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Emerson's Indian Awakening and Religious Dissent: Thomas Moore's "Veiled Prophet of Khorassan" in Emerson's Early Writing and the Divinity School Address

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ABSTRACT

Emerson's polemical 1838 Harvard Divinity School Address urged clergyman to break from Christianity's doctrinal errors—specifically Unitarian dependence on miracles and its "noxious" representation of Jesus. He believed Indian monism could help restore etiolated Christianity to its former status as a pure "doctrine of the soul" (Emerson and Atkinson 68). Emerson's mature studies of India's spiritual works are widely acknowledged to have influenced his approach to self-realization and concepts of monism. Researchers have also noted his youthful enjoyment and subsequent disdain of Romantic Orientalism; however, the links between *Lalla Rookh*, the Oriental fantasy by Sir Thomas Moore, the Irish Romanticist, and Emerson's early religious dissent remain unexplored. Emerson was a fourteen-year-old Harvard freshman in 1817 when he read extensive reviews of the popular work published in the same year. He references *Rookh* at significant junctures in his journals and discourses. This paper explores the connections between *Rookh*'s first frame narrative, "The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan" (*VP*), which offered an early critique of religious myopia, and Emerson's opposition to Unitarian doctrine. I examine the historiography of the New Englander's initial intellectual engagement with Indian spirituality through *VP*. Thereafter, I briefly analyze the intersection of *VP*'s religious themes with Emerson's inaugural essays, *Nature* and "The American Scholar." My conclusion details the intriguing conceptual and oratorical

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parallels between Mokanna's critique of religious dogma and Emerson's dissent in the Divinity Address. By arguing that Christians would do well to understand Indian monism, Emerson set the stage for critical spirituality in American Transcendentalism.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Moore, Emerson, Divinity School Address, Lalla Rookh, India, religious dissent, monism, Orientalism, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism.

I. Introduction

A group of seven graduating students at Harvard's Divinity School invited Emerson, then thirty-five, to speak following his acclaimed 1836 publication *Nature* and 1837 lecture "The American Scholar" at Harvard College. They were not prepared for what followed on July 15, 1838, when the ex-Unitarian minister delivered his inflammatory Harvard Divinity School Address. Emerson exhorted the future churchmen to free themselves from "the base doctrine of the majority" because "historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion." (Emerson and Atkinson 67). His transcendental "doctrine of the soul" polarized Harvard theologians with what contemporary scholars consider a synthesis of Christian, Vedic, Tantra-Yogic and Neo-Platonic ideas (68). Emerson argued authentic Christian worship meant (re)turning to an intensely personal relationship between the self and the divine. Unitarians would benefit from seeking inspiration through Indo-Greek spiritual praxes focused on *mokṣa*[1] (spiritual liberation) and the Platonic Good rather than depending on miracles and distorted views of Jesus. Emerson's "objectionable polemic" and criticism of Unitarian doctrine riled New England clergyman and Harvard "officers," who responded by refusing to let him speak at his alma mater for almost three decades (60). The ban proved useless; he spoke widely, including at the opening of the Chinese embassy in 1868 (Emerson, *JMN* 13: 20). His eclectic studies of Indian, Chinese, Greek, Middle Eastern, and Continental thought coalesced into a corpus of essays, poems, letters, journals, and notebooks that established New England Transcendentalism as part of America's seminal foray into comparative spirituality.

Emersonian scholars have long acknowledged that his East-West philosophical synthesis arose from highly diverse sources, making it difficult to establish a terminus a quo for Emerson's intellectual and spiritual relationship with India. Much of the existing scholarship on the history of Emerson's thought recognizes that his mature reading of translated Indian texts shaped his theology and the spiritual trajectory of American Transcendentalists like Henry David Thoreau. Commentators have also observed that the biases of his early Indological efforts paralleled his fascination with Romantic Orientalism. Nevertheless, as more translations of Indian texts arrived in New

[1] Sanskrit translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

England, Emerson gradually corrected the prejudices of his 1821 poem, "Indian Superstition." And while modern Indologists could argue that his mature cultural representations of Asia still reflect Saidean Orientalism, the nuanced cross-disciplinary appraisals of India's Brahmanical and Tantric philosophy[2] recorded in his journals (often from poorly translated or incomplete texts) made Emerson the progenitor of New England Transcendentalism. His comparative insights also made Emerson America's first Yankee *ācārya*—a guide to India's spiritual praxes. This spiritual wisdom has justifiably been associated with the strands of Platonism, Continental Idealism, and Indian mysticism linking the ancient and old world to New England. John Michael Corrigan's *American Metempsychosis: Emerson, Whitman, and the New Poet* persuasively analyzes Emerson's Americanization of Western and Indian mysticism. Corrigan argues the Bostonian "largely studied Hinduism through the lens of English and Continental Idealism," before merging ancient contemplative praxes into an "evolving metaphysical order" (17).

Despite the broad extant scholarship, we have yet to trace the textual connections between Emerson's mature dissent against Unitarian doctrine and his introduction to alternative Indian religions vis-à-vis the popular Romantic fiction of his youth. I offer the preliminary observation that Romantic Oriental fantasies, rather than original Indian texts, were most likely Emerson's first introduction to Krishna's teachings in the *Bhagavad Gitā* on *bhakti* (transcendent devotionalism) and *Brahma* (infinite consciousness/Aseity). I further suggest that the presence of India's spiritual praxis of devotion and concept of an infinite consciousness in the Divinity Address can be partially attributed to Emerson's youthful encounters with religious dissent in Romantic works. This reading helps fill in some of the gaps in our present understanding of the earliest Eastern literary influences on Emerson's break with Unitarianism.

By closely reading the Irish Romanticist Sir Thomas Moore's hugely popular Oriental Romance *Lalla Rookh*, I demonstrate that its secondary themes of religious and political struggle in the Indian continent resonated with the young Emerson's nascent doubts about his own religious beliefs and eventual dissent against Unitarian dogma. *Rookh* encoded revolutionary religious messages wrapped in an Eastern setting which seeded his imagination with

[2] Modern Indologists and Indian philosophers are increasingly viewing Vedānta and Tantra-Yoga as ancient parallel traditions that borrowed from each other; the latter focused on meditation and the former ritual (Sarkar 146). See Sarkar's "Tantra and Indo-Aryan Civilization" (Sarkar, P. R. *Discourses on Tantra Volume One.* Ananda Marga Publications, 1993).

unorthodox spiritual ideas, preparing him to accept and then adapt India's religious plurality and monistic ideology for his Unitarian audience. This previously unexplored impact is most apparent in *Rookh*'s oratorical criticism of blind belief. Academics consider Emerson's rejection of the Unitarian doctrine of miracles in the Divinity Address a major turning point in his religious career that has been retrospectively attributed to his reading of Indo-Greek philosophy. But most of Emerson's deepest engagement with Indian thought occurred post the Divinity Address, making the Indian influences somewhat anachronistic. Arthur Versluis notes that Emerson began to seriously read "Oriental Scriptures" after 1841 and by 1861 "vast sections" of his journals contained transcriptions of "Oriental texts" (58, 66). Still, in 1824, despite certain doubts about Christian theology, "Emerson remained very much as Christian with a passing interest in the Orient" (54). Versluis argues between 1823 and 1830 he demonstrated "little evidence of an interest in Hinduism or Buddhism," although by 1836 and the publication of "Nature" there is a progression from "Neoplatonic text towards more and more Oriental works" (63). As interest in sources remains a major theme in Emersonian scholarship, it is worthwhile to examine his youthful studies, which may yet shed light on Emerson's engagement with critical spirituality. Emerson encountered *Rookh*'s religious dissent set in India almost two decades before the Divinity lecture, and it is the novel's language that permeates his most polemical critique of Unitarian belief in miracles and Jesus. By closely attending to his reading of *Rookh*, with its theme of religious rebellion, it is possible to expose the Romantic work's surprising presence in Emerson's public rebellion and his subsequent appreciation of Indian philosophy.

