

Writing Self/Writing Colony in situ: Expatriate British Poetry in India

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IN THE SUMMER of 1853, a concerned Oxford don urged his Member of Parliament to exert his utmost influence to secure appointments in India for graduates of the university: "I cannot conceive a greater boon which could be conferred on the University than a share in the Indian appointments" (qtd. in Moore 89). The author of the letter was the illustrious Dr. Benjamin Jowett; the Member for Oxford was none other than the future Prime Minister of England, William Gladstone. Jowett, along with other prominent people of his age, was convinced that only the best educated and the most accomplished of Britain's young men deserved to be sent to India. Moreover, Jowett was certain that such appointments were likely to bring glory and "incalculable advantages" even to the country's pre-eminent university. Jowett's sense of the significance of the Indian appointments was based not only on shrewd foresight—India was to become the centrepiece of the British empire a few years later, in 1859—but also on a long-standing tradition which prompted bright, well-educated, and imaginative British young men to seek careers in India. A tenure in India had already been the prelude to brilliant career success at home for no small number of ex-India hands, Thomas Babington Macaulay and Charles Trevelyan being only two of the most notable examples.

While colonial America and Australia were often the destinations of Britain's socially disadvantaged classes, many of its brightest young men, equipped by the nation's best educational facilities, were gravitating toward India for nearly a century before Jowett wrote his letter to Gladstone. The East India Company had been operating for many decades the Haileybury

College, a special training institute for its prospective employees in India. For those already arrived in India, the Company ran Fort William College in Calcutta. It is needless to point out that specialized institutions like these were virtually unprecedented in European secular educational history. It is perhaps an ironical reflection on the immense attractiveness of an Indian career that admission to the Haileybury programme was frequently obtained through favoritism and nepotism. As early as 1813, it had been proposed that Indian appointments were too important to be made on the basis of backstairs influence, and that selection of students for the College ought to be made by competitive examination (Moore 86). One can gauge the prestige attached to employment in India—and get a sense of the social background and personal calibre of those selected for such appointments—from the fact that in 1855, when the Indian Civil Service Examinations were held for the first time, nearly seventy percent of the successful candidates were from Cambridge and Oxford universities (Moore 93). After the annexation of India by England in 1859, the profile of Indian appointments rose even higher in the British public eye because in addition to the earlier motivating factors of romantic adventuresomeness, business enterprise, missionary zeal, and thirst for knowledge was now the new factor of imperial responsibility.

The subject of my paper is the literary output, more specifically the poetry, of a small number of British expatriates in India who, during the nineteenth century, produced their writings in the midst of other pre-occupations. The point of this longish preamble has been to indicate that these expatriate writers were exceptional people with especially keen minds. In many remarkable ways they provide a strong contrast to the often naive and intellectually unprepared expatriate writers of other British colonies. The contrast is heightened by the fact that unlike the other colonies, India, with its established cultural traditions, institutions, and a vast body of written literature, often produced in the minds of these educated expatriate authors an inescapable sense of belatedness. Although instances of racial arrogance and intellectual obtuseness are far from rare, what makes the works of the major expatriate writers interesting is a peculiar combination of

a sharp sense of exile and an equally unavoidable sense of appreciation for and insight into the unique nature of the alien context. The resulting literary phenomenon provides especially fertile and intriguing material for study from postcolonial theoretical positions. (As I argue below, in particular it renders Edward Said's notion of "Orientalism" quite problematic.) The location of this literature, the total entity called India, was at once a scene of appropriation, transgression, self-obliteration, and self-recovery. The drama was played with varying intensity and psychic signification in the works of the different poets.

Given their superb intellectual preparation, most of these expatriate British writers were not only unwilling to arrive but also incapable of arriving at obtusely one-sided or simplistic conclusions about their experience. (I say "British" because some were decidedly not English, and this is a significant fact for us.) As Herbert Gowan has pointed out, Macaulay's disdainful attitude towards Indian civilization was quite untypical: "Even where the sense of being an exile manifests itself in a wistful regard for things left far behind, there is as a rule an attitude poles apart from the narrow Macaulayan conviction" (529). Moreover, Gowan has remarked that of all the colonies it was only in India that the foreigner did not inevitably have the sense of "being but a part of a garrison" (530). Given, for example, Northrop Frye's well-known view that Canadian literature has traditionally expressed a colonial and "garrison" mentality, Gowan's observation about British expatriate writers in India is particularly noteworthy. It points to the historically unique nature of the encounter that took place: between a highly evolved and ponderable—because written and institutionalized—culture (rather than a supposedly silent landscape that needed to be articulated—Robert Frost's "unstoried, artless" land [Frost 467]) and a special kind of acute and alert European mind (rather than that of the usually hapless émigré). The response to the experience could not have been other than complex, in most cases also paradoxical.

I find this paradoxicality and complexity in the encounter between India and these writers especially noteworthy because they interrogate, and supplement, Edward Said's inflexible view

of "Orientalism." "Orientalism," as Said describes it for us, is a onesided, manipulative process: "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (*Orientalism* 3). Although he is very scrupulous in declaring the limits of the discursive process he defines, Said appears unwilling to grant any power to the Orient, or to ascribe a dynamic or dramatic nature to the cultural confrontation between the East and the West. For example, when it comes to discussing India, *Orientalism* makes no mention of Milton Singer's monumental work, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*. Again, while Said labels K.M. Panikkar's *Asia and Western Dominance* as a "classic" (5), he makes no use of the Indian author's insights into the dialogic nature of Asian-Western relations, preferring rather to focus on the word "dominance" in the book's title. We know that Indians and Chinese had long-standing and firmly entrenched views about their *own* absolute cultural superiority (Panikkar 455-56; Graham 31-32). If the individual Orientalist was not entirely obtuse, he inevitably experienced *in situ* some fracture in his ego, some assault upon the wholeness of his cultural identity. When he was, moreover, an artist his art had to reflect some of that cultural and psychological negotiation. Said's book is virtually silent about these matters.

