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In Darkest England and the Way Out: Imagining Empire, Imagining Britain

...it is worth pausing to ask why small incidents in such an out of the way place as the trackless depths of a primeval forest should remind one of thoughts of friends and their homes in England.

– Henry Morton Stanley, *In Darkest Africa* (1890)

The exceedingly bitter cry of the disinherited has become to be as familiar in the ears of men as the dull roar of the streets or as the moaning of the wind through the trees... What a satire it is upon our Christianity and our civilisation, that the existence of these colonies of heathens and savages in the heart of our capital should attract so little attention!

– ‘General’ William Booth, *In Darkest England* (1890)

When Henry Stanley’s caravan staggered into Bagamoyo in German East Africa on 4 December 1889, arguably the most extraordinary journey of the nineteenth century came to an end. Thirty months earlier Stanley had left Yambuya Rapids, 1800 km up the Congo River, on a mission to relieve Emin Pasha, a British colonial administrator stranded by an uprising in Sudan. Without any contact with the outside world and in some of the most inhospitable and isolated terrain on earth the rescue had become a bloody fiasco, claiming the lives of five hundred Zanzibari porters and two British officers. As one commentator wrote in January 1890, ‘It would be difficult to discover in the annals of history any story more fraught with interest, more full of romance, or more wrapt up throughout its pages in ominous suspense and mystery, than the story of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition.’¹

Almost twenty years earlier, Stanley had been viewed with resentment and scepticism in Britain after sensationally rescuing the missionary David Livingstone and interviewing him for the scurrilous *New York Herald*. It was thus a paradox that upon his return to London on 26 April 1890, after a disaster without equal in the history of African travel, he was met by cheering crowds and nationwide ‘Stanleymania’. Wearing his patented hat and endorsing a startling array of products, Stanley seemed to be everywhere –

from newspaper supplements to puzzle-games and from music-hall songs to the Stanley and African Exhibition (complete with live ‘natives’). However, there was – at least initially – only one authoritative narrative of the journey: Stanley’s own *In Darkest Africa* (1890). Written in just fifty days and at half a million words, *In Darkest Africa* was seen by many reviewers as a literary feat almost as astonishing as the expedition which it purported to describe. Stanley’s publisher even released a book of his own, entitled *How Stanley Wrote ‘In Darkest Africa’* (1890).²

Not only a phenomenal commercial success, *In Darkest Africa* changed the way British people looked at Africa. A contemporary anecdote has a mother sympathizing with her daughter’s struggle to understand the new map of Africa and its many place names. ‘Oh yes,’ replies the little girl, ‘it’s all that horrid man Stanley.’ Likewise, if Africa had long been known to Europeans as the ‘dark continent’, the metaphor was given its definitively modern expression in *Darkest Africa*’s account of a realm of starvation, fever, Arab slavers, cannibals, warlike pygmies, and vast tropical rainforests. This was an image of Africa too powerful to be shaken even by the scandalous revelations in late 1890 of the brutality of some expedition members. Instead, as the *Spectator* put it, ‘Africa has grown darker this week.’ Indeed, a wave of publications breathed new life into an ancient metaphor: *Darkest London* (1891), *Darkest India* (1891), *Darkest Russia* (1896), *Darkest World* (1891) and even *In Darkest Egglund: How to Hatch Chickens* (1891).³

Stanley’s journey and, above all, his description of the Ituri rainforest seized readers’ imaginations. The great equatorial forest became, as P. Du Chaillu observed, ‘a subject of the most widespread interest’. J. Scott Keltie noted that ‘Probably every one will admit that the most prominent feature of the many-sided expedition was the forest, in whose gloom so much of its time was spent... Its gloom and grandeur, its strange sights and sounds seem to have entered his [Stanley’s] innermost soul.’ The *London Quarterly Review* declared *In Darkest Africa* ‘wonderful’, ‘picturesque’, as well as ‘strikingly realistic’. ‘After the sober prose of the [Royal] Geographic Society’s

