

## A 19<sup>th</sup> Century Miscellany: Imperialism and Anti-Semitism

One of the pleasures of writing this podcast is that, whereas if we were writing a book or an article I'd need to adhere to confining editorial guidelines, here I can pursue whatever intriguing fact or dangling idea I stumble across to great (perhaps excessive) length, however weakly it may be connected to my main topic. I assume this wandering off into clouds of digression may frustrate listeners. I imagine you, the exasperated listener, wishing I'd get to the point already and give up my self-indulgent ways. I should stop testing your patience and return to the main narrative. If you feel this way, I suggest either you skip ahead or preferably enjoy the ride, accompanying me, for instance, as we travel to the Rue Vaneau in Paris, a journey I took you on in Episode 17.

While his daughter arranges her marriage, Baron Hulot plots his affair with Valérie Marneffe. First, he will set her and her husband up in a new home, moving her from the ugly neighborhood of the Rue du Doyenne to the more upscale Rue Vaneau. The street name "Vaneau," spelled with one "n," is the French word for "lapwing," a bird "noted for its slow, irregular wingbeats in flight and a shrill, wailing cry. (A group of lapwings is called a 'deceit'" ["Lapwing"]). In an attempt by a "right-wing Republican government . . . to reinforce its shaky legitimacy" ("Rue Vaneau"), an additional "n" was added to "Vaneau" in 1873 to honor a 19-year-old student at the Ecole Polytechnique, Louis Vanneau, who was killed leading a charge of insurgents during the July Revolution of 1830. In 1843, the then little-known Karl Marx lived on this street. In the twentieth century, the writer Andre Gide lived here, where, in 1944, he hid Albert Camus from the Nazis ("Rue Vaneau").

The most striking feature of this neighborhood is the Hôtel Matignon, built in 1722 and once the residence of the Italian Anne Éléonore Franchi, a professional dancer who became the mistress of the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph II, until exiled from the Habsburg Empire at the command of the empress Maria Theresa ("Hôtel"). In Paris, she married an Irish officer named Sullivan and traveled with him to India where she, now Éléonore Sullivan, became the mistress of the Englishman Quentin Crawford, who had made his fortune in service to the British East India Company, the two returning to Paris in 1780. Beginning in 1789 and lasting for a decade, she had an affair with a Swedish count, Axel von Fersen the Younger, who is alleged to have been a lover of Marie Antoinette. In 1791, Crawford and Sullivan assisted in the Flight to Varennes, the ill-fated attempt by Louis XIV and family to flee the Revolution. Crawford and Sullivan themselves fled France but returned several years later and in 1802 purchased the Hôtel Matignon ("Eleanore").

In subsequent years, it would be owned by the diplomat Talleyrand, the sister of King Louis Phillippe, a Genoese duke, and the Austro-Hungarian emperor for whom it would serve as embassy. During the first world war, it was taken over by the French, who were fighting both the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians, which resulted in the confiscation of the stamp collection of Philip Ferrari de La Renotière, "probably the most complete worldwide collection that ever existed, or is likely to exist ("Hotel"). Among his extremely rare stamps were the unique Treskilling Yellow of Sweden and the 1856 one-cent 'Black on Magenta' of British Guiana." Only one copy of each exists ("Philipp"). Philip Ferrari's collection was

auctioned off by the French government in the 1920s (“Philipp”). The “Black on Magenta” was purchased in 2014 by the shoe-designer and entrepreneur Stuart Weitzman for \$9,480,000 (“British”). Since 1958, the Hôtel Matignon has served as the French Prime Minister’s residence (Episode 17, 1:44:26).

In addition to entertaining myself (and frustrating my listeners) by digressing, I sometimes, partly to vary my sentence structures in order to make the podcast more engaging or to reinforce an idea I’m expressing, but mostly for my own enjoyment, will write long and syntactically complex sentences, with interrupting clauses and phrases, experimenting with style at the risk of clarity. Here are a couple of examples (the first a sentence from Episode 13 explaining that sensation novels gave voice to the dark side of human behavior at a time when there existed no explanatory frameworks to understand such destructive and self-destructive behavior, the second a long sentence, from Episode 8, summarizing a chunk of plot from William Mackenzie’s sentimental novel *Man of Feeling*).

At this time, theories that might have explained how civilization, which had reached its pinnacle in Victorian Britain, both concealed and amplified the innate violence within humans (which would later be explained by theories like Darwinian natural selection and Freudian psychology) did not exist (Episode 13, 31:45).

One way to elicit tears from a reader is through melodrama—excessive and elaborately described heartache and pathos, as when Harley listens to the plight of an old acquaintance, Edwards, whose son Jack’s dog is abruptly shot and killed by a gamekeeper for trespassing on the property of a justice of the peace, Jack subsequently hitting the gamekeeper, being taken to jail, denied bail, tried for assault and battery, and forced to pay a fine, then having a press gang arrive at his house on Christmas Eve, while he is playing with his children, to abduct him into the military until his father, Edwards, volunteers to go in his stead and is sent to India where he frees an unjustly imprisoned Indian and is punished with 200 lashes and banished from camp and thus forced to begin a lethal 400 mile trek to the nearest seaport but only a mile into his journey is assisted by the Indian he had helped escape and another Indian, the latter of whom guiding him to the coast and giving him 200 pieces of gold to help him return to England, after a week in which he discovers that his son and daughter-in-law had suffered bad crops and bad debts and had died of broken hearts, leaving behind two young children who he will now raise, assisted by Harley who provides him with a small farm (Episode 8, 21:38).

This long sentence highlights the melodramatic aspects of Mackenzie’s novel. But, as I said, many of my complex sentences were written that way simply to keep me engaged and entertained by puzzling through syntactical tangles.

