

SHELLEY'S ORIENTALIA: INDIAN ELEMENTS IN HIS POETRY

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Shelley, one of the major English Romantic poets, was greatly influenced by the Indian thought that reached him through the works of the early English Orientalists of his time. Although his dream of personally visiting India had never materialized, his favorite readings included Sir William Jones's poems and essays on Indian subjects in the 1770s, Captain Francis Wilford's essay, 'Mount Caucasus' (1801), Sidney Owenson's *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811) and James Henry Lawrence's *The Empire of the Nairs, or the Rights of Women; An Utopian Romance* (1811). This paper is an attempt to provide an account of the influence of these works on some of Shelley's major poems (such as *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Prometheus Unbound*, 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Adonais') in their setting, style and themes. As a revolutionary, Shelley was influenced by the forces of liberation and freedom suggested by oriental models as opposed to the hackneyed and overused neoclassicism of European literature. This paper will argue how his was an effort at a sympathetic understanding of India as a cradle of ancient civilization that knew no divide in terms of the so-called Western moral and racial superiority. His creative vision of India embraced an approach to integration as opposed to the Victorian reaction of mixed feelings. In fact, the Indian influence was not just a matter of stylistic embellishment away from the traditional but an indirect yet powerful means of attacking the Western political system he so passionately rebelled against.

Key words: The Orientalism controversy, the reductionist theory, visionary integration, ancient Indian civilization, freedom, transcendence.

Romantic ideals of love and romance, permanence and transcendence and freedom and liberation found expression through a variety of modes and motifs such as Hellenism, Medievalism, Pastoralism and Orientalism. Initially conceived as a fanciful exercise about passing curiosities of the East, Romantic Orientalism came to be connected with the rise and glory of Empire and the accompanying challenges and tensions, subsequently becoming more imaginative, academic and objective. Compared with the similar writings of the past, Romantic Orientalism claimed to be more realistic on account of the local details it made use of as at the same time it became more poetically interesting and suggestive. In the wake of European colonial expansion, many European writers, including the major English Romantic poets, participated in the

fashionable discourse of Orientalism, approaching their subject matter with scholarly disinterestedness and leading to the concept of Orientalism as a body of serious scholarly works on the Middle East and South Asia. Moving away from the earlier notion of the Orient as a mere exotic and extravagant fantasy of cheap commercial glamour, they viewed the Orient, according to Edward Said, in abstract, extracting terms, as a vague ideological rather than a historical geopolitical reality. Said, the foremost postcolonial literary critic, observed that Western writers set themselves off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self so that their Orientalist texts tell more about their own than our Asian culture. He argued that regardless of whatever academic or scientific objectivity they might lay claim to, their writings were ultimately a deliberate attempt to distort and misrepresent the 'other' in the colonized East with the end of managing, dominating and controlling it from a morally 'superior', unscrupulous, racist, imperialist and ethnocentric perspective.

Said's landmark theory, first laid out in his book *Orientalism* (1978), has been highly influential in the field of postcolonial study of the relationship between literature, history and culture. However, it has also been critiqued as problematic and controversial in its so-called sweeping generalization. As pointed out by Nigel Leask, "Said falls into the trap of constructing 'the West' in exactly the same ahistorical, essentialist terms as Europe's 'Orient', the object of his critique" and his theory fails to adequately respond to the fact that "...the 'Easts' of literary orientalism are as manifold, various, and historically contingent as the 'Wests' which produced them. Moreover, whilst Said is correct in mapping Orientalism on to the historical rise of empire, he seriously overestimates the confidence and unity of purpose of European imperialists and writers, failing to register adequately the anxiety, not to mention the critical scruples, which often underwrite oriental texts" (2005: 138-39).¹

Deirdre Coleman, quoted in Roe, agrees with Leask's qualification saying:

The principal complaints are that Said's conception of Orientalism is too monolithic, and his methodology too rigidly dichotomized between East and West. These limitations result not only in an Occidental stereotype of the racist Westerner but leave little scope for the multiplicity of orients imagined by hosts of writers, artists and scholars. Nor did Said's argument take account of what was so palpable in so many Orientalist texts—the anxiety of empire and its accompanying sense of European vulnerability. (2005: 247)

It is true that Said's somewhat overgeneralization at times ignores the other side of the coin: that oriental writings do indeed open up an exploration of the rich and complex cultural history of the East and do betray a sense of ironic doubt, ambiguity and mixed feelings not only about the East itself but also its occupation by the West. It needs to be pointed out here, however, that Said himself warned against reductionist readings of his argument that tended to be confined to a fixation on the binary opposition between the West and the Orient and a tendency to homogenize both categories.² He never entertained positions that might allow *Orientalism* to be used as a derogatory term rather than a scientific concept. Nonetheless, recent scholars, as shown above, have

¹ Also see Nigel Leask (1992).

² See the author's disclaimer in the afterword to Said (1995).

been trying to distance themselves from the supposedly over-reductive readings that Said made of Oriental texts.

All Orientalist writers were not equally comfortable about Western colonization of the East. This is especially true of Shelley, whose love of freedom, purity of ideals and transcendent philosophy rise far above the racist, ethnocentric and imperialist construction of an Indian East and thus defy Said's seemingly straight and clear-cut categorization. Shelley's singularly idealistic, humanist, selfless and morally unalloyed attitude to society, together with the influences that helped him learn about the greatness of ancient Indian civilization, made him look at India with unequivocal admiration and enchantment. Far from constructing an 'inferior' *other* out of it under the 'superior' moral vigil of the colonial power (in the sense Said defines Orientalism), he created an India exactly the opposite—a storehouse of transcendent mythic philosophy and visionary ideals to reach out to. This enabled him to create and embrace the India of his imagination and rise above the fray of politico-historical dichotomy with which the colonized India was so much fraught. The India that may have played into the hands of those who, in Said's view, tended to fall into the pit of misrepresentation and distortion and exaggeration was not the one he entertained and envisioned.

