"A scanty plot of ground:" *Navigating Identity and the Archive in English Indian Sonnets*

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 Abstract

“A scanty plot of ground:” Navigating Identity and the Archive in English Indian Sonnets

Marya Grant

The motives informing an Indian author’s desire to write English sonnets are complicated by the cultural influences of British imperialism and modern globalization. This thesis considers how English Indian sonneteers negotiate questions of identity - self, nation, and culture - through the sonnet form and to what end. This study considers the possible motives through the lenses of sonnet history, colonization, and postcolonial and sonnet theory.

This thesis explores how the English Indian sonneteer attempted to fuse cultural identity, nationalism and form in order to subvert the cultural inculcation of the British Raj and create a hybrid identity for emerging national self. It also explores the development of the alienated self created by colonization and modernism. This work considers colonial and postcolonial sonnets in relation to how themes of nostalgia, history, identity, and nation influenced the works of Anglo-Indian poets. Historical narratives, cultural identity and memory became sites of anxiety, self-elaboration and imagination. These concerns are worked out in the rhetorical space of Anglo-Indian sonnets in ways that simultaneously endorsed, rejected or rewrote the historical narratives that informed the speaker and created a dynamic, hybrid cultural identity.

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Chapter One
The Well-Wrought Urn

> The sonnet is a room for sounding these irreconcilable oppositions [such as reason and emotion] and making sense of them, and for registering the edge of understanding, in which passion and reason somehow lead to an inward transformation, experienced silently yet surfacing in language that points to a border beyond which language cannot go (Levin lxxiv).

The first English Indian sonnets emerged in the early to mid 19th century during British colonial rule. Early Indian sonnets paid homage to British literary culture while at the same time dealing with Indian landscapes, subjects, myths and metaphors. Towards the late 19th century, Home Rule and independence became prominent national concerns, and later colonial English Indian sonnets reflect this focus. The 20th century saw the rise of linguistic and rhetorical experimentation as Indian authors were influenced by modernism and postmodernism.

As in Italy of the 15th century and England of the 16th century, the written word in 19th century India was a means of conveying learning and courtly (or imperial) status. Thus mastering the most complicated forms of expression, such as the sonnet, was a mark of merit within a system in which merit is arbitrarily assigned. As established in *The Development of the Sonnet,* the first Italian and English sonnets emerged at times that were politically quite similar to one another. Rulers of both nations were patrons of the arts and the arts flourished under their reigns.[1] Both countries were politically unstable in that they were divided by religion, language, and communal identities (Spiller 15). In each emerging nation-state (India included), political awareness and literary skill were judged important in the development of the career of rising civil/governmental servants.

The sonnet was born in each nation at a time when advancement meant currying favour, and political intrigues were veiled by rhetoric. Hence in many ways the sonnet was a tool used for accruing status and advancement within a developing nation.[2]

The sonnet, being a "well wrought urn"[3] for probing the paradoxical, appealed to each emerging nation-state on several levels. While sonnets outwardly focused on the beloved, they also became a vehicle for translating more complex topics such as the art of writing, immortality through art, and the speaker's desire for status or favour. Moreover, sonnets became a location in which complex emotional and political negotiations were analyzed by the speaker in relation to political power. As Arthur Marotti observes, "love is not love" because the love sonnet could also function as "a form of mediation between socioeconomic or sociopolitical desires and the constraints of the established order" (399).[4] The beloved became the stand-in for the speaker's unrequited search for political status in the nation-state. For instance, Spenser's Amoretti sonnet sequence can be read as being addressed to either his "beloved" or Queen Elizabeth I.

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[1] See M Spiller, Chapter 1 for further information on the socio-political histories of both England and Italy during the rise of the sonnet.

[2] See Michael Spiller's *Development of the Sonnet* for a history of the form. He explores the formal and thematic evolution of the sonnet from its birth in 13th century Italy up until 17th century England, with particular attention to the Italian and English traditions. The sonnet started off as a form of courtly banter and love poetry but quickly became a metaphor for the relationship between the self and the social/courtly sphere. The dramatic location of the speaker and the development of the form's poetic I are traced through the sonnets inception up until the 17th century. Spiller argues that the form's appeal stems from its ability to contain and develop the paradoxes that it explores. The form is understood to be a "self-reflexive [...] rhetorical performance" that forces speaker concision and is able to explore various themes as a discursive exercise in logic and emotion.

[3] Donne. The Canonization

[4] Shakespeare sonnet 116

The evolving nature of the sonnet over the course of its history saw a layering of new, complex tropes and discursive rhetoric used to explore the relationship between the beloved and the self. The altering face of the beloved object enabled the sonnet to move beyond its homo-social legacy and permitted for a complex array of issues related to identity to be introduced. As the form's focus shifted away from the female beloved, marginalized voices came into view and broadened the scope of sonnet discourse. The school of writing and theory that has the most relevance to the Indian sonnet was born out of one such emerging marginalized voice: the Harlem Renaissance.

African-American poets such as Countee Cullen and Claude McKay used the form to explore racial equity issues and the unrequited desire for shared socio-economic status in early 20th century America. According to Gary Smith, the black sonnet is a sonnet of protest. The black poet, aware of his hybrid identity, used the sonnet as a means of protesting the social inequalities he faced in order to prove to western cultural elite that the black man could move beyond the "folkie" tropes assigned to him. Likewise Indian authors used the form to dispel some of the British misconceptions about the noble eastern mystic and prove their ability to participate in the material cultural realm of the west. However, as James R Keller wrote, the paradox played out in the "black protest sonnet" is linked to cultural materialism's "subversion/containment debate". The artist either struggles to emancipate himself from the social institutions he is born into only to end up reinforcing them, or he uses contemporary rhetoric and institutions to find autonomy. (447) The paradox is that by writing in the sonnet, form then becomes both reflective of the authors emancipation from and his imprisonment within the cultural institutions that inform his work. In his quest for racial equality, the

African American was caught in a double bind: the desire to valorize his own cultural identity and to participate in American culture. The African American poet used the sonnet to identify the paradox behind his desire for racial equality: that American society must be re-invented before such a desire could be requited. Thus the black protest sonnet became a way of encouraging both identities to reevaluate the society in which they lived.

If we agree that the sonnet is ultimately a western form, then the same questions raised by the black sonneteer hold true for the colonial or postcolonial Indian sonneteer. Can the Indian author use the sonnet form to emancipate himself from colonial shackles, or does he ultimately endorse the colonial system of cultural inculcation? Given the form's history and rhetoric in regards to positions of "othered" identity, the question remains: what is it exactly that prompted colonial subjects, such as nineteenth century Indians and post-colonial authors (contemporary, post-independence Indians) to write within the western sonnet tradition?

While Indian authors were attracted to the form for many of the same reasons as Harlem Renaissance writers (such as colonial endorsement and protest), they were also enticed by the form because of the role English literature played in the colonial governmental system. As noted in Nandi Bhatia's *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance* Britain's policy of cultural consumption was anything but benign in its scope and influence. In as much as the British Raj maintained power through military and economic methods, it also kept its position of legitimacy through a policy of cultural superiority. Encouraging Indians to consume British culture, morals and art was an

integral aspect in the Empire's attempt to consolidate imperial power. Bhatia, summarizing Gauri Vishwanathan's *Masks of Conquest*, writes:

> Vishwanathan shows the link between English literature and the consolidation of empire, asserting that the introduction of English language and literature, on the pretext of offering a liberal education, actually served as an instrument for the British administration to maintain control over the natives. She points out that the 'humanistic functions traditionally associated with literature—for example, the shaping of character or the development of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking—were considered essential to the process of sociopolitical control.' In India [...] the discipline of English literature was invested with the 'human and moral attributes,' an investment that was intertwined with the 'civilising mission' of English literature... Therefore, in introducing English literature to the Indian elite [...] the colonial rulers attempted to secure the consent of the ruled through intellectual and moral manipulation rather than through military control. (53-4).

By using literature, particularly the inculcation of Shakespearean literature, the native Indian elite became subject to the morality and ideology of imperial Britain. After the Indian Educational Act of 1835 was implemented, Shakespeare was considered to be the prime example of English culture and dominated the English literary component of the Anglo-Indian educational curriculum (53). Moreover, "because Shakespeare constituted a dominant part of English literature, knowing Shakespeare became a necessity for those aspiring to join the civil services" (54). English literary education became synonymous with elite status because it ensured upwards social mobility amongst upper caste Indians and prestige within the British system. The rise of Indian productions of Shakespearean drama and the predominance of Shakespeare in Anglo-Indian literary studies during the British Raj reflected not only the underlying pattern of cultural hegemony of British imperialism but the Indian desire to master the English canon for favour. Therefore, despite the overt agenda to respect native Indian culture, the foreign cultural policy of the British Raj undermined Indian cultural identity. The cultural legacy left behind by the British Raj continues today. English language is still required in India for socio-

economic advancement and study of English literature is unique to members of the higher classes.

While Shakespeare and other English authors were used in India as a means of cultural and moral education, Indian artists also used British works subversively to promote political dissent and elaborate identity to Indian audiences (67). The cultural identity created by the colonial encounter and contemporary globalism continues to influence the identity of India and Indian literature. Though Fanon argued:

> The intellectual… when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses, if he wants to remain true to himself, the negation of one of these determinations. But most often, since they cannot or will not make a choice, such intellectuals gather together all the historical determining factors which have conditioned them and take up a fundamentally "universal standpoint" (218).

We must ask ourselves: should the renunciation of one identity in favor of another be valorized without question? Is it correct to assume that one can only remain true to one's heritage and cultural self by rejecting the influences of colonization? Is favoring postcolonial identity without acknowledgement of the colonial factors that contributed to it detrimental to the elaboration and exploration of individual identity within a global context? Bhatia's exploration of the roles of education and cultural hegemony through Shakespearean literature in India reveals that there is a dynamic interplay and dialogue occurring between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial culture and identity. Fanon's argument that the native intellectual must chose between two cultural determinisms before emerging as a whole self may be impossible to realize given the legacy of imperialism and the invasive impact of globalism on the emerging postcolonial self. Furthermore, the hybrid "universal" identity may even have its own set of benefits, such

as a dynamic and fluid sense of identity and openness to cross-cultural dialogue that transcends the boundaries of nationalism.

Re-imagining Cultural Identity

In *"Whose Imagined Community"* Partha Chatterjee attempts to answer the question of how a nation re-imagines its communal identity in light of a colonial encounter. He takes issue with the "modular" forms provided to post-colonial nations by European nationalist discourse and instead focuses on how postcolonial nations actually imagine their nationalism differently than the models presented by Europe or America (216). Like Fanon, Jameson, and Anderson, Chatterjee complicates notions of nationhood as they are understood within the western model. However, Chatterjee argues that the nation must establish its own private identity by reclaiming its cultural self before moving outwards to engage in the public, political realm to assert itself as a nation (217). He argues that being confronted with two very oppositional national domains, the private (spiritual/cultural/traditional) and the public (political/material/modern) create an incompatible identity division within the colonial or postcolonial nation. By working within the confines of the western imagined community, the (post)colonial nation is split between two irreconcilable communities. The postcolonial subject is denied access to a cohesive vision of self, one that exists outside of the violence of colonial memory, and this ends up creating a schizophrenic split in national identity. Fanon asks native intelligentsia to choose between imagined identities yet the very act of choosing perpetuates a discontinuous narrative of national and cultural self. Though the artist is

inherently caught between the act of subversion and containment, the universal or hybrid self adopted by the artist seeks to reconcile the divide created by colonialism.

If the postcolonial subject (or globalized self) can no longer chose an unadulterated narrative of self, then how does the English Indian sonnet negotiate the paradox of cultural identity? What self-identity is the Anglo-Indian poet creating by writing English sonnets? The answers to these questions may be found in the form itself. The sonnet, despite its western associations, inherently creates a space in which the speaker problematizes and identifies the permeable position he occupies. The choice to write in English cannot be viewed solely as an endorsement of the cultural voice of the colonial oppressor. The Indian poet's choice to write in English can also be understood as a refusal to choose between cultural identities and as a resistance to the reductive roles such a choice entails. In negotiating a hybrid identity the speaker seeks to transcend the topical and national in favor of a dynamic understanding of self. It is the sonnet's negotiation of the universal—the self versus the other—that makes the poet's choice more than a simple endorsement of colonial culture. In order to fully understand whether or not the sonnet in India has the potential of transcending its colonial legacy, it is important to consider how the Indian poet attempts to negotiate this notion of universality through the creation of self, nation, and culture; how the speaker negotiates self in order to re-write the historiographic meta-narrative of identity; how he struggles with the historical archive that identifies him. The speaker does more than write back to the west, he writes himself into a larger cultural narrative.