A few researchers examining Emerson's relationship with the East have footnoted his reading of *Rookh*, published in May, 1817. *Rookh*, as Emerson's early, if not first, intellectual contact with India did more than entertain him: it stimulated him to explore religiosity first in the exotic haven of the East and then at home. His eclectic readings make any argument for a single, monolithic influence on his awakening to critical spirituality[3] undesirable (hence the extensive scholarship exploring his historical sources), yet it is noteworthy that *Rookh* was published in the same year that the fourteen-year-old entered Harvard. We do not know how many times he first read *Rookh*; the freshman

[3] Marcus Bussey explains that "critical spirituality fosters the identification of self with the world, the collective and the cosmic good" (43).

encountered Francis Jeffrey's thirty-five-page review and extracts in the *Edinburgh Review*, before borrowing the book twice over twelve months. And *Rookh* echoes in his journals at significant points. As will be discussed later, he explicitly references Mokanna, the titular villain of *Rookh*'s first frame narrative, "The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan" (*VP*) before starting theological studies at Harvard. More importantly, the Divinity Address thematically and oratorically parallels Mokanna's scorn for the blind belief of his Muslim followers. Indeed, Emerson (in)directly borrows Mokanna's language and arguments while exhorting his audience of future New England clergyman to revile Unitarian interpretations of biblical miracles and to embrace Eastern spirituality.

Parsing Emerson's oeuvre for the threads of his youthful and mature reading of Indian and Western texts is deeply challenging. All of his sixteen published journals (about four million four hundred thousand words), six volumes of letters, notebooks and numerous essays borrow from countless works of fiction and nonfiction that are not easily cross-referenced.[4] Barbara Packer notes that the mature Transcendentalists often spoke "slightingly of fiction," yet the young Emerson keenly read "tales, novels, and poetic romances" (86). He famously encouraged American writers to establish their own national literary voice—although the anxieties of Romantic influence seem to have bothered him less in his old age. Russell B. Goodman states prevailing academic opinion sees Emerson welding "American philosophy" and "European Romanticism" (34). In his early twenties, he imitated influential critics, such as Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh Review*, who frequently criticized the content if not the style of popular Romantic works. For example, on 29 June, 1819, Emerson observes the "criticks" of the *Edinburgh Review* have put the "Lake Poets" under their "lash" and that "Lord Byron, Scott, Moore, & Wordsworth" are the founders of schools as "distinct" as the "Indian castes" (Emerson, *JMN* 1: 165). Yet the condescension of his 1824 journal entry, "Let Moore the laureate bard of lust & wine Write devil-melodies & songs for swine," is reversed fifteen years later in a journal section labeled "Idealism and Aristocracy" (*JMN* 2: 400). Set down a year after the Divinity Address, we read this intriguing message: "Moore's *Lalla Rookh* was some of my best *travelling*" (*JMN* 7: 257). Even though Emerson never visited India, he carefully italicized *travelling*. *Rookh* set the young scholar on an Eastern trajectory that would

[4] I incorporated digital mining via optical character recognition to enable a wider analysis for this essay.

introduce him to serious Indic texts. Moore's descriptions of Asia and Mokanna's invective against blind belief became something of a palimpsest during Emerson's formative intellectual years. Emerson's adult borrowing of *Rookh* suggests that it was more than a Romantic topography of the East; it was one of the catalysts that expanded his religious worldview, ultimately allowing "America's first Romantic philosopher" to demand "freedom from [Western] tradition" and Unitarian "institutions of the past" (Goodman 35).

As a former Unitarian minister condemning Christian doctrine, Emerson made his Divinity Address an instant controversy. D. Elton Trueblood points out that the "leading newspapers" raised an "outcry against Emerson's teachings as expressed in the Address" (41). In closing this introduction, it is worth recognizing that Emerson's mature appreciation of Krishna's exegesis of devotional worship (*bhakti*), which instructed spiritual seekers to find Aseity (God) within, would have been improbable without his criticism of Unitarian practices. His philosophy of independence and self-reliance—something he deemed a renaissance of authentic Christianity—was partially a subconscious reflection of Mokanna's scorn of unthinking religiosity. Here I add the caveat that *VP* was one of many texts about or situated in the East, so this examination considers *VP* as part of a broader Romantic and exploratory milieu which oriented the Bostonian towards critical engagement with religious dissent and Eastern spirituality. The comparative approach used in this paper indicates that *Rookh* played a larger role in Emerson's initial Orientalism[5] than has been recognized by revealing its presence in his seminal discourses. As such, I first investigate Emerson's formative intellectual encounters with India via *Rookh* and other Western texts. I then briefly consider *VP*'s shared spiritual ground with Emerson's inaugural works *Nature* and "The American Scholar" (1836-1837). Finally, I detail the conceptual parallels between Mokanna's critique of Islam and Emerson's confrontation of Unitarian dogma in the Divinity Address (1838) that leads him to include Indian monism in his spiritual worldview.

[5] Despite *Rookh*'s obvious European biases (Indological studies were in their infancy), Moore extensively researched Indic texts under the patronage of the British Governor-General of India in 1812.

II. Indian Thought in New England

Eighty-five years of scholarship demonstrate Indian, Persian, and Chinese influences on Emerson's mature transcendental thought, with three major works: Frederic Ives Carpenter's *Emerson and Asia* in 1930, Arthur Christy's 1932 work *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, and Arthur Versluis's *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*. Versluis's highly influential work mapped Transcendentalism as a religious and literary phenomenon deeply concerned with Asian spirituality and religious texts (4). Thereafter, a few articles and dissertations, particularly by Indian scholars, examined Emerson's interest in Asia.[6]

Emerson's childhood environment makes it highly unlikely that *Rookh* was the first he heard of India. Although eight when his father, the Rev. William Emerson, died, Goodman notes William founded the "Anthology Club in 1804," and its members frequently discussed "Indian themes" at Emerson's childhood home. William also edited the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* while reviewing works authored by Indologists. As early as 1795, Sir William Jones, the president of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (who unbeknown to the Massachusetts electors had died nine months earlier) was enthusiastically elected to the Massachusetts Historical Society because its members wanted to get an Indological perspective on their theological debates (Goodman 13). William joined the Society in 1799, hoping that comparative "oriental studies" might freshly illuminate the "Hebrew Scriptures," or explain why Indian texts, seemingly much older than Hebrew works, had no reference to the Great Flood (14). At home, Emerson likely heard some of these discussions, but how much stuck with him is unknown. However, given the multidisciplinary trajectory of his writing career, these childhood influences left an imprint that was reawakened when books about India began trickling into New England during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Cameron notes that 1805 marked the printing of the first act of Jones's "translation" of Calidasa's *Sakuntala*, probably the "first Hindu work" published in America (14). By the time Emerson was eight, Charles Wilkins' first English translation of *The Bhagvat Geeta*, *or Dialogues of Kreeshna and*

[6] Laksmi Kasturi's 2002 dissertation, *India's Contribution to East and West Spiritual Emerson and Vedic Literature*, explores the Vedic elements in Emerson's thought but mostly ignores textual chronology.

