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Walter Crane and the *Imperial Federation Map* *Showing the Extent of the British Empire (1886)*

PIPPA BILTCLIFFE

In 1988, in an essay on 'Maps, knowledge and power', Brian Harley took as his first illustrated example of the way he saw cartographical mapping as 'pre-eminently a language of power, not of protest' an anonymous map of 1886 showing the extent of the British Empire (Plate 8). Harley's aim was to situate maps within the broader realm of value-laden texts through which power could be gained, administered, validated and codified. This map exemplified his argument about the cartographical promotion of imperialism. Apart from a comment in the caption that 'Mercator's projection, a pink tint for empire territory, and decorative emblems showing Britannia seated on the world are used to articulate the message of the "New Imperialism"', Harley gave no details about the map or the context in which it was made, nor did he offer any systematic analysis of its image.¹ Alongside Harley's original argument, I would suggest that there are other ways of reading this frequently reproduced image, particularly when it is grounded in its original context and seen in the light of the artist's social philosophy. Here I wish to draw attention both to the map's context and to the artist responsible for its decoration, the socialist illustrator and designer Walter Crane.

Imperial Federation Map (1886)

The *Imperial Federation Map* was published on 24 July 1886 as a large, colour supplement (78 ×

60 cm) for *The Graphic*, an illustrated weekly newspaper printed in London. The map shows the world, with Britain's territorial acquisitions depicted in pink, in contrast to the neutrally coloured regions that appear ripe for colonization. A series of maritime trade routes connect the chief colonial ports with the mother country, and an inset map shows the extent of the British territories a century earlier, in 1786. Statistical tables plotting the area, population and volume of trade between Britain and each major colony in both 1851 and 1886 are distributed over the map. The map proper is framed by lavish illustrations of flora and fauna; down both sides depictions of the inhabitants of the colonies evoke the exoticism of the empire's distant lands. All co-exist under the banners of 'freedom', 'fraternity' and 'federation' that are emblazoned along the top of the map. Along the bottom, and the focus for the colonists' gaze, Britannia is enthroned on the world with her trident and shield.

How Harley may have deconstructed the map content is a matter for speculation. In line with his central proposition, we can imagine that he would have interpreted its distortions, subliminal geometry, representational hierarchies and decoration as reifying imperial power. He would have noted, for example, the way the trade routes freeze colonial interaction along chartered lines, disciplining the colonies through a discursive grid of Western

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knowledge and power.² He would have remarked on what he considered to be the map's sanitized view of colonial engagement and on its de-socializing of encounters to purely commercial exchange through the addition of statistical information in the tables and in the inset map. Harley would have noticed, too, the use of the Mercator projection, which allowed Britain's geographical importance to be fortuitously elevated to the centre of the world, conveying to the observer the sense of a powerful core and marginalized peripheries. Assuredly, he would have commented on the map's decorative elements. The key figure is that of Britannia (bottom centre), the very manifestation of imperialism. Seated on the world, upheld by the mythical figure of 'Atlas', and accompanied by her regalia of a shield bearing the Union Jack flag and a trident that strikes into the heart of the world, Britannia would seem to portray the all-powerful civilizing force of Great Britain. As her subservient subjects look towards her for leadership, she, in turn, represents the power that places the colonial population under surveillance and control. To the left of Britannia, a sailor and soldier characterize the exploration and conflict that are integral to empire building, on the one hand, and the continuing enforcement of subject control, on the other. The sailor has his hand on his pistol ready to fight for the imperial enterprise, and the soldier's presence attests to the continued enforcement of British law over the mapped spaces of the empire.

We may go on to remark on the essentialist stereotypes of indigenous peoples that legitimized colonial appropriation in the name of civilization. In the left-hand margin, placed one above the other, figures from the empire—an American Indian chief, a fur trapper, a game hunter and an elephant laden with a howdah and servant—invoke the imperial hierarchy; all are prisoners within the map's spatial matrix of embedded social vision.³ In the right-hand margin, the East is eroticized, a persistent trope within Western imaginings.⁴ The sensuality inherent in the gendered portrayal of Orientalism served to justify Britain's civilizing mission.⁵ The map's portrayal of colonial interaction with the 'Other' is that of subjugation, but in their quiescent repose, Britannia's subjects accept her authority. Appropriation over nature and native is graphic; the game hunter's firm grip on the tiger and the use of African labour embody the exertion of

power over the colonial peoples and their land. The language of power conveyed by the figures in this map is also highly gendered: it is the men who are the active colonizers, despite the presence of female colonizers who share in colonial discourses of power. The colonized females are highly sexualized, allegorizing the openness of continents for conquest by European societies.⁶

