CHAPTER 20

Decolonizing Romantic Studies

Nigel Leask

Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall, and other movements have reinvigorated the demand to "decolonize" universities across the world. BLM may have originated in the USA in response to the toxic legacy of racial slavery, but the targeting of Black lives that saw the murder of George Floyd is endemic elsewhere. Even here in Scotland, where according to the 2011 census only just over 1 percent of the population is of African or Caribbean descent (compared to 2.7 percent Asian), Shako Bayoh was killed by police in 2015 in depressingly similar circumstances. BLM has shone new light on the ongoing racial oppression of African Americans, Latinx, and other ethnic minorities in "the land of the free." Of course, the United Kingdom shares a slavery legacy with her former American colonies, even if, as Simon Gikandi has argued, slavery tends to feature as "the political unconsciousness of Britishness" rather than a manifest presence, geographically located as it was "yonder awa" in her American or Caribbean colonies (Gikandi, Slavery; Morris, "Yonder Awa"). The most intensive phase of this crime against humanity coincided with the literary period known as romanticism, although the coincidence was only belatedly acknowledged by scholars of the period.

Britain's "imperial meridian" (1780–1830) saw the colonial and economic power base shifted from the West to the East Indies, partly in response to abolitionism, as well as the meteoric transformation of an English trading company into the expansionist "Company State" in South Asia (Bayly). Beyond the enslavement of Africans, Britain is also historically accountable for crimes perpetrated in other parts of its global empire, much of it only formally decolonized in my own lifetime. It's conveniently forgotten that in early nineteenth-century Britain, "everybody has an Indian uncle," in the words of that archimperialist Thomas De Quincey, "the English opium-eater" (De Quincey 7:22). Resources extracted from "the East and the West Indies," as well as southern Africa, southeast Asia, and the settler colonies of Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, underpinned the rise of industry, commerce, and civic

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institutions and enabled Britain's rise to paramount global power in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. At a high price not only for colonized peoples, but also for the planet as a whole – as eco-historians Jason Moore and Andreas Malm have argued, the "Capitalocene" (a better designation for our current environmental crisis than the "Anthropocene") was based on the colonialist "world-praxis" of "Cheap Nature," the "fossil-imperial metabolism that undergirded the post 1825 development of [the British] empire" (Moore 600; Malm 236). The effects of colonialism and postcolonialism transformed every aspect of life in the UK – including mass migration to the metropolis from the former colonies in the wake of independence, and more recently the ever-more urgent refugee crisis, with accompanying reactionary backlash.

Nonetheless, UK cultural and educational institutions have been slow to address the role of global empire (benignly repackaged as "the Commonwealth") in the history of "our island nation," in anything other than nostalgic or even triumphalist terms. Even in more progressive versions of the curriculum, schooling in the UK tends to focus on the American Civil Rights movement rather than historical events nearer at home: leading to David Olusoga's criticism of "our obsession with American racism . . . as a diversionary tactic from looking at our own history." Olusoga recalls history lessons on the Industrial Revolution in his own school in northwest England, which simply ignored "the 1.8 million African Americans who produced the cotton which went into the 4,500 mills of Lancashire. We miss out the linkages between what we think of as mainstream history and what we've ghettoised as 'black history' – and yet it is just British history" (Olusoga). The same applies here in Scotland – visitors to the UNESCO World Heritage Site at the New Lanark Cotton Mills, for example, learn that millowner Robert Owen was a pioneer of "progressive education, factory reform, humane working practices, international cooperation, etc.," proving that "the creation of wealth does not automatically imply the degradation of its producers." Hardly any mention is made of the "cheap nature" that undergirded this industrial miracle, namely that the raw cotton spun in New Lanark was picked by enslaved Africans in Georgia, New Orleans, Trinidad, Jamaica, Grenada, and Guadeloupe. Nor the fact that Owen "consistently endorsed the arguments of slave masters and specifically opposed emancipation in the late 1820's . . . repeatedly employ[ing] the time-honoured anti-abolitionist rhetoric that 'white slaves' in Britain had it worse than black slaves in the colonies" (Morris, "Problem" 120). The first step in *decolonizing* the curriculum must be to uncover and square up to the past and continuing legacy of colonialism upon our culture.

