The poems of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) were collected and edited by Dr. Sakti Sadhan Mukhopadhyay and Sri Adhir Kumar, members of the Derozio Commemoration Committee, and published in 2000 in the Complete Works of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. These poems fall under three subdivisions, “Sweets,” “Elegiac Stanzas,” and “Ballad Stanzas,” originally identified by the author himself. These poems were never published in the form of a book until recently, as they were presumed lost. Mukhopadhyay and Kumar retrieved twenty three poems of varying length, most of which were first published in The India Gazette from January to October 1825 when the poet was only sixteen years old. Two poems, “Woman’s Smile” and “The Death of Righteous” were written in 1829. Between 1825 and 1829 Derozio wrote his masterpieces such as Poems (1827) and The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale (1828). Though many of the unpublished poems lack ingenuity and are imitative of the early nineteenth century English poets, they nonetheless possess a lyrical and elegiac quality that give us a glimpse of the secular themes, flowing rhythms and romanticism that were to emerge in Indian writing in English later in the century.
His Life

Derozio did not live long. He died at an early age of twenty-two and a half when most poets are about to begin their careers. He was of a Luso-Indian-British descent, that is his father, Francis Derozio, was Portuguese-Indian and his mother, Sophia Johnson, English. Some of his biographers point out that he was not dark skinned, as his mother was English. Few of his portraits survive but the ones that do reveal a rounded boyish face, thick black hair and somewhat dreamy eyes.

As a young man Derozio must have faced a crisis of identity, as he could neither identify himself exclusively with the Europeans nor with the Indians. He dressed himself as a European, even rode a horse, but in thought and sentiment treasured India as his native land. In his poetic works Derozio called himself an East Indian writer, while in his prose writings he identified himself with the Anglo-Indian and Indian communities of Calcutta where he was born. He was the first ‘Indian’ writer in English who imagined India as his motherland, especially in his popular poem “To India—My Native Land” and his highly didactic prose writings in The India Gazette. His insider’s perspective of India and his highly patriotic tenor, placed him within the nationalist discourse imagined by Raja Rammohun Roy one of the founders of Hindu College where Derozio worked.

Born in a Protestant family and baptized at St. John’s Cathedral in 1809, Derozio received a secular education in Calcutta where he was surrounded by the vestiges of both Hindu and Islamic cultures. The varied religious influences gave his poetry both a secular and humanist slant which was fused with Christian, Hindu and Muslim imagery. It is possible to see a rich tapestry of images drawn from these three religious traditions that are woven into a secular humanist philosophy.
Perhaps this diversity of Derozio's personal and literary background prevented literary historians from placing him squarely within the literary tradition of India. Much of this is changing or has changed. In recent years his position as a writer has been transformed from being a minor Eurasian poet to a major Bengali poet and reformer. Vinay Dharwadker calls him the first literary figure who expressed “a romantic nationalism in Indian literature.” Poets like Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and novelists like Allan Sealy see him as an illustrious forbear who gave them a literary aesthetics to refer to, if not to emulate.

During his lifetime Derozio was both maligned and praised for his talent as a poet. One of his early biographers, C.J. Monteque, a Calcutta schoolmaster, writing in The Oriental Magazine, narrates an apocryphal tale about the jealousy Derozio’s reputation aroused amongst the hoi polloi in Calcutta:

It was the fate of poor Derozio to be as much bespattered with abuses, and exposed to envy as he is said to have been courted and flattered. In the season of his full bloom reputation he was, one evening, walking up the steps of a house, to which he had been invited by the lady who was for a long while the distinguished ornament of this society, when he heard voices and he immediately recognized the tones of the gentleman of the house and a poetical friend. He was announced and these words reached his ear. ‘As for Derozio, I allow he possesses fancy, but my Khansuma [cook] possesses more judgment than he.’ Derozio turned back and never did he again visit that house.4

Young as he was Derozio took quick offense to slander and insults which at times cost him dearly as seen in his dismissal from Hindu College.
Monteque also opines that had Derozio paid more attention to William Shakespeare and John Milton and less to Thomas Moore and Lord Byron, his poetry would have been less fanciful and more perceptive. However it is hard to ignore the sweet, flowing rhythms of Derozio that beautify even his mundane sentiments. In fact the strong influence of the Scottish poet Thomas Moore is reflected in his *Poems* which begins with a quotation from Moore’s poem “The Harp of Erin” or “Dear Harp of My Country.” Derozio rewrites the Scottish poem with all its “sweetness” and lost national glory into “The Harp of India.” Though Derozio’s poem is imitative of Moore, Derozio’s patriotic fervor is stronger and flashier than his predecessor.

