

THE MYTHOLOGY OF IMPERIALISM
*a revolutionary critique of british literature
and society in the modern age*

RUDYARD KIPLING, JOSEPH CONRAD,
E. M. FORSTER, D. H. LAWRENCE, and JOYCE CARY

by JONAH RASKIN
foreword by BRUCE ROBBINS

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Contents

FOREWORD TO THE NEW EDITION by Bruce Robbins	7
INTRODUCTION: <i>The Mythology of Imperialism</i> Redux	17
A VOICE FROM THE THIRD WORLD	31
INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION:	
Bombard the Critics	35
1. Chaos: The Culture of Imperialism	43
2. Kipling's Contrasts	61
3. Portrait of the Artist as Imperialist	69
4. Terror	89
5. Imperia Romana	103
6. <i>Kim</i> : The Middle Way	111
7. Conrad's Contradictions	131
8. Season in Hell	149
9. <i>Lord Jim</i> : White Skins	159
10. The Darkness of the Gulf	165
11. Russians and Revolutions	193
12. Forster and Cary: Old and New	205
13. Disconnections	221
14. Trips East	233
15. School Lessons: History and Geometry	255
16. <i>Mister Johnson</i> : On the Road	261
17. The End: Neocolonialism	275
18. Works of Passion and Imagination	283
AFTERWORD:	
Edward Said, Colonialism, and Global Reversibility	295
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	307
INDEX	311

CHAPTER ONE

Chaos: The Culture of Imperialism

I. THE THIRD WORLD

The world of imperialism came crashing through the walls of the nineteenth-century novel. Old conflicts were terminated, old boundaries were destroyed, old characters were banished. A new universe of fiction was set down in their place. A revolution in the novel was effected. It was Joseph Conrad—the Pole, the outsider—who battered down the old walls. He set the clock on the time bomb of the twentieth-century revolution in the novel. His first blast leveled the old house of nineteenth-century fiction. His second ripped asunder the imperial house of modern fiction: Rudyard Kipling’s monument to the empire. Kipling’s walls hide the truth of imperialism. Conrad broke them down. He dragged the colonial world onto stage center of English fiction.

In “Autocracy and War” (1905) he described the new world of imperialism:

Industrialism and commercialism—wearing high-sounding names in many languages (*Welt-politik* may serve for one instance), picking up coins behind the severe and disdainful figure of science whose giant strides have widened for us the horizon of the universe by some few inches—stand ready, almost eager to appeal to the sword as soon as the globe of the earth has shrunk beneath our growing numbers by another ell or so. And democracy, which has elected to pin its faith to the supremacy of material interests, will have to fight their battles to the bitter

end, on a mere pittance—unless, indeed, some statesman of exceptional ability and overwhelming prestige succeeds in carrying through an international understanding for the delimitation of spheres of trade all over the earth, on the model of the territorial spheres of influence marked in Africa to keep the competitors for the privilege of improving the nigger (as a buying machine) from flying prematurely at each other's throats.

Conrad saw the worldwide extension of capitalism, the antagonism between imperial and colonial lands, the radical upheaval of primitive communities, their introduction into the political and economic context of the twentieth century, the intrusion of machines into the jungles, the exploitation of the peasants, the extraction of wealth and its expropriation by foreigners and colonial rulers. It is a world in which progress drinks nectar from the skulls of the slain, a world of directorates and monopolies, of world wars and revolutions for the control of wealth and power. It is a time of nationalist, socialist, and working-class movements. It is the era of communist revolution. The West collapses, the East rises. The Third World flexes. The peasant, the African chief, the Indian guru, the Hindu monk, the guerrilla fighter, the international financier, the anarchist—all become dominant figures in the jungles of Africa and Asia and in the jungles of cities. It is an era of dictatorship, of autocratic democracies. Culture and literature are political weapons, both in the hands of the colonialists and their revolutionary adversaries. Western European culture is increasingly decadent. The cultures of Black, Brown, and Latin peoples are the centers of creativity and vitality. Intellectuals join the fight; they become pamphleteers or apologists. It is an era of disintegration and fragmentation; men are acutely conscious of chaos, alienation and loneliness. Racism infests the house of Western thought—divides, corrupts, poisons. Private lives appear dissociated from public existence; history seems to have no meaning.