Having explained some of the quirks of this podcast—long digressions and long sentences—I’ll spend most of the remainder of this episode on the politics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, specifically on European imperialism. The passage I just paraphrased from Mackenzie’s novel is evidence that British novelists did sometimes refer to British rule in India. However, given the great expanse of the British empire and given how central its commercial enterprises were to the maintenance of the lifestyles of the middle classes, including novelists, it’s surprising that references to Britain’s colonies—India, Australia, Malaya, Canada, Egypt, South Africa, Ireland, etc.—and discussions of the workings of this empire are abbreviated or non-existent in the British novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

These realist novels often depicted the political economy of Britain, its victims and victors, but never connected it to the global economic system that helped determine the lives of the British, not to mention its colonial inhabitants. As Temple University English professor Diedre David writes, “the subjects of empire and race tended to be incidental in nineteenth-Century fiction, despite the fact that in political actuality Britain’s imperial reach and governance was anything but decoration. Beyond the expanding Raj, the English had settled in Australia and acquired Singapore, the Cape Colony, Malta, Ceylon, St. Lucia, and Guiana” (84). Victorian novelists have characters travel to Australia and back, to Canada, to the West Indies, mostly to escape scandal and to seek their fortunes. But the natives of these lands rarely appear in these novels. And when they do appear, often in popular adventure tales, they’re presented, as in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*, as exotic and mysterious and deadly. It’s only at the end of the century, in the works of outsiders like the Ukrainian-born, Poland-raised, French-speaking Joseph Conrad and the Anglo-Indian Rudyard Kipling that, in literary fiction, the empire began to look at itself.

Generally, though, references to the empire in 19<sup>th</sup> century novels, especially to India, are frequent but tangential to the main narrative, are offered without development or critical examination; empire is seen as a fact of life, a Terra Incognita whose actuality exists only in rumor and conversation and vague allusions. The frequency of these allusions suggests how integrated into Britain Indian culture (though not Indian people) had become. India and things Indian were inescapable in British daily life. When, in Episode 14, I looked at death announcements on the front page of the *Times* of London, for example, I discovered not just interesting local color but recognition of how prominent and how seemingly normalized was news about the deadly consequences of the Indian Mutiny.

When he awakens, Robert is discomfited by his dream and by the partial telegram he found, realizing now that “there was some mystery involved with the disappearance of his friend—some treachery towards himself, or towards George” (88). And so he “bought the *Times* newspaper, and looked instinctively at the second column, with a morbid interest in the advertisements of people missing” (88). Robert’s turning to the second column would have been a natural choice for someone looking for a lost friend: in the 1850s, the *Times* of London featured lost and found listings in the second column on its front page. Looking at the front page of the October 22, 1857 edition (a date I picked at random but within the time frame of the novel), one can read about lost purses and wallets and opera glasses, as well as lost dogs:

- a small RAT-COLOURED TERRIER DOG—tan face and legs, white breast . . . comes to the name of Smut;
- a BROWN AND GRAY ROUGH SCOTCH TERRIER DOG, ears uncut and black, black nose, and has lost the front teeth underneath, light bushy tail and answers to the name of Boz;

and even a lost husband:

- Mr. George Green, late brushmaker of Northstreet, Brighton, is earnestly and affectionately entreated to RETURN, or Communicate immediately with his wife, his absence causing her and his relatives, much grief and anxiety.

The first column of the paper listed announcements of births, marriages, and deaths. It's where George first read of the death of his wife Helen. On this particular day, October 22, 1857, in addition to men, women, and children who died from natural causes, are four officers who died during the Indian Mutiny, including this family tragedy:

- In the intrenchments at Cawnpore, killed by a round shot, Capt. W.L. Halliday, 56<sup>th</sup> Regt. N.J., youngest son of the late John Halliday, Esq. of Chapel Cleeve, Somersetshire; also of small pox and fever, Emma Laetitia, his beloved wife, and, it is believed, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, Edith Mabel, their daughter, aged 2 years and 3 months. (Episode 14, 1:07:10)

Despite this background, these matter-of-fact recitations of British soldiers killed in India, the Mutiny is in these novels at best only alluded to, as are other details of imperial rule. This allusiveness suggests, especially after the Indian Mutiny, that for many British rule was too individually worrying and ideologically troubling to look at more closely but was a subject too entwined in daily life to be excluded from novels. While references to India could reveal genuine concern and especially an opposition to the corruption of imperial rule, as in the nabobs who prospered via the British East India Company, they could also, as in the following discussion of Rhoda Broughton's *Cometh Up as a Flower*, from Episode 7, be quite reactionary and could demonstrate the casual racism that pervaded Victorian Britain.

Nell seems only vaguely aware of Britain's own use of violence to suppress resistance in its colonies. When she imagines "Dick having been killed in the wars," she can't decide which war this might be, "whether French, Kaffire or Sikh" since there was "an equally remote probability of our picking a quarrel with either of those nations" (159). These allusions suggest the span of the British empire, from India, home of the Sikhs; to France, under Napoleon II an imperial rival against whom the British fought for territory in South and Southeast Asia; to Africa: the word "kaffir," deriving from the Arabic word for infidel, referred originally to all Bantu-speaking tribes in southern Africa, then to only the Xhosa people, and finally to all Africans—as Wallace Mills, History professor at St. Mary's University in Halifax, explains: "By the end of the nineteenth century, [kaffir] had similar connotations and uses as the term 'nigger'" (615). Use of the word "kaffir" in contemporary South Africa can result in a civil penalty. This racial sensitivity to the word "kaffir," though virtually unknown in the United States, is common in Britain where one grocery store chain has relabeled "Kaffir limes" "Makrut limes."