Arjoon had been in print for over two decades. Richard Davis' superb 2015 biography of the *Bhagavad Gitā* says Wilkins' was the first "work of classical Sanskrit" in English that opened a flood of other Indian texts—many of which Emerson encountered decades later (76). At Harvard, Emerson began reading Indological articles edited by his father in the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, such as M. M. Clifford's 1804 "Asia, an Elegy." He also "faithfully" reviewed "current and early volumes of the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*," which collectively contained almost "twenty articles on India" and a corpus of "Eastern law" (Cameron 16). In the preface to the first volume of his father's *Monthly Anthology*, the editors (presumably William) set themselves a mandate to navigate liberality while avoiding becoming "rash innovators of the present age" and "heretick in religion" (Thacher et al. iv). Perhaps, then, the accusations of heresy directed at Emerson's Divinity Address stem indirectly from the son's adherence to his father's methodology that was outlined in the first volume of the *Monthly Anthology*: "As his very liberal education will peculiarly fit him for the task, he shall read and review the most important literary productions of our country, and candidly give his opinion of their worth" (Thacher iii). Unfortunately, Emerson's early opinions about Indian customs were infrangibly flawed by their ethnocentric sources. For instance, an excerpt on marriage customs from the 1808 *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* reads, "Girls with too little or too much hair; who are too talkative, who have bad eyes, a disagreeable name, or any kind of sickness, who have no brother, or whose father is not well known, are all with many others excluded . . ." (Thacher 497). Despite similar marriage prescriptions being prevalent in the West, the description does not address the value Indian society gave to family ties and religious piety in potential mates for their children. Early Indological works were simply rife with Western misrepresentations, anthropological distortions, and other historical errors, while the authors and poets who relied on these accounts frequently exacerbated these flaws for their Western audiences.

In his preface to later editions of *Rookh*, Moore devoted several pages to lauding his purportedly veridical cultural depictions of India that numerous "distinguish[ed] authorities on Eastern subjects" had praised (*Rookh* 14). Modern Indologists would balk at the claims made by Moore's contemporaries that *Rookh* contained "the truth of the historian." Moore, "in justice" to his "own industry," noted "the pains [he] took in long and laboriously *reading* for

it" that he believed gave him greater familiarity with Asia than "any of those countries lying most within my reach" (*Rookh* 14). We should not be surprised that such Western conceits influenced the younger Emerson, and, in time, he would set aside his superficial preliminary observations of India that initially earned him academic recognition and financial rewards at Harvard.

Steven Adisasmito-Smith, quoting Cameron, notes the boy "read an amount of Orientalia that was unusual for a student of Harvard at the time" while "indulg[ing] in youthful fantasies about the Oriente" (135). A clearer picture of Emerson's contact with India emerges between 1817 and 1821 through "Indian Superstition," a poem he presented at the Harvard College Exhibition of April 24, 1821. This previously lost poem's recovery provides evidence of his "earliest reading in East India and lore," because "Ralph was only seventeen when he completed his poem," which was subsequently awarded a "ten-dollar faculty award" (Cameron vii, viii). The boy's curiosity about Asia likely increased after discovering the extensive Bibliographical Notices of the Harvard College Library published in volume five of the 1808 *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*. There is reference to a bequeath of "3000 volumes in various languages" from the estate of the deceased attorney, Thomas Hollis (82).[7] It records that books about Asia were becoming extremely valuable to employees in the "East India Factory" who purchased every available copy, so that works originally priced at a single shilling would later go for a thousand times markup of fifty guineas or more. The piece's closing advice to "youth, who are fond of Oriental literature" is to seek out, amongst others, "*the Asiatick Miscellany* . . . *the Institutes of Menu*, and, above all, the works of Sir William Jones" (Thacher 88). Emerson took this advice to heart: one of the first complete Hindu texts he read was the 1794 translation of the *Laws of Manu* which he quoted twice in 1821: "as long ago as Menu enlightened morality was taught in India" (*JMN* 1: 340). This is probably secondary material from the footnotes of the *Curse of Kehama*, which he referenced in connection with his "Bowdoin Prize dissertation on The Character of Socrates" ("Indian Superstition" 20).

Mary Moody Emerson, Emerson's paternal aunt, was also keenly interested in Hindu thought. Phyllis Cole argues Mary made significant contributions to her "idolized" young nephew (257). Cole references two letters Mary wrote to Emerson in 1822 after she met Rammohun Roy, who had

[7] Harvard's online resource system HOLLIS commemorates his contributions.

uncovered similarities between the "Vedas and Western Unitarianism" that received attention from Boston newspapers. Emerson replied that he was "curious to read your Hindu mythologies," although his poem "Indian Superstition" from the previous year showed he had "dabbled in the subject" (Emerson et al. 169). Cole also proposes that the pair discovered an "early interest in Brahmin wisdom" after reading Sir William Jones's translation of the "Hymn to Narayana," which planted the "early seeds of Orientalism" (169). Three months after his aunt's letter, on July 6, 1822, Emerson quoted the "Hymn to Narayena" from the *Works of Sir William Jones* in a journal section labeled "Idealism." According to the *JMN* editors, his aunt gave him the poem (*JMN* 1: 154), but Cameron rightly points out that two years earlier in March, 1820, Emerson had studied "volume one of the *Asiatick Miscellany*," which included Jones's poem (17).

Cole's otherwise fine-grained analysis of Mary's role in introducing Emerson to Indian texts errs in one regard: the poem was not, as the Emersons believed, a translation by Jones. Rather, Jones composed it himself in 1785 and published it in the first issue of the *Asiatick Miscellany*. I suggest his "Hymn to Narayena" took its name from the well-known Sanskrit mantra, *Om Namo Narayana* (salutations to Lord Vishnu), found in the *Tarasaropanishad*. The poem idealized Tantra-Yoga's contemplative devotionalism and monism, evident in the stanza Mary appended in her letter:

> My soul absorbed, only one Being knows,
> of all perceptions, one abundant source.
> Hence every object, every moment flows,
> Suns hence derive their force,
> Hence planets learn their course,
> But suns and fading worlds I view no more,
> —God only I perceive, God only I adore! (Cole 169)

These lines evoke the experience of singularity in *samādhi* as a state of spiritual unity between meditators and their object of meditation. Thus, Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gitā*, "*na tv evā ' haṁ jātu nā ' 'saṁ na tvaṁ ne*"; there has never been a time when I was not, nor you [were I] (Radhakrishnan 103). Both Emerson's 1841 "The Over-Soul" and 1856 "Brahma" echo these texts. "The Over-Soul" reads, "but the act of seeing and the things seen, the seer and

the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one." Similarly, "Brahma" reads, "I am the doubter and the doubt / and I the hymn the Brahmin sings" (Emerson and Atkinson 237, 732). Jones's two lines "My soul absorbed, only one Being knows" and "God only I perceive, God only I adore!" surely inspired Emerson's essay, *Nature*. The essay describes how nature mediates Emerson's devotion to the divine in a relational praxis between infinity and ipseity. "Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God" (Emerson and Atkinson 6). These admittedly brief comparisons indicate that Emerson's mature discourses on self-realization owe a debt to his youthful engagement with Western works on Indian spirituality. References like these are too numerous for my purposes, and we now turn to Emerson's first contact with India through *Rookh*.

