

# Literature as Mirror of Empire: Examining the Dialectic Between Narrative Forms and Contemporary English and British Imperialism for the World History Classroom, from *The Tempest* to *Heart of Darkness*

This study argues that from the earliest days of English empire-building to the climax of British imperial power, writers from Shakespeare to Conrad used colonization as a device to raise moral questions about empire, the relationship between different races, and to show how new forms of wealth destabilized the prevailing social order in Britain and challenged tradition.<sup>1</sup> For students and scholars of world history and empire, literary forms provide insight not only into the mores, values, and social systems that guided colonization and empire-building, but also the limits of popular understanding and sentiment regarding the imperial project. They also reveal one of the few constants in the centuries-long imperial project: popular critique. Mining the work of such authors and playwrights as Shakespeare, Swift, Defoe, Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, and Conrad can reveal perceptions of and attitudes toward colonization, as well as how events in the colonies—such as the conflicts between settlers and the indigenous peoples of North America, the struggles over the Caribbean sugar islands, and the exploitation of indigenous peoples in Africa—influenced their narratives. Moreover, they allow students to develop a sense of the usefulness of primary sources, such as through the examination of captivity narratives, which will help them understand how the colonial experience became popularized and mythologized. The appendices of this article include several in-class exercises to help instructors teach about the influence of empire-building on English and British literature.



Image 1: A map showing the extent of the British Empire in the late-nineteenth century. At its height, the British Empire encompassed nearly a quarter of the world's land mass and population. Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imperial\\_Federation,\\_Map\\_of\\_the\\_World\\_Showing\\_the\\_Extent\\_of\\_the\\_British\\_Empire\\_in\\_1886.jpg#/media/File:British\\_empire\\_1886.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imperial_Federation,_Map_of_the_World_Showing_the_Extent_of_the_British_Empire_in_1886.jpg#/media/File:British_empire_1886.jpg).

## The British Empire and Literature in the 17th Century

Beginning with the reign of Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) and continuing under James I (r. 1603–1625), early adventurers and privateers such as Sir Martin Frobisher, Sir Richard Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and Sir Walter Raleigh sailed across the Atlantic under royal letters patent to “discover” and “explore,” a remit which implicitly included the harassment of other European powers in the Caribbean and the Americas, in particular the Spanish and the French. Over the course of some thirty years—and despite numerous failures—these efforts resulted in the establishment of settlements in Virginia (1607) and the West Indies (1609).

It took some time before West Indian sugar, cotton, and coffee and American rice, indigo, and tobacco made manifest the economic advantages of these early stages of English exploration and discovery. In the meantime, the naval exploits of adventurers and privateers

helped stimulate interest in incipient English empire-building. Writers such as Richard Hakluyt (*The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffics, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 1577), Thomas Hariot (*A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, 1588), and John Frampton (who translated Nicolás Monardes' *Joyfull newes out of the newfound world* in 1577) brought the exoticism of the New World to England's reading public with tales of derring-do, engravings of Native Americans, and stories about the consumption of novel commodities,<sup>2</sup> such as a plant the Spanish called "*tabacco*."<sup>3</sup>

As almost three-quarters of the male population in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century England was illiterate, however, the written word alone was insufficient to stir broad-based interest in England's inchoate imperial venture.<sup>4</sup> But this was the age of the great Elizabethan playwrights, too, and theatrical productions helped remedy this deficiency. Broadly appealing and relatively cheap, few literary forms could be as effective at firing the collective imagination about the overseas exploits and encounters of England's privateers as staged public performance, a popular vehicle which included the work of William Shakespeare.

Post-colonial scholars have for some time considered Shakespeare's *The Tempest* an allegory for this earliest phase of British imperialism. As Brian McHale observes, "Whatever else Shakespeare's *Tempest* may be, it is hard now *not* to see it as a reflection on English imperialism in the West Indies and Virginia (and perhaps in Ireland too), displaced to a Mediterranean island."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, students of World History and Empire will recognize in *The Tempest* many of the great themes of early empire building, including the uncertainties of European exploration and colonization, as well as the perils of shipwreck.

Written in the early 1600s, *The Tempest* tells the story of Prospero, sorcerer and one-time Duke of Milan, who was usurped by his brother Antonio, kidnapped, rendered unconscious, and set adrift on a raft to die along with his daughter, Miranda. The pair survived the ordeal and made landfall on an island in the Mediterranean. After spending twelve years in exile, which they shared with Ariel, Prospero's spirit agent, and Caliban, his "savage"<sup>6</sup> servant, Fortune smiled on Prospero and gave him the opportunity to revenge himself against his usurpers: a ship carrying a royal party, which included Antonio, passed by the island on its return voyage to Italy. Prospero, with the aid of Ariel, summoned a storm—the eponymous tempest—which destroyed the ship and stranded the survivors on the island.

Post-colonial scholarly interest has focused on the relationship between Prospero and the "wild man" Caliban as being the most suggestive of questions and criticisms of England's nascent colonialism. For Dominique Mannoni, the Prospero/Caliban paradigm defined a "dependency complex" in the "colonized culture that prevents the colonized freeing themselves from illegitimate domination."<sup>7</sup> An island indigene, Caliban was the son of the witch Sycorax, whose land it was before the arrival of Prospero and Miranda. Caliban taught Prospero about the island, showing him what foods to eat and what perils to avoid, and attempted to coexist and collaborate with the banished duke—only to be



Image 2: An eighteenth-century engraving depicting Miranda, Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Enchanted\\_Island\\_Before\\_the\\_Cell\\_of\\_Prosero\\_-\\_Prospero,\\_Miranda,\\_Caliban\\_and\\_Ariel\\_\(Shakespeare,\\_The\\_Tempest,\\_Act\\_1,\\_Scene\\_2\)\\_MET\\_DP859557.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Enchanted_Island_Before_the_Cell_of_Prosero_-_Prospero,_Miranda,_Caliban_and_Ariel_(Shakespeare,_The_Tempest,_Act_1,_Scene_2)_MET_DP859557.jpg).

enslaved and to have his land taken. In his rebuke of Prospero, fictional Caliban suggests the lived experience of the colonized:

The island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou camest first,  
Thou strok'st me and madest much of me, wouldst give me  
Water with berries in't, and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,  
That burn day and night: and then I loved thee  
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,  
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren places, and fertile:  
Cursed be I that did so.

Caliban's frustration was the result of his condition and treatment under Prospero, as he complained to the shipwrecked Stephano and Trinculo:

As I told you before, I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island. (III.ii.42)

Aggrieved, Caliban rebelled and used the English Prospero taught him for the one thing he deemed it useful: cursing the tyrant. "You taught me language," Caliban says, "and my profit on't is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your

language.” (I.ii.365–7) It is an ironic passage. In using the language of the colonizer to complain of his condition, Caliban has unconsciously revealed the depth of his own “colonization.”<sup>8</sup> His enslavement by the Europeans could not be more complete.

