



## Too Dark Altogether

<http://www.drb.ie/essays/too-dark-altogether>

Angus Mitchell, *Dublin Review of Books*, issue 102, July 2018.

*The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World*, by Maya Jasanoff, William Collins, 400 pp, £25, ISBN: 978-0007553730

*Rubber Justice: Dr Harry Guinness and the Congo Reform Campaign*, by Catherine Guinness, privately published, 244 pp, ISBN: 978-0648057604

*British Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Movement, 1896-1913*, by Dean Pavlakis, Routledge, 320 pp, £88.99, ISBN: 978-1472436474

*The Politics of Dissent: A Biography of ED Morel*, by Donald Mitchell, Silverwood Books, 246 pp, £11, ISBN: 978-1781321782

As the nineteenth century came to an end, rumours started to circulate widely about the violence perpetrated by the regime of King Leopold II in the Congo Free State. Parliamentary intervention followed from involvement by the two main NGOs: the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and the Aborigines Protection Society. In 1903, a question was asked in the House of Commons by the Liberal MP Herbert Samuel. The foreign secretary, Lord Lansdowne, ordered the British consul and his man on the spot, Roger Casement, to journey into the upper Congo. Having spent five years reporting officially on many aspects of Leopold's colonial administration, Casement was well-placed to investigate the stories. He would spend the next three months travelling through the region. On exiting the river with a dossier of hand-written reports, copied correspondences and memos, testimonies and a diary, he scribbled the first of nearly three hundred letters to ED Morel, a young activist-writer. He recommended him to read *Heart of Darkness* and suggested he contact the author, Joseph Conrad, to see if he would support a public campaign for systemic reform. Casement and Conrad had met in the lower Congo in 1890 and a friendship had developed between the two men.

Over the coming weeks, as the idea for a grassroots Congo reform movement grew green shoots, Casement corresponded with Conrad about the issue of atrocities and slavery. Casement's letters have not survived, but five manuscript letters from Conrad to him are held in the National Library of Ireland. They reveal, on the part of Conrad, a sense of controlled outrage that the diplomatic will that had put an end to slavery at the start of the nineteenth century should have allowed an even more atrocious system to thrive in its place. Conrad was reticent. He may have expressed support for the campaign in spirit, but he declined to do so in public.

Two months later, Morel and Casement founded the Congo Reform Association following a meeting at the Slieve Donard Hotel in Co Down. One principal ally in the initiation of this venture was a group of faith missionaries led by Dr Harry Grattan Guinness, the great-grandson of the brewer-philanthropist Arthur Guinness, and son of the eschatological preacher and evangelical divine Henry Grattan Guinness. The latter is revered to this day amongst Ulster Presbyterians for his sermonising during the Great Awakening of 1859 in Belfast.

The Grattan Guinnesses were part of that entanglement of evangelical Protestant missionary work and empire-building that remains something of an obscure dimension in the general understanding of late nineteenth-century imperialism. In 1873 Henry and Fanny Grattan Guinness founded the East London Training Institute for Home and Foreign Missions. Over the next forty years, until its closure in 1915, the joint colleges of Harley House (for men) and Doric Lodge (for women) undertook the training of around fifteen hundred interdenominational missionaries (Catholics excluded), who established missions across the world and worked their way into influential positions of temporal and spiritual power. Their interests lay in reaching out to souls in the most inaccessible peripheries of the globe or “Regions Beyond Missionary Union” (RBMU), as they renamed their organisation in 1899. By then their faith empire reached from the upper reaches of the Congo and the Sudan Belt to the interior regions of China, northern India, Argentina and Peru.

