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0521586046 - Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity

Saree Makdisi

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The years between 1790 and 1830 saw over a hundred and fifty million people brought under British imperial control, and one of the most momentous outbursts of British literary and artistic production, announcing a new world of social and individual traumas and possibilities. This book traces the emergence of new forms of imperialism and capitalism as part of the culture of modernization in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and looks at the ways in which they were identified with and contested in romanticism. Saree Makdisi argues that this process has to be understood in global terms, beyond the British and European viewpoint, and that developments in India, Africa, and the Arab world (up to and including our own time) enable us to understand more fully the texts and contexts of British romanticism. New and original readings of texts by Wordsworth, Blake, Byron, Shelley, and Scott emerge in the course of this searching analysis of the origins of the cultural process of globalization.

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This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those “great national events” that were “almost daily taking place”: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanization, industrialization, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion and literature were reworked in texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Biographia Literaria*; gender relations in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and *Don Juan*; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; poetic form, content and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of response or done so much to shape the responses of those notions of “literature” and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars, on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

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William Blake, *Michael binding Satan*, c. 1805. The Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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SAREE MAKDISI

University of Chicago



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For my parents

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Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett, the
 Mohican, the Pokanoket, and many other powerful tribes of
 our people? They have vanished before the avarice and the
 oppression of the White Man, as snow before a summer sun.

Tecumseh, in Dee Brown, *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*

All Love is lost Terror succeeds & Hatred instead of Love
 And stern demands of Right & Duty instead of Liberty.

William Blake, *The Four Zoas*

In the years between 1790 and 1830, over one hundred and fifty million people were brought under British imperial control. During those same years, one of the most momentous outbursts of British literary and artistic production took place in romanticism, announcing the arrival of a whole new age, a new world of social and individual traumas and possibilities. The starting point of the research project that resulted in this book was an intuitive assumption that these events were somehow related to each other; what I realized by the end was that an adequate understanding of either event requires an understanding of both – at one and the same time – if it is not to be seriously flawed.

Romanticism cannot be understood properly without reference to modern imperialism and modern capitalism: perhaps this seems clear enough. Modern imperialism and modern capitalism cannot be properly understood without reference to romanticism: this may not seem quite so clear at all. In this book, I will argue both these points at once. To understand British romanticism as more than merely a random collection of literary texts – as a specific cultural formation – requires us to locate it as an event within the historical map of modern imperialism and modern capitalism. Moreover, to understand modern imperialism and modern capitalism as more than merely socio-economic practices – as cultural processes – requires us to locate those practices on the

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literary-historical map precisely where we have customarily found romanticism. What I want to propose is that the dynamics between these discourses and practices constituted an overall *cultural revolution* called modernization, which is most adequately grasped at the multiple horizons where the economic and the literary, the poetic and the imperial, the social and the philosophical converge.

While the primary reference point of this book will be British romanticism, I believe that modern capitalism and modern imperialism – and modernization itself – must ultimately be understood as global processes, and not (for all their Eurocentrism) as specifically British or European phenomena. Much, therefore, of what I will propose here as an account of British romanticism should help us to understand the transformative processes of imperialism and capitalism in places and times far removed from late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain. However, one of the central and underlying hypotheses of this book is that those other developments – in India, Africa, the Arab world, and elsewhere, up to and including our own time – should *also* enable us to understand more fully what was happening in romantic Britain. They should do so not only in that they would force us to broaden our perspective away from a dangerously myopic concern with Britain, or even with Europe, and their literatures, but precisely because modernization has always been, and continues to be, a worldly and a global process, in which the so-called margins and peripheries have always played a central role.

When all is said and done, romanticism will turn out to be not only worldly, but also global, and to have been so all along – marking the beginning of a process that has only in recent years come to be recognized as “globalization.” Our contemporary experience of globalization will certainly make more sense to us if we understand it as part of a broader historical process rather than as a freak occurrence or as something marking the inevitable victory of one way of living in the world. It will also make much more sense if we can understand it as a *cultural* process and not merely as a socio-economic development. What I want to contribute in this book is an attempt to map out the origins of that process in the cultural politics of imperial modernization during the romantic period.

