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Edited by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson

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## CHAPTER I

*Romanticism and colonialism: texts, contexts, issues**Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson*

The publication in 1983 of Jerome J. McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* precipitated a return to historical and political readings of the Romantic period. Critics began to analyse ideas of ideology, class and gender in an attempt to deconstruct previous notions of 'Romanticism' as a mainly aesthetic and literary movement amongst five canonical, male poets. Much effort has been made to return Romantic discourse to the contexts in which it was written and read – the 'actual literary communities as they functioned within their larger communities of time and space'.<sup>1</sup> As a result, it is now accepted that it is impossible to understand writing in the period without examining political responses to the French Revolution and the numerous texts (many of them by women and many far more popular at the time than the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Blake or Keats) which were excluded from the canon.

Given these critical developments, it is surprising that, with some recent exceptions,<sup>2</sup> Romanticism's relationship with colonialism has been relatively little studied, although a wealth of critical writing has been devoted to the connection between both early modern and nineteenth-century literature and the histories of colonialism and

<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Butler, 'Repossessing the Past', in Marilyn Butler, Paul Hamilton, Marjorie Levinson, Jerome J. McGann, *Rethinking Historicism* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 64–84 (p. 72).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's 'History of British India' and Orientalism* (Oxford, 1992); John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven and London, 1991); Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge, 1992); H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Stanford, 1996). The most recent study of the subject, Alan Richardson's and Sonia Hofkosh's, *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780–1834* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996), comments that 'the considerable effect of these vast social and geo-political developments upon Romantic-era British literature remains largely unanalyzed, despite long-standing associations between Romanticism and literary exoticism, primitivism and Orientalism', p. 4. On race and gender in the eighteenth century see, Laura Brown, *The Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca, 1993).

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imperialism.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, the most sustained critical attention to the issues of colonialism and literature in the period has been afforded to the novels of Jane Austen in Edward Said's noted analysis of *Mansfield Park* (1814) which considers Sir Thomas Bertram's source of wealth in his plantations in Antigua in relation to the domestic values of home and hearth which the novel endorses.<sup>4</sup> Few similar discussions of the major 'Romantic' writers have yet been forthcoming. In fact the history and politics of the years 1785–1830 were marked not just by the French Revolution, but by the loss of the American colonies, the impeachment of Warren Hastings (the Governor of Bengal), the transportation of convicts to Australia, the campaign to abolish the slave-trade, the acquisition of new colonies in the Mediterranean and Africa, the development of Canada and the administration of older colonies in India, Africa and Ireland. With Mungo Park's first exploration to the Niger in 1795, the systematic exploration of the interior of Africa began.<sup>5</sup> That year Britain also took over the Cape Colony from the Dutch East India Company for the first time (British rule was confirmed in 1815) and began to take an interest in Southern Africa. Further afield, Chinese history became known through De Mailla's translations (1777–85) and Britain began to countenance the opening up of Chinese markets through the power of the Royal Navy. By the end of the nineteenth century, the British Empire was territorially the largest empire in world history, its population of over 400 million people to

<sup>3</sup> See for instance, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, *New World Encounters* (California, 1993); *Marvellous Possessions* (Chicago and Oxford, 1991); *Learning to Curse* (London and New York, 1990); Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore and London, 1978); Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London and New York, 1986); *Women, 'Race', and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London and New York, 1993); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (London and New York, 1995); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993); Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca and London, 1988); Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was: Four Centuries of British Writing About Africa* (New York, 1970); Ashton Nichols, 'Silencing the Other: The Discourse of Domination in Nineteenth-Century Exploration Narratives', *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, 3 (1989), pp. 1–22; Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London and Henley, 1980); Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism* (London, 1983); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford, 1995); Gail Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism* (London and New York, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> For Said, Austen is at 'the centre of an arc of interests and concerns spanning the hemisphere, two major seas, and four continents'. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 95–116 (p. 101).

<sup>5</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Actions, 1780–1850* (London and Madison, 1964), pp. 150–51.

