

# Sir William Jones and Representations of Hinduism in British Poetry, 1784-1812

Kurt Andrew Johnson

PhD

University of York

Department of English and Related Literature

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# Abstract

This thesis examines the representations of Hinduism in Romantic poetry from 1784 to 1812, using as case studies the poetry of Sir William Jones, William Blake, Robert Southey and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The study argues that Jones' sympathetic and syncretic representations of Hinduism in his nine 'Hymns' to Hindu deities (1784-1789) influenced the use of Hinduism within the works of these later Romantic poets. It is interested in the way in which Blake, Southey, and Shelley use Hinduism, by way of Jones, to represent, react to, and recontextualise geopolitical and religious issues relative to the French Revolution and the expansion of the British Empire, as well as the rise of an evangelical, missionary, and dissenting culture highly influential to the period. By examining these four poets, the study traces the representation of Hinduism in relation to the shifting geopolitical and religious debates occurring throughout the period – and the way in which such representations subsequently contribute to the emergence of what we now call Romantic literature.

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# Introduction

...thus finite we compare  
With infinite...  
– Sir William Jones, 'A Hymn to Náráyena' (1785)

This thesis explores the prose and poetical works of Oriental scholar Sir William Jones, examining his introduction of Hinduism to British literature and the way in which his representation of Hinduism influenced British poetry from 1784 to 1812. A famed polyglot, translator and poet, Jones worked and lived in India as a Supreme Court Judge for the East India Company from 1783 until his death in 1794. During that time, Jones published volumes of translations, prose researches and poetic compositions on Arabian, Persian and, most importantly, Hindu literature and language – much of which, this thesis argues, proved influential to the poetic works of later Romantic writers, including William Blake, Robert Southey and Percy Bysshe Shelley. By examining Jones' translations of Hindu source materials as well as his original composition of nine 'Hymns' to Hindu deities (1784-1789), my thesis investigates how Blake, Southey and Shelley reacted to, incorporated and developed Jones' often sympathetic representations of Hinduism in their own poetry.

As such, the study seeks to accomplish two main objectives: 1) to trace Jones' poetic legacy throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through the subject of Hinduism, establishing both his popular and poetic appeal during those periods in order to illustrate his significant contributions to Romantic period verse; and 2) to demonstrate Hinduism's sustained and pervasive use as a poetic subject during the period and suggest its importance in crafting the poetic aesthetic and polemic for Jones, Blake, Southey and Shelley.

There have been a number of worthy critical studies investigating India's influence on the literature of the Romantic period from which this work draws and develops. For example, Raymond Schwab's pioneering *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (1958) first broached the

subject by recognising and identifying the frequency with which India was a topic of literary concern. Schwab argues that 'The Orient served as alter ego to the Occident', suggesting the way in which the two complemented each other, rather than competed with – or controlled – the other.<sup>1</sup> Although Schwab spans two hundred years of British literary history, his primary focus is the Romantic period and the way in which 'Romanticism [was]...an oriental irruption of the intellect'.<sup>2</sup> That is, Schwab views the Romantic period as an Oriental 'Renaissance' whose natural philosophy and pantheistic ideals of the divine reconsidered and reworked the scientific empiricism of the Enlightenment; 'India', Schwab argues, 'had worked to reunite the human with a divine that is the Universe', thereby locating Romanticism's penchant for the mystic and pantheistic in writers' fascination with the subcontinent.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis agrees with – indeed, takes as its initial premise – Schwab's assertion that,

When the day comes that a philosopher studies in technical detail the influence exerted by Hindu thought on...nineteenth-century philosophy, he will be surprised that such influence was not recognized earlier.

Unfortunately, Schwab never explores the potential of this claim fully, particularly from a historical perspective. Moreover, he is more concerned with philosophy rather than literature. This may explain why he often fails to engage critically with Jones' influence on poets such as Blake, Southey and Shelley; while he notes Jones influence, Schwab is more preoccupied with tracing Jones' work in the German philosopher Frederich Schlegel, who referenced Jones much more conspicuously than the British poets.<sup>4</sup> This work seeks to develop these areas which Schwab left critically unexamined.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oriental Renaissance*, p. 482.

<sup>3</sup> *The Oriental Renaissance*, p. 483.

<sup>4</sup> *The Oriental Renaissance*, p. 195.

A scholarly work closer to this thesis' aim is John Drew's *India and the Romantic Imagination* (1987). In this work, Drew is much more thorough than Schwab in his analysis of Jones' own poetic works and in Jones' influence on poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Shelley. And, much like this work, Drew is critically concerned with Jones' syncretism – that is, the way in which Jones forges historical, philosophical and literary connections and associations between religions historically, geographically and culturally disparate – and the way his syncretic values are not only presented in his poetry, but passed on to other Romantic poets. Yet this thesis seeks to develop Drew's work in two distinct ways. Firstly, Drew focuses his attention on the way in which Jones uses the Neo-Platonic theory so prevalent during the Eighteenth Century in order to introduce and conceptualise his representation of Hinduism. He argues that this Platonic influence was vital to captivating the attention of other Romantic poets (particularly Coleridge and Shelley), as it not only tapped into the fashionable aesthetic of the day but also incorporated another fashionable trend – Orientalism – to justify the use of foreign religions in their work.

This thesis' focus seeks to locate Jones' representation of Hinduism within its native context, drawing more on the scholarship of Michael J. Franklin in works such as *Sir William Jones: Selected Prose and Poetical Works* (1995) and *Romantic Representations of British India* (2006). Like Drew, Franklin is interested in Jones' syncretic methodology. However, Franklin differs from Drew in emphasising Jones' syncretic tendencies within the multi-cultural and multi-faith environment of metropolitan India rather than in the ideals of the European Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> This thesis develops Franklin's criticism in order to argue that Jones' 'Hymns' to Hindu deities use ideas of translation and originality in order to provide a poetic and cultural space where the 'Hymn' syncretically demonstrates both a British and Hindu

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. 'General Introduction and [meta]historical background [re]presenting "The palanquins of state; or, broken leaves in a Mughal garden"', *Romantic Representations of British India*, ed. Michael J. Franklin (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 1-44.



religious exegesis. Moreover, this thesis follows Franklin's example by contextualising Jones' 'Hymns' within a framework of bi-lateral cultural translation and cultural interaction which belies the assimilative and unilateral assumptions of postcolonial theory laid out in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) – a work which views Jones as the leading architect of Britain's imperial ideology (however, a further analysis of Said, and other postcolonial scholars who view Jones similarly, will occur in Chapter I).

A second way in which this thesis develops Drew is its focus on Hinduism specifically, and Indian religions generally. Drew's topic of scholarly concern is India rather than Hinduism; that is, he is interested in the way in which India as a geographical and imaginary locale infiltrated and was mapped throughout the landscape of Romantic poetry. Although at points in Drew's analysis, as well as in the Romantic poetry he considers, India and Hinduism are interchangeable terms for one another, this thesis strives to differentiate between them and make the religion of Hinduism the prime target of examination, given that India was, and is still, home to a diverse consortium of religions and cultures, such as Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, as I explore in more detail in Chapter I. Hinduism takes precedence in this study because it was the best known and most studied of the Indian religions during the time, as well as the most prevalent in, and to, Romantic literature.<sup>6</sup>

In short, the rationalisation for my thesis is simple: there is no single study currently available that aims solely to analyse and interpret the expansive and pervasive appeal of Hindu religious imagery and thought, as introduced by Jones, in British literature from the closing decades of the eighteenth century to the opening decades of the nineteenth century. My thesis' premise rests on doing just that. What I hope to do in undertaking this project is to call attention to and trace a literary

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<sup>6</sup> Another reason lies in the fact that Buddhism and Jainism were often considered sects of Hinduism, rather than separate religions, until the early nineteenth century; for Buddhism in the Romantic period, cf. John Rudy's *Zen and Romanticism* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 2004) and Mark Lussier's 'Colonial Counterflow: From Orientalism to Buddhism', *Interrogating Orientalism(s): Theories and Practices*, eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffrey Cass (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006), p. 135-62.

history of the cultural interaction and exchange between India and Britain which still bears relevance to our modern day, particularly in the wake of the political and cultural implications emerging from the advent of multiculturalism, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7, the appeal of Eastern Philosophy in popular Western culture and the immanent rise of India as an economic and regional superpower in the Twenty-First Century. As the historian William Dalrymple writes in *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*, a fascinating history detailing the extent to which British soldiers and politicians acculturated themselves to India in the eighteenth century by converting religions and/or by marrying local women:

Beneath the familiar story of European conquest and rule in India, and the imposition of European ways in the heart of Asia, there always lay a far more intriguing and still largely unwritten story: the Indian conquest of the European imagination. At all times up to the nineteenth century, but perhaps especially during the period 1770 to 1830, there was wholesale...and surprisingly widespread cultural assimilation and hybridity: what Salman Rushdie – talking of modern multiculturalism – has called ‘chutnification’. Virtually all Englishmen in India at this period Indianised themselves to some extent. Those who went further and converted to Islam or Hinduism, or made really dramatic journeys across cultures, were certainly always a minority; but they were probably nothing like as small a minority as we have been accustomed to expect.<sup>7</sup>

My thesis is interested in the way in which British literature, thanks to Jones’ experiences in India in the vein Dalrymple outlines above, ‘Indianised’ and was ‘Indianised’ during this period; it is in this sense that my work hopes to make a meaningful contribution to the existing scholarship of Eighteenth Century and Romantic studies, as well as to Postcolonial Studies, in conjunction with its recent move towards challenging the discursive framework and assumptions of Said’s *Orientalism*.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, a few fundamental questions form the basis of this study, including: how was Hinduism represented? Who was representing it? From what sources were

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<sup>7</sup> *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London, 2003), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., Robert Irwin’s *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), Ashok Bery’s *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Ziad Elmarsafy’s *The Enlightenment Qur’an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

the poets gaining their impressions and understanding of the religion? How was the religion in general, and the poet's representation of it specifically, received? And, perhaps most importantly, how did these impressions and influences change over time? Jones' importance for my thesis lies in the fact that it would be utterly impossible to answer anyone of these questions without mentioning his name and giving some account of his life and works. In this very real way, Jones becomes synonymous with Hinduism in the Romantic period.

Before Jones, however, Hinduism was not a religion altogether new to the British public. The religion was but part of the greater study of Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures, languages and religions which had arisen during the latter half of the eighteenth century due to colonial expansion and the advent of travel literature (a study more commonly referred to as 'Orientalism'). Following the Seven Years War (1756-1763), Britain had defeated France to gain greater control over its Bengalese colonial, from where the British would expand over the rest of the subcontinent and rule for the next two hundred years. As an immediate result, India became a vital economic, geopolitical and artistic centre during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. India's sudden geopolitical and economic importance led to a burgeoning interest in and study of its culture by British and Europeans alike – particularly on the subject of religion.

The first British works on Hinduism came from the East India Company soldiers John Z. Holwell and Alexander Dow, who wrote, respectively, *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal* (1765-1768, 3 vols) and *The History of Hindostan, Translated from the Persian; including a Dissertation Concerning the Customs, Manners, Language, Religion and Philosophy of the Hindoos* (1768-1772, 3 vols). Both Holwell and Dow represented Hinduism through their Deist perspective, portraying the religion as fundamentally monotheistic and emphasising the religion's belief in the 'unity, eternity, omniscience and

omnipotence of God' – a representation that would define most sympathetic portrayals of Hinduism for the next fifty years.<sup>9</sup> Both did so so as to counter previous European impugnation of Hinduism's 'polytheism' and abject idolatry; moreover, Holwell uses his explanation of Hinduism in order to lecture on the need for religious toleration in Britain, not just for foreign religions like Hinduism but also for home-grown Dissenting religions and Catholicism as well.<sup>10</sup> As this thesis explores, Holwell's conflation of Hinduism with dissenting Christian religions would not be the last; indeed, this seems to be the first of many such comparisons which would come to characterise various representations of Hinduism throughout the period.

Though both Holwell and Dow were not as proficient or accurate translators as they thought themselves to be, and though they at times misunderstood the Hindu works to which they were referring, their importance lied in their contribution to Hinduism becoming better known to British and European audiences. For example, Holwell and Dow's work influenced Voltaire's view and understanding of India and Hinduism – subjects which contributed to the anti-Christian polemic of his *Philosophie de L'histoire* (1765).<sup>11</sup> As Jyoti Mohan writes, because of his stature in Europe's intellectual community, Voltaire's writings on India were 'extremely widely read and influential'<sup>12</sup>; thanks to Holwell and Dow's work, Hinduism had begun its ascent into the intellectual mainstream of European Enlightenment thinking.

The appearance of Hinduism in European intellectual discussion would only increase as the rather amateurish researches of Holwell and Dow gave way to something of a professionalization of Indic study. In fact, by the time Jones arrived in Calcutta, a thorough, methodical, and academic review of Indian culture, language,

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<sup>9</sup> 'Dissertation Concerning the Customs, Manners, Language, Religion and Philosophy of the Hindoos', *The History of Hindostan, Translated from the Persian* (London, 1768), p. lxii. Vol. I.

<sup>10</sup> Cf., 'To the Public', *Interesting historical events, relative to the provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan* (London, 1765), p. 1-25. Vol. I.

<sup>11</sup> For more on Voltaire's representation of India, and his use of Indian source materials produced by Holwell, Dow and Jones, cf., Jyoti Hohan, 'La civilisation la plus antique: Voltaire's Images of India', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), p. 173-185.

<sup>12</sup> 'La civilisation la plus antique: Voltaire's Images of India', p. 173.

and literature was already well under way. The sympathetic portrayals of Hinduism for which Jones made famous found their roots in the tolerant colonial policies enacted by Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of Bengal. In 1773, when he took the helm of the East India Company as the Governor-General, Hastings quickly implemented a policy of ruling India 'on its ancient laws...with ease and moderation according to their own ideas, manners and prejudices'.<sup>13</sup> From these tolerant policies, Hastings led a sustained effort to fund and support attempts by the British to learn, read and translate into English works of Hindu mythology, religion and law – an endeavour that would first yield Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's *Codes of Gentoo Law* (1776) and *Grammar of the Bengalese Language* (1778). Though useful at first, these works were soon made obsolete once Jones, a much better scholar, linguist and translator than Halhed, turned his hand to both Sanskrit and Hindu law.<sup>14</sup> The real breakthrough for Hastings' project came in 1785 when Charles Wilkins, the lead translator and superintendent of the Company press, published his translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, the Hindu holy scripture that became the first (authoritative) Sanskrit translation into English; the *Geeta* was a work Hastings found so captivating and original that he predicted its literary influence and fame would 'survive when the British dominion in India shall long have ceased to exist' – ironically, the very 'dominion' he was charged with overseeing and expanding.<sup>15</sup>

However, Hastings' accommodating policies and encouragement of Indic research would find its greatest success once Jones took up the study of Sanskrit, Hindu mythology, and the Hindu religion. The eleven years Jones spent in Calcutta were the most productive of his literary life – a literary life which almost singularly

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<sup>13</sup> 'To Lord Mansfield, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1774', *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Hon. Warren Hastings, First Governor-General of Bengal*, ed. Rev. G.R. Gleig (London, 1841), p. 404, 400.

<sup>14</sup> For more detail on the transition from Halhed and Jones, cf., Michael J. Franklin's 'Cultural Possession, Imperial Control, and Comparative Religion: The Calcutta Perspective of Sir William Jones and Nathaniel Brassey Halhed', *Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 32 (2002), p. 1-18.

<sup>15</sup> 'To Nathaniel Smith, Esquire', *The Bhagvat-Geeta; or Dialogues of Kreesna and Arjoon, in Eighteen Lectures, with Notes*, Trans. Charles Wilkins (Chicago: Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, 1871), p. 11, reprinted from the original. Hereafter abbreviated *Bhagvat-Geeta*.

centred on introducing, explaining, and representing Hinduism to a British and European audience, as exemplified primarily by his composition of nine 'Hymns' to Hindu deities.

Published, read, and commented upon widely during the 1780s and 1790s, Jones' 'Hymns' are important for the way they define a period in the late eighteenth century, as Dalrymple noted earlier, when a vibrant interest in Hinduism and Hindu literature fostered, at best, an attitude of cultural tolerance and reciprocity ripe for cultural exchange, and, at the very least, a welcomed (and fêted) literary respite from otherwise contentious Anglo-Indian relations. In 1787, *The Monthly Review* exhibits such an attitude, when they write that

an acquaintance with Indian literature in general might have the most beneficial effects. It might even tend to redeem the national character, by teaching Englishmen to consider the nation of India as Men, as Beings entitled by Heaven with the same facilities, the same talents, and the same feelings with themselves.<sup>16</sup>

This comment was made during the build up to Warren Hastings' impeachment trial for high crimes and misdemeanours (1788-1795) – a trial which saw the former Governor-General of Bengal (and close colleague and friend of Jones) acquitted of charges including profiteering, illegally invading what is now Afghanistan, and brutally killing its inhabitants.<sup>17</sup> The incident painted the colonial administration (as well as the British Government) in a decidedly negative light; Hastings was famously depicted by James Gillray in 'Blood On Thunder Fording the Red Sea' (1788) sat atop the shoulders of Lord Thurlow (the Lord Chancellor) with money-bag laden arms as Thurlow waded through a 'Red Sea' of Indian dead [Fig. 1]. Such a portrayal represented Hastings having 'gone native' during his rule, and thus Hastings became a symbol of how the British government (in both India and Britain)

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<sup>16</sup> 'Art II. *The Bhagvat-Geeta, or Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon*', *The Monthly Review*, Vol. LXXVI (London, 1787), p. 198-210, 295-301, 199-200.

<sup>17</sup> For the charges, cf., Edmund Burke's *Article of Charge of High Crimes and Misdemeanours, Against Warren Hastings, Esquire, Late Governor General of Bengal, Presented to the House of Commons, on the 4<sup>th</sup> Day of April, 1786* (London, 1786). For an impassioned defence of Hastings, cf., Charles Hamilton's *An Historical Relation of the Origin, Progress, and Final Dissolution of the Government of the Rohilla Afghans in the Northern Provinces of Hindostan* (London, 1787).

were stereotypically adopting the tyrannical ways of Oriental governance. In the midst of such scandal, 'Indian literature' like the *Bhagvat-Geeta* offered not only a way to learn about another religion and culture, but also 'redeem the national character' from these offences in the fostering of a cross-cultural appreciation of each other's common humanity – one sanctioned by both a British and Hindu 'Heaven'. As this thesis will show, Jones' sympathetic and syncretic representations of Hinduism contributed to and demonstrated the ideals of cultural reciprocity and exchange prevalent during the 1780s – ideals, as this thesis investigates, which would influence other major Romantic poets for the next thirty years.

From a historical and literary perspective, the rise of Hinduism into the artistic consciousness of Britain and the subsequent rise of Romantic literature is a concurrence that is hardly coincidental. There is something extremely gratifying and telling by the fact that, only months after supposedly writing without 'consciousness of effort' what would become, historically, the quintessential 'Romantic' poem *Kubla Khan* (c. June 1797), Samuel Taylor Coleridge describes his ideal imaginative state using Hindu mythological imagery:

I should much wish like the Indian Vishna [*sic*] to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotos, & wake once in a million years for a few minutes – just to know that I was going to sleep a million more years.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Coleridge romanticises the imagination to be like the Hindu mythological cycle of creation (and destruction). In this myth (according to Coleridge), *Vishnu*, the Preserver, floats upon the waters of Creation in a 'Lotos', dreaming the existence of

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<sup>18</sup> *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. I: 1785-1800*, ed. Earl Leslie Gigg (Oxford, 1956), p. 350-351.



Figure 1 – James Gillray's 'Blood on Thunder Fording the Red Sea' (1788)

the universe until he awakens 'for a few minutes' to find that dream manifest into reality – only to shortly disappear into another state of dreaming.<sup>19</sup> Without delving too deeply into Coleridge's theorising of imaginative creation, mainly because Coleridge does not feature as a topic of analysis in this thesis, it suffices to say that it is Coleridge's definition of the Imagination in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) that, again historically, would come to delineate and symbolise the Romantic mythos of the 'Imagination'. That Coleridge's 'Imagination' has roots in Hindu mythology and imagery provides some evidence, however anecdotal, to supporting the argument

<sup>19</sup> Coleridge's version of the myth is slightly inaccurate; as Mohit K. Ray writes, 'In the traditional image Vishnu is not afloat on a lotus...but on a snake. It is Brahma, the god of creation who sits on the lotus stemming out from the navel of Vishnu' ('Coleridge and His Innermost 'Id''', *Studies in Literary Criticism* [New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2001], p. 60-74, 66). The famed comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell succinctly and sublimely narrates the myth in the documentary *The Power of Myth* (1988): 'Just think, Vishnu sleeps in the cosmic ocean, and the lotus of the universe grows from his navel. On the lotus sits Brahma, the creator. Brahma opens his eyes, and a world comes into being, governed by an Indra. Brahma closes his eyes, and a world goes out of being. The life of a Brahma is 432,000 years. When he dies, the lotus goes back, and another lotus is formed, and another Brahma. Then think of the galaxies beyond galaxies in infinite space, each a lotus, with a Brahma sitting on it, opening his eyes, closing his eyes'.



that the rise of Hinduism contributed to the establishment of (a kind of) Romantic aesthetic.

However, while my thesis agrees with the notion also put forward by Schwab and Drew that Hinduism played a significant part in contributing to and creating a 'Romantic' aesthetic, my work also seeks to place and trace the influence of Hinduism in Romanticism within another historical context: the emergence and impact of dissenting religion on the period. As a rash of recent scholarship has illustrated – including Martin Priestman's *Romantic Atheism* (1999), Mark Canuel's *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing 1790-1830* (2002), Daniel White's *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2003), Franklin's *Romantic Representations of British India*, and Ziad Elmarsafy's *The Enlightenment Qur'an* (2009) – religion has once again become a topic of intense scholarly investigation in Eighteenth Century and Romantic literary studies, particularly as it concerns dissenting and/or Eastern religions.

Needless to say, this body of scholarship is far from creating a consensus on the topic. For example, take the idea of religious tolerance; whereas religious tolerance for Franklin and, to an extent, Elmarsafy rests in the ideals of sympathetic cultural exchange and negotiation, for Canuel toleration defines a buzz word of the times delineating the 'means through which distinct beliefs could be coordinated or organized under the auspices of more capacious and elaborate structures of government'.<sup>20</sup> Much like the coordinated effort, and domineering impulses, of 'Orientalism', Canuel portrays religious toleration as an ideological means of consolidating politically unruly, and potentially dangerous, religious sects. Canuel does not, however, expend his analysis to non-Christian religions other than Judaism, so the extent to which a religion such as Hinduism fits into his argumentation is unclear. While my work does not specifically address this unexamined point, it does seek to integrate Hinduism within these larger discourses

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<sup>20</sup> *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing 1790-1830* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 4.

surrounding dissenting religions during the Romantic period in order show how Hinduism not only contributed to and influenced the religious debate, but played a major role in them.

As Daniel White writes in *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* concerning the general point of dissenting religions' importance to Romantic literature, it would be a fallacy, to say the least, to declare that

we can understand late-eighteenth-century taste and genius, including the development of the Romantic lyric, without attending to the myriad thoughts and feelings produced and structured by religious Dissenting publics.<sup>21</sup>

This work seeks to add to that sentiment by acknowledging the extent to which Hinduism, through confluences and conflicts with Dissenting religion, equally informs our understanding of the development of the Romantic lyric – especially the hymn. It also seeks to recognise Hinduism's involvement in the emergence of religious heterodoxy during the eighteenth century, and that heterodoxy's contribution to the Romantic period. As to the rest of the works noted above, the extent to which my thesis draws from and develops them will become clearer as I move to examine more individual issues and poems.

As such, the rise of heterodox Christian religions and the rise of India and Indian religions into the political and literary consciousness of eighteenth-century Britons was also hardly coincidental. It is the premise of this thesis that these two seams of intellectual life in Britain converge with the introduction and proliferation of Hinduism in the literature of the period. For example, in 1785, Charles Wilkins writes in his preface to the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, that, 'The most learned *Brahmans* of the present time are Unitarians' (24). As a dissenting sect of Christianity which denied the authority of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ but still believed in Jesus' moral message, Unitarianism became a common religious point of comparison for Hinduism.

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<sup>21</sup> *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge, 2006), p.1.

For Wilkins' part, the comparison was largely an accurate one based on theological similarities. The holy text Wilkins translated, the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, tells the story of *Krishna*, an earthy incarnation of *Vishnu* the Preserver, who reveals the mystical secrets of the universe and of Hindu theology to *Arjoon*, a Hindu prince set to go into battle. In their dialogues, *Krishna* states that:

I am generation and dissolution, the place where all things are repositied, and the inexhaustible seed of all nature...I am death and immortality: I am entity and non-entity...I am the soul which standeth in the bodies of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things. (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 71, 76)

The omnipresence which *Krishna* symbolises and embodies here represents a monotheistic Hinduism which Wilkins, Hastings, and Jones were all eager to promote in terms relative to Unitarianism, which Europeans and Britons alike could understand. There was a perfectly sound reason for such comparisons to be made: namely, there was no other language available to contextualise a foreign religion such as Hinduism within terms comprehensible to Europeans, or enunciate, and thereby translate, accurately its theology which delved deeply into unfamiliar esotericism and mysticism. Thus, one of the early questions which presented itself to Britons sympathetic to Hinduism, and which serves as a fundamental enquiry for this thesis, was 'how' – how does Hinduism become translated in order to make it accessible to a British and European audience?

Methodologically, in order to answer this and other questions, this thesis follows the example set by Martin Priestman in *Romantic Atheism*, who bases his book on the 'simple' premise of exploring the links between 'the development of explicit atheism...and the simultaneous emergence of much important new poetry'.<sup>22</sup> Like Priestman, my thesis focuses on poetic criticism to drive the analytical force of its arguments. While Hinduism manifested itself in novels – interestingly, the most famous of which were all written by women (Phebe Gibbes' *Hartly House, Calcutta* [1789], Elizabeth Hamilton's *Letters from a Hindoo Rajah* [1797] and Sydney

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<sup>22</sup> *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 1.

Owenson's *The Missionary* [1811]) – poetry seemed to be the textual form in which it appeared most frequently<sup>23</sup>; references to India and Hinduism can be found in the poetry of Halhed, Jones, Blake, Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Keats, William Cowper, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, William Beckford, Thomas Beddoes, Walter Savage Landor, Felicia Dorothea Hemans, Thomas Moore, Thomas Medwin, John Flaxman and Lord Alfred Tennyson, to just name a few, as well as the works of Indian poets who became familiar with the British Romantics such as Raja Rammohan Ray and Henry Derozio.

My thesis privileges poetry because it is primarily interested, particularly in Chapter I, in the way in which Jones translated Hinduism, itself based textually on religious poetry known as the *Vedas*, through a like poetic form: the hymn. In this sense, poetry is critical to both the fundamental understanding of the Hindu religion as well as to understanding the way in which Hinduism was transmitted and mediated to other poets in the period.

With this in mind, I turn now to examine the works of William Jones – who, through his ‘Hymns’ to Hindu deities, stands as the leading and permeating voice of Hinduism in British poetry for the period in question.

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<sup>23</sup> For an examination on women writing on India, cf., Michael J. Franklin’s ‘Representing India in the Drawing-Room and Classroom’; or, Miss Owenson and “Those Gay Gentlemen, Brahma, Vishnu, and Co.”, *Interrogating Orientalism*, p. 159-181, and ‘Radically Feminizing India: Phebe Gibbes *Hartley House, Calcutta* (1789) and Sydney Owenson’s *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811)’, *Romantic Representations of British India*, p. 154-179. See also Balachandra Rajan’s ‘Feminizing the Feminine: Early Woman Writers on India’, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 118-138.

# Chapter I

## 'Lisping Tongues' and 'Sanskrit Songs': Sir William Jones, the Hymn(s), and the Mediation of *Vedanta* Hinduism

### I: Introduction: Hinduism, Religion, and the Issue of Translation

In 1785, Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal from 1773 to 1785, wrote an introductory letter to Charles Wilkins' translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* expounding the virtues of one of Hinduism's most sacred texts. Hastings lauded the *Geeta* as a work of 'great originality' and 'sublimity', and even suggested that it reflected the 'fundamental doctrines' of Christian theology, despite its occasional 'absurdity, barbarous habits, and...perverted morality' (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 11, 7-8). In describing the Hindu religion in such conflicted terms – as somehow simultaneously reflecting monotheistic Christianity and the 'perverted', 'barbarous', 'sublime' and 'absurd' religion that is Hinduism – Hastings frames, in Hinduism's first significant appearance in English, the terms by which Britain's discordant relationship with the religion would be defined for over the next half century or so, oscillating between fascination and fear, respect and revulsion.

Yet, this characterisation is not to diminish the importance of Hastings making Hinduism available to a British audience in the first place. When he became Governor-General in 1773, Hastings instituted a policy of ruling India 'on its ancient laws, and...[ruling the Hindu] people with ease and moderation according to their own ideas, manners and prejudices'; for Hastings, this was the only just way to impose foreign rule: 'It would be a grievance to deny the people protection of their own laws, but it would be a wanton tyranny to require their obedience to others of which they are wholly ignorant'.<sup>1</sup> Hastings was sensitive to his own Enlightenment ideals concerning the primacy of law, but at the same time, he wanted to draw a clear distinction, in theory at least, between the tolerance of the incoming British administration and the 'bigotry of the Mahomedan government' it was replacing (a

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<sup>1</sup> 'To Lord Mansfield, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1774', *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Hon. Warren Hastings, First Governor-General of Bengal*, Ed. Rev. G.R. Gleig, (London, 1841), p. 404, 400.

government which had attempted the widespread conversion of Hindus to Islam in the seventeenth century under Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb).<sup>2</sup> One of Hastings' reasons for promoting native Indian law was his respect for 'the institutes which time and religion had rendered familiar to [Hindus'] understandings and sacred to their affections'.<sup>3</sup> Hastings knew that Hindu law was 'interwoven with their religion' and that a tolerance of the one required a tolerance of the other.<sup>4</sup> These sentiments led him to fund and support efforts by the British to learn, read, and translate in English works of Hindu mythology, religion, and law – an endeavour that yielded Wilkins' translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*.

However, while Hastings desired to translate ancient Sanskrit texts as a means to make Hindu religion and law more comprehensible (and, as an intended consequence to his colonial position, easier to control), he also recognised the complications involved in converting, or translating, another culture – particularly another culture's religion – into terms comprehensible to Britons. Interestingly, Hastings makes one of the earliest comments about the difficulties of such 'cultural translation'. In his introductory letter to Wilkins' *Bhagvat-Geeta*, Hastings comments that:

the Brahmans are enjoined to perform a kind of spiritual discipline...[that] consists in devoting a certain period of time to the contemplation of the Deity, his attributes, and the moral duties of life. It is required of those who practice this exercise, not only that they divest their minds of all sensual desire, but that their attention be abstracted from every external object, and absorbed, with every sense, in the prescribed subject of their meditation... To those who have never been accustomed to this separation of the mind from the notices of the senses, it may not be easy to conceive by what means such a power is to be obtained; since even the most studious men of our hemisphere will find it difficult so to restrain their attention but that it will wander to some object of present sense or recollection; and even the buzzing of a fly will sometimes have the power to disturb

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<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Hon. Warren Hastings*, 400. Like Hastings, in his 'Hymn to Gangá', William Jones describes Aurangzeb as a 'ruffian king' whose 'ruthless bandits' 'deface' and destroy Hindu 'shrines, whence gifts eternal spring' (*Sir William Jones: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Michael J. Franklin, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995: p. 130, ll. 99, 101, 102; abbreviated hereafter *SWJ*); in contrast, *Bráhmans* 'fair-smiling realms' will be appreciated by other 'nations', such as Britain (*SWJ*, 130, ll. 104).

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Hon. Warren Hastings*, 400.

<sup>4</sup> *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Hon. Warren Hastings*, 404.

it...But as [such religious doctrines] must differ, yet more than the most abstruse of ours, from the common modes of expression, so they will require consonant modes of expression, which it may be impossible to render by any of the known terms of science in our language, or even to make them intelligible by definition. (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 9-10)

To Hastings, the Hindu religion and its practice of devotional meditation promoting the abstraction of the self is so 'different', 'abstruse', and, as he says elsewhere, 'highly metaphysical' that he questions if the religion is practically and epistemologically comprehensible (let alone translatable) to a larger European and British audience; after all, studious and rigorous self-denial was hardly the forte of European civilisations, particularly those, such as the British, engaged in colonial endeavours (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 9).

Yet, it is not just the mental abstraction of Hindu metaphysics which concerns the Governor-General; Hastings questions if Hindu religious doctrine is even linguistically translatable, suggesting that Hindu principles defy the linguistic possibilities of an idiom grounded in European empiricism and rationalism. As he subsequently writes, such a linguistic deficit accounts for Wilkins' use of vague and imprecise terms like 'Action', 'Application', and 'Practice' to describe such a 'separation of the mind', or for his use of Sanskrit words for the simple reason that they have no English equivalent (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 10). Hastings' only solution to the problem is to propose a hypothetical, but nonetheless necessary, 'consonant mode of expression' that may adequately equate the religious principles of the Hindus with accordant terms 'intelligible' to English speakers. Hastings seems to suggest the invention of a new epistemological lexicon to accommodate the esoteric tenets of Hinduism that defy 'common modes of expression'; but the phrase 'consonant modes of expression' leaves open the possibilities of a variety of forms to come and bridge the linguistic (and religious) gap in order to make Hinduism comprehensible. Moreover, it suggests that a plurality of 'modes of expression' may be required for 'intelligibility' to be sufficient, accurate, and applicable.

In many ways, the problems Hastings grapples with here are the basic problems of translation. On a linguistic level, those problems are obvious: certain words and expressions have no ‘consonant mode of expression’, thus making it difficult for entire concepts and theories to have ‘intelligibility’ once transposed from a source language into a target language. But Hastings is talking about something besides language; he is talking about cultural and religious practices, and the language, concepts, and theories which construct and contextualise those cultural and religious practices – what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz refers to as ‘thick description’; Geertz describes this concept as the

multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which [the translator] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render.<sup>5</sup>

What seems implicit in Hastings’ analysis is a growing realisation that the culture itself is untranslatable through language only, that something else – something analogous to engaging in the practice of self-denial itself – was necessary in order to give these cultural and religious practices a translation grounded in their own cultural and religious authenticity. In other words, Hinduism must somehow first be ‘rendered’ before it can be ‘grasped’, inverting the more common mode of translation Geertz describes above.

Since Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978, translation within the context of eighteenth-century India has been a byword for the process of imperial control. Said viewed translation, particularly the translation of ancient Sanskrit texts on Hindu mythology, as the ‘irresistible impulse...to codify [and] to subdue the infinite variety of the Orient to “a complete digest” of laws, figures, customs and works’ so that British colonial administrators like Hastings and Wilkins would be able to impose their imperial rule further, and with more ease.<sup>6</sup> Translation was a means of codifying,

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Fourth Edition (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 78.



calcifying, and controlling the culture in which one was colonising. As Tejaswini Niranjana writes, translations in the colonial context constitute acts of imaginative conquest, participating 'in the *fixing* of colonized cultures, making them seem static and unchanging rather than historically constructed'.<sup>7</sup> According to Niranjana, translation became an attempt to embalm a culture and stricture it to being nothing more than an object placed on a shelf. Somewhat less morbidly, but nonetheless consistent with Niranjana's argument, Robert Young writes that

translation begins as a matter of intercultural communication, but it also always involves questions of power relations, and of forms of domination...[under colonialism] Translation becomes part of the process of domination, of achieving control.<sup>8</sup>

What begins as an 'intercultural' exercise to exchange information ultimately turns into a conflict of cultural power, with the colonial power always serving to dominate and 'control' the perceived inferiority of the colonised culture. Said, Niranjana, and Young view the translation of Hindu texts during Hastings' reign as part and parcel of the imperial 'impulse' to establish, authorise, and adjudicate control over a 'lesser' culture for its hegemonic assimilation into the 'superior' culture.

However, recent studies on translation – and particularly recent studies on translations of culture and religion – have sought to soften the rigidity of postcolonial assumptions regarding translation and its appropriation of 'Eastern' cultures. In *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, Ziad Elmarsafy considers the interpretative potential of the *Qur'an* for authors such as Spinoza, George Sale, Rousseau, Goethe, and others, examining how translations of the *Qur'an* contributed to the development of these authors' Enlightenment ideals. As he writes in the preface to the book, 'Translation is the most political art, all the more so when it involves re-presenting a text held sacred by those with whom relations are not always friendly'.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, Elmarsafy

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<sup>7</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Postcolonialism and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p.3.

<sup>8</sup> *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, OUP, 2003), p. 140.

<sup>9</sup> *The Enlightenment Qur'an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam* (Oxford, Oneworld, 2009), p. ix.

refers to the often contentious geopolitical and cultural relationship between Christian Europe and the Islamic Middle East during the eighteenth century which served as a backdrop for a period of intense European interest in the *Qur'an*. But on the other hand, Elmarsafy questions whether translation can effectively and adequately 'carry over' aspects of culture and religion without bearing too overt a polemic; translation, as he concedes above, is always political, in both a literal and figurative sense. But can the figurative politics of translation – the negotiation of meaning and language from source to target – assuage the literal politics of translation – the 're-presentation' of religious texts held sacred by the source *culture*, but sacrilegious by the target?

Elmarsafy suggests that this is possible – at least in George Sale's 1734 translation of the *Qur'an* – provided that a concept of 'faithfulness' is applied to the text.<sup>10</sup> By 'faithfulness' Elmarsafy means the accommodation of

the text's own claims to legitimacy, in trying to find, in English, an idiom and style smooth enough to contain the rich texture of the Qur'ān...Sale succeeds in restituting to the text something of the dignity and majesty of the Arabic original, thereby making it his own.<sup>11</sup>

'Faithful' translation denotes the negotiation of terms in the target language that preserve and communicate the religious 'legitimacy' and 'dignity' of the source language. It is less about finding the exact corresponding words from source to target and more about the overall effect of the language's presence and presentation in communicating the 'majesty' of the original sacred text. 'Faithful' translation concedes linguistic fidelity in order to maintain emotional appeal and a 'spirit' of originality – a 'spirit', as Elmarsafy writes, in which 'we see a very real desire not only to understand, but perhaps also to imitate'.<sup>12</sup> 'Faithful' translation seeks to emulate the original's 'spirit' in the sense of both creative innovation and primal conception. By 'imitating' the 'spirit' of the original, a translation can be made one's 'own'; that is, a translation can be more than just a copy – it can be made 'original'. When Hastings

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<sup>10</sup> *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, p. 46.

dubbed Wilkins' translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* a work of 'great originality' and 'of sublimity of conception, reasoning, and diction, almost unequalled', he captures the 'spirit' of 'faithfulness' Elmarsafy outlines above.

In *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry*, Ashok Bery accurately summarises the current trend which moves away from the rigidity of postcolonial notions of translations as *only* a unilateral domestication of foreign culture. While Bery concedes the postcolonial assumption that '*all* translation is in some sense invasive, manipulative and, if you will, imperialistic' in the sense that translation 'will not leave the source text as it originally found it', he also admits that 'translations do indeed add something to the target culture, and don't simply appropriate the source culture'.<sup>13</sup> As Elmarsafy ably demonstrates, the 'faithful' translation of the *Qur'an* had a tremendous impact on the Enlightenment's key figures, such as Voltaire and Goethe (two authors also heavily influenced by Hinduism, as we'll see). And while the legacy of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* would not reach the fame, or the infamy, of the *Qur'an*, it nonetheless would spur an interest in Hinduism throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that affected key poetic figures such as William Blake, Robert Southey and Percy Bysshe Shelley in important ways as well.<sup>14</sup>

For Hastings, however, finding a 'consonant mode of expression' to suit the 'intelligible' translation of Hinduism would elude him – although, to be fair, he did not try in any earnest to do so. But it would become something of a preoccupation for one of Hastings' colleagues, who was more capable intellectually and linguistically to render the spirit of cultural and religious tolerance, sympathy and translation that Hastings' policies imagined into textual expression(s). This colleague was, of course, Sir William Jones. Jones arrived in India in 1783 to take his seat as a judge upon the

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<sup>13</sup> *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): p. 10, 19.

<sup>14</sup> For an extensive analysis of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*'s influence in the period, see Krishna Gopal Srivastava's *Bhagavad-Gītā and the English romantic movement: a study in influence* (Macmillan India, 2002).

Bengalese Supreme Court. A renowned polyglot, Jones soon took up the study of ancient Sanskrit, despite some reluctance at first given his already busy judicial schedule. Given his study of Sanskrit, and his former renown as a translator of Persian literature, he naturally began to take up translation of the ancient language as well, focusing particularly on ancient mythological works of Hindu law, religion, and philosophy (subjects which are, as is the nature of ancient mythological works, often interrelated, even inseparable matters in the same text). From these translations, Jones would announce his findings on Hindu culture and religion in the form of annual discourses given to the Asiatick Society, a scholarly organisation Jones founded and presided over upon his arrival to Calcutta; the Society's remit was to enquire into the 'History and antiquities, the arts, sciences and literature of Asia', much after the Royal Society in London, of which Jones was a member before his leaving for India (*Letters*, II, 626).

In this sense, then, one of the 'consonant modes of expression' for Hinduism was the language of the European erudite – the pendants, linguists, officers-cum-scholars, antiquarians, missionaries, and self-made researchers who, for one reason or another, found themselves in India and used their Enlightened empiricism to 'discover' a lost Orient. As Sharada Sugirtharajah writes in *Imagining Hinduism*, these 'orientalists and missionaries fashioned a Hinduism largely in terms of their own conceptual frameworks, informed by such Enlightenment ideas as modernity, rationality, linear progress, and development'.<sup>15</sup> As evidenced by his founding of the Asiatick Society, Jones' researches were very much a part of this intellectual and knowledge-construction framework – much to the postcolonial, analytical chagrin of scholars such as Said and Sugirtharajah who view Jones as a leading architect of Britain's colonial infrastructure.

However, Jones' prolific output also provided of an "excess" of knowledge',

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<sup>15</sup> *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. xii.

as Saree Makdisi terms it, which ‘served no immediate administrative purpose’.<sup>16</sup> In other words, Makdisi suggests that Jones’ publications on Hinduism were not always applicable to, or even useful to, the administration of empire in the sense that Said and Sugirtharajah argue that they were. Such a colonially-useless ‘excess of knowledge’ seems to stem from Jones’ first-hand exposure to Hinduism and its mytho-religious texts – texts which prove something of a personal revelation to Jones. In a letter to his friend Richard Johnson in 1784, Jones writes that he is

in love with the *Gopia*, charmed with *Crishen*, an enthusiastick admirer of *Rām*, and a devout adorer of *Brihma*...not to mention, that *Jūdishteīr*, *Arjen*, *Corno*, and the other warriors of the *M’hab’harat* appear greater in my eyes than Agamemnon, Ajax, and Achilles appeared, when I first read the Iliad.<sup>17</sup>

Jones finds in Hinduism a mythology that is ‘greater’ than the Classicism he had read and admired as a young student, and to which tradition he had alluded himself as a poet before coming to India. Moreover, however, Jones’ rhetoric emphasises a particular religious subtext, using words such as ‘enthusiastick’ and ‘devout’ to describe his admiration for Hindu deities such as *Krishna*, *Brahma*, and *Rama*. While largely free from the implications of zealotry and radicalism they would convey in the 1790s, Jones’ use of ‘enthusiastick’ and ‘devout’ to describe his admiration for the Hindu deities still suggests an impassioned fascination with Hindu mythology and religion that goes beyond the norms of religious tolerance – as well as the scholarly disinterestedness which characterised his more formal prose discourses on Hinduism. Indeed, by placing it on an equal footing as Classical mythology, Jones’ rhetoric here communicates a legitimisation of a foreign religion quite at odds with its

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<sup>16</sup> *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge, CUP, 1998), p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> *The Letters of Sir William Jones* (2 vols), ed. Garland Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 606, vol. II. Hereafter abbreviated *Letters*. The *Gopia* are nine maidens who attend *Krishna* (referred to here as ‘*Crishen*’), the *avatar*, or earthly incarnation, of *Vishnu*. *Rām* refers to the god *Rama*, another famous incarnation of *Vishnu*, and *Brihma* refers to *Brahma*, the god of Creation. The *Mahabharata* is an epic poem of Hindu mythology, considered a sacred text. The *Mahabharata* contains the *Bhagavad-Gita*, another work of Hindu mythology considered one of the main holy scriptures of Hinduism.

representation as a polytheistic and idolatrous faith back in Britain; as P.J. Marshall notes in *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*:

the attitude of the great mass of Europeans who came into contact with [Hinduism] was always either ridicule or disgust. Books were filled with accounts of a multiplicity of deities, repellent images and barbarous customs.<sup>18</sup>

Such ‘repellent images’ and ‘barbarous customs’ often revolved around *sati*, the ritual burning of widows – reports of which were often circulated in periodicals such as *The Edinburgh Magazine* and the *Monthly Review*.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Jones, like Hastings and Wilkins, advanced a representation of Hinduism that was monotheistic, moral, and pious. These two conflicting images of Hinduism – the ‘popular’ and the ‘philosophical’, as Marshall terms them – often find little common ground in the period as they demarcate the extremes of the political, religious, and aesthetic spectrum.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, Jones’ (religious) fascination with Hinduism impels him to find and negotiate a ‘consonant mode of expression’ in order to mediate, even translate, ‘faithfully’ Hinduism’s spiritual validity in the face of such prejudice – a ‘mode of expression’, I argue, Jones finds within the hymnal form.

Inspired by his translation of ancient Sanskrit texts, which encouraged his ‘enthusiastick’ and ‘devout’ fascination with Hinduism, Jones composed a series of original ‘Hymns’ to Hindu deities between 1784 and 1789. He wrote nine such hymns, addressing them to specific Hindu gods and goddesses. These deities included: *Camdeo*, the god of Love; *Náráyena*, the ‘spirit of God’ sustaining Creation as an incarnation of *Vishnu*, the Preserver; *Sereswaty*, the wife of *Brahma*, the Creator, and the goddess of Music, Language and Poetry; *Gangá*, the river goddess of the Ganges; *Indra*, the god of the *Swerga*, the Hindu Heaven; *Súrya*, the Sun god; *Lacshmí*, the wife of *Vishnu* and the goddess of Wealth and Good Fortune; and two hymns to the goddess *Pracriti* (or Mother Nature), the wife of *Shiva*, the Destroyer,

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<sup>18</sup> *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Andrea Major’s *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati, 1500-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 20.

who Jones praises as *Durgá*, the goddess of Destruction, and *Bhavání*, the goddess of *śakti*, or the dynamic artifice of divine energy found within the female (*Bhavání* means ‘Giver-of-Existence’).<sup>21</sup> Each poem consists of two sections: a prefaced prose ‘Argument’ and the poetic body itself, the one serving to coordinate with and explain the other. The Argument introduces various mythological, philosophical and etymological aspects of the invoked deity, explicating and contextualising ‘any difficult allusions’ that may appear within the poems (‘Two Hymns to Pracriti’, *SWJ*, 167). In turn, the poem vivifies those allusions through a narrative appropriate to the deity’s significance. It is through this inter-textual mediation of explanation and encomium that Jones negotiates a ‘consonant mode of expression’ that makes Hinduism not only ‘intelligible’ linguistically, but also ‘intelligible’ religiously and aesthetically to Britons and the British literature of the period – a fact evinced by Jones’ very use of a poetic form known for its religious connotations, particularly in the eighteenth century.

This chapter examines Jones ‘Hymns’ to illustrate the ways in which their mediation of Hinduism in many ways resembles the idea of ‘faithful’ translation explored by Elmarsafy. Interestingly, Jones uses that very term ‘faithful translation’ to similar effect in his Preface to *Sacotalá* (1789), a Hindu drama he translated ‘word for word into English’, but then ‘disengaged...from the stiffness of a foreign idiom’ to present an ‘authentick picture’ of Hinduism (*SWJ*, 216). As in Elmarsafy’s description of Sale finding an ‘idiom and style smooth enough’ for his translation of the *Qur’an*, here Jones describes his translation as relaxing the ‘stiffness’ of strict ‘word for word’ English transposition in order to imbue his work with an ‘authentick’ air. I maintain

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<sup>21</sup> *SWJ*, p. 107, 179. *Durgá* is closely aligned to *Kālī*, the Black Goddess of Death. However, as Michael J. Franklin notes, Jones presents her ‘not as the terrifying goddess of destruction, but as the destroyer of the world of illusion. Aware that many Europeans were anxious to locate Hinduism in a monstrous mire of thuggery and blood sacrifice, *Durgá* is portrayed as the presiding deity of devout intellect’ (*SWJ*, 168). *Durgá*, as the goddess of Destruction, is also the goddess of Rejuvenation, since in Hindu theology destruction is a form of (new) creation; thus *Durgá*, often represented with prominent breasts and wide hips, has a quality of the *Mahādevī*, or the Mother Goddess, to her divine nature.

that Jones employs translation in a similar fashion with his 'Hymns' – even though they are not translations in the traditional sense of the word.

The poems' investment in originality performs the very negotiations of meaning and language that is often the domain of translation. I will demonstrate this in two ways: 1) by examining how Jones' aesthetic conception and poetic use of the hymn evokes Hindu, rather than Christian, religious exegesis, particularly in his 'Hymn to Súrya' (which serves as the focus of this chapter); and 2) by exploring the historical legacy of the 'Hymns' and contextualising them within the religious debates of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (which serves as the purpose of Chapter II). In doing so, I hope to ground Jones' 'Hymns' in a Hindu theology and examine the religio-political and aesthetic implications of their Hindu character.

Before I move on to this discussion, however, I believe it is important that I first define what I mean by, and what Jones knew of, Hinduism in order to frame my arguments for the two points above. The following section examines *Vedanta* Hinduism, the particular philosophical strain of Hinduism which Jones privileged, and explores the philosophy's influence on both Jones' religious and aesthetic attitudes.

## II: Jones and (*Vedantic*) Hinduism

Hinduism is largely an amorphous religion. It has no unifying theology; no single scriptural authority; no fundamental belief system. Rather, it has multiple theologies, scriptures, and belief systems that form the religions of Hindus. As Romila Thapar explains:

The evolution of Hinduism is not a linear progression from a founder through an organizational system, with sects branching off. It is rather the mosaic of distinct cults, deities, sects and ideas...Religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity see themselves as part of the historical process of the unfolding and interpreting of the single religion and sects are based on variant interpretations of the original teaching...In contrast to this, Hindu sects often had a distinct and independent origin.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity', *Modern Asian Studies*. Vol. 23, No. 2 (1989), pp. 209-231, 216.



That is, what we know today as Hinduism incorporates various regional and philosophical traditions that run a wide theological (and, as Thapar argues, socio-political) spectrum – from atheism on one hand to complete monism on another. Unlike other monotheistic religions such as Islam or Christianity, or even other Indian religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, or Sikhism, Hinduism has a disparate and diffuse organisation that lacks a concrete centre such as a founding figure (Christ, Buddha, Mohammad) or a founding theological principle (Jesus as Christ; Mohammed as Prophet; Buddhist enlightenment; Jainist pacifism). The single thread weaving Hinduism's mosaic of 'distinct cults, deities, sects and ideas' together is an unwavering belief in the divine sanctity of the *Veda*, the canon of Hindu religious texts including the *Bhagvat-Geeta*.<sup>23</sup>

Jones was well aware of India's diverse theological and religious traditions, even if he sometimes mistook the finer points of them. In his 'On the Philosophy of the Asiaticks', Jones writes how 'the works of the...*Bauddhas*...[and] *Jainas*' are 'heterodox' philosophies diverging from what he considers to be conventional Hinduism; he even writes how Buddha 'dissented' from 'orthodox *Bráhmens*'.<sup>24</sup> Here, Jones confuses the Buddha of Buddhism – a separate religion – with the Buddha of Hindu tradition. In one sense, Jones was correct, as Buddhism shares certain Hindu traditions; Buddha, for example, is considered an *avatar*, or humanly reincarnation, of *Vishnu* called the *Sugata-Buddha*. However, whereas Hinduism may consider Buddha a part of its theological system, Buddhism, and Jainism, reject *Vedic* authority, thereby making them religions in their own right rather than 'heterodox' sects of Hinduism.<sup>25</sup> This theological jumble confused Jones; as he writes in 'On the Chronology of the Hindus' (1788):

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<sup>23</sup> Buddhist and Jainist doctrine dispute and dispel the *Veda*'s sacred authority, thus making them separate religions from Hinduism.

<sup>24</sup> *The Works of Sir William Jones: Volume I*, ed. Lord Teignmouth (London, 1807), p. 234, 13 vols. Abbreviated hereafter *Works*, with volume number.

<sup>25</sup> As Mark Lussier explains in 'Colonial Counterflow: From Orientalism to Buddhism', Buddhism was never really considered a 'distinct body of thought from Hinduism' until 1804, when it became officially defined in British dictionaries as one. However, Lussier remarks that Jones' syncretic perspective of

The *Bráhmans* universally speak of the *Bauddhas* with all the malignity of an intolerant spirit; yet the most orthodox among them consider BUDDHA himself an incarnation of VISHNU; this is a contradiction hard to be reconciled. (*Works*, IV, 17-18)

Lost in Hinduism's thick theological 'knot', as he describes it, Jones focuses his attention on understanding the (orthodox) *Vedic* tradition and a specific Hindu philosophy that he views as representing the core orthodoxy of Hindu belief:

*Vedantism* (*Works*, IV, 18).

*Vedanta* means 'end of the *Veda*'. It refers to the philosophy's inception near the end of the *Vedic* age (c. 600-100 BCE) and its emphasis on the *Upanishads*, sacred texts which lecture on *Vedic* philosophy that arose during the same period. *Vedantism* is one of six *astika*, or orthodox, schools, the others being: *Nyāya* (logic), *Vaishesika* (atomism), *Samkhya* ('enumeration,' a philosophy of duality), *Yoga* (meditation), and *Mimamsa* (enquiry). Each school pairs with another complementary one, thus conjoining *Nyāya* and *Vaishesika*, *Samkhya* and *Yoga*, *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta* – all of which Jones describes more or less accurately in 'On the Philosophy of the Asiaticks'.

In that work, Jones describes the 'fundamental tenet of the *Védántí* school' as

not in denying the existence of matter, that is, of solidity, impenetrability, and extended figure...but, in correcting the popular notion of it, and in contending, that it has no essence independent of mental perception, that existence and perceptibility are convertible terms, that external appearances and sensations are illusory, and would vanish into nothing, if that divine energy, which alone sustains them, were suspended but for a moment. (*Works*, I, 238-239)

More specifically, Jones actually describes a sect within *Vedantism*, known as *Advaita* (non-dualist) *Vedantism*. *Advaita Vedantism* is an immaterialist, monist philosophy ascribed to the ancient mystic Shankara (or as Jones puts it, 'the incomparable SANCARA') (*Works*, I, 239). *Vedantism* postulates that everything is attributable to a singular Divine source (*Brahman*) which is the one true reality. All

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Hinduism helped to foster a 'linguistic and textual counterflow through which Buddhism...slowly emerged into European consciousness' (*Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual Approaches and Pedagogical Practices*, eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffery Cass, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2006: p. 90-106, 98).

materiality, including one's own conscious self (*Ātman*), is a component of that Divine source at some fundamental, metaphysical level. However, the self, or *Ātman*, is often disconnected from that divine source, or *Brahman*, by *Máyá*, the perceived delusion of the material world (the 'external appearances and sensations' that are 'illusory' as Jones writes above). The plurality of the material world exists only as the 'mental perception' of one's thoughts; as Jones writes in more Berkleyan language, things 'exist only as far as they are *perceived*' ('A Hymn to Náráyena', *SWJ*, 106).<sup>26</sup> As Jones says, *Vedantism* does not deny the existence of materiality, but rather changes one's perception about what materiality is – including perception itself. Perception is a means of sensing the material world, but it is a world that exists only as perception, thereby veiling the true unifying reality and materiality of all things; true existence, and thus true perception, rests only in the union of *Ātman* with *Brahman* – the 'sustaining divine energy.'

Aware of the different philosophical *astika* traditions, it is interesting that Jones privileges *Vedantism* over a philosophy such as *Nyāya*. Jones describes *Nyāya* as 'logical...metaphysics... accommodated...to the natural reason and common sense of mankind', while also noting that this philosophy was the one which 'the *Bráhmens* of this province [Bengal] almost universally follow' ('On the Philosophy', *Works*, I, 237, 240).<sup>27</sup> With an emphasis on materiality, perception, and human reason, *Nyāya* closely adheres to the scientific principles of the Enlightenment in which Jones was educated and purported to adhere to in his scientific study of Oriental languages and literature. Also, as Jones points out, it was the 'common opinion' of the local Bengalese *Brahmans*, with whom Jones had been

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<sup>26</sup> In fact, in a letter to Wilkins in 1785, Jones notes in passing that the Hindu 'doctrine' of *Vedanta* is similar to that of 'our *Berkley*' (*Letters*, II, 669, 670). In his *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), George Berkley famously theorised that '*esse est percipi*': to be is to be perceived; existence rests in perception (*The Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. Roger Woolhouse, London: Penguin Books, 1988: 54).

<sup>27</sup> '*Nyaya* means logical analysis. By the use of perception, including the senses and insight, inference, analogy, and verbal testimony...valid knowledge resulting in moksha [spiritual liberation] could be acquired'. From V.P. Kanitkar and W. Owen Cole's *Hinduism*, (London: Hodder Headline Plc, 1995), p. 136.

corresponding in an attempt to understand and translate various Hindu texts, as well as the intricate nature of Hindu mythology and philosophy (*Works*, I, 240).<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, Jones opts for the more esoteric, mystical, and 'obscure' strain of Hinduism that denies materiality and challenges the reality of one's sensual perceptions; as Jones fully acknowledges, 'human reason alone could...neither fully demonstrate, nor fully disprove' *Vedantic* philosophy ('On the Philosophy', *Works*, I, 239). Yet, for what *Vedantism* lacked in scientific empiricism, it more than made up for in poetic mysticism.