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Institutional and National Reflections

Priyamvada Gopal has argued that "the university cannot be decolonised independently of society and economy, but it can be a site where these questions are frontally addressed towards wider change, not least in habits of mind . . . [this] should not be conceived of as a sop to ethnic minorities or a concession to pluralism but as fundamentally reparative of the institution and its constituent fields of inquiry" (Gopal 11, 8). As university teachers of literature, we have an ethical responsibility to address these issues in our own areas of practice: institutionally through promoting diversity, equality, and antiracism; and pedagogically, by reflecting on our discipline's history and future direction, as well as our positionality. In most of Britain's older universities, the connection with empire is never far from the surface. My own Glasgow "Regius Chair of English Language and Literature" was established by Queen Victoria in 1862 in response to the introduction of competitive examinations for the Indian Civil Service (ICS), in which one-quarter of possible marks were awarded to candidates for proficiency in English language and literature. Thomas Macaulay, the architect of the ICS reforms, believed that English literary education would support "men who represent the best part of our English nation" in the colonies, disseminating "that literature before the light of which impious and cruel superstitions are fast taking flight on the banks of the Ganges . . . wherever British literature spreads, may it be attended by British virtue and British freedom" (quoted in Baldick 71). It was feared that young Scottish men lacking the opportunities of an "English" literary education (as well as any of the sense of the "Englishness" that Macaulay confidently promoted) would lose out in the stakes of becoming imperial Britons, given that an ICS career was a jewel in the imperial crown.

The history of Glasgow's Regius Chair exposes how the birth of our own university discipline of English was underpinned by imperial concerns. Initiated in 1762 with Edinburgh's Chair of Rhetoric, the rise of university English followed a transperipheral trajectory, crossing the Atlantic from Scotland to the American colonies in the eighteenth century, spreading over the red parts of the world map in the century to come, although only making a late footfall in Oxford in 1892 and Cambridge in 1922. In one sense, the discipline of English literature could be said to be coterminous with the rise (and fall) of the British Empire itself (Crawford). That is why, writing in 1968 in postcolonial Kenya, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o hit the central target when he advocated the "abolition of the English Department." Ngũgĩ questioned the "role and situation of an English department in an

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African situation and environment . . . just because we have kept English as our official language, there is no need to substitute a study of English culture for our own. We reject the primacy of English literature and culture" (Ashcroft 439). That was back in 1968: as the editors of the present volume ask: "Why has the discourse on decolonization come *after* postcolonial thought and theory sprang fully formed from the brow of imperial history in the 1980s and 1990s? . . . It seems strange to return to the time of decolonization in what, strictly speaking, is the postcolonial era."

Glasgow University has an overwhelming preponderance of White staff and students, like the city itself, and much remains to be done to improve diversity in a university that aspires to be a global institution. However, to its credit, it has taken a proactive lead in slavery reparation among UK universities. In 2017, it commissioned a report, the findings of which acknowledged that the university historically benefited from wealth derived from chattel slavery estimated to be between £16 and £198 million (2016 values), although this was only a fraction of monies derived from colonial capital *in toto*, much of it deriving from South and East Asia (University of Glasgow, "Slavery"). The Atlantic port city of Glasgow held a virtual monopoly on the late eighteenth-century tobacco trade, and subsequent commerce in cotton and sugar: and "of all British universities with antecedents in the period of British slavery (c.1600–1838), only [Glasgow] Old College was located in a city that was rapidly transformed whilst closely connected with Atlantic slave economies."[1] Although it petitioned against the slave trade in 1792, report author Stephen Mullen argued that "the institution was pro-slavery in practice" (Mullen 229). Accordingly, Glasgow has committed £20 million to bursaries and studentships in a historic agreement with the University of the West Indies, reported as a reparative justice initiative. These initiatives (following Oxford's All-Souls Codrington project) were inspired by Brown and Georgetown Universities in the USA, as well as by the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa, driven by the student-led decolonization protests. In turn, they have inspired similar initiatives at Cambridge, Nottingham, Bristol, and Aberdeen universities.[2]