No doubt this neglect sharpens the political focus of Said's "Orientalism" project, but it also produces unfortunate results. The sheer influence of *Orientalism* on subsequent postcolonial theorizing has generated and privileged a historically inaccurate and intellectually indefensible notion of a uniformly passive oriental world. So, in a curious and ironical way Said's work, in effect, has perpetuated "Orientalist" thinking in our times.¹ It is necessary to intervene in Said's discourse of Orientalism as a "corporate institution" (3), and to reexamine the phenomenological scenes on which certain other kinds of Orientalist textual productions took place.

Said has declared, "I doubt that it is controversial, for example, to say that an Englishman in India or Egypt in the later nineteenth century took an interest in those countries that was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies" (11). I suggest that it is not only possible but also right to doubt the

validity of this ad hoc assumption. In the first place, not all "Englishmen" were, in fact, English—and the rise of Scottish, Irish, and Welsh nationalism can be prominently dated back to the historical period Said is here investigating. Furthermore, Said appears to conflate all kinds of textual productions into an overall "text" of Orientalism which he then characterizes as a "genre": "a genre of Orientalist writing" (53).

However, once we extricate the individual sojourner in India from the prototype "Englishman," and recover specific *literary works*, specially poems, from the generic Orientalist text, we start noticing very different (and exceptionally slippery) power relations at work. This procedure, which results in the enabling of India and the empowerment of the individual author, is not merely a sentimental one. Since Said constructs for us the lineaments of a very powerful, perhaps unmatched, cultural discourse, it is correspondingly important for us to identify clearly its limits and its inherent gaps. Only then can we make really informed use of Orientalism. Said, the author of *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, repeatedly alerts us to the fact that texts are "worldly"; in *Orientalism*, he had not yet fully recognized all the implications of that further insight. Rather, he was himself gathered up in the sweep of his own master narrative.

I

My specific subject here is the presence of diverse degrees of alienation in the poetry of three expatriate British writers not once mentioned by Edward Said: John Leyden (1775-1811), Reginald Heber (1783-1826) and Ronald Ross (1857-1932). These were not men whose primary vocation, even primary avocation, was the writing of poetry. At the same time, however, all of them acquired a remarkable measure of contemporary acclaim as poets of distinction. In the case of Leyden, that reputation was particularly high in Britain, and his untimely death in Asia at the age of thirty-six was at that time seen by many as a serious blow to English poetry. This must be considered a matter of some significance because it was a time when the poetic scene in Britain was presided over by the likes of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Walter Scott. It is important

to remember that Scott's own antiquarianism, so vitally significant in the creation of his sense of Scottish cultural nationalism, was directly influenced by his friend Leyden. In "Memoirs of Leyden," published in the *Edinburgh Annual Register*, 1811, Scott wrote, "I knew him, a lamp too early quenched," and in a "Dirge" of more than usual sincerity—that is, more sincere in tone than run-of-the-mill occasional elegies—Scott expressed his sentiments in this way:

His bright and brief career is o'er,
And mute his tuneful strains;
Quenched is his lamp of varied lore,
That loved the light of song to pour;
A distant and a deadly shore
Has Leyden's cold remains. (435)

Any "distance" can be, of course, measured from its two ends. From Scott's sincerely mourning perspective this was a deadly distance. But if we believe existing accounts of the circumstances of Leyden's death, we have to acknowledge that the distant location where he was fatally afflicted must have also given him a paradoxical sense of homecoming unavailable to the stay-at-home Scott. Surely, the *manner* of Leyden's death tells us something useful about the unusual mental quality of the people we are studying. In March 1811, Leyden sailed out of Madras toward the East Indies, particularly the southern end of the Malay Peninsula and toward Java. He was part of a military and diplomatic offensive launched by the British against rather shaky French and Dutch initiatives to bring about colonial rule in these areas. Lord Minto, Governor of the East India Company from 1807 to 1813, had personally sought Leyden's assistance in this mission because of the latter's extraordinary command of various Asian languages (he was a Professor of Hindusthani at Fort William College during part of his stay in India)² and his generally open-minded and humane interest in the peoples of Asia and their cultures. These qualities made Leyden an important diplomatic aid in what appears to have been a relatively civilized phase of British colonial history.

In August, five months after setting out from India, and after easily overcoming whatever little military resistance came its way,

the East India Company force occupied Java and entered Batavia, the capital. Although he was a member of what was ostensibly an occupying military force, Leyden took the earliest opportunity available to him in the new city to pursue the activity most congenial to his nature: researching linguistic and anthropological questions. He discovered an abandoned library containing an invaluable collection of rare books and manuscripts. In a typically eager manner, Leyden entered the long unused building without first having it aired and dusted. Being exposed to the "noxious vapours" in the ancient library, Leyden fell ill. He died before the month was over. Contemporary accounts suggest that Leyden, who was by training and profession a medical doctor, was not unaware of the possible serious consequences of his impulsive action, but the several months of military campaign and transient life had caused him such intellectual starvation that he was unable or unwilling to postpone even for a short while entering his essential home—an archive filled with books and manuscripts (Brown, "Memoir" in *Leyden* lxxxix-xc).