² Felix Driver, ‘Henry Morton Stanley and his Critics: Geography, Exploration and Empire’, *Past and Present* 133 (November 1991) 134-166; Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), especially chapter 5, ‘Selling Darkest Africa’; Edward Marston, ‘How Stanley Wrote ‘In Darkest Africa’: A Trip to Egypt and Back (1890). For detailed analysis of the reception of *In Darkest Africa* in Britain see Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travellogues, 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

³ ‘Studies in character (No. III): Henry M. Stanley,’ *New Review* 2 (May 1890): 385-398, 394; *Spectator*, 15 November 1890, 699; Julian Cross, *Darkest London* (1891); Frederick de Latour Booth-Tucker, *Darkest India* (1891); H. Grattan Donnelly, *Darkest Russia* (1896); W. J. Riley, *In Darkest Egglund: How to Hatch Chickens and Rear Them* (1891); Joseph Hebblethwaite, *Darkest World Turned into Brightest Glory* (1891). See also F. C. Burnard, *A New Light Thrown Across the Keep It Quite Darkest Africa* (1891); Robert Douglas, *Darkest England’s Epiphany* (1891); William Taylor, *The Flaming Torch in Darkest Africa* (1898); G. S. Lackland, *In Darkest Ulster* (1910).

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¹ ‘Stanley’s Expedition: a Retrospect,’ *Fortnightly Review* 47 (January 1890): 81-96, 81.

endeavours,' opined RGS member Robert Felkin, 'it reads like a chapter in the Arabian Nights'. The *Saturday Review* pronounced the Ituri sections 'excellent specimens of their kind... deserv[ing] separation from the rest of the volumes and preservation permanently'. In the *Edinburgh Review* Henry Reeve praised Stanley's 'singularly picturesque and eloquent' evocation of the 'scenery of the dark forest', 'bring[ing] before our eyes the groups of malicious pigmies who track his march like demons of the wood'.⁴

In *Darkest Africa* described the Ituri forest – a lightless world of dense vegetation, seething clouds of insects, and tribes of pygmies subsisting on a meagre diet supplemented by human flesh – as 'typical of the life of humanity'. In his 1890 lecture series Stanley, a former showman, carefully exploited the public's evident fascination with these harsh conditions of life in a distant African jungle: 'The forest very faithfully represents human life in pantomime. The struggle for place, the selfishness, greed, voracity, [and] indifference to the interests of others may be found there as with us.' Audiences were invited to imagine themselves 'dazed and mazed in this weird shadow-land, and marching from dawn to eve in a perpetual duskiess... only lit at rare intervals by a little spray or a flickering dust of sunlight'. In effect, Stanley asked his public to conjure up a vision of Britain itself as a decaying, polluted and disease-ridden forest:

Take a thick Scottish copse dripping with rain; imagine this to be a mere undergrowth nourished under the impenetrable shade of ancient trees ranging from 100 to 180 feet; briars and thorns abundant... Imagine this forest and jungle in all stages of decay and growth, rain pattering on you every day of the year; an impure atmosphere with its dread consequences, fever and dysentery... and then if you can imagine such a forest extending the entire distance from Plymouth to Peterhead, you will have a fair idea of some of the inconveniences endured by us in the Congo forest.⁵

⁴ P. B. Du Chaillu, 'The Great Equatorial Forest of Africa,' *Fortnightly Review* 47 n.s. (June 1890): 777-790, 776; J. Scott Keltie, 'Mr Stanley's Expedition,' *Fortnightly Review* 48 n.s. (July 1890): 66-81, 79; 'The Relief of Emin Pasha,' *London Quarterly Review* 15 n.s. (October 1890): 25-48, 25; Robert Felkin, *The Graphic Stanley Number* (30 April 1890); Unsigned review, *Saturday Review* (5 July 1890); Henry Reeve, 'In Darkest Africa,' *Edinburgh Review* 172 (Oct 1890): 372-388, 372.