To date, literary and cultural historians have not reckoned with imperialism. F. R. Leavis, Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, E. M. Forster—they have not performed the necessary task. Raymond Williams's inability to tangle with imperialism distorts modern culture and society. Williams writes, "our moods appear in effect after the war of 1914–18," and "we tend to look at the period 1880–1914 as a kind of interregnum. It is not the period of the masters. . . Nor yet is it the period of our contemporaries, of writers who address themselves, in our kind of language, to the common problems that we recognize." Williams begins *Culture and Society*,

1780–1950 by discussing five words that were coined or which gained new meanings at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. These words—industry, democracy, class, art, and culture—he says, are the key to “those wider changes in life and thought to which the changes in language evidently refer.” They help account for late- and mid-nineteenth-century history, but in the twentieth century their power to ferret out the truth is sapped. But take these words and phrases which were coined or which acquired new meanings at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century:

Imperialism
 Colonialism
 Fascism
 Bolshevik
 Racism
 White Man’s Burden
 Technology
 Freudian
 World War

With these words and phrases twentieth-century history comes to life. Then the period 1880–1920 is no interregnum. It is the age of revolution.

No Victorian had Conrad’s social vision. He could not have had because the world Conrad saw did not exist in 1830, 1850, or 1880. No Victorian wrote a good novel about the colonial world. Every major modern writer has been preoccupied by the conflict between the metropolis and the hinterlands, the conflict between Europeans and Asians, whites and Blacks, the colonizers and the colonized. Third World consciousness transformed their lives. The Victorian novelists breathed the world of class. Modern novelists—from Conrad to Lawrence, from Kipling to Orwell, from Forster to Cary—have been preoccupied with race, with cultural and national conflicts. Twentieth-century novelists have brought the colonial world into the heart of fiction: *Heart of Darkness*, *Kim*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, *A Passage to India*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *The Heart of the Matter*, *Mister Johnson*, *Burmese Days*.

The Victorians were conscious of their empire: their Queen was Empress of India, their sons served in the army in Egypt and Singapore, men invested in overseas companies, ladies wore silks from the East, workers drank tea from China and India. In daily life, the fact of empire

was difficult to forget. Yet the Victorian novelists imagined that the colonies were peripheral to their domestic concerns, and rarely felt that the colonial world impinged on the metropolis. In Victorian novels the colonies are usually places to transfer burned-out characters, or from which to retrieve characters when they were needed. They are especially convenient for the beginnings, turning points, and endings of fiction. The plot began—or flagging interest was revived—when a character returned from abroad, and the action terminated when the characters left for the colonies. For the Victorians, existence meant existence in England: it began when they returned to Southampton or Liverpool and it ended when they embarked for Australia, Canada or Nigeria. Going to India was like falling off a cliff. The Englishman coming back to London felt like a fish thrown back into the sea after flopping about on land.

Most nineteenth-century novelists thought solely in terms of England because they were born in and spent their entire lives in England. The Brontës, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, and Dickens were all rooted in English communities. Conrad and Kipling, unlike most of the Victorians, were born and lived extensively abroad. They were aliens in England, so they scrambled for roots, created an image of England to suit their foreign appearance. Their contemporaries—James, Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Yeats, and Shaw—were all foreigners in England. Modern British literature was created by Irishmen, Americans, and a Pole. Outstanding contemporary literature in English is more and more the product of Africans and Indians—Wole Soyinka, R. K. Narayan, V. S. Naipaul. Modern British culture colonized writers from varied cultures and national backgrounds. With the major exception of the Irish writers, the modern British writers—Conrad the Pole, Eliot and James, Americans—were deeply committed to England. They were loyal foreigners. Their dedication to the imperial society binds writers as diverse as Kipling, Conrad, Lawrence, Cary, and T. S. Eliot. The only major modern novelist born in England who was nourished by English culture is D. H. Lawrence. He is a lone wolf, an anomaly, but he too, restless with England, seeking an escape from its fettering confines and the confines of traditional English fiction and criticism, went abroad. The harvest was a series of books about the New World, the colonial world, the primitive: *Kangaroo*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, *Etruscan Places*, *Mornings in Mexico*, *The Sea and Sardinia*.

A significant number of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century British writers were born abroad. Conrad was born in Poland in 1857, W.

H. Hudson in South America in 1841, Hugh Walpole in New Zealand in 1884, Katherine Mansfield in New Zealand in 1888, Christina Stead in Australia in 1902, Angus Wilson in South Africa in 1913, Dan Jacobson in South Africa in 1929, Doris Lessing in Persia in 1919 and, of special importance, Rudyard Kipling in Bombay in 1865, R. H. Tawney in Calcutta in 1880, George Orwell in Bengal in 1903 and Lawrence Durrell in India in 1912. By contrast (and with the exception of William Thackeray), no important Victorian writer or social critic was born in the colonial world. Among the Victorians, only Anthony Trollope and Samuel Butler—as compared with the moderns Conrad, Forster, Cary, Kipling, Greene, Orwell, and Lawrence—traveled and worked in the hinterlands. Thackeray's birth in Calcutta makes him unusual in the company of Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Emily Brontë.