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be found in all regions of the globe. Colonialism shaped the early nineteenth-century church, with the rise of missionary societies. It affected culture at home, creating new fashions in aesthetics, sport and costume. Indeed, the Romantic period is a watershed in colonial history, witnessing a move from a protectionist colonial system, based upon mercantilist economic principles, to a free-trade empire with a political and moral agenda, proverbially described, after Kipling's poem, as 'the white man's burden'.

Looking at the Romantic-period writing from the perspective of categories of colonialism, imperialism and race is especially challenging because of the very transitional nature of the colonial project in the period. From a Marxist perspective 'colonialism' is 'the conquest and direct control of other people's lands' – a historical phase in the larger process of imperialism, or 'the globalization of the capitalist mode of production'.<sup>6</sup> From a post-Althusserian position it is also possible to discriminate between colonialism, as the material system of conquest and control, and imperialism as a form of colonialism buttressed by hegemonic cultural and ideological imperatives. Although nineteenth-century colonialism is a thing of the past, imperialism is often said to persist in the sense of the continuing global ambitions of Western capitalism. This raises the vexed question of the relationship between culture and imperialism and the complicity of English literature in the imperialist project, and, indeed, the role of a volume such as this in the debate. It is often pointed out that the historical moment which saw the emergence of the academic discipline of English also produced a distinct brand of colonialism.<sup>7</sup> Gauri Viswanathan has argued that 'British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education'.<sup>8</sup>

Amongst the texts valued by the British in India were those which Romantic critics had helped to establish as embodiments of Englishness and Christianity – Shakespeare and Milton. Indeed,

<sup>6</sup> *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York and London, 1994), pp. 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York, 1989), pp. 3–8.

<sup>8</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, 'The beginnings of English literary study in British India', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1987), p. 17. See also her *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (London, 1989).

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Wordsworth's own writing anticipates the development of this form of cultural imperialism. In the light of Viswanathan's analysis, the Wanderer's vision of Albion civilizing the rest of the world in *The Excursion* (1814) exhibits a sinister undercurrent:

So the wide waters, open to the power,  
The will, the instincts, and appointed needs  
Of Britain, do invite her to cast off  
Her swarms, and in succession send them forth;  
Bound to establish new communities  
On every shore whose aspect favours hope  
Of bold adventure . . .  
Earth's universal frame shall feel the effect;  
Even the smallest habitable rock,  
Beaten by lonely billows, hear the songs  
Of humanised society . . .

Your Country must complete  
Her glorious destiny. Begin even now.<sup>9</sup>

The Wanderer claims that the world will look to Britain for leadership and that his country's imperial future will be glorious. Coleridge also voiced similar views when, in later life, he commented that 'Colonisation is not only a manifest expedient – but an imperative duty on Great Britain. God seems to hold out his finger to us over the sea'.<sup>10</sup> Noting this connection between Romantic thought and its imperial dimension, Marlon B. Ross comments that:

In a very real sense the Romantics . . . help prepare England for its imperial destiny. They help teach the English to universalize the experience of 'I', a self-conscious task for Wordsworth, whose massive philosophical poem *The Recluse* sets out to organize the universe by celebrating the universal validity of parochial English values.<sup>11</sup>

The Wanderer's hopes for Albion, however, are not unique in this period. Ross's point is actually made in a more emphatic way by an opponent of the conservatism of the later Wordsworth and Southey, Anna Letitia Barbauld. Her remarkable *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, a Poem* (1812) links colonization, language and culture in a composite imperial endeavour:

<sup>9</sup> *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. v, *The Excursion, The Recluse*, ed. Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1949; 1972), pp. 295, 299.

<sup>10</sup> *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols. (London and Princeton, 1990), 1, p. 369.

<sup>11</sup> Marlon B. Ross, 'Romantic Quest and Conquest', in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington, 1988), p. 31.

