

ROMANTIC IMPERIALISM

Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: Universal Empire

The greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history, because the despotism of custom is complete.
This is the case over the whole East.

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

I

The Hindu legends still present a maze of unnatural fictions, in which a series of real events can by no artifice be traced. The internal evidence which these legends display, afforded indeed, from the beginning, the strongest reason to anticipate this result. The offspring of a wild and ungoverned imagination, they mark the state of a rude and credulous people, whom the marvellous delights; who cannot estimate the use of a record of past events; and whose imagination the real occurrences of life are too familiar to engage. To the monstrous period of years which the legends of the Hindus involve, they ascribe events the most extravagant and unnatural: events not even connected in chronological series; a number of independent and incredible fictions. This people, indeed, are perfectly destitute of historical records.¹

James Mill's assessment of India's past in the opening pages of his *History of British India* (1817–36) establishes the context for the arrival of his own historicizing project and of the larger civilizing mission undertaken by the East India Company. To set to rights the chaos of India's past, and to connect factual events into a diachronic story within a rational, logical, and, above all, historical narrative: this is evidently a significant component of Mill's effort to bring history not only to British India, but to all of India (both geographically and temporally). If, he argues, the "wildness and inconsistency of the Hindu statements evidently place them beyond the sober limits of truth and history," then what is required to bring governance to the hitherto ungovernable is precisely the imposition of those very limits. Part of Mill's mission, then, is to distinguish fiction from truth, myth from reality, and unreal time from

historical time, in order to supply this people without history with properly historical records, records whose epistemological foundation will rest upon a lattice-work of such dualisms. Another part of his mission, though, is to help Britain and the East India Company absorb contemporary India into the narrative of a universal history – the world history of modernization – thereby retroactively historicizing India's unruly past even as its present is brought under increasing control and order.

Thus assimilated, India and its past would exhibit the sort of order that defines the universal conception of history informing Mill's voluminous text – a conception of history that had only begun to emerge in his own lifetime, and that was still in the process of development when he sat down to write what was, he claims, the first true history of India. Mill's conception of history claims for itself the privilege not only of uniqueness, but of universal truth; for it allows itself to be thought and written only in its own sequential terms and only according to the dictates of its own units of abstract modern time. According to Mill's conception, not only was there no prior history; there was above all no prior *world history* in terms of which all other histories could be brought together and rendered meaningful.

Mill's project entails, then, the retroactive rewriting of all previous histories in terms of the narrative of the universal world history to which he claims to belong, as well as the projection of that narrative into his own time and on into the future (a future of its own making). The historical narrative into which Mill is eager to incorporate India is not so much that of British imperialism or that of capitalism, but rather the narrative of their joint transfiguration by, and convergence in, the process of modernization.² Paradoxically, however, the sudden appearance of such a narrative of modernization as world history anticipates the actual (and much more gradual) convergence of capitalist and imperialist practices within the process of modernization. In fact, during Mill's lifetime in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – a span commonly though not unproblematically referred to in British literary history as the romantic period – these practices had only just begun to merge and become inseparable, and at the same time *potentially* or *tendentially* global in reach.³

The global reach of these processes thus appears in virtual form long before it is materially consolidated in political and economic terms; in other words, the dreams of this unified world-system appear in narrative form long before it has consolidated itself and become a cultural domi-

nant.⁴ At the same time, we can also chart the simultaneous emergence of a number of *anti-histories* of this process, that is, a body of efforts to anticipate, understand, and contest these historical developments before they have actually taken place. Such anti-histories – including the one that I would argue is the earliest and most comprehensive, namely William Blake’s prophecies of *Universal Empire* – share in common with Mill’s sense of history the fact that they are anticipating a development that has not yet taken place. With this key difference: that, rather than seeking to facilitate that development, they seek to contest it.

Ironically, both the histories and anti-histories of the world-system in the early nineteenth century have the status of prophecy. However, the primary orientation of these prophecies is not the future, but rather the present in which they were produced. They are prophecies not in the usual sense, but rather in the more restricted Blakean sense. They are concerned above all with their own time, with historical and material developments that already exist, as well as possible (and impossible) future developments – including the emergence of a single dominant world-system.⁵ In his form of prophecy, Mill envisages a future and a past both understood in the seamless terms of his own present: a homogenization not only of time but of all history, in which virtually everything could be made to conform and make sense (and that which could not, for example, much of the Indian history of India, would be dismissed as fantasy or impossibility or outright falsehood).

For someone like Blake, on the other hand, historical experience and time itself are never homogeneous, and one of the purposes of his kind of anti-history is to seek out the heterogeneous and the unexpected in the present, as well as to imagine the unimaginable projected into any number of possible (or impossible) futures. “Historians,” he writes, “being weakly organiz’d themselves, cannot see either miracle or prodigy; all is to them a dull round of probabilities & possibilities; but the history of all times & places, is nothing else but improbabilities and impossibilities; what we should say, was impossible if we did not see it always before our eyes.”⁶ In Blake’s oppositional form of prophecy, the present is simultaneously projected as a future and renarrated as a past, but in such a way that present, future, and past intermingle in an unresolved radical heterogeneity of time – the improbable and the impossible – which is precisely what sustains Blake’s kind of prophetic vision.