But their proselytising on the Congo, where their faith mission began, remained a priority. The Livingstone Inland Mission (named after the Scottish explorer-missionary David Livingstone) established a chain of stations on the lower Congo at Palabala, Banana, Matadi Minkanda, Banza Manteka, Bemba and Manyanga. These outer stations for spreading the Gospels became stepping stones for King Leopold’s gradual “development” of the interior. The work of evangelising went hand in hand with opening the interior of Africa – the flag followed the Bible. In 1884, the mission was handed over to the American Baptist Missionary Union. In 1889, a new mission, the Congo Balolo Mission, was established by the Grattan Guinnesses. Their intension shifted to building stations in the unmapped forested expanses of the upper Congo. 1890, the year that Conrad arrived in the Congo, saw the publication by Mrs Grattan Guinness of a history of their missionary activity, *The New World of Central Africa*. This coincided with the Brussels conference and a critical juncture in the strategic rise of King Leopold II and his so-called Congo Free State.

As the missionary empire grew, Henry Grattan Guinness left its daily organisation to his family. His days and nights were devoted instead to eschatology and the mathematical interpretation of the scriptures. Inspired by his readings of Sir Isaac Newton’s *Observations upon the Book of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St John* (1733) and the essay by the Swiss astronomer Jean Philippe Loys de Cheseaux, *Remarques historiques, chronologiques, et astronomiques, sur quelques endroits du livre de Daniel*, he proclaimed that the Bible was encrypted with astronomic codes proving God was the creator of the universe.

To aid his research, Grattan Guinness brought a large telescope and had “Holiness to the Lord” engraved in Hebrew around the rim. He then set out to reveal the divine plan. According to his calculations, 315 years constituted a soli-lunar year, the cycle which brings about the convergence of sun, earth and moon. This was a multiple of 1,260, the number of days mentioned in the books of Daniel and Revelation as significant for the end of the age. In a series of publications, Grattan Guinness explained how the mysteries of the divine plan were about to be revealed. He prophesied that the “end times” described in the Book of Revelation, when the Jewish people would return to Jerusalem, were nigh. Through a complex set of prophetic calculations, he predicted that 1917 and 1948 would be of critical significance. Though almost entirely forgotten today, the Grattan Guinness name presided over a congregation of faithful that reached deep into political and intellectual circles across Britain and the empire.

But the atrocity stories started to change the dynamic between the mission stations and Leopold’s administration. Missionaries trained by the RBMU gradually started to speak out

about the horror. Henry's son Harry, a qualified medical doctor, joined up with a widening chorus of voices denouncing the regime and its supporting propaganda. In 1904, when Casement and Morel planned their campaign to take on Leopold's "evil empire" they recognised that the Grattan Guinness network would be a key constituent in any successful outcome. Catherine Guinness, the granddaughter of Harry Grattan Guinness, grew up hearing stories of her family's deep connection to the Congo and the reform movement. Through a process of patience, diligence and curiosity, she has pieced together a family history explaining the campaign and how her grandfather successfully combined his work as missionary, humanitarian and medical practitioner. It is a compelling story.

In *The Dawn Watch*, Harvard historian Maya Jasanoff in many ways captures those wider contexts of world systems of trade and knowledge exchange through which the Grattan Guinness missionary empire moved. Taking the writer Joseph Conrad as her subject, she examines four of his greatest novels as a way to understanding that first age of globalisation. Part history, part biography, part literary criticism and part travelogue, Jasanoff's study provides a superb and intricate perspective into the period and those narratives of interconnectedness that provoke plenty of comparative insights linking the four decades before the First World War to our own faltering age of globalisation.

Conrad experienced empire in unique ways. His childhood was defined by the struggle of his parents, both involved in the Polish nationalist movement against Tsarist hegemony. During twenty years as a rootless sailor, he witnessed the tidal flows of world trade and the technological shift in sea power from wind to steam. In his adopted home of England he found sanctuary as both immigrant and intellectual. The world he described through his stories of individuals caught up in the powerful vectors of multinational capitalism, nationalism, migration, social upheaval and the triumph of technological innovation found an appreciative public.

