

# The Sinthomal Literary Aggressivity of the Subaltern: Rethinking Chander's Brown Romantics

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Brown Romanticism, a term introduced by Manu Samriti Chander in his *Brown Romantics: Poetry and Nationalism in the Global Nineteenth Century*, is a theoretical advance in the discourse of Romanticism that questions the place, influence, and aims of the Romantic writers in the British colonies, those who found themselves on the periphery of the Romantic movement. The purported advance, as we will see, does not hold up to scrutiny. In his introduction to *Brown Romanticism*, “World Literature and World Legislation,” Chander specifically theorises Brown Romanticism according to a Kantian logic of disagreement with the end of agreement; that is, the opposition between Romantics of the metropole and Romantics of the colony can be dialectically reconciled through a Kantian “coming to terms,” an actualisation of a plurality of taste in a world republic of letters (Chander 9). The theorisation laid out in “World Literature and World Legislation will be the focus of my argument, and perhaps the issues that I will take with this approach might be perceptible already – or perhaps not. In any case, a theoretical exposition – something of a detour – will be necessary to sufficiently ground my argument.

When thinking of the Brown Romantics, one cannot help being reminded of Antonio Gramsci, who, in his *Prison Notebooks*, introduces the notion of the subaltern, which is popularly deployed by postcolonial critics like Gayatri Spivak. Chander, too, is reminded of subalternity, even if he goes on to (erroneously) discount it. In his third notebook, Gramsci explains that

For the subaltern classes, the unification [with the state] does not occur; their history is intertwined with the history of civil society; *it is a disjointed segment of that history*. One must study... their passive or active adherence to the dominant political formations; that is, their efforts to influence the programs of these formations *with demands of their own*. (91; italics mine)

The subaltern class represents a point of exclusive inclusion within civil society, in so far as it is a ‘disjointed segment’ of this broader social entity that has been denied ‘unification’ into said entity, vis-à-vis other classes. Despite their disjunction from society at large, however, the subaltern classes still issue ‘demands of their own’, in an effort to ‘influence the programs’ of the social formations around them. What are these demands, in the context of colonial writers, like the Brown Romantics? Better yet, what are the forms of these demands, and how might we locate them? To put it briefly, the Brown Romantics demand a sinthomal release of aggressivity through writing, with the aim of subverting colonising discursive formations. Let us develop this notion, beginning with aggressivity as such.

With subaltern classes, the question of aggressivity towards the ruling order arises naturally as a result of radical exclusion and the discontent it fosters. “In every society, in every collectivity, exists—must exist—a channel, an outlet through which the forces accumulated in the form of aggression can be released,” writes Frantz Fanon in his *Black Skin, White Masks* (112). Fanon’s model of collective aggressivity posits cultural productions as avenues through which a pent-up aggressivity may find release. In other words, art, be it consciously or unconsciously, is always possibly ‘a channel’ through which such release may flow. It is here clarifying to define aggressivity. For that matter, I turn to Jacques Lacan, who, in “Variations on the Standard Treatment,” writes:

For the subaltern classes, the unification [with the state] does not occur; their history is intertwined with the history of civil society; it is a disjointed segment of that history. One must study... their passive or active adherence to the dominant political formations; that is, their efforts to influence the programs of these formations with demands of their own. (91; italics mine)

Borne out of the drama of the mirror stage, aggressivity emerges following the imaginary capture of the subject by the specular other — more precisely from ‘the rending of the subject from himself’ that results from this specular identification with the ‘unified whole’ that is the image of the other. This relation, though in this instance explicated in the context of the *imago* of the mirror stage, is the point of entry into imaginary lack — ‘images of fragmentation’—that can be applied more broadly to the colonial context, between the subject-as-subaltern and the specular other-as-hegemon.

Indeed, the question of aggressivity is broadened to a social level by Lacan in “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” wherein he posits five theses on aggressivity, the fifth being, “This notion of aggressiveness as one of the intentional coordinates of the human ego, especially as regards the category of space, allows us to conceive of its role in modern neurosis and in the malaise in civilisation” (98). Aggressivity, in Lacan’s understanding, is an aspect of the ego that plays a role in ‘modern neurosis’ and civilizational ‘malaise’. As the argument goes, aggressivity is an egoic *adoption* of this fundamental ‘malaise’ in a ‘coordinat[ing]’ manner (this ‘malaise’, for example, exists in the social, political, economic, and cultural lack imposed on the subaltern by the hegemon). An adoption, in this context, is followed by *conversion* that ‘coordinates’ the subject. My inclusion of the term conversion here stems from Lacan’s use of ‘neurosis’, which, based on his appropriation of Freud in *The Psychoses*, is a condition in which “the subject attempts to make the reality that he at one time elided re-emerge by lending it a particular meaning, a secret meaning, which we call symbolic” (45). In the process of repression [*Verdrängung*], that which was ‘elided’ in the unconscious is followed by a ‘symbolic’ return that is the symptom, in so far as the symptom is a signifier of that which is repressed [*Verdrängte*]. Put otherwise, the neurotic converts that which is repressed in the unconscious

into a symptom in the symbolic. To quilt this to the question of colonialism, aggressivity, as the internalisation of civilizational ‘malaise’ associated with neurosis, leads to a conversion of said ‘malaise’ into, per Fanon, cultural productions. These cultural productions, *qua* materialisations of aggressivity, whether or not their content is explicitly aggressive, perform the discontent of the subject in question, with the latent—or not—aim of changing the status quo. Therefore (to unite psychoanalysis with subalternity), the subaltern poet’s creative output is the *form* of their demands, as Gramsci understands them—demands for change and for a realisation of their subjectivity.

I have sought to sketch out this model of subaltern literary aggressivity only to apply it as a critique of Chander’s “World Literature and World Legislation,” which, in its Kantian idealism, fails to account for matters of the psychic economy. Chander argues that “it is wrong to understand the ambivalence that these writers [the Brown Romantics] demonstrate in laying claim to European literary lineage within a psychological problematic,” specifically citing Fanon and Bloom as figures who offer such ‘problematic[s]’ (3). The logic for this claim, that the psychic economy is the ‘wrong’ framework for understanding the Brown Romantics, is unclear and underdeveloped; it seems, at best, that Chander is giving priority to the socio-cultural field of colonialism over the psychical one. Yet questions of psychic economy are not at all separate from this field; rather, the psychic is deeply integrated in the socio-cultural, as the arguments of Fanon and Lacan I invoke above suggest. I will consequently posit that Chander’s so-called Brown Romantics—a term that I most hesitatingly deploy, only for the sake of clarity—can very well be read through a psychoanalytic model, one coupled with Gramscianism, and, indeed, should be thus read. It is through a wilful rejection of the ‘psychological problematic’ that Chander, wittingly or unwittingly, neutralises—co-opts in terms favourable to colonialism—the radical aggressivity locatable in the Brown Romantics. He performs what I will call, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, a stifling oedipalisation that denies these subaltern writers their self-realisation in aggressivity. By oedipalisation, I certainly intend to invoke the structure of

social normalisation established by Freud wherein the son desires to, but is unable to, kill the father with whom he competes, but I align here more so the Deleuzoguattarian idea of binding the subject to a position of subordination vis-à-vis a master signifier in which the choice is twofold: accept the despot or be relegated to an extra-symbolic zone of indeterminacy. Aggression may be located in this structure as well; however, here, aggression is critically sublated into identification with the father – which reproduces the structure as a whole, given that the desired end is not transcending the father but rather *becoming the father*. In other words, we find in the oedipal scheme an eventual neutralisation of aggression in favour of identification—which is precisely what Chander’s approach effects as well. Assuredly, this is not where we ought to lead the Brown Romantics.