As part of the new campus development, Glasgow University's new Learning and Teaching Hub has been named in honor of James McCune Smith (students have already dubbed it "the Jimmy Mac"), an emancipated enslaved person from the USA, who graduated in medicine from the University of Glasgow in 1837. In so doing, he became the first African American to receive a medical degree, an opportunity not open to him in his native country. In 2021, the university launched a "James McCune

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Smith" doctoral scholarship to provide full funding for Black UK students to conduct research. Welcome as this is, it is only the tip of the iceberg: in 2019, the University's "Understanding Racism, Transforming University Culture" report uncovered disturbing evidence that half of all ethnic minority students had been racially harassed since beginning their studies at the university, eliciting an apology from the Principal (VC) and a comprehensive action plan to address racial inequality on campus.

Gopal writes pertinently on the importance of attending to historical context in decolonizing universities across the world: "there is no one-size-fits-all formula, no laundry list of action points for universities to table ... posing the right question for each context is itself part of the work of intellectual decolonization" (Gopal 9). The cultural location of my university is complicated by the current crisis of the British Union: Glasgow's role as Scotland's biggest city places it at the heart of the urgent constitutional debate concerning Scotland's independence from the UK. Now supported by a slim majority of the Scottish population in the wake of the Brexit agreement (62 percent of Scots voted Remain), the "Indy 2 movement" has gathered further strength in response to the current UK government's curtailment of devolved powers to the Scottish government and the rise of English ethnonationalism and imperial nostalgia. Many of its supporters see Scottish independence as a significant chapter in the ongoing decolonization of the British state: although dominated by a nationalist paradigm, it interprets Scotland as a "civic" rather than an "ethnic" community and is orientated toward independence within the European Union.

The argument that Scots were also "colonized" by England is now discredited, except among a few fringe nationalists: recent work by Scottish historians underline the fact that many Scottish individuals and institutions did extremely well out of the British (never "English") empire (Mackillop). Historically, the 1707 Act of Union between the two nations opened England's colonies to Scottish agents and capital, enabling Scotland's proactive role in the transatlantic slave trade, as well as other forms of colonial exploitation in the Caribbean and South/East Asia. Even if only twenty-seven recorded slave ships sailed from Scottish ports between 1706 and 1766 (compared to 1,500 from Bristol alone), the Atlantic trade, as well as personal fortunes made by Scots merchants, planters, and "sojourners," had a transformative effect on the Scottish economy and society. The economic benefits were felt more strongly in Scotland than England, Ireland, or Wales, in part because Scotland was poorer than England, with a small but well-educated population well fitted

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to provide "human capital" for empire (Devine).[3] As Sir Walter Scott wrote in 1821, "India is the corn chest for Scotland, where we poor gentry must send our younger sons as we send our black cattle to the south" (quoted in Caine 7). "Deprovincializing" Scotland and embracing independence means accepting historical responsibility for empire, not blaming it on England. So how, I wonder, can Ngũgĩ's question about the "role and situation of an English Department" apply in an ancient Scottish university, when in stark contrast to Ngũgĩ's Kenyan students, Scots were beneficiaries rather than victims of British imperialism? The question is especially pertinent to me as a socially privileged Scot, born in Glasgow, whose privilege largely accrued from the profits of "Scotland's empire." My grandfather's ascent into the British middle classes from the ranks of the Orcadian peasantry was enabled by a career in the Imperial Bank of India: my father was born in Tamil Nadu, as well as seeing war service in the Indian army. Many friends and colleagues in Scotland as well as England can trace similarly colonial family backgrounds.