*Vedanta* serves as the subject of Jones' most eloquent and most popular poem, 'A Hymn to Náráyena' (1785). *Náráyena* is an incarnation of *Vishnu* who sustained existence at the beginning of creation by 'moving on waters' (what *Náráyena* literally means). In a letter to Wilkins in 1785, Jones calls the *Vedanta* subject matter of the poem 'the sublimest the human mind can conceive' (*Letters*, II, 669). In the first five stanzas, the poem retells the Hindu creation myths of 'the *Egg* and the *Lotos*', referring to the birth of *Brahma* from the Golden Mundane Egg and his control of cosmic existence as he rests lazily in the cradle of a lotus flower – each opening and closing of his eye lids symbolising the creation and destruction of the universe (*Letters*, II, 669). *Brahma*'s creative power is one Jones invokes in the rousing final stanzas, in which he interjects himself as narrator and poetises his liberation from *Máyá* (known as *moksha*) and the reunion of *Ātman* with *Brahman*. Firstly, Jones describes how the 'Omniscient Spirit' resides in all the world's natural beauties – 'in the rainbow', 'in the stream', in the sky's 'Blue crystal vault', and in the

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<sup>28</sup> It is worth mentioning that Jones was schooled in Sanskrit by the *pandit* Rámaločan, who was a Sanskrit teacher at the University of Nadia whom Jones called a 'pleasant old man' and the 'father' of his University (*Letters*, II, 682, 687). Rámaločan was of the *Vaidya* caste, which denoted his vocation as a physician, and thus was not a member of the priestly *Brahmans* who, as Michael J. Franklin remarks, 'were still reluctant to unlock the treasures of their sacred language to a foreigner' (*SWJ*, 215). However, Robert L. Hardgrave notes that the *Vaidya* caste was 'Respected for their erudition in Sanskrit' and 'were the only non-brahmins admitted into the Sanskrit grammar schools of Bengal', although they were denied access to the *Vedas* (*A Portrait of the Hindus: Balthazar Solvyns & the European Image of India 1760-1824*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004: 174).

mountains ‘radiant spires’ – before he abruptly changes tone after he realises these perceptions as the effect of *Máyá*:

Hence! Vanish from my sight:  
Delusive pictures! Unsubstantial shows!  
My soul absorb’d One only Being knows,  
Of all perceptions One abundant source,  
Whence ev’ry object ev’ry moment flows:  
Suns hence derive their force,  
Hence planets learn their course;  
But suns and fading words I view no more:  
GOD only I perceive; GOD only I adore.  
(*SWJ*, 111, 112, ll. 91, 93, 109, 113, 118-126)

Here, the experience of *moksha* is epiphanic. The narrator foregoes the material pleasures of perception, casting them as delusions, mere pictures, ‘unsubstantial’ in both a phenomenal and spiritual sense. In doing so, Jones’ narrator undergoes an act of union with the ‘One abundant source’, by which he becomes privy to both the physical and mystical secrets of the cosmos – the ‘course’ of planets, the ‘force’ of suns.

In terms of Hindu theology, by attaining knowledge of these cosmic secrets, Jones narrates a union with a god known as *Íśvara*, ‘the Lord of Creation’ who created the waters upon which *Náráyena* moves (*Works*, III, 365). In some non-*Advaita* philosophies, the union with *Íśvara* is the same as the union with *Brahman*. However, in *Advaita Vedantism*, *Íśvara* as the creator god is simply another form of *Máyá* since *Íśvara* is bound to his material creations; in this case, *Íśvara* is simply a humanly-perceived projection of *Brahman* in the material world. In *Advaita Vedantism*, union with *Íśvara* is necessary for *moksha*, but it is the penultimate stage towards unification with *Brahman*. In the final couplet, Jones makes this theological distinction between non-*Advaita* and *Advaita Vedantism* by transcending the materiality of ‘suns’ and even the ‘fading words’ of the hymn itself to become ‘absorb’d’ into ‘GOD’, or *Brahman*, thus showing his adherence to *Advaita* metaphysics.

Overall, the poem conveys a striking sublimity; *The Critical Review*, for instance, writes in 1787 that, as a work explaining ‘the religion, the mythology, and the customs of the Hindoos’, ‘Náráyena’ was ‘highly sublime...poetical and beautiful’.<sup>29</sup> As we will see in later in this chapter, so theologically concise and poetically accessible was the poem that ‘Náráyena’ often comes to stand as a representative of Hinduism itself; that is, critics and commentators refer to ‘Náráyena’ as an original source of Hindu theology and philosophy as if they were citing the *Bhagvat-Geeta* itself. In this sense, Jones was very successful in succinctly representing Hindu *Vedantic* thought with comprehensive authenticity.

Jones seems to be attracted to *Vedantic* philosophy for several reasons. For one, he finds it to be ‘a system wholly built on the purest devotion’ and one completely ‘removed from impiety’ (‘On the Philosophy’, *Works*, I, 239-240). Jones recognises that, despite his empirical misgivings, *Vedantism* offers a morality and piety completely disassociated from any sort of ‘Atheism’, as he says in the ‘Argument’ to ‘Náráyena’, or any other popular stereotype of Hinduism as a monstrous, multi-limbed idolatry (*SWJ*, 106). Jones tasks himself with combating the ingrained ignorance of his British and European audiences towards Hinduism by illustrating the religion’s moral fidelity – and moral *rationality* – he finds within its theology. In fact, Jones’ admiration of Hinduism’s more rational religious principles borders on belief; as he writes in a letter to his friend and pupil Lord Althorp in 1787:

I am no Hindu; but I hold the doctrine of the Hindus concerning a future state to be incomparably more rational, more pious, and more likely to deter men from vice, than the horrid opinions inculcated by Christians on punishments *without end*. (*Letters*, II, 766)

Despite his qualification about not being ‘Hindu,’ the above quotation reveals the extent of Jones’ theological tolerance on matters spiritual and moral. Not only does Jones legitimise Hindu theology in the face of Christian doctrine, but he believes it to

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<sup>29</sup> *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature: Vol. Sixty-Third* (London, 1787), p. 266-269, 266, 267.

be more morally effective. In a parallel statement of theological tolerance, Jones writes in 'On the Philosophy of the Asiaticks' that:

I have not sufficient evidence on the subject to profess a belief in the doctrine of the *Védánta*...but...the inexpressible difficulty, which any man, who shall make the attempt, will assuredly find in giving a satisfactory definition of *material substance*, must induce us to deliberate with coolness, before we censure the learned and pious restorer of the ancient *Véda*. (*Works*, I, 239-240)

Although again Jones equivocates on making a public profession of 'belief' in *Vedantism*, his conciliatory and moderate tone suggests an attempt to make this belief system more tenable to a British, Christian audience. By keeping an open mind and refraining from 'censuring' *Vedantism* out of turn, Jones implies that Hinduism and its religious principles offers its British observers a theological depth and a moral substance that should not be dismissed by their Christian beliefs.

The moral and theological sympathy Jones professes for Hinduism was, for Jones, an exercise in intellectual and cultural relativism. In 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India', Jones writes of his 'systematic spirit' to compare 'the Gods of the *Indian* and *European* heathens' and conjecture that they 'proceeded originally from one central place' – though he declines to assign 'which was the original system' (*Works*, I, 323, 386, 385). In 'On the Philosophy of the Hindus', published ten years after 'On the Gods', Jones is prepared to stake a claim in Hinduism's cultural origins, citing that Plato seems 'to have adopted' key elements of *Vedantic* philosophy, among them the notion of immaterialism (*Works*, I, 239). That Platonic connection was an important argumentative point for Jones in drawing cultural connections between ancient India and Europe's Classical past. As John Drew explores in *India and the Romantic Imagination*, Jones found that *Vedantic* thought fit easily within his, and the late eighteenth century's, preoccupation with Neo-Platonism; as Drew writes, the 'identification of the foremost school of Indian philosophy with the philosophy of...Plato informs Jones' whole approach to classical Indian culture'.<sup>30</sup> Despite Jones'

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<sup>30</sup> *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 49.

rather innocuous usage of common-day, but nonetheless patronising, idioms like ‘heathens’, his focus clearly lies in the identification of cultural parallels that could lead to answers about an original *Ur*-culture. As he writes, ‘we may infer a general union or affinity between the most distinguished inhabitants of the primitive world’, thereby tracing a line of cultural and religious dissemination from India to Classical Europe – and, ultimately, to modern Britain (‘On the Gods,’ *Works*, I, 320).

Yet as Michael J. Franklin explores, while Neo-Platonic thought was crucial in his intellectualisation of Hinduism, Jones was not limited to the intellectual milieu and history of European philosophy and religion. The syncretic multiculturalism and inter-religiousness of eighteenth century India – replete with Islam, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, the numberless sects of Hinduism, and more current to Jones’ day, the influx of Christianity (Catholicism and the Protestant Missionaries) – was an ideal place for someone of Jones’ tolerant and relativistic disposition; as Franklin notes:

The textual construction of India achieved by Jones's comparative philological, historical and literary researches can be viewed against the backdrop of a pre-existent subcontinental pluralism in which a multiplicity of beliefs co-existed and sometimes coalesced...[Jones’ work] was not so much a question of British construction of India, as British appropriation of existing sources and structures of information. A bewildering variety of knowledge systems from both Muslim and Hindu public and private spheres...contributed to [Jones’] colonial understanding and representations of India.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the ‘textual construction of India’ did not happen entirely within a European epistemological space, as Said *et al.* would have one believe. The cultural, religious, and philosophical diversity of eighteenth-century India informed Jones’ representation of India as much as his knowledge of Enlightenment Neo-Platonism. It was the confluence of these hitherto separate ideological strains that proved one of the intellectual successes of Jones’ work.

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<sup>31</sup> ‘General Introduction and [meta]historical background [re]presenting “The palanquins of state; or, broken leaves in a Mughal garden”’, *Romantic Representations of British India*, ed. Michael J. Franklin (New York, Routledge, 2006), p. 15.



Nonetheless, I would argue, Jones' sympathy and tolerance for cultural relativism seems to anchor itself firmly in the fundamental tenets of *Vedantism*. As Brian A. Hatcher notes, *Vedantism* teaches that 'reality is non-dual...and all appearances of plurality is illusory, grounded in ignorance of ultimate truth'.<sup>32</sup> For Jones, the appeal of *Vedantism* rests in its erasure of demarcated plurality, be it religious, cultural, or metaphysical; the uniqueness of Hinduism, Jones shows, is that it not only respects and tolerates other religions, but also cooperates with and includes them, or is willing to include them, in its own religious exegesis:

[the Hindus] contend, that [the Gospel] is perfectly consistent with their *Sāstras*: the deity, they say, has appeared innumerable times, in many parts of this world and of all worlds, for the salvation of his creatures; and though we adore him in one appearance, and they in others, yet we adore, they say, the same GOD, to whom our several worships, though different in form, are equally acceptable, if they be sincere in substance. ('On the Gods', *Works*, I, 396)

Jones depicts Hinduism as a syncretic religion tolerating different forms of worship and different incarnations of the divine in order to argue that all cultures and religions ultimately worship 'the same GOD'. Moreover, he suggests that while Hindus do not follow the Gospel, they certainly adhere to its fundamental morality. Here, Jones pivots from the *Vedantic* esotericism of 'Hymn to Nārāyena' in order to present *Vedantism* as a fundamentally rational, inclusive monism that privileges sincere devotion over strict dogma. The inclusivity of *Vedantism* allows Jones to position Hinduism within existing European and Indian aesthetic and religious frameworks without having to qualify or compromise its theological principles or integrity.

Jones' interest in the theological syncretism of *Vedantism* brings into consideration Jones' own religious beliefs – a subject of some historical inaccuracy because his first biographer, John Shore, disingenuously represented Jones as an Evangelical Christian.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Jones professed a belief in Christianity, stating that

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<sup>32</sup> *Bourgeois Hinduism, or the Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Shore suggests that 'the conversion of the Hindus to the Christian religion would have afforded him the sincerest pleasure' (*Works*, XIII, 244), when Jones emphatically writes that 'neither *Muselmans* nor

the 'antiquity of Isaiah' illustrated 'the conformity of his prophecy with the life and death of Jesus' (*Letters*, II, 758). In validating the prophecy of Jesus as Christ, Jones seems to refer to Chapters 24-34 of 'The Book of Isaiah', in which Isaiah speaks of a future Messiah and which Christians have traditionally interpreted as prophesising the coming of Jesus Christ. Jones' Christian belief rested in what he saw as the authenticity of Mosaic history – a history he would uphold despite the mounting evidence his researches on India and Hinduism began to accumulate in opposition to it; as he writes in 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India':

Either the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*...are true, or the whole fabrick of our national religion is false; a conclusion, which none of us, I trust, would wish to be drawn. I...cannot help believing the divinity of the MESSIAH, from the undisputed antiquity...of many prophesies, especially those of ISAIAH. (*Works*, I, 325)

Unwilling to rent the social, cultural, and historical 'fabrick' which interweaved himself and his colleagues within the 'national religion', Jones professes his support for the historical accuracy of the Bible. However, Jones offers a caveat to this support by suggesting the possibility that Hinduism could offer substantial evidence to counter the Mosaic tradition:

...if any cool unbiased reasoner will clearly convince me, that Moses drew his narrative through *Egyptian* conduits from the primeval fountains of *Indian* literature, I shall esteem him...for having weeded my mind from a capital error, and promise to stand among the foremost in assisting to circulate the truth. (*Works*, I, 325)

Here, Jones suggests that a link between ancient Judaeo-Christian history and Hinduism is not altogether unfathomable. Although adhering to Christian doctrine, Jones still acknowledges the potential '*Indian* literature' holds for redefining the 'capital error' of 'national religion' – and religious history in general. So, while Jones was careful not to be the catalyst for any great theological debates – although, as we will see, other religious antagonists such as Volney and Shelley were more than

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*Hindus* will ever be converted any mission from the Church of *Rome*, or from any other church' ('On the Gods', *SWJ*, 354).

willing to use Jones' works to do just that – he is ready to back Hinduism should it successfully challenge and undermine Christian tradition.

Yet, Jones was less interested in confirming or denying the validity of religious dogma than he was in advocating the significance of religious sincerity. One of the works that Jones states confirmed his Christian belief was *Sermons on the Christian Doctrine* (1787), a collection of sermons published by the Unitarian minister and future Revolutionary radical Richard Price. In *Sermons*, Price attempts to demonstrate, in typical Unitarian fashion, the unity of Christian belief across denominations by showing how 'Christians of all parties, however they may censure one another...are agreed in all that is essential to Christianity': namely, that 'the Gospel teaches us that there is only one living and true God'.<sup>34</sup> Although Jones finds such discussions 'not necessary...since all, who believe the *essentials* of religion and act according to the principles of virtue, must be happy', he relishes in the *Sermons*' 'Truth' in the sense that its religious attitude allows one to forsake 'a belief in riddles for the sake of rectories, prebends, and lawn-sleeves' in order to be religiously fulfilled and content (*Letters*, II, 758).<sup>35</sup> Doctrine and dogma are not needed for salvation – only a belief based on a rational morality, enacted sincerely, is necessary. Such religious principles are ones that Jones sees equally in Hindu *Vedantism* and Christian Unitarianism.

Jones shows great sympathy, even support, for Unitarian beliefs in his personal and professional writing. Writing about the need to keep 'Theology' out of scientific discussions, Jones contends confidently that 'Many pious Christians deny, that the doctrine of the Trinity is to be found in the Gospel' (*Letters*, II, 738). The key word here is 'pious', demonstrating that, even in Christianity, dogmatic 'doctrine' need not disqualify one's religious sincerity. In a letter to Lord Althorp that same year,

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<sup>34</sup> *Sermons on the Christian Doctrine as received by the different denominations of Christians* (London, 1787), p. 6, 7.

<sup>35</sup> A 'prebend' is a stipend paid by a cathedral or church to a clergyman; 'lawn-sleeves' allude to part of the dress of an Anglican bishop, and was used at the time metonymically to refer to Bishops themselves.

Jones bemoans the insistence of 'Romanist' and 'Trinitarian' missions in teaching their 'creeds' as, well, gospel. He considers such insistence as the 'one evil' corrupting 'our pure and rational religion'. To which 'pure and rational religion' he was referring remains unclear from the context, but Jones does utter that statement as he discusses Price's Unitarian-based *Sermons*, suggesting if not his belief than certainly his espousal of the 'rationality' and 'purity' of Price's Unitarian principles (*Letters*, II, 758). Furthermore, after dismissing the 'absurd' notion put forward by missionaries that 'the *Hindus* were even now almost *Christians*, because their *BRAHMÁ*, *VISHNU*, and *MAHÉSA* [*Shiva*], were no other than the *Christian* Trinity' and professing the 'holiness and sublimity of the [Trinitarian] doctrine', Jones makes sure to note that 'other *Christians*, as pious [as those who believe in the Trinity], openly profess their dissent from them' ('On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India', *Works*, I, 393). Jones emphasises that not all Christians believe in the Trinity as a way to discourage vague and unthinking comparisons about or comments on Hindus, as well as Unitarians. Thus, Jones' admiration and defence of Hinduism can also be seen as an admiration and defence of Unitarianism; the comparison between the two religions, after all, was a recurring one: in his introduction to the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, Wilkins writes that, 'The most learned *Brahmans* of the present time are Unitarians'.<sup>36</sup> In short, Jones would have recognised the rationality of his own religious beliefs in the *Vedantic* tenets with which he was becoming increasingly familiar.

We see Jones allude to *Vedantism's* religious syncretism at the end of 'A Hymn to Náráyena'. Jones employs Enlightenment terminology in his use of 'GOD' in the final lines of the poem ('GOD only I perceive; GOD only I adore'), thereby striking a balance between the poem's Hindu origins and Jones' Christian inclinations – a negotiated compromise, it seems, to placate the Christian sensibilities of his British

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<sup>36</sup> *Bhagvat-Geeta*, p. 24.

audience.<sup>37</sup> However, given *Vedantism's* central philosophical influence on the poem – along with the philosophy's acceptance of all 'sincere' forms of religious worship in concert with Jones' support of Price's Unitarian sentiments – qualifying whether the 'GOD' in the closing lines of 'Náráyena' is a Christian or Hindu one is an irrelevant point for the poem to consider; in fact, the purpose of the poem is to instigate the mediation of a cultural and religious indifference to that very question. The 'sincerity' of religious expression rejects and makes unsubstantial the necessity of religious identification. One's sincere devotion to the concept of God is enough to secure divine adoration; the rest, particularly religious and theological dogma, simply does not matter.

In this sense, *Vedantism* offers Jones the religious and philosophical means to mediate (a version of) the Hindu religion in an accessible, authentic, and largely uncompromised form. It also informs his larger syncretic goals of tracing back cultural and religious parallels between two different cultures separated by religion, geography, and history. One of Jones' best and most effective ways of piecing together such a lost ancestry was through poetry. In the next section, I explore how Jones uses poetry and poetic form to search for cultural links. I also examine how his use of the hymn serves as an effective form for mediating Hinduism and fostering a space necessary for the kind of rational religious syncretism he finds in *Vedantism* and demonstrates in his 'Hymns' to Hindu deities.

### III: Jones and the Hindu Hymn(s)

As discussed earlier, Jones explores principles of *Vedantic* philosophy in his 'Hymn to Náráyena'. Yet, in many ways, Jones demonstrates those principles not just in the subject of the poem, but through the poem itself. For instance, in the closing lines of 'Náráyena', Jones writes that he no longer sees the 'fading words' of the hymn as he integrates himself with a unified vision of the divine. Here, Jones plays

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<sup>37</sup> Jones uses such a compromise consistently in order to gloss over the more sexually-implicit and explicit images and ideas inherent in Hindu religious literature.

with *Vedantic* concepts of *Ātman* and *Brahman* by equating the powers of the imagination which created the hymn with the creative powers of the 'GOD' the hymn evokes and celebrates. Beyond the 'fading words' of the hymn lies the same divine force and presence as that revealed to the narrator by *moksha*: the creative power of the hymn itself. In this way, the hymn substitutes for the very creative powers 'God' as *Brahman*, and its incarnation *Nārāyena*, represent. Moreover, the hymn's 'fading words' suggest the union of the narrative *Ātman* with the hymn's formal *Brahman*, in which the narrator transcends the hymn's formal subjectivity to unite with the divine authority of the hymn's creator. The hymn's 'fading words' vanish to leave behind the universal divine: the unifying power of poetic imagination, as wielded by 'GOD' and poet alike.

The formal importance of the hymn, then, is an important component when understanding and analysing Jones' mediation of *Vedantism*. This section explores Jones' use of the hymnal form, firstly examining Jones' aesthetic conceptualisation of the hymn to act as an appropriate medium – indeed, an appropriate 'consonant mode of expression' – for *Vedantic* thought. Secondly, the section explores how we can see Jones' 'Hymns' as participating in the Hindu hymnal tradition, paying particular attention to 'A Hymn to Súrya' (1787), an invocation to the Hindu Sun god. For it is in this poem, as we will see, that Jones discusses how his ability to 'lisp' the 'celestial tongue' of Sanskrit, although 'not from *Brahmà* sprung', still affords him access to the religious syncretism of the '*Sanscrit* song' – and the creative powers of the divine he invokes in a poem like 'Nārāyena' (*SWJ*, 152, ll. 184, 185, 188).

'Súrya' was not the only poem that advocated the power of the hymn and hymning. As already noted, Jones composed nine 'Hymns' to Hindu deities and in most of them, the hymn and hymning repeatedly appear within the poems as both an act of joyful divine worship and a catalyst for divine creation. In Jones' first hymn, 'A Hymn to Camdeo' (1784), the Hindu god of Love, the narrator says how he will

'hallow' *Camdeo* and 'kiss [his] shrine' – acts of sincere, although somewhat paganistic, veneration and praise (*SWJ*, 100, ll. 10). In 'Náráyena', the introduction of 'mystick Love' and 'Love divine inflam'd' into the metaphysical primordial soup of creative energy initiates the Hindu mythological version of the Big Bang, where 'Things unexisting to existence sprung, / And grateful descant sung' – that is, where creation and existence comes into being and hymning immediately follows (*SWJ*, 108, ll. 8, 30, 9-10).

In 'A Hymn to Indra' (1785), the god of the Hindu heaven (known as the *Swerga*), Jones writes that 'Nor bards inspir'd, nor heav'n's all-perfect speech / Less may unhallow'd rhyme his beauties teach' – in reference to what is appropriate for hymning to Indra and the *Swerga* (*SWJ*, 137, ll. 40-41). In other words, *only* 'inspir'd' poets, presumably such as himself, and Sanskritic 'rhymes' (Sanskrit is known as 'the language...of the gods', thus his referral to it as 'heav'n's all-perfect speech') can be used to 'teach' the beauties of Indra and the *Swerga* – where 'feasting Gods exhaustless nectar sip' ('On the Persians,' *Works*, I, 126; *SWJ*, 137, ll. 48). Here, although he writes in English, Jones privileges the traditional medium of Sanskrit verse as the proper form of divine communication. Later in the poem, Jones lists Indra's various names, saying that 'With various praise in odes and hallow'd story / Sweet bards shall hymn thy glory' – a common example of the way in which Jones implicitly injects himself within the tradition of Hindu hymning (*SWJ*, 139, ll. 91-92). In 'Súrya' (1787), Jones commands the ethereal 'spheres' to 'Burst into song... / And hymn... / The God with many a name' – a reference to *Súrya's* canonical authority as the overseer of Hindu astronomy (*SWJ*, 147, ll. 35-37). Near the end of 'Súrya', we find Jones, just as in 'Camdeo', 'on lowly knee' praying to the deity, as he 'Dares hymn' the 'pow'r' of the Sun god – a poetic act Jones seems unable to resist (*SWJ*, 151, ll. 175, 173). Though not exhaustive, this inventory of references to hymning makes clear that Jones uses the hymnal form rhetorically and reflexively to reflect his own act of hymning in his 'Hymns'.

Why is this noteworthy? By invoking the act of hymning within his ‘Hymns’, Jones demonstrates the importance of the hymn as a means of communicating with the divine, while also emphasising the reflexive nature of the hymnal form itself. The intertextuality of a hymn within a hymn reveals an additional layer of creative praise and potential – the ‘mortal eyes’ that ‘in smoothest mirrors gaze’ in order to compare the ‘finite.../With [the] infinite’, as Jones writes in ‘Náráyena’ (*SWJ*, 109, ll. 24-25). In *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, Stuart Curran intimates that one of the rhetorical and formal strategies of the hymnal form is to close the gap between the ‘finite’ and the ‘infinite’ – that is, between the divine and the cognizant self.<sup>38</sup> Such reflexivity often means that the hymn becomes more concerned with locating the divine, or a parallel creative potential, within one’s self rather than simply praising or ‘hallowing’ God. This is not to say that the divinity becomes inconsequential; rather, it suggests that the deity invoked bears some common creative expression with the poet, or poem, doing the invocation. To put it in Hindu theological terms, the hymn serves as a medium uniting *Ātman* with *Brahman* – the self with the original, unifying source of all existence.

From the outset of Jones’ literary criticism and translations of Oriental poetry, the hymn acted as a natural and essential aesthetic expression of religious thought. In his ‘Essay on the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative’ (1772), Jones challenges the Aristotelian notion of poetry as imitation, asserting that poetry evolves from ‘a natural emotion of the mind’ (*SWJ*, 339). As such, poetry cannot be an imitation because those emotions recreate the invoked experience within the poem:

It seems to me, that, as those parts of *poetry*...which relate to the passions...act by a kind of *substitution*...by raising in our minds, affections, or sentiments, analogous to those, which arise in us, when the respective objects in nature are presented to our senses... Thus will each artist gain his end, not by *imitating* the works of nature, but by assuming her power, and causing the same effect upon the imagination. (*SWJ*, 345, 346)

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<sup>38</sup> *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 56.



Denying poetic *mimesis*, Jones recognises that the emotions poetry excites stand analogous to those produced by nature; thus, the poet could harness that emotive power and direct it towards the imagination's creative potential. By exciting emotions, poetry acts as a substitute for nature and creation rather than an imitation of it (a theory – expressed twenty-eight years before William Wordsworth's similar conceptualisation of poetry as the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions' in *Lyrical Ballads* – which M.H. Abrams credits as 'the identifying characteristic and cardinal poetic value' of Romantic poetry).<sup>39</sup> By using those emotions as the driving imaginative force, poetry and nature assume an equal standing of originality, in both the innovative and inceptive denotations of the word.

Jones evinces his argument by writing how 'the most ancient sort of poetry consisted in *praising the Deity*' (*SWJ*, 339). Jones speaks, of course, of the hymn. The hymn is the most 'ancient sort of poetry' because it conveyed humanity's first emotion:

for if we conceive a being, created with all his faculties and senses, to view for the first time the serenity of the sky, the splendour of the sun...we should hardly believe it possible, that he should refrain from bursting into an extasy of *joy*, and pouring his praises to the creator of those wonders, and the author of his happiness. This *kind of poetry* is used in all nations. (*SWJ*, 339)<sup>40</sup>

Jones conceptualises the hymn as an expression to the 'creator' of humanity's first exalted emotions of conscious being – the 'extasy of *joy*' inherent in the grateful comprehension of existence. As the 'most ancient' poetic form, then, the hymn re-creates humanity's first emotions, therefore serving to substitute for that original moment of conscious being. In short, Jones views the hymn as the original poetic form eternally expressing humanity's original emotions. Additionally, since it consists of '*praising the Deity*', Jones positions the hymn as the origins of religious expression as well. In its sentiments and in its mediation of sentiment, the hymnal form embodies the genesis of a historical lineage when poetry and religion were the same

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<sup>39</sup> *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, 1971), p. 88.

<sup>40</sup> Jones' italics.

expression. Moreover, since ‘all nations’ engage in this ‘*kind of poetry*’, all nations share a historical and cultural stake in those religio-poetic origins. As such, Jones presents the hymn as a form with the potential to forge syncretic bonds between disparate nations, cultures, and religions.

It was this syncretic potential of the hymnal form which fuelled Jones’ admiration and his advocacy for Oriental literature. Before going to India, Jones was a famous Arabic and Persian scholar with a passionate interest in ‘Eastern’ poetry, publishing *Poems, consisting chiefly of translations from the Asiatick languages* and ‘An Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations’ in 1772. Understanding the importance of the Persian language in Britain’s colonial relationship with India – Persian was the *lingua franca* of the Mughal court, and thus the language of colonial commerce and law – Jones also published *A Grammar of the Persian Language* in 1771 in the hope that the East India Company would use it as a training manual for new officers wanting to learn the language. However, as Robert Irwin comments in *For Lust of Knowing*:

Jones’s *Grammar of the Persian Language*...was really of more use to poets than to imperial administrators, as...he was more interested in introducing Persian poets to a European audience than he was in producing a crib for merchants and administrators working in exotic parts.<sup>41</sup>

For Jones, the primary reason for Britons to learn Persian was not to make it easier for them to administer the colony, but rather to gain a better appreciation of ‘Eastern’ poetry. Jones seeks to foster that appreciation by demonstrating how European poetry resounded with aesthetic echoes from Persian poetry. As he writes in ‘Essays on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations’, Persian and European poetry possess ‘in an eminent degree, *that rich and creative invention, which is the very soul of poetry*’ (SWJ, 334). Undercutting the European stereotype of ‘Eastern’ poetry as ‘ridiculously bombast’, Jones is eager to show the ‘very great resemblances between the works’ of writers such as the Persian poet Hafiz and the epic Persian poet Ferdowsi, and,

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<sup>41</sup> *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 122.

respectively, Shakespeare and Homer (*SWJ*, 333, 332, 334). Here, Jones not only endows Oriental literature with aesthetic legitimacy by comparing it with the hallowed writers of the European tradition, but also by suggesting that all those writers, whether Persian, Greek, or English, had drawn from the same creative well of poetic 'invention' and originality. Furthermore, Jones suggests that the very European writers who marked the pinnacle of fashionable eighteenth-century literary taste, such as Shakespeare and Homer, were influenced themselves by Oriental literary sources. By making these comparisons, Jones was attempting to illustrate the ways in which Oriental literature had already always been a part of British literature.

For example, in *Poems, consisting chiefly of translations from the Asiatick languages*, Jones includes a Petrarchan ode so that his readers can compare it with an ode from Hafiz. Jones believes that 'The Odes of *Hafez*... would suit our lyric measures', suggesting the poetic congruence between Persian and British forms.

Jones comments further that:

The ode of *Petrarch* was added, that the reader might compare the manner of the *Asiatick* poets with that of the *Italians*, many of whom have written in the true spirit of the *Easterns*; some of the *Persian* songs have a striking resemblance to the sonnets of *Petrarch*; and even the form of those little amatory poems was, I believe, brought into *Europe* by the *Arabians*. (*Works*, VIII, 202)

Here, Jones makes a claim for the cultural lineage of the Petrarchan ode. He suggests that the poetic form bears the 'spirit' of 'Eastern' poetry and can be read as a history of past cultural interaction and exchange. That history becomes a means of cultural mediation, allowing Jones' readers to compare the two poetic forms, and thus the two cultures. Given its poetic similarities, Jones proffers Hafiz's poems as an easy transition into the themes and images of Oriental poetry which, to Jones, conforms to and confirms the aesthetic taste his readers may have already cultivated in their appreciation of Petrarch, or Shakespeare, or Homer.

However, Jones' objective of fostering an understanding of Eastern poetry among the Europeans and British involved more than simply alleviating aesthetic

prejudice; Jones wanted to demonstrate the aesthetic influence and effect ‘Eastern’ poetry could have on European poetry. As he writes at the end of ‘An Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations’:

*if the principal writings of the Asiaticks...were studied in our places of education...we should be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes...which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate.’ (SWJ, 336)*

Tired of the ‘perpetual repetition of the same images, and incessant allusions to the same fables’ of Greek and Roman Classicism in European verse, Jones advocates the study and even the ‘imitation’ of ‘Asiatick’ poetry as a means to revive and rejuvenate a languid British poesy. By ‘imitation’, Jones does not mean the Aristotelian mimesis which he denounced in ‘Essay on the Arts’, but more, I argue, the sense of imitation Elmarsafy denotes when speaking of George Sale’s translation of the *Qur’ān* – of imitating the ‘spirit’ of a text rather than imitating simply its style or imagery. Another 12 years would pass until a poet put Jones’ advice into effect; as it turned out, it would be Jones himself with the composition of his nine Hindu ‘Hymns’. Although the ‘Hymns’ were not translations, they were based on Jones’ translations of Hindu mythological and religious texts; as such, they clearly evoke, even translate, the ‘spirit’ of the Hindu religious texts on which they are based.

The ‘Hymns’ invoke the ‘spirit’ of Hindu religious texts in many different ways. In a letter in 1785, Jones writes that, ‘It is my intention to compose, at my leisure, *eighteen* such Hymns, the number of the Purāns of Vyāsa’ (SWJ, 113). Here, Jones indicates his desire for the ‘Hymns’ to reflect the number of ‘Purāns’, or *Purānas*. The *Purānas* are narrative myths and legends about the Hindu deities attributed to the *Vedantic* sage Vyāsa (the founder of *Vedantic* philosophy and presumed author of most of the *Vedas*). As Jones relates in his ‘On the Literature of the Hindus’ (1787), the *Purānas* form an essential corpus of texts which contribute to the

Six great *Sāstras*, in which all knowledge, divine and human, is supposed to be comprehended; and here we must not forget, that the word *Sāstra*...means generally an *Ordinance*, and particularly a

*Sacred Ordinance* delivered by inspiration. ('On the Literature of the Hindus, From the Sanskrit', *Works*, IV, 110-111)<sup>42</sup>

In short, the *Shastras* represent Hindu 'sacred literature' (*Works*, IV, 111). The canon of Hindu 'sacred literature' to which Jones refers includes: the *Vedas*, four separate compilations of writings consisting of hymns to deities (the *Rig Veda*), instructions on sacrificial methods (the *Yajur Veda*), chants and melodies (the *Sama Veda*) and incantations (the *Atharva Veda*); the *Upanishads*, lectures and teachings on *Vedic* concepts (also known as the *veda-anta*, or 'end of the Vedas,' a name which reveals the *Upanishads*' textual importance to *Vedanta* philosophy); the *Védāngas*, six prose commentaries explaining *Vedic* ceremonies, grammar, mathematics, prosody, astronomy, and obscuration; and the *Purānas*.

What is clear from Jones' intention to write as many poems as there are *Purānas* is his attempt to locate the 'Hymns' within a Hindu literary and cultural tradition; as he explains in his introductory 'Argument' to 'A Hymn to Náráyena', 'A complete introduction to the following Ode would be no less than a full comment on the VAYDS [*Vedas*] and PURÁNS of the HINDUS' (*SWJ*, 106). Jones acknowledges that a complete comprehension of this poem requires a more thorough explanation of, and grounding in, Hindu culture, mythology, and theology than his 'Argument' could conceivably convey; however, Jones does his best to provide something more than just a superficial understanding of the Hindu religion. To illustrate this point, Jones notes that the 'third and fourth [stanzas of 'Náráyena'] are taken from...the eighteenth *Puran* of VYÁSÁ, entitled *Srey Bhagawat*' (*SWJ*, 107).<sup>43</sup>

In these stanzas, Jones introduces two important images from the Hindu creation myths: those of 'the *Egg* and the *Lotos*' – referring to the Golden Mundane Egg from which *Brahma* hatches to create the world and the Lotus petal upon which *Vishnu* floats in the creation of existence. In 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India',

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<sup>42</sup> 'On the Literature of the Hindus' was originally presented to the *Asiatick Society* in May 1787, and was a work translated by Jones from an essay written in Sanskrit by *Pandit Govardhan Kaul*.

<sup>43</sup> The '*Srey Bhagavat*,' or *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, is one of the more famous *Purānas* centred of the life and teachings of the god *Krishna*. It is a major *Purānic* source for *Vedantic* philosophy, even though *Vedantic* philosophy traditionally dismisses the *Purānas* because of their mythological narrative format.

Jones mentions that he knew the creation myth of the 'Mundane Egg, and the veneration paid to the...*Lotos*' from two 'different *Purāna*'s', referring to the *Skanda-purāna* and the *Brahmānda-purāna*, the former which mentions and the latter which narrates the *Brahmānda*, or the 'Egg of Brahma', tale (*SWJ*, 351; *Letters*, II, 669).

Jones even provides a passage from the *Brahmānda* legend in 'On the Gods' which he read and translated from *The Institutes of Menu*:

[God], desiring to raise up various creatures by an emanation from his own glory, first created the *waters*, and impressed them with a power of motion: by that power was produced a golden EGG, blazing like a thousand suns, in which was born BRAHMĀ. (*SWJ*, 352)

This mythological imagery sourced first-hand from Sanskrit texts becomes important for the creation scenes of 'Nārāyena'. In the third stanza, Jones writes:

First an all-potent all-pervading sound  
Bade flow the waters – and the waters flow'd,  
Exulting in their measureless abode,  
Diffusive, multitudinous, profound,  
Above, beneath, around.  
Then o'er the vast expanse primordial wind  
Breath'd gently till a lucid bubble rose,  
Which grew in a perfect shape an Egg refin'd:  
Created substance no such lustre shows,  
Earth no such beauty knows.  
Above the warring waves it danc'd elate,  
Till from its bursting shell with lovely state  
A form cerulean flutter'd o'er the deep,  
Brightest of beings, greatest of the great:  
Who, not as mortals steep,  
Their eyes in dewy sleep,  
But heav'nly-pensive on the *Lotos* lay,  
That blossom'd at his touch and shed a golden ray.  
(*SWJ*, 109-110, ll. 37-54)

Here, we see the extent to which Jones uses the language of Hindu mythology to inform his hymn: the '*waters*, impressed with motion' from the mythology are the '*waters*' that are 'bade to flow' and do so in the poem; the waters that 'produce a golden Egg' are the same that give rise to a 'lucid bubble' which is shaped into Jones' 'Egg refin'd'; the 'thousand suns' blazing in the myth become the 'lustre' that no earthly 'beauty knows', as well as the 'golden ray' shed from the 'pensive *Lotos*'.

In short, Jones clearly locates his Hindu 'Hymns' within their own cultural and mythological environment.

However, Jones' use of Hinduism's mythological images is not mere imitation; Jones uses the image of *Brahma* awakening from the 'Egg' and 'Lotos' to represent the meditative, imaginative power of divine creation. As mentioned before, the hymn seeks to assume this power by invoking the narrative itself. By retelling the creation myth, the hymn itself creates on a metaphysical level, where the poet adopts the very creative power of the deity invoked. The birth of *Brahma* is simultaneous to the creation of the hymn, since the hymn also was there at the beginning as the original religious expression of gratitude and praise; as mentioned earlier, when 'Things unexisting into existence sprung', the hymn immediately followed, as creation 'grateful descant sung'. As Jones demonstrates, mythological, divine, and poetic creations are concurrent acts within the hymn.

Most recent scholarship examining Jones' 'Hymns' to Hindu deities has commented on the way Jones incorporates and communicates the Hindu religion through a British poetic form. Through such comments, many scholars have reiterated or expanded the Orientalist (*à la* Said) assumption that the incorporation of Hinduism within a British poetic form legitimised Britain's larger colonial enterprise in India; even someone such as Michael J. Franklin who is extremely sympathetic to Jones' syncretic tendencies admits the extent to which 'Jones's hymns lie firmly within an English poetic tradition' (*SWJ*, 100).

Kate Teltscher, in *India Inscribed*, perhaps makes the most comprehensive argument about the 'Hymns' formal colonialism. Teltscher argues that 'Jones cleared the way for a tradition of mastery' directly from his use of the hymnal form.<sup>44</sup> By alluding to the poems and poetic structures of Milton, Thomas Gray and Pindar – as he does in 'Náráyena' and 'Lacshmi' – Jones familiarises, or as Teltscher calls it,

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<sup>44</sup> *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Oxford, OUP, 1995), p. 223.

'anglicizes' the Hindu religion in terms conducive to the refined taste of his larger European and British audience. With such 'anglicization', Teltscher comments that, 'Jones evidently does not consider it incongruous to incorporate the observations of an English poet...in a hymn addressed to a Hindu deity'.<sup>45</sup> Teltscher maintains that this kind of 'anglicization' where English poetics merge easily, if not inappropriately, with Hindu divinities suggests something of a poetic and religious insincerity on Jones' part; if Jones was so enthusiastic about *Náráyena* or *Lacshmi*, Teltscher seems to ask, why does he evoke Milton and Gray? Moreover, and more important to her postcolonial perspective, this 'anglicization' makes the Hindu deities more knowable and ultimately more controllable through 'cultural appropriation' – that is, through the unilateral translation, and thus domestication, of the foreign 'Other' in terms of one's own culture.<sup>46</sup> For Teltscher, the hymn is a metaphor at the formal, cultural, and epistemological level for Britain's larger imperial exploitation of India at the economic and geopolitical level.

Yet in her effort to argue for Jones' 'anglicisation' of Hinduism, Teltscher fails to consider it incongruous that Jones would write a hymn to a Hindu deity in the first place. After all, in the late eighteenth century, the hymn was synonymous with the uniquely British poetic tradition of congregational, Christian Dissent – a tradition enshrined by poets such as Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and William Cowper. Moreover, the structure of the Pindaric ode which Jones uses for his 'Hymns' was largely equated with the neo-Platonic tradition of Andrew Marvell and Abraham Cowley, poets known for their (Christian) 'metaphysical' and ontological poetics concerning life, death, and the nature of the soul. This is to say that there was little poetic precedent at the time of the 'Hymns' composition for Jones to gather the poetic licence to use the form conventionally reserved for the Christian God in order to 'hymn [the] glory' of foreign deities – deities, by the way, whose perceived idolatry

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<sup>45</sup> *India Inscribed*, p. 210.

<sup>46</sup> *India Inscribed*, p. 210.



in Britain stood antithetical to the very religious principles the hymn was traditionally meant to invoke ('A Hymn to Indra', *SWJ*, 139, ll. 92).

In other words, the very idea of a hymn to a Hindu deity would have been completely incongruous within, and heretical to, the tradition in which Jones' poems appeared to be participating and evoking, at least in the nominal sense. As Stuart Curran notes, the hymn's very efficacy in the eighteenth century lied in it being 'addressed to a divine, an immortal being, in [whom], on both cosmic and personal planes, one has the certainty of belief'.<sup>47</sup> The fundamental value of the hymn lies in its profession of faith; as such, a hymn to a Hindu deity, despite any reference to Milton, Gray, or Pindar, professed an obvious religious predilection. After examining Jones' 'Hymn to Náráyena' in 1789, *The Critical Review* comments that, 'Indeed, we have almost apprehension, that our excellent countryman had, with his situation, changed his religion'.<sup>48</sup> Despite favourable reviews elsewhere concerning the poem's exoticism and sublimity, *The Critical Review* reacts critically to Jones' enthusiastic encomium of this foreign religion, underlining the dangers of this 'excellent' Briton falling completely under the sway of the Oriental 'other' – a fear pervasive at the time due to the on-going impeachment trail of Hastings.

Yet this review also reminds the reader of the profound religious exegesis the hymnal form embodied, particularly along the lines of belief Curran notes above. That Jones invokes the religious efficacy of the hymn while simultaneously expanding its traditional remit to include foreign gods – to the point of setting a precedent for Romanticism's poetic penchant for pagan deities as Curran claims – goes habitually unnoticed or unexamined in most scholarship.<sup>49</sup> Even more unnoticed or unexamined

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<sup>47</sup> *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, p. 56-57.

<sup>48</sup> 'Art. XIV. *Asiatic Researches; or Transactions of the Society*,' *The Monthly Review*, July (London, 1789), p. 648-653, 653.

<sup>49</sup> Some noted exceptions include Curran's *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, but it gives Jones only a brief mention; a more thorough examination occurs in Martin Priestman's *Romantic Atheism: Poetic and Free Thought 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 1999). For late Romanticism's proclivity for paganism, cf. Marilyn Butler's *Romantics, Rebels & Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford, 1981). As for Jones' 'Romantic' pedigree, Jerome McGann begins his *New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* (Oxford, 1993), a chronologically-ordered perspective of the Romantic poetry,

is the fact that the hymn is also a Hindu poetic form with an equally profound religious exegesis as that of its Christian counterpart – a fact of which Jones was well aware.

In his discourses on Hindu culture, Jones refers repeatedly to the religious nature of the Hindu hymns found in the *Vedas*, which in Sanskrit means ‘knowledge’. As Jones explains in ‘On the Literature of the Hindus’ (1787),

the *Véda*’s are considered by the *Hindus* as the fountain of all knowledge human and divine; whence the verses of them are said in the *Gíta* [*Bhagavad-Gíta*] to be the *leaves* of that holy tree, to which the Almighty himself is compared. (*Works*, IV, 99)

The *Vedic* poems are the wellspring of Hindu philosophy and theology from which the rest of the sacred canon of Hindu literature – the *Purānas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Védāngas* – flow, expanding and elaborating *Vedic* thinking. Metaphorically, the *Vedas* are the leaves of the great ‘*As’watt’ha*’, or *ashvastha* tree – the ‘*Religious Fig-tree*’, as Jones describes it, ‘with heart-shaped pointed and tremulous leaves’ (*Works*, IV, 100).<sup>50</sup> As Jones explains, in Hindu mythology, the *ashvastha* tree represents *Brahman*, the ‘Incorruptible One’, which has its roots in heaven and which Hindus consider the tree of eternal life; if the tree is *Brahman*, then the *Vedas* are its leaves.<sup>51</sup> Wavy in stature – thereby giving the leaf its ‘tremulous’ nature – and indeed heart-shaped, the *ashvastha* leaf as the *Vedas* represents ‘heavenly knowledge, descending and taking root on earth’ (*Works*, IV, 100). The metaphor seems mixed, but the *ashvastha* tree has roots that seem to go upwards towards heaven rather than downwards into the ground. This is why the tree is considered ‘rooted in heaven’ and why its leaves, which seem to hang closer to the ground than the roots, ‘take root on earth’. More practically, Hindus also use the *ashvastha* leaf medicinally to heal wounds and cure certain ailments like inflammation and swelling – the relevance

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with Jones’ ‘A Hymn to Náráyena’ (1785) – in effect positioning Jones at, perhaps even as, the ‘beginning’ of Romantic period verse.

<sup>50</sup> Also known as the *pipala* or *peepal* tree in India, in Europe it is known as *Ficus religiosa*, the Sacred Fig.

<sup>51</sup> Also sacred to *Buddhism*, the *ashvastha* is the *Bodhi* tree under which the Buddha sat and attained Enlightenment.

of which will be made clearer later on. That said, the metaphor reveals the importance of the *Vedas* in Hindu cosmology: they are literally – and more importantly, literarily – extensions of the all-encompassing divinity of *Brahman*. And, more to the point, as hymns and as poems, they form the basis of the Hindu religion; in Hinduism, poetry *is* religion.

In another work, 'On the Musical Modes of the Hindus' (1792), Jones emphasises the religious significance of Hindu poetry, though in a somewhat indirect way. Discussing the sacred status of Hindu music, Jones writes:

Had the *Indian* empire continued in full energy for the last two thousand years, religion would, no doubt, have given permanence to systems of musick invented, as the *Hindus* believe, by their Gods, and adapted to mystical poetry; but such have been the revolutions of their government...that, although the *Sanscrit* books have preserved the theory of their musical compositions, the practice of it seems almost wholly lost. (*Works*, IV, 204-205)

Although Jones' purpose in this work is to focus on the lost practice of ancient Indian music, he relates an important point: if Hindu culture had remained dominant for the past two millennia, Hindu music would have been established a religious 'permanence' much in the way 'mystical poetry' had already been established. By making this comparison, Jones illustrates the idea that poetry already shares a common origin with religion; to the '*Hindus*' poetry is a religious expression that has survived from the time when poetry and religion were the same expression. Music, though theorised as divine, has lost its religious purpose through the ages. However, it still holds the potential to be 'adapted' to poetry and participate in religious activity through it.<sup>52</sup>

Jones' comparison between poetry and music is important because he uses that comparison to elaborate his most direct statement on his translational theory. Soon after the above passage, Jones remarks that 'the musician must naturally have emulated the poet, as every translator endeavours to resemble his original' (*Works*,

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<sup>52</sup> Cf., Bennett Zon's 'From "very acute and plausible" to "curiously misinterpreted": Sir William Jones's "On the Musical Modes of the Hindus" (1792) and its reception in later musical treatises' in *Romantic Representations of British India* (London, 2006), p. 197-219.

IV, 207). Although Jones uses translation as a metaphor here, his statement suggests that poetry is an original source which music merely attempts to 'emulate'. Music's emulation of poetry resembles the translator's emulation of the original. What is interesting about this comparison is the way in which it gives poetry a translational originality – poetry is a religious source language, if you will, that must be translated into a musical target for music to be religiously 'adapted.' For Jones, translation itself has a religious importance because it allows one to trace back (religious) origins. This tracing back of origins provided the essential impetus for his use of the hymn, since the hymn was the origin of poetic and religious expression.

It is not surprising, then, that when Jones turns his attention to Hindu verse after his arrival to Calcutta, he proceeded to apply the aesthetic principles of natural, emotive, and innovative poetry established in his 'Essay'. In 'On the Literature of the Hindus' (1787), the structure of Hindu poetry serves as one of the main topics of discussion. 'The *Sanscrit* Prosody is easy and beautiful,' Jones relates from *Pandit* Govardhan Kaul's essay<sup>53</sup>; 'the learned will find in it almost all the measures of the *Greeks*; and it is remarkable, that the language of the *Bráhmans* runs very naturally into *Sapphicks*, *Alcaicks*, and *Iambicks*' (*Works*, IV, 107). One of the reasons for this formal coincidence seems due to ancient Greek's linguistic origins in the ancient Sanskrit; Jones was after all the first linguist to posit a connection between the languages, saying that,

The *Sanscrit* language...[is] 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'. ('On the Hindus', *SWJ*, 361)

As Michael J. Franklin notes, Jones' translational works 'established the cornerstone of modern comparative philology' (*SWJ*, 355). In Jones' mind, Sanskrit had an originality all its own, conceiving the language – and, as he explores in 'On the Gods

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<sup>53</sup> See footnote 42 above.

of Greece, Italy, and India' (1784), the religious mythology – of Europe's Classical past.

Yet Jones' remarks on '*Sanscrit Prosody*' also fit into the aesthetic criticism he established in 'Essay on the Arts' and 'Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations' fifteen years earlier; not only is there a historical reason for the Hindu poems to be similar, comparable, perhaps even interchangeable with European poetry, but there is a poetic one as well. Jones finds in Hindu poetry the same natural expression of originality he lauds in 'Essay on the Arts'. In 'On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus' (1789), Jones explores and explains

a singular species of poetry, which consists almost wholly of a mystical religious allegory, though it seems, on a transient view, to contain only the sentiments of a wild and voluptuous libertinism: now, admitting the danger of a poetical style, in which the limits between vice and enthusiasm are so minute as to be hardly distinguishable, we must beware of censuring it severely, *and must allow it to be natural*, though a warm imagination may carry it to a culpable excess; for an ardently grateful piety is congenial to the undepraved nature of man, whose mind, sinking under the magnitude of the subject, and struggling to express its emotions, has recourse to metaphors and allegories, which it sometimes extends beyond the bounds of cool reason, and often to the brink of absurdity.<sup>54</sup>

Just as he does with *Vedantism*, Jones decries 'censuring' the 'mystical religious' nature of Hindu poetry based on cultural or religious prejudice, and instead favours responding to it in a measured, sympathetic manner. Although rhetoric such as 'wild', 'libertinism', 'culpable excess' and 'the brink of absurdity' comes across as condemnatory – perhaps even debasing by its subtle suggestion of native Hindus' incapability to express the 'magnitude' of 'grateful piety' in anything other than metaphor or allegory – the point Jones attempts to make revolves around the 'natural' inclinations of the poetry's expression of 'emotion'. Despite certain exploits one may disparage within Hindu verse – and here Jones is referring to the overt sexual explicitness of some Hindu poetry – Hindu 'mystical' poetry still has a 'grateful

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<sup>54</sup> 'On the Mystical Poetry of the Hindus', *Asiatic Researches; or, Translations of the Society, Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia*, Third Volume (London, 1799), p. 165-183, 165-166. My italics.

piety' that is not only 'undepraved' but fundamentally 'natural' to the poem's expression of sentiment itself.

And, just like in 'Essay on the Arts', Jones progresses from a discussion of 'natural emotion' to talk about the hymn – or, rather, an encomiastic expression such as the hymn. Quoting at length a passage on the expression of religious love by Isaac Barrows, a seventeenth-century mathematician who developed calculus and was a friend of Isaac Newton, Jones writes how Barrow defines 'Love' as 'an affection or inclination of the soul toward an object', and how 'pious love' is always directed toward 'the author of their happiness' in an artful 'panegyrick'. We should note that, in saying 'the author of their happiness', Jones uses exactly the same language as he does in 'Essay on the Arts' to describe the hymn's invocation of the divine. Here, we see the theoretical connection between Jones' conceptualisation of the hymn in his early aesthetic criticism and his later fascination with Hindu 'mystical poetry'.

After quoting Barrows' 'panegyrick' at length, Jones concludes that the

passage from BARROW (which borders...on quietism and enthusiastick devotion) differs only from the mystical theology of the *Súfis* and *Yógis* [a *Brahmanical* practitioner of austere religious devotion], as the flowers and fruits of *Europe* differ in scent and flavour from those of *Asia*...the same strain, in poetical measure, would rise up to the odes of SPENSER on *Divine Love and Beauty*, and in a higher key with richer embellishments, to...the mysteries of the *Bhágavat*.<sup>55</sup>

The difference of religious love, which Jones finds as a common attribute in Sufism, *Vedantism*, and Barrows' gnostic notions of Christianity – 'our soul...vergeth toward him as [God's] centre, and can have no rest, till it be fixed on him' – is in degree, and not substance, as Jones says later on; 'the spirit of GOD pervades the universe', Jones writes and it is the same spirit that can be found in the poetry of Spenser, the *Súfis*, or the *Bhagavad-Gita* not only because it is the same 'GOD', but also because it is the same aesthetic principle of poetry recreating, and reinstating, the original emotions of humanity in their own hymned gratefulness of being (*Works*, IV, 214).

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<sup>55</sup> 'On the Mystical Poetry of the Hindus', *Asiatic Researches*, Third Volume, p. 167, 168.

Jones thus continues an aesthetic conceptualisation of the hymnal form which had begun in his earlier days; however, it just so happened conveniently to fit into the very religious and metaphysical constructs of *Vedantism* which Jones was advocating in his 'Hymns'. In this sense, we can see the way that Jones incorporates not only his own views of the hymn into his 'Hymns', but also Hindu concepts of the hymnal form to recreate the 'originality' of the hymn as a religious expression.

As Jones knew, the Hindu hymn was sacred not only symbolically but also structurally. The *Vedic* hymns are composed of a trimetric, triplet poetic form known as *gáyatrí*. The trimetre and the tercet of *gáyatrí* represent the sacred word, *AUM*. In the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, Wilkins describes *AUM*, or as he writes it *Om!*, as the 'mystic emblem of the Deity' which is

forbidden to be pronounced but in silence. It is a syllable formed of the letters अ a, उ oo, which in composition coalesce, and make ओ O, and the nasal consonant म् m. The first letter stands for the Creator [*Brahma*], the second for the Preserver [*Vishnu*], and the third for the Destroyer [*Shiva*].<sup>56</sup>

As Wilkins explains, a Hindu devotee should utter *AUM* in silent meditation of the divine as it is the 'all-knowing Word' encompassing both the divine triumvirate of *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Shiva* as well as the three main *Vedas*, the *Rig*, *Yajur*, and *Sama*.<sup>57</sup> In *The Institutes of Hindu Law*, Jones also describes *AUM* as 'The trilateral monosyllable [which] is an emblem of the supreme'; 'but', he continues, 'nothing is more exalted than the *gáyatrí*: a declaration of truth...more excellent than silence'.<sup>58</sup> In Jones' description, even though *AUM* represents in linguistic form the sacred divine union of all things in *Brahman*, the declaration of *gáyatrí* is more 'exalted than [the] silence' in which *AUM* is uttered and the silence which follows that utterance.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Bhagvat-Geeta*, p. 66. My notes.

<sup>57</sup> *Bhagvat-Geeta*, p. 70. Jones uses this exact phrase, 'Th' unknown all-knowing Word', in 'Náráyena' to describe *Brahma*'s meditation of his own existence (*SWJ*, 110, ll. 69).

<sup>58</sup> *The Institutes of Hindu Law; or, The Ordinances of Menu*, translated by Sir William Jones (London, 1796), p. 28. Abbreviated hereafter as *Menu*.

<sup>59</sup> This silence which proceeds the utterance of *AUM* represents, as the famous comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell says, the place 'out of which [*AUM*] comes, back into which it goes, and which underlies it...that [silence] is, what we call the immortal'. *The Power of Myth*, Disc 2.

*Gáyatrí* is more 'exalted' than that sacred silence in which *AUM* is uttered not because it is the poetic metre and form of the hymn which represents *AUM*, but because *gáyatrí* is a hymn itself – in fact, according to Jones and Hindus alike, *gáyatrí* is 'the holiest hymn in the Veda' ('Extracts from the Vedas,' *Works*, XIII, 365). Jones was working on *gáyatrí* for his next discourse 'On the Primitive Religion of the Hindus', but was unable to finish it due to his death in 1794. However, in his notes, he provided a translation of *gáyatrí* as the 'holiest hymn', which reads:

'Let us adore the supremacy of *that* divine sun, the godhead who illuminates all, who recreates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understandings aright in our progress toward his holy seat. \*\*\*\*\* What the sun and light are to this visible world, that are the *Supreme good* and *truth* to the intellectual and invisible universe; and, as our corporeal eyes have a distinct perception of objects enlightened by the sun, thus our souls acquire certain knowledge, by meditating on the light of truth, which emanates from the Being of beings; *that* is the light by which alone our minds can be directed in the path to beatitude'. ('Extracts from the Vedas,' *Works*, XIII, 365)

As Jones explains, *gáyatrí* is not the adoration of the 'visible material *sun*,' but rather that '*divine and incomparably greater light...which illuminates all...and which alone can irradiate* (not our visual organs merely, but our souls and) *our intellects*'.<sup>60</sup> In short, *gáyatrí* is a hymn to the original, untranslatable source of all creation (i.e., *Brahman*). As Jones translates in *The Institutes of Hindu Law*, 'By the sole repetition of *gáyatrí*, a priest may indubitably attain beatitude, let him perform, or not perform, any other religious act'; in so doing, that priest is '*united to the Great One*' (*Menu*, 125, 126). Thus, not only is *gáyatrí* the holiest hymn in Hinduism, but the enunciation of the hymn is also the holiest religious *act* of Hinduism one can perform.

Jones both invokes and enunciates *gáyatrí* in his 'Hymn to Súra', an invocation to the Hindu Sun god. In this poem, Jones uses the hymn as a translational form to allow Hindu religious tradition and theology to find a 'consonant mode of expression' in English. Here, the hymn performs a metacritical act of

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<sup>60</sup> 'The Preface', *Menu*, p. xvi.



reflexivity, explaining the Hindu hymn as it praises through it, thereby translating the 'spirit' of *gáyatrí* into Jones' hymn.

From the outset of the poem, Jones works to re-establish the mythological and religious importance of the hymn. As he writes:

O Sun, thy pow'rs I sing:  
Thy substance *Indra* with his heav'nly bands  
Nor sings nor understands;  
Nor e'en the *Védas* three to man explain  
Thy mystick orb triform, though *Brahmà* tun'd the strain.  
(*SWJ*, 146, ll. 13-17)

Here, if we read this passage literally, Jones suggests that his 'hymn' 'praises' and is 'tun'd' to *Súrya*'s 'mystick' being in a way that *Indra*, the Hindu god of Heaven, or the *Vedas* – the thousand sacred hymns that serve as the wellspring of Hindu religious philosophy – are not.