Walter Crane (1845–1915)

Thus far, it may be assumed that the visual language of the *Imperial Federation Map* sanctioned British power over her dominions. A reconsideration of the map in the light of the identification of its artist and of what we now know of its original context, however, suggests a more complex reading. In view of internal evidence, there is little doubt that the map was illustrated by Walter Crane, although it has not been listed within the corpus of his works.⁷ Quite apart from stylistic consistencies, the map actually bears Crane's distinctive rebus, so often used to mark his art: a crane, accompanied by his initials (Fig. 1). This detail is found outside the map in the extreme bottom left of the frame. The map is packed with Crane's characteristic repertoire of Pre-Raphaelite-inspired women, exotic animals and plants, corroborating the suggestion that the decoration is indeed his work.⁸ Although Harley acknowledged the London publishers of the un-attributed map—Maclure and Co. in his 1988



Fig. 1. The distinctive rebus of the artist Walter Crane (1845–1915): a crane and his initial 'W', contained within the letter 'C'; a feature that appears in the extreme bottom left of the *Imperial Federation Map* (see Plate 8).

reproduction of the image—he did not raise the question of its authorship.⁹

Walter Crane was a prolific Victorian illustrator, designer and artist. His artwork stretched into a number of genres, including children's literature and the applied arts, but it was as the 'artist of socialism' that he achieved greatest renown.¹⁰ Crane, a close friend of William Morris, was a leading proponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement that sought to reform the apparent ugliness and poor design of Victorian mass-produced commodities.¹¹ Crane proposed that art and beauty could be united only through striving for a socialist utopia that emphasized manual skills and a dignity of labour.¹² As a member of a number of socialist societies, including the Social Democratic Federation and later the Fabians, he was non-sectarian; his ethos was simply that socialism could be achieved through education rather than revolt, and his compelling cartoons, often reproduced in socialist publications such as *Justice* and *Commonweal*, became an indispensably powerful means of propaganda for the cause.¹³

Crane believed that society's contemporary emphasis on commerce and capitalism, the foundation of the imperial project, enslaved humanity to an economic system that produced all things for profit rather than use and destroyed the vitality of the people.¹⁴ A later illustration by Crane for the 1901 May Day issue of *Justice*, entitled 'Socialism and the Imperialistic Will o' the Wisp' (Fig. 2), reveals his aversion to commercial imperialism, which is depicted as capitalist exploitation burdening the British workman. Socialist ideology stood, in principle, against imperialism because it accumulated wealth into the hands of the capitalist few rather than the working-class many. The situation was more convoluted, however; the Fabians, of which Crane was a member, advocated imperialism as the medium through which the empire could be effectively organized into a cooperative working community led by Britain.¹⁵ Although Crane resigned from the Fabians when the group failed to take an anti-imperialist stance over the Boer War in 1900, his critique of imperialism as a commercial system needs to be distinguished from his use of empire to advance social reform. In some contexts, the empire was seen as a vehicle through which the socialist ideal of international commonwealth could be achieved.¹⁶ Interpretation of the 1886 empire map requires careful consideration of these issues in the light of Crane's authorship. At the very least, it suggests that the imagery of

empire was susceptible to different interpretations, even at the height of imperialism.

Contextualizing the Map

The 'new Imperialism' was in full swing in the Britannic world in the 1880s.¹⁷ The map of the Imperial Federation, dated just before the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 1887, reflects the celebratory consciousness of Victoria's Empire. Maps were part of a wider popular culture that cultivated interest for the imperial project through images of heroic colonial encounters in foreign places.¹⁸ These imaginative geographies presented an exciting and acceptable face of colonialism which served to enthrall as well as inform a home audience.¹⁹ The great international exhibitions staged around the world between 1851 and 1939 did much to glorify and naturalize empire within British consciousness.²⁰ The themes of the exhibitions altered as relationships with the empire evolved; they were transformed from industrial expositions, as in 1851 and 1862, to displays of a predominantly imperial flavour from the 1880s.²¹ Maps were a standard feature within the exhibition spaces, encapsulating a familiar repertoire of colonial images that were often produced as ceremonial and commemorative artefacts.