For the last decade and a half, my research has focused on Scottish romanticism (*Ossian*, Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, etc.), on "domestic" travel writing, and more recently on Gaelic literature in the same period, largely unstudied outside Celtic departments.[4] Until recently, Scottish romanticism was itself marginalized within the English literary canon, despite the central importance of Scottish publishing, critical reviews, novels, and poetry in the period 1750–1850. Therefore, I have my own institutional issues as a professor of "English Language and Literature," teaching Scottish as well as English romantic writing in an English department, located in a university that also boasts (uniquely) a Scottish Literature department. Scottish language and literature are also taught and studied in Glasgow's department of English Language and Linguistics, as well as in the Celtic and Gaelic department, but despite some excellent collaborative projects, there is limited traffic between the four departments. Ngũgĩ's proposal concerning the "English Department" has a distinctive inflection in an institution specializing in Scotland's literary culture, which spans three Indigenous languages, Scots, Gaelic, and English. A similar story could doubtless be told about other UK universities in Wales, as well as in Ireland, undermining the notion of any unified "English" curriculum on these islands, which postcolonialists often set against an equally monolithic colonial "other," largely based on the experience of the North American "English Department."

In the romantic period, the multinational British state was an assemblage of diverse national cultures, in the case of Ireland recently yoked to

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Britain by military force, after a major uprising in 1798, the year of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. Saree Makdisi has argued for a program of "Occidentalism" in the case of Georgian England, still too internally heterogeneous to represent a civilizational ideal, which worked by "locating and clearing a space for a white, Western self who could be more effectively counterposed to the Orient out there" (Makdisi 26). Studying this kind of internal "uneven development" during the romantic period is perhaps even more urgent in the case of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, where large segments of the populations couldn't speak English and identified in widely variable degrees with the British crown and the established churches. It should remind us of the importance of the critical study of "Whiteness" – hardly a normative category in this or any period – in any plan to decolonize the romantic curriculum. One of the great possibilities of postcolonial study is its power to break open silos based on oversimplified national canons, as in the potential for collaborative work in my own university with colleagues in Gaelic, as well as modern language departments engaging with Francophone and Hispanic postcolonial literatures. I regret that in my case this opportunity does not extend to non-European languages such as Persian, Bengali, Hindi, and Swahili, because I have no doubt the future direction of postcolonialism will increasingly challenge the monoglot regime of "global English."

Rethinking the Romantic Curriculum

After these reflections on positionality, the rest of my essay hazards some proposals for decolonizing romanticism, in terms of canon, cultural geography, and genre. I stress that these are based on my personal research interests, and my experience of teaching romanticism students in Glasgow: other colleagues with other interests and in other locations will have different priorities. They are, first, to "trouble the universalising function" of the White canon by considering "black romanticism" (meaning more than "just add black writer and stir") (Youngquist 5); second, to remap the cultural geography of British and European romanticism in relation to global empire; third, to include the genre of travel writing alongside poetry, drama, and the novel, given its role in establishing what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "planetary consciousness" of European romanticism. My 1992 book *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* sought to rethink romanticism in the light of the pioneering work by the first postcolonial generation of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Parry, and so on. Engaging with Said's compelling narrative of the relations between

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orientalism and colonial power, the book proposed a more anxious, unstable, and contradictory representation of the oriental "other" than Said would allow, in the works of a group of canonical male romantics: Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, and De Quincey.[5] In the introduction, I wrote that "the internal decolonization of our culture, ethnically heterogeneous and multiracial, *as well as* European, must proceed by brushing our imperial history against the grain, to adapt Benjamin's aphorism" (Leask, *British Romantic Writers* 12). My focus on Asia excluded considerations of slavery: along with other studies, Simon Gikandi's *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (2014) has more recently offered a powerful conceptual framework for placing racial slavery at the heart of literary studies in this period, exposing how the brutality and ugliness of enslavement actively shaped theories of taste, beauty, and practices of high culture, fundamental to European enlightenment and romanticism. Excerpts from Gikandi and other critics would frame seminar readings, as well as offering a revisionist angle on traditional topics such as the romantic imagination.

Despite the impressive body of work on romantic orientalism, colonialism, and slavery published since *British Romantic Writers and the East* thirty years ago, it is arguable how much that sort of critique has changed the way in which romanticism is taught at university level. One problem is that the voices of BME and other colonized peoples were marginalized in my own book, even as I acknowledge their "subversions" of the imperialist project. I now reflect with interest on my parenthetical statement in the book's introduction, referring to anticolonial resistance: "(this was largely the work of the colonized peoples who, with the exception of the remarkable Rammohun Roy, are a *silent*, but informing presence throughout my book)" (2). Maybe the colonized were silent in my 1992 book, but certainly not in history, even in English *literary* history. In rethinking my romantic canon, I draw inspiration from Aravamudan's notion of "tropicopolitans" (a term I prefer to "subaltern" in discussing writer/activists), defined as "the residents of the tropics, the bearers of its marks, and the shadow images of more visible metropolitans [who] challenge the developing privileges of Enlightenment cosmopolitans" (Aravamudan 4).