This account of John Leyden's death may have been somewhat overblown by its chroniclers, but the particular employment of this "historical" narrative (to use Hayden White's term somewhat freely) is especially effective in foregrounding a personality type that was peculiar but not rare in colonial India. Also, ample contemporary evidence, including that from Minto, makes it difficult for us to discount the essential details of the history. The important point to note, of course, is that an "exiled" British like Leyden was precisely the kind of expatriate European who, across the great geographical gulf, made possible the so-called "second" renaissance of Europe. Although only vaguely recognized by Western scholars today, Leyden and Heber were contributors to the great broadening of the European mind that accompanied the Romantic movement. In Edward Said's words, this was an intellectual shift, the impulse and material for which "Calcutta provided, London distributed, Paris filtered and generalized" (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 250).

Clearly, we are not concerned with merely "minor" writers in whom our interest can at best be peripheral. Rather, these are unusual people, and their responses to their exiled and some-

times alienated states of mind, and to India, which brought about such mental states in them, are similarly significant for a proper evaluation of the British imperial act of *writing* the colony, as well as of an important aspect of Romanticism. Though these responses were varied and sometimes even contradictory to each other, they give us also useful insight into the psychology of gifted people as they react to situations simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar to them.

I have already described the unusual quality of mind possessed by John Leyden. Equally, even if differently, exceptional were Reginald Heber and Ronald Ross. Heber was a brilliant student of the classics at Oxford where he also excelled in writing poetry both in Latin and in the vernacular. Like Leyden, he too had been praised by Scott, and his appointment in 1822 as the Bishop of Calcutta was no light matter for the Church of England because it put him in charge of a diocese that extended through all of the East Indies, to Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and all of Australia. (It was not until 1837 that Australia got its first Anglican Bishop. Incidentally, Heber's predecessor in Calcutta, Thomas Middleton, too, had strong literary connections, having formerly been the editor of the powerful *British Critic*.) To accept the appointment in Calcutta, Heber had to give up his prestigious position as the Preacher at Lincoln's Inn as well as leave behind much native acclaim: for example, he had been elected to give the 1815 Bampton Lectures at Oxford. Sir Ronald Ross, our third poet, was awarded the 1902 Nobel Prize in Medicine for his discovery of the transmission methods of the malarial parasite. The significance of his scientific achievement should require little additional gloss.

The point has already been made that none of these ostensibly part-time writers was primarily a literary person. We notice, more particularly, that they had multifaceted talents, and were for the major part of their professional lives deeply involved with the *history* of their times, even when they *read* that history differently and with varying degrees of freedom. The scholarly Leyden qualified himself as a medical doctor, served as a geologist, and participated in diplomatic missions. Heber left a distinguished and secure career at home—which would also have been con-

genial to his literary inclination—to administer a far-flung bishopric in an unknown land. After his first tenure in India as a military physician, Ross did not return to Britain to carry out the rest of his scientific research in the company of his peers. Rather, he retrained himself in bacteriology in Edinburgh and went back to India and the tropics to practise his art in most uncongenial settings and to conduct his research in far from ideal circumstances.

Apparently, then, the notion—particularly strong in the post-Romantic tradition—of the poet in the ivory tower does not apply in the least to the lives and works of these writers. Nor, indeed, does “alienation” in the usual sense pervade their writings, for they were, in each case, genuinely involved in and intensely attached to their vocations. After all, as Theodore Roszak has so persuasively demonstrated, today alienation springs primarily from the workers’ being forced to distance themselves from the nameless, robotic, and fragmentary nature of the job he has to perform to earn a living. Alienation, in this sense, is “the withdrawal of self from action, the retreat of the person from the performance” (215). Using the Buddhist notion of “right livelihood,” Roszak has pointed out:

Responsible work is an embodiment of love, and love is the only discipline that will serve in shaping the personality, the only discipline that makes the mind whole and constant for a lifetime of effort. There hovers about a true vocation that paradox of all significant self-knowledge—our capacity to find ourselves by losing ourselves. We lose ourselves in our love of the task before us, and, in that moment, we learn an identity that lives both within and beyond us. (216-17)³

II

Roszak’s notion of an identity that lives “within and beyond” each individual is particularly significant for our study because the writers we are concerned with today had to contend with a “beyond” that was especially distant from whatever constituted the identity that may be assumed to have lived “within” them; the enormous distance between the “within” and the “beyond” was, of course, both literal and metaphorical. In other words, Leyden, Heber, and Ross had to deal with a “beyond” that was composed

of both a foreign country and a foreign culture. In a similar circumstance the overwhelming probability is that most people, less equipped intellectually and imaginatively than these poets, would fall victim to a crippling sense of alienation. Surprisingly, it is the most modern and "objective" of the three, the medical researcher Ronald Ross, who shows in his verse the crushing weight of a sense of exile and disaffection, whereas the earlier, perhaps the more Romantic, Leyden and Heber are able to handle admirably well the "beyond" they experienced in India. It will be worth investigating the reasons for this difference between Ross and the two earlier poets. After all, the nineteenth century experienced a rapid explosion of knowledge and technology and, clearly, Ross inhabited a smaller and apparently more *familiar* planet than did Leyden and Heber.

"One of the great glories of an urban civilization," writes sociologist Everett C. Hughes, "is the complex man, finely tuned to the many 'others' in his life-orbit," and only such a person can be called truly "creative" (126). It is no wonder that Hughes's list of such "creative" people is headed by "playwright[s]" and "novelist[s]," and he maintains that it "is hard to imagine" their being "insensitive to the gestures and attitudes of others" (119). It is particularly important to notice that Hughes's comment on "urban civilization" and the complex yet fine personality it produces can be used to contextualize Edward Said's enumeration of the "great capitals" (Calcutta, London, Paris) and the peculiarly urbane, university-moulded, public-affairs-oriented personalities of our authors.

