

Stories of the English Empire

In 1851 the Great Exhibition marked the triumph of English economy and the high point of British imperialism. Colonialism had started with the first geographical discoveries and the journeys of exploration, but during the nineteenth century Britain consolidated its existing empire, and further expanded her dominions: by the end of the century Britain could proudly proclaim that "the sun never sets on the British Empire." Consequently, in the second half of the century the imperial activity had a great impact on the cultural life of the country. Literature in particular became strictly involved in the imperialist project and the colonial ideology, informed the collective unconscious of the British public during the entire period. Some novels were set in distant lands where writers like Rudyard Kipling – author of *The Jungle Books* and *Kim* - were born. The exotic atmosphere affected British readers which soon got attracted by the narratives of adventure of romance novels like Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and R. M. Ballantyne's *Coral Island* focus around. But already in the 18th century the novels about journeys' like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Tobias Smollet's *Roderick Random* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* focus around discoveries and new settlement where the British crown could expand her power. And in the first decades of the 19th century Charles Dickens, William M. Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte mention these new realities. Dickens's description of Coketown in *Hard Times* shows the author's attraction for the new environment: the colourful waters of the rivers are compared with the colours of a savage, the pistons of chimneys with the head of elephants and the smoke coming out is seen like uncoiled serpents. In *David Copperfield* Mr. Micawber achieves success in Australia. Thackeray deals with people who go to India to trade and make their fortune and C. Bronte in *Jane Eyre* introduces the character of Bertha, Mr. Rochester's first wife, who comes from the Caribbean Island and St. John Rivers leaves for India to fulfill his missionary aspirations. The same Jane Austen who appears so far from the commercial routes of the British novelists reveals that Sir Thomas Bertram's estate in *Mansfield Park* is maintained by his possessions in Antigua. Colonialism supplied new routes for British author's imagination and a new expansion for the domestic novels, revealing the strong involvement of British society in the colonial enterprise.

The English in South Asia

The first British settlement in South Asia was established in 1619 at Surat on the north-western coast. Later in the century, the East India Company opened permanent trading stations at Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, each under the protection of native rulers .

The British expanded their influence and, by the 1850s, they controlled most of present-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In 1857, a rebellion in northern India, led by mutinous Indian soldiers, caused the British Parliament to transfer all political power from the East India Company to the Crown. Great Britain began administering most of India directly, while controlling the rest through treaties with local rulers. In the late 1800s, the Indians started a fight for their independence. At first Britain recognized provincial councils with Indian members; subsequently it widened Indian participation in legislative councils.

At the beginning of 1920, Indian leader Mohandas K. Gandhi transformed the Indian National Congress political party into a mass movement against British colonial rule. The party used both parliamentary and non-violent resistance to achieve independence. On August 15, 1947 India became a dominion within the Commonwealth, with Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister. Enmity between Hindus and Muslims led the British to divide British India, into East and West Pakistan, where there were Muslim majorities. India became a republic within the Commonwealth after promulgating its Constitution on January 26, 1950. India, called the jewel of the British Empire, has always impressed vividly in the imagination and writings of the British: from Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* at the beginning of the 1800 to the novels of R. Kipling, E. M. Forster, and G. Orwell. Yet Indian literature and English also called "Indo-Anglian Literature" only began to get international recognition in the last two decades of the 20th century. Though English language is seen as inauthentic, a reminder of British imperial domination, it has become an Indian language in its own right with a particular verve and linguistic inventiveness.

