

## English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832

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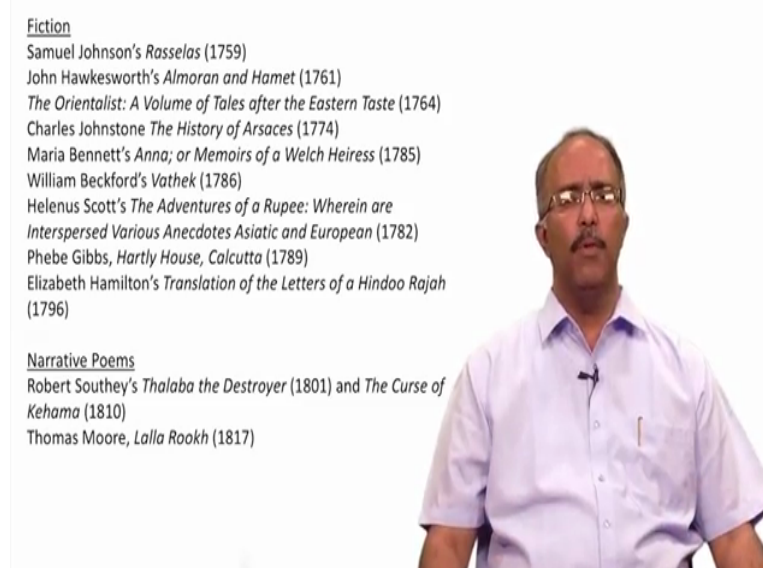
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### Romantic Literature: Empire and Orientalism Introduction 2: Romanticism, the Empire and the Other

Hello everybody, so welcome back to our explorations of the English Romantic writer 1798 to 1832. In the last session we spoke about Empire and Orientalism and we had a brief review of romanticism the Empire and other, today we continue that.

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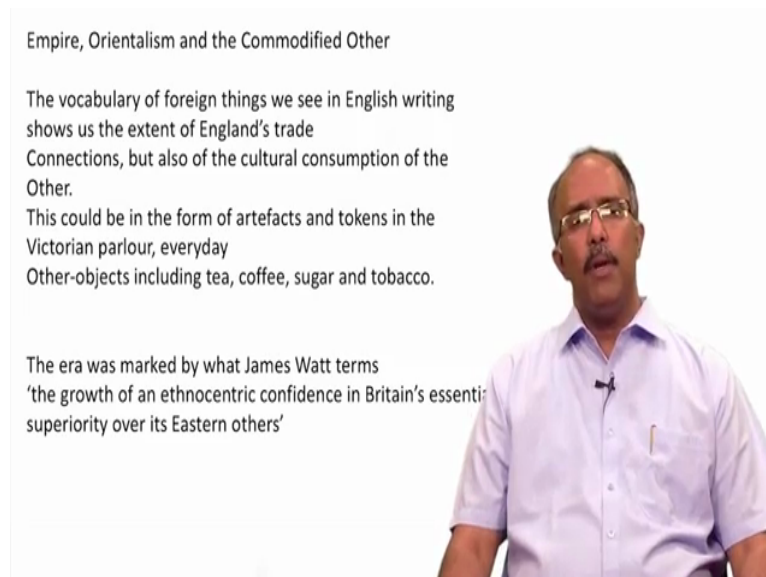


We have a whole bunch of texts fiction, nonfiction, narrative poems, drama produced around the theme of Empire. We can start with Samuel Johnson is *Rasselas* 1759, John Hawkesworth

is texture of 1761 Almorán and Hamet, lesser known texts of course the more famous ones are William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Phebe Gibbs' *Hartley House, Calcutta* which is traditionally taken to be the first Anglo-Indian novel but Anglo-Indian novel we speak here of novels by Britishers is set in British India and the first such novel has been traced for a long time we did not know the name of the author *Hartley House Calcutta* 1789 and now we have discovered that the author was actually Phebe Gibbs.

Elizabeth Hamilton's translations of the letter of a Hindoo Rajah then there are narrative poems such as Robert Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* and *The Curse of Kehama*, Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. We will take it in stages as to how the Empire occurs in this in the social and literary imagination of England.

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Empire, Orientalism and the Commodified Other

The vocabulary of foreign things we see in English writing shows us the extent of England's trade connections, but also of the cultural consumption of the Other.

