In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow says that Africa is no longer the “blank space” on the map that he had once daydreamed over. “It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. . . . It had become a place of darkness.” Marlow is right: Africa grew “dark” as Victorian explorers, missionaries, and scientists flooded it with light, because the light was refracted through an imperialist ideology that urged the abolition of “savage customs” in the name of civilization. As a product of that ideology, the myth of the Dark Continent developed during the transition from the main British campaign against the slave trade, which culminated in the outlawing of slavery in all British territory in 1833, to the imperialist partitioning of Africa which dominated the final quarter of the nineteenth century.

The transition from the altruism of the antislavery movement to the cynicism of empire building involved a transvaluation of values that might be appropriately described in the genealogical language of Michel Foucault. Edward Said’s Foucauldian analysis in *Orientalism*, based on a theory of discourse as strategies of power and subjection, inclusion and exclusion, the voiced and the silenced, suggests the kind of approach I am taking here. For middle- and upper-class Victorians, dominant over a vast working-class majority at home and over increasing millions of “uncivilized” peoples of “inferior” races abroad, power was self-validating. There might be many stages of social evolution and many seemingly bizarre customs and “superstitions” in the world, but there was only one “civilization,” one path of “progress,” one “true religion.” “Anarchy” was
many-tongued; "culture" spoke with one voice. Said writes of "the power of culture by virtue of its elevated or superior position to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, demote, interdict, and validate: in short, the power of culture to be an agent of, and perhaps the main agency for, powerful differentiation within its domain and beyond it too." At home, culture might often seem threatened by anarchy: through Chartism, trade unionism, and socialism, the alternative voices of the working class could at least be heard by anyone who cared to listen. Abroad, the culture of the "conquering race" seemed unchallenged: in imperialist discourse the voices of the dominated are represented almost entirely by their silence, their absence. If Said is right that "the critic is responsible to a degree for articulating those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced" by the authority of a dominant culture, the place to begin is with a critique of that culture. This, according to Foucault, is the function of "genealogy," which seeks to analyze "the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations."2

Paradoxically, abolitionism contained the seeds of empire. If we accept the general outline of Eric Williams’ thesis in *Capitalism and Slavery* that abolition was not purely altruistic but was as economically conditioned as Britain’s later empire building in Africa, the contradiction between the ideologies of antislavery and imperialism seems more apparent than real. Although the idealism that motivated the great abolitionists such as William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson is unquestionable, Williams argues that Britain could *afford* to legislate against the slave trade only after that trade had helped to provide the surplus capital necessary for industrial "take-off." Britain had lost much of its slave-owning territory as a result of the American Revolution; as the leading industrial power in the world, Britain found in abolition a way to work against the interests of its rivals who were still heavily involved in colonial slavery and a plantation economy.3

The British abolitionist program entailed deeper and deeper involvement in Africa—the creation of Sierra Leone as a haven for freed slaves was just a start—but British abolitionists before the 1840s were neither jingoists nor deliberate expansionists. Humanitarianism applied to Africa, however, did point insistently toward imperialism.4 By mid-century, the success of the antislavery movement, the impact of the great Victorian explorers, and the merger of racist and evolutionary doctrines in the social sciences had combined to give the British public a widely shared view of Africa that demanded imperialization on moral, religious,

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and scientific grounds. It is this view that I have called the myth of the Dark Continent; by mythology I mean a form of modern, secularized, "depoliticized speech" (to adopt Roland Barthes' phrase)—discourse which treats its subject as universally accepted, scientifically established, and therefore no longer open to criticism by a political or theoretical opposition. In *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960*, Nancy Stepan writes:

A fundamental question about the history of racism in the first half of the nineteenth century is why it was that, just as the battle against slavery was being won by abolitionists, the war against racism was being lost. The Negro was legally freed by the Emancipation Act of 1833, but in the British mind he was still mentally, morally and physically a slave.5

It is this "fundamental question" which a genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent can help to answer.

1

From the 1790s to the 1840s, the most influential kind of writing about Africa was abolitionist propaganda (see fig. 1). Most of the great Romantics wrote poems against what William Wordsworth in *The Prelude* called "the traffickers in Negro blood." William Blake's "Little Black Boy" is probably the most familiar of these:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,  
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;  
White as an angel is the English child;  
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.6

To Blake's poem can be added Coleridge's "Greek Prize Ode on the Slave Trade," Wordsworth's "Sonnet to Thomas Clarkson," and a number of stanzas and poems by both Byron and Shelley. Several of Robert Southey's poems deal with the slave trade, including the final stanza of his poem "To Horror":

Horror! I call thee yet once more!  
Bear me to that accursed shore,  
Where on the stake the Negro writhes.7

Quite apart from the similarity between Southey's "Dark Horror" and Conrad's "The horror! The horror!" a century later, I want to make two main points about the literature of the antislavery tradition.8
Fig. 1.—Typical of abolitionist propaganda were the publications of the Leeds Anti-Slavery Society.
First, antislavery writing involves the revelation of atrocities. Simon Legree's beating Uncle Tom to death is only the most familiar example. Abolitionist propaganda depicted in excruciating detail the barbaric practices of slave traders and owners in Africa, during the infamous middle passage, and in the southern states and West Indies. The constant association of Africa with the inhuman violence of the slave trade, of course, did much to darken its landscape even during the Romantic period. The exposé style of abolitionist propaganda, moreover, influenced much British writing about Africa well after slavery had ceased to be an urgent issue. Though not directly about slavery, an exposé purpose is evident in *Heart of Darkness* and also, for example, in Olive Schreiner's fictional diatribe against Cecil Rhodes, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897). The frontispiece to Schreiner's novel is a photograph showing white Rhodesians with three lynched Mashona rebels—unfortunately a summary of much of the history of southern Africa (fig. 2).

The second main point about antislavery literature is that the Romantics, unlike the Victorians, were able to envisage Africans living freely and happily without European interference. Strike off the fetters which European slavers had placed on them, and the result was a vision of noble savages living in pastoral freedom and innocence (see fig. 3). In sonnet 5 of Southey's "Poems concerning the Slave Trade," a slave's rebelliousness is inspired by

> the intolerable thought  
> Of every past delight; his native grove,  
> Friendship's best joys, and liberty and love  
> For ever lost.9

Similarly, in "Africa Delivered; or, The Slave Trade Abolished" (1809), James Grahame writes:

> In that fair land of hill, and dale, and stream,  
> The simple tribes from age to age had heard  
> No hostile voice

—until the arrival of the European slave traders, who introduced to an Edenic Africa those characteristic products of civilization: avarice, treachery, rapine, murder, warfare, and slavery.10