**Schooling**

Derozio was an autodidact. He never had a formal schooling. In 1815 he started education when he was six years old at the Dharamtallah Academy of David Drummond (1787-1843) and began scribbling verses rather early. In the same year Henry’s mother died near Krishnagar and his father Francis married an English lady Anna Maria Rivers the following year. The death of his mother left a deep impression on young Henry’s mind and turned him into a serious boy.

He left school when he was fourteen and worked as an accountant at the Agency House of Messer’s J. Scott where his father also worked in a senior position. Derozio left his job at Calcutta and moved to Bhagalpur, Bihar, to join his uncle Arthur Johnson who was an indigo planter. The pastoral surroundings of Bhagalpur awakened in him his poetical talents and he began sending poems to *The India Gazette* run by Dr. John Grant, a classical scholar and editor of the *Gazette*, who encouraged the young poet to write. A year after the publication of his poems in *The India Gazette* he came back to Calcutta in 1826 and sent his
collection of poems to the press. He also got *The Fakeer of Jungheera* printed, which owes a lot to his Bhagalpur experiences. In the same year he was appointed a Master of English Literature at Hindu College through the recommendation of Grant, to whom he had earlier dedicated the first volume entitled *Poems* (1827) and not to his sister, Sophia, who died in the same year.

**Early Nineteenth Century in India**

In the early part of the nineteenth century the Anglo-Indian community felt that its future lay with the British and, therefore most families imitated the English in dress and habit and sent their children to England to study. However in the middle of the nineteenth century all this changed. The British began to discriminate against the Anglo-Indians and prevented their children from going abroad to study. Reservations for Anglo-Indians in high military and civil positions were also abolished. Derozio felt that the Anglo-Indians must throw their lot with the Indian community in order to survive. The British, Derozio realized, were quite particular in constructing identity based on race, place and physique and there was no way in which the Anglo-Indians would be accepted by the British as equals partners in education, business and commerce.

During the early nineteenth century leading up to the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the changing notions of race, color and place had a strong influence on the way the British in India thought about themselves and the Indian population they interacted with. British colonialism of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly a site of discrimination based on race, color and physique. Though both Edward Said and his notions of orientalism has been vehemently attacked by historians as being an incomplete and often unreliable measure of the complex history of imperialism in India, they tend to forget how the ideology of difference was used...
in aggrandizing the power of the Raj.

Derozio died of cholera at an early age of about twenty-two, shortly after he was forced to resign from Hindu College for his supposedly blasphemous and iconoclastic views. A brief mention must be made about the unhygienic condition of Calcutta in the nineteenth century and the outbreak of cholera, which caused the untimely death of Derozio. The nineteenth century had seen many cholera epidemics in different parts of the world from India and Iran to Europe and the United States of America. The banks of the Ganges River have been described as the cradle of cholera bacillus. For centuries the warm waters of the river had accelerated the growth of the bacillus introduced through human excrement. Cholera is described as a fecal-oral disease that moves from human excrement into water and food of communities, at times turning into an epidemic. Cholera destroys the immune system of the body resulting in excessive vomiting and diarrhea if not properly treated. The patient acquires a blue-gray pallor and sunken eyes, and comatose. Excessive loss of body fluids can result in death.