Thus, the very beginning of the gradual convergence of imperialist and capitalist practices in the process of modernization provided at once

the necessary and the sufficient conditions for the emergence of a new universal narrative of world history (projected both forward and backward according to the new understanding of homogeneous unilinear time that emerged with it) that is articulated in Mill's discussion of India.⁷ But it also provided the conditions for the simultaneous emergence of a discontinuous constellation of attempts to resist, or to chart out alternatives to, its history – in romanticism. For it is a striking fact, which requires much further elaboration, that Mill launched his project as early as 1806, when the first generation of romantic poets was still in its prime (Wordsworth had just finished the first full draft of *The Prelude*, Southey had just published *Madoc*, Coleridge had not even contemplated the *Biographia*, Blake had just started work on *Jerusalem*) and the second generation still in its youth (Byron and Shelley had not yet published anything, and Keats, “the tadpole of the Lakes,” as Byron would later call him, was not even a teenager).

The emergence of the new understanding of history was closely related to certain changes taking place at the time in British paradigms of empire and attitudes towards non-Europeans, which Mill's approach to India emblemizes. Moreover, this history, projected “forward,” would henceforth be governed not only by the principles of rationality and diachrony championed by Mill, but by the ebbs and flows of the capitalist mode of production and system of exchange (both of which were undergoing momentous transformations during this period), and hence by the pulses and rhythms of what Fernand Braudel refers to as “world-time.”⁸ This history would, furthermore, be narrated and controlled by the most modern, most advanced, most “civilized” people in the most developed societies – those farthest ahead in what Johannes Fabian has elaborated as the stream of evolutionary Time – who, like Mill, who would claim history as their own possession in their confrontations with cultures and peoples without history.⁹

According to this view, such peoples were making the uneasy transition from a wretched state of static pre-modernity to the beginning of their apprenticeship in modernization, in which their social, cultural, and economic practices would be transformed and recoded in the transition not only from past to history, but also from custom to law;¹⁰ from communal, clan, tribal, or despotic forms of property to private property;¹¹ from heterogeneous and irregular (“casual”) forms of labor to the rigors of a wage economy;¹² from customary forms of payment and compensation to the strictly monetary remuneration of the hourly wage;¹³ from archaic, seasonal, irregular temporal practices to the

regular practice of modern clock-time;¹⁴ from barter economies or trades-in-kind to a more strictly measurable monetary system of exchange ruled by principles of computational equivalence;¹⁵ from highly skilled artisanal craftsmanship to an increasingly automated system of production relying only on that flow of quantified and regulated energy-in-time that would eventually come to be called “unskilled labor” but that was first broken down in William Petty’s “political arithmetick” into a stream of labor-power that could (ideally) be smoothly distributed across a highly diversified production process, subject only to the forms of resistance that this appropriation of energy might encounter from the possessors of labor-power themselves;¹⁶ from all kinds of political systems to the modern liberal democracy that would eventually (if we follow this logic to its ultimate conclusion) preside over the “end of history” about which we have heard so much in recent years.¹⁷

II

Britain’s transition into a social formation dominated by the culture of modernization was not defined by one cataclysmic event. Rather, this process took several decades to emerge – the decades identified as the romantic period in Britain – and it took several more decades for this new cultural dominant to consolidate itself. Economically, the romantic period in Britain marked a shift from the primacy of trade and commerce towards the primacy of industrial production, and hence towards a properly modern mode of capitalism (albeit one that at the time often took only an embryonic form).¹⁸ Politically, the period marked a rupture in paradigms and policies of imperial power, and a shift in the locus of intense imperial activity from the western to the eastern hemispheres, as well as a dramatic intensification in the exercise of state power in response to the revolutionary situation within Britain itself.¹⁹

However, neither the political nor the economic transition, taken on its own, can account for the overall *cultural* change that was taking place in this period. This overall change in attitudes, perspectives, relations, knowledges, and practices can be located in both material and discursive forms (including economic and political practices, to be sure, but not restricted to them). In fact, this change reminds us of the extent to which discourse – and culture – are material processes. Modernization must be understood from the very beginning as an overall cultural development, and not merely as a socio-economic process from which

we might only in a secondary sense abstract either a free-floating or a superstructural notion of cultural “modernity.”²⁰

However, the varied engagements with the culture of modernization in Britain that we may identify as romanticism primarily took the form of an engagement not with modernization *tout court* or as such, but rather with its social, economic, and political manifestations. These in turn were grasped through their effects rather than systemically: in urbanization, for example; or the advent of machine-production; or imperial conquest; or the transformation of the countryside; or the degradation of the natural environment; or the anomie and alienation of the monad – the individual human subject cut adrift in the modern world – which inspired Keats’s most passionate and disturbing Odes.

Let us consider a classic example of the often astonishing sweep of romanticism’s critique of modernization. In his haunting poem, *Michael*, Wordsworth ties together (to name only a few issues brought up in the poem) the Enclosure movement; the newly significant question of debt; the development of a modern urban culture of dissolution and apparent degeneration; the erosion and destruction of traditional forms of family and social production; the possibilities opened up by emigration to the colonies; the transformation of agriculture; the emergence of a new way of thinking and experiencing time; and a new modern sense of national, as opposed to local, culture, custom, identity. It is not evident that Wordsworth thought of all these questions (which we today would readily identify as aspects of modernization) as related to one another in an overall or systematic way. But – sensitive and perceptive as he was – he was quite obviously, even if only intuitively, aware of the fact that they had something to do with each other, and were collectively to be identified as part of a “multitude of causes, unknown to former times,” for which Wordsworth lacked only the systemic label that we are now in a position to supply with the benefit of hindsight.