At the same time, I would argue that "Black romanticism" exists as more than just a Derridean "trace" (or "shadow image") in the literary archive. For instance, Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789) has proved one of the most popular and engaging texts that I have taught, a generically hybrid work, part-slave narrative, part-conversion narrative, part-autobiographical memoir, and part-travel account. An instructive dialogue can be set up

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between Equiano and the Scottish-Jamaican radical Robert Wedderburn's *The Axe Laid to the Root* (1817) and *The Horrors of Slavery* (1824): this also exposes an interesting Scottish connection, given that Wedderburn was only two years younger than Robert Burns, whose coronation as "Scotia's Bard" saved him from taking employment as a "negro driver" in Jamaica in 1786. Wedderburn's radicalism also exposes the connections with the Haitian revolution of 1791, which in the annals of *colonial* romanticism takes on equivalent importance to the role of the French Revolution in canonical romanticism: "*Jamaica will be in the hands of the blacks within twenty years*," Wedderburn wrote, "*Prepare for flight, ye planters,* for the fate of St Domingo awaits you" (McCalman 86). As Joel Pace has suggested, another way of combating the "double consciousness" of conventional literary studies would be to read, for example, West African-born, formerly enslaved Phyllis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1773) in relation to verse by canonical romantics, given their concerns with subjectivity, spirituality, and the powers of nature (Pace 116–18). An equally productive comparison might be with the poetry of White woman abolitionists such as Helen Maria Williams, Hannah More, and Anne Yearsley, all of them aware of Wheatley's verse in promoting their sentimentalized critique of chattel slavery. Finally, a product of the later years of romanticism, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831) is a more conventional but equally disturbing narrative, and the first biography (albeit partially ghostwritten) of a Black enslaved woman published in Britain (Salih).

Moving to "the East Indies" is to engage with a very different form of cultural encounter, following the East India Company's annexation of much of the former Mughal empire, aptly described by William Dalrymple as "the supreme act of corporate violence in world history" (xxxiii). British orientalists such as Warren Hastings and Sir William Jones established hegemonic power in the subcontinent by interpreting and translating Sanskrit culture as (a lesser) equivalent to the legacies of Graeco-Roman civilization in Europe. For all their (relative) cultural sympathy, Jones and his ilk sought to mummify modern India in a timeless Brahminical past, largely ignoring its more recent Mughal history: by contrast, South Asian writers of the romantic period experienced colonial education and institutions as the shock of modernity, stimulating them to reinterpret their own rich cultural traditions. First on my list would be the Indo-Muslim munshi and poet Mirza Abu Talib Khan, whose Persian-language account of his travels in Europe and Britain in 1799–1803 were translated by the Irish scholar Charles Stewart and published in London in 1810, representing one of the first "reverse

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travelogues" descriptive of Europe written by an Indian author.[6] Next I would return to the Bengali religious reformer and social theorist Rajah Ram Mohan Roy (as mentioned above, the single colonized voice discussed in *British Romantic Writers and the East*) and explore the influence of, say, his *Translations of an Abridgement of the Vedant* (London, 1817) on the ethics and metaphysics of British romantic writers such as Shelley and Bentham. Finally, to explore another cultural exchange, the anglophone poetry of the Eurasian Calcutta teacher Henry Derozio represents an explosive reinterpretation of the "bardic nationalism" of *Ossian*, Walter Scott, and Tom Moore in the Bengali context, evident in a poem such as "The Harp of India" (1827). Rosinka Chaudhuri's excellent edition of Derozio's poetry makes his work readily available for the seminar room.