Instead, I see the Brown Romantics as figures who, because they refuse the strictures of their metropolitan *noms-du-père* and therein face a threat to their subjective existences as such, must find an evanescent realisation of their subjectivity in aggressivity-steeped writing that aims beyond a mere oedipal drama of becoming-father, to which Chander relegates them. Writing, in so far as it serves the Brown Romantics as an outlet for this aggressivity, becomes the crutch upon which their subjective integrity is preserved, in the face of colonial eviscerations of the same. It is a *sinthome*, a means of transcending an oedipal subordination, that allows for these figures to move past the White Romantics – colonial *noms-du-père* – and their laws of taste. This *sinthome* allows them, from a position of subalternity, to make demands for change, distinct from the father-son engagement found in a standard oedipal drama by virtue of their ultimate aim being one of deconstructing the hegemonic structure—not assuming mastery thereof via repression of aggression. Again, the *sinthome* situates the subject beyond the oedipal drama, according to an inward turn that aligns with an emancipatory jouissance. Yet, to deny this *sinthome* and the overtly aggressive libidinal charges associated with it is to shackle, as Chander does, these subaltern writers—the so-called Brown Romantics—to White Romantic sensibilities. In my rethinking of Chander’s theorisations on the Brown Romantics, I will

offer an exegesis and deconstruction of Chander's own argument, then work through the question of the Brown Romantics' *sinthome* (which I will study through Henry Derozio – one of the figures Chander often cites as a Brown Romantic—and his *The Fakeer of Jungheera*), before offering a path forward for Brown Romanticism, according to the psychoanalytic-Gramscian model of the subaltern's sinthomal aggressivity proffered thus far.

### **§I The Oedipalisation of the Brown Romantic**

The Brown Romantics, according to Chander, were writers writing from a position of exceptionality, bound as they were to metropolitan, White Romantic laws of taste—the injunction of the colonial Other. Their work is, indeed, in Chander's view, inseparable from their differential-diminutive colonial status relative to the British metropole, the Other as such:

This relationship makes it impossible for the colonial writer to enter into the cultural field free of a stigmatizing mark of difference, a sign of inferiority that operates in exactly the way race operates in empire—namely, to justify a form of subjugation so natural, indeed so evident, to the colonizer that it hardly requires any justification at all. (3)

Chander is quite right in this. As marginalised figures in every sense of the term, Brown Romantics could not operate without a 'mark of difference, a sign of inferiority' that diminished their status as poets relative to the White Romantics. Of course, this subjugation is 'so natural' to the colonising bodies that it goes unquestioned by those in the seats of power, be they political, economic, or literary. Accordingly, one of the initial stances Chander takes about this group of writers is that they "labored to organize local readers into a collective whole, anticipating the rise of a reading nation that would not be fully realized in these poets' lifetimes" (2). What Chander identifies as the aim of these writers is collective literary organisation in a way that forms a 'reading nation': the construction of a national literature that asserts the colonial subject's notions of style, without yielding to the dominant literary order of the White Romantics. In this sense, and Chander is still well-positioned, "Brown Romantics are, in every way, 'unacknowledged legislators', figures competing for relative privilege within their particular

cultural arenas” (3). As excluded figures (‘subaltern figures’ would be more precise, but Chander disagrees with the term, a matter that will be addressed below), the Brown Romantics find themselves desirous of the literary centre qua centre of imperial literature (England) and some sort of ‘privilege within their particular cultural arenas’. They are the legislators-in-waiting of their respective cultures, in so far as they cannot yet legislate and are still anticipating the opportunity to do so—an opportunity that will not realistically arrive.

The impossibility of the Brown Romantic’s self-realisation as legislators in this perspective, as Chander explains, involves a double bind of taste: the Brown Romantic, if they follow the White Romantic’s literary order, is a mere imitator; if they argue for their own laws of taste, they are ignored and, in fact, considered tasteless (4). “This double bind,” Chander writes, “defines his [the Brown Romantic’s] position as one ‘exclusive inclusion’, which systemically relegates the colonial writer to outsider status no matter which option he chooses” (4). Let us tentatively accept this: the Brown Romantic is ever-relegated to a point of real exclusion, regardless of their symbolic inclusion—interpellation, more aptly, into the ideological conditions set by the Other—in the dominant literary order. There is simply no path, for the Brown Romantic, within this bind, to accomplish their subjectivity. It is here where Chander begins to stumble in his argumentation. Having, in the quoted excerpt, affirmed the exclusion of the Brown Romantic from the prospect of literary legislation, Chander curiously refuses the subalternity of the Brown Romantic:

I do not mean by adopting this concept to suggest that the Brown Romantics were in any sense subaltern figures outside the ‘circuits of citizenship’. They had indeed been called—directly by reviewers and indirectly by the demand of the literary market—to represent those who would otherwise be without ‘speech’: the Hindu widow, the ‘superstitious’ Caribbean Negro, or the laborers of the Australian bush. Yet this very limitation on acceptable subject matter effectively denied Brown Romantics full citizenship in the republic of letters. (8)

The Brown Romantic is, as Chander has said before, radically excluded while being included in literary discourses, to the extent that the Brown Romantic

does not have ‘full citizenship’ in the ‘republic of letters’. This denial of ‘full citizenship’ is, indubitably, a denial of the Brown Romantic’s subjectivity; that is, unless they meet the conditions imposed upon them by their metropolitan *noms-du-père* – and to meet these conditions is to lose their liberty all the same, since they would merely be instruments for the hegemonic order’s reproduction—they will remain barred from the literary society at large. The Brown Romantic is but a partial citizen, which Chander perceives to be a position above a subaltern one—but partial inclusion is nevertheless an exclusion of sorts, a mark of subalternity in and of itself. I am only using Chander’s words here, let us not forget, which shows an internal contradiction in his logic. In this reduction, indeed, is it not the case that the Brown Romantic becomes the very “disjointed segment” that Gramsci characterises as subaltern (g1)? Even a Spivakian inflection of subalternity contains within it the Brown Romantic as Chander here describes them: they speak, certainly, but they cannot control the subject matter of their speech (though Chander is drawing on Spivak’s use of the term ‘subaltern’, it should be noted that Spivak’s theorisations are heavily based on Gramsci’s and the Gramscian logic still applies). All is dictated by the hegemony of their metropolitan masters: to have a modicum of agency in this structure, via partial citizenship, is not to have any meaningful agency – for this agency (and agency in general) is merely a metaphysics of presence, elevating the perceived *having* of agency to the point of deludedly repressing the not-so-apparent colonial structures dictating the terms and conditions of that very *having*. Assuredly, then, to be content with this modicum of agency, as Chander is, betrays a contentment with the manna thrown to the poor Brown sons from their White fathers. This manna is a gift, perhaps, but one that *integrates* and, moreover, *indebts* the son into the structures erected by the father: “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (*New International Version*, Deuteronomy 8:3). The ‘hunger’ for a paltry form of citizenship is ‘caus[ed]’ by the father, who then



