

English Romantic Writers' Attitudes towards Islam and Muhammad (PBUH)

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Abstract

English Romantic writers are generally seen as individuals with liberal mindsets. This is clearly reflected in their portrayal of Eastern elements in literature. They give the impression that they are free from the so-called "Eurocentricism" and other Western prejudices about the East. This may be true. But their attitude towards Islam and the greatest Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH) do not always show the same appreciative leaning. This article explores the diverse approaches of English Romantics to both Islam or Muslims and Muhammad (PBUH). It also tries to unearth the reasons behind these.

Key Words: Romantics, East, Islam, Muslims, Christianity.

The imaginative faculty of the English Romantics was nourished greatly by their vast reading of Eastern life, culture and literature. The East appealed to them and they responded by making positive representations of it and sometimes even glorifying it in their poetry. Their heartfelt appreciation for the East may be attributed to their inner urge to go beyond the familiar surroundings of the industrialized and urbanized England. To the Romantics, the East was not merely an element to enrich their poetry; it, rather, created a permanent place in their psyche. This is why the mystic views of the Romantics, specially, those of the early ones, are found to be highly influenced by Oriental mysticism like Sufism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. In responding to all these influences, they seem to reflect, in particular, a peculiar and unique interest in Islam. Hinduism and Buddhism do not really find direct representations in Romantic Literature. However, because of their vast reading of Persian Literature translated into English from the German, they found their Christian faith to be greatly moulded by Sufi doctrines. Until this point, Romantics can only be appreciated for their liberal and all-embracing attitude. But in case of Islam, they do not always seem to have the same favourable impression. Their attitude toward Islam can best be termed "varied". This work is an attempt to explore how the English Romantics reacted to Islam, one of the most dominant religions of the world.

There are several occasions when Romantics are found appreciating Eastern life and culture in their writings. They seem to be free from the so called "Eurocentricism". In fact, they were the first to give a serious consideration of the 'other'. The point I am trying to bring home here is that the English Romantics did not have this colonial dominance in mind as they brought the Orient in their poetry; rather, it is their pure admiration and respect for the life and culture of the Eastern people that fascinated them. It was the sincerity of heart on the part of the Romantics for whom the "exotic-other" did not mean essentialism, but a true attraction and source of inspiration. One

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instance can be found in S.T. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" where the poet, being enthralled by the song of the 'Abyssinian Maid', is not confident enough to reproduce it in him:

"A damsel with a dulcimer
 In a vision once I saw:
 It was an Abyssinian maid,
 And on her dulcimer she played,
 Singing of Mount Abora.
 Could I revive within me
 Her symphony and song,
 To such a deep delight 'twould win me
 That with music loud and long
 I would build that dome in air," (37-46)

I think the lines "Could I revive within me/ Her symphony and song," say a lot about the mindset of this English poet. Coleridge's choice of words is not tainted by the sense of superiority; rather, we find a European profusely showering his heartfelt and sincere appreciation for an Oriental song.

There may be three main reasons behind Romantics' interest in the East. Firstly, the abundance of travel literature that introduced and familiarized the East to the Romantics. One may not always find an authentic representation of the Eastern life and culture in the books, but Romantics were drawn to them without being critical. Secondly, the indomitable thirst for something exotic and the idea prevalent among the English Romantics that only the mysterious, sensual, distant and naturally rich world of the East could quench this thirst in them intensified this interest in them. This may be seen as a form of escapism as Romantics often traveled to the exotic world of the East on the wings of their imagination to liberate themselves from the contemporary social, political and religious evils. Maryanne Stevens comments: "One of the preoccupations which profoundly affected the Western understanding of the Near East was the belief that this region could satisfy the West's urge for exotic experience. Exoticism meant the artistic exploration of territories and ages in which the free flights of the imagination were possible because they lay outside the restrictive operation of the classical rules." (17) This view finds a resonance in Friedrich Schlegel's comment that he made in 1800, "It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism" (Said 277). Finally, since the East was the birthplace of almost all the ancient civilizations and of heavenly religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Romantics felt a natural affinity for this region as Romantics always gave priority to spirituality over materiality.

