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Dreamworlds of Race is Duncan Bell's third book in the trilogy about racial imaginaries of the British Empire. The first, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, had focused on the late-Victorian attempts towards re-organizing the British world through closer associations with the white settler colonies. *Reordering the World* honed on the complex, often contradictory, relationship between liberal thought and imperialism. Drawing on a range of influential thinkers both these books showed how anxieties of imperial decline fostered fertile imaginaries about restructuring the empire. Before discussing *Dreamworlds'* contribution, it bears highlighting that Bell's oeuvre is compellingly expansive. In his intellectual journeys into the late-Victorian (spilling at times into the Edwardian) period, he draws of a range of thinkers and issues to offer a rich tapestry of political thinking of these times. Yet, there is also a singular idea underpinning his work. These intellectual histories are consistently a dive into the psychology of Anglo-Saxonism, one that as he says in the book under review, is impelled by 'a fissile mix of anxiety and hope'.

The anxiety, if a name be given I would call it *declinism*—of which Bell is an astute diagnostician, has been a constant feature of British intellectual and political life since at least the late-nineteenth century and often manifests in grandiose, expansive visions. Let Hedley Bull make the case. Writing about the emergence of the Commonwealth in 1950s, the Australian-born scholar wrote:

> The Commonwealth …. enables the British nation to avoid, or at least to dull, the sense of historical defeat. If something remains of the Empire, and it conforms to the moral fashions of the times, then not all of Britain's efforts in the past have been in vain. By throwing a cloud of ambiguity over the loss of power when independence is granted to subject territories, it has enabled the British public to accept gracefully what they otherwise might not have accepted at all. More than that it has enabled the claim to be made that what is apparently defeat is really victory, that the disintegration of the Empire is the

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fulfillment of a deliberately willed policy of constructing a great association of free peoples (Bull 1959, 586).

Peter Mandler (2006) provocatively argues that unlike the French or Germans whose national identity was premised on either the state (for the French) or people (*kultur*) (for the Germans), British identity was weaved around the alleged uniqueness of its political institutions, primarily 'rule of law'. Consequently, nothing really separated the British nation-state and it's Empire, since both were seemingly held together by the same institutions. The British 'state' or 'people' or 'culture' had no specific advantage nor distinguishing feature. The universalism of British liberalism, which aimed towards the telos of human perfection, had little place for nation-state except as an intermediate stage (unlike the French or Germans who regarded nation as the final form). The ever-expanding British *lebensraum*, the Empire, exemplified this march of history and the British genius lay in grounding the Empire in the progressive philosophy of 'rule of law'. The Empire, consequently, was simultaneously a universal as well as a national project. The loss of Empire therefore, as Bull argues above, was not just a loss of territory, but a loss of the sense of self. As an idea, the Commonwealth served to make sense of the loss; the eternal deferment of an acknowledgement of defeat. Indeed, the only way the Commonwealth made sense to the British identity was by imagining it not as the end of Empire, but as its endpoint.

The Eastern and Southward-gaze of this expansive Empire/Commonwealth vision which turned the world into a mirror image of Britain had a less well-known counterpart. This self-deception of turning defeat into victory, Duncan Bell's third book in the trilogy shows, had another life once—and perhaps continues to flourish in the Brexiter-hopes. A west-ward vision, decidedly less violent, and allegedly more progressive. A vision that achieved perpetual peace without the dirty work of colonialism—or at least, without its British version, if one were willing to look over American colonial projects. *Anglotopia*: a unity between America and Britain.

It was an elitist project, steeped in the belief that a political elite would raise the consciousness of the population. And its manifestations differed. The maximalist version advocated compete unity between America and Britain—or rather a merger of Britain into an expanding America. The minimalist version gestured towards defence cooperation. And the space in the middle was occupied by a range of ideas from shared citizenship to racial unity.

Dreamworlds is about these imaginations of Anglotopia which are carefully elaborated in an intellectual history of Bell's *fin de siècle* subjects—Andrew Carnegie, Cecil John Rhodes, William Stead and H.G. Wells. Carnegie, who fervently guarded his authorial claims on being the first to call for a racial union of the English-speaking peoples, sought a federation of the Anglo-American world. Schemes of imperial federation and colonialism were for him unwanted distractions, that took away from the main task at hand—a British American Union. If Carnegie, a Scottish immigrant to America, sought to remake the world from the West, another migrant magnate contributed to the project from the southern tip of Africa. Cecil John Rhodes was never an intellectual. His ideas were crude, which often found a vent in his multiple secret wills and aspirations for a Secret Society. But he brought ferocious passion

and abundant money to back them. His enthusiasm for an American-British Union was more measured than Carnegie. The American constitution, he thought, provided a workable template for the eventual fusion of the English-speaking peoples. But he invested most of his energy on the intervening steps towards this scheme: the unification of South Africa and eventually the whole of Africa—under British rule. Unlike Carnegie, he believed in the consolidation of the Empire through federation, and his imperialist credentials are too well known to elaborate.

