CHAPTER ONE

OVERLAPPING TERRITORIES, INTERTWINED HISTORIES

Silence from and about the subject was the order of the day. Some of the silences were broken, and some were maintained by authors who lived with and within the policing strategies. What I am interested in are the strategies for breaking it.

TONI MORRISON, *Playing in the Dark*

History, in other words, is not a calculating machine. It unfolds in the mind and the imagination, and it takes body in the multifarious responses of a people's culture, itself the infinitely subtle mediation of material realities, of underpinning economic fact, of gritty objectivities.

BASIL DAVIDSON, *Africa in Modern History*

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Empire, Geography, and Culture

Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions—about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities.

In one of his most famous early critical essays, T. S. Eliot takes up a similar constellation of issues, and although the occasion as well as the intention of his essay is almost purely aesthetic, one can use his formulations to inform other realms of experience. The poet, Eliot says, is obviously an individual talent, but he works within a tradition that cannot be merely inherited but can only be obtained "by great labour." Tradition, he continues,

> involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.
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> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.[1]

The force of these comments is directed equally, I think, at poets who think critically and at critics whose work aims at a close appreciation of the poetic process. The main idea is that even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other and, in the totally ideal sense intended by Eliot, each co-exists with the other. What Eliot proposes, in short, is a vision of literary tradition that, while it respects temporal succession, is not wholly commanded by it. Neither past nor present, any more than any poet or artist, has a complete meaning alone.

Eliot's synthesis of past, present, and future, however, is idealistic and in important ways a function of his own peculiar history;[2] also, its conception of time leaves out the combativeness with which individuals and institutions decide on what is tradition and what is not, what relevant and what not. But his central idea is valid: how we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present. Let me give an example. During the Gulf War of 1990–91, the collision between Iraq and the United States was

a function of two fundamentally opposed histories, each used to advantage by the official establishment of each country. As construed by the Iraqi Baath Party, modern Arab history shows the unrealized, unfulfilled promise of Arab independence, a promise traduced both by "the West" and by a whole array of more recent enemies, like Arab reaction and Zionism. Iraq's bloody occupation of Kuwait was, therefore, justified not only on Bismarckian grounds, but also because it was believed that the Arabs had to right the wrongs done against them and wrest from imperialism one of its greatest prizes. Conversely, in the American view of the past, the United States was not a classical imperial power, but a righter of wrongs around the world, in pursuit of tyranny, in defense of freedom no matter the place or cost. The war inevitably pitted these versions of the past against each other.

Eliot's ideas about the complexity of the relationship between past and present are particularly suggestive in the debate over the meaning of "imperialism," a word and an idea today so controversial, so fraught with all sorts of questions, doubts, polemics, and ideological premises as nearly to resist use altogether. To some extent of course the debate involves definitions and attempts at delimitations of the very notion itself: was imperialism principally economic, how far did it extend, what were its causes, was it systematic, when (or whether) did it end? The roll call of names who have contributed to the discussion in Europe and America is impressive: Kautsky, Hilferding, Luxemburg, Hobson, Lenin, Schumpeter, Arendt, Magdoff, Paul Kennedy. And in recent years such works published in the United States as Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, the revisionist history of William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, and Walter Lefeber, and studious defenses or explanations of American policy as non-imperialist written by various strategists, theoreticians, and sages—all this has kept the question of imperialism, and its applicability (or not) to the United States, the main power of the day, very much alive.

These authorities debated largely political and economic questions. Yet scarcely any attention has been paid to what I believe is the privileged role of culture in the modern imperial experience, and little notice taken of the fact that the extraordinary global reach of classical nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European imperialism still casts a considerable shadow over our own times. Hardly any North American, African, European, Latin American, Indian, Caribbean, Australian individual—the list is very long—who is alive today has not been touched by the empires of the past. Britain and France between them controlled immense territories: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the colonies in North and South America and the Caribbean, large swatches of Africa, the Middle East, the Far East (Britain will hold

Hong Kong as a colony until 1997), and the Indian subcontinent in its entirety—all these fell under the sway of and in time were liberated from British or French rule; in addition, the United States, Russia, and several lesser European countries, to say nothing of Japan and Turkey, were also imperial powers for some or all of the nineteenth century. This pattern of dominions or possessions laid the groundwork for what is in effect now a fully global world. Electronic communications, the global extent of trade, of availability of resources, of travel, of information about weather patterns and ecological change have joined together even the most distant corners of the world. This set of patterns, I believe, was first established and made possible by the modern empires.