constructs the son's dependency on him—the son lives 'on every word' of the father—by 'feeding [him] with manna'. But this dependency, again, is constructed by the father in the first instance. Chander, thus falling victim to the illusory appeals of presence, fails to account for the subalternity—the disjointedness—of the Brown Romantic, and it is this theoretical misstep, this humanistic fallacy that leads to his surprisingly optimistic view of Brown Romanticism and its concerns.

Chander's rejection of literary resistance in the works of the Brown Romantics stems from this misstep and results in a neutralising oedipalisation of their condition that constitutes a continued denial of their subaltern subjectivity. Chander states his position as follows:

In subtle ways, Brown Romantics did challenge these principles and thereby challenged the sovereignty of English Romantics. Yet, I will argue that their efforts are not legible according to familiar understandings of literary resistance. They are not 'writing back with a vengeance', as a previous generation of postcolonial criticism might have seen it. Rather their struggle represents a desire to realize the promise of plurality in Shelley's formulation, that the peripheral poet might equally serve as what Immanuel Kant would call *Mitgesetzgeber* or "co-legislator." (4-5)

Against a postcolonial tradition that treats the Brown Romantics according to notions of literary resistance, Chander refuses to consider them as figures 'writing back' against their white counterparts 'with a vengeance' and instead chooses to read their desire as a desire for 'plurality' as promised at the end of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, a Kantian 'co-legislator'. What Chander does here, going against his attempt to carve out a space to rethink the Brown Romantics, is confine them to subalternity. Without their 'vengeance', reduced to a peaceful search for 'plurality'—which Chander also later calls a "hope of coming to terms'," following Kant—nothing remains of the Brown Romantic but a figure yearning to become just like their white master (9). Otherwise stated, Chander positions the Brown Romantic not as someone who has opted for a revolutionary break with the system around them, but as some kind of rule-obeying participant therein who seeks to reform the system that disjoins them—except this participation, this quest for plurality from

within is merely a proliferation and reproduction of the White Romantic order, and therefore not a proper plurality.

I propose, contra Chander, that we analyse the Brown Romantics through their literary resistances, which are the very realisations of their subaltern subjectivity—their *sinthome*. Before pursuing this aspect of Brown Romantics, though, let us further elaborate the problem of Chander’s approach, which goes as far as his coining of the term ‘Brown Romanticism’ itself. In *Anti-Oedipus*, from whence the logic of oedipalisation has been taken up, Deleuze and Guattari offer an incisive point of entry into this problematic, through the lens of desire, which is closely associated with aggressivity: “at the very limit of the social ... a despotic Signifier destroys all the chains, linearizes them, biunivocalizes them... But the schizo continually... carries them off in every direction in order to create a new polyvocality that is the code of desire” (40). Though Deleuze and Guattari speak of the schizophrenic under capitalism, I will suggest that the Brown Romantic under the White Romantic’s imperial laws of taste faces a similar threat: instead of being allowed to freely navigate their flows of desire, the Brown Romantics are forced—in this instance, by Chander—under a ‘despotic Signifier’, here understood as Romanticism *qua* white, colonial literary movement, which restricts them to a ‘biunivocaliz[ation]’. In other words, what was before an amorphous ‘polyvocality’ becomes, in this characterisation, a bifurcated choice: either the Brown Romantics are Romantics or they are not. There is no consideration of these figures outside the spectre of Romanticism, which consistently haunts and certainly invalidates Chander’s naivety: “in matters of taste, there may be contention, but it must be coupled with a ‘hope of coming to terms’. Disagreement is understood in this context as the potential for agreement among a community of subjects, the possibility of peaceful accord” (Chander 9). Chander stoops to this level of oedipalised relational thinking: it is always a question of comparing the Brown Romantic to the established White Romantic, and therein to think of the former as aiming for equality with the latter—but it must be a ‘peaceful accord’, nothing aggressive, nothing revolutionary! All there is of the Brown Romantic must

fall to the feet of the colonial *nom-du-père*, the law of the White Romantic father, in a crippling oedipalisation. In truth, the Brown Romantics offer more, like the Deleuzoguattarian schizophrenic: they seek to create ‘a new polyvocality’ according to the ‘code of desire’ (indeed through a relationality, one of aggression-subversion, but a decolonial, transient one that envisions a future beyond the grasp of the colonial Other). This ‘new polyvocality’, a liberation of the Brown Romantics—which Chander shuts himself off to as soon as he rejects their literary resistances—is marked precisely by the aggressivity in their writing, which becomes their *sinthome*. This is where we should focus, not on some idealistic neo-Kantianism that fails to treat the Brown Romantics beyond little children seeking the approval of their colonial *noms-du-père*, the White Romantics.

To further aggravate Chander’s approach, let us push the Deleuzoguattarian perspective even more through a questioning of the politics of colonial recognition, which I will argue are a means of reproducing the colonial ideological apparatus. For this purpose, I wish to consider Coulthard’s response to the prospect of recognition from the colonial Other in *Red Skin, White Masks*: “the colonized must instead struggle to work through their alienation/subjectation against the objectifying gaze and assimilative lure of colonial recognition” (43). Recognition from the colonial Other, per Coulthard’s argument, which draws on Fanon’s theorisations of the subject under colonialism, legitimises the hegemon’s claim to power over the conditions of the subaltern classes by not fundamentally transforming the hegemon-subaltern relation; such recognition is inextricably tied to ‘objectif[ication]’ and ‘assimilat[ion]’ and thus further cements the subaltern’s place in existing structures of power. Is this not precisely the nature of Chander’s notion of Brown Romanticism, which proposes that it is a desire for “co-legislat[ion],” for the “plurality in Shelley’s formulation” — a ‘formulation’ of the colonial Other, we must note, divorced from the realities of the subaltern — that drives the Brown Romantic: is not the Brown Romantic, in Chander’s view, merely chasing after such recognition from the Other, a recognition that would legitimise said Other? That is, seeking a

hypothetical plurality in a world republic of letters that only offers the Brown Romantic a place sans voting rights, sans autonomy, sans any hope of a majority—an exclusive inclusion—is not satisfactory by any decolonial standard, as it merely justifies the subaltern’s subalternity. Chander is in error to adopt his Kantian idealism: the Kantian end of agreement is simply not a relevant framework when treating matters such as the violation of basic human rights (the erasure of the subaltern, overwritten and overridden by a hegemon). To do any justice to the Brown Romantic, we must look at them through a de-colonial approach – which I shall propose to be nothing other than the *sinthome*, a turn from the outside to the inside of the subject, one that does not care for the Other’s recognition or lack thereof, that actualises the ‘work[ing] through’ of subaltern ‘alienation/subjection’ that Coulthard mentions.

