

Storie inglesi di terre lontane

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 (ulteriormente) expanded her dominions: by the end of the century Britain could proudly (orgogliosamente) proclaim that "the sun never sets (tramonta) 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 (educò) 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 (pistoni delle ciminiere) with the head of elephants and the smoke coming out is seen like uncoiled serpents (serpenti che si srotolano). In *David Copperfield* Mr. Micawber achieves (raggiunge) success in Australia. Thackeray deals with (tratta) 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 fulfil 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 (possedimento terriero, proprietà) 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 (coinvolgimento) of British society in the colonial enterprise.

The first British settlement (avamposto) 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 (governatori locali).

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 (trattati) with local rulers.

In the late 1800s, the Indians started a fight for their independence. At first Britain recognised provincial councils with Indian members; subsequently it widened (ampliò) 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 (raggiungere) independence. On August 15, 1947 India became a dominion within the Commonwealth, with Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister. Enmity (inamicizia) between Hindus and Muslims (Mussulmani) led (portò) 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 (ottenere un riconoscimento internazionale) 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.