The modern classics that present the colonial world reverberate with contradictions and extreme situations, which are missing from most Victorian novels. The colonial experience, the colonial theme, altered the sense of time and space in the modern British novel. The colonial world brought a sense of urgency and crisis into European society. It shattered the familiar patterns in English fiction. The prevailing contemporary critical view, articulated best by Richard Chase in *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, is that “the English novel has followed a middle way,” that the “American novel tends to rest in contradictions and among extreme ranges of experience. . . . The English novel has been a kind of imperial enterprise, an appropriation of reality with the high purpose of bringing order to disorder. By contrast . . . the American novel has usually seemed content to explore, rather than appropriate and civilize, the remarkable and in some ways unexampled territories of life in the New World and to reflect its anomalies and dilemmas. It has not wanted to build an imperium but merely to discover a new place and a new state of mind.” Chase is on fairly solid ground when he compares the nineteenth-century American novel with the Victorian novel, but his thesis cracks when one compares the modern British novel with the American classics. The British novel in the age of imperialism has explored unmapped territories in its own new worlds. It has dropped a bucket down into wells of extreme consciousness. By shifting from drawing rooms to jungles, from city to plains and mountains, the novelist went beyond the familiar sense of well-defined space into what seemed to be an undefined, endlessly moving world. In the colonial world there was a sense that time was speeded up,

compressed: the primitive past clashed with the industrial present, which was already shattering into a communist future. In the Victorian novel, man is surrounded by comfortable society. In the modern British novel the white man is isolated, thrown back into himself. He finds little middle ground to which he can cling in safety.

II. KIPLING AND CONRAD

The differences between the old and the new novel emerge when James and Conrad are contrasted. *Nostramo* (1904) was published the same year as *The Golden Bowl*, but whereas Conrad describes the present and the future, James describes ancient history. James's New World nouveaux riches tangle with Old and New World fortune hunters; his world smacks of perversity, vulgarity, cunning, incarceration, and terror. Conrad's Costaguana brings the twentieth century into the realm of fiction: fragmentation, estrangement, dislocation, imperialism, revolution, war. When James thought of revolution an image of the year 1789 flashed across his mind; when he thought of the international scene he engaged an American girl and a European man; and when he thought of culture he re-created the salons of *ancien régime* France and Newport, Rhode Island, in the 1870s.

Terror is a country of the mind and writers who describe it are citizens of the same state. But writers approach terror from different social perspectives. Consider, for example, what Conrad would have done with James's image of the "beast in the jungle," an image which releases a moment of terror. For James the beast is in the self; for Conrad it would have referred to the self, but also literally to real beasts in real African jungles. For James, terror was the feeling that his doomed, wealthy American cousin, Minnie Temple, experienced when at twenty-four she knew she was to die, just when all the possibilities of travel and luxury were made available to her. It is the moment when the young French aristocrats jailed by the revolution knew that they were shortly to be guillotined by their class enemies. For Conrad, terror was the moment in the Congo when, surrounded by the jungle and hidden Black men, he hears a distant drum and confuses it with the beating of his heart. It is the moment when the interrogated knows that unless he confesses, the concentration camp's inquisitor will give the final turn of the screw. Conradian terror is distinct from but akin to Jamesian terror. It reflects a different society.

James had a perverse social sense. He felt doom, crisis, and intuited the process of change. Knowing of the growing power of the working classes and fearing revolution in the streets of London, he noted in 1886 that “in England the Huns and Vandals will . . . come ‘up’—from the black depths of . . . the people.” He also felt that the empire was threatened at its frontier, the border country between civilization and savagery that haunted the late nineteenth-century Englishman. In 1899, James told Charles Eliot Norton that the English were living “under the very black shadow of S. Africa,” and that the Boer War made him “gloom and brood and have craven questions of ‘Finnis Britanniae.’” He saw the crisis of the empire, described it as “the greatest drama in history;” but in that social drama he detected no material he could transform into his art. He was receptive to new talents, to writers who introduced new material into the territory of English fiction. In 1893, after reading Robert Louis Stevenson’s “The Beach of Falesá,” a story about the South Seas, he wrote to its author, “Primitive man doesn’t interest me, I confess, as much as civilized—and yet he *does* when you write about him.” He hailed Kipling for introducing a new land—India—into English fiction; he greeted Conrad as a fellow craftsman, but also because of the fresh experiences he rendered in his work. “What he gives us, above all,” James wrote of Kipling, “is the feeling of the English manner and the English blood in conditions they have made at once so much and so little their own . . . He is wonderful about India, and India has not been ‘done.’” After reading *The Mirror of the Sea* he told Conrad, “No one has known—for intellectual use—the things you know.” Kipling and Conrad were both exotic figures for James.

