PART III

Forms in Flux I

Trajectories of Digital Cultures
in Indian Literatures

9

"DIGITIZING DEROZIO: EXPLORING INTERTEXTS TO ENGLISH ROMANTICISM IN *COLLECTED POEMS OF HENRY DEROZIO*"

Amardeep Singh

Introduction: The Archive Gap

Since Henry Derozio is a writer strongly associated with the Romantic period, it seems appropriate to begin with two bits of explanatory context for the digital edition of Derozio's works that is the present occasion for this chapter.[1] The first is an ongoing engagement in a phenomenon I have called the *Archive Gap*,[2] by which I mean the disparity between the extent and quality of digital archives for white, Euro-American, and Canonical writers, and those in the colonial and postcolonial world. The causes of the Archive Gap are many and begin with decisions about which sorts of primary texts were preserved and which were discarded, especially under colonialism. The Gap in preservation means that there is a much better British record of key historical events like the 1857 Indian uprising against the British Raj than there is of the Indian side. One sees a similar discrepancy when it comes to the preservation of materials in South Asian languages, especially 19th-century newspapers. Nearly perfect records exist of many English-language newspapers published in places like Calcutta, Lucknow, Allahabad, and Lahore throughout much of the 19th century; by contrast, the preservation of newspapers printed in Bengali, Urdu, or Punjabi was much more uneven. A second phase in the Archive Gap relates to how materials that were preserved were later acquired by research libraries, and which of those collections were catalogued and made accessible to users. In many collections, important documents and manuscripts remain uncatalogued and therefore essentially off the grid. For literary critics working on South Asian literary history in particular, important periodicals might be lying in boxes in dusty rooms, known essentially only to librarians with deep knowledge of the holdings. These materials are not being digitized, and in many cases are not even really being protected from the elements.

The final phase in the Archive Gap involves digital archives. There are impressive digital archives, often developed with significant grant funding and sizeable staff and technical support, for British and American writers such as Walt Whitman, William Blake, and Emily Dickinson. These archives have not only digitized published texts but also often different versions and editions, manuscript materials, and personal correspondence; they are tagged and marked up with TEI; they might use advanced tools like GIS maps or topic modelling to explore their corpora. It is much harder to find work of this kind with South Asian writers. Many writers who are clearly important—like Henry Derozio, or Krupabai Satthianadhan (an early Indian woman novelist and one of India's first women doctors)—have until now not had any digital archives dedicated to their work. To be clear, I am not suggesting that their work has not been *digitized*; page-images of the works of Krupabai Satthianadhan can be found on Google Books and HathiTrust. Rather, the issue is that these works are not accessible as *texts*, with contextual information, editorial commentary, and annotations, or metadata that might help readers find and situate the materials. This problem is so well-documented in the digital humanities that Roopika Risam has described the field as essentially "digital *canonical* humanities."[3] Sites like the William Blake Archive, the Rosetti Archive, and the Walt Whitman Archive have been key to the development of Digital Archives as a field, and projects like NINES, which aggregate 19th-century digital collections, are overwhelmingly dominated by Anglo-American authors and texts.

Rectifying the Archive Gap

While European and American digital humanities communities have been slow to respond to this problem, in recent years, we have seen some progress, with projects like Livingstone Online (which takes a self-reflexive approach to the European encounter with cultural otherness in Africa), the "One More Voice" project, and The Early Caribbean Digital Archive.[4] In the South Asian context, one is impressed by the richness of the Tagore Variorum,[5] but there remains much more room to work, especially when it comes to writers other than Tagore. There are many important South Asian authors whose works remain underrepresented in digital collections, especially early writers and writers who worked in South Asian languages.

