

Introduction

In 2017, to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Partition of India, BBC Films released *Viceroy's House*, a film about the last viceroy of India, Lord Louis Mountbatten, and his well-intentioned but hapless efforts to ensure a peaceful transition from British rule to independence. As the Indian characters struggle to decide whether to pledge allegiance to India or to Pakistan, Lord Mountbatten (played by *Downton Abbey* star Hugh Bonneville) informs the domestic staff at his residence that the Partition Council has decided to apportion eighty percent of the national assets to India and twenty percent to Pakistan. He then announces that “[w]e will be following that same formula in this great house.” The film cuts to a montage sequence depicting the staff at Viceroy’s House dividing items ranging from silver cutlery to musical instruments into separate portions for India and Pakistan. The sound of an official checking off items on a list carries over several shots: “Soup spoons, fifteen cases for India, three cases for Pakistan. Teaspoons, forty cases for India, ten cases for Pakistan. Butter knives, twenty cases for India, five cases for Pakistan. Tuba, India. French horn, Pakistan. . . .” The ludicrousness of dividing the viceroy’s property in this pedantic manner culminates in a scene in the library, where two female librarians are arguing over which books should go to India or to Pakistan. The scene begins with a close-up of two sets of bookshelves, the one on the left labelled “India” and the other on the right labelled “Pakistan.” The camera slowly zooms out to show the librarian on the right proclaiming that “*Wuthering Heights* must come to Pakistan,” and the librarian on the left replying, “Then *Jane Eyre* stays here and all of the Jane Austen” (figure I.1). The camera zooms out further to reveal the two librarians standing in the center of the frame surrounded by stacks of books, with a male assistant on the right carrying books to and fro. Although the librarian on the left claims that “break[ing]



Figure I.1. The librarians at Viceroy’s House disagree over which books should go to India or to Pakistan. *Source: Viceroy’s House*. Directed by Gurinder Chadha, Pathé, Reliance Entertainment, BBC Films, Ingenious Media, and British Film Institute, 2017.

[up] the encyclopedias . . . would be a crime,” she eventually accepts that India will have volumes A-R while Pakistan gets volumes S-Z.

This scene in the library suggests that, like the other objects in Viceroy’s House, the canon of English literature is an inheritance that the British colonialists are giving to the newborn nations of India and Pakistan. However, unlike the tableware and the musical instruments, the gift of English literature cannot be neatly divided into portions for India and Pakistan. As the librarians quarrel over the encyclopedias, the camera cuts to Lady Mountbatten and her daughter Pamela entering the library and witnessing this exchange, which prompts Pamela to turn to her mother with the exclamation, “This is absurd!” The shot-reverse shot of the librarians arguing and Lady Mountbatten and Pamela watching them encourages the viewer to share the latter’s assessment of the situation. *Viceroy’s House* implies that it is indeed “absurd” for India and Pakistan to claim that *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre* belongs to either country, because the cultural legacy of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* will remain with both countries, regardless of how the librarians divide the books in the collection. English literature, the film implies, is a cultural inheritance that belongs to everyone.

Yet the library scene in *Viceroy’s House* opens up possibilities for a completely opposite reading. By encouraging the viewer to identify with Lady Mountbatten and her daughter, the film seems to be telling British viewers in particular that this tussle between India and Pakistan is “absurd,” not because *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* are part of a common inheritance,

but because these classic works of English literature ultimately belong to “us” and not to “them.” The opening close-up shot of the library bookshelves brings to mind Thomas Babington Macaulay’s infamous assertion in 1835 that “a single shelf of a good European library [is] worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia” (“Minute on Education in India” par. 10). The British colonial administration brought British literary works to India, not to make the canon of English literature “Indian” (or “Pakistani”), but to make the Indians “English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect,” as Macaulay put it (par. 34). Wherever English literature traveled to, Macaulay implied, it would always remain firmly “English.” The echoes of Macaulay’s anglicization program in the film’s library scene suggest that, despite all the failures of the British imperial project in India, the British still have something left at “the remains of the day”—to borrow the title of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel about the end of the British Empire—and this something is the enduring power of English literature.

Empire of Culture: Neo-Victorian Narratives in the Global Creative Economy explores these questions of cultural heritage, ownership, and what remains after the heyday of British imperialism has long passed. How does the globalization of British cultural forms and practices, and especially English literature, in the long nineteenth century shape the global marketization of historic buildings, films and television dramas, women’s magazines, fashion, and other forms of “culture” in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries? How did this earlier wave of globalization encourage Britain’s imperial subjects, then and now, to think that British culture is global in the sense that it constitutes a benchmark of civilizational development for the entire world? Furthermore, how does this myth of British universality affect cultural commodity production and consumption in countries that, unlike India and Pakistan, were not formally colonized in the long nineteenth century? Correspondingly, what happens when this idealization of British culture takes root in former colonies that, also unlike India and Pakistan, have since come to perceive British rule as a benevolent process of modernization?