⁵ Henry Morton Stanley, *In Darkest Africa; or the Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin* (1890), 2:79; Stanley, 'The Great Forest of Central Africa: Its Cannibals and Pigmies (Lecture)' (1890), 6-7; Stanley, 'Across Africa and the Rescue of Emin Pasha (Lecture)' (1890), 29; Stanley, *In Darkest Africa*, 1:87. Late-Victorian novels like Richard Jeffries' *After London; or, Wild England* (1886) often raised the spectre of Britain in utter collapse. See Sally Ledger, 'In Darkest England: The Terror of Degeneration in Fin-de-Siècle Britain,' *Literature and History* (3rd series) 4/2 (Autumn 1995): 71-86.

Many of Stanley's readers, such as the socialist William Morris (who denounced Stanley as a brutal capitalist profiteer), had no difficulty in finding further parallels between Britain and the Ituri forest. One who had access to a far greater audience than Morris was William Thomas Stead: celebrated social reformer, Radical Liberal, pioneering journalist, and in 1890 editor of the successful new monthly *Review of Reviews*. Stead saw Stanley as a modern Christian hero and *In Darkest Africa* inspired him to ghost-write an exposé of poverty in Britain on behalf of 'General' William Booth of the Salvation Army (who was nursing his dying wife at the time). *In Darkest England and the Way Out* appeared in November 1890 and caused an immediate sensation, selling perhaps 100,000 copies by Christmas. By the end of 1891 it was available in Dutch, French, German, Japanese, and Swedish. Combining the Christian topography of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* with the encyclopaedic factual detail of 'Social Explorers' like Seebohm Rowntree (*Poverty: A Study of Town Life* [1900]), Stead's *In Darkest England* rebuked its readers for tolerating social and spiritual degradation at the very heart of the British Empire: 'As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England? Civilisation, which can breed its own barbarians, does it not also breed its own pygmies? May we not find a parallel at our own doors, and discover within a stone's throw of our cathedrals and palaces similar horrors to those which Stanley has found existing in the great Equatorial forest?'⁶

For Stead, England shared the Ituri forest's vastness, its 'monotonous darkness', its 'dwarfish de-humanized inhabitants' and the 'slavery to which they are subjected'. Its women were preyed upon by men of the ruling classes, its sweated labourers endured conditions no better than 'any African slave system', its slums reeked with a miasma 'almost as poisonous as that of the African swamp', and an evil régime of 'Arab' publicans kept the poor in bondage to their own intemperance. *In Darkest England* laid equal weight on the moral decay of modern 'civilised' society: '[T]he stony streets of London, if they could but speak, would tell of tragedies as awful, of ruin as complete, of ravishments as horrible, as if we were in Central Africa; only the ghastly devastation is covered, corpse-like, with the artificialities and hypocrisies of modern civilisation'. The solution offered was the Stead-Booth 'In Darkest England Scheme'. The 'submerged tenth' of England would be physically and morally redeemed through organised self-help, retraining in domestic 'City Colonies' and 'Farm Colonies', and the transferral of the 'entire surplus population' to the overseas territories of 'New Britain' (principally South Africa, Canada, and Australia, but also the U.S.). Stead called for an army of volunteers, an efficient labour exchange,

⁶ William Morris, *News From Nowhere* (1892); W. T. Stead, 'Character Sketch: Mr. H. M. Stanley,' *Review of Reviews* (January 1890): 20-27; 'General' William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), 12. I am indebted to Dr. Grace Eckley for information on Stead's writing of *In Darkest England*.

charitable work programmes (today's 'workfare'), a small-loans bank, and a million pounds. Like Stanley's experience of a 'larger life' and knowledge that every forest has a limit, faith in human endeavour and divine righteousness would inspire the Stead-Booth army of regeneration as it too marched from the 'depths of the depressing gloom' towards the 'light beyond'. 'There is not one of us but has an Emin somewhere or other in the heart of Darkest England, whom he ought to sally forth to rescue,' urged Stead, '. . . it needs each of us to be as indomitable as Stanley to burst through all obstacles, to force our way right to the centre of things, and then to labour with the poor prisoner of vice and crime with all our might.'⁷