Not only James, but the society at large enthusiastically greeted Kipling and Conrad as though they were foreigners wearing odd clothes, speaking a different language. Here at last, readers exclaimed, was something new under the imperial sun. *Plain Tales from the Hills*, *Life’s Handicap*, *The Phantom Rickshaw*—these works by an obscure Anglo-Indian journalist, a provincial from a remote corner of the Empire, took the London literary world by storm and disturbed conventional ideas about society. Kipling was a sensation, sought after by publishers, editors, readers. A find: his name in lights, the artist of the season.

Kipling and Conrad both cultivated an exotic air. Conrad used the pen name Kamudi (a Malay word meaning rudder) when he submitted the manuscript of his first novel to his publisher, and Kipling wrote early stories under the pen name Yussuf. Kipling and Conrad both felt that they were bizarre figures, that they were innovators. They made a romantic

identification with the East. In their rebellion they turned away from English fiction to American and Russian literature, and often to the other arts. In Russian and American literature these modern British writers found the extremes which were missing from Victorian fiction. In painting, sculpture and opera they touched on artistic forms which liberated them from the old structures of the novel. "I am *modern*," Conrad wrote, disdaining any comparison between his work and Thackeray's, Walter Scott's, and George Eliot's. "I would rather recall Wagner the musician and Rodin the sculptor, who both had to starve a little in their day—and Whistler the painter, who made Ruskin the critic foam at the mouth with scorn and indignation." Like Lawrence, who in his last years spoke of the novel as a bomb, Conrad noted that "an explosion is the most lasting thing in the universe. It leaves disorder, remembrance, room to move, a clear space"; and he claimed that his works "exploded like stored powder barrels." He cleared a space in English literature, blasting away Thackeray and George Eliot, with the help of the saboteurs James Fenimore Cooper, Flaubert, Maupassant and Dostoevsky.

The image that came to his mind when he summed up his view of the Victorian novel sprang from his experiences in the colonial world. "The national English novelist," Conrad wrote, "does not go about building up his book with a precise intention and a steady mind. It never occurs to him that a book is a deed, that the writing of it is an enterprise as much as the conquest of a colony." Writing as defined in his dictionary means colonizing, appropriating space, taming a wilderness of words, building a society. More important than the conquest-of-a-colony metaphor is the "Author's Note" (1895) to his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*. This preface is a revolutionary literary manifesto. It was intended to clear the ground for the new literature about the colonial world. Look out, London, something radically different is on its way, Conrad says. The critics rejected the "literature which preys on strange people and prowls in far-off countries," but that literature was valid, Conrad claimed, because "the picture of life, there as here, is drawn . . . with the same tints . . . There is a bond," he concludes, "between us and that humanity so far away."

When Kipling wrote about India and reached a perilous crossing, he turned to French and American writers for aid. In Mark Twain he found a novelist who had wrestled with the problems which nagged him. In Zola he discovered how "low life," as he called it, how subjects normally excluded from polite English fiction, could be presented in fiction. The foreign observer could understand India, he suggested, not by going to

English fiction, but by reading the “more Zolaistic of Zola’s novels.” Kipling, with his knowing swagger, struck James as a French rather than an English type, and on the basis of his early work James felt that he “contained the seeds of an English Balzac.” When James looked for the contemporary writer who had affinities with Conrad, he alighted, though mistakenly, on Pierre Loti. Conrad’s gestures to the exotic East are his most superficial. Unlike Loti, he felt that the Third World was the home of all humanity. When the tradition of the English novel caved in, other traditions were useful. An international network of literary relations came into being. Writers became world citizens.