Of the many lands that comprised the British empire, it's India that's most frequently mentioned in the novel. Nell imagines Dick dying in a "wild Mahratta battle" a generic, ahistorical term she uses to refer to any exotic and distant combat in India. In actuality, there were three Mahratta wars waged by the British East India Company against the Mahratta empire (from 1775 to 1782, 1803 to 1805, and 1817 to 1819), the last of which ending the empire's two centuries rule and establishing British rule over the Indian subcontinent. Another reference to India appears in a moment of banter, Nell telling her penniless suitor Dick he is "not related to the Great Mogul" (151), a reference, perhaps, to a Mughul emperor or perhaps to the world's largest diamond, a 787-carat stone found in India in 1650. Recut and rechristened the Orlov diamond, this stone is believed to be part of Catherine the Great's scepter, now on display in the Kremlin Army museum in Moscow. Britons' fascination with Indian diamonds followed the public display of the Koh-i-Nor diamond, a 186-carat stone discovered in India, probably in the 1600s, which became the property of Queen Victoria as part of the settlement of the Second Anglo-Sikh war, and which was put on display at the Great Exhibition of 1851, inspired Wilkie Collins's 1868 novel *The Moonstone*, and became part of the Crown Jewels which tourists flock to see in the Tower of London. This reference to the Great Mogul, whether despot or diamond, shows how intertwined Indian culture was becoming with British culture, as does Nell's describing Dolly sitting motionless "as a statue, tinted with life colours, like

Vishnoo contemplating his own attributes and god gifts in the shining heart of the Swerga,” the Hindu underworld (156).

Most striking and most disturbing is Dick’s telling Nell, as they sit by a brook in a lover’s embrace that he “knew [Hugh] in India; all through the Mutiny; he is the deadliest shot. . . . They used to get him to pick off those black devils; he bagged a good deal of black game” (150). One might expect Nell to be, at a minimum, surprised by this recounting of what we would consider war crimes, not to mention a casual racism that views Indians as game to be shot, presumably in the same spirit in which an aristocrat like Hugh enjoys fox hunting. Unbothered by Dick’s cavalier retelling of these horrors, Nell instead responds by asking if Dick and Hugh were good friends, before going on to talk of Dick’s financial circumstances, all the while “rub]bing] [her] cheek gently against his shoulder” (151) and then drifting away in a lyrical account of “the rosy flush . . . catching at the tops of the churchyard yews” and the “little amber pools, where . . . tiny baby fish . . . shelter their semi-transparent bodies from the sun” (151).

That these horrors bother Nell not at all, that she unself-consciously moves from “black game” being shot to “tiny baby fish” sheltering their bodies, suggests either a crippling lack of moral intelligence or a belief by Nell, by Broughton, and by a majority of Britons that there was nothing wrong—and in fact much right—with killing “black devils.” At the height of its powers, Britain in the 1860s was convinced of the rightness of its imperial mission. Maintenance of this belief often required one to ignore or to justify troubling contrary evidence. The Indian Mutiny of 1857, “in some respects,” writes Mark Seaman, “a national rebellion against British rule, and in other respects, a military revolt within the ranks of the native army” (16), was unbelievably brutal, with Indian rebels massacring large numbers of British soldiers and civilians. After British East Indian forces surrendered in the siege of Cawnpore, for example, 300 soldiers were murdered. One hundred and twenty women and children who escaped this execution were held captive and ultimately killed, their bodies thrown down a well (“Siege”). Only five men and two women survived these two massacres. Seaman describes the immediate British response: “The effect these massacres had on the British, along with their general contempt for the Indian, combined to make retaliation just as fierce and probably even more indiscriminate” (19). Writing in his 1858 *History of the Indian Mutiny*, Charles Ball explained that “Throughout the British empire, the shout of the people was for rescue and for vengeance: the blood of their slaughtered country-men, of their martyred women and children, came welling up before their mental vision; and one desire for retribution seemed to pervade all hearts, and nerve all arms” (648). This desperate cry for revenge suggests how greatly the Indian Mutiny shook British confidence. Writes Gautam Chakravarty, English professor at the University of Delhi, “British women had been subjected to systematic humiliation and violence, the news of such events questioned current notions of security, and the inviolability of British power, prestige and person in India” and ended rule by the East India Company (36). Hugh’s murders, Dick’s racism, and Nell’s moral blindness are best understood within this context, this need to reassert the rightness both of Britain’s imperial mission and of the wealth it produced, wealth that enabled the privileged lives of the upper-classes, the jewels and gowns, picnics and balls, carriages and estates (Episode 7, 19:10).

Much like the characters in Rhoda Broughton’s novel, the novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon herself demonstrated a reactionary, pro-Britain, militarist response to the Mutiny, which you can hear in this excerpt from Episode 14.

In the late 1850s, Braddon was not only aware of the Mutiny but was caught up in the public outrage over atrocities committed against the British, even publishing, in provincial newspapers, poems defending British rule and condemning Indian violence, beginning the poem “Delhi,” for instance, with lines demanding the eradication of Britain’s Indian foes:

Down to the ground, scattered be every stone!  
Annihilation be thy mildest fate;

And be thine epitaph these words alone:  
Here lie the bones of fiends infuriate—  
Here rot the carcasses of million slaves;  
And here *free* Britain's unstained banner waves.

Braddon's exterminationist response to the Mutiny was likely inflamed by her personal connections to Anglo-India. Her uncle William, notes Braddon biographer Robert Lee Wolff, "had spent thirty years as a judge in Bengal and had . . . come home, well-to-do and generous" (30). Following in his uncle's footsteps, Braddon's brother Edward began his remarkable career, setting sail for India in 1847 to work for his cousin's Calcutta mercantile firm, leaving in the early 1850s to become manager of several indigo factories. According to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*,

Braddon . . . display[ed] the usual planter arrogance towards the Indians. A European deputy magistrate once actually found him guilty of "aggravated and unprovoked assault", a decision that was later reversed. In July 1855 his work was interrupted by skirmishes and cleaning-up operations against the Santal people who had revolted briefly. The opportunity for martial activity pleased him, and he later spoke of it as 'a splendid substitute for the tiger-shooting which came not to my hand. (Bennet)

Edward Braddon would fight as a volunteer for the British during the Indian Mutiny and serve for many years in the Indian civil service. With these family connections to India and with the public furor aroused by and trauma caused by the Mutiny, it's no surprise that we find traces of the Mutiny in *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Braddon was far from alone in responding so excessively to the Indian Mutiny. Saverio Tomaiuolo, Associate Professor of English at Cassino University, Italy, argues that the Mutiny was "one of the most tragic events in Victorian and imperial history . . . a cultural trauma that affected the public opinion and the literary world in unprecedented ways" (113). Ironically, the response to this sudden and violent threat to British certainties and self-identity was itself a form of intolerance and violence. Some criticized their fellow Britons' rage, Benjamin Disraeli, for one, declaring, "I have heard things said, and seen them written of late, which would make me almost suppose that the religious opinions of the people of England had undergone some sudden change; and that instead of bowing before the name of Jesus, we were preparing to revive the worship of Moloch" (qtd. in Herbert, "Doctrine" 434). For Karl Marx, Indian violence had its origins in British colonial violence:

However infamous the conduct of the Sepoys, it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India, not only during the epoch of the foundation of her Eastern Empire, but even during the last ten years of a long-settled rule. To characterize that rule, it suffices to say that torture formed an organic institution of its financial policy.