In Darkest England at once sparked a major controversy. The Salvation Army was viewed with much suspicion at this time and Stead had gained notoriety by vigorously campaigning against child prostitution in 1885. Yet it was the crisis, economic and political, in which Britain found itself in late 1890 which made *In Darkest England's* tremendous impact so alarming for commentators. A new era of social unrest had been marked when soldiers violently dispersed demonstrating workers in Trafalgar Square on 'Bloody Sunday' in November 1887. The successful strike by the Bryant and May matchgirls in 1888, followed in 1889 by a strike of 8,000 East End dockworkers, gave impetus to the 'New Unionism' which historian Eric Hobsbawm has called 'labour's turning point'. In September 1889 a union rally in Hyde Park, where Britain's first May Day had been celebrated earlier that year, drew 100,000 demonstrators. By 1890 90% of the entire workforce of the building industry (90,000 people) stood idle and the TUC historically voted for an 8-hour day, signalling the start of a rupture with its laissez-faire, liberal past. Small wonder, then, that a conservative like Edmund Gosse could complain that while 'the whole concern is going to the dogs' some people were 'amusing [themselves] by printing Cook's tickets for a monster excursion to Boothia Felix or other provinces of Utopia'.⁸

Philanthropists like the Reverend A. Osborne Jay took offence at *In Darkest England's* imputation that no aid was currently being given to the poor. Citing a battery of critiques of the Stead-Booth scheme, Jay argued that large-scale centralized projects were 'delightful in theory' but impracticable. Other Christians embraced the scheme in terms that could scarcely have pleased its authors. The Methodist *London Quarterly Review* welcomed any export to the colonies of the 'refuse population of the country and the Continent' which might offset the 'replenishment' of London's poverty and crime by immigrants such as the three hundred Jews recently arrived from

⁷ Booth, *In Darkest England*, 12-15, 156. The sad history of the Salvation Army's short-lived 'overseas colonies' in Colorado, Ohio and California is told in Clark C. Spence, *The Salvation Army Farm Colonies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).

⁸ Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardie* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1997), 62-77; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Edmund Gosse, 'The Influence of Democracy on Literature,' *Contemporary Review* (Apr 1891): 523-536, 523.

Poland. On the left, the Social Democratic Foundation leader Henry Hyndman denounced the connection of social reform to the 'last infamous journey of the canting and murderous filibuster Stanley'. Stead's liberal credo that 'capital is good unless congested' was utopian, mocked Hyndman, since capitalism and not 'drink' or 'vice' was the root of social misery. The Stead-Booth scheme, he continued, was anti-socialist in its reliance upon the 'fraudulent philanthropy' of the bourgeoisie, upon a pipe-dream of escaping capitalist competition through collectivist farms, upon paying destitute workers below the market rate, and upon shameful non-monetary payment ('truck') and waste food collection.⁹

Significantly, Hyndman excoriated Stead's scheme of overseas colonies for its shoddy economic basis, rather than for the moral or legal crimes of occupying someone else's country. This was not just a quirk of Hyndman's famously autocratic personality. Liberals like Francis Peek complained that the colonial scheme was as bad as the socialists' demand for state-funded public works projects to alleviate the distress of the poor. (Others welcomed it on the same grounds.) For many of Stead's and Stanley's contemporaries in 1890 the question of empire was subservient to economics: could capitalism deliver on its promise of prosperity for all and, if so, was imperialism a necessary element or a dilution of that commitment? Even for an aggressive 'jingo' imperialist the Empire comprised Britain's trade and military bulwark against other European colonizing powers; it was not just some exercise in muscle-flexing intimidation of pre-capitalist societies. As a good liberal (and later Liberal-Unionist MP), Stanley himself had always insisted that imperialist schemes were only valid whilst financially self-supporting and his books are sprinkled with references to the challenge of creating a work-hungry African proletariat. Stanley's first trip to the Central African Forest prompted his lament, 'Oh for the hour when a band of philanthropic capitalists shall vow to rescue these beautiful lands' and several years later he enthused, 'In every cordial faced aborigine whom I meet, I see a promise of assistance to me in the redemption of himself from the state of unproductiveness in which he at present lives.' It was therefore natural for Stead to present colonisation as an economic resource for relieving social pressures in Britain: after all, this was what imperial territories were intended to do. And it was Stead who recorded for posterity the dictum of his 'intimate friend' Cecil Rhodes – later made famous through inclusion in Lenin's *Imperialism* (1917) – that 'in order to save the 40,000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial states-

