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**Daniel E. White, *From Little London to Little Bengal: Religion, Print, and Modernity in Early British India, 1793–1835*, hardback, 288 pages, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-1421411644; £32**

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Daniel E. White's *From Little London to Little Bengal* investigates the circulation of people, books, ideas and things between London and Calcutta in the early part of the nineteenth century. In this dense and carefully researched book, White threads together his multiple interests in Romanticism, print culture, intellectual history, space and religion in the service of understanding how all of these are produced and transformed in the processes of empire. For White, London and Calcutta continually reshape and reimagine each other through these perpetual and accelerating exchanges.

A professor of British Romanticism at the University of Toronto, White sees his study as most closely akin methodologically to the new imperial history, represented in recent work by such scholars as Tony Ballantyne, Antoinette Burton, Dinesh Chakrabarty, Frederick Cooper, Ann Stoler and Stephen Howe, among others, and somewhat in opposition to the more binary postcolonial view of a one-way flow of cultural influence from metropole to colony. 'Many subjects in London and Calcutta', he argues, 'experienced imperial culture and space in circulation, defining the two capitals in multidirectional, recursive, or contrapuntal, rather than unilinear terms' (3).

The book proposes a rethinking of Romanticism, redefining it as more deeply and fundamentally connected to the flux of empire than previous readings of its Orientalist borrowings or 'influence' have conveyed. Not only does White point us to the emergence of an Indian Romantic literature and a reading public for it, but he also argues for a 'globalized Romanticism' that is produced by a 'powerful current of

imperial culture ... that projected its values as mobile and its ideals as exceeding the conceptual boundaries of territorial nationalism' (14). This argument is made intermittently through the book in readings of a variety of texts from Southey's epic poem 'The Curse of Kehama' to Henry Derozio's 'Don Juanics' and several imperial novels of sentiment. White also seeks to expand book history beyond an investigation of the transit of physical books between London and India and the development of an English print culture and readership in India. He uses the methods of book history to think about how other things circulate and are 'read'—panoramas of India and England, intellectuals and their work, or Hindu idols shipped to a Bristol museum.

For scholars and students of London and its literature and culture, the book is of most interest for its exploration, in the first and last chapters, of three major areas of inquiry: how London was recreated, reinvented and reimagined in Calcutta in various modes; how the space of London was recreated through the establishment of Anglo-Indian institutions and the emergence of 'Little Bengal' in Marylebone, the neighbourhood where returning Anglo-Indians had been settling since the mid-eighteenth century; how London is embedded culturally and socially in processes of imperial exchange through the flow of books and people.

In his first chapter, 'Little London: Imperial Publics, Imperial Spectacles', White looks at the complex cultural negotiations through which 'the fantasy of Little London was enforced and contested' (29), taking two public spectacles as his prime examples: the exhibition in Calcutta of panoramas of England and the Durga Puja, the one Hindu festival to which Europeans were routinely invited. How, through such spectacles and the responses to them, White asks, can we understand the production of a reading public and public opinion in Calcutta and parse the relationship of that public to an English public in London? Particularly compelling is his analysis of the panoramas—vast 360 degree painted canvases of English and London scenes—exhibited first in London and then shipped to Calcutta to be exhibited there. 'When a panorama of London comes to Calcutta', he writes, 'it operates on its spectators by turning them into not a new public but rather a *little* one', a public 'whose agreement with metropolitan taste affirms its inseparability from metropolitan life' (42). But '[t]he panorama ultimately', he argues, 'subverts the distinction between center and periphery itself, redefining the latter, paradoxically as a space that *includes* the former' (43).

White's fourth chapter, "'Little Bengal': Returned Exiles, Rammohun Roy, and Imperial Sociability", reverses the lens and looks at Little Bengal in London, a site 'every bit as much or as little Indianized as Little London was Anglicized' (144). Looking particularly at the Marylebone neighbourhood dubbed 'Little Bengal', at the Anglo-Indian institutions founded in London, and at the 1831 London visit of the Hindu journalist and reformer Rammohun Roy, White suggests the ways in which the space and social practices of early nineteenth-century London are reshaped and redefined through the processes of 'circulation and mobility' (145) that characterise the empire in this period.

Threaded through the chapter are White's reflections on 'exile' and the 'alienation and new forms of community' (153) experienced by the returning exiles who inhabited Little Bengal and founded both the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain

and Ireland and the Oriental Club. Read in dialogue by White, these two institutions embody the tensions, complexities and peculiarities of the situation of returned Anglo-Indians in London and the city's ambivalent view of them. White sees Rammohun Roy's much-publicised visit as an emissary of the Mughal emperor to the British court as 'an Orientalization of London very different from Little Bengal' (14). White reads Roy's 'imperial sociability', his presence and the influence he exerts through conversation and social interaction in many arenas of London, and particularly in Unitarian circles, as another contested site which for some reasserts the boundaries between here and there and for others makes London an open, cosmopolitan space more connected than ever to India and the rest of the world.

The strength of this book is undoubtedly in the density of its connections across multiple registers of imperial culture, politics, and society. White allows us to see how examples from different contexts—a book, an idol, a travelling Indian reformer—echo each other and are imbricated in the flows and exchanges that constitute imperial culture. But there is a trade-off here. The multiplication of instances, readings, and examples often means that we leave each one wishing to know more. For me, that was particularly true for Little Bengal, its inhabitants, and institutions. Nevertheless, the book, with its deep and thorough scholarship, should prove invaluable for scholars of imperialism, of Romanticism, of London, for demonstrating, as White says he hopes to, 'how imperial phenomena, too often understood as discrete, are mutually constitutive' (10).

### **Note on Contributor**

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