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Wide spreads thy race from Ganges to the pole,  
 O'er half the Western world thy accents roll:  
 . . . Thy stores of knowledge the new states shall know,  
 And think thy thoughts, and with thy fancy glow;  
 Thy Lockes, thy Paleys shall instruct their youth,  
 Thy leading star direct their search for truth;  
 Beneath the spreading Plantain's tent-like shade,  
 Or by Missouri's rushing waters laid,  
 'Old father Thames' shall be the Poet's theme,  
 Of Hagley's woods the enamoured virgin dream,  
 And Milton's tones the raptured ear enthrall,  
 Mixt with the roar of Niagara's fall.<sup>12</sup>

Barbauld's enthusiastic anticipation of a British cultural imperialism, through which the colonized might be taught to think the thoughts of the poets and philosophers of the mother country, certainly pre-empt the arguments of critics such as Homi K. Bhabha and Viswanathan. And it is certainly true that the Romantic canon did become, as Wordsworth and Barbauld predicted, a part of the later nineteenth-century cultural imperialism of Britain's domination of nearly one quarter of the terrestrial globe. Nevertheless, writing of the Romantic period cannot simply be seen as univocal in its support of that domination: the contributors to this volume investigate some of the ways in which it articulates resistance to, and/or anxiety about, cultural imperialism, even as it also, in other areas, remains complicit with it.

The question of resistance to and complicity with imperialism has been deepened – in discussions which few Romanticists have so far addressed – by Henry Louis Gates Jr, Kwame Anthony Appiah and other writers working on black British and American writers of the period.<sup>13</sup> In the Indian context, the work of Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies group has provided a more nuanced understanding of power within the colonized population.<sup>14</sup> Guha has shown that, beyond the stereotypes constructed by colonizers, colonized peoples are divided in themselves and amongst themselves, so that no one native group, and least of all a nationalist élite educated in the systems of schooling, law, government etc. which are organized

<sup>12</sup> Lines 81–96. *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, eds. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Athens, Georgia and London, 1994), p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Criticism* (Oxford and New York, 1988); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> *Subaltern Studies 1: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. R. Guha (Delhi, 1982).

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by the colonizers, can speak for all. Those not educated in the colonizers' discourses often find their voices go unrecorded and unheard in colonial and post-colonial society, although it is often on their labour – and their attitudes to labour – that both the colonial and nationalist élites depend.

The emphasis in the Subaltern Studies group has been on a shift in historiographical method: they have attempted to collect and consider the voices, histories and traditions of those who are often left unrecorded and excluded. In this volume, a similar attempt is made by Lauren Henry, who considers the writings of a number of enslaved and liberated Africans of the period, neither simply as examples of some notional slave or African consciousness, nor purely as responses to the discourses of the colonizers. Instead, she portrays them as artefacts shaped from varied cultural traditions and from differing personal histories, political affiliations and interpretative strategies. Phillis Wheatley, Henry shows, incorporates in her work references to West African forms of worship, references which inflect – and even undercut – the neoclassical style and Christian attitudes of the colonialist society which had enslaved her. Drawing on the work of Gates, Henry argues that by writing and publishing former slaves such as Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana asserted the full humanity of blacks, against the arguments of Enlightenment philosophers that their lack of literature demonstrated the inferiority of Africans.

Equiano's history illustrates the difficulties in discussing the issue of 'othering' in the period. Equiano moves from the subject position of marginalized, African slave to speak in the metropolitan and imperial centre. But, to do so, he must take up an assumed, subject position of the converted pagan and present his story in a language not his own, and in the form of the Protestant, spiritual autobiography, uncannily shadowing fictions such as DeFoe's *Crusoe*. The contributors to this volume are well aware of the dangers of 'othering' different nations and cultures, a process in which the writers discussed in this collection are inevitably complicit. The other is always the 'uncanny Other' and othering is a process of alienation and of epistemic violence (often a prelude to material force), whereby an exclusionary distinction is made between the white westerner and the colonized subject. The essays demonstrate how the many and various peoples subject to Western colonial and imperial processes, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

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century, underwent a process of estrangement, frequently being homogenized and often demonized. Imaginary borderlines were constructed on the bases of imputed savagery, cannibalism, and so on. As Homi Bhabha argues, in his critique of Fanon, it is vitally important that:

The Other must not be imaged, as Fanon sometimes suggests, as a fixed phenomenological point, opposed to the self, that represents a culturally alien consciousness. The Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity – cultural or psychic – that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the ‘cultural’ to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality. If . . . the subject of desire is never simply a *Myself*, then the Other is never simply an *It-self*, a font of identity, truth or misrecognition.<sup>15</sup>

Although aware of the economies of desire in producing a colonial Other through identification and alienation, the contributors to this volume focus primarily upon the material, historical conditions and processes of colonialism in the period and their implications for representation itself.

