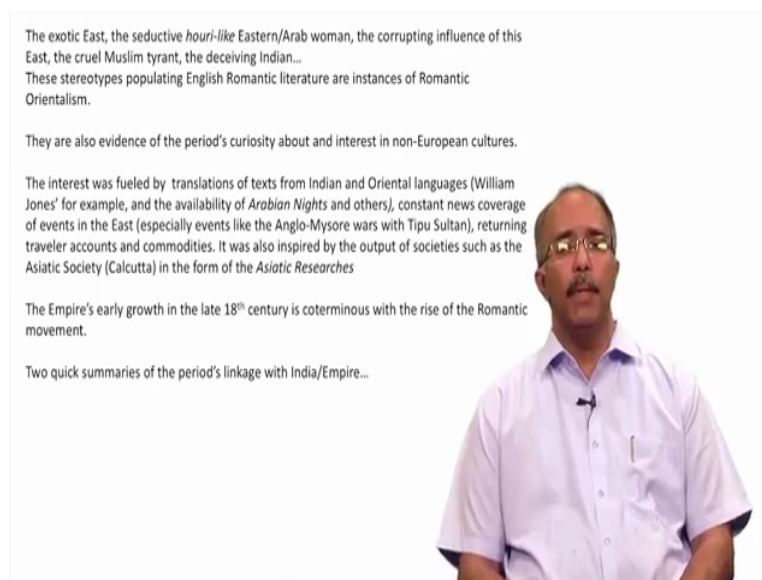
Hello everybody, here we continue the NPTEL lessons on the English Romantic writer 1798 to 1832, our focus for the next few sessions is on Empire and Orientalism.

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We will begin with an introduction to Romanticism, the Empire and the racial cultural other.

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The exotic East, the seductive houri-like Eastern Arab woman, the corrupt influence of the East, the cruel Muslim tyrannical ruler, the deceptive deceiving Indian, these are the stereotypes that are populated English Romantic literature for a very long time. There instances of what is called romantic Orientalism but stereotypes apart these are also bits of evidence literary evidence of the periods general curiosity about an interest in other cultures.

And when we look at the texts from this period roughly 1750 to about 1850 you will see texts about China, the Far East, India, the Arab world, contrasting of Istanbul and others which have entered the English literary canon, this interest in curiosity about the other nations was filled by translations of texts from Indian and Oriental languages, William Jones translation. So for example the translations the Arabian Nights, the Bhagavad-Gita and others but there was also a lot of news coverage of events in the East which appear in the English papers.


So for instance the Anglo-Mysore wars specifically with Tipu Sultan and Hyder Ali commonly appeared in The Times, the London Times and other periodicals traveller accounts also fed back into the English social imagination, commodity the of course from the 17th century tea, coco which entered via mercantilism into the English household. So in short what you need to understand is the literary interest in the East in the non-European other Asia and other places was also supplemented by the arrival of commodities from carpets to tea also people as in people of different races who entered the English and European imagination they also put together a very learn at societies such as Asiatic Society of Calcutta founded in 1784 and there was a serial publication of volume such as the Asiatic researches which compiled information about the poetry of the East, the religion of the East, the architecture of the east and so and so forth.

So there is a very large cultural apparatus of knowledge making about the east that fills the romantic interest in the East and if you notice the Empires arise in the last decades of the 18th century is more or less coterminous with the rise of the Romantic movement. Two quick summaries of the periods linkage with it with India slash Empire and like I said it is not just India but several parts of the East including Arabia where part of the social imagination of the literary canon during this period but our focus is more or less just India and South Asia are two commons on the link between India slash Empire and the English thinking on of the globe itself.

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Even if the empire was not the only area of concern, it was certainly something of an obsession throughout the Romantic period. With the notable exception of William Blake, every single major writer in the period (and most of the minor ones as well) had at least a passing flirtation with imperialism or its major cultural manifestation, Orientalism. Many authors (e.g., Lord Byron, Robert Southey, Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Charlotte Dacre, Percy Shelley, Elizabeth Hamilton, Tom Moore, Walter Savage Landor) had significant imperialist or Orientalist works, if not long-standing, career-long engagements with the East. Moreover, the interest in imperialism invested virtually all areas of cultural production, including those that, at first glance, ought to have had nothing to do with the empire (such as arguments for and against the rights of man and of woman, or country-house novels, or even the most seemingly withdrawn and other-worldly forms of nature poetry).

Saree Makdisi


A man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a light blue short-sleeved button-down shirt, is speaking. He is positioned on the right side of the slide, with his hands clasped in front of him.