In kicking out the old and introducing the new, Kipling and Conrad often misread English fiction and the nature of their own art. But they recognized that the English novel had neglected the colonial world, that in order to conquer an English reading public skeptical of their alien vision new techniques had to be mustered. “I hope to bring the three men,” Kipling wrote in 1888 of his colonial heroes in *Soldiers Three*, “to the notice of the Englishman. But there is no light in this place, and the people are savages living in black houses and ignorant of everything beyond the Channel.” With an air of superiority Kipling affirmed that he—an Anglo-Indian and an imperial spokesman—saw a more significant world than did the domestic variety of Englishman. He felt the presence of the colonial empire everywhere and all the time. Kipling noted that for the novelist as well as for the painter—and he frequently made analogies between words and the pigments on a painter’s palette—England was a dark place. The English were unenlightened about the empire, and also, literally—since there was little light in England—the English writer necessarily saw things differently from the colonial writer living under the glare of the bright tropical sun. The sense of the contrast between England and India, the metropolitan center and the frontier, is implicit in nearly everything he wrote. It allows him here to speak of the English as savages, to reverse the normal assumptions about civilization and savagery, sophistication and naïveté. He was dissatisfied with the sense of place in traditional English fiction. He wanted to expand it, to introduce new colors and shapes, to cast a different imaginative light on the material world. In place of gray and tan he wanted violet, aquamarine, scarlet, blazing white, and harshest black. “Surely there must be things in this world paintable other and beyond the North Cape . . . and Algiers,” he observed. “For the sake of the picture,” he proposed, it was important “to venture out a little beyond the regular circle of subjects.” He and Conrad thought of them-

selves as explorers venturing out beyond the regular settlements into new fields and forests.

They wrote most of their major works during the same period. Their careers were long: Conrad's lasted from 1895 to 1924, Kipling's from 1884 to 1936. But their most profound and original works—*Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, *Kim*, *The Just So Stories*—were written between 1899 and 1904. Their other major works, *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), are outside these limits, but *Plain Tales* is the seed which yielded *Kim*, and *Under Western Eyes* is the last flowering of the imagination which created *Nostromo*. These were times of social upheaval and intellectual ferment. Their work takes us to the midst of the crisis; it indicates the cultural and social antagonisms of the period. The differences between Kipling and Conrad are a reflection of the contradictions within the society as a whole.

The period 1898 to 1905 was defined by the Spanish-American War, the Boer War, the Russo-Japanese War, the first Russian revolution, the Dreyfus affair, the death of Queen Victoria, and the assassination of President McKinley. Those seven years saw the publication of J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism*, Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Birth of Capitalism*, Freud's *Traumdeutung*, Einstein's basic theories, James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Moore's *Principia Ethica*, the creation of the new journalism and changes in technology and communications.

Conrad and Kipling are fundamentally dissimilar. In their work opposing ideas find expression. Kipling writes of contrasts and compromises, Conrad writes of crisis and contradiction. Conrad defined himself as a historian and a magician, writing from the conflicts within himself. Kipling saw himself a tribal bard, a mastersinger. Kipling ventures out into the world. Conrad extracts the world from the depths inside. Kipling wanted literature to incite men to action, to participate in Empire. More than any other English writer in the last one hundred and fifty years he changed British society's image of itself. Conrad asked of the novel that it produce a moral discovery. Kipling offered detail, catalogs, surfaces. Conrad sought the pattern, the hidden, the essential. Kipling was an imperialist. Conrad was an anti-imperialist.

To critics and readers in the late 1890s, Kipling and Conrad seemed to be engaged in similar work. Arthur Symons reviewed *Captains Courageous* and *The Nigger of the Narcissus* together; the review was severely critical and Conrad recoiled in anger. Symons, Conrad wrote, "went out of his way to damn Kipling and me He says that *Captains*

Courageous and *The Nigger* have no idea behind them.” The fact that they wrote about sailors and soldiers and that they told exciting tales led readers to assume that they had common pursuits. Conrad was widely called the “Kipling of the Seas.” This distorted view is still often expressed. John Bayley distinguishes them from E. M. Forster and notes that they were the “last great representatives of the literature of achievement. They celebrated activity.” But it is much closer to the truth to say that Kipling thought in terms of action while Conrad thought of creation.

Conrad, like most of the English reading public in the late 1890s, read widely in Kipling’s work. In 1897 he wrote to his friend R. B. Cunningham Graham, the wealthy socialist, “Mr. Kipling has the wisdom of the passing generations—and holds it in perfect sincerity. Some of his work is of impeccable form and because of that little thing he shall sojourn in Hell only a very short while. . . . In the chaos of printed matter, Kipling’s *ébauches* appear by contrast finished and impeccable.” The next year, 1898, he told a Polish cousin, “Among the people who deserve attention the first is Rudyard Kipling (his last book *The Day’s Work*).”