I will argue this point at greater length in the chapters that follow, but for now I want to suggest that romanticism can be partly understood as a diverse and heterogeneous series of engagements with modernization (which here may be seen as a cause that is immanent in its effects and really has no other existence). It can also be understood as a mediating discourse, through which the multitudinous political and economic facets of modernization, many of which are mapped out in *Michael*, are related to each other to a greater or lesser extent, situated as parts of an overall cultural transformation. Romanticism was not merely a response to this transformation. It was a key constitutive element: as much as any

other material development, this series of engagements contributed to the constitution of modernization as a cultural field that would eventually rise to dominance (notwithstanding this romantic critique that would accompany it to the bitter end).

We are now in a position to see that the staggering heterogeneity of romanticism was directly related to the heterogeneity of the processes of modernization. Thus, my task in this book will not be to produce a single key to “unlock” or explain the huge variety of literary and cultural output during the romantic period; such a task would in any case be not only impossible, but unnecessary. For what I am saying here is that romanticism must not be understood as a movement, a school, a style, or even a tendency. I therefore heed Marilyn Butler’s warning – not the first, but one of the most persuasively argued – that we could never generate such a cohesive identity for romanticism, into which we might then insert various authors or texts.²¹ “‘Romanticism,’ Butler writes, “is inchoate because it is not a single intellectual movement but a complex of responses to certain conditions which Western society has experienced and continues to experience since the middle of the eighteenth century.”²² I would like to follow Butler’s lead and further specify the nature of this “complex of responses,” and also to suggest that romanticism was never simply a “response,” but a key constitutive element in those transformations.

For we, at least, *can* identify those “certain conditions” as various aspects of one overall cultural development, as signifying the emergence of the culture of modernization. If “romanticism” can make any sense as a term, then, it would have to be not as a label identifying a particular style, theme, or form, let alone a school or movement. It would have to serve as the historical designation of a number of enormously varied engagements with the multitudinous discourses of modernization, which took place in a staggering number of forms, styles, genres, and which can be linked together only in terms of that engagement and in such a way that their individual and unique traits and characteristics are respected and not meaninglessly collapsed into each other.

Such romantic engagements were dialectically bound up with modernization, and contributed to its development as a cultural dominant. In different forms, they can always be found wherever the culture of modernization is found, whether dominant, residual or emergent, in the West and in the non-West alike.²³ Strictly speaking, this is not exactly a periodizing hypothesis, except insofar as the romantic period in Britain itself marks the moment of the emergence of the culture of moderniz-

ation, and hence of that whole new way of thinking of periods and periodizing and historical change that was articulated for the first time in British romanticism.²⁴

While by the end of the nineteenth century the sense of world history and world-time invoked by Mill would gradually rise to cultural dominance, diffuse through and finally pervade virtually all aspects of cultural production and activity (commerce, trade, politics, exploration, as well as literary production), literature, and even more specifically poetry, emerged during the romantic period as a privileged site for the exploration of alternatives to modernization, or the celebration of anti-modern exoticism that we can see at work, for example, in the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*. Later nineteenth-century modes of understanding anti-modern otherness would rely on a different kind of epistemology, a different kind of language, and above all different ways of conceiving temporality. And while literature would retain its importance as a field for the representation and articulation of cultural identity and difference (usually but not always in the service of empire), the emphasis would increasingly shift to the novel and particularly the realist novel of development.

Of course, the nineteenth-century realist novel is the genre on which much of the most important critical work on the relationship between literature, on the one hand, and capitalism and imperialism on the other, has been focused – in, for example, the work of Patrick Brantlinger, Sara Suleri, Jonathan Arac, Christopher Miller, Fredric Jameson, and Edward Said. One of the aims of the present study, then, is to shift the emphasis to an earlier period and a different genre, in order to expand more fully our understanding of these relationships by examining them in an unstable and even explosively transitional moment.

“Most historians of empire,” writes Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, “speak of the ‘age of empire’ as formally beginning around 1878, with the ‘scramble for Africa.’ A closer look at the cultural actuality reveals a much earlier, more deeply and stubbornly held view about overseas European hegemony; we can locate a coherent, fully mobilized system of ideas near the end of the eighteenth century, and there follows the set of integral developments such as the first great systematic conquests under Napoleon, the rise of nationalism and the European nation-state, the advent of large-scale industrialization, and the consolidation of power in the bourgeoisie.”²⁵ Said argues that a pattern of cultural attitudes (or structures of feeling) corresponding to this set of developments emerged alongside and accompanied the elaboration of

imperial rule well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This pattern was characterized by virtually unanimous support of imperialism and a striking lack of dissent. One of the main forms of expression of this pattern of cultural validation of imperialism was the novel. The history of the novel may be understood in Said's terms as the history of imperialism itself, since "imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible . . . to read one without in some way dealing with the other."²⁶

According to Said, only in the climax of the "age of empire" in the 1890s, when the realist novel enters its modernist crisis, can we begin to find a sustained pattern of anti-imperial criticism within the realm of (metropolitan) literary production, a pattern that formed a significant component of the modernist breakdown of the realist novel.²⁷ Thus, although Said admits that the cultural ideology of imperialism never enjoys absolute dominance within, for example, British literature, he wants to argue that the main forms of cultural opposition to imperialism within the metropolis itself came only towards the end, when its vision had largely been consolidated in the decades around the First World War; so that, until then, he says that we can speak of a *largely* if not *completely* "unopposed and undeterred will to overseas dominion."²⁸