## **§II The Sinthome of the Brown Romantic, the Brown Romantic as a *Synth-Homme***

I have referred consistently to the *sinthome* as an escape for the Brown Romantic from the oedipalisation forced upon them, which manifests in the idealisation of the White Romantic as their endpoint. Indeed, the *sinthome* is this escape, the evanescent realisation of the subaltern Brown Romantic, a means by which they reclaim their subjectivity from the metropolitan White Romantic. This *sinthome* I speak of is writing, writing as a materialisation of aggressivity. First, however, some elaboration on the term *sinthome* is necessary – and so pardon the lengthy detour into this late Lacanian innovation. For want of a satisfactory elucidation of the *sinthome* in Lacan’s *The Sinthome*, we shall resort extensively to Roberto Harari’s insights, as a Lacanian psychoanalyst that works with the *sinthome* in a clinical setting, to ground our understanding of the concept – though not to any exclusion of Lacan’s interventions, which will be included where relevant. The *sinthome* is introduced by Lacan as a reparative intervention in the Borromeo knot when it threatens to break apart in psychosis, defined by the foreclosure [*Verwerfung*] of the *nom-du-père qua* social link by the subject (see Figure A).

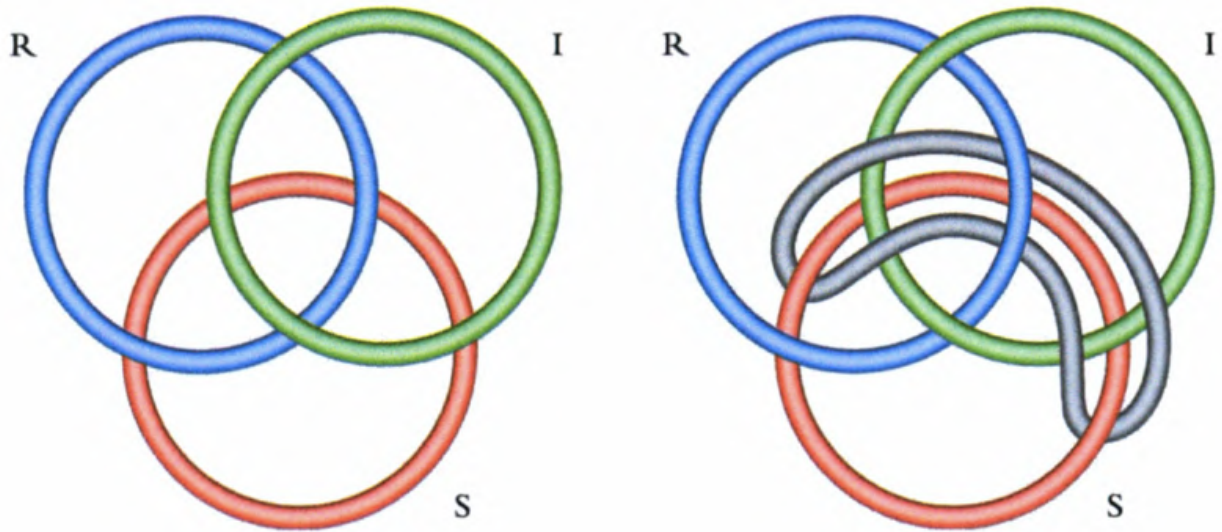


Figure A: On the left, the Borromean knot, at risk of coming apart; on the right, the knot repaired by the addition of the *sinthome* – in black – as a fourth ring (*S<sub>23</sub> 12*).

“This is why,” Harari explains, “the fourth term [in addition to the real, imaginary, and symbolic] opens a new field that we can call the clinic of suppletion, referring to an inherent aspect of the *sinthome*” (95). The purpose of the *sinthome* is ‘supple[mentary]’, a rectification of the disordered Borromean, if we choose to put it that way. Transcending the real, imaginary, and symbolic triad of the Borromean knot, the *sinthome* takes a primacy for the subject by whom it is posited: it is an artificial addition to maintain the integrity of the Borromean knot, where the alternative is an evisceration of the subject into a psychotic structure, unmoored as it is by the absence of the father’s law and, by extension, symbolic codification.

The *sinthome* repairs, the *sinthome* retains structure—and in addition to this, the *sinthome* is artistic, tied to invention. Harari, performing a genealogy of the *sinthome*, provides us with an important distinction between the symptom [*symptôme*] and the *sinthome*: “The suffering entailed by the symptom is certainly not at work in the same way in the *sinthome*, linked as it is to the epiphanic quality of inventing something” (70). The ‘suffering’ of the symptom is contrasted to the ‘epiphanic qualities’ of the *sinthome* that, critically, lend into ‘inventing something’. Sinthomal invention is often

is often invoked through the notion of *savoir-faire*, which roughly translates to ‘know-how’. Concerning the notion of *savoir-faire*, Lacan proposes that “One is only responsible within the limits of one’s *savoir-faire*. What is *savoir-faire*? It is art, artifice, that which endues a remarkable quality to the art of which one is capable, because there is no Other of the Other to perform the Last Judgement. At least, so I say” (*S23* 47). The logic of *savoir-faire* extends out of the illegitimacy of the Other, for our purposes understood as the White Romantic: *in absentia* of its own Other, the Other has no right to perform ‘the Last Judgement’ on the ‘art’ of the artificer—the artificer merely creates art, without concern for the Other. “Joyce,” Lacan writes in this same context, “didn’t know that he was fashioning the *sinthome*, I mean that he was simulating it. He was oblivious to it and it is by dint of this fact that he is a pure artificer, a man of *savoir-faire*, which is what is likewise known as an artist” (99). The ties between the *sinthome* and the ‘man of *savoir-faire*’ are critical for our study: being a ‘pure artificer’ and simply creating his art, Joyce is inextricably linked with the ‘simulating’ of his own *sinthome*, which is nothing besides the very positing of the *sinthome* as such. Though the invention in question — the literary productions of Joyce — may seem to fall under the aegis of the symbol (and hence the symbolic), Harari urges us to think otherwise:

It is thus no surprise that Lacan isolates from this invention of artifice the properly human aspect in the *sinthome*. What is specifically human is the act of artifice: this constitutes a new advance, a new conception of what had been hitherto proposed, in other words that the distinctive human characteristic lay in language. Lacan now refers this to invention, in terms that certainly necessarily imply language — as shown by the order of the symbol — but also another order that we will attempt to conceptualize. Let us stress that, for the moment, we are dealing with another dimension than that of the Symbolic. This already indicates how subversive the fourth order must be. (88-89)

The *sinthome* is ‘specifically human’ in its ‘act of artifice’, which one finds ‘in language’—but this language is also detached from the order of the symbol, the symbolic, and rather locatable in ‘another dimension’ that must be

‘subversive’ to the Borromean triad. This ‘dimension’ is the dimension of the real, as traceable in language (the real being an order that we can equate to structural causality).