The desire to rectify the Archive Gap led the author of this study to embark on a project that is in a way the immediate precursor to the digital edition of Henry Derozio's poems that is the subject of this chapter. That is the Literature of Colonial South Asia text corpus.[6] This open-access corpus brings together writings by British and South Asian writers, which are known to be out of copyright in the U.S., into a simple collection of plain text files. One goal of this project is to enable and encourage people who use quantitative methods to consider applying them to South Asian Anglophone materials, and, for this, clean plain-text files are considered an essential starting point. And while one can find corpora of various sorts

online to use as a basis for text analysis, most of these aim for massive scale rather than thematic specificity. But another central goal is to increase the accessibility of these texts, especially for teachers and students.

This project in turn emerged out of a digital collection I initiated in 2015, centred around the Kipling family—especially Rudyard, his sister Alice Fleming, and his father, John Lockwood Kipling.[7] As that project continued to develop, it became apparent that for many 21st-century readers, the Kipling family might be less interesting than their various Indian interlocutors. In the present project, along-side expected figures like Toru Dutt, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, and Cornelia Sorabji, there's scope to create accessible digital editions of somewhat lesser-known figures like S.B. Banerjea and Krupabai Satthianadhan. And on the British side, the corpus includes obvious mainstays like the Kiplings, Maud Diver, Flora Annie Steel, and Sara Jeannette Duncan, but also some lesser-known figures like the American writer G.A. Henty and the Irish romance novelist B.M. Croker.

And, of course, one is interested in the *dialogue* between the British and the South Asian writers mentioned earlier. What influence did British writers have on emerging South Asian literature in English? Conversely, what influence, if any, did South Asian writers have on British colonial writers? People who read Rudyard Kipling or Flora Annie Steel know well that their prose is rich with Hindustani terms, sometimes used a little imprecisely. How dense, exactly, is their engagement with South Asian languages? When and how do we see engagement with South Asian languages in their works? What does the geographical representation look like? To some extent, the idea of creating an open-access corpus entails bringing these texts together to make them readily accessible to human researchers. But some of these questions might also be addressed through computational methods, including natural language processing queries that might be used to discover geographical representations and proper names.

By and large, with respect to materials in the Literature of Colonial South Asia text corpus, the goal is not to produce full digital editions. With some of the more obscure writers mentioned earlier, it's not likely that very many people will need fully functional versions of their texts, which could potentially be assigned in a 21st-century university classroom; at least with some of these figures, distant read-ing might be more important than close reading.

One exception to that might be with Henry Derozio, who has special impor-tance, because he appears to be the first Indian poet to write in English. And because of his education and his family background, he appears not to have been self-translating from an Indian language, but rather writing first and foremost in English. Though Derozio died when he was quite young, and some of his poems have a juvenile quality, many of his best poems are formally sophisticated and likely to be accessible to students. Finally, because of the work of scholars like Rosinka Chaudhuri, Mary Ellis Gibson, and Manu Samriti Chander, his works have, in the past ten years, begun to gain more visibility for scholars and teachers of Roman-tic poetry, especially those influenced by the growing movement to bring greater

diversity and inclusion to studies of the Romantic period, a movement sometimes referred to as "Bigger 6" Romanticism.[8]

In effect, while specialist scholars of global Romanticism might know Derozio, and many Indians will know his name (as he is taught in some English-medium colleges and universities), he could potentially be better-known than he is, especially in the U.K. and the U.S. (The Open Syllabus project, which uses web crawlers to find college syllabi published on the web, only shows three "hits" for Derozio's name. By contrast, one sees 4,150 hits for Percy Bysshe Shelley and 2,180 hits for Byron.[9] As a person of mixed Portuguese, British, and Indian heritage who wrote not long after the advent of English-medium education in India, Derozio's position seems structurally connected to that of the Anglo-Indian community. Mary Ellis Gibson sums him up nicely when she writes: "It is ironic—but absolutely right—that a poet of complex political views and of complex ethnic, religious, and familial identifications should be thought of as the paterfamilias of Indian English poetry" (Gibson 2011, p. 2). Derozio wrote exclusively in English at a time when few other Indians did so. When he wrote about the conflict between Greeks and Turks,[10] he sympathized with the Greeks over the Turks, in part because of his *religious* background as a Christian. But Derozio taught at Hindoo College in Calcutta (later Presidency College, and now Presidency University)—a school exclusively for Indian students, and his actual poetry is enthusiastically and patriotically Indian.