Crane's map was produced to mark the Colonial and Indian Exhibition that took place between 4 May and 10 November 1886, a showcase for the wealth and industrial development of the British Empire.²² But it was not the only map produced in that year to observe the same occasion. Two other maps are germane to the present discussion. The first, printed on linen and entitled *The India and Colonial Exhibition Map of the World Shewing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886* (78 × 64 cm), was specifically produced for the exhibition (Plate 9). This anonymous map bears striking similarities to Crane's map, although Britain's possessions appear in blue, rather than the usual red or pink. At the bottom, Britannia is seated with trident and shield, and the map is illustrated with scenes from the empire. To the left of Britannia appears a soldier and an elephant laden with a howdah, and to her right are Australian natives and colonizers. The second, the *Howard Vincent Map of the British Empire* by T. B. Johnston, which measures almost 1.8-metres square, depicts British imperial possessions in red.²³ Like Crane's *Imperial Federation Map*, it too was produced by the Imperial Federation League and provided a medium for the promotion of the empire's value. It also has an



Fig. 2. 'Socialism and the Imperialistic Will o' the Wisp', cartoon illustration by Walter Crane for *Justice* (May Day Issue, 1901). It shows the artist's aversion to commercial imperialism. Note also Crane's rebus (bottom left). British Library, Newspaper Collections, Colindale M7781. (Reproduced with permission from the British Library.)

inset map representing the empire in 1786 and tabulated statements about the area, population and revenue of the colonies, but with only a

scattering of Union Jack flags on its surface, it cannot compare with the decorative profusion so prominent in Crane's map.

Counter to the display of harmonious empire so manifest in these maps and at the imperial exhibitions in the 1880s, the establishment of a broad range of organizations dedicated to reforming colonial policies attested to an awakening imperial sentiment.²⁴ Crane's map appeared in *The Graphic* as an accompaniment to an essay by Captain J. C. R. Colomb entitled 'Imperial Federation'. Here Colomb set out the tenet of the Imperialist Federation League, an organization formed in 1884 to secure the permanent unity of empire by federation. He contended that the political machinery through which the business of empire was administered was failing to accommodate its rapid growth.²⁵ The two supplementary graphs and the tabulated statistics superimposed on to Crane's map were provided to illustrate the urgent necessity for parliamentary reforms that allowed the colonies to exercise influence upon their own foreign policies. The message from the article was explicit: without an increased federation of colonial peoples that permitted them some of the treaty-making power exclusively exercised by Britain, the empire would disintegrate.²⁶

I have been unable to determine the precise nature or extent of Crane's association with the Imperial Federation League, but it may be that Crane was asked to illustrate the map, and in seeking a model, he turned to the blue 1886 Exhibition map. The resemblance of decorative elements—noticeably, the soldier, elephant and howdah in the bottom left of the map, the centralized Britannia seated on the world and the Australasian colonials on the right—suggests that Crane's map was probably a re-working of this earlier map. Crane may, of course, have taken many of his images directly from the artefacts and live exhibits on display at the Exhibition itself. The enhanced ornamentation of Crane's map was an outcome of its particular context within *The Graphic*, a liberal publication featuring social-realist illustration, which had been founded in 1869. It not only documented societal problems but also had a reputation for providing a vehicle for campaigns of reform.²⁷ Crane had already produced illustrations for *The Graphic*, but the positioning of the map within its pages reflected the increasing amount of popular commentary relating to imperialist policies.²⁸

Re-Reading the Map

What difference does attributing the illustration to Crane make to our interpretation of the map?

Crane's socialist ideology, as revealed through his writings and imagery for the cause, sheds new light on the articulation of discourses of empire in contemporary popular cartography. Merging art and labour, Crane proposed that dignity in work was a necessity of health and happiness. The map's depiction of the colonial endeavours of farming and hunting evokes the potency of imperial expansion for achieving the socialist ideals for labour abroad. Notably, 'Atlas', a titan bearing the globe on which Britannia sits is labelled 'human labour'. The late-Victorian period saw a complex interplay between imperialism and aspirations for general social reform. The notion of 'colonization' was frequently deployed by reformers and was integral to the many civilizing initiatives that sought to improve the labour conditions of the working class both at home and abroad.²⁹ In Crane's representation, the male colonizer of Australia represents this ideal labour; enabled by his hard work, he embodies the righteousness of working the land with the tools of his trade. Crane's depictions of the colonizers symbolize conquest through the actions of hunting and farming, but by placing the colonial peoples side-by-side, he emphasizes their solidarity and common interest and also their need for increased fraternity. The inscriptions of 'freedom', 'fraternity' and 'federation' on the imperial map space speak particularly to the political ideals of the Imperial Federation League which are outlined in the accompanying essay. In line with imperial federation, Crane illustrates the interconnectedness of labour, calling for a unity of empire that could only be achieved through increased co-operation and tighter ties with the colonies.³⁰

