CHAPTER SIX

In darkest England

As we have seen, in the first half of the nineteenth century social reformist and evangelical journalists, laying distinct claim to have access to the metropolitan poor, abandoned iconographies of the criminal, bizarre and grotesque, to develop perspectives deeply embedded in theorizations of the innate superiority of the Anglo-Saxon subject over both poor and colonial others. These urban travellers, however, rarely used racial theory with rigour and coherence. The pioneering Henry Mayhew borrowed freely from contemporary racial theory in writing the interpretative preface to his London Labour and the London Poor, but any putative logic was undermined by the plurality of empirical material on the experience of the poor recorded in the corpus of the work. Nonetheless, the tradition of urban exploration that followed displayed an increasingly intensified concern with race. Around 1860, as fears of social disorder and imperial decline gripped the bourgeois imagination, writings of journalists such as James Greenwood took a sinister turn, manifest particularly in their use of symbolic repertoires of dirt and degeneration.

The trope of racialization locates shifts in the construction of the poor within the imperial formation, and provides a more satisfactory explanation of their chronology and nature than those focusing exclusively on domestic politics and social policy. In the following I wish to explore the workings of this symbolic process. To understand the active construction of racial identities in this period, we need to go beyond the convention of identifying characteristics of racial stereotyping, to an investigation of the subtle and powerful mechanisms through which they were created. From there I proceed to consider how modernist impulses transformed the discursive realm of the poor. Toward the end of the century anonymous crowds from an unknown abyss surfaced upon the urban landscape; race, however, remained the principal referent.
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The meaning of dirt

Dirt featured prominently in the imaginative universe constructed around the nineteenth-century metropolitan and colonial poor. Consider, for example, the Rev. Garratt, who in 1852 lectured to the London City Mission on the problem of the London Irish. While displaying admirable qualities of ‘intellectual acuteness and imaginative glow’, he claimed, the London Irish were ‘idle and dirty’, and ‘without that honourable independence of mind which is so valuable a feature of the English character’.¹ John Hollingshead, a staff member of Dickens’s Household Words, in a sociological flourish anticipating William Beveridge by nearly a hundred years, talked of the poor as a population marked by the ‘five great divisions ... of poverty, ignorance, dirt, immorality and crime’.² And James Greenwood referred to ‘creatures that you know to be female by the length and raggedness of hair that makes their heads hideous, and by their high pitched voices, with bare red arms and their bodies bundled in a complication of dirty rags’.³ This physicality was linked increasingly to urban topography. Watts Phillips’s ‘Wild tribes of London’ crouched in ‘darkness, dirt, and disease’;⁴ Hollingshead’s ‘Ragged London’ were ‘half buried in black kitchens and sewer-like courts and alleys’.⁵ In 1863, W. Cosens, Secretary of the Additional Curates Society, spelt out the necessary lessons:

The purity of the moral atmosphere in which we live exercises over us an influence as real as the purity of the physical atmosphere.... The parallel between the infection of disease and the infection of crime holds strictly; if we suffer pollution to remain unabashed in the hovel it will take its revenge on the palace.⁶

Most influential, however, was George Godwin, editor of The Builder – the most important architectural and building periodical of the time – who wrote prolifically on the relationship between living conditions and the social pathology of the poor. Although investigation was ‘a task of no small danger and difficulty; it is necessary to brave the risks of fever and other injuries to health, and the contact of men and women often as lawless as the Arab or the Kaffir’,⁷ he persevered, and in the 1850s published a series of articles, collected later in Town Swamps and Social Bridges.⁸ Guided by the maxim ‘As the homes, so the people’, he described vividly the housing environments suffered by the poor in ways that were to become very familiar. By a Thames tributary, for example:

Dwelling-houses are built on the sewer wall, and around it. The people living about here have, in most instances, sickly children, who in a measure resemble the poor plants observable in some of the windows about. Everything around is bad. The bank, when the tide goes out, is covered with filth; and when the number of the similar tributaries which flow to Father Thames, both night and day, is recollected, his state is not to be wondered at.⁹

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The ‘hybrid suburb’ of Canning Town, then in the initial stages of a tumultuous growth, was similarly depicted:

In 1857 an outbreak of cholera proved the truth of the prediction [of evils resulting from poisoned cesspools], and great efforts were made to obtain improvements in the drainage of the place... The President of the Board, the Right Hon. Mr. Cowper, went down immediately, and found houses without drainage, without ventilation, without water-supply, except of the worst description, ditches presenting an evaporating surface of the foulest kind, and the roads a mass of mud and filth, the whole being a marsh seven feet below high-water mark.10

In their notable The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have elaborated the cultural significance of a coding that separated the slum, the sewer, the poor and the prostitute from the suburb.11 This separation enabled the social reformer, as part of a process of validation of the bourgeois imaginary, to survey and classify its own antithesis.12 Dirt was crucial because while it moved readily across the symbolic domains, it was always matter in the wrong place. Furthermore, the physical filth of the poor and the colonized became a metonym for moral defilement and impurity. Thus ‘contagion’ and ‘contamination’ were the tropes through which the imperial formation appropriated the metropolis and the colonies, and expressed fears that dismantling of boundaries between suburb and slum, public and private would threaten class distinctions.13

These symbolic hierarchies, however, contained inherent contradictions. Filthy bodies and geographical spaces were held ambivalently between disgust and fascination, repugnance and desire in a way that suggested that the low was not a marginalized other but laid as an ‘eroticized constituent’ at the centre of the bourgeois imaginary. Prostitutes, rookeries, the body of the poor, the lascar and other sources of contagion in the Victorian metropolis attracted a degree of attention incommensurate with their ‘real’ presence, thereby revealing the symbolic centrality of the socially and economically peripheral. The preoccupation with social reform, slumming, visits from members of the Charity Organization Society, urban exploration and prostitution were therefore in part an encoding of fascination with the transgressive qualities of the dirty, low other.

Important though this analysis is to an understanding of how dirt moves freely around symbolic domains, in focusing on the consolidation of class-based hierarchies certain limitations are exposed. In the imperial formation the category of class was articulated with gender and race in ways that denied any essential privileging; class, gender and race existed only as relational categories in a state of ‘dynamic, shifting and intimate interdependence’.14 This imparts a new range of meanings to dirt, some of
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which have been explored by Anne McClintock in her Imperial Leather. Dirt, she argues, was used symbolically in Victorian culture to define and transgress social boundaries. The middle class, for example, had an obsession with dirt – evidenced nicely in the deification of soap – which was used imaginatively to define identity. Since dirt was visible evidence of manual labour it had to be eliminated from the body and clothes; if not then the symbolic encoding of class boundaries would have been under threat. Similar arguments obtained in the sphere of sexuality. In the course of the nineteenth century, therefore, the ‘iconography of dirt became a poetics of surveillance’ in policing the boundaries not only between ‘normal’ and ‘dirty’ work, but also between ‘normal’ and ‘dirty’ sexuality.