For those various reasons, it seemed appropriate to assemble a simple digital edition of Derozio's poetry, containing the poems from his two published collections; this work was completed in the summer of 2020. One of those two books, *The Fakeer of Jungheera and Other Poems* (1828), could already be found as a page-image scan on HathiTrust; Derozio's first book was available in print via a British library reprint, so digitizing it required a bit more work.

The Scalar platform was chosen for this project for several reasons. First, it is a free platform developed by university-affiliated librarians and digital humanists,[11] rather than a for-profit company; this reduces the need for external funding to support the project (which may be especially problematic five or ten years down the line). It also has a helpful "Paths" structure that is well-suited to the presentation of materials in sequence. Scalar also has a built-in visualization engine that can be helpful for giving users a visual point of entry into their collections. It also helps that the university where I teach has been able to install an "instance" of Scalar, which should remain permanently accessible even if the platform ceases to be updated at some point in the future. Many digital projects also use the version of Scalar hosted by the University of Southern California.

The central principle here is flexibility. People come to digital collections for different reasons and with different amounts of expertise; it's not terribly effective to construct sites that are too narrowly framed, and only focused on highly experienced users; such users are few and far between, especially with less well-known writers. Some users will know what they're looking for, while others will simply be browsing and curious to find something engaging, perhaps something that might

be accessible to students. With that multiplicity in mind, *The Collected Poems of Henry Derozio* is a site with multiple ways "in."

Some Features of the Collection

Reading Derozio's major poems, one cannot help but notice the remarkable frequency of the author's engagement with British and Irish Romantic poets. Sometimes, he explicitly tags the poem he is borrowing from with an epigraph, making the task of detecting the borrowing much easier. In the present digital edition, tags have been included that link to the original British or Irish poem referenced to make tracking references easier for the reader. In Derozio's poetry, there are 17 such poems, and users interested in this particular side of Derozio's poetry can see those links collected on a single page.[12]

Derozio's descriptions of Indian locales in his poetry are also notable. Though he was born and raised in Calcutta (Kolkata), Derozio spent some time as a teenager working in his uncle's indigo factory in Bhagalpur, Bihar, and as a result had at least some exposure to rural India and the broader Indian landscape. Many of these geographical reference points show up in his long poem, *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, but another strong poem along these lines might be "The Ruins of Rajmahal," describing Shah Shuja's palace in what is today Jharkand. These poems have all been tagged and collected on a single page, "South Asian Locales."[13]

A third feature to highlight is the "Resource for Teachers."[14] This is a collection of ten poems that might be effective in a college classroom for a one-day unit on Derozio. This includes some obvious choices, such as Derozio's "The Harp of India," some poems that seem important because of their thematization of British Romanticism (Derozio's "Heaven"), and some that engage with South Asian locales (the aforementioned poem "The Ruins of Rajmahal").

As mentioned earlier, there has been a wave of recent criticism, which has had a significant impact on how scholars understand Derozio. Chief among them is Manu Samriti Chander's book, *Brown Romantics: Poetry and Nationalism in the Global Nineteenth Century* (2017). There, Chander argues that writers like Derozio, and the Guyanese writer Egbert Martin and the Australian writer Henry Lawson, were engaged in close dialogue with canonical British Romanticism. Their output could be described as imitative, but still reflective of a marginalized positionality. And the fact that these figures were largely overlooked as the Romantic canon came to be organized suggests a hidden racialized agenda in the process of Canon-formation:

> To put it another way, "Brown Romantics" are not marginalized because they are brown; on the contrary, they are brown because they are marginalized. Their capacity to participate as poets in the cultural field is restricted by their relationship to the colonizer prior to their participation in it, which in turn exposes the racial dimension of "the world republic of letters."
>
> *(Chander, 3)*