Living in London and exposed to English reporting on the Mutiny, Marx noted the hypocrisy and hyperbole of the press: "it should not be forgotten that, while the cruelties of the English are related as acts of martial vigor, told simply, rapidly, without dwelling on disgusting details, the outrages of the natives, shocking as they are, are still deliberately exaggerated." The unease and threat and immorality that define the sensation novel, then, were in part a reaction to the many ways the Indian Mutiny threatened conventional and comforting British self-identity (Episode 14, 41:49).

More than impacting individual novels like *Lady Audley's Secret*, the Indian Mutiny so shook British complacency and self-assurance that it influenced a whole genre, the sensation novel, as I discussed in Episode 13.

Coinciding with the Married Women's Rights and Divorce Act, questioning British tradition and domestic stability, and influencing the sensation novel was the Indian Mutiny of 1857, which shocked and enraged the British and lingered for decades in public memory, even generating a literary subgenre, the Mutiny novel. Why was what for the British was a minor incident so shocking? After all, it's not like Victorian Britain, as it pursued and maintained its empire, was pacifist. W.L. Burn, Professor of Modern History at Durham University, provides us with a compelling list of British militarism between just 1815 and 1846:

Within that period British troops had been in action against Gurkhas, Pindaries, Mahrattas, Sikhs, Afghans, Burmese, Chinese, Kaffirs, Ashantis and Boers. Ships of the Royal Navy had bombarded Algiers, routed the Turks at Navarino, operated against Mehemet Ali [in Egypt and Syria], underwritten Latin American independence, blockaded Buenos Aires and [Athens], captured slavers and waged war on pirates from the Caribbean to the China Sea. [Parts of India and Pakistan] and a great part of Burma had fallen to British arms. . . . It was natural that a country which lived by its foreign trade and its foreign investments should protect and extend them, in the last resort by force. (56)

Furthermore, however brutal, the Mutiny did little damage to British rule in India and led to fewer British deaths than the Crimean War two years earlier. "Gauged purely in the light of its empirical scale and its practical consequences," writes English Professor Emeritus at Northwestern University Christopher Herbert, "the Mutiny might not seem an outstandingly momentous historical event. . . . nor do modern historians tend to treat it as more than a lurid footnote to the tale of nineteenth-century imperialism" (1-2).

And yet the Mutiny had a dramatic, if not traumatic and long-lasting impact upon the British. Herbert notes that "Contemporary accounts of the Mutiny portray it . . . as an event of almost incomprehensible magnitude and historical importance" (2). In part, this impact was caused by the sudden and seemingly irrational nature of the Mutiny, in which Sepoys (i.e., Indian soldiers) serving the British turned against them. This reaction was also caused by the shocking and brutal details, the atrocities committed against British soldiers and civilians, as reported in the popular press. Lydia Murdoch, History professor at Vassar College, focuses on one particular trauma connected to the Indian Mutiny: the murder of children. Anyone who's read a few Victorian novels quickly perceives the culture's worship of children and, with a high childhood mortality rate, its need to ritually grieve and find solace in Christian worship. Children killed in the Indian Mutiny were denied these rituals. Murdoch explains that "Survivors could not always mourn children's deaths in a manner that reinforced British values and Christian traditions. The inability to grieve and commemorate the good deaths of children," she continues, "compromised the domestic ideals justifying British imperialism. When proper burial and mourning rituals for children could not be carried out, the British sense of national community began to fray, and doubts about the costs of empire emerged" (367). Ultimately, the Mutiny was perceived as, according to Herbert, "'a terrible break' in British experience, a traumatic explosion from a known world into a frightening new historical era" (2-3).

The sensation genre, with its frequent violence and law-breaking and assaults upon the domestic world, was shaped by the Mutiny. The intrusion into public consciousness of mass violence generated by British colonial rule conflicted with the benign picture of this rule, threatening the national confidence and superiority prevailing in mid-century Britain (as exemplified by the Great Exhibition of 1851). n. For many Britons, imperial rule in India established political stability, helped staunch primitive and destructive cultural practices, raised Indians' standard of living, initiated the country's entry into the modern world with the establishment of a rail system and an efficient civil service, and sought to bring a

superior morality and the true faith through conversion to Christianity. The Mutiny undercut all of these beliefs. According to Herbert,

it was a moment when educated Britons suddenly were afforded a deeply disillusioning view into the national soul and found that they could never return afterward to their prelapsarian state of unawareness. The shock of finding that they were despised by their supposedly grateful imperial subjects in India was in part the shock of finding that their national idealism and national self-esteem were self-deluding and morally corrupting. The moment of this discovery coincides with the beginning of the rapid unravelling of the mid-Victorian fabric of values that forms the main story of British cultural history over the next several decades. (16-17)

The prevailing darkness—the lies and disguises and madness and violence—intrinsic to the sensation novel was a response to and a reflection of this “deeply disillusioning view.” (Even the proximate cause of the Mutiny—Muslim and Hindu troops believing that their rifle cartridges were greased with pig and cow fat—was sensational.) Arousing British indignation, the Sepoys’ atrocities, inflicted upon a people they served and a governing system they supposedly admired, revealed a dark underside to human nature, a view adopted by sensation novelists and disparaged by critics, one reviewer, writing in 1865, declaring sensation novels “one of the abominations of the age” because “into uncontaminated minds they will instill false views of human conduct. . . . The fault of these novels is that they contain pictures of life, wherein there are scenes . . . grossly untrue to nature” (Rae 203). The same author approvingly cites the words of the Archbishop of York: These novelists “want to persuade people that in almost every one of the well-ordered houses of their neighbours there was a skeleton shut up in some cupboard; that their comfortable and easy-looking neighbour had in his breast a secret which he was always going about trying to conceal” (qtd. in Rae 203) (Episode 13, 22:22).