Abolitionist portrayals of Africans as perhaps noble but also innocent or "simple" savages were patronizing and unintentionally derogatory. Nevertheless, portrayals of Africans between 1800 and the 1830s were often both more positive and more open-minded than those of later years. In saying so, I am slightly extending the period of relative objectivity noted by Katherine George, who argues that accounts of Africa from Herodotus to about 1700 tend to be highly prejudicial but that with the
FIG. 2.—Frontispiece. Olive Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, 1897.
Fig. 3.—A typical Edenic African scene, with a slave ship approaching. James Montgomery, James Grahame, and E. Benger, *Poems on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 1809.
Enlightenment arose new standards of objectivity.11 Ironically, the expansion of the slave trade itself from the 1600s on meant that Europeans had to develop more accurate knowledge of Africans—both those Africans with whom they did business and those who became their commodities. Many factors contributed to what George sees as a golden age of accuracy and lack of prejudice in writing about Africa; among these were the satiric tradition of the noble savage, turned to effective popular use by Aphra Behn in Oroonoko; or, the Royal Slave (1688); and later by many abolitionists; the Enlightenment belief that all people should be treated equally under the law; the growth of the abolitionist movement; and the exploration of the Niger River by Mungo Park and others, starting in the late 1700s. This period of relative objectivity did not end in 1800 but continued well into the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the abolitionist poetry of Southey and Grahame and by such works of social observation as Thomas Bowdich’s Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee (1819). Bowdich condemned the Ashanti practice of ritual human sacrifice, but he did not treat that aspect of their culture as representative of the whole, nor did he allow it to interfere with his appreciation for other Ashanti customs, arts, and institutions.12

The abolition of slavery in all British territories did not eliminate concern about slavery elsewhere, but the British began to see themselves less and less as perpetrators of the slave trade and more and more as the potential saviors of the African. The blame for slavery could now be displaced onto others—onto Americans, for example. Blame was increasingly displaced onto Africans themselves for maintaining the slave trade as a chief form of economic exchange. This shifting of the burden of guilt is already evident in the Niger Expedition of 1841, “the first step toward a general ‘forward policy’ in West Africa.”13 Thomas Fowell Buxton, leader of the British antislavery movement after Wilberforce, recognized that the emancipation legislation of 1833 would not eliminate slavery from non-British parts of the world. He therefore proposed to attack slavery at its source, planning the Niger Expedition as a first step toward the introduction of Christianity and “legitimate commerce” to west Africa. In The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy (1840), Buxton portrays Africa as a land “teeming with inhabitants who admire, and are desirous of possessing our manufactures.”14 In the past, Africans had learned to trade in human lives; in the future, they must learn to produce something other than slaves. The British would teach them to be both religious and industrious.

Although Buxton repudiated empire building, the Niger Expedition aimed to establish bases from which European values could be spread throughout Africa. Buxton’s portrayal of Africa is almost wholly negative: “Bound in the chains of the grossest ignorance, [Africa] is a prey to the most savage superstition. Christianity has made but feeble inroads on this kingdom of darkness” (A, pp. 10–11). In a chapter entitled “Super-
stitions and Cruelties of the Africans,” Buxton anticipates many later writers who also seek to show the necessity for increased intervention in Africa: he extracts the most grisly descriptions of such customs as human sacrifice from the writings of Bowdich and others and offers these as the essence of African culture. Buxton’s “dark catalogue of crime” combines slavery and savagery; both are seen as disrupting Africa’s chances for civilization and salvation (A, p. 270). “Such atrocious deeds, as have been detailed in the foregoing pages, keep the African population in a state of callous barbarity, which can only be effectually counteracted by Christian civilisation” (A, p. 244).

The Niger Expedition ended in disaster when most of its European participants were laid low by malaria, forty-one of them dying. For at least a decade, its failure supported arguments that Europeans should stay out of central Africa; the harsh facts of disease and death themselves contributed to the darkening of the Dark Continent. In his essay on the Niger Expedition (1848), Charles Dickens attacked the aims of philanthropists like Buxton and decried Africa as a continent not fit for civilization—one best left in the dark.

The history of this Expedition is the history of the Past [rather than the future] in reference to the heated visions of philanthropists for the railroad Christianisation of Africa, and the abolition of the Slave Trade. . . . Between the civilized European and the barbarous African there is a great gulf set. . . . To change the customs even of civilised . . . men . . . is . . . a most difficult and slow proceeding; but to do this by ignorant and savage races, is a work which, like the progressive changes of the globe itself, requires a stretch of years that dazzles in the looking at.15

In Bleak House, Dickens’ placement of Mrs. Jellyby’s Borrioboola-Gha mission on the banks of the Niger suggests its utter and absurd futility, like that of the Niger Expedition. In his occasional rantings against “natives,” “Sambos,” and “ignoble savages,” Dickens also vents his hostility toward evangelical philanthropy. He regarded missionaries as “perfect nuisances who leave every place worse than they find it.” “Believe it, African Civilisation, Church of England Missionary, and all other Missionary Societies!” he writes. “The work at home must be completed thoroughly, or there is no hope abroad.”16 This was also Thomas Carlyle’s attitude in “The Nigger Question” (1849) and again in his response to the rebellion in Jamaica in 1865. According to both Carlyle and Dickens, abolitionist and missionary activities were distractions from more appropriate concerns about poverty and misgovernment at home.

As the Governor Eyre Controversy of 1865 showed, many Victorians (including Carlyle and Dickens) sympathized with the poor at home but not with the exploited abroad. Thus, a sizable portion of the Victorian
public sided with the South during the American Civil War. Slavery, however, remained an important issue from the 1840s to the end of the century. Slavery is central, for example, to an 1847 novel by Sarah Lee Wallis (whose first husband was Thomas Bowdich), *The African Wanderers*, in which "from one end of Africa to the other we find traces of that horrible traffic." Some of Wallis' "natives" are restless and hostile because they are cannibals "who file their teeth" and lust after human flesh, but more are restless and hostile because their normally pacific lives have been disrupted by the slave trade. When *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared in 1852, moreover, it sold more copies in England than in America.17 One of Harriet Beecher Stowe's most ardent English admirers, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, also contributed to the abolitionist cause with her poems "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" and "A Curse for a Nation." Following the Civil War, slavery seemed largely confined to Africa; along with such staples of sensationalist journalism as human sacrifice and cannibalism, slavery looked more and more like a direct extension of African savagery.

After abolishing slavery on their own ground, the British turned to the seemingly humane work of abolishing slavery—and all "savage customs"—on African ground. By the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884, which is often taken as the start of the "scramble for Africa," the British tended to see Africa as a center of evil, a part of the world possessed by a demonic "darkness" or barbarism, represented above all by slavery and cannibalism, which it was their duty to exorcise. The writers most responsible for promoting this point of view—and for maintaining the crusade against the slave trade even after both Britain and the United States were well out of it—were the explorers and missionaries, with Buxton's disciple David Livingstone in the lead.

The so-called opening up of Africa by the great Victorian explorers commenced in the late 1850s, facilitated by quinine as a prophylactic against malaria. Earlier explorers had excited public interest, but the search for the sources of the White Nile—initiated by Richard Burton and John Speke in 1856 and followed up by the expeditions of Speke and James Grant, Samuel White Baker, Livingstone, and Henry Stanley—raised British interest to a new level. As headline, best-selling reading, the "penetration" of Africa provided a narrative fascination that has been likened to excitement about space exploration today.18 When Alec MacKenzie, the hero of William Somerset Maugham's *Explorer* (1907), begins "to read the marvellous records of African exploration," his "blood tingled at the magic of those pages." Inspired by the journals of Burton, Livingstone, and Stanley, MacKenzie becomes an explorer who struggles mightily against savagery and the internal slave trade (not to mention
European villainy) and who thus contributes mightily to imperial expansion. Maugham offers a fictional hagiography of all the great explorers of Africa, “men who’ve built up the empire piece by piece” and whose chief aim has been to add “another fair jewel to her crown.” If the connection between exploration and empire building was not always evident to MacKenzie’s originals, it is paramount for Maugham: “Success rewarded [MacKenzie’s] long efforts. . . . The slavers were driven out of a territory larger than the United Kingdom, treaties were signed with chiefs who had hitherto been independent . . . and only one step remained, that the government should . . . annex the conquered district to the empire.”