For some British writers, the appearance at the imperial centre of people from the colonies demanded acknowledgement in their depictions of London. Anna Letitia Barbauld describes (in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, a Poem*) how, in the streets of London, ‘the turban’d Moslem, bearded Jew, / And woolly Afric, met the brown Hindu’<sup>16</sup> and Wordsworth also recalls the national and racial variety of the metropolis: ‘The Swede, the Russian; from the genial South, / The Frenchman and the Spaniard; from remote / America, the hunter Indian; Moors, / Malays, Lascars, the Tartar and Chinese, / And Negro ladies in white muslin gowns’.<sup>17</sup> John Whale’s contribution to the volume records Hazlitt’s troubled response to the performances of a troupe of Indian jugglers playing in popular London theatres. James C. McKusick discusses the celebrated South Sea Island visitors Omai and Lee Boo. It has been estimated that there were probably around 20,000 black people in Britain during the eighteenth century. Of these only a comparative few – Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Mary Prince and Robert Wedderburn (for example)

<sup>15</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, ‘Remembering Fanon’, in *Colonial Discourse*, eds. Williams and Chrisman, pp. 118–19. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London, 1965); *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> Lines 165–66, *Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, pp. 152–61 (p. 155).

<sup>17</sup> *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York and London, 1979), p. 238 (Book vii, lines 239–43).



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besides Equiano, Cugoano and Sancho – left records of their experience. Similarly, few black poets of the stature of Phillis Wheatley had yet appeared on the American literary scene.<sup>18</sup> Yet the impact of these black writers in an age which witnessed strenuous intellectual clashes over race and slavery issues, should not be underestimated. Henry's discussion reminds us that several were widely read in the period, in their own right as literary artists. She also shows that they may have been influences on William Blake's poem 'The Little Black Boy'.<sup>19</sup> Iain McCalman's historical research into the activities and writings of black and mixed-race members of the radical underworld of early nineteenth-century Britain, including Robert Wedderburn and William Davidson (both mulatto offspring of slave owners and their black mistresses), has also provided a new ideological context for the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake and Shelley.<sup>20</sup> Wedderburn's writings demonstrate how sections of the English Jacobin grouping were alert to colonial issues and their relationship to the political system at home. Indeed, Olaudah Equiano became a member of the London Corresponding Society.

Arranged in a broadly chronological order, the chapters collected here examine representations of individuals and societies in the Western Coast of Africa, the Caribbean, Venice, the South Sea Islands, America, the Ottoman and Hebrew Middle East, as well as India. Representations of India and the West Indies receive most attention because it is our belief that these areas were of most importance to the development of colonialism in the period. The chapters are all informed by a historicist concern with explicating the transformations which were visited on the peoples subject to the colonizing process in this period. And this concern leads them to investigation of the many discourses, economic, ethnographic, aesthetic, religious, colonial, which inform these transformations. This

<sup>18</sup> See *Black Writers in Britain, 1760–1890: An Anthology*, eds. Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen (Edinburgh, 1991); *Black Atlantic Writers of the 18th Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas*, eds. Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr (London, 1995); Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984); *The Black Presence in English Literature*, ed. David Dabydeen (Manchester, 1985); Keith Sandiford, *Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth-Century Afro-English Writing* (London and Toronto, 1988); Rosalie Murphy Baum, 'Early-American Literature: Reassessing the Black Contribution', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27 (1994), pp. 533–50.

<sup>19</sup> See also Paul Edwards, 'An African Literary Source for Blake's "Little Black Boy"?' *Research in African Literatures*, 21.4 (1990), 179–81.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, ed. Iain McCalman (Edinburgh, 1992); see also Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld* (Cambridge, 1988).