The first is by Saree Makdisi who writes even if the Empire was not the only area of concern it was certainly something of an obsession throughout the Romantic period with a notable exception of William Blake every single major writer in the period and some minor ones as well had at least a passing flirtation with imperialism or it is major cultural manifestation, he is a long list of authors who had very strong interests in the East and he mentions Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Tom Moore, Walter savage Landor, Percy Shelley, Elizabeth Hamilton and others and he makes the argument that several of them had significant imperialist and Orientalist works, they also had carriers in the East.

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Romantic Orientalism is the recurrence of recognizable elements of Asian and African place names, historical and legendary people, religions, philosophies, art, architecture, interior decoration, costume, and the like in the writings of the British Romantics.

https://www.wvnorton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic_4/welcome.htm

The same man from the previous slide is speaking, now with his hands clasped together in front of his chest. He is wearing the same light blue shirt and glasses.

The second one is very (04:33) resource of course from wwnorton and company are available on their website and it is a contextual citation that I have put up here for you on the slide, romantic Orientalism is a recurrence of recognizable elements of Asian and African place names historical and legendary people, religions, philosophies, art, architecture, interior decoration costume and the like in the writings of the British romantics.

So that is the context it is a large span of what the Romantic orientalist tendency is, please understand what we are talking about is the arrival of the East in the social imagination of the English and the Europeans it occurs, in the form of commodities people and literary themes, so there are three components to this. The commodity is like I mentioned coffee and tea which have come in from various parts of the world, also china pottery I knew some of you might recall Charles lamb famous essay old China it occurs in the form of people who move from India and other parts of the world and travel through Britain, William Hazlitt famous essay Indian jugglers would be a great study of this.

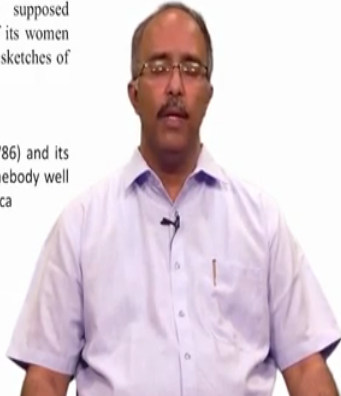
There are also other products such as opium which enters the English imagination and many of you know (05:45) interest in the substance, Thomas De Quincey is extraordinarily long extraordinary exploration in the form of the confessions of an English Opium-Eater, all of which are part of the Romantic Orientalist project.

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We shall study select themes in the representations of the Empire, the distant Other and cultural difference: erotic geography, effeminate Easterners, commodification.

To many, the Orient represented an erotic geography – what Felicity Nussbaum aptly termed the 'torrid zones', or 'porno-tropics', referring to European representations of the climatic conditions, the supposed hypersexed nature of the natives and the excessive fecundity of its women (1995). This erotic geography was often embodied in numerous sketches of the Oriental woman, the seraglio and the harem.

Oriental excess revolves around the women.
For example, here is William Beckford's Gothic tale, *Vathek* (1786) and its representation of Carathis, Vathek's mother, represented as somebody well versed in the dark arts and satanic magic, and a purveyor of exotica

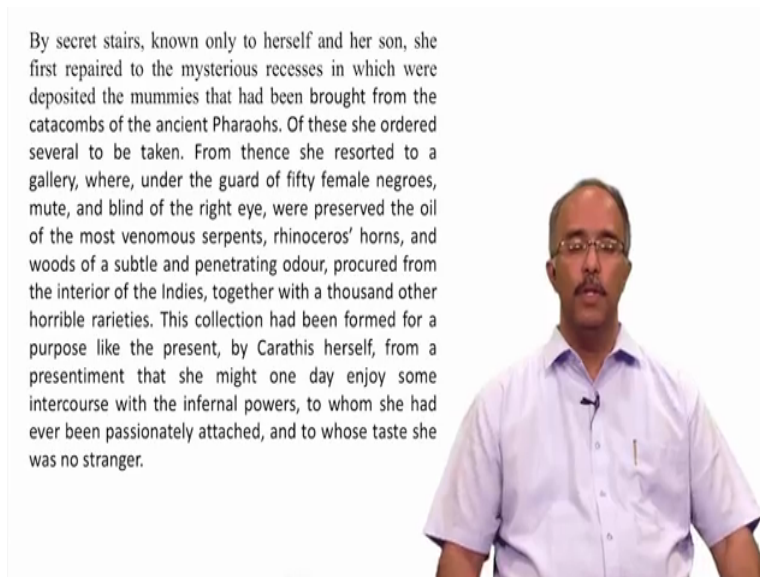


We shall restrict ourselves to select themes here in the representations of the Empire, first and foremost to many of the English the Orient represented an erotic geography what Felicity Nussbaum famously called torrid zones or porno-tropics referring to European

representations of the climatic conditions, the supposedly hyper sexual nature of the natives and the extraordinary fertility of it is women. This erotic geography was often embodied in numerous sketches of the oriental (wom) woman, the seraglio, the harem, the mysterious woman of the harem.