In critiquing Said, my contention is that Orientalist writers, be they travelers or diplomats, merchants or missionaries, instead of misrepresenting as a way of their racially-motivated strategy, were in fact truthful to their experience and to what they saw. And what they saw was indeed largely true about the culture of their colonized lands in the East as a whole. Instead of being prejudiced, they may have depicted a part only, just like any writer, which does not mean they were intentionally fragmenting, splitting, bifurcating, dissecting, slicing the East to inject race or power or were so weak and shortsighted that they were blind to the truth and beauty of the whole. No writer is ever under the obligation of understanding and speaking the whole truth and nothing but the truth. A writer's business is to be revealingly suggestive and insightful about part or otherwise and thereby evoke the possibilities of the rest within the demands of his craft and space.

European Orientalist writers were no exception. They learnt about India and let Indians learn about themselves and their Eastern heritage—rich and long and complex as it was—both from within and without, as far as they could, significantly contributing to the artistic utterance about the East. It was not (and can never be) the wholesale monopoly of only the native writers of one culture to educate and enlighten their people. Western Orientalists made a difference to this effect, more to the advantage of Indians than their own, and provided the very important dimension of how outsiders from the vantage point of a ruling position could afford to safely detach and distance themselves and look at Indians and examine them dispassionately and disinterestedly. They had the power and skill to rule and so they did. They said what they said about Indians without fear or favor and they were starkly true in what they said. Any denial of this would be attributable to the general sense of inferiority of those who have been subjugated for long and who still harbored that sense continually bred of their class-ridden, poverty-ridden and corruption-ridden society now ruled by their own domestic masters, postcolonial colonizers at home. Deprived of healthy freedom of expression

and with hardly any critical discrimination or accountability, but with doubtful moral transparency and much deep-seated fear and conflict of loyalties and interests either under the home-grown dynastic or dictatorial rulers or 'divide-and rule' foreign occupiers, it is the local writers, then, in the Arab, Turkish, Persian and Indian lands who were likely to fail (with exceptions, of course) to see and tell the real clear truth about themselves. Instead, they may have found an escapist second self in various internal or external agents—religion, nature, personal or spiritual love, apolitical, visionary ideas—for a cover-up. Even if they succeeded in describing what was happening on the ground, in society, their success was likely to be partial, incomplete, marred with bias, connivance and careful carelessness.

What follows below is a discussion of the influences on Shelley, especially Sir William Jones, whose works were an investigation of the greatness of India as a seat of one of the most ancient civilizations in the world. In 1812, Shelley ordered Jones's *Works* (1799), among nearly 70 other titles (White 1940: 243).

The literary history of Orientalism goes back to the time of Chaucer's 'The Man of Law's Tale' (1386), Knolles's *History of the Turks* (1603), much admired by Dr. Johnson and Lord Byron, and Purchas's *Pilgrimage* (1613), a key influence on Coleridge's oriental poem 'Kubla Khan'. It continued through the works of the Restoration writers such as Dryden, Waller, Milton (Persian and Indian elements in *Paradise Lost*, Bk. XI) and others dealing with India and other Easts. Since the publication of D'Herbelot's encyclopedic *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697), Antoine Galland's *Arabian Nights Entertainment* (1704-12) and many other influential works throughout the eighteenth century,³ there had been a popular demand for tales of diverse Eastern origins and settings—Chinese, Arabian, Egyptian, Turkish, Persian, Indian and Abyssinian—partly for a refreshing change from whatever was familiar and conservative and partly from a desire to indulge colonialist feelings or even to suggest the opposite, that is, freedom and liberation from all kinds of oppression and occupation, including the imperialist. Completely disregarding neoclassical restraint and discipline, such tales sometimes served to expose the folly and excesses of oriental traditions and cultures in a gothic manner and sometimes the beauty and excellence of them, indirectly implying by contrast a criticism of contemporary European Enlightenment mores and manners. At first there was a fascination for China during the greater part of the 18th century, which

³ Mention may be made of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) and *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Lord Lyttleton's *Persian Letters* (1735), William Collins' *Persian Eclogues* (1742, later as *Oriental Eclogues* in 1757), Horace Walpole's *Letters from Xo-Ho* (1757), William Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* (1762), John Hawkesworth's highly successful *Almorán and Hamet* (1761), and *Account of the Voyages...in the Southern Hemisphere* (1773), Alexander Dow's *Tales of Inatulla of Delhi* and *The History of Hindostan* (both 1768), his *Zingis* (a drama, 1769), and *Sethona* (also a drama, 1774), Frances Sheridan's 'Persian' *History of Nourjahad* (1767), a successful moral oriental novel, staged as a musical play, *Illusion* in 1813, Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759), Anquetil Duperron's French translation of the Zoroastrian *Zend-Avesta* in 1759 (English translation in 1771), *Travels in India*, and the *Upanishads* in 1786, Sir William Jones's essays and translations directly from Eastern origins in the 1780s, and William Robertson's *Historical Disquisition on Ancient India* (1791).

was later replaced by an interest in Indian, Arabian or Near Eastern elements in Romantic Orientalism. As pointed out by Leask, "William Hazlitt's criticism of the millionaire Beckford's collection of tacky chinoiserie seen at Fonthill Abbey" was just a telling sign of this shift of interest (2005: 140).