Although English Romantics left the marks of their positive reception of the Eastern materials in their literature, the same is not true about how they felt about Islam and Muhammad (PBUH). In their poetry and prose, their attitudes toward both Islam and Muhammad (PBUH) seem to be very much in line with the contemporary hostile view of the Occidentals. The very few exceptions that are found may have resulted from issues other than a high regard for the world's greatest man and the religion he preached. Among the Romantics, Robert Southey dealt with these issues more

than anyone else. In *Chronicle of the Cid* (1808), his attitude toward Islam and morals of Muhammad (PBUH) is one of stern disapproval. He believes that the greatest prophet of Islam was prompted by ambition, not by religious enthusiasm: "The pure theism which he preached he probably believed: but his own claims proceeded from ambition, not from self deceit." (Southey 188). Anyone who has studied the way of life that this great man opted for himself will call him anything but ambitious. Southey also makes the accusation that "Muhammad attempted nothing like a fabric of a society; he took abuses as he found them" (Southey 188). However, the history of Mecca and Medina during his time suggests otherwise. It was Muhammad (PBUH) who both introduced and upheld the social values needed to unite the society. In the same book, Southey also opines that the continuance of polygamy was Muhammad (PBUH)'s great and ruinous error. While other founders of religions had not hesitated to crucify the lusts of the flesh, "Muhammad attempted no such conquest over human nature; he did not feel himself strong enough to conquer" (Southey 188). This, too, seems to be a highly prejudiced and careless remark by Southey. The issue of polygamy should be seen in the light of contemporary social system where women were extremely helpless and vulnerable and in particular, the circumstances that forced Muhammad (PBUH) take such decisions. Besides, as the distorted phrase "lusts of flesh" refers to his getting married and indulging in the worldly life, it may be argued that since Islam claims to be a complete way of life, Muhammad (PBUH) is the pioneer who actually shows how to remain on the path of religion even after living a worldly life. This is a great challenge for any human being and Muhammad (PBUH) met it by setting examples.

Dismissing the idea that Muhammad (PUBH) was superior to the common herd in native ability, Southey attributes the rise of Islam to fortuitous circumstances only. This is perhaps, one of the lowest opinions expressed against Muhammad and Islam. About Muhammad (PBUH)'s ability Southey writes: "His were common talents, and it is by common talents that great revolutions have been most frequently effected" (Southey 189). One may wonder how Muhammad (PBUH), having only common talents, was able to impose on his contemporaries. An unbiased study may reveal that he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels. In spite of having humble origins, he founded and promulgated one of the world's great religions, and became an immensely effective political leader. If there is a comparison made between Muhammad (PBUH) and Jesus Christ, Muhammad (PBUH) must be ranked higher than Jesus Christ. There are two principal reasons for that decision. First, Muhammad (PUBH) played a far more important role in the development of Islam than Jesus did in the development of Christianity. Although Jesus was responsible for the main ethical and moral precepts of Christianity, St. Paul was the main developer of Christian theology, its principal proselytizer, and the author of a large portion of the New Testament. On the other hand, Muhammad (PUBH), however, was responsible for both the theology of Islam and its main ethical and moral principles. In addition, he played the key role in proselytizing the new faith, and in establishing the religious practices of Islam. No detailed compilation of the teachings of Christ has survived. Since the Quran is at least as important to Muslims as the Bible is to Christians, the influence of Muhammad (PBUH) through the medium of the Quran has been enormous. It is probable that the relative influence of Muhammad on Islam has been larger than the combined influence of Jesus Christ and St. Paul on Christianity. On the purely religious level, then, it seems

likely that Muhammad (PBUH) has been as influential in human history as Jesus. Furthermore, Muhammad (PBUH) (unlike Jesus) was a secular as well as a religious leader, In fact, as the driving force behind the Arab conquests; he may well rank as the most influential political leader of all time. Being unaware of all these, Southey goes on with his harsh comments. He does not hesitate to include the whole first generation of Muslims, with the exception of the youthful Ali in a conspiracy of deceit. Southey adds insult to injury when he says about Quran:

There is nothing in the Qur'an which affects the feelings, nothing which elevates the imagination, nothing which enlightens the understanding, nothing which ameliorates the heart: it contains no beautiful narratives, no proverbs of wisdom or axioms of morality; it is a chaos of detached sentences, a mass of dull tautology. Not a solitary passage to indicate the genius of a poet can be found in the whole volume (Southey 189).