Whereas *Viceroy’s House* is a period film set in 1947, *Empire of Culture* turns to representations of Victorian Britain in an array of contemporary cultural texts and practices, both literary and popular. This book focuses on texts and practices from Britain, as well as from the United States, Japan, and Singapore: three locations where British imperialism took on different forms in the long nineteenth century. By bringing together neo-Victorian cultural materials ranging from A. S. Byatt’s novel *Possession* and its Holly-

wood film adaptation to Japanese Lolita fashion and the *Lady Victorian* manga series, this book explores how Britain's past entanglements with its colonies, spheres of influence, and fellow imperial powers have come to shape the interconnectedness of global cultural commodity production, export, and consumption today. Why do young Japanese and Singaporean women consume British high-culture commodities such as heritage tourist attractions, period dramas, and luxury brands with long histories? Why do the Japanese state and cultural industries focus on marketing manga, anime, cosplay, and other Japanese popular culture products to international audiences under the banner of "Cool Japan"? Examining trans-imperial interactions then and now through the lens of the neo-Victorian allows us to recognize that the imperial past inheres in how post-imperial subjects—both in and outside of Britain—commodify this amorphous thing called "culture." Like all forms of historical fiction, neo-Victorian narratives from Britain, the US, Japan, and Singapore look back on the past from their perspective in the present. In doing so, they remind their readers and viewers that the expansion of British imperialism in the long nineteenth century not only introduced new systems of government and new modes of extraction and enterprise; it also brought people around the world into contact with British "culture"—its forms of textual representation and social practices—against a backdrop of highly unequal power dynamics. In particular, the neo-Victorian narratives discussed in this book reveal that the widespread dissemination of English literature in the long nineteenth century, along with British forms of dress, dining, and etiquette, has encouraged many to think of British high culture as a universal standard of civilizational accomplishment to which everyone should aspire. As highly commercial cultural products of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the neo-Victorian narratives discussed in this book further reveal that this presumed universality of British culture has significantly shaped the formation of three cultural empires in particular in today's global *creative economy*: one founded on British high culture and heritage, one on the global reach of multinational media corporations based in the US, and the third on Japanese popular culture. International tourists and consumers today gravitate towards British high-culture products that speak to the enduring assumption that Englishness constitutes a global touchstone of cultural excellence. While supporting the growth of the British heritage industry, however, this fantasy of Englishness also brings this new incarnation of British imperialism into competition and collaboration with the other two cultural empires, as they too respond to the legacy of British universalism in the context of a post-Fordist global

economy. Since the 1980s, Britain, the US, Japan, and other industrialized nations have turned increasingly towards information, media, services, and other intangible goods as lucrative forms of economic production. Reading historical fiction, watching period dramas, going sight-seeing, and other kinds of leisure might seem like mere entertainment, yet these activities have become central to contemporary economic life and are in fact, as this book argues, profoundly informed by the trans-imperial networks and structures of power engendered by an earlier wave of globalization.

The global economy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is one that foregrounds the commodification of culture. Robert Hewison coined the term *heritage industry* in 1987 to describe how the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher was actively marketizing historic monuments and museums in Britain as a means of regenerating local economies hit by the shift from manufacturing to services. Neo-Victorian texts and practices from Britain, the US, Japan, and Singapore reveal that the historical transmission of British culture under the aegis of British imperialism dovetails with these more recent post-Fordist developments, thereby contributing to the rise of the British heritage industry since the 1980s. The British heritage industry draws on the enduring idealization of British culture to attract international tourists, shoppers, readers, and viewers to its high-cultural attractions, brands, and media products. On the one hand, the British heritage industry invites American, Japanese, and Singaporean consumers to partake in its form of high culture, as a shared Anglo-Saxon heritage or as a source of self-improvement and social distinction for non-white subjects. On the other hand, cultural producers and consumers in the US, Japan, and Singapore are actively engaging with this new wave of British cultural globalization. Cultural industries, state bodies, and individual consumers in these three locations work with the British heritage industry for their mutual benefit, while competing with it or claiming to provide an alternative to its high-cultural offerings. *Culture* is a notoriously amorphous and contested term, whose definition ranges from “a general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development,” to “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity,” and to “a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, or a group” (Williams, *Keywords* 90). John Storey’s *Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* broadens this already expansive definition to include any text or practice that produces meaning, even if it is not “intellectual” or “artistic” (2). In the field of cultural policy studies, policymakers and scholars often define *culture* in specific terms to denote the music, film, and

television industries; the fine and performing arts; museums and historic monuments; sports; urban planning; and even the Internet.¹ For the purposes of this book, I foreground what we might call *high culture*; namely, textual representations and social practices that claim to be the best that humankind has developed, and which thereby enable their readers, viewers, and participants to *distinguish* themselves as a superior social class, as Pierre Bourdieu has famously argued in *Distinction*.

