

The Two Faces of an Imperialist Scrooge: Nineteenth Century Representations of Exploitative and Utopian English Culture and Management

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In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said focused on the binary opposition of English hegemony and the appropriated and silenced other of the Orient. Instead of allowing for a mutual influence that shapes both the colonizer and the colonized, Said suggested a one way stream of 'saturating hegemonic systems' (14) which does not accurately represent the social and cultural relationships of the nineteenth century English empire. As MacKenzie has argued in *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts*, the East influences the West as much as the West does the East so that "the Orient can become the means for a counter-western discourse, that it can offer opportunities for literary extension, spiritual renewal and artistic development" (10). This openness to a more relational cross-influence between colonizer and colonized yields a more comprehensive understanding of an English culture of empire that could nurture both the exploitative, profit-driven capitalist tendencies of the nineteenth century and the utopian, romantic notions of the same period. These tendencies are evident, even if not immediately obvious, in many of the texts of the time. Thus, this presentation will focus on the seemingly oppositional yet totally corollary perspectives of imperial management and leadership found in the texts of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and Lord Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses."

The first cultural tendency that this study will analyze in the context of nineteenth century British texts is that of an exploitative, profit-driven capitalism. In Part One: Commodities and Money of *Das Capital* Marx strove to reconnect the consumer with the process of production so that the human labor inherent in production was no longer hidden by the process of commodity exchange but became valued and acknowledged as an integral part of the commodity creation and valuation. Marx's efforts were necessary, especially in light of Max Weber's insight that capitalism is only possible because there is a "separation of business from the household which completely dominates modern economic life" (xxxv) and that separation alienates the consumer from the producer of the goods.

This alienation of producer and consumer combined with mass production creates a new focus on rational bookkeeping or what Georg Simmel calls calculative exactness which leads individuals in an industrial city to shun personal relationships since they are a hindrance to the bottom line thinking, take on a "matter of fact" instead of personal attitude, and reduce human relationships to "a mere objective balance of service and return" (49). In the

context of a capitalist society, isolation and alienation is a natural state when an individual practices a specialized trade and is valued only as a source of skilled labour and is thus bound to Simmel's proverbial clock. Furthermore, this alienation allows individuals to create a myth of a self-made man, as opposed to understanding the self as part of a social process, and to fail to value a fellow human being based on the notion of surplus labor. Finally, this profit-driven isolation leaves the individual both immune to city life stimuli and compelled to self-police his own daily practices and consumption of goods for the sake of profit.

Weber posits that this self-policing is a result of the influential "worldly Protestant asceticism...[that] acted powerfully against the spontaneous enjoyment of possessions; it restricted consumption, especially of luxuries" (115). Paradoxically, however, it also "broke the bonds of the impulse of acquisition in that it not only legalized it, but looked upon it as directly willed by God" (Weber 115). Thus, while personal deprivation for the sake of enthusiastic profit seeking in a capitalist market was the norm, the actual profit seeking was clearly advocated as a God-given calling. In other words, "the process of sanctifying life could thus almost take on the character of a business enterprise" (Weber 77), and a new impetus was found for a more secular life focused on industry which devalued the worker's individuality and humanity. Meanwhile, Carlyle criticized this culture of capitalism promoted by the Captains of Industry because "out of such came only gore and wreck, infernal rage and misery, desperation quenched in annihilation" which left both workers and the Captains "half alive, spell-bound amid money bags and ledgers" (1009), thereby recalling the Midas myth. However, his very counter-cultural writings demonstrate the very prevalence of that which he deems a morally contemptible nightmare : dehumanizing, profit-driven, capitalist exploitation manifest both in colonial management and in the metropole.

This profit-seeking, exploitative capitalist vision of English culture is a key aspect of the culture of empire which pervaded nineteenth century British society; however, there is another seemingly oppositional yet compatible aspect of this culture which must be explored: the utopian, romantic and sentimentalist counterpart. Carlyle indirectly advocates it when he wishfully posits in "Captains of Industry" that "to be a noble Master will again be the first ambitions with some few; to be a rich Master only the second" (1008). Carlyle's terminology is inherently problematic because it sets an imbalance of power as the foundation on which to build a necessarily eschewed relationship. In the industrial city, the capitalist entrepreneur is the master who must strive to be noble amongst his countrymen. While difficult in light of class status, there is a basic connection with the worker through citizenship. However, when applied to the colonies, the paradigm yields a morally superior master viz. a viz. a black slave/subject of the empire, and the master is no longer on an egalitarian human plane. Instead, the master is an representative/agent of the empire, whose role is,

by definition, exploitative, and the subject is transformed into a "savage" or a slave-like human being who is defined in terms of his or her lack of "civilized" humanity: British culture, religion, and language. Thus, this term, while problematic in the metropole, is even more problematic when attached to the management of the colonies, for the indigenous people are often used for slave-like labor in the exploitation of the colony's natural resources. Thus, an indigenous worker is seen by the not-so-noble imperial Master as a slave who is "a project, a source of energy, organized in order to exploit Nature" (Lamming 13). The very prospect of colonialism is intrinsically connected to profit seeking and mastery of a geographic area and its inhabitants, so Carlyle's terms, while they are used in support of a more utopian view, resonate with an inherently exploitative capitalist system.