Undergraduates familiar with *The Tempest* can be incredulous when these passages are situated within the context of seventeenth-century English empire-building; in particular, the establishment of Virginia Colony and settlements in the West Indies.<sup>9</sup> The reasons for student skepticism are twofold: either they have never considered the possibility of a relationship between the work of Shakespeare and nascent English colonialism, or they are unconvinced any such connection exists because it presupposes Shakespeare was aware of the colonial dynamics then prevailing in the Caribbean and North America. Yet by the time *The Tempest* was written, not only had the work of Hakluyt and Hariot and others popularized the exploits of English privateers, but Africa and Ireland were also “highly topical places” when considering policies of English colonialism.<sup>10</sup> These circumstances made colonialism a part of popular discourse. Shakespeare also had access to much Elizabethan travel writing, in particular William Strachey’s eyewitness account of the shipwreck and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates’ expedition in the Bermudas in 1609, which was then on its way to Jamestown in the Virginia Colony. Shakespearean scholars believe it is this account which informed *The Tempest*’s dramatic opening scene of a storm-tossed sea and shipwreck and the European encounter with the “savage” Other, Caliban.<sup>11</sup>

The dynamic between Prospero and Caliban (and, to some extent, the meditations of the European Gonzalo when he first spied Caliban’s island) can be read as a microcosm of contemporary English imperialism, in particular the relationship between the dominated and colonized Native Americans and the colonizing English. As literary scholars John Gillies and Andrew Hadfield have observed, “Shakespeare’s play is vitally rather than casually implicated in the discourses of America and the Virginia colony” because of “its participation within contemporary debates about colonialism which were inevitably centred on the English colonies in the New World.”<sup>12</sup> (See Appendix I: “Caliban as Natural Slave” for a research- and discussion-based exercise on the relationship between Prospero and Caliban and the Aristotelian model of the “natural slave.”)

## The British Empire and Literature in the 18th Century

By the end of the eighteenth century, the growth of British<sup>13</sup> commerce derived from the overseas trade in commodities and finished products had begun to outpace agricultural growth, a trend which would never be reversed.<sup>14</sup> Increasingly few Englishmen were impacted by Britain’s empire of commerce, albeit to varying degrees and levels of awareness. As more and more Englishmen were taking to the high seas and experiencing first-hand the risks involved, the domestic audience for tales about shipwreck and castaways, captivity, and heroic bravery abroad likewise grew. Feeding this keen appetite in the eighteenth century

were the works of such writers as Daniel Defoe, whose *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was inspired in part by the real-life experiences of Scottish privateer Alexander Selkirk, who spent four years as a cast away marooned on an island in the South Pacific.

Written in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe* is the tale of an Englishman cast away on a desert island in the 1650s. The eponymous adventurer spent 28 years on the island. The story starts with a narrative device familiar to Defoe's audiences: A young man driven by "individualistic impulses"<sup>15</sup> goes off to sea against his parents' wishes only to be shipwrecked "after great Labor and Hazard" along the "Barbarian coast" of Africa and captured and enslaved by dreaded Moorish pirates.<sup>16</sup> In keeping with the theme of adventurism and derring-do, Crusoe escaped from his African captors and was rescued by a Portuguese sea captain who took him to Brazil, where Crusoe acquired enough land to start a plantation. But Crusoe, like countless European planters in the Americas, found that tobacco and cane production was labor intensive and so was persuaded to embark on a slaving voyage to West Africa. A pair of storms, however, dashed the voyage and Crusoe was shipwrecked on an island in the Caribbean.<sup>17</sup>

On the island, the individualist Crusoe labored to achieve a primitive self-sufficiency. The result was an England in miniature, with agriculture in the form of rice, corn, and barley crops, and simple industry with the production of charcoal. Along the way, he shaped the island into a model of colonial expansion, which included the fortification of the island with a "Castle" and various "Works and Improvements," and assumed an aristocratic "right of possession":<sup>18</sup>

I descended a little on the Side of that delicious Vale, surveying it with a secret Kind of Pleasure, . . . to think that this was all my own, that I was King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly, and had a Right of Possession; and if I could convey it, I might have it in Inheritance; as compleatly [sic] as any Lord of a Manor in *England*.<sup>19</sup>

The bucolic idyll of Crusoe's Caribbean fiefdom was shattered with his discovery of a footprint in the sand. The implications were at once obvious and terrifying: After two decades of solitary existence on the island, the wider social world was encroaching in the form of an unknown and possibly hostile and cannibalistic "Other." Two years later, Crusoe's deepest anxieties were confirmed when he discovered a shore strewn with "Skulls, Hands, Feet, and other Bones of humane [sic] Bodies; and particularly I observ'd a Place where there had been a Fire made, and a Circle dug in the Earth . . . where it was suppos'd the Savage Wretches had sat down to their inhumane Feastings upon the Bodies of their Fellow Creatures."<sup>20</sup>

A year later, Crusoe rescued a would-be victim of the cannibals, a completely naked, olive-skinned "savage" he christened "Friday" to commemorate the day Crusoe saved his life. Students are at times jarred by this scene. Not because of the appearance of Friday, but because it shows that Crusoe has maintained a form of timekeeping despite almost

three decades of near-total isolation. Here, it is useful to point out that Defoe is deliberately contrasting the advancements characteristic of civilized society, to which timekeeping has bequeathed an ordered and structured existence, with the primitive state of the “savage” Friday, whose life had been governed by the seasons and the cycles of the sun before his encounter with the European. As with Prospero before him, Crusoe taught the “savage” English, beginning with words like “master,” and promptly enslaved him.

As with his taking of the island, there was never any doubt in Crusoe’s mind as to his right to subjugate the uncivilized Friday: to force upon him the language, culture, values, and religion (having converted Friday to Protestantism) of the colonizer. Doing so was in keeping with the ideologies governing eighteenth century British imperialism, which cast “savages” as “inferior culturally, technologically, morally, and religiously.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, for James Joyce, Crusoe was “[t]he true symbol of British conquest.”<sup>22</sup>

Students might doubt that Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* is a commentary on the British Empire and an indictment of its relations with indigenous peoples. But a closer look at Crusoe’s interactions with the cannibals complicates Defoe’s work and helps us to understand that *Crusoe* is no “unalloyed defense” of the imperial enterprise.<sup>23</sup> When Crusoe first encountered Friday and the cannibals, his initial reaction was to “put twenty or thirty of them to the sword.” But his attitude changed; for Friday seemed not only kind and loyal



Image 3: Robinson Crusoe and Friday spy a clutch of “savages” on the beach and plan their attack. Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A. F. Lydon\\_Robinson\\_Crusoe\\_Plate\\_09\\_\(1865\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A. F. Lydon_Robinson_Crusoe_Plate_09_(1865).JPG).

but also, as Crusoe later remarked, “the aptest Scholar that ever was, and . . . so constantly diligent.”<sup>24</sup> Crusoe came to realize that the cannibals were not the bogeys he had imagined, but rather possessed the “same Powers, the same Reason, the same Affections, the same Sentiments of Kindness and Obligation . . . the same Sense of Gratitude, Sincerity, Fidelity, and Capacities of doing Good . . . as he has given to us.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, the same capacities as civilized Englishmen.