What Chander is alluding to here seems like an important point when reading Derozio. While Derozio does identify, strongly and exclusively, as an Indian poet— with a strong Indian *national* identity—he does not identify necessarily as *racially other* to the poets with whom he is in dialogue. To some extent, this reflects the unique moment in time of the early 19th century, where Derozio was educated at schools that included British, mixed-race Eurasian, and Indian young men (women were not admitted to these schools). Chander builds on a reading of Derozio by Makarand Paranjape, who wrote, "it is not possible to explain or understand a poet like Derozio merely by speaking of influence and imitation. In fact, whatever he borrowed, he superimposed in his local, Indian material, creating a new idiom in English poetry" (cited in Chander [2017] 22–23). For Chander, this suggests that we can understand Derozio's complex positioning as a "transcultural assemblage," "by means of which the poet retains his position of authority in a field that places supreme value on originality and situates himself in relation to fellow bards" (Chander 2017, p. 23).

Chander goes on to explore, in some depth, Derozio's dialogue with Lord Byron in Derozio's poem "Heaven." Here are a few lines from the first stanza of Byron's "The Bride of Abydos":

> Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
> Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime?
> Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle,
> Now melt into sorrow, now madden to crime?
> Know ye the land of the cedar and vine,
> Where the flowers ever blossom, the beams ever shine;
> Where the light wings of Zephyr, oppressed with perfume,
> Wax faint o'er the gardens of Gúl in her bloom;
> Where the citron and olive are fairest of fruit,
> And the voice of the nightingale never is mute;
> Where the tints of the earth, and the hues of the sky,
> In colour though varied, in beauty may vie,
> And the purple of Ocean is deepest in dye;
> Where the virgins are soft as the roses they twine,
> And all, save the spirit of man, is divine—
> Tis the clime of the East—'tis the land of the Sun—
> Can he smile on such deeds as his children have done?
> Oh! wild as the accents of lovers' farewell
> Are the hearts which they bear, and the tales which they tell.[15]

What is the Orient in Byron's poem? It's a place of exotic foliage ("crypress and myrtle") and various forms of sin and crime ("deeds that are done in their clime" where "clime" rhymes with "crime" two lines later). The word "deeds" is repeated twice in the short excerpt here, as is the word "clime"; and there's a strong and repeated emphasis on the revelation of secret truths of those sinful deeds. This is

classic Orientalism, in effect, where the properties of the East are seen as at once immutable and beyond human agency—and inherently sinful and unspeakable. It is Orientalism as a form of projection—the East as the West's unseemly underbelly rather than a cultural context in its own right. And while Derozio would not have had access to Edward Said's critique when he read this in the 1820s as a teenager, his homage to Byron in "Heaven" aims to tell a decidedly different story:

> Know ye the land where the fountain is springing,
> Whose waters give life, and whose flow never ends;
> Where cherub and seraph, in concert, are singing
> The hymn that in odour and incense ascends?
> Know ye the land where the sun cannot shine,
> Where his light would be darken'd by glory divine;
> Where the fields are all fair, and the flowret's young bloom
> Never fades, while with sweetness each breath they perfume;
> Where sighs are ne'er heard, and where tears are ne'er shed
> From hearts that might elsewhere have broken, and bled;
> Where grief is unfelt, where its name is unknown,
> Where the music of gladness is heard in each tone;
> Where melody vibrates from harps of pure gold,
> Far brighter than mortal's weak eye can behold;
> Where the harpers are robed in a mantle of light,
> More dazzling than diamonds, than silver more white;
> Where rays from a rainbow of emerald beam,
> Where truth is no name, and where bliss is no dream?—
> Tis the seat of our God! 'tis the land of the blest—
> The kingdom of glory—the region of rest—
> The boon that to man shall hereafter be given—
> 'Tis Love's hallowed empire—'tis Heaven! 'tis Heaven![16]

It is striking that Derozio does not mark the East here as "other"; indeed, within the text of the poem, it appears that he is not naming the "east" at all in "Heaven." Rather than a space of sin, Derozio has decided to use the exotic framing to describe a holy place, the "seat of our God." While the poem itself might suggest that the place he's describing is literally intended to be understood as heaven (not a terrestrial location), because of the intertext—the homage to Byron's very well-known poem—this is an unmistakable recasting of an exotic locale from a space of sin and degraded otherness to a kind of sublime and sacred otherness. This is a powerful gesture for an emergent Indian writer to make in 1826.