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is not to say that the critics represented in the volume present a homogenized approach to the texts they discuss, or even agree about the ways such texts are functioning at the level of representation and agency. For instance, Alan Richardson and Timothy Morton read Southey's sonnets on the slave-trade in different ways, Richardson approaching the sonnets from the perspective of altering perceptions of race and Morton from an analysis of the production, commodification and consumption of sugar. Neither do Nigel Leask and Michael Franklin agree over the question of the complicity of William Jones's Indian scholarship in colonial ambitions, Leask being less sanguine than Franklin about its liberationist effects upon the Bengali Renaissance. Rather than presenting a single perspective on Romanticism and colonialism, this volume contains a series of interventions in a number of complex debates, from critics whose work is nuanced in different ways. Nevertheless, all the chapters here are concerned with returning Romantic texts to the context of the material, colonial processes contemporaneous with their imagined versions of colonized people and places. The contributions to this volume also take their bearings both within and outside the Romantic canon. Traditionally, canonical Romantic-period writers, such as Blake, Burke, Coleridge, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley, Hazlitt and Byron loom large, along with Bowles, Chatterton, Clarkson, Southey, Beckford, Hannah More and Sir William Jones, while Wordsworth and Keats are relegated from their usual starring roles to briefer character appearances in the colonialist drama. These writers have been examined not because they are either canonical or non-canonical *per se*, but because their work has been influential in constructing and propagating different portrayals of cultures, hitherto unfamiliar to an increasingly imperialist Britain. It is not the intention of the contributors to this volume to reinforce traditional notions of canonicity by adding further complexities to the work of canonical writers. Such complexities are not necessarily viewed as unquestioned virtues and, more often, they are seen to reveal the Romantics' material interests, ideological limitations and blind spots. What is presented here is, in Gates's phrase, 'a loose canon' of Romantic-period writers, poets and novelists supplemented by less familiar writers, propagandists, and natural philosophers from the margins of the traditional canon and beyond.

That colonialism shaped literary representation was noted nearly fifty years ago by the French literary historian Raymond Schwab

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when he defined Romanticism as Europe's response to the overwhelming experience of finding its civilization not unique but merely one of many, those of the East being older and, perhaps, its source.<sup>21</sup> Schwab focused on the Orient, as did Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). Said demonstrated that the period saw the consolidation of 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient'.<sup>22</sup> The critics contributing to this volume seek to develop the debates initiated by Schwab, Said and others, by investigating in detail the historical and aesthetic relations of writing of the period, not only to the Orient, but also to the other geopolitical zones primarily colonized by Britain, and also by other European powers. Said's work has stimulated a dramatic growth in theoretical analysis of colonialism. Later theorists, most notably Aijaz Ahmad, Abdul R. JanMohamed, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Homi K. Bhabha, Benita Parry, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, reviving the insights of earlier writers, – Frantz Fanon, Freud, Bakhtin – have revealed the limitations of Said's model of colonial discourse.<sup>23</sup> Rather than working at the purely theoretical level the contributors to this volume are more interested in developing applications of some of the perspectives opened by these writers, mixing historicist and new historicist approaches. Implicit in many of the contributions is the recent questioning of the overly rigid, binary distinctions implicit in the notion of the Other that is such an important element in the work of Said and JanMohamed. Several of the chapters move in the area opened by the work of Homi K. Bhabha who showed how Said underestimated the ambivalence and indeterminacy which appeared within colonialist discourse when it

<sup>21</sup> Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, tr. Gene Patterson Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978); see also, John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, theory and the arts* (Manchester and New York, 1995); Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (London, 1986); Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient* (London, 1995); Gail Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins Black Masks*.

<sup>23</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders', in *Europe and its Others*, ed. Francis Barker et al., 2 vols. (Colchester, 1985), 1, pp. 89–106; 'The Other Question . . . the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse', *Screen*, 24.6 (Nov/Dec. 1983), pp. 18–36; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London, 1987); Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', in *'Race,' Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago and London, 1985), pp. 78–106; Marilyn Butler, 'Orientalism', in *The Penguin History of Literature*. Vol. v: *The Romantic Period*, ed. David B. Pirie (Harmondsworth, 1994), pp. 395–447. See also Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1987), pp. 26–58.