The four novels structuring Jasanoff's analysis were all written in a period of eight years between 1899 and 1907. Arguably, they are four of his greatest works and crystallise that "fierce, almost demonic energy" the sculptor Jacob Epstein would later describe as Conrad's aura. In *The Secret Agent* (1907) Conrad captured the underworld of anarchist-driven terrorism in central London in 1886 and a plot to blow up Greenwich Observatory – the symbolic centre of imperial modernity. The ports of southeast Asia are the backdrop to Conrad's most familiar territory as a sailor immortalised in *Lord Jim* (1900). His most controversial and overdetermined novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is set in Africa and is based upon his own transformative experiences of central Africa. Finally, what is considered by many critics to be his greatest novel, *Nostromo* (1904), set in Costaguana, an imaginary South American republic, was written as Conrad read the daily news reports about the US coup in Panama.

Jasanoff's scholarly engagement with Conrad was driven by her personal fascination with *Heart of Darkness*. In researching the book, she undertook a journey into the Congo to discover a more contemporary definition of that system Conrad excoriated:

Today's hearts of darkness are to be found in other places where civilising missions serve as covers for exploitation. The heirs of Conrad's technologically displaced sailors are to be found in industries disrupted by digitisation. The analogies to his anarchists are to be found in Internet chat rooms or terrorist cells. The material interests he centred in the United States emanate today as much from China.

Strikingly, Jasanoff's contemporary orientation of Conrad helps to explain the extraordinary overlaps between fact and fiction recurrent in the telling of the Congo tragedy. Mark Twain, the father of American literature, published a scathing satire, *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, that shocked the American public. In 1908, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle, wrote *The Crime of the Congo*, a popular investigative study unequivocally supporting Morel and his campaign. Unlike Conrad, who refused to openly involve himself in the Congo reform movement, Conan Doyle went on to play a very active part.

On May 29<sup>th</sup> 1911, Conan Doyle left his desk to attend a function in the Whitehall Rooms at the Hotel Metropole, in the heart of imperial London. It was an event that he had helped to organise and one that offered some respite from his preoccupation with the writing of his latest Professor Challenger novel, *The Lost World*. His new adventure, he hoped, would feed a public appetite for unmapped worlds, undiscovered lands and fabulous, prehistoric creatures. Readers would be transported into a realm cut off from time and history, where "primitive" men roamed wild. Research for the book had been carried out diligently. He had consulted with various explorers and geographers with first-hand experience of remote tribes, untrodden jungles and unmapped regions. The lost world he imagined was to be based firmly in ethnographic and anthropological observation.

One key source was the legendary Percy Harrison Fawcett, a friend who shared his fascination with psychical research and the occult. Fawcett's talk to the Royal Geographical Society a few months earlier about his expedition across the Huanchaca plateau, undertaken during a mission to delimit the border between Bolivia and Brazil, had influenced Conan Doyle deeply. Beside the irascible Professor Challenger, the central figure in *The Lost World*, would be a young news reporter called Ed Malone. Malone, as Conan Doyle later admitted, was loosely based upon the activist and journalist ED Morel, and it was in honour of Morel that the testimonial luncheon was being organised on that day in late May 1911.

The occasion proved a somewhat formal affair. But it demonstrated that Conan Doyle's admiration for Morel was shared by many other distinguished subjects of the British empire. The dining room filled with a throng of mainly men and a few women from all walks of empire, including leading industrialists such as the founder of the Unilever brand, WH Lever, the Quaker philanthropist William Cadbury and the publisher George Macmillan. Guests congregated from several different corridors of power: members of parliament, newspaper editors, literary luminaries, bishops, churchmen and nonconformists. The Earl of Cromer, former proconsul of Egypt, spoke first and was followed by the leader of the Belgian Workers' Party, Emil Vandervelde. This conjunction of an arch-imperialist administrator and banker alongside a committed European socialist and anti-imperialist activist revealed a spectrum of difference that the cause of Congo reform had sought to encourage from the outset.

In various ways, the event reflected a strategic switch of allegiance by the Congo Reform Association towards intellectual strands of European socialism. The Grattan Guinness influence was now conspicuously absent from proceedings. Morel was a man still in his late thirties; he was tall, powerfully set and prematurely grey. In little more than a decade, he had emerged from relative obscurity as a shipping clerk in Liverpool to become a towering defender of the rights of the Congo "native" and, from 1911, a ferocious critic of the British foreign office.