To put it another way, the British heritage industry presents a particular image of Britain to the world, one that positions Britain as a producer of high culture that is universally admired. As culture increasingly becomes a commodity that is bought and sold internationally, more and more nation-states are engaging in the practice of *nation branding* to compete for overseas markets, not to mention foreign investment, skilled labor, soft power, and other benefits associated with international cultural prestige. As Keith Dinnie has argued in his seminal introduction to the subject, nation branding is the cultivation of a highly selective cultural identity or image, which would enable the nation-state to differentiate itself from others and thereby stand out from the global competition (*Nation Branding* 15, 17–18, 46). This book focuses on British attempts at nation branding, as well as American and Japanese responses to those attempts; but unlike much of the literature on marketing the nation, this book recognizes that nation branding is not always fully conscious and intentional. Nation branding in the global economy often draws upon deeper layers of meanings and associations that are shaped by the nation's past interactions with other nations. Nation branding thus does not occur in a historical vacuum but is mediated through the history of imperialism—including but not limited to British imperialism—in the long nineteenth century. The British heritage industry's promotion of an "old England" full of history and tradition acts in conjunction with an ideology of British universalism that derives from the country's imperialist past. Likewise, the competition and collaboration amongst the British heritage industry, the American media industries, and the Japanese pop culture industries is refracted through American and Japanese engagements not only with the British nation-brand, but also with the imperialist past that has connected Britain with the US and Japan. With their emphasis on Britain in the nineteenth century, neo-Victorian narratives, especially those that are partly or entirely aimed at audiences outside of Britain, play out these abstract processes of historical mediation. This book therefore examines the film and novel *Possession*, which speak mainly to an Anglo-American audience; Japanese neo-Victorian manga and magazines

that mostly cater to young Japanese women; as well as Lolita fashion in the former British and Japanese colony of Singapore.

In mediating between past and present, these neo-Victorian texts and practices have the capacity to illuminate the trans-imperial and transhistorical dynamics that inflect the commodification of culture in the global economy today. As texts and practices designed for popular consumption, many of the neo-Victorian cultural materials discussed in this book (re)produce stock images of Victorian Britain, thereby lending themselves to the accusation that heritage films and other neo-Victorian narratives present the past as a “flat, depthless pastiche” that has no relation to historical reality (Higson, qtd. in Jeffers 46). Nevertheless, the Victorian British setting of these narratives raises the question not only of how the present appropriates images of the past for its own purposes, but also of how the past shapes the present, including the ways in which we perceive that past. While the neo-Victorian narratives discussed in this book are certainly guilty of rehashing all the familiar stereotypes of the Victorian, from maids and butlers to tea and top hats, they also provide a lens for contemplating how the historical transmission of British cultural forms and practices has given these stereotypes their particular valence. As Victorian Britain floats free of its geographical and temporal specificity, the stock images that make up Victorian Britain coalesce into a fantasy of British cultural universality and superiority. At the same time, these tropes of the Victorian also provide a foil for new forms of “universal” popular culture, as well as a site for cultural localization and playful performativity. In this way, neo-Victorian narratives comment on the global creative economy in which they themselves are situated, revealing how the cultural industries that produce and circulate these neo-Victorian narratives are in effect positioning themselves in response to the historical globalization of British culture and its accompanying myth of universality. On a related note, other scholars have looked at how specific canonical works of Victorian literature have traveled abroad and been adapted into neo-Victorian fiction.² This book, on the other hand, takes a broader perspective to consider how *the assumption that British culture itself is canonical* has traveled outside of Britain and become entrenched in the long nineteenth century and after. This assumption that British culture constitutes a global standard of cultural excellence is not quite reducible to the gains and losses in the canonical status of individual literary works. While specific literary works have come and gone, British culture retains its privileged status as a universal ideal, thus continuing to inhere in the present, not least in global flows of cultural commodity production, distribution, and consumption.

Neo-Victorian texts and practices from Britain, the US, Japan, and Singapore offer an insight into this history of cultural globalization and its legacies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.