We must also consider the role of language in context of the Indian sonnet. As previously mentioned, English was the lingua franca of British colonial India and post

Independent India continues to recognize English as an auxiliary national language. Although they were often attacked as purveyors of colonial culture, Bruce King wrote in *Modern Indian Poetry in English* that later English Indian writers defended their linguistic choice out of a love of the English language rather than an endorsement of colonial culture. They claimed that they were concerned with individual "expressions of the human condition" rather than nationalism and independence and as such sought to write for themselves and not for the nation. (11) Given that Indian English poetry garners such little attention both nationally and globally, we cannot assume that global recognition is the primary motive behind the choice of language. Whether it is out of an affinity for the English language or the desire to gain international favour, the act of writing English sonnets in postcolonial India must be understood as a marginalized labour of love and not solely an attempt to curry favour.

The recent rise of attention to English Indian literature in the West, particularly fiction by ex-patriot authors, has shed new light on India as Commonwealth literature. What attention can this new interest cast upon contemporary English Indian poets? Is English Indian poetry about to enjoy its own renaissance, or in keeping with the opinion of Salman Rushdie, is English Indian poetry incapable of garnering international attention because Anglo-Indian poets lack the ability to write poetry in English without sentimentality?[5] Unlike postcolonial literature, which has experienced a rise in international attention and acclaim over the past 20 years, English Indian poetry is not a site of primary study in academia and remains marginalized and obscure. English sonnets make up an even smaller portion of the body of English Indian poetry and remain

on the academic periphery of an already marginalized field for both Indian and international scholars. Given the contemporary interest in postcolonial studies, images of re-created identity, re-invented language, and fractured reality, it would seem that Indian poetry is ready for a revival. Although colonial English Indian poets were criticized for their sentimentality and linguistic misappropriations, postcolonial poets have become adept and innovative in their use of the English language. How this will affect future studies in the field remains difficult to determine because of a lack of access and overall paucity of scholarship in the field. The study of English Indian writing remains an elite and limited area of scholarship in India and rare in the West.

Given the above information, why else would contemporary Indian authors make the choice to write in English if not for the love of the language or form? Are English Indian poets writing with the intention of representing India to outsiders? If so, what does that mean? One answer is implicit in Alain Locke's writing on the negritude movement: "The fiction is that the life of the races is separate and increasingly so. The fact is that they have touched too closely at the unfavorable and too lightly at the favorable levels" (632). Locke's argument, extended beyond the negritude movement, reflects the desire to focus upon negative and factional identity relations in terms of cultural contact between groups. Postcolonial studies often automatically privilege the pre-colonial self and view the adoption of the English language and literary form as being a negative by-product of colonial contact at the expense of a unique, national self and cultural heritage. To be sure, colonial impact has had its share of negative consequences. However, given that the sonnet form often seeks out themes of identity and liberation, it

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[5] See Salman Rushdie's introduction in *Mirrorwork: 50 years of Indian Writing 1947-*

may not be as negative a formal choice as it originally appears. While the sonnet is not universalizing, it allows for a universal exploration of self in times of conflict and transition. The sonnet permits the speaker a space to work out the paradoxical. Colonial Anglo-Indian sonneteers, like their precursors in the west, adopted the form for a myriad of reasons: social equality, cultural authority, and political negotiation. Post-colonial authors use the form to explore themes of alienation, identity, and cultural hegemony.

Thus, while the sonnet form seems to be at odds with themes of liberation and cultural emancipation, it actually has a longstanding tradition of re-imagining the self that allows the speaker to reconfigure his identity. Critics may question why an Indian poet would chose to write in the rhetorical tradition and form of his colonizer, privileging the static Western identity over his own dynamic culture. Ironically, the answer is: form allows liberation. When the legacy of the form is considered outside of issues of race and culture, it is clear that the sonnet form is born out of a tradition of self-creation and rhetorical exploration. The form, "a forensic instrument" that is conducive to the types of discursive examination that is taken up by the sonneteer, has a well established history of being used as a vehicle for social commentary (Spiller 17). The discursive box that encompasses the questions contained therein is the perfect vehicle not only because of the history that it encapsulates, but also for the potential universalism that it encourages. In writing in English to a western audience the Anglo-Indian poet extends questions of postcolonial identity beyond national borders and makes it a global discussion. The choice to write in English in some ways brings the world and the colonizer back into the conversation, albeit from a position of audience instead of author. The postcolonial

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1997 for more details.

English poet speaks from a position of authority and controls the terms of debate. The Anglo-Indian sonneteer may write in the literary frame of the West but does so on his own plot of ground.

Furthermore, poetry, like postcolonialism focuses on the dislocations of meaning and identity through language.

> Metaphor and postcolonialilty are both conceived of in terms of the movement, transference, or alienation of discourse from one place to another, a movement that involves not only a one-way shift but inevitably a bi-directional hybridization. (Ramazani 28-9)

If the sonnet is understood as either a sieve of meanings in juxtaposition or layering of ideas at work to create meaning, then passing issues of postcolonial identity through the sonnet lens becomes less paradoxical in terms of the framework of English Indian sonnet debate. The characteristics of split identity, divided understanding, and layered structure function together to allow the postcolonial, globalized individual to locate self. This makes the sonnet a favorable vehicle of inter-connection between nation, self, and language. Moreover, the British Raj imposed a dual identity upon Indian writers that led them to use the form as a rebuttal to the flat archival identity created by the historical narratives of colonialism. These poets created a cultural perception of "I" based upon an amalgam of dynamic identities and re-interpolated the hybrid "I" of cultural identity. The sonnet speakers in the following pages fuse themes of dislocation—language, identity, and nationality—in order to problematize the paradoxical role of history in creating and commemorating the individual and collective self in colonial and postcolonial nations.

Chapter Two
The Colonial Sonnet

> … we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. […] These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha 1-2)

Although issues surrounding the archive tend to be linked to postmodern, postcolonial Indian diaspora literature, concerns regarding identity, nationalism, personal experience and the documented archive are also explored in colonial sonnets. Discussion of these themes can be traced back to the British and Indian agendas to document a national narrative that recorded a "history of us" before, during, and after colonization. The British desire to unify Indian identity into one national history (while simultaneously dividing cultural factions) created an identity split within India, as well as between the Occident and the Orient. Thus, identity was complicated by the experience of colonialism, subjectivity and the emerging global nation as the boundaries defining the self became simultaneously more fixed and mutable.

These concerns can be expanded into a larger cross-cultural anxiety brought about by cultures coming increasingly into contact with one another. National boundaries were solidified and historical narratives documented in an attempt to define self and culture in the face of shifting global perspectives. While history and society were busy fixing identity in order to protect traditions and culture, the individual (artist/intellectual) was faced with growing concerns over the nature of identification. In India, and abroad, art began to be marked by a growing sense of alienation, questioning, and re-evaluation as global access to a larger corpus of ideas, values, and behaviors were expanded beyond

their original boundaries. Encounters with the "other" highlighted the subjective nature of culture and led to a heightened awareness of the mutability of society. Moreover, exposure to another culture (particularly when threatening) forced a revalorization of native culture. The desire to fix social identity, location, and history became matters of public concern as they were perceived as being a means of laying claim to selfhood in an imperial system. Culture became a site wherein the colonial subject could strategically claim authority and self-rule; as such it became increasingly more significant in the rise of independence politics.

Furthermore, because English education was so invasive in its ability to 'morally' re-educate Indian subjects, Indian writers often felt alienated from their indigenous culture. The native intellectual ensconced in British traditions and steeped in western Humanism tended to view his culture through the lens of the West. This alternate gaze created a sense of cultural division: he existed as an outsider to both cultures. His education was at odds with his roots, but his Indian identity barred him from entrance into the realm of imperial society. Therefore, when the Indian scholar and artist, educated in the British system, sat down to write, he did so from a position of double alienation. The "progressive" and "enlightened" education was at odds with the "archaic" and "spiritual" traditions he had been raised in, and his writing reflected the culturally ambiguous position he inhabited. Issues related to independence, rising anxiety, and alienation of the native intellectual are all evident in both the imitative and innovative sonnets of the colonial period. In fact, even the most innovative colonial sonnets—those that created an Indian identity within their framework—were highly imitative of the British sonnet canon. Even more apparent is that most of the sonnets

emerging from this period, particularly the earliest generation, dabble in the literary rhetoric of Western culture by adopting Western classical forms and myths to convey subject matter. The body of colonial sonnets reflects a bias that betrays a distinctly Romantic sentimentality. By mimicking Romantic philosophies, Indian poets created an intriguing cross-cultural dialogue, whereby many Romantic poets were influenced by Orientalism and their Indian counterparts were affected by English Romanticism. While poets like Coleridge were looking to the East for poetic inspiration, Eastern poets were imitating Western writing created by Orientalism.[6]

As poets negotiated the ideologies and values ascribed to the foreign nation—while simultaneously trying them on, accepting, or rejecting them—tropes gradually evolved to incorporate an Indian voice and identity. The sonnets selected in this essay attempted to fuse identities and were marked by the transitional terrain occupied by the poet. Indian identity within the form became more pronounced as the poet and nation became increasingly aware of their interstitial location and the malignant nature of imperial rule. Moreover, as nationalism grew with its traditional backlash, so too did the anxiety over the impermanence of archived cultural memory.[7] This anxiety was not confined to the golden age of nationalist vision, but was increasingly expressed in terms of the impermanent nature of memory and the documented texts, or monuments, wherein individual and collective memories were contained. As poets contemplated their own

[6] While writing about Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bose claimed that snobbish prestige was accorded to contemporary colonial English Indian writing. This meant that English Indian authors were using their writing in a calculated manner to acquire credibility and stature amongst the upper classes much like English and Italian courts of the Renaissance.

culture through the lens of the outsider, many sonnets started to express a rising concern over how the archive documents the private (personal) realm within the public narrative. The peripheral position of Anglo-Indian poets allowed for a vision of modern nationalism through both lenses of Western Humanism and traditional Indian identity.

Although India's English poetry canon remains relatively unknown (both in India and abroad), the poets included are amongst India's best known sonneteers. The poems analyzed in this study were selected because they best represent the paradoxes inherent in writing English sonnets in India. These sonnets are amongst the most adept in their fusion of cultures, examining contemporary cultural issues and pondering the creation of a historical identity in India. Each sonnet reveals elements that challenge the reductive paradigm of the complicit colonial subject and show the speaker struggling with the implications of colonialism and Orientalism. They also reveal the impact of colonial cultural education upon the colonial and postcolonial subject. Many of the poems omitted work to inculcate British mores and identity. Many of those not included would entail a completely different examination of the role of English Indian sonnets. Others are sentimental, technically weak, or outside of the scope of this study. In fact, the collected works of the earlier generation of the well known Dutt literary family contains several sonnets that clearly indicate a privileging of Western identity. [8] The main criteria

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[7] Chatterjee's essay elaborates in its discussion the link between nationalism and the private realm for further clarification on how the two elements became central to the move for Independence.

[8] One example, found in *the Dutt Family Album*, clearly rejects Indian identity in favour of the speaker aligning himself with British morality and humanism:

> The nameless mystic rite will soon begin,
> The air is heavy with the incense cloud,
> And as the Brahmin rises grave and proud,

of the sonnets that were selected included the following: they had to be technically adept, related to themes of identity (cultural and self), alienation and history in order to explore how the speaker reified or subverted British cultural control. To have included sonnets that fell outside of these criteria would have changed the purview of this analysis. Famous colonial sonneteers such as Michael Madhusudan Dutt were omitted in favour of Henry Derozio's better known *Harp of India* and Hur Chunder Dutt's *Sonnet: India* because they were in keeping with the themes being explored. Toru Dutt's lesser known sonnet *À Mon Père,* was selected over others because it encapsulated many of the themes desired in a unique way that added to the body of works included. Instead of only selecting sonnets that were overt in their nationalist agenda, several sonnets were selected because of their discrete exploration of identity, alienation and recorded memory.

Looking Homeward: Nationalism and the Colonial Sonnet

One of the first and best known Indian sonnets, Henry Derozio's (1809-31) *The Harp of India*, was written in 1827. This poem is an early example of developing

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Bursts forth at once the wild barbaric din
Of drum, and trump, and fife. Close pressed within
That narrow court devoutly kneel the crowd
Of worshippers, with heads to earth low bowed,
All bent the golden gates of heaven to win!
Oppressed with shame and grief I turned away,
And sought the sunshine of the open sky,
Base slaves of foul idolatry are they,
Who wilful thus their Maker dare deny,
And cringe to stock and stone and creeping thing,
False traitors to their rightful Lord and King. (Dutt, Family Album)

alienation and reveals an ambivalent relationship between East and West, all the while paying tribute to the English Romantic period.

> Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
> Unstrung for ever, must though there remain;
> Thy music once was sweet—who hears it now?
> Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
> Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
> Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
> Like ruined monument on desert plain:
> O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
> Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,
> And many a wreath for them did fame entwine
> Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave
> Those hands are cold—but if thy notes divine
> May be by mortal wakened once again,
> Harp of my country, let me strike the strain! (149)

Derozio's sonnet responded to the inculcation of Western culture and, in turn, used it for its own purposes. He used the language and literature of the oppressor to problematize the lost Indian literary culture, moving beyond a simple reification of past values and culture. The harp, a metonym for art and literature, hangs "unstrung for ever" despite its noble past. The speaker re-strings the dormant instrument of Indian literature by merging the past and present, the East with the West, into a hybrid work of art that speaks to imperial rulers and the contemporary literary elite.[9]

Derozio implemented many of the classic sonnet tropes, most significantly the artistic disclaimer of being unfit for the task at hand and the idea of art as a monument.