Through his immense tide of writings, he had both mapped and condemned the violent transition into imperial modernity for the millions of people living in communities across the

tropical expanses of sub-Saharan Africa. His evidence endures as one of the most unsettling legacies of the modern age. The Congo Free State formed the largest part of that region the explorer HM Stanley had offensively termed “darkest Africa”. In a period of two decades between 1884 and 1904 the tropical forest and its people were quite literally sacrificed to satisfy market demands and for the greedy ambitions of a European monarch and his lust for riches and aggrandisement. Peaceful village communities living within the water systems of the Congo were violently ripped asunder by the arrival of pith-helmeted men, steamboats, modern weaponry and new forms of commercial exchange. As the last vestiges of the slave trade were outlawed in Brazil and Cuba, new slaveries erupted throughout the rainforests of Africa and South America. Men, women and children were coerced by terror into debt bondage to extract rubber latex, or “white gold” as it was called. Rubber was the resource building the next generation of industrial innovation, above all electrification and motorised transport. But the human and environmental cost of these developments was colossal. At first, the missionaries remained complicit through their silence, but gradually they found the courage to speak out. Morel’s unceasing activism, first in Liverpool and then in London, catalysed the shift in understanding and popular consciousness.

Supported by his wife, Mary, he emerged as the individual who was prepared to take on the system by co-ordinating a campaign to try to assert pressure and encourage reform. In his early years his efforts were given further encouragement by the Irish historian Alice Stopford Green. Following the death of her husband, the historian John Richard Green, Kells-born Mrs JR Green (as she was called until she left her husband’s legacy behind) nurtured one of the most dynamic intellectual coteries from her house in the exclusive Kensington Square in west London. Determined to bring about colonial reform, she operated backstage, holding power lunches and exclusive *soirées* of political and literary luminaries. Morel was a regular presence at her table.

For a decade he networked, lobbied, influenced and campaigned. He edited a newspaper, the *West African Mail*. Publications flew from his desk. His best-known book, *Red Rubber*, went into a series of reprints. Besides Twain and Conan Doyle, many other public intellectuals supported the cause. Journalist WT Stead and Conrad’s great friend, the Scottish socialist and nationalist Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham, were others who held out hands of support. In 1908, the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, commenting on the question of Congo reform in the House of Commons, said: “No external question for at least thirty years has moved the country so strongly and so vehemently.” The comment was made at a moment when the good relations between Morel and Grey were faltering. Up to that moment, Morel had cooperated closely with the foreign office and it in turn had decided on policy based upon his expertise. But these amicable interactions were turning sour.

King Leopold II of Belgium died in 1909, shortly after his personal control over the Congo had been annexed by the Belgian parliament. The paradigm was starting to shift. Morel’s confrontation with the apparatus of diplomatic power had given him unique insights into international relations. From several years out, he had recognised the fault lines in European treaty-making that he and others believed was spinning the world towards Armageddon. By 1911 his energies were shifting away from Congo matters towards a campaign to avert war between Britain and Germany. As the historian AJP Taylor commented, Morel had by then established himself as the “Foreign Secretary of Dissent”.

In 1912 he published *Morocco in Diplomacy*, a study of the diplomatic context behind the Agadir crisis that had brought the world to the brink of war the previous year. He dedicated the

book to “those who believe the establishment of friendlier relations between Britain and Germany to be essential to the prosperity and welfare of the British and German peoples and to the maintenance of the World’s peace”. But his efforts came too late. Those colonial conflicts fought out of sight on the frontiers now collapsed back into the centre. When war was declared in August 1914, the paradigm changed utterly. Belgium, excoriated a few years earlier for perpetrating widespread atrocities, found itself transformed into “Gallant Little Belgium”, the victim of German atrocities.