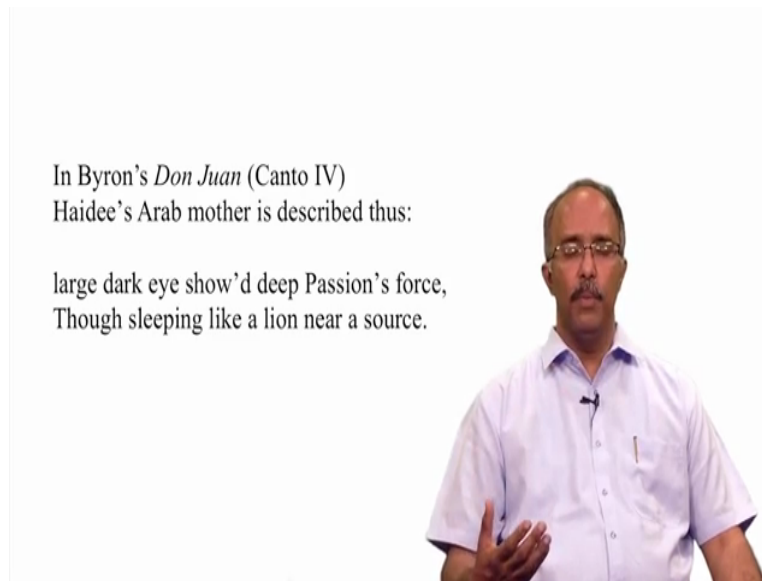
Oriental excess revolves around women for example coming up on your slide now is William Beckford is description of Carathis, Vathek is -mother in his 1786 oriental tale Gothic tale Vathek. Here is Carathis describe for you on the slide up next.

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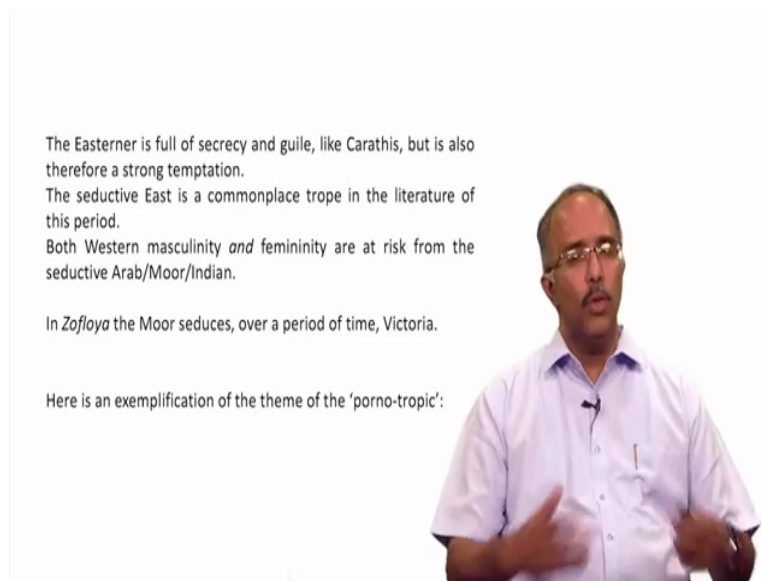
My secret stairs, known only to herself and her son, she first repaired to the mysterious recesses in which were deposited the mummies that had been brought from the catacombs of the ancient Pharaohs. Of these she ordered several to be taken and as you go around that paragraph you will see what she has gathered the blind of the right eye were preserved the oil of the most venomous serpents, rhinoceros horns, it is an intact collection actually of things that have come from various parts of the world, so there is that.

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Now here is Byron's *Don Juan* Canto four where an Arab woman is described as follows, large dark eye showed deep passions force, though sleeping like a lion near a source. So there is the passionate woman, there is the evil woman.

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This Easterner in these kinds of stereotypical accounts the eastern is full of secrecy and guile like Carathis but is also therefore a strong temptation. The seductive East is a major trope in the literature of this period and both western masculinity and femininity are at risk from this seductive Arab slash Moor slash Indian. In *Zofloya* for example Charlotte Dacre novel, the Moore seduces over a period of time the European Victoria, here is an example of the theme of the porno-tropic coming up on your slide now.