But Conrad was also aware of his differences with Kipling. He told Edward Garnett that his integrity had been compromised by writing for *The Outlook*, a popular magazine edited by Kipling’s friend W. E. Henley. “Words. Words. Words,” Conrad exclaimed. “Apparently that is what they want. They asked for more. Today I’ve sent a silly thing about Kipling. It took me one and a half days to write 1,500 words.” Conrad sent the piece about Kipling to *The Outlook* (it was never published), but he did not like the magazine or its editor. He noted that the policy of the magazine was “imperialism, tempered by expediency,” and that Henley was “a horrible bourgeois.” As Kipling’s popularity waned and as his attention turned from India to England, from man to animal and then to machine, Conrad became more critical of his work. He told his French translator H. D. Davray in 1908:

I am a thoroughly English writer, extremely difficult to translate into another language. A national writer like Kipling is easy to translate. People read him for his subject matter, people read me for the effect my work produces. Kipling speaks of his countrymen. I write for them. Foreigners are very much interested in his work. It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, for them to be interested in my work.

Earlier, Conrad had been influenced by Kipling’s work. His subject is occasionally also Kipling’s, especially in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. As the

tale begins, the white crew assembles; they talk in “masterful tones” while the Asians clamor and babble in feverish Eastern tongues. As the Asians rage and shriek for a few more rupees the white sailors admire the “resplendent and bestarred peace of the East.” Kipling would have been sympathetic to Conrad’s attack on working-class agitators, on West Indian Blacks, and his eulogy of England. Conrad’s concluding description of England is as patriotic and sentimental as anything Kipling ever wrote.

In times of crisis they defended Britain, but politically their positions were antagonistic. In 1898 and 1899 Conrad opposed the wars in South Africa, Cuba, and the Philippines, all of which Kipling supported. Kipling moved to South Africa, helped publish a military newspaper, met consistently with Cecil Rhodes and Jameson, and congratulated the United States on becoming an imperial power. For Conrad the Boer War was anguishing; he exploded with anger against Kipling and the English. “If I am to believe Kipling,” he wrote, “this is a war undertaken for the cause of democracy. *C’est à crever de rire.*” The war, as he saw it, was idiotic. Kipling pumped out story after story, poem after poem, about the war. Conrad noted that “all that’s art, thought, idea will have to step back and hide its head before the intolerable war inanities.” While he knew that the war was not being fought for democracy but for wealth and power and that English victory would bring “ruthless repression,” he hoped that British success would “be crushing from the first—on the same principle that if there’s murder being done in the next room and you can’t stop it, you wish the head of the victim bashed in forthwith and the whole thing over for the sake of your own feelings.” He opposed the war but did not participate in any anti-imperialist movements.

Kipling celebrated the white man’s burden. Conrad deflated it. During World War I Conrad described Germany as that “promised land of steel, of chemical dyes, of method, of efficiency,” and he called the Germans “that race planted in the middle of Europe, assuming in grotesque vanity the attitude of Europeans amongst effete Asiatics or barbarous niggers; and with a consciousness of superiority freeing their hands from all moral bonds, anxious to take up . . . the ‘perfect man’s burden.’” Kipling was enthusiastic about efficiency, industrial production, the machine. Conrad was sickened by the financial and industrial power which had precipitated the crisis and the technological advances which had brought death to the battlefields.

Kipling had an official role as defender of the Empire. In 1915, when James, in the midst of the imperial holocaust, became a citizen of the

empire, Kipling wrote to tell him that his act was of the utmost significance for the British Empire and for all the civilized world. At long last, Kipling sighed, James had won his deepest admiration, not for his literary work, but because James had taken a stand against barbarism. It was a day Kipling would remember proudly for the rest of his life. Conrad was not the establishment spokesman. He loved England, but he was not at the dock to welcome American or French exiles to the English shore.

III. T. S. ELIOT

T. S. Eliot was the first critic to corral Conrad and Kipling. He branded them both as no other critic has yet done, for he saw their importance in British culture. In his essay "Kipling Redivivus" (1919) Eliot noted that Conrad is:

. . . the antithesis of Kipling. He is, for one thing, the antithesis of Empire, (as well as democracy); his characters are the denial of Empire, of Nation, of Race almost, they are fearfully alone with the Wilderness.

He saw Kipling and Conrad as antagonists springing from hostile camps: one affirming order, empire, race, the other negating order, empire, race. Eliot's perspective on Kipling and Conrad is part of his larger concern with imperialism, with the British Empire. Eliot defended the British Empire. Out of one side of his mouth he attacked imperialism, but with the other side he talked up the Empire. Eliot had the prime handicap of modern British writers. He saw no pattern in history, only chaos in the breakup of the imperial order and the development of the forces of revolution. He turned to the British Empire and the Catholic Church to conserve the old order. He looked to myth to contain the forces of change. He ran from communism and the future and hid in the ancient house of imperialism.