I have pointed out that Emerson's first encounters with reviews of *Rookh* occurred in late 1817 or early 1818, when he was fourteen or fifteen. While *VP*'s appraisal of religious tyranny is apparent to modern scholars, Jeffrey's study in the *Edinburgh Review* entirely ignored this theme. The first page of his extensive thirty-five page review begins, "a great deal of our recent poetry derive[s] from the East: but this is the finest Orientalism we have had yet." We are informed of Moore's genius for his "colouring and imagery" and evocative description of "India, Persia, and Arabia" that demonstrate the poet's "entire familiarity with the life, nature, and learning of the East" (2). This praise may be mostly misplaced in the modern context, yet this should not diminish Moore's six years of intensive research under the patronage of Lord Moira, who was appointed the "governor-general of India" in 1813 (Cavaliero 151). Versluis has addressed "the enormously popular *Lalla Rookh*" as evidence of the old world's fascination with Orientalism, and Moore's debt to the aforementioned William Jones, who introduced "variant spellings of Kamadeva, the heaven of Indra, Rama, Krishna" and other figures (30). Versluis states that between 1823 and 1830, Emerson expressed little overt interest in Hinduism and Buddhism, but he harbored "doubts" about "various aspects of Christian theology." Nevertheless, "the young Emerson remained very much as Christian with a passing interest in the Orient" (54). Barbara Packer notes he was sixteen or seventeen when he "compiled a dictionary of poetic lines" filled with Byron and other famous poets—including several lines from *Rookh*. The latter work,

perhaps more than any other of the Romantic texts he read as a youth, "widened" his "perspective," allowing him "to indulge in emotions" his "own culture could neither sanction nor tolerate" (89).

Emerson first read *Rookh* at a time when his immaturity and lack of experience precluded any overt doubts about his own faith. In this regard, an incorrectly quoted line from *Rookh* in his journal gives us some indication of when his religious curiosity began to take shape. I confirmed this was Emerson's mistake by accessing the original manuscript housed in the special collections of Harvard's Houghton Library.[8] January 1820 is the only date in XVII of *JMN* volume 1, but the original manuscript reveals how closely Emerson's questions about God and ritual are followed by a quote from *Rookh*. His notes on Socrates, which helped him win the "Bowdoin Prize Essay competition," (206) record that the "ostentatious rituals of (Egypt &) India which worshiped God by outraging nature softened as they proceeded West were too harsh a discipline for Athenian manners to undergo—Socrates had little to do with these & perhaps his information on the subject was very limited" (*JMN* 1: 210). A few notes further, he draws on Plato to question the nature of God, sixteen years before the Divinity Address: "What is God? said the disciples & Plato replied it is hard to learn & impossible to divulge" (213). Emerson's misquote of *VP* follows immediately from his observations about India, antinomian worship, and God: "Built the high-pillared *walls* of Chilminar. Moore *Lalla Rookh*, III, 6." Page sixteen of the *Edinburgh Review* contains the line "Built the high pillar'd *halls* of CHILMINAR [sic]." Emerson either misspelled or misremembered *halls* for *walls* as it appears in *VP*. The editors of Emerson's journals believe he discovered the line in volume 29 of the *Edinburgh Review* or directly from *Rookh*, which he withdrew from the "Boston Library Society" on May 10, 1819 and July 1, 1820. Maybe the mistake stemmed from his first reading of the *Edinburgh Review* or *North American Review* at the end of 1817. We do know that he read *Rookh* twice in the space of fourteen months, and why this particular line interested him might be attributable to Moore's endnote. "The edifices of Chilminar[9] and Balbee are supposed to have been built by the Genii, acting under the orders of Jan ben Jan, who governed the world long before the time of Adam" (*Rookh* 249). Perhaps

[8] See *R. W. E Journals and Notebooks, 1820-1880* (MS AM 1280H) in the Houghton Library Special Collections.

[9] Persepolis, capital of the Archaemenid Empire 550-330 BC.

Emerson was dabbling in non-biblical religious histories, partially motivated by his father's similar interest in alternative accounts of creation. These uncertainties aside, I believe the young Harvard scholar read all of *Rookh*'s extensive endnotes. The narrative and Moore's research notes introduced him to the *Bhagavad Gitā*, Krishna, *Brahma,* and religious dissent in an Oriental Romance that Emerson continued to quote in his old age. For the young Emerson, the thrill of reading about Mokanna's revolt against religious traditions prepared his mind to confront hard questions about religious belief and spiritual practice.

III. Mokanna's Religious Revolution and Emerson's Dissent

Commentators have mostly focused on *Rookh*'s revolutionary political themes, yet Moore's narrative is layered with criticisms of faith that Emerson tracked in his Divinity Address. J. C. M. Nolan's "In search of an island in the Orient: Tom Moore's *Lalla Rookh*" notes that recent scholarshi p has attended to how Moore encoded Ireland's "political and cultural contexts" in *Rookh* (81). The Romantic poet was personally familiar with the devastating consequences of "flirting with revolutionary" thought: his close relationship with the Irish revolutionaries Robert Emmet and Edward Hudson in Trinity college ended after one was exiled and the other "hung," following the "radical rebellion in 1798" (Dabundo 383). My research indicates that only Mohammed Sharafuddin touched on the idea that Moore's ideas of "freedom of worship" evolved from "Oriental material" that allowed him to articulate "increasingly complex ideas" about Catholicism (134). While Moore deliberately politicized *Rookh*, *VP*'s subtext addresses the dangers of religious doctrine. It should not be missed that his literary subversion of the dominant religious ideology was not without risk. Moore would later outrage "orthodox Christians" for incorporating Christian themes in his 1822 poem "*The Love of the Angels*," compelling him to "change the angels to Muslims" who fell in love with mortal women (Dabundo 384). This redirection did not mollify all the critics. A review in the 1823 edition of the *North American Review* commences, "In some of his political pieces, there are, mingled with much nonsense and weakness, sarcasms of intense severity, which prove his power to be almost equal to his malice" (353). The reviewer continues that *Rookh* has "absolutely nothing that should keep it out of a decent parlor," but "*The Love of the Angels*" is polluted by the

sensual tendency of his [Moore's] imagination," which stains the subject by uniting "the holiest of created existences with the holiest of passions." In short, the work was a "profanation" unfit for good Christian consumption (354). Moore's status as a Catholic was not questioned, in much the way Emerson remained a Christian (despite criticisms), yet Moore was not above questioning the chastity of sacred angels in a way that discomfited mainstream Christian sensibilities. In *VP*, Mokanna directs his invective against Islamic orthodoxy, but Moore's aborted Christian theme in "*The Love of the Angels*" proves his own religion was not immune to a transgressive interpretation. Nevertheless, Moore understood that his audience could only stomach profanation in an Eastern setting.