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Never till this moment, had she been so near the person of the Moor—such powerful fascination dwelt around him, that she felt incapable of withdrawing from his arms; yet ashamed, (for Victoria was still proud) and blushing at her feelings, when she remembered that Zofloya, however he appeared was but a menial slave ... she sought but vainly, to repress them; for no sooner ... did she behold that beautiful and majestic visage, that towering and graceful form, than all thought of his inferiority vanished, and the ravished sense, spuming at the calumnious idea, confessed him a being of superior order.


Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya*



This is Charlotte Dacre's novel about a European woman Victoria seduced by Moor, Zofloya is the Moor (08:35) never till this moment had she been so near the person of the Moor, such powerful fascination dwelt around him that she felt incapable of withdrawing from his arms yet ashamed note that she is ashamed but she is unable to control herself basically what Dacre is suggesting is this overwhelming sensuality of the native Arab, Muslim the martial races and the white woman mesmerized by it.

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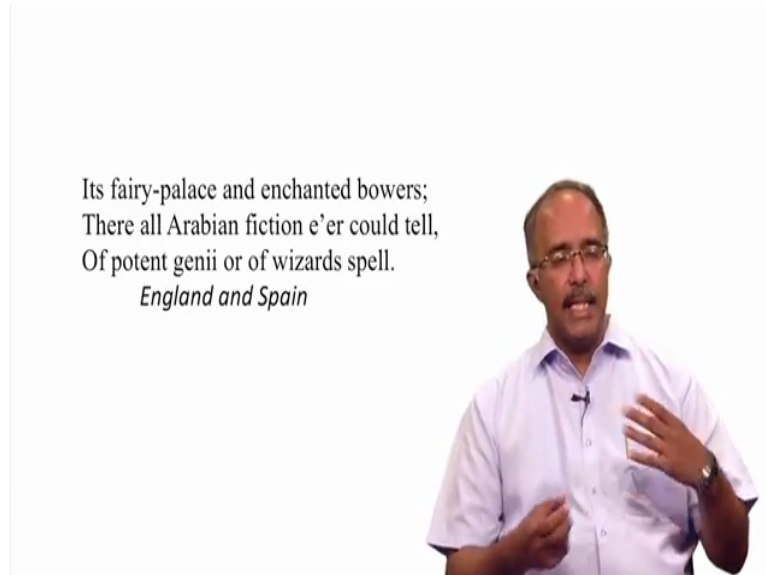
The eroticized Other that we see in Beckford, Dacre and other texts represents a certain envy and anxiety over what the Westerner saw as a feminine or feminized civilization, with touches of the magical and the mystical. See, for example, Felicia Hemans' representation here:



The eroticized other that we see in Beckford, Dacre and other text represents a certain envy and anxiety or what the Westerners saw as a feminine or feminized civilization with touches of the magical and the mysterious. See for example Felicia Hemans representation here

coming up on your slide now and except of three lines from Hemans is one of more famous poems England and Spain.

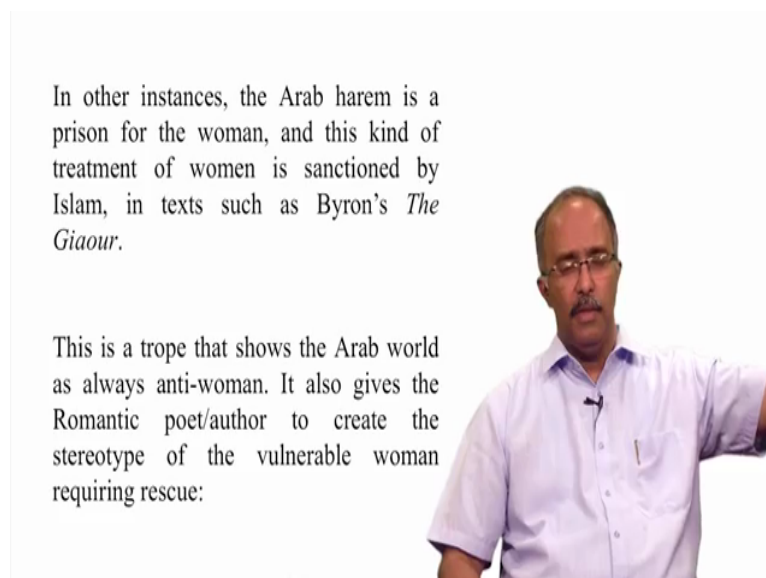
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It is fairy-palaces and enchanted bowers; There all Arabian fiction e'er could tell, Of potent genii or a wizard spell. You might actually say that these three lines and compass everything you need to know about a romantic Orientalism there is magic, there is Arabia, there is a sense of the mystical and the mysterious fairy play Palace and enchanted powers then there are wizards as well.