⁹ Reverend A. Osborne Jay, *Life in Darkest London: A Hint to General Booth* (1891), n.p.; *London Quarterly Review* 15 (January 1891): 331-345, 343; H. M. Hyndman, *General Booth's Book Refuted* (1890), 6-7; Booth, *In Darkest England*, 229. See also Bernard Bosanquet, 'In Darkest England' on the Wrong Track (1891); George William Foote, *Salvation Syrup or Light on Darkest England* (1891); T. H. Huxley, *Social Diseases and Worse Remedies* (1891). A full bibliography of the controversy is given in Herman Ausubel, 'General Booth's Scheme of Social Salvation,' *American Historical Review* 56:3 (April 1951): 519-525.

men must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets, for the goods produced in the factories and the mines... If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists.¹⁰

If Britain's ruling classes increasingly presented imperialism as a strategy for joint economic growth and domestic political stability, middle class radicals and 'Social Imperialists' like Stead gladly incorporated it into reforming projects to alleviate the growing misery of the poor. Working class people's view of imperialism – when they held one at all and where records of it survive – was by no means monolithic. It could scarcely be characterized as an influential political opinion when many of them had neither vote nor party. Those who had newly begun organising would certainly not have shared the view that imperialism was the answer to their demands for houses, education, employment, trade union rights, political representation, and health insurance. Some of their leaders were outspoken opponents of 'capitalist' imperialism and readily linked the oppression of colonial peoples to the exploitation of the working class in Britain. Visiting India in 1907, Labour Party leader and socialist Keir Hardie bluntly asserted that 'the sooner the people of India controlled their own affairs the better.' For this and for addresses given at Indian political rallies the right-wing press in Britain howled for Hardie's deportation for sedition. In any case, it is not hard to appreciate that for all its 'exoticism', Africa (as represented by explorers and imperialists) would have seemed to many people to share a number of features of their own country. Ordinary Africans' lives were often depicted as harsh, precarious, unfree, racked by struggle, and subject to the arbitrariness of their rulers. They too clung to what time remained to them for 'unproductiveness' or, in a different lexicon, leisure. As historian Victor Kiernan concludes: 'Much of the talk about the barbarism or darkness of the outer world, which it was Europe's mission to rout, was a transmuted fear of the masses at home. Equally, sympathy with the lower orders at home, or curiosity about them, might find expression in associations of ideas between them and the benighted heathen far away.'¹¹

Kiernan's conclusion, that much imperialist rhetoric was a distorted reflection of arguments about domestic politics, is rejected by many academics these days. For the latter, imperialism was an expression of the xenophobic beliefs of large numbers of Europeans. In other words, not only did most people have views which we now consider racist but imperialism

¹⁰ Francis Peck, 'In Darkest England and the Way Out,' *Contemporary Review* 58 (December 1890): 796-807; W. Moore Ede, 'National Pensions: One Way Out of Darkest England', *Contemporary Review* 59 (April 1891): 580-596; Stanley, *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State* (1885), 2:93; Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), 1:223; V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967), 1:737. See Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1968), *passim*.