On the surface, this proclamation supplies ample evidence to postcolonial arguments suggesting that Jones' 'Hymn' displays a colonial and epistemological arrogance in its presumptuous attempt to educate natives in their own cultural traditions. In the prefaced 'Argument' to the poem, where he explicates various mythological and etymological aspects of *Súrya*, Jones explains in an erudite, even disinterested, tone how the Hindu Sun god represents the '*Treyítenu, or Three-bodied*' aspects of fire: producing forms of 'genial *heat*, preserving them by his *light*, or destroying them by the concentrated force of his *igneous* matter' (*SWJ*, 144). This 'personification of the Sun', Jones continues, 'will account for nearly the whole system of *Egyptian, Indian, and Grecian* polytheism' (*SWJ*, 144).

Reading this stanza from a Saidian postcolonial perspective would then suggest that *Súrya*'s 'mystick orb triform' is attributable not so much to the deity's divine mystique, but rather to its general appropriation of the mythological trope of fire as a producer, preserver, and destroyer of forms as is evident throughout various mythological systems. Thus, Jones 'understands' *Súrya* better than the native epistemology or hermeneutics which *Indra* and the *Vedas* represent because he is

privity to this wider, empirical survey of mythological systems in which Hinduism is but one example out of many. In this sense, Jones rationalises the religion to a point where its scientific applicability constricts and suffocates its cultural authority and distinctiveness. This is a general argument that has been levelled against Jones and his works by numerous scholars, such as Said, Teltscher, Sugirtharajah and Michael Dobson.<sup>61</sup>

However, such a reading would completely miss the high level of cultural mediation actually occurring here. While Jones may be referring to the general mythological significance of the '*Treyitenu*' as it applies to *Súrya*, he also grounds his narrative specifically in Hindu religious belief. This stanza actually alludes to a key passage from the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, a text with which, as a friend and colleague of Wilkins, Jones was intimately conversant. The *Bhagvat-Geeta* recounts a conversation between *Krishna*, the earthly incarnation of *Vishnu*, and *Arjoon*, a prince fearfully preparing for battle. *Krishna* reveals to *Arjoon* the secrets of metaphysical existence and describes the duties of a devout Hindu, thereby putting his fears of death to rest by revealing his greater spiritual destiny (union with *Brahman*). In the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, *Krishna* explains to *Arjoon* that:

The followers of the three *Vêds* who drink the juice of the *Sam*, being purified of their offences address me in sacrifices and petition for heaven. These obtain the regions of *Eendra*, the prince of celestial beings in which heaven they feast upon celestial food and divine enjoyments; and when they have partaken of that spacious heaven for a while, in proportion to their virtues, they sink again into this mortal life, soon as their stock of virtue is expended. In this manner those, who, longing for the accomplishment of their wishes, follow the religion point out by the three *Vêds*, obtain a transient reward. (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 45)

*Krishna* explains to *Arjoon* that if one only follows the *Vedas*, which in Sanskrit means 'knowledge', one will only obtain the 'transient reward' of the *Swerga*, the Hindu heaven presided over by *Indra*. While an important step towards ultimate enlightenment and union with the divine, it is by itself a fleeting and finite experience

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Dobson's *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880* (London, 2008), and Sugirtharajah's *Imagining Hinduism: A Postcolonial Perspective* (London, 2003).

which eventually returns one to the cycle of 'mortal life'. We can be certain that Jones knew this passage well because he refers to it specifically in the prefaced 'Argument' to 'A Hymn to Indra' (1785). There he announces that the passage relates a 'distinct idea of the God' before providing his own translation of it:

These, having through virtue reached the mansion of the king of *Sura*'s, feast on the exquisite heavenly food of the Gods: they, who have enjoyed this lofty region of *Swerga*, *but* whose virtue is exhausted, revisit the habitation of the mortals'. (*SWJ*, 134)

Jones' translation of this passage emphasises the moral principles and implications of *Krishna*'s adage, implicitly invoking the ethical consequences of *karma* in determining the feasters' subsequent transmigratory transition.

As noted early, karmic reincarnation was a theological precept with which Jones had much sympathy; as he writes in a letter in 1787,

I am no Hindu; but I hold the doctrine of the Hindus concerning a future state to be incomparably more rational, more pious, and more likely to deter men from vice, than the horrid opinions inculcated by Christians on punishments *without end*. (*Letters*, II, 766)

Though cited earlier, the premise of this quotation is important enough to bear repeating; again, not only does Jones legitimise Hindu theology in the face of Christian doctrine, but he finds it more morally efficacious. By invoking this metaphysical and moral concept in his 'Hymn to *Súrya*', Jones achieves two inter-related objectives: 1) he positions the hymn firmly within Hindu mythological tradition, thereby distinguishing that tradition from others and recognising its mythological authority; and 2) he actively participates in that tradition by acknowledging the moral credence of *Krishna*'s words from the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, thereby striving to guide the hymn towards a 'knowledge' of the divine that gestures beyond the 'transient reward' that the *Vedas*, as 'knowledge', offer. In this sense, Jones directs both the narrative and the religious principle of his 'Hymn to *Súrya*' towards *gáyatrí*.

And it is here, in the build up towards *gáyatrí*, where the underlying idea of translation and originality this chapter has explored, becomes particularly important. As Walter Benjamin writes in his essay 'The Task of the Translator' (1923),

‘Translation is a form. To comprehend it as a form, one must go back to the original, for the laws governing the translation lie within the original, contained in the issue of its translatability’.<sup>62</sup> Benjamin’s idea of form, translatability, and originality leads him back to a discussion about the process of translation and an examination of the target and the source languages (and cultures) involved in that process. The issue of ‘translation’ is one of ‘translatability’, what Benjamin defines as ‘an essential quality of certain works...a specific significance inherent in the original [which] manifests itself in its translatability’.<sup>63</sup> We might term this the ‘spirit’ of a work which lends itself to be translatable because it somehow harkens to a lost originality which binds the different source and target languages (and cultures) together. This is translation as ‘form’, in that translation takes place through the translatability of an ‘essential’ form that stands ‘in the closest relationship to the original by virtue of the original’s translatability’.<sup>64</sup> Translation is not the original, nor is it the translatable form, but rather it

*at least points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages. The original cannot enter there in its entirety, but what does appear in this region is that element in a translation which goes beyond transmittal of subject nature.*<sup>65</sup>

Benjamin discusses the ways in which translatability ‘*points the way*’ to something like the mythological reconstruction of a divine *Ursprache*, or the lost original language of Babel, from all other existing languages. That is, translatability does not reconstruct or translate the *Ursprache* – for it is untranslatable – but allows, through the process of translation, for it to be theorized as a realm of linguistic ‘fulfilment’ in the face of untranslatability. The ‘task’ of the translator for Benjamin, then, is to find the ‘echo of the original’ in the target language – to find the translatability in the

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<sup>62</sup> *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 253-263, 254.

<sup>63</sup> ‘The Task of the Translator’, *Selected Writings*, 254.

<sup>64</sup> ‘The Task of the Translator’, *Selected Writings*, 254.

<sup>65</sup> ‘The Task of the Translator’, *Selected Writings*, 257. My emphasis.

source language that leads to the *Ursprache* being 'echoed' in the target.<sup>66</sup> Benjamin quotes from Rudolf Pannwitz to make his point: 'Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a mistaken premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English'.<sup>67</sup> Benjamin views translation not as the unilateral carrying over of language from the source to the target, but rather as a form responsive to a more nuanced process of reciprocity between source and target. Translation in this sense is the 'carrying over' of language into the other that 'echoes' in both source and target the original from whence they both came.

This idea of translation is helpful in explaining what happens next in Jones' 'Hymn to Súrya'. Translation plays an important role in how Jones both frames and invokes *gáyatrí*. In the penultimate stanza, Jones, as usual, interjects himself into the narrative as one who hymns; he writes:

'He came; and, lisping our celestial tongue,  
 'Though not from *Brahmà* sprung,  
 'Draws orient knowledge from its fountains pure,  
 'Through caves obstructed long, and paths too long obscure.'

Yes; though the *Sanscrit* song  
 Be strown with fancy's wreathes,  
 And emblems rich, beyond low thoughts refin'd,  
 Yet heav'nly truth it breathes  
 With attestation strong.  
 (*SWJ*, 152, ll.184-192)

Here, Jones refers to his ability to read and translate Sanskrit, known to the Hindus and to Jones as 'the language...of the Gods' ('On the Persians,' *Works*, I, 126). As only the second European after Wilkins to learn and translate Sanskrit authoritatively at the time, Jones revels in his ability to draw 'orient knowledge from its fountain pure / Through caves obstructed long and paths too long obscure'. Jones views his unfettered access to the wellspring of Sanskrit texts as an untapped resource for

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<sup>66</sup> 'The Task of the Translator', *Selected Writings*, 258.

<sup>67</sup> 'The Task of the Translator', *Selected Writings*, 262.

religious originality – a resource, until the composition of his ‘Hymns’, secreted away within the cavernous depths of history.

Many scholars, such as Teltscher and Sugirtharajah, have interpreted this sentiment of drawing knowledge from India’s sacred, secret past as Jones aligning himself, and his translational exercises, with Britain’s colonial enterprise in India. Such translational access to original Hindu works was indeed important for Jones’ professional duties; as a Supreme Court Judge, Jones translated a number of Sanskrit texts, his *magnum opus* – according to himself – being *The Institutes of Hindu Law; or, the Ordinances of Menu* (1794, posthumously), a translation of the *Mānava-Dharma Shastra*, a mythological compilation of legal and divine ordinances thought to underpin Hindu society. Jones sought to provide a comprehensive translation of Hindu law for two interconnected reasons: 1) to make it easier for British administrators such as himself to adjudicate Hindu law, and 2) to counter what he perceived as the Hindu *pandits*’, or legal scholars, inconsistent, incompetent, and sometimes even ignoble interpretation of their own legal texts. As Teltscher puts it, this translation was an attempt by Jones to out-pandit the pandits, thereby circumventing native social structures and hermeneutical systems to place Hindu law under the authority of British administrators.<sup>68</sup> In this sense, Jones uses translation as a colonial tool much in the way Bernard Cohn describes it: as a means for Britain to ‘invade and conquer’ not only India’s territorial space, but also its ‘epistemological space’ as well.<sup>69</sup>

However, the cave represents an insular, sacred place – a place of origins and enlightenment, as Jones demonstrates in ‘A Hymn to Durgá’ (1787). In that poem, we find *Shiva* ‘Sat in a crystal cave’, meditating on the origins of existence through his enlightened ‘Third eye’, which concurrently also allows *Shiva*, through his

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<sup>68</sup> *India Inscribed*, p. 200.

<sup>69</sup> *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, 1996), p. 4. Several arguments about Jones’ Hymns have been made along these lines; cf. Said, Teltscher, Dodson and Sugirtharajah.

powers of creation by destruction, to 'new worlds design' (*SWJ*, 170, II.2.6, 2.5).<sup>70</sup>

The contemplation of existence and being stimulates creation in its own right, so that by meditating on the original, one somehow makes a completely new form. This fits well in Jones' aesthetic criticism; firstly, as he states in 'Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations', his goal is to make British poetry new by incorporating more ancient 'Oriental' verse. Secondly, the reflexivity of the hymnal form, and its position as the original poetic form, allows him to access that originality continually as a means of pushing forward with the new. The 'cave' from which Jones accesses the 'pure fountain' of Hinduism is the same wellspring of 'poetic invention' from which he says Hafiz, Ferdusi, Homer, and Shakespeare drank.

Furthermore, the fountain of 'orient knowledge' from which Jones drinks is the *Veda*. As we may recall from earlier, Jones describes the *Vedas* as the 'fountain of all knowledge human and divine' in 'On the Literature of the Hindus'. Jones receives his 'knowledge' of Hinduism from the *Vedas*, the '*Sanskrit songs*', the hymns to deities which are the 'leaves' of the divine tree of *Brahman*. Here, Jones' 'lisp' of the '*Sanskrit song*' suggests his inchoate, but nonetheless authoritative, grasp of the language so that he may translate the works in English. However, 'lisp' also suggests faulty pronunciation, as perhaps a child would when first learning a language. There is a sense of Jones learning the language as a native would and engaging in the religious significance of the *Vedic* utterance. Thus, by 'lisp'ing the '*Sanskrit song*', Jones also represents himself as a devotee to *Súrya*. Indeed, he presents himself 'on lowly knee' as *Súrya*'s 'poet free / Who with no borrow'd art / Dares hymn thy pow'r, and durst provoke thy blaze' (*SWJ*, 151, II. 175, 171-173). Here, Jones dispenses with translation in the traditional sense, saying that he can 'hymn' with 'no borrow'd art'. He 'Dares hymn' the power of *Súrya* not within the guise of a professional translator, but as a personal discipline. Jones feels *Súrya*'s 'thrilling dart' and, to him 'who gave the wound', genuflects and so from the god 'the balsam prays' (*SWJ*, 151,

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<sup>70</sup> As Franklin notes, 'Śiva represents concentrated enlightenment and spiritual energy' (*SWJ*, 170).

ll. 173, 175). Jones goes to the source of the wound to find the cure, symbolising his dismissal of the artifice of translation in order to access the original in its complete, unedited form.

In these lines, Jones recognises *Súrya* as a physical threat. In a letter to Wilkins in 1787, Jones writes that, ‘The powerful *Surye*, whom I worship only that he may do me no harm, confines me to my house, as long as he appears in the heavens’ (*Letters*, II, 665). *Súrya*’s physical threats were very real. India’s climate was notoriously hostile to the British; as William Dalrymple explains in *White Mughals*, ‘two monsoons was the average life-span of a European in Bengal...Every year at the end of the monsoon in October, the survivors used to hold thanksgiving banquets to celebrate their deliverance.’<sup>71</sup> These brutal realities were very much a part of Jones’ everyday life; he often complains in letters of either himself or his wife recovering from one illness or another, usually attributed to the heat. Bucking the trend, Jones would last ten monsoons, yet still succumb to its dangers, dying in April 1794 from inflammation of the liver – a common cause of death due to the malarial climate.

Yet Jones’ rather playful reference to the harshness of colonial life serves another purpose altogether: to accentuate that which will alleviate the severity of the climate – the ‘thrilling dart’ of hymning. As we might remember, the leaves of the *ashvastha* tree were used medicinally to ease inflammation. Those same leaves were also used metaphorically to symbolise the *Vedas*. Here, Jones cleverly invokes the leaves’ medicinal and metaphorical meanings to serve as the ‘balsam’ for Jones’ ailments. If it is physical pain, the leaves provide relief; if it is spiritual, they also offer enlightenment through the *Vedas*. Instead of fleeing from *Súrya* as the substantial cause of this ‘wound’, Jones evokes the deity as the literary cure. His enthusiasm for hymning to the god ‘with no borrow’d art’ – that is, not through mere linguistic

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<sup>71</sup> *White Mughals: Love & Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London, Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 399.



translation but through the innate 'lispings' of the '*Sanskrit* song' – is the very 'balsam' which ameliorates the 'blaze' provoked by the hymn; Jones reaches beyond the materiality of language towards the original source by using the original (poetic) form. As a result, Jones prostrates himself to *Súrya* not from deathly illness, but from divine illumination.

Such is *Súrya*'s 'pow'r', and such is the hymned invocation to the god, that they simultaneously 'wound' and heal the invoker. The audacity of the hymn stems not so much from its invocation to the Sun god, but rather from the fact that such an invocation is done 'with no borrow'd art' – that is, with an originality and innovation that goes beyond the imitative and derivative nature of translation. While linguistic translation may provide access to 'oriental knowledge', in his 'lispings' of the 'celestial tongue' of the '*Sanskrit* song' – that is, of the hymn – Jones seeks the 'heav'nly truth it breathes' of the 'far more glorious He, who said serene, / BE, and *thou* [*Súrya*] *wast* – Himself unform'd, unchang'd, unseen' (*SWJ*, p. 152, 191, 203-204). That is, Jones conceptualises translation not as the transposition of one language into another for colonial gain; rather, Jones seeks to use the hymn to *Súrya* as a translational means to suggest a common religious origin between *Súrya* and the 'glorious He' who created all existence. In both readings of Jones' 'lispings' of the '*Sanskrit* song', Jones uses the hymn to emphasise his translation skills, but in such a way that they highlight the hymn's distinct purposes: divine praise.

As noted earlier, Jones' 'Hymns' are not translations. However, they bear the 'spirit' of translations because they were based on translations, but also because they seek to translate, to find the 'echo' of originality, in both British and Hindu hymnody. Here, the hymn is the translational form which Jones uses to find that lost originality – both poetic and religious – and ground his contemporary hymn in the religious and poetic originality of Hindu myth and metaphysics. By invoking *gáyatrí*, Jones seeks not only a poetic primacy, but a religious one as well. *Gáyatrí* makes his translation possible; it finds the 'spirit' of the Hindu religion and translates it not so

much in English, but rather, as Pannwitz suggests all good translations do, translates the English into Sanskrit – and both into the divine *Ursprache* of the hymn.

## Chapter II

### Translation, Religion, and the Reception of Jonesian Hinduism

*But, earth-born artist, hold!  
If e'er thy soaring lyre  
To Deipeç's notes aspire*

...  
*Red lightning shall consume;  
Nor can thy sweetest song avert the doom.*  
- Sir William Jones, 'A Hymn to Sereswaty' (1785)

#### I: Introduction

As the previous Chapter explored, scholars have often neglected analysing the ways in which Jones' 'Hymns' incorporate the religious components of the Hindu hymn. The previous chapter sought to ground Jones' 'Hymns' in a Hindu theological exegesis, while also hinting at Jones' own Unitarian sentiments, in order to read back into those poems the obvious, though often overlooked, religious nature of the works. I have done so not only to demonstrate what I believe the poems to express, but also to situate them within the larger context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain and India where religious and political debates vigorously shaped, and shifted, the historical reaction to Hinduism. This chapter examines the reception of Jones' 'Hymns' throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in order to trace their influence in the religious and political debates of those periods. I include such an examination in order to show the extent to which Jones' representation of Hinduism in his 'Hymns' had not only poetic implications, but, due to their religious nature, political ones as well.

#### II: The 'Second Wilkes': Jones' Early Poetry and Radical Politics

During the 1770s and early 1780s before he left for Calcutta, Jones was renowned primarily for his translations of Persian literature and language. Due to his linguistic talents, Jones socialised within the elite literary and intellectual circles of the period, becoming a member of Samuel Johnson's Literary Club and a Fellow at the Royal Institute of London. However, Jones also made a name for himself as something of a political radical, particularly between the years 1776 and 1782. Under the banner of pro-Wilkite policies, which included support for American

Independence, Whig constitutionalism, and greater manhood suffrage for dissenters and the working classes, Jones ran as a candidate for Oxford University's Parliamentary seat in 1780. Yet, assured of a loss, he stood down and threw his support behind John Wilkes' run in Middlesex.

Despite his earlier views that Wilkes was a 'trouble-maker' and 'firebrand' (*Letters*, I, 10), Jones wrote his *Speech on the Nomination of Candidates* (September, 1780) in favour of Wilkes after hearing him speak in Hackney. Dubbed a 'second Wilkes' by the *Gentlemen's Magazine* (*SWJ*, 372) because of this support, Jones' impassioned *Speech* criticises the sitting British Parliament for their domestic and foreign policy failures, including the American war, the slave trade, and Britain's colonial mismanagement of India. In a letter to American statesman and friend Benjamin Franklin in 1781, Jones speaks plainly of his political concerns: 'All virtue and public spirit are dead in this country: we have the *shadow* merely of a free constitution, but live in truth under the substance of despotism' (*Letters*, II, 493-494). Here, Jones suggests that the '*shadow*' of constitutional authority indicates not only the degree to which the country's political virtues are without substance, but also the degree to which a creeping 'despotism' is beginning to cast itself over the country. Fearing the increase of governmental control by the crown, Jones advocates for a return to fundamental constitutional principles in which Parliament acted as a more substantial check to monarchical authority.

With his unsuccessful Parliamentary run dashing his dreams of a political future, Jones turned to literature to express, and implement, his views on constitutional politics. His 'Ode in Imitation of Alcæus' (1781) asks 'what forms a state?' and answers the question by advocating the rule of 'sov'reign Law.../O'er thrones and globes elate' (*SWJ*, 79, ll.18-19). His 'Ode in Imitation of Callistratus' (1782) recounts with tyrannicidal fervour the democratic founding of Athens by Harmodius and Aristogiton, hoping to instil liked-minded 'Equal laws and liberty', as

well as 'People valiant, firm, and FREE' in Britain.<sup>1</sup> Even 'The Muse Recalled; An Ode on the Nuptials of Lord Viscount Althorp and Miss Lavinia Bingham' (1781), an epithalamion for his friend and student Lord Althorp, broached the political by suggesting that Althorp and his new wife, with their 'publick virtues' intact, venture 'Beyond the vast Atlantick deep' in order to avoid

...this abandon'd age,  
When Albion's sons with frantick rage,  
In crimes along and recreant baseness bold,  
Freedom and Concord, with their weeping train,  
Repudiate. (SWJ, 74, ll. 117, 133, 118-122)

By suggesting the wedded couple flee to America in order to escape the 'crimes' and 'recreant baseness' of Britain's compromised political and moral systems, Jones implies that patriots who harbour a true sense of British 'publick virtue' would find a more compatible social and political atmosphere in American democracy.<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that the 'frantick rage' and 'recreant baseness' of which Jones speaks reflects his disgust at the recent religious incitement to public disorder which defined the anti-Catholic tone of the Gordon Riots in June 1780. In this sense, not only did America offer a political equality, but a religious one as well – or, at least, a sense of democratic rationality when it came to religious matters.

Jones champions the democratic ideals of 'The Muse Recalled' further in his most famous political work, *The Principles of Government, in a Dialogue between a Gentleman and a Farmer* (1782). A Socratic dialogue between a Gentleman and a Farmer, it argues for a governing system based on 'not only *just* and *rational* but

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<sup>1</sup> *The Poetical Works of Sir William Jones, Volume II* (London, 1807), p. 23, 24, ll. 21, 48.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Arthur Lee, an American diplomat during the war, in 1788, Jones writes about the drafting of the American Constitution:

If young Englishmen had any English spirit, they would finish their education by visiting the United States instead of fluttering about Italy, and strive rather to learn political wisdom from republicans than to pick up a few superficial notions of fine arts from the poor thralls of bigotry and despotism. (*Letters*, II, 821)

The 'political wisdom' Jones emphasises in this letters mirrors that of 'The Muse Recall'd'; that 'wisdom' being, of course, the realisation by 'young Englishmen' that the history of constitutional and democratic government as celebrated in the American political system has a British foundation. Here Jones suggest that British youth need to study the American system in order to understand how a British democracy *should* be; it is, however, a foundation under threat by 'young Englishmen's' blasé attitudes towards British politics.

*constitutional and salutary*' doctrines (SWJ, 395). The tract works to explain the processes of a constitutional government and make it applicable to, and comprehensible by, any person. The Farmer learns the principles of a free state, but more so, he realizes that his pastoralism does not exclude him from the political process, stating that he had 'knowledge in my own mind of this great subject' before his conversation with the Gentleman (SWJ, 402). Jones attempts to capture the innate and natural qualities of a democratic society through the rural reflections of the Farmer. The balancing of urban gentry with rural labourers symbolises the true spirit of democracy that Jones, Wilkes and others identify with the legacy of the Glorious Revolution and the English Constitution.

As Michael J. Franklin notes, in this work 'Jones anticipates the efforts of Priestly, Paine, and Godwin in the 1790s to tear the Burkean veil of baroque mystery and stress the intelligibility of government to the common man' (SWJ, 396). *The Principles of Government's* appeal to the 'common man' is evinced by that fact that it was republished by the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI), a radical, working-class corresponding society who distributed tens thousand copies of it for free; soon after the *Principles'* publication, Jones was elected a member of the SCI.<sup>3</sup> *The Principles of Government* was also republished throughout the 1790s during the 'Pamphlet Wars', as well as following the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, demonstrating not only the work's enduring political philosophy, but also one of the ways in which Jones' work became appropriated through the years to carry the banner for different political and historical events.

Incidentally, Jones' political views were thought to have endangered his appointment to the judgeship in Calcutta. According to rumours to which Jones was privy, the Lord Chancellor Lord Thurlow feared that Jones would spread and

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps another piece of evidence that *The Principles of Government* appealed to the 'common man' was the fact that it was the subject of a heated libel trial in 1783 in which Jones' brother-in-law William Shipley, the Dean of St. Asaph, who was also the publisher, was eventually acquitted of seditious libel. As for Jones, by the trial, he was already on the *Crocodile* sailing to Calcutta. Cf. Anthony Page's 'The Dean of St. Asaph's Trial: Libel and Politics in the 1780s', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, (March 2009), Vol. 32, Issue 1, 21-36.

implement his radical political views as a judge. In truth, it is unclear why Lord Thurlow delayed Jones' appointment for so long (some six years), although whatever his concerns were, it eventually took the intervention of both the new Prime Minister Lord Shelburne and King George III himself to persuade Thurlow to make the appointment in 1782.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, Thurlow was not the only one with concerns regarding Jones' political sentiments and his newly acquired position of authority. In 1784, Josiah Tucker, Dean of Gloucester, published a satirical sequel to Jones' *Principles*, entitled *Dialogue between a Gentleman and a Farmer*, in which Tucker, anticipating Burke's rhetorical defence of the divine rights of royalty in *Reflections of the Revolution in France* (1790), demonstrates the dangers of Jones' democratic ideals to the established monarchy. As Rory T. Cornish notes about Tucker's works during this period, Tucker thought that 'friends of America', such as Jones, Wilkes, and Joseph Priestley, were involved 'in little more than a conspiracy to extend republicanism to Britain, a political catastrophe that would increase the power of the people to the destruction of the established institutions of the country'.<sup>5</sup> Broaching the conflict of interest between Jones' political views and his professional duties in India in his *Dialogue*, Tucker writes:

I wish to know, whether he himself allows the consequences of his own doctrine, when put into practice against his own interest? Doth he or doth he not permit the poor enslaved Gentoos and plundered Indians to dispute his authority, and disobey his commands, by telling him to his face that they never chose him to be the judge of their country?<sup>6</sup>

Here, Tucker questions if Jones would acquiesce to direct dissent by the 'Gentoos' to his own authority in light of Jones' non-democratic appointment over Indian judicial

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<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Thurlow, King George III notes Jones' competency as a lawyer and the 'additional qualification' of 'his knowledge of Eastern languages' as sufficient reasons for his appointment (*The Correspondence of George the Third. 1760-1783, vol. VI*. Ed. Sir John William Fortescue, London: Macmillan and Co., 1928: 253-254).

<sup>5</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27790> (accessed 3/1/2010, 15.43).

<sup>6</sup> *A Sequel of Sir William Jones pamphlet on the principles of government in a dialogue between a freeholder in the County of Denbigh, and the Dean of Gloucester* (London, 1784), p. 22.

affairs. That is, Tucker asks if Jones would have the courage of his political convictions and cede authority to the democratic will of the Hindus, as Jones had asked the British monarchy to do in relation to its own peoples.

While Jones never responded to Tucker's question directly, he already addressed (and would continue to address) such concerns in his private correspondence prior to and following his appointment to the judgeship. In a letter to the historian Edward Gibbon in 1781, Jones' defends his participation in radical politics while under consideration for the Indian judgeship by declaring that 'my system is purely speculative, and has no relation to my seat on the bench in India, where I should hardly think of instructing the Gentoos in the maxims of the Athenians' (*Letters*, II, 481-482). Attempting to impose distance between his political and professional interests, Jones hedges on the political implications of his professional authority. In another letter in 1789, Jones reveals an uncharacteristically condescending attitude towards the native Hindus' political intellect; he writes that they would 'receive Liberty as a curse instead of a blessing...and would reject, as a vase of poison, that, which, if they could taste and digest it, would be the water of life' (*Letters*, II, 847). Even if he wanted to 'instruct the Gentoos in the maxims of the Athenians', Jones conjectures that, due to their ingrained prejudices for Brahmanical authority, native Hindus would refuse the institution of democratic ideals, despite its life-inducing benefits.

In light of such comments, scholars have traditionally discouraged and discredited attempts to read into Jones' 'Hymns' a continuation of his political radicalism articulated before his arrival to India. In *Ungoverned Imaginings*, Javed Majeed contends that Jones' history of radical sentiments dissipates once he relocates to India and becomes incorporated into the colonial system – writing that Jones' 'Hymns' 'ignored the politically radical strands evident in his writings before



his arrival in India'.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Majeed maintains that Jones' project of 'revealing,' reconstructing, and preserving a 'lost' Hinduism for a European and colonial audience anticipates more 'the conservative ideology articulated by Burke' in *Reflections* than it continues to anticipate the radical, democratic ideals of Paine, as Franklin suggests Jones' *Principles of Government* does.<sup>8</sup> In short, Majeed argues that Jones' work on Hinduism reflects the conservative impulse of Burke's ideological attempt to define British cultural traditions and preserve the social structure that had nurtured those traditions throughout the ages.

Yet as Majeed warns, 'it would be naïve to assume that the influence of a corpus of texts was always in keeping with the author's intention, even when these can be reliably ascertained'.<sup>9</sup> Jones' intention with the 'Hymns' seem rather apolitical, if not politically conservative, as Majeed suggests. However, if we view the reception of Jones' 'Hymns', and his work in general, along a broad enough time-line (30 years or so), we see the extent to which his 'Hymns' become incorporated into the religious and political debates of the 1790s and the first two decades of the 1800s. That is to say, even though Jones' 'Hymns' may have been intended to be apolitical, even conservative, as Majeed argues, if we examine their reception and use after their publication, we see the extent to which they are often associated with radical politics due to their perceived religious affiliation with paganism and atheism. One of the reasons I have sought to emphasize the religious nature of Jones' 'Hymns' and his associated work on Hinduism is to suggest the ways in which such readings allow us to view Jones' work within the radical culture of the late eighteenth century. And though the 'Hymns' themselves may not have been radical in a political sense, they certainly lent themselves, through their reception, to engaging with and being incorporated into the radical politics of the period.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* (London, Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ungoverned Imaginings*, p. 4.

## II: Religion, Translation, and the Reception of Jones' 'Hymns'

Initially, Jones' 'Hymns' were well received for their Oriental imagery – particularly the first hymn, 'A Hymn to Camdeo'.<sup>10</sup> In 1784, *The Gentlemen's Magazine* writes that 'Camdeo...not lost by his translation, gives us a very favourable idea of the poetry and allegories of the East'. The same year, *The Monthly Review* comments that the 'Hymn to Camdeo', '*translated* from the Hindu into Persian, and from the Persian into English...is, indeed, a charming performance, and will equally delight the admirers of genuine and elegant poetry, and the lovers of Eastern allegory.'<sup>11</sup> In 1785, *The Critical Review* also writes about 'A Hymn to Camdeo,' stating that 'the wild imagery, and luxuriant language, peculiar to the poetry of the East...[if] well-directed...will be enabled, in a superior degree, to combine the useful and the pleasing'.<sup>12</sup> On the whole, these reviews ignore the religious nature of 'Camdeo' and instead focus on its exotic imagery; they suggest that such imagery opens up the possibility of understanding and appreciating 'Eastern' poetry (despite its disadvantage of 'luxuriant language'), and if 'well-directed', could even become 'useful'.

These reviews also perpetuate a common misapprehension of Jones' 'Hymns': that they were translations rather than original works.<sup>13</sup> That is, reviewers thought Jones had simply translated hymns from the ancient Sanskrit into English, rather than composed original verse works – and continued to believe this despite corrections made by Jones and other periodicals correctly stating that the 'Hymns' were original compositions. In the 'Argument' to his 'Two Hymns to Pracriti' in 1788,

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<sup>10</sup> Not all Jones' 'Hymns' were published in periodicals; the last two 'Hymns to Pracriti' were first published in the first edition of his collected *Works* in 1799. And while 'Camdeo' and 'Náráyena' received wide coverage between 1785 and 1789, the following five 'Hymns' (to *Sereswatya*, *Gangá*, *Indra*, *Súrya*, and *Lacshmi*) received limited to no comment, and were often grouped together in general comments on Jones' 'Hymns'.

<sup>11</sup> *The Monthly Review, July to Dec., Vol. LXXI*, (London, 1784), p. 354-357, 357.

<sup>12</sup> *The Critical Review, or Annals of Literature: Vol. Fifty-Ninth*, (London, 1785), p. 19-21, 21.

<sup>13</sup> A surprisingly stubborn misconception, pervading not only commentary on Jones in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but also the Jonesian scholarship of the twentieth and twenty-first century. For example, Kathleen Raine in *Blake and Tradition* in 1968 and Julia M. Wright in her otherwise brilliant edition of Sydney Owenson's *The Missionary* (1812) in 2002 both refer to Jones' 'Hymns' as translations.

for example, Jones writes that his 'Hymns' 'were neither translations from any other poems, nor imitations of any' (*SWJ*, 167). Here, Jones attempts to stress the originality of his 'Hymns', but it was not until 1797 that the first attempt in a periodical to correct the error of their being translations appears (interestingly in the *British Critic's* review of Elizabeth Hamilton's novel *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*, a novel which relied heavily on Jones' poetic and prose works on Hinduism to create her Indian characters religious beliefs).<sup>14</sup>

Why Jones' 'Hymns' were misconceived as translations is unclear. One reason may have been his already-established reputation for translations of Arabic and Persian poetry, as evinced by *Grammar of the Persian Language* and *Poems, consisting chiefly of translations from the Asiatick languages*. The reviews of his 'Hymns' use the same language and aesthetic concepts as Jones' uses to describe his Persian translations. For example, In *A Grammar of the Persian Language*, Jones writes that, 'The language of Asia will now, perhaps, be studied with uncommon ardour; they are known to be useful, and will soon be found instructive and entertaining' (xiii). Jones' *Grammar* set the standard for 'tasteful,' and more importantly, 'useful' poetic translation, as well as the proper execution of those standards within a poetic translation. A review of the *Grammar* in *The Monthly Review* (1772) focuses on the translational aspects of the work, calling Jones, 'more full and copious than any grammarian whom we have had any opportunity of consulting; and he merits due praise for his industry and taste in the exhibition of them,' while also citing the great importance of the work for the East India Company.<sup>15</sup> Here, Jones' 'exhibition' of his translational talents reveal the level of 'taste' and utility of Persian and Persian translations – the sense of translational 'performance' inherent in the word 'exhibit' alluding to the poem's pleasurable or entertaining aspects. Another reason for being mistaken as translations could have

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<sup>14</sup> Note from *British Critic*.

<sup>15</sup> *The Monthly Review*, Vol. ILVI (London, 1772), p. 37-42, 81-92, 42, 92.

been the fact that they were included in periodicals from India that included other translations or works based on translations; thus the finer points of their originality were simply never a matter of great interest.

Yet I think the reason why the 'Hymns' were mistaken as translations is somewhat less important than the implications they had as mistaken translations. By being mistaken as translations, the 'Hymns' carried less polemical weight than had they been known to be originals the entire time. That is, early on, Jones did not have to fight against the religious stigma of hymning to a foreign deity since they were considered translations, literally becoming a proxy for Hinduism and Hindu doctrine for critics and commentators of the period. For example, during a discussion of India in his *History of Great Britain from the Revolution to the Session of Parliament Ending A.D. 1793* (1798), William Belsham, a radical Whig from a dissenting background, writes some four pages on the Hindu religion. Belsham laments that the 'popular religion of the Hindoos', known to the modern European as Brahmanism, had devolved from a 'system of pure and refined theism' into a Brahmanical predilection for 'gross idolatry' (Brahmanism denoted the corrupted priestly order of Hindu *Brahmins*).<sup>16</sup> To this statement, he appends a lengthy annotation explaining the tenets of Hinduism. After writing how Brahmanical Hinduism teaches that 'GOD is to be worshipped by SYMBOLS', inculcating its idolatrous tendencies, Belsham moves on to explain the Hindu religion's 'pure theism', providing as an example of it Jones' 'Hymn to Náráyena'. Commenting on the poem, Belsham states that:

The grand dogmas of Indian theology are exhibited with the blended energies of philosophy and poetry, in an antient hymn, or divine ode, addressed to NARAYENA, or the *Divine Intellect*, as it appears in the animated translation of Sir William Jones.<sup>17</sup>

Belsham refers to Jones' 'Náráyena' in this instance because he believes it to be an 'antient hymn' imbued with the cultural authenticity of the mystical, esoteric

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<sup>16</sup> *History of Great Britain, from the Revolution to the Session of Parliament Ending A.D. 1793* (4 vols). (London, 1798), p. 445, Vol. I.

<sup>17</sup> *History of Great Britain*, 447.

philosophy of Hinduism – particularly how the notion that Hinduism’s ‘system of pure and refined theism’ is defined by ‘the Principle of Truth’, the ‘Spirit of Wisdom’, the ‘Universal Soul’, whose essence pervades ‘all things, [and] who fills all space’.<sup>18</sup>

Belsham emphasises the particular *Vedantic* philosophy of the poem to demonstrate Hinduism’s religious sublimity.

Moreover, Belsham uses the ‘Hymn’ to provide a poetic accessibility to Hinduism; indeed, Belsham uses ‘Náráyena’ to demonstrate succulently and efficiently the tenets of Hinduism he laboriously explicates elsewhere. By instilling the ‘Hymn’ with the cultural validity of the ‘grand dogmas of Indian theology’, Belsham thereby positions Jones as an authoritative ‘translator’ of Hindu doctrine. Jones’ authority as the ‘translator’ of the hymn makes his ‘translation’ as authentic as the original text; the ‘Hymn’ becomes a substituted form for Hindu theology in general. In short, by making Jones’ ‘Hymn’ synonymous with Hinduism, Belsham makes Jones synonymous with Hinduism as well.

Such authority would be a double-edged sword for Jones, particularly given the political climate that arose during the 1790s. Jones began working and publishing on Hinduism during a time of an important hermeneutical transition on issues concerning mythology and religion. As J.B. Bullen writes in *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ‘For the eighteenth century mythography centred on the relationship between pagan myth and Christianity, and in the nineteenth century it focused on mythogeny – the origins, meaning, significance, and interpretation of myth.’<sup>19</sup> Jones played an important role in both of these positions, as well as the transition from the one to the other. As noted earlier, Jones adhered to the Mosaic timeline despite evidence he and others were uncovering that suggested the contrary; Michael Dobson maintains in *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture* that

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<sup>18</sup> *History of Great Britain*, 446.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Introduction’, *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature, and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J.B. Bullen (Oxford, 1989), p. 3.

Jones' body of scholarship...[was] an attempt to forge what he considered a more rational and, ultimately, scientific basis for utilising orientalist research in the confirmation of Mosaic ethnography and the attendant Biblical chronology.<sup>20</sup>

Jones' adherence to the Mosaic timeline and Biblical ethnography – he viewed the Hindus as descendents of Ham – demonstrate the ways in which Jones positions Hinduism as 'pagan myth' towards explaining and in some ways certifying Christian historiography; as Bullen notes, 'Much of the writing on myth in the Britain concentrated on the attempt to reconcile the polytheism of ancient religions and their heterodox moralities with the beliefs of Christianity'.<sup>21</sup> But at the same time, Jones' insistence on tracing back origins, religious and poetic, particularly in his 'Hymns', also demonstrate the ways in which he complicates a strict reading of his work as promoting and advancing a colonial Christianity as Dobson has it, while also illustrating the ways in which he anticipates later nineteenth century 'mythogeny'.

The study of pagan or polytheistic religions, which Hinduism was certainly included amongst, was 'led by the irreligious', as Marilyn Butler claims.<sup>22</sup> Jones stands as a glaring exception to Butler's rule due to his professed Christianity, thereby prompting us to qualify Butler's statement by suggesting that the research and study of pagan and polytheistic religions which preceded Jones' introduction of Hinduism was largely led by the 'irreligious'. Paganism became a subject of study by the 'irreligious' in order to examine the 'joyousness, hedonism, sexual permissiveness or...naturalness and innocence of pantheons such as the Greek, Hindu, and Polynesian'.<sup>23</sup>

A classic example of such libertine study was Richard Payne Knight's *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (1786), a work which investigated the mytho-religious significance of phallus worship from the ancient Hindus, to the ancient

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<sup>20</sup> *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770-1880* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> 'Introduction', *The Sun is God*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> 'Romantic Manichaeism: Shelley's 'On the Devil, and Devils' and Byron's Mythological Dramas', *The Sun is God*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> 'Romantic Manichaeism: Shelley's 'On the Devil, and Devils' and Byron's Mythological Dramas', *The Sun is God*, p. 15.

Greeks, to Christ and beyond. In *Priapus*, Knight displays clear evidence of his familiarity with Wilkins' *Bhagvat-Geeta*, citing it often, as well as Jones' 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India', and uses their work to advance and endorse his own polemical agenda to destabilise traditional Christian authority. As Martin Priestman comments in *Romantic Atheism*, Knight also had political connections to Wilkes, and was 'a perfect embodiment of the links between libertinism, religious infidelity and political radicalism widespread in his class from the 1780s to the early nineteenth century'.<sup>24</sup> It was these types of 'libertine' writers such as Knight, and the Frenchmen F.C. Volney in *The Ruins* (1791), who were some of the first to latch onto Jones' works on Hinduism and incorporate them into their own anti-Christian, anti-religious rhetoric.<sup>25</sup>

In turn, these writers were used to paint Jones as a radical, atheist sympathiser. In 1794, *The British Critic*, a conservative, high-Church minded periodical, writes a critical review of Edward Moor's *A Narrative of the Operations of Captain Little's Detachment, and of the Mahratta Army* (1794). Moor is better known as the author of the *Hindu Pantheon*, published in 1810. The *Hindu Pantheon* explains in great detail the various gods and goddesses of Hinduism and their mythological meanings; importantly, it was a work which relied heavily on Jones' researches (such as 'On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus' and 'On the Philosophy of the Asiatics') and his 'Hymns', and was a source William Blake, Robert Southey, and Percy Bysshe Shelley all knew and used to help with their own understanding of Hinduism. However, not only does Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* rely on Jones' researches on Hinduism, but it also advances and advocates Jones' sympathetic tone towards the religion. Relating the point that what may seem offensive about Hinduism to British sentiments is not necessarily true to Indians,

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<sup>24</sup> *Romantic Atheism*, 55.

<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Indologists such as Thomas Maurice in his multi-volumed *Indian Antiquities* which spanned the 1790s (1793-1797) used Jones' works to advance a view of India which proved Christian tradition. In this sense, Jones was used by both sides to support the bias of their arguments.

Moor repeats Jones' continual claim that the religion offers 'no proof of moral depravity' despite some images Britons may find idolatrous, or even evil.<sup>26</sup>

In 1794, Moor was a Lieutenant for the East India Company and wrote a travel narrative/war correspondence piece detailing his experiences looking for and fighting the armies of Tipu Sultan in the country 'between Seringapatem and Poona'.<sup>27</sup> However, in a 'Notes and Illustrations' section appended to his work, Moor digresses from his travel narrative to comment upon the Hindu religion, particularly 'the worship of *Priapus*, the PHALLUS and the LINGAM' in India. Moor states that although he has noted authors who 'anathematize the depravity of this dissolute and vicious system', he also wants to mention other authors who are its 'defenders; who by their logical ingenuity, metaphysical reasonings, and charitable indulgence, can acquit votaries of this worship, not only of criminality, but of any immoral tendency, in their sensual and voluptuous excesses' (*Narrative*, 392-393). In other words, realising that it was often stereotypically depicted as hedonistic heathenism, Moor wants to portray a more nuanced and culturally sensitive representation of Hindu 'Lingam' worship by examining 'defenders' who provided a more 'logical' approach to the worship's 'metaphysical reasonings'.

Those 'defenders' include Knight and his provocative *Discourse on the Worship of the Priapus*; the Enlightenment man of letters and French Jesuit Abbé Guillaume Raynal and his portrayal of 'Xinto', or *Shinto*, priests in Japan who 'taught that the innocent pleasures of mankind are agreeable to the Deity; and that the best method of paying devotion to the Camis [or *kami*, the Japanese word for 'God'], is to...enjoy in this world that happiness they enjoy in another' (*Narrative*, 409); and, of course, William Jones, who notes the common use of the phallic symbol in 'the

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<sup>26</sup> *The Hindu Pantheon: The Court of the Holy Gods* (New Delhi, India: Indigo Books, 2002), p. xii, 314. Reprinted from the 1864 edition.

<sup>27</sup> 'Preface', *A Narrative of the Operations of Captain Little's Detachment, and of the Mahratta Army, commanded by Purseram Bhow; during The Late Confederacy in India, against the Nawab Tippoo Sultan Bahadur* (London, 1794), p. ii. Abbreviated hereafter *Narrative*. Seringapatem is located just between Mysore and Bangalore towards the southwest coast of India, and 'Poona,' or Pune, is located just south of Mumbai on the central-western coast; Moor's description of that country was apparently 'the first every constructed' in English (*Narrative*, ii).



writings and temples of Hindoostan' and justifies its use in his usual way by noting that

it never seems to have entered the heads of the legislators or people that any thing natural could be offensively obscene; a singularity, which pervades all their writings and conversations, but is no proof of depravity in morals. (*Narrative*, 399; *Works*, III, 367)

In his defence of these defenders of *lingam* worship, Moor compares Saivite (Hindu worship of *Shiva* as the supreme god) *lingam* worship with the Christian *agapē*, or love-feast. Following Knight's lead in *Discourse on the Worship of the Priapus*, Moor suggests that *agapē* was a polite way to describe, and disguise, ancient Christian continuation of *Priapus* worship, the Greek god of fertility known for his permanently erect penis. Liberally 'borrowing' (word for word) from Knight's *Discourse* without citation, Moor writes:

The feasts of gratulation and love, the αγαπαι [agapē] and nocturnal vigils, gave too flattering opportunities to the passions and appetites of men...[*Agapē*'s] suppression may be considered the final subversion of that part of the ancient religion here examined, in Europe; for so long as those nocturnal meetings were preserved, it certainly existed, though under other names, and in a more solemn dress. (*Narrative*, 398-399)

The 'suppression' of *Priapus* worship simply took 'other names' and 'dress' that were more befitting the mores of the dominant culture. However, Moor maintains that such worship still appeared in the arts; as he notes, references to such 'nocturnal meetings' can be found incorporated into the brass doors of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome and in 'our Gothic abbey of Westminster', suggesting that *agapē/Priapus* rituals took place throughout Christendom in the recent past (*Narrative*, 399).

Because of his 'defence' of *Priapus*, *The British Critic* charges Moor *et al.* with being 'apologists' for Hindu *lingam* worship.<sup>28</sup> In particular, the *Critic* fingers Jones and suggest that he is 'desirous of acquitting the Bramins of the charge of idolatry' for stating that there is 'no impurity, to their ideas'.<sup>29</sup> The *Critic* decries Moor and Jones'

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<sup>28</sup> 'Article IV. Lieutenant Edward Moor's Narrative', *The British Critic, A New Review, for July, August, September, October, November, December; Vol. IV* (London, 1794), p. 381-391, 387.

<sup>29</sup> *The British Critic, Vol. IV*, p. 384, 387.

use of 'Philosophy...to justify these depravities'; that is, the *Critic* criticises Moor and Jones' use of reason and logic to attempt a culturally relative, even anthropological, explanation of phallus worship rather than blindly condemn it as idolatrous heresy. Subsequently, the *Critic* moves to make a distinction between philosophy and religion: the former, the *Critic* says, investigates the truth, the latter, as Christianity, simply is the truth.<sup>30</sup> Overall, *The British Critic* argues that the defenders of Hindu 'philosophy' use their study of it to erode the moral 'truth' of the Christian religion in favour of 'depravities' like *lingam* worship.

Moreover, the *British Critic* defends the origins and development of Christian *agapē* against the allegations of phallic heathenry, citing the 'superiority of Christian purity' and the 'prevalence of a better religion' for having stamped out any lingering phallic ceremonies long ago.<sup>31</sup> The *British Critic* also criticises Moor for invoking Abbé Raynal and his positive portrayal of temple prostitutes in Shinto shrines in Japan. The *Critic* condemns Abbé Raynal's 'ideas of religion' which encourages people to:

see, feel, breathe God in all their communications, adore him together, invoke him, and associate him to their pleasures; make him *palpable* and sensible to themselves, by that effusion of souls and senses, where all is mystery, joy, and heavenly [fervour].<sup>32</sup>

Here, Raynal advocates a union with God and an achievement of divine bliss through bodily and sensual pleasure, which is not altogether unlike *Vedantic* philosophy. The *Critic* condemns this gnostic, paganistic, and corporeal sense of divine communion by identifying it with

the language of Philosophy in France! Such were the Philosophers who prepared the people for the destruction of Christianity, and the renunciation of God's supremacy...Such be the opinions of the enemies of our country.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The British Critic*, Vol. IV, 387.

<sup>31</sup> *The British Critic*, Vol. IV, 390.

<sup>32</sup> *The British Critic*, Vol. IV, 391. I assume 'fervour' is last word as it was largely illegible, but resembled the word and made sense in this context.

<sup>33</sup> *The British Critic*, Vol. IV, 391.

In a classic example, the *British Critic* tars Oriental religions with an atheistic brush by associating them with the existential threat of French military invasion by proxy of its liberal political and religious philosophy. More interesting, however, is the *Critic's* steady focus on Hinduism – or rather, their steady focus on European representations of Hinduism. The *British Critic* uses Hinduism's religious philosophy against itself to deny claims by Moor and Jones of Hinduism's monotheistic tenets and then associate its atheism with the political situation in France. In this manner, the *Critic* depicts French and Hindu religion and philosophy as a dread spectre over British liberty. Here, the *Critic* integrates religious xenophobia with Anti-Jacobin sentiment by portraying Hinduism and its 'apologists' as representatives of a foreign, radical philosophy endangering the 'supremacy' of Christianity and British liberties.

The *Critic's* attack does not target Jones as an individual so much as its targets the sympathetic, syncretic 'spirit' of Jonesian Orientalism that Moor advances. This 'spirit' is evident in Moor's attempt to use 'logical ingenuity, metaphysical reasonings, and charitable indulgence' to explain the cultural reasons behind *lingam* worship. *The Critic* views such an introduction of 'foreign' cultural elements as threatening to Britain's political and cultural security, and wraps it within the palpable public fear of the very real threat of French invasion. In short, the religious nature of Hinduism that works such as Jones' 'Hymns' introduced and celebrated here becomes politicised – indeed, radicalised – by their association with the atheism of French Jacobinism.

While *The British Critic* criticises Jones and his representation of the Hindu religion for its religious and political radicalism, *The Monthly Review* in 1798 acclaims Jones and his representation of Hinduism for harbouring a radical religious potential. Discussing Johann Gottfried Herder's *Son of God* (1797), the reviewer displays a clear enthusiasm for what he calls Herder's 'paganised antinomian Christianity' – one the reviewer exhibits by quoting from the work:

‘Truth, love, and a holy bond of communion are with him the grand medium which links the Deity with man and mankind in intimate and active union. Intelligence and sentiment in him are one; his expressions are the most comprehensive wisdom in the strictest application:— his epos becomes eclogue; his eclogue is epos’.<sup>34</sup>

Here, the reviewer sees Herder grounding his ‘paganised antinomianism’ in the ‘intimate and active union’ of God and humanity. Through such a union, humanity shares an ‘intelligence and sentiment’ with the divine; humanity’s ‘expression’ reveals a ‘comprehensive wisdom’ that is at once profound and epic (‘his epos’), yet also pastoral and idyllic (‘his eclogue’). Herder’s descriptions of this union resemble the basic tenets of *Vedantism* Jones outlines in ‘Náráyena’ and ‘On the Philosophy of the Asiaticks’ – a sentiment *The Monthly Review* echoes; the *Review* writes that Herder:

employs [sacred writings] rather like the mythological allusions and parabolic instructions of an eloquent moralist, than as lessons of experience or dogmata of revelation...[like] the Gopia listening with mingled love and devotion to the hymnings of Krishen; while Cama strains his cany bow and mixes for the nuptial feast his cup of fivefold joy...He seems inclined to institute a paganised antinomian Christianity; and to make the feared gods of the vulgar into the beloved divinities of the cultivated. Had *Sir William Jones* been the founder of a new sect, he would have taught the religion of HERDER.<sup>35</sup>

Here, the reviewer demonstrates a close understanding of Jones’ work by the fact that his references to ‘Krishen’, the ‘Gopia’, and ‘Cama’ allude to imagery found almost exclusively in Jones’ ‘Hymn to Camdeo’ and his translation of the *GítaGóvinda* (1790), a verse tale narrating the love story between *Krishna* and *Radha* which was a huge influence on German Romantics such as Herder. As such, the reviewer directly links Jones, and his works, to the ‘paganised, antinomian religion’ of Herder, suggesting that Jones’ representations of *Vedantic* Hinduism held the ‘moral’ potential to have founded a ‘new sect’ – one which the reviewer believes would have been identical to Herder’s religious *gnosis* summarised above.

The reviewer’s conflation of Herder’s Christianity and Jones’ representation of *Vedantism* suggests the ways in which Jones’ syncretic attitude found a particular

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<sup>34</sup> *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal, Enlarged, From September to December*, Vol. XXVII, (London, 1798), p. 565-567, 567.

<sup>35</sup> *The Monthly Review*, Vol. XXVII, 1798, p. 566.

religious and moral currency in the period. Despite the claims of atheism, paganism, and French Jacobinism levelled against the Hindu religion, it became a popularly used subject in the poetry of the period. One of the first poets to adopt, and adapt, Jones' representations of Hinduism was a contemporary of Jones' who roamed the halls of the Royal Society as an engraver's apprentice while Jones roamed its halls as a member. That poet was William Blake.

# Chapter III

## 'The Authority of the Ancients': William Blake and the 'Philosophy of the East'

*'be free from duplicity, and stand firm in the path of truth;  
be free from care and trouble, and turn thy mind  
to things which are spiritual.'*

– Krishna, from Charles Wilkins translation of *The Bhagvat-Geeta* (1785)

### I: William Blake, William Jones, and Hinduism

Three years after William Blake died in 1827, an anonymous essay entitled 'The Inventions of William Blake, Painter and Poet' appeared in *The London University Magazine*. The essay examines Blake's career, seemingly to convince a sceptical readership of Blake's artistic talents. At one point, the author writes that 'If Blake had lived in Germany, by this time he would have had commentators of the highest order upon every one of his effusions'.<sup>1</sup> In attempt to support this claim, the author examines Blake's *The Book of Thel* (1789), a poem which narrates Thel's reluctant transition from an innocent dreamscape of childhood purity to the world of experience and the reality of death. The author writes that Thel

seems born in the perfume of the lily, so charming, so fairy-like, are all its illustrations, there is only one work that we remember like it for elegance, the *Sakontala*, for it wears all the freshness of Indian simplicity and innocence.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to prove Blake's artistic worth, the author compares Blake's *Thel* with the translation of *Sacontalá*, a Hindu drama about a rajah who falls in love with a maiden he meets in the woods, and whose imagery is replete with the exoticism, eroticism, and esotericism of Hindu religious symbolism.<sup>3</sup>

*Sacontalá* was translated by Sir William Jones in 1789 and published in Britain in 1790; it was famously well-received throughout Britain and Europe,

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<sup>1</sup> *London University Magazine* (March 1830), in *Blake's Records: Documents (1714-1841) Concerning the Life of William Blake (1757-1827) and his Family Second Edition*, ed. G.E. Bentley, Jr. (London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 510-517, 512. Abbreviated hereafter *Records*.

<sup>2</sup> *Records*, p. 515.

<sup>3</sup> Jones comments in his Preface to the drama that, 'As to the machinery of the drama, it is taken from the system of mythology, which prevails to this day' (*Sir William Jones: Selected Poetical and Prose Works*, p. 218; abbreviated hereafter *SWJ*).

making a particularly big impression among German Romantics such as Goethe and Novalis, for whom Jones' works on Hinduism was vital in their own ideological and aesthetic contributions to German Romanticism (Goethe was known for saying at the time, 'When I mention *Sacotalā*, everything is said').<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to provide Blake, and his work, a status like that of the German writers, the author compares Blake not only to Novalis – they both 'contemplated the natural world as the mere outbirth of the thought' – but also to Jones and his Hindu translations, for the way in which Blake's *The* exudes an 'Indian simplicity and innocence'. Because of this 'Indian simplicity and innocence', the author infers that: 1) Blake is sympathetic to the exotic aesthetic of India as much as Jones and the German Romantics were (thus the reason why Blake would be popular in Germany); and 2) that Blake participated in the very introduction of Indian culture and aesthetics, however indirectly, which Jones was so instrumental in establishing, and the Germans so instrumental in perpetuating.

The significance of the author's comparison is not so much the suggestion that Jones somehow influenced Blake – though this is a point this chapter seeks to explore – but rather that Blake's work contributed to, even anticipated, an aesthetic shift that was characteristic of the introduction of Hinduism into Europe by Jones. Here the author attempts to place Blake back into that context in order to give Blake the artistic prestige he clearly never received when alive; as Richard Holmes points out, when Blake died in 1827, 'he was already a forgotten man'.<sup>5</sup> What is noteworthy is how the author attempts to give value to Blake's work through Jones, suggesting the literary currency not only of Jones' legacy, but that of the Hindu religion and imagery he introduced.

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<sup>4</sup> *SWJ*, p. 213. For Jones' influence on German Romanticism, cf. Raymond Schwab's *The Oriental Renaissance* and Leslie A. Willson's *A Mythical Image: The Ideal of India in German Romanticism* (Duke University Press, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> 'Introduction'. *Gilchrist on Blake: Life of William Blake, Pictor Ignotus by Alexander Gilchrist*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. vii. Reprinted from Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (London, 1863).

The comparison between Blake's *TheI* and Jones' translation of *Sacontalá* places both Blake and Jones back in the 1780s – a time when Blake was in his formative years as a visionary, prophetic poet and when Hinduism was sympathetically championed and at the apex of its influence. During this time, Blake would have had direct and indirect contact with any number of the various articles, books, artefacts, paintings, and people that contributed to fashioning the intellectual milieu around India and Hinduism at this time – works and people such as Wilkins and his *Bhagvat-Geeta*. Blake acknowledges his familiarity with the *Bhagvat-Geeta* in 1809, with his now lost drawing entitled *The Bramins* which he describes as displaying Wilkins translating the *Geeta* in the *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809). In *Brahma in the West: William Blake and the Oriental Renaissance*, David Weir suggests that Blake could have conceivably met Wilkins, who moved in the same circles as Blake's friend and publisher Joseph Johnson.<sup>6</sup> Johnson was also the main publisher of the periodical *The Analytical Review*, which, as Weir writes, 'was one of the most important sources of information about the new scholarship on Indian culture produced by the Asiatick Society of Bengal' – the society, of course, founded and led by Jones.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Helen Braithwaite notes how Johnson set up *The Analytical Review* in order to provide an alternative periodical that was not only 'sympathetic to Protestant dissenters and their views', but also provided access to 'foreign literature'.<sup>8</sup> *The Analytical Review's* focus on such matters proves important for locating the places from which Blake's intellectual and literary engagement with dissenting religions and Hinduism may have originated. As Weir maintains, Johnson's *Analytical Review* was probably one of Blake's main sources about India, given Blake's close relationship with Johnson and Johnson's circle of

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<sup>6</sup> *Brahma in the West: William Blake and the Oriental Renaissance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> *Brahma in the West*, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> *Romanticism, Publishing and Dissent: Joseph Johnson and the Cause of Liberty* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 87.



friends – friends such as Henry Fuseli, Joseph Priestly, and Mary Wollstonecraft, all of whom incidentally wrote about the scholarship coming out of India on Hinduism at one point or another.<sup>9</sup> In short, India, Hinduism and Jones were all around Blake at the time he began writing religiously prophetic (and syncretic) works such as ‘All Religions are One’ (1788), ‘The Divine Image’ (1789) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790).