Expeditions to Egypt

The novel *The Four Feathers* (1902) by A.E.W. Mason is about a British officer, Harry Feversham, who resigns from the regiment when it is going to Sir Garnet Wolseley's 1882 expedition to Egypt to suppress the rising Pasha. Considered a coward by his comrades he is delivered three white feathers signs of despise. Also his fiancée, Ethne Eustace, presents him with the fourth feather and his best friend in the regiment, Captain Durrance becomes his rival for Ethne. When Harry hears about the first dramatic reports of the British battles, he decides to help his friends. He leaves for Egypt and Sudan, where in 1882 Muhammad Ahmed has proclaimed himself the Mahdi (the elected) and has started a Holy War. He is saved by a Sudanese Arab, Abou Fatma, and makes his best to help his friend Durrance, blinded by the blow of a gun. The other friend, Castleton was killed and Trench is kept as a prisoner. Harry succeed in rescuing Trench.

Back to England he goes to see Ethne for one last time as she has promised herself to Col. Durrance. But Durrance goes to Germany to seek cure for his blindness and leaves Ethne free to marry Harry. Many film adaptations have been inspired by the novel. Among the most famous are the films *The Four Feathers* of 1939 by Zoltan Korda, *Storm over the Nile* by Terence Young and Zoltan Korda, Two more recent adaptations with the same title, *The Four Feathers* were shot in 1977 by Don Sharp and in 2002 by Shekhar Kapur

Famous figures

Florence Nightingale (1820 –1910) was an English nurse that became famous for her work during the Crimean War (1853–1856) – a war fought mainly on the Crimean Peninsula between the Russians and the British, French, Ottoman Turkish, and the army of Sardinia-Piedmont to prevent Russia from exercising protection over the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman sultan. Nightingale reported about the horrific conditions for the wounded during this conflict. On 21 October 1854, she and the staff of 38 women volunteer nurses that she trained, were sent to the Crimea camps. where the British soldiers based. Nightingale witnessed that soldiers were not cured

because of the overwork of doctors in camps. The situation she found was serious: lack of medicine, lack of hygienic, no equipment to process food for the patients and mass infections. She sent a request to The Times for a government solution and the British Government commissioned Isambard Kingdom Brunel to design prefabricated. It had to be built in England and then shipped to the Dardanelles. The result was Renkioi Hospital. The rate of death was reduced from 42% to 2%. Yet illnesses such as typhus, typhoid, cholera and dysentery killed many soldiers due to poor nutrition, lack of supplies and overworking. Nightingale showed before the Royal Commission on the Health of the Army, that most of the soldiers at the hospital were killed by poor living conditions and the last part of her career was turned to the sanitary design of hospitals. She was called "The Lady with the Lamp" as she, at night, visited wounded soldiers who needed help. Nightingale laid the foundation of professional nursing with her nursing school at St Thomas' Hospital in London (1860), the first secular nursing school in the world, now part of King's College London

Conquest of South Africa.

In 1874, Sir Henry Bartle Frere was sent to South Africa as High Commissioner for the British Empire to conquer the land. The main obstacles were the presence of the independent states of the South African Republic and the Kingdom of Zululand and its army. The Commissioner presented an impossible ultimatum on 11 December 1878, to the Zulu king Cetshwayo with which the Zulu king could not conform. The war started and was notable for several particularly bloody battles, and some terrible British defeats namely at Isandlwana and at Rorke's Drift. However the war eventually resulted in a British victory and the end of the Zulu nation's independence (1879). The film Zulu (1964) tells about the defeat at Rorke's Drift (1879), after the Battle of Isandlwana. Rorke's Drift was a missionary station which a company of the British Army, a Welsh regiment, used as a supply storehouse and hospital for their invasion force across the border in Zululand. They received news that an army of 4000 Zulu Warriors were advancing their way, and they knew that they could not outrun the Zulu army, so decided to fortify the station and made a barricade. When the soldiers saw the Zulu approaching, they started understanding their situation, but still resisted. Wave after wave of Zulu attackers were kept away, but the Zulu set fire to the hospital and went on attacking during the night. The following day the Zulu overcame the exhausted British forces . Zulu was directed by Cy Endfield; Zulu Dawn, its prequel shot in 1979 about the historical Battle of Isandlwana was directed by Douglas Hickox with the screenplay was by Cy Endfield.