The nineteenth century often brings to mind the emergence of the nation-state and the rise of nationalism. However, as Jürgen Osterhammel demonstrates in *The Transformation of the World*, the nineteenth century was also characterized by multiplying and intensifying transnational networks of trade, travel, and colonization, especially between the middle of the century and the First World War (710–11). In recent years, scholars of Victorian studies have increasingly directed their attention to these transnational networks, especially in cases where these networks take the form of intertwined and competing empires.³ Moving between the nineteenth century and the present, *Empire of Culture* integrates this global turn in Victorian studies with two recent strands of research in neo-Victorian studies: 1) reading neo-Victorian texts as meditations on Britain's transnational interactions in the nineteenth century, and 2) approaching neo-Victorian texts as cultural commodities that are produced and consumed globally. In *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire*, Elizabeth Ho argues that the Victorian “has become a powerful shorthand for empire in the contemporary global imagination,” so much so that “the return to the Victorian in the present offers a highly visible, highly aestheticized code for confronting empire again and anew” (5). Like the neo-Victorian narratives that Ho discusses, the texts and practices under examination in this book use Victorian Britain as a setting to engage with the history of the British Empire, although they do so less self-consciously. Empire in the case of these texts and practices, moreover, refers to a highly informal and indirect process of cultural influence, more than to the ruling of territories or even to the enforcement of free trade via unequal treaties (which in fact came to an end in Japan relatively quickly with Britain agreeing to revise its trade treaty in the 1890s).⁴ In focusing on the cultural dimension of empire, this book is indebted to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and the tradition of postcolonial scholarship on decolonizing the mind, while contributing to ongoing efforts to globalize both Victorian and neo-Victorian studies. *Empire of Culture* takes as its premise Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietzrak-Franger's call for a “global” neo-Victorian studies (1).⁵ It pushes beyond the boundaries of Britain, the formal British

Empire, and the English language to argue that cultural flows from Britain to the US, Japan, and Singapore in the long nineteenth century have a lasting impact on cultural commodity production, export, and consumption in these four locations today.

In foregrounding the production and circulation of cultural goods ranging from novels, films, and manga to luxury brands and heritage tourist attractions, this book adds a new dimension to scholarship on the globalization of Englishness and English literature in the long nineteenth century. Ian Baucom has argued that, while British imperialism sought to disseminate Englishness as a form of control, this paradoxically resulted in Englishness becoming fragmented and susceptible to redefinition in the spaces of the empire (4–6). This production of Englishness in the colonial encounter, as Simon Gikandi asserts, continues to shape identities both in Britain and its former colonies (13). In Gikandi's words, we are still "[l]iving in the shadow of Englishness" (20). For Gikandi, Baucom, and other scholars in the field, Englishness is an amorphous set of idealized images that is open to reinvention and appropriation by diverse political agendas, and which has little or nothing to do with England as an actual place.

While *Empire of Culture* borrows this useful understanding of Englishness, it is less interested in the construction and contestation of "English" identity. It is also not primarily concerned with rejecting abstract ideas of Englishness in favor of a more concrete identity based on England as a physical location and nation (although this is an important project, as Michael Gardiner demonstrates in *The Return of England in English Literature*). Rather, *Empire of Culture* considers how Englishness often evokes the idea that British culture is universal, and how this equation of Englishness with universality gives rise to relations of competition and collaboration between the British, American, and Japanese cultural empires in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For Gardiner, the adjective *English* in English literature refers not to a particular place or people, but to a function of projecting Englishness across the territorial boundaries of England to Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and beyond. This globalizing impulse, Gardiner argues, is essentially an institutional force or "will to create and manage a *canonicity*—not just a canon or set of texts but an ordering principle based on values which seem to pre-exist and are presented as natural" (3). In other words, English literature as a discipline and a body of works rests on the assumption that there is a timeless and universal tradition that embodies—to misquote Matthew Arnold—"the best which has been

thought and said in the world" (190). Disseminating Englishness, in both the long nineteenth century and the contemporary present, often involves disseminating the notion that British culture in general and English literature in particular constitute a canonical tradition. My book thus draws on the important work that has been done by Baucom, Gikandi, Jed Esty, and Gauri Viswanathan on the globalization of Englishness and English literature under British imperialism, while taking this work in the direction of the globalization of cultural commodities and the trans-imperial dynamics that structure this phenomenon today. As Viswanathan argues in *Masks of Conquest*, the dissemination of Englishness, especially via English literature, exerts a unifying force. This book seeks to understand this unifying force not in terms of political domination over the (former) colonies, but in terms of the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural commodities at a time when culture is being instrumentalized as a source of economic revenue in a late capitalist creative economy.