The books that the explorers wrote took the Victorian reading public by storm. In the first few months after its publication in 1857, Livingstone’s Missionary Travels sold seventy thousand copies and made its author wealthy and so famous that he had to avoid situations where he might be mobbed by admires. If Livingstone was already a national hero in the late 1850s, he was a national saint by the time of his last African journey in 1872. The obverse side of the myth of the Dark Continent was that of the Promethean and, at least in Livingstone’s case, saintly bestower of light (see fig. 4). Even Dickens, with his dislike of evangelical types, made an exception of Livingstone, calling him one of those who “carry into desert places the water of life.” Livingstone’s apotheosis was complete in 1872 when Stanley, with his great journalistic scoop, published his first best-seller, How I Found Livingstone. Stanley’s other books were also best-sellers: In Darkest Africa, for example, sold one hundred and fifty thousand copies in English, was frequently translated, and, according to one reviewer, “has been read more universally and with deeper interest than any other publication of” 1890. Still another best-seller was Baker’s Albert N’yanza of 1866; many others were widely read, including Burton’s Lake Regions of Central Africa (1861), Speke’s Discovery of the Source of the Nile (1864), Joseph Thomson’s To the Central African Lakes and Back (1881), and so on. Although these titles do not figure in standard histories of Victorian literature, such accounts of African exploration exerted an incalculable influence on British culture and the course of modern history. It would be difficult to find a clearer example of the Foucauldian concept of discourse as power or as “a violence that we do to things.”

The great explorers’ writings are nonfictional quest romances in which the hero-authors struggle through enchanted or bedeviled lands toward a goal, ostensibly the discovery of the Nile’s sources or the conversion of the cannibals. But that goal also turns out to include sheer survival and the return home, to the regions of light. These humble but heroic authors move from adventure to adventure against a dark, infernal backdrop where there are no other characters of equal stature—only bewitched or demonic savages. Although they sometimes individualize their portraits of Africans, explorers usually portray them as amusing or dangerous obstacles or as objects of curiosity, while missionaries usually portray
Africans as weak, pitiable, inferior mortals who need to be shown the light. Center stage is occupied not by Africa or Africans but by a Livingstone or a Stanley, a Baker or a Burton—Victorian Saint Georges battling the armies of the night. Kurtz’s career in devilry suggests that, on at least some occasions or in some ways, it was a losing battle.

Livingstone offers a striking example of how humanitarian aims could contribute to imperialist encroachment. Deeply influenced by Buxton, Livingstone also advocated the “opening up” of Africa by “commerce and Christianity.” He had more respect for Africans than most explorers and missionaries, though he still viewed them as “children” and “savages.” Occasionally he even expressed doubt that a European presence in Africa would be beneficial, but he also believed that the African was “benighted” and that the European was the bearer of the “light” of civilization and true religion. He held that Africa would be without hope of “raising itself” unless there was “contact with superior races by commerce.” Africans were “inured to bloodshed and murder, and care[d] for no god except being bewitched”; without “commerce and Christianity,” “the prospects for these dark regions are not bright.” Tim Jeal writes of this most humanitarian of explorers that “with his missionary aims and his almost messianic passion for exporting British values [Livingstone] seemed to his successors to have provided the moral basis for massive imperial expansion.”

Economic and political motives are, of course, easier to detect in Livingstone’s doppelgänger, Stanley. The purpose behind his work in the Congo for King Leopold II of Belgium was not far removed from the aims of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition in Heart of Darkness: “To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe” (HD, p. 31). But that sort of blatant economic motive was not what impelled Livingstone and the horde of missionaries who imitated him. The melodrama of Africa called for intervention by a higher moral power, and the Victorians increasingly saw themselves—again, with Livingstone in the lead—as the highest moral power among nations. The success of the British antislavery movement, after all, seemed to prove that Britain was more virtuous than its rivals for empire. For Livingstone, as for other missionaries and abolitionists, the African was a creature to be pitied, to be saved from slavery, and also to be saved from his own “darkness,” his “savagery.” At least Livingstone believed that the African could be rescued from “darkness”—that he could be Christianized and perhaps civilized. This attitude was, of course, necessary for any missionary activity. At the same time, missionaries were strongly tempted to exaggerate “savagery” and “darkness” in order to rationalize their presence in Africa, to explain the frustrations they experienced in making converts, and to win support from mission societies at home.
Typical missionary attitudes are suggested by such titles as *Daybreak in the Dark Continent*, by Wilson S. Naylor, and *Dawn in the Dark Continent*; *or, Africa and Its Missions*, by James Stewart. Typical, too, are these assertions from *By the Equator’s Snowy Peak* (1913), May Crawford’s autobiography about missionary life in Kenya: “With the coming of the British,” she says, “dawned a somewhat brighter” day for Kenya. It is only “somewhat brighter” because of the great backwardness of the natives, not because of any failing by the British. “Loving darkness rather than light,” she continues, the “natives” “resent all that makes for progress.”25 Perhaps what the Kenyans resented was the British intrusion into their country, but this Crawford could not see. I have read of no instances where cannibals put missionaries into pots and cooked them, but Africans did sometimes kill, capture, or drive missionaries away from their lands, thus fueling arguments for armed intervention and imperialist annexation.26 In Anthony Hope’s novel *The God in the Car* (1895), Lord Semingham is asked how his great scheme for investing in central Africa is faring. “Everything’s going on very well,” he replies. “They’ve killed a missionary.” This may be “regrettable in itself,” Semingham smiles, “but [it’s] the first step towards empire.”27

The missionary idea that Africa could be redeemed for civilization was more than some explorers were willing to grant. Burton believed that the African was “unimprovable.”

He is inferior to the active-minded and objective . . . Europeans, and to the . . . subjective and reflective Asiatic. He partakes largely of the worst characteristics of the lower Oriental types—stagnation of mind, indolence of body, moral deficiency, superstition, and childish passion.28

Burton goes to some trouble to undermine the missionary point of view. He declares that “these wild African fetissists [sic] are [not] easily converted to a ‘purer creed.’ . . . Their faith is a web woven with threads of iron.” At the same time, Burton agrees with the missionaries when he depicts fetishism as witchcraft and devil worship, Kurtz’s “unspeakable rites.” “A prey to base passions and melancholy godless fears, the Fetissist . . . peoples with malevolent beings the invisible world, and animates material nature with evil influences. The rites of his dark and deadly superstition” are entirely nefarious, as almost all Victorian writers claimed.29 In their books and essays on the Dark Continent, the Victorians demote all central African kings to “chiefs” and all African priests (with the exception of Muslims) to “witch doctors” (see fig. 5).