However, I would argue that the romantic period in Britain marks the earliest sustained (though largely doomed) attempt to articulate a form of opposition to the culture of modernization – including but not limited to imperialism – from its very beginnings. Once it is reinterpreted as I propose, the often remarked aesthetic convergences and parallels between romanticism and modernism can be explained in a new way. Because of the complex and shifting engagement between literary production and the practice and experience of modernization, modernist literary experiments, arising partly out of the perceived exhaustion of the realist novel and especially the *Bildungsroman* by the early twentieth century, would return to and elaborate an earlier romantic obsession with fractured, disjointed, and disruptive temporalities, both in poetry and in prose.²⁹

For romanticism appears alongside the emergence of modernization and helps to define it culturally from its very beginnings; a process that helps us to explain what makes the romantic period in Britain identifiable as a period. Modernism, on the other hand – though precisely like romanticism a discourse of unevenness, and also in many of its varieties a critique of the modern – emerges as the culture of modernization reaches its fullest development and is on the point of absorbing or

wiping out the last vestiges of the pre-modern and the archaic in a rapidly modernizing society.³⁰ The distinction between modernism and romanticism, however, lies not so much in their engagements with modernization (for they sometimes look uncannily similar in this regard, though one would probably be going too far to say, “first time as tragedy, second time as farce”), but rather in that romanticism emerges with the beginnings of modernization and persists alongside it to the end; whereas modernism emerges specifically at the climax of that process and helps to constitute that climax in overall cultural terms. In other words, the difference between romanticism and modernism lies in the extent to which we can understand them as periodizing hypotheses; or, rather, in the extent *to which they enable us to understand the process of periodizing to begin with* (for otherwise modernism might just look like nothing but a return to romanticism, albeit in a new and more intense form because of its specific cultural and historical situatedness). Whereas modernism, in many of its varieties, celebrates the pre- or anti-modern and the archaic as they are on the verge of final eradication or commodification, romanticism celebrates the pre- or anti-modern at the moment at which that eradication is just beginning. Such celebrations are not unique to Britain, and can be located wherever the process of modernization comes into contact with “traditional” cultures and ways of life; it is in this sense that romanticism marks the inception of a new culture of modernization, of which the late twentieth-century phenomenon of globalization appears as the climax.

III

Indeed, a certain fascination or even obsession with the pre- or anti-modern (Nature, the colonial realm, the Orient) occupied the very center of the British romantic critique of modernization. This involved above all a new mode of understanding such anti-modern otherness precisely because of its historical and political relationship to the emerging culture of modernization.

Even for someone writing (and voyaging) as late as Lord Byron, it was still possible to think of the Orient, for example, not only as geographically distinct from Europe, but also as temporally and historically unique. As I shall show in chapter 5, for the Byron of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* (1812), the Orient was defined and structured by its own sense of temporality and its own sense of history, rather than merely constituting, as it clearly already did for Mill, a subordinate element in a

larger world-history – a history narrated by Europeans, a history at the end of which stands Europe.³¹ Only a little later in the nineteenth century, such a synchronic construction of the non-European (synchronic in that it is seen to exist *alongside* modern Europe, in parallel rather than in series: *anti*-modern rather than strictly *pre*-modern) would become much more difficult to articulate. For, later in the nineteenth century, the non-European, like Nature and the organic community, would be reconfigured in British narratives as that which modern Britain “might have been” or perhaps “used to be,” but is no longer, having evolved into something that is not merely different, but superior. (“And this also,” Marlow reminds his English audience in the opening pages of *Heart of Darkness*, “has been one of the dark places of the earth.”³²)

Whereas cultural otherness had formerly been regarded in terms of sheer and even immutable difference, seen from a properly modern perspective in the late nineteenth century, anti-modern otherness would often become inferiority plain and simple, demanding that benign and nurturing program of development and improvement called empire. By the end of the nineteenth century, in a world dominated by the great European empires (which in the romantic period were just beginning their worldwide expansion) whatever alternatives to modernization a sphere of cultural otherness might offer would be strictly temporary. For the impending doom of its inevitable penetration, colonization, and incorporation into the world of modernity (i.e., its modernization) would be a haunting or perhaps reassuring imminent development.

However, this was not yet the case at the *beginning* of the dual process of colonial conquest and capitalist modernization in the early nineteenth century. In fact, the anti-modern Orient of *Childe Harold* is by no means a unique case during the romantic period. For, as I shall argue, what emerges before these later developments and specifically during this period – especially though not exclusively in literary production – is a new *mode* of understanding and representing such sites of cultural otherness, such other worlds, as the Orient. This new mode, defined in a constellation of literary works, must be understood in relation to the sense of modernization and world history clearly exemplified by Mill’s book on India, which was emerging at the same time. This *specific* historical-political conjuncture is what axiomatically distinguishes this new mode from, on the one hand, any earlier British literary tradition of imagining alternative worlds (e.g., the work of James Thompson, Andrew Marvell, and perhaps above all John Milton), and, on the other

hand, any previous representation or imagination of cultural otherness. After all, the notion that the Orient is Europe's other is nothing new in and of itself; what *is* new – as I shall argue – is the specifically romantic mode of understanding both the Orient's otherness *and* its relationship to other sites of alterity, other zones of anti-modernity.

