



Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914

By Patrick Brantlinger

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Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914 By Patrick Brantlinger

A major contribution to the cultural and literary history of the Victorian age, *Rule of Darkness* maps the complex relationship between Victorian literary forms, genres, and theories and imperialist, racist ideology. Critics and cultural historians have usually regarded the Empire as being of marginal importance to early and mid-Victorian writers. Patrick Brantlinger asserts that the Empire was central to British culture as a source of ideological and artistic energy, both supported by and lending support to widespread belief in racial superiority, the need to transform "savagery" into "civilization," and the urgency of promoting emigration.

Rule of Darkness brings together material from public records, memoirs, popular culture, and canonical literature. Brantlinger explores the influence of the novels of Captain Frederick Marryat, pioneer of British adolescent adventure fiction, and shows the importance of William Makepeace Thackeray's experience of India to his novels. He treats a number of Victorian best sellers previously ignored by literary historians, including the Anglo-Indian writer Philip Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* and *Seeta*. Brantlinger situates explorers' narratives and travelogues by such famous author-adventurers as David Livingstone and Sir Richard Burton in relation to other forms of Victorian and Edwardian prose. Through readings of works by Arthur Conan Doyle, Joseph Conrad, H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, John Hobson, and many others, he considers representations of Africa, India, and other non-British parts of the world in both fiction and nonfiction.

The most comprehensive study yet of literature and imperialism in the early and mid-Victorian years, *Rule of Darkness* offers, in addition, a revisionary interpretation of imperialism as a significant factor in later British cultural history, from the 1880s to World War I. It is essential reading for anyone concerned with Victorian culture and society and, more generally, with the relationship between Victorian writers and imperialism, and between racist ideology and patterns of domination in modern history.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Rule of Darkness a title with a point of view explores imperialist ideology in 19th-century England from 1830 onward. Brantlinger draws on a wide range of materials to make his case: the boys' adventure novels of Captain Marryat, the fiction of Thackeray and Disraeli, personal narratives by explorers. The book concludes with a revisionist reading of Heart of Darkness. Brantlinger's argument is imposing and well documented, but this book has an ax to grind. Furthermore, the pattern of imperialistic thinking Brantlinger discerns in Victorian literature and culture is hardly astonishing. The author generally suppresses his judgmental attitude, but it lurks close enough to the surface to make Rule of Darkness somewhat tiresome. Keith Cushman, Univ. of North Carolina, Greensboro
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Review

"An outstanding analysis of imperialism in 19th-century British literature. . . . Brantlinger deploys a real wealth of material, providing fresh insights at every turn." *Times Higher Education Supplement*

"The path-breaking work Brantlinger has done opens up the terrain of Victorian culture in refreshing and remarkable ways. His analysis of the imperialist impulse in many heretofore isolated phases of Victorian culture is both inspiring and dependable, a rare combination. *Rule of Darkness* will undoubtedly be complemented and extended by the work of others in the near future, but it is hard to see how it could be surpassed." *Novel*

"This learned and incisive study shows how deeply imperialist assumptions pervade Victorian narratives from the adventure yarn through the realist novel and the 'Imperial Gothic' of fantasy fiction. Brantlinger both colonizes a range of noncanonical texts and explores the imperialist darkness at the heart of such standard authors as Macaulay and Thackeray, Kipling and Conrad. . . . His mapping of overgrown paths between Victorian liberalism and imperialism, abolitionism and racism, are invaluable guides to the imaginative politics of the last century." *Virginia Quarterly Review*

"*Rule of Darkness* is a significant contribution to studies seeking to reveal how the English in the nineteenth century created demeaning and often destructive images of Africa and the East, images that continue to haunt twentieth-century writing, films, and attitudes." *Conradiana*

"An unusually full treatment of the imperialist idea as that idea developed and altered during seven decades of the nineteenth century. Patrick Brantlinger gives us a fresh and valuable discussion of the novels of Marryat, approaches Thackeray from an unusual angle, and demonstrates how crucial to the justification of the colonialist project were such matters as the Indian Mutiny and the emergence of Africa as a metaphor for savagery and darkness."?Elliot L. Gilbert, University of California, Davis

About the Author

Patrick Brantlinger is James Rudy Professor of English (Emeritus) at Indiana University. He is the author of many books, including *Dark Vanishings*, *Fictions of State*, *Rule of Darkness*, and *Bread and Circuses*, all from Cornell.

Users Review

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