The British weren’t alone, of course, in seeking to advance national interests through imperial rule, through an allegedly benign co-optation of native communities, and through the often violent suppression of native populations. In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the French fought for and lost control of India to the British. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the French initiated their imperial rule in North Africa, the financial exploitation of which is a key plot point in Balzac’s *Cousin Bette*, although just as in Broughton and Braddon, the details of this rule, well-known at the time, were overlooked by Balzac but elaborated upon by me in Episode 17.

The struggle between France and Algeria began in 1827 when, during a dispute over payment for grain supplies, the Algerian governor hit the French consul with a jeweled flyswatter—the so-called “Fly Whisk Incident”—leading to a French naval blockade and declaration of war (Spencer 35). However farcical its beginning, the tension between France and what had once been part of the Ottoman Empire was real and soon developed into a serious military conflict. The French invaded Algeria in 1830, in what historians view as a desperate attempt by King Charles X to gain public support and retain his crown. Justifying his proposal to seize Algiers, Aimé-Marie-Gaspard, comte de Clermont-Tonnerre, minister of War from 1828 to 1831, explained, “it is useful sometimes to remind France that military glory survived the revolution and that a legitimate monarchy . . . also knows how to float its battle flag in far-off countries” (qtd. in Bower 9-10). As Jennifer Sessions, Professor of History at the University of Virginia, further explains, “Designed to rally the nation to the monarchy and reinforce its legitimizing principles, the public spectacles orchestrated around the expedition sought to demonstrate the power of sacred kingship to protect civilization from barbarism, Christianity from Islam, and freedom from tyranny” (28). Only three weeks after the taking of Algiers, however, Charles abdicated and the July Monarchy of King Louis-Phillipe, so disliked by Balzac, came to power. Louis Phillipe continued the war in Algeria for much the same reasons as his predecessor: according to Benjamin Claude Bower, History professor at UT-Austin, “having come to power on the barricades, Louis-Phillipe faced troubling questions about his legitimacy,



and foreign conquests offered him a valuable tool to consolidate power. Algeria provided the luster of imperial conquest necessary for his family to hold on to the throne” (13).

Given his belief in the monarchy and Catholicism, it should come as no surprise that Balzac supported the war in Algeria. Yet despite the encyclopedic goal of his literary project, to document all of French life, Balzac, did not depict the French in Algeria. Although a years-long guerilla war was being fought by the French, who would commit 100,000 troops to the conflict (Sessions 83), in the novels that comprise *La Comédie Humaine*, Algeria exists merely as a distant reality. It is, writes U.C. Santa Cruz English professor Dorian Bell, “An absent setting that never attracts the Balzacian narrator's famously topographic eye. . . . Algeria lingers there with the ontological strangeness of something missing but still felt: a phantom limb, as it were, and a big one” (35). It’s not as if French culture was ignoring this distant war. On the contrary, as Sessions reports,

From the early 1830s, the conquest was integrated into the three-day national holiday held on the anniversary of the July Days. . . . incorporate[ing] references to the Armée d’Afrique and the ongoing war in Algeria. . . . Military parades frequently included] famous African units, while scenes from the Algerian war were incorporated into the popular diversions. . . . Costumed “Bedouins” performed for Parisian festival-goers as early as 1831, and in the 1840s scenes set in Algeria were featured among the military pantomimes presented on temporary stages erected around the city to entertain the populace. The conquest became a theme for the capital’s elaborate pyrotechnic displays, as well. In 1836, the grand finale of the fireworks capping the three-day holiday simulated the siege of a “Moorish” fort . . . . In the 1840s, public buildings were illuminated with “Oriental” or “Moorish” arches and even, in 1845, emblazoned with colored lights spelling out “Afrique française.” (89)

At the same time that this conflict was being celebrated and exoticized, though, it was being criticized for its cost and cruelty. According to Sessions, “As the occupation grew, liberal lawmakers objected to its financial costs, while parliamentarians, journalists, and citizens of varied political stripes questioned the extreme violence that characterized antiguerilla warfare in North Africa” (83). The cruelty of the war could be seen in its initial stages when, soon after the fall of Algiers in 1830, French soldiers took part in what Bower, calls “the brutal sack of Blida,” which saw “Pell-mell executions of people assembled as prisoners . . . includ[ing] firing squads and sabering and bayoneting of those who survived. This improvised slaughter dragged on for more than six hours. . . . French troops descended on one neighborhood and killed everyone. Eight hundred Blideans were slaughtered as recompense for the twenty-one French soldiers killed in action that day” (Bower 16). A French army publication concluded that “This unfortunate town can be considered no longer to exist” (qtd. in Bower 16).

Scenes of such barbarity occurred throughout the war. In 1845, just a year before Balzac began *Cousin Bette*, a French army, having trapped a rebellious Arab tribe, set fires to smoke them out of their mountain caves. William Gallois, History Professor at the University of Exeter, describes the result: “What those soldiers who advanced found in the cave were around six hundred villagers. Almost all of them appeared to be dead, but after dragging the bodies from the smoky caves into clearer air, it became clear that perhaps fifty or a hundred of the tribe had survived, able now to make peace with the French army” (94). This “gassing . . . in caves [was] a tactic of irregular warfare employed by the French on several occasions during the Algerian campaign” (“Aimable”).