India was one of the major 'Easts' that occupied the attention of most orientalists. Despite the fact that it was ridiculed for its polytheism and other superstitious practices by the classically-minded Western intellectuals, they had a high regard for India as one of the most ancient civilizations of the world (Clarke 1997: 54-55). While Indian metaphysics and the Indian bent towards nothingness, inwardness and passivity were, philosophically speaking, in conflict with Enlightenment reason and rationalism, it was precisely these qualities that had a great appeal for the Romantic frame of mind and with which the Romantics engaged with great enthusiasm. "Stick to the East ... The North, South, and West, have all been exhausted ...the public are orientalizing, and pave the path for you", that was what Lord Byron wrote to Thomas Moore in May 1813, quoting his 'oracle' Madame de Stael, who advised him about "the only poetical policy" left to the poets. This was a year after Byron had achieved instant fame with the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. While Byron and Moore were highly successful in their oriental narratives, Southey unfortunately was not. His epic romances, *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), furnished with scholarly footnotes, were far from being popular, but they did not fail to leave a marked influence on other longer Romantic poems such as Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813), *Alastor* (1815) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) together with Keats's *Endymion* (1818) in their appropriation and assimilation of Eastern elements.

Of all the English Romantic poets, Shelley's handling of Indian thought, in line with his treatment of Platonic or any other body of thought, is characteristically most idealistic, imaginative and psychologically internalized. He uses both Eastern and Western machinery in a syncretic manner to convey his abstract visionary ideas about the historical and political realities of his time. Leask has observed of Shelley that his "interest in India transcends the level of biographical anecdote" and has quoted Edgar Quinet's remark that "Shelley is completely Indian" (1992: 71). Many earlier critics such as H. G. Rawlinson, Stoppord Brooke, James Cousins, Amiyakumar Sen and G. Wilson Knight stressed Shelley's interest in Indian lore and experience of things of the spirit.⁴ For instance, Rawlinson, as early as 1937, found the *Vedanta* philosophy "magnificently propounded" in *Adonais* (Clarke 1997: 59). Brooke considered the description of the moon in the orientalized lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound* (IV, 206-35) as a piece of nature-myth, which might equally be said of the moon-god in Indian mythology.

Cousins (1933) noted the reflection on Prometheus's transcendental philosophy of the Indian transcendental meditation represented by the system of *yoga*. The *yoga* system involves the discipline of devotion (*bhakti-yoga*), practice of the control of body and mind, and the path of action (*karma-yoga*) as it leads to the powerful final stage of what is called *raja-yoga*—the full expression of the Will and the regeneration of the complete individual in the realm of the spirit of wisdom. Cousins also noted the

⁴ Stoppord Brooke (1907: 153); James H. Cousins (1933: 35-36, 43); Amiyakumar Sen (1936: 243-70); G. Wilson Knight (1941: 211). All these critics have been noted in John Zillman (1959).

influence of the oriental sage Vasishta on Prometheus's suffering condition and selfless contribution. He thought that Vasishta's concept that the mere addition of the finite to the finite did not produce the infinite seemed to have been an influence when Shelley, for example, said that "the alleviations of his state,/ Prometheus gave to man, for which he hangs/ Withering in destined pain" (II.iv.98), with *alleviations* meaning different steps in the processes of civilization. If *alleviations* can be taken to mean different stages of civilization, then, in Cousins' view, those life-improving processes, finite as they were, could not proceed to their final manifestations, for their higher self, as embodied in Prometheus, was in bondage and thereby restrained from participating in the forces of creativity and further advancement (1933: 35-36). In other words, Prometheus, who represents the principle of highest perfection, was barred from taking those forces forward to the level of ultimate accomplishments.

Sen (1936) found a deep resemblance between the *Upanishadic*, thought to be the progress of Prometheus's lover Asia to the limit of ultimate reality, and Shelley's use of the veil image throughout to imply the difference between appearance and reality, inner truth and outer illusion. Sen also noted a parallel between the passive Indian goddess Iswara and the passive Prometheus, between the active Shakti and the active Asia, whose radiance fills the universe creating a new heaven and new earth, in the following passages: the concluding lines of I, 827-33; II. iii, 72-81; II, v, 26-30; III.iv, 190-204. Ellsworth Barnard suggested that Shelley's Demogorgon, in addition to many other sources, might owe something to the Hindu and Buddhist 'Karma' (1944: 86). Carl Garbo (1930) found the evidence of the concept of Nirvana—the sea of universal mind or spirit—in the concluding part of Act II, scene iv, 394-99, 565-69 (Barnard 1944). Woodberry observed that Shelley had almost a Buddhistic sympathy with life in its humblest form (qtd in Zillman 1959. III.iii, 91-93).

The young Shelley was highly influenced by the royal physician Dr. James Lind, who "in early life was a surgeon to an East Indiaman: a wanderer in strange lands", and who had "a love of Eastern wonders" and a liking for "tricks, conundrums and queer things". Shelley recalled his debt to Dr. Lind with fervor: "I owe to that man far more than I owe to my father; he loved me and I shall never forget our long talks where he breathed the spirit of the kindest tolerance and the purest wisdom" (qtd from Dowden 1926 in Peck 1926: 23). Influenced by Dr. Lind, who had gathered a fine collection of Indian and other Eastern curiosities during his travels, Shelley had developed an interest in Oriental lore. In early 1818, he and Mary visited the Indian library in the British Museum. Later he wrote to Peacock inquiring about the possibility of going to India in the employ of the East India Company. Peacock replied pointing out the practical impossibility of such a project (Brett-Smith and Jones 1934: 225-26).