Despite the problematic nature of Carlyle's terminology, he does advocate a more utopian approach to management that can be separated from his hegemonic terminology. He urges captains of industry to take a more idealistic and romantic stance by embracing fellow human beings as vehicles for personal redemption, for it demands that every individual value other human beings and see himself in relation to them as fellow human beings. As a consequence, the individual can reaffirm his own goodness, humanity, and potential in relation to the working man. Building on this premise, the ethos of utopian sentimentalist idealism also expects the individual to give to charity to help fellow human beings, to disregard the clock and calculation so that these are, while still important, second to human needs. Furthermore, it calls for less of a focus on profit so that more consumption is allowed for the enjoyment of others as well as to meet their basic needs, and in this utopian vision, care replaces profit as the first priority. Thus, according to Carlyle, redemption of the individual is possible through his or her interaction with fellow human beings and the greater nurturing community for "isolation is the sum-total of wretchedness to man."

John Ruskin, too advocated a focus on the shared humanity of individuals when he posited that "in our dealings with the souls of other men, we are to take care how we check, by severe requirement or narrow caution, efforts which might otherwise lead to a noble issue" (1337). There is an inherent belief in the potential nobility of every individual implicit in this statement, and it is echoed yet again when he states "you must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both" (1337). While this emphasizes the worker as a source of nobility and humanity, there is further utopian idealism behind Ruskin's argument that in crude forms of art and workmanship "are signs of life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure; but which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children." Thus, according to Ruskin, it is this nobility of mind, "higher ground in the field of humanity," and freedom of thought that will bring redemption to the British citizen mired in the dehumanizing profit-seeking capitalist mentality prevalent

at this time, for “in the manufacturing city ...we manufacture everything there except men.... To brighten, strengthen, to refine or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages” (1340). Thus, the focus on community, shared humanity, and redemption of one’s one spirit by refining the spirit of others is the key to this romantic and very idealist manifestation of nineteenth century British culture.

These two tendencies reveal the influence of a culture of empire in nineteenth century Britain and consequently on nineteenth century British literature, and the apparent incompatibility of the two strains gives way to an understanding of how they go hand in hand with the conception of a British empire and imperial cross-influence between colonized and colonizers. In the nineteenth century texts examined in this analysis, their congruence becomes readily apparent.

Charles Dickens’ novel *A Christmas Carol* is a well-studied text that has not yet been plumbed for its manifestation of the influence of an imperial culture on nineteenth century British literature. For the purpose of this study, it is divided into pre- and post- apparition sections that allow for a closer examination of Scrooge’s two complementary cultural tendencies of management and leadership in the text. These, in turn, will mirror those of British imperial culture, so they provide keen insights and added evidence for MacKenzie’s argument that a culture of empire, in which colonizer and colonized engaged in mutually influential relations, was pervasive in the arts and culture of the nineteenth century.

In the pre-apparition section of the novel, Ebenezer Scrooge is presented as the very embodiment of the capitalist spirit, for even his face “had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice” (65). He seeks profit and is “a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner” (34). Marley’s ghost tells him that he has lost his imaginative, nobler aspirations and that “the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you” (65), so he has focused on profit seeking at the expense of all else. Thus, he is meticulously calculative in his expenditures, his own and his assistant’s productive time, and his potential profit, and his ledger is the bible of his life, for he is a “merciless creditor” (104). He cares little for other human beings, underpays his worker, and when asked to donate to charity, he refuses on the basis that he gives what is necessary through taxation and that society would benefit from a decrease in the “surplus population” (39). In other words, he would rather see people die than share any of his profits for the sake of helping fellow human beings. His alienation is complete for his only friend, his partner Marley, is dead, and Scrooge has no ability to communicate or relate to others.