It would seem probable, then, that our poets should display little sense of alienation in their encounters with India. After all, they were not really victims of a modern, computerized workplace; in Marxist terms, their "work" was not *external* to them. Indeed, they were fortunate to be able to do what they considered most congenial to their sense of vocation. And using Hughes's criterion of the sensitive, complex urbanite, we may claim to have among the best and finest examples of such people in Leyden, Heber, and Ross. Yet, mental complexity carries its own demands and sets its own price on happiness. So, we find instructive evidence of alienation and its varying modes of opera-

tion in the works of the three writers. What is more important than the fact that, *pace* Roszak, Hughes, and Marx, they experienced any alienation at all is the quality and degree of alienation they felt and which their works portrayed.

In the first place, there was a telling irony in the very situation of these writers: in India they found themselves at once *close to* the intellectual or imaginative lives they wanted to live, and immensely *far from* those other friends and colleagues at home who had helped to form the framework of their mental growth—their peers, their authentic community. At a very obvious level, the poems of these writers show evidence of an alienation caused by separation from one's intellectual homeland and its inhabitants. This is quite a different thing from being lonely, or missing home and family, which we might term a normal sense of separation. In so far as the feeling is expressed in poetry, the act of poetic creation—which assumes a hospitable audience back at home—becomes a bridge across the gulf. The poem can then act as a means of working out the alienatory feelings. John Leyden's "To Mr. James Purvis" (184-86) is a good example of this kind of handling or managing of a powerful feeling of exile. But it is a complex matter because the place of exile is also, in this case, the scene of imaginative enrichment. I assume the poem works well as a psychological escape hatch mainly because the putative recipient, James Purvis, was not merely an intimate and affectionate friend but also a fellow seeker of India. The poem begins by recording a chance meeting ("... on this eastern strand / With glad surprise I grasp thy hand") in India with Purvis, with whom Leyden had gone to school in Scotland as a young boy, then movingly recounts the death in India of a mutual friend, also from the same school, and passes into a visionary glimpse of a future when the speaker and his friend will "dance once more on Denholm's green." The poem expresses graphically the loneliness of suffering undergone by the speaker in India, but its unusual character is found in its tone of intimacy that springs from many experiences shared between the speaker and his listener. The speaker, the friend the poem is addressed to, and their dead friend have had their lives intertwined in a labyrinthine manner both at home—on their native ground—*and*

in India, the strange land they all had woven into their separate destinies.

The fear of the strange, *horror alieni*, is a commoner aspect of our experience than is its opposite, the love (or, at least, the acceptance) of the strange, *amor alieni*. As Michael Landmann, the Swiss philosopher and anthropologist, has pointed out, "the strange is not a value-neutral concept," and our "[e]motion is directed at the strange before knowledge is, in fact as a negative feeling" (135). Knowledge, it appears, would be an antidote to the negative response to strangeness that is promoted by mere emotion. However, as we see demonstrated clearly in the case of Ronald Ross, when "knowledge" is our name for the merely rational faculty (the Kantian *vernunft* rather than *verstand*) then the overcoming of alienation (the movement from *horror alieni* to *amor alieni*) may never come about. This is because reason, so highly valued by the Age of Enlightenment, is, as the Romantic movement strenuously argued, only a partial function of the human mind—and the late nineteenth century's anti-Romantic return to an admiration of reason and objectivity so thoroughly imbibed by Ross, made him quite incapable of overcoming the horror of the strange even though his stay in India was prompted by a true sense of vocation which, according to Roszak, seldom causes alienation. Ross represented the Victorian age's great love affair with Comtean positivism. For Victorian positivists Comte's severe atheism was, of course, filtered through Mill's influential interpretation that simultaneously, but somewhat coldly, championed the scientific and sceptical sensibility portrayed by the French philosopher and a Calvinistic notion of a cheerless deity.⁴

There can be little need to establish definitely that Ross had studied Comte.⁵ So pervasive was the influence that it would have taken a strong mental effort on Ross's part to avoid being influenced by it—particularly Mill's version of it. As the early part of this paper has tried to demonstrate, all three poets discussed in this essay had the kind of academic upbringing that put them directly in touch with the important fashions in thought prevalent in their times: Leyden and Heber with Romanticism, Ross with Victorian positivism. More often than not, the expatriates in

India were entirely familiar with contemporary European, particularly British, movements in ideas.

The Comtean influence is especially pertinent in a study of Ross's Indian poems, although I have no space here to treat the topic fully. First, Comte's notion of the human mind was essentially limited to the European cultural context. In fact, he had unequivocally declared that India and China had made no contribution to the development of the human mind (Edwards 2:174). The overwhelming quantity of lithic imagery (rocks, denuded hills, sand, deserts) in Ross's poems portrays the Indian landscape as being essentially inert, lacking will and energy, although not incapable of a helpless and mindless kind of suffering, while also suggesting the poet's incapacity either to arrogate the colony entirely to his imperial purposes or to respond to it at an imaginative level. Whereas the Romantic spirit of Europe had often looked to India for inspiration and knowledge leading it specifically to a notion of the mind in its totality—reason, sensations, feelings, and imagination culminating in the wholeness called understanding or sensibility—the newer scientific, Comtean positivism clearly put all but the narrowly rational beyond the ken of human understanding.

Clearly, then, Ross was saddled with the dual responsibilities of bringing hope and amelioration to a darkened society—the imperial burden—and fulfilling his personal aspiration to be a successful scientist. The India he encountered thwarted both missions. In spite of Comte and neo-rationalism, Ross's mental preparation was inadequate for the totality of the experience he encountered in India. If the grinding poverty and natural calamities tortured him, the magnificence of the country's art, its ritualistic and myth-laden culture perplexed him no less. It was perhaps possible to ignore India from afar—as Comte had done—but it was not possible for Ross to do so while he was living *in* India. The complexity of what he experienced, which was always pushing him toward the outer limits of reason, bothered the positivist in him. The mind that had been taught the religion of positivism, in Ross's own words "the patient study of little things" (*Philosophies* iv), was constantly being urged toward a methodologically less sound and speculatively more daring posi-

tion by the complex reality of the Indian experience. This created the particular kind of alienation Ross experienced in India.