However, it was the scholarly activities of Sir William Jones and the other learned members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded in Calcutta in 1784, that most influenced Shelley (and other Romantics) in their use of oriental elements.⁵ Jones and

⁵ Other well-known members of the Asiatic Society include Nathaniel Halhed (1751-1830), Charles Wilkins (1749-1836), who produced in 1785 the first translation of the great Hindu epic the Bhagavat-Gita, and Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837), who wrote essays on the religion and

his other colleagues were instrumental in transforming the oriental materials from a fanciful subject into a great oriental renaissance. There was a genuine pursuit of knowledge about classical India and its languages and literatures as a seat of one of the most ancient civilizations of the world. Jones's famous essays, 'On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations' (included in his *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatic Languages* of 1772) and 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India' (1784) and his 'Hindu Hymns' published through the 1780s—were all an attempt to discover the greatness of ancient India and to favorably compare and integrate it with that of the West. He praised the ancient Indian (and Persian) poetry for its exulting tone and expressive ideas and recommended the study of oriental models to instill new life into the worn-out neoclassical European literature. "The Asiatics excel[led] the inhabitants of our colder regions", Jones said, "in the liveliness of their fancy and the richness of their invention" and while "Reason and Taste [were] the grand prerogatives of the European mind, the Asiatics have soared to loftier heights in the sphere of Imagination" (quoted in Roe 2005: 141).

Jones's works celebrated the revival and rejuvenation of Hindu culture. He thought it was possible on account of a British initiative when Britain, as he says in the Argument to the *Hymn to Lakshmi*, was "a most extensive and celebrated Empire" (quoted in Roe 2005:142). He and his fellow orientalist have the credit of pioneering the idea of what Leask called *benign imperialism* and which characterized the orientalist interaction with India during the time of the increasing British colonial presence there. It finds a poetic expression in the closing lines of Jones's just-mentioned Hymn:

Oh! bid the patient Hindu rise and live ...
Now, stretch'd o'er ocean's vast from happier isles,
He sees the wand of empire, not the rod:
Ah, may those beams, that western skies illumine,
Disperse th' unholy gloom!

"By 1800, then", Leask argues, "orientalism had been transformed from the status of an exotic mercantilist commodity—a token of oriental luxury—into a form of knowledge which incorporated the iconography and mythology of Britain's Asiatic subjects into the nation's image repertoire, in precisely the manner demanded by William Jones" (2005: 141). It became more ethnographically and culturally informed as it became more critically discriminating, thereby becoming more authentic and original. It is demonstrated by the scholarly research that went into the composition of oriental poems and fictions and the long footnotes added to them.⁶

philosophy of the Hindus. Robert Southey acknowledges his debt to Jones in the Preface to *The Curse of Kehama* and in at least a dozen notes to that poem.

⁶ Samuel Henley's notes to Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) drawing upon the writings of Jones and others sources, Elizabeth Hamilton's notes to her epistolary novel *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1797) drawing upon the work of the Asiatic Society and prefaced by a 'Dissertation on the History, Religion and Manners of the Hindoos', Southey's *Curse of Kehama* (1810) following a decade of laborious research into orientalist sources and its complicated set of notes, Byron's Eastern tales and the notes added to them and Moore's *Lalla Rookh* and its notes are some of the examples of

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, mythology and comparative religion were among the most discussed fields, questioning the notion of a solely Christian state and implying an obvious challenge to the idea of Europe as representing the only dominating cultural or religious tradition. The awareness of other cultures which came with the British and European colonization of other lands across the oceans raised the level of anxieties about the empire and threatened the Western sense of cultural pre-eminence. Despite the fact that some orientalist only served to reinforce the superiority of the Christian religion and European cultural traditions and so to confirm the legitimacy of colonial occupation, knowledge of other myths and religions and languages and cultures was in fact a challenge to the classical and biblical traditions and deepened the doubt of the freethinkers who were already critical of the Christian hegemony.

The question of the origins of the European peoples had been the subject of intensive debate for some time, especially during the French Enlightenment tradition when, apart from the accounts of other cultures and traditions (such as those of native Americans, Pacific or Polynesian islanders, the Norse and Celtic myths and the ancient Icelandic sagas), India proved to be an especially interesting storehouse of knowledge and information. The biblical narrative, instead of being regarded as older in time, was considered to have derived from Hindu or Egyptian sources. Added to the pagan myths of Greek and Roman origin were the ancient cults of the East, both imparting a new immediacy and universality to each other and both having great similarities with each other.

Jesuit missionaries such as John Holwell and Alexander Dow, among other Western pioneers in Indian scholarship, had an Enlightenment inclination towards deism and hence a tolerant, universalistic outlook which made it possible for them to give a highly favorable account of the religious and philosophical ideas of India. They encouraged the belief that India was the source of all wisdom and that it had profoundly influenced the philosophical traditions of Ancient Greece. Their writings were influential with Voltaire (1694-1778) and helped him form his views on the antiquity of Indian religion and civilization. Voltaire held up Hinduism as an example of a natural deistic religion with origins older than those of Judaism and Christianity. Anquetil Duperron (1723-1805), who visited India between 1754 and 1761, developed an appreciation for diversities of culture and tradition and an openness for broad comparisons among them beyond the limits of Eurocentric orthodoxy only. This openness was evident in his recommendation that Indian classics be treated and studied with equal importance as given to those of Greece and Rome and that the teachings of the Upanishads be taken seriously rather than read for merely antiquarian interest. He was indeed one of the first thinkers to draw attention to parallels between Indian and Judaeo-Christian ideas. Of particular importance was the connection he made between Indian Brahmin philosophy and the German philosopher Kant's transcendental idealism. He became

how the new Romantic orientalism was rooted in a conscious appreciation for the reality of cultural and ethnographic details.

one of the favourite readings of another German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, who also was greatly influenced by Indian thought.