Now I am temperamentally and philosophically opposed to vast system-building or to totalistic theories of human history. But I must say that having studied and indeed lived within the modern empires, I am struck by how constantly expanding, how inexorably integrative they were. Whether in Marx, or in conservative works like those by J. R. Seeley, or in modern analyses like those by D. K. Fieldhouse and C. C. Eldridge (whose *England's Mission* is a central work),[3] one is made to see that the British empire integrated and fused things within it, and taken together it and other empires made the world one. Yet no individual, and certainly not I, can see or fully grasp this whole imperial world.

When we read the debate between contemporary historians Patrick O'Brien[4] and Davis and Huttenback (whose important book *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire* tries to quantify the actual profitability of imperial activities),[5] or when we look at earlier debates such as the Robinson-Gallagher controversy,[6] or at the work of the dependency and world-accumulation economists André Gunder Frank and Samir Amin,[7] as literary and cultural historians, we are compelled to ask what all this means for interpretations of the Victorian novel, say, or of French historiography, of Italian grand opera, of German metaphysics of the same period. We are at a point in our work when we can no longer ignore empires and the imperial context in our studies. To speak, as O'Brien does, of "the propaganda for an expanding empire [which] created illusions of security and false expectations that high returns would accrue to those who invested beyond its boundaries"[8] is in effect to speak of an atmosphere created by both empire and novels, by racial theory and geographical speculation, by the concept of national identity and urban (or rural) routine. The phrase "false expectations" suggests *Great Expectations*, "invested beyond its boundaries" suggests Joseph Sedley and Becky Sharp, "created illusions," suggests *Illusions perdues*—the crossings over between culture and imperialism are compelling.

It is difficult to connect these different realms, to show the involvements of culture with expanding empires, to make observations about art that preserve its unique endowments and at the same time map its affiliations, but, I submit, we must attempt this, and set the art in the global, earthly context. Territory and possessions are at stake, geography and power. Everything about human history is rooted in the earth, which has meant that we must think about habitation, but it has also meant that people have planned to *have* more territory and therefore must do something about its indigenous residents. At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others. For all kinds of reasons it attracts some people and often involves untold misery for others. Yet it is generally true that literary historians who study the great sixteenth-century poet Edmund Spenser, for example, do not connect his bloodthirsty plans for Ireland, where he imagined a British army virtually exterminating the native inhabitants, with his poetic achievement or with the history of British rule over Ireland, which continues today.

For the purposes of this book, I have maintained a focus on actual contests over land and the land's people. What I have tried to do is a kind of geographical inquiry into historical experience, and I have kept in mind the idea that the earth is in effect one world, in which empty, uninhabited spaces virtually do not exist. Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.

A whole range of people in the so-called Western or metropolitan world, as well as their counterparts in the Third or formerly colonized world, share a sense that the era of high or classical imperialism, which came to a climax in what the historian Eric Hobsbawm has so interestingly described as "the age of empire" and more or less formally ended with the dismantling of the great colonial structures after World War Two, has in one way or another continued to exert considerable cultural influence in the present. For all sorts of reasons, they feel a new urgency about understanding the pastness *or not* of the past, and this urgency is carried over into perceptions of the present and the future.

At the center of these perceptions is a fact that few dispute, namely, that during the nineteenth century unprecedented power—compared with which the powers of Rome, Spain, Baghdad, or Constantinople in their day were far less formidable—was concentrated in Britain and France, and later in other Western countries (the United States, especially). This century

climaxed "the rise of the West," and Western power allowed the imperial metropolitan centers to acquire and accumulate territory and subjects on a truly astonishing scale. Consider that in 1800 Western powers claimed 55 percent but actually held approximately 35 percent of the earth's surface, and that by 1878 the proportion was 67 percent, a rate of increase of 83,000 square miles per year. By 1914, the annual rate had risen to an astonishing 240,000 square miles, and Europe held a grand total of roughly 85 percent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths.[9] No other associated set of colonies in history was as large, none so totally dominated, none so unequal in power to the Western metropolis. As a result, says William McNeill in *The Pursuit of Power*, "the world was united into a single interacting whole as never before."[10] And in Europe itself at the end of the nineteenth century, scarcely a corner of life was untouched by the facts of empire; the economies were hungry for overseas markets, raw materials, cheap labor, and hugely profitable land, and defense and foreign-policy establishments were more and more committed to the maintenance of vast tracts of distant territory and large numbers of subjugated peoples. When the Western powers were not in close, sometimes ruthless competition with one another for more colonies—all modern empires, says V. G. Kiernan,[11] imitated one another—they were hard at work settling, surveying, studying, and of course ruling the territories under their jurisdictions.