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[9] While at the Hindu College, Derozio was responsible for creating a circle of young intellectuals and writers in Calcutta, part of what is known as the Bengali Renaissance. He challenged the status quo and encouraged students and members of the group to explore notions of free will, nationalism, truth, and religion in keeping with their western Humanist education. His own work often responded to the subjects discussed in these gatherings and heavily influenced the young minds that attended these meetings. See Alphonso-Karkala for more details regarding Henry Derozio's biography and involvement.

Derozio, like Sidney, Shakespeare, and several other famous English sonneteers, denounced his endeavors as being unequal to the literary task embarked upon. "Though many a hand more worthy far than" his, the speaker searches to re-awaken the nation. Unlike Sidney's muse who told him to "look in thy heart and write," Derozio's muse is the song of the nation itself (14). The famed minstrels of the nation's past have been silenced by time and the harp of the nation seeks a new lyricist. The poet's disclaimer was both apologetic and self-effacing, according to the style of British writers, because the poem veils larger political ambitions: to write back on equal terms and to give voice to the emerging nationalist sentiment. Just as British Renaissance poets framed their works with the apologetic preface for poetic wisdom, the speaker in *The Harp of India* draws upon the poetic apology as a trope to justify the role of art. However, unlike Shakespeare who sought to immortalize his beloved by writing that "not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme," Derozio paid homage to his beloved nation in verse. [10] The "ruined monument" of the nation is immortalized through its artistic legacy.

This sonnet further imitates the English tradition by following the conventional iambic five foot pattern in all but three lines. The lines with an additional beat work in tandem with a rhyme scheme that draws upon the Italian tradition.[11] The tropes of the harp, music, and art as historical monument all fall within the purview of the sonnet form and do not deviate from formal traditions. Thus, structurally and metaphorically (in terms of tropes employed to convey metaphoric meaning), Derozio adds nothing new to the form. The silenced lyre, or speech, is within the realm of the expected formal

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[10] Shakespeare sonnet 55

rhetoric. The tone and tropes are in keeping with the literature taught to Indian English scholars. The morbidity of the verse and the elegiac formality of the cultural archive draw on both the English Renaissance and the Romantic tradition in British poetry. The combination of the quasi-pathetic fallacies of the barren landscape and fecund graveyard invoke Romantic authors (Keats, Shelley), whereas the morbidity of tone draws upon earlier works by poets like Shakespeare and British contemporaries such as Tennyson and Browning.

Though the melancholic landscape is familiar, Derozio's use of it is inventive. He draws upon the elegiac to contemplate the cultural death of the Indian nation and the ramifications this silencing has upon the national self. While the sonnet, both in tone and rhetoric, could easily be about any nation, the possessive use of "my country" unites the universal nature of the subject matter with the specific location of the speaker's identity. In other words, by claiming the country as his own or identifying allegiance to the land, the speaker demands that the reader (intended or otherwise) understand nationalism as a possession—something that instills a sense of belonging. Once the poem is located in its historical moment, readers are made to understand through dislocated meanings and metaphors that the lost cultural legacy of India is a ruined national monument. Though it has been silenced and neglected, the cultural heritage of the nation must be celebrated; it must be revived. By calling attention to the artistic archive, the speaker reminds members of the nation of their past and outsiders of a history that pre-existed their arrival.

The discussion in this sonnet is multifaceted. First, the speaker questions the silence of India's artistic community: "why hang'st thou?" Next, he asks, "who hears it

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[11] See Spiller for more detailed discussion on the subject.

now?" In describing the harp as a "ruined monument," Derozio again reminds readers of the nation's rich history and that a monument is barren and static if not alive. If there is no music, or current national artistic voice, the community loses touch with its identity and sits on a "desert plane." However, instead of bemoaning the static legacy of the past the speaker moves away from the fallen monuments and deserted landscapes to the fecund graveyard of poetic legacy. Lines 9-11 are each increased by one beat, recalling the Italian foot and breaking with British cultural imperialism. These lines remind the audience that latent possibility lies in the grounds trod by the ancestors. From the hibernating soil of the sleeping past, fame and fertility await. The additional beats in the landscape of the dead re-imagine a future that can be created from the past. Derozio's speaker reminds us, by the embedded additional beats that subvert tradition, that the voice of the future is not dead but rather lies buried, waiting to be unearthed, restrung and reawakened. Burying the past does not stop the cycle of rebirth. Artistic culture continues to blossom despite the appearance of death. Art continues to be remembered, even in death, as it is the immortal cultural archive of the nation. The speaker's desire is thus twofold within the end rhyme couplet of the sonnet: to rally the voice of India and the arts "to strike the strain," and to find glory—fame—within that project.

The Harp of India draws upon the tropes of the western canon in order to write back to an Occidental audience (British or Anglo-Indian). By invoking the rhetoric of Occidental poetic traditions, Derozio's sonnet navigates the paradox of wanting to belong and respond to the sites of cultural control. The desire to belong and yet write back to an exclusionary culture speaks of the anxiety experienced by the native intellectual in the British Raj, but is also indicative of the global moment of growing historical alienation.

The poet both writes against and in favor of identity being suppressed and muted by imperialism. Yet paradoxically, the same act of silencing gives voice to a new identity and allows it to be re-imagined within the cultural archive. Suppression leads to the desire to re-write the inscribed text in order to expand the narrative from a colonial perspective. Countee Cullen wrote that it was a "curious thing: to make a poet black, and bid him sing," and yet it is, at least in part, his otherness within the western canon that makes his song unique and noteworthy (13-14). The working out of the paradox is what gives the sonnet its deeper meaning. The paradox of the silenced voice singing on page, beyond the grave, finds fruition in order to illuminate the future. The historical narrative, the golden age of Indian culture and the sonnet combine to invoke a past that is not static and fixed (cause for concern for Fanon) but one that allows the poet to realize a new, hybrid identity. By experimenting with the rhetoric of another nation, the speaker seeks to reclaim his own cultural heritage and remind outsiders of this legacy.

However, as Derozio looked to the past to find his cultural territory, he did so through the lens of the colonizer, making the sonnet a vexed example of Said's notion of secondary (ideological) resistance. Said claimed that "decolonization is a very complex battle over the course of different political destinies, different histories and geographies, and it is replete with works of the imagination, scholarship and counter-scholarship" (219). Anglo-Indian authors, educated in an English system loaded with notions of British literary and cultural supremacy, merged both cultures in dynamic, albeit complex ways and created a new literary and cultural identity within the Indian canon. Derozio's sonnet is an example of how that fusion and re-creation of identity came into being and the complicated ideological position the fused identity inhabits. By drawing attention to

the past glories of Indian literary traditions, Derozio challenged the notion of Western literary supremacy within the Western form par excellence: the sonnet. Derozio's sonnet paid homage to Britain's classical canon by emulating English tropes and temperament (the poetic lyre, mortality, the elegiac and poetic apology)[12]. It fused immortality (through verse) with nationhood and in so doing developed prominent issues in contemporary Indian literature: rising nationalism, increased alienation and anxiety, and mixed literary canons. As such, the poem is a by-product of combined artistic encounters, cultural moments, and cross-cultural education.

Like Henry Derozio, Hur Chunder Dutt's[13] (1831-1901) *Sonnet: India* used the form to recall the nation's past glories and express hope for the future. The speaker combined history, art, and memory to imbue the poem with nationalist fervor. Stylistically the sonnet draws upon conventional images, such as the poetic laurel, and adheres to English rhyme scheme and rhythmic structure.

> O yes! I love thee with a boundless love,
> Land of my birth; and while I lisp thy name,
> Burns in my soul 'an Aetna of pure flame'
> Which none can quench not aught on earth remove.
> Back from the shrouded past, as with a spell,
> Thy days of glory memory recalls,

[12] If we compare Derozio's sonnet with Wordsworth's *London 1802* or Shelley's *To Wordsworth* we can see similarities in terms of tropes and tone. Derozio looks to the past like Wordsworth and Shelley, and celebrates the artistic legacy bestowed upon his generation by his predecessors. Like prior poets, Derozio's speaker sees the past as being virtuous and noble whereas the contemporary moment is lacking. Albeit different in scope, the sonnets recall the past in an effort to revitalize the poetic traditions of the present and imbue them with majesty and merit.

[13] Dutt was a member of the Dutt family of writers. Collectively they published *The Dutt Family Album,* in 1870. It was the first anthology of Anglo-Indian writing to be published abroad. The family was Christian and the works contained in the anthology reflect an English Romantic sentimentalism that often leaves readers with the impression that they are reading poems about England instead of India.

> And castles rise, and towers, and flanking walls,
> And soldiers live, for thee dear land who fell;
> But as from dreams of bliss men wake to mourn,
> So mourn I when that vision is no more,
> And in poor lays thy widowed fate deplore,
> Thy trophies gone, thy beauteous laurels torn,
> But Time shall yet be mocked;—though these decay,
> I see broad streaks of a still brighter day. (61)

Frantz Fanon wrote that "the artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically toward the past and away from actual events" (225). While Derozio and Dutt relied heavily upon Western tropes and turned to the past as a means of addressing national loss, both drew upon the past in search of a way forward. National love is described as being "boundless" and "mourn[ed]" when gone. Hur Chunder Dutt's soldiers fought for a national dream, or memory of nation. The loss of national memory and love is viewed as being more detrimental to the self than the demise of the nation itself. The tone of the sonnet is psychologically driven because it focuses upon the loss of hope and the consequences of such a loss rather than being a reductive glorification of a pre-colonial past.

The second stanza focuses on the physical loss of nation, how personal and national speeches are blocked and why eruption is imminent. By returning to the "shrouded past," the poet invokes the funereal to depict the extent of loss and suppression. The mythic glories and proud nation lie buried beneath the present moment. Like Mount Etna, the nation threatens to erupt into violence. This is a land fought for and constructed upon; it is a community with a long imagined identity. Castles commemorate victories and walls delineate the boundaries the soldiers sought to preserve. The seventh line "and castles rise, and towers, and flanking walls" conveys how these structures establish the legacy of an Indian national heritage and function as a

physical archive of the nation that subverts the imposed cultural framework of British imperialism. Although the volcano (nation) appears to be slumbering, the additional beat in this stanza breaks with convention long enough to make the reader stutter through the established order of the sonnet verse and realize that all is not as it should be. The stammered text interrupts the narrative flow, expands the boundaries of the textual monument, and asks readers to contemplate the sites by which they measure cultural history. The nation is built upon a bloody history and the poem foreshadows the blood yet to be shed by the battle for independence.

The sonnet's first quatrain establishes the purity of national love and the nation become the unrequited object of affection that ennobles the soul of the poet. Nationalism is the new language of love, and the nation the beloved. "None can quench" the transcendent love, whatever may come. Unlike Renaissance sonneteers who veiled political ambition in the rhetoric of courtly love, Hur Chunder Dutt is distinctly more overt in his fusion of the political with national fealty for the land of his birth. Yet the love felt by the speaker threatens to erupt and overwhelm him. "An Aetna of pure flame" recalls Mount Etna's violent and active eruptions.[14] National love exists as something that contains latent potency; a constant source of turmoil under the surface. Beneath the nationalist fervor lies a force that cannot be controlled or stymied despite the impeded and imperfect speech of the poet. The lisped name of the nation reveals that the nation is incomplete, stuttered, and only half realized. This silent, stuttered speech of poetic reveal that both nation and speaker are emasculated by their inabilities to unite the

[14] Although not a sonnet, Lovelace's *The Grasshopper* is evoked in Dutt's "Aetna of pure flame." Both poems liken nationalism to the burning core of Mount Etna.

public/private realms with the present/past archival moments. They are emasculated by their inability to realize and voice themselves.

Awaking from blissful dreams of the past, inhabitants mourn the passing of the home they hold dear. The speaker, however, mourns the loss of vision, a greater failure than the actual loss of the past itself. Without historical vision, the nation loses sight of its future. While "none can quench" or "remove" national esteem, pride is contingent upon having a legacy to recall. The speaker attempts to remind his fellow countrymen of their past in his "poor lays," but fears that the lost "trophies" and destroyed "laurels"—literary heritage—will silence the volcano. Such a silence will cause the soldiers—people—to become blinded to the cause for which they fight. Time may succeed in its erasure if Indians are not reminded of their history. Thus, history becomes important not only for past identification, but for future identity. The archived narrative is one means by which the nation can regain its sense of self. Yet not all is lost. The speaker claims in the final couplet, "Time shall yet be mocked." Despite the decay, the dawn brings a new hope and vision for the future by which the nation can emerge.