Bourdieu begins *Distinction* with the statement that "[t]here is an economy of cultural goods" (1). Since the 1980s and 1990s, this economy of cultural goods has rapidly become an increasingly attractive source of revenue, especially in post-Fordist economies that are moving away from manufacturing towards a greater emphasis on services. The monolithic "Culture Industry" of Adorno and Horkheimer is now better understood as a variety of cultural industries specializing in film, television, and digital media; publishing; pop music; heritage tourism; advertising; graphic design; and many other fields of cultural commodity production. The success of these industries, especially in the US and Britain, has over the last two and a half decades inspired a celebratory discourse on the creative economy, which in turn promotes the further expansion of the cultural industries. While the Thatcher government in the 1980s was arguably the first to focus attention on the economic value of culture in Britain, the New Labor government headed by Tony Blair in the late 1990s played a major role in conceptualizing this marketization of creativity. The idea was then taken up by John Howkins in *The Creative Economy* (2001) and Richard Florida in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). Howkins, Florida, and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) set up by New Labor in 1997 all have slightly different definitions of what counts as a cultural or creative industry. Nevertheless, the discourse that they and others have collectively produced fundamentally assumes that art or culture (broadly understood) is a particularly profitable area for economic development, and that the state should actively steer the economy in this direction (Brouillette

1). In his 1998 manifesto *Creative Britain*, DCMS Minister Chris Smith championed the government's role in nurturing "the growing importance to the modern economy of Britain of all those activities and industries that spring from the creative impulse" (1). Under Smith's direction, the DCMS set up the Creative Industries Taskforce to establish the scale and potential of the cultural industries in Britain. The taskforce published its findings in the 2001 *Creative Industries Mapping Document* which, together with Howkins's and Florida's highly influential books, inspired governments in Europe, South America, and especially East Asia (including Japan) to look to cultural commodity production and export as a lucrative new industrial sector (O'Connor 49). The neo-Victorian narratives discussed in this book comment on this contemporary context, in which they also participate as globally circulating cultural commodities. In employing the image of Victorian Britain to discuss contemporary concerns, these narratives signal that the turn to cultural commodity production and export in Britain, the US, and Japan is refracted through the earlier globalization of Englishness and English literature in the long nineteenth century.

We might extrapolate from Jed Esty's line of reasoning in *A Shrinking Island* and claim that the Englishness that the British cultural industries have been exporting worldwide since the 1980s is motivated by a post-imperial desire for a uniquely English national identity. If this is the case, we also need to recognize that this export of a distinctive Englishness draws upon the traces of former imperial networks and the earlier dissemination of Englishness as canonical culture, or what Esty calls "the primary universalism of the metropolitan era" (14). The late modernist writers that Esty discusses implicitly inscribe universalism back into the language of English particularism by representing Englishness as paradoxically unique and representative of modern nationalism at the same time (14). *Empire of Culture* demonstrates that this ideology of simultaneous universality and particularity was already present in the globalization of British culture in the long nineteenth century, and that it continues to shape the global creative economy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As the library scene in *Viceroy's House* indicates, Englishness presents itself both as a standard of civilizational progress that is shared by all, and as a prized possession that belongs to a specific group of people. The export of Englishness in the global creative economy today intertwines the particular with the universal and vice versa to create a new cultural empire for the British, one that is founded on the transnational circulation of heritage and other high-culture commodities.



Like its nineteenth-century precursor, the British cultural empire in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is only one amongst several. Drawing on Caroline Levine's "From Nation to Network" as well as polycentric models in world systems and world literary theory, *Empire of Culture* approaches the global creative economy as a vast network connecting multiple centers and peripheries. This book interrogates the relations between three major centers of cultural production and one peripheral site of consumption: Britain, the United States, Japan, and Singapore. The picture that emerges from exploring these relations is not quite a totalizing world-literary system that is—in Franco Moretti's pithy formulation—"simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*: with a core, and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality" (46). Instead, my readings of neo-Victorian texts and practices map a world of multiple cultural empires formed out of networks, which are autonomous at some points and intersect at others. These cultural empires coexist, and often compete and cooperate with one another in commodifying culture. Although this book focuses on Britain, the US, Japan, and Singapore, these four locations exemplify trans-imperial and transhistorical dynamics that can also be seen in other rising cultural production powerhouses in East Asia, such as South Korea and mainland China.