The crucial link between both these moneyed-men with worldly ambitions was the journalist and editor William Stead who trusted the other-worldly with idiosyncratic devotion. Carnegie was influenced by Herbert Spencer's evolutionism, Rhodes by John Ruskin's call to colonize for the greater good, but Stead took his call from above—he actually believed that God was working through him. Relying on the Christian notion of divine providence, he saw the English-speaking peoples as essential to the providential plan, as God's instrument to bring peace to humanity. While Carnegie's plan was single-legged, i.e. an Anglo-American Union which he prioritized over everything else; Rhodes's hopped on two legs of imperial expansion and federation of English-speaking peoples, including settler state. Stead's world-making project was more capacious than both. Anglo-American Union, Imperial Federation, and the United States of Europe—all three were important steps to a world state.

The writer H.G. Wells, the most distinct of the Anglotopian quartet in Bell's book, had comparatively less faith in humans and more on technology to the inevitable coming of the New Republic—an implied union of the Anglo-world. With technological developments, he thought that the territorial model of politics would increasingly become irrelevant, and innovative modes of political life would emerge. Consequently, he envisaged a fusion of the US and the British colonial empire. As was common with Wells' genre of writings, the initial impetus would come from a shock, political or otherwise, which would drive political elites to act towards the New Republic. The New Republic would be ruled by a governing class of technocratic elite, with the governing ideology of 'efficiency'. For Wells, efficiency implied a hybrid of state welfarism and negative eugenics.

With careful precision but laborious work, Bell weaves for the readers the complex, sometimes counter-intuitive, ways in which race functioned as a marker that separated white Anglo-Saxons from others. His notion of race as a biocultural assemblage draws on the French sociological idea of *assemblage* that emphasizes rootless fluidity of relationships among the component parts of a system. Hence, he sees race a hybrid mix of biological, cultural, linguistic and technological claims that eventually establish the superiority of Anglo-Saxons over others. Bell quite rightly argues that by seeing race in this fashion one becomes attentive to figurations of racial hierarchy.

Indeed, an important component of this 'shared habitus of race' was the English-language. A common language provided lubrication for a racial union. But these thinkers saw the English-language not just as a means of communication but as an autonomous cultural system of its own. Several influential leaders and intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic contributed towards simplifying the English language, not only to make it more modern but also to facilitate a common racial identity.

Bell's idea of seeing race as a biocultural assemblage aims to be an important intervention in studies on racism. Racial discrimination is seen primarily as an ideology of biological difference. Culture and language are considered secondary features, convenient explanations to mask biological difference. Critiquing this form of essentialism, Bell argues that racism is often an elaborate ideology, built on a set of interlaying assumptions, and rarely crudely biological in its enunciation. Its meanings and manifestations become visible only when we are attentive to its shape-shifting nature. However, the usefulness of race as an *assemblage* without a 'root' or pre-ordained hierarchy is limited when one considers that even if non-whites became *definitionally* Anglo-Saxons—by learning the English-language for instance—they could never cross the colour line, as Bell himself shows. This was different for white non-Anglo Saxons, who may have been considered distinct or even inferior, but the colour line remained sufficiently elastic to assimilate them. The post-structural, rhizomatic rootlessness of assemblage implies that Anglo-Saxon superiority emerges out of a set of interactions among the component features, while the fact remains the component features are arranged according to the primal feature of that system, biological difference, that is never subverted. There is considerable scholarship, particularly from scholars of colour, on the intersections, transversions, and coral-like nature of racial identity, which would greatly enhance the analytical strength of this scholarship.

While Bell is interested in these four figures, *Dreamlands of Race* is also about a lot more, to which a short review cannot really do justice: on forms of citizenship, science fiction, technological utopias (and dystopias), abolition of war and world peace.

This is an intellectual feast. But having had one's fill, one wonders if these are two sumptuous meals sequestered into one. The first half of the book is bound by the ideas of four men, the second half is a set of essays. Arguments become repetitive as we turn the pages, although with new details. By the end as we arrive at the conclusion, non-white figures appear as critics—perhaps way too late in the book, and it is often not clear if they were critics of Anglo-Americanism, or of racial discrimination within the British Empire and in America? An intellectual history of 'Black Anglosphere' is not the aim of the book, so the book ought not to be evaluated on that basis. But its inclusion, almost as an afterthought in the conclusion, becomes unnecessarily tokenistic (as Nivi Manchanda also suggests in this forum). The book is about white imaginations, and in exploring those, the book does a tremendous job.

Declarations

References

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