These arguments, however, do not capture fully the nuanced repertoire of dirt. The dirt of manual labour was not the dirt of the metropolitan poor. Despite their enforced remoteness from the bourgeois imaginary, a cultural void existed between the ‘honest’, ‘manufactured’ dirt of the artisan (grease, sweat, oil, dust and grime) and the ‘grotesque’, ‘faecal’ dirt of the poor (filth, sewage, swamp, slime and putrefaction). This distinction was of considerable significance in a number of interrelated ways:

1 The vocabulary was used in a highly selective way; the coding of manual dirt was rarely deployed in descriptions of the poor.
2 As the dirt of the poor became subject to surveillance, so it was mapped in distinctive ways. ‘Honest’ dirt was to be found on the hands and the brow; ‘grotesque’ dirt was located on the whole body of the poor, and within the body of the metropolis that they inhabited.
3 It is specifically the dirt of the poor that enters the bourgeois psyche as a repugnant low other.

These processes never operated independently. In the construction of symbolic hierarchies of the body, for example, they are all in evidence:

But whilst the ‘low’ of the bourgeois body becomes unmentionable, we hear an ever increasing garrulity about the city’s ‘low’ – the slum, the rag-picker, the prostitute, the sewer – the ‘dirt’ which is ‘down there’. In other words, the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city, and whilst the bodily low is ‘forgotten’, the city low becomes a site of obsessive preoccupation, a preoccupation which is itself intimately conceptualized in terms of discourses of the body.

A more significant omission in McClintock – given her focus on the invention of race in the imperial metropolis – is any recognition of the ways in which the iconography of dirt contributed to the racialization of the poor. Dirt was colour-coded, it was neither brown nor grey, but unambiguously black. This was no semantic or poetic device. This synonymic...
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association was part of a structuring process through which a complex chain of signification was established in a series of binary oppositions: dirt/filth – cleanliness; unwashed – washed; darkness/shadow – light; impure – pure; black – white; low – high. Until the 1850s much of this coding was muted; for most Victorians heretofore race described social rather than colour distinctions. Thus the poor lived in ‘miserable hovels, many of them underneath the ground, without glass windows, or indeed without windows of any kind – the only light and air being admitted through the horizontal door’. Phillips guided the reader through the courts of St Giles: ‘Let us cross the road, and pausing before that dark archway, that seems to have retreated from the ill-paved street, and slink, as it were, into the shadow of the wall, glance into the pandemonium which lies beyond.... Such courts are the headquarters of filth and fever.’

During the 1880s, however, the associations with ‘black’ became more direct. In the East End ‘the angular meanness of the buildings is veiled by the dusk, and there stretches on either hand a hummocked wilderness of mysterious murk.... In the by-streets the lamps are so few and dim the feeble flickering light they cast upon the house fronts is only less dark than the pitchy blackness that broods above the lonely-looking roofs.’ The Rev. Rice-Jones visited the vicinity of St Giles Mission House: ‘The walls are stained black with dirt; the passage and the stairs are thickly carpeted with dirt; and wherever you go, dirt reigns supreme’, while its inhabitants had ‘bare black feet, as black as the hands and face; shapeless boots, ungartered hose falling over the instep; brimless hats, low-looking eared caps drawn athwart the wickedest little faces possible to imagine’.

This black/white coding constituted a manichean allegory which became a critical trope in the imperial formation of the late nineteenth century. Stereotypical images based on physical characteristics, most notably skin colour, had existed ever since a black presence was known. But at determinate historical moments the coding took on particular forms. The wretched history of slavery provides abundant evidence of how virulent racial forms emerged as a means of validating the practice of enslavement, and were mobilized by pro-slave interests when they felt threatened by the impulses of abolition and slave revolt. And in India, the caste system – the internal boundaries of which were defined by precisely the same allegory articulated to notions of purity and cleanliness – was reconstructed and rigidified by imperial intervention after 1850 [see Chapter 7]. It was at this time that racial discourse, cultivated by scientific theory, shifted from the bestowal of arbitrary features to the systematic ascription of natural and essential signs. Faced with seemingly diverse, uncontrollable and unknowable low others, the imperial formation found in the allegory a versatile means of transforming physical difference into moral and cultural difference. The superiority of white over black [with all
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their respective chains of signification) was naturalized and thereby consolidated. Eventually, through improvised extensions, such allegorical forms dominated most spheres of the imperial formation, implicating sympathizers and critics alike.

Peculiar problems were created within the metropolis. Here the poor were for the most part white, that is, without the visual sign of otherness. The poor presented a radical disruption to order by forcing the conjunction of a culturally constituted whiteness with its own metaphors of difference; they could be embraced within a symbolic dualism and hence resolved only by being constructed as black. The Irish, as both colonial subjects and urban poor, were doubly problematic, and it comes as no surprise to find that the most strident racial coding was deployed on them. The examples previously cited testify to this. Better known are Carlyle’s epithet in Sartor Resartus of the Irish as ‘white negroes’, and Kingsley’s impressions on his tour of Ireland in 1860:

But I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don’t believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only many more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours.

Such sentiments were examples of a more general process through which the Irish were increasingly ‘simianized’. Between 1840 and 1890 visual representations of Irish physiognomy gradually changed; the early 1860s was a critical period, for it was then that the early emphasis on big-mouthed and prognathous faces was displaced by stereotypes with ape-like features. In the aftermath of the explosions at Clerkenwell and Manchester when Fenians had attempted to liberate some of their leaders from police custody, cartoonists in popular periodicals such as Punch, Judy and Puck drew upon the early Francophobic anthropomorphisms of Gillray and Cruikshank to invent the Irish ape. A second wave of simianization occurred during the 1880s following the Phoenix Park assassination, renewed land wars and the rise of Parnellite nationalism. Similarities between Tenniel’s famous 1882 cartoon of the Irish Frankenstein and his 1888 portrayal of the spectral Ripper were striking. Thus although simianization was evident in depictions of other subjects, the most virulent forms were retained for the Irish. Occasionally members of the English poor were endowed with ape-like features, but they were very much the exception. Even the brutal stereotypes of Africans at the time did not ‘come close in terms of monstrousness to the Irish and Irish American gorillas of the Fenian era’.
Dirt therefore was a versatile metaphor that helped give meaning to shifting and complex fields of racial hierarchies. It assumed a distinct significance in the 1860s when a peculiar conjunction of metropolitan and imperial crises forced a reconstitution of the racial order. The Indian revolt of 1857 and the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 shook seismically the foundations of the imperial formation by demonstrating unequivocally that colonial subjects were no longer prepared to tolerate imperial authority or, in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, the state of free wage labour, and that in mounting such challenges they revealed the dangers of an endemic savagery out of the control. Across the Atlantic the course of the American Civil War – closely watched in this country – placed in sharp relief a kaleidoscopic range of racial tensions. Meanwhile, the 1860s represented something of a watershed in metropolitan history. The collapse of traditional industry in East London cast tens of thousands of workers into the residuum, precipitating a series of bread riots, undermining the actuarial basis of poor relief, and threatening the moral virtue and economic rationality upon which liberal utopian visions of the future were based.

Degeneration and desire

It was at this moment that notions of degeneration assailed the discursive realm of the metropolitan poor. Expressing certain anxieties about the stability of the social order in the face of revolutionary upheaval, such ideas had surfaced occasionally to influence post-Enlightenment thought, but they remained relatively minor components within large theories of social and political evolution. Now, at a time when an unprecedented crisis in the imperial formation catalysed a loss of confidence in progress, and in the context of a measured scientific valorization promoted by social Darwinism, degeneration took on dramatic new significance. The attractions were obvious. Degeneration was a fluid category; it shifted readily and was thereby reconstituted between the human sciences, fiction and social commentary, rendering it irreducible to any fixed theory and unidentifiable with any single political cause. But in the second half of the nineteenth century, degeneration was increasingly articulated with race. Thus, for example, it was used to explain the pathological condition of the urban poor as symptomatic of a degenerative process within the imperial race, and the natural savagery of colonial subjects as a characteristic degeneration from the ideal white race, and provided an ominous portent which could be mobilized to legitimate an extensive repertoire of repressive measures.

