

BETWEEN CULTURES:

'UNDEVELOPED' COUNTRIES IN BRITISH FICTION

DEVAPRIYA CHITRA RANJAN ALWIS GOONETILLEKE

B.A. (UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON)

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF PH.D.

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF LANCASTER

1970

A B S T R A C T

I have selected for special study the best of the modern fiction - by Conrad, Kipling, Forster, Lawrence and Cary - which embodies the major British reactions to and presentations of 'undeveloped' countries which at the same time reflect their respective periods in important ways.

Both Conrad and Kipling wrote during the heyday of the British Empire. Conrad developed an extraordinary artistic understanding of imperialism which enabled him to write such works as Heart of Darkness and Nostromo; even when his experience of an 'undeveloped' area, the Malay Archipelago, was slight, his artistic gifts enabled him to write more interesting fiction about it than Sir Hugh Clifford. On the other hand, Kipling was at times conventionally imperial-minded and, at best, a liberal imperialist. On the whole, his fiction is chiefly valuable as a record of a phase of India under the British.

Forster's view of imperial realities is radical; this makes him akin to Conrad rather than to Kipling. In A Passage to India (1924), he finely dramatizes the difficulties of race relations in a colonial context. Lawrence's fiction in the 1920's set in Mexico and New Mexico is different from the fiction of the others. In them he works out primitivist themes which are not less important than imperial themes.

Cary's non-racialist liberalism connects him with Conrad and Forster. He has the ability to penetrate deep into African culture, a culture very different from the British and at an earlier stage of development. But he betrays a paternalist tendency which makes his view of imperial realities a little too rosy.

All these writers deal with themes that are alive with significance for people in both developed and 'undeveloped' countries. And in modern times, more good British fiction has been set in 'undeveloped' countries rather than in Britain itself.