This could be in the form of artefacts and tokens in the Victorian parlour, everyday Other-objects including tea, coffee, sugar and tobacco.

The era was marked by what James Watt terms 'the growth of an ethnocentric confidence in Britain's essential superiority over its Eastern others'

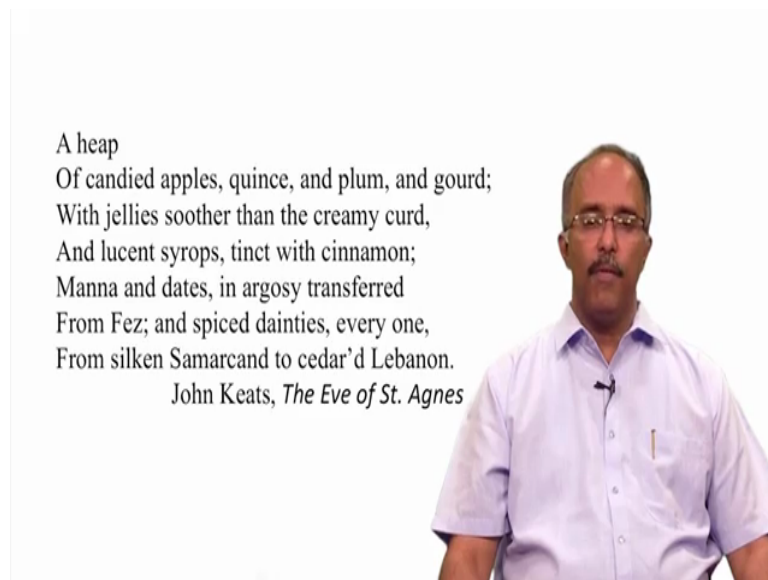
Our first stop here is Empire and Orientalism and the Commodified other. The vocabulary of foreign things we see in English writing shows us the extent of England's trade connections but also the cultural consumption of the other. Now I am thinking of this in two ways one the actual arrival of commodities in England soap, tea, coffee, tobacco and all those other things including cloth and muslin but also that these products feel the way the literature about the east is produced.

So it is a two way interaction together we put it under the category the cultural consumption of the other. So there is the consumption in terms of artefacts and tokens in the Victorian parlour, everyday objects tea, sugar, coffee, tobacco which come from elsewhere and this as

somebody put it up James Watt writes the growth of an ethnocentric confidence in (ink) Britain is essential superiority over eastern others.

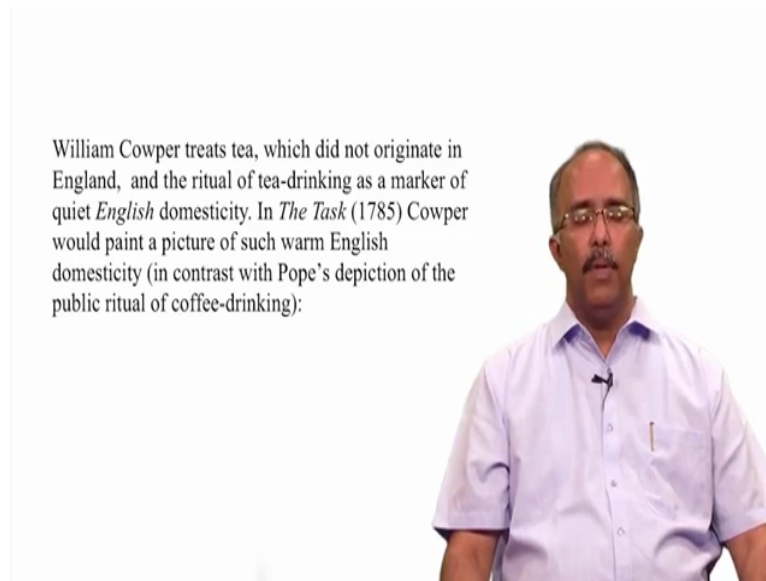
If you want to know how this was put together you can see an instance in John Keats is poem The Eve of St. Agnes.