In the early part of the nineteenth century as the East India Company penetrated India and globalized its trade in the Indian sub-continent it became an unwitting agent of spreading cholera. As the East India Company carried infected goods of recycled clothing and foodstuff in fast ships with frequent ports of call in the region it spread the disease over a wide area from India to Europe. Human vectors were also responsible for the spread of the disease in the Middle East and Europe. Vigorous trade with southern Iran using fast ships led to the spread of the disease as sailors and merchants came in contact with the Iranian population. From there, during 1830-37 period, cholera entered Europe through the Russo-Iranian border. The Persian Gulf ports had important commercial links with
British India and they further accelerated the spread of the disease. Iran also occupied an important place in the Islamic world as a stopping point for Haj pilgrims to Mecca. Traveling in horse carriages through Tehran, and then by steamer and railroad through Russia, Turkey and Egypt, many pilgrims would then reach Mecca spreading the disease in this region. The spread was further complicated by the weak administrative system, sanitary ignorance and poor medical facilities in both India and Iran.9

During his brief illness and death many of Derozio’s friends and well wishers like Krishna Mohun Banerji, congregational minister Mr. Hill, Dr. Grant, his foster mother and sister, Amelia, were at his bedside rising above the “fear of contagion to bolster his spirits.”10 With his death in 1831 his influence increased by leaps and bounds. Many young Bengalis, including some of his former students, became adherents to his ‘free thinking’ philosophy and were called ‘Young Bengal’ or Dorozians. In due course they initiated the Bengal Renaissance that transformed and modernized the parochial Hindu society of Bengal.

Twenty-Three Unpublished Poems

It seems most of the Unpublished Poems were addressed to a brunette whose name is referred to as “C—.” Not much work has been done on the real identity of the woman, but she certainly does not seem Indian. The C— of these poems seems to be someone who has been untrue and is either dead or belongs to someone else. In either case the male companion wants to forget her memory but finds the earthly world of love that she represents cannot be forgotten so easily. At times he turns maudlin longing for the other world in poems such as “The Stars,” “Ode to the Setting Moon” and “The Poet’s Grave” and at others hard-
hearted, without sympathy. Most of these poems are signed under the Latin pseudonym “JUVENIS” which means youth, perhaps a reminder of the youthful status of the poet.

In the first poem called “To” the persona confesses that his “dream of love has past away” and now the “spell has broken,” but we wonder if this is really true. Though the persona has resolved to “break the chain” that binds him fast he has to make a great effort, as he still cannot shake off the beautiful past. Later in the poem he resolves to “pine alone” and live a life of seclusion and die unattended—“Forgotten live—unheeded die.” This poem was published in The India Gazette with an interesting note to the editor, which read as follows:

TO THE EDITOR OF THE INDIA GAZETTE

SIR, --The following original Stanzas are at your service, if worthy of appearing in your Poet’s corner. Should they be acceptable you will hear oftener from

Your Obdt. Servant

JUVENIS

Understandably Derozio was greatly encouraged by the publication of the poem as he wrote many afterwards in the same journal.

The second poem is also entitled “To” and elaborates on the same theme of love and betrayal. Here the poet explains that the woman belongs to someone else and the persona, therefore, must forget her. The poem underscores the belief that true love is possible only between two people and not more—“I can’t with others share thy heart.” Though they have shared many passionate moments in the past yet the persona resolves to tear her out of his “memory” for she has been
untrue—she possesses a “faithless heart.” He admits that it will be hard to live up to his resolve, but, nevertheless, he will “teach [his] feelings to forget.” He complains in stanza four that though he has loved her “better day by day” she has not loved him as much. Instead she has been “untrue.” Nevertheless he will pray for her soul and happiness. He bids her farewell, never “to meet again,” not in this life nor “beyond the tomb.” He exhorts her not to express grief upon his grave and throw away the “tokens” of love that he has given her:

Let tokens that thou hadst from me
Be cast then far away from thee.—

Having said all this he feels intense anguish and craves for a “draught of lethe’s spring” in order to assuage the pain in his heart—“To soothe the pangs that in me wring.” Interestingly the poem ends with a note from the editor, which reads, “We hope Juvenis will continue to favor us,” and he does.