Even if Africans are doomed by their “negro instincts” always to remain “savage,” Burton still has a role in mind for them in the work of civilization. Like Carlyle, Burton argues both that abolitionist philanthropy
FIG. 5.—A typical portrayal of African religion as idol or devil worship. Herbert Ward, *Five Years with the Congo Cannibals*, 1890.
is mistaken and that primitive peoples need civilized masters. His argument is explicitly imperialist:

I unhesitatingly assert—and all unprejudiced travellers will agree with me—that the world still wants the black hand. Enormous tropical regions yet await the clearing and draining operations by the lower races, which will fit them to become the dwelling-places of civilized man.30

Other explorers agreed with Burton. Though a hero in the late stages of the antislavery crusade, Baker believed that “the African . . . will assuredly relapse into an idle and savage state, unless specially governed and forced by industry.”31

Burton was a marginal aristocrat and Baker came from a well-to-do family of shipowners and West Indian planters. Their racist view of Africans as a natural laboring class, suited only for performing the dirty work of civilization, expresses a nostalgia for lost authority and for a pliable, completely subordinate proletariat that is one of the central fantasies of imperialism. For opposite reasons, that fantasy also appealed to explorers from working-class backgrounds like Livingstone and Stanley: their subordinate status at home was reversed in Africa. Livingstone the factory boy could be Livingstone the great white leader and teacher in Africa, and Stanley the pauper orphan could be Stanley the great pioneer and field marshal, blazing the trail for civilization.

That Africans were suited only for manual labor is an idea often repeated in fiction. In Henry Merriman’s With Edged Tools (1894), for example, African porters “hired themselves out like animals, and as the beasts of the field they did their work—patiently, without intelligence. . . . Such is the African.” The comparison with British labor is made explicit when the narrator adds: “If any hold that men are not created so dense and unambitious as has just been represented, let him look nearer home in our own merchant service. The able-bodied seaman goes to sea all his life, but he never gets any nearer navigating the ship—and he a white man.” The English protagonists are shocked to discover that the Africans who work for their villainous half-breed partner are his slaves, to whom he pays no wages. Slavery by the 1890s was patently a violation of “one of Heaven’s laws.”32 But when the English offer the Africans the choice between freedom and continuing in slavery, most of them choose slavery. Merriman implies that Africans are not suited for freedom, though he leaves cloudy the issue of whether they can ever be elevated to freedom or are genetically doomed to a life no higher than that of beasts of burden.

Racism often functions as a displaced or surrogate class system, growing more extreme as the domestic class alignments it reflects are threatened or erode. As a rationalization for the domination of “inferior” peoples, imperialist discourse is inevitably racist; it treats class and race
terminology as covertly interchangeable or at least analogous. Both a hierarchy of classes and a hierarchy of races exist; both are the results of evolution or of the laws of nature; both are simpler than but similar to species; and both are developing but are also, at any given moment, fixed, inevitable, not subject to political manipulation. Varieties of liberalism and socialism might view social class as more or less subject to political reform, and in that way the hierarchy of classes never seemed so absolute as the hierarchy of races. Further, while the “social imperialism” of Joseph Chamberlain offered itself as an alternative to socialism, the spectacle of the domination of “inferior races” abroad also served to allay anxieties about both democratization and economic decline at home.

As in South Africa, the “conquered races” of the empire were often treated as a new proletariat—a proletariat much less distinct from slaves than the working class at home. Of course, the desire for and, in many places, creation of a new, subordinate underclass contradicted the abolitionist stance that all the explorers took. Nevertheless, it influenced all relations between Victorians and Africans, appearing, for example, in the forced labor system of King Leopold’s Congo which Stanley helped establish or again in so small an item as Sir Harry Johnston’s design for the first postage stamp of British Central Africa (fig. 6). The Africans who flank the shield and the motto Light in Darkness hold a spade and a pickax—the implements, no doubt, to build the future white civilization of Africa.

The racist views held by Burton and Baker were at least as close to the science of their day as the somewhat less negative views of the missionaries. As a member of James Hunt’s Anthropological Society, Burton was a scientist of sorts. Hunt had founded his group in 1863, after breaking with the Ethnological Society on the issue of whether the Negro race formed a distinct species. Hunt believed that it did; the Darwinians, in contrast, held that the races of mankind had a common origin and therefore supported ideas of the unity of human nature. But Darwinism was only relatively more advanced than Hunt’s racism. The development of physical anthropology and of “ethnology” as disciplines concerned with differences between races was reinforced from the 1860s on by Darwinism and social Darwinism; these “sciences” strengthened the stereotypes voiced by explorers and missionaries. Evolutionary anthropology often suggested that Africans, if not nonhuman or a different species, were such an inferior “breed” that they might be impervious to “higher influences.”

Just as concerted investigations of race and evolution were beginning, so were investigations of prehistory and of the anthropoid apes. Some
Fig. 6.—Sir Harry H. Johnston, design for first postage stamp of British Central Africa. Phot. Roland Oliver, Sir Harry H. Johnston and the Scramble for Africa, courtesy of the Royal Geographical Society.
of the results can be seen in Charles Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1872) and earlier in Thomas Henry Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* (1863). Huxley's essay involves a refutation of the idea that Africans, Australians, or other primitive peoples are the "missing link" or evolutionary stage between the anthropoid apes and civilized (white) mankind. But Huxley repeatedly cites evidence that suggests the proximity between the African and the chimpanzee and gorilla, including the story of an African tribe who believe that the great apes were once their next of kin. Into the middle of his otherwise logical argument, moreover, he inserts a wholly gratuitous note on "African cannibalism in the sixteen century," drawn from a Portuguese account and illustrated with a grisly woodcut depicting a "human butcher shop" (fig. 7).

When an astute, scientific observer such as Huxley indulges in fantasies about cannibalism, something is at work on a level deeper than mere caprice. As Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow note, cannibalism was not an important theme in British writing about Africa before mid-century. But "in the imperial period writers were far more addicted to tales of cannibalism than . . . Africans ever were to cannibalism." Typical of the more sensational treatments of anthropophagy is Winwood Reade, who in *Savage Africa* (1863) writes that "the mob of Dahomey are man-eaters; they have cannibal minds; they have been accustomed to feed on murder." Reade nonetheless describes his flirtations with "cannibal" maidens, and in a capricious chapter on "The Philosophy of Cannibalism," he distinguishes between ritual cannibalism, which was practiced by some west African societies, and another (mythical) sort which is "simply an act of gourmandise." "A cannibal is not necessarily ferocious. He eats his fellow-creatures, not because he hates them, but because he likes them." The more that Europeans dominated Africans, the more "savage" Africans came to seem; cannibalism represented the nadir of savagery, more extreme even than slavery (which, of course, a number of "civilized" nations practiced through much of the nineteenth century).

Evolutionary thought seems almost calculated to legitimize imperialism. The theory that man evolved through distinct social stages—from savagery to barbarism to civilization—led to a self-congratulatory anthropology that actively promoted belief in the inferiority—indeed, the bestiality—of the African. In *The Origin of Civilisation* (1870), John Lubbock argues not just that contemporary "savages" represent the starting point of social evolution but that they are below that starting point. The original primitives from whom Europeans evolved contained the seeds of progress; modern savages had not progressed, according to Lubbock, and hence must be lower on the evolutionary scale than the ancestors of the Europeans. All the more reason, of course, to place them under imperial guardianship and to treat them as nothing more than potential labor. The connection between theories of race and social class appears in George Romanes' *Mental Evolution in Man* (1889):
When we come to consider the case of savages, and through them the case of pre-historic man, we shall find that, in the great interval which lies between such grades of mental evolution and our own, we are brought far on the way towards bridging the psychological distance which separates the gorilla from the gentleman.\textsuperscript{38}

Presumably, everyone is a link somewhere in this late Victorian version of the great chain of being: if gentlemen are at the farthest remove from our anthropoid ancestors, the working class is not so far removed, and “savages” are even closer.