The sonnet is a way of expressing the nation's mortality, a way of meditating on the transient nature of nationhood and man's desire for immortality through nation. "Memory recalls," "castles rise" and the love of nation "burns in my soul." Dutt takes up Derozio's nationalist vision and expands upon it to voice the integral role the nation has in personal and historical psychology. Nation becomes the home of identity and history, both of which only continue to exist within the national construct. The castles may outlast the nation but without the national dream, the castle is merely a lost trophy. Despite being often imitative in style, the Eurocentric subject matter of these sonnets is

used to convey the alienation felt by the Anglo-Indian poet. Frantz Fanon argues that in the first stages of cultural liberation the "native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. His writings correspond point by point with those of his opposite numbers in the mother country. His inspiration is European." (222) Ironically, Derozio's and Dutt's sonnets both contradict Fanon's reductive paradigm of colonial emancipation. The course of cultural liberation has never run smoothly and the colonial subject is aware of the paradoxical box from which he writes. While not always of superior artistic talent, the Indian sonnet belies the reduction of cultural emancipation into the three steps of colonial nationalism.[15]

In the nationalist sonnets of both Derozio and Dutt, we find the seeds of historical anxiety and the quest to revitalize national identity. The past is something that to some extent must be collected and recollected in order to have meaning. History is only as useful as it is allowed to be; great monuments can be erased and forgotten if not given significance through memory and can become meaningless if not revitalized through art. Both Dutt and Derozio look to the past in search for identity: but in finding the past lost, stolen, or erased by Time, each speaker seeks to uncover new means of creating an original archive of the national narrative through art. That they do so using the English sonnet functions as a means of subverting the cultural supremacy claimed by the British, while invoking and re-energizing India's own cultural identity.

Shyam Sunder Lal Chordia's sonnet *Chitor* follows the tradition of classical allusions and commemorating history but attempts to bridge the cultural divide by

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[15] The first step towards national independence in literature is the adoption of colonial culture, the second a return to the pre-colonial golden age and the last, polemical nationalism in literature.

introducing Eastern-themed allusions into the form[16]. Chordia's sonnet draws upon the classical tale of Rajput warriors and the historical site of Chitor (Chittorgarh). Long associated with heroism and romantic legend, the story of Chitor was popularized in the 19th century by James Tod's 1829 *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan.*[17]

> Here is the old Chitor queen-like and crown'd
> With deathless glory; in the long sad past
> For thee the legion Rajput chiefs fell fast
> Amid the shock of battle; and falling found
> The lotus-heaven of the Lord. What streams
> Of precious blood they shed! What wars they waged
> When marched and counter-marched the foes and blazed
> Their swords in the dark hour of doom when dreams
> Of pulsing life shone dim in them! They fought
> For thee, they died for thee whene'er thy walls,
> Guarding they palaces, temples, towers and halls,
> Were by the mighy hordes of Moslems sought. [sic]
> O Nurse and Mother of the brave and free!
> How red with blood the path that leads to thee! (115)

The sonnet commemorates the valor of the Rajput warriors in an effort to venerate the history of the Rajasthani region. Like Derozio and Dutt, Chordia adopted the past in order to remember pre-colonial India. However, Chordia's subject matter again belies Fanon's argument in regards to the complicit native intellectualism of artistic vision. The

[16] Author of a collection of poems titled *Chitor and Other Poems,* limited biographical information available.

[17] Chitor, according to Tod, has a longstanding tradition of political and romantic intrigue between Hindu princes and Muslim rulers. The first major sacking of Chitor occurred in the 12th century when the wife of the acting ruler of Chitor was taken as ransom by a Muslim. The second sacking of Chitor took place in the 14th century because the Rana of Chitor secretly married a princess of Amber. Upon ascending to the throne he failed to make his marriage public and she then became engaged to another. The Rana being insulted led his troops into battle. Shortly thereafter, in the 16th century, Chitor was sacked again. However, this time after the Rajput warriors were defeated by Muslim invaders, the women of the fort performed suttee (immolation by fire in a chamber). Thousands died. The final incarnation of Chitor's legend saw the fort seized once again by Muslim rulers and razed to the ground. The fort was rebuilt but never re-inhabited. (Tod 212-251)

speaker creates a vexed identity for himself by recalling the battle for freedom whilst writing from within the tradition of the colonizer, and in so doing he further complicates the discussion. Like Countee Cullen and Claude McKay of the Harlem Renaissance tradition, Chordia's sonnet plays out the paradoxical position of writing back from within as a means of conveying cultural identity. More specifically, by participating in the cultural dialogue of the West while simultaneously revalorizing the past and the quest for freedom, the speaker locates himself in the complex position allocated to the Western educated native intellectual. Additionally, by remembering the lost Muslim battles, the speaker unites the contemporary quest for freedom with earlier battles for autonomy. Though defeated repeatedly, the monument remains as tribute to past victories. By conflating the history of colonial subjection at the hands of the Muslims, the educational inculcation of the British, and the bravery and continued independence of Chitor, Chordia creates a triangle that defies passive complicity in the act of writing back.[18] The sonnet becomes a subversive tool for recalling Indians of their cultural heritage in the face of colonization. The speaker parallels history with the present moment in order to remind Indians of their legacy of valor and their ability to withstand cultural encroachment. The irony and paradox of this subversion is that it relies upon the cultural form of foreign literature. Thus, the speaker, aware of this paradox, cannot be understood as passive or complicit in his adoption of an English form. The sonnet uses subject matter, history, and literary culture to speak out to both the colonizer and the national subject.

By identifying Chitor as feminine, the speaker creates a parallel between the fort and the nation. Chitor becomes a metonym for Mother India; the brave Rajput warrior

[18] See Edward Said's discussion on Orientalism in Culture and Imperialism.

stands in for the Indian population. Early colonial sonnets evoked the unstrung song of the past, bemoaning lost glory; here again the speaker relies upon the past to speak indirectly to the future. The nation and the quest for independence were difficult and ongoing for centuries, but the prize was worth the battle. The speaker calls the nation to attention by reminding them of the other battles lost, prompting them with the legends of valor witnessed in historical moments. Moreover, the legacy of the Chitor and the Rajput chiefs speaks of the nation's ability to survive invasion. Chitor still stands, and has survived both Muslim and British attacks. Further, if the battle is lost, death will re-unite the fighter with the "lotus-heaven of the Lord," presumably Krishna, to whom the site is dedicated.

In recalling the history of Chitor, the speaker attempts to rewrite the present moment by re-inserting cultural memory into the dialectic of the contemporary self. The cultural narrative is re-imagined insofar as history and art are used to prompt the future to unfold in light of the past and re-think the public narrative. Ironically, the subject of the sonnet, which recalls Muslim invasions and Rajput heroics, requires readers to recall that India was invaded by Muslim rulers prior to British colonization and has a long history of Muslim imperialism. However, as noted above, in recalling Muslim attacks, the poem reminds us of the fact that Hindu culture managed to successfully fuse both identities into one Indian culture. The combination of the historical subject matter with the form can be understood as a similar process of cultural merging into the present moment. In defeat or victory, the nation survives. The collective character will subsume the influence of colonial encounters in order to adapt and evolve as a cultural identity.

The use of Tod's *Annals* problematizes the sonnet's use of history because Chordia's reliance upon a British soldier's interpretations of Indian history locates power and knowledge in the hands of the British Raj.[19] Metcalf and Metcalf note in their history of India that the British controlled the access of knowledge, and Vishwanathan's discussion on the inculcation of education forces readers to acknowledge how Chordia works within the framework of imperial knowledge. His reliance upon Tod's archive of Rajasthan to convey part of his argument is subject to controversy because it also reifies the educational control of power exercised by the British over Indians and their own history. How history is being recollected must be contextualized in light of who is recording and reifying the ascribed historical narratives. While Chordia writes back to the colonizer with knowledge that is familiar to him, he also reifies British knowledge to the colonial subject. His merging of the two cultures within the form is simultaneously positive and negative. He breaks away from Western imagery, only to rely upon a history created for the nation by the colonizer. However, the speaker's anxiety over colonization and nationalist sentiment can also be viewed as subversion within the contained cultural moment.

The overarching point that unites Derozio, Dutt, and Chordia is that none of these colonial sonneteers simply rejected their Indian identity in favour of their colonial education, nor did they return to their pre-colonial past without questioning it in some way. The sonnet, well-written or otherwise, reflects not only in choice, but often in

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[19] Metcalf states that during the British Raj (19th century) histories were being recorded in ways unknown before to man. Britain was building a national archive in keeping with its empire both at home and abroad. Tod's *Annals* and other Oriental scholarly pursuits combined with the Humanist education project and shaped the nature of national independence rhetoric. (61)

theme and tropes, a hybridization of identity. The author does not simply rely on a celebration of glorious pre-colonial identity nor merely endorses the forms of the colonizer, but must in fact carve out a new identity that speaks to the current conditions of the nation in order to create a vision for the future. I would argue that in many cases the desire to carve out a new literary space within another cultural tradition also embodies an attempt to re-invent identity in light of a more positive framework. To simply reduce the desire to write in sonnet form to an Ariel-esque submission to the colonizer devalues the project that many of these authors were trying to realize. It is an attempt to understand this hybrid self within the boundaries of literary tradition, be it Western, Eastern, or an amalgamation of the two. It is not merely a question of writing back or participating, but also of writing yourself into the historical meta-narrative of a new emerging national identity, one that transcends regional dialects and physical borders. The goal is the creation of a site of culture that incorporates the divided self.

From public nationalism to private experience[20]

Moving away from the external narrative of history into the internal experience of the historical, Toru Dutt (1856-1877) subtly infused questions of national identity and

[20] In writing about the Dutt family, Rosinka Chaudhuri noted that colonial English literature in India was marked by two stages. In the first, writers were filled with idealism and faith in British humanism. In the second (post Bengali mutiny) writers were less idealistic and tended to assert their Indian identity more in their verse. (61-2) Though the latter colonial sonnets are less overtly nationalistic, they are more ambivalent and skeptical towards the British historical project and the positive influence of western viewpoints and traditions.

belonging in her sonnet *À Mon Père*.[21] Through meditation on a plucked flower, Dutt manages to convey that identity is best nurtured on native ground and that belonging comes from location as much as from culture.

> The flowers look loveliest in their native soil
> Amid their kindred branches; plucked, they fade,
> And lose the colours Nature on them laid,
> Though bound in garlands with assiduous toil.
> Pleasant it was, afar from all turmoil,
> To wander through the valley, now in shade
> And now in sunshine, where these blossoms made
> A Paradise, and gather in my spoil.
> But better than myself no man can know
> How tarnished have become their tender hues
> E'en in the gathering, and how dimmed their glow!
> Wouldst thou again new life in them infuse,
> Thou who hast seen them where they brightly blow?
> Ask Memory. She shall help my stammering Muse. (349)

Dutt's sonnet follows Italian formal conventions and describes the experience of natural beauty in the first octave. In a moment of private retreat into a green space, the speaker reflects on the natural solitude found away from the public sphere. "Afar from all turmoil" the speaker enjoys the beauty of the moment. By acknowledging that her gathered spoils will fade once plucked, the speaker privileges the moment of experience over the attempt to collect and record the moment for posterity.[22] Pleasure is gained through the act of wandering amongst the floral solitude, in retreat from the "turmoil" of

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[21] Toru Dutt is part of the second generation of the Dutt writing family. She is best known for her translations of French sonnets into English. Raised Christian and having traveled to France and England, Dutt returned to India in her late teens and infused her own sonnets with themes related to the Indian landscape. See either Rosinka Chaudhuri or Chandani Lokugé's introduction in the Toru Dutt collection.

[22] If we compare Toru Dutt's treatment of memory with William Wordsworth's *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* we can see how differently her speaker views memory. Wordsworth carries the permanent, continuous memory of his daffodils whereas Dutt meditates on the fragility of memory and arts inability to contain and capture the

the man-made world. The speaker seeks to carry a souvenir of introspection back into the material realm; however, attempting to preserve the moment or "spoils" of the land ultimately fails because the flower loses vibrancy once uprooted. The speaker realizes in her attempt to immortalize the moment in verse that the plucked flower (physical or imagined) fades outside of its natural habitat. The moment cannot be recalled nor can it be re-located.

By focusing on the plant in its milieu, the speaker explores ideas of belonging and home in the poem. The idea of identity and location are introduced by flowers that are best nurtured amongst their peers, "in their native soil." Though the wandering soul amongst the flowers of Dutt's poem embraces Romantic sentimentality and is reminiscent of poets such as Wordsworth, inserting the location of home however, gives rise to notions of belonging. Outside of its natural habitat, the beauty of the flower fails because part of its identity is linked to its native location of belonging just as experience and memory are linked to location and time. Thus, the poetic translation of experience ultimately fails the speaker because memory is an unstable narrative site.