The ‘Sweets’ Section

In the subsequent six poems under the section “Sweets” published between 1925-29, Derozio begins with the captivating power of a woman’s smile and ends with the glorious death of the righteous—the “widow’s cry” and the “orphan’s sigh.” Just as a woman’s smile helps us to forget our troubles, her tears too release a “tragic” rapture most sublime. As the poet departs from this world he leaves behind the “sublime” magic of his words that will live forever making his memory “sacred” and “sweet.” The present is always enriched by the memory of the past. By remembering “The Days Gone By!” we can seize the day, carpe diem. Therefore in “Happy Meetings” parting from friends is full of sorrow, while meeting them is “sweet.” Even in these poems the recurring image of a
Hindu widow's life becomes a metaphor for all the tragedy and pain of human existence. Derozio's forceful representation of the world of suffering, the joys and sorrows of a woman's companionship, memory and desire, past and present and the joys of friendship are unerringly captured in the section called "Sweets." The word 'sweets' imply both delight and gratification and the poet gives his own spin to the word by emphasizing the transience of earthly delights and the accompanying sorrow of their departure.

In the first poem entitled "Woman's Smile" the poet calls woman a "blessing" and the "kindest boon" to man. Her smile is captivating like the moon:

Her smile is bright as May's young moon,
And sweet beyond expressing.
It fills the soul with sacred fire,
It feeds with fancy young desire,
It tells the eye a tale of pleasure—

Undoubtedly, the poet admits that a "woman's lovely smile" can "beguile" all the worry and "soothe to bless thy keenest throes." He compares the warmth, freshness and brilliance of a woman's smile to "May's young moon," as it holds promise, commitment and hope.

In the second poem entitled, "Woman's Tear," the poet creates a most interesting conceit. To cause a woman to cry is commendable—"To thank the hand that gave the blow"—as her crying causes a different kind of joy revealed at the end of stanza two:

This is great, supremely great,
Feeling bright with bliss elate.

The blissful experience, though sad, both elates and gives significance to life. The poet goes on to explain that the tears shining in a woman’s eyes are like “celestial stars,” a sacred stream, and sweetness beyond compare:

The tear that starts from woman’s eye
With stars celestial fair may view:—
Hail! sacred drop of pity’s stream,
Grief’s commencement, joy extreme,
Preface of each tragic tale,
Liquid balmy treasure, hail!—
To let the tear unconscious flow,
To thank the hand that gave the blow,
This is sweet—a lovely sweet—
Sweeter sweet ye seldom meet!

The tears from a woman’s eyes are a matter of great aesthetic beauty. The notion of a sublimated tragic beauty captivates the heart. It provides us with a strange kind of rapture, an incomparable equipoise that is reveled in “conquest:”

This is rapture, joy complete,
Triumph pleasant, conquest sweet.

The versatility, ingenuity and creativity of the poet lead us to the third poem of the “Sweets” called “The Poet’s Grave.” A poet becomes immortal with the songs he creates on his “heaven-strung magic lyre.” To mark his fame and immortality “eternal laurels bloom” by his graveside. Many go to his grave to
register their regret or show pity at his early departure for this world,

To mark the spot where Genius sleeps,
The child of song in weeds of wo [sic]
To that sad spot shall oft' repair,
To let a tear of pity flow.

In the telling of a story the poet creates "an awful thrill" by the "soft numbers" or poems and transcends the "rudest shock of wasting time." The poet's tomb beckons each passerby with the written word left behind—"writ in memory's ample page." The genii guards the spot as the poet sleeps sweetly. Derozio explores the Islamic traditions where the genii usually guards the dead.

Encouraged by the publication of these poems in *The India Gazette*, Derozio wrote more. In poem number four of "Sweets" entitled "The Days Gone By!" the poet writes to the editor thus: "The Editor of the India Gazette will oblige Juvenis, by giving the following verses an early insertion in his Paper." The poem in question talks about the "treacherous smile" which promises hope but never delivers. The "magic of memory" on the other hand "flits" upon the mind like "relics of joy." According to the poet the memory of days gone by will never "decay;" as such remembrance burns like "dim lights on "life's desolate way" and often "charm the mind's eye" like some twinkling star in the firmament. The "happy times" of the past cannot be destroyed or taken away. They possess a charm par excellence, beyond words, beyond fancy and beyond reason. The poet sings of the beauty of the past and argues thus,