In examining the relations between multiple cultural empires, this book responds to recent scholarship in literary and East Asian studies that posit a polycentric approach to understanding the production and circulation of world literature and East Asian popular culture respectively. Debjani Ganguly, for example, draws on Muhsin al-Musawi's work on the Arabic Republic of Letters to propose a "polysystemic" model of world-literary production (272–73). Similarly, scholars of East Asia including Chua Beng Huat and Joseph Tobin often employ polycentric models in analyzing the "rogue flows" (Iwabuchi, Muecke, and Thomas) of popular culture between Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and other locations in the region. Besides engaging with scholarship on world literature and East Asian popular culture, this book also speaks to the growing interest in trans-imperial relations in Victorian studies, as well as in the field of world history. In her contribution to the 2018 "Keywords" issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Sukanya Banerjee contends that the term *trans-imperial* is less anachronistic and more appropriate than *transnational* in describing cross-border interactions in the nineteenth century (926). Not only does

trans-imperial recognize that Britain and its empire are mutually constitutive and therefore coeval, it also draws attention to Britain's relations with other imperial powers (Banerjee 926). Likewise, in the coda to *Empire in Question*, Antoinette Burton critiques the tendency in historians to assume that Britain (especially Victorian Britain) represented the very essence of what it means to be global (277). Following Dipesh Chakrabarty, Burton provincializes the British Empire by revealing its intersections with other empires in the world (279). “[R]ematerializing the histories of other contemporary empires,” Burton argues, “makes that globality [in British imperial history] look like a co-production rather than a distinctively English/British phenomenon” (289). In a similar vein, Laura Doyle proposes “inter-imperiality” as a productive critical framework that sheds light on the kinds of affiliations and locations in global history that cannot be neatly reduced to a single core and a single periphery (and a single semi-periphery) (161, 163).

Empire of Culture adopts this polycentric, trans-imperial framework proposed by Burton, Doyle, and others to explore relations of competition and collaboration between multiple empires both past and present. These relations cannot be reduced to the conventional binaries of colonizer and colonized, domination and subjugation, and even domination and resistance; binaries which structure much of existing scholarship in both postcolonial and Victorian studies. Not only is global cultural production today organized around several major centers, the historical transmission of British culture that has informed these contemporary relations of cultural production was likewise more than a unilateral process of core-peripheral domination. The US and Japan certainly came under British imperial influence in the second half of the nineteenth century, even though by that time the US had gained its independence, and Japan had not been formally colonized by any Western power. However, the US and Japan were also becoming imperial powers in their own right towards the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Japan acquired its first overseas possession, Taiwan, after defeating China (once the foremost imperial power in the region) in the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War. Japan and China had gone to war over Japanese intervention in Korea, which had begun twenty years earlier with the signing of the Kanhwa Treaty in 1876. This treaty enabled Japan to gain a foothold in the Korean peninsula, and to impose the same system of unequal trade treaties on Korea that the Western powers were subjecting Japan to at the same time. After defeating Russia in 1905, Japan went on to exercise even greater control over Korea, eventually annexing the entire country in 1910. Back in 1898, as a result of the Spanish-American War, the US took over

the Spanish colony of the Philippines and used its newfound base in the Asia-Pacific to expand its influence, while ceding its interests in Korea to the Japanese, who were in turn supported by the British against Russia in the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902–1921. As the colonial history of Korea demonstrates, the imperial project in the long nineteenth century was a tangled web of declining and aspiring imperial powers, inter-imperial rivalry, and shifting allegiances, whose complexity calls on us to look beyond the usual dichotomies.

Exploring trans-imperial dynamics also requires us to rethink the periodizing categories that we use to frame our study. The *long nineteenth century* conventionally refers to the period beginning with the French Revolution in 1789 and ending with the onset of the First World War in 1914. For the purposes of this book, however, the long nineteenth century begins with the British colonization of Singapore in 1819 and then the opening of Japan to Western trade in 1853. It incorporates the rise of Japanese imperialism in East and Southeast Asia from the 1870s to the 1940s and ends with the conclusion of the Asia-Pacific War in 1945. This book's version of the long nineteenth century also extends from the emergence of *heritage* as a concept and practice in 1830s Britain, to Anglo-American competition over heritage ownership at the turn of the century, and lastly to P. G. Wodehouse's attempts to preserve a rapidly disappearing Victorian heritage for Anglo-American audiences in the early to mid-twentieth century.

As these time frames suggest, this book foregrounds the *longue durée*, rather than seeking out clear-cut continuities and disjunctures between the Victorian past and the contemporary present. Although many of the neo-Victorian narratives discussed in this book are set during Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901), the historical contexts that they engage with far exceed the regnal temporal markers that we habitually use to designate the Victorian period. In emphasizing the *longue durée*, this book departs from critical works on neo-Victorianism that approach the relation between the Victorian period and the neo-Victorian context of production in terms of sameness and difference. In their 2014 edited collection *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture*, Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss define the “neo-Victorian project” as “an ongoing cultural and academic venture to analyze the manifold overlaps and intersections, the continuities and the breaches between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (1). Similarly, in Diane Sadoff and John Kucich's *Victorian Afterlife*, neo-Victorianism (or “post-Victorianism” as they prefer to call it) locates postmodernism's origins in the nineteenth century, while acknowledging the gap between the nineteenth-century past