Theories of degeneration imparted a sinister and menacing twist to the racialization of the poor. Social pathologies, it was argued, were due to characteristic hereditary factors not to the social conditions which the
poor inhabited. This effectively rendered their presence invisible, and even more of a threat. For while heredity encouraged the racial separation of the poor, their persistence – indeed, their increased presence within the bourgeois imaginary – suggested simultaneously that the poor constituted a degenerative and threatening strain within the Anglo-Saxon race. For many, this invisible enemy within posed a ‘far greater problem than the racial inferiority of non-European peoples’; it also helped to explain why the racialization of the metropolitan poor assumed its most pernicious forms after the 1860s when the immediate crises in imperial rule precipitated by colonial insurrection had been superseded by fears that dissembling processes were operating at the heart of empire.

Robert Young has argued skilfully that in the troubled climate manifest by theories of degeneration, hybridity emerged as a key cultural signifier. Drawing upon examples from animal and plant kingdoms, racial theorists of the nineteenth century surmised that because hybrid offspring had diminishing fertility sexual unions between people from two different races threatened the propagation of the human race. In the worst case scenario, the intermixing of races gave rise to a raceless mass, a chaos of indiscrimination that threatened to contaminate and hence subvert the vigour of the pure race with which it came into contact. At the core of emergent racial theory, therefore, ‘hybridity also maps out its most anxious, vulnerable site: a fulcrum at its edge and centre where its dialectics of injustice, hatred and oppression can find themselves effaced and expunged’. But this preoccupation with hybridity betrayed an ambivalence between desire and repulsion, thereby revealing the centrality of sexuality in race and culture, and suggested that racial theories were deeply implicated in theories of desire. A dialectic existed between a structure of covert colonial desire promoting racial intermixing and a structure of repulsion in which racial antagonisms were perpetuated.

Racial theorists can most conveniently be located within a colonial context. Gobineau, for example, who in his Essay on the Inequality of Races, published in 1853–55, laid the foundation for European racial theory, was explicit about colonial desire, indeed erected hybridity rather than racial purity as the defining feature of modern civilization. He elaborated the principle that internal poison resulting from continual adulteration of the race would eventually prove fatal. Thus while the attraction felt by the white (male) race for yellow and brown (female) races was critical to the development of civilization, the same imperative would bring about its downfall. The idea here that generation contains the seeds of its own destruction was clearly linked to fears about the fall of empire. And the most recent work on the mediation of race and culture with sexuality has been within the broad ambit of postcolonial theory.

But the parallels with contemporary discourses about the metropolitan
poor are unmistakable. As we have seen, the same dialectic between fasci-
nation and disgust informed the imaginary relationship with the low
other. Equally significantly, the trope of degeneration assumed a new sali-
ence from the 1860s as the presence of the poor and colonial others – seen
as part of an internal orient – became subject to urgent concern and sur-
veillance. Indian herbalists and tract sellers had been noted by Mayhew
among the street poor, but later in the 1850s, as records of their plight
came to the attention of magistrates and poor law authorities, evangelicals
sought to understand their condition and provide relief. Joseph Salter em-
barked on missionary work among Asians in the metropolis, leading to
the establishment in 1856 of the Asiatic Strangers’ Home. His account of
this work echoed the earlier sentiments of Joseph Mullens (p. 122). The
progressive influence of civilization on Indian peoples, he declared, had
done much to encourage a questioning of their heathen beliefs and prepare
the grounds for their salvation. Citing a missionary in India, he argued
that British modernization had undermined the caste system. Railways
have ‘ploughed up the soil consecrated to Gunga and Kalee’, and lightning
is ‘dispatched along its wire path … more quickly than Ram escaped from
Ceylon to the continent’.40 Indians who had migrated to London were dis-
cussed in sympathetic terms. Many risked defilement but on their return
had been praised for their courage. The majority proved themselves hard-
working and open to Christian influence. The more educated – apothecar-
ies and interpreters – rarely thought their ancient religion worth struggling
to save. But in London they are exposed to various frauds and cheats, lose
any money they have, and rapidly sink into begging and crime. Noticed by
few until seen shivering in rags, cared for by none, many perish on the cold
streets. One body found at Shadwell had ‘horny hands’ that bore evidence
of ‘honest labour and hard toil’.41 Quite apart from the human suffering
exacted, Salter concluded, ‘the treatment they had received had evidently
produced upon their minds the very reverse of a favourable impression of
the Christian religion’.42 More importantly, profound neglect had forced
them to associate with the depraved poor, serving only to build a danger-
ous moral isolation:

The heathens of the heathen land associate here with the heathens of Chris-
tian London; and, truly, they both dwell in the valley of the shadow of death.
Between these waifs from the banks of the Indus and Ganges, and the reputa-
table white man brought up on the banks of the Thames, there is a great gulf
fixed, and this gulf is crossed by very few. The difficulty of colloquial com-
unication is one barrier that stands in the way, but far more formidable, as
a division, is the foul atmosphere of human depravity in which these Orientals
live and suffer.... The heathen mind is dark, and the vices of the various
heathen systems in which the Asiatic is so brought up, as to form part of his
nature, are bad enough when unmingled with European sin in his own land
of superstition; but here is an interchange of sin and an unholy compound of both.43

This sense of impenetrable isolation combined with cultural fantasies redolent of De Quincey constructed the opium den as the site of orientalist disgust and desire, hybridity and degradation. Accounts of the metropolitan poor came routinely to include descriptions of dens and their inhabitants. In ‘Tiger Bay’ (Brunswick St, Wapping) was discovered a cellar in which

four lascars roll their yellow and black eyes upon us as they glare silently at each other, and smoke from one bamboo pipe.... The two wretched women who are cooking some rice at a scanty fire are English, but so degraded, even below the degradation of such a neighbourhood, that they answer only with ghastly grins and a cringing paucity of words.... Rooms where dark-skinned, snake-like Hindoos [beggars and tract-sellers by day] live with English and Irish women as their wives, and live, as it would seem, not always so miserably as might be imagined.44

Popular as Tiger Bay was as a haunt of social investigators, it was eclipsed by the den at Bluegate Fields off the Ratcliff Highway, which entered into popular iconography. J.C. Parkinson described it in familiar terms:

There is a little colony of Orientals in the centre of Bluegate-fields, and in the centre of this colony is the opium den.... The livid, cadaverous, corpse-like visage of Yahee, the wild excited glare of the young Lascar who opens the door, the stolid sheep-like ruminations of Lazarus and the other Chinamen coiled together on the floor, the incoherent anecdotes of the Bengalee squatting on the bed, the fiery gesticulations of the mulatto and the Manilla-man who are in conversation by the fire, the semi-idiotic jabber of the negroes huddled up behind Yahee, are all due to the same fumes.45

Ewing Ritchie inquired further into the effects of opium, expressing little surprise that the oriental experienced none of the mystical pleasures induced in the English mind:

With the somewhat doubtful confessions of De Quincey and Coleridge in my memory, I tried to get them to acknowledge sudden impulses, poetic inspirations, splendid dreams; but of such things these little fellows had never conceived; the highest eulogism I heard was: ‘You have pains – pain in de liver, pain in de head – you smoke – all de pains go’.46

Tiger Bay was demolished and the Ratcliff Highway cleared as part of a slum clearance programme in the mid 1870s, but the area continued to hold the same grim fascination for scribbling visitors because like all such waterside spaces it provided refuge for a transient seafaring population and the readiest opportunities for racial intermixing. But with the obliteration
of the dens peculiar interest was focused on one of the previously identified and most visible participants – the site of the most profound moral danger and desire – the active, orientalized, predatory female. *Wonderful London*, published in 1878, welcomed the abolition of Tiger Bay, where ‘swarms of Lascars and Malays herded together to indulge in mad opium orgies’, but noted that ‘the tigresses remain’. Here a reversal was effected. A savage was not the male who ‘tracks and brings down the game to share it with the she’, but was the female who ‘hunts, while the he creature lurks in ambush to give assistance if need be, or remains home at the den’. And while the Highway was a ‘spectacle which no visitor from the country should miss; the whole human family ... is here perambulating the streets, with every shade of colour’, tigresses were not always alert to this ‘great variety of game’, because like ‘other carnivora, they are not partial to hunting by daylight’.

Such images were by this time becoming part of a popular currency. Taine recorded in 1873 his impressions of numerous visits to London. In Shadwell, another waterside area, he found conditions with which the bad quarters of Marseilles, Antwerp and Paris could not compare. In the low houses, he noted

unmade beds, women dancing. Thrice in ten minutes ... crowds collected at the doors; fights were going on, chiefly fights between women; one of them, her face bleeding, tears in her eyes, drunk, shouted with a sharp and harsh voice, and wished to fling herself upon a man. The bystanders laughed; the noise caused the adjacent lanes to be emptied of their occupants; ragged, poor children, harlots – it was like a human sewer suddenly discharging its contents.

Home missionaries discovered similar scenes while working in East London. In one article entitled ‘Degradation’, we are confronted with the terrible prospect of missionary work amongst a poor population in which overcrowding subverted the normal boundaries of Christian and racial morality:

[T]here are hideous cases of the most revolting incest occasionally coming to the surface, which tell how near the level of the brutes some of the masses of our people are fallen.... Enter one of these houses, and from cellar to garret it is packed with people, each floor let and sublet again with different families, herding together in a way from which even the beasts that perish would instinctively shrink. In such a part the work of a clergyman is as truly missionary as if his labours were being carried on in Central Africa.

Some of the scenes reached such low depths of depravation that even heathens found them shocking. In ‘Measured by a Mahometan’s standard’ (and no doubt that also of the home missionary), we learn that:
They beheld the streets swarming with prostitutes, and they were horrified at the sensuality and the sin which such scenes suggested. And so they fled, terrified and amazed at the spectacle. Instead of being attracted by the outer manifestation of England’s religion, they thanked the God they worshipped, and the false prophet by whom they had been misled, that this religion was not their religion.51

This nexus of hybridity, orientalization, degradation and covert desire marked both an apotheosis of the racialization of the poor and the onset of a transformation, for from this point the poor assumed a more threatening aspect which could not be theorized so readily using contemporary racial discourse. The predatory prostitute was emblematic of a new and distinctly modern sense that the poor were transgressing the imaginative and spatial boundaries of the metropolis. The prostitute’s attraction for urban travellers since the time of Mayhew can only in part be explained by her position within male voyeuristic fantasies; the prostitute also transgressed the gendered boundaries of the metropolis.52 By asserting an active presence within the public spaces of the city, the prostitute challenged defiantly prevalent norms of female virtue centred on a passive domesticity, and around the body of the prostitute was articulated moral, sexual and medical concern.

Crowds bred in the abyss

In the course of the 1870s anxieties about the transgressive threat of the prostitute were generalized to include the metropolitan poor as a whole:

The savage class in question comprises the ‘roughs’ who infest every one of the hundreds of shady slums and blind alleys that, despite metropolitan improvements, still disgrace the great city. We held up our hands in speechless horror and indignation at the time when the scum and dregs of humanity which cling to the bedraggled skirts of Communism committed such frightful ravages in Paris; but it is as certain as that night succeeds day, that we have lurking in our undercurrents a horde of ruffianism fully equal to similar feats of carnage, plunder, and incendiarism, should occasion serve.53

Here was signalled something of the transformation in constructions of the poor. Detectable elements of earlier racialized discourses around savagery, dirt and degradation were to be expected, but qualitatively new was the politicization and spatial reordering of the poor. The modern metropolis, in spite of improvements undertaken as part of a civic mission to rid its streets of the residuum, was found still to be infested by their numbers. Indeed, the suggestion was that their presence had increased. No longer savage tribes confined to the racialized spaces of East and South London, the poor were a mob which, guided by the example of the 1871 Paris
Commune, threatened in an act of supreme transgression to seize the metropolis as a whole.

This transformation was underpinned by structural change within the metropolis. The social and economic crisis of the 1880s was deeper and more widespread than that of the 1860s. The cyclical depression impacted on a far broader range of occupations, slum clearance schemes and housing reform had done little to solve the chronic problem of working-class housing let alone the slums, evangelical missions had for the most part been met with indifference even hostility by the poor, and the spectre appeared of socialist currents in working-class organization and thought. Incidences of the poor rampaging through the streets of the respectable West End bore witness that the worst fears of mob rule were being realized. All this fostered in the bourgeois consciousness a sense of fragmentation, self-doubt and loss of confidence in inexorable progress at a time of imperial expansion. The attendant ‘epistemological crisis ... precipitated changes in the visual image of the city that produced new representations of the self and the Other’.

In the course of the 1880s the metropolitan poor were rediscovered and reconstituted in ways that defy neat generalizations. The sensational revelations of a new breed of social investigators articulated older discursive formations with contemporary political and moral concerns. Of these, Andrew Mearns’s *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* had the greatest impact. Originally published as a pamphlet of approximately 8,000 words in 1883, it appeared to have little sociological or literary merit. It had neither the originality of Mayhew nor the flair of Greenwood; it was poorly structured, misquoted sources and was based fragilely on an extremely limited survey of housing in Bermondsey, Ratcliff and Shadwell. But its unprecedented reception suggests that the pamphlet resonated powerfully with the growing sense of unease and guilt about the state of the metropolitan poor.

Mearns highlighted the gulf that was daily widening between the ‘lower classes of the community’ and ‘all decency and civilization’, as a result of which a ‘TERRIBLE FLOOD OF SIN AND MISERY IS GAINING UPON US’. This population, however, was not racially distinct, but belonged ‘as much as you, to the race for whom Christ died’, and given the appalling conditions in which they were condemned to exist they were ‘entitled to credit for not being twenty times more depraved than they are’. If urgent measures were not taken, then the political consequences would be dire:

The only check upon communism in this regard is jealousy and not virtue. The vilest practices are looked upon with the most matter-of-fact indifference. The low parts of London are the sink into which the filthy and abominable from all parts of the country seem to flow.
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And the measures? These from the outset had to be based on a comprehensive collectivism:

[Without State interference nothing effectual can be accomplished upon any large scale.... The State must make short work of this iniquitous traffic [rack renting], and secure for the poorest the rights of citizenship; the right to live in something better than fever dens; the right to live as something better than the uncleanest of brute beasts.]