The long passages in which Defoe describes Crusoe’s meditations on the cannibals reflects the decades-long period of political and popular reassessment of Anglo-West Indian relations which preceded the writing of *Robinson Crusoe*.<sup>26</sup> Initially, colonization and settlement were in part justified by the Christian call to convert the “savage” indigenes, but as the seventeenth century wore on there was a marked decline in the relationship between Britain’s colonists and the Native American population. It was so severe that not only did the settlers abandon the proselytizing ideal, it also led many to doubt the likelihood of the colonies’ survival. After years of increasing demands and depredations by English colonists at Jamestown, the Powhatan massacred the settlers in 1622 and almost wiped the settlement off the map, prompting an order from the Virginia Company to “roote out from being any longer a people, so cursed a nation, ungratefull to all benefitts, and uncapable of all goodnesse.”<sup>27</sup> There followed a decade-long war of revenge in which the English seized Powhatan land. Later that century, relations between the Wampanoag and the settlers in New England soured so severely it erupted into an uprising led by Chief Metacom. This “First Indian War” marked the descent into near-continual warfare with other hostile tribes after 1689, circumstances which caused many colonists to feel that Native Americans should be exterminated. As Dennis Todd observes, by the end of the seventeenth century, “Indians had become irredeemable and savage Others, ‘Atheistical, proud, wild, cruel, barbarous, brutish, (in a word) diabolical Creatures’.”<sup>28</sup>

This sentiment was reinforced by the long string of wars waged between the British and the French and Indians from 1689 to 1714. In these conflicts, known as King William’s War (1689–1697) and Queen Anne’s War (1702–1714) in North America, the American theater featured as one part of much larger conflicts<sup>29</sup> that spanned the globe. Yet the fact that the French had enlisted the indigenous peoples of the Americas to terrorize the British in North America and the Caribbean crystallized for many the “alien” nature of the broad swathe of Native Americans, whose “otherness” was amplified by their putative cannibalism.

At the intersection of these events is found Crusoe’s prolonged and (for him) revelatory introspection on the cannibals, who, when called to exercise their God-given capacities enumerated above, “are ready, nay, more ready to apply them to the right Uses for which they were bestow’d than we are.”<sup>30</sup> So considered, *Crusoe* presents as neither a straightforward paean to the British colonial enterprise nor an unambiguous critique of it. Both elements are present, and the result is a work whose message is rather more equivocal than undergraduate audiences may prefer. Yet, it is this very same ambivalence that makes *Crusoe*



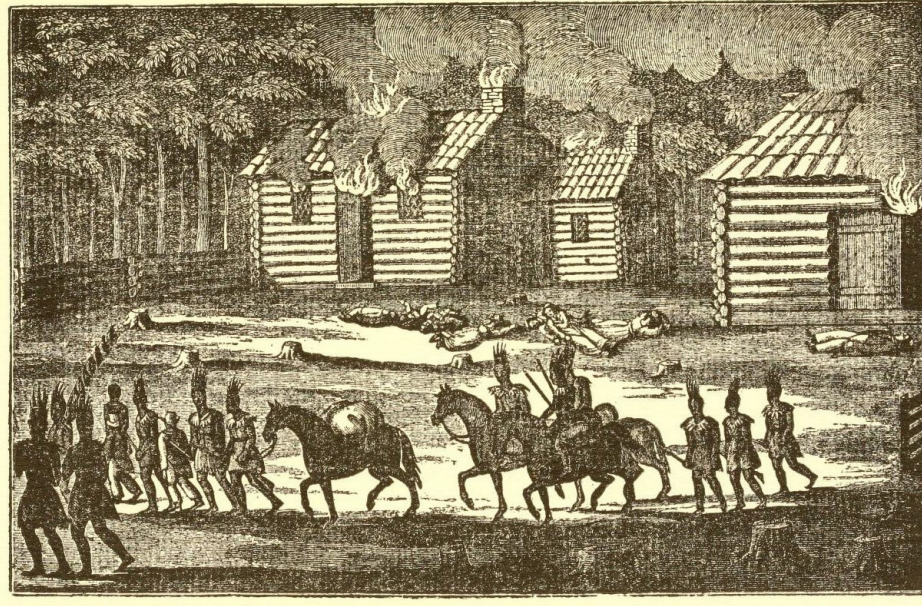


Image 4: Beginning in the late-seventeenth century, successive British monarchs conducted global wars against the French (and others) in the interests of preserving colonies and markets, monopolizing natural resources, and empire-building. Europeans on both sides of the conflict enlisted indigenous peoples in their colonies to help wage these wars through raiding and guerilla warfare. As shown in this image, British settlers in the American colony of New York are subjected to a raid by indigenous American peoples during King William's War (1688–1697). Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saccage\\_de\\_Schenectady\\_f%C3%A9vrier\\_1690.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saccage_de_Schenectady_f%C3%A9vrier_1690.jpg).

great fodder for undergraduate study of World History and Empire. It allows students the opportunity to develop a sense of Defoe's contemporary political and imperial context, how this may have influenced his work, and, more broadly, how eighteenth-century popular culture reflected it.

All the great themes of seventeenth-century empire building are to be found in *Robinson Crusoe*, from pirates and hazardous voyages to remote islands and cannibals. Many of these same themes are present in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, which was published soon after Defoe's *Crusoe*. But the high-seas escapades of the eponymous Gulliver, which entail him in shipwrecks, mutinous sailors, marooning, and eventual return to England, reveal the essence of Swift's satirical narrative: captivity and alienation. Departing from Bristol, an English port heavily implicated in the transatlantic trade in slaves and commodities, Gulliver was bound for the Spanish Americas, the West Indies, and Coastal India, only to have to abandon his voyages time and again. Following an accidental landing on the island of Lilliput, he is captured and tied down by the tiny Lilliputians, who then reduced him to servility. Later, after being abandoned by his shipmates, he is shipwrecked and then overwhelmed by the Brobdingnags, a people much larger than himself, who sell him on



Image 5: A nineteenth-century illustration by Arthur Rackham depicting Jonathan Swift's titular Gulliver being released from the strings of his Lilliputian captors. While a source of entertainment for many Britons, the travails of Gulliver were also an uncomfortable reminder of the stories of captivity popularized by the press between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The hazards of empire-building sat uncomfortably alongside the tales of heroic derring-do which inspired many to take to the seas. Source: Public Domain at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gulliver-Rackham-008.jpg>.

as a commodity and abuse him sexually. In his final captivity, Gulliver is reduced to such slavishness by a group so alien and unlike himself—the far-superior and racist Houyhnhnm horse-people—that he becomes caught up in their society and adopts its values, including their disgust of the racially-distinct Yahoos.<sup>31</sup> When at last he returned to England, Gulliver was appalled by his former countrymen and found their stench and ugliness loathsome.<sup>32</sup> The sense of alienation he felt in his various captivities was transferred to what was perhaps his final unexpected captivity: England.

As Colley observes, Gulliver's exploits abroad "brought no conquests, or riches, or easy complacency; only terror, vulnerability, and repeated captivities, and in the process an alteration of self and a telling of stories."<sup>33</sup> In many ways, this is the classic arc of the captivity narrative, a popular form of writing in seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>34</sup> Britons seized as sailors or soldiers in various overseas contexts, from the Barbary Coast of North Africa and the Mediterranean to the forests of North America and the reaches of Mysore in India, were held in captivity, often for years at a time. Some of those who were seized recorded their experiences and if they survived, returned to Britain and published their accounts. Early examples of captivity narratives include Thomas Saunders' chapbook (a type of widespread street literature) *A True Description and Breefe*

*Discourse of a Most Lamentable Voiage* (1587), Job Hortop's *Travailes of an English Man* (1591), Thomas Phelps' *A True Account of the Captivity of Thomas Phelps at Machaness in Barbary* (1685), and Robert Drury's *Madagascar; or, Robert Drury's Journal* (1729).