"I am all for empires," Eliot told Ford Madox Ford in 1924, "especially the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and I deplore the outburst of artificial nationalities, constituted like artificial genealogies for millionaires all over the world . . . let us not have an indiscriminate mongrel mixture of socialist internationals or of capitalist cosmopolitans, but a harmony of different functions." The idea of different races and cultures preserving their ancient languages and customs and united under a common aegis—the

British Empire—seized his imagination. Like Kipling, he was dizzy with the thought that Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, Australians, South Africans and Canadians all pledged allegiance to Britain. Eliot exposed “the exploitation of the earth . . . for commercial profit,” but he did not connect it with capitalism or colonialism. He saw “dearth and desert” brought about by man’s profit motive, but he did not favor a socialist revolution which would transform economic relationships. Communism seemed to Eliot “merely an attempt to catch up with Western Capitalism, and to imitate some of . . . its most objectionable habits.” His insistence on the necessity of empire sprang from his feeling that revolution was imminent. This feeling pervades *The Waste Land* and it is especially pronounced here:

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

“The most important event of the War,” Eliot wrote, “was the Russian Revolution. For the Russian Revolution has made men conscious of the position of Western Europe as . . . a small and isolated cape on the western side of the Asiatic continent.” He saw Europe at the edge of a precipice, on the verge of falling off into outer space. Eliot wanted a European empire to hold off the Bolsheviks, to convene a new congress of Europe, to forge a holy alliance of reaction. In the age of revolution Britain had a special part to play, for she was “the only member of the European community that has established a genuine empire . . . a world-wide empire as was the Roman Empire.” In response to economic imperialism Eliot wanted a Christian imperium. He wanted a European culture in the twentieth century which would continue Roman and medieval culture. It was his dream to resurrect the Roman and the Holy Roman Empires in a modern shape. Tradition was his prime value, for it emphasized conser-

vatism, continuities, and sought to smother upheavals, innovations, revolutions. It was through a European culture that Eliot wanted to create a European empire. He created an imperium of writers, an aristocracy of artists. Dante spoke to Shakespeare, Virgil chatted with Goethe, Milton talked with Aeschylus. Virgil stands at the head of Eliot's imperium of artists; he is the link between the ancient and the modern world. "Destiny" for Virgil, Eliot writes, "means the *imperium romanum* He set an ideal for Rome and for empire in general, which was never realized in history." Eliot goes on to say that "We are all, so far as we inherit the civilization of Europe, still citizens of the Roman Empire." Reverence for the past is what he preaches. Eliot distinguishes between Virgil's *Aeneid* and the actualities of Roman history:

The Roman Empire which Virgil imagined . . . was not exactly the same as the Roman Empire of the legionaries, the pro-consuls and governors, the business men and speculators, the demagogues and generals. It was something greater, but something which exists because Virgil imagined it. It remains an ideal.

So, too, in his own day Eliot created a British Empire that was an ideal. His imaginary empire had nothing to do with soldiers, diplomats, financiers. It was a never-never land. By creating it, Eliot obscured the realities of exploitation and oppression. He led men on a false pilgrimage toward the imperial chalice.

For Eliot the most important modern writer was Rudyard Kipling. Eliot wrote three essays on Kipling. Kipling is as important a figure as Milton or Shakespeare in Eliot's literary cosmography. He invested everything he had in Kipling's stock, for Kipling extends the imperial tradition. He is Virgil's successor. Eliot's attitude toward Kipling changed several times between 1919, the date of the first essay, and 1958, the date of his last essay on Kipling. As he got older, Kipling loomed larger and larger on the horizon, but the figure on the horizon resembled less and less the flesh-and-blood Rudyard Kipling.

In 1941 Eliot argued that Kipling's vision is:

. . . of the people of the soil. It is not a Christian vision, but it is at least a pagan vision—a contradiction of the materialistic view: it is the insight into a harmony with nature which must be re-established if the truly Christian imagination is to be recovered by Christians. What he is trying to convey is . . . a point of view unintelligible to the industrialized mind.

For these same reasons Eliot had praised Virgil. He was aware of the predicament his admiration for Kipling got him into. Eliot knew that Kipling's critics argued that since the architect of the white man's burden "dwelt upon the glory of empire . . . he helped to conceal its more seamy side: the commercialism, exploitation and neglect." But Eliot's response is that "no attentive reader of Kipling can maintain that he was unaware of the faults of British rule: it is simply that he believed the British Empire to be a good thing." And Eliot, too, condemns the exploitation of the earth but believes that the British Empire is a virtuous institution. He proclaims his hostility toward industrial and commercial society, but he praises Kipling, the chief celebrant of the machine and the industrial state. Eliot also supported the British Empire, knowing its exploitation and commercialism. Below his appeal to Christianity, order, harmony, tradition, is his objective stance—side by side with the masters of empire against the colonized peoples of the earth.