This romantic mode of understanding otherness is perhaps most clearly illustrated by Wordsworth. It entails grasping romantic anti-modernity on its own terms, as the “discovery” of some of the “other worlds” being surrounded and cut off by the space-time of modernization. Here Wordsworth's notion of the spot of time (as articulated in Book XII of *The Prelude*) can be grasped as a central concept with which to understand – and an optic through which to view – the proliferation of seeming alternatives to the world of modernization that either appear or, in effect the same thing, take on entirely new significance in the romantic period and especially in romantic literature. I will explore three examples at length in later chapters: Byron's Orient, Scott's Highlands, Wordsworth's Nature. Seen as spots of time, such apparent alternatives can be understood (and meaningfully related to each other) as self-enclosed and self-referential enclaves of the anti-modern, each defined by its own unique structures of feeling and its own distinct temporality. Each is conceived as a hitherto untransformed enclave that, when discovered and colonized by the outside world, is seen to experience a fall which erases, or, rather, rewrites it by weaving it tightly into the history of the outside world.

For the spot of time is always threatened by assimilation, by incorporation into that reorganization of spatial and temporal practices and institutions called modernization (new forms of production and exchange, new ways of thinking time, new histories of the world, new territorialities, new ways of regulating flows of energy and desire). The spot of time is even threatened by the very acts of discovery and identification that reveal it to the outside world. The hidden bower in Wordsworth's poem *Nutting* is an ideal example: its existence is discovered, registered, and appealed to, precisely at the moment when it faces sudden and irreversible annihilation as a result of that discovery, as simultaneously celebrated and mourned in that poem. Thus the attractiveness of the spot of time is inseparable from the inevitable destruction that is seen to follow from its discovery.

Indeed, the spot of time can serve as an ideal conceptual optic through which to view the romantic mode of representing anti-modern otherness. This is so because of the considerable extent to which the

production or articulation of difference during the romantic period implied a spatio-temporal project (and not merely a thematic or aesthetic one) as the social production, practice, and experience of space and time began to change in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This re-composition was taking place largely in terms of an antagonism between a growing abstract world-space and world-time of modernization and differential spaces and times not yet drawn into that world, and hence defined as different precisely because of their resilience – perhaps even their purity as opposed to the impurity and often disturbing ugliness of the scene of imperial struggle.³³ Viewed as spots of time, the romantic productions of space that I will examine in the chapters that follow – Nature, the Scottish Highlands, and the Orient – articulate a (futile) desire to preserve such sites of difference and otherness, to register opposition to a homogenizing system by upholding certain sites as differential loci of space and time.

Standing out as a distortion in the spatio-temporal fabric of the age of modernization, the spot of time is for Wordsworth a shelter from “the multitude of causes, unknown to former times” that were then “acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor.”³⁴ He humbly presents his own poetical career to the modern world as a “feeble endeavour” to resist the changes taking place by appealing to Nature as an alternative world offering the chance of even a temporary shelter or detour: *temporary* precisely because of its uneasy dislocation within the time of the modern, and yet perhaps also permanent because of the hope that it might somehow resist an otherwise inevitable modernization. In fact the spot of time stands out precisely by virtue of its supposedly permanent temporariness. As long as it is not fully assimilated into the flow of world-time and modern history, it has the potential to outlast them, to resist them by surviving as a disruption of the spatio-temporal logic of modernization, one of any number of gaps or aporias in the history of modes of production that seem to have opened up during the transition from any number of previous modes of production and never fully closed.

The persistence of such fissures within the space-time of modernization would in effect forestall the completion of the very process that is supposed to have extinguished and annihilated them. They would serve as reminders that the moment of passage from which they emerged was not fully accomplished or closed and that, paradoxically, modernity really represents not so much an accomplished state but rather a long

and uneasy process of transition (modernization) towards itself: a transition *requiring by definition* the persistence of anti-modern others against which modernity can be constituted.³⁵ This process of transition can be seen as a struggle between what appears as a totalitarian system and a range of sometimes localized (and sometimes not) sites and zones and cultures of resistance, *beginning* though not *ending* in the romantic period. Hence this period marks not so much an open-and-closed moment but rather the onset, the beginning, of a whole range of cultural and political articulations of modernization; it defines not so much a discrete unity, but rather, as James Chandler has argued (via Hazlitt and Heidegger), the inauguration of a new way of thinking about history and the very question of “ages” and indeed of periodization itself.³⁶

Thus, if the anti-modern spaces of difference first identified in romanticism are threatened with annihilation, such spaces can always (and indeed would later) be invented anew throughout the modern age. For, as, Bram Stoker puts it in *Dracula*, “the old ages have powers of their own which mere ‘modernity’ cannot kill.” These “powers” will continue to either haunt and torment modern English imaginations (in configurations as disparate as *Dracula*, *The Moonstone*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Sign of Four*), or to attract them, whether for their perverse horror (*Heart of Darkness*), their frank and “manly” homosociality and “savage” nobility (*The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, *King Solomon’s Mines*), their liberatory difference, their non-identity and non-conformity with the rational and the modern (*Kim*, *Eothen*), or their resilient natural innocence (*Cranford*, *Adam Bede*).