The *sinthome* has been conceptually broached, I would think, but what of jouissance, *sinthomal jouissance*? “Analysis proposes not enjoyment through the symptom, but enjoyment with the *sinthome*”: here we have arrived at the question of sinthomic jouissance; that is, the jouissance of the *sinthome* – the repetition-compulsion behind the enjoyment of one’s *sinthome* – as that which elevates the subject, via artifice, beyond the lack of the imaginary and symbolic (108; italics mine). In clinical experience, Harari tells us, the real makes an appearance at times:

These [bits of the real] are not, however, insurmountable obstacles that must be accepted with resignation, but rather bear witness to the singular identification with the *sinthome* where an irreducible jouissance takes shelter. Here, then, it is not a question of a search for the true, but of ‘finding’ this bit of the Real and the jouissance it can offer. (151)

When the psychoanalyst faces this ‘bit of the Real’ in the clinical setting, which is really the manifestation of the *sinthome*, what must be sought is not ‘the true’ – for the real has no truth, it is truth – but locating, through the *sinthome*, ‘the jouissance it can offer’. The observation of a ‘singular identification with the *sinthome*’, as well as the interpretation of the *sinthome* as a site, a ‘shelter’ of ‘an irreducible jouissance’, are key for our study. First, we find the highly individualised character of the *sinthome* expressed (it involves a ‘singular identification’); second, the *sinthome* is explicitly tied to a form of jouissance deemed ‘irreducible’. In this respect, the *sinthome* can situate itself in relation to the real – and thereby be a pathway to return to the real, through the jouissance it contains. To grapple with the ‘bit of the Real’ in the *sinthome* is, ultimately, to raise oneself to the point of approaching that real:

‘Attaining its [the *sinthome*] real’ implies succeeding in grasping what invention circles around, by biting into the lack of the Other. Lacan thus opens the way to the logic that belongs to the *sinthome* – something that does not of course amount to any fixed phenomenological entity, insofar as it entails a singular manner of working with a choice. In sum, the *sinthome* has a logic, in other words it emerges as an articulated register grounded, necessarily, in the Real. (154-55)

The reason the *sinthome* returns us, approximately, to the level of the real, Harari explicates, stems from the *sinthome*’s emergence as ‘grounded, necessarily, in the Real’ – though not limited to the real, since it becomes its own ‘articulated register’. Sinthomal jouissance, with that said, ‘bit[es] into the lack of the Other’, via an ‘invention’ that ‘circles around’ the ‘lack of the Other’: it is ‘working with a choice’, establishing oneself by artifice (which destabilises the Other by making apparent its own artifice, its veiled lack). We might think of this through the vase metaphor: the *sinthome* ‘bites’ into the Other, which we could think of as a shattering of the vase (the subject); the real, the emptiness at the core of the vase, is then ‘circle[d] around’ by the *sinthome* in a way that forms a new vase-structure. This is the ‘logic’ of sinthomic jouissance – a jouissance firmly based on a kind of rationality, where the subject (or non-subject, if I may) has relative self-mastery via the process of separation from the Other (and one’s status as a barred subject).

Lacan, while he is situating the *sinthome*, accordingly elucidates this particular relation that it has to the real, but emphasises the meaning therein. This development further associates the *sinthome* with a rationality. In *L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à mourre*, Lacan helpfully informs us that “*Le sinthome est réel, c’est même la seule chose vraiment réelle, c’est-à-dire qui ait un sens, qui conserve un sens dans le Réel. C’est bien pour ça que le psychanalyste peut, s’il a de la chance, intervenir symboliquement pour le dissoudre dans le Réel*”(62). What we find in the *sinthome* is a kind of reason – a meaning (“*un sens*”) – but one that we must distinguish from *jouis-sens*, the intersection of the imaginary and the symbolic. *Jouis-sens*, we could say, is a notion of meaning that emerges out of misrecognitions constitutive of the field of the other and the Other (the imaginary and the symbolic, respectively); the



*sinthome*, conversely, provides a meaning in so far as it rebukes the real senselessness of the imaginary and the symbolic and artificially posits itself. If I may rephrase this: the *sinthome*, because it is aware *and* accepting of the senselessness of the real, becomes suddenly sensible—it very well understands its own artifice as part of this real non-meaning. This is the core rationality of the *sinthome* and sinthomic jouissance. This may seem to contradict Harari’s remarks on the *sinthome* in his reading of Lacan’s final years:

‘There is One’ can be said to invoke the *One of the sinthome*, thus indicating a marginal instance, since it can be neither totalized nor added up. Situated elsewhere, on another edge, it operates as the support of the speaker... it answers to no integration, no context, no history, no full or anticipated meaning. (125)

The *sinthome* is immediately characterised as a non-totality and a non-additive instance — since it refuses ‘integration’, ‘context’, ‘history’, and ‘meaning’ — that ‘answers to... no full or anticipated meaning’. What Harari, from a quick skim of his statement, seems to suggest is that the *sinthome* is incredibly senseless, something that resists all logic and logical convention (and there finds itself ‘a marginal instance’ that becomes ‘the support of the speaker’). Might we not say, however, to give a better reading of Harari, that he is instead advocating for the extremely rational character of the *sinthome*? To refuse ‘integration’, ‘context’, ‘history’, and ‘meaning’, all of which seems to me dependent on the imaginary and the symbolic, is to refuse a misleadingly appealing surface of the Other and arrive at its core lack: to embrace senselessness is the rational response to the pretences of sense in the Other. The *sinthome*, in this regard, restores a sense of the senseless real latent in the Other to the subject. This senselessness is carried through the adoption of artifice: artifice, knowing artifice, is a rational pathway to concrete individuality, to non-subjectivity in the real.