Captivity narratives reveal the complex interplay between the culture of the captive and the culture of the captor which engendered tensions surrounding notions of identity. Years of "sordid accommodations, paltry food, abject labor, and harsh punishment for trivial offenses" with no hope of rescue could produce problematical and unexpected outcomes, as when English captives "went native" in North Africa, married "Others," and religiously converted.<sup>35</sup> Various motivating factors underlay such transitions, from despair of ever returning home because their families could not afford to ransom them to the social and economic benefits which accompanied conversion. For many soldiers and sailors, whose fortunes in England were circumscribed by their social status and condition but who nonetheless possessed highly marketable skills in the competitive mercantile markets of North Africa, conversion to Islam opened doors to new economic opportunities which could result in a level of individual prosperity never attainable back home. On the rare occasions when the converted Englishman was ultimately redeemed, he found himself in a Britain whose culture had become strange and foreign to him. It was a complete reversal of the circumstances which characterized his earlier captivity. It is this same sense of alienation which Swift's Gulliver experienced on his return from the land of the Houyhnhnms.

Captivity narratives remained popular through the nineteenth century, particularly as the British Empire waged war against Napoleon Bonaparte and expanded territorially to the East and South. The dialectic between identity and nationalism revealed by these stories are fodder for student engagement with larger questions of "Britishness." Did conversion render a captive Briton culturally irredeemable, even though they had been rescued? How thoroughly and in what ways were captives divested of their physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual attachments to their former abductors? Besides religion, what other markers of British or indeed English or Scottish or Welsh identity were subsumed as a means of survival among captors, only to be awkwardly reawakened upon recovery? (See Appendix II: "Captivity and British Identity" for a research- and experience-based exercise in which students analyze the historicity of captivity narratives.)

## The British Empire, Literature, and Wealth in the 19th Century

Colonial and imperial themes pervade much nineteenth-century literature, from Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), the estate at the center of which was founded on wealth generated from the slave trade in the West Indies; Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), the governess who falls in love with Mr. Rochester, whose marriage to Bertha Mason, a "creole" madwoman from the West Indies, throws a spanner in the works;<sup>36</sup> and William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), which features episodes and asides in the West Indies (referred to as the

“Cannibal Islands” by John Osborne, suggesting how very little popular notions about indigenous peoples had changed since Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, which was published one and a quarter centuries earlier) and India (in the character of Joss Sedley’s ostentatious and recently-returned “nabob,” lately a civil servant in the East India Company).<sup>37</sup> Not only do these novels reveal contours of British ideas about “race” and “otherness” as they were evolving, as well as popular perceptions of imperialism during the late-Georgian and early-Victorian periods, but also how colonial wealth altered the established order of things.

The novels of Austen, Brontë, and Thackeray appeared in the early decades of the so-called “British Century” (1815–1914), a period considered by historians to be the high watermark of British imperialism and empire-building. It is during this hundred-or-so year span, which began with the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 and British acquisition of Cape Colony in South Africa and ended with the outbreak of World War I, that the British Empire grew to dominate or encompass vast swathes of the globe, including much of Africa, parts of Asia, and almost all of India and Australia. Much later-Victorian literature reflected this enlarged geopolitical context, including Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*.

Serialized between 1860 and 1861, *Great Expectations* is an historical novel which tells the story of Philip “Pip” Pirrip, a poor orphan whose chance-encounter with a convict in a graveyard had serious consequences for his future. Escaped from a prison hulk—decommissioned ships used by the British government as floating prisons—the convict, whose name is Magwitch, prevailed on Pip to bring him food to sustain him while he rested and eluded the authorities. This Pip does, until Magwitch was rearrested and transported—a

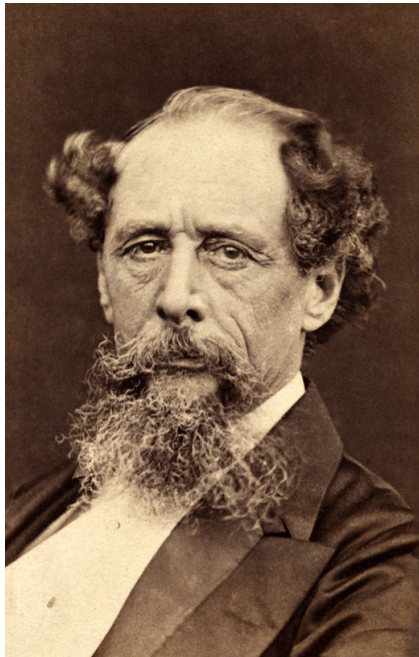


Image 6: A photograph of Charles Dickens, taken the same decade *Great Expectations* was published. Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charles\\_Dickens\\_portrait\\_c1860s\\_restore.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charles_Dickens_portrait_c1860s_restore.png).

common practice in early-nineteenth century Britain wherein convicted criminals were relocated to distant places as punishment for their crimes—to the Australian penal colony of Botany Bay. Later, when Pip was befriended by the elderly and eccentric Miss Havisham, he developed feelings for her ward, Estella, who not only provoked in him desire, but also an acute sense of social inferiority induced by her casual indifference and contempt.

Pip became determined to pursue Estella but recognized that he had no chance of changing their relationship for the better without a fundamental alteration in his own social status. At this point in Dickens' narrative Pip learned he had an anonymous benefactor who wished to pay for his education so that he could become a fine gentleman. Pip's much longed-for social upgrade followed; but, blinded by his desire for the cruelly indifferent Estella, Pip makes a grave error and assumed his mysterious patron was Miss Havisham.<sup>38</sup> When Magwitch reappeared in England some years later, a move which violated the terms of his transportation, he brought seismic news: he had made his fortune as a sheep farmer in Australia and had been Pip's benefactor. He had never forgotten Pip's kindness, which had consoled him through his many years of hard labor in the colony. Magwitch, an escaped convict, had been compelled to share his good fortune with the compassionate young man and, as he proudly explained, raise him up a "London gentleman."

Although written decades after the practice of transportation to Australia had been abolished, Dickens' irredeemable Magwitch aptly symbolizes the elements "of danger,



*THE LANDING of the CONVICTS at BOTANY BAY*

Image 7: "The Landing of Convicts at Botany Bay" from Capt. Watkin Tench's *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay* (1789). Some 162,000 male and female prisoners were sent to Botany Bay Penal Colony between its founding in the late-eighteenth century and 1868, when the colony received its last convict. Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Convicts\\_at\\_Botany\\_Bay.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Convicts_at_Botany_Bay.jpg).

of wealth, and of unpredictability” that marked the colonial experience of the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> He is a figure who spent a great deal of time on the imperial periphery because of his crimes, but as a result became a man of property. In success, Magwitch embodied a paradox of empire: the empire flourished if, and only if, colonists and ex-convicts kept their distance from Britain. As Edward W. Said notes, “[t]he prohibition placed on Magwitch’s return is not only penal but imperial: subjects can be taken to places like Australia, but they cannot be allowed a ‘return’ to metropolitan space, which, as all Dickens’s fiction testifies, is meticulously charted, spoken for, inhabited by a hierarchy of metropolitan personages.”<sup>40</sup> But Magwitch contravened; for it is the wealth he accumulated as the result of his labors along the periphery—as an outcast in a penal colony, no less—that enabled Pip’s advancement up the rigid English social ladder. It allowed Pip to stay in London and receive a gentleman’s education by way of his tutorials with Matthew Pocket. In a status-obsessed society whose landed elite’s wealth was derived from heritable holdings in *Great Britain*, assets which in turn bestowed upon them the ancient right to participate in and dominate British politics, Pip’s newfound social mobility—to which he had no real claim—manifestly represented an upending of the traditional system. As literary scholar Janet Myers has observed, Magwitch’s contravention “resides not in the fact that he gains access to wealth, but that he also seeks the corollary status that accrues to wealth at home in Britain by creating his protégé, Pip.” When Magwitch reappeared, he made visible the challenge he and Pip presented “to the existing class system and to the traditions of primogeniture and inheritance.”<sup>41</sup>