The hidden natural bowers that appear and re-appear throughout Wordsworth’s poetry can be seen as spots of time – and in fact also as synecdoches for Nature in a larger sense – by virtue of their opposition to the “artificial” and unnatural world of humanity as the latter has been corrupted in the age of modernization. Wordsworth’s poetical project thus logically involves not only the opposition between the natural and the modern which marks its point of departure, but above all an attempt to reconnect the human to the natural, to reconnect “man” to his own “nature.” Wordsworth’s kind of art is thus natural precisely in its opposition to the “artificial,” the made, the fabricated, the constructed – to the very same extent as Nature (in his view) endures as all that which *has not* been made in the face of that which *has* been made. In a similar sense, poetry (“the *image* of man and nature”) is outside of modern time and history just as Nature is outside of modern time and history; it is “as immortal as the heart of man.” Hence

Wordsworth's project involves resurrecting "certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind" and reconnecting them to "the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible," thereby in effect short-circuiting the products of human-made artifice (which Blake for his part would call "the productions of time").

In its perfect form, this kind of poetry would no longer be art, for the "naturalness" of such a poem resides in precisely its lack of artifice. Hence the most natural poetry is that which taps directly into "the real language of men," or as closely as possible into the immediate and even *unspoken* language of Nature (simple, clear, permanent, so direct as to preclude the very possibility of mediation and hence construction and art as well as the vicissitudes of time). Wordsworth opposes this natural poetry – which his own work, by his own admission, only approximates – to the built-up language and art of the modern age, the "arbitrary and capricious habits of expression" by which modern poets "furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation." Thus the "gaudiness and inane phraseology" of the "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" denounced in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* are the gauges of the artificiality of modern literary productions according to Wordsworth; gaudy because they have not only been made, but overmade: so that every production is always an overproduction, and all art is by (this) definition unnatural.

The spot of time is the perfect mode for Wordsworth's nature poetry because of its very opposition not only to modern time and history but to the artificial and the constructed – to art – and hence it is no surprise that it emerges in *The Prelude* in opposition to (in fact a refuge from) the artificiality of London, the great center of empire. Just as the project of empire can be understood in terms of the conquest of nature and the imposition of rational contractual institutions on dangerous natural tendencies, the naturalization of the artificial would represent the ultimate victory of both the spot of time and the natural poet over the process of modernization. This almost happens in the sonnet "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge," in which London is naturalized by being imaged as a spot of time, frozen in the quietness of dawn.

The spot of time represents a potential and persistent disruption in the logic of continuous progressive time. Hence it offers an ideal optic through which to read romantic articulations of anti-modern otherness. But here we come to the two all-important shortcomings of this

concept, and to two conceptual traps that any account of romanticism can fall into. First, there is no way of accounting for the history of the coming-into-being of the spot of time in any terms other than those of the very modernity against which it is defined. Second, the spot of time can only make sense as a heterotopic refuge or alternative to something larger and more powerful than itself, to which it owes its (oppositional) existence, and in terms of whose history alone it can be understood, determined, and defined. Thus its potential resistance is extremely circumscribed, even if it is not entirely eliminated.³⁷

For romantic discoveries of cultural otherness were dialectically articulated in opposition to the emerging world of modernization even as the latter was being defined; they enabled that definition to begin with. This is what separates romantic “other worlds” from earlier constructions of cultural otherness, which do not take on such a dialectical form and which depend instead on less dynamic and less fluid oppositions between ontologically independent outsides and insides, distinctly *unmarried* heavens and hells. Even if Wordsworth was attempting to appropriate and rewrite Milton, he was sensitive to the unbridgeable gap between Milton’s era and his own, just as he was painfully aware of the extent to which Milton and the other “Great men that have been among us” are so palpably absent from the “perpetual emptiness” and “unceasing change” that define his own age of revolution from the 1790s onwards: an absence that perhaps accounts for Wordsworth’s repeated failure to recapture the spirit of Milton in such projects as *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*. Seen in this light, Blake’s claim not only to have appropriated Milton but to be his reincarnation takes on new significance.

Even if it appears as a distortion in the otherwise seemingly homogeneous and abstract spatial fabric of modernization, a disruption, however temporary, in the apparently otherwise smooth and irrepressible flow of world-time, the spot of time can only be defined against the very modernization whose emergence it concurrently helps to constitute. The romantic discovery of such spots of time must be understood dialectically, not as a reaction but rather as a mutual process of constitution through which both the inside and the outside of the spot of time emerge in relationship to each other, neither privileged with ontological priority. In being constituted dialectically against modernization, the resistance offered by a spot of time may in the long run turn out to be no resistance at all, but rather in effect an affirmation of modernization. Hence it is important to be able to see

romantic spots of time as historical constructions, rather than as ahistorical essences that exist outside of time, even if there is no way to account for their historicity in their own terms, and even if they are constructions that seek (as they often do) to deny their own historicity in the first place.³⁸

In any case, although the spot of time is inadequate to the task of understanding its own history, its own location outside of history still needs to be understood historically, even if it itself provides no way to do that other than by reference to the history of modernization. This necessity highlights the significance of Blake's anti-history of modernization in his prophetic books, which mark a critical divergence from the constellation represented by the other romantic writers.