In her examination of the “scientific” codification of racist dogmas, Stepan writes:

By the 1850s, the shift from the earlier ethnographic, monogenist, historical and philosophical tradition to a more conservative, anthropological, and polygenist approach . . . had advanced quite far in Britain. . . . Races were now seen as forming a natural but static chain of excellence.\textsuperscript{39}

By the end of the century, eugenicists and social Darwinists were offering “scientific” justifications for genocide as well as for imperialism. The two were inseparable, but whereas imperialism could be lavishly praised in public, open support for the liquidation of “inferior” races was another matter. In \textit{Social Evolution} (1894), Benjamin Kidd argued that, try as they might to be humane, the British would inevitably kill off the “weaker” races in “the struggle for existence”:

The Anglo-Saxon has exterminated the less developed peoples with which he has come into competition . . . through the operation of laws not less deadly [than war] and even more certain in their result. The weaker races disappear before the stronger through the effects of mere contact . . . The Anglo-Saxon, driven by forces inherent in his own civilisation, comes to develop the natural resources of the land, and the consequences appear to be inevitable. The same history is repeating itself in South Africa. In the words [of] a leading colonist of that country, “the natives must go; or they must work as laboriously to develop the land as we are prepared to do.”\textsuperscript{40}

Similarly, in \textit{National Life from the Standpoint of Science} (1901), the eugenicist Karl Pearson goes beyond the vision of the black African with spade or pickax performing the groundwork for white civilization in the tropics: “No strong and permanent civilization can be built upon slave labour, [and] an inferior race doing menial labour for a superior race can give no stable community.” The solution? Where the abolitionists sought to liberate the slaves, Pearson’s “science” seeks to eliminate them or at least push them out of the path of civilization:
We shall never have a healthy social state in South Africa until the white man replaces the dark in the fields and the mines, and the Kaffir is pushed back towards the equator. The nation organized for the struggle [of existence] must be a \textit{homogeneous} whole, not a mixture of superior and inferior races.\footnote{197}

Darwin himself speculated about the causes of the apparently inevitable extinction of primitive races in the encounter with “higher” ones. Genocide decimated the American Indians, Tasmanians, Maoris, and Australians, but Darwin believed that they would have withered on the vine anyway—the less fit races vanishing as the more fit advanced. The Africans did not dwindle away as Europeans encroached on their territory, despite the slave trade; this seemed to some observers proof of their hardiness, their fitness. But to some this apparent fitness only showed the Africans’ inferiority in a different light—they were made of coarser stuff from that of the sensitive and poetic Maoris, for example. Darwin is comparatively cautious in his speculations about race. Nevertheless, throughout \textit{The Descent of Man} he emphasizes the distance between “savage” and “civilized” peoples, contrasting “savages” who practice infanticide to types of moral and intellectual excellence like John Howard, the eighteenth-century prison reformer, and Shakespeare. In the last paragraph, he declares that he would rather be related to a baboon than to “a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions.”\footnote{201} In general, Darwinism lent scientific status to the view that there were higher and lower races, progressive and nonprogressive ones, and that the lower races ought to be governed by—or even completely supplanted by—civilized, progressive races like the British.

There is much irony in the merger of racist and evolutionary theories in Victorian anthropology, which was, in certain respects, the first scientific anthropology. For the Victorians, the distance between primitive and civilized peoples seemed immense, perhaps unbridgeable. But through another sharp transvaluation, anthropology in the modern era has shifted from evolutionism to cultural relativism. First in the work of Franz Boas, and then more generally after World War I, the morally judgmental and racist anthropology of the Victorians gave way to a new version of “objectivity” or even of what might be called scientific primitivism.\footnote{203} What Claude Lévi-Strauss has to say in \textit{Tristes Tropiques} about the religious attitudes of “primitives” is exemplary of the transvaluation that anthropology has undergone since its nineteenth-century inception as the study of racial differences and a form of scientific rationalization for empire. Their beliefs are not “superstitions,” he declares, but rather “preferences . . . denoting a kind of wisdom [acceptance of individual and ecological limits, reverence for nature] which savage races practised spontaneously and the rejection of which, by the modern world, is the real madness.”\footnote{204}
While the antislavery crusade inspired much poetry before 1833, Victorian poets wrote little about Africa except for patriotic verses on topics such as General Charles Gordon’s last stand at Khartoum. Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “Timbuctoo” is perhaps an exception, but it was written in 1829 for a Cambridge poetry contest, and it offers a Romantic account of how the visionary city of Fable has been “darkened” by “keen Discovery” (a paradoxical application of “darken” similar to Marlow’s). More typical of later Victorian attitudes is William Makepeace Thackeray’s “Timbuctoo,” written for the same contest that Tennyson’s poem won. Thackeray produced a parody of abolitionist propaganda:

Desolate Afric! thou art lovely yet!!
One heart yet beats which ne’er shall thee forget.
What though thy maidens are a blackish brown,
Does virtue dwell in whiter breasts alone?
Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no!
It shall not, must not, cannot, e’er be so.
The day shall come when Albion’s self shall feel
Stern Afric’s wrath, and writhe ’neath Afric’s steel.45

Other far-flung parts of the world inspired the Victorian muse—Edward FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám and Edwin Arnold’s Light of Asia come to mind—but Victorian imaginative discourse about Africa tended toward the vaguely discredited forms of the gothic romance and the boys’ adventure story. For the most part, fiction writers imitated the explorers, producing quest romances with gothic overtones in which the heroic white penetration of the Dark Continent is the central theme. H. Rider Haggard’s stories fit this pattern, and so—with ironic differences—does Heart of Darkness.

Explorers themselves sometimes wrote adventure novels. Baker’s Cast Up by the Sea (1866) and Stanley’s My Kalulu: Prince, King, and Slave (1889) are both tales addressed to boys, and both carry abolitionist themes into Africa well after the emancipation of slaves in most other parts of the world (Cuba ended slavery in 1886, Brazil in 1888). “I had in view,” writes Stanley, “that I might be able to describe more vividly in such a book as this than in any other way the evils of the slave trade in Africa.”46 The story traces an Arab slaving caravan to Lake Tanganyika; when the Arabs are attacked by the blacks whom they’ve come to enslave, the only survivors—a few Arab boys—are enslaved instead. Later they are rescued from slavery by Prince Kalulu, who himself escaped from slavery in an earlier episode. But Kalulu and the Arab boys are once more captured by slave-trading blacks, “the Wazavila assassins and midnight robbers,” whose attacks on innocent villages provide what Stanley calls “a true
picture" of the horrors of the slave trade. Even the Arab slavers are morally superior to the “fiendish” Wazavila. After many scrapes, Kalulu and the Arab boys reach Zanzibar and freedom, well experienced in the horrors of both slavery and the Dark Continent. Stanley’s moral is plain: the internal slave trade will cease only when European forces squelch slave-trading tribes like the Wazavila and harness the African to the wheel of—to use Buxton’s phrase—“legitimate commerce.”