Moore began to write *Rookh* following advice from Byron in 1813: "Stick to the East . . . the public are Orientalizing, and pave the path for you" (Leask 137). He strongly desired that his fantasy would be socially relevant, noting the delay in its writing came from a lack of an inspiring revolutionary ideal: "Finding my subject so slow in kindling my own sympathies, I began to despair of their ever touching the hearts of others." The impasse was resolved after he recalled the "fierce struggle" between the Persian Fire-worshipers and their "haughty Moslem masters . . . . The cause of tolerance was again my inspiring theme; and the spirit that had spoken in the melodies of Ireland soon found itself at home in the East" (*Rookh* 13). For Emerson, this reactionary political and religious commentary resonated beyond its Indian setting, which had found such favor with critics.

Rookh is a love story between Lalla Rookh, the youngest daughter of Aurangzebe,[10] the most powerful Indian Mughal ruler of the time, and Aliris, the young king of Bucharia,[11] whose father, Abdalla, goes on a royal religious pilgrimage. Abdalla passes through Cashmere and rests at Delhi, where he and Aurangzebe arrange for their children's nuptials in Cashmere. Lalla's journey from Delhi is grounded by lavish descriptions of Indian dress, customs, and geography. As a devout Muslim, and the "magnificent protector of the line of Sadi," Aurangzebe dispatches Fadladeen, the "Chamberlain of the Haram," to accompany his daughter's caravan along with representatives of Aliris (*Rookh* 23). Fadladeen is the narrative's foil who "considere[s] himself not the least

[10] Moore based Aurangzebe on Muhi-ud-Din Muhammad (1618-1707), the sixth Mughal Emperor, who ruled over most of India which, at the time, had the world's strongest economy.
[11] An area to the west of Tibet.

important personage of the pageant." His Sadi politics have turned him into a "judge of everything—from the penciling of Circassian's eyelids to the deepest questions of science and literature; and such influence had his opinion upon the various taste of the day, that all the cooks and poets of Delhi stood in awe of him." His "zeal for religion" and acquiescence to authority simultaneously reveals the hypocrisy of sycophants and the Muslim rulers' demands for blind obedience: "Should the Prince at noon-day say, It is night; declare that you behold the moon and the stars." Fadladeen's farcical expression of faith—of which "Aurangzebe was a munificent protector"—may indirectly mock its highest arbiters, but Moore does not hold back in his scathing endnote that describes the historical Aurangzebe. Quoting the *History of Hindostan*, he writes that the "hypocritical Emperor would have made a worthy associate of certain Holy Leagues"[12] for "building a magnificent mosque at Delhi" while "murdering and persecuting his brothers and their families" (23, 236).

Fadladeen's acquiescence to Muslim ideology finds juxtaposition in the thoughtful Feramorz, a young Bucharian poet traveling with the convoy. Feramorz's beauty is compared with that of the Hindu/Tantric divinity, Krishna, who Emerson rediscovers in the *Bhagavad Gitā* years later.[13] The young poet is as "graceful as that idol of women, Crishna [sic], such as he appears to their young imaginations, heroic, beautiful, breathing music from his very eyes, and exalting the religion of his worshipers into love" (25). Moore's poetic description of Krishna is surprisingly insightful: P. R. Sarkar (Ánandamúrti) explains the Sanskrit "*gopa*" that describes the "cowherd[s] or milkmaid[s]" enraptured by Krishna's beauty is etymologically based on the Sanskrit root "*go*," indicating the "sense organs." The devotee who employ *bhakti* (spiritual devotion) to concentrate on cosmic consciousness "worships only Krśńa" (*Yoga Sādhanā* 194). The sound of Krishna's divine flute is an aid to their devotion, and Feramorz plays the flute to set the stage for his poems. He then offers to tell Lalla a tale about the adventures of the "Veiled Prophet of Khorassan," who "created such alarm throughout the Eastern Empire" (26). Although Fadladeen finds the poem about Mokanna and doomed lovers distasteful, Lalla, like Krishna's disciples, is captivated and gradually falls in love with Feramorz during the journey to her betrothed in Cashmere. *Rookh*

[12] Moore is likely referring to Papal state alliances in the Ottoman wars.

[13] P. R. Sarkar notes that Krishna, as a *Sadguru* (supreme spiritual teacher), desired to unify the people of India to create "a Mahabharata" (great India) (Ánandamúrti, Shrii Shrii. *Discourses on Tantra: Volume 2.* Ananda Marga Publications, 1994).

ends with the revelation that Feramorz is actually her future husband, the young king, in disguise. Fadladeen's discovery of the fact is "almost pitiable," but he swiftly recovers the "experienced courtier's" most valuable resource, "change of opinion." Recanting his previous estimation of the young king's tales as "frivolous" and "nonsensical" for their supposed dependence on the "charms of paganism" and "the merits of rebellion" (226), *Rookh*'s penultimate paragraph has Fadladeen "swearing by all the Saints of Islam that never had there existed so great a poet" as the young monarch (231). The turn of Fadladeen's initial criticism to his final praise of Feramorz's poetry, with its themes of rebellion and paganism, further accentuates the myopia of Islamic authorities, while reifying religious freedom and tolerance.

The foregoing summary suggests that *Rookh* contrasts serious and satirical characters to problematize how religious authority is acquired and abused vis-à-vis demands for unquestioning obedience. Fadladeen has attained his status through a fanatical obedience to Muslim rulers and their precepts. Mokanna also uses religious rhetoric to blind his followers into absolute devotion: "There on that throne, to which the blind belief / Of millions rais'd him, sat the Prophet-Chief, / The Great MOKANNA" (27). In contrast, *Rookh* has genuine authority appear in the humble guise of a poet (perhaps Moore is being self-referential). Nevertheless, Feramoz's role as a simple entertainer is deliberately undermined by his comparison with Krishna, the omniscient avatar of *Brahma* disguised as Arjuna's charioteer in the *Bhagavad Gitā*, and his poems carry greater weight once his role as king is unveiled. *Rookh*'s plot reversals lead perceptive readers to question the sources of authority and how (non)secular truth is presented. The provocative theme of religious dissent embedded in the narrative clearly affected Emerson who, as will be discussed, compares Mokanna's religious duplicity and criticism of unthinking religiosity to his personal religious and collective fears about Christianity. Mokanna hates God for hideously disfiguring his face and seeks revenge by pretending to represent the divine to manipulate the unquestioning religious beliefs of his followers. He goads them into a religious frenzy, intending to orchestrate a catastrophic war across India that will destroy God's most cherished creation, humankind. Mokanna's rebellion against God's will makes him *VP*'s villain, yet this revolt allows Moore to implicitly present the dangers of dogma, which Emerson directly approaches in his Divinity Address. However, twelve years before Emerson

takes these concerns public, he uses Mokanna as a symbol for his fears about his future as a theologian and clergyman.