This book is burdened (but also supported) by many intellectual and political debts to scholars and writers working in a number of languages and traditions, as well as to teachers and friends from different parts of the world. However, this project occupies a particular position with

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regard to the work of two of these scholars, writers, and teachers – Edward Said and Fredric Jameson – and I want to reflect briefly on this position because its significance has to do with the nature of the questions I have been investigating, and not just with the ways in which I have approached those questions. Jameson's work (which is primarily concerned with capitalism) and Said's work (which is primarily concerned with imperialism) helped to define the political and intellectual forcefield into which I have ventured, and which I hope to have transformed in some way.

Such a transformation, if it has taken place at all, would have to do with more than merely framing Jameson's concerns with Said's project, or framing Said's concerns with Jameson's project. Nor would it have to do simply with combining both projects (which are primarily concerned with the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries), bringing them simultaneously to bear on what might seem to be a fuzzy gray area, or even blind spot, for both, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rather, if I can hope that any transformation takes place in these pages, it would not just concern the primary object of inquiry (romanticism), nor even various approaches to it (in romanticist scholarship), but also the political and intellectual forcefield defined by Said and Jameson. My claim here is not just the banal point that scholars of romanticism have much to learn from those who study imperialism and capitalism, and vice versa. It is that there is something unique about the object of inquiry – the event – called romanticism, which should force us to reconsider the ways in which imperialism and capitalism are historically related to each other, as well the ways in which they have been related to each other in and through scholarship.

This book would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, and guidance of many other friends, colleagues, and teachers. Parts of this project were first developed in my PhD dissertation in the Literature Program at Duke University, and the first rounds of writing what would eventually turn into this book were suggested during and after that process. I will always be deeply indebted to my dissertation committee (Professors Kenneth Surin, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Marjorie Levinson, and especially Robert Gleckner and Fredric Jameson), who helped me to set this project on its feet and to move through its earliest stages; and to my friends at Duke who helped sustain me and my work, many of whom read and re-read chapters and helped me develop my ideas: John Waters, Amanda Berry, Michael Speaks, Jonathan

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Beller, Neferti Tadiar, Loris Mirella, Carolyn Lesjak, Caren Irr, Richard Dienst, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca Karl.

This book took its final shape during my first years on the faculty at the University of Chicago, and I am deeply indebted to my friends and colleagues in the departments of English and Comparative Literature, particularly Lauren Berlant, Lisa Ruddick, Miriam Hansen, Ken Warren, W. J. T. Mitchell, Françoise Meltzer, Jay Schleusener, Katie Trumpener, Homi Bhabha, Michael Murrin, and Richard Strier. My colleagues Larry Rothfield, Janel Mueller, Elizabeth Helsinger, James Chandler, and Bill Brown not only read and re-read the whole book, but very patiently sorted through drafts of re-drafts of revisions of new drafts, etc., right up to the blessed end; their encouragements, criticisms, and suggestions were always invaluable to me. I am also grateful to Wolfram Schmidgen, Fiona Robertson, Nigel Leask, Ronald Judy, and Michael Hardt for their comments on particular chapters.

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To my friends Richard Dienst, Vincenzo Binetti, and Cesare Casarino I owe more than mere words: their support, their understanding, their seemingly infinite tolerance for my endless phone calls and e-mails, as well as their advice, their criticism, and their suggestions, all helped to nourish the intellectual and political project that this book proposes. But it was that shared experience of deep friendship and community that sustained its author; that sustenance I owe to them, and especially to Cesare, the sharer of telephone consultations in the middle of the day and the middle of the night.

It was and is a different – but equally valuable – kind of community in Chicago that sustained and sustains me here: to Heidi, Vincenzo, Bill, Bernadine, Elizabeth, and above all Rashid and especially Mona I owe an altogether different kind of thanks, for the nourishment of mind, body, and soul.

Last but not about as far from least as one can go, I wish to thank my uncle Edward, not only because he first marked out the terrain onto which I have adventured, but because all my adventures have taken

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place under his watchful eye; my brothers Ussama and Karim, whose undying fraternity goes beyond any possible acknowledgment; Christina, who made the final months of this process not only bearable but valuable beyond measure; and, above all others, my parents, Samir and Jean Makdisi, to whom this book is dedicated, because they had faith and they never lost it, because they never let the war take that faith away from them, because beneath their faith there was always unfailing love.

An earlier version of chapter 4 was published as “Colonial Space and the Colonization of Time in Scott’s *Waverley*,” in *Studies in Romanticism* (summer 1995); and a slightly different version of chapter 6 was published as “Versions of the East: Byron, Shelley, and the Orient,” in Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh, eds., *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).