The American experience, as Richard Van Alstyne makes clear in *The Rising American Empire*, was from the beginning founded upon the idea of "an *imperium*—a dominion, state or sovereignty that would expand in population and territory, and increase in strength and power."[12] There were claims for North American territory to be made and fought over (with astonishing success); there were native peoples to be dominated, variously exterminated, variously dislodged; and then, as the republic increased in age and hemispheric power, there were distant lands to be designated vital to American interests, to be intervened in and fought over—e.g., the Philippines, the Caribbean, Central America, the "Barbary Coast," parts of Europe and the Middle East, Vietnam, Korea. Curiously, though, so influential has been the discourse insisting on American specialness, altruism, and opportunity that "imperialism" as a word or ideology has turned up only rarely and recently in accounts of United States culture, politics, history. But the connection between imperial politics and culture is astonishingly direct. American attitudes to American "greatness," to hierarchies of race, to the perils of *other* revolutions (the American revolution being considered unique and somehow unrepeatable anywhere else in the world)[13] have remained constant, have dictated, have obscured, the realities of empire, while apologists for overseas American interests have insisted on American innocence, doing

good, fighting for freedom. Graham Greene's character Pyle, in *The Quiet American*, embodies this cultural formation with merciless accuracy.

Yet for citizens of nineteenth-century Britain and France, empire was a major topic of unembarrassed cultural attention. British India and French North Africa alone played inestimable roles in the imagination, economy, political life, and social fabric of British and French society, and if we mention names like Delacroix, Edmund Burke, Ruskin, Carlyle, James and John Stuart Mill, Kipling, Balzac, Nerval, Flaubert, or Conrad, we shall be mapping a tiny corner of a far vaster reality than even their immense collective talents cover. There were scholars, administrators, travellers, traders, parliamentarians, merchants, novelists, theorists, speculators, adventurers, visionaries, poets, and every variety of outcast and misfit in the outlying possessions of these two imperial powers, each of whom contributed to the formation of a colonial actuality existing at the heart of metropolitan life.

As I shall be using the term, "imperialism" means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; "colonialism," which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory. As Michael Doyle puts it: "Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire."[14] In our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see, lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices.

Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like "inferior" or "subject races," "subordinate peoples," "dependency," "expansion," and "authority." Out of the imperial experiences, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected. As for the curious but perhaps allowable idea propagated a century ago by J. R. Seeley that some of Europe's overseas empires were originally acquired absentmindedly, it does not by any stretch of the imagination account for their inconsistency, persistence, and systematized acquisition and administration, let alone their augmented rule and sheer presence. As David Landes has said in *The Unbound Prometheus*, "the decision of certain European powers . . . to establish 'plantations,' that is to treat their

colonies as continuous enterprises was, whatever one may think of the morality, a momentous innovation."[15] That is the question that concerns me here: given the initial, perhaps obscurely derived and motivated move toward empire from Europe to the rest of the world, how did the idea and the practice of it gain the consistency and density of continuous enterprise, which it did by the latter part of the nineteenth century?

The primacy of the British and French empires by no means obscures the quite remarkable modern expansion of Spain, Portugal, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and, in a different way, Russia and the United States. Russia, however, acquired its imperial territories almost exclusively by adjacence. Unlike Britain or France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other continents, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept moving farther and farther east and south. But in the English and French cases, the sheer distance of attractive territories summoned the projection of far-flung interests, and that is my focus here, partly because I am interested in examining the set of cultural forms and structures of feeling which it produces, and partly because overseas domination is the world I grew up in and still live in. Russia's and America's joint superpower status, enjoyed for a little less than half a century, derives from quite different histories and from different imperial trajectories. There are several varieties of domination and responses to it, but the "Western" one, along with the resistance it provoked, is the subject of this book.

