

Daniel E. White, *From Little London to Little Bengal: Religion, Print and Modernity in Early British India, 1793-1835*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Pp. 261. £32. ISBN 9781421411644.

Britain's increasing imperial dominance over India during the Romantic period witnessed parallel developments in metropolitan cultures both east and west. In India, this was most obviously located in the imperial city of Calcutta, with its impressive Georgian architecture, press, and entertainments, 'a little London in Bengal', as James Atkinson described it in his poem, 'The City of Palaces'; while in Britain, areas of London (Marlebone and Mayfair in particular) which attracted retired Anglo-Indians of the East India Company came to be known as 'little Bengal', on account of the exotic, oriental culture imported into Britain by the tawny, hookah-smoking inhabitants of these areas. These globally-connected metropolitan developments in Britain and India, generating an extensive network of printed texts and visual imagery, people and objects that circulated within the empire, are the subject of Daniel S. White's fascinating and intricately argued new study, *From Little London to Little Bengal: Religion, Print and Modernity in Early British India, 1793-1835*.

While earlier studies have tended to view such relations through the lens of a binary perspective involving a centrally configured imperial metropolis and its exoticized and distant other, White's work, drawing on the 'new imperial history' and on a range of spatial, affective, and postcolonialist theories, insists on the 'stubborn fact that Britons and Indians inhabited the same globe, a material and imagined terrain where unequal relations of power and representation were contested through alliances and conflicts, communication and mistranslation, sympathies and failures of feeling and understanding' (2). The resultant study of cultural connections between 'little London' and 'little Bengal' indicates that both sides were engaged in a far more intricate exchange of texts, religious ideas, and material artefacts than has generally been acknowledged, drawing them into an affiliation that went well beyond the earlier paradigms of imitation, mimicry, or straightforward resistance that characterised such relations.

Chapter 1, 'Little London', discusses the fashioning of public opinion in the Calcutta press, and concomitantly examines two kinds of urban spectacle: the panoramas of British scenes (imported from England, but serving a different function in colonial Calcutta), and the newly evolving festivities of the annual Durga Puja to which East India Company officials were often invited by the Bengali elites (*bhadralok*) of Calcutta, and which some of them criticised as idolatrous. As White argues, these developments bespeak the transformation of public and private spaces in Calcutta, producing sympathetic or antipathetic responses in the press, forging new relationships of power between Britons and Indians, and negotiating the faultlines between the spiritual and the secular realms that would characterise the modern colonial state.

While early East India Company policy in British India had been largely tolerant and non-interfering with regard to native religious beliefs and practices, the growth of evangelicalism opened up a rift in early nineteenth-century British public opinion with regard to the intervention of missionaries. White's second chapter correspondingly examines Robert Southey's epic, *The Curse of Kehama*, based on a wealth of Indological materials, in the light of such debates. Focusing his reading on the heroine Kailyal's devotion to the idol of her goddess, Marriataly, White argues that what Thomas De Quincey described as Southey's 'intensely *objective*' aesthetic explains his evidently sympathetic portrayal of Hindu idolatry, though his ultimate aim was to replace such beliefs with the 'Light' of Christianity. Chapter 3 looks at Indian engagements with Christianity and Romantic religious poetry through the polemical and compelling works of the Hindu Unitarian Rammohun Roy who achieved

celebrity status visiting England in the early 1830s, and the neglected writings of the talented Eurasian poet Henry Derozio of Calcutta who died young in 1831. The fourth and final chapter before the epilogue returns to the 'little Bengal' of London where returned Anglo-Indians affiliated to the Royal Asiatic Society and the Oriental Club recreated in microcosm their oriental habits and habitat, and retained their connections with the empire. It was here that Rammohun Roy first settled on arrival in England, and White excavates in considerable detail his lionisation in London and absorption into the dissenting Unitarian culture of the period, thus bringing the work full circle from its beginnings in 'Little London' to its apotheosis in Rammohun Roy's visit to 'little Bengal'.

White's sophisticated and engaging work profits from a wealth of recent scholarship and theory. Drawing on Partha Chatterjee's influential view that 'modernity was not a modular import from the West to the East' (19), White follows in the path of a growing number of new imperial historians and postcolonial critics who have been gradually transforming our view of colonial relations between Britain and India. Informed by original archival scholarship as well as by recent textual editions of writers such as Robert Southey and Henry Derozio, White reads the material, visual, and print cultures of the Romantic period in fluid juxtaposition, producing a complex view of global cosmopolitanism imbued with imperialist and protonationalist imaginings.

Daniel S. Roberts
Queen's University Belfast