So there is the seductive East, the seductive Arab woman or Harem.

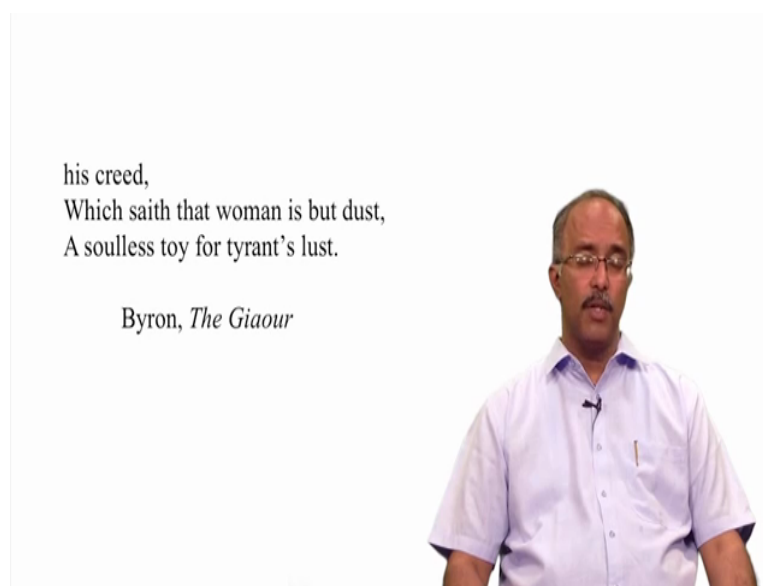
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There is a converse, in other instances the Arab (ha) harem is a prison for the woman and there is this politics of pity that plays out in the romantic Orientalists which shows that women are treated badly by Muslim rulers and we need to as in we here would be the white man having to rescue them this kind of treatment of women according to them is sanctioned by Islam in texts such as Byron is famous poem *The Giaour*.

This is a trope that shows that Arab world as always anti-woman, a sexist in patriarchal. It gives the romantic poet author to create the stereotype of the vulnerable woman who has to be rescued coming up on your slide is a set of three lines from Byron is he *Giaour*.

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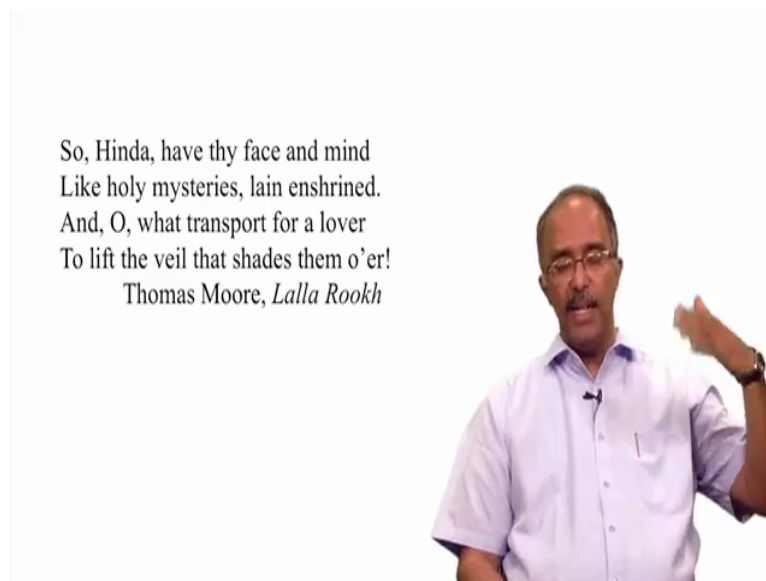
And of course it is before on an earlier occasion as part of the politics of representation in the romantic writers, his screed, which saith that woman is but dust, a soulless toy for tyrant is lust. So there is a selective east and now here is a vulnerable where the woman has to be rescued she is trapped in the prison of a home.