Yet in *Cousin Bette*, while the remote Napoleonic wars linger, the ongoing Algerian war is absent but for the war-profiting opportunity it offers Baron Hulot. Admittedly, the war provided many opportunities for profiteering: in 1840 alone, Algeria cost the War Ministry 58 million francs, and between 1831 and 1840, 305 million francs (Browder 33). Other than its corruption, Balzac only briefly and in passing refers to the war. Hulot’s brother, the Marshal, comments that Hulot is “overwhelmed with work because of the

Algerian situation” (179). And, as noted earlier, Hulot tells his brother-in-law they can profit “by raids and levies,” and “there is a lot of fighting over grain” (144). Bower provides the context that Balzac passes over:

The purpose of such raids was to break the rural economy and consequently the capacity of people to resist. French troops burned crops, emptied silos, stole herds, and cut down fruit and olive trees, thereby ensuring economic ruin. Terror became the army’s most important weapon . . . kidnapping, summary executions, outright murder, torture, and sexual assaults produced . . . the sense of ‘terrible fear’ that commanders thought would destroy existing social bonds and result in a docile population. (22)

In *Cousin Bette*, however, there’s no indication of the military’s use of terror, no explanation of what “raids” consisted of. Likewise, the vague reference to “a lot of fighting” occurring over grain ignores the French strategy of confiscating and destroying grain and other crops as part of a strategy to destroy the region’s social infrastructure (Episode 17, 2:05:15).

One tactic of 19<sup>th</sup> Century novelists when faced with a troubling subject was to marginalize it, as often happened with imperialism. Another tactic was to exaggerate or misrepresent, as consistently happened when novelists wrote about Jews, who, denied a full humanity, were often reduced to stereotypes and grotesques. Novelists frequently resorted to these because such depictions were commonplace and were considered realistic, especially for those writers who had little or no contact with Jews other than perhaps in their role as bankers or money-lenders. Jewish stereotypes also provided writers with easily constructed villains and comic buffoons incapable of fitting into mainstream Christian culture. This depiction drew on pre-existing tropes, as is apparent in several of the novels I’ve examined so far, such as Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*, which I documented in Episode 4.

She is unable to disarm the two men who have laid claim to her father’s corpse as collateral. What separates these two men from the others? Why are they immune to her charms? Because they are Jews. These men, “each with a remarkably hooked nose, stole away from the hubbub of the clamourers and peered cunningly about” (89). Here Wood relies on the familiar anti-Semitic stereotype. Hook-nosed and cunning, these Jews, presumably money-lenders, do not show reverence for the dead, as Christians would, but instead see the Earl’s body as a tool to enrich themselves. In depicting this laying claim to a body, Wood is drawing on local history. The funeral of Robert Carr, Bishop of Worcester and a friend of her father, “was interrupted by creditors who seized his coffin in lieu of debts” (Jay qtd. in Wood, 625n95). Seizing a body as payment for debt occurs in at least two other 19th century novels, Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* and Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*. (Altick, *Presence*, 665n). But without the hook-nosed creditors. This scene is not the only appearance of antisemitism in *East Lynne*. Later in the novel, following the anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as physically weak and inactive, Wood renders a Jewish lawyer as short and grossly over-weight, “about five times the breadth [of two normal-sized men] rolled into one.” “The lawyer’s name,” Wood writes, “was Rubiny, ill-naturedly supposed to be a corruption of Reuben” (475). This character appears nowhere else in the novel and thus serves as a gratuitous bit of racist humor. About this scene, Elisabeth Jay comments, “Wood manages to cast an anti-Semitic slur while apparently disavowing it” (639n475).

The most famous instance of anti-Semitism in Victorian literature, of course, is the character Fagin in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (published 24 years before *East Lynne*). Although the hooked-nose appearance of Fagin owes more to George Cruikshank’s illustrations than to Dickens’s descriptions, Dickens nonetheless depicts “the Jew” (as he frequently calls Fagin) as an evil homunculus: “It seemed

just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal. gleefully gazing at his purloined treasures” (153). And of course the Jew is obsessed with riches: “His eyes glistened,” Dickens writes, “as he raised the lid [of a small box hidden in a trap in the floor] and looked in. . . . and took from it a magnificent gold watch, sparkling with jewels. . . . ‘Aha!’ said the Jew, shrugging his shoulders and distorting every feature with a hideous grin” (67).

However, at the time of the writing of *East Lynne*, Britain had taken significant steps toward inclusion, toward recognizing the common humanity of Jews. As Frank Felsenstein, Emeritus Professor of English at Ball State University, explains in his book on anti-Semitic stereotypes in English popular culture: “many of the old assumptions that cast Jews as fiendish assassins and infernal bogeymen came to be viewed by the [1830s] with an increasing skepticism coupled with what appears to be an unfeigned remorse at their vile treatment in former times” (220). In 1848, the House of Commons approved the Jews Relief Act, which would allow Jews to enter Parliament without having to swear an oath on “the true Faith of a Christian.” Ten years later, in 1858, the bill was approved by the House of Lords. David Salomons, the first Jewish mayor of London, was elected in 1855. The Jewish born Anglican convert Benjamin Disraeli would become Prime Minister seven years after the publication of *East Lynne*. And in 1871, Parliament passed the Universities Test Act, which opened Oxford, Cambridge, and Durham universities to Catholics, non-conformists, Jews, and other non-Christians.

But stereotypes aren’t erased by legislation. They persisted in the culture, as reflected in Wood’s depiction of the carrion-like Jews hovering over the corpse of the Earl. Writing in 1847, the novelist and Jewish historian Grace Aguilar noted that Jews “are yet regarded as aliens and strangers; and still, unhappily but too often, as objects of rooted prejudice and dislike” (qtd. in Ragussis 302). Thirty years later, in 1877, in a review of George Eliot’s novel *Daniel Deronda*, Joseph Jacobs voiced a similar complaint: “There yet remains a deep unconscious undercurrent of prejudice against the Jew which conscientious Englishmen have often to fight against” (107). Yet the once-prevailing anti-Semitism did wane due to Enlightenment views about equality, to a sense, especially as England’s self-regard grew to match its growing wealth and power, that this religious prejudice could not be reconciled with a belief in “England’s green and pleasant land,” and to the recognition that a capitalist economy needed to respect and support successful capitalists, their religious beliefs notwithstanding. A bit of this more progressive view is apparent in the novel. When a businessman, Mr. Warburton, alleges that half of the Earl’s creditors must be Jews who, therefore, will find losing a little money “an agreeable novelty,” the new Earl angrily responds, “Jews have as much right to their own as we have” (102-3) (Episode 4, 34:00).