These represent merely a sample of possible Black or colonized writers of the romantic period to question the notion of "silent subjection." But just as important is to reappraise the contribution of *White* writers who were relegated to secondary status in the traditional canon precisely *because* of their concern with the colonial world, which came to seem ephemeral and meretricious compared to timeless Wordsworthian themes of imagination, nature, and selfhood. As Marilyn Butler indicated many years ago, the best example is Poet Laureate Robert Southey, whose whole literary career was dedicated to reforming and fortifying Britain's imperial ideology, borrowing largely from the literature of the prior Spanish and Portuguese empires that he had studied so assiduously. In addition to his oriental epics *Thalaba* and *Kehama*, I teach sections from his "Mexican" romance *Madoc* (1805), in which medieval Welsh colonists are pitted against orientalized Aztecs as a blueprint for the colonial annexation of Indigenous peoples. Earlier drafts of *Madoc* are also connected to the young and radical Southey's project, shared with the abolitionist Coleridge, of establishing a "pantisocratic" colony in Pennsylvania, subsequently an important influence on contemporary colonial schemes with links to abolition, such as the Sierra Leone settlement (Leask, "Southey's *Madoc*"). Of all the major romantics, Wordsworth seems most resistant to postcolonial reading, as the poet of normative Englishness, organic selfhood, and consolatory nature. Yet as Alan Bewell and David Simpson have argued, his reflective poems of encounter (with discharged soldiers, dying Indian women, old leech gatherers, solitary reapers) can be seen as paradigms of colonial encounter when "the anthropological other begins at home, indeed right outside one's front door" (Simpson 192). Wordsworth was also a pioneer of ecological thinking, exemplified in a poem like "Nutting," which provides an opening to considering the massive environmental damage effected by British

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imperialists from the sugar islands of the Caribbean to the teak forests of Burma. As environmental historian E. A. Wrigley has demonstrated, colonial "ghost acres" rescued metropolitan Britain from the ecological bottleneck of increasing population and dwindling resources, powering the industrial revolution (39).

Colonial remapping also shines a light on areas of the traditional canon that have seemed secondary or unimportant, connecting gothic and orientalist tropes: Byron's *Turkish Tales*, for example, or the orientalist poems of Shelley and Keats, as addressed in my 1992 study. This could be extended in relation to excellent scholarship on other canonical figures. Sara Suleri's elegant critique of Burke's rhetoric in the impeachment of Warren Hastings offers a new Indian context for thinking about the aesthetics of the sublime and Burke's seminal *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Saree Makdisi's work has shown the orientalist and imperialist concerns of William Blake and the radical culture of the 1790s, engaging with modernity's uneven development, and the "occidentalizing" of Britain itself. When teaching Blake, I explore visionary poems of revolution such as *America*, *Europe*, and the *Song of Los*, but also *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, its fable derived from James Macpherson's "Oithona: A Poem" (1762), one of his highly "foreignized" "translations" from ancient Gaelic ballads attributed to the blind bard Ossian but now applied to the modern conditions of transatlantic slavery and Wollstonecraftian feminism. (For all his dissident Jacobite roots in the Highlands, Macpherson himself made a fortune as the London agent of the Nabob of Arcot, and his later career was devoted to theorizing British imperial supremacy [McElroy].) Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) pioneered the "contrapuntal" postcolonial reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, which along with Austen's other novels has inspired a spate of excellent criticism of the period's greatest novelist; meanwhile, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, now one of the most widely studied novels in the curriculum, has been opened to incisive postcolonial readings by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Elizabeth Bohls, and others. The verse romances and novels of Walter Scott have tended to be overlooked by postcolonial critics, although closer scrutiny reveals essential links between Scotland and India in *Guy Mannering* (1815) or *The Surgeon's Daughter* (1827), as well as his influential portrait of multiethnic England in *Ivanhoe* (1819), or his historical romance of the crusades in *The Talisman* (1825), with its strangely sympathetic portrait of Saladin. Ian Duncan has proposed that Rob Roy's primitivism (in Scott's 1817 novel of the same name), and the comparison of Scottish Gaels to tribal Afghans, represents a key

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facet of British imperial ideology that promoted a patriarchal primitivism "still structurally present within modernity," and one that also could account for the brutalities of slavery (128).