Moreover, some of Blake’s closest friends and confidants at the time were huge admirers of Jones and critical to creating and extending his posthumous legacy. His friend and patron William Hayley followed Indian scholarship closely, writing a memorial poem to Jones entitled ‘Elegy on the Death of *The Honourable Sir William Jones*’ in 1795 which lamented, among other things, the passing of Indian learning itself. Hayley also collected the *Asiatick Researches* periodicals that Jones’ Asiatick Society produced. Hikari Sato shows that during Blake’s three-year stay in Felpham with Hayley from 1800 to 1803, Blake had access to many of these periodicals; moreover Sato suggests that Blake was aware of the 1792 edition of the *Asiatick Researches* which included, for Sato’s purposes, information to influence and inspire some of Blake’s etchings for Hayley’s *Designs to a Series of Ballads* (1802).<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, as Sato fails to note, that edition also included Jones’ ‘On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus’, in which Jones describes and compares the esoteric monism of Islamic *Sufism*, Hindu *Vedantism*, and gnostic Christianity, as described in Chapter I. Though there is no way to know if Blake read this work specifically, the work’s forthright assertion that Plato and Pythagoras received their theology at the fountain of Persian and Hindu religious learning, rather than the Egyptian, would have

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<sup>9</sup> Fuseli and Wollstonecraft both wrote reviews for the *Analytical Review*, Fuseli on the *Asiatick Researches* in 1789 and Wollstonecraft on *Sacotalá* in August 1790. Priestly wrote *The Institutions of Moses and Those of the Hindoos, &c. Compared* in 1792, in which he lauds Jones efforts, but disagrees with his portrayal of Hinduism as containing sublime elements.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Blake, Hayley and India: On *Designs to a Series of Ballads* (1802)’, *Receptions of Blake in the Orient*, ed. Steve Clark and Masashi Suzuki (London: Continuum, 2006), p.134-144, 135.

squared nicely with Blake's similar portrayal of theological genealogy represented in *The Song of Los* (1795) and his *Descriptive Catalogue*, as we will see.

There are even further suggestions that Blake may have had access to Jones' work before 1800, for one of Blake's other close friends, the sculptor John Flaxman, also had links to Jones. In his elegy to Jones, Hayley refers to the memorial sculpture crafted by Flaxman and commissioned by Jones' widow, Anna Maria [Fig. 2]. In the poem, Hayley praises the 'modest' Flaxman as the sculptor best fit to 'Teach stone to breath' in a way befitting Jones' 'fame'.<sup>11</sup>

Although not yet complete by the time of Hayley's poem, Hayley's comments in his 'Notes to the Elegy' suggests that Flaxman's close associates were aware of the project:

I have presumed, without the knowledge of my friend, to allude in this stanza to a monumental drawing of Mr. Flaxman, in which he has represented Sir William Jones collecting information from the Pandits to settle the Digest of Hindu and Mahommedian Law. (*Elegy*, 35)

As early as 1795, then, Blake had the artistic works of two of his closest friends to draw upon in order to be introduced to, and even engage with, Jones' Hindu scholarship. Coincidentally, 1795 was also the year Blake published *The Song of Los*, in which he writes that 'Rintraah gave Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East' – Blake's first explicit reference to Hinduism in his poetic works.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *An Elegy on the Death of the Honourable Sir William Jones, A Judge of the Supreme Court of Judicature in Bengal, and President of the Asiatic Society* (London, 1795), p. 15-16. Abbreviated hereafter *Elegy*.

<sup>12</sup> *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), p. 67, 3.11. All references to Blake's written work comes from this text, unless otherwise stated.



**Figure 2 – John Flaxman's monument to Sir William Jones (1797)**

Although there is no direct evidence of Blake reading Jones' work, his drawing of Wilkins and his association with Johnson, Hayley, and Flaxman – who all knew Jones' work well – provides fairly convincing circumstantial evidence that Blake would have at least heard of Jones' work, if not studied it.

However, Blake is known more as a poet of religio-mythological radicalism than he is as a poet about India. Blake's formative years as a poet coincided not only with the wave of poetic and scholarly material on India and Hinduism coming from the likes of Jones and Wilkins, but also with the rise of Evangelicalism and Dissenting political radicalism within the geopolitical context of the French Revolution. Jon Mee has explored the ways in which Blake participated in the 'radical enthusiasm' of the 1790s, depicting a visionary, prophetic millenarianism that was a confluence of 'well-established...syncretic tendencies in literary primitivism, biblical studies, and historiography' and Blake's own unique brand of popular antinomianism – what Mee describes as a 'heretical hostility to the authority of moral law which plagued the Christian church'.<sup>13</sup> A major influence for his antinomianism was the mystic Christianity of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), whose New Church Blake and his wife Catherine

<sup>13</sup> *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 7, 57.

attended on 13 April, 1789. Although Blake would resist formal conversion in the Church of Swedenborgianism – and despite chastising Swedenborgian theology in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as not writing ‘one new truth’ and rewriting ‘all the old falsehoods’ – the Church’s emphasis on love, charity, and spiritual perception would become major spiritual and political themes in Blake’s poetry (42, plate 21-22).

As Mee writes, from such interactions, ‘Blake constructed a rhetoric that was alive with political resonances’ in response to the ‘intensely ideological decade of the 1790s’.<sup>14</sup> Such an ideologically-charged atmosphere made Hinduism all the more potent for Blake’s antinomianism; as noted in the last chapter, writers such as Richard Payne Knight and F.C. Volney – the latter particularly influential to Blake, as we will see – used (Jonesian) Hinduism to advance their own anti-religious, anti-Christian agenda. Given that Blake was ever the revolutionary against monolithic, hegemonic authority – ‘I must create a System, or be enslav’d by another mans’ – the infiltration of Hinduism into this ‘intensely ideological decade’ provided an additional level of literary primitivism, biblical relativism, and historiography for Blake to incorporate into his visionary mythography and his antinomian theology (*Jerusalem*, 153, 10.20-21). In this sense, Blake and his poetry are positioned at the epicentre of Hinduism, Revolutionary politics, and religious enthusiasm’s (both radical and evangelical) convergence during the 1790s. It is my argument that Blake’s use and representation of Hinduism both informs and influences the religious and mythological nature of his poetic aesthetic within the full context of these events.

Firstly, however, I turn to explore Blake’s antinomianism and the way in which he portrays religion in order to contextualise Hinduism within the religious framework of Blake’s mythography.

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<sup>14</sup> *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 6.

## II: 'Dark Delusions' and 'Forms of Worship': Blake and Religion

Religion was undoubtedly one of the principal subjects and themes of William Blake's poetic works – as a glance at some of his most famous works, such as 'All Religions are One' (1788), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *Jerusalem* (c.1804), demonstrates. Religion served as both the cause and the cure of humanity's great spiritual crisis – ignorance of the fact that 'All deities reside in the human breast' – and Blake eagerly sought to use such ignorance to expose religion's dual nature (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 38, plate 11). As he writes in *Jerusalem*, 'a pretence of Religion to destroy Religion' (185, 38[43].36). Blake ruthlessly placed the social and spiritual injustice of the world on the 'pretence', the charade, of institutionalised religion, which in lieu of promoting the original ideals of religion – that 'Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell / There God is dwelling too' – it, in fact, only serves to 'destroy' them ('The Divine Image', 13, ll.19-20).

Religion's destruction of its own ideals is one of the themes of Blake's *The Song of Los*. *The Song of Los* narrates the Babel-esque beginnings of institutionalised religion, stating:

Adam shuddered! Noah faded! black grew the sunny African  
When Rintrah gave Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East:  
(Night spoke to the Cloud!  
Lo these Human form'd spirits in smiling hipocrisy. War  
Against one another; so let them War on; slaves to the eternal  
Elements)  
...  
Moses beheld upon Mount Sinai forms of dark delusion  
(67, 3.10-14, 17)

Here, Blake illustrates the evils wrought upon humanity by the inception of the first religion, which happens to be Hinduism: the instigation of 'smiling hipocrisy', war and slavery. These consequences, however, have less to do with Hinduism specifically than they do with the problem of religion generally. Human acts of war and slavery result from the collusion between the 'Night' and the 'Cloud' to shroud perception and usher in 'forms of dark delusion'. The phrase 'dark

delusion' suggests the very kind of spiritual opacity Blake rages against when he declares religion a 'pretence to destroy Religion'; as he writes in *Los*, 'Laws & Religions' bind humanity more and more through 'shrunken eyes /...closing and restraining' (*Los*, 68, 4.14, 4.12, 4.15). That is, religion narrows divine perception within humanity, 'closing' off and 'restraining' the innate divinity humanity once knew so well.

The gift of 'Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East' initiates the institutionalisation of religious belief, thereby narrowing perception further and further as it spreads like a disease to the various cultures and regions of the world. Blake writes, 'The human race began to wither, for the healthy built / Secluded places, fearing the joys of Love / And the diseas'd only propagated' (67, 3.25-27). The contagion of institutionalised religion begins to 'wither' humanity and the humane qualities of 'Mercy, Love & Pity' which once defined humanity's relationship to, and with, God. The 'disease' of religion proliferates by subsequently developing into the world's other major systems of theology: the 'abstract Law' of the Greeks, the 'Gospel' of Christianity, the 'loose Bible' of Islam, and the 'Code of War' of Norse Mythology (67, 3.18, 3.24, 3.30); moreover, the infection also proliferates by manifesting the social institutions of religion, 'Churches: Hospitals: Castles: Palaces' (67, 4.1). Here, God becomes textualised, formalised, and codified into defined dogma. The codification of the divine within the scriptural authority of religious texts and buildings begins the immediate pollution and decline of humanity itself. These codified books and buildings become the 'nets & gins & traps to catch' the spiritual 'joys of Eternity' Blake associates with the humane qualities of the divine (67, 4.2). In an ironic reversal, religion destroys the very humanity it purports to promote and sustain.

The division of God into different religions also instigates the division of humanity into different races and nations – a division emphasised by the poem itself being divided into two sections: 'Africa' and 'Asia'. When religion is

institutionalised through 'Brama in the East', the immediate result is that 'the sunny African' grew 'black'. An immediate response to this change in skin colour is war and slavery, highlighting further the ethnic divisions, racial subjugation, and national conflict which occur from the 'dark delusion' of religious inception. In other words, Blake illustrates the ways in which religion has political repercussions analogous to the spiritual malaise and moral hypocrisy it fosters.

Blake emphasises such national and ethnic divisions in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Recounting his conversation with the Biblical prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel in the second 'Memorable Fancy', Blake relates how Ezekiel tells him that 'The philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception' (39, plate 12). As in *The Song of Los*, there is the suggestion here that Hinduism was the original conception of religious thought; however I will explore this idea in more detail further below. For the moment, I would like to focus on the implications of such religious inception, as Ezekiel explains that, immediately after the 'philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception':

some nations held one principle for the origin [of religion] & some another, we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests & Philosophers of other countries, and prophecy that all Gods would at last be proved. to originate in ours & to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius, it was this. that our great poet King David desired so fervently & invokes so pathetically, saying by this he conquers enemies & governs kingdoms; and so we loved our God. that we cursed in his name all the deities of surrounding nations, and asserted that they had rebelled; from these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the jews. (39, plate 12)

Ezekiel's account describes the inception of one religion, Judaism, and how this inception leads to religious and national divisiveness. Israel's institutionalisation of 'the philosophy of the east' devolves into theological and political warfare, ethnic tensions, and a sense of national self-righteousness in their own religion and 'God'.

Here, Blake illustrates the psychological parameters of an imperial paradigm, showing how the psychological impulse for imperial tendencies such as 'conquering enemies and kingdoms' derives from a need to prove and institutionalise one's own religious beliefs. As a result, this paradigm comes to define humanity's violent inter-cultural, inter-religious, and international relationship from the beginnings of institutionalised religion to the present. The founding of the Hebraic religion fosters overt national hubris – 'all Gods would at last be proved. to originate in ours' – and violent intolerance – 'we cursed in his name all the deities of surrounding nations...[and] came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the jews'. The love of 'their' God ironically arouses Israeli vehemence against all the other 'surrounding nations'. By not believing in *their* 'God', the surrounding nations 'rebelled', thereby defying the perceived national sovereignty and authority that they 'of Israel' had earned through their supposed religious superiority. In this way, they politicised religious difference by making it synonymous with national differences. Thus, the only way Israel could prove their religious superiority was to 'conquer and govern'; here, the belief of religious superiority results in a show of marshal and political superiority as well. The political and religious violence of Israeli 'perswasion' results in their belief that 'all nations [should] believe the jews code and worship the jews god, and what greater subjection can be [?]' (39, plate 12). Enforced as a theological *and* political system, religion corrupts not just the spiritual body, but the national one as well.

Such religious 'perswasion', however, had not always defined inter-religious and international relationships. In plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the plate just before Ezekiel makes his statement about the 'philosophy of the east', Blake describes religion before it became institutionalised. 'The ancient Poets,' Blake writes,



animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive. And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country. (38)

In the beginning, as it were, there was a complete recognition – and ‘animation’ – of ‘Gods’ within the natural and the *national* environment; that is, the divine was seen not only through connections with the natural world, but also in the development of nations. Divinity took a particular form according to each nation, as Blake explains in his prophetic ‘All Religions are One’: ‘The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call’d the Spirit of Prophecy’ (1). In these times before institutionalised religion, the different nations’ ‘different reception’ of the ‘Poetic Genius’ – Blake’s term for the recognition of divine creativity with the human form – was not only tolerated, but celebrated. The ancient Poets ‘studied the genius of each city & country’, assumedly to draw connections from the infinitely various in order to point towards the eternally universal – as Blake affirms in Principle 7<sup>th</sup> of ‘All Religions are One’: ‘As all men are alike (tho’ infinitely various) So all religions & as similars have one source’ (2).

The ‘ancient Poets’ were naturally syncretic, taking into account other deities from other nations and recognising the ‘one’ in the ‘various’ – much in the same fashion which Jones describes *Vedantic* Hinduism doing in ‘Náráyena’, ‘Súrya’, ‘On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and the Hindus’ and ‘On the Philosophy of the Hindus’. At one time, religion centred on the ancient Poets’ recognition of the divine not only within their own ‘Poetic Genius’, but also within the ‘Poetic Genius’ of other poets from other regions and religions who shared in the common divine inspiration. The implicit assumption, then, is that the ancient Poets wrote poetry expressing and celebrating the syncretic nature of religion, since all religions and all humans came from the common ‘one source’. In this

sense, poetry came to represent the original expression of poetic and religious expression, much like Jones conceptualisation of the hymn.

Yet the ancient Poet's syncretic task changed when the study of religion formed 'a system' (38, plate 11). When a 'system' became formalised, the ancient Poets turned into a 'Priesthood. Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales' (38, plate 11). Here, poetry becomes redacted, where some 'forms of worship' are accepted and others are rejected. Ezekiel demonstrates this process of redaction and ideological construction when he mentions how

we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius...was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests & Philosophers of other countries.

Instead of being equal, as they once were, one principle of religious worship is made a derivative of another, creating animus between religions and regions that once cooperated and coexisted. Israel's religious inception of the 'first principle' becomes a hierarchical power structure to subdue the 'surrounding nations'. This is particularly exemplified by the way in which the task of the ancient Poet to study all the other nations and their 'Gods' is replaced by the 'great poet King David' conquering and governing his 'kingdoms'. Poetic relationships with and unions between the natural and national world are replaced by the religious conquests of one system over the other's spiritual and national sovereignty.

Through this religious, imperial process, the divine becomes 'abstract[ed]' from its 'object' to the point where the system, and the differences between systems, becomes the main focus of religious belief rather than the thoughtful consideration of how different objects and religious inceptions all contribute to the universal divine source (38, plate 11). The divine becomes something that can no longer be sensed; instead, it becomes a 'form of worship', a systemised ideology. 'Thus,' Blake concludes, 'men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast' (38, plate 11). The great evil of institutionalised religion is its veiling, its clouding of perception that makes humanity forget their connection to each other and to

the universal divine – the divine that humanity itself, through the work of the ancient Poets, ‘animated’ and brought to life.

However, as Blake famously proclaims, ‘I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create’. Recognising how institutionalised religion imprisons humanity within the ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ of social, religious, and political adherence to ‘God & his Priest & King’, here Blake affirms his religious ethos of antinomianism and contrarianism as a means to bring down the very systems he despises. With this mantra of defiance, Blake prophesises the creation of a new ‘System’ based on the principle that ‘God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men’ (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 40, plate 16). Blake’s religious ‘System’ seeks to reinstate the recognition of the divine within the human – and the human within the divine.

‘Religion’ such as that preached by ‘God & his Priest & King’, Blake says, ‘is an endeavour to reconcile’ the irreconcilable. The irreconcilable are, on one side of the spectrum, those such as Blake who believe in ‘Mercy, Love & Pity’ and the syncretic task of the ‘ancient Poets’, and, on the opposing side, those such as the ‘Priest’, who are humans of ‘weak and tame minds. which have the power to resist energy’ – the ‘Energy’ that is ‘Eternal Delight’: the recognition of the ‘Eternal’ universality of all things (40, plate 16; 34, plate 4). ‘[W]hoever tries to reconcile’, Blake adds, ‘seeks to destroy existence’ (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 40, plate 16). Reconciliation is a compromise – a compromise for ‘another Mans’ system and a compromise against the true revelation: that ‘God only Acts & Is’ as humans act and are. To suggest that compromise can be reached is to deny the fundamental tenets of existence and to fail to recognise how inherent differences contribute to the universal whole. Blake’s ‘System’ is one that refuses to compromise; it is one that harnesses ‘Energy’ to recognise difference and irreconcilability.

Blake's concept of 'Energy' forms the core features of his antinomian religious 'System', highlighted by his ironic attitude towards, and subversive depiction of, Christianity in works such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The Songs of Experience* (1794). Blake's ironic attitude is found in the way in which he uses antilogies and contradictions to advance his own concept of a spiritual, or mythological, physics; by physics, I mean the fundamental laws by which Blake's mythological and spiritual universe quite literally 'progresses'. As Blake writes, 'Without Contraries [there] is no progression' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 34, plate 3). For Blake, 'Progress' is the comprehension of the interactive union of binary opposition; almost Zoroastrian in principle – in the sense of the interplay between order and chaos – Blake's 'Progress' views and values knowledge of 'Human existence' as the resulting unified, though conflicting, relationship of binary opposing forces – forces such as 'Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 34, plate 3). These elements do not 'progress' themselves; that is, that do not move from 'Love' to 'Hate', or vice-versa. Those elements are universal constants that collide and conflict with one another. It is 'Human existence' which progresses through those elements by acknowledging and using these oppositional forces to know, and achieve, 'Eternal Delight' – the recognition and creative power of human divinity (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 34, plate 4).

In *Milton* (c.1804), Blake writes that 'There is a place where Contraries are equally True' and that place is located within Blake's poetic mythography (129, 30.1). This is a place where Blake can locate the revelatory and salvational Imagination in Jesus Christ while simultaneously undermining the very Christian tradition based on his ideology. It is also a 'System' wherein 'Brama in the East', that is Hinduism, not only unleashes the plague of religion upon humanity thus covering the world in 'dark delusion', but also heralds the coming of the 'New Age' of Imaginative and artistic revival. In the following section, I turn to focus

more specifically on Blake's references to and uses of Hinduism in his mythography in order to attach Hinduism to Blake's conceptualisation of what I call the apocalyptic Imagination – the religious 'System' Blake creates in order to restore religion to its ancient origins, as demonstrated by the 'Ancient Poets' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

### III: 'The Philosophy of the East' and Blake's Apocalyptic Imagination

In one of his earliest published poems, 'To the Muses' (1783), Blake mourns the loss of poetic inspiration – a loss he symbolises through the increasing stillness of an imaginative Aeolian harp. He writes:

Whether on Ida's shady brow,  
Or in the chambers of the East,  
The chambers of the sun, that now  
From antient melody have ceas'd  
...  
How have you left the antient love  
That bards of old enjoy'd in you!  
The languid strings do scarcely move!  
The sound is forc'd, the notes are few!  
(417, ll. 2-4, 13-16).

Harold Bloom reads the poem as a satire mocking, in 'the diction of Augustan minor poetry', the poetic trope of inspirational lament ('Commentary', 969). Yet the poem provides early evidence of Blake's interest in and pervasive use of the 'East' in his poetics. Moreover, it is worth emphasising, particularly at this early stage of Blake's development, his employment of lexicon such as 'authority', 'antient love', and 'antient melody' in conjunction with the 'East' – a lexicon, as we will see, that Blake employs throughout his career. The cardinal directions have an intricate and complex spiritual and dimensional symbolism in Blake's larger mythography. As Blake writes in *Jerusalem*, 'the North is Breadth, the South is Height & Depth, the East is Inwards, & the West is Outwards every way' (158, ll. 14.29-30); in *Milton*, the cardinal directions demarcate the spiritual universes of his mythological figures Urthona (N), Urizen (S), Luvah (E), and Tharmas (W)

within the Mundane Egg (112, 119[121].15-22). While the finer points of this directional symbolism require a more thorough analysis than they will be given here – particularly since such an explanation is not the main concern of my argument – it is worth noting that in Blake’s mythography the ‘East’ symbolises or is often associated with: the incarnation of Jesus, the art of music, the emotion of love, the organic heart, the continent of Asia, the country of England, and the cities of London and Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> This catalogue of associations with Blake’s ‘East’ is mostly attributable to Blake’s later and larger mythographic prophecies, namely *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

However even in an early poem such as ‘To the Muses’, we find a directional correspondence of ‘antient’ love and music with the ‘East’, in accordance with these later prophecies. In this way, ‘To the Muses’ may be less satirical than prophetic – prophetic of Blake’s own later prophecies and what his ‘East’ comes to represent. Blake’s poetic lament is not just about inspiration leaving him, but about a specific *kind* of inspiration which Blake believes is leaving the art of ‘Poetry’ altogether: the ‘antient love’ of the ‘bards of old’ that directly comes from the ‘East’. Where the ‘East’ is, Blake does not specify in this poem; however, he provides clear evidence that his ‘East’ is associated with a more ancient culture than that of the ‘old bards’ of Europe’s Classical past.

Firstly, he mentions that the ‘ancient music has ceas’d’ from ‘Ida’s shady brow’, a reference to the Mount Ida either in Crete or Turkey – or both, since the two are equally significant in ancient Grecian lore as sites for Zeus and other ancient Goddesses. Secondly, Blake mentions the Classical ‘Muses’ – the ‘Fair Nine’ who have ‘forsak[en] Poetry!’; the invocation to these ‘Muses’ leaves very little poetic inspiration to be found, thereby suggesting their failure to evoke successfully the ‘antient love’ the ‘bards of old’ used as imaginative stimulation,

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<sup>15</sup> S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 113, 212.

thus their 'forsaking' of it (417, ll.12). Although Blake likewise notes that the 'ancient melody' has 'ceas'd' from the 'chambers of the East' as well, the 'chambers of the East' are paired with 'The chambers of the sun', suggesting that should true poetic inspiration rise again, it will ascend in these eastern 'chambers'.

In this sense, Blake employs the 'East' as a metaphor for the revival of poetic and mental faculties; in 'Mad Song' (1783), the rising Sun 'Over the eastern steeps' brings on a 'light' which 'doth seize my brain / With frantic pain' (415). Here, Blake compares the onset of poetic inspiration with the onset of madness – a common trope throughout Blake's work, as well as the period as a whole.<sup>16</sup> But for Blake, such inspirational 'madness' was true revelation, whereas commonplace reason was verifiable psychosis; as Blake writes in – or rather *on* – *The Laocoön* (c.1825), 'There are states in which all Visionary Men are accounted Mad Men [/] such are Greece & Rome' (274). Here, Blake depicts the Classical past as an inadequate medium through which to convey 'Visionary' experience; after all, it was the prophet Laocoön in Greek and Roman mythology who warned his Trojan countrymen of accepting gifts from the Greeks – a warning, a 'vision', that was dismissed as if he were a 'Mad Man'. Blake's portrayal of inspirational madness came from his recognition that what he believed to be 'Visionary', or a 'Visionary Man', was considered radical and eccentric, and would be rejected by most people. Although in 'Mad Song' Blake turns his 'back to the east' in an attempt to stave off the inspirational madness the rising Sun induces, the poem makes clear that is it the 'East' from whence any such inspiration will come.

In both 'To the Muses' and 'Mad Song', Blake's poetic inspiration follows the revolution of the Sun from east to west – and then back to the east. The diurnal cycle itself becomes a metaphor for the process of cyclical poetic

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<sup>16</sup> Cf., Frederick Burwick's *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination* (New York, 1992).

inspiration and imagination. For Blake, this imaginative cycle has pointed him back towards the 'East' to seek those 'antient melodies'; the course of the day has died in the 'west', where Classical invocation fails him (symbolised by the failure of the Muses). Blake seeks the coming day, the new dawn of imaginative poetry, in the revival of the 'antient love' and 'melodies' of, and from, the 'East'.

In this sense, the 'East' was vital to the ways in which Blake conceptualised and defined his 'Visionary' Imagination. As noted earlier, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake declares that, 'The Philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception' (39, plate 12). Here, Blake traces the origins of 'human perception' to the 'Philosophy of the east', but fails to specify to which 'Philosophy' and to where in the 'east' he was referring. Blake writes this declaration in the context of an imaginary dinner conversation between himself and the Hebrew prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah, in which Isaiah utters the 'Philosophy of the east' comment in order to defend the Hebraic inception of God; as Isaiah says, 'some nations held one principle for the origin & some another, we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you know call it) was the first principle...and we so loved our God' (39, plate 12). Here, Blake defines the 'first principle' as the 'Poetic Genius', his term for the central significance of the Imagination: the recognition of divine creativity within the human form. As he writes in 'All Religions are One' (1788), 'the Poetic Genius is the true Man...The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius' (1). The 'Poetic Genius' represents the 'true' status of humanity – a status where 'human perception' equates to divine creation.

'Perception' is a term Blake uses to represent the act of imaginative creation. On one level, perception is but a natural sensation; as he writes in 'There is No Natural Religion [a]' (1788), 'Man cannot naturally Perceive but through his natural or bodily organs' (2). This 'perception' is the delimiting sensory experience of the world which restricts humanity's ability to see beyond



themselves or the material world around them (an idea comparable to *Máyá* in Hindu theology); 'None could have other than natural or organic thoughts if he had none but organic perceptions' ('There is No Natural Religion [a]', 2). Here, 'natural' perception leads to a narrowing of perception, and a narrowing of human possibilities. As illustrated in *The Song of Los*, it is the onset of institutionalised religion which causes 'shrunken eyes' and the delimitation of perception to 'Nature'.

But on a far more 'Visionary' scale, 'Perception' is also a necessary component of the poetic – and prophetic – power of the Imagination. As he writes elsewhere in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite' (39, plate 14). The 'cleansing of perception' is an imaginative apocalypse, one focused on the artistic revisualisation and re-conception of the world and humanity's relation to, and with, the divine: 'He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God' (There is No Natural Religion [b]', 2). To see 'Infinitely' was to see divinely. As Northrop Frye writes concerning Blakean aesthetics, 'if all art is visionary, [then] it must be apocalyptic and revelatory too.'<sup>17</sup> 'Perception' is 'visionary' in its recognition of the 'infinite' – a recognition that requires the destruction of previous modes of seeing and the creation of new forms of Imaginative vision. For Blake, 'infinite' perception was the result of the apocalyptic Imagination – the Imagination which redefined, through art, the world outside itself. This is what Blake sought for his art to accomplish – to be, as it enacted, infinite perception.

The irony of Isaiah's statement in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is that he attempts to narrowly base the 'first principle' of the 'Poetic Genius' in the Hebraic 'perception' of God, while fully acknowledging that this 'first principle' came from 'The Philosophy of the east' – an example, perhaps, of the 'smiling hypocrisy' religion performs once institutionalised. Nonetheless, Isaiah's

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<sup>17</sup> *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 45.

statement is important in that it confirms that the 'Philosophy of the east' establishes the 'principles' for Blake's imaginary 'Vision' and his apocalyptic Imagination by teaching the first principle of the Poetic Genius.

Again, although Blake does not specify to which 'philosophy' or to where in the 'east' he was referring in *The Marriage in Heaven and Hell*, he does echo, even elucidate, the 'Philosophy of the east' comment in *The Song of Los*. In *Los*, Blake writes that 'Rintrah gave Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East' (67, 3.11). As evidenced by his reference to 'Brama', the Hindu god of Creation, here Blake provides philosophical and locational specifics that seem to establish the 'Philosophy of the east' in Hinduism and in India – thereby implying that Hinduism taught the 'first principles' of the creative powers of Blake's Imagination. Not only does the phrasal similarity of the 'Philosophy of the east' and 'Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East' allow us to infer that Blake was referring to Hinduism in each of these poems, but so do the contextual events in the poem surrounding each statement. Both the 'Memorable Fancy' section of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The Song of Los* deal with the social, religious, and political consequences of the inception of institutionalised religion. The two poems' similarity in theme and expression provide viable evidence to conclude that Blake was situating the 'Philosophy of the East' in Indian Hinduism.

That Blake locates his principles of the Imagination in Hinduism is the basic argument this chapter seeks to demonstrate. However, a direct assertion of this argument is difficult to substantiate, for not only does such an argument require a submersion into the intricate nexus of Blake's mythography and its often paradoxical, contrarian logic, but it also seems easily disputed by a surface reading of Blake's works. For example, as demonstrated in *Los*, institutionalised religion becomes the spiritual veil that clouds and cloaks humanity's divine nature – and it all begins with Hinduism as an 'Abstract Philosophy'. Foster writes that, for Blake, 'Abstract Philosophy' is the 'enemy' of the Imagination – an

interpretation which seems to underline the irony of my argument which tries to place Hinduism as an important influence to Blake's Imagination.<sup>18</sup> 'Abstract Philosophy' is antithetical to the Imagination because it exemplifies the Newtonian and Lockean empiricism Blake so ardently despised. In *Los*, Blake traces the mythological lineage of *Brahma's* 'Abstract Philosophy' to its bequeathal of the 'Philosophy of Five Senses' of 'Newton & Locke' (67, 3.8; 68, 5.15, 5.16).<sup>19</sup> In this sense, Blake traces a historical lineage in *Los* between Hinduism as 'Abstract Philosophy' and the Enlightenment empiricism his Imagination fought to discredit and dismantle.

In a letter to George Cumberland, an art critic and fellow painter, in 1795, Blake explains his criticisms of 'Abstract Philosophy'. Blake writes:

Now You will I hope shew all the family of Antique Borers, that Peace & Plenty & Domestic Happiness is the Source of Sublime Art, & prove to the Abstract Philosophers – that Enjoyment & not Abstinence is the food of Intellect. (700)

Blake's remarks refer back to earlier complaints in the letter about Locke and his 'pretended Philosophy which teaches that Execution is the power of One & Invention of Another' (699). Opposed to Locke's philosophical division of sensation and reflection, Blake asserts 'he who can Invent can Execute' (699). To Blake, the division of 'invention' from 'execution,' and 'execution' from 'invention,' fails to nourish the intellect – and thus 'Sublime Art.' The 'Abstinence' of imaginative execution proves sinful to a Blakean morality which preaches that 'The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom' (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 35, plate 7). Only an active, indulgent participation in the 'Enjoyment' of sensation and reflection together provides a flourishing of art and thought – and thus creation. For Blake, contrarities are true; thus his position that 'the true faculty of knowing must be the faulty which experiences' does not disqualify the following from also being true: 'Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception.'

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<sup>18</sup> *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 195.

<sup>19</sup> *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 350.

he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover' (1, 2). In other words, true 'knowledge' for Blake comes from the 'experience' of perceiving that which is outside 'sensation'. For Blake, the Imagination makes the unperceived perceivable, to the point at which mental 'invention' becomes the same thing as physical 'execution'.

Although Blake specifically mentions Locke in reference to 'Abstract Philosophers', he also seems to invoke Hinduism by implicitly reiterating the reference to *Brahma's* 'Abstract Philosophy' in *The Song of Los* – a poem written the same year as his letter to Cumberland. By conceptualising the ethos of 'Abstract Philosophy' as abstemious to the 'food of Intellect' – as ascetic and austere to the Imagination, the 'Source of Sublime Art' – Blake seems to make an indirect criticism of the idea of 'wisdom' as defined in the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, which Kathleen Raine suggests that 'Blake had read by 1795' because of his reference to *Brahma* in *The Song of Los*.<sup>20</sup> The *Bhagvat-Geeta* relates the theological and philosophical tenets of Hinduism through a series of dialogues between the human warrior-prince *Arjoon* and the god-incarnate *Krishna*. Discussing 'wisdom', *Krishna* says, 'A man is said to be confirmed in wisdom, when he forsaketh every desire which entereth into his heart, and of himself is happy, and contented with himself' (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 39). The connection of wisdom with abstinence is clear – 'forsaking' bodily desires implicitly leads to knowledge of one's true self, and one's contentment with *only* one's self; such knowledge, as *Krishna* goes on, makes it possible to be fully absorbed into union with the divine.

The Hindu view of 'wisdom' as outlined by *Krishna* is antithetical to Blake's principles. Blake writes that 'Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling' (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 34, plate 5). The repression of desire allows 'reason' to 'govern' those principles of perception

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<sup>20</sup> *Blake and Tradition: Volume II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 351, 2 vols.

which Blake wants liberated through desire. Here, the fundamental tenets of Hindu 'wisdom' conflict with the Blakean ideal that 'The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite' ('There is NO Natural Religion [b], 3, VII). Desire creates the 'Infinite' and the 'Infinite being' of 'Man', for 'He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God' ('There is NO Natural Religion [b], 3). In this sense, 'Desire' replaces 'reason' as the governing principle of perception; if one desires to 'see God,' one can, and thus is not allowing 'reason' to delimit one's perceptions to the five senses, which would make it impossible to 'see' that vision. Hindu principles promote self-denial and self-effacement in the throes of desire – it is through such abstinence that divinity can be realised and understood. In contrast, Blake promotes the liberation, not the repression, of desire as the road to divine wisdom.

While the reference to *Brahma* in *The Song of Los* alone provides insufficient evidence to confirm whether Blake had read the *Geeta*, the reference coupled with his letter to Cumberland, due the similarity of language, provides some circumstantial support that it was likely. If Blake had read the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, however, it is clear he would not have agreed with some of its basic principles. John Adlard argues that Blake's use of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* would have been employed not as a point of comparison for his works, but rather as a 'fairly vigorous contradiction', as I have suggested above.<sup>21</sup> In response to Adlard's claim, David Erdman argues that if Blake 'echoes Wilkins' terms – desire, restrain, reason, govern, passive – it is to overturn 'Geeta' ideals.<sup>22</sup> Even David Weir conjectures that 'Blake's language is so close to Wilkins's but, at the same time, so contrary to Wilkins's meaning that it may very well be a deliberate, diabolical gloss on the translation'.<sup>23</sup> Ever the dissenter of monolithic dogma,

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<sup>21</sup> 'Blake and the 'Geeta'', *English Studies*, XLV (1964), p. 460-462: 462.

<sup>22</sup> *Blake Prophet Against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> *Brahma in the West*, p. 96-97.

Blake would have enjoyed using the terms of Hinduism to subvert its own premise – a hallmark of his ironic attitude towards, and subversive depiction of, Christianity in works such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The Songs of Experience* (1794).

However, if Blake really wanted to make Hinduism the ‘abstinent’ ideological antithesis of his Imagination, it is particularly ironic that he would have Rintrah give ‘Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East’. In Blake’s cosmology, Rintrah is one of the four sons of Los – who, as ‘the Eternal Prophet’, is Blake’s mythological embodiment of the creative Imagination within the mundane world (that is, the world of ‘organic perception’) (*Los*, 67, 3.1). In turn, Rintrah represents ‘the just wrath of the Prophet’, according to Foster – ‘just’ in the sense that Rintrah embodies Blake’s rage against spiritual, social, and political corruption in the world – ‘God & his Priest & King’.<sup>24</sup>

Such rage presages revolutionary acts. In the prefaced poem entitled ‘The Argument’ which opens *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Rintrah ‘roars & shakes his fires in the burdend [*sic*] air’ and is described as the ‘just man’ who ‘rages in the wilds / Where lions roam’ (33, 2.1, 2.19). Rintrah’s ferocious posturing seems to initiate the poem’s revolutionary, contrarian antinomianism – one evidenced by the poem’s very title suggesting a mollifying union between two inherently oppositional spiritual and moral states, as well as the poem’s opening line: ‘a new heaven is begun...the Eternal Hell revives’ (34, plate 3). Rintrah’s rage is one against the established religious system as well as one for the principles which will destroy those systems and create another. As such, Blake associates Rintrah’s rage with the ‘wisdom of God’, through Rintrah’s natural proximity to and symbolic association with the ‘lion’ – an animal which represents

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<sup>24</sup> *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 349. In *The Chariot of Fire: a study of William Blake in the light of Hindu thought*, Charu Sheel Singh suggests that, based on mythological similarities, Rintrah is a Blakean recreation of Indra, the thunder god and king of the Hindu heaven (p. 21). However, Singh does not provide any direct evidence to show that Blake made such a connection purposely.

'spiritual wrath' (36, 8.24; 37, 9.40).<sup>25</sup> As the 'wisdom of God', Rintrah's rage serves as the catalyst for the apocalyptic Imagination to 'cleanse perception' and initiate the artistic inspiration Blake seeks in the 'East'.

By understanding Rintrah's mythological significance, we can interpret Rintrah's 'gift' of 'Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East' as an event which foreshadows the coming of Blake's Imaginative apocalypse, thereby again connecting Hinduism with Blake's Imagination. This idea of Hinduism foreshadowing the Imaginative apocalypse is born out by events in *Milton*, to which I will turn to examine in a later section; but I mention this point now to demonstrate Blake's contrarian logic, in that, even though Rintrah represents the 'wisdom of God', and Hinduism represents a 'wisdom' at odds with Blake's ideal of it, the gift of 'Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the East' still presages Blake's Imaginative apocalypse because of its historical proximity to the time of the 'ancient Poets' – the period of Imaginative history Blake seeks to invoke in order to instigate his Imaginative apocalypse.

As a codified system of rationality and morality, Hinduism – like all the other religions – fails to live up to its own dogmatic standards by polluting the very humanity it seeks to serve. It is a repeat of – and worse, it repeats – all the evils in the world that Blake abhors: 'War / Against one another'; 'smiling hypocrisy [*sic*]'; and mental enslavement to rigid dogma (*The Song of Los*, 67, 3.13-3.14). Yet, Blake positions Hinduism as the 'original' religion by placing it as the first religion from which all others derive. Moreover, Blake places Hinduism nearest to the 'one source' he talks about in 'All Religions are One' from which human notions of divinity originally sprang. As Weir writes, 'Blake accommodates Hinduism as the most recent candidate (circa 1795) for the most ancient faith'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 242. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes that, 'The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God' (36, 8.24). Rintrah's proximity to the lion is 'natural' in the sense that he wanders the 'wilds/ Where lions roam', suggesting that the Rintrah and the lion share an environmental and symbolic similarity.

<sup>26</sup> *Brahma in the West*, 8.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the debate about whether Egyptian or Indian culture was the most ancient – and which culture influenced which – was at its peak; Blake displays that he was not only aware of this debate – once again suggesting his knowledge of work such as Jones’ – but he even seems to take a stand on the issue by making Hinduism the oldest. Moreover, Blake uses that scholarly debate on Hinduism to his poetic and prophetic advantage in order to create a mythological genealogy of religions that stem from Hinduism – including Christianity.

By doing so, Blake joins a chorus of other radical and dissenting writers at the time, such as Richard Payne Knight in *The Worship of the Priapus* (1786) and F.C. Volney in *The Ruins* (1792), who attempt to discredit the Christian tradition through references to ancient Hindu mythology. *Los*’s religious genealogy seems to have a particular resonance with Volney’s polemic in *The Ruins*. As Jon Mee writes, ‘The catalogue of false religions, for instance, in “Africa” participates in Volney’s global perspective’.<sup>27</sup> In *The Ruins*, Volney argues that all religions are derived from forms of Sun worship. He also makes the claim that the ‘Hindoo God *Chris-en*, or *Christna*’ bore the etymological and mythological equivalent of ‘*Chris-tos*, the son of Mary’ – thereby implying Christianity’s mythological derivation from Hinduism.<sup>28</sup> Volney’s point, however, is less about favouring the ‘ancient authority’ of Hinduism. Like Blake’s *Los*, his point is more about realizing that:

the whole history of the spirit of religion is merely that of the fallibility and uncertainty of the human mind, which, placed in a world it does not comprehend, is yet desirous of solving the enigma; and which, the astonished spectator of this mysterious and visible prodigy, imagines causes, supposes ends, builds systems...rejects the truth of which it is in pursuit, invents chimeras of heterogeneous and contradictory beings, and, ever dreaming of wisdom and happiness, loses itself in a labyrinth of torments and illusions. (*Ruins*, 295-296)

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<sup>27</sup> *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, 139.

<sup>28</sup> *The Ruins; or A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires: Third Edition* (London, 1796), p. 292. Abbreviated hereafter *Ruins*.



*The Song of Los* resembles *The Ruins* in its scepticism about religious 'systems' which distract humanity from a real sense of self and purpose. Yet within this similarity there is also a major difference; Blake breaks from Volney by expounding an alternative, Imaginative 'system-building' ethos; as he writes in *Jerusalem*, 'I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create' (153, 10.20-21). Blake's poetry seeks to mythologize an inspired religious system that frees humanity from the ideological constraints he and Volney condemn – even at the expense of Volney's rational disposition to 'Reason & Compare'. As Marilyn Butler comments, 'Blake mythologizes in a far less rational spirit [than Volney, who was]...anthropologizing religion out of existence'.<sup>29</sup> While Blake agrees with the principles of Volney's condemnation of religion, he does not concur with Volney's methods; Blake was interested in not just creating a 'System', but creating one that would destroy all others and return to an original 'System' – that of the 'ancient Poets'.

While Blake's critique of rational philosophy distances him from Volney's Enlightenment polemic, he still engages with Volney's spirit of antinomianism through his mythological adaptation of Hinduism's religious precedent to subvert conventional forms of morality and rationality. This has important implications for Blake's imaginative and prophetic concepts. By creating an imaginative rather than rational route for his 'system', Blake can include culturally disparate and historically conflicting theological approaches, thereby allowing him to include Hinduism to undermine the Christian tradition while simultaneously locating his creative centre in Jesus; in that sense, this seems Blake's way of validating Volney's theory – a way of finding and mythologizing something of *Krishna* into Christ. While his inclusion of Hinduism allows Blake to challenge 'orthodox

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<sup>29</sup> *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 45.

Christianity so consistently and blasphemously as to leave very little of it standing', as Martin Priestman argues in *Romantic Atheism*, it also allows him historical access to the mythological origins he seeks to revive in order to unleash the full imaginative potential of his visionary system.<sup>30</sup> Such access is found in Blake's drawing *The Bramins* (1809), to which I now turn in order to provide a more thorough analysis of how Blake uses Hinduism to invoke his Imaginative ideals, as well as how he positions Hinduism and Christianity within his Imaginative framework.

#### IV: William Blake and *The Bramins*

In his first and only exhibition in 1809, Blake displayed sixteen original works of water-colours he dubbed '*portable Frescos*' ('Advertisement of the Exhibition', 527). Most of the works, if we judge simply by their titles, have a 'spiritual' or religious element to them: 'I. The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan'; 'II. The Spiritual Form of Pitt guiding Behemoth'; 'VIII. The Spiritual Preceptor'; 'XIII. Jacob's Ladder – A Drawing'; 'XIV. Angels hovering over the Body of Jesus in the Sepulchre – A Drawing', etc. (551). His Fresco 'Number X' also seems to have a 'spiritual' dimension. Entitled 'The Bramins – A Drawing', Blake describes the now lost painting in the *Descriptive Catalogue* thus:

The subject is, Mr. Wilkin [*sic*], translating the Geeta; an ideal design, suggested by the first publication of that part of the Hindoo Scriptures, translated by Mr. Wilkin. I understand that my costume is incorrect, but in this, I plead the authority of the ancients, who often deviated from the Habits, to preserve the Manners, as in the instance of Laocoon, who, though a priest, is represented naked. (548)

Contrary to its title, the fresco's subject is not a Hindu holy man at all, but rather the British Oriental scholar Charles Wilkins. Wilkins, of course, translated the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, the 'Hindoo Scriptures,' into English in 1785 and was a close friend and associate of William Jones while in India. Wilkins returned to England

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<sup>30</sup> *Romantic Atheism*, p. 82.

in 1786, and, according to Weir, 'was active in circles very close to Blake'. This 'circle' included Fuseli and Moses Haughton, who would engrave the pictures of Hindu deities for Edward Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1810) and would ask for Wilkins' assistance with the *Devanagari* script for the Sanskrit text.<sup>31</sup> As Raymond Schwab notes, Wilkins was 'the first to discover and, in 1778, personally use methods of engraving, casting and setting Bengali characters'.<sup>32</sup> Wilkins was not only the first European to authoritatively learn and translate Sanskrit, but also the first to produce its letters for type printing, making it possible to print Sanskrit for a wider audience (which Wilkins did for Nathaniel Halhed Brassey's *Code of Gentoo Law* [1776]). The similarity of Wilkins' tradesman skills as an engraver and book producer to those of Blake's suggests one reason why Blake may have chosen to represent Wilkins over, say, Jones, who was already the sculptural subject of Flaxman – a friend with whom, by 1809, Blake had had an unamiable relationship. Yet, despite their similarities in trade, Blake focuses quite specifically on Wilkins as a translator in *The Bramins*, suggesting perhaps another reason for Blake's memorialising of Wilkins' work.

In *Blake and Tradition*, Kathleen Raine interprets *The Bramins* as evidence that 'Blake had read Wilkins' *Geeta* before 1795, when he wrote *The Song of Los*'.<sup>33</sup> Raine assumes Blake's knowledge of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* because of his reference to 'Brama in the east' in *The Song of Los*, although she provides no historical evidence to support this claim. Nonetheless, Blake's fresco provides the most direct indication of his engagement with the Jonesian scholarship of the 1780s and 1790s. More recently, Tristanne Connolly has argued that Blake's drawing of Wilkins harks back to Jones' sympathetic and syncretic scholarship on India and Orient that prevailed in the 1780s, so as to

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<sup>31</sup> *Brahma in the West*, 21-22. In his 'Preface' to *The Hindu Pantheon*, Moor thanks Wilkins for being 'so good as to affix the names in *Sanskrit*, to many of the subjects of my plates' (p. xii).

<sup>32</sup> *The Oriental Renaissance*, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> *Blake and Tradition*, p. 351.

deny 'complicity in any imperialistic relationship between knowledge, power and profit'.<sup>34</sup> In other words, Connolly argues that Blake, with his painting of Wilkins, attempts to deflect and disengage with attitudes towards the Orient that, by 1809, have become increasingly intolerant and Evangelical – as exemplified by Robert Southey's review of the Baptist Missionary Society published the same year in *The Monthly Review*, in which Southey chronicles, as he champions, Indian proselytisation and the first Christian conversion of a Hindu native by the Missionary leader William Carey. To Connolly, the glorification of a past attitude of religious tolerance provides Blake a historical alibi for his current engagement with colonised India; she writes:

[Blake] can retain British and Christian centrality without having to ally himself with an obtuse and unimaginative bigotry. Instead of the growing imposition of British culture on Indians, he opts for outdated syncretism which allows him to see Indians and Britons as originally alike.<sup>35</sup>

Connolly suggests that Blake's 'The Bramins' inevitably partakes in the discourse of colonial knowledge construction, but one that Connolly views as already obsolete and thus no longer applicable to the current imperialist policies of 1809. By evoking that historical Orientalism through Wilkins, Blake is able to deny culpability in supporting the current imperialist system, but unable to abstain from the colonial enterprise altogether.

In this sense, Connolly is attempting to refute Makdisi's claim that 'Blake was basically the *only* major poet of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who categorically refused to dabble in recognizably Orientalists themes or motifs'.<sup>36</sup> By invoking an 'outdated syncretism', Connolly argues that Blake's retention of a 'British and Christian centrality' in fact does categorically 'dabble in recognizably Orientalists themes or motifs' – only those that are 25 years old and

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<sup>34</sup> 'Blake and Wilkins' Translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, *Receptions of Blake in the Orient*, p. 146.

<sup>35</sup> 'Blake and Wilkins' Translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 209.

seen as a relic of different political and religious times. To Connolly, if the India of 1809 is defined by Christian conversion, the India of 1785 is defined by Christian syncretism; Wilkins did after all compare the Hindu's religious tenets to Unitarianism, a dissenting, even radical, Christian sect, but Christian nonetheless.

Connolly clearly bases her belief of Blake's 'Christian centrality' on his definitions of the Imagination – the 'Divine Vision', as he defines it, which allows humanity to become divine through creation ('Annotations to Wordsworth's *Poems*', 665). In the 'Preface' to *Milton*, Blake describes the 'Imagination' as 'those Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live for ever; in Jesus our Lord' (95, plate 1). The 'Human Imagination', he explains further, is 'the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus'; in fact, it is 'Human Existence itself' (*Milton*, 96, 3.3, 4; 132, 32[35].32). As S. Foster Damon writes, 'because [Jesus] is human, he is Divine'.<sup>37</sup> It is Jesus' humanity which makes him an exemplar of the divine qualities Blake invests into his conception of the Imagination. Blake's association of the Imagination with Jesus shows the extent to which he places the 'origin of art and mythology...inside Judeo-Christian tradition', Connolly writes.<sup>38</sup> To Connolly, then, the invocation of Hinduism through Wilkins is an attempt to displace debates about Hinduism's challenge to Christian tradition based on antiquity, and incorporate the Indian religion into the Blake's own mythology, with the Christian tradition at its core. In short, Connolly maintains that 'Blake's own mythology can be the origin of all' by imposing its own mythological imperialism over both Hindu and Christian traditions.<sup>39</sup>

Yet Connolly's argument fails to consider the ways in which Blake consistently anathematizes the very Christian tradition upon which he bases his

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<sup>37</sup> *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 159.

<sup>38</sup> 'Blake and Wilkins' Translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*', p. 154.

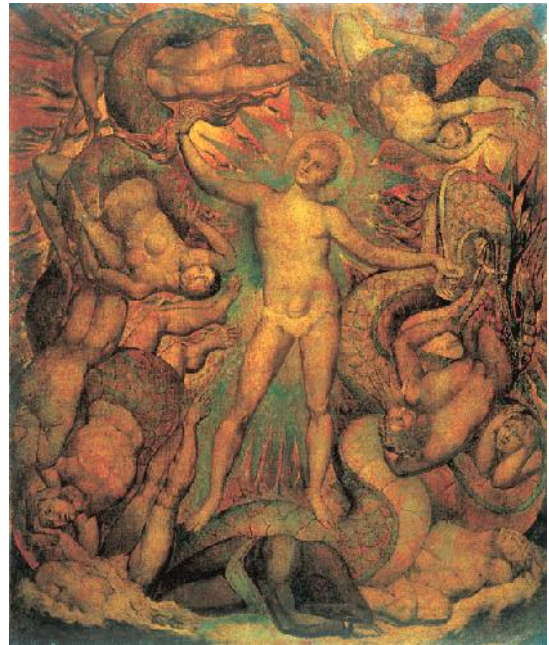
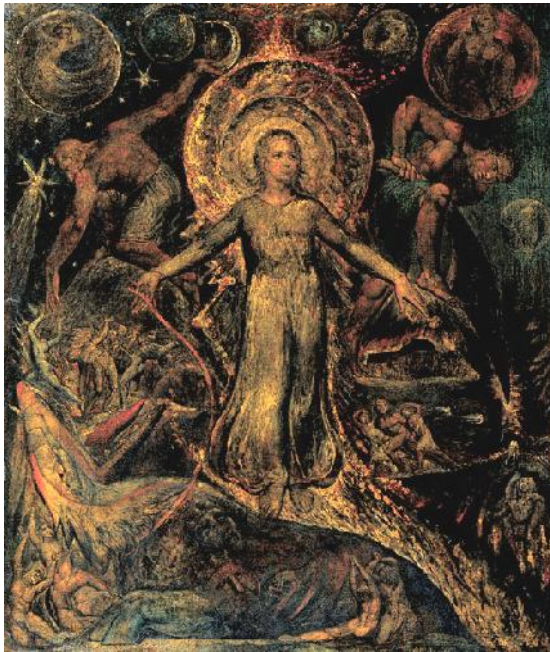
<sup>39</sup> 'Blake and Wilkins' Translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*', p. 156.

imaginative principles. For the Imagination Blake most closely associates with Jesus is one he most fervently seeks in Non-Western, ancient mythologies – particularly in India and Hinduism. And it is with this point in mind that I return to analyse *The Bramins* within the context of Blake's Imaginative 'vision'.

A vital element of Blake's larger aesthetic vision is the denunciation and replacement of Neo-Classicism. In his 'Preface' to *Milton*, Blake rouses the 'Young Men of the New Age' to instigate a new era of artistic and spiritual revival by defying 'Greek or Roman models' and by being 'just & true to our own Imagination, those Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live for ever; in Jesus our Lord' (95, plate 1). The 'New Age' Blake envisions is one grounded in his principles of the 'Imagination', which seeks to recognise the creative power of the divine within the human, as exemplified by Jesus. As demonstrated earlier, in order to recognise this divine humanity, the 'Imagination' must be apocalyptic. In this sense, Blake sought for his art and his 'New Age' to be, as it enacted, infinite perception through the act of Imaginative apocalypse.

Moreover, Blake shapes the 'New Age' to be a modern artistic invocation of the ancient, original forms of inspiration. The 'New Age' is one in which '[A]ll will be set right: & those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly Inspired Men, will hold their proper rank' (95, plate 1). Blake puts these aesthetic principles into practice in his *Descriptive Catalogue*. In describing his first two paintings – 'spiritual' depictions of the former Prime Minister William Pitt and the naval war hero Horatio Nelson [Fig. 3 and Fig. 4] – Blake writes that they are

compositions of a mythological cast, similar to those Apotheoses of Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian Antiquity, which are still preserved on rude monuments, being copies from some stupendous originals now lost or perhaps buried till some happier age. The Artist having been taken in vision into the ancient



republics, monarchies, and patriarchates of Asia, has seen those wonderful originals ... The Artist has endeavoured to emulate the grandeur of those seen in his vision. (530-531)

Here, Blake connects the 'spiritual form' of Pitt and Nelson with the 'apotheoses of Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian antiquity'; in other words, Blake models his depiction of Pitt and Nelson after the ruined sculptures of divine forms found in India and Egypt.<sup>40</sup> It is appropriate that Blake focuses on 'apotheosis', which is the elevation of a human to a deified figure. Blake obviously finds such ancient apotheosis as practised by the Hindus and Egyptians accommodating to his own 'spiritual' principles of the Imagination – which attempts to reveal the divine within the human form – for the 'visions' of 'Hindoo and Egyptian Antiquity' are the very ones he wishes to 'emulate'.

The 'emulation' of Hindu and Egyptian apotheosis lies in their historical and cultural proximity to the 'stupendous originals' which defined the imaginative

<sup>40</sup> Blake likely has in mind the caves of Elephanta, near Mumbai, where phallic representations of *Brahma* and other Hindu deities are carved into the rock, and the ancient cities of Giza and Luxor, which Blake mentions as the 'highly cultivated states of Egypt'. These two 'Oriental' sculptural and architectural sites captured the imagination of many Britons throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including Robert Southey, Percy Shelley, and Sydney Owenson (531). Cf. David Fallon's 'The Angel Who Rides on the Whirlwind': William Blake's Oriental Apotheosis of William Pitt', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Volume 31, Number 2, Spring 2007, p. 1-28.

genius of the first artists. In the same paragraph quoted above, Blake also writes that,

No man can believe that either Homer's Mythology, or Ovid's, were the production of Greece, or of Latium...The Greek Muses are daughters of Mnemosyne, or Memory, and not of Inspiration or Imagination, therefore not authors of such sublime conceptions.  
(531)

Like Jones does in 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India' and 'On the Hindus', Blake traces Classical artistic inspiration back to Oriental antecedents. But Blake does so in a way as to discredit Classicism altogether, as earlier poems such as 'Mad Song' and 'To the Muses' illustrate. For Blake, the Greeks were not original at all; they did not receive 'Inspiration' or use the 'Imagination' to create. They merely memorised and copied such 'Inspiration' from the antiquated grandeur of Egypt and India. Thus, Classical Greek and Rome are not suitable examples from which to build a spiritual aesthetic; however, originality and antiquity – as found in Hindu and Egyptian apotheosis – are, and thereby form the basis of Blake's Imaginative principles.

In this sense, Wilkins comes to exemplify Blake's 'New Age Artist' because of his translational excavation of a 'stupendous original'. Wilkins' translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, the 'Hindoo scriptures', demonstrates an active invocation – indeed, an active transportation – of the ancient spiritual authority of the Hindus into Blake's present day. Wilkins' translation is not a simple transposition of a work from a source language into a target language; for Blake, it is a revivification of ancient forms of worship that hold the key to the origins of culture and the origins of 'apotheosis' – humanity's relationship with the divine (and thusly the Imagination). The act of translation Wilkins' undertakes recreates, as it reconstitutes, the 'authority of the ancients', and in this sense is an act of spiritual fulfilment which intimates the kind of spiritual fulfilment Blake seeks in the union of Jesus with the Imagination. After all, Blake writes that 'Antiquity preaches the Gospel of Jesus' – that is, the Gospel of Jesus as the Imagination



(*Descriptive Catalogue*, 543). Hindu antiquity, Jesus and the Imagination are all relative to each other by pointing the way back to the 'one source' from which all religion and inspiration came.

Thus, through this act of translation, Blake considers Wilkins a 'Bramin' artistically, poetically, even prophetically. This is suggested by the title itself, *The Bramins*, which demonstrates two things: 1) that in some form, Wilkins is a 'Bramin' (Blake makes specific reference to the (in)accuracy of his clothing, perhaps suggesting that he is clothed as one); and 2) that there are additional individuals present in the picture whom Blake does not describe, as the 's' at the end of *Bramins* illustrates. The first point seems proven by the second, in that Blake seems to confer upon Wilkins the same status of ancient authority as the Hindu votaries whose presence alongside Wilkins is suggested by the title's pluralisation. Blake's comparison of Wilkins with the Trojan prophet *Laocoön* also suggests the ways in which Blake positions Wilkins as a 'New Age Artist' – as one heralding a prophecy, but no one paying any attention to him. Through the invocation of the 'authority of the ancients' – and the ancient Hindus – Wilkins displays the creative act of heralding the coming of a new artistic Imagination. In this sense, Wilkins is representative of the type of artist Blake envisions himself to be.