Further reliance upon dehumanizing descriptions and moral condemnations of Jews can be found, as I noted in Episode 7, in Rhoda Broughton’s *Cometh Up as a Flower*:

In the description of the creditors about to pounce on the Lestranges we find perhaps the novel’s most disturbing element: a virulent anti-Semitism. “The children of Israel,” Broughton writes, “had come down upon us like locusts: a dreadful man with a hook nose, thick lips, and a greasy Hebrew face had come to make an inventory of the furniture and movables” (256). Anti-Semitism appears earlier in the novel when Nell talks to Dick about selling an antique watch, to which Dick responds, “What a mercenary person you must be! Are you sure that you have not got some Hebrew blood in your veins?” (92). Nell does not object to this anti-Semitic quip. Instead, she reassures Dick that her family “never had anything to say to the Jews” (93). Much later in the novel, after the Lestranges have had to sell their possessions, Nell rants, “Greasy Jews—the offscouring of the earth-- . . . the accursed Israelite dog . . . have been prowling about, trading, as is their want, on the miseries and weaknesses of poor humanity” (290). Having heard nothing from Dick, Nell reluctantly agrees to marry Hugh and with his money to fend off “the children of Israel,” those “beaked Israelite faces [that] swarm before [her] mind’s eye” (271). Since the novel offers no

correction, no normative position from which this anti-Semitism is criticized, these views seem endorsed by Broughton and her editors (and by the reviewers who made no mention of the book's anti-Semitism.) In my previous podcast on Ellen Wood's novel *East Lynne*, I argued that British attitudes and policies toward Jews became more tolerant as the 19th century progressed. These passages complicate my earlier claim, suggesting not only that anti-Semitism persisted in Victorian Britain but that it was so common and accepted in popular discourse that its appearance in such a gross and revolting manner in Broughton's novel generated not a word of criticism (Episode 7, 30:50).

In Britain, Jews weren't allowed to attend Oxford or Cambridge or to become a member of the government until the middle of the 19th Century. In France, Jews gained rights during the Revolution and the rule of Napoleon and gained full equality in 1831. Nonetheless, anti-Semitism persisted in France, strikingly in the Dreyfuss Affair at the end of the century. As in the Victorian novel, Jewish characters in the French novel, including the novels of Balzac, were often reduced to stereotypes, as heard in this excerpt from Episode 19.

Upon seeing him, Josépha exclaims, "My word, you look like one of these twenty-franc pieces, clipped by German Jews, that money-changers won't take" (353).

If it's the 19th century and someone's borrowing money or collecting debt, or in this case, just looks like a person ruined by debt, talk will likely turn to the Jews. For example, Crevel tells Adeline that Josépha is "the natural [i.e., illegitimate] daughter of a Jewish banker" (16); she is "eaten up with greed, wants to be rich, very rich" (17); she has developed "the first Hebrews' instinct for gold and jewels, for the Golden Calf" (17). Monsieur Rivet, the owner of the lace and embroidery house where Bette works, refers to Jews, Cossacks, and peasants as "wild beasts wrongly classed with humankind" (118). Even after teaming up with Valérie, Bette "continue[s] to do the most difficult pieces of ornamental embroidery" for Rivet because, Balzac explains, "one of the ingrained ideas of country people is never to give up their means of livelihood; in this they are like the Jews" (167). And when telling Adeline that Paris is ruled by money, ruled by the "holy, venerated . . . hundred-sou piece" (316), Crevel analogizes the triumph of capital to the triumph of the Jew. "God of the Jews," he tells her, "you prevail!" He riffs comically on the origins of capitalism in the Book of Exodus: "In Moses' day, there was [speculating] in the desert. We have returned to biblical times. The Golden Calf was the first register of public loans. . . . The Egyptians owed enormous amounts borrowed from the Hebrews and they didn't pursue God's people, but financial capital" (316).

I'm not saying Balzac was anti-Semitic; these notions, after all, are expressed by characters, not the novel's narrative voice. I'm merely pointing out how commonplace it was, when talking about money, to talk about the Jew, partly because of the Catholic Church's calumny against Jews and partly because the Church's restrictions on usury by its followers meant that money-lending was a profession that was disproportionately Jewish. This perception of the Jewish dominance of banking and finance, of course, has been and continues to be central to anti-Semitic conspiracies. In reality, according to Robert Wistrich, Professor of European and Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, "under the Monarchy of Louis Phillipe, la haute bourgeoisie protestante [i.e., Protestants of French, Swiss and German origin] were at least as prominent in banking as Rothschild & Co" (114). Balzac's and his contemporaries' reliance on Jewish stereotypes was also due to the geographical isolation of French Jews, which helped construct them as mysterious outsiders. At the time of the French revolution, only 500 Jews lived in Paris, with the largest percentage of the Jewish population—40,000, living near the German border in Alsace-Lorraine. The Jewish population of Paris would increase to 22,000 by 1866 (Green 135). In the early part of the century, argues Erika Vause, Associate Professor in History at St. John's University, Balzac and his "contemporaries certainly believed usury to be a pressing problem. Usurers were ubiquitous figures in the era's novels and plays. Countless pamphlets, often deeply anti-Semitic, portrayed usury as the 'plague of

the countryside' and lamented the plight of the peasant expropriated from his land by ruthless lenders. Reformers portrayed the situation as only slightly less dire in the cities, where borrowers resorted to seedy discounters and the public pawnshop for loans" (105).