Scrooge practices a very protestant asceticism which prevents him from enjoying the profits he gains. As his nephew states, “his wealth is of no use to him. He don’t do any good with it. He don’t make himself comfortable with it” (87) because it is the pleasure of acquisition that drives Scrooge and not the

enjoyment of the fruit of his labor. He also imposes the same ascetic lifestyle on his clerk, for Cratchit's miserly pay deprives him and his family of many of the basic necessities yet not necessarily pleasures of life. Whereas Scrooge is willing to live with only a tiny fire for warmth in a dilapidated old building that has been turned to commerce, and he wears old, tattered clothing thereby signifying his dehumanization and alienation from other human beings, Cratchit's deprivations are forced upon him by the capitalist industrial society he lives in. In addition, Scrooge also lives by the clock, and even the apparitions are scheduled when the clock strikes twelve, thereby contributing to the calculating nature of his current capitalist existence. This dependence and enslavement to time is also a chain attached to his clerk who must perforce obey Scrooge's demands for punctuality and long hours. As Bruce Heydt points out in his article "The Centre of Time and Space," this imposition of an exact time standard is also reflective of Britain's successful effort to have its own Greenwich Mean Time and Greenwich Meridian established as standards for the whole world, thereby creating a global subservience to the British timetable.

Scrooge is so isolated in his daily life that it was "the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance" (34) so that he comes to embrace what George Simmel labels the city's dehumanizing isolation of the individual and Weber's argument that specialization of the worker separates him from his family and friends. Thus, Scrooge can only walk on the margins of society, for he cannot allow stimuli to register and is too busy working to think beyond his calling: making money. He cannot relate to his only living relative, his nephew, who regularly seeks him out for disinterested communication or to his clerk who actually lives a very community-centered life. Instead, Scrooge must foresee a death alone, for his pre-apparition self would have "frightened every one away from him when he was alive" (102). This inability to relate to others, including family, because he is too busy seeking profit from his trade and practicing business without mercy or acknowledgement of the humanity of others is in line with the exploitative, capitalist style of management in the nineteenth century industrial city¹.

In the post-apparition section of *A Christmas Carol*, however, a seemingly opposite ethos of utopian sentimentalism and idealism is espoused. Thus, after Marley and the three other apparitions force Scrooge to think about his overly capitalist and self-serving patterns of behavior, he embraces fellow human beings as vehicles for his own redemption. Thus, he changes his attitude toward Cratchit who is then given a fair wage, presented with Christmas gifts, and valued as a fellow human being and not simply a producer of human labor. In this way, Scrooge strives to be the noble master mentioned by Carlyle, to whom *A Christmas Carol* is dedicated. He also gives generously to charity once he

¹ See Simmel's statement that it has been said that "London has never acted as England's heart but often as England's intellect and always as her moneybag" (50). In this sense, pre-apparition Scrooge embodies this capitalist spirit.

internalizes Marley's message that helping others is the way to prevent eternal damnation. Thus, people cease to be "surplus population" and their nobility and humanity is restored and, in turn, so is Scrooge's.

Additionally, post-apparition Scrooge chooses to disregard the clock, so he takes a leisurely walk during which he allows the stimulus of the industrial city to register, and he begins to feel alive precisely because he acknowledges and processes the stimuli. Therefore, Scrooge strives for freedom of movement in all relationships to let "the noble substance common to all to come to the fore" (Simmel 59). Scrooge opens himself up to the stimuli of his community by walking, talking with people, and engaging in social intercourse which allows him to reconnect himself to a community of family, friends and workers, and the world. Instead of worrying over lost productivity, he replaces strict calculation with attention to human need, so the clock loses its power over him. He is able to promenade without apprehension, to joke with Cratchit and thus build camaraderie, and to encourage his clerk to attend to his own needs. Furthermore, in doing so, he intentionally links himself to other human beings to reaffirm his own goodness, humanity, and potential. He engages in a very humanizing practice of focusing less on profit and more on consumption for enjoyment and meeting needs of others, and in doing so, he redeems himself without relinquishing the capitalist dream. Instead, he subsumes his desire for profit to pursue the reconnection to humanity. The transformation is complete when the reader is told that Scrooge becomes a second father to Tiny Tim and that he "became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world" (116). Thus, Scrooge comes to embody the utopian and romantic tendencies of English society in the nineteenth century, for he is Carlyle's noble master who is willing to acknowledge the humanity and nobility of his worker, as defined by Ruskin in "The Stones of Venice."