Slavoj Žižek, in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, offers a further explication of the *sinthome* that clarifies the stakes of this theorisation for our study of Brown Romanticism:

What we must bear in mind here is the radical ontological status of symptom: symptom, conceived as *sinthome*, is literally our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject. In other words, symptom is the way we – the subjects – ‘avoid madness’, the way we ‘choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe)’ through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world. (81)

Žižek’s characterisation of the *sinthome* as a choice of ‘something... instead of nothing’ is vital: if we ignore the *sinthome* and reduce the Brown Romantics to figures perpetually lacking relative to their metropolitan masters, then ‘nothing’ remains for them; however, if we accept the jouissance of their writing, in as much as it marks their subversion (their *aggressive* subversion) of White Romanticism, then they become something—then we can acknowledge their ‘being-in-the-world’. It is thus that the *sinthome* goes *beyond the Oedipus complex*, as it were, and aids the subaltern classes in going beyond their status as the “disjointed segmented” of society (Gramsci 91). The *sinthome* is the subaltern’s voice, the path towards self-invention—a liberating self-invention of subjectivity.

I wish to evaluate and challenge Chander’s analysis of Derozio’s “Heaven” vis-à-vis Byron’s *The Bride of Abydos* in “World Literature and World Legislation,” because I find this contrast to be exemplary of the *sinthomal* aggressivity with which I have been grappling and without which, I contend, Derozio’s poem is truly a mere imitation of Byron’s. We are told, correctly, that “Derozio’s ‘Imitation’ opens by mimicking the dactylic tetrameter, diction, and syntax of the English original [*The Bride of Abydos*]” (Chander 10). The formal imitation is significant: Derozio is asking to be juxtaposed with the English original. I must explicate that our approach here towards comparison will differ from Chander’s oedipalising approach: instead of treating the White Romantic as the be-all, end-all of the Brown Romantic, we are instead here seeing the latter enter a relation of aggressive contention with the former (which Chander, unsurprisingly, dismisses) with the aim of proper separation.

Chander makes some well-analysed remarks at this point, eclipsed though they are by his disappointingly oedipal conclusions, which enchain the Brown Romantic to subalternity:

Where Byron's poem refers to the Ottoman Empire, Derozio refers to the Christian Heaven, which he later names 'love's hallowed empire'. The epithet suggests *a revision of the imperialism undergirding Byron's Orientalism*. But even though one cannot fail to detect that Derozio has built his poem in contention with Byron's, the poem cannot be dismissed as a simple act of resistance. Indeed, it seems to me, Derozio has entered into a contentious relationship with his famous predecessor *in order to sustain the possibility of 'coming to terms' with Byron's Orientalism...* Derozio has entered into an agreement to disagree, implicitly endorsing a heterogeneous cultural field as allowing for a more even distribution of literary authority than a field that aimed at unifying participants. His critique of Orientalism has a *cosmopolitical end*. (10; italics mine)

Defanging the Brown Romantic, after recognising their fangs no less, Chander somehow misses the revolutionary potential that liberates Derozio in his imitation of Byron – the *sinthome* – and returns to a neutralising Kantian conclusion that 'Derozio has entered into an agreement to disagree'. Where Derozio, as Chander himself notes, is occupied with an overtly subversive de-orientalising of Byron's metropolitan discourse, Chander decides to effectively say: 'Derozio is in contention with Byron, but he is not really subverting Byron's orientalism – which he is rather fine with – since all he really wants is show is that he can do what Byron does, with the same degree of skill, just in India rather than England'. Asserting that Derozio's 'critique of Orientalism has a cosmopolitical end' defeats the aggressivity located within this critique and its intrinsic demand for an acknowledgement of the subaltern's subjectivity. It wrenches from Derozio all his work in excavating India from the metropole's fetishistic, phantasmal projections.

If we properly evaluate these same passages, Derozio's reworking of Byron's Orientalism demonstrates a desire to take back what has been overwritten by the metropole. India, and the East more broadly, is not some underdeveloped, barbarically beautiful "land of the Sun," as Byron puts it, but instead, per Derozio, a place where "his [the sun's] light would be darkened by

glory divine” (The Bride of Abydos 16; “Heaven” 5-6; both quoted from Chander 10). Derozio re-establishes the subaltern classes’ claim to their land — he is not simply vying for the same status as Byron, while respecting Byron’s differences like an obedient son. Instead, he proclaims the ‘glory divine’ that watches over the East, rather than the West, in a manner that challenges and subverts orientalisating discourses, through a decentring of divine blessing towards the East from the West. Chander’s warning against reducing Derozio’s poem to a ‘simple act of resistance’ is therefore misleading and incorrect: resistance is far from simple (and clearly more complex than Chander’s pacifying neo-Kantian readings, which ignore all the nuances of literary resistance). Derozio—and this applies to the Brown Romantics more broadly — finds in writing a means of externalising his discontent as a subaltern figure; he turns to writing, but specifically writing qua *jouissance* that subverts the dominant literary order of the White Romantic. Derozio may consequently latch onto his writing as a *sinthome* that safeguards him from the double bind of exclusive inclusion typical of the subaltern. It is, furthermore, a positive assertion of his identity — he becomes a subject in full, from a subject-in-waiting — which is otherwise lost to a void of negativity constructed by the British metropole’s hegemony over India. This negativity itself is no different from the void of neutrality into which Chander places Derozio, in so far as neutrality, in Chander’s work, is — even if he fails to notice as much — based on an oedipal lack.

In *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, Derozio offers an even more explicit subversion of colonial discourses, especially those surrounding the Hindu *sati*, reinforcing our reading of aggressive writing as the Brown Romantic’s *sinthome*. In one of his earlier references to the *sati*, Derozio’s speaker calls out the European reader: “Ye who in fancy’s vision view the fires / Where the calm widow gloriously expires” (FJ 1.10.17-18). The second-person here — this ‘Ye’ who observes the *sati* with ‘fancy’s vision’ — is brought into direct confrontation with the content of the poem. As Derozio’s notes to these two lines demonstrate, this second-person is the European, whose immersion in a separate symbolic field leads to a dangerous ignorance of *sati* and its perils:

The whole of this passage has reference to a mistaken opinion, somewhat general in Europe, namely, that the Hindu Widow's burning herself with the corpse of her husband, is an act of unparalleled magnanimity and devotion. To break those illusions which are pleasing to the mind, seems to be a task which no one is thanked for performing; nevertheless, he who does so, serves the cause of Truth. The fact is, that so far from any display of enthusiastic affection, a Suttee is a spectacle of misery. (123-24)

The intervention of Derozio-as-author in this key moment – whereby the European reader is directly targeted – confirms his effort to recast the *sati* against orientalisising discourses. Far from a 'display of enthusiastic affection', Derozio urges, the 'Suttee is a spectacle of misery'. This is the 'Truth', hidden as it otherwise is behind 'those illusions' of Orientalism. Derozio charges, then, those two lines that I quoted earlier with a strong notion of duty: a duty to clarify the 'Truth' against 'mistaken opinion'. Such a move also showcases the aggressivity embedded in Derozio's poem: constructed with the aim of subverting Europeanist readings of a Hindu tradition and reclaiming it, thereby, as it is – with all its real problems – for India, Derozio issues a demand from his subalternity to the metropole. This demand is a demand for change, as described earlier, that stems from a malaise generated through the hegemonic dynamics behind British colonialism.