¹¹ Porter, *Critics of Empire*, 95-137; Benn, *Keir Hardie*, 230; Victor Kiernan, *Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to Other Cultures in the Imperial Age* (1969; London: Serif, 1995), 330.

itself was sustained by, indeed, took place because of such views. This is a narrative of imperial history which assigns great importance to culture. In its many forms – from penny novels to opera, public exhibitions and advertising – culture is presented as the principal vehicle for the dissemination of imperialist and racist ideas. Not surprisingly, this 'culturalist' model of the causal motor of imperialism has found fertile ground in the university, especially in departments of literary and cultural studies. (One suspects that the history of imperialism taught at military academies ascribes greater significance to factors like quinine manufacture, smokeless ammunition, the Maxim machine gun, Navy budgets, and European military rivalry than, say, the work of Rudyard Kipling.)

The most prominent exponent of this culturalist model of imperialism has undoubtedly been Professor Edward Said, author of the bestselling *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and outspoken critic of American foreign policy. Recently, Said has distanced himself from the way that jargon-wielding literary theorists increasingly reduce entire political traditions such as feminism and marxism to mere competing methods of textual interpretation. Nonetheless, as Said concedes, a burgeoning industry of postcolonial theory – and, one might add, its abstract language of 'Others,' 'boundary-crossing,' 'hybridity,' and 'marginality' – owes a deep debt to his groundbreaking *Orientalism* (1978). Said's eloquent appeals for a just settlement of the Middle East conflict and longstanding opposition to conservatism have deservedly made him a figure of inspiration for a huge public. And yet, together with his frequent references to socialist thinkers and historians such as Gramsci, Benjamin, Lukács, Raymond Williams, Victor Kiernan, and Eric Hobsbawm, this has partly obscured the serious difference between Said's influential view of imperialism and that of many others on the left. It is thus worth recalling exactly how imperialist ideology is represented in *Orientalism*.¹²

Said calls 'Orientalism' a 'style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinctions' (2), a 'knowledge of subject races... [which] makes their management easy and profitable' (36), an 'intellectual power' (41), and 'intellectual imperialism' (245). Orientalism constructs Africans, Asians, and other 'undeveloped' peoples *en bloc* as 'Orientals' (107). Put like this, Orientalism seems almost identical to the older concept of 'imperialist ideology': the real novelty of Said's argument lies in his theories of Orientalism's origins and of its relation to imperialism. Not just an ideology propagated by the ruling classes, Orientalism is a comprehensive mind-set 'based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness' (8). Not just a pretext for profiteering, Orientalism expresses a 'will

¹² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993; London: Vintage, 1994), 389; Said, 'Afterword', *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995). Further references to Said's *Orientalism* will be given in the text.

or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different... world' (12). Orientalism originates in those primal reflexes of the human mind which Claude Lévi-Strauss and Gaston Bachelard define as the 'requiring [of] order', the 'universal practice of designating... a familiar space', and the imposition of arbitrary boundaries (53-4). Yet the expression given to these instincts in Orientalism is pathological, 'a form of paranoia' (72).

For Said, Orientalism is transhistorical, driven by its own 'dialectic of information and control' in which 'knowledge gives power, more power requires knowledge, and so on' (36). For example, Ferdinand de Lesseps' project for a Suez Canal was the 'logical conclusion of Orientalist thought' (91). In the 1870s Orientalism emerged in its modern form, a 'political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West', out of a cocktail of an age-old Western discourse on the East, a century of rapid economic growth and modernization, plus other 'general cultural pressures' (204). All Europe was complicit in this 'political doctrine', from Benjamin Disraeli to Karl Marx to those millions of ordinary readers whose opinions are lost to us: 'every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric' (204). Said implicitly posits a causal relation between the rapid growth of Orientalism (or racism or imperialist ideology) and the Great Powers' scramble for colonies after 1870. This is a crucial point. Said excludes the possibility that popular imperialist attitudes were not a *necessary* condition of imperial expansion. In other words, flag-waving crowds and xenophobic newspaper readers were more than just profitable consumers of empire-related commodities or useful checks upon republicanism, radicalism, and the trade unions: their collective prejudice was the prerequisite for modern imperialism. To paraphrase Clauswitz, imperialism was orientalist discourse by other means. 'Once we begin to think of Orientalism as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient,' notes Said, 'we will encounter few surprises' (95).