The introduction of new forms of wealth acquired through imperialism and the colonial experience was widely seen by the elite as harmful to British political life. For such “vulgar wealth,” as Lord Chatham saw it, unmoored the right of the property owner from its anchorage in the English constitution and made somewhat tenuous claims to a monopoly on power. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, such concerns grew muted as decades of political reform (vitalized by working class radicalism) gradually broadened the political franchise by lowering the bar of property qualifications.

With the “Scramble for Africa” toward the end of the nineteenth century, the British Empire became an outside source of national pride among Britons. While it is true that most Victorians had no interest in the high policies and mechanics of empire (the lofty realm of what Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher called the Victorian “official mind,”), they were captivated by its trappings. Indeed, commodified and packaged for popular consumption across an array of mediums—from medicine, children’s toys, candy, and exotic foods to circus sideshows, museum exhibitions, newssheets, pamphlets, poetry, and engravings—knowledge of as well as economic, emotional, and psychological investment in Britain’s imperial enterprise surged among average Britons, a sentiment nourished by Victorian scientific Darwinism and the imperial hawks and fantasists of successive Disraeli and Gladstone Governments. Yet reform-minded observers who did not share in the

enthusiasm of the Victorian imperialists' "cult of empire," which advocated for the benefits and necessity of the British Empire and its civilizing mission, refused to leave unaddressed the moral questions raised by this new wave of empire-building, particularly when they witnessed first-hand the disparity between the rhetoric of imperialism and its reality.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the most scathing eyewitness indictment of the concurrent partitioning of Africa is Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>43</sup>

Serialized in *Blackwood's Magazine* in Britain in 1899, the chief protagonist of *Heart of Darkness* is Charles Marlow, a man fascinated by Africa since childhood and now English captain of an ivory-trading steamer sailing up the Congo River. For Marlow, Africa had by this time ceased to be "a blank space of delightful mystery" on the map, and was rather a "place of darkness."<sup>44</sup> Marlow's destination is a trading post where the company's ruthless agent, Mr. Kurtz, is stationed. The company's man deep in the interior, Kurtz is the subject of much dark rumormongering. The most disturbing allegations concern his cruel, repressive, and violent treatment of enslaved Congolese to meet ivory collection quotas. As Marlow is told, Kurtz's appetite for ivory "had got the better . . . of the less material aspirations."<sup>45</sup> Marlow's 200-mile journey upriver to find Kurtz is a hellish one, and in the end reveals the brutal reality of imperialism and its destructive impact on "both the colonizer and the colonized, stripping both of their humanity."<sup>46</sup>

Marlow's expedition belies the popular impression in Britain of the great work done by Belgian colonists embarked on a "civilizing mission" in the Congo. Instead of a philanthropic and "holy mission" to "enlighten and civilize the lives of the Congolese natives," as Belgian king Leopold II claimed in his speech at the Belgian Geographic Conference (1876), Marlow witnesses a "panorama of brutality": emaciated, chained Congolese force-marched through the forest, their metal bonds rubbing their flesh raw.<sup>47</sup> Shackled as they labored to construct a railway, they were beasts of burden; a dehumanization rendered complete by their restrained toil. Marlow observes much casual violence, too. After being informed by a drunken white man that the road he is camping beside is undergoing "upkeep," Marlow "absolutely stumbled" upon the "body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead" lying next to it.<sup>48</sup> The Congo also appears desolated to Marlow, as villages everywhere have been abandoned. Marlow learns that the residents fled to "avoid conscription as porters and collectors of ivory" and to escape enslavement by and the brutality of Kurtz, who killed, cut off hands, systematically raped women, and burned houses.<sup>49</sup>

Kurtz, once a "civilizing" agent, had veered out of control. Far from the romanticized adventure stories which obsessed so many young Britons in the late-nineteenth century, the reality of life upriver was one of madness, illness and death, the brutal exploitation of the indigenous people, and bickering ambition and greed among Europeans. Looming over all this is a sense that the veneer of civilization is very thin. And indeed, when Marlow finally locates Kurtz, it is Kurtz who has become savage; he has killed men and impaled their heads on stakes around his hut. As Marlow spied the hovel from his glass, he was taken aback:

"I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen—and there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids, a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole." Marlow was led to conclude, "the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion."<sup>50</sup>

*Heart of Darkness* mirrors Conrad's own experience as an English merchant sailor working in Congo Free State between June and December 1890. Hired by a Belgian trading company to operate a steamer on the Congo River during the most notorious phase of Belgian king Leopold II's exploitation of the territory, Conrad spent several months traveling between riverine trading stations. Africa was the great symbol of the unsolved and unknown for nineteenth century Britons; indeed, Conrad himself had dreamed of visiting and exploring it since childhood. In his autobiography, he recalled the "youthful spirit of adventure with which he pointed to a map of Africa and declared, 'When I grow up I shall go there'."<sup>51</sup> But for Conrad, his six months on the Congo River were nothing like what he had imagined; they were, however, revelatory.

As captain of the steamer, Conrad witnessed the murder, abuse, and other atrocities committed by the agents of Leopold II, whose reign was infamously marred by brutality, the mistreatment of the Congolese people, and the deliberate plundering and looting of natural resources, especially rubber.<sup>52</sup> The invention of the pneumatic rubber tire in 1887 resulted in the mass production of bicycles and a much-needed supply of a major component



Image 8: Cartoon showing the Belgian king Leopold II slicing a pumpkin representing Congo during the Berlin Conference of 1884/5. Leopold II is flanked by Germany's Wilhelm II on his left and a crowned bear symbolizing Russia on his right. Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cartoon\\_depicting\\_Leopold\\_2\\_and\\_other\\_emperial\\_powers\\_at\\_Berlin\\_conference\\_1884.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cartoon_depicting_Leopold_2_and_other_emperial_powers_at_Berlin_conference_1884.jpg).



of the incipient motor vehicle industry.<sup>53</sup> These two developments combined to prompt skyrocketing global demand for rubber tires, which Leopold sought to capitalize on by exploiting Congo's abundant rubber tree forests. But extraction required the movement of men and supplies, and Congo lacked anything beyond the most basic of transportation infrastructures. With the Belgian king unwilling to invest the time or money in the clearing of forests and the building of roads, he turned instead to the use of forced labor and imposed a strict tax and quota system on villages across the Congolese interior. The quota system, with its impossible standards, was harshly enforced by Leopold II's private Congolese army, the *Force Publique*. The British diplomat Roger Casement wrote of what he experienced in Congo, including stumbling across complete human skeletons lying in the grass near trading posts, the resigned banality of victimhood expressed by some of the Congolese he interviewed, and the unspeakable horrors which attended Leopold II's administration of his *Domaine Privé*, in his diary. He concluded it was a "veritable hell on earth."<sup>54</sup> Such circumstances "permanently darkened" Conrad's view of human nature. As he wrote from Congo to his aunt in September 1890, "Everything here is repellant to me. Men and things, but above all men."<sup>55</sup>