Adapting his experience of public campaigning for Congo reform, Morel now took on the acting secretarial role in the formation of a group called the Union of Democratic Control (UDC). His skills were channelled towards trying to bring the war to an end, shaping the eventual peace, and making governments more accountable to the people for their diplomatic actions. Although the group was not strictly a pacifist organisation, it was deeply opposed to the militarisation of politics.

Membership of the UDC was composed of a coalition from both the Independent Labour Party, the Liberal Party and disparate radicals involved actively as social reformers and suffragettes. Among the leadership were the politicians Ramsay MacDonald, Charles Trevelyan and Arthur Ponsonby; the economist JA Hobson; the Cambridge mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell; and the editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, CP Scott. Arising from a long tradition of pacifism in the women’s movement, various figures stood forth: suffragette Helena Swanwick, sister of the painter Walter Sickert, who went on to write the first history of the UDC, *Builders of Peace*; the writer Vernon Lee, author of a moving anti-war play, *The Ballet of the Nations*; and Isabella Ford, an active organiser in the Independent Labour Party. The network expanded. Pamphlets circulated, public meetings were organised across the country and vigorous efforts made to influence decision-makers.

While Congo reform was deemed a patriotic pursuit and conformed to the basic principles of free trade, the UDC was a ginger group born from a combination of opposition to the war, the crisis in liberalism and the awakening of an anti-colonial tradition in the Independent Labour Party. That there were clear imbrications between the cause of Congo reform and the foundations of a European anti-war movement before 1914 is a story still obscure and controversial. The jingoistic press perceived the UDC as deeply unpatriotic, even treasonable. Meetings were infiltrated and “patriots” were encouraged to disrupt proceedings. Embryonic British intelligence agencies kept a close eye on what was deemed an internal security threat. As the war dragged on, ever more oppressive instruments of state were deployed to stifle the dissenting voices. Morel’s energies did not diminish. In July 1916 he published *Truth and the War*, a compilation of his anti-war speeches and writings. A century on, this collection endures as a powerful indictment of war, secrecy and the abuse of democratic process.

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1916, Morel’s close friend and collaborator Roger Casement was executed for his role in the Easter Rising. Morel had distanced himself from the rebel Irishman in those final months, no doubt fearful of being tainted further with accusations of German sympathies. The following year, Morel himself was imprisoned in Pentonville Prison for a technical breach of the Defence of the Realm Act. His treatment was particularly harsh. He was released in early 1918, broken by six months of starvation rations and hard labour.

In his rigorous study *British Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Movement, 1896-1913*, Dean Pavlakis has drilled deep into the labyrinthine archives held between the Morel papers catalogued at the London School of Economics and the Antislavery papers held at Rhodes

House, Oxford. The result is a masterpiece of academic endeavour and his comprehensive analysis contributes meaningfully to the current interest in drawing out the distinctions and connections between the histories of humanitarianism and human rights. By locating his study within the wider context of British humanitarianism, Pavlakis succeeds in explaining the complexities of a key organisation seeking to control colonial excesses. Analysis of the day-to-day running of the campaign exposes the endless funding problems, infighting and power struggles. He reveals a dimension of the British empire that can be easily silenced or marginalised, yet one that in many ways catalysed thinking about imperial power at the core. Intrinsic to this moment is understanding the busy network of morally motivated individuals determined to reform foreign policy.

In the early years, the success and reach of the Congo Reform Association was dependent upon the immense organisational structure of the British evangelical and Methodist movements. Lantern slide lectures were projected in prayer halls across England. Audiences of hundreds, sometimes thousands, turned up to listen to the stories of horror and brutality. Mass empathy was mediated through the projection of images of suffering, disfigured bodies and macabre stories of baskets of severed hands.

Alongside Morel, Pavlakis retrieves other key campaigners. These included the seasoned parliamentarian Charles Dilke, the dedicated HR Fox Bourne, the aforementioned Dr Harry Grattan Guinness, and the missionary-photographer Alice Harris, whose images did so much to structure public feeling. Her husband, the ex-RBMU missionary John Harris, would later take on the day-to-day responsibilities of the Antislavery and Aborigines Protection Society.