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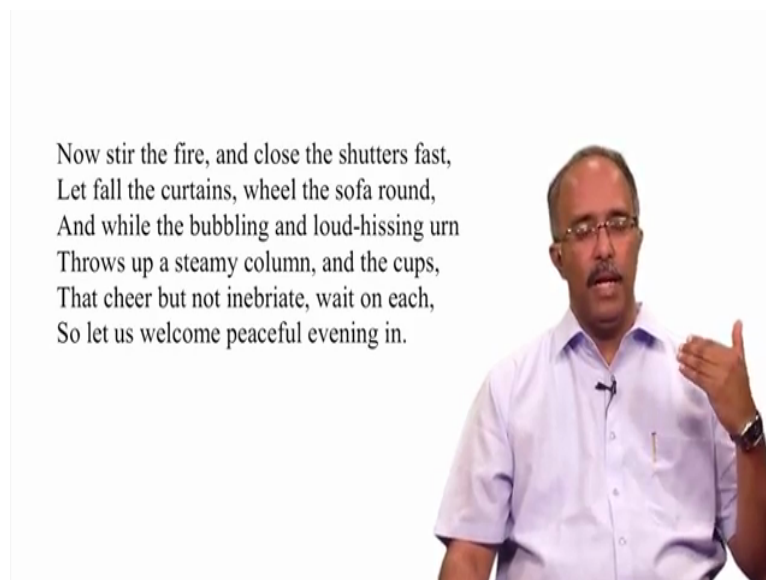
And here is a description. A heap of candied apples, quince, and plum and god with jellies soother than the creamy curd and lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon: Manna and dates, in argosy transferred from Fez; and spiced dainties, everyone, from silken Samarcand to cedard Lebanon, take a look at this you will see parallels with The Rape of the Lock Alexander is Poem Pope is poem were also there is a categorization and an inventory of things which have come from different parts of the world, John Keats is The Eve of St. Agnes doing pretty much the same thing.

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William Cowper treats tea which did not originate in England please understand and the ritual of tea drinking as a marker of quite English domesticity. In for example a poem the long poem *The Task* 1785 Cooper would paint a picture of such warm English domesticity entirely in connection with tea drinking, here is a description of Cooper is tea drinking ritual as a marker of Englishness coming up on your slide now.

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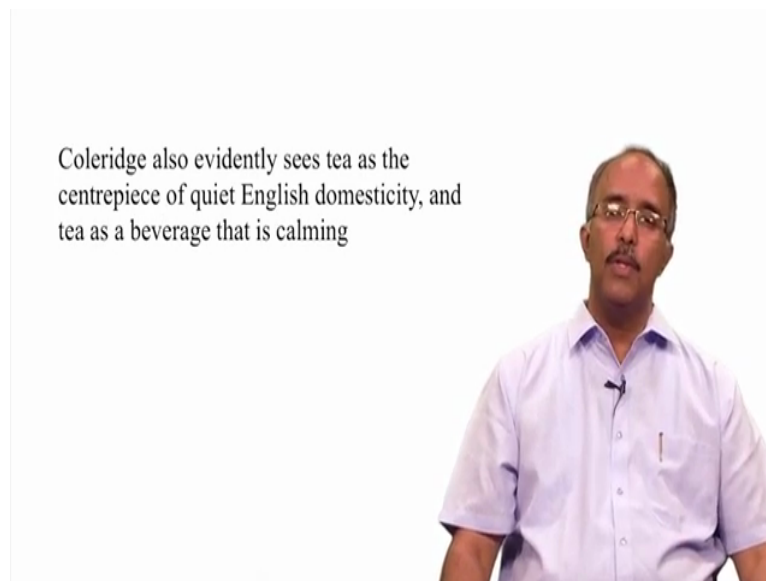


Now stir the fire and close the shutters fast, let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round and while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn throws up a steamy column, and the cups, that cheer but or not inebriate wait on each, so let us welcome peaceful evening in, what is Cooper doing? Cooper is suggesting that Englishness true English identity depends on tea drinking.

Now surely you should see the irony here true English identity depends upon the consumption of a thing which never came from England itself, it is a reinstatement of a restatement of advert sized argument in Orientalism that Europe could only construct itself when there was a racial and cultural other.