It was not until 1908 that Leopold II's brutal exploitation in Congo Free State was ended. In the decade or so between the publication of *Heart of Darkness* and the Belgian king's relinquishment of his fiefdom, international criticism over the humanitarian crisis grew. It was particularly pronounced in Great Britain, where Conrad's novella inspired journalist and publisher E. D. Morel to use his *West African Mail* weekly magazine to discredit Leopold II's regime. Dividends were soon forthcoming: the work of Morel's weekly influenced Parliament's Congo debate in May 1903.<sup>56</sup> Following their introduction, Morel was convinced by Casement to establish the Congo Reform Association (CRA), which led a vigorous international campaign aimed at exposing Belgian mistreatment of the Congolese population. The activism of the CRA played an important role in bringing an end to Leopold II's reign, which resulted when Belgium formally annexed the Congo from the monarch. (See Appendix III: "Congo and the Popular Press" for a research- and discussion-based exercise in which students examine how the popular press reported on the conditions in King Leopold II's Congo Free State.)

## Conclusion

Historians and students of world history and empire draw connections between empire-building and literature across centuries of development and revision. Imperial themes can be detected in many literary forms, from plays and poems to novellas and novels. From the earliest days of the English (and subsequently British) imperial enterprise, colonies played various roles in literature: in Shakespeare, Defoe, Swift, and Conrad, Britain's extra-territorial acquisitions became the vehicle for moral questions about colonization

as well as questions about the relationship between different races; in Austen, Brontë, Thackeray, and Dickens, wealth accumulated in the colonies destabilized the prevailing social order in Britain and challenged tradition. Thus, although Said has argued that the “novel is formally implicated in the imperial project” in that it “creatively colonizes non-European territory,” it is apparent that a type of feedback loop exists within many contemporary narrative forms that at least suggest an effort at critique.<sup>57</sup> To paraphrase Daniel Carey, the history of eighteenth-century literature cannot be written without reference to empire. If that is true, then surely it is no less true of nineteenth-century literature, particularly as it was the zenith of European imperialism—for the British as well as the French and Germans.

Students and scholars must be cautious, however, and avoid falling into the trap of presentism—that is, interpreting past events in terms of modern values and concepts. In terms of the literature surveyed above, the possibility of presentism exists to degrees in all of them, although *The Tempest* is the example perhaps most at risk. This is the case for two reasons. First, it is chronologically the earliest work presented and thus the least relatable in modern terms. Second, controversies over the nature of colonialism were to some extent incipient because the English empire itself was inchoate. Most contemporary English experience with colonialism in the early seventeenth century tended to be closer to home, in the form of Ireland. In many ways, this shaped contemporary English perspectives on empire-building. Thus, the question is raised: can the relationship between Caliban and Prospero in *The Tempest* really reflect questions about how the colonized and colonizer interact, or are these modern concerns projected onto an ancient people?

Some scholars argue that such projections are the inevitable and unavoidable result of historians’ efforts to obtain “knowledge of the past ‘from the inside out.’”<sup>58</sup> In this reasoning, the very practice of history writing courts controversy—or at least risks it, as the historian David Armitage has suggested elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> Yet in the case of Shakespeare’s protagonist and antagonist, ample evidence survives that debates over the seventeenth century colonial enterprise (and specifically anti-Irish rhetoric) were part of a popular discourse which the playwright could hardly have been unaware of.<sup>60</sup> The fact that the language used to distinguish groups of people—what modern scholars refer to as “otherness”—has been present in the Western historical tradition since Herodotus’ *The Histories* also implies the possibility.

The challenge for historians and students of world history and empire is to be cautious. While it can be difficult for students to account for presentism and attempt objectivity when they are researching a topic of interest to them, it is not unfeasible. They must be trained to acknowledge the possibility of these influences and to be conscious of them when critically assessing source material, be it *Mansfield Park* or *Magna Carta*. Coupled with a thorough understanding of the context in which they were produced, scholars and

scholars-in-training can hope to mine sources in such a way as to enable a more nuanced interpretation of them, the historical actors behind them, the age which shaped them, and share that knowledge with their students.

## Appendix I

### Caliban as “Natural Slave”

The idea that Caliban was a “natural slave” has been around at least since Frank Kermode’s 1954 edition of *The Tempest*. Kermode argued that Caliban “embodied the characteristics” of the Aristotelian paradigm, a model Joseph Karbowski has explained was based on the “three main features of slaves”: slaves are “animate pieces of property”; slaves “are assistants/second-order tools for action”; and slaves “are human beings who belong to another or are of another unqualifiedly.”<sup>61</sup> From these features, Aristotle defined the Greek idea of a *natural slave* as:

anyone who, while being human, is by nature not his own but of someone else is a natural slave. And he is of someone else when, while being human, he is a piece of property; and a piece of property is a tool for action separate from its owner.<sup>62</sup>

Instructors provide students with a list of the features of the natural slave as well as Aristotle’s culminating definition. Ask students to consider the relationship between Prospero and Caliban within this framework. Students should attempt to answer the following questions:

1. In what way/s is Caliban an “animate piece of property”? What examples of this nature can students find in the play?
2. In what way/s does Prospero use Caliban as an “assistant/second-order tool for action”? What examples of this nature can students find in the play?
3. Does Caliban “belong” to Prospero “unqualifiedly”? Explain.

Instructors should have students identify specific passages in *The Tempest* that support their suppositions, whether they agree or not that Caliban as written meets the criteria of the Aristotelian model.

### Extended Learning: Friday as “Natural Slave”

To deepen students’ understanding of the concept of the “natural slave” and to connect the historical and narrative elements and imperial themes between seventeenth and eighteenth century literature discussed in the study, instructors could turn the lesson to the character of Friday, the rescued cannibal from *Robinson Crusoe*, and ask students to apply the Aristotelian paradigm of the “natural slave” to him.

After addressing the same questions above, challenge students further by asking them to research the significance of the appearance of the trope of the “natural slave” in imperial literature. When they have completed their research, have them get into groups to discuss the following question:

1. What does the persistence of the theme of the “natural slave” suggest about the mores, values, and belief systems of William Shakespeare’s and Daniel Defoe’s contemporaries?

## Appendix II

### Captivity and British Identity

Captivity narratives were part of the popular discourse of English and then British empire-building throughout the three-century period covered by this study. The apex of captivity narrative popularity seems to have been between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a time of rapid expansion of the British imperial presence in the Americas and India.

In this exercise, students research a North American or Indian captivity narrative and then situate it against the backdrop of contemporary British imperial expansion. Students should consider the political/economic/strategic factors motivating British expansion in the region/s they are researching, the earlier history of this expansion, and the historical relationship between the Britons and the indigenous peoples of the region.

Using a free podcast-creation app (e.g. Anchor, Sounder, etc.), students create a 10-minute mini-documentary podcast in which they analyze the narrative, being sure to explore the background of the author and their source material (e.g. whose specific captivity experience is it derived from and can the student gain access to it?), with the historical reality of the expansion of the British Empire into the region/area.