In the sonnet's sestet, the speaker admits that trying to contain and preserve memory in the material realm fails. She knows better than anyone else what has been lost in the act of translation. Only memory can preserve the art and beauty of the moment, the introspective tranquility that her escape has allowed. Ideas of ownership and historical documentation are challenged by the fact that only "Memory" (capitalized, personified) can aid her "stammering Muse." However, since language and memory are personal and fail to recreate or commemorate the truth or beauty of the experience, the

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spontaneous experience of self in nature. Dutt matches Wordsworth's artistic idealism

archive is revealed as flawed. Memory is unreliable, subjective and intangible, and thus equated with the sphere of femininity. Once we enter into the realm of memory, we leave behind the progressive, modern, material realm and enter the feminine narrative space. Moreover, given that writing itself—particularly fictional writing—is equated with the silent realm of feminine speech, the fact that the author chooses to explore concepts of memory, belonging and identity in the framework of the sonnet furthers the its exploration of the unrecorded narratives that inform identity. Memory is the silent speech of history.

In uniting the experience detailed above, the speaker in this sonnet begins to re-imagine the question of fixed identity. "The flowers look loveliest in their native soil" addresses the idea that any attempt to gather the experience and render it tangible, or transferable, fails the poet. Words cannot document the moment as vividly as it is contained by memory. Like many earlier sonneteers who curse the pen's failure to do justice to the moment, individual, or emotion being depicted, Dutt's speaker realizes that words stumble, "stammer," when put to the task of translating experience into the material realm. Moreover, memory being a silent, unreliable and unstable site of history questions the very ability of language to document history and identity.

Beyond the immediate moment of experience, archived memory becomes a faded representation of a vibrant past. Memory is a distorted mirror that reflects the unreliable location of the speaker's experience. Thus, in recalling the moment and concept of belonging, the speaker reminds readers that the quest for archiving and immortalizing the moment fails. The speaker can no more commemorate her own identity and home in

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with skepticism.

verse than she can depict the flowers in their natural environment. In fact, the layered removal through representation speaks to the growing divide created between experience and language, experience and the archive. Inadvertently, Dutt has written back to the legion of male sonneteers wishing to immortalize themselves through art by recalling that her "stammering Muse" relies on the unreliable memory for inspiration. Language and the sonnet cannot fix the moment within its confines any more than memory and experience (location). History is a narrative made up of unreliable texts. Art is as valid a means of documentation as experience, memory, and historical fact because loss is imminent in the act of translation.

Conversely, while Dutt was re-imagining memory the lens of silent speech, male Indian sonneteers who embodied the effete image of the superstitious, spiritual and timeless Orient were accused of pandering to Oriental stereotypes. While the next sonneteer included is often viewed as "the noble Eastern mystic," his sonnets attempted to use the Western tropes of form and content in order to draw a picture for the reader that bridged a cultural gap in light of a more globalized, universal identity. Sri Aurobindo's (1872-1950)[23] *A Dream of Surreal Science* is an example of this new, fused cultural identity contained within the sonnet:

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[23] Né Aurobindo Ghose, he was educated entirely in English because his father felt that English was India's future, he lived with an English foster family and studied at Cambridge. It was only upon his return to India that he learned Sanskrit and Bengali in order to become versed in his native culture. He started as an Oriental scholar, became a journalist, political writer and eventually a poet and mystic. His sonnets were written after his years of political activism while in retreat in the ashram he founded. See Nandakumar for a complete bibliography. Aurobindo's verse set the tone for English Indian verse for several decades. Modernist poets reacted strongly against the Aurobindo

> One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink
> At the Mermaid, capture immortality;
> A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink
> Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.
> A thyroid, meditating almost nude
> Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light
> And, rising from its mighty solitude,
> Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.
> A brain by a disordered stomach driven
> Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell.
> From St. Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven.
> Thus wagged on the surreal world, until
> A scientist played with atoms and blew out
> The universe before God had time to shout. (Aurobindo, Iyengar 159)

Aurobindo not only merges the East with West in terms of form and content, he merges Western science with Eastern mysticism. The thyroid meditates under a sacred tree before seeing the yogic eightfold path.[24] Western literary traditions, tropes and allusions are merged with references from Eastern spiritual texts. *Hamlet* and the Sutras co-exist within the sonnet. The "disordered stomach" leads the brain to thunder through Europe in what is clearly an imperialistic agenda. Thus, Western knowledge and science, though worthy of their own merit, become meaningless when the soul is unbalanced. Aurobindo's sardonic fusion of history, literary tradition, material and spiritual realms reveals how the sonnet can be used constructively to unite the stereotypical tropes of both the East and the West. The sonnet became a means of overthrowing Western discourse, in that it revealed the limited focus and understanding of the material realm while also revealing Eastern knowledge of the body and spirit. The two create a universalized perspective in order to reveal how East and West can merge and create something beyond

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Oriental verse and sought to distance themselves from the mysticism contained in his writing.

their liminal understanding of national identity. Hamlet meets the yogi, and both learn from each other.

The sonnet is particularly significant given its contemporary historical references. Each bodily organ/function is a dissected piece of world history: the gland in the first two lines of the sonnet refers to Shakespeare and the famous Mermaid Tavern; the next "committee of hormones" alludes to Homer and the oral tradition that developed the Iliad and the Odyssey. The thyroid under the Bo-tree is Buddha, and the "brain by a disordered stomach driven" speaks of Hitler and his invasion of Greece. Finally, the scientist and the atoms that "blew out the universe" refer to Leo Szilard, inventor of the atom bomb, and the development of the atomic bomb in this era of man's history. The historical narrative and development of man, though not chronological in the sonnet itself, depicts the odd evolution and contrasting nature of mankind. His capacity for great philosophy, spirituality and art is juxtaposed with his imperialism, dictatorship, and self-destructive tendencies. The tense balance between man's vice and virtue is the sonnet's thematic exploration of paradox. With Britain struggling to maintain control over a nation whose resources it needed during WWII, India's political independence became deeply invested in the events of the war. Thus, Aurobindo's exploration of the various levels of perception of world events is rendered more complex. On one hand, the spiritual and artistic paths are given precedence over imperialism; on the other, all elements of mankind's nature are inescapably fused together in an overarching narrative. For Aurobindo, the sonnet was a space to work out the spiritual paradoxes experienced

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[24] The eightfold path of yoga is as follows: Yama (ethics); Niyama (self-discipline); Asana (yogic postures); Pranayama (controlled breathing); Pratyahara (inner focus); Dharana (concentration); Dhyana (meditation); Samadhi (union with self).

by the British Indian subject by Western Classical education, Hindu spirituality, and contemporary global events.

The merging of East and West, introspective and active, literal and literary, and past and present unites man's actions with the physical body of the world in order to conflate time and history within the sonnet's framework. While Aurobindo doesn't express a direct anxiety over his poetic ability to commemorate time, he does view Time as an arbitrary historical construct. Aurobindo conveys an existential approach to notions of permanence and history. The greater paradox explored in his sonnet is the juxtaposition of the two binary systems within the constructed box of time's historical archive. Man's race towards the future, propelled by time and the active narrative of history is a site of disease for the poet. Thus Aurobindo's sonnet can be read as an elaboration and fusion of themes related to modernist anxiety and alienation as well as Indian identity and independence.

The last sonnet to be included in the survey of the colonial period, Govinda Krishna Chettur's (1898-1930) sonnet *XIX,* returns to the classic sonnet tropes of love while continuing to deal with the speaker's personal anxiety over time and memory. In sonnet *XIX* of the sonnet sequence *The Triumph of Love*, Chettur explores love and loss as he contemplates his impending death.

> How many golden hours have we won
> From that grey leaden-fisted miser Time,
> Rich with the suns, the odorous moons that spun,
> Across this perfect passion of our prime?
> Love makes no count! – Sufficient unto each
> Unmortal moment is the bliss thereof;
> Tis grief that yearneth every way to reach
> Remembered rapture by remembered love.
> Love takes no count! – Forget the late, fond lover,
> Today, the hours are freighted with pure gold;

> And when the golden days of love are over,
> And naught remains but as a story told,
> With benediction of that grace sublime,
> Life shall unfold love's page a second time. (Chettur, RPO)

Writing while he was dying of cancer, the sequence explores the legacy of love while sick and after death. Like Spenser, Chettur wrote from a position of love attained. Thus, his anxiety is not in gaining the affections of his beloved but the permanence of love beyond death. In asking his love not to mourn his passing, the speaker attempts to address the beloved from afterlife. The speaker calls to attention the failure of verse to recall the experience of love—"when the golden days of love are over and naught remains but as a story told"—yet identifies how art can give their love a second life beyond death. The poem fails to immortalize their personal experience because it is fleeting, subject to time, and intangible while meditating upon the lovers' mortality and the role of art within the archive.

In the sonnet's first quatrain, the speaker recalls the days and nights the couple has stolen from "Time." The bounty of the time they have shared is then contrasted with the infinite. Each moment of bliss cannot be measured because it is eternal, "unmortal" [sic] and thus deathless. Grief prompts the hording of time "tis grief that yearneth every way to reach remembered rapture by remembered love" and death renders each moment more explicit, something to be counted more dearly. Yet the speaker reminds us that the memories of love cannot be tallied and that reminiscing over each past moment is a waste because time was always on loan. Time is borrowed. Whether the speaker is addressing his beloved during the process of dying, or intending the words to be a reminder after his death, the message is the same. Cherish the moment for "today, the hours are freighted with pure gold" and "naught remains" beyond the moment. Do not suffer the memory of

the past too long, for love lives on and will live again as memory or story. The moment is impermanent and must be experienced in full because it is only through art and memory that the past lives on.

Like Toru Dutt, Chettur's speaker contemplates the legacy of memory as a narrative. While the sonnet is topically about the impending grief of the beloved, it delves deeper in order to contemplate the narrative of emotional memory and personal history. Beyond the questions of national or cultural identity, Chettur's speaker returns the colonial English sonnet reader to the universal questions of love, loss, and death. The reference to the unfolding page in line 14 evokes the sonnets legacy of contemplating immortality through art and reminds readers that the speaker is using the sonnet form to fight time despite his arguments to the contrary. Despite all of his protests, the speaker's archived meditation on love attempts to quantify and qualify love against the dying light of mortality. He was anxious to document his experience but ultimately realized that time and the mutability of memory's archive prevents experience from being permanent. Like Toru Dutt, he recognized that the remaining story is but a faded rendition of the original experience. Thus, as the colonial sonneteer moved towards the modern moment of alienation and globalization, he questioned history's ability to document the personal self within the archival narrative. Though the speaker uses art to transcend death, the sonnet is cautionary as well as commemorative. In keeping with Fanon's idealized vision of realized national liberation, the speaker asks his intended audience not to live in the golden age of the past but rather to look to the future with the past in sight: to allow life to "unfold love's page a second time."

Part of the anxiety over personal and communal identity depicted in the colonial sonnet was linked to the challenge of merging national spiritualism with capitalistic imperialism. With the task of creating a finite self within the fluid archive of the nation, the Indian author came to recognize the limitations of fixity within a shifting narrative. As alienation and cultural identification became mutable, the challenge to fix self within the nation became the subject of increasing anxiety internationally in the 20th century. Faced with the fluidity of national boundaries, allegiances, and cultural narratives, the permanence of identity within the historical archive became questionable both in and out of India. As anxiety over national and cultural identity was not exclusive to India, the Indian sonnet responds not only to its own personal historical moment, but also correlates with the modernist anxiety experienced on a larger global scale. The sonnet offered a space for the colonial speaker and emerging modernist self to problematize the paradoxes contained within his environment. The evolving nature of the colonial sonnet can be read as a ladder leading towards modern anxiety and the postmodern pastiche of identity. Beyond independence, in keeping with the movement towards postmodernism, the foundations built by the colonial sonneteer are elaborated upon and problematized to a greater extent in the works of the migratory postcolonial world.

Chapter Three
The Postcolonial Sonnet

Since Independence (1947) English Indian sonnet writing has changed significantly in terms of tropes, form, and tone from its colonial counterpart. Early sonnet writers were highly imitative of the British Romantics, whereas postcolonial writers have more in common with modernism and postmodernism. Formally more experimental and thematically more diverse, the postcolonial sonnet leaves behind the legacy of overt sentimental nationalism. Many of the postcolonial sonneteers instead reformulate notions of history, heritage, culture, and self to fit with contemporary global concerns. Postmodern anxieties regarding identity formation, the narrator's reliability, the multiplicity of narratives as they relate to self, history, and culture are filtered through the sonnet lens. Time and text become the mediators between realms of private/public, nature/culture, spiritual/material and experience/text.