Pavlakis dedicates further space to analysing the denominational breakdown of the organisation. He reveals the multi-denominational support received from nonconformists, Quakers, Anglicans and Methodists. Philanthropist and chocolate manufacturer William Cadbury, who was required to defend the reputation of his company in a celebrated trial that involved Sir Edward Carson, was a generous supporter. The Liverpool trader and shipping line owner John Holt was another pillar of philanthropic support. Without their backing it is likely the movement would have failed at a very early stage.

A key conclusion of this book is that the CRA was “less unique in motives or methods than its leaders and its historians have claimed”. Its reforms still worked within the framework of free trade, and though it abhorred the cruel treatment of colonised people its thinking was frequently paternalistic and not as anti-imperial as much extant history has claimed. Ending the Leopoldian system and advocating for the rights of African people over their land were both central concerns. However, the activists deemed their cause was as much about regenerating the reputation of Britain and defining a new moral direction, or ethical foreign policy, as it was about protecting “native” life.

Whether or not the CRA was a successful operation is hard to gauge. Measuring the success and outcomes of any humanitarian organisation is complicated. Certainly, in its years of operation from 1904 to 1913, the organisation succeeded in galvanising action across Europe and the USA. The 1911 testimonial luncheon proved there was buy-in at the highest level, but this did not bring about the requisite changes and reform. A hundred years on, the exploitation of sub-Saharan Africa is no less violent or oppressive. Colonial power and the equations of exploitation have persisted and have become even more opaque. The vast mineral wealth of the country continues to lock the people and their environment into endless cycles of resource wars, where the only things that change are the natural products demanded by global markets.

Morel's name is largely forgotten today but by rights should rest in the pantheon beside other humanitarians and antislavery activists such as Frederick Douglas or Florence Nightingale. Even though the Congo Reform Association had its strongest constituency of support in Liverpool, the impressive International Slavery Museum, opened in 2007, has no significant mention of the campaign. Congo reform should be claimed as the last chapter of the nineteenth century antislavery movement in Britain as much as it might be heralded as a proto-human-rights NGO. Why Morel has been redacted from the antislavery narrative is a question we need to ask ourselves in an era when so much of what he both campaigned for and against remains salient. Part of the answer to this can be explained by what happened to him after August 1914.

A striking omission evident in the extensive historiography to have appeared about the First World War in the last few years is the unremembering of those who opposed war. Of the many impressive studies of this incomprehensible tragedy, there has been a revealing absence of analysis of anti-war dissent. If Morel or the UDC are mentioned at all they are given little more than a few lines, or a footnote at best. Pacifists and conscientious objectors, derided at the time in state propaganda, have been obscured and silenced by the historical record. The one noteworthy exception is Adam Hochschild's *To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914-1918*. Hochschild is perhaps best known for his bestseller *King Leopold's Ghost*, which did much to revive understanding of Morel's achievement when it was published in 1998. However, in his scrutiny of how the war divided Britain, he makes little of Morel or the UDC and entirely ignores the intellectual continuities and overlaps between those seeking reform (both colonial and social) and those who opposed war in 1914.

Once more it is that perennial ghost called "the Irish factor" that is partly to blame. The two critical figures involved with Conan Doyle in organising Morel's Testimonial in May 1911 – Alice Stopford Green and Roger Casement – colluded in the planning of the Howth and Kilcoole gun-running for the Irish Volunteers in July 1914. Stopford Green was able to source the money need to buy the guns from the royalty payments she was still receiving for her husband's *A Short History of the English People*. Was there ever a more sublime moment of irony in Anglo-Irish relations? It remains the case that the anti-colonial dimension of Irish nationalism/republicanism has been quite carefully toned down in the consensual narrative of 1916. A century on and Stopford Green has been as thoroughly forgotten in the mainstream interpretation of Ireland's war of independence as Morel has been redacted from Britain's remembrance of the First World War. For evidence of this you might turn to the monumental *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, which entirely ignores Stopford Green's role as a key catalyst of cultural nationalism and makes nothing of the influence of her historiography in shaping the hearts and minds of the revolutionary generation.