This confused and contradictory text best represented the stumbling attempts to recognize the nature of a problem that had beset the Victorian metropolis but which at a time of a crisis of confidence in the imperial formation assumed an unprecedented political urgency. The flood of moral depravity evident amongst the lowest sections of the population had to be stemmed, Mearns contended, by social and political reform lest the nation as a whole be engulfed by communism.

The contemporaneous writings of George Sims reveal the source of inspiration for much of Mearns’s pamphlet. Working in the tradition of urban travel, Sims published an influential series of articles throughout the 1880s, which were collected in How the Poor Live. The prose was less restrained than Mearns’s, but the message was the same:

This mighty mob of famished, diseased, and filthy helots is getting dangerous, physically, morally, politically dangerous. The barriers that have kept it back are rotten and giving way, and it may do the State a mischief if it be not looked to in time. Its fevers and its filth may have spread to the homes of the wealthy; its lawless armies may sally forth and give us a taste of the lesson the mob has tried to teach now and again in Paris, when long years of neglect have done their worst.

And while Sims’s arguments were replete with racist characterizations of ‘savage tribes’ which commanded the attention of much missionary activity, and references to the ‘quaint sayings and peculiar wit of the nigger breed’, the metropolitan poor are not thought as a race apart; indeed, the poor are entitled along with the rest of British society to participate in the benefits of empire:

There are people who will contend that in these islands the great blessing of the natives of all degrees is that they are Great Britons. Our patriotic songs bid us all rejoice greatly in this fact, and patriotism is not a class privilege. The starved outcast, crouching for shelter on a wild March night on one of the stone recesses of London Bridge has a right to exclaim with the same pride as the Marquis of Westminster –

‘Far as the breeze can bear the billow’s foam
Survey our empire and behold our home.’
As the poor demonstrated an increased propensity to transgress spatial barriers and bring closer the lessons of Paris, so anxiety escalated. H.J. Goldsmid, travelling among lodging houses, recorded his impressions of discontented dossers:

We have not been without warnings. When last winter a brutal mob rushed through the streets and looted the shops of the West-end, most people said it was the work of roughs and larrikins whose only object was plunder. They grievously misunderstood the facts. Many – nay most – of the men who took part in the riots of that day came from the low lodging houses, and though the majority were actuated solely by cupidity and greed, there were many a stern, determined man there who believed that in plundering and destroying he was merely executing the righteous wrath of starved, oppressed, and discontented labour against harsh, bloated, and unsympathetic capital.... Before very many years have flown we shall be compelled to read in haggard, wolfish faces, robbed of every tender or human expression, to hear in coarse cries of menace, ay, even of lawless triumph, that lesson that has been taught so sharply in other lands than ours – that what might once, not long since, have been reformed, has grown and swelled and gathered force and volume until the torrent can no longer be stemmed, and we are confronted by REVOLUTION.64

Events around the 1889 dock strike and the early struggles of new unionism dissipated heightened political anxiety. Fears that an impoverished residuum organized by a socialist-inspired leadership would provoke mob rule were not realized; instead bands of dockers marched in orderly and good-humoured fashion in furtherance of modest demands. The more militant and threatening struggles of gasworkers were defeated by military-style police tactics which enabled employers to bring in large numbers of unskilled, strike-breaking labourers.65 But if immediate political fears had receded, the problem remained of incorporating the poor within an interpretative framework for the metropolis as a distinctly modern totality.

The seventeen volumes of Charles Booth’s Life and Labour of the People in London published over 1889–1902 constituted the single most comprehensive and systematic attempt to capture this totality.66 Fired by a vision of social and moral progress removed from the orthodoxies of contemporary political economy, Booth set out to classify and quantify the metropolitan poor as the first step in formulating ameliorative measures. The focus was on production and distribution, and the multiplicity of social – and to a lesser extent cultural – relations built upon them. As the investigation progressed in a climate of relative political ease, so the diversity and dynamism of the metropolitan experience emerged. Although this challenged convenient polarizations of the poor and respectable so characteristic of previous social inquiry, Booth was unable to break completely...
with the genre. He and his army of co-workers remained urban travellers inhabiting psychological oppositions between the bourgeois and the low other, carrying with them all the familiar baggage of degeneration, depravity and gender disorder.\textsuperscript{67}

The Booth survey was situated uneasily – and in some respects defined the moment – between past racializations of the poor and modernist impulses to see them as part of the metropolitan totality. The theory of hereditary urban degeneration may have been endowed with a certain authority by the survey,\textsuperscript{68} but the theory implied no essential racial separateness; on the contrary, it both generalized and encompassed the poor within the metropolitan – and hence national – whole. And while slum dwellers were perceived as degenerate populations whose pathological features were transmitted from one generation to another and who carried contamination with them when forced as a body to migrate, there was little sense in Booth that degeneracy was the product of irreversible hereditary processes.\textsuperscript{69} Recommendations for eliminating poverty were moral and socio-economic, not social Darwinist. At other times the poor were perceived in terms of a modern experience. Mile End fair was described as a vortex attracting the young, and the East End as a ‘rush of human life as fascinating to watch as the current of a river to which human life is so often likened’.\textsuperscript{70}

It was only with respect to the wave of Jewish immigration in the 1880s that more familiar racial constructions obtained. Even then there were contradictions. Jews may have possessed characteristic features of a racial other – high cheekbones, thickened lips, darker complexion and unmistakable noses – but they were sober and industrious, private and respectable. ‘The Jews’, Walkowitz concludes, ‘were a peculiar people who eluded and challenged Booth’s categories of class and gender Otherness.’\textsuperscript{71}

The same ambiguities were evident in much of the considerable literature that addressed the problems posed by this immigration. Thus while the East End was seen to contain an internal orient larger and more visible than before, there is little of same sense of moral degradation or political threat. Thus H. Walker, writing in 1896, argued:

But we soon begin to make the great and startling discovery which awaits every newcomer into Whitechapel. Here, in spite of English-looking surroundings, he is practically in a foreign land, so far as language and race are concerned. The people are neither French nor English, Germans nor Americans, but Jews. In this Whitechapel ghetto the English visitor almost feels himself one of a subject race in the presence of dominant and overwhelming invaders.\textsuperscript{72}

Such a ‘disaffected population might have been a standing menace to London’, but Whitechapel was not the home of ‘malcontent refugees or

\textsuperscript{67} John Marriott - 9781526137838
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political anarchists’: ‘Nothing, in fact, is more remarkable on Sunday than the quiet and orderliness of a great population of aliens in faith and speech who ... are less aggressive in the streets than many of their better circumstanced co-residents’.73

The popular works of Walter Besant went further, actually identifying the regenerational potential of English culture. Thus in East London he observed the ‘narrow-chested and pasty-faced Polish Jew’, asking one of their scholars if this was the ‘race which defied the legions of Titus’, or a descendant of ‘Joshua’s valiant captains’? The scholar answered that ‘these are the children of the Ghetto.... Come again in ten years’ time. In the free air of Anglo-Saxon rule they will grow; you will not know them again.’74