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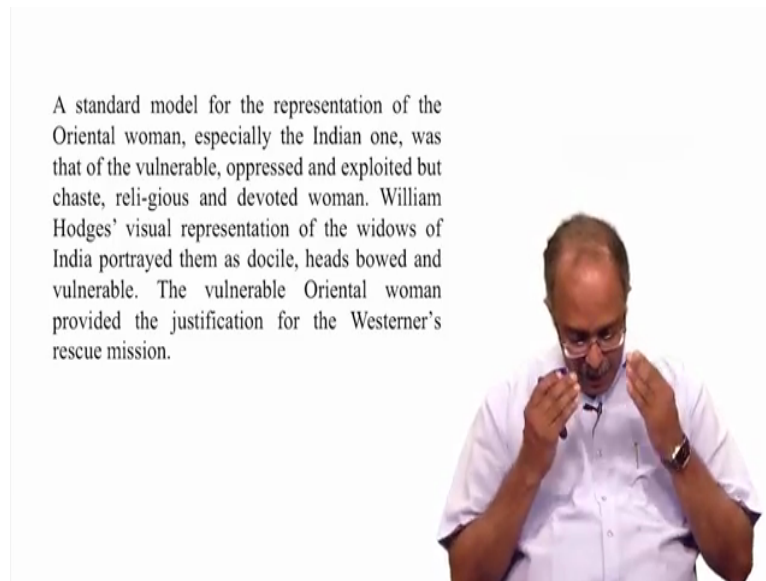
In Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, Hafed courts the Emir's daughter Hinda by climbing into her tower and her home is depicted almost like a prison, here is a description from *Lalla Rookh*.

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So, Hinda, have thy face and mind like holy mysteries, lain enshrined, And, O, what transport for a lover to lift the veil that shades them over. The woman whose parda nasheen, who is closed but also segregated, separated is treated badly and that in itself renders or vulnerable.

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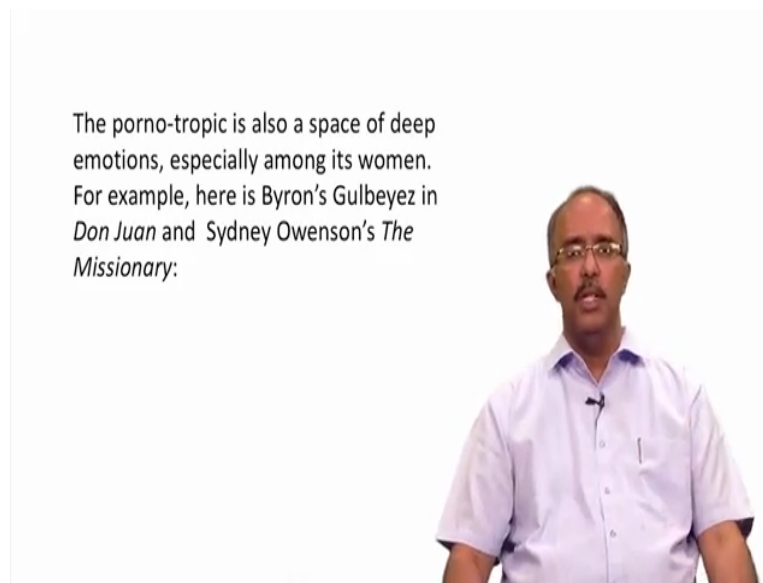


A standard model for the representation of the Oriental woman, especially the Indian one, was that of the vulnerable, oppressed and exploited but chaste, religious and devoted woman. William Hodges' visual representation of the widows of India portrayed them as docile, heads bowed and vulnerable. The vulnerable Oriental woman provided the justification for the Westerner's rescue mission.

Another standard model for the representation the oriental woman especially the Indian one was that are the vulnerable, oppressed and exploited but chaste, religious and devoted woman. William Hodges official (paint) appointed by Warren Hastings to travel through India and put together his account of it with images and writing, he publishes travels in India 1793 to 1798 as part of this project.

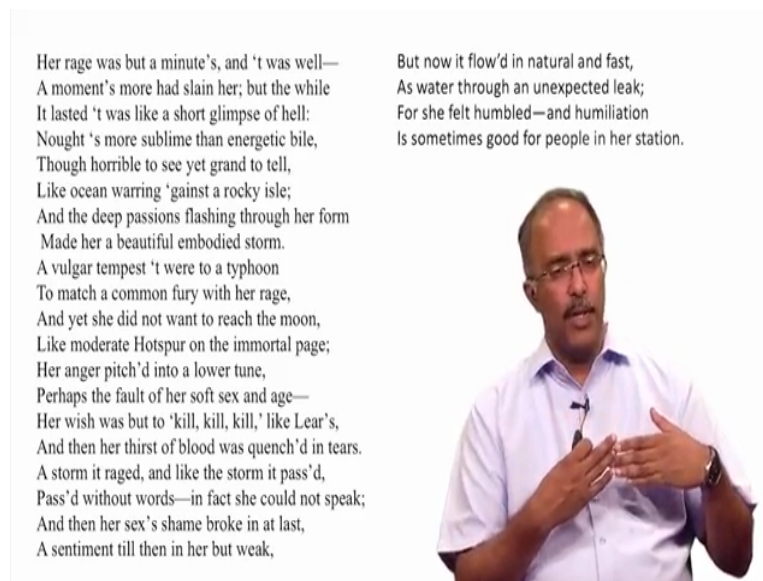
William Hodges visual representation of the widows of India portrayed them as docile, heads bowed and vulnerable, they are at least two or three images paintings that Hodges did which show widows Indian women going to pray and they are all docile their heads are bent, the paradigm is like this, they look very weak and vulnerable. So the oriental woman then becomes this vulnerable sensitive person who requires taking care of.