In his study of the institutionalizing of the doctor-patient relationship, *The Birth of the Clinic*, Michel Foucault describes the forming of the "gaze"—the unrestricted power of the clinician to subject the hospitalized patient to his detached, authoritarian observation and analysis (Foucault *passim*). As we know, the subtitle of Foucault's book is "An Archeology of Medical Perception." As a medical doctor, Ross was professionally trained by institutions that authorized that gaze. And his phrase "patient study," quoted above, indicates Ross assumed that the world and the others it contained were meant to be subjected to his objective scrutiny. But what he saw in India he could neither easily fit into his familiar categories nor, therefore, fully comprehend or dominate:

I would but only this:
 I wish that I could go
 And see the thing that is,
 And, seeing, better know;

 And take things in my hand
 And find if false or fit;
 But in this far-off land
 What hope is there of it? ("In Exile" 37)

The great distance indicated by the words "this far-off land" is really the one between Ross's simple view of knowledge and the very complex mode of knowing India demanded of him. No matter how uneasy Ross is in admitting this gap or discrepancy, that acknowledgement itself differentiates him from Said's generic Orientalist. There is unmistakable poignancy in Ross's utterance: "I would / I wish," "but only / . . . / But."

Horror alieni is overcome only when we understand that our own selves, too, are in many ways quite unknown to us. Such realization posits an epistemology in which the nature of the "beyond" or the "other" or the "strange" can be seen reflecting essential aspects of one's own "within." In some ways, it ought to matter little whether the "alien" comes from within or without the self. However, the kind of philosophy Ross was equipped with

put all unknowable matters beyond his comprehension, providing him instead with a righteous and pseudo-scientific despair.

The agenda Ronald Ross had before him was one that Victorian imperialism had quite clearly established for its upholders. Characteristically, however, Ross's scientific and literary identities participated in the agenda in a splintered or self-divided manner; also, it was one that his literary project articulated only obliquely and obscurely. Nevertheless, the agenda was there in its multi-faceted presence. In the first place, Ross's literary works (including his *Memoirs*) expressed a political aesthetic that sought to re-enact the old Enlightenment doctrine of individual self-sufficiency upon which so much Western progressivist liberalism has traditionally depended. This aspect of the aesthetic allowed him to be in easy collusion with the colonizing enterprise by attaching to it a missionary significance: the enlightened English helping the benighted Indian achieve his full potential. There was yet another way in which the aesthetic was political. As a part of the Raj machinery at the height of its imperial glory, Ross needed to offer a corrective to, or seek to offset the value of, the occasional veerings and hesitations expressed by pre-imperial India-hands like Heber or Leyden. It was essentially an ideological opposition because the philosophical underpinning of the earlier position was Romanticism's critique of Enlightenment liberalism—a liberalism that was now, once again, in ascendancy. However, the Enlightenment project notwithstanding, Ross was also affected by the "racialism" that, according to Kwame Appiah, came into existence really for the first time in the later part of the nineteenth century, following Victorian science's "biologiz[ing]" of the idea of race (279).

In retrospect, it seems both curious and interesting that yet another major obstacle in Ross's path to proper understanding was his Victorian religiosity, which, of course, was peculiarly blended in with his scientific intellectualism and imperial fervour. Ross's fear was typically one of the key fears of Judæo-Christian religions—particularly in their protestant versions—the fear of "messiness"⁶ of the unintelligible, the chaotic, the feminine, and the contingent. He stood squarely on the side of a certain dry kind of liberal-humanism (orderly, predictable,

clean, patterned, and balanced) but informed throughout by an unwavering faith in the rightness of Christian religion—the latter understood primarily in terms of moderation, work-ethic, and prayer.

India, if it has a consistent *symbolical* significance for the Western mind, typically stands for all that destroys neat and artificially ordered patterns of desire. The experience of India, as we find depicted in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, is useful really only as far as it takes the confident and supposedly well-integrated European personality and puts it out of its own depths, confronts it with what unsettles and unnerves. The experience may be frustrating, but for the right person it is always therapeutic because it leaves him more flexible, more sensitive, more accepting of all forms of the "other" within and without himself.

Ross's predicament was that, in spite of his enormous scientific intellect, he was a helpless, and perhaps willing, victim of the dominating mode of lower-order rationality of his times—what modern scholars have defined as "instrumental" or "administrative" rationality (Landmann 9-10). These terms refer to an over-riding philosophy that, in a given culture, *administers* every aspect of an individual's thinking. After all, modes of thought and sentiments that enjoy hegemonic discursive status in a society become labelled as "Reason." So Ross's alienation was caused as much by his experience of the strange or the other in India as it was by the inauthenticity (to use an existentialist term) of a philosophy he passively assumed as his own, and which was, into the bargain, also peculiarly incapable of growth or modification.

In Ross's poetry we repeatedly hear tortured words that, while ostensibly passing moral judgements on India, its history and its people, really express the unproductive anguish of an imperfectly understood struggle within the speaker:

Shout, barren thunders shout
 And rattle and melt again!
 So fall the fates about,
 So melt the hopes of men. ("In Exile" 25)

Beware the bitter moment when awake
 We view the mischief that our visions make—
 The good things broken in a mad mistake.
 ("Thought and Action" 18)

In spite of the metrical and rhyming regularity—which, indeed, calls for separate comments (see below)—the seemingly prophetic and self-righteous voice barely hides the puzzlement and the utter bewilderment of the positivistic mind.