Yet, "in general," writes Frances Grodzinsky, Professor Emerita in Computer Science at Sacred Heart University, "the French literature of 1800 to 1840 did not focus on the Jew. Stereotyped references to Jews did appear, but were so accepted that they were not intended or considered to be offensive" (5). About Balzac, Grodzinsky asserts, "Although his Jews display the common stereotypic traits of evil and avarice, Balzac was not a facile anti-Semite. . . . The Jews he portrayed were not the unidimensional minor characters commonly found in earlier literature. Rather, they were complex men and women who played major roles in his novels" (1). Balzac's reactionary politics, though, his yearning for tradition and lamenting the rise of the bourgeoisie, could be subsumed by others into a critique of the harmful influence of Jews, with the rise of speculation and the destruction of French tradition.

According to Frederick Busi, Professor Emeritus of French and Italian Studies at the University of Massachusetts, the notorious anti-Semite, Édouard Drumont, author of the best-selling 1886 book *Jewish France*, declared "the main character in Balzac's novels . . . is money. . . . it is a form of energy, a source of power to be used for the manipulation of men and society. Drumont was quite sentimental about what he viewed as the destruction and disappearance of old France. . . . He also lamented the passing of all the social types dear to Balzac's readers. Only one . . . remained: Nucingen," that is, Frederic de Nucingen, a prosperous banker loosely based on the Baron James Rothschild. To Drumont, while other French noble characters have disappeared, Nucingen, an immortal like Shylock, has become the true king. Drumont, writes Busi, "carefully selected and exaggerated the extremely rare anti-Jewish references found in the novels. . . . It was Drumont's judicious exploitation of the imaginary world create by Balzac that helped in part to provoike the national debate over the guilt or innocence of Dreyfus" (185).(147) (Episode 19, 25:29).

The discussion of politics and history here, taken from previous episodes (and ubiquitous within this podcast overall), was generated by close readings of several 19<sup>th</sup> century novels and analysis of several novel genres, a process which, by noting ill-explained references and vague allusions, identifying omissions and distortions, filled in some of the gaps between these references and their historical and social reality, expanding upon these mentions of imperialism and anti-Semitism by drawing from the work of historians and literary critics. I used these novels to draw a fuller picture of the worlds in which Braddon, Balzac, and other 19<sup>th</sup> Century writers lived, showing, in what is the guiding premise of this podcast, how these novels were inflected by contemporary politics (in the broadest sense) and how this politics was entangled within and inseparable from fictional narratives and literary aesthetics.

I'll end this episode with one more digression, from Episode 12, about the Norman Yoke, the strange belief in a democratic golden age in Britain that was destroyed by the Norman conquest, the belief, in other words, that French invaders imposed a feudal system on an egalitarian society which had been established by the arrival in the 5<sup>th</sup> century of two German brothers. With its assertion of the Teutonic roots of a homogenous English nation and an accompanying belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority, this myth seems a fitting subject with which to close an episode on imperialism and anti-Semitism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel.

The influential historian of 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain Christopher Hill summarizes this myth:

Before 1066 the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of [Britain] lived as free and equal citizens, governing themselves through representative institutions. The Norman conquest deprived them of this liberty, and established the tyranny of an alien King and landlords. But the people did not forget the rights they had lost. They fought continuously to recover them with varying success. Concessions (Magna Carta for instance) were from time to time extorted from their rulers, and always the tradition of lost Anglo-Saxon freedom was a stimulus to ever more insistent demands upon the successors of the Norman usurpers. (57)

This myth, Hill observes, served as “a rudimentary class theory of politics” (57), in which a foreign and hereditary ruling class, supported by the Church, imposed its views on and extracted wealth from a native, mostly peasant class. In other words, the Normans imposed a feudal system on what had been a more egalitarian Saxon Britain. In its remembrance of a communal past overwhelmed by force, this myth, especially during the tumultuous 17<sup>th</sup> century, both challenged the legitimacy of the monarchy, the nobility, and the church, and suggested the possibility of a more egalitarian alternative. On the other hand, conservatives were able to exploit this myth, embracing the Norman yoke theory because it legitimized established institutions of power. William’s conquest, on this reading, over-ruled whatever communal existence had gone before, replacing it with a monarchical and hereditary rule which had persisted to the present. Therefore, in the conquest of 1066 common people hadn’t acquired rights; they’d been given them—and could have them taken away—by William and subsequent English Kings and Queens and Parliaments.

This myth also supported the perception that Britain’s Anglo-Saxon heritage was rooted in a Germanic culture—a notion that “emphasized glories of England’s Anglo-Saxon and German past, the Germanic of the English language, and the common racial origin of the Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Normans.” “The love of liberty, a trait of the Germanic peoples,” writes Reginald Horsman, History Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, “had, according to these arguments, been transposed by the Anglo-Saxons in England into a system of free institutions” (389). Barnes elaborates: “The dogma stressed the political superiority of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. . . . It rested primarily upon the assumption that the Teutonic invaders of England had made a clean sweep of the early Briton and Celtic inhabitants and had created an England purely Germanic in culture and almost purely Germanic in race” (218).

This interest in and appreciation for the Teutonic roots of Anglo-Saxonism was widespread among the educated classes, so much so that Thomas Jefferson considered placing on the Great Seal of the United States the mythical Germanic brothers Hengist and Horsa who were supposed, in the fifth century, to have led the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes to victory over the native Britons, thus initiating a democracy drawn from Germanic culture that American democracy was an inheritor of (Colbourne 171). These brothers are referred to at least four times in *Ivanhoe*, Scott, for instance, identifying the Saxon Athelstane as a “descendent . . . of Hengist and his hardy tribes” (227). Jefferson saw the Saxons, who sailed from the continent to establish their rule in a new land, as prefiguring American colonists’ similar history (Yorke). John Adams, in a letter to his wife Abigail, described the design of Jefferson’s seal: “Mr. Jefferson proposed the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; and on the other side, Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs from whom we claim the honor of being descended, and whose political principles and form of government we have assumed” (“Jefferson’s”). This Anglo-Saxon identity shared by the English and the Germans would become the basis for the noxious and ultimately genocidal belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon “race” (Episode 12, 26:42).

## Works Cited

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