   One surprise for non-specialists in reading Derozio's poems is the way the Romantic Canon looked a little different to him than it does to us today. There are several poems in Derozio's corpus inspired by Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, to be sure, but there are also almost as many inspired by writers like Thomas Campbell, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, and the Irish poet Thomas Moore. Several of Derozio's

poems drawing from Byron focused specifically on the idea of a valiant and noble people, of ancient pedigree, resisting foreign domination. While Byron usually figured the plight of the noble resistance as Greeks resisting Ottoman occupation, in Derozio's adaptive transplanting to the Indian context there emerges a strong potential for a subversive reading, as the posture of nationalist resistance could be interpreted by Indian readers as a challenge to British colonialism.

Thomas Moore, as an Irish poet and an exponent of "Bardic nationalism," is particularly salient. While Derozio seemed to repurpose Byron in "Heaven" for his own purposes, here his poem aligns with Moore's sentiments much more affirmatively—though it resituates the poem in India rather than Ireland. We should begin with Moore's "Dear Harp of my Country":

> Dear Harp of my Country! in darkness I found thee,
> The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long;
> When proudly, my own Island Harp! I unbound thee
> And gave all thy chords to light, freedom and song!
> The warm lay of love and the light tone of gladness
> Have waken'd thy fondest, thy liveliest thrill;
> But so oft hast thou echo'd the deep sigh of sadness,
> That e'en in thy mirth it will steal from thee still.
> Dear Harp of my Country! farewell to thy numbers
> This sweet wreath of song is the last we shall twine,
> Go, sleep with the sunshine of Fame on thy slumbers,
> Till touch'd by some hand less unworthy than mine.
> If the pulse of the patriot, soldier, or lover,
> Have throbb'd at our lay'tis thy glory alone;
> I was but as the wind, passing heedlessly over,
> And all the wild sweetness I waked was thy own![17]

Here, Moore takes on the posture of the national bard—the person who has, by chance, been given the opportunity to play the "Harp of my Country." The poet disavows any special capacity ("some hand less unworthy than mine" needs to emerge to truly play the Harp as it should be played), but clearly the disavowal is a kind of theatrical gesture rather than a serious part of the argument. From this point on, after I play it, the poet suggests that the "wild sweetness" of the Island will be given life through "sweet wreath of song."

Let us compare Moore's bardic nationalism to Derozio's take on the same gesture, in his poem "Harp of India" (1827):

> Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
> Unstrung for ever, must thou 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![18]

Mary Ellis Gibson has a persuasive reading of this poem; she describes Derozio's gesture as a "poetics of cancellation," noting the somewhat confusing hint of a silenced Indian music. If and when that music were to be awakened, what exactly would it sound like? Gibson notes that "Harp of India" reflects

> the complexity of the poet's situation as a person of multiple identities and identifications, from the impossibility of writing a national poetry for a nation that can only be imagined in some futurity, and from the extreme tensions already visible in the biblical progenitor of the bardic trope.
>
> *(Gibson 2011, p. 78)*

Manu Chander echoes that reading when he writes:

> What qualifies Derozio to stand as a representative of India? Is it the fact that, unlike earlier Anglophone poets living in India, he was born there? Or is it the trace of native ancestry in the "Eurasian" poet of primarily English and Portuguese descent? Indeed, is it even possible to speak of a national poet of India in the 1820s, decades before the rise of coherent nationalist movements in the region?
>
> *(Chander 2014, p. 21)*

Assessing the similarity between the two poems, one sees slight rhetorical differences that perhaps help to alleviate the concern that Derozio's attempt to claim a kind of bardic nationalism might be premature. Where Moore's disavowal of his status as bard-presumptive is framed in the past tense ("I was but as the wind"), Derozio's is anticipatory—proleptic. The national song, in his version, is yet to be sung.