Blake's use of Wilkins is also representative of Blake's adaptation of a Jonesian syncretism and cultural tolerance that was at its peak during the late 1780s and early 1790s. As Saree Makdisi writes:

For if Blake refuses the Heliocentric move, he does so not only in order to stress the Afro-Asiatic origins of European culture (a notion also stressed...[by] Sir William Jones...), but also in order to emphasize the unity of *all* human cultures.<sup>41</sup>

By by-passing the Neo-Classical aesthetic, Blake was able to reach deeper into the cultural history of the world in his search for the original 'authority of the

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<sup>41</sup> *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*, p. 246.

ancients' – to which he holds Wilkins as a leading example. As for Blake's engagement with Jones' work and his use of Hinduism to emphasis 'the unity of *all* human cultures', this is most obviously demonstrated in Blake's prophetic poem *Milton* and his use of the symbolic 'Mundane Egg', which serves as the topic of examination in the following section.

#### V: Blake, Jones, and 'The Mundane Egg'

In *Blake and Tradition*, Kathleen Raine wonders if Blake's reference to the 'Mundane Egg' in *Milton* derives 'in part from the "egg" of Brahmā as well as from the Orphic egg' – a question to which she never provides an answer.<sup>42</sup> At the time, her question was a provocative one, and it remains so; as Michael J. Franklin comments in regards to Raine's suggestion, 'A detailed examination of Jones's influence upon the longer mythological poems of William Blake has not yet been undertaken' (*SWJ*, 349). One of the problems in finding an answer stems from the Mundane Egg's ubiquity as a mythological symbol, persistent in the ancient mythologies of India, Egypt, and the Orphic Greeks.<sup>43</sup> The 'mundane', as Johnson's *Dictionary* has it, was something 'Belonging to the world', which was fitting for the idea of the Mundane Egg, for in those various mythologies it always stood as a symbol for the Earth. In his *Worship of the Priapus*, Richard Payne Knight explains that the egg was chosen because it was 'the material of generation...containing the seeds and germs of life and motion, without being actually possessed of either'.<sup>44</sup> From that which has neither life nor motion, comes life and motion; or, as Jones more poetically puts it in 'Náráyena', a poem about the Mundane Egg myth, 'Things unexisting to existence sprung'. Such a paradoxical explanation of creation – something from nothing – offered a (mythological) rationalisation, as well as a (spiritual) mystery, for existence and

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<sup>42</sup> *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. I, p. 182.

<sup>43</sup> We now know that the Hindu Mundane Egg myth was the earliest conception of this mythological motif.

<sup>44</sup> *Priapus*, p. 34.

other grand events such as the creation of the world. In his explanation of the myth, Knight refers to the Orphic Egg, the egg in Orphic Greek mythology from which the hermaphroditic *Phanes*, the primeval god of Creation, hatched and created the other deities.

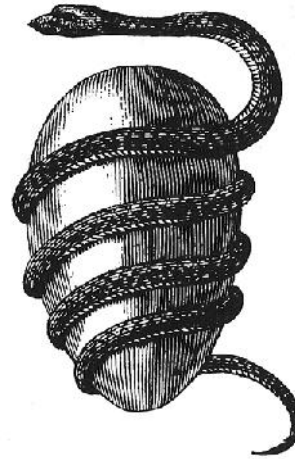


Figure 5 – The 'Orphic Egg' from Jacob Bryant's *A New System, or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774-1776)

Blake knew of the Orphic Egg from Jacob Bryant's *A New System, or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774-1776, 3 vols) – a publication for which Blake did some early engraving work while he was still an apprentice for James Basire, the official engraver for the Society of Antiquities.<sup>45</sup> In his *New System*, although Bryant acknowledges that the Egg's Persian, Syrian, and Greek usages, he still describes the 'Orphic Egg' as a symbol of Noah 'inclos[ing]' and 'preserv[ing]...all mankind' in the Ark.<sup>46</sup> Such an analysis is typical of Bryant's systematic method of comparative mythology in which he appropriates pagan myths within an Judeo-Christian historical tradition, viewing ancient mythologies as symptoms of a Post-Diluvian trauma, the Flood having 'cut humanity off from the primitive Christianity of the patriarchs'.<sup>47</sup> It was a method Jones himself criticised, despite a general fondness for Bryant's work: 'There is infinite profusion of learning in his book, but I cannot help thinking his system very uncertain' (*Letters*, I, 239).<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, many scholars have traced Blake's fascination with, and learning of, world

<sup>45</sup> It is possible that Blake even engraved the 'Orphic Egg' design pictured above for Bryant's *New System*. Blake was an apprentice of Basire's from 1772 to 1778. Basire also did work for the London Royal Society at the same time William Jones was there; however, there is no documented evidence of them crossing paths. Nonetheless, this does not dissuade David Weir in *Brahma in West* from hypothesizing that a meeting between Basire and Jones, or even Blake and Jones, was possible, since Blake often haunted the hallways of the Royal Society. Many scholars believe that Blake's *Laocoön* (1825) was based on drawings he made as an apprentice when he had sufficient access to the sculpture in the Royal Society.

<sup>46</sup> *The New System, or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology, Vol. II* (London, 1775), p. 321, 3 vols.

<sup>47</sup> *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, p. 132.

<sup>48</sup> Jones also took Bryant to task for his work on the 'derivation of words from *Asiatick* languages' in his Third Anniversary Discourse 'On the Hindus' in 1786 (*SWJ*, 356).

mythology to Bryant's work.<sup>49</sup> After all, Blake writes that 'The antiquities of every Nation under Heaven, is no less sacred than that of the Jews. They are the same thing [*sic*] as Jacob Bryant and all antiquaries have proved' (*Descriptive Catalogue*, 543).<sup>50</sup> Who these other 'antiquaries' are Blake does not say, but we could reasonably assume that he would have included Wilkins in this list (since Blake's drawing of Wilkins is in the same work in which he makes this statement) and, by proxy to Wilkins, Jones, who articulated similar syncretic sentiments in his works on Hinduism.

However, as noted earlier, Blake was eager to dismiss Classical influences, such as the Orphic Greeks, and trace a deeper mythological history of all cultures and nations. He was also interested in disrupting the dogmatic certainty of the Judeo-Christian tradition Bryant sought to prove in his work, feeling that the goal of the antiquarian should be to discover why the Judeo-Christian tradition is lauded over others. As Blake writes immediately after his commendation of Bryant's work:

How other antiquities came to be neglected and disbelieved, while those of the Jews are collected and arranged, is an enquiry, worthy of both the Antiquarian and the Divine. All had originally one language, and one religion, this was the religion of Jesus. (*Descriptive Catalogue*, 543)

Here, Blake reiterates the task of the Ancient Poet he outlines in Plate 11 in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The 'Antiquarian' is one who should inquire into and investigate the reasons behind the negligence and dismissal of other religions in the effort to revive the 'original' language and religion from which all forms of faith derived (as was Jones' intent). This is a task also worthy of the 'Divine', but as Blake shows with Wilkins in *The Bramins*, sometimes the 'Antiquarian' and the 'Divine' become the same thing.

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<sup>49</sup> For example, Northrop Frye writes that 'The work of Bryant...influenced few besides Blake' (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 175).

<sup>50</sup> *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, p. 132.

In this sense, viewing Bryant's 'Orphic Egg' as the influence for Blake's 'Mundane Egg' sits inconsistently with the task Blake sets out for his poetry – reviving the 'religion of Jesus', which is the religion of the Imagination – because of Bryant's Classical and Judeo-Christian bias. Importantly, however, there were other representations of the Egg myth in sources familiar to Blake that may have proved more influential. In *The Ruins*, for example, Volney writes from the perspective of a Tibetan Lama of the Hindu myth of the Mundane Egg:

In the beginning...[there] immediately became an immense bubble, shaped like an egg, which when complete became the vault globe of the heavens in which the world is enclosed'.<sup>51</sup>

The Hindu myth of the Mundane Egg comes from the *Brahmānda-Purana*, and narrates the creation of the world; *Brahma* hatches from the Egg to create existence, and the broken halves of the Egg's shell form the Earth and the Heavens. Volney's description of the Hindu Mundane Egg myth employs similar imagery and lexicon as Jones' description of the myth in his popular 'Hymn to Náráyena': 'a lucid bubble rose, / Which grew in perfect shape an Egg refin'd' (*SWJ*, 109, ll. 43-44).

As demonstrated in Chapter I, Jones knew this myth well and his 'Hymns', particularly his 'Náráyena', were often used by other writers for their own political and religious purposes. In *The Ruins*, Volney uses the Hindu myth of the Mundane Egg for the exact opposite purposes with which Bryant used the Orphic Egg myth: to discredit, rather than defend, Christian hegemony; as Volney writes in a section on '*Brahmanism, or the Indian System*':

the [Jewish] prophets had doubtless been careful to infuse into their pictures the spirits and style of the sacred books employed in the Pagan mysteries...the formation of every [religious] system...pursued [this] same track'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *The Ruins*, p. 207. In the early 1790s, when *The Ruins* was published, Buddhism was still considered to be a sect of Hinduism and not a religion on its own terms.

<sup>52</sup> *The Ruins*, p. 289, 296.

Like Blake in poems such as 'All Religions are One' and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Volney posits the underlying unity of all religions by undermining the historical claims to religious superiority erected by the Mosaic tradition. Along with the Hindu myth of the Mundane Egg, Volney also provides the Japanese, Hebrew, and Orphic versions of the myth, but consistently traces them back to 'Beddou' or *Buddha*, whom Volney – like Jones – understood as a Hindu god.<sup>53</sup> In short, Volney positions the Hindu myth of the Mundane Egg as the original from which all the other mythological versions derive.

Blake's use of the 'Mundane Egg' in *Milton* seems to have been more in keeping with Knight and Volney's radical portrayal of the myth rather than Bryant's religiously polemical one. As Mee comments, 'Blake's history of religion rejects Bryant's assumption of Christianity's primacy'. By tracing Blake's use of the Mundane Egg within *Milton*, I hope to demonstrate how Blake uses and positions Hinduism within the larger framework of his mythography in order to instigate and enact his Imaginative apocalypse, as well as to resurrect the 'one language, and one religion' of antiquity. In short, this section wants to answer Raine's rhetorical question about Blake's use of *Brahma's* Egg with an emphatic 'yes'.

Upon first glance, Blake's version of the 'Mundane Egg' in *Milton* has obvious Christian exegesis. The poem mythologises the return of the poet John Milton from 'Eternity' to the Earth in order to redeem Blake from the rational influences of Satan and prophesise a second coming of Christ. Milton's journey from Eternity takes him through the 'Mundane Shell', the piece of the 'Mundane Egg' that mythologically created the Earth.

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<sup>53</sup> *The Ruins*, p. 176.

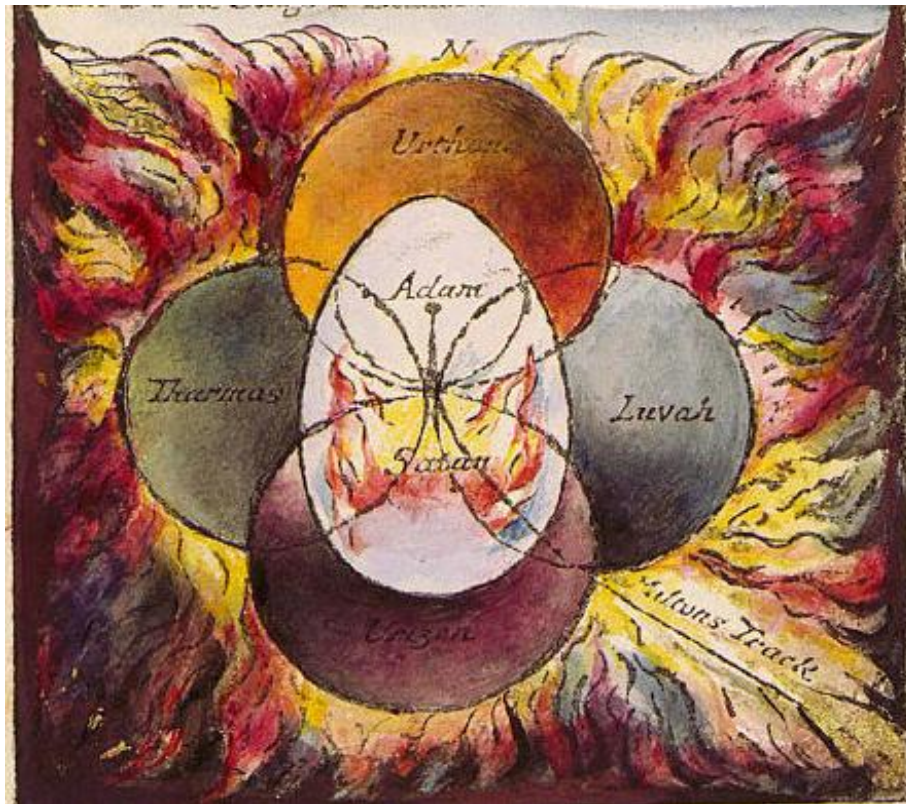


Figure 6 – William Blake's 'Mundane Egg' from *Milton* (1811)

Blake describes the 'Shell' as:

...a vast Concave Earth: an immense  
 Hardened shadow of all things upon our Vegetated Earth  
 Enlarg'd into dimension & deform'd into indefinite space,  
 In Twenty-seven Heavens and all their Hells; with Chaos  
 An Ancient Night; & Purgatory. It is a cavernous Earth  
 Of labyrinthine intricacy, twenty-seven folds of opakeness  
 And finishes where the lark mounts; here Milton journeyed  
 ...For travellers from Eternity. pass outward to Satans seat.  
 (110-112, 17[19].21-29)

Here, Blake depicts a constricted, restricted space, which he also refers to as the 'Satanic Space [of] delusion'. 'Concaved' since 'man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks in his cavern' (*MHH*, 39, plate 14), the 'Mundane Shell' is a space of narrowed vision and limited perception, a place of 'labyrinthine intricacy' through 'twenty-seven folds of opakeness'. These folds represent the 'Twenty-seven Heaven and Hells' of the various Christian denominations, which add to the 'deformity' and narrowness of human perception by multiplying the spiritual opacity which religion brought about in the first place,

as documented in *The Song of Los*. As Foster writes, the 'Mundane Shell' represents 'the visible sky', but here we see that it also encompasses the heavens, the hells, the 'Purgatories', the 'Chaos of Ancient nights'; that is, it represents all the spaces of extra-sensory human conception.<sup>54</sup>

The 'Mundane Egg', on the other hand, is described as 'every Nation & every Family.../...every Species of Earth, Metal, Tree, Fish, Bird & Beast. / We form the Mundane Egg' (122, 25[27].40-42). Here, the Mundane Egg is portrayed as a composite of the humanly sensed world which is grounded in the organic beings which Blake says make up the 'earth of vegetation' (109, 14[15].41). Thus the 'Mundane Egg' and 'Shell' demarcate the physical and metaphysical boundaries of human perception and comprehension. They are the limits of humanity. Milton's journey from Eternity through the 'Mundane Egg' is a journey back into the narrowness of human being, thought, and perception that oppose the Eternal being, thought, and perception from whence he came – and which he prophesies to come on Earth in the form of the Lark, whose zenith represents the boundaries of the Shell. The Lark's rise at the end of the poem opens, or rather cleanses, the doors of perceptions to reveal infinite reality to the phenomenal beings of the 'Mundane Egg', signifying a second coming of Christ and heralding a new era of humanity and creativity.

As discussed earlier, Blake defines this new era as a 'New Age' which seeks to defy 'Greek or Roman' art as models of artistic inspiration and replace them with the 'ancient Apotheosis' of 'Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian Antiquity'. In this sense, Blake invokes Milton to return to Earth in order to redress Milton's own 'general malady & infection' of 'Greek & Latin' and assume an 'apotheosis' like that of the ancients. Milton was Blake's poetic hero, yet Blake could never seem to honestly reconcile his own perception of Milton's prophetic nature with Milton's Neo-Classicism. As Blake writes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

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<sup>54</sup> *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 288.



But in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses. & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum! Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it. (35, plate 6)

Here, Blake criticises Milton for representing Jesus and the Holy Spirit as a 'Ratio of the five senses' and a 'Vacuum' – terms Blake always uses to disparage the rational philosophy of the Enlightenment. Blake excuses Milton, saying that Milton was really a 'true Poet' and 'of the Devils party without knowing it' – a revisionist reading of Milton's character which suggests that the poet unconsciously participated in the 'Eternal Delight' Blake privileges as the act of true Imaginative vision.

As such, Blake's poem *Milton* allows Milton to return to Earth and redeem his ignorance of, while at the same time assume his position of, the 'true Poet'. Milton pledges to 'wash off the Not Human / ...To take off [Albion's] filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination / To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration' (142, 41[48].1, 6-7). By 'clothing' himself in the 'Imagination' and dispossessing 'Poetry' of everything but 'Inspiration', Milton undergoes a baptism into the Blakean Imagination, which not only redeems his reputation as a 'true Poet', but also instigates the 'cleansing of perception' and the necessary preparations for Second Coming of Christ. Milton's journey through the 'Mundane Egg', then, symbolises the spiritual quest of the Artist to redeem the fallen state of Eden by locating, and creating, that space for Christ's resurrection, which is the resurrection of the Imagination of the Ancient Poet – the one Blake locates in the 'East' and the 'Apotheosis' of Hindu antiquity.

When and how this occurs in the poem I will explore further below.

However, I first want to make some comparisons between Blake's portrayal of Milton here and his portrayal of Wilkins in *The Bramins*. In this painting, Blake exemplifies Wilkins as an Artist of the New Age – in part due to his 'Costume' which Blake notes is 'incorrect', but likens it to 'Laocoon, who, though a priest, is

represented naked'. On its own, Blake's description is incoherent at best. But within the context of Milton's redemptive pledge – to 'take off the filthy garments' of reason and 'clothe' himself in the 'Imagination' – Blake represents Wilkins not only as a 'Bramin' endowed with the 'authority of the ancients', but a prophetic seer like that of *Laocoön* – or even Isaiah, who, at the end of the 'Philosophy of the east' episode in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, is asked why he went 'naked and barefoot for three years' (39, plate 13). 'The same that made our friend Diogenes the Grecian' was Isaiah's answer, in reference to the Stoic mendicant famous for his provocations of Plato and Aristotle (39, plate 13). Nakedness suggests a seer, a prophet who is outside the social and religious customs heralding the coming Vision. Although it is not known if Wilkins himself was naked, his incorrect Costume suggests, through his translation of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, his disrobing of the 'filthy garments' of reason and being garmented in nothing but the 'Imagination', thereby undertaking the same ritualistic pledge as Milton.

Wilkins figures as an important peripheral character in this section's argument if not so much for his costume than for his association with the historical and scholarly validity his work provides Blake's mythological recreation of the 'Mundane Egg'. Unlike other contemporary works on mythology, Wilkins founded his scholarship on first-hand research and translation. Working in *Benares*, a city famous as a seat of Sanskrit learning, Wilkins had access to many of Hinduism's sacred texts. His access to these texts was one reason why Jones quickly struck up a working relationship with Wilkins, who would become Jones' Sanskrit mentor. For instance, Wilkins was an important source for much of the information on Hindu mythology and the Hindu deities that Jones included in his 'Hymns' to Hindu deities. 'All my hopes', Jones writes venerably in 1784, 'of being acquainted with the poetry, philosophy, and arts of the Hindūs, are grounded on the expectation of living to see the fruits of your learned labours'

(*Letters*, II, 646). Here, Jones displays the extent to which he relied on Wilkins' advice and learning for his own representations of Hinduism, often asking Wilkins for clarification on a Sanskrit spelling, or for an elucidation of a Hindu mythological episode.

In a letter to Wilkins in 1785, Jones asks for information regarding 'the two Purāns of the *Egg* and the *Lotos*' for his 'Hymn to Náráyena' (*Letters*, II, 669). As noted in the last chapter, the *Purānas* are a series of verse stories relating the Hindu creation myths and mapping out the genealogy, cosmology, and philosophy of Hinduism. The two *Purānas* Jones asks Wilkins about are the *Skanda-purāna* and the *Brahmānda-purāna*, the latter which means the 'Egg of Brahma' and narrates the myth of Brahma's birth from the 'golden Egg' ('On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India', *SWJ*, 352). In 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India' (1784), Jones translates an account from the myth, writing that, '[Brahmá]...dwelled in the Egg, through revolving years, Himself meditating on Himself' (*SWJ*, 352). Jones notes how the world rises as an 'Egg refin'd', with Brahma inside questioning his own being. Brahma emerges from the shell the colour of the sky, and his existence becomes the existence of 'all worlds'. Mythologically, the 'Mundane Egg' symbolises the mind as well as the world, encapsulating a self-contemplative space which precedes a self-awakening into divinity. The awakening from the egg is the realisation of one's own divine power to create imaginatively.

With help presumably from Wilkins, Jones presents the *Brahmānda* myth of 'Mundane Egg' in 'Náráyena', taking full advantage of the myth's divinely creative potential:

First an all-potent all-pervading sound  
    Bade flow the waters – and the water's flow'd,  
...Then o'er the vast expanse primordial wind  
    Breath'd gently till a lucid bubble rose,  
    Which grew in perfect shape an Egg refin'd:  
...Above the warring waves it danc'd elate,  
    Till from its bursting shell with lovely state

A form cerulean flutter'd o'er the deep  
 Brightest of beings, greatest of the great:  
 Who, not as mortals steep,  
 Their eyes in dewy sleep,  
 But heav'nly-pensive on the Lotos lay,  
 That blossom'd at his touch and shed a golden ray.

...

Full-gifted BREHMA! Rapt in solemn thought  
 ...whilst his viewless origins he sought,  
 ...With restless pain for ages he inquir'd  
 What were his pow'rs, by whom, and why conferr'd:  
 With doubts perplex'd, with keen impatience fir'd  
 He rose, and rising heard  
 Th'unknown all-knowing Word,  
 'BREHMA! No more in vain research persist:  
 My veil thou canst not move – Go; bid all worlds exist.  
 (SWJ, 109-110, ll. 36-37, 42-44, 47-54, 61, 63, 66-72)

In this poem, Jones represents the 'Egg' as the medium of 'Brahma's', or *Brahma's*, self-realised divinity. 'Inquiring' after his own 'viewless origin' and questioning his own reason for being, *Brahma* reaches the limits of inquisition and rises when he hears the 'all-knowing Word' – *AUM* or *Om!* – which, when sounded, becomes the Word that initiates the creation of existence. *Brahma's* 'persistent research' of the creative 'origin' is 'vain' because it is his own 'veil' he cannot lift; it is himself for whom he is looking. Once this realisation occurs, divine creativity is possible – for *Brahma* as much as Jones. For Jones realises this divine power of creativity at the end of the poem, when he writes, 'But suns and fading words I view no more: / GOD only I perceive; GOD only I adore' (SWJ, 112, ll. 125-126). Through the 'fading words' of the hymn itself, Jones comes to realise that which is beyond the poem: his own creative Imagination, the very one which just created the hymn.

In *Milton*, Blake uses similar mythological imagery as Jones' *Brahmānda* tale in 'Náráyena' in order to herald his Imaginative apocalypse. However, to understand the way Blake does this first requires some contextualisation of events in *Milton* itself. Before Milton re-emerges into the 'Egg form'd World of Los', 'The Bard', who is Blake's mythologized self in the poem, sings for Milton's return for redemption, proclaiming, 'I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing /

According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius / Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity' (108, 13[14].51-14.[15].1-2). Prophesying Milton's return to Earth, Blake as 'The Bard' endows himself and his 'song' with the revelatory power of the 'Poetic Genius' and 'Divine Humanity' – in short, with the vital components of the apocalyptic Imagination. Shortly after 'The Bard's' proclamation, 'Milton rose up from the heavens of Albion' (108, 14[15].10). Upon his return, Milton declares that he will go to 'Eternal Death' (denoting a sacrificial, messianic death for humanity) because 'The Nations still / Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam'. Here, Milton refers to the Trojan king Priam, and thus the Classical aesthetic he has returned to Earth to condemn and destroy. Milton's 'Eternal Death' is for the Imagination that Blake locates in the 'East' and the 'Apotheosis' of Hindu antiquity, and serves as the original, inspirational 'contrary' to the mimetic aesthetic of Classicism.<sup>55</sup> That is, Milton offers to sacrifice himself for the aesthetic and Imaginative redemption of all humanity in order to revive the antiquity that found all religions as one.

It is in preparation for such an event that we find India and Hinduism as important mythographic elements contributing to its successful realisation. In between 'The Bard's' Imaginative proclamation and Milton's messianic proclamation, the 'Earth' convulses:

Then there was great murmuring in the Heavens of Albion  
 ...  
 Albion trembled to Italy Greece & Egypt  
 To Tartary & Hindostan...  
 Shaking the roots & fast foundations of the Earth in doubtfulness.  
 The loud voic'd Bard terrify'd took refuge in Miltons bosom  
 (108, 14[15].4, 6-9)

On the surface, the tremors suggest the fearful anticipation and 'doubtful' uncertainty of the Bard's prophecy and Milton's return. Blake usually employs 'doubt' in reference to 'Reason' as the enemy of the Imagination; in *Jerusalem*,

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<sup>55</sup> In *Milton*, Blake writes than an 'Eternal Death' is one in which 'one must die for another throughout all Eternity' (105, 11[12].18).

he talks about the 'Rational Power' of 'Bacon & Newton & Locke who teach Humility to Man! / Who teach Doubt & Experiment' (203, 54.16-18). 'Doubt' is a consequence of reason and seeks to tear down the potency of the Imagination by making it 'rational' instead of visionary. The purpose of Milton's return is to eradicate such 'doubt' and replace it with the prophetic Imagination. In this respect, the shaking of the Earth in 'doubtfulness' seems to suggest the initial unhinging of the 'Earth' *from* the rational 'doubt' to which Blake feels the world is too closely connected as much as it suggests the world's trembling *because* of it. The Bard's 'terrify'd' reaction to the trembling certainly displays dismay and fear, but his refuge in 'Miltons bosom' is also emblematic of the very disconnection from 'doubt' Milton's return is meant to instigate. As Blake says in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 'men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast'; the Bard's retreat into Milton's 'breast' symbolises the return of such a realisation by placing the Bard, the 'Poetic Genius', back into the 'bosom' of humanity – which, as its saviour, Milton singularly embodies. This trembling occurs in expectation of a reunion with the divine Imagination in all humanity – as we'll see in a parallel episode later in the poem.

It is significant, then, that in this episode Blake refers to Britain by its mythological name – 'Albion' – shaking, seemingly fearfully and deferentially, towards the direction of 'Hindostan' and the 'East'. Albion is an abstracted embodiment of Britain's mythological and spiritual heritage; Albion is 'our Ancestor...whose History Preceded that of the Hebrews & in whose Sleep, or Chaos, Creation began' (*Descriptions of the Last Judgment*, 558). In *Milton*, one of Milton's mythological goals is to arouse Albion from his chaotic sleep:

Awake thou sleeper on the Rock of Eternity Albion awake  
...all Nations are awake  
But though are still heavy and dull: Awake Albion awake!  
...the Covering Cherub advances from the East.  
(118, 23[25].3-5, 10).

Awaking Albion from his sleep will initiate the Imaginative apocalypse, symbolised here by the 'Covering Cherub' who represents 'Selfhood', the very thing Milton swears he will annihilate upon his 'Eternal Death' – an idea I will explore further below.<sup>56</sup> For the moment, however, note how, like in 'To the Muses', 'Mad Song', and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, this Imaginative inspiration comes from the 'East'. Both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* (which similarly narrates the story of Albion's sleeping and awakening without the Miltonic plotline) end with Albion's union with Jesus, as the Imagination, and the achievement of 'Eternity', which as Foster writes, is the 'mystical union of all things'.<sup>57</sup> Albion's awakening, then, represents the very revival and reunification of the ancient Poet's religion as illustrated in plate 11 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; when Albion awakes, all religions once again become one. Thus, Albion's trembling towards Hindostan, if we read such tremors as 'shaking' the Earth loose from the roots of rationality, represents Albion's anxious longing to reunite mythologically with the ancient mythologies of 'Italy Greece & Egypt...&Hindostan' that have been divided from the universal whole by institutionalised dogma.

This union is possible, and can occur, because of Milton's re-entry to the 'Mundane Egg', which bears mythological similarities to *Brahma's* time within the Egg. As Jones writes, *Brahma's* incubation in the Egg was a time of self-meditation. For Milton, once again human, his quest turns to his own 'Self-examination' (142, 40[46].37). The purpose of Milton's return to Earth is his quest for 'self annihilation and eternal death' in order to combat his 'Satanic Selfhood', or rather, his rationalised self which disconnects his spiritual self from the divine origin (108, 14[15].22). 'Self annihilation' is a symbolic gesture, Hatsumo Nimii writes, of 'the unification of various contraries within the self, which is in

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<sup>56</sup> *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 94.

<sup>57</sup> *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 13.

consequence liberated from those contraries'.<sup>58</sup> Liberation from 'contraries' is actually liberation from 'Negation', the divisive self-centredness which comes from rationality:

The Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries  
The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man  
This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal  
Spirit: a Selfhood. which must be put off & annihilated always  
To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.

To bathe in the Waters of Life...  
(142, 40[46].32-36 – 41[47].1)

Following this speech is when Milton removes the 'filthy garments' from Albion and 'clothes' himself in the Imagination, as discussed earlier. In this sense, Milton's journey into the 'Mundane egg' mirrors *Brahma's* self-conscious reflection in Hindu mythology, in that, when *Brahma* was in the 'Mundane Egg', he thought about his self and from whence he came; in doing so, *Brahma* fertilised the Egg with the potency and prolificacy of Imaginative creation, for when he emerged, he was able to 'bid worlds exist', according to Jones. Milton's 'Self-examination' and his announcement of 'Self-annihilation' likewise fertilises Blake's 'Mundane Egg' with the seed of prophetic self-awareness and the embryo of divine self-existence by becoming the ultimate catalyst for the Imaginative apocalypse, which brings about the new creative potential of 'Infinite' perception. Milton's reintroduction to the 'Mundane Egg' is an opportunity to reflect on himself and his divine potential; once he comes to realise such potential within himself, he too is free to break from the Egg and 'bid worlds exist'. Such a reading is augmented by the fact that Milton seeks to 'bathe in the Waters of Life', which is exactly what *Brahma* does as *Náráyena*, whose name means 'moving on water' – *nárá* being, according to Jones, the 'waters' of first creation upon which life moves into being ('On the Gods', *SWJ*, 352).

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<sup>58</sup> 'Self-Annihilation in Milton', *The Reception of Blake in the Orient*, p.172-180, 178.



Blake compliments his seeming use of the philosophical aspects of the Mundane Egg myth with narrative similarities as well. When Milton enters the 'Mundane Egg' to become 'human', he is allowed to retain an eternal spiritual body – what Blake calls Milton's 'Shadow'. Milton's 'Shadow' enters a dream-like state and his eternal consciousness goes to sleep:

...for when [Milton] entered into his Shadow: Himself:  
His real and immortal Self: was as appeared to those  
Who dwell in immortality, as One sleeping on a couch  
Of gold. (109, 15[17].10-13)

If Milton is the imaginative seed fertilizing the 'Mundane Egg' with divine self-awareness, then Milton's Shadow is the Spiritual body which incubates it, waiting for it to hatch and reunite the 'Mundane' and the 'Spiritual' into one being.

The 'couch of gold' upon which Milton's 'Shadow' sleeps bears resemblance to the 'golden Egg' of Hindu mythology prior to the birth of *Brahma* – and not just because of its colour. The 'couch of gold' represents a reposing period of time; 'every Moment', Blake writes,

has a Couch of gold for soft repose,  
(A Moment equals a pulsation of the artery)  
...  
Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery  
Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.

For in this Period the Poets work is Done: and all the Great  
Events of Time start forth & are conceived in such a Period  
Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery.  
(128, 28[30].46-47, 62-63; 29[31].1-3)

The 'Pulsation of the Artery' measures Time to the smallest degree of its imaginative potential. In fact, it is in itself a microcosm of all things:

And every Space smaller than a Globule of Mans blood. opens  
Into Eternity...  
The red Globule is the unwearied Sun by Los created  
To measure Time and Space to mortal Men. every morning.  
(*Milton*, 127, 29[31].21-24)

This 'Moment' of Time represents not only the creative potential of 'Six Thousand Years' – the 'Period of the Poet' – but it also has its own sense of eternal and temporal 'Time and Space'. It is not only a universe within a universe, but Time

within Time; Eternity within Eternity. Thus, Time and Space are 'open' and 'Eternal,' but also periodic, cyclical, and revolutionary in their repose upon the 'Couch of gold'. Every 'Moment', every universe, has its own 'Couch of gold' upon which that moment or universe is simultaneously self-contained yet eternally open. Time measures a certain 'Moment' – be it the pulsation of an artery or six thousands years – but that moment bears the potential to open insight into 'Eternity' and the Imagination.

In this sense, the 'Couch of gold' resembles the golden Egg because the Egg too is a self-contained universe, which periodically, though eternally, comes into being and disappears into oblivion with each passing cycle of 'day' and 'night'. According to Wilkins, a day *and* a night to *Brahma* equates to 4,320,000,000 earthly years, 'a thousand revolutions of the Yoogs', or *Yuga*, which means 'era' or 'epoch' (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 67). Thus, a *full day* to *Brahma* is 8, 640,000,000 human years – and contains two creations and destructions of the Universe. As Jones writes, day and night are '*alternate* creations and destructions *of worlds*...the Being Supremely Desirable performs all this again and again' (*Works*, IV, 3). Creation and destruction are cyclical events in the eternity of existence. As Wilkins explains in his translation from *The Bhagvat-Geeta*:

On the coming of...day, all things proceed from invisibility to visibility; so, on the approach of night, they are all dissolved away in that which is called invisible. The universe, even, having existed, is again dissolved; and now again, on the approach of day, by divine necessity, it is reproduced. (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 67)

Raine conjectures that Blake was aware of the Hindu concept of time, and whereas Jones deems it 'wild', for Blake, it 'would have seemed the mere truth' ('On the Chronology of the Hindoos', *Works*, IV, 6).<sup>59</sup> Blake seems to grasp this 'truth' about the cyclical, yet eternal nature of Time and readily apply it, as Los' creation of the Sun 'every morning', 'To measure Time and Space to mortal Men',

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<sup>59</sup> *Blake and Tradition*, Vol. I, p. 144.

exemplifies. The 'Couch of gold', then, as a place of repose for Time, harbours Eternity as it acts as a device for transition, even though the couch itself serves as neither the instrument nor the catalyst for such change – much in the manner the Mundane Egg itself lacks the very life it contains and ultimately creates.

These two episodes – the trembling towards Hindostan and Milton's shadow on the 'Couch of gold' – merge in the second half of *Milton* to herald the Imaginative apocalypse. When Ololon, Milton's female counterpart, journeys to Beulah, the 'ether' area dividing the 'Mundane Egg' from Eternity where 'Contrarities are true', she replicates Milton's journey to Earth. This parallel journey, Harold Blooms argues, 'is associated with the apocalyptic coming of the Lord, for Ololon is the totality of Milton's achievement [in the 'Mundane Egg]' ('Commentary', 923). Ololon's descent is met with a second 'trembling of the Nations', just as Milton's was, to demonstrate their readiness for the coming resurrection:

Into this pleasant Shadow Beulah, all Ololon descended...  
All Beulah wept, for they saw the Lord coming in the Clouds...  
And all Nations wept in affliction Family by Family  
Germany wept towards France & Italy: England wept & trembled  
Towards America: India rose from his golden bed:  
As one awakened in the night: they saw the Lord coming  
In the Clouds of Ololon with Power & Great Glory!  
(130, 31[34].8, 10, 12-16)

Here, the nations are connected not by the 'roots' of ancient mythology or 'fast foundations' of earth, but by 'Family'. The closer the resurrection, the less contrary the Nations become. This culminates with 'India rising from his golden bed'. India arises as 'One awakened in the night', seemingly preceding, and predicting, the eventual awakening of Milton's Shadow laid on 'the golden couch'. Here, Blake seems to invoke the Hindu myth of *Brahma's* birth from the golden Mundane Egg to symbolise Milton's 'self-annihilation' and the ushering in of the 'New Age'. The annihilation of contraries is almost complete with the weeping of all the other nations towards India. As Blake positions 'Brama in the east' in *The*

*Song of Los* to be the first religion to pollute the perception of original inspiration, here Blake appoints India as the first nation to rise and initiate the 'cleansing of perception'. India rises as the place from which and the direction from which the Imaginative apocalypse will come. Just as the other nations followed India's example with the institutionalisation of religion, it is from India in the 'New Age' that they will also take the cue for their own imaginative redemption to 'go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations' – which, according to Foster, represents 'the great revolution in world thought' (144, 43[50].1). For Blake, India represents the mythological and cultural antiquity necessary for implementing the imaginative redemption for future generations.

In *Milton*, India, in connection with the Hindu Mundane Egg myth, serves as the mythological catalyst for the Imaginative apocalypse – tying together the inspirational 'East' in 'To the Muses' and 'Mad Song', Rintrah's gift of 'Abstract Philosophy to Brama' in *The Song of Los*, and Wilkins' spiritual translation of the 'Authority of the Ancients' in *The Bramins*. By redefining the mythological parameters of the 'Mundane Egg' myth, Blake is able to incorporate Hinduism into his own mythology to, in rather Jonesian fashion, illustrate and prove the ultimate realisation: that, whether

In [Hindu], turk or jew.  
Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell,  
There God is dwelling too.  
(13, ll. 18-20).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> My edit.

## Chapter IV

### ‘Monstrous Fables’ and ‘Sublime Institutes’: Representations of Hinduism(s) in Robert Southey’s *The Curse of Kehama*

#### I: Introduction: Hindu Machinery, Monstrosity and Morality

When Robert Southey introduces his poem on Hindu mythology, *The Curse of Kehama*, in 1810, he does so with little reverence: ‘the religion of the Hindoos...of all false religions is the most monstrous in its fables, and the most fatal in its effects’.<sup>1</sup> Southey speaks plainly, unequivocally characterising Hinduism as a ‘false’ and ‘monstrous’ religion. Part of his characterisation of Hinduism has to do with the physical ‘monstrosity’ of Hindu deities. ‘No figures can be imagined more anti-picturesque, and less poetical, than the mythological personages of the Bramins’, Southey writes, noting ‘deformit[ies]’ such as ‘their hundred hands’, ‘their numerous heads’, and ‘the gross image of divinity, “whose countenance...is turned on every side”’ (*Curse*, 3). This kind of ‘anti-picturesque’, physical deformity renders Hindu deities antithetical to poetic treatment.

At the same time, however, Southey also attempts to justify the ways in which he makes such a ‘monstrous’ and ‘false’ religion ‘fit machinery for an English poem’ (*Curse*, 3). In multiple letters as well as his two ‘Prefaces’ – the original 1810 ‘Preface’ and the expanded 1838 new ‘Preface’ for his collected *Poetical Works* (1838) – Southey makes clear that, for him, the success of *Kehama* will be judged on his poetry’s ability to ‘excite astonishment, terror, and sometimes delight’ – not the ‘materials of the narrative’ (that is, the Hindu deities) to do so.<sup>2</sup> In Southey’s mind, the ‘materials of the narrative’ challenge him, who ‘learnt the language of poetry from our own great masters and the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Preface’, *Robert Southey Poetical Works 1792-1810: Volume 4 The Curse of Kehama*, Ed. Daniel Sanjiv Roberts (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004), p. 3. Abbreviated hereafter *Curse*.

<sup>2</sup> ‘To Charles Wynn, Oct. 1808’, *New Letters of Robert Southey, Vol. I* (London: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 486. 2 vols. Abbreviated hereafter *NL*.

great poets of antiquity', to put his poetic erudition to the test in order to make the un-poetic poetic ('Preface' [1838], *Curse*, 4).

Southey's 'Preface' seemingly prepares the reader for a poetic journey through the multi-limbed and monstrous cosmology of Hinduism. However, as we will see, Southey's representation of Hindu mythology in *Kehama* does not always correspond with his rhetoric on Hindu mythology. In fact, in some cases, the two are diametrically opposed, as Southey offers his reader a Hinduism that is, in his own words, 'sublime' ('Notes', *Curse*, 242). Even contemporary reviews of *Kehama* noted this conflicted representation and charged Southey with, in his own words, 'writing a poem of 5000 lines for the purpose of teaching Hindoo mythology' (*NL*, II, 1).<sup>3</sup> Writing for the *Eclectic Review* in 1811, John Foster, an evangelical Baptist, charges Southey with something considerably worse than 'teaching' Hinduism; *Kehama*, he says, makes:

Void of the true religion, and the substitution of another and vile theology in its place; it is no less than the substitution of a positive and notorious system of paganism. It vacates the eternal throne...absolutely to elevate Seeva, the adored abomination of the Hindoos.<sup>4</sup>

Foster's reading of the poem exposes Southey's stated intentions; whereas Southey posits Hinduism as a 'false' religion, Foster sees the poem as falsifying, and replacing, the 'true' religion of Christianity. Foster may have been offering Southey his comeuppance since Southey, often less than congenial towards Calvinism or its Baptist progeny, once described the Baptist missionaries in the South Seas as 'Vital Xtians, a set of vermin who increase rapidly, proceed systemically, and may perhaps one day set up a Calvinistic persecution' (*NL*, I, 327).<sup>5</sup> Southey also once asked Joseph Cottle to send him Foster's *Essays in a Series of Letters to a Friend* (1805) in order for Foster's *Essays* to be 'killed off' in a review (*NL*, I, 395). Regardless of any personal

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<sup>3</sup> 'To Grosvenor Charles Bedford, Jan'y 1, 1811'.

<sup>4</sup> *The Eclectic Review*, Vol. VII, (London, 1811), p. 347.

<sup>5</sup> 'To John Rickman, Sept. 1803'.

animosity, however, Foster's accusation that Southey promotes Hinduism as a 'substitution' for Christianity in *Kehama* has never been easily explained away nor has it been deemed entirely untruthful. In fact, in another (unsigned) review in *The Monthly Mirror*, the author wryly writes that Southey will never receive the fame he and his poem are due until '*The Curse of Kehama* [can] be translated into *Hindostanee*'.<sup>6</sup> The idea proposed in both Southey's 'Preface' and in some recent scholarship that Southey treats Hinduism stereotypically or 'monstrously' is often refuted by his own portrayals of Hinduism *within* the poem and by contemporary reactions such as those found in the *Eclectic Review* and *Monthly Mirror*.

This chapter is interested in exploring the contradictions between Southey's rhetoric and his representation of Hinduism as a means of understanding his portrayal not only of Hinduism but also of religion in general. Written over nine years from 1801 to 1810, the poem spans a critical time for Southey's increasing political and religious conservatism. In the mid-1790s, Southey was a fervent radical republican, Pantisocratist and Unitarian; by the early 1800s, however, Southey had largely given up on republicanism and Pantisocracy, and moved towards what Daniel E. White describes as a latent Quakerism.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the writing of *Kehama* took place in the time period in which Southey was writing articles on the Baptist Missionary Society for the *Quarterly* and *Annual Reviews* (1802-1809); despite his ridicule of Calvinists as 'Vital' and 'vermin' in 1802, Southey supported their efforts to convert Hindus to Christianity in general. For example, Southey writes in 1809, just a year before *Kehama*'s publication, that 'The path of duty and of policy is always the same. India would be trained up in civilization and Christianity, like a child by its

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<sup>6</sup> 'From an unsigned Review, *Monthly Mirror*, February 1811', *Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Lionel Madden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 132-134, 134.

<sup>7</sup> See "'A Saracenic mosque, not a Quaker meeting-house": Southey's *Thalaba*, Islam, and religious nonconformity' in *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2006).

guardian'.<sup>8</sup> Southey clearly associates Christian conversion with colonial governance, and sees the two as key strategies to rearing India into 'civilization'.

Recent scholarship has focused on the religious, political and colonial issues underpinning *Kehama*. In *Writing the Empire: Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism*, Carol Bolton examines the political differences between *Kehama* and Southey's two previous mythological poems, *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and *Madoc* (1805). She is primarily interested in exploring how Southey's increasing political conservatism and his eventual support for the Established Church shapes Southey's political and colonial representations in *Kehama*. In *Thalaba and Madoc*, Bolton argues, Southey uses acts of colonialism to criticise British domestic policy, thereby relocating the Pantisocratic and republican sympathies of his youth to the 'safer, more remote, geopolitical arena' of Arabia and North America (respectively).<sup>9</sup> By displacing these political issues abroad, Southey can simultaneously criticise the British government while imaginatively implementing his Pantisocratic and republican ideals elsewhere. In a similar fashion, Bolton maintains, 'Southey chose India and the Hindu religion to delineate the correct principles of government'; however:

to do so he employed a prescriptive, negative example of oriental tyranny...In this instance his impetus was employed not to attack his own society, but a foreign tyranny, with the British government portrayed, in contrast, as a responsible, benevolent polity, particularly in its own engagement with imperial policy.<sup>10</sup>

In *Kehama*, Bolton sees Southey repositioning his new-found conservative ideals in favour of Britain's imperial mission, offering the British government as a colonial 'polity' with which 'negative' forms of Oriental despotism can be

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<sup>8</sup> 'Periodical Account relative to the Baptist Missionary Society'. *The Quarterly Review*, Vol. 1. (London, 1809), p. 193-226, 211.

<sup>9</sup> *Writing the Empire: Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> *Writing the Empire*, p. 210.



removed and replaced. In this sense, *Kehama* becomes not just an account of political fantasy – as Bolton argues is the case with the Pantisocratic *Madoc* – but rather an account of real-time political and colonial history unfolding under imaginative circumstances.

Central to *Kehama*'s fictional 'polity' is Southey's support for the Christian missionaries in India. White's recent work on Southey, Hindu idols and the Baptist Missionaries has shown how Southey employs missionary strategies for de-sanctifying Hindu idols through a process he dubs 'intense objectivism' – that is, the turning of 'materiality into textuality, objects into signs' so as to introduce Evangelical culture and replace Hindu 'ritual' with Christian 'faith'.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, White argues that *Kehama* is a conversion poem, showing how Southey's appropriation of Hindu imagery in the poem correlates with Missionary strategies for de-sanctifying Hindu idols in order to coerce conversion.<sup>12</sup> 'How to christianize the natives', White writes, 'became the question that motivated Southey first in the reviews and then in *The Curse of Kehama*'.<sup>13</sup> For White, *how* Southey accommodated a tone of conversion in *Kehama* was 'two fold': 'he seeks not just to depict Brahmanical religion as the essence of priestcraft and superstition but also to show that 'popular' forms of Hinduism contain implicitly Christian virtues and beliefs, and that the majority of Hindus are therefore suited to evangelicalism'. White's reference to 'popular forms of Hinduism' suggests that there were 'two' types of Hinduism known at the time: the stereotypical Brahmanism riddled by priestly corruption, barbaric sacrifices and incomprehensible ritual (such as *sati*, or widow-burning), and the superstitious deification of idols; and *Vedantism*, made popular by Jones, which was a type of immaterial monotheism – or more accurately, monism – which

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<sup>11</sup> 'Idolatry, Evangelicalism, and the Intense Objectivism of Robert Southey'. *Romanticism* (forthcoming), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> See 'Idolatry, Evangelicalism, and the Intense Objectivism of Robert Southey'.

<sup>13</sup> 'Idolatry, Evangelicalism, and the Intense Objectivism of Robert Southey', p. 5.

saw all things as issuing from, and returning to, the divine source. White contends that Southey attempts to exploit the former in order to make the case that the latter offers a theological point of comparison by which Christian conversion could be introduced. As Southey writes in the *Quarterly Review* (1809):

if, from their gross notions of incarnations, and obscure fancies of a Trinity, their minds can be...led into the higher...doctrines of the Gospel, no teacher should decline it...they have the *Trimourtee* and the *Avatar* ready, and the people are prepared to receive the Bible as the Shaster of the new cast.<sup>14</sup>

With similar theological elements in place – the ‘*Trimourtee*’, or divine trinity, and the ‘*Avatar*’, or bodily incarnation of God – Southey seems to believe that Christianity can easily be translated into cultural terms familiar to the Hindus and thus perpetuate the conversion process. According to both Bolton and White, then, Southey uses Hinduism in *Kehama* as a thinly-veiled allegory for Christianity and evangelical conversion. The corrupt theocracy of Kehamian Brahmanism is thwarted by the heroic ‘faith’ and independence of the morally-rich protagonists Kailyal and Ladurlad, whose virtues are suspiciously ‘Christian’.

However, though Bolton and White’s work on Southey is important and contributes greatly to my own arguments, neither comments sufficiently on the contradictions of Southey’s representation of Hinduism. For example, in his explanation of the Hindu ‘Trimourtee’ in *Kehama*, Southey notes that ‘The allegory is obvious, but has been made for the Trimourtee, not the Trimourtee for the allegory’ (*Curse*, 7). Southey clearly states that the allegorical comparison between the Hindu ‘Trimourtee’ and the Christian Trinity is a manufactured one; in other words, the theological weight of the Christian Trinity is one placed onto Hinduism, rather than being an inherent component of Hindu

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Account of the Baptist Missionary Society’, *Quarterly Review* 1 (February 1809), p. 193-226, 215.

theology. As Southey further clarifies, the Hindu Deities 'are regarded by the people as three distinct and personal Gods', not three in and of the same as in Christianity (*Curse*, 7). Comparisons with Christianity, Southey suggests, only offer a false religious analogy. Southey seems to suggest that to the possible Hindu convertee, the validity of this analogy does not matter; for his readers, however, such a comparison would be an inappropriate one. This statement implies Southey's hesitancy to make allegorical comparisons between the two religions for the purposes of his poem. What, then, could be alternative reasons for Southey's preoccupation with Hinduism?

As Mark Storey writes, 'This is what is so strange about [*Kehama*], that Southey achieves something that his other long poems had been working towards, a complete fascination with and for a totally alien culture that he professes to despise'.<sup>15</sup> Due to the ambiguity within his own rhetoric, Southey's 'fascination' with Hinduism is not immediately discernible. The poet recalls how he devised a plan, after reading Bernard Picart's *Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World* (3 volumes, 1733-1739) as a student in 1792, to exhibit 'all the more prominent and poetical forms of mythology...by making each the groundwork of an heroic poem'.<sup>16</sup> This statement is interesting in the sense that it, again, contradicts his assertion in the 'Preface' to *Kehama* that Hindu deities were 'less poetical' than any other figure; here, Southey states that it would be the 'poetical' aspects of all the world's mythologies that would serve as a 'heroic', or epic, poem. The young poet's ambitious project produced the Islamic *Thalaba*, the Welsh/Mexican hybrid *Madoc* and the Hindu *Kehama*, but fell far short of his original intention to write on 'the Persian, the Runic, the Keltic, the Greek, the Jewish, the Roman

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<sup>15</sup> *Robert Southey: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 206.

<sup>16</sup> *Vindiciae Ecclesiae Anglicanae: Letters to Charles Butler Comprising Essays on the Romish Religion and Vindicating the Book of the Church* (London, 1826), p. 7. Abbreviated hereafter *Vindiciae*.

Catholick and the Japanese' (*NL*, I, 476).<sup>17</sup> This inventory of potential religious sources for artistic inspiration contributes to Southey's reputation for having created a 'laboratory of cultures', but at the same time shows the extent to which Southey wanted to invest poetically in foreign religions that affected Britain politically.

Southey's political interest in foreign religions, then, has important implications for his description of Hinduism's 'monstrous' mythology. Chris Baldick writes in *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* about the aesthetic and political notions of 'monstrosity'. 'Transgression of Horace's rule in fanciful and disturbing compounds of images constitutes the category of the "grotesque"', Baldick writes, 'which unlike the "picturesque" is an artificially contrived violation of Nature'.<sup>18</sup> Baldick defines 'Horace's rule' as the 'injunction against ridiculous and unnatural combinations' which became, 'in the Age of Reason, a sacred text within the neo-classical Rules for the decorous imitation of Nature'.<sup>19</sup> Southey's description of the 'divine countenance' of Hindu deities as 'gross' certainly implies their transgression of the 'natural' rules of the picturesque into the 'ridiculous', 'unnatural', and 'deformed' combinations that delineate the grotesque. As Baldick shows, aesthetic deformities are often used to describe the political body. He writes:

The representation of fearful transgressions in the figure of physical deformity arises as a variant of that venerable cliché of political discourse, the 'body politic'. When political discord and rebellion appear, this 'body' is said to be not just diseased, but misshapen, abortive, monstrous.<sup>20</sup>

Baldick examines how the notion of 'monstrosity' as a deformed 'body politic' becomes a major trope of the 'Pamphlet Wars' of the 1790s. He notes Burke's description of the French Revolution as being 'out of nature' and producing 'a

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<sup>17</sup> 'To Anna Seward, May 1808'.

<sup>18</sup> *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, p. 14.

monster of a constitution'.<sup>21</sup> Burke views the Revolution as a 'monstrous' threat to the time-honoured traditions that had once made Europe – and still makes his Britain – great. In response, Thomas Paine shows the 'monster' to be the political and aristocratic class already in place; as Baldick writes, 'Burke announces the birth of the monster child Democracy, while Paine records the death of the monster parent Aristocracy'.<sup>22</sup> In short, the tropes of physical monstrosity and deformity representing a corrupted political body were in the political and literary lexicon at the time of Southey's burgeoning poetic interest in world religions and mythologies.

In fact, the theme of religious and political monstrosity appears in Southey's first 'heroic poem', *Thalaba, the Destroyer*. The poem follows the devout monotheistic Thalaba (who is Muslim) as he destroys the system of superstitious idolatry symbolised by the *Dom Daniel*, a mythological cave under the ocean full of evil spirits and magicians (a myth first made popular in *The Arabian Nights*). In Book IX, Thalaba is held captive in the dungeon of the evil Sultan Mohareb. Mohareb visits Thalaba after his morning prayers – 'the perfect rite performed' – and tempts him with 'the pleasures of the world.../ Riches and rule, the kingdoms of the Earth', and the offer of being like him, 'the Sultan.../ The Lord of Life and Death'.<sup>23</sup> 'Abandon him who has abandoned thee', Mohareb says, referring to his devotion to Allah, 'And be as I am, great among mankind!' (*Thalaba*, 132, IX.119; 134, IX.197-198). Thalaba defiantly rejects Mohareb's 'faith' and his 'monstrous creed! / This lie against the Sun and Moon and Stars / And Earth and Heaven' (*Thalaba*, 134, IX.203-204). Mohareb's 'monstrous creed' is not only one of material riches and political power, but also one that honours 'in Nature...two hostile Gods, / Makers and Masters of existing

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<sup>21</sup> *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Robert Southey Poetical Works 1792-1810: Volume 3 Thalaba the Destroyer*. Ed. Tim Fulford, with Daniel E. White and Carol Bolton (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2004), p. 134, IX.190-191, 195-196. Abbreviated hereafter *Thalaba*.

things, / Equal in power' (*Thalaba*, 133, IX.150-152). Mohareb's 'faith' is a composite of two opposing forces of 'Evil and Good', a Manichean, seemingly Zoroastrian, dualism that seeks to deny his 'own Crimes, and Truth, and God in Heaven!' (*Thalaba*, 133, IX.169; 135, IX.222). The composition of Mohareb's creed – 'Evil *and* Good', 'Life *and* Death', 'Earth *and* Heaven' – constitute in Thalaba's mind a fundamental unnaturalness which is 'monstrous' to his 'true' monotheistic worldview of moral improvement:

That in the Manhood of the World, whate'er  
Of folly marked its Infancy, of vice  
Sullied its Youth, ripe Wisdom shall cast off  
Stablished in good, and knowing evil safe.  
(*Thalaba*, 134, IX.207-209)

For Thalaba, religion involves a progressive, linear movement, developing from the 'folly' of youth – in this sense paganistic, superstitious faiths like Mohareb's 'monstrous creed' – towards a more rational, and moral, system embodied by Thalaba's Islamic devoutness. Since Mohareb is Sultan, Thalaba's rejection of his religion is also a rejection of its 'monstrous' infection of the political body; likewise his destruction of it is the corporeal replacement of its dualistic composite monstrosity with a progressive, rational monotheism.

This linear progression from superstitious religion to rational faith reflects Southey's own religious evolution in the late 1790s and early 1800s, while also providing a model, I argue, for Southey's interest in Hinduism. After all, such religious evolution contributed to Southey's interest in Islam. Before *Thalaba*, in 1799, Southey had begun collaborative work with Coleridge on an unfinished poem entitled *Mahomet* – a poem which was to show the prophet as an 'idol-breaker' and 'liberator' from dogmatic thinking.<sup>24</sup> Two years later with *Thalaba*, White demonstrates how Southey found in Islam, 'a dissident religion, theologically homologous to his own antitrinitarian nonconformity, that

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<sup>24</sup> Nigel Leask, 'Kubla Khan and Orientalism: The Road to Xanadu Revisited', *The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism*, 1998; 4 (1): p. 1-21, 4.

challenged Christian orthodoxy and established power'.<sup>25</sup> Islam offered Southey a religio-mythological platform for his own dissenting, anti-establishment views, as they were at the time. In a letter to Coleridge in 1800, Southey writes that Islam is not 'hostile to improvement' and that religious hostilities only come through 'an establishment' (*NL*, I, 216). Here, Southey implies that Islam has a sense of independence from its 'establishment' which allows for 'improvement' – that is, a progression away from rigid dogma.

Early on in his radicalisation, Southey had formed fervent anti-establishment views; in 1794, he writes, 'Upon every religious system I deny the necessity of an established faith, and of a religious establishment' (*NL*, I, 54).<sup>26</sup> Southey wrote this at a time when he was being pressured by his Uncle Herbert Hill to join the clergy and establish financial independence; his resentment of this pressure, as well as of the Established Church, led him to consider dissenting alternatives that were more in keeping with his radical politics. As White explores, Southey moves between various dissenting faiths during the 1790s, thereby becoming a 'dissenter from Dissent'.<sup>27</sup> White examines how Southey situates himself from Socinianism (which denies the authority of the Trinity and Jesus' divinity, but promotes him as a moral example) in the mid-1790s into a 'far more moderate position' between 'Deism' and the 'Established Church' by the early 1800s.

Even by 1811, a year after the publication of *Kehama*, a young Percy Shelley would quip after a visit to his poetic hero that 'if ever there was a definition of a Deist', it would have been Southey.<sup>28</sup> Yet Southey would profess himself that, 'I incline to Quakerism, and if the present Quakers abstained from

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<sup>25</sup> *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, p. 169.

<sup>26</sup> 'To Grosvenor Charles Bedford, June 1794'.