The derision of the language of the Quran and its “dull tautology” actually works against the imaginative world the poet is trying to establish, the world in which the Quran is the law. The language with which religious ideas are connected must not be intruded for artistic purposes. And it becomes almost a crime when someone with inadequate knowledge of the language tries to do this. Beyer aptly remarks "Southey may be excused for not knowing the prodigious mnemonic powers of the language of the Quran in Arabic" (Beyer 235). But his personal views of the power or tameness of the language of Sale's (1734) translation should not have caused him to commit an artistic blunder of this sort.

The basic story of “Thalaba the Destroyer” comes from *The Arabian Tales, or, a Continuation of the Arabian Nights*. Southey's attitude toward Islam is not revealed in the poem itself, but in what he makes in the notes. When Thalaba's mother expresses her resignation in the words: “He gave, he takes away!” Southey comments: “I have placed a Scripture phrase in the mouth of a Mohammedan...it had been easy to have made Zeinab speak from the Koran, if the tame language of the Koran could be remembered by the few who have toiled through its dull tautology” (Southey 840). Here, Southey is so careless that he undermines the artistic credibility of his Arabian epic in the text itself as well as the notes. Had he omitted this note altogether, the readers might have accepted Zeinab's speech without much difficulty, for the idea of the Biblical verse is not alien to Islam.

Southey does not spare even Muslim art and architecture. In a note he says:

A waste of ornament and labor characterizes all the works of the Orientalists [Orientals]. I have seen illuminated Persian manuscripts that must each have been the toil of many years, every page painted not with representations of life and manners, but usually like the curves and lines of a Turkey carpet, conveying no idea whatever The little of literature that has reached us is equally worthless.... The Arabian Tales certainly abound with genius; they have lost their metaphorical rubbish in passing through the filter of a French Translation (Southey 232).

The comment reflects not only the jingoistic posture of superiority but also what we call cultural blindness. It seems that he could not imagine any valuable art outside the tradition of Europe.

What he cannot appreciate must be worthless. Moreover, the comment on Oriental literature would sound absurd and ridiculous even to the ears of those scholars who dared to call Ferdousi "The Oriental Homer".

In his preface to the "Curse of Kehama" Southey explains how he came to write poems that exhibit the most remarkable form of mythology:

I began with the Mohammadan religion, as being that with which everyone who has read the *Arabian Nights' Entertainment* possessed all the knowledge necessary for readily understanding and entering into the intent and spirit of the poem..... The design required that I should bring into view the best features of that system.... It would have been altogether incongruous to have touched upon the abominations engrafted upon it; first by the false Prophet himself, who appears to have been far more remarkable for audacious profligacy than for any intellectual endowments, and afterwards by the spirit of oriental despotism which accompanied Mohammedanism wherever it was established (Southey 568).

But if Southey believed Muhammad to be a "false hero", what kind of a hero was he liked to make out of him in his projected epic "Mahomet"? The poem's outline that Ober (1976) has published in *Notes and Queries* and the one Warter (1856) has published in the fourth volume of Southey's *Commonplace Book* indicate that the two poets intended to follow the outline of the prophet's life as far as it was known to them. From the letter to John May quoted above, it seems that the poem would have involved the representation of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as an enthusiast whose mission was of some value to the idolatrous Arabs. A hint of this is given by Southey himself. Towards the end of the plan as given in the *Commonplace Book*, the author given the following sketch of "The Bader Book," i.e. those dealing with the battle of Bader:

...Pursuit of the caravans . Sebane and Miriam must feel respect and adoration for the enthusiast; but it is after the defeat and danger of Ohud, that his fearless yet wise, fanaticism inflects her, and makes her at once believe and love. (Southey IV:20).