One of the most important themes running through Jones's writings on India and translations of Indian texts was the claim that European and Indian languages bore remarkable resemblances to each other. His discovery of the affinity of Sanskrit with Greek and Latin, proclaimed in his *Third Anniversary Discourse* to the Asiatic Society on 2 February 1786, laid the foundations of historical and comparative linguistics. He argued that Sanskrit was "more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident" (qtd in Cannon 1952: 45). Such a historical kinship based on grammatical structure rather than the etymological method of Jacob Bryant's *A New System; or Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1775), the source of his discourse, pointed to the probability that all three languages may have sprung from some common source. Jones's thesis of the Indo-European family of languages made it possible to make intercultural comparisons and contrasts with a far more solid basis than before.

Following the same line of argument about linguistic similarities, Jones conjectured that the European and Indian races may have sprung from a common source. As shown in the brief historical background above, he was an heir to over a century of speculation about migrations from Asia, but with his knowledge of Sanskrit he was able to bring more precision and authenticity to these speculations. In his *Ninth Anniversary Discourse on the Origin and Families of Nations* Jones argued that there was "incontestable proof . . . that the first race of Persians and Indians, to whom we may add the Romans and Greeks, the Goths and the old Egyptians or Ethiops, originally spoke the same language and professed the same popular faith", (qtd in Clarke 1997: 58) suggesting that Iran was the common place of origin and thus asking to exercise more caution in accepting the biblical account asserted by Bryant in his *Analysis*.

Bryant dismissed ancient pagan myths, idolatrous solar rituals and thereby the whole sceptical tradition of natural, erotic, allegorical and astronomical meanings as distortions of Noah's original monotheism following the catastrophic Flood. He stressed the authority of the Bible and the primacy of the biblical tradition, highlighting the significance of Ham, whose Cushite generations, through his wicked grandson Nimrod, builder of the tower of Babel, settled all over the world in the way of colonial occupation, preserving and disseminating its original language. Bryant argued that the whole range of ancient civilizations were all of Cushite descent, a fact etymologically supported by the Cushite roots of their languages. It is this discovery of etymological similarity, which, while lacking in convincing proof in consideration of the fact that he had no knowledge of oriental languages, made him argue that Noah was the origin of a range of ancient mythological figures from Prometheus to Osiris.

On the other hand, armed with his knowledge of a number of oriental languages including Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, Jones provided a scholarly critique of Bryant's argument and rejected his notion that ancient myths were actually distorted memorials of Noah and his family. When he said that "the whole crowd of gods and goddesses in ancient Rome and modern Varanes [in India] mean only the powers of nature, and principally those of the SUN" (qtd in Clarke 1997: 58) he came strikingly close to the

allegorical and intellectual freethinking position of sceptics such as Erasmus, Darwin and Constantin Volney, the latter arguing in his *The Ruins, or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires* (1791) that the “Gods, who act such singular parts in every system, are no other than the physical powers of nature, the elements, the winds, the meteors, the stars, all of which have been personified by the necessary mechanism of language, and the manner in which objects are conceived by the understanding”(qtd in McCalman 1999: 339-41).

Jones, however, did not belong to the radical, naturalist and libertine tradition of skeptics nor did he side with any religious conservative brand as he was careful in endorsing or defending the full prior authority of the Bible too.⁷ Accepting the Deluge as “a historical fact admitted as true by every nation”, he believed that the children of Ham, Shem and Japhet had settled in Iran but gradually lost their common original language, a process commemorated in the tower of Babel episode in Genesis. Only the children of Shem—the Jews—maintained the record of universal history in an uncorrupted form. Jones concurred with Bryant in his account of the Christian diffusionist tradition according to which all the peoples of the world descended from the survivors of the Flood and the Cushite children of Ham—“the most ingenious and enterprising of the three, but the most arrogant, cruel and idolatrous”—spread into India, China, America, Egypt, the Mediterranean and Scandinavia, preserving the common linguistic and mythological heritage (qtd in McCalman 1999: 339-41).

Jones had explored the matter in his deeply syncretic ‘On The Gods of Greece, Italy and India’, which established a direct relationship between the Romantic interest in Hellenistic culture as shown by Shelley, Keats, Peacock and Barry Cornwall and the ‘oriental renaissance’ inaugurated by himself and his fellow scholars of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The influential essay, built on his discovery of the common linguistic roots of Sanskrit and European languages, compared the Hindu with the Greco-Roman classical pantheon, concluding that the gods worshipped under different names were in fact identical. It was thus a pioneering exercise in mythographical syncretism identifying the Hindu and Greco-Roman pantheons as similar. The synthesizing argument had a powerful influence on Shelley who exploited the analogy between Greek and Hindu deities in *PU (Prometheus Unbound)* and represented Prometheus’s rebellion against the tyrannical Jupiter as a geopolitical reunification of the ‘European’ hero with his lover ‘Asia’. Drawing on the sceptical tradition of exposing the primitivism and irrationalism of Christian orthodoxy, *PU* suggested how closely linked

⁷ The European sceptical tradition was represented by Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), Voltaire (1694-1778), Jean-Sylvain Bailly (1736-93), Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), Pierre Francois D’Hancarville (1719-1805), Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803), Charles Dupuis (1742-1809), Thomas Paine (1737-1809), Constantin Francois Volney (1757-1820), Richard Payne Knight (1751-1824), Louis Langles (1763-1824), Sir William Drummond (1770-1828), the Revd Robert Taylor (1784-1844), also called the ‘Devil’s Chaplain’, and G. S. Faber (1773-1854), among others, all of whom sought to undermine the chronological and spiritual priority of the Bible by often maintaining a polytheistic account of cultural and religious origins and that the biblical narrative had derived from Hindu (Vedantic) or Egyptian sources and that the Hindu chronology was superior to the Mosaic one. Jones disagreed with them.

was Shelley's admiration for classical Greece in *Hellas* to the search for the Asiatic roots of Greek myth.