By actively constructing a threat, however, these racial ambiguities could be resolved. In a discussion of the furniture trade in East London, for example, F. Hird pointed to the capacity of Jews to force British workers out by undercutting the price of labour. Racial barriers were firmly erected around a diverse but unified population:

[These districts are a little world of Israels, where the Poles, Armenians, Russians, and Germans of the faith live and have their being amidst the babel of foreign tongues, and in an environment of dirt indescribable. But however interesting from the point of view of the picturesque the presence of these strangers within our gates may be, their effect upon the East End is truly lamentable.75]

In a similar vein, George Haw claimed that Jewish landlords were ‘coming down on the clamouring poor like a wolf on the fold ... and were now driving out the Christian poor in a more merciless way than they themselves were ever persecuted and driven out of Russia or Poland’.76

Problems of the race

Other writers saw the racialization of the poor less ambivalently. Arnold White began his publishing career in 1886 with The Problems of a Great City.77 Here the problems of the great city were the ‘problems of the race’, which had to be resolved through a ‘moral revolution’ rather than delegation ‘to governments or to a clerical caste’ lest the ‘dark seeds of poisonous and eternal evil’ were sown to threaten the empire:

Distress in London is not the distress of a great city – it is the distress of a great empire.... The social question in England is shrouded in greater darkness than the social questions of Imperial Germany or Republican France.... Great as the sum of poverty and degradation inherited by this generation from that which preceded it, we are making no sensible reductions of this debt to humanity, and in fair way to hand down to the next generation greater
embarrassment, with more efficient machinery for the manufacture of larger masses of human degradation.76

Mayhew was then rallied to the social Darwinist cause:

Compared with the nomadic tribes of tropic countries, where the curse of civilization is unknown, the nomads of London are but miserable savages.... Criminal and pauperised classes with low cerebral development renew their race more rapidly than those of higher nervous natures.... The fecundity of starving people is notorious, and has again and again been exemplified in famine districts in India. A policy based on relief from funds collected in a hurry, and administered by a machinery raised in a night, can be but a temporary policy. The evil grows by what it feeds on.79

Instead White proposed legislation to sterilize the unfit, ban early marriages and force emigration, which with eugenicist logic he claimed would harmonize with ‘the inexorable tendencies of our natural law’. By linking the social crisis caused by the threat of the metropolitan poor to fears in the imperial formation via theories of degeneration, White intensified the racialization of the poor. He may have been an erratic figure, working in isolation, but he represented an important response to the crisis.

William Booth emerged as part of the same strand of social imperialism; his writings were enormously popular, however, providing a secure financial and ideological basis for the expansion of the Salvation Army. In Darkest England and the Way Out, published in 1890, sold 200,000 copies in the first year.80 The referent was Henry M. Stanley’s In Darkest Africa, in which the explorer described an immense area ‘where the rays of sunshine never penetrate, where in the dark, dank air, filled with the steam of the heated morass, human beings dwarfed into pygmies and brutalised into cannibals lurk and live and die’.81 The parallels between degenerated Africans living in foetid darkness and the metropolitan poor were only too obvious:

It is a terrible picture, and one that has engraved itself deep on the heart of civilisation. But while brooding over the awful presentation of life as it exists in the vast African forest, it seemed to me only too vivid a picture of many parts of our own land. As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England? Civilisation, which can breed its own barbarians, does it not also breed its own pygmies?82

Within this barbarian population, the racialized female reappeared to occupy a privileged site:

The lot of a negress in the Equatorial Forest is not, perhaps, a very happy one, but is it so very much worse than that of many a pretty orphan girl in our Christian capital? We talk about the brutalities of the dark ages, and we
profess to shudder as we read in books of the shameful exaction of the rights of feudal superior. And yet here, beneath our very eyes, in our theatres, in our restaurants, and in many other places, unspeakable though it be to name it, the same hideous abuse flourishes unchecked.83

The impact of social imperialism was to be felt in the formation of the Edwardian welfare state.84 But as the century turned, more pressing concerns around continued immigration and the standard of recruits for the Boer War intensified fears that degeneration was consuming the heart of empire.85 With this more extreme current of racial theory surfaced views that seemed to traverse political boundaries. George Haw cited with approval Lord Rosebery when he asked, ‘What is an Empire unless it is pillared on an Imperial race, and what are you doing to allow this Imperial race to be vitiated and poisoned in the dens of crime and horror in which too many of them are reared at this moment?’86

And Major W. Evans-Gordon, a leading voice in the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, claimed that there was

almost a spell which brings the Jewish immigrants into the already crammed and congested areas of the East End, where their brethren are aggregated and segregated.... The Hebrew colony, then, unlike any other alien colony in the land, forms a solid and permanently distinct block – a race apart, as it were, in an enduring island of extraneous thought and custom.... Many English people living in the neighbourhood have summed up the situation in a phrase ‘We are living in a foreign country’.87

A rather different current simultaneously began to take shape and gain momentum, particularly among the liberal intelligentsia. Evident in embryonic form among Charles Booth’s descriptions of East End crowds, and as part of the totalizing project, racialized conceptions of the metropolitan poor were displaced by modernist fears of the crowd. The French psychologist Gustave LeBon theorized contemporary perceptions in The Psychology of Peoples, first published in 1894. The crowd, according to LeBon, took different forms; the common denominator was faceless anonymity, but in the bourgeois mind of late Victorian Britain it was the irrational, aggressive, savage, instinctual and feminine crowd that prevailed.88

In the troubled context of an extended franchise and the failure of social reform to eradicate poverty, this crowd represented the hidden presence in modern society of destructive atavistic features – a regressive trend in civilization which by signalling the onset of mass irrationality marked the end of human development. The crowd thus became the dominant site of degeneration, effectively displacing the individual, the family and the ‘tribe’; linked to the threat of social chaos and the fall of empire, the crowd was ‘a commentary upon modernity itself’.89 Paradoxically, as Young has noted, these raceless masses, by threatening to erase difference, both asserted and
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subverted the trope of degeneracy, leading to a more intense and sinister racialization of the crowd.90

Modernist accounts of the metropolis began with *The Heart of the Empire*, an important collection of articles written by the vanguard of the new liberal intelligentsia.91 ‘The Victorian era has definitely closed’, announced the editor Charles Masterman at the outset:

For many years it was manifest that the forces characteristic of that period had become expended, and that new problems were arising with a new age. But during the latter years of the nineteenth century men were content to confront the evils of national life with the old remedies.92

But the expressed intent of the authors to distance themselves from nineteenth-century approaches to the poor and the imperialist sentiment of Gladstonian Liberalism evident in Rosebery was not fully realized. Thus while the increase in the poor was described in sympathetically modernist terms as ‘the continual impetuous multiplication of the dwellers of the abyss’, they were still perceived through the lens of social imperialism:

The second generation of the immigrants has been reared in the courts and crowded ways of the great metropolis, with cramped physical accessories, hot, fretful life, and long hours of sedentary or unhealthy toil. The problem of the coming years is just the problem of this New Town type; upon their development and action depend the future progress of the Anglo-Saxon Race, and for the next half-century at least the policy of the British Empire in the world.93

A year later Masterman’s modern consciousness was given free rein. In *From the Abyss* he described in a striking manner the ‘dense black masses from the eastern railways [that] have streamed across the bridges from the marshes and desolate places beyond the river’:

We have seen a ghost; we are striving to readjust our stable ideas. The newspapers stir uneasily, talk in a shamefaced manner about natural ebullitions of patriotism, police inefficiency, and other irrelevant topics, deprecate the too frequent repetition of the ceremony, and praise the humour of a modern crowd. But within there is a cloud in men’s minds, and a half-stifled recognition of the presence of a new force hitherto unreckoned, the creeping into conscious existence of the quaint and innumerable populations bred in the abyss.94

The plural is significant, for the populations Masterman refers to extend well beyond the metropolitan poor of nineteenth-century observers. In the immediate aftermath of the Boer War when the fitness of recruits to the British army became a matter of intense concern, fears surfaced of a ‘weird and uncanny people’ who comprise the ‘dense black masses from the
eastern railways’ streaming ‘across the bridges from the marshes and desolate places beyond the river’. These are the new city types, ‘aged men in beards and bowlers shambling hastily forward; work girls, mechanics, active boys, neat little clerks’ who blinked in the sunshine, surged through London streets with a power that even they seemed afraid of, and who as night fell relapsed into carnivalesque revelry. Then in a remarkable passage calling upon the full repertoire of race, degeneration and social Darwinism, the abyss from which these denizens emerged and to which they retreated is likened to a forest where the unremitting yet hopeless struggle for life of the imperial nation takes place:

Everywhere exuberant, many-featured life, struggling under the tropical sun, a struggle continued ardently year after year, through innumerable succeeding generations. Only always at length the end. Some inexplicable change; slowly, imperceptibly, the torrent of life has overreached itself; the struggle has become too terrific; the vitality is gradually dying. And then, as the whole mass festers in all the gorgeous, wonderful beauty of decay, comes the mangrove – dark-leafed, dank, slippery, unlovely, sign and symbol of the inevitable end. And with the mangrove the black-marsh and the reeking, pestilential mud.95

‘Crowd’ and ‘abyss’ lay at the centre of imaginative attempts to appropriate metropolitan masses at a time of alienation and fragmentation. The abyss was a swamp in which the crowd dwelled, but as a site of existential despair it offered the modern subject an opportunity for renewal.96 Jack London, for example, in the tradition of the urban traveller explored the abyss, recording his observations in The People of the Abyss.97 And Ford Madox Ford, in the same journey of self-discovery, produced one of the first modernist texts – The Soul of London – which rendered impressionistically the urban landscape.98 For Madox Ford modern urban society provided the most urgent challenge to imaginative writers who were better placed than ‘gatherers of facts’ to become ‘intimately acquainted with the lives of those around us’ and hence avoid the ‘great danger of losing human knowledge and human sympathy’.99 Within the metropolis, the eastern parts attracted his particular concern:

They are grim, they are overhung with perpetual miasma, they lie low in damp marshes. Square and stumpy chimneys rise everywhere in clusters like the columns of ruined temples overhung with smirchings of vapour. Great fields are covered with scraps of rusty iron and heaps of fluttering rags; dismal pools of water reflect back on black waste grounds the dim skies. But all these things, if one is in the mood, one may find stimulating, because they tell of human toil, of human endeavour towards some end with some ideal at that end. But the other thing is sinister, since the other influences are working invisible, like malign and conscious fates, below the horizon.100
In evangelical and journalistic accounts located within the tradition of urban exploration founded by Mayhew, racial coding assumed stridently novel forms, at the heart of which lay the symbolic repertoires of dirt and degeneration. By linking physical appearance to moral and cultural difference, the metaphor of dirt gave meaning to and legitimized racial hierarchies; by ascribing innateness, the trope of degeneration gave racialization a sinister and menacing twist. Degeneration assumed increasing significance as fears of social disorder and imperial decline took hold, and attention turned to internal dangers. Perceived threats in the late 1880s from the poor and from Jewish immigration redefined racial boundaries. Social imperialists took up extreme eugenicist stances on the degenerative strains identified within the imperial race, and on the threats posed by the increased presence of the Jewish race. More influential were modernist impulses, the key imaginative sites of which were occupied by the crowd from the abyss. A new liberal intelligentsia infused with evangelism and critical of older imperialist sentiment also redefined racial boundaries.

The shifting and unstable boundaries of racialization of the poor resulted from attempts to understand the anachronistic presence in the modern metropolis of a population that defied modernity. It was historically coterminous with the emergence of a distinctly modern colonialism characterized by a ‘coherently “anthropological” mode of typifying natives’. In this endeavour race was originally an analytical category with which human culture could be thought; over time it became ‘the crucial determinant, not only of culture but of human character and of all history’. Race facilitated the imagined interconnectedness of colonial and metropolitan others in the imperial formation as it strove to survey and position them within an objective totality, and hence to assimilate threats to its future. The task to ‘find a single, comprehensive principle of explanation which would underpin a rational theodicy of racial privilege and anchor structural inequality within an organic image of the body politic’ found urgent application in both domestic and colonial spaces. This process was strategically partial and complex, as a result of which within broad shifts there were continuities, and within continuities there were shifts. Nonetheless, overall the dialectic of capitalist modernization in asserting the superiority of colonizers over the colonized necessarily constructed inferiority at home; this suggests why the poor were racialized in the first instance and why toward the end of the century as the forces of modernization accelerated racialized boundaries expanded to encompass not only the poor but the masses as a whole.
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Notes
1 John Garwood, The Million Peopled City, or One Half of the People of London Made Known to the Other Half, London, Werthleim and Macintosh, 1853, p. 263.
5 Hollingshead, Ragged London, p. 44.
8 George Godwin, Town Swamps and Social Bridges, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1859, reprinted with an introduction by A.D. King in 1972 by Leicester University Press. Although swamps referred most immediately to the housing conditions of the poor, they were a metaphor for a whole range of related social pathologies including crime, poverty, disease, ignorance and superstition. Bridges were the institutional infrastructures required in an urban society to combat them, particularly adequate schooling and public health. Godwin’s manifesto was ‘Drain the swamps and increase the bridges’ (ibid., p. 102).
9 Ibid., p. 56.
10 Ibid., p. 58.
12 Ibid., p. 128.
13 Ibid., p. 135. Stallybrass and White actually refer only to the city, but as I will attempt to demonstrate, the arguments apply equally validly to the colonies. See also the useful discussion on the materiality of dirt in the bourgeois imagination, in Phil Cohen, ‘The perversions of inheritance’, in Phil Cohen and H.S. Bains (eds), Multiracist Britain, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 72–3.
15 Ibid., pp. 152–5.
17 Note that in a curious inversion collectors of dog shit described in Mayhew were known as pure finders.
26 Ibid., p. 77.
27 Cited in ibid., pp. 76–7, and in Mary Hickman, Religion, Class and Identity. The State,
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the Catholic Church and the Education of the Irish in Britain, London, Avebury, 1995, p. 49. These are two of very few examples of where the term ‘white’ was used. ‘White’ was more generally noted by its absence in racial discourses – an indication of any felt need to subject it to scrutiny. This is a silence that has recently been broken, albeit in a different context, by Theodor W. Adorno, The Invention of the White Race. Racial Oppression and Social Control, London, Verso, 1994, and David Roediger, Towards the Abolition of Whiteness. Essays on Race, Politics and Working-Class History, London, Verso, 1994.

