

JOHN CLAIBORNE ISBELL



AN OUTLINE OF
ROMANTICISM
IN THE WEST



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Romanticism Outside the Western Ambit

To end, at the last: how global is the present overview? A search for, say, Slovenian, Albanian, or Ecuadorean Romanticism quickly turns up representative figures for each national tradition. In other words, Romanticism is remarkably and thoroughly colored inside the lines, and this is just as we might expect, given the movement's metastatic force. Within the Western ambit, national models or writers are necessary, this book argues, and can be identified *post hoc*, as they visibly have been. But that is not the case outside the West, a region which requires different treatment. Outside Europe and the newly independent republics of the two Americas, there is indeed evidence of, for instance, Turkish, Japanese, and South Asian Romanticism—each with its own characteristics, as is to be expected. We might pause a moment over these three different Asian cases, to see what is going on.

Let us begin with Ottoman Turkey—a state for which Romantic nationalism posed an existential threat, much as it did for the Austro-Hungarian Empire after 1867. There is, simply put, no Ottoman Romanticism. What we find instead are Romantic models for the subsequent and much smaller Turkish nation, with comparative silence elsewhere in the sultanate—in Egypt or Morocco, for instance. But are these models home-grown? An interesting question. The Ottoman capital, Constantinople (or Istanbul after 1930), was split between Europe and Asia—it looked to Albania, Bulgaria, or Greece (until 1832), as it did to Syria, Tunisia, or the Persian Gulf. Centuries of cross-border trade and influence cannot be discounted as they can for, say, Japan, when accounting for an emergent Westernized Turkish literature; this influence was then focused on France after the Crimean War of 1854–1856. The first novel published in Turkey is thus dated either to 1851

(in Armenian: *Akabi Hikâyesi* [Akabi's Story]) or to 1872 (in Turkish: *Taaşuk-u Tal'at ve Fitnat* [Tal'at and Fitnat in Love]).

In Meiji Japan (1868–1912)—a nation with centuries of novel-writing behind it, forcibly opened to the West by Commodore Perry's gunboats after further centuries of isolation—Europe arrived like a gunshot, bringing rapid industrialization and a variety of European models, from free verse to Enlightenment, Classicism, and Realism. In 1889, the novelist Mori Ōgai's anthology of translated poems brought Romanticism to Japan. He was followed in this by Tōson Shimazaki and by new literary magazines. Certain parallels are curious, such as Natsume Sōseki's humorous novel *Wagahai wa neko de aru* [I Am a Cat] in 1905), which employed a cat as the narrator, just as Hoffmann had done with Tomcat Murr. In brief, Romantic art reached Japan by gunboat and was not indigenous to that nation.

Lastly, across the wide linguistic expanse of South Asia—within the British Imperial administration of the Raj—foundational Romantic authors can and have been traced by interested scholars. In the years 1857–1945, they include writers in Kannada, Telugu, and Gujarati, and the great Muhammad Iqbal in Urdu, and Rabindranath Tagore—who won the Nobel Prize—in Bengali and English. Two further foundational groups seem worth noting, in Malayalam and in Hindi with the Chhayavaad movement of neo-Romanticism in poetry, 1922–1938. Outside of Chhayavaad, I hesitate to call these authors Romantic. However, the quintessentially Romantic role of language here—giving voice to the voiceless—is visibly primordial for all.

One may perhaps conclude thus: onto the very disparate soils of the non-Western world, Romanticism arrived like an alien seed. It was brought in by the free exchange of ideas, as Adam Smith might have celebrated, and by simple conquest. And then—as Goya had pointed out in Spain in 1814, as Bolívar or San Martín had pointed out in the Americas—it provided tools across the colonized globe for the wretched of the Earth—those *damnés de la Terre*, as Fanon has it—to find a path out of European empire to national self-determination.