and postmodernism's discursive production of its origins in that past (x–xvi, xxv–xxvii). Likewise, Cora Kaplan states that the term *Victoriana* encompasses a wide range of representations and reproductions that take the Victorian as their referent, “whether as the origin of late twentieth-century modernity, its antithesis, or both at once” (3). These approaches to neo-Victorian fiction and culture are based on an analogous mode of thinking, in which the scholar of neo-Victorian studies seeks to determine how closely the contemporary present parallels, or does not parallel, the Victorian past. Although the “palimpsestuous” nature of the neo-Victorian undoubtedly encourages the reader/viewer to read the past and the present analogously (Jones, “Palimpsestuous’ Attachments” 38), this book suggests that we also need to examine how material trans-imperial connections in the long nineteenth century have shaped our present through multiple twists and turns in the *longue durée*.⁶ The global history of British imperialism does not parallel the global creative economy today; the nineteenth century is not in some way already postmodern. Rather, the past shapes the present through a series of historical developments extending outwards from the nineteenth into the mid-twentieth century. In particular, the escalation of Japanese imperialism from 1895 to 1945 intersected with its British counterpart to give rise to many of the developments that this book discusses. In foregrounding the *longue durée*, *Empire of Culture* diverges from the conventional Eurocentric conceptualization of the long nineteenth century. By shifting the timeframe from 1789–1914 to 1819–1945, this book reformulates the long nineteenth century so that it becomes appropriate to the study of Britain's engagements with the US and especially East Asia, as seen through the eyes of neo-Victorian fiction and culture.



Empire of Culture is divided into three sections that discuss Britain's relations with the US, Japan, and Singapore respectively. The enduring belief in British culture's canonicity and universality fuels the British heritage industry today, while bringing it into competition and collaboration with the American and Japanese cultural empires. The first two sections of the book examine these trans-imperial interactions. The struggle in *Possession* over who gets to “possess” a collection of fictional Victorian letters underscores Anglo-American rivalry *and* cooperation in commodifying British heritage since the 1980s. *Possession* traces this ambivalent transatlantic relationship back to the sense of a shared Anglo-American literary inheritance in the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries, and to the anxieties that surrounded this shared heritage at a time of rising American wealth, tourism, and the purchase of British heritage properties. Japanese neo-Victorian manga and magazines likewise point to how the positive reception of British culture and English literature in the second half of the nineteenth century has left its mark on Japan's current position in global cultural commodity flows. Certainly, contemporary Japanese popular culture, as well as Japanese intellectual life in the long nineteenth century, has often engaged with countries and historical contexts besides Victorian Britain, from Mori Ōgai's (1862–1922) reading of German literature to Ikeda Riyoko's *shōjo* manga *The Rose of Versailles* (1972–1973). Japan in the nineteenth century did not become the colony of any particular power, and it was open to a multitude of Western influences. Nonetheless, the second section of the book zooms in from this broader context to focus on Japanese attitudes towards Britain both in the past and in the present. In the neo-Victorian manga series *Kuroshitsuji*, the aristocratic protagonist's penchant for English tea and delicate pastries signifies "English" taste and refinement, but during a curry-cooking competition, the protagonist's "Japanese" butler creates a fusion concoction that wins Queen Victoria over with its hybrid and populist sensibility. As this example shows, Japan's historical encounter with Britain and the West has since generated a long-standing desire for an aristocratic form of Englishness that is associated with an idealized image of Victorian Britain. On the one hand, the Japanese manga and magazine publishing industry supports the British heritage industry by channeling young Japanese women's desire for this Englishness into tourism and other consumption practices. On the other hand, the products of this publishing industry, such as *Kuroshitsuji*, draw upon Japanese imperialist discourse from the 1930s and early 1940s to position Japanese manga, anime, and other cultural commodities as a proudly popular alternative to the British high-cultural empire.

The last section of the book turns from texts to the people who consume them, focusing on young Singaporean women who dress up in Victorian-inspired outfits as followers of Lolita fashion from Japan. The historical circulation of British culture as canonical culture informs not only cultural commodity production but also consumption in places such as Singapore, where it forms the backdrop against which consumers negotiate between the diverse offerings of the three cultural empires. Why do these women invest time, effort, and money in performing this highly mediated form of Victorian-ness, and how does Singapore's doubly colonial past as a former British and Japanese colony shape the fashion practices of these women? As