To understand Morel's redaction you might turn to Donald Mitchell's concise and sympathetic biography, *The Politics of Dissent*. This was the only significant attempt to explain Morel during the centenary commemoration of the 1914-18 war in Britain and why this process of disremembering has happened is explained in the opening paragraph:

Powerful establishments have many ways of silencing embarrassing critics. At worst, they simply assassinate them. Alternatively, they exile or imprison them. Almost always they vilify and discredit them. And finally, if the elite survives to supervise the writing of history, and particularly if a critic's comments remain pertinent, they do their utmost to airbrush him or her from the narrative, and ensure that the destabilising influence is cloaked in obscurity.

Although Morel returned to the campaign trail after he was released from jail in early 1918, he was broken by the experience of imprisonment. In the 1922 general election he ran against Winston Churchill in the election for a seat in Dundee. Churchill was recovering from appendicitis at the time and the former lord chancellor Lord Birkenhead was dragooned in to bolster the campaign. It was a bitter contest. Both sides forgot the inconvenient fact that Churchill had endorsed the founding issue of Morel's *West African Mail*. Morel won the election and held onto the seat in subsequent elections in 1923 and in 1924, when Labour briefly formed a government. Many thought that his immense knowledge of foreign affairs made him the obvious candidate to be foreign secretary. But the new prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, who had formerly served on the executive committee of the CRA and was a co-founder of the UDC, snubbed him. By the end of the year Morel was dead, his health broken by a combination of exhaustion from overwork, anxiety from years of precarious living and disillusionment about his treatment by a system that he had sought to reform.

Mitchell's impressive and thoughtful biography, covering the key moments and alliances in Morel's life, had the potential to catalyse an alternative discussion about the formation of opposition to the war. Alas, it did not. Not a single significant review appeared in the mainstream British media, nor did it inspire any concerted effort to rethink the importance of one of the most vociferous opponents of industrialised slaughter. A century on from the First World War, Britain still has little appetite to think about the values and champions of anti-war activism. This paradox was partly explained in 1922 by Jean Jules Jusserand, French ambassador to Washington from 1903 to 1924, who stated in his inaugural lecture as president of the American Historical Association: "Civilized mankind has always desired peace, and, in spite of its civilization, has always made war." Peace has never had a chance.

If historians are finally coming around to recognising the power of distributive networks, then the intersections and interconnections linking the Regions Beyond Missionary Union to the labyrinth of correspondences and publications about Congo reform to the imprisoned memory of those peacemakers who fought war might be read as a foundational worldwide web in the intellectual history of the British Left and the European socialist movement. It might be claimed, too, as a core component of the archive defining the *Heart of Darkness*, revealing, by way of a long trail through a vast jungle of documentation, everything that Conrad suggests through fiction, ambiguity, anonymity, metaphor and precision.

At the end of *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow returns to Europe and the sepulchral city. After efforts by Kurtz's former company employees to take control of his papers, Marlow pays a visit to Kurtz's intended to tell her the circumstances of the death of her fiancé. But as he is about to repeat Kurtz's last words – "The Horror! The Horror!" – he lies. Instead he tells her: "The last word he pronounced was – your name"; to have told her the truth "would have been too dark – too dark altogether". A simplified explanation as to why Marlow lies suggests that it was to protect innocence. But surely Conrad is hinting at a compulsive and collective pathology to conceal these unpalatable realities? Truth-telling is potentially so disfiguring to what the cultural theorist Mark Fisher termed "capitalist realism" that we have fine-tuned our collective memories to avoid confronting our complicity in, or entrapment by, the system. Conrad condemned the Leopoldian enterprise as "an enormous and atrocious lie in action" and he produced a book that, for more than a century, has helped us to structure and imaginatively comprehend the extent of that deception. Each of these recent works is intrinsic, in quite different ways, to an expanding archive revealing a darkness at the heart of modern history.