In 1888 the great Scottish explorer of Kenya, Joseph Thomson, published an ostensibly adult novel. The protagonist of *Ulu: An African Romance* is a disgruntled Scotsman named Gilmour (partly modeled on Thomson himself), who escapes from corrupt civilization to the Kenyan highlands. Gilmour accepts as his fiancée a fourteen-year-old African girl, Ulu, whom he proceeds (inconsistently, given his rejection of civilization) to try to civilize before marrying. This African Pygmalion story seems daring for the first fifty pages—a direct assault on Victorian stereotypes of race and empire. But the hero never marries or even civilizes Ulu; instead, he realizes the terrible mistake he has made when he meets the blond, blue-eyed daughter of the local missionary. Ulu then becomes an object of patronizing, cloying concern for the white lovers. Gilmour acknowledges “the impossibility of making Ulu other than she is, an out-and-out little savage, childlike and simple, and lovable in many ways, perhaps, but utterly incapable of assimilating any of the higher thoughts and aspirations of the civilized life.” While Gilmour’s Pygmalion scheme collapses, the story falls into a stereotypic adventure pattern. The ferocious Masais attack and capture Ulu and the missionary’s daughter. “What had [Kate] to expect from these licentious, bloodthirsty savages, the indulgence of whose brutal passions was their sole rule in life?” Fortunately, the Masais have never seen anything so beautiful as Kate; they proceed to worship her as a goddess. Gilmour rescues Kate, and Ulu conveniently sacrifices herself so that the intrepid white couple, who were of course meant for each other all along, can live happily ever after. (It’s tempting to correlate this wishful fantasy of love and extermination with the “scientific” rationalizations of genocide mentioned earlier: progress and fulfillment are the domain of Europeans even on an individual level. Nevertheless, Thomson was one of the more liberal defenders of Africans and African rights among the great explorers.) Thomson’s story is ludicrously inconsistent, but it is also remarkable for suggesting that the European invasion of Africa might corrupt the innocent savages without civilizing them and for even broaching the possibility of intermarriage. White/black unions were not uncommon in reality: the history of the Griqua and other racially mixed peoples in South Africa testifies to the contrary. But intermarriage was unheard of in fiction.

Except for the stress on love and marriage, there is little to distinguish Thomson’s adult novel from the whole subgenre of boys’ adventure tales to which Stanley’s and Baker’s stories belong. An adolescent quality per-
vades most imperialist literature, as it does much fascist culture in the 1920s and 1930s. Africa was a setting where British boys could become men but also where British men could behave like boys with impunity, as do Haggard's heroes. Africa was a great testing—or teething—ground for moral growth and moral regression; the two processes were often indistinguishable. And since imperialism always entailed violence and exploitation and therefore never could bear much scrutiny, propagandists found it easier to leave it to boys to "play up, play up, and play the game" than to more mature, thoughtful types. Much imperialist discourse was thus directed at a specifically adolescent audience, the future rulers of the world. In the works of Haggard, Captain Frederick Marryat, Mayne Reid, G. A. Henty, W. H. G. Kingston, Gordon Stables, Robert Louis Stevenson, and many others through Rudyard Kipling, Britain turned youthful as it turned outward.

In Black Ivory: A Tale of Adventure among the Slavers of East Africa (1873), another boys' novelist, R. M. Ballantyne, emulated Livingstone in seeking to expose "the horrible traffic in human beings" (see fig. 8). "Exaggeration has easily been avoided," Ballantyne assures us, "because—as Dr. Livingstone says in regard to the slave-trade—'exaggeration is impossible.'" Ballantyne wishes both to expose the atrocities of the slave trade and to expose anti-Negro stereotypes. Ballantyne writes that his character Chief Kambira has "nothing of our nursery savage...[he] does not roar, or glare, or chatter, or devour his food in its blood." This is all to the good, but Ballantyne is inconsistent. His sympathetic Africans are so mainly as melodrama victims; otherwise he portrays their customs as laughably childish. And he has only praise for British antislavery squadrons patrolling the coasts and for Britishers intruding inland in east Africa to stop the slave trade.

More interesting than Black Ivory is Sir Harry Johnston's History of a Slave (1889), which takes the form of an autobiographical slave narrative. Himself an explorer and an artist (see fig. 6), Johnston attacks slavery as an extension of savagery. The atrocities which his slave narrator depicts are more grisly than anything in Ballantyne's work; most grisly of all are the slow tortures practiced by the Executioner of Zinder under the Tree of Death. But if the slave's life under various Muslim masters is violent and cruel, his life before slavery was just as bloody and even more irrational. Thus the narrator recounts his earliest memory: "When...the men of our town killed someone and roasted his flesh for a feast...the bones...were laid round about the base of [a] tree. The first thing I remember clearly was playing with [a] skull." Johnston's exposé of the atrocities of the slave trade is preceded by an exposé of the alleged atrocities of tribal savagery—no pastoral innocence here. The solution to the slave trade entails more than persuading Muslim sheikhs to set black Africans free; it also entails abolishing tribal savagery, and the only way to do this
FIG. 8.—Frontispiece. Robert M. Ballantyne, Black Ivory: A Tale of Adventure among the Slavers of East Africa, 1873.
lies through imperialist annexation, the fulfillment of Britain's "civilizing mission."

Other post–Civil War fictions about Africa also attack the slave trade as part of a larger pattern of violence and savagery. In *The Congo Rovers: A Story of the Slave Squadron* (1885) by the American William Lancaster, the hero is captured by slave-trading natives and, in a chapter entitled "A Fiendish Ceremonial," narrowly escapes being sacrificially murdered. Such a work exhibits all the stereotypes about the Dark Continent that were to be exploited by another popular American writer, Edgar Rice Burroughs, in the Tarzan books. In novels not about slavery, moreover, stress still falls on the violence and irrationality of tribal customs. The publication dates of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and John Buchan's *Prester John* (1910) span the period of the main imperialist "scramble for Africa," and in both novels "civilization" is juxtaposed to "savagery" in ways that call for the elimination of the latter. For Haggard and Buchan too, the Dark Continent must be made light.

But Haggard and Buchan also give new life to the Romantic figure of the noble savage—Haggard through his magnificent Zulu warriors, Umbopa and Umslopagass, and Buchan through his black antihero, John Laputa, also from Zulu country. Haggard sees clearly the destruction of Zulu society brought about by the encroachment of whites (*King Solomon's Mines* appeared six years after the Zulu War of 1879); he can also praise primitive customs, contrasting them favorably with civilized ones. He nevertheless maintains a sharp division between the savage and the civilized; his white heroes penetrate the darkness as representatives of vastly higher levels of social evolution. Like aristocrats in Renaissance pastoral, they cleave to their own kind and return to the light. Their friendship with Umbopa cannot hold them in Kukuanaland, and only one other relationship threatens to do so. The romance between Captain John Good and the beautiful Foulata is nipped in the bud when, like Ulu, she is killed near the end of the story. The narrator, Allan Quatermain, concludes:

I am bound to say that, looking at the thing from the point of view of an oldish man of the world, I consider her removal was a fortunate occurrence, since, otherwise, complications would have been sure to ensue. The poor creature was no ordinary native girl, but a person of great, I had almost said stately, beauty, and of considerable refinement of mind. But no amount of beauty or refinement could have made an entanglement between Good and herself a desirable occurrence; for, as she herself put it, "Can the sun mate with the darkness, or the white with the black?"