With this explicit invocation of the European reader, Derozio proceeds with his narrative such that it arrests the jouissance of this reader by denying the *sati* – and the perverse pleasure that orientalisising readings derive from it – and instead seeking recourse in the Sufi love tradition. The choices in terms of content ensure the subjectivity of Derozio as a subaltern, despite his divergence from the metropolitan laws of taste (and, unlike Chander, I will not suggest that there is some hope on Derozio's part for reconciliation with the White Romantic). In Derozio's first canticle, the Fakeer interrupts Nuleeni's *sati*:

Disorder reigns: – the yell, the shout,  
The dying gasp, the groan, the rout,  
Alas! have marred the solemn scene  
Where late mysterious rites had been. (1.22.23-26)

What was being steadily romanticised and glorified in a sombre, melancholic voice — an ever-rising sense of tension, a continuous and eroticised consumption of misery for *jouissance* — is upturned in this scene. The Fakeer’s entry forces the colonial spectator to turn their enjoyment in Nuleeni’s misery towards something far less pleasing: the ‘Disorder’. The spectator must acknowledge, rather than Nuleeni’s tragic beauty, the ‘yell’, ‘shout’, ‘gasp’, ‘groan’, and ‘rout’ that ‘mar’ the once ‘solemn scene’. No longer is this misery, as Derozio puts it in his notes, a consumable spectacle. Chaos is all that remains, negating the European reader’s sadistic *jouissance* in Nuleeni’s ritual death: there is no more *jouis-sens*, as the narrative stage shifts elsewhere, as our connection with the anticipated meaning of the ‘mysterious rites’, of the *sati*, is lost.

Nuleeni’s *sati*, indeed, never arrives, which serves as Derozio’s ultimate rejection of the metropolitan interest in *sati* (and its orientalisising tendencies around the practice, generally): she dies, upon the Fakeer’s body — in what might mirror a *sati*, but is doubtlessly not a *sati* (the logic of mirroring to criticise and thence decolonise, of course, extends to much of Derozio’s project—on her own terms. We are given Nuleeni’s reaction to the Fakeer’s death—“Nuleeni’s settled glance is fixed upon / That dying form, as if for him alone / Her soft eye’s lamp were lit” — but nothing else until she too is dead (2.23.97-99). The next scene offered is that of Nuleeni’s corpse, atop the Fakeer’s:

And fondly ivying round it were the arms  
Of a fair woman, whose all powerful charms  
Even death had failed to conquer—her lips seemed  
Still parted by sweet breath, as if she dreamed  
Of him in her embrace: but they who thought  
That life was tenanting her breast, and sought  
Some answer from her heart to hush the doubt,  
Found that its eloquence had all burned out. (2.24.21-28)

The lacuna in the text, wherein Nuleeni dies, purposefully withholds her misery, dignifying her death by concealing it from the spectacle-thirsty European reader, to recall Derozio’s active considerations in his notes.

This lacuna marks a point at which the reader loses their mastery over Derozio's poem: our lack of knowledge around Nuleeni's death elevates that death into something constitutive of our desire as readers, something that we wish to unearth from Derozio, but ultimately cannot; of course, this follows the logic of the Lacanian *objet a*, the object-cause of desire. In this passage that I have brought forth, we can say that the speaker simulates the European reader's voyeurism of the colonial subaltern, trying to mine, like this reader, 'Some answer... to hush the doubt' they now hold. The diction choices in this passage, such as 'seemed', 'as if', and 'thought', support this incertitude, this speculation on the part of speaker as such and qua embodiment of European reader: all these signifiers construct the final scene through a definite perspective that is engaged in this 'seem[ing]', these 'as if' statements, such 'thought' with the implicit aim of 'hush[ing] the doubt' that lingers around Nuleeni's death (and this perspective can be tied to the European reader, who Derozio explicitly charges with a desire for mastery over the subaltern). In this sense, the lacuna introduced by Derozio apotheosises Nuleeni and the Fakeer, who remain – and perhaps Derozio is extending this claim to the subaltern class at large – beyond the grasp of the reader, especially the European reader. It is a point at which the poem absolutely resists European attempts to co-opt it for colonial purposes, for colonial discourses, for colonial enjoyment (perhaps *jouissance* is already out of the question)—and thereby becomes the point at which Derozio's subalternity is elevated to subjectivity proper. Just as the 'eloquence' of Nuleeni is 'all burned out', so is the subaltern radically transported beyond the colonial master, in so far as writing (writing with a vengeance towards the dominant literary order) permits this escape, this positive, sinthomal assertion of the subject as such. It is not a matter of Derozio trying to equalise himself peacefully with the colonial *nom-du-père*, but one of him trying to free himself from the latter's clutches in a subversive externalisation of his built-up aggressivity through writing: the sinthome, which allows this subaltern writer to re-invent himself,

to become a *synth-homme* that has the potential to – rather than find some equality with the Byrons and the Southeyes of his time – escape a colonial relation to the West.

As an aside, there is no need to treat this final scene as a yielding to European expectations through the staging of a tragic romance, even if it is not the expected *sati* – that would be egregiously ignorant of Derozio’s other key influences, such as Sufi mysticism. Joseph Lumbard contributes to our understanding of Sufism and love, as found in the Indian subcontinent: “Many of the themes associated with the Sufi love tradition find direct reflections in the secular literary traditions of the Muslim world, particularly *‘udhrī* ghazal poetry, where the beloved becomes the personification of the ideal and the lover is condemned to die in love” (172). Just because Nuleeni’s death resembles a motif from the European tradition does not mean it must be derived from this tradition: we can just as easily posit a Sufi influence on this stylistic choice in Derozio’s work. For his love, the Fakeer ‘is condemned to die’, while, as the object of the Fakeer’s love, Nuleeni is consistently personified into an ‘ideal’ woman. The possibility of Sufi inspiration holds, just as – if not more – strongly as that of a European influence. Bluntly, Derozio is not obeying a European tradition, following those like Southey, but doing something new.

### **§III Rethinking the Problematic: Towards a New Brown Romanticism**

Chander, to return to his “World Literature and World Legislation,” might still have some rebuttal against the plausibility of taking up the Brown Romantics as figures of resistance. Having mentioned Spivak’s charge of bigotry against figures like Shelley, Chander emphasises that

The same charge of bigotry can be leveled at the Brown Romantics: Derozio’s work features anti-Islamic sentiment, Martin figures all non-Christians as heathens in need of saving, and Lawson was a rabid white supremacist, thoroughly committed to the eradication of Asians in particular. These incidents of religious and racial intolerance warn us not to idealize Brown Romantics as figures of resistance to the oppression of white Western imperialism, even as we locate within their appeals for citizenship the desire for a more hospitable republic of letters. (11)



Notwithstanding Chander's usual oedipalised neutralisation of the Brown Romantics – with their revolutionary potentials being reduced to 'the desire for a more hospitable republic of letters' – this passage simply lacks sense: even if the Brown Romantics exhibit 'religious and racial intolerance', does that completely discredit their work towards asserting the subaltern beyond the double bind of British imperialism? Perhaps I am overstating Chander's claim here, and he is merely warning us 'not to idealize' these figures as 'figures of resistance'. (Who said that we should? When did we ever say to applaud them beyond the cause of resisting colonial discourses?) But in the broader development of Chander's essay, it does not seem that he is merely warning against an 'idealiz[ation]', but against viewing the Brown Romantics as 'figures of resistance', which is an indefensible perspective. Derozio's craft in *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, or even "Heaven," demonstrates that he is a figure of resistance against the imperial discourse of White Romanticism, whether or not he is perfectly progressive beyond that project.