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But the porno-tropic in addition to all this is also a space of deep emotions especially among the women, here is Byron is Gulbeyez in *Don Juan* and Sidney Owenson is the missionary to quotes up there one after the other on your slides.

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She is tempestuous, she is described as a vulgar tempest and but there is also an example of an (())(12:59) or trope of ocean which warring against a rocky isle and the deep passions in them. So the woman is always exceedingly passionate, passionate is used partially in the pejorative sense but also has something you envy. So like I said at the beginning it is an over fertile over sexed native.

Here Sidney Owenson the missionary on your next slide.

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When he beheld her receiving the homage of a deity, all lovely as she was, she awakened no other sentiment in his breast than a pious indignation, natural to his religious zeal, at beholding human reason so subdued by human imposition.

Sydney Owenson's *The Missionary*



When he beheld her receiving the homage of a deity, all lovely as she was, she awakened no other sentiment in his breast than a pious indignation, natural to religious zeal and beholding human reason so subdued by human imposition. So this whole idea that the Indian woman, the Arab woman is subdued because the social order especially religion is oppressive is central to how you see the east itself in the romantic period.

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Wordsworth's 'The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman', published in the Lyrical Ballads, also focuses on the vulnerable Indian woman, abandoned to die while her tribe marches onward.

In Robert Southey's 'Dirge of the American Widow' its protagonist is a (Native) Indian woman who seeks the 'vengeance of anguish'. Part mourning, part furious diatribe, the poem presents an injured Indian woman who refuses to be just a widow.

A slightly different version of the vulnerable woman figures in Felicia Hemans' 'The Indian City'. What makes this poem interesting is that Maimuna, the Muslim woman protagonist of the poem, rises up to lead an army.

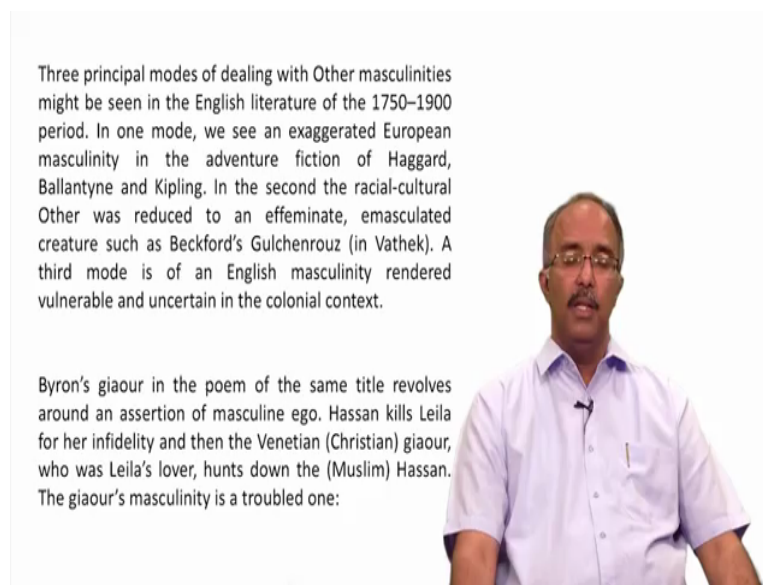


Paralleling this would be poems like Wordsworth The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian woman which spoke of the vulnerable Indian in this case the Indian is the Native American

woman she is again abandoned or died while her tribe marches onward. If you look at Robert Southey's *Dirge of the American Widow* its protagonist is a Native American woman that is a Native American woman who seeks the vengeance of anguish as we put it and you will see variants of this in Felicia Hemans's *The Indian City* and other writers.

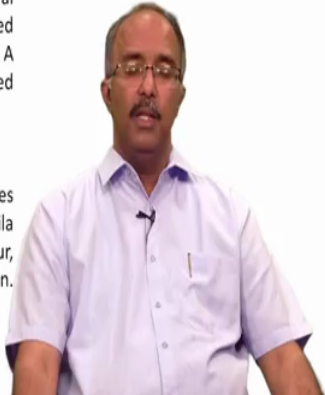
Having looked at the portrayal of women we now move on quickly to looking at masculinities.