### Some questions to guide student inquiry:

1. Where is the individual from? What has motivated their move to North America/India?
2. In what way(s) has captivity challenged their notions of “Britishness”?
3. If present, compare the reclaimed Briton’s before and after ideas of “otherness”.
4. Based on the foregoing, gauge the overall impact on the reclaimed Briton. In what ways has the experience changed them?

It is useful for instructors to provide a list of captivity narratives for students to use in their project. The following is a list of narratives from British North America and India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

**America**

- Ethan Allen, *A Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen's Captivity*
- John Blatchford, *Narrative of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life of John Blatchford*
- Jean Lowry, *A Journal of the Captivity*
- Capt. John Smith, *The General Historie of Virginia*
- Peter Williamson, *French and Indian Cruelty, Exemplified in the Life and Various Vicissitudes*

**India**

- Henry Beecher, *Remarks and Occurrences of Mr. Henry Beecher during his imprisonment*
- James Bristow, *A Narrative of the Sufferings of James Bristow*
- J. Z. Holwell, *A Genuine Narrative of the Deplorable Deaths . . . in the Black Hole*
- Francis Robson, *The Life of Hyder Aly*
- William Thomson, *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*

**Appendix III**

## Congo and the Popular Press

Between 1885 and 1906, Congo was ruled as a fiefdom by the Belgian king Leopold II. The colonial experience under Leopold II prompted Joseph Conrad to write *Heart of Darkness*, a novella inspired by his time serving as captain of a steamer for a Belgian trading company on the Congo River in 1890. Once the character of Leopold II's exploitation of Africans in Congo became apparent to the British public, the popular press printed images which depicted the brutality of Leopold II's regime. Highly critical, cartoons such as the one published in *Punch* were rife with metaphorical suggestions concerning both the nature of Belgian rule during the period and the international community's response to the humanitarian crisis. Photographs, on the other hand, made vivid and real the atrocities inflicted upon the Congolese under the Free State in ways cartoons simply could not.

In this exercise, students should research the images below (image 1 and image 2) and respond to the following questions:

1. What was the status of Congo Free State at the time *Punch* published these cartoons?
2. Whose head is on the body of the snake in image 1? What does the snake represent?

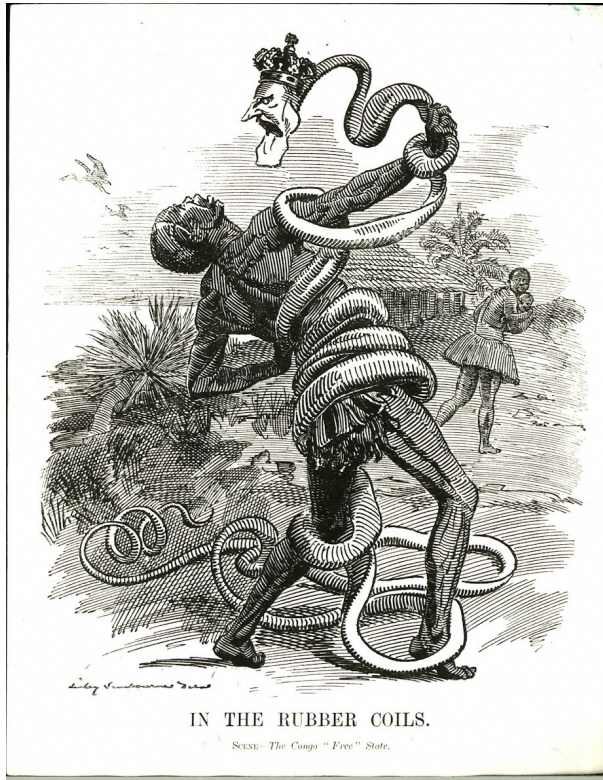


Image 9: "In the Rubber Coils." *Punch*. 1906. Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punch\\_congo\\_rubber\\_cartoon.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punch_congo_rubber_cartoon.jpg)

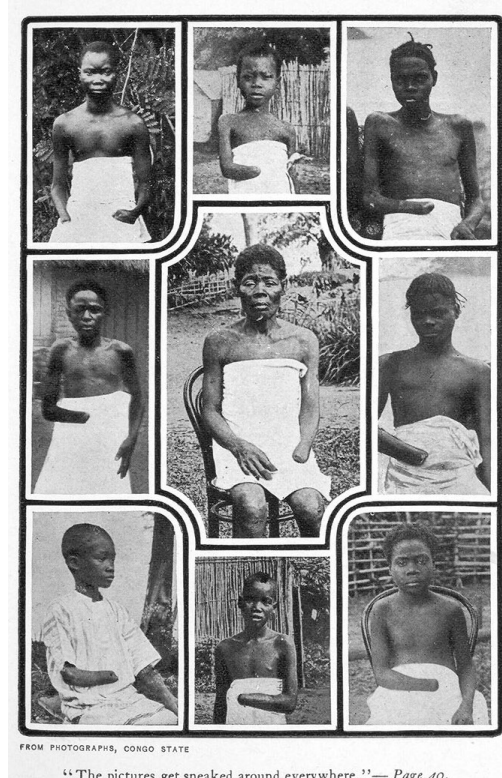


Image 10: Mutilated children and adults from Congo, c. 1900–1905. Source: Public Domain at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MutilatedChildrenFromCongo\\_\(orig\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MutilatedChildrenFromCongo_(orig).jpg)

3. The caption at the bottom of image 2 says, "These images get sneaked around everywhere." What is depicted in the image? Why and where might they be "sneaked around?"
4. Why did it take the international community so long to respond to the brutality of Leopold II's rule in Congo?

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The literature on this topic is wide-ranging, encompassing as it does the Elizabethan Age through the British Empire of the nineteenth century. The following is a select bibliography of some of the foremost works touching on the subject: David Armitage, "Literature and Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume I: The Origins of Empire*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and "The New World and British Historical Thought: From Richard Hakluyt to William Robertson," in *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750*, ed. K. O. Kupperman (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Lawrence Bergreen, *In Search of a Kingdom: Francis Drake, Elizabeth I, and the Perilous Birth of the British Empire* (New York: Harper Collins, 2021); Daniel Bivona, *British Imperial Literature, 1870–1940: Writing and the Administration of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Robert R. Cawley, *Unpathed Waters: Studies in the Influence of the Voyagers on Elizabethan Literature* (New York: Octagon Books, 1967); Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979); Robert Giddings ed., *Literature and Imperialism* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1991); J. E. Gillespie, *The Influence of Overseas Expansion on England to 1700* (New York: Columbia University Studies, 1920); Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); Suvir Kaul, *Eighteenth-century British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); and Jeffrey Knapp, *An Empire of Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See Robert M. Adams, *The Land and Literature of England: A Historical Account* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1983), 168 and Robert Giddings, *Literature and Imperialism* (London: Palgrave, 1991), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana and the Journal of the Second Voyage Thereto* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1893), 9.

<sup>4</sup> James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 81–82.

<sup>5</sup> Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 110–111. The emphasis is McHale's.

<sup>6</sup> Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.

<sup>7</sup> As paraphrased in Mary Ann McGrail, *Tyranny in Shakespeare* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 127.