In the expansion of the great Western empires, profit and hope of further profit were obviously tremendously important, as the attractions of spices, sugar, slaves, rubber, cotton, opium, tin, gold, and silver over centuries amply testify. So also was inertia, the investment in already going enterprises, tradition, and the market or institutional forces that kept the enterprises going. But there is more than that to imperialism and colonialism. There was a commitment to them over and above profit, a commitment in constant circulation and recirculation, which, on the one hand, allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples *should* be subjugated, and, on the other, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the *imperium* as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples. We must not forget that there was very little domestic resistance to these empires, although they were very frequently established and maintained under adverse and even disadvantageous conditions. Not only were immense hardships endured by the colonizers, but there was always the tremendously risky physical disparity between a small number of

Europeans at a very great distance from home and the much larger number of natives on their home territory. In India, for instance, by the 1930s "a mere 4,000 British civil servants assisted by 60,000 soldiers and 90,000 civilians (businessmen and clergy for the most part) had billeted themselves upon a country of 300 million persons."[16] The will, self-confidence, even arrogance necessary to maintain such a state of affairs can only be guessed at, but, as we shall see in the texts of *A Passage to India* and *Kim*, these attitudes are at least as significant as the number of people in the army or civil service, or the millions of pounds England derived from India.

For the enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea* of *having an empire*, as Conrad so powerfully seems to have realized, and all kinds of preparations are made for it within a culture; then in turn imperialism acquires a kind of coherence, a set of experiences, and a presence of ruler and ruled alike within the culture. As an acute modern student of imperialism has put it:

> Modern imperialism has been an accretion of elements, not all of equal weight, that can be traced back through every epoch of history. Perhaps its ultimate causes, with those of war, are to be found less in tangible material wants than in the uneasy tensions of societies distorted by class division, with their reflection in distorted ideas in men's minds.[17]

One acute indication of how crucially the tensions, inequalities, and injustices of the home or metropolitan society were refracted and elaborated in the imperial culture is given by the distinguished conservative historian of empire D. K. Fieldhouse: "The basis of imperial authority," he says, "was the mental attitude of the colonist. His acceptance of subordination—whether through a positive sense of common interest with the parent state, or through inability to conceive of any alternative—made empire durable."[18] Fieldhouse was discussing white colonists in the Americas, but his general point goes beyond that: the durability of empire was sustained on both sides, that of the rulers and that of the distant ruled, and in turn each had a set of interpretations of their common history with its own perspective, historical sense, emotions, and traditions. What an Algerian intellectual today remembers of his country's colonial past focusses severely on such events as France's military attacks on villages and the torture of prisoners during the war of liberation, on the exultation over independence in 1962; for his French counterpart, who may have taken part in Algerian affairs or whose family lived in Algeria, there is chagrin at having "lost" Algeria, a more positive attitude toward the French colonizing mission—with its schools, nicely planned cities, pleasant life—and perhaps even a sense that "troublemakers"

and communists disturbed the idyllic relationship between "us" and "them."

To a very great degree the era of high nineteenth-century imperialism is over: France and Britain gave up their most splendid possessions after World War Two, and lesser powers also divested themselves of their far-flung dominions. Yet, once again recalling the words of T. S. Eliot, although that era clearly had an identity all its own, the meaning of the imperial past is not totally contained within it, but has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology, and policy still exercises tremendous force. Frantz Fanon says, "We should flatly refuse the situation to which the Western countries wish to condemn us. Colonialism and imperialism have not paid their score when they withdraw their flags and their police forces from our territories. For centuries the [foreign] capitalists have behaved in the underdeveloped world like nothing more than criminals."[19] We must take stock of the nostalgia for empire, as well as the anger and resentment it provokes in those who were ruled, and we must try to look carefully and integrally at the culture that nurtured the sentiment, rationale, and above all the imagination of empire. And we must also try to grasp the hegemony of the imperial ideology, which by the end of the nineteenth century had become completely embedded in the affairs of cultures whose less regrettable features we still celebrate.