28 The most impressive work on this is L.P. Curtis, Apes and Angels. The Irishman in Victorian Caricature, Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, particularly Chapter 4, ‘Simianizing the Irish Celt’. This is a revised version of the 1971 edition, with a new chapter – ‘Historical revisionism and constructions of Paddy and Pat’ – in which Curtis, drawing upon recent writings from postcolonial theory, effectively challenges critiques of the earlier work.

29 Ibid., p. 121.

30 It was at this time that the term ‘nigger’ was widely used to describe not only blacks and the Irish, but also Indians (James Walvin, ‘Recurring themes: white images of black life during and after slavery’, Slavery and Abolition, 5, 1984, pp. 118–40).


33 Ibid., p. 7.

34 Ibid., p. 21.

35 Malik, The Meaning of Race, p. 111.


37 Ibid., p. 19.


39 See, for example, Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, London, Routledge, 1994; Richard Hyam, Empire and Sexuality. The British Experience, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1991; McClintock, Imperial Leather; Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory. A Reader, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1993; Young, Colonial Desire.


41 Ibid., p. 20.

42 Ibid., p. ii.

43 Ibid., pp. 21–2.


45 J.C. Parkinson, Places and People, Being Studies from Life, London, Tinsley Bros., 1869, pp. 25–6. This was a collection of articles previously published in Dickens’s All the Year Round, Tinsley’s Magazine and the Daily News.


48 Ibid., p. 339.

49 Hippolyte Taine, Notes on England, London, Strahan, 1873, pp. 33–4. The observations were originally published in Paris Temps, and almost simultaneously in English translation in the Daily News. Extracts were published widely in the Athenaeum,
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Saturday Review, Spectator, Edinburgh Review and Westminster Review, and thus provided a source for much middle-class discussion.

50 Stories and Episodes from Home Mission Work, London, Society for Promoting the Employment of Additional Curates, 1881, pp. 76, 100. This was a collection of articles previously published in the society’s journal The Home Field.

51 Ibid., p. 77. The recent work of Antoinette Burton has studied similar responses of a different class of Indian travellers in the late nineteenth-century metropolis. Various educated middle-class Indians migrated to England in order to gain medical or legal qualifications, or simply to explore for themselves British culture. They recorded their observations in letters, travelogues and newspaper articles which reveal how they sought to transform themselves from objects of spectacle to carriers of Western mores, but how ‘unmannered and coercive’ Western civilization could be. This colonial encounter, Burton concludes, could unsettle power relations of the imperial formation in the metropolis. [Antoinette Burton, ‘Making a spectacle of empire: Indian travellers in fin-de-siècle London’, History Workshop Journal, 42, 1996, pp. 98–117, and At the Heart of Empire. Indians and the Colonial Encounter in late Victorian Britain, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.]


54 Stedman Jones, Outcast London, especially Chapter 16.

55 Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, p. 38.

56 [Andrew Mearns], The Bitter Cry of Outcast London. An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor, London, Clarke and Co., 1883, reprinted with an introduction by A.S. Wohl by Leicester University Press in 1970. Mearns was a member of the London Congregational Union, but was aided by members of the London City Mission and the East London Tabernacle. The introduction provides a measured assessment of the impact of the pamphlet.

57 Ibid., p. 56. This was the only phrase in the pamphlet to be capitalized.

58 Ibid., p. 60. This was a misquote from one of George Sims’s articles that appeared earlier in the year in Pictorial World.

59 Ibid., p. 61.

60 Ibid., p. 69.

61 George Sims, How the Poor Live, and Horrible London, London, Chatto and Windus, 1889. The articles were originally published in Pictorial World and the Daily News. Sims claimed with some hyperbole that the ‘author of The Bitter Cry of Outcast London derived the greatest assistance from these while compiling his famous pamphlet’ (Preface).

62 Ibid., p. 44.

63 Ibid., p. 54.


67 Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, p. 33.

68 Stedman Jones, Outcast London, p. 128.

69 The point is well made by Jose Harris that the widespread currency of the language of degeneracy did not always reflect a commitment to the intellectual framework of social Darwinism. See Jose Harris, ‘Between civic virtue and social darwinism: the
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concept of the residuum’, in Englander and O’Day (eds), Retrieved Riches.
70 Booth, Life and Labour, Vol. I, p. 64, cited in Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, p. 34.
71 Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, p. 36. For the description of Jews in Booth, see
David Englander, ‘Booth’s Jews: the presentation of Jews and Judaism in Life and
Tract Society, 1896, p. 17.
73 Ibid., p. 27.
75 F. Hird, The Cry of the Children. An Exposure of Certain British Industries in which
Children are Iniquitously Employed, London, Bowden, 1898, p. 61.
76 George Haw, No Room to Live. The Plaint of Overcrowded London, London, Wells
Gardner, 1900, p. 76.
77 Arnold White, The Problems of a Great City, London, Remington, 1886. A wide trav-
eller with a deep interest in social problems, White had contested Mile End as a Tory
candidate in 1886, and was to contest Tyneside in 1892 and 1895. His racism in
publications such as The Modern Jew, English Democracy and Efficiency and Empire
became increasingly shrill. He was sent to prison in 1903 for contempt, but liberated
by public subscription, and gave evidence to the inquiry which established the 1905
Aliens Act.
78 Ibid., p. 12.
79 Ibid., pp. 14, 48, 227.
The book was in part least ghost-written by W.E. Stead, editor of the Pall Mall
Gazette, who had five years previously been responsible for one of the most successful
endeavours of sensational journalism. His investigation of juvenile prostitution in the
‘Maiden tribute of modern Babylon’ had an estimated circulation of one and a half
million copies. The whole episode is well discussed in Walkowitz, City of Dreadful
Delight.
82 Ibid., p. 10.
83 Ibid., p. 13.
84 Stedman Jones, Outcast London, p. 312.
85 The metaphor of the heart of empire became popular, particularly in titles of books
such as Charles F.G. Masterman (ed.), The Heart of the Empire. Discussions of Prob-
Unwin, 1902; George Haw, Britain’s Homes. A Study of the Empire’s Heart-Disease,
Studies from the Life of the Poor, London, Grant Richards, 1905.
86 Haw, Britain’s Homes, p. 53.
88 Mark Harrison, Crowds and History. Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790–1835,
Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 6–8; Malik, The Meaning of Race,
pp. 104–9. The gendering of the crowd is discussed by McClintock, Imperial Leather,
p. 119, and Wilson, The Sphinx in the City, p. 7, who writes: ‘At the heart of the urban
labyrinth lurked not the Minotaur, a bull-like male monster, but the female Sphinx,
the “strangling one”, who was so called because she strangled all those who could not
answer her riddle: female sexuality, womanhood out of control, lost nature, loss of
identity’.
89 Pick, Faces of Degeneration, pp. 4, 223.
90 Young, Colonial Desire, p. 19.
92 Ibid., p. v.
93 Ibid., p. 7.
94 Charles F.G. Masterman, From the Abyss; of its Inhabitants by One of Them, London,
Johnson, 1902, p. 4.
Ibid., p. 17.


99 Ibid., Introduction, pp. xx–xxi.

100 Ibid., pp. 68–9.

101 For a discussion of the premodern character of casual labour throughout the nineteenth century see my ‘Sensation of the abyss’.

102 Nicholas Thomas, Colonialism’s Culture. Anthropology, Travel and Government, London, Polity Press, 1994, p. 49. The few brief references I have made to this important work rather understate the influence it has had on the development of my thought in this chapter.