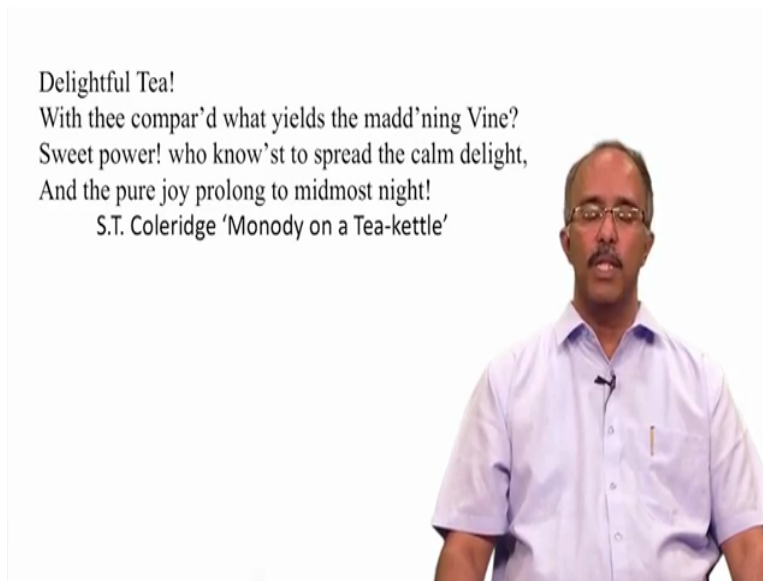
So think of this Cooper who argues that English identity is defined by tea drinking, English domesticity is defined by tea drinking is making the argument that the English domestic scene is possible with the presence of a foreign product tea.

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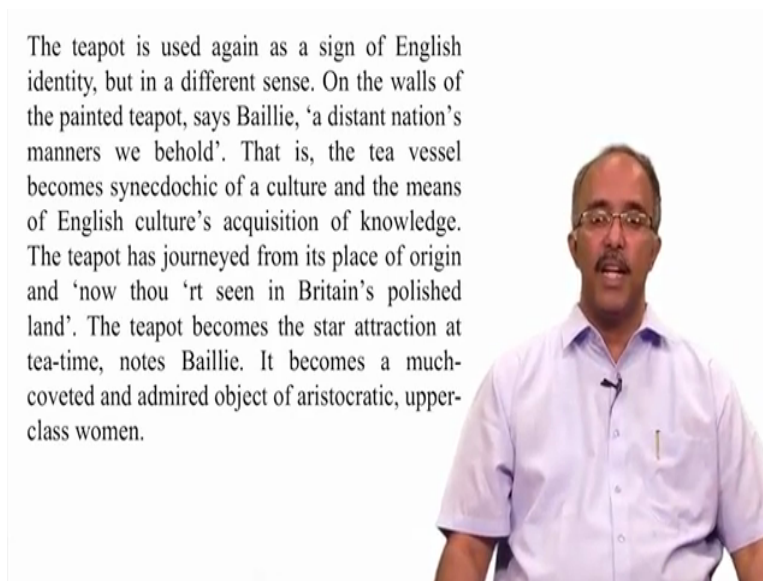
Coleridge would also see tea as the centrepiece of quiet English domesticity coming up on your slide now.

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A few lines from Coleridge is poem Monody on a Tea-kettle, Delightful Tea! with the compared what yields the maddening wine? Sweet power! Who knows to spread the calm delight and the pure joy prolong to mid most night!

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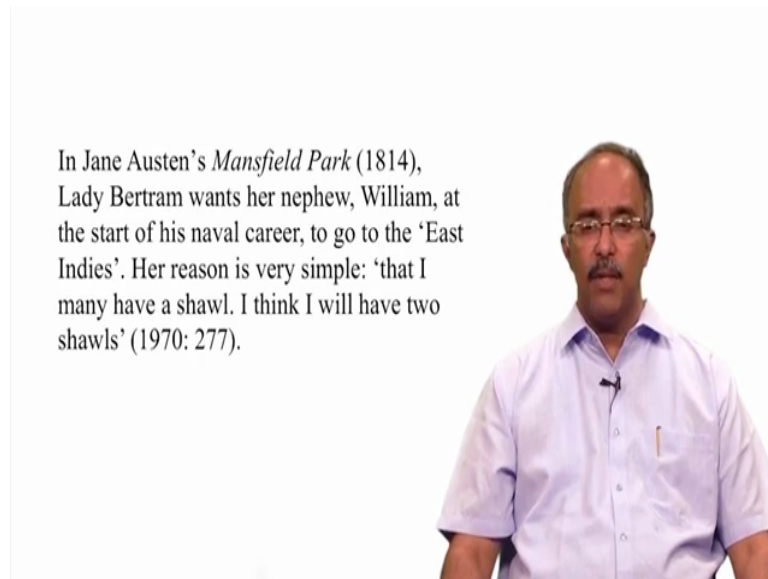