Buchan depicts a revolutionary conspiracy led by John Laputa, the self-proclaimed heir of Prester John. To the narrator, Davie Crawfurd, Laputa is a noble but also satanic savage; Davie finds him intensely
attractive, but the attraction is charged with a deeply racist and erotic antipathy. Buchan portrays the conspiracy in terms of gothic romance, as a nightmare from which Davie struggles to awake. "You know the [kind of] nightmare when you are pursued by some awful terror," Davie says. "Last night I ... looked into the heart of darkness, and the sight ... terrified me." But this "heart of darkness" is not within Davie's psyche; instead, it is Africa and the murderous savagery of Laputa. Haggard can entertain the thought of a free society of noble savages so long as it is distant and mythical; so can Buchan in *A Lodge in the Wilderness*. But in *Prester John*, the idea of independence for Africans is a source only of terror. Laputa must be destroyed, the nightmare dispelled.

Even at its most positive, the romance genre renders the hero's quest as a journey to an underworld, a harrowing of hell; the myth of the Dark Continent fits this pattern perfectly. Conrad dealt with these mythic dimensions in a more conscious way than other writers, producing a quest romance that foreshadows the atrocity literature of the Congo Reform Association—works such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *Crime of the Congo* and Mark Twain's *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, to name two examples by other prominent novelists. By combining the romance and exposé forms, Conrad creates a brilliantly ironic structure in which the diabolic Kurtz demonstrates how the Dark Continent grew dark. For Conrad, the ultimate atrocity is not some form of tribal savagery; it is Kurtz's regression. Kurtz has become "tropenkollered" or "maddened by the tropics"; he has "gone native." In one sense, going native was universal, because in Africa—or in any foreign setting—every traveler must to some extent adopt the customs of the country, eat its food, learn its language, and so on. But Kurtz does something worse—he betrays the ideals of the civilization that he is supposedly importing from Europe. Conrad does not debunk the myth of the Dark Continent: Africa is the location of his hell on earth. But at the center of that hell is Kurtz, the would-be civilizer, the embodiment of Europe's highest and noblest values, radiating darkness.

By universalizing darkness, Conrad passes judgment on imperialism. Marlow looks more favorably upon British than upon Belgian, German, or French imperialism. In the red parts of the map, at least, "one knows that some real work is done" (*HD*, p. 10). But Marlow can also say that the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems [conquest] is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to . . . [*HD*, p. 7]

The modern version of idol worship, it appears, is idea worship. Conrad suggests the universality of darkness by suggesting the universality of
fetishism. If the natives in their darkness set Kurtz up as an idol, the European “pilgrims” or traders worship ivory, money, power, reputation. Kurtz joins the natives in their “unspeakable rites,” worshiping his own unrestrained power and lust. Marlow himself assumes the pose of an idol, sitting on ship deck with folded legs and outward palms like a Buddha. And Kurtz’s Intended is perhaps the greatest fetishist of all, idolizing her image of her fiancé—a fetishism which Marlow refuses to disrupt, as he has earlier disrupted Kurtz’s diabolic ceremonies. Marlow’s lie leaves Kurtz’s Intended shrouded in the protective darkness of her illusions, her idol worship.

Ian Watt identifies nine possible models for Kurtz—the very number suggests the commonness of going native. Stanley is among these models, and so is Charles Stokes, “the renegade missionary,” who abandoned the Church Missionary Society, took a native wife, and led a wild career as a slave trader and gun runner. Stokes was not particular about either his stock-in-trade or his customers: he sold guns to Germans working against the British in east Africa and also to French Catholic converts in Buganda, waging a small-scale religious war against the Protestant converts of Stokes’ former colleagues. He was finally arrested and executed without trial in the Congo for selling guns to Arab slavers; his demise added to the scandal back in Britain about King Leopold’s empire. Stokes’ case of backsliding was no doubt extreme, but not unusual. “I have been increasingly struck,” wrote Johnston in 1897, “with the rapidity with which such members of the white race as are not of the best class, can throw over the restraints of civilisation and develop into savages of unbridled lust and abominable cruelty.” That was another way in which “savages” and the working class sometimes appeared similar. But Kurtz is of “the best class,” not a “lower” one: going native could happen to anyone. It could even happen to entire societies. In Charles Reade’s novel *A Simpleton* (1873), for example, the Boers have “degenerated into white savages”; the British hero finds that Kaffir “savages” are “socially superior” to them, a typical assertion well before the Boer War of 1899–1902.

Missionaries were perhaps especially susceptible to going native; they frequently expressed fears about regressing, about being converted to heathenism instead of converting the heathen. According to J. S. Moffat, a missionary had to be “deeply imbued with God’s spirit in order to have strength to stand against the deadening and corrupting influence around him. . . . I am like a man looking forward to getting back to the sweet air and bright sunshine after being in a coal-mine.” Another missionary, S. T. Pruen, believed that merely witnessing heathen customs could be dangerous: “Can a man touch pitch, and not be himself defiled?” The Victorians found strong temptations in Africa, as their frequent references to the allegedly promiscuous sexual customs of Africans show. Burton’s prurient anthropology is a notable example; also typical is the sensuousness that Haggard attributes to Foulata and Thomson to Ulu (fig. 9).
"defiled"—for "going native" or becoming "tropenkollered"—led Europeans again and again to displace their own "savage" impulses onto Africans. Just as the social class fantasies of the Victorians (Oliver Twist, for example) often express the fear of falling into the abyss of poverty, so the myth of the Dark Continent contains the submerged fear of falling out of the light, down the long coal chute of social and moral regression. In both cases, the fear of backsliding has a powerful sexual dimension. If, as Freud argued, civilization is based on the repression of instincts and if the demands of repression become excessive, then civilization itself is liable to break down.

Dominique Mannoni has raised the question of the extent to which Europeans "project upon ... colonial peoples the obscurities of their own unconscious—obscurities they would rather not penetrate." In European writings about Africa, Mannoni says,

> the savage . . . is identified in the unconscious with a certain image of the instincts. . . . And civilized man is painfully divided between the desire to "correct" the "errors" of the savages and the desire to identify himself with them in his search for some lost paradise (a desire which at once casts doubt upon the merit of the very civilization he is trying to transmit to them).

Kurtz is a product of this painful division. But not even Marlow sees Kurtz's going native as a step toward the recovery of a lost paradise; it is instead a fall into hell, into the abyss of his own darkness. For modern Europeans—Lévi-Strauss again comes to mind—as for the Romantics, the association of primitive life with paradise has once more become possible. But for the Victorians, that association was taboo; they repressed it so much that the African landscapes they explored and exploited were painted again and again with the same tarbrush image of pandemonium. But as they penetrated the heart of darkness only to discover lust and depravity, cannibalism and devil worship, they always also discovered, as the central figure in the shadows, a Stanley, a Stokes, or a Kurtz—an astonished white face staring back.