This generation of writers is invested in challenging the fixed narratives ascribed to nations, cultures, and selves. They write from the position of hybridized identity and move beyond linguistic and national boundaries to find a universal common ground. In seeking this "universal standpoint," they do not choose one identity over another. In fact, if we take Bhabha's notion of hybrid identity into account, it is impossible for the postcolonial writer to make this choice because he is working from the position of a new fused identity[25]. In their work on the African-American sonnet, Keller and Smith both

[25] While I focus on hybrid identity in the Anglo-Indian sonnet, it is important to note that English literary study in India still reflects the elite indoctrination of and utilitarian attitude towards English culture. This holds true for both academia and writing. While Indian scholars of the field may be interested in the study of English authorship in India, English cultural scholarship is still a means of class differentiation. John Oliver Perry

noted that the postcolonial (or post-slavery) subject must negotiate the paradoxical position this hybrid identity creates. Any rejection or endorsement of the poet's informing society is part of a larger subversion and containment debate about the role of the artist in society. (Keller 447) As Heather Dubrow noted in her study of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence, the sonnet "tradition not only stages but also represents a series of paradoxes; its poems are [...] likely [...] to be either singularly conventional or strikingly transgressive or both" (Dubrow 15). The desire to dissect and understand the mutable nature of identity in relation to globalization trends, permeable borders, and fluid domestic spaces (work migration and domestic relocation) over the past half century has become an increasingly popular focus in contemporary art and is a natural by-product of the modern era. While these issues may play out more dramatically in postcolonial debate, relegating the argument solely to the postcolonial realm marginalizes the voices of dissent being made in regards to evolving national identities. The Indian English sonnet is but one narrative within a larger dialogue dealing with self and the archive.

As individuals migrate away from their ancestral homes and families for work, education, and pleasure, cross-cultural encounters lead to an increasing awareness of the other in relation to self. The rise in cross-cultural communication reveals the gaps between the individual's perception of the other and the historical/social texts that document a nation. This does not imply that we have overcome cross-cultural challenges but rather that the migratory self (or cultural diaspora) is left to fill the cross-cultural

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wrote: "at present the great majority of Indian English poetry readers is composed of M.A. student in English, their teachers, and other academics. [....] We must assume ... that for some time to come, most concerned Indian English poetry readers will have some professional or career-enhancing interest motivating them." (92) English Indian poetry continues to be written for an elite or foreign audience.

divide. It is more intriguing to consider how these poems seek to negotiate the divide and come to a broader understanding of self outside of nation than reducing the English Indian sonneteer to a purveyor of the colonial paradigm or protest writer.[26] In navigating notions of self and culture, how do they negotiate the problems contained within the cultural and historical archive? While linguistic choice of authorship continues to be a site of contention in terms of intended audiences and market-driven publications, the postcolonial project of contained subversion re-imagines communal meta-narratives. These Anglo-Indian sonneteers participate in a global postmodern dialogue by discussing the fluid nature of hybrid identities and histories. Problematizing self and the archive become a means of understanding the roles of subversion and containment in art, history, and society, which indirectly leads to the speaker working out the inherent paradoxes of cultural mores and protest in relation to the poetic "I."

Containing the Public and Private Self in the Archive

Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929-93), one of the better known English Indian poets, bridged the divide by using time as a thematic trope to translate between the

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[26] See Keller's essay on the Harlem Renaissance sonnet. The choice to write in the sonnet form remains paradoxical and contemporary Anglo-Indian sonneteers must write with awareness of the ambiguous position they inhabit. Yet they still choose to write in the sonnet form. Rushdie and Bhabhi have both claimed that the position of hybridity is a positive space for the postcolonial author however such a claim ignores the access to privilege and elite status of English Indian authors. What motivates the choice of these privileged authors and what they do with the form (given their elite status and education) is the central concern of this essay.

private and public spheres.[27] In his poem *Sonnet*, the speaker contemplates the dynamic relationship between time, the body, nature, and culture:

> Time moves in and out of me
> a stream of sound, a breeze,
> and electric current that seeks
> the ground, liquids that transpire
>
> through my veins, stems and leaves
> toward the skies to make fog and mist
> around the trees. Mornings brown
> into evenings before I turn around
>
> in the day. Postage stamps, words
> of unwritten letters complete with commas,
> misplaced leases and passports, excuses
> and blame swirl through the night
>
> and take me far away from home
> as time moves in and out of me. (220)

The sonnet has no rhyme scheme, and only two lines recreate the five foot iambic line: "into evenings before I turn around" and "misplaced leases and passports, excuses." The first three stanzas layer the idea of time shifting through the speaker's self, the speaker's perception of his exterior landscape, and the texts that identify the speaker's legacy before uniting all three realms into an identity in flux. Although this poem seems to defy many of the conventional sonnet structural elements, its three quatrains, two iambic lines, and pronounced turn establish its status as a sonnet. Furthermore, the manner in which it works out the paradoxical questions of home thematically unites its content and form with the sonnet tradition.

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[27] A.K Ramanujun moved to the USA in 1959 and became a professor of linguistics at the University of Chicago in 1962. He translated Kannada and Tamil verse into English as well as other Indian myths/folklore. See Vinay Dharwadker's introduction in his collected verse for more biographical information. His poetry tends to deal with the experience of transnational identity.

The speaker shifts away from the physical realm of the body, nature, and the sensory perception of experience because they cannot be tangibly documented in the textual archive. However, his turn at line eight reveals that the archive of textual inscriptions (letters never written or sent, "misplaced leases," homes inhabited, "passports, excuses and blame swirl through the night") are all lost and tinged with regret (nostalgia). Each lost document takes the speaker further from home. Eventually, he reaches the point where there is no geographical landmark to link him or the reader to a specific location. The jagged rhythmic patterns mirror the disjointed experience of the speaker moving through his landscape, while the fragmented nature of the speaker's journey through time and space speaks to the growing familiarity of loss and nostalgia. As more is lost, the terrain becomes increasingly jagged and unfamiliar; the expected mementos fall to the wayside. In fact, the eleventh line, "misplaced leases and passports, excuses," merges iambic structure with theme in order to unite tradition with the lost items. This fusion of structure and loss accentuates the ungrounded nature of the speaker's environment. The items that he is expected to collect and preserve are juxtaposed with the excuses made for their loss. The unfamiliarity of the remaining terrain defies the conventional mapping that the sonnet form relies upon; as a result, the form merges with the content to recreate the dislocated identity in this fluid new world.

Time travels through the speaker, recording the daily minutiae of existence. Material objects such as "stamps," "leases," and "passports" are contrasted with nature, "stems and leaves" and "fog and mist". All of these items mark the daily existence of the speaker in a way that recalls that the body exists both in nature and in the social world. However, these objects fail to locate him because the movement of time takes the speaker

"far away from home as time moves in and out of me." As Vinay Dharwadker noted in the introduction to *The Collected Poems of A.K. Ramanujan,* "the poem argues lyrically that movement is precisely what breaks down the boundaries we habitually impose between interior and exterior, proximity and distance, mind and body, or subject and object" (xxvi). Therefore, a contemporary poet like Ramanujan manages to find a niche for himself by realizing that even in movement there is fixity (by traversing the boundaries of interior and exterior, form and content, nation and culture). Even though movement breaks down the boundaries of fixed identity revealing it to be fluid, the speaker understands time as a constant by which he measures his fluid identity.

The sonnet is understood as being a fixed container that provides a safe space to work out questions of identity. By breaking the form and creating a fluid identity, the speaker attempts a project akin to Edna St Vincent Millay's sonnet *I will put Chaos into fourteen lines*. St Vincent Millay wrote:

> I will put Chaos into fourteen lines
> And keep him there [...]
> his adroit designs
> Will strain to nothing in the strict confines
> Of this sweet Order, where, in pious rape,
> I hold his essence and amorphous shape
> Till he with Order mingles and combines (lines 1- 8).

Both poets pick up on the notion of containment (St Vincent Millay explicitly, Ramanujan implicitly), but instead of trying to understand disorder by creating order, Ramanujan's speaker releases it in an attempt to understand the disorder of identity. Whereas St Vincent Millay's speaker controls chaos, "I shall not even force him to confess or answer/I will only make him good," Ramanujan's sonnet tries to understand disorder in relation to self. His speaker maps the landscape thematically and structurally

in order to re-create the fluidity of movement and identity, to comprehend fixity and fluidity in terms of time and self. A fluid identity continues to evolve despite the impermanent nature of its environment, and this leads the speaker to seek a new means of understanding self. The paradox that the speaker comes to understand is the shifting nature of life outside of the established markers of identity, domestic or national. Once outside of the frameworks previously understood to determine identity, the individual must find a new method of relating self to his environment, mutable as it may be. The annals of a nation become unfixed markers, and the speaker can no longer bind himself to them as a fixed point. By removing the markers that we build identity upon (nation, home, possessions), the speaker reclaims his identity outside of the established paradigms. Identity is no longer merely hybrid; it is fluid. Time is the only constant that links the self to his experience. Ironically, something that is arbitrary and in constant change (time) becomes our one true compass regardless of location. If poetry, particularly postcolonial poetry, is a means of navigating various dislocations, then the speaker's removal of permanence reminds us that the house in which identity dwells is a misnomer. The realization that home is no longer the fixed location of identity (self, cultural, or national) is one way in which the postmodern, postcolonial author benefits from using the hybrid, universal standpoint. The sonnet becomes a contained means of subversively challenging the contemporary location of identity and the material archives by which we situate the self in order to redefine the "proportioned mental space" allotted to fixed identity. (Fowler, as quoted by Spiller 2) By extension, the sonnet allows the speaker to work out how he understands himself within his own shifting cultural location and memory.

In another of Ramanujan's sonnets, *If Eyes Can See*, the poet continues to work out issues related to the location of cultural memory. The speaker chooses to break with traditional sonnet (western) legacy and further the link between form and content. Dislocated identity and formal structure unite in order to shed light on the false narratives of history.

> A poor man's history will brown the gold
> of day as mere air browns a cut apple.
> Green moss muffles the steps of a childhood
> house. Doors and windows open into cobwebs.
>
> A family once lived there with pictures
> on the wall, women in the kitchen, a yard
> noisy with children, men working in the woods,
> reading newspapers in the verandahs.
>
> A change of government, embezzlement in a bank,
> a law that parceled the land to cousins,
> and sheer fecklessness have crumbled the walls,
> messed up the children, auctioned the pictures.
>
> Yet days can be golden, apples beautiful,
> if eyes can see only days and apples. (264)

In the first quatrain, the first three lines follow a conventional pattern, but the last line "House. Doors and windows open into cobwebs" breaks the unified voice by inserting an extra syllable and stress. This eleven syllable, seven beat line draws attention to the conflict between history and home. The additional stress on cobwebs combines with the extra beat to emphasize that the poor man, who lives outside of the larger historical narrative, is erased by time and nature, eradicating all traces of his passage. Moreover, the additional stress on cobwebs reveals how the act of opening up closed historical spaces and examining the narratives of the past jars the fixed history and disturbs the established archive. History and time are broken by the intrusion of the domestic into the

narrative. "Apple" and "house" recall the private realm; therefore history and time carry over into the realm of the domestic. The extra syllable of line four re-writes history by inserting another voice into the discourse, "doors and windows open into cobwebs" of the domestic unrecorded history. One way of understanding this is through Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism.* In it she writes that the artist's attempt to re-inscribe himself into history through historiographic metafiction reveals the boundaries between art and history while simultaneously "foreground[ing] the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history" (114).[28] Time fades the memory of the domestic experience of the individual, and the intrusion of home into the temporal history described in the first three lines attempts to correct the assumption of the historical narrative. By merging the political with the domestic, history and memory destabilize the "History House"[29] and re-imagine memory "as a site, a dwelling place of legitimate historical practice" (Burton 102). Thus, the domestic and memory of the domestic become a location where the individual can "claim a place in history at the intersection of the private and the public, the personal and the political, the national and the postcolonial" (4). Home becomes a location of historical memory, a place where the individual (and the communal) voice can be identified and remembered.

The tension between convention and theme is carried into the second quatrain, where the syllabic break in lines six and seven dislocate the reader and disrupts the iambic rhythmic flow of the text. The additional beats in these two lines, dealing with women and children, reflect history's missing narratives: the ten beat line convention

[28] See part II of Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* for further details related to boundaries between art and history in postmodernism.
[29] See Antoinette Burton on Arundhati Roy in Dwelling in the Archive, page 102.

must be extended in order to insert them. This furthers the point that the current history does not voice the domestic or encapsulate the entirety of the individual within its discursive rhetoric. Not only does the structure break down, the methods of documenting historical memory fail to catch the moments that fall in between conventional sources of history. "Women in the kitchen, a yard noisy with children" and "men working in the woods" are placed in between the pictures and newspapers that function as historical narrative. Both the fifth and eighth lines, which document conventional sources of memory, follow the traditional five foot line. These lines fall into the cultural heritage of time and history. The routine activities of the domestic realm, or individual experience, fit in between the cracks of the conventional narrative. They are literally and figuratively the forgotten texts in between the pictures and newspapers.