Crane's depiction of African labour at the bottom left of the map needs to be interpreted within its imperial context. In the late-nineteenth century the discourse of anti-slavery and legitimate commerce was a defining rationalization of British imperialism; the British ascribed to themselves the role of civilizing guardians of the vulnerable 'native' against exploitation by other European powers. Within a hierarchy of labour, the work deemed suitable for indigenous peoples was based on contemporary racial and colonial assumptions; hence there were diverse interpretations as to what actually constituted 'slavery'.³¹ In his cartoon, 'Socialism and the Imperialistic Will o' the Wisp', for example, Crane shows that under capitalist exploitation, the British worker would be reduced to 'industrial slavery'. Crane was well aware of the

abuses inherent in native labour. He described how in the 'unscrupulous struggle' for imperial wealth, 'one after another, virgin markets are opened, and new peoples [are] exploited by commercial enterprise'.³² As such, from Crane's depiction of the strained bodies of the African labourers burdened by their heavy loads, we can speculate that the artist may have been gesturing towards the exploitation of the worker under capitalism.

When compared with other maps that propagated imperial themes, notably the 'blue map' produced for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, the multiple meanings of Crane's map are made apparent. While both maps extol the virtues of empire, it is possible to interpret how the decorative motifs of the 'blue map' have been re-worked in Crane's illustrations to offer a more complicated, and perhaps even critical exploration of imperial interactions and policies. Crane praises the interdependency of the empire that connects its people through trade. Each citizen is shown to be integral to the production and consumption of colonial commodities. In the right-hand frame of the map, Crane draws attention to a number of objects that in the simplicity of their form and function appear to unite both utility and beauty, realizing the central premise of the Arts and Crafts Movement. To my mind, rather than merely remarking on the empire as a global enterprise, Crane also used the map to comment on the shortcomings of commercial imperialism. A distinct message in Crane's work was that capitalism was the mere toy of the wealthy bourgeoisie.³³ His illustration of the female colonizer of North America (in the left frame of the map) is noteworthy here. She, unlike the other colonial citizens, does not gaze upon Britannia. Adorned in furs and skins, she instead looks down avariciously on the captured tiger as another luxury commodity. Whether the artist intended this imagery to reflect the consumption of products from the resources of empire, or to be a critique of materialism, is open to interpretation.

An analysis of the 1886 *Imperial Federation Map* indicates how, as Harley proposed, this map articulates a language of imperial power. I have briefly suggested how the socialistic outlook of Walter Crane, and fuller consideration of the context in which this map was produced, open up the map to other readings. While the map extols the virtues of empire, within the same cartographical space is a reformist appeal for the revision of imperial policies, suggesting a plural and diffuse play of power across what might otherwise be

viewed as imperialist propaganda. The evidence offered by the India and Colonial Exhibition's blue map reveals the intertextual context in which Crane's map must be situated. Crane's possible re-working of this latter map highlights the interplay between cartographical forms propagating a diverse range of imperial messages. It is likely that further research will bring to light other contexts and alternative understandings to aid the interpretation of this celebrated map, and others like it.

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2. Harley, 'Maps, knowledge and power' (see note 1), 303.
3. Brian Harley, 'Deconstructing the map', in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, ed. Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (London, Routledge, 1992), 245.
4. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London, Routledge, 1978).
5. See Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London, Macmillan, 1986).
6. See, for example, Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds. *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (London, Guilford Press, 1994); and Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).
7. The *Imperial Federation Map* has not been recorded within inventories of Crane's artworks. It is absent, for example, from Paul George Konody, *The Art of Walter Crane* (London, George Bell and Sons, 1902), and from Isobel Spencer, *Walter Crane* (London, Studio Vista, 1975).
8. The resemblance between details in the map illustration and design elements from Crane's broader corpus of work is pronounced. Particular parallels can be drawn, for example, between the depiction of the tiger that appears in the bottom left of the map and those featured in 'Lilies turned to tigers' in *Flora's Feast: A Masque of Flowers* (London, Cassell, 1888), one of Crane's best-known children's books. Similarly, comparison with the animated figures of Crane's socialist cartoons shows they are closely akin to those represented on the map. See, for

example, Walter Crane, *Cartoons for the Cause, 1886–1896* (*A Souvenir of the International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress, 1896*) (London, Twentieth Century Press, 1896).