Nothing points more uncannily to the processes of projection and displacement of guilt for the slave trade, guilt for empire, guilt for one's own savage and shadowy impulses than those moments when white man confronts white man in the depths of the jungle. The archetypal event is Stanley's discovery of Livingstone; the famous scene of "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" suggests a narcissistic doubling, a repetition or mirroring. The solipsistic repression of whatever is nonself or alien characterizes all forms of cultural and political domination (see fig. 10). In analogous fashion, Haggard's Britishers in King Solomon's Mines discover a black race living among the ruins of a great white civilization. When Karl Mauch discovered the ruins of Zimbabwe in 1871, no European was
FIG. 10.—“Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” Stanley, How I Found Livingstone, 1872.
prepared to believe that they had been constructed by Africans. So arose the theory that they were the ruins of King Solomon's Golden Ophir—the work of a higher, fairer race—a myth which archaeologists only began to controvert in 1906; hence, "King Solomon's Mines." Haggard repeats this myth in other stories. In She, Ayesha is a beautiful white demigoddess ruling over a brown-skinned race; and in Allan Quatermain, the white explorers discover a mysterious white race in the heart of darkness. So the Dark Continent turned into a mirror, on one level reflecting what the Victorians wanted to see—heroic and saintly self-images—but on another, casting the ghostly shadows of guilt and regression.

The myth of the Dark Continent was thus a Victorian invention. As part of a larger discourse about empire, it was shaped by political and economic pressures and also by a psychology of blaming the victim through which Europeans projected many of their own darkest impulses onto Africans. The product of the transition—or transvaluation—from abolitionism to imperialism, the myth of the Dark Continent defined slavery as the offspring of tribal savagery and portrayed white explorers and missionaries as the leaders of a Christian crusade that would vanquish the forces of darkness. The first abolitionists had placed blame for the slave trade mainly on Europeans, but, by mid-century, that blame had largely been displaced onto Africans. When the taint of slavery fused with sensational reports about cannibalism, witchcraft, and apparently shameless sexual customs, Victorian Africa emerged draped in that pall of darkness that the Victorians themselves accepted as reality.

The invasion of preindustrial, largely preliterate societies by the representatives of literate ones with industrialized communications, weapons, and transportation techniques meant a deluge of ruling discourse on one side and what appeared to be total acquiescence and silence on the other. As Frantz Fanon declares, "A man who has a language ... possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. . . . Mastery of language affords remarkable power." Victorian imperialism both created and was in part created by a growing monopoly on discourse. Unless they became virtually "mimic men," in V. S. Naipaul's phrase, Africans were stripped of articulation: the Bible might be translated into numerous African languages, but the colonizers rarely translated in the other direction, even when they learned Wolof or Zulu. African customs and beliefs were condemned as superstitions, their social organizations were despised and demolished, their land, belongings, and labor often appropriated as ruthlessly as they had been through the slave trade.

But the ethnocentric discourse of domination was not met with silence. Though it has not been easy to recover, modern historians have begun
piecing together how Africans responded to their Victorian savior-invincers. The wars of resistance fought by Zulu, Ashanti, Matabele, Ethiopian, Bugandan, and Sudanese peoples have offered perhaps the best evidence. The writings of literate nineteenth-century Africans like the Liberian Edward Blyden, pioneer of the négritude movement, have also been important. Still other responses can be found in the modern independence movements and the writings of nationalists like Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, and Steve Biko. But the legacy of the myth of the Dark Continent and, more generally, of imperialism has been massive and impossible to evade, as stereotypic treatments of Africa by today's mass media continue to demonstrate. The work of liberation from racism and the politics of domination is far from over. Discourse—that most subtle yet also inescapable form of power—in its imperial guise persists, for example, in the most recent assumptions about the antithesis between "primitive" or "backward" and "civilized" or "advanced" societies, about the cultural and historical differences between Afro-Americans and white Americans, and about the legitimacy of the white apartheid regime in South Africa. In this regard, what Nkrumah said in 1965 about the special impact of the American mass media on the African situation is still relevant:

The cinema stories of fabulous Hollywood are loaded. One has only to listen to the cheers of an African audience as Hollywood's heroes slaughter red Indians or Asiatics to understand the effectiveness of this weapon. For, in the developing continents, where the colonialist heritage has left a vast majority still illiterate, even the smallest child gets the message. . . . And along with murder and the Wild West goes an incessant barrage of anti-socialist propaganda, in which the trade union man, the revolutionary, or the man of dark skin is generally cast as the villain, while the policeman, the gum-shoe, the Federal agent—in a word, the CIA-type spy—is ever the hero. Here, truly, is the ideological under-belly of those political murders which so often use local people as their instruments.

The spirit of Tarzan and Tabu Dick lives on in Western culture, though often reduced to the level of sophisticated buffoonery, as in Saul Bellow's *Henderson, the Rain King*. In criticizing recent American and European failures to imagine Africa without prejudice, Chinua Achebe notes the continuing "desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest." As Achebe points out, whether they come from Victorian or modern England, the America of Grover Cleveland or that of Ronald Reagan, "travellers with closed minds can tell us little except about themselves."
1. Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (New York, 1963), p. 8; all further references to this work, abbreviated HD, will be included in the text. Philip D. Curtin writes that "the image of 'darkest Africa,' either as an expression of geographical ignorance, or as one of cultural arrogance, was a nineteenth-century invention" (The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780–1850 [Madison, Wis., 1964], p. 9). See also Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablo, The Africa That Never Was: Four Centuries of British Writing about Africa (New York, 1970), esp. pp. 49–113.


13. Curtin, The Image of Africa, p. 298. The Niger Expedition was “no mere exploring expedition [but] the first step toward a general ‘forward policy’ in West Africa, reversing the established doctrine of minimum commitments” (p. 298).


25. May Crawford, By the Equator's Snowy Peak: A Record of Medical Missionary Work and Travel in British East Africa (London, 1913), pp. 29, 56. I am indebted to Carolyn Redouty for calling my attention to these citations.


43. See George Stocking, Jr.: "Once the 'one grand scheme' of evolutionism was rejected, the multiplicity of cultures which took the place of the cultural stages of savagery, barbarism, and civilization were no more easily brought within one standard of evaluation than they were within one system of explanation" (*Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* [New York, 1968], p. 229).


49. In Ballantyne's best-seller of 1858, one of the three shipwrecked British boys says: "We've got an island all to ourselves. We'll take possession of it in the name of the King; we'll go and enter the service of its black inhabitants. Of course we'll rise, naturally, to the top of affairs. White men always do in savage countries" (*The Coral Island* [London, n.d.], p. 22). Ballantyne expresses the sentiment of total racial and cultural superiority that pervades boys' fiction about "savage countries" even when, as in *Black Ivory*, the target is the slave trade.


54. "Tropenkollered" was the term used by the Dutch naval officer Captain Otto Lütken, quoted in Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), p. 145.

61. See Karl Peters, *King Solomon's Golden Ophir: A Research into the Most Ancient Gold Production in History* (1899; New York, 1969); this work is one example of the speculation about the Zimbabwe ruins that underlies Haggard's stories. The first scientific work demonstrating that the ruins had been built by Africans was David Randall-MacIver, *Mediaeval
Rhodesia (London, 1906). As late as the 1960s, works published in Rhodesia and South Africa were still insisting that the original builders were non-African.