Moreover, line nine's volta, "A change of government, embezzlement in a bank", (with thirteen syllables) reinforces the divide between the public narrative and private history. Drawing upon the Alexandrian line (six feet and twelve beats), this glutted line merges the excesses of language with those of the public realm. Government, banks and embezzlement are located in the poem's only thirteen-syllable line. The excess of the fattened line and the inability to read it harmoniously functions as a marker of public corruption. It denotes the personal/political conflict and reminds us that historical memory often documents a 'truth' that serves political discourse at the expense of the individual. Ironically, after identifying state corruption, the rest of the quatrain returns to the iambic line. The poem seems to return to convention as though nothing untoward has occurred, yet the content contained within tradition bespeaks further corruption. The lines following the Volta, "a law that parceled the land to cousins/and sheer fecklessness

have crumbled the walls/messed up the children, auctioned the pictures", addresses harm guised in tradition. By destroying the legacy of the sites of private memory (land, home, women, children, pictures), imperial and national histories create split narratives that cause an artificial schizophrenic divide between the nation, personal self and memory.

The irony of lines ten through twelve can be even more significant if we read the historical narrative of independence in relation to this sonnet. After independence, India sought to establish a postcolonial, democratic and independent constitution, yet much of the older colonial form of government was carried over into the new independent nation (Metcalf, 227). The carrying over of the British Raj's legacy into the new nation-state can be read into the poem as an ironic break in ideology. Originally attempting to overthrow the corruption of colonial rule, the new state was itself plagued by inner corruption. In a move that can only be considered ironic in terms of postcolonial identity formation, the new nation ended up maintaining aspects of colonial rule. Hence, in the third quatrain, the poem follows the same cultural and political movement of the nation, but does so in a manner that highlights the irony of such a move. The merging of old and new is arguably the 'universal standpoint' that undermines the development of a true self, independent of colonial influence. However, uniting old with new is not always detrimental. Combining form and content allows the speaker to gain a position of authority over tradition. The speaker's (self) control over the traditionally inscribed narrative is marked by the sonnet's return to tradition after the glutted excess of the Volta. The continuation of man's political machinations through time and history, in spite of political ideology, or national and cultural identity, defies logical comprehension. Yet it is the negotiation of this paradox through a universal lens that leads to clarity in the

speaker. Uniting disjointed stories allows the speaker to find beauty in the narrative of disjointed action.

The end couplet of this sonnet propels readers towards an awareness of the consequences of political machination, while denying the conventional return to traditional vision. "Yet days can be golden, apples beautiful/If eyes can see only days and apples" breaks the traditional pattern. The thirteenth line has eleven syllables, but the sonnet ends with the expected ten syllable line. The broken thirteenth line functions as a counter-turn to all that has come in the previous stanzas. It moves beyond time, memory, public or private spheres in order to draw readers outside of the immediate enjoyment of the moment. All of the conflict that comes before is broken by the thirteenth line's call to remembrance and nostalgia. The split vision of the natural world, political arena, and private realm of home are juxtaposed in order to conflate the three into one unified concept of self. Memory becomes the abode of historical identity. Though tensions remain unresolved, resolution is achieved through the last line's conventional iambic pentameter structure. The poem closes with a sense of completion. Time and history are contained and deflated in favor of the immediate.

Both speaker and reader have been transformed by the discourse of an alternate historical narrative. Vision is recreated to the point that views the narrative from a stable (5 foot concluding line) albeit dislocated (slanted rhyme) position. The poem's only rhyme, the concluding slant rhyme, attempts to create "prudential experience" (Spiller 90). If the individual can look beyond the material and appreciate the world outside of the political, then beauty can still be found. However, the very fact that this requires the viewer to skew his vision speaks to the difficulty of the act. Moreover, by slanting the

focus, the speaker underlines that identity is complicated by the fact that the binaries applied to the postcolonial subject are false. The postcolonial self cannot return to a position of ideological celebration of his pre-colonial self because he never existed in the first place. That the new nation is marked by vices and corruption, akin to the colonial reign, identifies that each incarnation of power has its own challenges. Furthermore, the speaker problematizes division by locating the fixed gaze in an ambivalent position within the poem. Though the title announces the notion of viewing, the I/eye pun is taken up indirectly by never explicitly stepping into the subjective role until the concluding couplet. Leaving the gaze ambivalent deflates the divide between participants because the sonnet functions through "controlled immediacy" between the speaker and reader. (2-3) The gaze and schism between cultures is deconstructed by uniting the participants in the universality of the end couplet. Each participant must refocus his gaze in order to find beauty again. Much like the romantic poets, spiritual transcendence is achieved through the ability to look beyond, and find beauty and truth in the physical realm of nature. Slanted vision becomes a metaphor for the contemporary dislocation of identity through false (or incomplete) visions of history. The gaze, when shifted, provides a point of consensus between the divides by revealing the incomplete vision of archived memory.

Purusottam Lal's (1929-) sonnet *Hidden Glory* deals with self and the archive much differently.[30] Lal's treatment of cultural memory is more overt. Instead of writing

[30] Lal was one of the founding members of the Calcutta Writers Workshop which has been the first publisher of many of India's most famous international English authors. He has been an active member of the English Indian literary scene and has written in defense of English authorship in India. See *Lal: Anthology and Credo* for his defense of English writing. The Writers Workshop sought to embody Modernist philosophies and rebelled

within the domestic walls he juxtaposes historical legacy with the simplicity of spiritual truth. The speaker does this in order to re-prioritize the private spheres of experiential history. Though both Ramanujan's and Lal's speakers seem confused by man's failure to unite the private and the public realms, Lal's speaker focuses on the philosophical and spiritual lessons to be recalled from national heritage. The divided cultural archive, which demands the self to choose between moments of historical (political/national) and experiential (spiritual/familial) memory, is at odds with holistic self-perception. The need to re-unite these histories speaks to the poet's desire to re-imagine himself and his cultural narrative more holistically.

> If culture could, as a meteor,
> Roll back from Time's obliterated page,
> And hand us back our prided heritage
> Once-illuminating, now no more;
> And if wisdom's sea could roll to shore
> Upon its waves the splendour of an age
> Which gratified philosopher and sage,
> Whose unrivalled hoard of mystic lore
>
> The world, astounded, pondered deep; O then,
> Perhaps, we'll realise the emptiness
> Of perpendicular delights, and men,
> Endowed with innate spiritual fire, stress
> The introspective gospels once again,
> Whose simple truths we now but dimly guess. (Lal 139)

Lal used the combination of formal elements from Italian and English sonnets to unite the contents of multiple traditions within the poem. The poem is divided into an octave and

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against what was dubbed the "Aurobindian" school of mysticism and verse. Though Lal espouses Modernist philosophies in literature, his writing is marked by a distinctive mysticism and sentimentality. Lal remains a prominent figure in English literature and a devout publisher of rising English Indian authors.

sestet, but layers ideas in a manner akin to that of the English quatrain.[31] In the first four lines, the speaker states that time has erased the archive of cultural heritage. With each successive quatrain, Lal introduces a new metaphor for time's unfolding: the hand that "roll(s) back", a sea's "roll to shore", and "perpendicular delights." In the octave, the speaker focuses on the past, aligning the memory of culture and wisdom with the cyclic. The ebb and flow of the tide, or the cycling hand of the clock, are invoked to soften and counteract "Time's obliterated page" and the "perpendicular" timeline of history. With each successive wave, the speaker eases his way towards a renewed vision of inner awareness. Thus form and content are conflated to mirror the attempted reunion of public history with personal, spiritual experience.

The past's legacy is a dim memory that cannot be revived. The conditional clause identifies the speaker's longing to reclaim his lost history while simultaneously noting the possible futility of such an endeavor. For the speaker, the conditional return to the past is marked by the reclamation of an "illuminating" cultural site of knowledge. The restorative historical project for Lal's speaker is one that would reveal the lost wisdom of our ancestors. Cultural heritage is viewed as being a lost text; the fallen victim of time, which contains a body of knowledge that, once recovered, would refocus our priorities. Due to its spiritual focus, Lal's sonnet can be viewed as pandering to Orientalist views of the noble Eastern mystic. By valorizing man's "innate spiritual fire," the speaker inherently endorses cultural stereotypes and plays out the role assigned to the Eastern artist by the West. If the Eastern self wanted to re-instill cultural pride, one way of doing so would be to glorify the imagined pre-colonial self. Unlike many colonized cultures,

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[31] See Zitner's article "Truth and Mourning in a Sonnet by Surrey" for a discussion on the

India can draw upon a textual archive that provides a tangible philosophical heritage to be valorized. However, in some ways, choosing one realm (private/spiritual) over another (public/political) perpetuates Oriental assumptions that the East is mystical, illogical, hysterical, and effete. Celebrating historical identity, or adapting to colonial influences, leaves the author in a position that cannot be resolved without compromise.

At first, it would appear that recalling the ancient spiritual wisdom evokes the "mystic lore" of the Sanskrit sutras. Upon further consideration, the poem can also be viewed as being skeptical of the contemporary separation of factual and personal narratives of history. While the speaker is looking to the spiritual past of the nation, he does so with an eye on the present moment of identity. If we could reclaim the ocean of personal, experiential knowledge of our past, we would gain deeper spiritual insight into our historical identity and our contemporary moment of formation. He recalls the wisdom of past ages in such a way that looks to the future in order to slant perception. By juxtaposing philosophical perspectives (linear/cyclic), the speaker asks the reader to reconsider his own manner of viewing the narratives informing society. Moving away from linear, "perpendicular" narratives of identity in favour of a holistic standpoint, the speaker argues that we should reprioritize the values that inform our current culture, regardless of cultural location. Consequently, the speaker argues that if we could reclaim past knowledge, we could recreate the epistemological narrative and ensuing perceptions of self-identity because we would be reshaping the ways by which identity is "contained and represented" (Said, Orientalism 880).

Italian heterology (sieve) and the homologous English building block sonnet.

Though time has erased the script, the ebb and flow of the tide, as well as the cycling hand of the clock indicate that the body of knowledge remains. Knowledge is power, therefore diving through the wrecked archive to unearth a trove of cultural wisdom turns the tide. Historic memory moves towards a more encompassing meta-narrative. In so doing, the speaker's endorsement of holistic cultural narratives bridges the gap between public and private realms by uniting the linear (male) with the cyclic (female) narratives of history. This act deflates the artificial colonial narrative schism. The universal standpoint becomes a positive means of working out the paradoxical archive and understanding self in history. The postmodern self is in a state of hybridity. Working with the double lens of a universal viewpoint allows the self to interpret non-linear narratives and create a self that recognizes cultural identity outside of the dominant symbolic reductive framework (Lacan 181).

The speaker of Lal's sonnet meets history with distrust. The documented text of cultural heritage has been destroyed and wisdom lost in our pursuit to create a chronology of progress. The "simple truths" the speaker invokes reclaim the knowledge that is universal to our ancestors, regardless of cultural location. The sonnet deals with the contrast between the present moment of linear materialism and thinking, and the perception of a timeless, spiritual past. Yet the distrust of the archive is pervasive: history has not documented the personal, spiritual and philosophical narrative. The pages that contain our cultural timeline fail to impart the wisdom gained by our ancestors; they fail to document inspiration, truth, or our "innate spiritual fire." Despite being outside of the "history house," this sonnet begins to document the rising uneasiness surrounding the recorded historical meta-narrative of subaltern, marginal, or alternative voices in

informing historical paradigms. For Lal's speaker, the sonnet becomes a means subverting the "process of diffusion" of "philosophical thought" and the ways they are "subsumed and absorbed [...] in history" (Gramsci 327). While it would take "a meteor" blast to history's annals to unveil the true narratives of the past, it would redirect the contemporary and historical gaze by uniting the self in a universal position of identity were it successful.

Art as Historical Document

Ramanujan's sonnet, *The Rickshaw-Wallah,*[32] builds upon the ideas of art and the historical narrative by puzzling out the legacy of immortality through art. Can art serve as an alternative historical narrative? Can it document the liminal voices forgotten in the hegemonic narrative? Through an unconventional series of tropes and metaphors, the speaker problematizes the archival narrative as record of experiential history.

> His arms and legs were wholly literate:
> in green and in red,
> the indelible
> names of friends long-dead.
>
> His chest had the three names
> of one woman, and several incredible
> forms, now gone in the teeth,
> the bitches, their limbs
>
> loosely strung like linen-dolls,
> their breasts no longer the faces of lambs.
> But he, he would take all comers yet,
> especially the thin-stemmed witches.

[32] A rickshaw is a three wheeled bicycle taxi; wallah translates as owner; rickshaw-wallah, a bicycle taxi owner.

> The tattoo will stand, green, red
> when all else is gone, he said. (Ramanujan 24)

The first line of the poem, "his arms and legs were wholly literate", follows the iambic five foot line and introduces the conventional narrative of self, albeit in an unusual fashion. The body is a tattooed text, and functions as a national site of collective memory. The longstanding tradition of seeing the nation as body is conflated into the tattooed text of the rickshaw wallah's arms and legs. His limbs stand in for the nation and the ink represents the major sects of Indian identity, Muslim (green) and Hindu (red). The divided nation is permanently united by this indelible ink. The driver is literally the physical carrier of memory. This visual mnemonic archive is in constant motion as it is transported by the demands of his passengers from one destination to another. Therefore, history is in constant motion despite its documented permanence, subject to the will of those occupying the seat of power.