Finally, my third and final proposal would see the consolidation of the genre of travel writing firmly at the center of a decolonized romantic curriculum, alongside poetry, drama, and the novel. I commented above on "tropicopolitan" travel writers such as Equiano, Wedderburn, and Abu Talib Khan, but of course the majority of romantic-period travel books described European journeys to the colonial peripheries.[7] Here, I draw largely on research published in my 2002 *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, a sequel to *Romantic Writers and the East*.[8] The popularity of books of voyages and travels during the "long romantic" decades was second only to that of novels and romances, coterminous with Europe's colonial expansion in the same period. Travel writing is a form of colonial knowledge: as Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, "travellers' stories were generally the experiences and observations of white men whose interactions with indigenous 'societies' or 'peoples' were constructed around their own cultural views of gender and sexuality" (Tuhiwai Smith 41). But although the "objectivity" of colonial travel writing is mediated by orientalist and imperialist (as well as gendered) paradigms, in the period the genre was to some extent regulated by empirical protocols: as Antony Pagden writes, "however much we may . . . fabricate rather than find our counter-image, we do not fabricate it out of nothing" (184). Rather than reading accounts of travelers' encounters with "the other" as a Manichaean opposition of power and innocence, I prefer Nicholas Thomas's stress on the contingency (and sometimes confusion) determining the "cultural entanglements" of European travelers in diverse times and places. This was especially the case on the colonial frontier, or beyond the boundaries of colonial rule, where European travelers were in a "weaker" position than the Indigenous people they encountered, often challenging myths of European triumphalism and reminding us that its global paramountcy was never an historical inevitability. At its best, travel writing in this period has a heteroglossic quality that allows the otherwise-silenced voices of Indigenous people to be heard, however mediated: take for example Gikandi's moving account of the fate of "Nealee," an enslaved African woman who formed part of a coffle traveling through West Africa to the slave forts on the Gambian coast in 1797. Unlike millions of African slaves, "Nealee's" testimony survives in the travel narrative of the Scottish explorer and botanist Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior District of Africa* (1799), "the sole scriptural witness to this event," albeit as "a mere trace in

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the archive of modern identity" (Gikandi, *Slavery*, ch. 2, "Taste, Slavery and the Modern Self").

By focusing on the "antique lands" of Egypt, India, and Mexico, my 2002 book sought to shift the cultural focus of romanticism from the classical topography of Rome or Athens, or the gothic ruins of medieval Europe, to the pyramids and temples of tropical high cultures in the colonial zone, which both fascinated and threatened Western travelers. These journeys themselves constitute a variety of romantic historicism, as well as orientalism: as J.-M. Degerando wrote in 1799, "the philosophical traveller, sailing to the ends of the earth, is in fact travelling in time; he is exploring the past; every step he takes is the passage of an age" (quoted in Leask, *Curiosity* 46). At the same time, "antique" easily collapses into "antic," as the material conditions of modernity constantly reassert themselves, exposing the travelers' anxiety and dependence upon native peoples who mock (and sometimes take advantage of) their sublime obsessions. Thus, the Scottish explorer James Bruce's hyperbolic account of his discovery of the source of the Nile collapses into bathos as (in a passage of Shandyean irony) he likens himself to Don Quixote, and his toasting George III in Nile water leads the local Agow people to speculate that he has been bitten by a mad dog (quoted in ibid. 79). Italian circus strongman Giovanni Belzoni's role in the "rape of the Nile," extracting Egyptian antiquities for his British employers as described in his *Narrative of the Operations* (1820), is literalized as material engorgement as he tumbles into a mummy pit at Qurna: "I could not pass without putting my face in contact with that of a decayed Egyptian . . . I could not avoid being covered with bones, legs, arms, and heads rolling from above" (quoted in ibid. 141). Sometimes, oriental ruins elicit a more critical note, as when, visiting the Elephanta Cave temples near Mumbai, Maria Graham notes a hidden ledge behind the statue of Siva "where a Brahmin might have hidden himself for any purpose of priestly imposition" (quoted in ibid. 216). But the enduring *antic-olonial* power of Indigenous antiquities is evidenced in Humboldt's account of the massive Aztec statue of Coatlicue ("snake-belt"), which he had persuaded the Spanish authorities to disinter for him in 1803. Previously displayed in Mexico City's university cloisters after its excavation in the late eighteenth century, an Indigenous cult had begun to form around it which threatened colonial authority, remarkable enough considering that Mexicans has been nominally converted to Catholicism for two and half centuries. The Spanish authorities promptly had it reburied (ibid. 278).