It appears that Southey wanted to give special emphasis to Miriam the Copt, a Christian convert, possibly to explain the origin of the similarities between some of the Quranic and Biblical stories. However, Southey does not seem likely to have succeeded in portraying a coherent and convincing characterization of the Prophet Muhammad; he was too unsympathetic to the man, his religion, and the culture it produced to be able to treat him fairly and dispassionately .

In fact, Southey's approach in *Thalaba* is self-contradictory. In the poem, he undermines the very world that he tries to create. The protagonist Thalaba, who is a devout Muslim, goes to Babylon to ask Haruth and Maruth, the two fallen angels supposedly able to tell the future, for the talisman that will aid him in his mission. The angels tell him that the talisman is faith, which he had all along. According to the world of the story it is faith in Allah and in his Prophet (PBUH). Haller observes, the "Perennial theme" in Southey's work is the destruction of evil agents by missioned heroes" appointed from on high and with arm[s] made omnipotent by faith in the eternal good ".

Thalaba is chosen from the start by Allah to be the destroyer of the Dom Daniel. His weapon is neither intellectual power nor physical prowess; he is more of an immature young man who has seen nothing of the world. His only strength lies in his faith, or what Southey calls "resignation", which the author tells us, "is particularly inculcated by Mohammed, and of all his precepts it is that which his followers have best observed" (Haller 240). If the poet tells us beforehand that this faith is false and that the enlightened arm of Europe will pluck the Crescent from the mosques where it is practiced and replace it with the cross, we must conclude that Thalaba's faith is misplaced, and, consequently, the divine protection that he receives when ever danger is near is also misplaced. In other words, Southey's imaginative world is confused; he is unable to keep his personal prejudices to himself. Evidently, Southey approached his subject with the wrong frame of mind. In the words of Haller, Southey "traveled to the Orient in the same spirit in which he had gone to Spain,...to congratulate himself at every step that he was an Englishman. He wore his Arabian plumage precisely as the English ladies wore the rich Indian shawls sent home by kinsmen free-booting in the train of Warren Hastings" (Haller 257).

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of Southey's close contemporaries, preferred to stay away from this very sensitive issue. There are abundant examples of Eastern allusions in his poetry and they serve to establish his unprejudiced and non-Eurocentric approach. Coleridge's interest in Eastern life and culture was, perhaps, the most intense as explored by Abul Hasnat in *The English Romantics' Response to Perso-Arabic Literature*. Nevertheless, there is at least one rare example where he carries-on the same mindset that reflects his heartfelt love and sincere appreciation for both Islam and Muhammad (PBUH). "Mahomet" was a fragment and part of an intended, desired, Islamic, unfinished epic that was first published in Coleridge's *Poetical Works* in 1834. Coleridge's and Southey's collaborative work to which "Mahomet" was the short contribution was called "The Flight and Return of Mohammed" whose radicalism is manifest in Coleridge's "Mahomet" and "Kubla Khan" (1799).

Southey and Coleridge collaborated on Mahomet as a savior, an idol-breaker, a liberator, and a revolutionary figure making universal reform possible. The opening lines give his conception of Islam as a heaven sent punishment for the idol-worshipping Christians of the East:

Utter the song, O my soul! The flight and return of Mohammed,
Prophet and priest, who scatter'd abroad both evil and blessing,
Huge wasteful empires founded and halo'd slow persecution,
Soul-withering, but crush'd the blasphemous rites of the Pagan
And idolatrous Christians.- For veiling the gospel of Jesus,
They the best corrupting, had made it worse than the vilest. (Coleridge 278).

But there is another way of looking at this poem. In "Mahomet" (1799), Coleridge seems to keep in tune with many of his contemporary writers in representing Mahomet as a revolutionary figure, but he imaginatively reconciles the Orient with home in order to create a model for a better universe in which opposites are united, the universal bond is kept and a return to the origins of true religion is made possible. Although Coleridge seems to attack European corruption and false religion of the Christian West by desiring the Islamic figure of Mahomet to bring liberty and