<sup>27</sup> *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> 'To Elizabeth Hitchener, Dec. 26 1811', *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley: Correspondence Volume VIII: LETTERS 1803-1812*, ed. Roger Ingpen (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1965), p. 223-226, 223. Abbreviated hereafter *Letters 1803-1812*.

insisting on articles of faith...I should perhaps call myself a Quaker' (*NL*, I, 468).<sup>29</sup> Southey leans towards Quakerism because, as he writes in 1808, he would 'rather be reverently silent than dogmatise[d]' (*NL*, I, 474).<sup>30</sup> Quakerism's quietist methodology seemed to appeal to Southey as a particularly pious form of religious rebellion. As such, the anti-doctrinal similarities he finds in Islam and Quakerism provide him the nonconformist alternatives that offer Southey 'material suitable to a Jacobin mythological poem' like *Thalaba*.<sup>31</sup>

Southey's use of Islam reveals his recognition of a fundamental moral legitimacy in the religion. Tim Fulford notes that 'Southey's hero, whom [traditional readers] were supposed to admire because he destroyed superstition and idolatry, did so in the cause of a religion they were used to regarding as the enemy of Christianity – Islam' (*Thalaba*, viii). Moreover, Southey's hero does it in the name of a religion traditionally seen as superstitious and idolatrous. Yet, Southey utilises Islam's Biblical history, via its 'Covenant with Ishmael', in order to circumvent those cultural prejudices and as a means to place 'the most favourable light' on the 'morality of the Koran' in *Thalaba* ('Preface' [1838], *Curse*, 4).<sup>32</sup> The idea that there was a moral validity to Islam seems to underline the radical elements in Southey's own theological views, suggesting a latent Jonesian sentiment that essentially all religions contain a core piety; as White contends, 'in Southey's mind his wild Arabian romance risked becoming a Quaker poem'.<sup>33</sup> Within the 'wild' monstrosity of any foreign religion – or any religion for that matter – Southey suggests that there is an essential morality which can be found and used to destroy those monstrous elements.

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<sup>29</sup> 'To James Grahame, Janr. 4 1808'.

<sup>30</sup> 'To James Grahame, April 1808'.

<sup>31</sup> *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, p. 154.

<sup>32</sup> Ishmael was Abraham's first born son and, in Qur'anic and Jewish traditions, is the ancestral father of the Arabs. In the Qur'an, he is also credited, along with his father, for rebuilding the *Kaaba* in Mecca.

<sup>33</sup> *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, p. 170.



This is the basis of his own religious beliefs enunciated just after his publication of *Kehama*. Southey describes an imagined, moral anti-establishmentism he dubs the 'Eclectic Church'. In a letter to his brother Thomas in 1811, Southey writes:

The Establishment has been an infinite blessing to the English – in proof of which we have only to look at Popery and Calvinism from both of which it has preserved us. It still is a blessing because it saves us from persecution; but its creed will not stand the test of sound criticism. The story of the Fall, the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, and the miracles must be given up. Abandon these, insist upon a diseased moral nature, the necessity of all-sufficiency of grace effecting a moral redemption... appeal to the heart of man for the truth of these doctrines, and Christianity becomes invincible. The nature of the Fall and question of the Trinity and the superhuman nature of Christ may safely be left behind, for every person to understand according to his judgement. (*NL*, II, 6)

Though Southey's growing conservatism is apparent through his justifications of the Established Church, so too is his earlier radicalism through the rejection of established precedents. Southey praises the Established Church more for its political role in 'preserving' Britain from the religious and political impact of Catholic emancipation (against which he always argued) and Jacobin Dissent. Its theology, however, he views as outmoded and dated. Southey articulates his 'Quakerish' views that dogmatic standards such as belief in the 'Fall', the 'Trinity' and Christ's 'superhuman' nature should be left up to the 'judgement' of the individual. In other words, the Church's political organisation has far more rational credibility and importance than it does as a religious body. Southey feels the Church's moral 'creed' is fraught with rational discrepancies and a thin devotional veneer; in the same letter, he writes, 'faith is an appetite of mind: our establishment starves it, the Catholics gorge it even to surfeiting and sickness' (*NL*, II, 6). Southey's metaphor positions faith as rational nutrition: whereas the Established Church starves the religious body of that sustenance, Catholicism over-feeds the gluttonous masses. The corporeal imagery suggests something of the ideas of deformity and monstrosity; yet whereas the Established Church's

problem is only a kind of theological anorexia easily solved by the rationalisation of its moral structure, Catholicism's bodily 'sickness' from its own theological obesity implies a sense of the grotesque inherent in its very theological being.

Southey's discursive solution to the spiritual famine proposes eliminating the institutional validity of some of the more 'unsound', even superstitious, elements of the liturgy which rely on a willing suspension of rational thought. In other words, Southey wants to remove the mythological aspects of Christianity and contend with the bare essentials of 'diseased moral nature' and 'moral redemption'. As Fulford notes, this is exactly what happens in *Thalaba*.

Southey's unorthodox views on Church theology reflect his vision for a new moral system. Southey feels that the tilt towards morality over mythology will help solidify the 'invincibility' of Christianity. Through that moral strength, Southey describes to Thomas the institution of a new 'Eclectic Church', which would 'combin[e] all that is good in each [religion], yet so philosophically framed, that as the world grew wiser it would be adopted for a Catholick – i.e. – a universal faith' (*NL*, II, 6). Southey imagines a new moral order which combines various religions and focuses on personal improvement and growing 'wiser' – just like the improvement discussed earlier in *Thalaba*'s denial of Mohareb's 'monstrous' creed. That Southey uses Islam to make the case for such a new moral order suggests his belief in syncretically incorporating other non-Christian faiths, as long as they grow 'wiser'. Shelley notes during his visit with Southey in December 1811:

Southey is an advocate of liberty and equality. He looks forward to a state when all shall be perfected, and matter becomes subjected to the omnipotence of mind, but he is now an advocate for existing establishments. He says he designs his three statues in 'Kehama' to be contemplated with republican feelings, but not in this age. (*Letters 1803-1812*, 223)

The notion of a future moral utopia underlies Southey's representation of the 'Eclectic Church', where he sees the republicanism of his youth take a 'wiser'

path towards implementation. That is, even at this late date, Southey believes in republican ideals, but only sees them as products of an imagined future state. 'I was a republican', he writes in 1814, 'I should be so still, if I thought we were advanced enough in civilization for such a form of society'.<sup>34</sup> Southey's introduction of 'republican feelings' into *Kehama* suggests the ways in which he uses foreign religion as a poetic means towards imagining this future state.

That is, the attempt to balance political and religious monstrosity with morality seems to be one of the key features of Southey's fascination with, and repulsion by, Hinduism. I argue that we can view Southey's ambiguous and contradictory portrayal of Hinduism in *Kehama* as an attempt to find this balance and implement his notion of the 'Eclectic Church'. By examining the 'monstrosity' of *Kehama*, the 'morality' of *Kailyal* and the 'machinery' of the Hindu deities, I want to suggest the ways in which Southey indeed wrote a '5000 line poem for the purpose of teaching Hindoo mythology'.

## II: Jones, *Kehama*, and the Question of Translation

Before I begin with my analysis of *Kehama*, however, I wish to make a brief, but important, aside about the idea of translation that is relevant to the whole notion of monstrosity and morality discussed previously, but did not quite fit into the introductory narrative.

As noted earlier, in his 'Preface', Southey describes 'the religion of the Hindoos' as 'false', 'monstrous', and anti-poetic. The essence of its religious fallacy, monstrosity, and poetic illegitimacy stems from its inherently foreign nature. Southey displays this fact in his stated goal to make Hindu mythology 'fit machinery for an English poem'. In other words, Southey wants to put Hindu mythology into poetic terms appropriate for, and to, 'English' cultural standards. To put it another way, Southey discusses a form of cultural translation,

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<sup>34</sup> From *Robert Southey: A Life*, p. 230.

attempting to postulate how one finds a 'consonant mode of expression' to make Hinduism comprehensible.

In 1807, Southey published *Specimens of the Later English Poets* as a collection of national poetry 'from every poet...who had died between the years 1685 and 1800' (*NL*, I, 375).<sup>35</sup> Included amongst these poets was Sir William Jones. Southey's introduction to Jones was short, but respectful, describing him as a 'man of virtues, talent, and accomplishments, to which he owed his advancement in the world'.<sup>36</sup> Southey mentions neither Jones' Indian judgeship nor his renown for Oriental literature, but the four poems Southey includes – Jones' Alcaic 'Ode', 'A Persian Song of Hafiz', 'Solima, An Arabian Eclogue' (1772) and 'The Palace of Fortune: An Indian Tale' (1772) – give the reader a fair idea of Jones' poetic interests (were they not already known). Interestingly, none of Jones' Hindu 'Hymns' were included.

There are a couple of reasons why they may have been excluded. Firstly, Southey was not particularly fond of them. In an 1808 letter to Walter Savage Landor – author of the Oriental poem *Gebir* (1798), which was influenced by Jones' work – in which Southey talks about *Kehama*, Southey writes that, 'Sir William Jones has done nothing in introducing [Hinduism] so coldly and formally as he has done. They who read his poems do not remember them'.<sup>37</sup> Southey blames the poems for being inaccessible and unapproachable; 'the names are not familiar', he writes, and as such, 'people will fancy there is a difficulty in understanding [them]' (*SL*, 141). As poems, then, they fail to leave a suitable impression upon the reader because of their linguistic and cultural opacity.

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<sup>35</sup> 'To John Rickman, Jany 23. [1805]'.

<sup>36</sup> *Specimens of the Later English Poets*, Vol. I. (London, 1807), p. 383. 3 vols.

<sup>37</sup> *Letters of Robert Southey - a selection*, ed. Maurice H. Fitzgerald (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 141. Abbreviated hereafter *SL*.

Another reason for the 'Hymns' exclusion from Southey's *Specimens* may have been their perceived status as translations. Collen Glenney Boggs examines Southey's *Specimens*, noting that its goal was 'to define "English" poetry nationally and linguistically'.<sup>38</sup> The whole idea around a 'specimen' of English poetry was to 'function as a synecdoche...the collection defined national literature as much as it constituted that literature in its own collectivity'.<sup>39</sup> Boggs notes how Southey refers to it as a *hortus siccus* (a dry garden), in which he would be able to give a comprehensive view of English poetry, but also recreate 'a literary environment in its entirety'.<sup>40</sup> Individual poems were to represent both a type of English poetry as well as stand for English poetry itself. Yet the problem, both nationally and linguistically, came with poems in translation. As Boggs reveals, 'Southey excluded translation from his naturalizing metaphor by categorizing it as an alienated, inorganic form of labour and reproduction...Southey dismissed translation from his literary epistemology'.<sup>41</sup> As perceived products of translation, then, Jones' 'Hymns' lacked an appropriate linguistic and national sense of 'Englishness'. They are considered foreign and unfamiliar to the literary environment in which they seek to join. The cold 'formality' of the poems stems from an inability to make them sufficiently, or appropriately, 'English' in the literary sense.

However, Southey finds himself in a cultural dilemma over his own Hindu poem. He comments that, in writing *Kehama*, 'none but those who have read [Jones' 'Hymns'] can be expected to have even heard of my Divinities' (*SL*, 141). Despite criticising Jones, Southey realises that he must rely on Jones' poems – or rather, rely on his audience's knowledge of Jones' poems – in order to make his own poem possible and intelligible. In essence, Southey is

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<sup>38</sup> *Transnationalism and American Literature: Literary Translation 1773-1892* (NY: Routledge, 2006), p. 115.

<sup>39</sup> *Transnationalism and American Literature*, p. 113.

<sup>40</sup> *Transnationalism and American Literature*, p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> *Transnationalism and American Literature*, p. 115.

struggling with another form of translatability: that of appropriating the cultural elements of Hindu mythology within an English poetic form. Southey seems to be asking himself, “How can I make Jones – and thus Hinduism – translatable into English?” “How can I cultivate Hinduism as a ‘specimen’ for an English *hortus siccus*?”

By describing Hinduism as ‘false’ and ‘monstrous’, however, Southey does not do himself any favors in rectifying this conundrum. Jan Assmann writes that the claim of religious superiority ‘excludes translatability. If one religion is wrong and the other is right, there can be no question of translating the gods of the one into those of the other’.<sup>42</sup> As he puts it another way, ‘False gods cannot be translated’.<sup>43</sup> Thus by describing Hinduism as ‘false’, Southey renders it untranslatable.

Southey demonstrates the aesthetic untranslatability of Hinduism in an 1802 letter to his friend John Rickman. Southey writes that:

I prefer the Devil to Seeva the Destroyer – a thousand arms are unpicturesque – and a sad plague to the taylor if he has to make a breeches pocket for each – give me horns – cloven feet – and a tail. But man is a religious animal, and national faith moulds the national character. (*NL*, I, 292)

Southey’s depiction of *Shiva*, and therefore Hindu mythology in general, is at once a damnation of its extravagance and primitivism, as well as a commentary on the aesthetic and religious prejudices within one’s own cultural and national identity – be it British or Hindu. In short, Southey prefers the Devil to *Shiva* as a matter of national pride. The Devil is somehow more ‘English’ than *Shiva*, just as, presumably, *Shiva* is more ‘Hindu’ than the Devil. In this way, national ‘faith’ moulds not only ‘national character’, but a sense of the national aesthetic as well. By criticising Hindu ‘deformities’ such as ‘their hundred hands’, ‘numerous

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<sup>42</sup> ‘Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability’, *The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 25-36, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 3.

heads', and the 'gross image of divinity' with its 'countenance...turned on every side', as he does in the 'Preface' to *Kehama*, Southey implies Hindu deities' absence of, and resistance to, European notions of sublimity, beauty, and naturalism which defined the Romantic ethos, and mythos, of the 'picturesque'.

Not only is Southey's preference for the Devil a part of his 'national faith' and 'character', but it is also symbolic of the Judeo-Christian tradition which places humanity below divinity. Southey seems to prefer the Devil because of his 'animal' nature; that is, there is something more natural, in both the aesthetic and religious sense, about 'horns', 'cloven feet', and a 'tail' that translates better into the cultural aesthetic than 'a thousand arms'. Southey's description of the 'deformities' of Hindu deities suggests he has something in mind akin to Edward Moor's illustration of 'Siva Punchamuki' [Fig. 7], published in *The Hindu Pantheon* (1810). Southey uses Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* as one of his several sources for *The Curse of Kehama*, so it is reasonable to assume that he would have seen this illustration. The illustration shows *Shiva* with five faces and ten arms, and Moor notes that 'Punchamuki' means 'five-faced', allegorising *Shiva*'s divine status to that of *Brahma*, the Creator.<sup>44</sup> In his 'Notes' to *Kehama*, Southey quotes from William Bruton's *News from the East, or Voyage to Bengalla* (1638) which compares multi-limbed Hindu idols to the devilish scenes of multi-headed beasts in Revelations ('Notes', *Curse*, 250). Thus, the 'gross image of divinity' in Hinduism not only defies the laws of aesthetics and nature, but it also defies the laws of God. The Anglocentric religious and aesthetic traditions employed by Southey do not recognise nor do they understand Hindu traditions which use multi-limbed imagery to symbolise gnostic notions of humanity's closeness to, and indeed integration with, the divine; from this perspective, this theological aspect of Hinduism does not translate well into English aesthetics.

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<sup>44</sup> *The Hindu Pantheon*, p. 49.



**Figure 7 - 'The gross image of divinity': *Siva Punchamuki* from Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1810)**

Yet it is exactly this relationship between the divine and humanity which seems to fascinate, repulse, and compel Southey in his ambiguous and oftentimes contradictory portrayal of Hindu deities and Hindu mythology in *Kehama*. The notions of monstrosity and morality revolve around this core relationship between the human and the divine in both Southey's depictions of Kehama and Kailyal, which is thus vital to our understanding of the poem's Hindu machinery. At the fundamental level of poetic narrative, in order to make Hinduism translatable, Southey must recognise Hinduism as a legitimate religion. Ironically, only then can Hinduism be 'planted' within Southey's *hortus siccus* as a 'specimen' of 'English poetry'. The key to understanding this irony is understanding the relationship between divinity and humanity Southey wrestles with throughout *Kehama*.



### III: Kehama, Brahmanism, and Monstrosity

One component of Hinduism's 'monstrosity' and 'falsity' stems from its 'fatal effects' – which Southey denotes as a reliance on fate rather than as a cause of death (*Curse*, 3). The 'one remarkable peculiarity' which Southey decides to focus on – presumably from a myriad of other monstrous and false peculiarities – relates to Hinduism's amplified fatalism:

Prayers, penances, and sacrifices, are supposed to possess an inherent and actual value, in no degree depending upon the disposition or motive of the person who performs them. They are drafts upon Heaven, for which the Gods cannot refuse payment. (*Curse*, 3)

Southey structures his representation of Hinduism in *Kehama* around the 'peculiar' pretext of Hindu theology which states that the moral implications and motives of one's prayers are inconsequential to their actual approval or manifestation. If a 'draft' is exchanged, it must be 'paid' upon demand, despite the moral consequences. The 'monstrous' and 'fatal' effects of this theological loophole, as it were, form 'the foundation of the following poem' (*Curse*, 3).

In the poem, the theocratic Rajah Kehama performs various sacrifices in his successful attempt to gain illicit divine power over the Hindu *Swerga* (heaven) and *Padalon* (hell). As Kehama recites his 'prayers' for complete authoritarian rule, he finds that they cannot help but be granted – much to the dismay of the Hindu deities:

The danger hath disturb'd  
The calm of Deity,  
And Brahma fears, and Veeshnoo turns his face  
In doubt towards Seeva's throne.  
...Indra trembles at [Kehama's] prayers  
And at his dreadful penances turn pale.  
They claim and wrest from Seeva power so vast,  
That even Seeva's self,  
The highest, cannot grant and be secure.  
(*Curse*, 49, VI.89-92, 93-97)<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Indra* is the King of the *Swerga*. Brahma, Veeshnoo (Vishnu) and Seeva (Siva) represent the 'Trimourtee, or Trinity, as it has been called, of the Brahmins' according to Southey's 'Preface' (*Curse*, 5). They represent, respectively, creation, preservation and destruction. Theologically, Brahma is the Creator of everything and the most powerful deity. However, Southey denotes Seeva as 'Supreme among the Gods' for the purpose of his poem (a distinction I will comment further upon later) – thus Brahma and Vishnu's deference to Siva in the above lines.

The 'trembling' and 'fear' felt by the Hindu gods is recognition of their own moral, political, and divine impotence to 'secure' themselves from Kehama's despotic rule. Bound by the theological and ritualistic doctrines of 'drafts' and 'payment', the Hindu deities 'grant' Kehama power to their own divine demise. Here, Southey portrays the permission of Kehama's 'penances' as 'dreadful' enough to turn *Indra* 'pale' – that is, Kehama is 'monstrous' even in the eyes of the Hindu deities. Southey notes that 'The worst men, bent upon the worst designs, have in this manner obtained power which has made them formidable to the Supreme Deities themselves' (*Curse*, 3). Southey's annotation of the lines quoted above note how 'Seeva had once been reduced to a very humiliating employment by one of Kehama's predecessors' ('Notes', *Curse*, 208). Quoting from Moor's *Hindu Pantheon*, Southey relates the Hindu myth of *Ravana*, who, by using his 'power and infernal arts, had subjugated all the gods and demigods, and forced them to perform menial offices about his person and household' ('Notes', *Curse*, 208). The ironic subjugation of the gods in such a 'menial' fashion, then, reveals the extent to which, in a theological sense, the 'fatalist' aspect of Hinduism is what is truly 'monstrous', not necessarily the Hindu deities themselves.

However, Kehama becomes his most monstrous self when he combines the two elements of Hindu monstrosity Southey describes in his 'Preface': fatalism and a 'gross image of divinity'. One way Southey made Hinduism 'fit' for an 'English poem' was to keep the unpleasant attributes of multi-limbed imagery 'out of sight' – except, of course, when it proved convenient for his poetic narrative (*Curse*, 3). Southey uses multi-limbed imagery only twice in the poem; once at the end, when Kehama's physical attainment of divine power is likened to that of the Hindu gods:

He came in all his might and majesty,  
With all his terrors clad, and all his pride

And, by the attribute of Deity,  
Which he had won from heaven, self-multiplied,  
The dreadful One appear'd on every side.  
In the same indivisible point of time,  
At the eight Gates he stood at once. (*Curse*, 182, XXIV.14-20)

Kehama's appearance 'on every side' invokes the line 'whose countenance is turned on every side' from the *Bhagvat-Geeta* which Southey quotes in the 'Preface'. In the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, the 'countenance turned on every side' refers to the sight of the 'eternal God' as simultaneously the 'whole universe' and its 'vast variety' – an idea Southey elsewhere dubs 'sublime' (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 82). However, the physical manifestation of this concept becomes for Southey a personification of the religious corruption inherent in Hindu mythology. Southey conjectures in draft notes, 'Will it not be fine upon the Hindoo notion to make Kehama multiply himself & enter Padalon by all the eight roads at once – then recover his unity [?]' ('Draft Fragments and Notes', *Curse*, 281). For Southey, Kehama's divine form(s) completes the character's embodiment of Hinduism's grosser 'notions'; Kehama achieves an illicit divine genesis and becomes fashioned in an equivalent 'deformed' image – an ironic inversion, and perversion, of the Adamic tradition. Southey manipulates Hindu mythology to present Kehama synecdochically as at once the unified corrupted whole of Hindu religion, as well as its individual contaminated incarnations. Kehama only achieves true divine status when he becomes as 'gross' and 'anti-poetic' as a Hindu deity.

Kehama represents the corruptive and monstrous combination of religious superstition and political power. He uses that power to terrorise the poor, but morally rich peasant Ladurlad, upon whom he imposes the 'curse', and his daughter Kailyal. Ladurlad, defending his daughter from rape, kills her attempted rapist, Arvalan, Kehama's son. The unholy assumption of power largely defines Kehama; he is always described in despotic terms, as either a 'wretched Lord' unloved by his subjects or as a 'Man-Almighty' with 'no human

mood / Of mercy' nor any 'hesitating thought / Of right and justice' (*Curse*, 11, l.78; 21, ll.136, 137-139). He displays 'no human mood of mercy' through a variety of immoral actions: he lights the funeral pyre to initiate the *sati* ritual to the acclaim of the gathered crowd at the start of the poem; he unjustly slaughters a thousand of his own archers for failures wrought by his own curse; and he unnaturally conspires with 'evil Spirits' to seize control of the earth, the *Swerga* and *Padalon* (*Curse*, 102, XII.116).

According to Southey, these actions of massacre and inhumanity serve as stereotypical illustrations of the 'many examples' which 'the ancient and modern history of the East supply' of despotic Oriental governance ('Notes', *Curse*, 222). This point – and this point only – is one in which John Foster finds some agreement with Southey in his review: 'Kehama is a personage so monstrous, that nothing extravagant could be said to be out of character in him'.<sup>46</sup> As a political leader, Kehama is a figure so in keeping with the 'monstrous' notions of despotism and savagery commonly associate with 'Eastern' leaders that no amount of 'extravagancy' could overstate his characterisation. According to Foster, this was the only difference between Kehama's portrayal and the 'two moral sins of...absurdity and irreverence' plaguing the rest of the poem.<sup>47</sup> That is, the characterisation of Kehama as a 'monster' is the only believable aspect of a poem otherwise fraught with superfluity and irrationality.

While Kehama's 'monstrosity' may have its imagined roots in Oriental stereotype, they are also rooted in the geopolitical and religious debates of Southey's day. As illustrated in his letter to Thomas in 1811, in which he claims that the Established Church had 'preserved' Britain from 'Popery', Southey viewed Catholicism as a threat to his views of rational morality. Southey

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<sup>46</sup> 'John Foster, unsigned review, *Eclectic Review*, April 1811, vii, 334-50', *The Critical Heritage*, p. 138-145, 144.

<sup>47</sup> *The Critical Heritage*, p. 144.

distrusted the priesthood, believing that it contributed to unnecessary superstition and social corruption. Southey's first visit to Portugal in 1796 solidified his impressions of Catholicism as an illogical and corrupt moral system. He writes about the largely negative experience in *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* (1797). Though Southey disliked the dirty, rat-infested, and malodorous Lisbon streets, he was particularly shocked by the extent of the Catholic Church's social influence: 'I have felt myself inclined to think that the absurdities of Popery may have been exaggerated, but here, "the serious folly of Superstition stares every man of sense in the face"'.<sup>48</sup> Southey found Catholicism riddled with credulous thought and empty ritual. He takes note of 'a very small species of red ant that swarm over everything sweet; the Portuguese remedy is to send for a Priest and exorcise them. The superstition of this people in an age of credulity is astonishing' (*Portugal*, 246). This level of superstition, however, comes from the social prestige of the priestly class. Southey notes that confessions are enacted with an air of 'light hearts and clear consciences' only for the recently-forgiven transgressor to leave and sin anew (*Portugal*, 76). This revolving-door moral system is symptomatic of both the priests' social position and the superstition it occasions:

Much of the depravity of this people may be attributed to the nature of their religion...the option of this forgiving power vested in the church, will, among the mob of mankind, destroy the motives to virtue, by eradicating all dread of the consequences of vice. It subjects every individual to that worst slavery of the mind, and establishes an inquisitorial power in the ecclesiastics; who, in proportion as they are esteemed for the supposed sanctity of their profession, will be found less anxious to obtain esteem by deserving it. (*Portugal*, 49-50).

Priests do not earn their position, but are merely given it by their power to 'forgive'. This power is held over a believing public – 'the mob of mankind' –

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<sup>48</sup> *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal*, Second Edition (Bristol, 1799), p. 76. Abbreviated hereafter *Portugal*.

who are 'enslaved' by established doctrine, thus further exacerbating their status as an unthinking, reactionary, and morally subversive 'mob'. The priests presumably keep this 'mob' in line through their 'inquisitorial power', thus compounding their already corrupted and despotic grip on power.

The effects of such a corrupt moral system are physically visible. Southey comments on the 'horrible' and 'monstrous' beggars he encounters – 'monstrous' due to the 'dreadful diseases that their own vices have contracted' thanks to the revolving-door morality of the confessional system (*Portugal*, 243). The beggars become representative of a 'depraved Society' and 'religion' that forgives vices which only further corrode and corrupt the society from within (*Portugal*, 244).

Southey's views on Catholicism are important because they mirror, literally, his stated views on Hinduism. Thirty years after his Portuguese *Letters*, in his *Vindiciæ Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ* (1826), Southey would defend, once again, his political and moral stance against Catholic Emancipation – a view he held even during his radical years. Interestingly, however, Southey revisits a familiar theological argument in order to make his case against Catholicism. He criticises the 'baneful system' of 'Roman superstition' for:

acts of devotion [which] have in themselves an *inherent and positive value in no degree dependent upon the motive that prompts them, or the mood in which they are performed.*  
(*Vindiciæ*, 12, 9, 315)<sup>49</sup>

Southey's condemnation of Catholic 'superstition' is almost a word-for-word repetition of his denunciation of Hinduism's 'monstrous' moral theology stated sixteen years earlier in the 'Preface' to *Kehama*:

Prayers, penances, and sacrifices, *are supposed to possess an inherent and actual value, in no degree depending upon the disposition or motive of the person who performs them.*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> My italics.

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In the case of Catholicism, the 'acts of devotion' refer to the peddling of indulgences; interestingly, in *Vindiciæ Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ*, Southey condemns the Catholic priests for being worse than the Hindu Brahmins:

But even the fabricator of Brahminical fables did not reduce from this such monstrous doctrines as the Romanists, who inferred that such works were transferable by gift or purchase, and succeeded in persuading the rich that their property might be converted into post-obits for their own benefit, payable to themselves in the other world! (*Vindiciæ*, 315-316)

The Brahmins do not take advantage of the material wealth of their adherents and provide false promises of *post-obitum* prosperity in the way Catholic priests did. Moreover, Southey even seems to suggest that Catholicism's 'monstrous doctrines' derived from Hindu predecessors; he argues that the Catholic Church 'incorporated many of the ceremonies and superstitions of heathen idolatry, so it adopted from these old heresies...such opinions as were conformable to its own views' (*Vindiciæ*, 315). These adaptations, Southey continues, were the source of its various 'corruptions', like the *post-obitum* ruse (*Vindiciæ*, 315). Southey displays his contempt for 'Manichean systems' like Brahmanism and Catholicism which he believes exploit an archaic dualism between good and evil in order to control the larger population – the very same 'monstrous' system Southey destroys in *Thalaba* (*Vindiciæ*, 315).

Southey makes the association between Catholicism and Brahmanism much earlier, however; indeed, Southey seems to make the connection after his second visit to Portugal in 1801, when he began working on *Kehama*. Southey's concerns about the Catholic Church's social, political and moral corruption, as represented by their priesthood, seem to have triggered his imaginative interest in the political and religious possibilities of the monstrous. In a letter to James Montgomery in 1811, a year after *Kehama*'s publication, Southey explains the imaginative gestation of a *Kehama*-like character:

In 1801 on my passage from Lisbon to England, the imagination which had long been floating in my mind matured into something

like a plan. To account for the universal corruption which deserved such chastisement I supposed an universal monarchy, such as Louis 14 or Buonaparte would establish – and absolute Tyrant, and a persecuting and atheistic hierarchy. I conceived that the perversion of morals extended even to those who opposed this system, and that which they were organizing a sort of Irish Rebellion against it. The Ruling Powers anticipated them, and by a general massacre like that of St. Bartholomews Day, filled up the measure of iniquity. Some striking characters and situations grew out of this conception. (*NL*, II, 13)

Southey is actually discussing the plot of a poem on the Biblical ‘Deluge’ that he had planned, but had eventually abandoned.<sup>51</sup> Here, Southey conflates Biblical history with contemporary political history in his own apocalyptic, mythological vision. The narrative wants to make sense of what Southey sees as the ‘universal corruption’ and the ‘perversion of morals’ which extend from a ‘universal monarchy’. The basic players of republicanism are in place; but here they are all ‘monstrous’. Even the opposition who initially fight the ‘absolute Tyrant’ – reminiscent of Jacobin radicals – do so with a perverted morality. The dizzying array of historical features collapses into a confusion of political and religious intent: Irish-Catholic rebels from 1798 turn into the seventeenth-century Huguenot martyrs of St. Bartholomew’s Day; the absolute monarchy of Napoleon turns into a kind of atheistic Spanish Inquisition. All of this is then corrected by a Biblical flood, which serves as the only remedy to ‘chastise’ wayward modern morality (*NL*, II, 13). The premise of Southey’s imaginative maturation, however, is to meld, so as to be literally indistinguishable, the fears of Catholic superstition, Jacobin militias, and Napoleonic tyranny into one dread spectre threatening Britain’s common morality and political liberty.

It is clear that Southey’s fictionalised Napoleonic nightmare would ‘grow’ into the ‘striking characters and situations’ that would comprise the monstrosity

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<sup>51</sup> This is in response to inquiring about Montgomery’s poem, the apocalyptic ‘World Before the Flood’ (1812) – a poem Curran writes is the only real Christian epic of the Romantic period, but one that ‘cannot sustain either epic purpose or pressure’ (*Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, p. 168).



of Kehama. In his review of the Baptist Missionary Society for the *Quarterly Review* (1809), Southey warns that:

India is perpetually in danger, – not from Buonaparte [sic], – that would be the last object of his ambition, – he is not idiot enough to believe that England is to be conquered there, nor is it for Asia that Providence seems to have appointed him its executioner upon degraded nations. But no century has ever yet elapsed in which Asia has not produced some Buonaparte of its own, some villain, who setting equally at defiance the laws of God and man, collects the whole contemporary force of evil about him, and bears down everything in his way.<sup>52</sup>

Southey envisions a Hindu Bonaparte as more of a *real* threat to India than the French Bonaparte of his own historical period. He imagines, and amplifies, the threat of an ‘Orientalised’, Napoleonic ‘villain’ gestating in the Brahmanical ‘defiance’ of divine and human morality. This imagined tyrant comes as the ‘contemporary force of evil’ born out of the historical narrative of the two great threats to British sovereignty – Catholic-French militarism and Hindu-Indian barbarism.

These two threats, Southey suggests, had already shown themselves to be valid. In 1806, Indian *sepoys*, or native Indians who served as East India Company soldiers, attacked and killed some 200 British officers and European soldiers at St George’s Fort in Madras. This was known as the Vellore Mutiny. The *sepoys*’ rebellion, which lasted only a day, grew out of their anger over a new East India Company policy ordering the removal of Hindu caste marks from the face and body, the replacement of traditional turbans with military hats, the trimming of Muslim beards and facial hair, and, supposedly, the conversion of *sepoys* to Christianity (a rumour spread largely by the *sepoys* after being asked to carry a turn screw that resembled a cross around their necks). The mutiny was thought to have been planned by the sons of Tipu Sultan – surely one of the Napoleonic ‘villains’ Southey views as having come from India – who were

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Periodical Account relative to the Baptist Missionary Society’, *The Quarterly Review*, Vol. 1 (London, 1809, 193-226), p. 210. Abbreviated hereafter *QR* 1.

imprisoned at St George's Fort (however, Denys Forrest notes that there is no evidence to support this).<sup>53</sup>

In his 1809 review, however, Southey writes that 'The mission in Serampore...[has] been represented as connected with the mutiny at Vellore, and the dissatisfaction of the native troops' (QR 1, 204). He continues, '[Britons against Christian missions in India] insist upon the danger to which [Christian missions] exposes the British government in India, upon the utter impossibility of converting the Hindoos, and the utter unfitness of the persons who are making the attempt' (QR 1, 205). Southey portrays the missionaries as scapegoats for the incident, claiming that no missionaries were around to try to convert Indian soldiers (QR 1, 206). For Southey, the Vellore Mutiny occurred exactly because the *sepoys* were not Christian or Christianised; as he says, Christianising the 'natives' will help 'strengthen and secure ourselves' – not only from further mutinies, but from the Orientalised Napoleons lurking in the shadows of the 'fabric of human fraud' that is 'the Braminical [*sic*]' (QR 1, 211, 217).<sup>54</sup> The *sepoys* own 'fraudulence', due to their adherence to 'Braminical' doctrine, caused the violent rebellion; for Southey, this was proof enough of their danger should they somehow assume the kind of power Napoleon wielded.

In *The Curse of Kehama*, Kehama embodies this Brahmanical 'contemporary force of evil' that 'bears down everything in his way'. It is interesting that Southey uses this image to describe an Orientalised Napoleon, as one of Southey's most 'monstrous' scenes of Kehamian Brahmanism in *Kehama* occurs during the Juggernaut ritual. At the end of Book XIII, a band of roving Yogis who worship the 'Jaga-Naut', a giant idol devoted to the Hindu god

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<sup>53</sup> *Tiger of Mysore: The Life and Death of Tipu Sultan* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 331.

<sup>54</sup> A Major Pearce, quoted in *The Caledonian Mercury* in 1807, has a different view than Southey. He writes that the Vellore Mutiny can be traced to 'that implacable hostile spirit against European dominion, that could transform a soldier's *turnscrew* into the *holy cross*'; this led to 'the sticking up of placards in the mosques about Madras...calling on the people to rally in defence of the true faith' (Thursday, April 2 1807, Issue 13299). To those soldiers on the ground, Vellore was not just a revolt against the company's incursive polices on religious insignia, but indeed a religious revolt against Britain's very colonial presence.

Krishna, kidnaps Kailyal, the female moral protagonist of the poem. Southey describes the idol as the 'seven-headed God', illustrating his other use of multi-limbed imagery within the poem (*Curse*, XIV.41). In this way, the idol symbolises the very 'monstrous' notions of the grotesque and fatalism Southey discusses in his 'Preface' – a coincidence Balachandra Rajan describes as Southey 'struggling to make up for lost time' in the sense that *Kehama* is often 'out of synchronization' with 'the missionary conscience' it purports to hold.<sup>55</sup>

The Juggernaut idol is famously wheeled out in a large chariot during festivals. According to legend, this festival occasions devotees to throw themselves under the weight of the chariot to be voluntarily crushed to death or physically maimed for life. For European observers, this image became an Oriental (in the Saidian sense) stereotype, signifying the ruthless authority of, and inexplicable devotion to, barbaric rituals. In his notes, Southey quotes from a source that, 'This temple is to the Hindoos what Mecca is to the Mahommedans. It is the chief seat of Brahmanical power, and a strong-hold of their superstition' ('Notes', *Curse*, 249).<sup>56</sup> Southey uses this source to set a morbid, monstrous tone for the scene; the source also notes that, 'The precincts of the place are covered with bones' ('Notes', *Curse*, 250). This is the heart of Brahmanical corruption and its immoral, ritualistic superstition. It is, ironically, the 'holiest' of Hindu sites, where 'Brahmanical power' is at its most authoritarian, evil, and – with the 'seven-head god' – the most 'monstrous'.

Brahmin priests kidnap Kailyal in order to be ritualistically 'wedded' to the Jaga-Naut idol during the festival. This 'honour' is typically bestowed on a 'harlot-band', whom Southey denotes as a female harem bred to be priestly concubines, and thus 'Wives of the Idol' ('Notes', *Curse*, 251). As Southey says in his notes:

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<sup>55</sup> *Under Western Eyes*, p. 150, 149.

<sup>56</sup> Southey quotes this from Claudius Buchanan's *Memoir of the Expediency of an Ecclesiastical Establishment for British India* (1805).

These impostors [the Brahmin priests] take a young maid...to be the bride...of *Jagannat*, and they leave her all night in the temple...with the idol, making her believe that *Jagannat* himself will come and embrace her, and appointing her to ask him...what kind of processions, feasts, prayers, and alms he demands to be made for it. In the mean time one of these lustful priests enters at night by a little back-door into the temple, deflowereth this young maid, and maketh her believe any thing he pleaseth...these *Brahmans* [then] make her say aloud, before all people, whatsoever she had been taught of these cheats, [as] if she had learnt it from the very mouth of *Jagannat*. ('Notes, *Curse*, 252)<sup>57</sup>

The European outrage over this event centres not only on the wily, devious means by which Brahmin priests fool young maids to perform ritualised sexual acts, but by which they use these acts as forms of control over the rest of the believing population. Social control is held by 'lustful' and 'cheating' priests who use superstition and trickery for their sexual and political advantage. Though not quite like his portrayal of Catholicism in Portugal, the idea of priestly control of society through superstition certainly parallels his criticisms. In Kailyal's case, Southey is preparing her to suffer innocently at the hands of these corrupted priests.

Kailyal, however, counteracts this immoral social and political coercion through her own moral purity. Firstly, Kailyal stands in cultural relief to the 'harlot-band' which accompanies her in the wedding procession; the latter are bedecked in 'Armllets and anklets, that, with chearful sound, / Symphonious tinkled as they wheel'd around' (*Curse*, 115, XIV.120-121). The 'chearful sound' of the jewellery and the 'wheeling around' of the dancing 'harlot-band' pulsate with the kinetic sexuality that drives the hedonistic atmosphere of the festival: 'Go, happy One, the bed divine partake, / And fill his longing arms', the harlot-band sings as they dance around (*Curse*, 115, XIV.130-131). Movement, sound, and ornamentation propel the erotic energy of the ritual that sees Kailyal seated next to the 'seven-headed' Idol and led to the temple's 'bridal bed'

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<sup>57</sup> From Francois Bernier's *Voyage dans les Etats du Grand Mogul* (1670).

(*Curse*, 116, XIV.135). In contrast, Kailyal is 'Sate...like a bride; / A bridal statue rather might she seem' (*Curse*, 113, XIV.43-44). Her stoicism reveals a sexual inertia to the ritual – but also, as we see, a moral depth and defiance which breaks from the cultural norm of moral and sexual complacency seen amongst the Brahmins and their misled harem.

When the wedding celebration comes to an end, and Kailyal is alone in the temple with the Idol, a priest advances to consummate the marriage; however, 'A power invisible opposed his way' (*Curse*, 116, XIV.148). It is not a defender, though, but the ghost of Arvalan. Arvalan kills the priest and 'cloth'd in the flesh of man' comes to force himself on Kailyal once more (*Curse*, 116, XIV.157). This union between Arvalan's ghost and the dead priest represents the sordid, immoral marriage of Kehama's political power with the Brahmin's religious authority. Kehama's political and moral corruption is literarily embodied in the priesthood – a priesthood defined by their 'monstrous' adulation of a 'seven-headed God' – which then attempts to instigate a taboo act of fantastical necrophilia. In a sudden act of self-defence and virginal preservation – 'Yamen [the god of the dead], receive me undefil'd! she said' – Kailyal, awakened from her stoic trance:

...seiz'd a torch, and fir'd the bridal bed.  
Up ran the rapid flames; on every side  
They find their fuel wheresoe'er they spread,  
Thin hangings, fragrant gums, and odourous wood,  
That pil'd like sacrificial altars stood. (*Curse*, 118, XIV.201-206)

Rather than yield to the dubious rituals and religious power structures of Brahmanism, Kailyal moves to sacrifice herself in order to protect her sexual purity and moral innocence, thereby reversing the moral depravity of the Hindu ritual *sati* to defend herself from sexual perversity. The flames force off Arvalan, and Kailyal is saved when Ladurlad rushes into the fire to gather his daughter.

Southey's depiction of Kailyal's moral strength confirms her as Kehama's righteous antagonist. In another marriage scene, Southey

demonstrates this moral strength again when Kehama plagues Kailyal with leprosy after she refuses to marry him:

Nor when she saw her plague, did her good heart,  
True to itself, even for a moment fail.  
...Oh, better so,  
Better such foul disgrace,  
Than that this innocent face  
Should tempt thy wooing!

...  
This is a loathsome sight to human eye,  
But not to eyes divine (*Curse*, 151, XIX.20-21, 28-31, 58-59)

By remaining morally 'true', but sexually 'foul' and un-'tempting', Kailyal's ethical sensibilities refute and combat the sexual 'wooing' of Kehama's amoral political power; though she is made physically reprehensible – indeed, 'monstrous' in a sense – her moral ethos remains untainted. Unlike in Portugal, where the beggars' 'vice' leads them to appear 'monstrous' through disease, Kailyal's disease is one afflicted upon her through Kehama's vice, not her own.

The union of her physical deformity with her innate moral purity demarcates the political, religious, and moral rift between her and Kehama that is enunciated when Kailyal refuses Kehama at the end of Book XVIII. Kehama stipulates to Kailyal that:

Fate hath chosen thee  
To be Kehama's bride  
...For I can see  
The writing which, at thy nativity,  
All-knowing Nature wrought upon thy brain,  
In branching veins, which to the gifted eye  
Map out the mazes of futurity.  
There is it written, Maid, that thou and I,  
Alone of human kind a deathless pair,  
Are doom'd to share. (*Curse*, 148-149, XVIII.95-96, 99-106)

Kehama reads Kailyal's 'Fate', as Southey tells us, 'by the sutures of the skull...[where] these lines of destiny are formed' ('Notes', *Curse*, 256). In his notes, Southey relates that 'Brahma is considered as the immediate creator of all things, and particularly as the disposer of each person's fate, which he inscribes within the skull...and which the gods themselves cannot avert' (*Curse*,

256).<sup>58</sup> Throughout the poem, Kehama relies on the Hindu deities and his Hindu subjects' theological deference to Fate in order to take control of the former's divine powers and advantage of the latter's religious subservience; here, he assumes Kailyal's like deference to Hinduism's fatalistic tenets inevitably 'dooming' them together as husband and wife.

However, Kailyal, again, resists: 'Nature is never false; he wrongeth her! / My heart belies such lines of destiny. / There is no other true interpreter!' (*Curse*, 149, XVIII.115-117). Kailyal's Wordsworthian response delineates the fatalistic boundaries to which she refuses to defer. Kailyal insists that one's own natural sentiment usurps the demands established by 'fated' religious doctrine. When Kehama, in traditional patriarchal fashion, turns to Ladurlad and demands him to 'Counsel thy daughter / ...bid her bow / In thankfulness to Fate's benign behest', Ladurlad answers:

She needeth not my counsel  
...for though all other things  
Were subject to the starry influencings,  
And bow'd submissive to thy tyranny,  
The virtuous heart, and resolute will are free.  
Thus in their wisdom did the Gods decree  
When they created Man.  
(*Curse*, 149, XVIII.120, 121-122, 127, 130-135).

Ladurlad espouses his daughter's resolution of 'free will' flouting Kehama's 'destined' religious dogma. Kailyal's 'virtuous heart' will not 'bow' to the 'starry influencings' of Kehama's Brahmanical establishment. Kehama's 'monstrous' power depends on the fatalistic tenets of Brahmanical Hinduism; without 'submission' to these 'fatal effects', Kehama has no basis for political or religious authority. Here, then, we can begin to see Ladurlad and Kailyal's opposition to Kehama's theological 'tyranny' as an expression of Southey's own dissenting religious views. 'Kindle the combustible material yourself and direct them to your own purpose, or you will be consumed by them', Southey writes in

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<sup>58</sup> From Nathaniel Kindersley's *Specimens of Hindoo Literature* (1794).

that letter to Thomas Southey on religion in 1811, strangely echoing the imagery of Kailyal's own act of theological and political dissent with her self-sacrificial *sati* (*NL*, II, 6). In some ways, we can view that scene as Kailyal's initiation – quite literally, her baptism by fire – into the theological tenets of Southey's 'Eclectic Church'.

#### IV: 'Faith Invincible': Religious Conversion and Political Dissent

As noted earlier, during the same nine-year period in which Southey worked on *Kehama*, he also wrote a series of articles for the *Quarterly* and *Annual Reviews* on the Baptist Missionary Society in Seringapatem (which is on the central-east coast of India, about 300 miles south of Calcutta). In these reviews, Southey entered into the heated debate regarding the missionaries' effect on colonial governance. *The Monthly Review*, for instance, wrote a series of reviews against missionary influence in 1808, claiming that 'their [the Hindus] present habit and prejudices militate against their conversion' and suggesting that any attempt by policy to coerce conversion would 'affect our duty in all manners'.<sup>59</sup> The reviewer uses the common argument against missionary interference in India, suggesting Hindu refusal to conversion and the possible effects on Britain's commercial 'duty'. The reviewer clearly has the Vellore Mutiny in mind, but also cites Napoleon's eastern ambition as a more pressing threat, recommending that 'while the enemy threatens an invasion of India', Britain should 'desist altogether from every act which may diminish the confidence of the people of Hindostan'.<sup>60</sup> That is, Britain should desist from diminishing the confidence of the Hindus in the British, lest they should welcome such an invasion.

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<sup>59</sup> 'Art. XXXV. Christianity in India', *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal, Enlarged: Vol. LVII* (London, 1808), p. 106-107, 106.

<sup>60</sup> 'Art. XXXVI. The Dangers of British India from French Invasion and Missionary Establishments', *The Monthly Review, Vol. LVII*, p. 107-109, 109.



In the quotation from Southey's missionary review in which he talks about the threat of an Orientalised Napoleon, he seems to respond directly to these issues raised by the *Monthly Review*. As shown, Southey denies the validity of both a Napoleonic attack, as well as any missionary involvement in the Vellore Mutiny. His purpose is to preserve the idea that Christian conversion is necessary lest Britain's influence there should become unrecognisable in the future:

...not a wreck should we leave behind us [if Britain does not convert the Hindus]...not a trace of our language would remain; and for our religion – the Hindoo historians would argue that we had none; just as travellers do of the Hottentots, because they have no perceived among them no symptoms of religious belief. (QR 1, 211).

Southey represents the English language and Christian religion as civilising influences that would differentiate Hindus from Hottentots, as well as leave a historical legacy of British authority. In this sense, Southey demonstrates his increasing appropriation of the ideologies of empire that colour Missionary thought at the time, whilst anticipating later, like-minded policy shifts that would occur in years to come.<sup>61</sup>

In mentioning the 'Hottentots', Southey seems to invoke Andrew Fuller's exclamation in the *Periodical accounts relative to the Baptist Missionary Society* (1800) – the very work he was reviewing – that, 'Ah!, if the soul of a Hottentot, a Hindoo, or a Negro, be like mine; and who can dispute it? – capable of becoming like God in his moral image'.<sup>62</sup> Fuller's exclamation supposes equivalence between the 'Hottentot', 'Hindoo', 'Negro' and himself in the 'moral image' of God; through Christ they are all the same. For Southey, conversion has less to do with a belief in Christ than it has to do with the improvement of civilisation. Southey is concerned with moral improvement – as we saw in *Thalaba* and in his idea of the 'Eclectic Church'. The conversion missions in

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<sup>61</sup> For example, Thomas Macaulay's 'Minute on Education' (1835) which I examine in the Conclusion.

<sup>62</sup> *Periodical Account relative to the Baptist Missionary Society, Vol. I* (Clipstone, 1800): p. 10.

India are to rear up the Hindus 'in civilization' so that they have the 'symptoms' of religion (*QR* 1, 211). By religion, Southey means a moral system *not* based on superstition such as Catholicism and Kehamian Brahmanism.

Southey's views on conversion in 1809 changed from those he had expressed in 1803; in his first review of the Baptist Missionary Society, whilst agreeing with their objective, he criticised the missionary's persistence in pushing the finer points of Baptist theology, such as '*grace*' and '*the new birth*'.<sup>63</sup> These finer points are ones Southey disagrees with – so much so that he writes:

This is, indeed, a religion for which bedlams, as well as meeting-houses, should be erected. If the mission to Hindostan were connected with nothing but the propagation of such a faith, we should hope the natives would continue to worship Veeshnoo and Seeva, rather than the demon whom Calvin has set up!...They should dwell upon the great and obvious temporal advantages of Christianity; for even the Christianity which they preach holds out this inducement.<sup>64</sup>

Southey would rather the Hindus kept their practices of Vaishnavism and Saivism than convert to Calvinism (by which he means the Methodist and Baptists). Calvinism, Southey feared, offered too much 'intolerance, superstition, censorship, the notion of eternal damnation'.<sup>65</sup> Its fatalistic attitude towards predestination and intolerant enthusiasm for its own beliefs disgusted Southey; 'From ignorant Calvinistic persecution Good Lord deliver me! if I must believe or burn let me at least turn to a Jesuits faith' (*NL*, I, 267).<sup>66</sup> Even monastic Catholicism was preferable to Calvinism – which, given Southey's hatred for Catholics, particularly so soon after his trip to Portugal, says a lot about his views of the Protestant religion.

By 1809, however, Southey is much more interested in a moral conversion than a theological one; as Bolton puts it, 'the Baptists are

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<sup>63</sup> *The Annual Review*, Vol. I (London, 1802), p. 217.

<sup>64</sup> 'Account of the Baptist Mission'. *Annual Review*, ch. 2, no. 71 (London: 1803), p. 207-18, 216-217.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Storey. *Robert Southey: A Life*, p. 165.

<sup>66</sup> 'To John Rickman, [January, 1802]'.

now...viewed as the lesser of two evils'.<sup>67</sup> Moral conversion becomes a way by which Southey can position a political reasoning behind his support of the missions; that is, conversion becomes a moral imperative that denotes a step in the direction of social improvement he imagines in his concept of the 'Eclectic Church'.

Critical to Southey's idea of moral improvement in *Kehama* are the characters of Ladurlad and Kailyal. Southey portrays them as innocent, moral, and humble peasants drawn into a struggle against despotic theocracy when Ladurlad kills Arvalan for trying to rape Kailyal. For the defence of his daughter, Kehama curses Ladurlad with the inability to seek bodily relief from hunger, thirst, or sleep. Ladurlad also suffers from a 'fire in [his] heart / And a fire in [his] brain' as a constant mental and physical torment (*Curse*, 22, ll.164-165). However, he is also anesthetised from any physical harm or sickness which may cause his death. Theoretically, this was supposed to extend his suffering indefinitely, thus giving him an anguished, afflicted, and yet ironic immorality. Predictably, however, this anesthetisation benefits him throughout the poem as he proves antagonistic to Kehama's tyrannical plans. Southey imbues both Ladurlad and Kailyal with a hyper-moral sensibility based on familial loyalty, martial devotion, and an unwavering faith in the divine – all of which they use to thwart Kehama's political consolidation of divine power.

We find a model for Ladurlad and Kailyal's moral behaviour in Southey's 1809 review of the Baptist Missionary Society. To bolster support for his claim that Hindus can be converted, Southey relates the distressing story of one of the Society's successes, a Hindu named Kristno. Upon his decision to convert to Christianity, Kristno was taken to the Ganges and baptised by William Carey, the leader and founder of the Society (which was established in 1792). Carey spoke in Bengalese so the gathered crowd could understand, and said that 'he

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<sup>67</sup> *Writing the Empire*, p. 243.

and his followers did not hold the river [Ganges] sacred, [that] it was only water' and by Kristno professing this act of baptism, he promised 'to put off all [Hindu] deities, and all sin, and to put on Christ' (QR 1, 197-198). Kristno's conversion is not just an absolution from 'original sin', but a confession, and damnation, of his 'heretical' native religion and the idolatrous theology of imbuing 'things' – such as the Ganges – with sanctity.

Witnessing his baptism, Kristno's daughter, of whom he was 'very fond', announced that she too wished to convert. This caused a controversy within the Hindu community, since she was betrothed, at the age of ten, to a Hindu neighbour. The husband-to-be protested her conversion and the Danish judge before whom the case was brought announced that a Christian could not marry a 'heathen' (QR 1, 197). She was then kidnapped by her husband-to-be before she could be converted and Kristno was beaten by him and his family. Kristno would not see his daughter for another year. She, however, 'absolutely refused to cohabit with [her husband], saying, that living or dead she would be Christ's' (QR 1, 199). She was beaten by the family as well for refusing to pay homage to Hindu idols and for calling out Jesus' name. Her perseverance, however, finally prevailed and she was allowed to convert to Christianity, also convincing her husband to do likewise, 'thoroughly persuaded that it was their duty and eternal interest to renounce a senseless idolatry' (QR 1, 200). The family was thus reunited in, and by, their 'faith in Christ' (QR 1, 200).

Southey's conversion story serves as a historical anecdote for the power of moral conviction; Kristno's daughter wanted to be Christian and she proved her worthiness to be converted even before converting by dutifully renouncing idolatry in the face of pressure to do otherwise. Moreover, her strength reunites the family in their 'faith in Christ' and they become shining examples to refute 'the absurd opinion, that it is impossible to convert a Hindoo' (QR 1, 199). Her sense of moral righteousness overcomes the ingrained social dogmas of both

the Hindu religion and the British critics – a moral strength and certainty Southey seems to place within Kailyal.

White and Bolton have argued that *Kehama* is a conversion poem, and that Kailyal and Ladurlad are, as Bolton writes, ‘on a Christian mission through a world of superstition’.<sup>68</sup> White also contends that Kailyal is Christian – or at least is Christian-like. He maintains that her fall into the river in Book II can be seen in terms of a baptism, as well as an inoculation against the ‘diseased’ nature of Kehama’s theocracy.<sup>69</sup> Even Southey seems to concede the notion put forward by James Montgomery – author of the Christian epic ‘World Before the Flood’ – that ‘Kailyal is a Christian’ by responding rhetorically, ‘is it not because the poem, supposing the truth of the mythology on which it is built, requires from her faith and resignation?’<sup>70</sup>

Kailyal’s ‘faith’ and ‘resignation’ are crucial components of her moral characterisation. Bolton writes that Southey ‘domesticate[s] the Orient in this poem, [by] depicting his Hindu heroine as a model of feminine virtue for his western readers’.<sup>71</sup> That is, Kailyal seems to represent the ‘virtues’ of a British woman more than she does a Hindu woman. For example, in one scene, Southey describes Kailyal as:

With a diviner presence...  
No idle ornaments deface  
Her natural grace,  
Musk-spot, nor sandal-streak, nor scarlet stain,  
Ear-drop nor chain, nor arm nor ankle-ring,  
Nor trinketry on front, or neck, or breast,  
Marring the perfect form she seem’d a thing  
Of Heaven’s prime uncorrupted work, a child  
Of early Nature undefil’d,  
A daughter of the years of innocence. (*Curse*, 109, XIII.196-205)

In draft notes to the poem from 1801-1802, Southey writes, ‘Kalyal [*sic*] without all Hindoo ornaments / Line of dun sandal dust up between the xxxxxx hair –

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<sup>68</sup> *Writing the Empire*, p. 213.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Idolatry, Evangelicalism, and the Intense Objectivism of Robert Southey’, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted from White’s ‘A little God whom they had just sent over’, p. 21.

<sup>71</sup> *Writing the Empire*, p. 212.

spot between the eyebrows or black of musk' ('Draft Fragments and Notes', *Curse*, 282). These latter features are obviously those ornaments Kailyal will *not* have; yet it is interesting to note how forcefully, and early, Southey makes the point to have her culturally unadorned. Kailyal's 'perfect form' is neither 'defaced' nor 'marred' by cultural insignia such as 'sandal-streak' (face paint that denotes having recently bathed) or ornaments like bracelets, earrings, and necklaces. The absence of these cultural features symbolises Kailyal's 'uncorrupted' and 'undefil'd' nature, her virginal and moral 'innocence', and by effect her (moral) demarcation apart from Hindu culture. In fact, Southey's description of Kailyal's absence of cultural emblems eerily echoes the directive issued by the East India Company which inspired the *sepoys* to mutiny in Vellore: 'It is ordered by the regulations, that a native soldier shall not mark his face, or denote his cast, or wear ear-rings, when dressed in uniform'.<sup>72</sup> This directive speaks to the sense of bodily cleanliness and orderliness that was required of native Indians in order to be acceptable to British standards. That is, it defined the aesthetic standards which suitably represent 'Britishness'. To conceptualise it in another way, Southey's description delineates the point of translation at which the Hindu becomes 'fit' for an 'English poem'.

Importantly, then, we see the re-emergence of William Jones. Southey's rhetorical techniques in this passage are interesting: firstly, they set up Kailyal as one with 'No idle ornaments' and then goes on to list all the ornaments that are not adorning her. Secondly, Southey's note to the lines 'No idle ornaments deface / Her natural grace' provides a point of comparison between Kailyal and other poetic Hindu heroines, directing the reader to the 'toilet-tasks' of the female character in Jones' poem 'The Enchanted Fruit: Or, the Hindoo Wife' (1781). Depicting a wife's 'night thoughts' about how to make her appearance

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<sup>72</sup> *The Caledonian Mercury*. Edinburgh, Thursday April 2 1807, Issue 13299. *19<sup>th</sup> Century British Library Newspapers*.

'With art, yet with an artless air', Jones presents a female doting on the apparel by which she will dress her hair, ears, eyes, nose, breasts, waist, wrists, and ankles ('Notes', *Curse*, 247-248). Thus, all the ornaments that do *not* dress Kailyal are once more laid out and dutifully adorned by Jones' 'Hindoo wife'.

Jones' poem recreates the voyeuristic experience of watching a woman dress by imprinting Hindu names, references, and descriptions on the various ornaments and body parts. The poem develops the exotic and erotic connotations of Hinduism that would inspire the sexual innuendo and imagery later represented in phallicist works such as Richard Payne Knight's *Worship of the Priapus* and Erasmus Darwin's *Botanical Garden* (1795).<sup>73</sup> The Hindu female has a certain sexual allure in Jones and Southey's poem – think, again, of the harlots' sexually-kinetic dancing and singing in Book XIV (the book, incidentally, which proceeds Southey's description of Kailyal not wearing Hindu ornaments). Yet, Southey is attempting to make a point with Kailyal, and this is clear by the way in which he also compares Kailyal to the female character in the *GītaGóvinda*, a Hindu poem translated by Jones in 1789. The *GītaGóvinda* tells of the divine love between the gods *Krishna* and *Radha*. Southey quotes from a decidedly erotic encounter between the two:

See how he kisses the lip of my rival, and imprints on her forehead an ornament of pure musk...[how] On her breasts, like two firmaments, he places a string of gems like a radiant constellation; [how] he binds on her arms, graceful as the stalks of the water-lily...a bracelet of sapphires...how he ties round her waist a rich girdle illumined with golden bells which seem to laugh...[and] to propitiate the god of desire. He places her soft foot, as he reclines by her side, on his ardent bosom, and stains it with ruddy hue of Yavaca. ('Notes', *Curse*, 248-249)<sup>74</sup>

While Southey certainly uses Jones' poem to legitimise the authenticity of his story, he also uses it here as an image of moral contrast – ironically despite Jones' efforts to temper, and even conceal, the overt sexuality of Hindu

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<sup>73</sup> Cf., Martin Priestman's *Romantic Atheism*.