So the teapot itself becomes a sign of English identity but in a slightly different sense on the walls of the teapot says John Baillie another poet quote in distant nation is manners we behold. So the tea vessel becomes synecdochic of a culture and the means of English cultures association with an acquisition of knowledge. The teapot has and the tea of course has journeyed from somewhere and is now seen in England is Britain is polished land as she puts

it, the teapot becomes a star attraction at tea time and here is an excerpt from the poem for you.

The point to be noted here is tea is incorporated into the English thinking about itself tea, coco, coffee, sugar cane are re assimilated into England as part of it is identity but there were other products as well.

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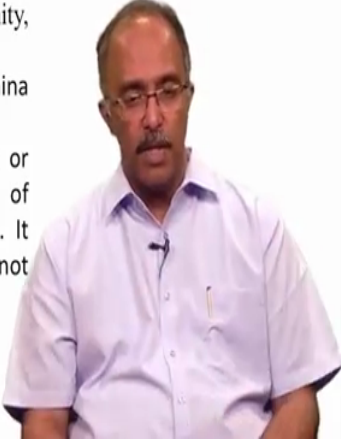


In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* published in 1814, Lady Bertram wants her nephew William at the start of his naval career to go to the East Indies and why does she want me to go? Her reason is very simple that I may have a shawl; I think I will have two shawls. So the purpose of the Navy of going abroad is to bring her things from various parts of the world.



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China, tapestries, cotton clothing, Kashmiri shawls constitute as we can see from the above texts, signs of privilege, class and modernity, and are instruments of self-fashioning. In Charles Lamb's essay 'Old China', the china vessels signifies social mobility. Displaying the Other-object in some form or the other was a prominent mode of appropriating the Other, as we shall see. It must be noted that such displays were not always only private.



And here is a list China, tapestries, cotton clothing, Kashmiri shawls constitute as we can see from these text signs of privileged, class and modernity and are instruments of self-fashioning and that is the point I was making, Europe can only fashion itself with the arrival and consumption of these other things from various parts of the world. In Charles Lamb is essay old China, the China vessels signify social mobility displaying the other object in some form or the other was a prominent mode of appropriating rather you make it your own.

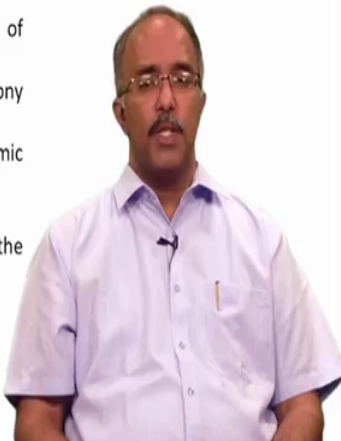
So that is roughly the community part of romantic Orientalism, we now move on to other things.

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In the Oriental tale, it was commonplace to

- Represent the Asians as plunderers, superstitious, unreliable people
- Kill off the Asian
- Suggest but not carry through the possibility of cross-cultural encounter or liaison
- Imply that British rule was good for the colony (especially India)
- Depict the condition of women, especially in Islamic societies, as a terrible one

Often a generalized statement and description of the 'East' with little specific detail.