There is, I believe, a quite serious split in our critical consciousness today, which allows us to spend a great deal of time elaborating Carlyle's and Ruskin's aesthetic theories, for example, without giving attention to the authority that their ideas simultaneously bestowed on the subjugation of inferior peoples and colonial territories. To take another example, unless we can comprehend how the great European realistic novel accomplished one of its principal purposes—almost unnoticeably sustaining the society's consent in overseas expansion, a consent that, in J. A. Hobson's words, "the selfish forces which direct Imperialism should utilize the protective colours of... disinterested movements"[20] such as philanthropy, religion, science and art—we will misread both the culture's importance and its resonances in the empire, then and now.

Doing this by no means involves hurling critical epithets at European or, generally, Western art and culture by way of wholesale condemnation. Not at all. What I want to examine is how the processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions, and—by predisposition, by the authority of recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts—were manifested at another very significant level, that of the national culture,

which we have tended to sanitize as a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments, free from worldly affiliations. William Blake is unrestrained on this point: "The Foundation of Empire," he says in his annotations to Reynolds's *Discourses*, "is Art and Science. Remove them or Degrade them and the Empire is No more. Empire follows Art and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose."[21]

What, then, is the connection between the pursuit of national imperial aims and the general national culture? Recent intellectual and academic discourse has tended to separate and divide these: most scholars are specialists; most of the attention that is endowed with the status of expertise is given to fairly autonomous subjects, e.g., the Victorian industrial novel, French colonial policy in North Africa, and so forth. The tendency for fields and specializations to subdivide and proliferate, I have for a long while argued, is contrary to an understanding of the whole, when the character, interpretation, and direction or tendency of cultural experience are at issue. To lose sight of or ignore the national and international context of, say, Dickens's representations of Victorian businessmen, and to focus only on the internal coherence of their roles in his novels is to miss an essential connection between his fiction and its historical world. And understanding that connection does not reduce or diminish the novels' value as works of art: on the contrary, because of their *worldliness*, because of their complex affiliations with their real setting, they are *more* interesting and *more* valuable as works of art.

At the opening of *Dombey and Son*, Dickens wishes to underline the importance to Dombey of his son's birth:

> The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them: A. D. had no concern with anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei—and Son.[22]

As a description of Dombey's overweening self-importance, his narcissistic obliviousness, his coercive attitude to his barely born child, the service performed by this passage is clear. But one must also ask, how *could* Dombey think that the universe, and the whole of time, was his to trade in? We should also see in this passage—which is by no means a central one in the novel—

an assumption specific to a British novelist in the 1840s: that, as Raymond Williams has it, this was "the decisive period in which the consciousness of a new phase of civilization was being formed and expressed." But then, why does Williams describe "this transforming, liberating, and threatening time"[23] *without* reference to India, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, since that is where transformed British life expanded to and filled, as Dickens slyly indicates?

Williams is a great critic, whose work I admire and have learned much from, but I sense a limitation in his feeling that English literature is mainly about England, an idea that is central to his work as it is to that of most scholars and critics. Moreover, scholars who write about novels deal more or less exclusively with them (though Williams is not one of those). These habits seem to be guided by a powerful if imprecise notion that works of literature are autonomous, whereas, as I shall be trying to show throughout this book, the literature itself makes constant references to itself as somehow participating in Europe's overseas expansion, and therefore creates what Williams calls "structures of feeling" that support, elaborate, and consolidate the practice of empire. True, Dombey is neither Dickens himself nor the whole of English literature, but the way in which Dickens expresses Dombey's egoism recalls, mocks, yet ultimately depends on the tried and true discourses of imperial free trade, the British mercantile ethos, its sense of all but unlimited opportunities for commercial advancement abroad.

These matters should not be severed from our understanding of the nineteenth-century novel, any more than literature can be chopped off from history and society. The supposed autonomy of works of art enjoins a kind of separation which, I think, imposes an uninteresting limitation that the works themselves resolutely will not make. Still, I have deliberately abstained from advancing a completely worked out theory of the connection between literature and culture on the one hand, and imperialism on the other. Instead, I hope the connections will emerge from their explicit places in the various texts, with the enveloping setting—empire—there to make connections with, to develop, elaborate, expand, or criticize. Neither culture nor imperialism is inert, and so the connections between them as historical experiences are dynamic and complex. My principal aim is not to separate but to connect, and I am interested in this for the main philosophical and methodological reason that cultural forms are hybrid, mixed, impure, and the time has come in cultural analysis to reconnect their analysis with their actuality.