Look forward, who will, to the days yet unborn,
Look forward, who will, to the bright coming morn!
I will sing of the suns that have happily set,  
That brought with them pleasures I cannot forget:—  
They past—and their progress no pow'r could restrain;  
But their mantle they dropp'd, like the seer, on the plain;  
O'er me 'twas the robe of rememb'rance they threw,  
Tho' gone, they are bright in my minds clearest view!—

The power of memory cannot be taken away and remembrance can remain fresh forever. On the contrary the pleasure of the moment “doth quickly pass by” for neither the dove nor the fountain stay in one place for long:

On life's barren sand it stops not, like the stream,  
And glides from the touch like the moon's silver beam:—

It is not only important to seize the day, but also value the days gone by. Drink to our country, to friends, to memory and to the past:

Then bring here the bowl—fill it high, fill it high.—  
One draught to the land of our fathers is due,—  
One health to the hearts that are tender and true,—  
One tribute at Memory's shrine we will cast,  
Then—here's to the days that have happily past!—

The poet underscores the significance of the days “happily past” or happily spent, as they can remain forever in “Memory's shrine” refurbishing the present.

The fifth poem in “Sweets” entitled “Happy Meetings” deals with the sorrow of parting with friends and the joy of reunion. The truth of lived experience is
encapsulated in the experience itself as the poet confesses,

How do friends part!—I would not tell—
But I Know it, alas! Too well:—

In the first stanza the sorrow friends feel upon parting is compared to the pangs a woman suffers when she sleeps alone in her bed as a widow. The second stanza elaborates upon the joys of meeting. The poet compares this happiness to a “meteor’s ray and a desert stream concluding thus,

As welcome—yes! And quite as sweet
The smile of friends is when they meet.

The last poem in the collection called “The Death of Righteous” celebrates a virtuous life and the serenity such faces acquire upon death. Those who lead a sinful life are troubled by their conscience when they die but the righteous have nothing to fear:

Where at the silent hour of dark midnight
The lonely taper shades sepulchral light,
Where shines the glow-worm and the deathwatch ticks,
‘Tis there we feel when conscience sharpest pricks,—
But see the good man on the bed of death,
Longing to breathe his last, his conquering breath—
See him unmindful of all cares and fears
Look back with comfort on the fleeted years;

The poet draws a lesson from the lives of the righteous and hopes to “go gently”
to his grave and be remembered for his good deeds and, social work especially
the improvement of the lives of widows and orphans:

    Be my lament, the helpless widow’s cry.
    And all my epitaph the orphan’s sigh!

In fact there are six kinds of sweetness that are described in the six poems—the
sweetness of a woman’s smile, the sweetness of a woman’s tear, the sweetness of
immortal fame, the sweetness of a delightful past, the sweetness of friends
meeting and the sweetness of a righteous life. Derozio approaches the world of
feeling and sentiment through these six ‘sweets’ and uses them, to construct his
own philosophical web of life and afterlife. These ‘sweets’ give significance to
life, the individual and his relationship with others.

The Elegiac Stanzas

In the “Elegiac Stanzas” Derozio describes the physical beauty of the fleeting
woman referred to in earlier poems as “C—” Her eyes were bright like stars, her
lips redder than “coral rock.” She spoke a “language fair and true.” Her
demeanor was peaceful and she exhibited great sympathy for others.

    Her soul was calm,
    Her voice was balm
    To soothe the child of wo—
    Her hand she’d stretch
    To aid the wretch
    Who had no where to go

    Her smile was like the “morning beam,” but now she is dead and gone to
heaven—"And heaven reclaim'd its own." The poem's overtly Christian theme shows the impact of his Christian upbringing. The poem "Love Me and Leave Me Not" shares some of the qualities of the metaphysical poets like Andrew Marvell in terms of tone and rhythm:

Tho' fate thy form from me should part,
Tho' destiny our fortunes sever—
Still, Lady, this devoted heart
Will throb—and true to thee for ever.