<sup>74</sup> *Yavaca* (or *Lac*) is a type of resin secreted by insects and used as a type of varnish.

literature for the modesty of his British audience. Jones celebrates that his heroine will 'reign...victorious Fair, / In *British*, or in *Indian*, air!' (*SWJ*, 97, ll.559-560). Her Hindu dress in an English poem provides her with a '*British* or an *Indian* air', suggesting her multi-cultural, or cross-cultural, appeal. Southey seems to position Kailyal, however, within the comforts a '*British* air'. By offsetting Kailyal with Jones' 'Hindoo Wife', Southey has it both ways: the moral virgin *and* the exotic harlot.

As Michael J. Franklin notes, in Hindu mythology, the positioning of the foot on the bosom represents adopting 'a coital position' – though it is clear from other images in this passage that it is of an erotic nature (*SWJ*, 311). Southey seems to offer Jones' parallel descriptions of Hindu females in order to display his own resistance to this form of sexual imagery in describing Kailyal. Yet, Tim Fulford argues that Southey 'was considerably less careful than Jones in hiding his penis – that is, in covering up the sexually explicit aspects of Hindu mythology and religion'.<sup>75</sup> He also suggests that Southey 'seemed to ask readers not to be appalled but fascinated by Hinduism's combination of idolatry, sexual license and human sacrifice'.<sup>76</sup> Though a provocative claim, it seems to me that Southey actually uses that 'monstrous' combination of idolatry, sexuality, and ritual to separate Kehamian Brahmanism from Kailyal's purer 'faith'; for in most cases, Kailyal rejects them. It could simply be another case of Southey attempting to have it both ways again. In either case, it is clear that Brahmanical sexuality is not to be applied to Kailyal.

In fact, the 'sexual license' of Brahmanism is simply another vice contributing to its overall moral, social, and political corruption. In consecutive letters to Coleridge and Rickman in January 1800, Southey attributes 'the

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<sup>75</sup> 'Plants, Pagodas and Penises: Southey's Oriental Imports', *Robert Southey and the Contexts of English Romanticism* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), p. 187-202, 194.

<sup>76</sup> 'Plants, Pagodas and Penises', p. 195.



inferiority of the Orientals to polygamy' (*NL*, I, 219).<sup>77</sup> In the letter to Coleridge, he asks:

To what is the great superiority of Europeans over Orientalists attributable?...It cannot be the climate – for in [Persia] there are all temperatures. Religions? but it was the same under Zoroaster as under Mohammed...at one period the Mohammedan courts were the most enlightened of Europe...Perhaps Polygamy is the radical evil. The degradation of females in consequence of it is obvious, and its perpetual excitement is probably the chief cause of the voluptuousness attributed to climate, hence premature debility, hence a brutalized nature, hence habits of domestic despotism, and the inference that what is best in a family, is best in a state. (*NL*, I, 216)<sup>78</sup>

Here familial values constitute political or state values. Thus Arvalan's necrophilic sexual assault on Kailyal embodies the monstrous, despotic body politic. Likewise, Kailyal's refusal to marry Kehama and become corrupted by his degraded, despotic sexuality, reveal a level of political dissent consistent with a Southeyan ethos.

Indeed, Kailyal and Ladurlad's familial relationship stands as an example for what is 'best for the state'. At the beginning of the poem, we see the effects of polygamy. If we compare Kailyal to Azla and Nealliny – Arvalan's wives who are victims of *sati* – we see the extent to which Kailyal and Ladurlad's familial values challenge the expected complacency to Kehama's will:

Here doth the funeral pile appear  
...And built of precious sandal wood.  
...Woe! Woe! for Azla takes her seat  
Upon the funeral pile!  
Calmly she took her seat,  
Calmly the whole terrific pomp survey'd;  
...Woe! woe! Nealliny,  
The young Nealliny!  
They strip her ornaments away,  
Bracelet and anklet, ring, and chain, and zone;  
Around her neck they leave  
The marriage knot alone,...  
That marriage band, which when  
Yon waning moon was young,  
Around her virgin neck  
With bridal joy was hung.

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<sup>77</sup> 'To John Rickman, Friday, 17 Jany. 1800'.

<sup>78</sup> 'To Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thursday 16 Jany. 1800'.

(*Curse*, 13-14, I.129, 131, 144-147, 150-159)

Southey's description of Nealliny in particular contrasts heavily with that of Kailyal. Before placing her in the pyre, Nealliny is stripped of the 'ornaments' that demarcate her as a Jonesian 'Hindoo wife'; the only piece they leave is the 'marriage band', signifying her subordination to both her (dead) husband and the will of (Brahmanical) custom. When compared to Kailyal's refusal of Kehama, both Nealliny's marriage to Arvalan and her cultural ornamentation signify her complacent acceptance of the fatalistic theology ordained by Kehama's ritualistic Brahmanism.

Southey dramatises the event, and the comparison, by leaving the 'marriage band' in place as the physical and psychological bond condemning the innocent to death. He also uses it to invoke moral outrage not only over the act of burning widowed women alive, but also of them doing so to one still honeymooning from her recent wedding ('when / Yon waning moon was young' conveying the fact that Nealliny's marriage was only three weeks earlier). Moreover, the fact that there are *two* widowed wives being burnt here illustrates quite clearly that Southey was indeed stoking the flames of moral indignation not only with the barbarity of *sati* but also with the lustful depravity of polygamy. Compared to Ladurlad's commitment to his late wife Yedillian – in which he 'mend[s] the marriage-bower / ...like a pious rite / Due to the moment of past delight' – the Brahmanical devotion of widowed wives to their dead husband through the custom and ritual of *sati* stands in stark contrast to the widowed husband's moral devotion to his (one) dead wife by choice and by love (*Curse*, 74, IX.52-54).

Here, that lustful depravity is inflated into a fiery orgy of ritualistic (and orgasmic) death celebrated by the unholy masses. Kehama lights the funeral pyre and:

At once on every side

The rapid flames rush up.  
 Then hand in hand the victim band  
 Roll in the dance around the funeral pyre;  
 Their garments flying folds  
 Float inward to the fire  
 In drunken whirl they wheel around;  
 ...The tambours and the trumpets sound  
 And clap of hand, and shouts, and cries,  
 From the multitude arise:  
 While round and round, in giddy wheel,  
 Intoxicate they roll and reel,  
 Till one by one whirl'd in they fall,  
 And the devouring flames have swallowed all.  
 (*Curse*, 15, l.182-196)

The 'multitude' or 'mob' mentality represented here suggests Southey's fear of the dangers of religious ritual in political affairs – as he describes in his *Letters* from Portugal, where the 'mob of mankind' destroy 'virtue' by investing power in the Catholic Church. As Bolton writes, the mob imagery becomes 'a trope for an intimidating, oriental form of fanaticism'.<sup>79</sup> The crowd, as an entity participating in and thus accepting the barbaric *sati* custom, legitimises Kehama's ruling political authority.

However, Southey's use of *sati* in the poem becomes interestingly ambiguous<sup>80</sup>; though it clearly has negative cultural connotations when Azla and Nealliny are burnt, earlier, when Kailyal initiated her own *sati* to stave off Arvalan, it portrays a moral and heroic admiration for the self-sacrificial female.

Bolton writes that Southey's use of *sati* shows that:

Southey sacrifices colonial politics to gender politics in creating an exemplar of feminine virtue...[Kailyal] is forced to conform to Southey's colonialist ideology, but also to the morality of the patriarchal society he promotes, which at this point demands she should give up her life to protect her virginity.<sup>81</sup>

Southey uses *sati* to defend Kailyal *from* the ritualistic elements of Brahmanism that works to impose its fate on her, rather than Kailyal controlling her own fate. Her self-sacrificial purity resembles the insistent faith of Kristno's daughter, who,

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<sup>79</sup> *Writing the Empire*, p. 217.

<sup>80</sup> For a thorough examination of representations of *sati* during the period, cf. Andrea Major's *Pious Flames: European Encounters with Sati, 1500-1830* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>81</sup> *Writing the Empire*, p. 241.

though beaten and forced to worship Hindu idols, remains true to her adherence to Christ and the hope of conversion. Kailyal's act of self-imposed *sati* is literally a baptism by fire that eclipses her 'baptism' in the river which White suggests; her baptismal *sati* exemplifies her 'faith' in and 'resignation' to a higher moral sensibility that counteracts the system of Brahmanism seeking to corrupt her purity.

And just as Kristno's daughter's conversion was able to bring the family together, Kailyal's 'conversion' provides both a political and moral example for her family. In Book X, Ladurlad likewise undergoes a baptism, akin to Kristno's. Ladurlad and Kailyal flee with their mythological escort Ereenia (a Glendover, or deified spirit or angel) to Mount Meru, the sacred mountain and mythological abode of Brahma. Once there, Ladurlad escapes the earthly restraints of Kehama's curse, which included exclusion from the thirst-quenching and cleansing qualities of water. Earlier in the poem, after first being cursed, Ladurlad attempts to put his hand into water; 'The water knew Kehama's spell, / The water shrunk before him' (*Curse*, 26, III.57-58). Once on Mount Meru, however, Ladurlad wanders over to the river and places:

His hand...in the water;  
The innocent man, the man opprest,  
Oh joy!...hath found a place of rest  
Beyond Kehama's sway  
His Curse extends not here; his pains have past away.

O happy Sire, and happy Daughter!  
Ye on the banks of that celestial water  
Your resting place and sanctuary have found...

So to Ladurlad now was given  
*New strength, and confidence in Heaven,*  
*And hope, and faith invincible.*  
(*Curse*, 81, 84, X.85-92, 195-197)<sup>82</sup>

The river where he finds his relief and his 'faith invincible' is the Ganges.

Ladurlad is at the mythological place of the Ganges' 'mortal birth' where the

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<sup>82</sup> My italics.

river reaches the earth from the forehead of Shiva, becoming 'The Holy River, the Redeeming Flood' (*Curse*, 80, X.38, 34). Much like Kristno's conversion, the Ganges acts to 'put off' the repressive physical and psychological 'pains' of Kehama's Brahmanical curse, and 'put on' a new, Brahmanically-dissenting 'confidence in Heaven'. Southey's language interestingly imitates the political and religious rhetoric he would use elsewhere: 'faith invincible' invokes Southey's notion of the 'invincibility of Christianity' which he feels would be inevitable under a morally-conscious 'Eclectic Church', while 'the Redeeming Flood' harks back to Southey's aborted 'Flood' poem and the 'chastisement' of 'universal corruption'.

Their simultaneous use here in the Hindu *Swerga* is somewhat ironic. Kristno was Baptised in a de-sanctified Ganges and promised to 'put off' Hindu idols and 'put-on' Christ. Here, however, Ladurlad is 'baptised' in the 'Holy River' and 'Redeeming Flood' of the Ganges *in* the Hindu heaven, in which he has grown a 'new confidence' and a 'faith invincible'. Now it is arguable that Southey 'christianizes' the *Swerga* in order to reflect Christian principles; White for instance argues that there is a Christianising principle in Southey's representation of a 'higher' Hinduism, one which Southey portrays in scenes such as this one in the *Swerga*.<sup>83</sup> Ladurlad, tainted with Kehama's cursed Brahmanism, is 'redeemed' by 'A foretaste of eternal pleasure' which foreshadows Kehama's demise, and his reunion with his wife in the 'higher' heaven at the end of the poem (*Curse*, 83, X.177).

Yet, Southey's note to this scene offers a contradictory account of this 'baptismal' scene. Southey credits two sources for the inspiration of this episode: Sir William Jones' 'Hymn to Gangá' (1785) and its poetic description of the mythological birth of the Ganges; and the 'Ramayuna, one of the most celebrated of the sacred books of the Brahmins' ('Notes', *Curse*, 226). This

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<sup>83</sup> 'Idolatry, Evangelicalism, and the Intense Objectivism of Robert Southey', p. 17.

latter source receives additional comment: 'This work the excellent and learned Baptist missionaries at Serampore are at this time employed in printing and translating' ('Notes', *Curse*, 226). Southey lauds the Society's translation and publishing proficiency to maximise their conversional efforts. In the review of the Baptist Missionary Society, Southey commends their ability to translate and publish Hindu literature for English consumption, such as the *Ramayana*, as well as their dedication to having 'translated the whole Bible into Bengalese, and have by this time printed it...[for] spreading the knowledge of the scriptures among the heathen' ('Notes', *Curse*, 225). Southey displays their talent for translation by quoting a large section of their version of the *Ramayana* in his 'Notes' in order to compare his 'fictions of Kehama' with the 'genuine specimen of Hindoo fable' ('Notes', *Curse*, 225). In this way, Southey goes to some effort to support, and indeed align, his poem with the religiously-inclined scholarship of the missions.

However, Southey's use of Jones' 'Hymn to Gangá' should not be ignored from an ideological standpoint. Although Southey merely states that he is 'indebted' to Jones for the 'fable', the juxtaposition of Jones' poem with the Baptist Society's prose translation offers an interesting ideological tension between Southey's two sources ('Notes', *Curse*, 224). Jones' 'Gangá' relates the mythological origin of the Ganges springing from Shiva's forehead, which Southey re-poeticises in the second stanza of Book X: *Párvatí*, *Shiva's* female consort, covers *Shiva's* eyes in jest, bringing on a universal darkness and the stoppage of time and existence. The 'thought of nature thus suspended' provoked a drop of sweat from *Shiva's* brow, which poured down as the Ganges, the redeemer and regenerator of life (*Curse*, 80, X.31). For Jones, the Ganges is thus 'To *Brahmà's* grateful race endear'd' for its rejuvenating effects (*SWJ*, 127, ll. 11). Southey seems keen to take advantage of this idea for Ladurlad's baptismal scene. Yet at the same time, unlike Carey's baptism of

Kristno, Southey validates the holiness and sanctity of the Ganges within the mythological framework of Hinduism outlined by Jones. Ladurlad's 'soul' becomes 'imbued / With hope and holy fortitude' after he learns that 'Seeva, the Avenger, is not blind, / Nor Veeshnoo careless for mankind' (*Curse*, 85, X.227-228, 225-226). Southey, in effect, imbues Hinduism with a moral validity through Ladurlad's renewed faith in 'Seeva' and 'Veeshnoo' – a faith which challenges the ritualistic elements exploited by Kehama, and one which aligns Southey's representation with Jones' own respectful and sympathetic treatment of Hinduism rather than the Baptist Society's desecrating 'objectivism' (as White outlines in 'Idolatry, Evangelicalism, and the Intense Objectivism of Robert Southey'). This tension suggests the ways in which Southey incorporates the Jonesian model from which he initially attempts to deviate; that is, Ladurlad's 'conversion' seems to be a step towards the sympathy and syncretism of Jonesian *Vedantism* rather than the obstinacy and dogmatism of English evangelicalism.

The same seems true for Kailyal. We find a similar sense of renewed faith emerge in Kailyal, centred on her devotion to Marriataly. Although she is the goddess of smallpox, Marriataly is also the goddess of the 'Parias' (pariah), the socially poor and disenfranchised who make up the lowest caste of Hindu society. In this sense, Marriataly offers a political and religious alternative to Kehama's reign ('Notes', *Curse*, 200). Daniel Sanjiv Roberts writes that:

Marriataly's exclusive domain as the goddess of pariahs separates her crucially from Brahmanical Hinduism and her benevolent characteristics would seem to express, in a displaced form, Southey's earlier radical and anti-institutional tendencies as a critic of church and state. (*Curse*, xx)

She seems to represent, in fact, the moral ideals of his 'Eclectic Church'. Throughout the poem, Kailyal turns to Marriataly for divine protection and guidance, vowing, as she and her father re-erect the wooden statue, to 'Raise our own Goddess, our Divine Preserver! / The mighty of the earth despise her

rites, / She loves the poor who serve her' (*Curse*, 34, IV.97-99). Her devotion to Marriataly allows Kailyal to keep her Saivite and Vaishnavite faith in the 'Heavenly Powers' of *Shiva* and *Vishnu* as an opposing ideology to Kehama's autocracy. She prays that:

Our hope is all in them: They are not blind!  
And lighter wrongs than ours,  
And lighter crimes than his,  
Have drawn the Incarnate down among mankind.  
Already have the Immortals heard our cries.  
(*Curse*, 34, IV.79-84)

Kailyal keeps 'faith' and 'resignation' in the *avatar*, or humanly incarnation, of *Vishnu* and *Shiva* coming to earth (again) to right the wrongs of moral corruption. Kailyal's conviction of the Hindu gods' ability to counteract Kehama's power is at odds with Montgomery's notion that Kailyal is imbued with a Christian 'faith'. Supposing the 'truth' of Hinduism, Kailyal seems to place her faith squarely in it.

Kailyal's devotion to Marriataly reveals the extent to which the Hindu Pantheon plays an 'integral' role in the poem's narrative arc, as well as in its ideological treatment of religion. In the last section of this argument, I expand on Southey's treatment of the machinery of Hindu deities in an attempt to recognise their part in Southey's ideologically-fractured treatment of Hinduism.

#### V: The 'materials of the narrative': Machinery, Mythology, and Southey's Hindu Pantheon

As noted in the introduction, Southey makes clear that, for him, the success of *Kehama*, if any, will be judged on his poetry's ability to 'excite astonishment, terror, and sometimes delight' – not the 'materials of the narrative' to do so (*NL*, I, 486).<sup>84</sup> In Southey's mind, the 'materials of the narrative' (that is, the Hindu deities) challenge him, who 'learnt the language of poetry from our own great masters and the great poets of antiquity', to put his

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<sup>84</sup> 'To Charles Wynn, Oct. 1808'.



poetic erudition to the test, in order to make the un-poetic poetic ('Preface' [1838], *Curse*, 4). This task was to make Hindu deities 'fit machinery for an English poem'. The literary importance of machinery in an epic poem is that it provides a level of direct interaction between the divine and humanity; as M.H. Abrams defines it, machinery allows the gods to 'take an interest or an active part' in the narrative.<sup>85</sup> The machinery of the epic, then, serves an important narrative element in framing the relationship between humanity and divinity. Stuart Curran notes that Southey 'delights in elaborating his machinery' for his mythological epics; in fact, Curran comments on how Southey subverts formal precedent in the way that 'the monstrous hubris of Kehama... attempts to unseat the gods'.<sup>86</sup> As I hope I have shown, part of Kehama's monstrosity is his very manipulation of the 'gross' features of Hindu theology which allow him access to the divine levers of power. Southey positions this form of human/divine relationship as anathema to the moral, virtuous relationship exemplified by Kailyal's affiliation with Marriataly.

And this is what is most striking, ambiguous, and contradictory about Southey's poem: the fact that Southey's treatment of the Hindu deities completely omit any such 'deformities' or 'monstrosities' that are a hallmark of Kehama's divine appropriation. This has something to do, of course, with Southey making them 'fit machinery for an English poem', but at the same time, in doing so, he completely undermines the entire premise of his 'Preface'.

Southey was aware of possible concerns regarding the appropriateness of Hindu deities operating within the mechanics of an English poem. As his friend Charles Wynn writes to him in 1808:

Machinery is an excellent ornament but a bad base for a poem particularly when it is not familiar to the reader. Seeva, Indra and Vishnu are not known to us as Mahomet and Alla or as Jupiter

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<sup>85</sup> 'Epic', *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Seventh Edition* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), p. 77.

<sup>86</sup> *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, p. 135.

Odin etc. besides the idea of a power formidable to the Deity is in itself revolting and unintelligible. (*NL*, I, 486)

Wynn is unimpressed with the closeness with which humanity and the divine form a relationship; indeed, he is quite troubled by it. He seems to be talking about *Kehama* in particular and the monstrous theological implications of prayers as 'drafts' and 'payments'. *Kehama's* assumption of divine power is 'revolting' and 'unintelligible' – seemingly in the same way that Southey prefers the Devil to *Shiva*: it is not cultural translatable. Wynn expresses the same concerns which Southey does in his complaints about Jones' 'Hymns': the deities are unfamiliar and cause difficulties through their cultural and religious foreignness. 'Seeva, Indra, Vishnu', though alien, provide 'excellent ornament' in the poem, but Wynn's uneasiness with those deities reveals a deeper concern. As Balachandra Rajan writes, 'though exotic machinery [in the form of Hindu deities] might be an 'excellent ornament' for a poem, its function in *Kehama* seemed to be integral rather than decorative'.<sup>87</sup> That is, Wynn's realisation is that these Hindu deities play a part in the narrative of the poem that is larger than mere 'decoration'. They are an 'integral' feature of the poem – perhaps too much so for some readers. As Sir Walter Scott wrote to Southey, 'In some respects I think you have followed your mythology a little too closely into its more fantastic recesses'.<sup>88</sup>

This section provides a deeper analysis of Southey's Hindu machinery in *Kehama*. Vital to this analysis is Southey's at times obsessive concern with poetics and versification. As we see, Southey attempts to ameliorate concerns such as Scott and Wynn's through the poetics itself. He writes in the 1838 'Preface' to *Kehama* that

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<sup>87</sup> 'Monstrous Mythologies: Southey and *The Curse of Kehama*', *European Romantic Review*, 9:2, 1998: p. 201-216, 202.

<sup>88</sup> *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott 1808-1811*, ed. H.J.C Grierson (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1932), p. 416.

nothing but moral sublimity could compensate for the extravagance of the fictions, and that all the skills I might possess in the art of poetry was required to counterbalance the disadvantage of a mythology with which few readers were likely to be well acquainted, and which would be monstrous if its deformities were not kept out of sight. I endeavoured, therefore, to combine the utmost richness of versification with the greatest freedom. (*Curse*, 4)

Southey pitches versification with mythopoeia to create a 'balance' to offset the demagoguery and restrictive exclusivity inherent in Kehamian Brahmanism with a 'moral sublimity' partaking of the imaginative aestheticism associated with the 'great poets of antiquity'. In his 1808 letter to Walter Landor, Southey writes, 'I will use such materials as have stood the test...With respect to metre...there we must look to English only, and in English we have no other great poem than the *Paradise Lost*' (SL, 139). Even though Southey decides against blank verse for *Kehama*, he invokes its connotations of 'Englishness' in order to provide suitable poetic cover for the 'materials of the narrative'.

To provide this cover, Southey believes that 'There must be quicker, wilder movements; there must be a gorgeousness of ornament also, – eastern gem-work, and sometimes rhyme must be rattled upon rhyme, till the reader is half dizzy with the thundering echo' (SL, 139). Rhetoric such as 'eastern gem-work' suggest his engagement with a stereotypically Orientalist discourse, such as that Said would condemn; however, Southey shows that he is looking for a poetic measure that will allow him to incorporate disparate elements of rhyme, tempo, and tone that he believes will help him accommodate not only Hinduism's 'monstrosity', but also 'echo' its 'sublimity'. He seems to reject blank verse because he wants the 'greatest freedom' in his versification to combat the strictures of Kehamian Brahmanism, but also to provide a level of 'ornamentation' for those parts of the poem with which he is displeased. Interestingly, his versification emulates some of the very principles of his

'Eclectic Church' – a mixture of all the best qualities of all the other forms, while at the same time rejecting the 'established' precedent.

Yet it was these very poetic notions that caused Francis Jeffrey, in his 1802 review of *Thalaba* in the *Edinburgh Review*, to label Southey, and his fellow 'Lake-School' poets (such as Wordsworth and Coleridge) '*dissenters* from the established system in poetry and criticism'.<sup>89</sup> The religious rhetoric used by Jeffrey, while certainly figurative, has a particularly extended resonance due to the subject matter involved. Southey is not simply 'dissenting' from metrical traditions standard to the epic form, but also, through his sympathetic portrayals of Islam, traditional Christian subject matter (at least in the Miltonic sense). In his review, Jeffrey describes Southey's versification as 'a jumble of all the measures that are known in English poetry', and 'a species of monsters [that]...Mr Southey...has made a vigorous effort their naturalization'.<sup>90</sup> Jeffrey considers Southey's versification 'monstrous', as a composite of all the different English verse forms fused together. As such, it creates an 'unbounded license of variation' which is 'disorderly', serving only to 'perplex and disturb the reader'.<sup>91</sup> There is something unnatural and subversive about his versification that not only 'dissents' from established tradition but seems to seek its complete overthrow.

This, in turn, has political overtones. David Duff argues that Southey's metrical heterodoxy in *Thalaba* leads Jeffrey to draw a

connection between Southey's anti-establishment politics and his unruly and irregular verse...Seen from this perspective, the 'Thalaba style' is the embodiment in poetry of the politics of freedom and innovation.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> 'Francis Jeffery, unsigned review, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1802, i, 63-83', *The Critical Heritage*, p. 68.

<sup>90</sup> *The Critical Heritage*, p. 78.

<sup>91</sup> *The Critical Heritage*, p. 78, 80.

<sup>92</sup> *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 74-75.

Duff is speaking in terms of romance and romance narrative itself, as well as the Revolutionary aspects it employed during the Romantic period. He maintains that *Thalaba* was seen as a break from poetic and political norms and that the unorthodox verse form only emphasized such 'dissent'.

Southey, however, consciously distances himself from the 'Thalaba style' in *Kehama*. 'The same sense of fitness which made me chuse for an Arabian tale the simplest and easiest form of verse', he writes in the 1838 'Preface', 'induced me to take a different course in an Indian poem' (*Curse*, 4). However, there is little more poetic and formal orthodoxy in *Kehama* than in *Thalaba* – perhaps, only a greater sense of rhyme which imposes some order to an otherwise free verse structure.

Importantly, Southey viewed the use of rhyme as a formal buffer against Hindu religion. In another letter to Wynn in 1805, Southey writes:

You will perceive that this poem [*Kehama*] is much altered – and rhyme very frequently introduced. Of this arbitrary use or rejection of rhyme precedents are to be found in the old dramatic writers... Yet it should seem reasonable rejecting rhymes as a necessary to admit it as an occasional ornament, and if this were done in such parts as require ornament because the circumstances are less interesting, the feeling less empassioned [*sic*], and the language in consequence in a lower key, I think the mark would be hit... in correcting the poem I have chiefly rhymed such parts as did not satisfy me before; tho perhaps this may not be altogether wide of what ought to be done, if the rhyme gives such passages the finish which they wanted. (*NL*, I, 378)<sup>93</sup>

By and large, critics did not see the difference between this poem and *Thalaba*, and berated *Kehama*'s free-verse irregularity. Jeffery in the *Edinburgh Review* described *Kehama* as 'tottering and slovenly'.<sup>94</sup> For John Foster, *Kehama* simply duplicated the vulgarity of Hindu mythology itself, allowing, 'in complete defiance of all rule... the poet to riot away in a wild wantonness of amplification'.<sup>95</sup> Southey, however, views the imposing of 'arbitrary' rhymed

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<sup>93</sup> 'March 24, 1805'.

<sup>94</sup> From Daniel Sanjiv Robert's 'Introduction', *Robert Southey Poetical Works*, Vol. 4, p. xvi.

<sup>95</sup> 'Eclectic Review. April 1811, vii, 334-50', *Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage*, p. 145.

sequences as an aesthetic element to add 'ornament' and 'interest' to the poem, as well as to 'increase the bustle' of those scenes with which he feels unsatisfied (*NL*, I, 384).<sup>96</sup>

Two episodes in the poem where Southey's versification most obviously employs rhyme is 'Book VII – The Swerga' and 'Book X – Mount Meru'. In these episodes, Southey deals extensively with Hindu mythology, introducing in Book VII the *Swerga*, or the Hindu Heaven, its ruling god *Indra* and *Nared*, the God of Music; and in Book X the idyllic abode of *Brahma*, as well as *Camdeo*, the God of Love, and *Súrya*, the Sun God. Since these are the scenes in which Southey most closely follows Hindu myth, the switch to rhyme suggests Southey's own sense of (dis) satisfaction with their poetic representation. It also suggests the degree to which Southey attempts to paint the Hindu deities as mythological ornaments present only to generate 'interest' and create a sense of 'bustle'.

Southey's representation of *Camdeo* displays such ornamental use of Hindu deities. As he writes to Grosvenor Bedford in 1808, 'The mythology is all true... [though] the close of [Book X] about Camdeo does not please me' (*NL*, I, 488).<sup>97</sup> There is a sense here that although the mythology is accurate, it is not *poetically* precise. Southey proposes in early draft fragments that *Camdeo*, depicted in the poem as a Cupid-like 'wanton' *provocateur* of sexual desire, 'will not aim at Kalyal [sic] – it were a crime' and that 'Camdeo grasps a flash of lightning' – perhaps a reference to the bolts of lightning that 'play idly there, / In inoffensive radiance, round th[e] head' of an ineffectual *Indra* ('Draft Fragments and Notes', *Curse*, 278, 283; 64, VII.262-263).

However, in the poem, Southey decides to have *Camdeo* take aim at Kailyal – to his own mythological demise. Although Southey's descriptions of *Camdeo* are mythologically accurate – *Camdeo*'s mythological lorry upon which

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<sup>96</sup> 'To Grosvenor Charles Bedford, May 1805'.

<sup>97</sup> 'October, 1808'.

he flies, his 'bow of sugar-cane' strung with bees, his flowered arrows are all there, replete with poetic tribute to Jones' 'Hymn to Camdeo' – Southey manipulates his divine potency for fictional gain (*Curse*, 88, X.317). *Camdeo* attempts to impose his amorous disposition on Ereenia and Kailyal, saying,

If men below and Gods above,  
Subject alike...have felt these darts,  
Shall ye alone, of all in story,  
Boast impenetrable hearts?  
(*Curse*, 87, X.289-292)

Ereenia's response mocks his mythological powers:

Go aim at idler hearts,  
Thy skill is baffled here!  
A deeper love I bear that Maid divine,  
Sprung from a higher will,  
A holier power than thine!  
(*Curse*, 88, X.323-327)

*Camdeo* shoots his arrows at the two, but they do nothing of his will; at one point, the bees of his bow become dispersed and buzz around Kailyal's head 'to pay their willing duty / To mortal purity and beauty' (*Curse*, X.336-337). The 'higher will' of Ereenia's love and Kailyal's purity renders *Camdeo*'s divine (and sexually explicit) potency impotent. Indeed, 'of all in story', they resist his powers. This is an instance of Hindu ornament bowing to the larger moral themes within the poem; it is also indicative of Southey's attempt to break the established mythological creeds of Hinduism with his own moral agenda attributable to a 'higher power' than a Hindu god. This suggests something of the conversion argument that White and Bolton make; Hinduism falls short of the purer theology of Christianity. It also suggests something of Southey's interest in translation as a concept for making Hinduism 'fit for an English poem'; the Hindu deities are nothing more than fanciful annoyances to the devoted moralists and pure of spirit. Their mythological powers can be easily dismissed by 'faith' in 'A holier power' than ornamental gods.

However, though Southey views versification as an aesthetic buttress against the 'monstrous' mythologies of Hinduism, he has chosen a form of poetry – the epic – which necessitates the involvement of Hindu machinery in the narrative. 'Book V – The Separation' is a case in point. After having been cursed by Kehama, Ladurlad and Kailyal make their way through a darkened forest. Ladurlad, suffering from the pains of the curse, decides not to burden Kailyal with his malady any longer and leaves her sleeping by a tree. Kailyal wakes to find him fleeing and chases after him, only to lose herself in the darkness. She then hears a 'Tyger's hungry howl' far off in the distance (*Curse*, 42, V.160). This 'howl' gives way to Arvalan's ghostly form and, 'like a light from Hell', once more comes after Kailyal with ill-intent (*Curse*, 42, V.167). Kailyal, at first paralysed by fear:

...burst the spell of fear,  
 Away she broke all frantically and fled.  
 There stood a temple near beside the way,  
 An open fane of Pollear, gentle God,  
 To whom the travellers for protection pray.  
 With elephantine head and eye severe,  
 Here stood his image, such as when he seize'd  
 And tore the rebel giant from the ground,  
 With mighty trunk wreath'd round  
 His impotent bulk, and on his tusk, on high  
 Impal'd, upheld him between earth and sky.

Thither the affrighted maiden sped her flight,  
 And she hath reach'd the place of sanctuary;  
 And now within the temple in despite,  
 Yea, even before the altar, in his sight,  
 Hath Arvalan with fleshly arm of might  
 Seiz'd her. That instant the insulted God  
 Caught him aloft, and from his sinuous grasp,  
 As if from some tort catapult let loose,  
 Over the forest hurl'd him all abroad.

O'ercome with dread,  
 She tarried not to see what heavenly power  
 Had saved her in that hour. (*Curse*, 44-45, V.201-224)

In this scene, Pollear – more commonly known as *Ganesha*, the Hindu god with an elephant head held as 'an emblem of sagacity' – plays a significant role in protecting the protagonist (*Hindu Pantheon*, 11). Kailyal flees from Arvalan and



takes refuge in a nearby temple dedicated to Pollear. In the temple, an idol of the god enacts a slightly altered version of his most famous mythological deed, subduing the giant *Gudja-mouga-chourin*, whose extraordinary power was used to do 'much harm to mankind' ('Notes', *Curse*, 204). In the myth, *Ganesha* throws one of his tusks at the giant and impales him in the stomach, at which point the giant changes into a rat (according to Moor, a symbol of 'wisdom and foresight'), which *Ganesha* saddles to serve as his carrier (*Hindu Pantheon*, 11).

In *Kehama*, Pollear is displayed lifting his adversary with his trunk and spearing him with his tusks – apparently foreshadowing the fate of those who would taint his 'holy ground' (*Curse*, 44).<sup>98</sup> Whereas Kailyal reaches a 'place of sanctuary' within the temple, Arvalan 'insults' the deity with his very being 'before the altar'. Arvalan's presence desecrates the sanctity of the temple and, indeed, Pollear himself, since he attempts to harm Kailyal, 'Yea, even...in *his* sight'.<sup>99</sup> In a re-enactment of Hindu mythology, Pollear seizes Arvalan with his 'sinuous trunk' and catapults him over the forest. As the protector of travellers, Pollear fulfils his godly responsibilities; if someone seeks refuge in his sanctuary, he will offer them (divine) protection.

However, by having Pollear fulfil his divine duties, Southey incorporates into his poem the action of 'genuine' Hindu mythology, thereby transferring narrative authority to an existing mythology. Southey introduces a Hindu *deus ex machina* to resolve plot sequences for the continuation of his own narrative. This may be perhaps ornamental, but importantly, those actions involve the deities in the moral implications of the narrative; that is, the Hindu deities act on behalf of Kailyal's moral mission.

Interestingly, Jones notes that

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<sup>98</sup> This phrase was one edited out by Southey in a previous manuscript. See note 1 to line 215 on page 44 and 'Draft Fragments, 1802-3' page 341.

<sup>99</sup> Pollear. My italics.

all sacrifices and religious ceremonies, all addresses even to superior Gods, *all serious compositions in writing*, and all worldly affairs of moment, are begun by pious *Hindus* with an invocation to GANÉSA... Few books are begun without the words *salutation* to GANÉS'. ('On the Gods', I, 328)

Like the Classical invocation of the Muses in an epic poem, *Ganesh* is invoked at the beginning of all Hindu poems or stories; Jones' follows suit in 'A Hymn to Durgá', opening the poem with the lines, 'From thee begins the solemn air, / Ador'd GANÉSA; next thy sire we praise' to pray, in the tradition, for a successful undertaking of one's endeavour (*SWJ*, 169, ll.1-2). Southey's introduction of Pollear occurs at the end of Book V, so Southey is not keeping with the Hindu tradition *per se*. However, Pollear is the first Hindu deity the reader encounters in the flesh, as it were, and Southey introduces him at the onset of Kailyal's own journey through the Hindu heavens, and ultimately, the rest of the poem. The first four books of the poem deal mostly with Ladurlad, but at the end of Book V, we see Kailyal assume the role as the main protagonist of the story. In this sense, Pollear's intervention into the poem symbolises not only a transition in the narrative from Ladurlad to Kailyal, but also a transition to a different kind of human-divine relationship.

Pollear's proactive intervention differs greatly from the passive fatalism of the other deities. For instance, *Indra*, the god of the *Swerga*, is caught unaware of Kehama's increasing threat to his throne and, once informed, is largely unwilling to do anything but turn to *Vishnu* for salvation. Ereenia retorts, 'Look not there for help / ...Our Father Casyapa hath said he turns / His doubtful eyes to Seeva' – thereby implying that the situation is well beyond the powers of *Vishnu* (*Curse*, 63, VII.254, 256-257). '[T]he Gods / Are feeble here', Kailyal responds in exasperation, 'but there are higher Powers / Who will not turn their eyes from wrongs like ours' (*Curse*, 65, VII.303-305). Pollear, with his 'eye severe' and with Arvalan 'in his sight', ensures such faith is recompensed.

The reiteration of 'higher powers' here seems to suggest something similar to The *Swerga* scene, where *Camdeo's* cheeky love-play is dismissed by Ereenia and Kailyal's 'higher will' and 'holier power'. As such, it implies a certain Christian-like 'faith' in things beyond the Hindu pantheon. However, the 'eyes' that turn not from Kailyal's 'wrongs' actually seem to foreshadow the 'Eye of Anger' that sees to Kehama's demise and the 'Eye of Mercy' which sees to Kailyal's immortal passage into heaven at the end of the poem (*Curse*, 188, XXIV.220; 189, XXIV.265). Contrary to that sentiment of Christian 'higher power', both of these 'Eyes' belong to *Shiva*.

Southey notes that Pollear is 'The first and greatest of the sons of Seeva'.<sup>100</sup> As the progeny of *Shiva* – and, in fact, an incarnation of *Shiva* – Pollear emphasises the Saivite influence that Southey has chosen to focus on in the poem. Pollear's mythological heredity also emphasises the particular Saivite 'faith' Kailyal expresses throughout the poem (more on that below). The explanatory list of Hindu deities preceding the poem introduces 'Brama', 'Veeshnoo', and 'Seeva' respectively as the 'Creator', the 'Preserver', and the 'Destroyer'. However, Southey also notes that, 'The two latter have at this day their hostile sects of worshippers; that of Seeva is the most numerous; and in this Poem, Seeva is represented as Supreme among the Gods' (*Curse*, 7). By describing Vaishnavite and Saivite sects as 'hostile', Southey invokes a sense of intimidation, even violence, in their forms of worship. Southey's decision to represent *Shiva* as 'Supreme among the Gods' particularly reflects this characterisation. He implies that he designates *Shiva* 'Supreme' because the Saivas are 'the most numerous'. Apparently, the greater number of worshippers, the greater the god. However, in *The Hindu Pantheon*, Edward Moor correctly states that, 'the *Vaishnavas* so far out-number the adherents of SIVA' (30).

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<sup>100</sup> 'Notes', *Robert Southey Poetical Works*, Vol. 4, p. 203-204. From Sonnerat's *Voyage to the East-Indies and China*.

Southey's misinformation perhaps stems from another source, Nathaniel Kindersley's *Specimens of Hindoo Literature* (1794), which says that 'the supremacy of *Shivven* appears to have obtained more general consent than that of *Veeshnoo*'.<sup>101</sup> Yet, despite the misinformation, Southey's reasons for exalting Siva as the 'Supreme God' are, I think, altogether different from his stated explanation.

Many of the works on Hindu mythology used by Southey associate Saivism with *Lingam*, or phallus, worship. Pierre Sonnerat writes that, 'The *Lingam* is the most sacred form under which *Chiven* is worshipped, and it is always placed in the sanctuary of his temples'.<sup>102</sup> Likewise Moor notes that, 'As the deity presiding over generation, [*Shiva*'s] type is the *Linga*, the origin probably of the *Phallic* emblem of *Egypt* and *Greece*' (*Hindu Pantheon*, 26).<sup>103</sup> Kindersley acknowledges his objection to such worship, stating that the 'emblem under which *Shivven* is most universally adored is the LINGAM', a figure deemed 'too gross to describe'. Kindersley comments further that 'some understand the LINGAM to be a symbol of the original supreme Creator', but 'that this is not the popular opinion, would appear from the sectaries of VEESHNOO holding it in execration, as a scandalous emblem of SHIVVEN alone'.<sup>104</sup> Kindersley's assessment attempts to make a distinction between the sects of Hindu worship, while backhandedly justifying his own (and assumedly his British readers') contempt for Saivite phallic worship by acknowledging Vaishnavite 'execration' of it. That is, he suggests that *Lingam* worship is so distasteful that even other Hindus object to it.

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<sup>101</sup> *Specimens of Hindoo Literature*, (London, 1794), p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> *A Voyage to the East Indies and China, Volume I* (Calcutta, 1788), p. 44.

<sup>103</sup> Although Siva is known as the 'Destroyer', Saivism considers destruction as a regenerative act of creation; as Moor explains, '*Hindu* philosophy excludes, while time shall exist, the idea of absolute annihilation: to destroy is, therefore, but to *change*, or *recreate*, or *reproduce*. And here we at once see how easy it is...to imagine the deity of destruction to preside also over generation' (*The Hindu Pantheon*, p. 25). For this reason, Saivas exalt Siva over Brahma, who only created once, while Siva creates always.

<sup>104</sup> *Specimens of Hindoo Literature*, p. 10.

Southey contextualises his representation of Brahman priests in the 'Jaga-Naut' episode (and, indeed, his whole portrayal of Hindu licentiousness) with reference to *Lingam* worship. In his 'Notes', Southey explicitly identifies *Shiva* as 'the God of the Ling' (*Curse*, 210).<sup>105</sup> Southey portrays this association negatively again in reference to the 'harlot-band', quoting from Thomas Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* (7 vols, 1793-1800). As he notes:

Incited, unquestionably...by the hieroglyphic emblem of vice so conspicuously elevated, and so strikingly painted in the temples of Mahadeo [*Shiva's* ascetic incarnation], the priests of that deity industriously selected the most beautiful females that could be found. ('Notes', *Curse*, 251)

Southey's notes leave unexplained that: 1) Mahadeo is an incarnation of *Shiva*, and 2) that 'the hieroglyphic emblem of vice' is the *Lingam*. This suggests that *Shiva's* association with the *phallus* is sufficiently well known to infer the former point from the latter; or, that it is easy enough to infer the *Lingam* as the 'hieroglyphic emblem of vice' and thusly associate it generally with the primitivism of Hindu mythology.

However, Southey and his sources once again do not quite have the details correct. Firstly, the Juggernaut festival celebrates *Krishna*, who is an incarnation of *Vishnu*, and thus an idol largely of Vaishnava worship.<sup>106</sup> Secondly, Kindersley's acknowledgement of Vaishnavite 'execration' of *Lingam* worship would disassociate that practice from the sexual perversity demonised in the 'Jaga-Naut' episode. Yet, Southey uses Maurice to suggest that, impelled by their lecherous worship of the *Lingam*, Brahmin priests aligned to *Shiva* actively participate in the morally dubious actions represented in 'The Jaga-Naut'. Southey uses the popular knowledge of Saivite *Lingam* worship to portray the evils of Brahmanism and thus verify his own stated beliefs about the 'monstrous' notions of Hindu mythology.

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<sup>105</sup> From Mark Wilks' *Historical Sketches of the South of India* (1810-1814).

<sup>106</sup> Appropriately referenced in Moor's *Hindu Pantheon*, p. 145, 170.

However, these negative representations of Saivite worship are the exclusive domain of Southey's notes and the inferred interpretation of Southey's depiction of sacrificial ritual. That is to say, these 'popular' portrayals of *Shiva* seem to have little influence on the way Southey actually portrays the deity within the poem's narrative, as well as within the mythological 'machinery' of *Kehama's* Hindu pantheon. As noted in the last section, Kailyal places her faith in *Shiva's avatar* to come to earth and save them from *Kehama's* tyranny. She also places her faith in him as a protector; when *Ladurlad* dismisses *Vishnu's* 'power to save' and *Shiva's* 'power to destroy', Kailyal responds that they, 'in the mercy of their *righteousness*, / Beheld us in the hour of our distress' (*Curse*, 34, IV.76, 77, 85-86).<sup>107</sup> Here, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* are revered for their 'mercy' and 'righteousness', qualities in direct opposition to *Kehama's* 'no human mood / of mercy', and his 'no hesitating thought / Of *right* and justice' (*Curse*, 21, II.137-139).<sup>108</sup> Despite the ritualistic association of Saivite *Lingam* worship with *Kehamian* Brahmanism in the 'Jaga-Naut' scene, here Southey clearly disassociates *Vishnu* and *Shiva as deities* from the religious corruption associated with *Kehama's* theological despotism. These representations suggest that the real problem lies not with the deities, but with the established modes of worship structured by the society – note that Southey deems the worshippers 'hostile', not the gods. Furthermore, throughout the poem's narrative, Southey summons *Shiva* to respond repeatedly to Kailyal's request to aid her and her father in the 'hour of their distress' – as seen in the episode with *Pollear*.

But there is another instance where *Shiva* plays an integral role in the narrative. When *Kehama* takes possession of the *Swerga*, thus ousting

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<sup>107</sup> My italics.

<sup>108</sup> My italics.

Ereenia's father *Casyapa* from his 'ancient and august abodes', *Casyapa* tells his son to:

With patient heart hold onward to the end, ...  
*Be true unto yourselves, and bear in mind*  
*That every God is still the good Man's friend;*  
And they, who suffer bravely, save mankind.  
(*Curse*, 100, XII.57-60)<sup>109</sup>

In a note to the italicised lines, Southey writes that the sentiment expressed in them 'is one of the few sublime ones' of Hindu philosophy ('Notes', *Curse*, 242).

The line is paraphrased from *The Institutes of Menu*, the divine legal code issued by Menu (or Manu), the progenitor of humanity, translated by William Jones and published posthumously in 1794. Southey's adaptation seems to suggest genuine admiration, and he quotes from the work in full to offer a better sense of its 'sublimity':

The soul itself is its own witness; the soul itself is its own refuge; offend not thy conscious soul, the supreme internal witness of men! The sinful have said in their hearts, none see us. Yes, the gods distinctly see them, and so does the spirit within their breasts. ... The guardian deities...perfectly know the state of all spirits clothed with bodies. ... O friend to virtue! that supreme Spirit, *which thou believest one and the same with thyself*, resides in thy bosom perpetually, and is an all-knowing inspector of thy goodness or of thy wickedness. ('Notes', *Curse*, 242-243)<sup>110</sup>

The line italicised in this quotation is done so not by Jones, or Menu for that matter, but by Southey. Southey chooses to emphasis one of the more esoteric and gnostic theological points of Hindu mythology – one which dissolves the boundaries between divinity and humanity and offers one's own moral sensibilities as a guiding divine force. This has particular resonance with Kailyal, who is a moral compass for the poem's narrative by defying the established religious doctrines and living by her own inherently good moral sense. At the end of the poem, she becomes divine herself and enters into the Hindu heaven without having to go through the several cycles of reincarnation to prove her

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<sup>109</sup> My italics.

<sup>110</sup> Taken from Sir William Jones *Institutes of Menu* (Ch. VIII, 1796).

moral purity – a final dismissal of Hindu mythology’s own religious machinery. However, as one ardent admirer of the poem comments, ‘yet there is one great error [in *Kehama*] – *faith* in the character of the divine Kailyal’.<sup>111</sup> That admirer was Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley’s criticism can be taken as a passing comment on his own atheistic views, but he also points out a possible discrepancy between Kailyal’s (Christianised) religious independence and moral individuality, and her professions of (Saivite) ‘faith’. If ‘every God is man’s best friend’ and if ‘an all-knowing inspector of thy goodness’ is omnipresent, then the poem’s machinery must accommodate these prophecies.

When, in ‘Book XXIV – The Amreeta’, Kehama drinks the ‘Amreeta’, or the mythological elixir of immortality, ‘Seeva opened on the Accursed One / His Eye of Anger: upon him alone / The wrath-beam fell’ (*Curse*, 188, 279-281). The ‘all-knowing inspector of goodness and wickedness’ is *Shiva* and although there are attempts to align Kehama with *Shiva*, it is ultimately *Shiva* who defeats Kehama’s attempts to gain his divine status. ‘A stream of poison doth the Amreeta run’ through Kehama and he is punished to spend eternity holding Yamen’s throne. *Shiva*’s intercession recalls, as Southey notes, an episode from the *Mahabharata*, one of two major epics of Hindu mythology, in which the Amreeta is spilt into the oceans of creation and ‘Seev...swallowed the fatal drug to save mankind’ (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 123). *Shiva* once again fulfils his mythological duty of human salvation by disposing of Kehama, while also justifying Kailyal’s moral purity:

Ye heavenly Powers?...  
Ye know my innocent will, my heart sincere,  
Ye govern all things still,  
...She said, and drank. The Eye of Mercy beam’d  
Upon the maid.  
(*Curse*, 189, XXIV.260, 262-263, 265-266)

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<sup>111</sup> *LETTERS 1803 to 1812*, p. 103.



'The Eye of Mercy' is *Shiva's*, although it attempts to allegorise a greater sense of benevolence inherent in the divine. Yet, it is Kailyal's faith in *Shiva*, throughout the poem, which drives the narrative to this ultimate conclusion.

This is taken to a whole other level in 'Book XIX – Mount Calasay', where Ereenia seeks *Shiva* 'To tell his tale of wrong' (*Curse*, 153, ll. 71). *Shiva* moves from being a mythological 'monstrosity' to a supreme spirit of virtue. Again, in another re-enactment of Hindu mythology, Ereenia seeks to find *Shiva*, where *Brahma* and *Vishnu* had previously failed:

Downward, its depth to sound  
Veeshnoo a thousand year's explor'd  
The fathomless depth,  
And yet no base he found:  
Upward, to reach its head,  
Ten myriad years the aspiring Brama soar'd,  
And still, as up he fled,  
Above him still the Immeasurable spread.  
...How shall the Glendoveer attain  
What Brama and what Veeshnoo sought in vain?  
(*Curse*, 153, XIX.87-94, 97-98)

However, for Ereenia, like Kailyal, 'Faith hath given him power, and Space and Time / Vanish before that energy sublime' (*Curse*, 154, XIX.115-116). 'Faith' proves vital to Ereenia's success in finding 'the Heaven of Heavens, where Seeva's self doth dwell' (*Curse*, 154, XIX.149). However, Ereenia comes to face not *Shiva's* self, but ornaments of his being – 'the Silver Bell', the 'broad Table', 'The sacred Triangle... / Holding the Emblem which no tongue may tell' (*Curse*, 154, XIX.135, 137, 147-148). Ereenia thus 'pray'd, intenser faith he felt':

O all-embracing Mind,  
Thou who art every where,  
Whom all who seek shall find,  
Hear me, O Seeva! hear the suppliant's prayer!

So saying, up he sprung  
And struck the Bell, which self-suspended hung  
...For when the Bell had sounded,  
...The Bell, the Table, and Mount Calasay,  
The holy Hill itself, with all thereon,  
Even as a morning dream before the day  
Dissolves away, they faded and were gone.

Where shall he rest his wing, where turn for flight,  
For all around is Light,  
Primal, essential, all-pervading Light!  
Heart cannot think, nor tongue declare,  
Nor eyes of Angel bear  
That Glory unimaginably bright;  
The Sun himself had seem'd  
A speck of darkness there,  
Amid the Light of Light!  
(*Curse*, 154, XIX.167, 182-187, 195, 197-209)

Daniel White argues that Ereenia, who represents a form of “higher” Hinduism’, or one that recognizes monotheistic unity, sounds the bell and ‘Hinduism dissolves away even as the morning dream before the day of Christianity’. According to White, this dissolution suggests Southey’s attempt to Christianise the narrative by objectifying Hinduism through things – such as the *Lingam*, the ‘Emblem no tongue may tell’. As White indicates, ‘The material objects readily proclaim their own readiness to give way to unmediated communion with a spirit that they could never contain’.<sup>112</sup> White is correct to emphasise the Christianisation of this narrative, and is particularly persuasive in his analysis of the objects of *Shiva* ‘giving way’ to a Christian ‘spirit’ they could otherwise not contain if not appropriated into such a narrative (in keeping with his argument of Evangelical methods of conversion).

However, I maintain that Southey’s decision to place this scene within a very different religious context recalls his earlier anti-establishmentism and even brings into question the doctrinal authority of Evangelism. Firstly, Southey comments that the line ‘all-embracing Mind’ perhaps should have been written ‘*all-containing* mind’ and then again quotes William Jones citing the *Bhagvat-Geeta*:

Even I [*Krishna*] was at first, not any other thing; that which exists, unperceived, supreme, afterwards I am that which is; and he who must remain, am I. Except the First Cause, whatever may appear, and may not appear, in the mind, know that to be the mind’s *Máyá*, or *delusion*, as light, as darkness...Even thus far may inquiry be made by him who seeks to know the principle

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<sup>112</sup> ‘Idolatry, Evangelicalism, and the Intense Objectivism of Robert Southey’, *Romanticism* [pending], p. 18.

of mind in union and separation, which must be *every where, always*. ('Notes', *Curse*, 259)

Southey seems to quote this line in tandem with the 'one sublime truth' from Menu; that is, there is a resonance here to Menu's idea that human understanding can attain a level of divine assimilation. By suggesting '*all-containing* mind', Southey places *Shiva* within the meta-physical bounds of *Máyá*; that is, he represents *Shiva* as a physical delusion symbolic of humanity's desire 'to know the principle of mind in union and separation' with the divine. *Shiva*'s dissolution into an 'all-pervading Light' removes the physical delusion and represents the divine nature of all things, which is '*every where, always*'. As he writes in his draft notes, 'The presence of Seeva is only Light' (*Curse*, 280).

Southey owes to Jones not just the philosophical framework of this idea, but also the poetic. The tone and tenor of Southey's description of *Shiva*'s dissolution into 'only Light' recalls Jones' 'Hymn to Náráyena' (1785), in which a similar august realisation of divine unity is invoked:

What eye can bear thy blaze, what utt'rance tell  
Thy deed with silver trump or many-wreathed shell?

Omniscient Spirit, whose all-ruling pow'r  
Bids from each sense bright emanations beam;  
...Thy will inspirits all, thy sov'reign Maya reigns.  
Blue crystal vault, and elemental fires,  
That in th' ethereal fluid blaze and breathe;  
...Mountains, whose radiant spires  
Presumptuous rear their summits to the skies,  
And blend their em'rald hue with sapphire light;  
...Hence! vanish from my sight:  
Delusive Pictures! unsubstantial shows!  
My soul absorb'd One only Being knows,  
Of all perceptions One abundant source,  
Whence ev'ry object ev'ry moment flows:  
Suns hence derive their force,  
...But suns and *fading words* I view no more:  
GOD only I perceive; GOD only I adore.  
(*SWJ*, 111-112, ll. 104-112)<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> My italics.

As discussed in previous chapters, Jones' hymn narrates the creation myth of *Brahma* being born from the Golden Egg and initiating physical existence *through* mental consciousness. It is this mental consciousness which allows humanity to seek their divine origins. Jones versifies the experience of breaking down the 'separation' between the human and the divine through the elimination of *Máyá*, or material substance, thereby attaining a sense of divine unity. As the 'One abundant source' manifests into mental consciousness, it contains the knowledge of 'One only being' – the human with the divine. Thus the poem's '*fading words*' vanish and leave only the divine mind 'perceiving' (creation in) the poem.

Jones' first-person hymnal form is more conducive to an immediate and personal representation of this consciousness, whereas Southey's third-person epic distances the reader from such direct realisation. However, in important ways, Jones' poem makes Southey's descriptions possible. *Náráyena*'s 'blaze' which no eye can bear nor words describe corresponds to the 'all-pervading Light' which no 'eyes of Angel bear' nor 'tongue declare' of Southey's poem. The dissolution of *Shiva*'s materials corresponds to the 'Delusive pictures' and 'unsubstantial shows' which pretend to showcase the divine but only veil it. As Ereenia falls back to earth, bathed in the Light, he himself has a revelation similar to Jones' narrator:

...in his ear  
A voice, which from within him came, was heard,  
The indubitable word  
Of Him to whom all secret things are known.  
(*Curse*, 156, ll. 212-215)

The voice from 'within' is the realisation of the divine within the self acting as a moral guardian. In this sense, Southey's 'monstrous' Hinduism itself dissolves from one invested in the Brahmanism of Kehama to one focused on the moral improvement of the individual gained by sublime union with the divine – a

revelation with roots in Jones' poetic representation of *Vedanta's* syncretism,  
and one which forms the cornerstone of Southey's 'Eclectic Church'.

# Chapter V:

## 'In Jones's Snow': Percy Bysshe Shelley and Jonesian Syncretism

*To Love all virtues homage pay,  
E'en stern religion yields.*  
– Sir William Jones, 'A Hymn to Gangá' (1785)

### I: Introduction: Shelley and Jones

As examined in the previous chapter, Robert Southey's attempt to have it both ways in his representation of Hinduism in *The Curse of Kehama* – that is, to incorporate Jonesian syncretism but also give it a 'Christian' colouring through his support of missions – demonstrates the extent to which representations of Hinduism was very much in a transitional phase during the second decade of the nineteenth century. The decade saw representations of Hinduism moving away from the Jonesian syncretism that had defined the religion during much of the late eighteenth century and moving towards the assimilative policies adopted by Christian missionaries and East India Company officials by the end of 1810s. Even Jones' legacy came under threat early in the decade, thanks in part to a push by Christian missions, and supporters such as Southey, to allow proselytising in British-held territory (a barrier successfully overcome in 1813, when the East India Company finally acquiesced to missionary demands).

For example, John Foster, the Evangelical minister who famously condemned Southey's *Kehama* in 1811, addresses the religious validity of Jones' 'Hymns' in his *Essays in a Series of Letters* (1813). Foster speaks generally of his disappointment in 'a man of enlarged mind exhausting his ability and his life on...foreign subjects', before mentioning Jones specifically in a footnote.<sup>1</sup> Foster writes:

I could not help feeling a degree of regret in reading lately the memoirs of the admirable and estimable Sir William Jones...did he think the last possible direct service had been rendered to Christianity, that his accomplished mind was left at leisure for hymns to the Hindoo

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<sup>1</sup> *Essays In A Series of Letters, On the Following Subjects: I. On a Man's Writing Memoirs of Himself. II. On Decision of Character. III. On the Application of the Epithet Romantic. IV. On Some of the Causes by which Evangelical Religion has been Rendered Less Acceptable to Persons of Cultivated Taste* (London, 1813), p. 369.

gods? Was not this even a violation of the neutrality, and an offence, not only against the gospel, but against theism itself?...[S]hould not a worshipper of God hold himself under a solemn obligation to abjure all tolerance of even poetical figures that can seriously seem, in any way whatever, to recognise the pagan divinities, or abominations, as the prophets of Jehovah would have called them?<sup>2</sup>

Here, Foster attacks the religious tenor of Jones' 'Hymns', recognising in them the legitimisation, and celebration, of a Hindu exegesis. Yet, Foster calls into question not only Jones' poetic talents and Christian sincerity, but also the very system of 'tolerance' and 'theism' that his 'Hymns' represent and for which they advocate. By showcasing an unabashed enthusiasm for 'pagan...abominations', Jones' 'Hymns', and thus his syncretic methodology, betray a religious 'neutrality' and bear witness to an act of pure heresy – an act, given Foster's outraged tone, he finds not just appalling, but dangerous (as his review of Southey's *Kehama* equally suggests). In Foster's view, neither Hinduism nor Jones syncretism had a place in British letters, as his 'regret' of Jones' life and his denigration of Southey's poem clearly demonstrates; any consideration of the Hindu religion was simply a waste.