Jones's liberating ideas opening up a new world of knowledge and learning about the East, especially India, were to have a great influence on the contemporary European mind and forced it to rethink about its sense of complacent superiority more critically. The German Romantic scholar Friedrich Schlegel, after reading Jones's work, exclaimed: "Everything, absolutely everything, is of Indian origin!" (qtd in Roe, 2005:142). The Indo-European 'Aryan' tradition provided German intellectuals with a more ancient and spiritual heritage than the 'Frenchified' civilizations of the Mediterranean. This was very useful to the Romantics who wanted to break out of what they saw as the narrowness of the Judeo-Christian tradition and marked a further step towards a more universal conception of humanity. It was vital in shaping the intellectual background of the oriental writings of Walter Savage Landor, Robert Southey, Lord Byron, Shelley and Thomas Moore, who "adapted [Jones's] forms, themes, style, and subject matter, preceded by the fantastic evocations of Eblis in William Beckford's famous novel *Vathek* (1784), which was itself influenced by Jones's evocation of the dreamworld of pleasure" (qtd in Cannon and Brine 1995: 41). Jones's translation, in 1790, of Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, the most famous specimen of dramatic literature from classical India, profoundly influenced European poetry from Shelley's *Alastor* to Goethe's *Faust*. The curse, the spirits, pastoral setting, defeat of the enemy, and the final reconciliation of Dushyanta and Sakuntala in the realm of the immortals have been variously worked out in *Prometheus Unbound*.

Shelley's romantic orientalism avoids being realistic and defies categorization in terms of the elements of typical or general cultural traditions. This sets him apart from other Romantic poets like Southey, Byron or Moore. His orientalist quest romances such as *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound* are all internalized versions of the drama of cultural encounter taking place in the realm of dream and exhibiting a psychological quest for the feminized 'epispsychidion' or 'soul within a soul'. His visionary thoughts and ideas show a great influence of Jones's well-received allegorical *Hindu Hymns* written over a number of years before they were first published in 1785, then 1810, 1816 and 1818. The nine *Hymns* addressed to nine Indian deities take their subject matter from Indian mythology and religion but in spirit and style they are a reworking of elements from diverse sources such as Plato, Pindar, Milton, Pope, Gray and the Bible.⁸ Garland Cannon is of the opinion that the *Hymn to Lakshmi*, which was inspired by the *Bhagavad-Gita*, foreshadowed Shelley in its allegorization of Lakshmi's qualities as the world's great mother and preserving power of nature (Cannon 2006: 236). The reconciliation of the dreadful Durga with her lover Siva in a mystic wood, the tribute paid to the sun god Surya by using many of his Sanskrit epithets, the description of Ganga's fabulous birth, her wanderings and nuptials with Brahma's son, the vision of the wonders of Indra, god of the abode of immortals in the firmament and his "empyrean train...mounted on the sun's bright

⁸ For example, while the *Hymns* to Durga and Bhavani use the manner and style of Pindar's Nemean Odes, *Hymn to Ganga* shows the measure and diction of Gray.

beam”, and the beautiful allegorical pictures of Kamdeo, the Indian Cupid and his being reduced to a mental essence when he attempts to wound Mahadeo suggested a possibility that the hymns were an influence behind the formation of much of Shelley’s symbolic expression used to convey his ideal dreams and abstract ideas. Jones’s imagery of the caves as when in the *Hymn to Surya* he says the sun-god Surya “Draws orient knowledge from its fountains pure, / /Through caves obstructed long and paths too long obscure...” (Jones, Lady, ed. 1779. II.50) is very common in Shelley and Coleridge, who use it to suggest the sources of metaphysical speculations and transcendent love.

According to De Sola Pinto (1946: 694), Shelley’s transition from his early atheistic materialism to the mystical pantheism of his mature works was largely due to a study of Jones’s writings.⁹ Pinto also points out a great similarity in style between Shelley and Jones. For example, the “Champak odors” falling “Like sweet thoughts in a dream” in Shelley’s ‘The Indian Serenade’, champak being a kind of magnolia-like flower, derived from Jones’s *Hymn to Indra*. Shelley’s poem, in which an East-Indian young woman is singing a serenade, is a dramatic imitation of an Oriental love-song of Turkish origin translated by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and mentioned in a letter of hers in April 1717. The Indian woman’s love-dream is melting like the champaka’s odor. Shelley himself acknowledged that he took the reference to the gold-coloured flower from Jones who had mentioned about how its elegant appearance on the black hair of Indian women supplied the Sanskrit poets with elegant allusions (Swinden 1976: 187, 195).

Similarly, the description of Love as a “planet-crested shape” with “lightning braided pinions” in *PU* is reminiscent of Jones’s “starry-crowned” Kamdeo with “locks in braids ethereal streaming” (De Sola Pinto 1946: 692). Shelley’s Queen Mab arrives to curb her swift coursers by the use of her “lines of rainbow light” (i.54), which was probably hinted at by Jones’s “Such heaven-spun threads of color’d light serene / As tinge the reins, which Arun guides” (*Hymn to Surya* : in Franklin, ed. 1995: 272).¹⁰ Shelley must have read *Hymn to Kamdeo* before June 21st of 1811 when he wrote to Elizabeth Hitchener about the “sacrifice” he was making at “the altar of the Indian Camdeo”. The last and best-known *Hymn to Narayana* with its description of the most divine attributes of the Supreme Being and His manifestation in different forms suggesting various archetypal ideas and the perception of primary and secondary qualities through Narayana’s chief epithets was perhaps the most influential with Shelley. As Hewitt (1942: 57) points out, the form of this hymn inspired that of Shelley’s ‘Intellectual Beauty’. Jones’s description of the remote, primeval deity may have been the inspiration for Keats’s opening lines in *Hyperion* (Sharp 1937: 100).