While art and the historical narrative can be shaped by the will of those in power by uniting factual identity on one body, the speaker attempts to rewrite the physical, emotional, and political divisions of the partitioned nation. He shows readers how history can record an intertwined narrative of communal identity despite political machinations. The body (nation) commemorates death, partition and the forgotten narratives of imposed division. The literary legacy of memory written on the nation is also the location of personal history; "the names of friends long-dead" are permanently etched onto the landscape. Moreover, because lines two through four, "in green and in red, the indelible/names of friends long-dead", are all half-lines breaking the iambic line with a five syllable structure, they imply a fragmented record. Indeed, the etched memoir recorded on the subject, being a personal recollection of history and a subjective

narrative, is an unreliable archive. The half-lines mirror the subjective and incomplete record of history and convey the need to add the other half of the missing voice of history.

In the next quatrain, the speaker returns to the iambic line until line eight, the turning point. "The three names of one woman and several incredible forms" replace the focus of the dead in the nation's "indelible" archive. The ancient woman, "gone in the teeth," and fantastical creatures speak to the mythical past of the nation. Moreover, the lengthened iambic line six, "of one woman, and several incredible," of the sonnet increases the epic nature of the "incredible form." Plus, the cadence of "several incredible" evokes a sing-song pattern that returns the speaker to childlike literary techniques. These combine with the Alexandrian line to revisit a fantastical past, where dramatic expressions were used to convey oral epics, myths, and legends. The three names of one female are memories "long-dead" that function as documents of the current incarnation of national identity. The older female and "incredible forms" speak to a supernatural past, one that privileges the 'illogical' history of the nation whereas the play on "long in the tooth" reminds readers that this time is nearing its end. The supernatural forms of the past are used up and no longer vital; "the bitches" are likened to decrepit rag-dolls. The speaker's description of the decaying text writ on the driver reflects the shift in tone. The sonnet becomes cynical, emotions broken and bitter as the poem again breaks the iambic line and moves into the final sestet.

The "loosely-strung" limbs of the archive tattooed across the rickshaw-wallah's chest and the sonnet lines are contrasted with his personal vigor. The indelible, aged text and the difficult passengers, "thin-stemmed witches," may no longer be attractive to

most, but "he would take all comers yet" reveals the driver's vital willingness to carry the challenging burdens of a cast off past. The turning point of the sonnet indicates that the past, with its legends, deaths, and memories, is contained on the body of a man bent on survival. The driver moves from being viewed as the emissary of the textual archive, the carrier of the past, to a vehicle for all. Though he favors the weather-worn woman, he is open to all that come his way. He is simultaneously a narrator and a carrier of the personal archive. Additionally, in the discussion of geographically dislocated identity, the rickshaw-wallah functions literally and symbolically as the cartographer between sites of national narrativization and personal experience.

Furthermore, Ramanujan's speaker identifies the fertility of the rickshaw-wallah by veiling his ride in sexual innuendo. "Limbs loosely strung," "breasts no longer" innocent, "bitches" (evoking dogs in heat), and his willingness to take "all comers" each contribute to the creation of a sexual undertone that imbues the textual narrative with fecundity. However, given the implied age of the virile subject and his partners, it is a blocked virility that fails to realize a future incarnation. The body is a text that commemorates, art is a preserver, and the driver a cartographer between locations, but "when all else is gone" and age takes its toll, he too shall fall. The fact that the human body is a fluid state in the historical archive serves to highlight the impermanence of textual legacy and personal memory, even the failure of art to fully realize the self in history. The identity of historical self being created by the speaker is one in which the personal and public realms of the narrative are being examined and revealed as flawed. Much as in Shelley's sonnet *Ozymandias*, whose speaker writes:

> [...] on the pedestal these words appear:
> 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. [...]
The lone and level sands stretch far away" (lines 9-14)

Ramanujan's speaker (also a removed narrator, in that he tells the story of another subject: he is the viewer), documents how the historical hubris of man eventually is the victim of time and memory. The blocked fertility and indelible ink fades with death. Memory is lost. Thus the speaker identifies a gap that is created between generational narratives. If the story cannot be carried from one location to another, the recollection of historical identity will become obscured by loss.

Vikram Seth's (1952-) sonnet *The Great Confucian Temple, Suzhou*[33] continues this theme of time's erosion of the physical archive[34]. Distinctly non-Indian in terms of location, Seth's sonnet satirizes the gap between the restorative project and the physical archive. While Ramanujan and Lal both evoke skepticism over archival inscription, Seth's sonnet goes one step further and expresses skepticism about the actual project of restoration. The speaker does so by juxtaposing cultural intention with the temple's state of disrepair. Like Shelley, Seth's tone is satirical and wry. In this sonnet, nature inhabits sites left to decay and creatures re-appropriate the man-made space as natural habitat. Nature is indifferent to the legacy of manmade history. "Geese strut through the balustrade," a dove sits in a tree, a centipede crawls over the text of a commemorative

[33] Suzhou China is a UNESCO world heritage site for its many gardens. The Confucian Temple is part of a major restoration project started in 1981 by the Chinese government. Seth's poem was published in 1985 and Suzhou was declared as a world heritage site in 1997 and 2000. (UNESCO)
[34] Born in Calcutta, Seth has studied in the UK, USA, and China. One of his earlier works, *The Golden Gate,* is a novel set in San Francisco and written in sonnet verse. His interest in Asian culture and poetry has heavily influenced his writing. It wasn't until he wrote his most famous work, *A Suitable Boy,* that he focused solely on Indian identity and subject matter.

plaque. Plants grow over and cover textual dynastic monuments and, in so doing, blank out the legible archive of the past. As in Shelley's sonnet, nature, through time, acts as an eraser of the manmade archive.

> Two geese strut through the balustrade, where rust
> And stacks of timber marked "Department of
> Culture: for Restoration" gather dust.
> The gingko lodges a complaining dove.
> A centipede squirms over "Hong Wu" hewn
> In seal-script on the white fragmented stone
> Where reign-names of the Ming and Qing lie strewn
> In mint and dog-turd, creeper, tile and bone.
> Before the frayed vermilion walls and eaves
> The plaster statue of a man in red
> With pudgy vehemence and rolled-up sleeves
> Proclaims the oppressive heritage is dead.
> Inside the hall six workmen renovate
> The verveless splendour of a corpse of state. (Seth 15)

In the first quatrain, the speaker focuses on the halted project of restoration and contrasts the rusting stacks stored by the "Department of Culture" with the intended "Restoration." Irony is culminated by the addition of insult into the mix: an irreverent geese's "strut" and a dove's complaint from his perch on the gingko tree. Instead of locating complaint in the beak of the cacophonous, squawking goose, the speaker places complaint in the softer, subtler voice of the peaceful dove, which speaks to the gentler nature of erasure over voices of protest. The diminutive dove fails to lodge his complaint, be it over the abandoned project or man's intrusion over his reclaimed space.

In the second quatrain, the gentle encroachment of nature over the physical archive builds upon the theme being explored. Each image introduced in lines five through eight becomes more gradual in its erasure, yet more pernicious. The centipede slowly obscures the "Hong Wu," temporarily obstructing the viewer's gaze over the known text of the "fragmented" archive. Whereas motion makes the centipede a non-

permanent barrier, the "mint and dog-turd, creeper, tile and bone" strewn over the dynastic reigns are more intrusive in their acts of erasure, as they must be removed by the viewer in order for textual legibility to be reclaimed. However, neither barrier is a permanent obstruction and can be removed in order for memory to be recovered. What remains to be uncovered though is a "fragmented stone."

Simultaneously turning away from the natural sphere of the textual monument and the natural erasure of memory, the speaker explores the active process of recovery in the final six lines of the sonnet. In order to do so, he turns his gaze towards to the statue located outside of the temple that "proclaims the oppressive heritage is dead." This line is the only line in this sonnet that breaks formal conventions to insert an additional beat. The contrasting irony between the statue, his statement, and the renovating workmen firmly establishes the speaker's cynicism towards the restorative project. By juxtaposing the statue with the workmen who endeavor to "renovate the verveless splendour of a corpse of state," the speaker raises the question: who is the restorative project for—the state or the individual? As put forth by the speaker in the octave, nature erases the historical texts of man, memory forgets its projects as they "gather dust," and life continues to flourish while temples fray and fade, so why do we need to revitalize the past? Like his counterparts, Dutt, Aurobindo, and Lal, Seth's speaker expresses anxiety over man's desire to commemorate the past at the expense of the present, natural moment.

In the sestet the speaker moves away from the physical process of erasure in order to focus on the governmental project of cultural restoration. Readers are then confronted with the artifice of a commemorative statue pronouncing history dead while restoration

crews seek to refurbish lost glories. The irony is that the "six workmen" who renovate the dead cultural site and re-build national heritage are excluded from the narrative they restore. The triangulation of nature, artifice, and history challenges the elitist archive of art, text, and public record in order draw our attention to the silent voices contained in the backdrop. These men rebuild a site of history that encroaches upon their sites of memory. The "verveless splendour" ignores the marginalized voices of the masses and fails to acknowledge those who are the foundation of such structures. The speaker's satirical tone lodges the silent histories of the subaltern by recalling that nature, time, and the artifice of documented memory is created by man. While earlier English Indian sonneteers express an anxiety over the written texts that inscribed identity upon a national or cultural subject, Seth's speaker also expresses an overt distrust over the current project of re-writing the archived identity by raising issue with what is being rewritten.

Come, let me write. And to what end? To ease a burdened heart.[35]

The paradox being worked out in the postcolonial sonnet is the deconstruction of schizophrenic identities. This is done through an examination and merging of several codes of meaning at work within the sonnet's contained discursive box. The postcolonial sonnet works with at least two codes: colonial (western) and post-colonial (newly defined/created independent self). The English Indian sonnet also works with private (domestic) and public (political), material and spiritual, history (narrative hegemony) and memory (archived, subaltern) codes in order to convey how hybrid identities demand a

[35] Sir Philip Sidney, Sonnet 34, Astrophil and Stella

revision of the historical construction of the postmodern self. The postcolonial English Indian sonneteer overlaps poetic codes of language and metaphor in order to bridge the "split that is characteristic of postcolonial literatures, a seeing of cultures in terms of one another," and finds universality in dislocated identity (Ramazani, 30). As the boundaries between nations and nationalities become more elastic and mutable, identity is complicated by the experience of postcolonial and postmodern global subjectivity. The containment and subversion of cultural determinations in favor of a globalized 'universal standpoint' is a means of transcending communalism in favor of a shared dialectic between groups.

However, as illustrated in Seth's sonnet, we must also be wary of the reductive reification of a recreated historical identity. The re-visionary process must be met with the same questions that the original archive faces in the hands of the colonial and postcolonial subject. The examination how identity is documented and how it can be reviewed allows both the reader and the speaker to participate in re-imagining and re-writing the meta-narrative of identity; they share the task of filling the cross-cultural divide created by imperialism. Though the decision to write in English remains a vexed one, by merging metaphors and identities within the sonnet—material and personal experience of history—the speaker is able to work out the paradoxical schizophrenia created by each binary code.

If the sonnet is a moment of psychic instability, it would then follow that the form would become a vehicle for expressing national, cultural and individual instability. Moreover, when we consider the structural components of the English sonnet at work in the Indian-English sonnet, readers will find that the speaker denies his audience the

expected conventions. Readers expecting standard rhyme schemes instead find slant rhymes, jagged syllabic patterns, and adapted themes, all of which convey a skewed vision that calls for a re-examination of self and the archive in order to insert a new voice into history's meta-narrative. Conversely, the project of cultural restoration is met with skepticism in the works of both colonial and postcolonial English Indian sonneteers as it recalls the ambiguous nature of memory, the paradoxical act of recollection, and the political motives informing historic inscription.

While the framework of the sonnet form provides the speaker with a means of containing his crisis, if we move beyond the postcolonial framework of analysis, we begin to see how the individual author takes up postmodern questions dealing with meaning and re-interpolation of narrative identity in the postcolonial sonnet. Like Western writers, the speaker begins to abandon the strictures of formal convention in order to play out the dialectics of identity in verse. The sonnet continues to intrigue post-Independence, postmodern Indians because of the "scanty plot of ground" it creates to navigate themes of dislocated identity, self and the archive. Hopefully, as the corpus of English Indian writing grows, access to education increases, caste divides diminish, and global dialogues broaden in scope, cross-cultural formal experimentations will expand beyond the question of cultural inculcation. Rejecting one's own culture will become a moot point because the motives behind formal experimentation will be linked to cultural understanding and not cultural control. Vikram Seth's own sonnets exploring China and the American-Asian experience begin to realize a growing phenomenon: identity that transcends the boundaries of culture for the postcolonial subject. Despite being a closed form, the sonnet allows infinite space for the self to plot out his environment and deal

with the questions facing a generation of rapidly evolving traditions and identities. As globalism changes the terrain the artist navigates, we may once again see the rebirth of the sonnet: looser in structure, freer in language, more experimental in rhythm, theme and identity, yet just as much focused on puzzling out the paradoxical issues created by a world in flux.

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