A final example offers a slightly different resonance on the subversive possibilities of Derozio's engagement with English Romanticism. This is in Derozio's poem "Freedom to the Slave," which contains an epigraph from Thomas Campbell's "Pleasures of Hope" (1799). Campbell's poem is a celebration of Enlightenment optimism about human nature and progress, including a clear ambition to free enslaved peoples around the world. Here is a portion of Campbell's poem:

Come, bright Improvement! on the car of Time,
And rule the spacious world from clime to clime:
Thy handmaid arts shall every wild explore,

Trace every wave, and culture every shore.
On Erie's banks, where tygers steal along,
And the dread Indian chaunts a dismal song,
Where human fiends on midnight errands walk,
And bathe in brains the murd'rous tomahawk;
There shall the flocks on thymy pasture stray,
And shepherds dance at Summer's op'ning day,
Each wand'ring genius of the lonely glen
Shall start to view the glittering haunts of men;
And silence watch, on woodland heights around,
The village curfew as it tolls profound.
In Libyan groves, where damned rites are done,
That bathe the rocks in blood, and veil the sun,
Truth shall arrest the murd'rous arm profane;
Wild Obi flies—the veil is rent in twain.
Where barb'rous hordes on Scythian mountains roam,
Truth, Mercy, Freedom, yet shall find a home;
Where'er degraded Nature bleeds and pines,
From Guinea's coast to Sibir's dreary mines,
Truth shall pervade th' unfathom'd darkness there,
And light the dreadful features of despair:—
Hark! the stern captive spurns his heavy load,
And asks the image back that Heav'n bestow'd.
Fierce in his eye the fire of valour burns,
And, as the slave departs, the man returns!
(Thomas Campbell, "The Pleasures of Hope")[19]

Here, we see Campbell enumerating many sites around the world where an Enlightenment-driven concept of personal liberty has not yet found a place. These are mostly spaces where various cultural others exist—the "Dread Indian" on the banks of the Erie River, who threatens with "murd'rous tomahawk"; Libyans who engage in "damned rites"; "barbarous hordes" of Scythians in western Asia. All of these societies have yet to be penetrated by the light of "Truth," though Campbell's expectation is that they will be: "Truth shall pervade th' unfathom'd darkness there." With that move towards Enlightenment comes the reassertion of fundamental human rights. Notably, Campbell nowhere mentions the transatlantic slave trade, or the denial of liberty that followed British colonial subjugation in Asia, or the Western Hemisphere. The "slavery" he depicts is entirely one perpetrated by unenlightened black and brown cultural others: not by subjects of the Enlightenment themselves: western colonists, traders, and plantation owners. Reading 200 years later, the omission seems like a blind spot: a 21st-century reader encountering the word "slavery" cannot help but think of that compromising legacy.

Derozio's response to Campbell does not entirely rectify this, though it does leave open the possibility of an anti-colonial reading in line with other anti-colonial

gestures we have seen earlier. The line Derozio will borrow and deploy to set his own poem in motion is the final one in the excerpt from Campbell quoted earlier: "And as the slave departs, the man returns!" Here then is Derozio's "Freedom to the Slave":

How felt he when he first was told
A slave he ceased to be;
How proudly beat his heart, when first
He knew that he was free!—–
The noblest feelings of the soul
To glow at once began;
He knelt no more; his thoughts were raised;
He felt himself a man.
He looked above—the breath of heaven
Around him freshly blew;
He smiled exultingly to see
The wild birds as they flew,
He looked upon the running stream
That 'neath him rolled away;
Then thought on winds, and birds, and floods,
And cried, "I'm free as they!"
Oh Freedom! there is something dear
E'en in thy very name,
That lights the altar of the soul
With everlasting flame.
Success attend the patriot sword,
That is unsheathed for thee!
And glory to the breast that bleeds,
Bleeds nobly to be free!
Blest be the generous hand that breaks
The chain a tyrant gave,
And, feeling for degraded man,
Gives freedom to the slave.[20]