Neither reason nor experience emancipates Ross. It is, in fact, quite arguable that the typical metrical traditionalism one finds in the poetical works of Ross, who was paradoxically a pathbreaking experimentalist in medicine, is a desperate effort at self-intensification or at re-assembling and re-fortifying a crumbling subjectivity—here a subjectivity that is pronouncedly marked by a predisposition to be subjugated by custom. In this sense, traditional metrical forms help a disintegrating or at least disquieted ego to forge a temporary unification with a set of established social norms and values, here the whole traditional culture of English letters—a particularly attractive but desperate strategy to fight alienation at a moment of crisis in exile. There is an undeniable nervousness and shrillness in Ross's own declaiming about fixed forms of art: "above all the great laws of form—which distinguish high art from low" (*Memoirs* 31). One would not make too much of the metrical matter in the works of a poet writing, say, a hundred years earlier. But, even cursory reflection will tell us that there is something odd in the total conservatism of form one finds in Ross's Indian poems (he wrote sonnets and verses in various strictly organized stanzaic sequences) when one recalls the robust, messiness-embracing, vitalist Whitman's incessant subversion of forms of English verse. It was Ross, on the other hand, who made the actual "passage to India." India sorely tested Ross's mental capacities because he lacked the eye to seek "whatever adheres," Whitman's telling phrase for the Romantic tendency toward inclusiveness (Whitman 45). And as Michael Cooke, the Jamaica-born Yale scholar of Romanticism and Third-World literature, has clearly demonstrated, performing "acts of inclusiveness" was among the most remarkable aspects of Romantic sensibility and will (32).

Ironical, also, is the contrast between the supposedly scientific Ross's Christian perturbation at the sight of Hindu religious practices, and the liberal attitude expressed by the ostensibly more orthodox man of cloth, Bishop Heber, who remained far

more equanimous and even intellectually curious about Indian religions. Surely, the India to which Heber journeyed at the beginning of the nineteenth century was by all standards a remoter and more unfamiliar place for any European than the India Ross encountered many decades later. Yet, as Heber's modern editor, M. A. Laird, has remarked, a "strong sense of the fundamental oneness of mankind" is central to the Bishop's writing, and "he does not give the impression that in passing from England to India he encountered a completely different order of people" (*Heber in Northern India* 32). Using Appiah's terminology one might say race had not yet been "racialized" at this early phase of Anglo-Saxon colonizing. Also "the fundamental oneness of mankind" that Laird mentions is undoubtedly connected with the Romantic view expressed, say, by Coleridge, of "the Social Sense / Distending wide, and man beloved as man" ("To William Wordsworth" 405). This notion courageously conflates the subjective and objective as it also locates the "other" within an *expanded* sense of the self. By contrast, Ross's poetry repeatedly (and in some ways at odds with his Enlightenment agenda) insists on the unbridgeable gap between "them" and "us." The constant vigilance for what *distinguishes* gives to Ross's poems not only a barren objectivity but also an objectivity that often lapses into an irritability. One is reminded of Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India*: "[God] had been constantly in her thoughts since she entered India, though oddly enough he satisfied her less" (71). Incapable of seeing the arches beyond arches, Ross, unlike Mrs. Moore, is a helpless victim of his narrowly circumscribed faith. Surely, part of what causes Ross's alienation is his incapacity to hold in balance two separate ideas: the necessary distinctions that exist between cultures and the oneness that overrides those distinctions. Here one may also detect an oddly distorted Comtean influence; after all, the father of the modern science of sociology and of positivism had said, "the entire succession of men, through the whole course of the ages must be regarded as one man, always living and incessantly learning" (Comte 2:95). Ross's Victorian humanism and Enlightenment liberalism tempted him to believe all people were destined for a uniformly perfect kind of ahistorical social, cultural, and intellectual goal.

But his experience of a strange foreign culture frustrated this rigid belief by which he had allowed his self to be appropriated.

Heber and Leyden, on the other hand, were not only desirous of spreading Western ideas—especially of religion and science—in India but they were also keen on increasing the West's storehouse of knowledge about the East. While they saw vast differences between Europe and Asia, they were sympathetically aware of the major developments in comparative philology to realize that very ancient and for them entirely undeniable bonds tied together the peoples of Europe and India. So, while the physical landscape of India was unfamiliar to them and the living conditions always uncomfortable and often life-threatening—the notorious “land of regrets”—their interest in the country was more than merely administrative. It is interesting to note that years before Heber had even contemplated a career in India he was aware of the cultural cross-currents that from time to time had brought Europe and India together, and that uncanny and inexplicable similarities may be found between pre-Christian European cultures and those of ancient India. For example, commenting on the poetry of Pindar, which he translated into English and published in 1811, Heber remarked at once, “the connection of these Eleusinian doctrines with those of Hindustan is in many points sufficiently striking” (Heber, *Poetical Works* 390). Elsewhere Heber says, noticing more than a mere conjectural similarity: “Perhaps indeed the Mount Meru of Hindustan, the blameless Ethiopians at the head of the Nile, and the happy Hyperborean regions at the source of the Ister, are only copies of the garden and river of God in Eden” (397). There is little need to point out that the word “copy” here is, in a typological sense, highly significant. Even more revealing is Heber's connecting of the contemporary literary imagination of England (Robert Southey) with both India and ancient Greece: “Southey and Pindar might seem to have drunk at the same source” (391).