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Such episodes inspired works of romantic poetry and prose, which can usefully be set on reading lists alongside passages from the travel accounts, providing a new colonial context for romantic lyrics. Examples are Coleridge's response to Bruce's *Travels* in "Kubla Khan," or Felicia Hemans's 1820 poem on "The Traveller at the Source of the Nile," or Shelley's sonnet "Ozymandias" (1818), inspired by the seven-ton statue of Ramesses II brought by Belzoni from Thebes to London that same year (Leask, "Kubla Khan"; *Curiosity* 81–83, 102–28). Another celebrated instance is De Quincey's orientalist nightmare of immolation in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, inspired by Belzoni's misadventure at Qurna: "I was buried, for a thousand years, in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids" (Leask, *British Romantic Writers* 227).

Such narratives of travelers' transactions in the colonial contact zone give life and immediacy to the erased presence of colonial realities in the conventional romantic canon. Although the length and sometimes inaccessibility of romantic travel accounts does raise practical problems for classroom purposes, Elizabeth Bohls and Ian Duncan's excellent anthology *Travel Writing 1700–1830* makes many of the texts mentioned above easily available, as does their increasing digital accessibility. Properly selected and edited, these often-long and digressive texts are now increasingly accessible to students of colonial culture and literature. As with my first two proposals for decolonizing the romantic curriculum, travel texts restore a sense of the global interconnectivity of Britain's colonial and imperial history, allowing citizens of our multicultural society (whether in Scotland or elsewhere in the UK) to recognize themselves in that history and literature and enabling them to better challenge the continuing racial and cultural inequities of the present. Decolonizing the romantic curriculum must be at best a tinkering round the margins, but it's a start. As Gopal indicates, decolonization remains "a meaningless piety without an extensive enactment of material reparations . . . to peoples, communities and countries that still struggle with the consequences of very material losses." But (she paraphrases Jamaica Kincaid), at least it promotes "a more demanding relationship with history and with the world" (Gopal 12, 25).

Notes

1. Anderson 12, quoted in Mullen 211. This article describes the research methodology, conducted largely by Stephen Mullen and Simon Newman in Glasgow's School of Humanities.

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2. Mullen 219. The university's external advisory group included three distinguished Afro-Caribbean scholar/activists, Glasgow City Councillor Graham Campbell, Professor Geoffrey Palmer, and Sir Hilary Beckles, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies. But for criticisms of the selectivity of the university's consultation, see Mullen 219.
3. It is also noteworthy that the University College London research project *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership* quantified the disproportionate Scottish role in Caribbean slaveownership (Mullen 212).
4. Although now a minoritized language, Gaelic was spoken by a quarter of Scotland's population up to the early nineteenth century. In some respects, the fate of Scottish Gaels in the expansion of the British Empire resembles that of a colonized people, especially their racialization and "clearance" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Stroh and Leask, *Stepping Westward* 281–99.
5. *Romantic Writers and the East* participated in a postcolonial reassessment of romantic orientalism with distinguished contributions by Saree Makdisi, Srinivas Aravamudan, Javed Majeed, Tim Fulford, John Barrell, Gauri Viswanathan, Mary-Ellis Gibson, Dan White, and Rosinka Chaudhuri, continuing up to the present with new studies by Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud and James Watt.
6. For a revisionary reading of Abu Talib and his kin, see Garcia.
7. For an up-to-date overview of the genre, including Arabic, Indian, and Chinese travel writing, see the essays in Das and Youngs.
8. My recent *Stepping Westward: Writing the Highland Tour* examines travel accounts about a much more proximate "antique land," the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*.

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