What surprises could Stead's *In Darkest England* give such an approach? Few indeed. Stead appears to have the quintessentially imperialist 'way of thought' one would expect of a lifelong advocate of white 'race union', former colleague of Alfred Milner, friend of Cecil Rhodes, inventor of schemes for international surveillance and knowledge centralization, and early champion of Stanley and the genocidal Léopold II of Belgium. Stead's *Review of Reviews* sports as its logo a globe covered with the names of European and colonial periodicals. *In Darkest England* uncritically repeats Stanley's pseudo-scientific assessment of the pygmies as 'more nearly approaching the baboon than was supposed to be possible, but very human'. Stead approvingly quotes *In Darkest Africa's* paradigmatic imperialist encounter between colonizer Stanley and a nameless, ventriloquized colonial subject (a 'degraded specimen' of a boy): 'When I once stopped him to ask

his name, his face seemed to say, 'Please don't stop me. I must finish my task'.' In accepting *In Darkest Africa's* fetishistic description of Africa as 'dark' (Part I being simply entitled 'The Darkness') Stead lends his authority to what Patrick Brantlinger has called 'the myth of the Dark Continent... [a] discourse that treats its subject as universally understood, scientifically established, and therefore no longer open to criticism by a political or theoretical opposition.' For Stead, orientals are degenerate survivors of ancient civilizations: Arabs are 'the race that wrote the Arabian Nights, built Bagdad and Granada, and invented Algebra' but which now 'sends forth men with the hunger for gold in their hearts, and Enfield muskets in their hands, to plunder and to slay'. Most importantly, Stead's perception of the urban poor as 'colonies of heathens and savages in the heart of *our* capital' is structured around orientalism's 'ontological distinction' between 'us' and 'them' (what postcolonial theorists call the imperialist's 'Self-Other binary').¹³

There is a no less politically engaged alternative to this approach. Imperial historian John M. MacKenzie has recently offered a bold critique of the current orthodoxy on imperialism, calling into question its dismissal of marxism and downplaying of the role of capitalism and social class. MacKenzie contends that the 'imperialism' of the Said school has a 'disturbing vagueness about it... lacking historical dynamic, innocent of imperial theory or the complexities of different forms of imperialism and varieties of economic and political relationship.' Furthermore, in responding to 'the burden of the present,' much of this work 'poisons the wells' of our radical and reformist traditions with a kind of 'reverse Whiggism', or history as anti-progress. Instead, Mackenzie proposes a history of culture and imperialism which recognizes both the opposition in Britain to imperialism's ruling classes and the fact that radicals in politics and culture often had historically progressive views of the world beyond Europe. For them, the 'fascination of the East lay in the manner in which it offered an atavistic reaction to modern industrialism, with its urban squalor, moral and physical unhealthiness, mass demoralisation, social discontents and the transfer of loyalties from the individual to the labour organisation with its politically explosive potential.' Mackenzie concludes his survey of foreign influences upon domestic British art, architecture, design, music, and theatre: 'In all these arts, the result was often the profound extension of mood and of psychological state, a dramatic liberation from existing conventions and constricting restraints; and in each of them the repeated appeal to a different cultural tradition infused radical movements more frequently than it propped up existing

¹³ Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972) and Frederic Whyte, *Life of W. T. Stead* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), 2 vols.; Booth, *In Darkest England*, 11; Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule Of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 174. Booth, *In Darkest England*, 16 (emphasis added).

conservative ones.' Most importantly, Mackenzie's history requires us to understand how the culture produced by enthusiastic imperialists like Stead originates in the conflicts and contradictions of class society rather than, as Said has it, in the human mind.¹⁴