No matter how distressing Heber might have found the Indian religious and social settings, he seemed also to be aware that India could still be a source for more than just his poetic inspiration. Many years later, W. B. Yeats was to claim that he discovered in the *Upanishads* “something ancestral in ourselves” (11). Heber,

a devout Christian priest and a missionary, could not be as openly enthusiastic as the twentieth-century atheist poet, but his metaphorical utterances leave little doubt that at least imaginatively he could see himself as belonging to India, and India to him. Therefore, even after much sorrow and a nagging sense of exile (“Yet who in Indian bowers has stood / . . . / And breathed a prayer [how oft in vain!] / To gaze upon her oaks again?”) Heber can still say, “But, oh! with thankful hearts confess / E’en here there may be found happiness” (“An Evening Walk in Bengal,” 368 and 370). There is a bit of self-criticism, a healthy pulling up of the mournful fellow by his boot strings, in the words “But . . . confess.” In the official and expected sense of the truth, the bewailment has a certain validity, but unlike Ross, Reginald Heber was able to raise himself above the official, *de rigueur*, alienation. Hence, he could write quite candidly, and at the expense of imperial chauvinism, “So rich a shade, so green a sod / Our English fairies never trod” (368). Whereas Ross saw only a dry, barren landscape symbolically useful for his official colonizing agenda, Heber found, at least in Bengal, more greenery than even in England. One notices particularly a tempering of a fervid imperial pride that characterized some of his earlier poetry: “Friend of the friendless—Albion! Where art thou?” and “Wing, wing your course, a prostrate world to save” (“Europe” [1809] 38). Once *in* India this tone of unthinking jingoistic fervour nearly disappears from Heber’s works and thereby allows him to escape the potentially most damaging source of alienation he might have experienced. Such narrow nationalistic pride would probably have split the integrity of his sensibility by positing an absurd gap between his finely tuned personality and a crude sentiment. In Heber we find, then, a wholesome ability to manage potentially threatening alienation; this is accomplished by digging through all shallow feelings and harmful cant and discovering/uncovering the essentially inclusive nature of his personality. This exercise in self-discovery is, certainly, a more authentic psychological adventure than the assuming of any second-hand and unfelt mask of liberalism or openmindedness. Through writing of a nearly decolonized India, Heber un-

colonized himself from the oppression of officially dictated roles.

Heber is particularly critical of British expatriates who succumbed to alienation by an inflexible adherence to official codes, whether of government or religion. It is interesting to note that although he is the author of some of the best known hymns in English, his Indian poetry is peculiarly thin in its Christian content. I think there are two reasons for this absence. First, Heber was as much a Romantic by temper—and, therefore, clearly attracted to the notion of a relatively “pure” imaginative and autonomous poetry—as he was a religious person, a man of the Church. And he found it both necessary and possible to keep the two sides of his mind in a paradoxical balance rather than force one to overwhelm and subsume the other. Recently, the distinguished Romantic scholar Donald Reiman, too, has noted without much elaboration this dual aspect of Heber’s personality (Heber, *Palestine* viii). Laird accounts for Heber’s flexibility of mind (what the Romantics would really have called “imagination” or “negative capability”) in terms of a sweetness of character, intellectual openness, and an acute social consciousness. On the other hand, I believe (and this is my second point) that Heber, influenced by European Orientalism and *then* being exposed to India, came to the realization that the heathens and pagans he had intended to enlighten had a vast and complex body of philosophy, religious learning and science which, in fact, could teach Europeans much about life, especially the life of the mind. In other words, in the presence of a discourse of India, and in the process of writing in the proximity of that discourse, Heber had to revise, to re-orientate if you will, his own self. He learned to recoil from narrow religiosity and bigotry because they could only divorce one part of him (the Christian missionary) from the other (the Romantic) part, causing not merely a fracture within but also a corresponding alienation from the dialogic reality of history, in which he was now self-consciously embedded. His journals contain, as I have noted earlier, several pitying references to Europeans, especially missionaries, who betrayed their alienation through overzealous adoption of official European religious and administrative missions.⁷

We come back now to John Leyden once more, who exemplifies most clearly an important aspect of the Romantic movement: the desire to *extend* the range of subject matter—themes, myths, allusions, images, and even modes of feeling—of English literature beyond traditional limits. One remembers the central role played by translations from classical languages in the shaping of Europe's first renaissance. The case with the second renaissance was not much different. William Jones (1746-94) had already expressed his views on the matter quite clearly in connection with his own translations from the classical literatures of Asia, especially Sanskrit and Arabic. Pointing out the "so many new expressions, new images, and new inventions" found in Asian literatures, Jones expressed the hope that the introduction of these new elements would renew the vitality of European literatures which had become too traditional and hidebound (qtd. in Agrawal 24). Clearly, the message had made an impact. One remembers, in this context, not only the works of Goethe and Southey, but also Byron's advice to Thomas Moore, "Stick to East . . . it [is] the only poetical policy" (qtd. in Gwynn 58-59). As the word "policy" indicates, the inhabitants of the literary scene in England in the early nineteenth century clearly realized there was even some power in Orientalism.