"The Midnight Hour" provides a grand sweeping vision of the night against a star-sprinkled sky from the "Chilian mountains" to the "Golconda mines." The poet exhorts us to see the heavens in the mirror of the sea. The screech of an owl disturbs the silence of the night and sends ripples on the surface of the sea reflecting the moonlight. In the bewildering silence,

The heart, now sever'd from the lighter thoughts
Of day, and all its troubles and concerns,
Is taught the language of another world;
And holding converse with starry skies,
Reasons with things that more of wisdom teach
Than all the empty gloryings of man;

The natural moral wisdom of the poem seems to imitate William Wordsworth poem "The Tables Turned" published in 1798 where Wordsworth writes,

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can.
Derozio however does not paint a world of idyllic life but seems to be aware of the cruel world of daily life and the “jarring deeds of man.” Yet he sings of man’s “wrongs, his woes, and his transient joys.” The poet attempts to grasp the present and the future and transcend the “low world” where the mind casts “a shade upon the things of earth.”

In “Stanzas” the poet reminds his beloved not to forget the “vows” they made at the “shrine” before they parted. They must have hope and look forward to meeting again:
“Look forward with hope to a rapturous meeting.” However in “The Bard’s Last Song” we come to know that she is dead:

And I have lov’d—A verse is due
To her for whom I sung of yore:—
To death’s dark home her spirit flew,
And now those songs I sing no more

The poet strikes a “plaintive strain” on his harp that expresses the “saddest throbings of [his] heart,” followed by a “sad repose.”

This impression is confirmed in “Lines Written at the Request of a Young Lady” where a poignant ineluctable mood of sorrow is struck at the very beginning:

Like roses blooming o’er the grave a fair and fragrant wreath,
That hides, with all its loveliness the wreck of
life beneath;

The poet now wishes to flee to a place of "some unbroken rest" to bemoan the loss and find "relief" in tears. But soon he realizes that his heart has become so hard that he has lost the desire to cry:

The sacred spring of sympathy has long ago been dried:—
Though sorrow in my desert breast her habitation make,
My heart will heed her dwelling not—it is too stern to break.

The poet admits that his heart has become "too stern to break" that prevents him from grieving anymore.

**The Ballad Stanzas**

In "Ballad Stanzas" the first three poems are "Addressed to Her, Who Will Best Understand Them." The poems again make reference to "C—" who has given a "lock of brown hair" as a parting gift. But the sorrow of separation is unmitigated by the promise of reunification. He dreams of the brunette,

Then I turn to your lock of bonney (sic) brown hair,
And I kiss it, and fancy I press
The lips I love best;—and I turn me to rest,
And my dreams give me back your caresses:
Oh! 'tis only a dream!—for the cool morning air
Re-visits my pillow.—But thou art not there.

However when he wakes up he misses her with greater intensity.

The next poem "To Hope" is again "Addressed to the Same." The passage of time does not bring any joy or respite:

To-morrow comes, but brings to me
No charm, disease or grief relieving!
And am I ever doom'd to see,
Sweet Hope, thy promises deceiving.

This is so because she has become "false and cruel," but in spite of her falseness and cruelty he continues to "cherish" her "delusion" till he dies.

Once again the next poem is "Addressed to Her, Who Will Best Understand Them." The woman alluded to here is maddeningly beautiful, a rose of beauty, with lips like rubies:

Then, rose of beauty, haste and cheer me,
With lips like rubies come and smile;
Ah! Trust my faith, and do not fear me,
I love too fondly to beguile!

She is again referred to as "C—" who is both "cunning" and "alluring:"

The false and cunning may allure thee,
And win thee only to betray:
I would not, C—, so secure thee,
Nor win thy favor for a day
And yet one kind word from her would make his heart “throb with pleasure.”
The poem is signed “Heynr.”

The next poem “Come Softly Love: A Duett Portuguese Air” deliberates upon
the transience of pleasure but seems childishly romantic. In the poem the
persona, Juan, finds his inamorata, Inez, an “angel of Night.” He waits for her in
his “galley” to take her over magical waters of the “swift” Tajo River, the longest
river of the Iberian Peninsula, where they will watch the “lingering star” and
enjoy their romantic sojourn. Juan promises to play on his “[be] witching guitar”
to bide the time as the galley floats on the river, but Inez points out that such
pleasure is transient as it “fades” like a flower in the sun. Juan agrees and asks
her to hasten before the moments fly away. Interestingly the poem is signed
“East Indian,” though it reflects upon a Portuguese myth. Derozio does not
claim his fraternal identity but the demographic identity of being Indian.