The comparison is readily discerned by our first introduction to Mokanna: "O'er his features hung / The Veil, the Silver Veil, which he had flung / In mercy there, to hide from mortal sight / His dazzling brow, till men could bear its light" (27). The introduction closes, "With turba'd heads of every hue and race, / Bowing before that veil'd and awful face . . . . *What dazzling mimicry of God's own power* / Hath the bold prophet plann'd to grace this hour?" (29; emphasis added). While Mokanna's silver veil and pretense at holiness disguise his physical and emotional disfigurement, Emerson borrows Mokanna's veil to symbolize his doubts regarding his own spiritual fortitude and suitability as a clergyman. On Sunday, April 18, 1824, just prior to beginning his studies at Harvard Divinity School, where he intended to "deliberately dedicate his time, talents and hopes to the church," he records misgivings about his ambition in the ministry and Christian theology. The latter, he records, is "a debateable [sic] Ground" which are the "fruit of a sort of moral imagination . . . akin to the higher flights of the fancy" (*JMN* 2: 238). His introspection following this analysis suggest that Emerson, like Mokanna, is simultaneously a victim of religious doctrine and a perpetuator of Christianity's unrealized promise for future salvation in return for obedience and suffering. Emerson states he loves that "Cause which is dear to God & Man—the laws of Morals, the Revelations which sanction, & the blood of martyrs & triumph and suffering of the saints." Still, the strength of the believer's worship correlates with their willingness to undergo physical anguish: humanity must shed its own "blood" and offer "suffering" in payment for a spiritual afterlife. Emerson continues, "What we ardently love we learn to imitate"; the same "mimicry" is apparent in Mokanna's pretense to be divine (239). He promises many of his "bold Believers" that dying for him would crown his "Elect with bliss that never fades" (*Rookh* 27). Emerson admits that in his "better hours, I am the believer (if not the dupe) of *brilliant promises*, and can respect myself as the possessor of those powers which *command the reason and passion of the multitude*" (*JMN* 2: 239; emphasis added). Finally, Emerson's deepest fears about his eligibility for the ministry—foreshadowing the Divinity Address—appear when he compares himself to Mokanna: "stateliness and silence hang very like Mokannah's suspicious silver veil, only concealing what is best not shewn [sic]. What is called a warm heart, I have not" (*JMN* 2: 241).

It is unsurprising that a twenty-one-year-old assuming his father's role might express some doubts, but Emerson's long journal entry goes into deeper theological questions about his personal spiritual praxis and its eventual outcome. He writes in italics of his devotion "*in form* to the service of God & and the War against Sin" in the hope of realizing "the same *in substance*." He then reiterates that he is a "dupe of hope" and that he may "write *dupe* a long time to come & the end of life shall intervene betwixt me & the release" (*JMN* 2: 241-42). These early journal entries indicate that Romantic Orientalism facilitated Emerson's examination of his personal religious doubts long before he was able to publicly confront Unitarian beliefs.

Emerson's ideas about spiritual independence and opposition to Unitarian ideology can be related to *Rookh*'s criticism of religious orthodoxy by examining the text's implicit reification of independent spiritual experience over collective religiosity. The latter generally entails suspending dissent and critical inquiry to stabilize a group's core philosophy and leadership. The faithful come to depend on centralized power structures to mediate their relationship with the divine instead of seeking self-realization through deep inner spiritual practice—in much the same way that we saw Emerson writing of service "*in form*" rather than "*in substance*" to God. Moreover, during Emerson and Moore's era, orthodox Christians and Muslims inherited a long legacy of belief in miracles and the sacrosanct authority of priests. This belief structured a collective qualification of divinity as something extrinsic to the self: miracles, angels, Jesus, Mohammed, etc. All claims to religious experience had to be validated by the sacerdotal class. Clerics, recognized as the arbiters of God's will, could subsequently establish absolute dominion over the religious life of the religious minded by pronouncing any doubts regarding their rules or adjudication heretical or misguided. Mokanna is Moore's archetypal exemplar of this psychological coercion. His claim to contain "the Holy Spirit" and to be an avatar of "ADAM" convinces much of India, Yemen, Persia, Kathay, and Georgia to obey him (31). Even Azim, the youthful warrior who escapes slavery in "Glorious" Greece" and returns to India with "proud views of humankind, Of men to Gods exalted and refined," is tricked by Mokanna's banner announcing "Freedom to the World" (30). Although this freedom is supposedly spiritual, its realization demands that his followers wage bloody war against all those ostensibly standing in its way, including free Muslims and Hindus. Mokanna justifies the bloodshed by proclaiming that "truths sublime"

require a "holier mood and calmer time" than the earth is capable of expressing. He says, it is only by fighting for freedom from the "darkling prison-house" that "Peace" and "Truth" will be realized (32). He also declares that by acquiescing to tyrannical political, religious, and historical forces, humanity has allowed itself to be mentally and physically imprisoned:

> When the glad Slave shall at these feet lay down
> His broken chain, the tyrant Lord his crown,
> The Priest his book, the Conqueror his wreath,
> And from the lips of Truth one mighty breath
> Shall like a whirlwind scatter in its breeze
> That whole dark pile of human mockeries:—
> Then shall the reign of mind commence on earth. (*Rookh* 32)

Mokanna's lies about his divine status may have blinded *VP*'s readers to his accurate assessment of how religious authorities invent symbolic objects of power (or truth) that essentially imprison the faithful through misguided reverence. I will show that Emerson did not mistake Mokanna's injunction that humanity must set aside these icons before ascending to the rule of mind. For Mokanna, scripture has no place in a mind seeking enlightenment; therefore, clerics must discard the "book" that obstructs consciousness from directly experiencing truth. The Veiled Prophet attacks Islamic orthodoxy by indirectly referencing the Koran's role in man's spiritual blindness. He scoffs at humanity's slavish dependence on history and rituals that trap consciousness in the past, which the learned masquerade as wisdom and transcendence:

> Ye wise, ye learn'd who grope your dull way on
> By the twinkling of gleams of ages gone
> like superstitious thieves, who think the light
> From dead men's marrow guides them best at night . . .
> Undazzled it can track yon starry sphere,
> But a gilt stick, a bauble blinds it here . . .
> By these learn'd slaves, the meanest of the throng;
> Their wits bought up, their wisdom shrunk so small,
> A scepter's puny point can wield it all! (*Rookh* 43)

The lines "Undazzled it can track . . . blinds it here" suggest that consciousness could voyage across the cosmos, "yon starry sphere," if the mind were freed from old ideas. Mokanna further contends that those who are considered wise are simply "learn'd slaves" who elevate obedience to the fading echoes of people long dead, diminishing men's minds to a "puny point." What humanity calls wisdom is merely a simulacrum of the past—a shiny bauble whose reflected light mutates rather than reveals the truth.