Returning to *In Darkest England*, we see that while modelling his 'Farm Colonies' on Canadian freedholds Stead has to concede that such estates were 'not to be had for the picking up on English soil'. Rather, he suggests, 'if a man will but work in England as they work in Canada or Australia, he will find as little difficulty in making a livelihood here as there'. The malaise of 'Darkest England' turns out to be one of labour productivity. As in his other publications of these years – such as *The Americanization of the World* (1902) and *The Largest Mail Order Business in Britain: An Object Lesson in Up-to-Date Enterprise* (1903) – Stead echoes the anxiety of British business at its impending eclipse by American and German manufacture. A quite different link between empire and Britain emerges: modern imperialism holds the promise of a magical resolution of the escalating social and economic contradictions of nineteenth-century capitalism. For Stead, the workers of both countries must be saved from themselves, whether their vices be alcoholism and a propensity to strike or village idleness and cannibalism.¹⁵

In 1903 Stead published *In Our Midst*, a fantasy again seeming to display the hallmarks of Said's 'orientalist discourse'. The arrival in England of Callicrates, envoy of the African queen of a lost white civilization in the Mountains of the Moon 'safely guarded by a belt of all but impenetrable forest', sounds the perfect setting for an adventure tale by H. Rider Haggard.¹⁶ In fact, the title of *In Our Midst* points to the real subject of this imperial romance: social upheaval in Britain, an increasingly combative women's movement, and escalating economic and political tension with Germany. Callicrates's *ingénu* account, like Stanley's, offers the liberal Stead a narrative framework for censuring society's oppression of women, heartless contempt for the plight of the poor, defence of privilege and wealth, and relentless commodification of every human relationship.

To be sure, very many (though not all) people in late-Victorian Britain indisputably held racist and arrogantly nonchalant attitudes towards the rights of Africans and Asians. Indeed, the monumental achievement of Edward Said has been precisely to sensitize modern readers to the sheer routineness of racist assumptions. But it is a huge leap from this fact to the

¹⁴ John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xv, xvii, 59, 209. See also Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992) and the special issue of *Public Culture* (Fall 1993) on Ahmad's *In Theory*.

¹⁵ Booth, *In Darkest England*, 126.

¹⁶ W. T. Stead, *In Our Midst: The Letters of Callicrates to Dione, Queen of the Xanthians, Concerning England and the English, Anno Domini 1902* (London: Review of Reviews, 1903), 9.

received wisdom of many critics today, that psychological categories of 'the Other' caused imperialism and that imperialism was a *central* influence on the worldview of modern Europeans. In contrast, a properly dialectical survey of the historical evidence shows that popular conceptions of modern imperialism – as brute fact and as a changing set of administrative policies – were more often formed by experiences of capitalist Britain as it entered a period of open class struggle. Before imagining the Empire, one had first to imagine capitalist Britain. And the most effective critiques of the former, then as now, come from those who hold out an alternative to the latter.



New Books from Down Under

Despite the failure of Pauline Hanson's racist One Nation party in last year's Australian general election the debate about the treatment and status of Aborigines in Australia has continued unabated. Several new books have also been published recently which reflect a growing awareness about the racist heritage of white Australian society.

In Richard Hall's *Black Armband Days: the truth from the dark side of Australia's past* (Vintage), the author has documented a whole history of systematic racist oppression from the genocidal clearance of whole tribes in the 19th century to the forced displacement of Aborigine children in the 1960s. The story is continued and brought up to date in Boori Pryor's autobiographical account of his own Aborigine childhood and youth in *Maybe Tomorrow* (Penguin). This book, which is now widely used in schools all over Australia, contains a wonderfully poignant and proud description of the author's own rediscovery of the ancient traditions and culture of his people.

Finally, two new fictional works, written by Aborigine writers, reflect the difficulties still facing young native Australians today. Kerry Davies has edited a wonderful collection of Aborigine stories in *Across Country* (ABC Books), while Steven McCarthy's *Black Angels – Red Blood* (University of Queensland Press) is an award-winning work of teenage fiction about a young Aborigine boy facing both poverty at home in the bush and police harassment in the big city.