However, Foster's views on Hinduism and Jones, while prominent in the missionary debates during the decade, would not completely prevail in the poetry of the period. For, in 1812, just a year before Foster's *Essays*, a young Percy Bysshe Shelley ordered the complete 13 volume set of Sir William Jones' *Works* (1807). From this point forward, as many scholars have noted (among them V. de Sola Pinto, John Drew, Nigel Leask, and Michael J. Franklin), Jones' influence within Shelley's poetry would become abundantly obvious. For example, the plot for Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1812) – in which a young woman is magically escorted off into the heavens by a golden chariot to learn greater universal truths – is nearly identical to that of Jones' *The Palace of Fortune: An Indian Tale* (1769)<sup>3</sup>; Shelley's use of 'champak odours' in his poem 'The Indian Girl's Song' (1823) alludes to the fragrant, magnolia-like flower

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<sup>2</sup> *Essays In A Series of Letters*, p. 369-370.

<sup>3</sup> A plot which Jones himself took from Alexander Dow's English translation of the story of Roshana in *Tales Translated from Persian of Inatulla of Delhi* (2 vols, 1768), p. 57-103. Vol. II.

described in Jones' 'Hymn to Camdeo', 'Hymn to Indra', and 'Botanical Observations of Select Indian Plants' (1794); and both the metrics and metaphysics of Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (1817) intimate Shelley's knowledge of Jones' enigmatic 'Hymn to Náráyena'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as de Sola Pinto puts it, after his purchase of Jones' *Works*, 'Shelley can be traced everywhere in Jones's snow'.<sup>5</sup>

In *India and the Romantic Imagination*, John Drew is particularly persistent in tracking Shelley through 'Jones's snow', noting the way in which Shelley references and syncretises an expansive breadth of religions and mythologies in relation to India à la Jones – particularly in the amalgamation of Classical deities and philosophies within the Kashmiri locale of *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). As Drew writes, 'neither the protagonist nor the total *mythos* of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is wholly explicable in terms of the Greek tradition of which it appears to be a part. Both are explicable in terms of the Indian tradition'.<sup>6</sup> Drew is keen to emphasise Shelley's syncretism in his study, particularly the way in which Shelley's Gnosticism in *Prometheus Unbound* 'derived from India...[and] the Indian tradition of non-dualism which Sankara developed' – referring to the *Vedantic* tradition privileged again and again by Jones in his 'Hymns' and works on Hinduism.<sup>7</sup>

However, though persuasive in his argument, Drew concentrates most of his attention and analysis on Shelley's more major works: namely, *Alastor* (1815) and *Prometheus Unbound*, since both poems are set in Kashmir. In doing so, Drew overlooks an earlier and much less critically examined poem on India: the unpublished 'Zeinab and Kathema' (c. 1811) – a poem Nigel Leask dubs 'unremarkable'.<sup>8</sup> However, this section takes 'Zeinab and Kathema' as its main

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<sup>4</sup> For more on this latter comparison, cf. R.M. Hewitt's 'Harmonious Jones', *Essays and Studies of the English Association*, 38 (1942), p.42-59, and John Drew's 'Shelley: *Prometheus Unbound* and a vale in the Indian Caucasus' in *India and the Romantic Imagination*, p. 234-235.

<sup>5</sup> 'Sir William Jones and English Literature', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 11 (1946), p. 686-694, 693.

<sup>6</sup> *India and the Romantic Imagination*, p. 232.

<sup>7</sup> *India and the Romantic Imagination*, p. 269, 270.

<sup>8</sup> *Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 71.



focus, arguing that the poem shows not only Shelley's similar engagement with Indian religions (Zoroastrianism and Hinduism) as these later works, but also his engagement with the Jonesian syncretism Drew finds abundantly evident in those late works as well. Moreover, Shelley's engagement with Jonesian syncretism in 'Zeinab and Kathema' predates his 1812 purchase of Jones' *Works*, suggesting an earlier knowledge of Jones than his ordering of the *Works* would imply. Walter E. Peck speculates that Shelley first read the poetical works of William Jones in the library of Dr. James Lind, the long-time physician to the royal family at Windsor, who was also a former surgeon for the East India Company and an Etonian instructor whom Shelley befriended while a student at the school (1804-1810).<sup>9</sup> Although Peck provides no historical evidence to support this claim, Shelley's close relationship with Lind, and Lind's expansive library of Oriental literature (any responsible collection of which would have included Jones' works), does help explain where he may have read Jones prior to ordering his *Works*, as well as provide an explanation for the Jonesian influence on 'Zeinab and Kathema' this section argues is evident.

As such, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the prevalence of Jones' influence in Shelley's poem by examining the way in which the narrative structure, characterisation and anti-missionary tone of 'Zeinab and Kathema' reflects the syncretic principles Jones emphasised in his poetic and prose representations of Hinduism. Furthermore, this section examines the way in which Shelley not only used Jones' syncretic principles, but developed them for his own polemical purposes, as is evident in the anti-religious sentiments of 'Zeinab and Kathema'.

As Earl R. Wasserman contends, the idea of syncretism was one familiar to Shelley from his education:

Syncretic mythology had been revitalized in the eighteenth century, especially by those deists who, arguing for the common basis of all faiths, had attempted to demonstrate the interconvertibility of all

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<sup>9</sup> *Shelley: His Life and Work* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), p. 25.

myths. This tradition of syncretism was part of Shelley's intellectual heritage.<sup>10</sup>

Wasserman argues that this 'intellectual heritage' of syncretism was one Shelley drew upon in order to create a syncretic environment in his poetry and thereby portray all mythologies and religions as 'portions of One Mind' – that is, as sharing a common origin within the human imagination.<sup>11</sup> However, Wasserman does not recognise that this 'tradition of syncretism' that formed an important part of Shelley's 'intellectual heritage' can be traced back to his reading of Jones; and not just Jones, but, as Marilyn Butler puts it, 'many of the leading ideologues, French and English, of the last thirty years or so'. These 'leading ideologues' included, among others, Richard Payne Knight, F.C. Volney, Anquetil DuPerron, and Edward Moor – all authors, just like Jones, distinguished for their interest in India and Indian religions (moreover, all of these authors, except DuPerron, came to such interest through Jones).

This list of radically-inclined Indophiles suggests the ways in which Shelley's ordering of Jones' *Works* was neither an isolated incident nor an arbitrary act, but a premeditated compendium of works on India and Indian religions collected in order to study the subjects' radical potential – a study which manifests itself poetically for the first time in 'Zeinab and Kathema'. The following sections, then, explore how Shelley's uses syncretism to advance his own anti-Christian message in the poem, all the while tracing instances of syncretic thought back to Jones.

## II: 'Zeinab and Kathema' and the Arabian 'Love' Poem

Written sometime between 1810 and 1811, but never formally published, 'Zeinab and Kathema' clearly demonstrates Shelley's early fascination with India, religion, and Indian religions. The plot of the poem is deceptively simply: it follows the

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<sup>10</sup> *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 271.

<sup>11</sup> *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, p. 272.

travails of the forlorn Kathema as he travels from his native Kashmir to Britain in order to find Zeinab, his childhood love who is kidnapped by 'Christian murderers'.<sup>12</sup> After searching throughout Britain, Kathema finally locates Zeinab as she hangs from the gallows as punishment for her 'prostitution, crime and woe' (Z&K, 8, ll. 166). Distraught, Kathema hangs himself next to her in order to join her as 'corruption's prey, or Heavens happy guest', further heightening the poem's tragic tone (Z&K, 7, ll. 156).

Throughout the poem, however, Shelley sets India and Britain into geographical, religious and moral opposition. Through such opposition, 'Zeinab and Kathema' demonstrates Shelley's foray in the genre of utopian literature as a means to comment upon one of the major religious and colonial debates of his day: the allowance of Christian missionaries into British-held Indian territories. As we saw in the previous chapter and in Robert Southey's pro-missionary writings, the question of missionaries in India was a contentious issue. Wanting to keep problems surrounding religion to a minimum so as to avoid any social turmoil (such as the Vellore mutiny) that may have economic consequences, the East India Company spent half a century keeping Christian missionaries out of British-controlled areas. Yet by the second decade of the nineteenth century, with authors and statesmen such as Southey and William Wilberforce forcefully arguing for the 'moral improvement' Christianity could bring to Hindus who worship 'absolute monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness, and cruelty', the issue was at the forefront of political discussions concerning the Indian colony's future.<sup>13</sup> These debates culminated in the granting of permission to Christian missionaries in 1813, when the East India Company charter came up for redrafting.

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<sup>12</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley: *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4, ll. 34. All poetic and prose works cited from this edition unless otherwise stated. 'Zeinab and Kathema' abbreviated hereafter Z&K.

<sup>13</sup> John S. Harford, *Recollections of William Wilberforce, ESQ, M.P. for the County of York During Nearly 30 Years* (London, 1864), p. 31, 33.

Speaking to this issue, Shelley thus presents 'Zeinab and Kathema' as an ironic portrayal of *Paradise Lost* situated within a modern colonial idiom, as defined by Britain's colonial possession of, and expansion in, India. Shelley displays ideas of possession and expansion in the poem's opening stanza, which has Kathema standing in 'the world's wide and drear expanse' watching the sunset towards that (Western) country to which Zeinab has been taken (Z&K, 4, ll. 44). Kathema's world has dramatically, and violently, expanded from the safely confines of Kashmir to the 'expanse' of a 'wide and drear' world that he had not known existed before the British arrived. In this sense, Kathema's situation invokes the ending of *Paradise Lost*, where Adam and Eve depart Eden looking westward with 'The world...all before them' after already 'looking back' one last time at 'all th' eastern side.../ Of Paradise' before the gate closes on their once heavenly bliss.<sup>14</sup> While the East/West dichotomy in *Paradise Lost* represents the religious consequences of the Fall, in Shelley, the East/West dichotomy teems with colonial implications metaphorically grafted onto a similar moral paradigm: the Indian 'East' is a vanishing utopia, the British 'West' the expanding world of sinfulness destroying an Indian Eden.

In this sense, the Paradisal 'Eastern' gate of India is one closed to Kathema by the 'Christian sin' of 'man's, or God's unprofitable plan' to seek profit in 'this heap, the Christian's God' of golden ore, while 'murder dye[s] Kathema's bower in gore' (Z&K, 8, 5, 4, ll. 178, 68, 42). That is, Shelley depicts the colonial expansion of Britain into India as a murderous enterprise for capital gain, one sanctioned by 'man's' and 'God's' 'unprofitable plan' to seek value in India's raw materials rather than its people. Thus, colonial greed is set up as an ironic version of 'original sin' – a sin committed not because of Zeinab and Kathema's disobedience to God's will, but because of God's omniscient deceitfulness, having foreknown – and thus sanctioned – such (colonial) injustice. Here, Shelley develops Milton's religious themes as means to

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<sup>14</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 288, 287, ll. XII.646, 641-642.

question and ultimately challenge the hegemonic power structures underlying Christianity and British colonialism, using India and, as we will see, Indian religious philosophy in order to do so.

By taking on the issue of Christian missions and by setting the poem in Kashmir, Shelley reveals the extent to which he drew influence from a variety of sources. While Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest view 'Zeinab and Kathema' as a poem demonstrating a 'marked advance in economy and [a] technical skill of...narrative' that distinguishes the poem's innovation from other earlier works, they also suggest the way in which Shelley's poem reveals Southey's particular (nominal) influence.<sup>15</sup> The name 'Zeinab', they argue, seems to be taken from Southey's Islamic epic-romance *Thalaba the Destroyer* (Zeinab being Thalaba's mother), while 'Kathema' seems to be a derivative of 'Kehama'. However, such an influence says very little about the supposed poetic 'advance' in 'economy' and 'narrative' Matthews and Everest propose, but do not explore further. The nominal similarities between Shelley and Southey's poems seem little other than the flattery of imitation, since *Kehama* was at the time of 'Zeinab and Kathema's' composition Shelley's 'most favourite poem'; moreover, the Southeyan context offers little insight into Zeinab and Kathema's characterisation in Shelley's poem.<sup>16</sup> Yet the name 'Zeinab' can be traced back to an earlier, more familiar and seemingly more influential source: Sir William Jones – an influence who provides the possible source of narrative innovation Matthews and Everest suggest 'Zeinab and Kathema' illustrates.

In his 'Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations', Jones uses the name 'Zeinab' in his explanation of the narrative structure of an Arabian 'love' poem – an explanation he provides in order to prove how 'the *Asiaticks* excel the inhabitants of

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<sup>15</sup> *The Poems of Shelley: Volume One*, ed. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest (London: Longman, 1989), p. 158. 2 vols.

<sup>16</sup> 'To Elizabeth Hitchener, June 11, 1811', *The Complete Works of Percy Shelley Shelly: Volume VIII: Letters 1803-1812*, ed. Roger Ingpen (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1965), p. 101-103, 103. Hereafter abbreviated *Letters 1803 to 1812*. Indeed, although Kathema seems a derivative of 'Kehama', Shelley's protagonist morally opposes Kehama in characterisation; in fact, in 'Zeinab and Kathema', it is the Christian God who fills the Kehamian role, as we will see.

our colder regions in the liveliness of their fancy, and the richness of their invention' (SWJ, 325, 324); that is, Jones provides this explanation as a means to show the ways in which 'Asiatick' poetic narratives demonstrates poetic innovation and 'invention'. Describing the Arabian narrative structure, Jones writes:

It sometimes happens, that the young men of one tribe are in love with the damsels of another; and, as the tents are frequently removed on a sudden, the lovers are often separated in the progress of the courtship: hence almost all the *Arabick* poems open in this manner; the author bewails the sudden departure of his mistress, Hinda, Maia, Zeineb, or Azza, and describes her beauty...he declares his resolution of visiting his beloved, though the way to her tribe lie through a dreadful wilderness...here he commonly gives a description of the horse or camel, upon which he designs to go, and thence passes, by an easy transition, to the principle subject of his poem...very frequently the piece turns wholly upon love [as the principle subject] (SWJ, 325)

As Jones explains, this is the basic narrative structure of most Arabian love poems; moreover, it is this type of poetry Jones exhibits in his 'Essay' in order to persuade the British public that Eastern culture provides an aesthetic which '*future [British] scholars might explain, and future [British] poets might imitate*' (SWJ, 336).

Shelley, it seems, takes note of Jones' suggestion. For, intriguingly, the poetic structure that Jones describes above is also the narrative sequence for 'Zeinab and Kathema'. The poem opens with Kathema 'bewailing the sudden departure of his mistress': "Oh!"... 'could this widowed soul / But fly where yonder Sun now speeds to dawn'" (Z&K, 2, ll.7-8). Looking westward towards the setting Sun, Kathema mourns his separation from Zeinab and proceeds to 'describe her beauty' – and what her beauty meant in terms of their life together:

He thought on his betrothed. . .for his youth  
With her that was its charm to ripeness grew.  
All that was dear in love, or fair in truth,  
With her was shared as childhood's moments flew,  
And mingled with sweet memories of her  
Was life's unveiling morn with all its bliss and care.  
(Z&K, 4, ll.19-24)

As 'betrothed' lovers they were obviously in the 'progress of courtship', as Jones puts it. Zeinab's 'beauty' is described as encapsulated in the experiences their relationship

makes possible: 'Love for the friend that life and freedom gave' (Z&K, 4, ll. 26). That is, her beauty is entwined with the 'youth' and 'charm' that make up the Edenic virtues of 'Love,' 'life' and 'freedom'. Her 'beauty' is not only a physical one, but a natural one that defines their relationship and their relationship with their Kashmiri home, as well as a political one that defines their opposition to the British colonialists.

The separation between Kathema and Zeinab occurs when 'Christian murders over-ran the plain / Ravaging, burning and polluting all' and take Zeinab 'to grace the robber's land' (Z&K, 4, ll.33-34, 35). While this depiction of invasive plunder is markedly different from the sudden nomadic removal of 'tents' as Jones has it, it is still consistent with the Arabic narrative construction of an unexpected and abrupt removal. Once this removal/kidnapping happens, Kathema, in adherence with the Arabian plot sequence, 'declares his resolution of visiting his beloved' when he, having spied a ship on the horizon and followed it until it reached the shore, runs up to it and books passage 'to far England's shore' in return for 'this heap [of gold], the Christian's God' (Z&K, 5, ll. 67, 68).

Next, Shelley describes the 'horse or camel, upon which he designs to go' – but in this case, the 'horse or camel' is the British ship:

The form that in the setting sun was seen  
...  
The white sails gleaming o'er the billows green  
...  
A wanderer of the deep it seems to be  
On high adventures bent, and feats of chivalry.  
...  
Unvarying in her aim the vessel went  
As if some inward spirit ruled her way  
And her tense sails were conscious of intent  
(Z&K, 5, ll. 55, 57, 59-60, 80-82)

Like an faithful steed would, the ship embodies the 'conscious' motive of Kathema's 'intent'; they become one, as Kathema's 'aim' becomes the ship's and the ship loyally delivers Kathema to his destination. Finally, Shelley describes the 'dreadful wilderness' which Kathema must traverse in order to reach his beloved. Ironically, however, that 'wilderness' is supposedly civilised Britain:

Yet Albion's changeful skies and chilling wind,  
     That change from Cashmire's vale, might well denote.  
 There Heaven and Earth are every bright and kind,  
     Here blights and storms and damp forever float,  
 Whilst hearts are more ungenial than the zone,  
 Gross, spiritless, alive to no pangs but their own.  
 ...  
 Unquiet death and premature decay,  
     Youth tottering on the crutches of old age,  
 And ere the noon of manhood's riper day  
     Pangs that no art of medicine can assuage,  
 Madness and passion ever mingling flames,  
 And souls that well become such miserable frames.  
 (Z&K, 7, ll. 123; 6, ll. 91-96, 103-108)

Though Kathema comes 'to a wild heath' to find Zeinab hanged, the 'wilderness' Kathema experiences is not so much a geographical one, as it is a social and moral one. The climatic change from 'Cashmire' to 'Albion' symbolises the Edenic fall from hearts full of 'Love' in India to the 'Gross, spiritless', and 'ungenial' hearts of Britain. Britain represents the cold, hard reality of sin, which is embodied in the 'Unquiet death and premature decay' of its youth and its people in general. Shelley represents the British as diseased with the 'Pangs' and 'Madness' of a hypocritical Christian religion that wilfully destroys the innocent love it purports to protect and perpetuate.

Here, Shelley weaves together two poetic influences: the plot structure of Arabian love poetry as per Jones and the religious imagery of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. By using the Arabian narrative structure as laid out by Jones, Shelley attempts to provide a 'native' perspective on the colonial issue, viewing the arrival of British colonists not just from the standpoint of Kathema, but from the narrative viewpoint of Oriental literature. In this regard, Shelley is placing the 'principle subject of the poem...love' as the defining moral difference between India and Britain. Zeinab and Kathema's 'love' is disrupted by colonial greed and religious hypocrisy, endangering and ending not only their lives, but also the unified and natural 'love' their relationship – and 'their' poetic narrative – represented. Because the narrative can only turn to love as the 'principle subject of the poem' through the tragedy of Zeinab and Kathema's lost love and subsequent death, thereby ultimately leaving it unfulfilled as



a narrative according to the traditional structure, Shelley uses the poetic narrative itself to direct accusations against British colonialism. British colonialism endangers not only the love the Edenic Kashmir represents, but the love poetry represents. Although it leads to their earthly deaths, Zeinab and Kathema are reunited in the love of the very Jonesian Arabic structure Shelley employs, thereby attempting to resist and subvert the hegemonic power structures of Christianity and British colonialism by reviving the love those power structures destroy within an 'Asiatick' narrative used specifically for telling love poems. In this sense, Shelley not only utilises Jones' Arabian structure, but develops it for his own anti-colonial sentiments.

### III: The 'Widow'd Soul': Religious Conversion and Religious Syncretism

Shelley's use of Jones' structure sets the tone (and the framework) for 'Zeinab and Kathema's' anti-Christian, anti-missionary polemic, one that takes shape through the way Shelley places Hinduism and Christianity into opposition by way of Zoroastrianism. Now Shelley does not explicitly make reference to Hinduism within the poem; however, we can infer some Hindu religious principles based on Zeinab and Kathema's natural affinity with their native Kashmir. As noted earlier, the poem first describes Zeinab and Kathema's relationship in an idyllic Kashmir, where the two grew up and fell in love; 'childhood's host of memories combine / Her life and love around his being to entwine' (Z&K, 4, ll.29-30). Their natural love 'entwined' equates their very being and they are 'betrothed' in 'All that was dear in love, or fair in truth' and in 'life's unveiling morn with all its bliss and care' (Z&K, 4, ll.19, 21, 24); or, as he writes in *Queen Mab*, 'Woman and man, in confidence and love, / Equal and free and pure together trod / The mountain-paths of virtue' (67, ll. 9.89-91). By representing Zeinab and Kathema's relationship as one based on 'confidence and love', as well as

equality and freedom, Shelley frames their betrothal outside of the 'despotism of marriage' he later criticises in his 'Notes' to *Queen Mab* (77).<sup>17</sup>

In Zeinab and Kathema's native Kashmir, then, there is the Shelleyan notion that 'Love' is 'the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything that exists' (*On Love*, 632). Their unity as natural, Edenic lovers represents the poet's ethic of 'Love' and portrays such 'Love' as synonymous to a unifying, pantheistic divine that encompasses and connects all things. Such an idea permeated Shelley's thoughts and writings during the time of 'Zeinab and Kathema's' composition. For example, in *Queen Mab*, which Shelley wrote around the same time as 'Zeinab and Kathema', Shelley boldly avows that 'There is no God!' (51, ll. 7.13). Here, Shelley unequivocally, and forcefully, proclaims his poetry's antinomian, even atheistic, polemic and identity – one underscored further by the fact that he appends to this proclamation a lengthy annotation: his treatise *The Necessity of Atheism* (1812) which had the poet, only a year previously, expelled from Oxford.

However, in his introduction to the treatise, Shelley qualifies the comprehensiveness of his otherwise arrogant atheism by noting that, 'This negation [of God] must be considered solely to affect a creative Deity. The hypothesis of a pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe, remains unshaken' (*Queen Mab*, 79). Here, Shelley shuns a God of creation – as one might encounter in ancient mythology or the opening verse of Genesis – in favour of a 'pervading Spirit' of divinity that is coexistent with nature – or, as he writes earlier in a letter in 1811 defining 'God', '*the existing power of existence...the essence of the universe*'.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Shelley seems to articulate a meaning of divinity conversant with Jones' representation of *Vedantism*; in fact, Shelley's use of the phrase 'pervading Spirit' betrays Jones' influence, for those exact words can be found in Jones' 'Extract from

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<sup>17</sup> A criticism underscored by Shelley's admiration of William Godwin, his polemical mentor and future father-in-law, and Godwin's notion that the 'institution of marriage is a system of fraud' (*An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness: Volume Two*, London, 1793, p. 381. 2 vols).

<sup>18</sup> 'To Elizabeth Hitchener, June 11, 1811', *Letters 1803 to 1812*, p. 103.

the Vedas' in Volume 13 of his *Works* – indeed, from his translation of the *Svetasvatara* and the *Isa Upanishads* no less, the body of Hindu literature Nigel Leask contends 'anticipates the mainspring of Shelleyan ethics, "[that] the great secret of morals is love"<sup>19</sup>. Jones' translation of this *Upanishadic* literature read as follows:

...without eyes he sees, without ears he hears *all*; he knows whatever can be known, but there is none who know him: Him the wise call the great, supreme, pervading spirit.

That all-pervading spirit, that spirit which gives light to the visible sun, even the same *in kind* am I, *though infinitely distant in degree*. Let my soul return to the immortal spirit of God, and then let my body, which ends in ashes, return to dust!  
(*Works*, XIII, p. 368, 377)<sup>20</sup>

Both of these quotations promote the 'pervading Spirit' as the impelling force of existence: as all that is 'known' and as that which provides physical 'light to the visible sun' as well as the spiritual light of the 'immortal' and '*infinite*' nature of God. In short, these excerpts suggest, indeed seem to influence, Shelley's notion of a 'pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe' expressed in his notes to *Queen Mab*.

Similar turns of phrases found elsewhere in Jones' work only provide further evidence of Jones' influence on Shelley in this particular case. In his explanation of the *Vedantic* and *Sufic* conception of God in 'On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and the Hindus', Jones writes that, 'the spirit of God pervades the universe, always immediately present to his work, and consequently always in substance' (*Works*, IV, 219). The 'substance' of this pervasive 'spirit of God' is also the 'substance' of nature; this is a particular feature of Hinduism Jones highlights in 'Náráyena', for it is from the 'Spirit of Spirits' from which 'Suns hence derive their force, / Hence planets learn their course'. There is a natural (perhaps even scientific) quality to the Spirit's pervasiveness which both Jones and Shelley make decisive components of their

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<sup>19</sup> *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 149.

<sup>20</sup> Neither Jones nor his editor, John Shore, indicate that the first translated piece comes from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, though the quote Jones provides can be found at the end of 'Part 3' of the five-part incantation; cf. *The Upanishads*, trans. Juan Mascaró (Penguin, 1965), p. 85-97, 90.

conception of the Divine. Shelley implies this natural connection to the divine in his representation of Zeinab and Kathema's relationship, thereby implicitly linking their relationship with his knowledge of Jones' portrayal of *Vedantism*.

Moreover, Zeinab's characterisation and situation is one heavily influenced by the character of Luxima in Sydney Owenson's novel *The Missionary* (1811) – a character who literally embodies the Jones' conception of *Vedantism* and the *Upanishadic* ethos of 'love'. Luxima is a Hindu priestess who seems to convert to Christianity when she falls in love with Hilarion, a Franciscan monk who comes to India specifically to proselytise.<sup>21</sup> Before her conversion, however, Luxima, is a disciple of 'the Vedanti school...and the sublime but impassioned tenets of religious love'.<sup>22</sup> The tenets of 'religious', or 'mystic', love are described as follows:

That matter has no essence, independent of mental perception; and that external sensation would vanish into nothing, if the divine energy for a moment subsided: that the soul differs in degree, but not in kind, from the creative spirit of which it is a particle, and into which it will be finally absorbed: that nothing has a pure and absolute existence, but spirit: and that a passionate and exclusive love of Heaven is that feeling only, which offers not illusion to the soul, and secures its eternal felicity.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, when 'adapted to the warm imagination', religious Love also 'harmonizes with every idea of human loveliness and human grace'; that is, it becomes the 'One Mind' for which Shelley's syncretism strives.<sup>24</sup> As a Hindu priestess, then, Luxima is worshipped as an incarnation of mystic Love. She devotes herself to *Camdeo*, '*the god of mystic love*', and upon seeing her perform her daily libations, Hilarion remarks that 'Her enthusiasm once kindled, her imagination became disordered: believing herself inspired, she looked the immortality she fancied...in all the imposing charm of

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<sup>21</sup> 'Seems' to convert to Christianity because although she goes through the conversion process, upon her death she proclaims, 'and now I *die* as Brahmin women *die*, a *Hindu* in my feelings and my faith' (*The Missionary: An Indian Tale*, ed. Julia M. Wright [Ontario, CA: Broadview Press, 2002], p. 257). Luxima's inability to renounce fully her Hindu religion serves a point of contention between her and Hilarion, but it also serves as a central point to the themes of Jonesian syncretism Owenson litters throughout the text.

<sup>22</sup> *The Missionary*, p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> *The Missionary*, p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> *The Missionary*, p. 89.

holy illusion'.<sup>25</sup> Here, using the esoteric notions of 'Vedanti' theology, Luxima evokes the 'passionate and exclusive love of Heaven' through her 'imagination' – and through the imagination, becomes the very deity she invokes.

Owenson's portrayal of the 'Vedanti', or *Vedantic*, religion in *The Missionary* relies heavily on Jones' work – her use of the term 'Vedanti school', a term Jones uses in 'On the Philosophy of the Asiaticks' (1792), being but one example. In fact, John Drew argues in *India and the Romantic Imagination* that Owenson's novel 'may be read as a perfectly extraordinary fictionalization of the psyche of William Jones' given the psychological religious turmoil that arises in both Hilarion and Luxima.<sup>26</sup> One key scene of Luxima's worship demonstrates clearly that not only was Owenson familiar with Jones' researches and his 'Hymns', but that she for the most part parrots Jones' works verbatim.

When Hilarion first sees Luxima, she bathes in 'a broad river, formed of the confluence of the Behat and a branch of the Indus' rivers at sunrise; as Owenson notes in an annotation to this line, 'The confluence of streams is sacred to the followers of Brahma'.<sup>27</sup> Jones discusses the sacredness of conjoining rivers in the 'Argument' and the poetic body of 'A Hymn to Gangá' (1785); but, more important than this particular point are the libations Luxima performs while bathing:

One arm, decorated with a rosary, was pointed to the rising sun; the other, at intervals, was thrice applied to the brow... Thrice again bowing to the sun, the suppliant thus continued: 'On that effulgent power, which is Brahma, do I meditate: governed by that mysterious light which exists internally within my breast, externally in the orb of the sun, being one and the same with that effulgent power, since I myself am an irradiated manifestation of the supreme Brahma'.<sup>28</sup>

Here, Luxima is performing *gáyatrí*, the 'holiest hymn of the Veda' according to Jones and Hindus alike. Despite Owenson's attribution in a footnote that Luxima's invocation comes from a French translation of the 'Shaster' (though which one and

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<sup>25</sup> *The Missionary*, p. 99-100.

<sup>26</sup> *India and the Romantic Imagination*, p. 242.

<sup>27</sup> *The Missionary*, p. 108.

<sup>28</sup> *The Missionary*, p. 108.

translated by whom she leaves unnamed), Luxima's rhetoric clearly invokes Jones' translation of *gáyatrí* more than it does the French translation Owenson provides.<sup>29</sup> 'Effulgent', 'meditate', 'irradiate', 'orb', and 'mysterious' are all words Jones uses to describe *gáyatrí* in his translation of the hymn in 'Extracts from the Vedas' (*Works*, XIII), in the Preface to his *Institutes of Hindu Law*, and in his 'Hymn to Súrya'. Owenson quotes from Jones' *Institutes of Hindu Law* later in the novel, literally putting Jones' words into the mouth of the chief Brahman, clearly illustrating that Owenson's knowledge of Jones' works was thorough. Her use of Jones' translation of *gáyatrí* is worth emphasising due to the syncretic significance Jones places on the hymn, as I discussed earlier my analysis of 'A Hymn to Súrya'. Owenson invokes Jones' *gáyatrí* not only to lend her novel the weight of his scholarly authority but also to incorporate his syncretic methodology, which is the major theme – indeed the moral – of her novel.

If we read 'Zeinab and Kathema' as a poem challenging Christian missionaries, we can see the way in which Zeinab reflects Luxima's characterisation in *The Missionary* – as well as her deep associations to Jonesian syncretism. In letters after reading this 'novel of the day', Shelley enthuses over Luxima, calling her 'divine', 'an Angel' and 'perfect'.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, he laments his inability to 'incorporate' her and make her a real, living being, anticipating the imaginary 'detumescence', as Nigel Leask puts it, of his later poem *Alastor*, in which the Poet's 'veil'd maid', an image of imaginary perfection as the Poet's doppelganger, disappears in his arms as he attempts to embrace her (97, ll. 151). Yet, with 'Zeinab and Kathema' written around the time of his reading of *The Missionary* (June 1811), we can read Zeinab as one of Shelley's first attempts to 'incorporate' Luxima poetically, for, by reading

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<sup>29</sup> Julia Wright provides this English translation of Owenson's French footnote: 'The Eternal, absorbed in the contemplation of his essence, resolved in the fullness of time to create beings of his essence and his beatitude' (269). It seems that Owenson provides this footnote more as an explanation of *gáyatrí* rather than as the prayer itself.

<sup>30</sup> *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Letters, Vol. I*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 107, 113. 2 vols. Abbreviated hereafter *Letters, Vol. I*.

'Zeinab and Kathema' as a poem about Zeinab's conversion to Christianity, we can see the way in which not only Zeinab's tragic fate mirrors Luxima's, but view Zeinab as a figure promoting a Shelleyan version of Jonesian syncretism.

As noted earlier, Zeinab and Kathema's loving relationship is sundered by 'Christian murders' that come to India from Britain 'polluting all' (Z&K, 4, ll. 33, 34). Amidst the pillaging, 'Zeinab was reft to grace the robber's land' (Z&K, 4, ll. 35). A surface reading of this line implies that she was kidnapped by the British to 'grace' their streets as a prostitute and their gallows as a criminal. However, Shelley indicates that there are additional motives behind the Christians being in India in the first place. The 'Christian murders' come with:

...their holy book to bring,  
Which God's own son's apostles had complied,  
That charity and peace and love might spring  
Within a world by God's blind ire defiled. (Z&K, 4, ll. 37-40)

The 'murderers' are also missionaries come supposedly to spread God's message of peace, charity, and love. However, the message is contained within a book compiled not by God, but by the fallible humans who follow God. Thus, that message of peace, charity, and love is 'defiled' by 'God's blind ire' to a world that allows the very same people to also bring 'rapine, war, and treachery' (Z&K, 4, ll. 41). This inconsistency, though, is more than a mere slip between Christian action and intention; for Shelley, Christianity is a wholesale hypocrisy of moral virtue – a moral virtue embodied by Zeinab and Kathema 'treading' the 'virtuous' Kashmiri 'mountain-paths' of Love.

Zeinab's 'kidnapping' reveals this moral hypocrisy. Her departure to Britain leaves Kathema's 'soul...widowed and alone' and he pines for their 'childish nights of guileless love, / ...ere Christian rapine tore / All ties' (Z&K, 5, ll.52-54). The use of 'widowed' is a telling word choice since, still in Kashmir, Kathema is unaware of Zeinab's death. Thus, 'widowed' alludes to the disunion of the natural, organic marriage of 'guileless love' shared in their 'childish' idyll – one now disbanded due to 'Christine rapine'. Yet more importantly, the word also suggests a deeper sense of

disconnection and alienation other than her physical absence. The fact that '*Christian rapine*', and not death, 'widows' Kathema's soul intimates a spiritual or religious 'kidnapping' rather than a bodily one. That is, it suggests that Zeinab may have converted to Christianity and left with the missionaries. In this case, Zeinab, graced in the naïveté of her idyllic 'love', falls victim not so much to the hypocrisy of Christian avarice and lust, but to the hypocrisy of Christian 'charity, peace, and love'. Later descriptions of Zeinab's experience in Britain support a reading of her conversion to Christianity rather than merely being kidnapped.

For example, when she was 'torn...from her home,' her 'innocent habits were all rudely *shriven*' (Z&K, 6, ll. 164).<sup>31</sup> 'Shriven' and 'torn' connote the act of a violent removal, thereby suggesting her kidnapping to Britain. In turn, her natural 'innocent habits' succumb to the gross realities of British society: 'prostitution, crime and woe' – and, of course, an 'untimely tomb'. However, as Michael O'Neill comments, 'shriven' also denotes an act of confession or absolution, a meaning which plays ironically within the religious context of the poem.<sup>32</sup> If we read the poem as being about Zeinab's conversion to Christianity, then this ironic play serves the interpretation well. Zeinab will have confessed her 'innocent habits' as idolatrous and would have been absolved from those sins by her baptism into Christianity. We saw a historical example of such a conversion in Southey's review of the Baptist Missionary Society, in which Kristno, baptised by William Carey, 'professed by this act to put off all their deities, and all sin, and to put on Christ'.<sup>33</sup> Baptism of the Hindus is not just an absolution from 'original sin', but a confession, and damnation, of their 'heretical' native religion. Whereas Southey argues for the merits of religious conversion in his review, Shelley portrays the deadly consequences of it in 'Zeinab and Kathema'. A proclamation of conversion to Christianity by Zeinab would have automatically led to

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<sup>31</sup> My italics.

<sup>32</sup> 'Notes', *The Major Works*, p. 706.

<sup>33</sup> 'Periodical Account relative to the Baptist Missionary Society', *The Quarterly Review, Volume One*, 1809, p. 197-198.



her being 'torn', or forced, from her home – not just by the Christians, but also by her caste.

Hindu conversion to Christianity was known to be difficult, if not impossible, because of the issues that arose from caste alienation. Charles Marsh, a MP and former Indian judge, spoke out against the clause added to the East India Company's charter in 1813 which provided 'Further facilities to persons, to go to India, for religious purposes'.<sup>34</sup> This clause provided governmental sanction to missionaries in British-held territory, where they were previously denied access. In a speech before Parliament debating the amendment, Marsh proclaims that:

The loss of caste is the immediate consequence of conversion; and it is the most dreadful ill with which an Hindoo can be visited... This division of caste has always erected an invincible barrier to the proselytism of the Hindoos... he considers the loss, or even the pollution or degradation of his caste, as evils worse than death. The same feelings descend through each successive generation... all of them united in one common sentiment of contempt of the Pariars, or out-casts, amongst whom they class the Christian Missionary and his convert; the Pastor and his disciple... Never, never, will the scheme of Hindoo conversion be realized, till you persuade an immense population to suffer, by whole tribes, the severest martyrdoms that have yet been sustained for the sake of religion.<sup>35</sup>

Here, Marsh veers from the common talking points against missionaries in India which maintained that they would unsettle the natives, causing social and economic problems for the commercial enterprise of the East India Company (as had occurred with the Vellore Mutiny in 1806, when new regulations forbidding caste marks caused a two-day uprising among the *sepoys*). Instead, Marsh outlines the social and humanitarian crisis of conversion for the Indian people. Like most anti-missionary advocates, Marsh considers conversion of the Hindu populace improbable, if not impossible, because of the strict social, religious, and familial observance of the caste system, as well as the social disdain with which Hindus viewed the Christian

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<sup>34</sup> 'Art. 11 – Substance of the Speech of Charles Marsh, Esq', *The Critical Review: or, Annals of Literature. Series the Forth. Vol. V* (London, 1814), p. 208-211, 208.

<sup>35</sup> 'Art. 11 – Substance of the Speech of Charles Marsh, Esq.', p. 209-210. My italics.

missionary. In a rather Shelleyan tone, Marsh says conversion needlessly throws away

the ties of friendship; the charities of the kindred...[and] all that life contains to support and adorn it: and all this – to embrace a new religion proffered them by polluted hands; a religion...of which they are planted [*sic*] all the appalling forms of penury, contempt, scorn, and despair.<sup>36</sup>

Marsh recognizes the devastating ineffectiveness of replacing one religion with another just as 'polluted'; Hindus give up their very social and religious identity to receive nothing but 'penury, contempt, scorn, and despair' in return.

For Zeinab's fate as a Christian convert is exactly that: 'penury, contempt, scorn, and despair'. After alienating herself from her culture, Zeinab expects Christianity to be a religion of charity, peace, and love, but finds it, 'like its God, unjust and pitiless' (Z&K, 8, ll. 175). Ironically, she learns 'penury, contempt, scorn, and despair' from her Christian peers, imitating them whilst rebelling against them with 'their own arms of bold and bloody crime' (Z&K, 8, ll.170). Zeinab is a victim of a Christian society which equips her with the faculty for 'bold and bloody crimes' and then judges, convicts and kills her for acting on those faculties. This, Shelley suggests, is the 'unjustness' and 'pitilessness' of the Christian 'God' – one completely ill-suited to the natural 'innocent habits' of 'guileless love' she embodied in India.

Interestingly, Shelley describes Zeinab's cultural and religious transition from Hindu to Christian with a religious metaphor. At first, it is thought she would come, 'like a mild and sweetly-beaming star / Whose rays were wont to grace the matin prime' (Z&K, 8, ll. 171-172). Considered to be a shining example of proselytisation, she serves as the guide for, as well as the object of, Christian morning prayers. However, upon her arrival, she actually arrives as 'a comet horrible and bright / Which wild careers awhile then sinks in dark-red night' (Z&K, 8, ll. 173-174). Instead of gracing the dawn of religious day, Shelley portrays her sinking like a meteor fading into the depths of sinful darkness – again a reference to the ending of *Paradise Lost*

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<sup>36</sup> 'Art. 11 – Substance of the Speech of Charles Marsh, Esq.', p. 210.

when 'The brandished sword of God before them blazed / Fierce as a comet.../.../...and to th' eastern gate/ Led them direct' out of Paradise (*PL*, 287, XII.633-634, 638-639). Zeinab's conversional 'knowledge' of the Christian God is not only a 'sin' against her native caste, but ironically, the very 'original sin' of 'knowledge' casting her, and Kathema, from Eden which her conversion to Christianity was meant to expunge in the first place.

Moreover, Priestman remarks in *Romantic Atheism* that, 'As the representatives of solar light and heat respectively...the Morning Star and fiery comet...[are] readily identifiable with the two warring principles of Zoroastrianism, in which Shelley was deeply interested'.<sup>37</sup> This interest in Zoroastrianism is evident not just through Shelley's metaphor, but in the way that Shelley incorporates Zoroastrian ideals in his poem as a means to combat Christian proselytisation.

Marilyn Butler writes extensively on Shelley's engagement with the ancient Persian religion, commenting that Zoroastrianism was 'the thinking radical's favourite form of paganism'.<sup>38</sup> As noted earlier in relation to his ordering of works such as Jones' and DuPerron's, Shelley read works on India and Indian religions because of their antinomian and contrarian potential against Christian hegemony.

Zoroastrianism was popular, Butler maintains, because

its worshippers must accept night as well as day, winter as well as summer. To have two alternating principles demonstrates graphically that there are no absolutes, no immutable good, but instead flux, change, alternation, contraries.<sup>39</sup>

Or, to put it in Shelley's own words, 'Doubt, Chance and mutability' ('Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', 118, ll. 31). Shelley was keen to use Zoroastrianism's more theologically-flexible principles in order to undermine Christianity's moral rigidity and its traditional authority. Butler notes that Shelley would have been aware of the

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<sup>37</sup> *Romantic Atheism*, p. 231.

<sup>38</sup> 'Romantic Manichaeism: Shelley's 'On the Devil, and Devils' and Byron's Mythological Dramas', *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J.B. Bullen (Oxford, 1989), p. 13-37, 15.

<sup>39</sup> 'Romantic Manichaeism', p. 15.

Manicheans, who were 'a party influenced by a Persian type of dualism, but operating within the Christian church between the first and third centuries A.D.'<sup>40</sup> By presenting this ancient Persian dualism as an element of the spirituality of the ancient Christian church, then, Shelley usurps the religious (and political) hegemony of Christianity by suggesting its derivation from previous forms of (pagan) worship. On the one hand, as suggested by the dualistic nature of Zeinab's heraldry as a 'sweetly-beaming star' but arrival as a 'horrible comet', Shelley's use of Zoroastrianism serves to augment the anti-religious, anti-missionary polemic of the poem.

Such a use of Zoroastrianism shows one of the ways in which Shelley's approach to syncretism differs from Jones': whereas Jones was cautiously diligent in tempering or even covering up aspects of Indian culture or religion which could provoke or exacerbate religious conflict, Shelley was enthusiastically provocative in igniting such conflict as intensely as possible. In this sense, Shelley shows that his conception and use of syncretism was not always in keeping with Jones' original intentions.

On the other, however, his use of Zoroastrianism also demonstrates Wasserman's point that 'Shelley held that all human minds are portions of the One Mind'.<sup>41</sup> Here, Shelley's syncretic impulse is apparent, as he uses Zoroastrianism to criticise the attempted Christianisation of Hindus – all within the narrative structure of Arabian love poetry, as per Jones. Under the framework of Zoroastrian principles, Shelley places Hinduism and Christianity in theological and social opposition, representing them as moral alternatives to each other. Even though Christianity serves as the theological antagonist of the poem, the religion also becomes a part of Zoroastrianism's celebration of opposites and contraries, acting as the necessary balance to the poem's moral paradigm, however ironically.

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<sup>40</sup> 'Romantic Manichaeism', p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, p. 272.

Through its imagery of divine unity and colonial division, 'Zeinab and Kathema' illustrates Shelley's engagement with, and development of, the Jonesian syncretism apparent in his representations of Hindu *Vedantic* philosophy. Zeinab's metaphoric characterisation as both the morning star and a comet careening through the sky invokes the duality of religion Shelley sought to discredit and dismiss as hypocritical, while at the same time standing for the very unity of thought he theorised in 'Love' – particularly Zeinab and Kathema's. Through its invocation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Edenic fall, 'Zeinab and Kathema's' representations of religions as varied as Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Hinduism demonstrate the extent to which Shelley used syncretism to forge his polemical poetics – and even a polemical aesthetic, if we take onboard his use of Arabian poetic narrative as per Jones. Although Shelley would represent Hinduism stereotypically and, like Blake and Southey, display its moral corruption due to its rigid dogmatism in *Queen Mab*, we can also see the way in which he uses Jones in 'Zeinab and Kathema' to set, in perfect Shelleyan irony, the anti-religious *and* syncretic tone of his later works such as *Prometheus Unbound* – a poem in which the 'love' from Prometheus and Asia's reunion in Kashmir spreads across the world and heals its earthly ills. The paradise lost in 'Zeinab and Kathema' through the destruction of love by colonial greed and religious hypocrisy is eight years later mythologically found again and restored in *Prometheus Unbound* through use of the 'intellectual heritage' of Jonesian syncretism and the poetic realisation of the 'One Mind' – 'One Mind' attuned to the basic premises of *Vedantic* philosophy.

## Conclusion: Jonesian Syncretism and De Quincey's Oriental Nightmare

In using Jonesian syncretism to develop the polemics of his poetry, Shelley, in effect, became the last major poet during the period to demonstrate Jones' influence. Having spanned thirty years, the legacy of Jones' poetry and his Hindu scholarship were on the descent during the second decade of the nineteenth century. This was due to a few reasons. Firstly, the legacy of the British as the foremost scholars on India and Hinduism – a legacy cultivated by Jones and Wilkins – had ceded slowly to the Germans during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Poets and scholars across Germany took to India and Hinduism with far more enthusiasm than the British – German poets and scholars such as Novalis, Goethe and August and Friedrich Schlegel who all received their initial inspiration, ironically, from Jones and his work.<sup>1</sup> By 1820, the shift was so complete and so obvious that the *Edinburgh Review* lamented that, 'The field of Indian Antiquities have been of late less diligently cultivated'; moreover, they note the extent to which Jones' death in 1794 and the return of Henry Colebrooke, Jones' immediate successor, to Britain had made the researches not only 'less frequent', but also 'less interesting'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, they make these remarks in a review of the latest Indic researches coming from Germany. While India as a territory had fallen further under British control during the early nineteenth century, India as a field of cultural and religious study had become the domain of the Germans, all the while India as a subject of poetic engagement in Britain all but disappeared.

Both of these moves weakened the strength of Jones' syncretic method and message, to the point where Jones himself came under increasing attack for his

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., Schwab's *The Oriental Renaissance* and Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson's *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860* (London, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> 'Art. VII', *The Edinburgh Review; or, Critical Journal*, Vol. XXXIII (Edinburgh, Jan-May, 1820), p. 431-442, 440.

syncretic sympathies, as noted earlier with Foster's *Essays*. In 1817, James Mill published *The History of British India*, a work which sought to construct a history of 'British India' – a phrase coined by Mill for this very work – in order to, as Balachandra Rajan puts it, 'provide the future [of India] with a different empowerment'; this 'empowerment' was to 'write a new text' for India's past (and thus its future) rather than 'amend[ing] an old one' – as the likes of Jones were wont to do.<sup>3</sup> Advocating this progressive polemic meant disengaging with previous policies and previous representations of India. Thus, Mill dared to defame Jones and his legacy by criticising the intimacy with which he formed a relationship with his Hindu subject matter. H.H. Wilson, the leading British Sanskrit scholar of the Victorian period, notes in the introduction to his 1858 edition of Mill's *History* the way in which 'the exalted...exaggerated descriptions of [the Hindu's] advance in civilization, of their learning, their sciences, their talents, their virtues, which emanated from the amiable enthusiasm of Sir William Jones' were challenged and discredited in Mill's work 'with equal enthusiasm'.<sup>4</sup> Mill argued that Jones' objectivity had been compromised because of his closeness, both geographically and emotionally, to his subject. Moreover, he boasted that his own ignorance of Sanskrit, coupled with the fact that he had never been to India, provided the necessary distance to judge his Indian subject matter more accurately and objectively.

Mill's attitude towards Jones is perhaps best exemplified by the contempt with which he treats *Sacotalá*, the dramatic work which served as the most popular and most influential of Jones' direct translation of Hindu literature. Mill writes that the Hindu drama affords little that 'either accords with the understanding, or can gratify the fancy, of an instructed people'.<sup>5</sup> Mill's purpose is clear: discredit and disparage Hindu literature and those closely associated with it, whether or not they clearly have

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<sup>3</sup> *Under Western Eyes*, 90.

<sup>4</sup> *The History of British India*, ed. Horace Hyman Wilson (London, 1858; fifth edition), Vol. 1, p. xii. 3 vols.

<sup>5</sup> *The History of British India*, abridged by William Thomas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 157-158.

popular appeal among the ‘understanding’ or ‘fancy’ of an ‘instructed people’ (which, as this thesis has shown, it did). By dismantling the political, as well as the aesthetic, legitimacy of a Jonesian syncretism that had obvious (though waning) influence in both the political and artistic arenas at the time, Mill was able to forge a new representation of India: one no longer tied historically and culturally to its ancient past as ‘Hindustan’ as per Jones, but one constructed in the progressivism of Britain’s future as ‘British India’.

Such a progressive attitude towards India came to define the British mindset – and policy – of the late Romantic / early Victorian age, one defined by the modernising impulse to make India like Britain. This is best exemplified by Thomas Macaulay, a Whig MP who in 1835 gave his ‘Minute on Education’ articulating the central policy of British intervention in India for the next century:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.<sup>6</sup>

The rule of India by its own laws – the Indian policy which was set in place after Warren Hastings’ ascent to the Governor-Generalship in 1773, which had been faithfully embraced in, and enabled by, the works of Wilkins and Jones, and which slowly began to erode under missionary and Millian pressure during the early nineteenth century – had officially come to a close.

In literary terms, this shift in the nineteenth century from Jonesian syncretism towards Macaulayan assimilationism can be seen in the works of Thomas De Quincey – specifically in the ‘Oriental Dreams’ section of his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822). Following the rather comical visit by the Malay at Dove Cottage in 1809, in which De Quincey gives the Malay a dose of opium and then sends him on his way only to fret over the Malay’s possible overdose, De Quincey

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Macaulay’s “Minute on Education”’, *Through Indian Eyes*, eds. Don and Jean Elliott Johnson (New York: The EYES BOOKS Series, 2008), p. 153-156, 156.



writes how the strange and dangerous exoticism of his Oriental visitor began to manifest itself into drug-induced, hallucinatory nightmares:

The Malay has been a fearful enemy for months. I have been every night, through his means, transported into Asiatic scenes...I have often thought that if I were compelled to forego England and to live in China and among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep...Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. As the cradle of the human race, it would alone have a dim and reverential feeling connected with it.<sup>7</sup>

De Quincey's transportation through 'Asiatic scenes' is described with none of the syncretic sympathy of Jones, august antiquity of Blake, or Edenic eulogy of Shelley. Rather, De Quincey's Orient – a geographically disoriented (and disorienting) miscellany of 'China', 'Indostan', 'Egypt', and Mesopotamia (designated in *Confessions* by his reference to the 'Euphrates') – is 'awful', 'fearful' and horrific, as well as antagonistic and maddening.<sup>8</sup> The antagonism and madness that define De Quincey's Oriental paranoia come less from his actual experience with the Malay – a person whom De Quincey describes in appearance as a 'demon' and 'ferocious' but one who displays none of those characteristics in his actions – than it does from a psychological realisation, and identification, of such qualities in his own self (with the help, of course, of the delusionary reverie of opium).<sup>9</sup> That is, the 'cause of his horror' lies in De Quincey's realisation of his own 'deep' historical association with the very Orient he fears – since, as the 'cradle of the human race', all humans are at some basic level 'Oriental'.

As Nigel Leask writes, 'The great anxiety of De Quincey's dream is thus precisely one of *orientalization*. Imperialist and oriental subjects are one...[it is] the repressed fear...of discovering the Other in the Same'.<sup>10</sup> De Quincey locates the Oriental 'Other' in his self, thereby, according to Leask, manifesting the 'anxiety of empire' and imperial encounters which Leask argues pervade late Romantic writers.

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<sup>7</sup> *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, and Other Writings*, ed. Barry Milligan (Penguin Books, 2003), p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 228.

Interestingly, however, De Quincey exhibits such anxiety through religious imagery – religious imagery which suggests the influence of a Jonesian syncretism the work ultimately comes to subvert. De Quincey writes:

Under the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sunlight, I brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Indostan. From kindred feelings I soon brought Egypt and all her gods under the same law. I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by parakeets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas and was fixed for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms. I was the idol, I was the priest, I was worshipped, I was sacrificed. I fled from the wrath of Brahma through all the forests of Asia. Vishnu hated me. Siva laid wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris. I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. I was buried for a thousand years in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed with cancerous kisses by crocodiles, and laid confounded with all unutterable slimy things amongst reeds and Nilotic mud.<sup>11</sup>

Firstly, De Quincey represents himself as something of an Oriental Noah, gathering 'all creatures' for his ark. There is a 'connecting' and 'kindred' feeling to the Oriental tropics that seems to suggest an agreeable association between and amalgamation of the different animals, 'usages' (or customs) and 'appearances' of Asia. They are all the 'Other', but also one and the same – as well as one and the same with De Quincey's self.

Yet the realisation of this 'sameness' in 'otherness' terrifies De Quincey and he moves to represent the Orient as a historical sarcophagus suffocating the individuality and sense of progress his identification as an 'Englishman' designates (a designation emphasised further by the title signifying that he is an '*English Opium-Eater*' rather than an Oriental one). As he writes before the above excerpt:

The mere antiquity of Asiatic things, of their institutions, histories, modes of faith, etc., is so impressive, that to me the vast age of the race and name overpowers the sense of youth in the individual. A young Chinese seems to me an antediluvian man renewed. Even Englishmen, though not bred in any knowledge of such institutions, cannot but shudder at the mystic sublimity of castes that have flowed

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<sup>11</sup> *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 81-82.

apart and refused to mix, through such immemorial tracts of time...Man is a weed in those regions.<sup>12</sup>

Here, De Quincey's sense of self as the collective 'Noah' is diminished by the very 'antediluvian' nature of the Orient which refuses to mix; the Orient will always be before him, prior to him, and thus always already a part of him, even though as an 'Englishman', he was never 'bred in any knowledge' of the Orient's 'history' or 'modes of faith'. In this sense, the Orient is a part of him – not by choice, but by a history over which he has no control. This lack of control terrifies him for he locates within it the part of himself that he cannot control, and thus the part of himself with which he cannot 'mix'.<sup>13</sup> Such is the reason why 'No man can pretend that the wild, barbarous, and capricious superstitions of Africa...affect him in the way that he is affected by the ancient, monumental, cruel, and elaborate religions of Indostan'.<sup>14</sup> The former is characterised by its baseness, incivility and unpredictability, whereas the latter is characterised by the antiquity and immensity of its institutions, suggesting the Orient's civilisation despite its 'cruelty'. The 'religions of Indostan' affect him because he realises his inescapable connection to them.

De Quincey demonstrates the inexorability of his connection with 'the religions of Indostan' – in fact, with Hinduism – when he writes, 'I was the idol, I was the priest, I was worshipped, I was sacrificed. I fled from...Brahma...Vishnu hated me. Siva laid wait for me'. He does this not just because he mentions the Hindu deities by name, but because his self identification with the 'idol', the 'priest' and the 'sacrificed' reveals his ironic utilisation of Jonesian syncretism and a diabolical paraphrasing of the *Bhagvat-Geeta*. In 'Lecture IX', *Krishna* tells *Arjoon* how, although he is praised through various means and in various 'shapes', he is ultimately the unified source and object of all worship. *Krishna* says:

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<sup>12</sup> *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> For a further study of this, cf., John Barrell's *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (London, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 81

I am the sacrifice; I am the worship; I am the spices; I am the invocation; I am the ceremony to the manes of the ancestors; I am the provisions; I am the fire, and I am the victim...I am the holy one worthy to be known...I am generation and dissolution, the place where all things are repositied, and the inexhaustible seed of all nature...I am death and immortality: I am entity and non-entity (*Bhagvat-Geeta*, 70-71).

The unity of being *Krishna* explains here is one celebrated again and again by Jones – and Shelley for that matter – in his representation of *Vedantism*. Yet for De Quincey, that unity is one which terrifies, even menaces, him, as the ‘wrathful’ and threatening attitudes of the Hindu deities towards him suggest. By using similar language and syntax as the *Bhagvat-Geeta*, De Quincey makes the Hindu philosophy otherwise lauded for its ‘mystic sublimity’ one ‘Englishmen’ should ‘shudder’ at, and flee in fear. Moreover, by combining the menacing behaviour of the Hindu deities with the ‘narrow’ pyramids and ‘cancerous kisses’ of the Egyptian gods Iris and Osiris, De Quincey combines the ancient religions in a Jonesian manner in order to foster revulsion rather than revelation, thereby subverting the very principles and ideals of Jones’ syncretic methodology.<sup>15</sup>

In this sense, we can see the ways in which De Quincey’s paranoid delusions articulate the argument of Mill’s *History of British India*. The Orient’s antiquity and ubiquity make it impossible to assert oneself; one is only a ‘weed’ within the larger tropical jungle that is Asia. The Orient’s histories and religions must be controlled, maintained and ultimately differentiated in order for the individual to make sense of it at all. Like Mill, De Quincey calls into question the ability for ‘Englishmen’ to comprehend Hinduism on its own terms and dismisses the Jonesian attitude of appreciating it. De Quincey does so in his own syncretic way, by imagining himself as Coleridge’s ‘Ancient Mariner’. De Quincey writes how he ‘was kissed with cancerous kisses by crocodiles, and laid confounded with all unutterable *slimy things* amongst reeds and Nilotic mud’ (my italics), alluding to the ‘slimy things’ that ‘did crawl with

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<sup>15</sup> *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 81.

legs / Upon the slimy sea' that the Ancient Mariner saw after killing the Albatross.<sup>16</sup>

Yet whereas the Ancient Mariner is able to appreciate those 'slimy things' and 'bless them unaware', De Quincey can only despair of them, and in despairing, lay 'confounded' among them. In this sense, De Quincey shows how, after Shelley, Hinduism was no longer the religion of rationality, originality and morality that Jones had advocated; it was now 'in dreams.../...the spirit that plagued', haunted and hindered the progress of British letters. In British literature at least, Jones' India was now to be feared rather than revered.

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<sup>16</sup> 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. H.J. Jackson (Oxford, 2000), p. 53, ll. 132-133.

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