Another influence on Shelley was Jones’s *The Palace of Fortune* (1769), taken from a number of Indian and Eastern sources. In the poem, the abstract characters in the form of Pleasure, Glory, Riches and Knowledge are destroyed by the very wishes they sought to be granted, the moral being that human wishes are vain and empty. The discontented maiden Maia, whose name means illusion, well understands the great moral lesson after

⁹ Coleridge, after an initial, youthful idealization of India, rejected Indian philosophy as a form of pantheism. See John Drew (1987: 186-88).

¹⁰ By his own admission, Southey was indebted to Jones’s picture in his description of the same character as one who “check’d the rainbow reins” in *The Curse of Kehama* (VII, St. 7).

seeing what happened to those personified characters. Like the earlier *The House of Superstition* (1762) by Thomas Denton, Jones's poem exploits an enchanting dream-vision and the associated psychological complexities adapted from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-1609). In both Denton and Jones, a human protagonist becomes magically transported to a celestial fairy world where he observes the universal conflicts in the human mind between the attractions of sensual pleasure and the call of duty.

Shelley must have read Jones's *The Palace of Fortune* before writing the description of Queen Mab's palace (ll. 29-39).¹¹ In a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, dated June 11, 1811, Shelley referred to "the true style of Hindoostanish devotion", alluding to Jones's poem. E. Koepfel (1900: 43-53) and Marie Meester (1915: 38) remarked on the similarities between *The Palace of Fortune* and *Queen Mab*: both poems tell of a sleeping maiden (Ianthe in *QM*), who is taken up to a fairy-court by a supernatural figure (the goddess Fortune in Jones's poem; the queen of spirits Queen Mab in Shelley's poem) and who is shown realistic visions by the supernatural figure, who seems to know all about mankind. Both critics said that Shelley took the idea of his two women, Ianthe and Queen Mab, from Jones's poem and explained other similarities in thought and expression.

Shelley was also influenced by the work of Captain Francis Wilford, a fellow member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, who represented the most extravagant development of Jones's linguistic research. Wilford claimed that all European myths were of Hindu origin and that India had produced a Christ whose life and works closely resembled the Christ of the Bible. The ten articles which he contributed to *Asiatic Researches* between 1799 and 1810 provided a rich source for poets like Southey and Shelley. Unlike the cautious Jones, who paralleled only Hindu and Greco-Roman traditions, Wilford was more interested in tracing parallels between Hindu and Jewish traditions. He claimed to have discovered a Sanskrit version of the story of Noah. In 'Mount Caucasus' (1801), Wilford argued for a Himalayan location of Mt. Ararat, claiming that *Ararat* was etymologically linked with *Aryavarta*, a Sanskrit name for India. Shelley embraced Wilford's thesis with enthusiasm: he set both his *Alastor* and *Prometheus Unbound* in Wilford's Hindu Kush and Cashmere (McCalman 1999: 341-42). In *Alastor*, the poet-protagonist's journey takes him back through human history (that is, Arabia, Persia, over the Hindu Kush mountains, which form the Indian Caucasus extending from Afghanistan to Kashmir in north-west India) to "the thrilling secrets of the birth of time" (l.128).

In *Prometheus Unbound* too, Shelley moves the location from the Russian Caucasus on the Caspian to the Indian Caucasus "as the scene for his drama because it was thought to be the cradle of civilization" (qtd in O'Neill 1998: 264). It makes him contemplate about a world of "thrice three hundred thousand years" (l.74) and "boundless space and time" (l.301). The "eagle-baffling mountain,/ Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb,/ Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life" (ll.20-22) to which Prometheus had been bound for three thousand years was believed, Duncan Wu

¹¹ The same poem (*The Palace of Fortune*) furnished Southey with many images in his account of the chariot of Arvalan and his description of Glendoveer in *The Curse of Kehama* (XI, 12 and VII, 4).

(1999: 867) notes, to have been the original home of the human race, and was associated with the golden age, thus being appropriate as the location for the birth of a second golden age. Commenting on the metaphysical aspect of *Prometheus Unbound*, Mary Shelley said what was akin to the spirit of Indian metaphysics,

Shelley develops, more particularly in the lyrics of this drama, his abstruse and imaginative theories with regard to the Creation. It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout the poem. They elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction, but they are far from vague...He considered these philosophical views of mind and nature to be instinct with the intensest spirit of poetry. (qtd in Noyes 1980: 282)

In *PU* the Greek Prometheus has been redefined as a syncretic figure analogous to the Greek Dionysus, the Persian Zoroaster, the Jewish Noah and the Hindu Rama. Wilford's essays made one ask the subversive question of "whether the Hindu Brahmins borrowed from Moses or Moses from the Hindu Brahmins".