regeneration, he still perpetuates the prejudice of Christianity's superiority over Islam. Coleridge uses Mahomet and Islam as models for the regeneration of European civilization that he found corrupt, and it is his desire to return to the Abyssinian Christianity which he believed to be the true religion revealed by Christ. In "Kubla Khan" composed in the same year, the poet wishes to revive the song of the Abyssinian maid from Abyssinia where he knew to be home to primitive and true Christianity as well as the Garden of Eden, where language began. This shows that, from an Orientalist' point of view, it is not Islam itself he wishes for but the origins of Christianity. Thus, imaginative reconciliation of Christo-Islamic inspirations can be considered as a political act of revival of Christian morality and moral regeneration. Coleridge does not emphasize Islam's sensuality and knows it to be the continuation of Christianity and the belief in the unipersonality of God, it is Christianity that must guarantee the universal bond and moral regeneration, for it is Christ, not Mahomet, that is the Teacher.

The Islamic allusions in Byron's poems are accompanied by footnotes for the enlightenment of the ignorant. Unlike Southey, he avoids giving comments. In the first canto of *Childe Harold* (1812) he points out the resemblance between the Spanish girls and the Houris:

Match me those Houris, whom ye scarce allow
To taste the gale lest Love should ride the wind
With Spain's dark-glancing daughters- deign to know
There your wise Prophet's paradise we find,
His black-eyed maids of Heaven, angelically kind (Byron 346).

The second canto finds us in Albania, listening to the call to prayer and receiving information about the fasting of Ramadan and the status of women:

Hark! from the mosque the nightly solemn sound,
The Muezzin's call doth shake the minaret,
"There is no god but God! -to prayer- lo! God is great!"

Just at this season Ramazani's fast
Through the long day its penance did maintain:
But when the lingering twilight hour was past,
Revel and feast resumed the rule again...

Here woman's voice is never heard; apart
And scarce permitted, guarded, veil'd, to move,
She yields to one her person and her heart,
Tamed to her cage, nor feels a wish to rove. (Byron 190)

From *The Giaour* (1813) and its notes we learn about the Islamic virtue of hospitality. "I need hardly observe, that Charity and Hospitality are the first duties enjoined by Mohamet; and to say truth, very generally practiced by his disciples" (Byron 136). He even puts an allusion to an Old Testament character into the mouth of a Muslim: "It is to be observed, that every allusion to

anything or personage in the Old Testament such as the Ark, or Cain, is equally the privilege of Mussulman and Jew” (Byron 173) because the Quran is full of such allusions. *The Siege of Corinth* (1816) contains a passage on the rewards of the Muslim warrior in Paradise, which anticipates a fuller elaboration of the theme in *Don Juan*. Alp, the renegade Christian, serves among the Muslim soldiers, but without their hope of Paradise:

He stood alone among the host;
Not his the loud fantastic boast
To plant the crescent o’er the cross
Or risk a life with little loss,
Secure in paradise to be
By Houris loved immortality. (Byron 303)

But Byron had a low opinion about the descendants of Muhammad. It is one of those rare occasions when he says: “Green is the privileged colour of the prophet’s numerous pretended descendants, with them, as here, faith (the family inheritance) is supposed to supersede the necessity of good works: they are the worst of an indifferent brood” (Byron 136).

The Islamic allusions in *Don Juan* (1818-1823) deal, for the most part, with plural marriage on earth and with the amorous possibilities of Paradise. At the beginning of the story of Juan’s adventures, we find the fair and frail Julia seated in as pretty a bower:

As e’er held houri in that heathenish heaven
Described by Mahomet, and Anacreon Moore. (Byron 29)

When Juan spends the night in female guise among the beauties of the sultan’s harem, the poet pauses in his narrative to moralize, curiously enough, on the tiresomeness of polygamy:

Polygamy may well be held in dread,
Not only as a sin, but as a *bore*:
Most wise men with one moderate woman wed,
Will scarcely find philosophy for more;
And all (except Mohametans) forbear
To make the nuptial couch a “Bed of Ware.” (Byron 166-67)

In his allusion to Islam, Thomas Moore makes no distinction between history and legend. The Veiled Prophet, for example, compares Zelica’s position in his harem to Muhammad’s coffin, which Moore, like Southey, suspends at Medina:

Half mistress and half saint, thou hang’st as even
As doth Medina’s tomb, ’twixt hell and heaven! (Moore 385)