9. Harley briefly refers to the map's publishers in his endnotes ('Maps, knowledge and power' (see note 1), 305, n 30).

10. Spencer, *Walter Crane* (see note 7), 8. See also Greg Smith and Sarah Hyde, eds. *Walter Crane 1854–1915: Artist, Designer and Socialist* (London, Lund Humphries, 1989).

11. A detailed discussion of the Arts and Crafts Movement is offered by Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals and Influence on Design Theory* (London, Studio Vista, 1971).

12. Crane's assertions for the necessity of the decorative arts are outlined in his early papers. For a compilation of these, see Walter Crane, *The Claims of Decorative Art* (London, Lawrence and Bullen, 1892).

13. For details of Crane's socialist publications see Spencer, *Walter Crane* (note 7), 141–58.

14. See, for example, Walter Crane, 'The architecture of art', 12–13, and 'Art and commercialism', 127, both in Crane, *The Claims of Decorative Art* (note 12).

15. Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought 1895–1914* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1960), 64–71.

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18. John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1986).

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20. See Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988), 54; and John M. MacKenzie, 'The imperial exhibitions', in *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation*

of *British Public Opinion 1880–1960* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984), 96–120.

21. MacKenzie, 'The imperial exhibitions' (see note 20), 97.

22. Frank Cundall, ed., *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition* (London, William Clowes and Sons, 1886).

23. T. B. Johnston, *Howard Vincent Map of the British Empire Showing the Possessions throughout the World of the British People* (engraved and printed by W. & A. K. Johnston, 1886).

24. See MacKenzie, 'The imperial exhibitions' (note 20), 148.

25. Captain J. C. R. Colomb, 'Imperial federation', *The Graphic* (24 July 1886), 90–94. For further information about the Imperial Federation League see Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform* (note 15), 56.

26. Colomb, 'Imperial federation' (see note 25), 90–91.

27. Harry Quilter, 'Some "graphic" artists', *The Universal Review*, 2 (September–December, 1888), 102.

28. Crane had produced a number of greetings cards for *The Graphic* in November 1874, and again, in February 1875.

29. Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2001), 188–94; Victor Bailey, "'In darkest England and the way out': the Salvation Army, social reform and the Labour movement, 1885–1910", *International Review of Social History* 29 (1984): 133–71; M. E. Chamberlain, 'Imperialism and social reform', in Eldridge, *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (see note 16), 148–67.

30. Colomb, 'Imperial federation' (see note 25), 90. See also Walter Crane, 'Art and labour', in his *The Claims of Decorative Art* (note 12), 61.

31. See, for example, the discussion by Driver, *Geography Militant* (note 29), 157–67.

32. Crane, 'Art and commercialism' (see note 14), 138.

33. An example is Crane's famous cartoon: 'Mrs Grundy frightened by her own shadow', which featured in the *Commonweal* in May 1886, the same year that Crane's map was published in *The Graphic*.



Plate 8. *Imperial Federation Map Showing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886*. Approximately 78 × 60 cm. Originally published in *The Graphic*, the map was cited by Brian Harley to demonstrate how maps are 'pre-eminently a language of power, not of protest'. The presence of the hallmark of the nineteenth-century socialist artist Walter Crane (bottom left; see text Fig. 1), however, suggests additional readings of the map. Statistical information on the map was provided by Captain J. C. R. Colomb, M.P. British Library, Newspaper Collections, Colindale, LD46. (Reproduced with permission from the British Library.) See page 63.



Plate 9. *The India and Colonial Exhibition 1886 Map of the World shewing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886*. Approximately 78 × 64 cm. Printed on linen. British possessions are depicted in blue. The illustrations bear a striking resemblance to those used by Walter Crane, suggesting that Crane re-worked much of this map's imagery for his *Imperial Federation Map*. British Library, Maps 183.q.1.[13]. (Reproduced with permission from the British Library.) See page 65.