I have already touched on certain aspects of this anti-history, but here I want to dwell on it a little longer and suggest certain ways in which Blake's prophetic books offer an alternative approach to the history of the period. For in effect Blake's anti-history of modernization allows us to read the history of the period against the grain *from within* and without forcing us to adopt a strictly retrospective analysis based on the accumulation of historical data and experience. The political aesthetics of the prophetic books offer us not only a variety of cultural options which were not taken up because they did not conform to the needs of the historical forces that Blake sought to oppose (whereas the aesthetic projects of the others did conform in certain fundamental ways), but also a way to prize open the cultural history of the romantic period. There is no room here to elaborate fully Blake's rearticulation of modernization, so I will present only a brief and condensed version of a far more complicated argument in order to illustrate my point about anti-history, and I will return to these questions in chapter 7.³⁹

"Natural Objects always did & do now Weaken deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me," writes Blake in his annotations to Wordsworth's *Poems*.⁴⁰ But in his criticism of Wordsworth he is using the term "natural" in a very specific way, to denote a world of "vegetable" objectivity that has been (mis)understood in strictly material terms by being falsely cut off and isolated from a larger world of energy flows, to which, in Blake's view, it belongs; and from which not only Wordsworth but Blake's greatest enemies – Bacon, Newton, and Locke – have abstracted and divorced it. In Blake's view all productions, including those that we might refer to as "natural," take place in a turbulent continuum of energy flows that are given both material and immaterial form and expression by imagination and labor, as well as that combination of

imagination and labor called art: "to create a little flower is the labour of ages."⁴¹

In this view, Wordsworth follows in the path of the great materialist prophets of sensory input and rational measurement by apprehending a world of material objectivity and individuated subjectivity in isolation from each other and from the world of energy, by opposing the human to the natural and the human mind to "the great and permanent objects that act upon it." Hence as far as Blake is concerned, Wordsworth's nature poetry represents only a variation on the all-too-familiar theme of materialist ideology, to which it offers no real alternative and from which it offers no escape, just as it offers neither escape from nor alternative to the socio-economic and political-cultural system defined by that ideology. Blake refers to this ideology, which he explicitly identifies with Newton and Locke, as the "Laws & Religions" that bound humanity "more / And more to Earth: closing and restraining: / Till a Philosophy of Five Senses was complete."⁴²

In the world of time and space created according to the dictates of this ideology, its laws are enforced by its institutions of power,

Churches: Hospitals: Castles: Palaces
Like nets & gins & traps to catch the joys of Eternity
And all the rest a desert;
Till like a dream Eternity was obliterated & erased.⁴³

This world is forever threatened by annihilation should the rational forces, institutions, and laws that constitute it be overwhelmed by the seething boundless energies that they seek to contain: a world governed by principles of mechanics, apprehended through the five senses, a world of unitary subjectivity in which desire is always subject to restriction and energy to the limits of rational control.

This is the world celebrated not only in Newton's and Locke's treatises but also in Wordsworth's nature poetry, one that is experienced by the individual subjects that correspond to it, one whose existence is bound up with those forms of subjectivity. Hence it is a world whose history begins and ends with the history of the form of subjectivity in terms of which it is constituted. All other possible forms of imagination and subjectivity are excluded from that history as "impossibilities," because they are indeed impossible in its terms, just as any other form of social or communal organization is inconceivable and unimaginable in its terms. Hence what we are talking about here is the coming-into-being of a whole new world, whose potential destruction would signify

nothing short of an apocalypse, an “end of history,” because from the standpoint of this world all time and history begins and ends with it.⁴⁴

In this anti-history, Blake calls this world “experience” – in other words the phenomenological world – and he identifies the key figure in the struggle to contain energy by rationality as Urizen, “the great Work master”⁴⁵ and self-proclaimed ruler of the Universal Empire (“am I not God said Urizen. Who is Equal to me”⁴⁶). Urizen is, however, more of a force than an actual being; a force that may be personified in various guises, that may take on a gendered and subjective existence, but whose real being consists in the turbulent and multivalent (hence seemingly omnipresent) condensations of the energy abstracted from and in turn confronting those subjected to his will. What is of the greatest interest is thus not so much Urizen “himself,” but rather the system that he creates and enforces, that is, the Universal Empire whose coming-into-being and whose operative processes Blake transcodes and traces out in his prophetic books of the 1790s.⁴⁷ It is important historically to distinguish the Universal Empire from the narrower and more territorial British empire, to which the former is related, but which it transcends. Blake forces us to understand the history of imperialism in relation to the history of capitalism (and vice versa); this, after all, is the great lesson of David Erdman’s *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*. For, indeed, if the Lambeth books of the 1790s retell the history of the creation, the creation whose story they tell is that of modern capitalism, and of the long process of modernization that began in Blake’s time (“First Trades & Commerce, ships and armed vessels he builded laborious / To swim the deep; & on the land, children are sold to trades / Of dire necessity, still labouring day & night till all / Their life extinct they took the spectre form in dark despair; / And slaves in myriads, in ship loads, burden the hoarse sounding deep, / Rattling with clanking chains; the Universal Empire groans . . .”⁴⁸). Blake writes against the advent of this process, up to and even beyond the point at which his writing breaks down into the uncontrollable and incoherent rage characteristic of much of his work.