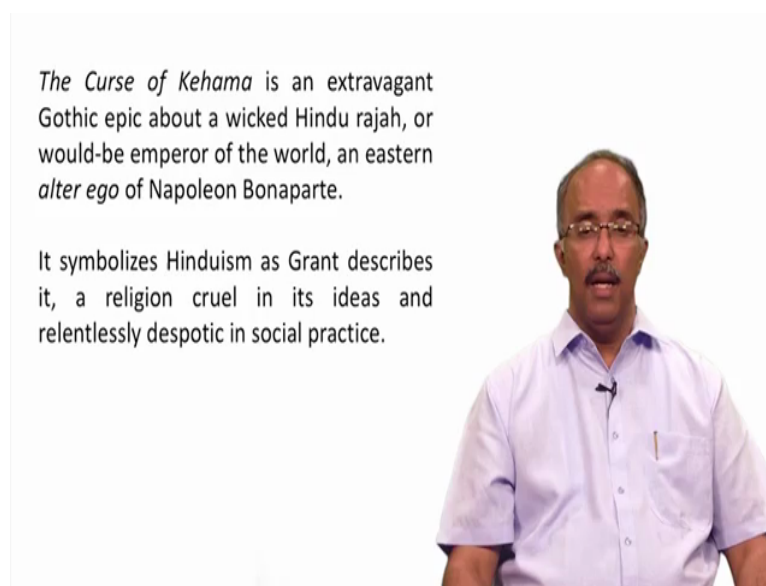




The oriental tale inaugurated by Samuel Johnson in *Rasselas*. In the oriental tale we can identify these following themes it represents the Asians as plunderers, superstitious, unreliable people it might kill off the Asian, it may suggest but not necessarily carry through the possibility of cross-cultural encounter or liaison a British man cohabiting with native women for example.

The implication that British rules the British rule was good for India that is something that works through as a trope in most of the text then of course the depiction of women in many of these texts.

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The curse of Kehama Robert Southey is longish narrative poem is an extravagant gothic epic about a wicked Hindu Rajah, a wicked Hindu Raja or would be emperor of the world and an eastern alter ego of Napoleon Bonaparte, it symbolizes Hinduism itself as something a religion cruel in it is ideas and a little despotic in it is practice. Now one of the things you will realize about romantic Orientalism is many of the evils of then of the subcontinent were traced to the bad religions in most cases Hinduism itself.

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From the early 1900s, the previous era's sympathy for the Easterner was eroded.

An imperial Gothic emerges in

Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820),  
Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806)  
Walter Scott's *The Surgeon's Daughter* (1827)

Themes of

- Illicit desire
- Demonic temptation
- Evil Asians
- The possible ruin of the English by the natives



Then you see the emergence of an imperial Gothic Charles Maturin is *Melmoth the Wanderer* 1820, Charlotte Dacre is *Zofloya* about whom a little mentions in the previous session, Walter Scott is *The Surgeon's Daughter*. The Imperial Gothic draws upon the Gothic tradition and you do know what the Gothic is? It was interested in the dark side of emotions, it was interesting things like madness, it was also interested in questions of class and power adapting that to the Imperial mapping the Imperial on to the Gothic you receive that you get to see the Imperial gothic itself.

And the themes would include illicit desire, the desire of people for each other outside marriage for example, Demonic temptation which is a favourite theme, Evil Asians you will see this occurring as late as the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the work of say someone like Arthur Conan Doyle where the Evil Asian is there somewhere out there somewhere to get you. Then of course the theme of the possible ruling of the English by the natives that once the natives begin coming in there will be a problem you will see this most exclusively portrayed in the *Moonstone* where it is arrival of the stone in England that produces unhappiness and tensions.

In other words the foreign out there is ok, but the foreign when it comes in becomes a problem. So romantic Orientalism was fascinated by the other but did not want to incorporate the other shall we say, so there is this tension between wanting something out there liking it but also discovering that or once they come in there is a problem. So everything that happens in the *Moonstone* is attributed finally the presence of this Indian stone, the Indian stone is something stolen from the siege of Tipu Sultan and at Seringapatam and the stone supposedly

is taken by somebody and goes to England and once it enters the household everything goes bad, so even a stone from India has a certain agency shall we say.

So romantic Orientalism is this huge swath of texts interested in gender, interested in class, interested in commodities but ultimately they come together to demonstrate that the East can be seen in certain ways.

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Additional/Recommended Reading

James Watt, 'Orientalism and Empire', in Richard Maxwell & Kate Trumpener (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to English Fiction in the Romantic Period*. Cambridge UP, 2008.

Saree Makdisi, 'Romanticism and Empire', in Jon Klancher (Ed), *A Concise Companion to the Romantic Age*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785*. Oxford UP, 2008.

Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*. Cambridge UP, 1992.



And that is important because whether it is the Imperial Gothic or the lyrical ballads of England published in 1798 for the first time you do see the sense of the exotic but you also know that there is a lot of unhappiness that goes on in those kinds of representations, thank you.