His emphasis on the imperial tradition in literature is in keeping with his preoccupation with the British Empire, his belief in continuities and harmonies. Luckily, no one took Kipling for the great artist Eliot did. Near the end of his life he was a rabid Kipling fan. In 1958 he noted that his and Kipling's "feeling about England springs from causes not wholly dissimilar." Kipling had praised James for becoming a citizen of the empire. Now Eliot joined the imperial order. He became a British subject, and he paid his tribute to the foremost imperialist-artist. He declared that Kipling was the "greatest English man of letters of his generation."

As Kipling loomed larger and larger on the horizon for Eliot, Conrad receded further and further into the background. As is well known, earlier and in his most creative period he had taken *Heart of Darkness* as a holy text. Kurtz's cry, "the horror, the horror," was to have been the epigraph to *The Waste Land*. "Mistah Kurtz—he dead" is, of course, the epigraph to "The Hollow Men." This is the Eliot who distorted Conrad's vision of horror, but who recognized Conrad's revulsion from European civilization. Eliot assumed then that Conrad was the finer of the two artists. In 1924, the year of Conrad's death, Eliot wrote in *The Criterion* that Conrad "was beyond question a great novelist," that his "reputation is as secure as that of any writer of his time." As the years went by Eliot said less and less about Conrad and instead crusaded for Kipling. His hatred for the English revolution and civil war of the seventeenth century governed both his dislike of Milton and his love for the metaphysical poets. His commitment to the British Empire determined his love of

Kipling. In celebrating Kipling and neglecting Conrad, Eliot buried the realities of imperialism and accepted the falsehood of empire.

We need to return to Eliot's idea that Conrad and Kipling are antagonists. We need to explore the remark in *The Sacred Wood* (1920):

It would be of interest to divagate from literature to politics and inquire to what extent Romanticism is incorporate in Imperialism; to inquire to what extent Romanticism has possessed the imagination of Imperialists.

To do that would also define much of Eliot's own work.

We need to examine the culture of imperialism; we need an aesthetics which allows for change, crisis and chaos, for imperialist criticism shuns dialectical contradiction and struggle. The best place to begin is D. H. Lawrence's essay "Chaos in Poetry." "Man cannot live in chaos," Lawrence writes. In "his terror of chaos he begins by putting up an umbrella between himself and the everlasting whirl. Then he paints the underside of his umbrella like a firmament. Then he parades around, lives and dies under his umbrella." The great writers tear the umbrella; they let chaos in, but men patch it up. "Chaos is all shut out." But "chaos is always there," Lawrence concludes, "and always will be, no matter how we put up umbrellas of vision." Eliot's concern with tradition and order needs to be replaced by Lawrence's sense of chaos. We need to see the contradictions between the ideal imperium and the actualities of imperialism. We need to get away from the ideal imperium of order to the actual imperialism of crisis and change. We need to celebrate the modern writers who were nourished on conflict. The modern titans let chaos in: they brought a new universe under the umbrella. By exploring this world of imperialism, they expanded the possibilities for man. They saw that men live in isolation in society, that men live through crisis as well as stability. They stand to testify that art and culture are bathed in the chaos of war and revolution.

Kipling and Conrad are antagonists. Their work reveals the broad and deep tensions within the culture of British imperialism. They indicate the conflicting attitudes about race, industrial and commercial society, technology, communications, England. Both were dedicated to the British Empire, but Conrad saw beyond its limits to imperialism, exploitation, racism. Kipling moved with and reflected the dominant social and intellectual currents of his time. He was a spokesman for the empire. He accepted the values and limitations imposed upon him by the establish-

ment. Conrad saw society in conflict. He thought of strife and violence. He thrived on contradictions. Kipling wanted order and a hierarchical society which negated conflicts. These two men indicate how profoundly British culture changed in the age of imperialism, in particular how British fiction took on the extremes of experience, explored a vast and chaotic world and diverged from the Victorian novel. They both saw the extremes, the contrasts, but Conrad immersed himself in them, squeezing his art from the clash of opposites. Kipling retreated from the extremes, from the conflicts. He ensured that they were frozen, separated, that they would never rebound against one another. But together they brought about a literary revolution that altered the course of modern literature. Eliot, Lawrence, Forster, Cary, and Orwell have had to respond, to recast their world. Kipling accepted and dominated his culture. The British lived the myth of the white man's burden. Conrad fought against his society. He is most representative of his time because he stands in sharpest opposition to it. He reminds us that the great modern writer is a rebel and a craftsman, that he is both a nihilist and a utopian. He destroys old worlds and builds new ones from the rubble about him.