Derozio's poem echoes many of the core themes and ideas of Campbell's famous poem, including the passionate belief in personal liberty. However, Derozio's poem is curiously devoid of reference to specific geographic or political frameworks in which enslavement is enacted. The Libyans, Obi-worshippers, and "murderous tomahawks" are all missing, and instead the poet engages in a reflection on the experience of freedom that is as at once much more abstract and much more personal. What Derozio is describing is the slave's personal experience of *discovering* freedom after having been denied it: "Then thought on winds, and birds, and floods,/And cried, 'I'm free as they!'" Is it possible Derozio, writing with a strong identification as an Indian, might be understanding his own status as a "brown" poet

as producing the experience of unfreedom he describes here? In other words, does his response to Campbell contain a critique of the racialized capitalism embedded in the colonial project?

Conclusion: Next Steps

As indicated earlier, the South Asian digital humanities community has made some very impressive strides in the past five years alone, but there is much more that could be done. With respect to Derozio in particular, there are apparent questions that could be explored in further work, possibly in collaboration with other scholars. First, in the poems discussed earlier, we have here marked particularly important keywords where Derozio borrows language directly from British and Irish poets. Would it be possible to use natural language processing to find a quantitative way of measuring the influence of one poet on another? A similarity index—or better yet, an Influence Index—not so unlike what Plagiarism detection tools use? The goal of course is not to diminish a poet who borrows as Derozio does, but rather to indicate the broad prevalence of this practice in literary history. Second, just as Derozio was influenced by British and Irish poets, he also left quite a legacy in Calcutta in the years following his death, with the rise of the Young Bengal Movement, which featured a formidable group of intellectuals and writers, most of whom published on social and historical topics (Peary Chand Mitter did publish at least one novel). Is there a hidden line of influence between Derozio and subsequent Indian English poetry? Third, how and where is Derozio being taught? Earlier it was argued that Derozio is not being widely taught in the U.K. or the U.S. It appears that he is taught more often in India; one gathers that he continues to be celebrated at Presidency University in particular. But how widely is he being taught? Can that presence be quantified—perhaps by doing a version of the Open Syllabus project that would focus on South Asian writers taught within South Asian universities? To what extent have English departments at Indian universities effectively moved to decentre the English Canon, specifically with reference to early Indian writing in English and the shape and scope of the British Romantic tradition?

Beyond Derozio, one returns again and again to the Archive Gap mentioned at the start; rectifying it will be a broad and collective effort. In addition to simply building out useable digital collections that are accessible to a broad range of readers, there's considerable work to be done with respect to quantitative text analysis. A collection like the Literature of Colonial South Asia corpus could be a start in moving in that direction, but much remains to be done.

Notes

1 See https://scalar.lehigh.edu/derozio/
2 Singh, Amardeep. "Beyond the Archive Gap: the Kiplings and the Famines of British India." *South Asian Review* 40.3 (2019): 237–252.

3 Roopika Risam, New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory and Praxis. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2019, p. 16.
4 Http://https://livingstoneonline.org/; http://onemorevoice.org;
5 http://bichitra.jdvu.ac.in/index.php
6 www.electrostani.com/2020/08/text-corpus-colonial-south-asian.html
7 https://scalar.lehigh.edu/kiplings/
8 See https://bigger6romantix.squarespace.com/
9 http://opensyllabus.org
10 See for instance Derozio's poem, "Greece" along these lines: https://scalar.lehigh.edu/derozio/greece-1?path=poems-1827
11 https://scalar.me/anvc/
12 https://scalar.lehigh.edu/derozio/intertexts-english-romanticism
13 https://scalar.lehigh.edu/derozio/south-asian-locales
14 https://scalar.lehigh.edu/derozio/resource-for-teachers
15 Text of poem accessed online here: https://genius.com/Lord-byron-the-bride-of-abydos-annotated
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