Finally, the fake prophet presents his most powerful indictment of collective belief and the behavior of Muslims in lines that strongly foreshadow Emerson's conceptual and semantic opposition to Unitarian credence:

> Ye too, believers of incredible creeds,
> Whose faith enshrines the *monsters* which it breeds;
> Who, bolder even than NEMROD, think to rise
> By nonsense hept on nonsense to the skies;
> Ye shall have miracles, ay, sound ones too,
> Seen, heard, attested, everything—but true.
> Your preaching zealots too inspired to seek
> One grace of meaning for the things they speak:
> Your martyrs ready to shed out their blood,
> For truths too heavenly to be understood;
> And your State Priests, sole venders of the lore,
> That works salvation;—as, on AVA'S shore,
> Where none but priests are privileged to trade . . .
> Dark, tangled doctrines, dark as fraud can weave,
> Which simple votaries shall on trust receive,
> While craftier feign belief till they believe . . .
> The heaven of each is but what each desires,
> And, soul or sense, whate'er the object be,
> Man would be man to all eternity! (*Rookh* 43; emphasis added)

Mokanna's tirade presents then deconstructs the psychology of belief while scorning the spiritual praxes of priests, martyrs, and the trusting (foolish) masses. Humanity and all believers of "incredible creeds" have been imprisoned by their belief in religious "nonsense," the empty "miracles" that are widely "attested" to by the scriptures and priests. He vilifies the preachers

who peddle their religious constructs without testing the meaning of what they teach (Emerson's *in form* mentioned above) and martyrs who give their lives for truths that they do not realize (Emerson's *in substance*). He points out that the political vendors of the law dominate the religious worldview of their subjects through fraud and false promises, which some accept on "trust." The "craftier," like Fadladeen, "feign belief" to gain favor or power until they even convince themselves. For Mokanna, humanity's quest for heaven ends in the realization of "desire" that has nothing to do with true "soul" or genuine spiritual life. At this point, I would like to end my reading of Mokanna's rhetoric with his indictment of blind faith in "miracles" that ultimately breeds and enshrines religious "monsters." Although his revolt against orthodox expressions of religious life is a manipulative ploy, Emerson will use precisely these terms when he criticizes Unitarianism belief in the Divinity Address before he outlines a new, inclusive spiritual path that adopts Indian philosophy for his Christian audience.

Before the Divinity Address cemented Emerson's break with Unitarian doctrine, he produced two works in the preceding two years. *Nature* and "The American Scholar" portended his quest for spiritual self-reliance by rising above the dictates of single traditions. His argument that liberation was attainable when seekers charted an individual transcendental path, essentially follows from my analysis of Mokanna's denunciation of blind belief. In 1836 Emerson says in *Nature*, "Why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe?" He continues, "there are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship" (Emerson and Atkinson 3). In 1837, a year later, his enthusiastically received "The American Scholar" address at Harvard used even stronger terms to describe the ill effects of overdependence on tradition:

> Each age, it is found, must write its own books . . . . Yet hence arises a great mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is transferred to the record . . . Instantly the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having one so opened, having once received

> this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry if it is disparaged. (46)

Emerson's stark criticism of how the objects of inspiration are elevated above the "act" itself, making the "book" a "noxious" and tyrannical guide, is equivalent to Mokanna's disgust with mankind's veneration of its historical symbols of power. Emerson calls for a critical approach to texts that have been sacralized by history and made inviolate by groups who chase the shadows of ancient intuitions rather than seeking individual transcendence. This fanatical dependence on religious works creates priests in "form" rather than experienced spiritual guides. Instead of Indian *ācāryas*, whose practice of meditation generates true insight, the "degenerate state" of belief causes the group to become a victim of its own devitalized doctrine and "the parrot of other men's thinking" (44). Still, Emerson does not deny the value of books, religious or otherwise, noting that "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst." He argues their purpose is solely "to inspire" not to "pin" the reader to a supposedly superior "past." In line with Mokanna's belief that a mind unfettered from tradition can understand the cosmos, Emerson continues to say that the "active soul" contained in each individual can see "absolute truth and utters truth" when it transcends "the book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind." Mokanna's observation that the light of past knowledge diminishes the thinker's mental capacities is also apparent in Emerson's declaration that receiving the "truth" from another, even "in torrents of light," is a "fatal disservice" without a time for "solitude, inquest, and self-recovery" (47).

The similarity of the metaphors appearing in *VP* and "The American Scholar" make the influence of the former highly likely. Emerson also solidifies the idea of self-reliance, arguing that mind must "not be subdued by [its] instruments." There is no time to waste on other "men's transcripts" of their experience of God when the individual "can read God directly." Finally, "The American Scholar" sets up the Indian trajectory apparent in the Divinity Address with a solution to the present inability of Christians to "read God directly." In short, Christians should attend to those texts that "guide [their] steps to the East again, where the Dawn is" (48). This injunction is a suitable place to turn to the Divinity Address that bears the inspirational imprint of

Moore's Oriental fantasy, with its strongest criticism of how dogma and uncritical religiosity undermine spiritual experience.

The Divinity Address opens with a brief invitation to observe the clues offered by nature regarding universal laws. Trueblood, summarizing the address in "sober prose," sees its message as essentially clarifying "the direct intuition" of religion which "can never be received" from another. Christianity had become "debased" by ignoring "the doctrine of the soul" and "inspiration." The solution was for Christians to stop imitating and enter the "depths" of the soul. Trueblood also makes the point that Emerson did not fully embrace a measured tone; he "introduced poetic touches" that inspired "enthusiasts" while providing his "critics with convenient clues to the author's loose thinking" (47). There is no better place to find early inspiration for Emerson's poetic elements than in *Rookh*, one of his favorite Oriental works. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that the Address has a decidedly Indian theme by paralleling the Tantric theory that anthropical mind is a reflection of *Nirguṇa Brahma*, "unqualified, infinite consciousness," which I have termed Metaseity. [14] Emerson suggests Metaseity is attainable once the "sentiment of virtue" drives mind to experience its infinite transcendental source so that individuals realize their existence "without bound" (63). Thus, the infant who plays with "baubles" (Mokanna uses the same word) is discovering the laws that govern "the game of human life," but (as with Mokanna's admonition) spiritual truths are ineffable and cannot be confined to texts, persons, or eras: "These laws refuse to be adequately stated. They will not be written out on paper, or spoken by the tongue." They are "out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance" (64). Humanity's "intuition of the moral sentiment" reveals "the perfection of the laws of the soul" which, in Emerson's description, are essentially karmic processes that establish psycho-spiritual causality. My comparison with Tantric theories of spiritual evolution is evidenced by Emerson's acknowledgment that "in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire;" therefore, good actions immediately elevate the mind, while "he who does a mean deed is by the action itself contracted" (64). The concept of how devotion (*bhakti*) aids spiritual transcendence reflects in his statement that actions cause mind to contract or expand. To transcend the qualifying limits of all action requires that the "just" individual realize "God" through perfect humility and devotion to Metaseity. *Bhakti* is therefore a spiritual practice that subdues the

[14] See Hewitson vii

ego through humility and virtue to gradually dissolve egological mind, revealing transcendental consciousness. In Emerson's words, "every step so downward, is a step upward" because "the man who renounces himself, comes to himself" (64). My analysis is evidence that the Divinity Address already contained the essence of Krishna's instructions in the *Bhagavad Gitā* on *bhakti,* the nature of worship, and monism. We saw the older Emerson piecing together these themes from Indian inspired Western works, like Jones's "Hymn to Narayana." Nevertheless, *Rookh* first introduced him to Krishna, and Mokanna's poetic deconstruction of religious belief helped him to air the flaws of Unitarian doctrine for the six Harvard seniors.