Unlike Southey who thought it incongruous to introduce statements derogatory to Islam into his *Thalaba*, Moore permits his non-Muslim characters to make the usual criticism of the religion. The Veiled Prophet- a heretic rather than a non-Muslim- in a soliloquy rivaling that of Voltaire’s Mahomet, derides the faith he pretends to represent:

Ye shall have miracles, ay, sound ones too,
 Seen, heard, attested, ev'ry thing- but true.
 A heav'n too ye must have, ye lords of dust,-
 A splendid Paradise, - pure souls ye must:
 That Prophet ill sustains his holy call,
 Who finds not heav'ns to suit the tastes of all;
 Houris for boys, omniscience of sages,
 And wings and glories for all ranks and ages. (Moore 383)

In "The Fire-Worshippers" the Muslim emir who conquers Persia is described, in words that come strangely from the Muslim story-teller, as:

One of that saintly murd'rous brood,
 To carnage and the Koran given,
 Who think through unbelievers' blood
 Lies their directest path to heav'n;-
 One, who will pause and kneel unshod,
 In the warm blood his hand hath pour'd
 To mutter o'er some text of God
 Engraven on his reeking sword. (Moore 416)

Still stronger is the language put into the mouth of the young leader of the fire-worshippers in his rage at his own countrymen- sons of Persia who look on:

And see her priests, her warriors driv'n
 Before a sensual bigot's nod,
 A wretch who shrines his lust in heav'n
 And makes a pander of his God. (Moore 416)

Shelley, in his short career as a poet, did not show that much interest in either Islam or Muhammad (PBUH). The title of his "Revolt of Islam" (1818) has beguiled many a Muslim students of English literature into reading the poem; never was a title more misleading. There is only one definite allusion to Islam, where an "Iberian" priest is mentioned. He made a common cause with the enemies of Christianity:

He dared not kill the infidels with fire
 Or steel, in Europe; the slow agonies
 Of legal torture mocked his keen desire:
 So he made truce with those who did despise
 The expiation and the sacrifice,
 That, though detested, Islam's kindred creed
 Might crush for him those deadlier enemies;
 For fear of God did in his bosom breed
 A jealous hate of man, an unreposing need. (Shelley 123)

In “Hellas” (1822) Shelley gives expression to the belief that the defeat of Turkey would mean the fall of Islam. The chorus sings:

The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set:
While blazoned as on Heaven’s immortal noon
The cross leads generation on. (Shelley 65)

Mahmud, the Sultan, fears that the end of Islam is nigh, and regrets that Islam should have had such triumphs in the past, which makes the bitterness of coming defeat more bitter still. In his speech, Christianity is symbolized by light and Islam by darkness:

O miserable dawn, after a night
More glorious than the day which it usurped!
O faith in God! O power on earth! O word
Of the great prophet, whose o’ershadowing wings
Darkened the thrones and idols of the West,
Now bright! (Shelley 328)

Four messengers arrive from different parts of the empire, announcing rebellion and revolt. The third messenger reports:

A Dervise, learned in the Koran, preaches
That it is written how the sins of Islam
Must raise up a destroyer even now. (Shelley 336)

And the unfinished prologue contains a curious three-cornered debate in eternity, among Christ, Satan and Muhammad (PBUH). The last speaker is Muhammad, who prays that decrescendo moon of Islam may again be filled with light:

Haste thou and fill the waning crescent
With beams as keen as those which pierced the shadow
Of Christian night rolled back upon the West,
When the orient moon of Islam rode in triumph
From Tmolus to the Acroceraunian snow. (Shelley 320)

Wordsworth’s earlier poems do not contain any allusion to Islam. But in his later career, he wrote “Ecclesiastical Sonnets” (1822), where there is one poem on the Crusades (No.XXXIV) that refers to the action of the Crusades: they are the consequences of Christian movement to arrest the progress of Islam. There are some references to the Crusades in one of his prose-works: “... the maintenance of Christianity and the reduction of power of the Infidels were the principal motives of the Crusades” (Wordsworth 164). There is almost a touch of fanaticism in “Crusades”:

.... they sweep along (was never
So huge a host!) – to tear from the Unbeliever
The precious Tomb, their heaven of salvation. (Wordsworth 336)

but to the poet it is welcome, and so it claims Christian support for its positive role to combat Islam. But it must be said that this uncatholic approach to Islam is not typical of Wordsworth. The zeal that he felt for Crusaders might have induced him to hurl curses on Muslims. There is one more occasion when we find the poet sharing the pride of the Crusades:

Furl we the sails, and pass with tardy oars
Through these bright regions, casting many a glance
Upon the dream-like issues the romance
Of many coloured life that Fortune pours
Round the Crusaders. (Wordsworth 338)

This spirit of antagonism is completely absent from "The Armenian Lady's Love" (1830). Wordsworth tells the story of a captive Crusader and an Armenian princess who escape together and together return to Europe. The lady loves the Crusader, but the Crusader may not return her affection, for he is married, and his faithful countess is waiting for him at home. They behave with strict decorum on the long journey, because the Crusaders were men with the highest ideals of conduct:

Judge both Fugitives with knowledge:
In those old romantic days
Mighty were the soul's commandments
To support, restrain, or raise.
Foes might hang upon their path, snakes rustle near,
But nothing from their inward selves had they to fear. (Smith 203)

The countess is equally high-minded, and she welcomes the fair virgin like a sister. All three live and die with perfect amity; and today we can see a tomb in a Saxon church:

Where a cross-legged Knight lies sculptured
As between two wedded wives. (Wordsworth 113)

Although the focus of the lines above is on the glorification of the moral conduct of the Crusader and the generosity of the countess, Wordsworth has shown a similar sympathy toward a Muslim lady.

One may wonder about the basis behind these varied attitudes towards Islam and Muhammad (PUBH). One should look at the history of contact between the Islamic East and Christian West. This history is one of prolonged hostility and mutual distrust. It is not surprising, therefore, that the image the West has formed of Islam and the Muslims has been a quite distorted one. As Jones observes, "the Occidental conception of Mohamet and his teachings come from literary sources than from actual observation of the Muslim people ... and the result is a combination of a little fact and much imagination of a very biased Character" (Jones 202).

By the eighteenth century the European image of Islam and the Muslims had long been stereotyped. Indeed , it went all the way back to the Middle Ages, where Islam as a religion figured largely in polemic writings, and the Muslims, almost universally called Saraceans , were present in the popular literature of the time.

The strategy of the Christian Polemicists, who varied greatly in the degree of their know ledge of Islam, remained the same from the beginning: to discredit Islam by using a rather limited number of standard criticisms. As Daniel points out, "The points in which Islam and Christianity differ have not changed, so that Christians have always tended to make the same criticisms; and even when, in relatively modern times, some authors have self-consciously tried to emancipate themselves from Christian attitudes, they have not generally been as successful as they thought themselves" (Daniel 1).

Common to all literature was the attack on the religion of Islam through the character of the Prophet. The attack upon the life of the Prophet was carried to great lengths. Daniel (1960) observes that the constant theme was that this man could not have been the bearer of true revelation. Muhammad they said, was a man of war, and more than war, of assassination; and he was a man of lust; and he was deceitful, a breaker of oaths. Two criticisms of Islam were explicitly related to the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The first is the imputation of violence as essentially a part of Islam. This was much stressed in the Middle Ages by the very people who practiced the Crusade. The other characteristic of Islam which was said to derive directly from Muhammad's life was the sexual laxity which was so popular a theme .

The diminishing danger of the Ottman Empire; the growing supremacy of British sea power increased contact between East and West , which resulted in an ever increasing output of travel books of more reliable nature than those of earlier ages; the rise of modern scholarship , which resulted in increased number of direct translations from Oriental languages , particularly Arabic- all of these elements , among others , contributed towards modifying the old image ,until practically a new one was created . In its own way, it was not completely accurate one either. If the earlier image was conditioned chiefly by religion, the new one was conditioned chiefly by aesthetics, as it were. The translation, early in the eighteenth century, of Galland's version of the *Arabian Nights*, stimulated an interest in the Orient that pushed religious matters to the background and nourished, instead a growing romanticism that was being fed by other contributory sources as well.

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