For Blake, this Universal Empire could *only* be understood on a global scale as it redefines all space and time according to its own terms (see chapter 7). For there is something about this system that drives it to overcome all limits and to transform the entire world into itself, as it slowly encompasses the thirty-two Nations and four Continents of Blake’s prophetic books. This does not exclude the possibility or the persistence of other forms of energy and desire that are not part of this

world-system. In fact the project of the Universal Empire is to seek out and to contain and rewrite those other forms in terms of itself. But Blake's understanding of the Universal Empire hinges on its status as a world-system, and moreover on his sense that it could only be contested by being first understood and then resisted on a world scale, a process he seeks to begin not only in his retelling of the coming-into-being of this new world in the *Books of Urizen, Ahania, and Los*, but also in his retelling of the global struggle against the Universal Empire in the appropriately named prophecies *America, Europe, Africa, and Asia* (the last two constituting the two parts of the *Song of Los*).

What is important for my present purpose is not so much Blake's important status as the unique insights that the prophetic books provide for understanding the cultural and political developments of the time, that he and the other romantics sought to resist in such different ways. If for Wordsworth and the others the most adequate form of resistance involved seeking out the world-system's heterotopic others, for Blake the relationship of the system to its others is of secondary importance compared to his first priority, which is understanding the potential globality of both the Universal Empire and of any possible mode of resistance to it. For Wordsworth in particular the key mode of resistance to modern artifice has to do with resurrecting (really inventing) a non-artistic form of natural poetry. For Blake the key mode of resistance lies in taking art beyond its limit by seeking out and activating, giving expression to, those forms of energy and desire that cannot be comprehended by either the system or the forms of subjectivity which populate it, and in particular by unleashing forms of energy and desire that might overwhelm both the system and its historically unique form of subjectivity, bringing both not only to a kind of crisis, but to their explosive and apocalyptic demise. If for Wordsworth and the others the confrontation that they are witnessing is between a modern system and its anti-modern others, for Blake the process of modernization has created its others and relies upon them for their very existence, just as Urizen relies for "his" existence on "his" confrontations with the sources of the energy that he has appropriated. What is important then is not returning to those sources of energy in their present form but rather releasing them, detonating them, exploding them; and understanding how the Universal Empire represents a disruption in the world of energy, a disruption that has created the very opposition between selves and others, nature and history, inside and outside, modern and anti-modern, the people in charge of history and destiny and those condemned to follow blindly in

the tracks of a system to which they can never catch up, whose standards they will never reach.

The significance of the Blakean divergence from the other romantic engagements with the culture of modernization is *not* that it embodies some kind of messianic truth, to which we must adhere. Rather, as anti-histories of modernization, the prophetic books allow us to rehistoricize the period as it takes shape and not just retrospectively. By virtue of his singular oppositional re-articulation of modernization – if for nothing else – Blake was unique among the now-canonical writers of the romantic period. His singular mode of rethinking modernization *in concepts other than its own* – concepts produced by Blake himself, whose staggering heterogeneity and fundamental untranslatability into modern rational terms anyone who has read Blake will have had to confront – will prove important to my own analysis of this period, partly, though not entirely, because it reveals the limits of the kind of anti-modern discourse in which other writers of the period participated. Blake therefore allows us a way to read the spot of time historically, against the grain, *in relation to* the world history of modernization, capitalism, and imperialism; but in an oppositional way.

The chapters that follow will examine what I regard as the key sites and locations of anti-modern otherness in romanticism. Chapter 2 presents an exploration of the heart of the emerging world-system, the city of London, as seen from the vantage point of Wordsworth; it will situate Wordsworth's spots of time in opposition to the worldliness of the imperial metropolis, and it will trace how London comes to be both the material and symbolic center of the world-system, against which all its others would be defined. Chapter 3 continues the discussion of Wordsworth and the spot of time not as a natural phenomenon but as a *human* potential for resisting the process of modernization. Chapter 4, centered on a reading of Walter Scott's first novel *Waverley*, continues the task of exploring how some of the key others were elaborated in romanticism, showing how the large-scale redefinition of British attitudes towards the Scottish Highlands unfolding at the time could not have taken place without the colonization and appropriation of both the material and the symbolic terrain of the Highlands themselves during and after the Clearances that followed the collapse of the doomed Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 at the battle of Culloden (which was, significantly, the last battle to be fought on British soil). Indeed, this colonization reached its climax only in the romantic period; so that there is a cruel irony in the fact that Scott sat down to write *Waverley* at the very moment that the Highlands

were being finally cleansed of their previous associations – as the exotic but dangerous Highlanders themselves were burned out of their ancestral homes and scattered to the corners of the earth, neither the first nor unfortunately the last people to be dispersed by modernizing colonial movements based on what Edward Said once called “an ideology of difference.” To ignore the brutal fact of this non-coincidence is, I would argue, to participate in the very same colonial processes whose power lies precisely in their ability to cover up, to hide away, to claim and reinvent and re-name spaces that are not theirs, and violently to ignore what was once there.

As I suggest in chapters 5 and 6, the dramatic shift in British imaginary maps of the Orient cannot be divorced from related shifts in both colonial and mercantile/industrial networks and paradigms *and* the role that various Eastern colonial and semi-colonial spaces and societies played in the British empire in the early nineteenth century. This was in fact a role dramatically altered following Britain’s victory over France in 1814–15, after which much of the world, including the Orient, lay directly open to British rule in ways that had never been possible before. Finally, in chapter 7, I will return to the imperial metropolis itself to explore Blake’s imaginary and symbolic map of London as the site in which resistance to that system could be mapped. Chapter 8, a set of conclusions, will elaborate some of the theoretical and historical insights I have tried to develop in this book, in particular the relationship of romanticism and modernization to capitalism and imperialism.