A *Christmas Carol* illustrates Marx's argument that commodities are separated from their human labor component by the commodity exchange process which dehumanizes the entire labor force and objectifies the commodity. Thus, Scrooge's pre-apparition lifestyle is the very embodiment of the capitalist, profit driven, exploitative tendencies of British imperial culture. Meanwhile, his post-apparition lifestyle is that of an idealist romantic seeking a new Eden to allow for his regeneration. Paul Davis argues that Dickens wrote to promote this more utopian tendency in his time because "he sought public involvement with the story as a way to awaken social concern and to prove to himself that he had not lost his imaginative power" (5). Thus, Scrooge's new stance as a noble master who sees his own worth and humanity in relation to his worker allows for the possibility that he will strike a balance between profit and idealism, just as Dickens strove to do with the creation of this text. It is this possibility which supports the argument of this article that the two seemingly oppositional tendencies of nineteenth century British culture are actually complimentary, for

Scrooge says that he will “honour Christmas” [read utopian idealist tendencies] and “live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me” (110). It is the reality of this century that these disparate tendencies co-existed in the British metropole and that they are reflective of what MacKenzie calls the culture of empire, for they are symptomatic of the continued interest in the empire and the cross-influence of colony and colonizer cultures.

In addition, a close reading of Tennyson’s well known poem “Ulysses” yields similar evidence of these nineteenth century cultural tendencies that are, in this case, representations of British colonial management and leadership. With the empire as the implied conceptual background for the poem, the two main characters represent two very different models of management which are clearly connected by service to the colonial power, Britain. Ulysses, now an old man, is stifled by his rule of a “savage race,/ that hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me” (4-5). These lines categorize his subjects as profit-seeking and commodity-consuming bodies that are unfamiliar with his own desires and previous life. His restlessness indicates a preference for adventure, action, and discovery instead of idleness, stillness, and old age as outlined in lines 1-4 of the poem. However, Tennyson’s eponymous hero is truly representative of the inquisitive, exploratory stage of imperialism which is by definition militaristic (“drunk delight of battle with my peers” (16)) and exploitative (“myself not least, but honored” (15)). Thus, the colonies are the “untraveled world,” the “newer world,” and that which is “beyond the sunset.” Ulysses strives to continue to exploit these territories for his own military and personal glory, pleasure, and self-fulfillment, for he is “always roaming with a hungry heart” (l.12). He is convinced that exploration and conquest are his calling, as defined by Weber, and that they can only be fulfilled in the search for new territories and therefore expanded empire. While Ulysses is not in search of power and greed alone, he is still reminiscent of the exploitative and capitalist tendencies within this culture of empire that is evident in Victorian England because his focus is the rampant acquisition of land for the empire.

In contrast to Ulysses’ more exploitative and exploratory tendencies, his son Telemachus embodies a tendency toward a utopian romantic model of management. While his father strives to travel, move, and urgently seek new adventure, the son is “centred in the sphere/ of common duties, decent not to fail/in offices of tenderness” (39-41). Telemachus is described as being well suited to management and administration with his softness, slow prudence, and tenderness, typical virtues of the middle class. He seeks to redeem the “savage race” the father has dismissed, and he finds virtue and fulfillment in their transformation into “the useful and the good” (38). He actually sees himself and his calling as an administrator in relation to his fellow country mates who are made better by his constant care and concern for their well-being. Telemachus is a noble master, as Carlyle envisions the concept of a captain of industry, and he lives in community with his subjects even as he provides them with “noble

guidance.” Thus, Telemachus is representative of the more utopian and idealist tendencies of Victorian culture and tends toward the managerial calling in the culture of empire.

Tennyson’s choice to set up the two seemingly oppositional styles of management in this poem is indicative of the prevalence of these two aspects of British culture, but it also points to the reality that these are complementary and equally important to the metropole. After all, Telemachus’s focus on noble management and guidance of his people seems a natural and organic extension of his father’s exploration, conquest, and acquisition of new lands. However, conquest of new lands is useless if Britain cannot manage the newly acquired territories. Thus, they are connected models of governance that develop according to the needs of both the British people and their colonies and in the midst of a metropolitan culture of empire.

Charles Dickens’ novel *A Christmas Carol* and Lord Alfred Tennyson’s poem “Ulysses” are canonical texts that clearly reflect the influence of two distinct yet concordant leadership tendencies of imperial culture on nineteenth century British literature. The profit-driven capitalist managerial style is portrayed as diametrically opposed to the utopian romantic sentimentalist approach ; however, these texts reveal an implicit connection which renders them complementary instead of oppositional. While Carlyle’s very designation of a “noble master” makes evident this collusion of managerial tendencies, Dickens and Tennyson’s works also allow the reader to deduce the necessary relationship between the two, for in both texts, there is no call to abandon the profit-seeking in favor of human care and interaction. Instead, the calling of a noble master is to care for the welfare of the workers while also retaining the capitalist tendencies as a high if secondary priority. This analysis then opens spaces for a discourse of complicity between these two tendencies, found in nineteenth century British literature, which support and maintain the culture of empire in the metropole.

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