<sup>8</sup> McGrail, *Tyranny in Shakespeare*, 128.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, in the following select bibliography: David Armitage, "Literature and Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume I: The Origins of Empire*, ed. Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and "The New World and British Historical Thought: From Richard Hakluyt to William Robertson," in *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750*, ed. K. O. Kupperman (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Robert R. Cawley, *Unpathed Waters: Studies in the Influence of the Voyagers on Elizabethan Literature* (New York: Octagon Books, 1967); Barry R. Clarke, "The Virginia Company's Role in *The Tempest*," in *The Whirlwind of*

*Passion: New Critical Perspectives on William Shakespeare*, ed. P. Penda (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016); Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979); J. E. Gillespie, *The Influence of Overseas Expansion on England to 1700* (New York: Columbia University Studies, 1920); Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); Jeffrey Knapp, *An Empire of Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Keith Linley, *The Tempest in Context: Sin, Repentance, and Forgiveness* (London: Anthem Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> David Stone, ed., *Nelson Thornes Shakespeare: The Tempest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7–8.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Travel, and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 243.

<sup>12</sup> John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 149 and Hadfield, *Literature, Travel, and Colonial Writing*, 244.

<sup>13</sup> With the 1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland, it is appropriate to use “British” and “British Empire” when referring to that state’s colonization efforts and imperial projects beginning in the eighteenth century. However, distinctions will be made between strictly English private commercial ventures when appropriate.

<sup>14</sup> R. C. Nash, “South Carolina Indigo, European Textiles, and the British Atlantic Economy in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Economic History Review* 63, no. 2 (2010): 1 (362–392). See also: R. Davis, “English Foreign Trade, 1660–1700,” *The Economic History Review* 7, no. 2 (1954): 150–166 and W. A. Cole, “Eighteenth-Century Economic Growth Revisited,” *Explorations in Economic History* 10 (1973): 327–348.

<sup>15</sup> Dennis Todd, *Defoe’s America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 99.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1868), 11–21.

<sup>17</sup> Eve Tavor Bennet, “*Robinson Crusoe* and Travel Writing,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Robinson Crusoe*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 129–131.

<sup>18</sup> Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 117 and 181–184.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 100–101.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>21</sup> Dennis Todd, “*Robinson Crusoe* and Colonialism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Robinson Crusoe*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 144.

<sup>22</sup> Manuel Schonhorn, “*Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe’s Mythic Memory, and the Tripartite Ideology,” in *Critical Essays on Daniel Defoe*, ed. R. D. Lund (New York: GK Hall & Co., 1997), 147.

<sup>23</sup> Todd, “*Robinson Crusoe* and Colonialism,” 144.

<sup>24</sup> Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 213–214.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 212–213.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, in the following select bibliography: Michael Dobson, *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Margaret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992); Jeffrey Knapp, *An Empire of Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Keith Linley, *The Tempest in Context: Sin, Repentance, and Forgiveness* (London: Anthem Press, 2015); and Alden T. Vaughan, “Shakespeare’s Indian: The Americanization of Caliban,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 137–153.



- [27](#) Edward D. Neill, *The Virginia Company of London* (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1869), 331.
- [28](#) Todd, "Robinson Crusoe and Colonialism," 146–147.
- [29](#) The Nine Years' War (1688–1697) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1714).
- [30](#) Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 213.
- [31](#) Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Slavery and the Politics of Place: Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1780–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 149.
- [32](#) Roger D. Lund, *Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 118–119.
- [33](#) Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 2.
- [34](#) Joe Snader, *Caught Between Worlds: British Captivity Narratives in Fact and Fiction* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 1.
- [35](#) *Ibid.*, 20.
- [36](#) Mark Stein, "Discourses of Empire: Complicity and Disjunction in *Jane Eyre*," in *Crabtracks: Progress and Process in Teaching the New Literatures in English*, eds. Gordon Collier and Frank Schulze-Engler (New York: Rodopi B.V., 2002), 206.
- [37](#) Marty Gould, *Nineteenth Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 2011), ebook.
- [38](#) Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 189.
- [39](#) Philip Steer, *Settler Colonialism in Victorian Literature: Economics and Political Identity in Networks of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 37.
- [40](#) Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xvi.
- [41](#) Janet Myers, *Antipodal England: Emigration and Portable Domesticity in the Victorian Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), 82.
- [42](#) Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781–1997* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 337 and Cedric Watts, "Heart of Darkness," in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 48.
- [43](#) Scholars have debated the literal, metaphorical, and symbolic meaning of *Heart of Darkness* since its publication. Some, such as Albert J. Guerard ("The Journey Within"), have seen the book as an "introspective plunge" into Conrad's own "heart of darkness." Others, such as the historian Chinua Achebe ("An Image of Africa"), have argued that while Conrad "saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation," his own racism made him "strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its tooth." Achebe points to Conrad's perpetuation of the dominant stereotyped image of Africa in the Victorian mind, from his description of Africans' use of "dialects" rather than "languages" to the "ugly" humanity of them as "savages" and "half-savages." Patrick Brantlinger ("*Heart of Darkness*: Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?") agrees with Achebe's argument, but emphasizes the ambiguity of Conrad's work. "In the world of the *Heart of Darkness*, there are no clear answers," he observes. In that vein, he concludes that Conrad "offers a powerful critique of at least some manifestations of imperialism and racism as it simultaneously presents that critique in ways that can be characterized only as imperialist and racist." Contrary to Brantlinger, Hunt Hawley ("*Heart of Darkness* and Racism") has argued that *Heart of Darkness* is an anti-imperial tract, while acknowledging Conrad's racism as being symptomatic of the period's "endemic racism." Abdul JonMohamed ("The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colo-

nialist Literature”), meanwhile, has argued that, notwithstanding their characterization in *Heart of Darkness*, Africans are incidental and not the main objects of Conrad’s work; rather, the Europeans were. Although the debate continues, current interpretations hold that *Heart of Darkness* is at least as anti-imperialist as Mark Twain’s *King Leopold’s Soliloquy*.

[44](#) Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*: Norton Critical Edition, ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 8.

[45](#) Mohit K. Ray, *Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness: The Atlantic Critical Studies* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2006), 16.

[46](#) Isam Shihada, “Historicizing Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: A Critique of King Leopold II’s Colonial Rule,” *English Language and Literature Studies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 15.

[47](#) Ibid.

[48](#) Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 20.

[49](#) Shihada, “Historicizing Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” 15.

[50](#) Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 57.

[51](#) Ibid., xiii.

[52](#) Shihada, “Historicizing Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” 13–14.

[53](#) Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo From Leopold to Kabila: A People’s History* (New York: Zed Books, 2007), 21–22.

[54](#) Peter Singleton-Gates and Maurice Girodias, *The Black Diaries: An Account of Roger Casement’s Life and Times with a Collection of His Diaries and Public Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 118.

[55](#) Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ix.

[56](#) Dean Pavlakis, *British Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Movement, 1896–1913* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 50–51.

[57](#) Markham Ellis, “Crusoe, Cannibalism, and Empire,” in *Robinson Crusoe: Myths and Metamorphoses*, eds. L. Spaas and B. Stimpson (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1996), 45.

[58](#) P. B. M. Blaas, *Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction Between 1890–1930* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 10–11.

[59](#) Armitage, “Literature and Empire,” 104.

[60](#) Michelle Lee, *Shakespearean Criticism: Excerpts from the Criticism of William Shakespeare’s Plays and Poetry* (Gale Research Company, 1998), 56.