For some of his Indian elements Shelley owes a great debt to James Henry Lawrence, a friend of William Godwin, both of whom were members of the radical Newton-Boynville circle in the early 1800s. Shelley wrote to Lawrence twice and met him more than once. In line with the Godwinian philosophy, Lawrence was an advocate of a feminist and freelothe theory. His four-volume romance, *The Empire of the Nairs; or the Rights of Women. A Utopian Romance* (1811), is an illustration of the matriarchal and matrilineal practices of the Nair people of the Malabar coast in Kerala, a noble cast of Hindus who had come under the rule of the East India Company in 1792. The work, which was originally published in German in 1801, came to be regarded as an extraordinary feminist tract after Mary Wolstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Dismissing the anti-utopian position of Thomas Malthus's *Essay on Population* (1798) in which he argued that the geometric rise in population due to the uncontrollable desire to procreate would defeat every effort to help the poor, Lawrence recounted the endless evils of the existing European system of marriage and approvingly described the sexual customs of the vibrant South Asian community of the Nairs in *The Empire*. The novel left a deep influence on the young Percy Shelley, who read it more than once and thought it was the greatest argument against matrimony. In a letter to Lawrence enclosed with a separate letter to his publisher Thomas Hookam of August 17, 1812, Shelley enthusiastically declared himself "a complete convert" to Lawrence's doctrines which called for the abolition of marriage as a form of licensed prostitution, and for inheritance and child-raising to be the responsibility of the mother. In the letter to Hookam, Shelley said, "I have read his Empire of the Nairs, nay, have it, perfectly and decidedly do I subscribe to the truth of the principles which it is desired to establish" (White 1940: 241-42; Jones, Frederick L. 1964: 322-22).

Shelley was to adapt and incorporate Lawrence's critique of Christian marriage and other elements of his plot and imagery in *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna* and *Rosalind and Helen* (qtd in Peck 1925: 246-49, and in Graham 1925: 881-91). Although a liberal attitude towards marriage and the insistence that unions be bonded by love and affection rather than by financial consideration were common in 18th century writings, the radical Lawrence and Shelley were for complete sexual freedom, where motherhood

of any type was highly rewarded and the concept of *father* was unknown. In their free-love utopia, like most of the utopias of discovery, primitivism was equated with virtue and the path of 'nature' formed the basis of a romantic ideal of love. But this same ideal also implied a turning away from the tradition of impractical and artificial courtly love and chivalric romanticism, with its inflated conception of female virtue or male constancy.¹²

Shelley drew inspiration from his reading of Lady Morgan's novel *The Missionary* (1811), on which he wrote, the same year, "The only thing that has interested me ... has been one novel. It is Miss Owenson's *Missionary, an Indian Tale*. Will you read it? It is really a divine thing. Since I have read this book I have read no other—but I have thought strangely".¹³ In the view of Leask, Morgan's tale of the love between Hilarion, a Portuguese missionary in India, and the Brahamachira priestess Luxima (Lakshmi), is an allegory of the desire for union between cultural opposites: "Anticipating the Byron/Moore plot resolution, Luxima is killed by Catholic bigots and the grieving missionary Hilarion retires to a cave in Kashmir to venerate her memory, true to Morgan's liberal opposition to evangelical activity in British India" (Roe 2005: 145).

Shelley's *Alastor* owes some of its scenery and much of its basic idea to Owenson's novel, which, as mentioned above, is the story of a priest who tries to lead a life of isolated high idealism, who forsakes this way of life to follow Ideal Beauty in the form of a beautiful priestess and thereby comes to ruin. The novel contains journeys and wonderful scenery, including a Tartar horse; so does *Alastor*. The meeting of Hilarion and Luxima in the sacred glen suggests the closing episode of Shelley's poem. Both works have a common moral: that meditative introspection may lead to the pursuit of virtue but too much of it causes gloom, depression and disaster.¹⁴

The quest narrative in *Alastor* describes the journey the protagonist undertakes to the East in search of self-knowledge and this involves the discovery of the "thrilling secrets of the birth of time". Shelley's version of the erotic encounter in the vale of Kashmir, Leask argues, is clearly a dream vision in which the visionary maid is represented "as a prophetess of secular republican, rather than orientalist, enlightenment" (1992:140). He goes on to say that Keats's narrative poem *Endymion*, written in response to Shelley's *Alastor*, reworks the quest romance structure and yields to the orientalist fashion by affording an important role to the Indian Maid in the poem's final book. In the syncretic fabric of *Prometheus Unbound*, again to follow Leask's observations, Shelley's quest romance takes place in the oriental setting of Hindu Kush, far away from the setting of his source, Aeschylus' tragedy, with the Caucasian Prometheus's lover named *Asia*. This time the lovers end in triumph, reunited in the cave after the fall of Jupiter, the symbol of tyranny, imperialist power and oppression and religious dogma. Jupiter's drinking of the "Daedal cup" (*PU*, III. i.

¹² Mary Shelley also read Lawrence but was less impressed by his utopian program, which she partially parodied in *Frankenstein*. See D. S. Neff (1996).

¹³ See Shelley's letter to Hogg, June 27, 1811 in White (1940: 140, 144, 147).

¹⁴ For more details of the connection between *The Missionary* and *Alastor*, see A. M. D. Hughes, (1912: 293-39).

26-32) and his being overthrown are based on the evil king Kehama's draining of the 'Amreeta Cup' at the end of Southey's Hindu epic, *The Curse of Kehama*.

As noted at the beginning of this essay, Romantic orientalism coincided with the growth and development of a scholarly discourse about the East in the wake of European colonial expansion. According to Edward Said, this discipline of scholarly discourse known as orientalism was invented to support the larger imperialist project of making the process of colonization more successful and lasting. As discussed above, this new enterprise cannot be said to be true in the case of Shelley, whose agenda did not include exporting and universalizing Western culture in the East. In his visionary love of freedom, he transcended Western imperial ambitions and came to be critical of a Western mode for allowing the domination of the Orient. His discourse of orientalism was without the pretension of knowing the East to disseminate distortions about the East; it was rather a sympathetic effort at the understanding and exploration of the East which was as great and old as - if not greater and older than - the Western sources of knowledge and civilization and needed to be integrated with the latter.

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