In Leyden's poetry, we find startling compounding or writing in of Eastern and Western figures that create almost new feelings and help develop an expanded literary sensibility. An example is his poem "Christmas in Penang," which combines traditional sentiments with unusual images, thereby producing something akin to a new feeling:

Champaca flowers for thee we strew,
To drink the merry Christmas dew . . .
Banana leaves their ample screen
Shall spread, to match the holly green. (214)

What is particularly remarkable in this poem is the poet's clear awareness of the new combinations he is effecting in his verse: "Dear Nona, Christmas comes from far / To seek us near the eastern star." Here, the potential sentimentality of the words "Christmas comes from far," is superbly offset by the complexity of relationships implied by the highly traditional Christian asso-

ciations of "eastern star." In a real sense, for European Christianity, too, is an Eastern religion, first announced by an Eastern star, and first recognized by three Eastern kings. So, for an imaginative European—or Westerner—living in Asia, the idea of Christmas must acquire multilevel ambiguity. As an exile, the poet has to make do with what is clearly untraditional, even improper: the champaka (or Champaca) flowers, for example, as the poet tells us, are traditionally associated with Kama or the Indian Cupid, "hail'd in each Malayan grove / The saffron-tinted flower of love." And out of the gross banana leaves the poet creates a "[s]weet emblem of the soul at ease." The religio-literary significance of the word "emblem" and the Christian idea of the soul in repose need hardly be explained further. Leyden's poem is self-reflexive to a very prominent degree as the poet arrogates, or has to arrogate, for his own purposes what is alien and strange. The "other," the strange is here accommodated through both a leap of imagination and an act of will, as it is *utilized* to enhance the meaning of the known and the traditional. Alienation is staved off and new combinations of feelings are created through this method—if that is the word—of assimilation of the alien into the familiar. The "leap of imagination" is also, of course, a paradoxical acknowledgement of contingency and of one's contingent self, because the "assimilation of the alien into the familiar" is, *in situ*, also the incorporation of the familiar into the alien:

In his re-creation in English of Indian historical and folkloric narratives (for example, in "The Dirge of Tippoo Sultan: from the Canara," and "On the Death of Tippoo Sultan: from the Hindustani"), John Leyden similarly attempted to add to the stock of fables and anecdotes traditionally available to the English reader. In these poems, particularly when celebrating Indian heroes, Leyden showed remarkable freedom of spirit and imagination. Instead of taking the debunking Macaulayan approach, Leyden was, in effect, providing foreign but new objects of admiration to readers of English poetry. The "lamp of *varied* lore" that Scott saw extinguished by Leyden's untimely death surely acknowledged that debt.

One thing, at least, is clear from this overview. One's escape from alienation depends greatly upon the freedom one has from pre-defined and "authorized" fictions of life. Ross aligned himself too closely with official Victorian philosophy and wrote himself into it; Leyden maintained an amused stance of the alien even within the British context and was able to authorize himself more freely. For example, he often repeated that he was Scottish not English, although he was from Britain and used the English language. When he first arrived in India in 1805, his friend Sir John Malcolm urged Leyden to soften his carefully and ostentatiously cultivated strong, rustic Scottish accent, so that his reception in the English establishment in India might be smooth. According to Malcolm's obituary note on Leyden's death, published in the *Bombay Courier* in 1811, Leyden's prompt response to this prudent suggestion was, "Learn English! No, never. It was trying to learn that language that spoilt my Scotch" (qtd. in Leyden xxi).⁸

NOTES

- 1 For example, the First (Second?) World authors of a currently popular college handbook on postcolonial literatures, *The Empire Writes Back*, naively suggest that Sanskrit, Tamil and Urdu have "ancient critical traditions" (117). Although Urdu has a fairly extensive body of critical texts, these certainly do not form an "ancient" tradition in the Indian context. Urdu is a *new and synthetic* language, and its significant difference from Tamil and Sanskrit *should* matter to scholars, but to "Orientalists" it does not—even when they are typically generous and liberal-minded.
- 2 I prefer the Indian spelling, Hindusthani, to the Anglicized "Hindustani."
- 3 It may be ironical, but it is not unexpected that in discussing modern industrial alienation Roszak should refer to the Buddha and to Yoga ("What else should the highest yoga be, after all, but the work we turn to each day," 217). As Said has pointed out, the second, or Oriental, renaissance freed the western mind from "the confines of a self-sufficient Greco-Latin terrain [and] deposited the whole world before him" (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 251).
- 4 For a recent discussion of the influence of Comtean positivism on Victorian Britain, see T.R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity, passim*.
- 5 That proof, however, is not entirely elusive. In the "Preface" to his autobiography Ross names Comte along with the Epicurus, Lucretius, and Spencer, and claims "I am one of the few among these masters' disciples who have attempted to bring their teaching to fruition" (*Memoirs* vii).
- 6 I have borrowed the word from Iris Murdoch, the contemporary British novelist and philosopher. See her "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" 260.
- 7 That the missionaries would fail to achieve large-scale conversion in India should have been abundantly clear to all but over-zealous proselytizers. If anything, such people contributed directly to the failure of Christian missions in India. As K. M.

Panikkar has pointed out, "Though there was never any prospect, except in the minds of blind fanatics, of either the Hindus or the Buddhists abandoning their religions and accepting the faith which the European trader and conqueror brought with him, the success of the missions need not have been so meagre and insignificant but for certain factors." Among the factors Panikkar enumerates are the "unreasonable and absurd" doctrine of "the monopoly of truth and revelation"; association with "aggressive imperialism" that made Indians look upon "missionary activity as inimical to the country's interests and native Christians as 'secondary barbarians'"; and the missionary's sharing "the belief in the racial superiority of the Europeans as a permanent factor in human history." See Panikkar 454-56.

- 8 Kitty Datta has astutely noted the "paradoxical . . . continuity" in Leyden's imagination between an intense "local" Scottish attachment and a lifelong "preoccupation with local vernaculars" or other lands ("John Leyden" 118). In *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment*, Datta and others have also remarked upon the distinctive characteristics of *Scottish Enlightenment*, which remained consistently dynamic over a very long period and expressed a pervasive non-utilitarian interest in India (*passim*). I want to suggest that whereas English High Romanticism was generated, in part, as a reaction against the smug generalizing and homogenizing tendencies of English Enlightenment and its associated "liberalism," Scottish Enlightenment values adumbrated and subsumed many Romantic ideas and impulses. In particular, one notices its generally respectful interest in the heterogeneity of cultures.

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