Chander, to end his introductory chapter, offers us a summary definition of his aims, which I will use to begin a summary of my own arguments:

I want to define as quintessentially Romantic a dialectic between dissent and agreement in which the conflict over taste proceeds in the name of peaceable reconciliation. If world literatures are, in Casanova's phrase, 'combative literatures', Romantic world literature, I want to show, is distinguished by the fact that its struggles are governed by Kant's 'hope of coming to terms'. (11)

This 'dialectic between dissent and agreement' that Chander claims finds its end in 'peaceable reconciliation' is truly an idealistic perspective, ignorant of the harsher realities of colonialism and imperialism. The subaltern classes cannot be expected to behave in a 'peaceable' manner, subjugated as they are under colonial hegemony. To advocate for peace between the subaltern and the hegemon is to legitimise the latter's oppression of the former; that is, it is to reproduce the conditions of the colonial apparatus under a new banner that fundamentally fails to liberate the subaltern subject as such. In as much as these subalterns are subjugated, additionally, they necessarily develop an

aggressivity, which must find some channel of release, like writing. This writing becomes *sinthomal*: the point of self-realisation of the subaltern as a full subject, beyond the spectre of colonialism, even if it is evanescent, only for a moment. In this *sinthomal* writing, the aim is not to find ‘peaceable reconciliation’, as it were, but to find the self beyond the colonial master, the *nom-du-père*. To have a ‘coming to terms’ is thus illogical and would, moreover, absolve the White Romantic of any of their sins by subjugating to them what would otherwise be a *sinthomal* realisation of the subaltern.

This paper does not contain a comprehensive critique of Chander’s Brown Romanticism as it is expressed in “World Literature and World Legislation”; I have remained focused only on this first chapter of a larger argument while relying solely on Derozio as a point of incision into the claims with which I take issue. Yet my aim is more to agitate a critical literary perspective that I find lacking in many regards, namely a dismissal of the psychic economy and its relation to subalternity. My argument is a theoretical response to the foundational assertions of “World Literature and World Legislation,” which taint all of Chander’s work in *Brown Romantics: Poetry and Nationalism in the Global Nineteenth Century* (including his chapter on Derozio and *The Fakeer of Jungheera*). That being said, a new classification for the Brown Romantics could potentially be found, one that frees them from the yoke of the despotic signifier, Romanticism, as it is forced upon them by Chander; alternatively, we can begin anew with a theory of Brown Romanticism, one that does not bifurcate the existence of these writers in such a way that they can either peacefully aspire to be like their colonial masters, or fail to be anything at all. Regardless, what cannot be ignored are the *sinthomal* politics of desire and aggressivity which are so vital to these writers’ subalternity: this model of relationality, unlike Chander’s, which only ever treats the Brown Romantic as someone vying for the status of the White Romantic, envisions a complete liberation of the Brown Romantic from their relation to the White Romantic. This model, then, must found a new Brown Romanticism (or a new term altogether) lest we consign the movement to the

annals of history as one inescapably marked by a colonial oedipalisation—  
wherein those poor, little, dutiful, peaceful colonial children tried and tried to  
be like their fathers—and end the discussion with only this and nothing more.  
I shall leave it there.

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# Constant Inconstancy: Learning to Belong through John Clare's Poetics of Attention

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## **I. Introduction**

John Clare celebrates the specificity of nature – a celebration which, in his extensive body of poetry, is lovingly confined to his village of Helpston and the surrounding Northamptonshire countryside. Much of his poetry is marked by his use of the phrase, “I love.” He loves to see, to hear, and he loves to simply mark or note, and none of these acts of recognition are reduced by his oft-repeated experiences with the objects of his attention. In fact, they seem to be enhanced by the repetition. Bridget Keegan writes that “Unlike other locodescriptive poets, he does not begin with ‘I see’ or a command to reader sto ‘Behold’” (159). Indeed, when Clare does appeal to the eye, he still writes, “I love to see.” He does not, except when trying to emulate his poetic predecessors from the latter half of the eighteenth century, stand atop the peaks of hills and declare his love. Instead, when expressing his own poetic voice, he stays close to the ground, more likely to whisper his love to ground nests or mumble it in fascination to himself as he watches critters on the road. As a working-class poet, Clare keeps his poetic self in the peopled landscape of his village, yet his poetry oscillates between being within it and without it. It is not by mere chance that he notices and writes about the small, the overlooked, the hidden: insects, nests, hedgerow-dwellers, birds, children.

Clare sometimes includes himself within this category. Curiously, and what criticism seems to have overlooked for the most part, is that although his poetry is perhaps not consciously didactic, it is, almost by nature, educational as a result of the amount of detail he includes. In this way, Clare places himself as the source of that education and embodies the position of being both within a community as a sharer of knowledge, and outside the community, as one who has abilities and prospects that others in his community do not, either because of disinterest or lack of access and time. His teaching is direct and immediate, reaching beyond schoolhouse prosaic teaching and into an imaginative realm of natural embodiment in which he attempts to mimic nature in its physicality and sound. Part of the impetus behind his poetry is to draw readers into a more physically involved and experiential inhabiting of nature — something he achieves through both staying true to his locality in knowledge and dialect, but also through energetic rhythms and emphasis on vocalicity in his verse.

There is, above all this, a multivalence to Clare's relationship towards his local nature: as a careful observer of perhaps otherwise hidden phenomena who also publishes these observations as poetry, he displays an irresistible urge to write and share that which he sees. Yet this sharing also isolates him from a largely illiterate, but tightly interconnected community. His attentiveness also coincides with the encroaching borders of enclosure laws, and many of the objects of his observations are in the process of disappearing, distorting his sense of rootedness and familiarity. In reading Clare's appreciation of what could be taken for granted, we witness how his keenly attentive poetry can show us to be better inhabitants of our locale; that is, if we acknowledge how our own senses of place are altered in the rapidly changing environments and disappearing landscapes in which we live. What are the different ways of knowing that he exemplifies, and what is at stake in the accuracy of his description? What does it mean for his identity and educative project that he experienced a life centered on the margins of both literary society and the Helpstonian community?