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Three principal modes of dealing with Other masculinities might be seen in the English literature of the 1750–1900 period. In one mode, we see an exaggerated European masculinity in the adventure fiction of Haggard, Ballantyne and Kipling. In the second the racial-cultural Other was reduced to an effeminate, emasculated creature such as Beckford's Gulchenrouz (in *Vathek*). A third mode is of an English masculinity rendered vulnerable and uncertain in the colonial context.

Byron's *gياour* in the poem of the same title revolves around an assertion of masculine ego. Hassan kills Leila for her infidelity and then the Venetian (Christian) *gياour*, who was Leila's lover, hunts down the (Muslim) Hassan. The *gياour's* masculinity is a troubled one:



Three principal modes of dealing with other masculinities may be traced in the English literature of the period. In one mode we see that exaggerated European masculinity in the adventure fiction of Haggard, Ballantyne and Kipling where it is all gung-ho heroism adventure they are all committed people young boys and young men and if you look at Ballantyne's *The Far Traders* and the other texts it is all about adventurous young men, their masculinities are of a particular match is more kind, that is type one.

Type two the racial-cultural other male is reduced to an effeminate, emasculated creature, William Beckford's *Gulchenrouz* is an example here where the effeminate Indian requires as much protection as the woman herself in the way the British represented it. A third mode is of English masculinity itself rendered vulnerable in this colonial context, that is the white man is himself his himself under threat from the context of the Orient and Byron's *gياour* in the poem of the same title revolves around an assertion of masculine ego, so you cannot let it go you have to make sure that you have to fight this and establish a masculinity.

Hassan kills Leila for is it for her infidelity and then the Venetian giaour who was Leila is lover hands down the Muslim Hassan. The giaour masculinity is a vaguely troubled one.

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He stood – some dread was on his face,
Soon hatred settled in its place:
It rose not with the reddening flush
Of transient anger's hasty blush,
But pale as marble o'er the tomb,
Whose ghastly whiteness aids its gloom.
His brow was bent, his eye was glazed;
He raised his arm, and fiercely raised,
And sternly shook his hand on high,
As doubting to return or fly.



And here is the description of that troubled masculinity for you.

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There also occurs the English
representation of the effeminate nature
of the Oriental male.




So there is the English representation of the effeminate nature of oriental man studied famously Revathi Krishnaswamy in a feminism, so they would construct say the Bengali munshi as effeminate as a way of saying they need us.

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Gulchenrouz could write in various characters with precision, and paint upon vellum the most elegant arabesques that fancy could devise. His sweet voice accompanied the lute in the most enchanting manner; and when he sung the loves of Megnoun and Leileh, or some unfortunate lovers of ancient days, tears insensibly overflowed the cheeks of his auditors. The verses he composed (for like Megnoun, he too was a poet) inspired that unresisting languor so frequently fatal to the female heart. The women all doated upon him, for though he had passed his thirteenth year, they still detained him in the harem. His dancing was light as the antique gossamer waved by the zephyrs of spring; but his arms which twined so gracefully with those of the young girls in the dance, could neither dart the lance in the chase, nor curb the steeds that pastured his uncle's domains ...

Both had the same tastes and amusements; the same long languishing looks; the same tresses; the same fair complexions; and when Gulchenrouz appeared in the dress of his cousin, he seemed to be more feminine than even herself. If at any time he left the harem to visit Fakreddin, it was with all the bashfulness of a fawn that consciously ventures from the lair of its dam; he was however wanton enough to mock the solemn old grey-beards to whom he was subject, though sure to be rated without mercy in return. Whenever this happened, he would plunge into the recesses of the harem, and sobbing take refuge in the arms of Nouronihar, who loved even his faults beyond the virtues of others.

Vathek



And there is a long age description of Gulchenrouz in the text as well for you to take a look at. What you can understand from all this is there are specific stereotypes of men and women that you see laid out in the Romantic era that is not innocent description it constructs the east in a certain way more importantly by positing the natives women as delicate vulnerable needing protection, the British were able to say it is justified what we are doing that because we are their protectors.

And some of you may know that this trope of rescuing the brown woman or the Asian woman is repeated into the 20th century as well for instance when the war on terror was declared Cherie Blair then the wife of the then Prime Minister of England Tony Blair said what about the poor Afghani there may must do something for them because look at the way the Taliban is treating them.

So the trope of the vulnerable Asian woman the non-European woman has continued for a very long time, it is a part of the social imaginary of the English itself, thank you.