The next poem, “Rain,” has Derozio’s full name under the title perhaps to give it
authenticity. Rain has been the perennial preoccupation of poets embodied in the
rain melody or Megh Malhar which was believed to bring rain when sung. Many
a poet has sung of the mesmeric power of the East Indian rain clouds and the rain
itself. Bengali poets from earliest times to Rabindranath Tagore have sung about
the regret rain clouds evoke and the desire for union with the lover/beloved. In
this poem, rain comes to the earth as a water song that makes every drooping
flower blossom, every sad spirit revive. Rain drops also replenish the “fountains
and brooks.” When rain departs it leaves behind a rainbow “on which love
appears.”
In the poem entitled “The Stress” the poet’s communes with the stars and wonders at the omnipotence of the mind. He writes,

Oh! They are eloquent of things, which make
Man’s nature half divine; and to his soul
Speak the high language of another world!

The final poem called “Ode to the Setting Moon (part)” expresses a longing for the other world as the poet sees the “souls” of people “flitting” at the edge of the moon playing with angels. Though the poet longs for the celestial ‘other’ world he cannot escape the earthly world of love. The tension within this contradiction provides strength to the poem.

The theme of love and betrayal runs through these poems and yet there is an abiding concern with social issues like the plight of widows and orphans. His social concerns become quite powerful in subsequent poems especially The Fakeer of Jungheera, written in English iambic tetrameter, where he weaves a magical tale around the life of a widow and her newfound but tragic love with a fakeer. We can also discern Derozio’s love for nature and his belief in friendship through these unpublished poems. At times his humanism cloys and his romanticism strikes as somewhat dreary, but Derozio introduced an aesthetic discourse in literature that could at once critique the upper caste Hindu society of the nineteenth century and the discriminatory British colonialism. Even in these early poems we can see his preoccupation with the twin themes of death and immortality, which resurface more strongly in his later poems. The love for womankind in these poems, the loss of his mother a decade earlier, and death of his sister during this period evoked longings for an imagined homeland, which Derozio understood to be India. This strong identification with India as a homeland helped Derozio to anchor his uncertain identity and locate the
discourse of ‘nation as mother’ within a truly Indian literary and social milieu of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

1 Dr. Abirlal Mukhopadhyay, Sri Amar Dutta et. al., Song of the Stormy Petrel: Complete Works of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2001). All future references are made from this text.

2 Elliot Walter Madge in Henry Derozio, The Eurasian Poet and Reformer, rpt., Complete Works p. iv. Derozio was baptized at St. John's Cathedral (old) on August 12, 1809 by Rev. James Ward, the same chaplain who later baptized William Makepeace Thackeray.


6 In the absence of English medium schools, much of the acquisition of English in the early nineteenth century was based on individual effort and initiative. The spread of English only began when the English started to set up schools in India. However as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries small private English institutions began to be established in Calcutta for the education of European children. In 1731 an English medium institution was established in Calcutta by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. In 1759 Rev. Kiernander started an English School with only forty eight students which was immediately followed by the establishment of 174 similar schools in the same year. However only when the Free School Society of Bengal was established in 1789 in Calcutta that the city became the center of English medium education. Amongst the important thinkers and scholars who went to English academia were Radhakanta Deb (1783-1869) and Derozio. Deb went to the Calcutta Academy of Mr. Cummings and Derozio to Dharmatollah Academy of Mr. Drummond.

7 At Hindu College English became the medium of instruction except in the teaching of classical and modern Indian languages. The syllabus for English Literature included Richardson's Selections, Shakespeare's plays, Francis Bacon's Essays, Milton's poetical works, Addison's Essays, Samuel Johnson's The Rambler and Rasselas, Goldsmith's essays, history of literature and rhetoric. Students at the college acquired a love of English literature and an enviable command of the English language. The College soon became the hub of intellectual life for the young Bengalis. This brought in Enlightenment ideas and rationalism that led to the intellectual renaissance of Bengal in the nineteenth century.

8 In 1827 his sister Sophia, who had turned seventeen passed away. The impact of her death together with the death of his mother was felt early in his life and finds its way in themes of regret and loss in his poems.