they negotiate between the British and Anglo-American cultural industries on the one hand and “Cool Japan” on the other, these young Singaporean women reaffirm the intertwined legacies of English literature and race, while finding a space within these legacies to perform an imaginary Victorian self that can accommodate their non-white bodies. *Empire of Culture* concludes with a coda that extends its central arguments to (South) Korea: a rising center of global cultural production and yet another node in the trans-imperial networks that this book is concerned with. Park Chan-wook’s film *The Handmaiden* reveals what is at stake when we use the category of the neo-Victorian to talk about historical fiction and practices such as historical costuming. In adapting Sarah Waters’s novel *Fingersmith*—itself a mashup of Victorian novels—*The Handmaiden* transposes the Victorian Britain of *Fingersmith* to Korea under Japanese rule in the 1930s. In doing so, the film calls the very meaningfulness of the term *neo-Victorian* into question. *The Handmaiden* demonstrates that, by shifting our gaze from the narrowly national neo-Victorian to trans-imperial connections in the long nineteenth century, we can expand the number and kinds of networks available for study, networks that exceed not only the grasp of formal British imperialism, but also the compulsion to tie our understanding of global circuits of power back to Britain.

Yet, at least for the time being, Britain retains its hold over the post-colonial imagination. As a scholar of English literature born and raised in Singapore, I have long been fascinated by how those of us whose countries and lives have been touched by the British Empire look back on the colonial encounter. What are the ways in which the past (including our perception of it) informs not only how we conduct politics or do business, but also how we enjoy our leisure: where do we travel to when we are on holiday, what do we do when we get there, where do we shop, what do we eat, what books do we read (if we still read books), and what films and TV shows do we watch? How does our seemingly inconsequential involvement in the global marketization of culture reaffirm and/or disrupt former imperial structures of power in a post-imperial present? This book is an attempt to answer these questions. In 2019, the Singaporean state and numerous community organizations rolled out a series of events to commemorate the two-hundred-year anniversary of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles’s landing on the island and the subsequent colonization of Singapore under British rule. The 2019 bicentennial marked a turning point in the country’s history in a double sense. Firstly, it marked the British arrival on the island in 1819. Secondly, in stretching the time frame to five hundred years before Raffles,

the so-called bicentennial also marked the first time that Singaporeans were encouraged on an unprecedented scale to rethink the conventional privileging of Raffles's "founding" of Singapore as the starting point for Singapore's transformation from a fishing village to a modern metropolis. The bicentennial program, which the organizers insisted was to be a commemoration rather than a celebration, sought to decenter the place of Raffles in Singapore history by drawing attention to the contributions that other individuals and groups have made pre- and post-1819, as well as to the unsavory aspects of British colonial rule.⁷ To signal their revisionist intentions, the Singapore Bicentennial Office (SBO) commissioned local artist Teng Kai Wei to paint over the white polymarble statue of Raffles located at the historic landing site in Boat Quay, so that the statue looked as if it were disappearing into the skyscraper behind it (figure I.2).



Figure I.2. The iconic statue of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles at Boat Quay, 21 June 2023. *Source:* Photo taken by the author.

However, as one commentator predicted in January 2019, the long-standing notion that Raffles and British colonialism paved the way for Singapore's present-day success has proven difficult to dislodge (Tee). While both organizers and commentators claimed that the bicentennial did not set out to either glorify or vilify the country's colonial past, the discourse surrounding the commemoration repeatedly invoked the *precious gifts* and *assets* that the British have left Singapore, whether intended or otherwise: the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, systems of civil administration, and the English language, to name a few (Fernandez, "Instead of Angst"). "The British left us with a rich and positive legacy," veteran diplomat Tommy Koh declared at the book launch of *200 Years of Singapore and the United Kingdom*, which was published in conjunction with the bicentennial (qtd. in Tay).⁸ If there is a specter haunting the Singapore bicentennial, it is certainly not the present/absent Raffles statue with its surrounding crowds of smiling tourists and locals busily snapping photos. Like a Victorian Gothic novel, the bicentennial implies that it is the *pre-nineteenth-century past* that returns from the dead to terrify Singaporeans with the possibility that the island might once again be violently "besieged and brought down," as it had been in the centuries before Raffles arrived (Hussain). In his opinion piece for the *Straits Times*, Zakir Hussain argues that this pre-1819 history reminds Singaporeans not to take their present-day security and prosperity for granted. In comparison to the bloodshed and turmoil of the precolonial past, British rule in the nineteenth century seems like a positively genteel affair. Until the Japanese invasion in 1942, the British did not have to enforce or defend their interests in Singapore through war and conquest. In recent years, neo-Victorian studies has employed the trope of the specter to conceptualize how neo-Victorian fiction engages with the various traumas of the nineteenth century that return to haunt us in the present, including the trauma of imperialism.⁹ This book charts a different terrain, one in which neo-Victorian texts and practices register the British colonial inheritance, including the gift of English literature, not as traumatic, but as enlightening, civilizing, and even pleasurable.