If the audience listening to the Divinity Address initially missed its Indian influences, Emerson's disagreement with Unitarian dogma and view of Christianity's etiolation was unmistakable. The outrage he caused by skewering Unitarian precepts occurred within a milieu where such criticism, as in Moore's case, had the potential for violent reprisals. Perry Miller notes in *The Transcendentalist: An Anthology* that being called an infidel "carried the connotations of suppression, the hangman, and mob violence"—the accused was a "threat to both the church and to the state." When Emerson revealed Christianity's "spiritual crisis," his former Professor, Andrews Norton, at Harvard Divinity School called him an infidel, despite having been accused "for decades" on the same grounds (7). David M. Robinson notes that Emerson was apprehensive about his theological topic because he was "in the process of abandoning the concept of a personal God." As it was, "the nature of divinity became [the] central point of contention." Robinson argues that the point made by "a religious teacher [Emerson], on a religious occasion, to a religious community" was a poet's response to the "famine" of local churches whose "overwhelming literalism" lacked "a surfeit of prose. What the soul craved was poetry" (186).

We see Emerson's heresy channeling Mokanna's argument when Emerson baldly stated that Christians should be freed from the "first defect of historical Christianity," which had "fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion" by exaggerating "the personal, the positive, the ritual. It has dwelt, it dwells, with *noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus*. The soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe" (Emerson and Atkinson 68; emphasis added). Emerson's invitation to make individual consciousness universal through realization and not ritual

aligns with Mokanna's observation of man's inherent capacity to know the cosmos discussed earlier. Carrying the similarities further, Emerson proposes that spiritual realization and the transmission of religion is not dependent on a specific religious intermediary. He argues Unitarianism has been corrupted by its fanatical dependence on the figure of Jesus and "the doctrine of inspiration" by being "attributed to one or two persons, and denied to all the rest, and denied with fury" makes life "comic or pitiful" (72). Mokanna also mocks humanity's failure to see that wisdom comes not from the past but from experience, and Emerson sees truth as "an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand . . . Truly speaking it is not an instruction, but provocation" (70). Authentic "religious sentiment" therefore enables "the soul [to] first know itself" by correcting the "capital mistake of the infant man who seeks to be great by following the great, and hopes to derive advantages *from another*." His personal emphasis of "*from another*" again undermines the Christian belief in Jesus as the ultimate divine intermediary. Reminiscent of "The American Scholar," he states that the limitations of Unitarian worship could be overcome by adopting India's synthesis of religious perspectives, the same idea of tolerance Moore envisaged for *Rookh*.

Emerson makes his appreciation of India's spiritual philosophy explicit after, as I demonstrated, implicitly structuring the beginning of his Divinity Address along the theory of Indian monism. He points out how the "sentiment" for self-realization that "creates all forms of worship"—whether pure or distorted—remains "deepest in the minds of men in the devout and contemplative East." For this reason, "Europe has always owed to Oriental genius its divine impulses" (66). It is reasonable to argue that the central messages of the address are that actualizing authentic spirituality requires heeding intuition above common or cherished beliefs. This inevitably demands active disagreement with the status quo, and when Emerson follows his own exemplar, Mokanna's words reverberate loudest. The transcendentalist says, "Miracles, prophecy, poetry; the ideal life, the holy life, exist as ancient history merely" because "life is comic or pitiful as soon as the high ends of being fade out of sight, and man becomes nearsighted, and can only attend to what addresses the senses." He contends, the "general views" of the base majority "find abundant illustration in religion, and especially in the history of the Christian church" (Emerson and Atkinson 67). As for Unitarian dependence on miracles, Emerson proclaims that "to aim to convert a man by miracles is a

profanation of the soul. A true conversion, a true Christ, is now, as always, to be made by the reception of beautiful sentiments" (69). Man, he says, has been kept spiritually blind by the past: "None believeth in the soul of man, but only in some man or person old and departed" (80). Finally, invoking Mokanna's most compelling indictment of blind belief (in miracles or otherwise) for creating and enshrining "monsters," Emerson uses the exact terms to describe Christian miracles: "But the word *Miracle*, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is *Monster*" (68; emphasis added).

My foregoing historiography and exegesis of Emerson's early spiritual thought has shown that *Rookh*'s religious themes partly inspired his public rejection of certain Unitarian beliefs and "realignment" of the Western soul with Indian monistic praxes. This syncretism inspired New England transcendentalists, like Thoreau, to practice critical spirituality. These transformations were not uniquely American: Emerson's renaissance of Western mysticism continued from work started by Romantic authors. Jonathan Roberts rightfully argues the Romantics were creators of a "religious experience" in the process of becoming "privatized" (xii). Although Emerson's spiritual vision was infrangibly a product of an increasingly liberal Western religiosity, he started America's critical synthesis of Asian and European philosophy while gradually (if not always successfully) eradicating the Oriental biases of romantic texts like *Rookh*. We see that Moore's work remained a fixture in Emerson's Romantic view of the East up to the last decades of his life. His 1859 speech for the Burns Centenary cemented Moore's provenance "in the luxurious East," but by that point any quibble over his use of *luxurious* is an unnecessary and misleading criticism (Emerson and Emerson 441). Even though *Rookh* framed Emerson's earliest uninformed vision of India, the Divinity Address reified India's highest spiritual praxes. Emerson's later journal entries evidence a nuanced understanding of Hindu monism. In 1861, he extensively quoted Indian works on ethics, *Brahma*, and meditation: "Brahma is the truth of truth," and "Speech is the supreme Brahma. Speech does not desert him who with this knowledge meditates on Brahma" (*JMN* 15: 100-02).[15]

In May, 1862, a year after this observation, he records a sad note of sixteen Indian works "bequeathed to him" by his late friend, Henry David Thoreau, that included books on the Vedas, Puranas, Upaniṣads, Vedānta, Yoga, and the

[15] Interested readers should look at pages 99-107.

Mahabharata (252-55). Even in the Bostonian's last decade, *Rookh*'s poetic value is seen in a note on Moore's "Arabian Ballad," whose 1828 Boston edition remained in Emerson's personal library till his death (*JMN* 16: 465). One year shy of his seventieth birthday, while preparing material for his "Poetry & Imagination," he leaves a self-reminder to aid his failing recollection that "the sentence of Moore about 'prose poets' must not be omitted" (277). While the constraints of space have forced me to focus on a fraction of Emerson's East-West readings, I have detailed *Rookh*'s unexpected yet influential presence in his spiritual imagination and early writing. Emerson's initial readings of Moore's Oriental fantasy became part of the literary continuum that shaped his early articulations of religious dissent and his critical appreciation of Indian monism as it is expressed in the Divinity Address.

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