Penetrating Critiques: Vulnerability, Prowess, and Contested Masculinities within the British Imperial Project in Africa

by

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ABSTRACT

PENETRATING CRITIQUES: VULNERABILITY, PROWESS, AND CONTESTED MASCULINITIES WITHIN THE BRITISH IMPERIAL PROJECT IN AFRICA

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Tracing intersections between archival documents and popular adventure fiction pertaining to British imperialism in Africa in the late nineteenth century, this dissertation highlights nodes of anxiety surrounding the vulnerability of the white male body and its governmental avatars by attending to the destabilization of narrative itself. Critiquing the efficacy of martial masculine prowess and male authority by underscoring the grotesqueness of male forms, narratives, and moralities, I contend that the texts examined here destabilize the legitimacy of patriarchal power. Emphasizing the relationship between institutional imperial writing and popular discourse, I argue much more complex, fraught, and critical approaches to imperialism and masculinity were circulating throughout Victorian culture than have heretofore been recognized. Chapter one, attending to dialogues between colonial dispatches, wartime reports, travel writing, and newspapers and more obviously imaginative writing, analyzes the metaphors of engulfment and penetration in accounts of the Anglo-Zulu War. While British overconfidence led to emasculation, the reassertion of white prowess was predicated on brutality and reappropriations of the trope of penetration. Thus, a crisis in the post-1850s schoolboy culture of heroism began to fissure the conception of the ideal imperial man. Chapter two examines Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She*, arguing Haggard’s rhetorical strategies hinge on a parodic treatment of adventuring males while his critique of the frame narrative undermines the imperial adventurer’s authority. Next I analyze Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*, suggesting that, in linking the grotesque male body with the ostensibly authoritative narrative’s leakiness, the novel critiques governmental legitimacy. Chapter four uses an underexplored institutional archive to argue that in Sierra Leone, colonial confrontation with the subversive violence of indigenous groups resulted in a breakdown of imperial principles and notions of the structured British military body. Confronted with white complicity in various forms of brutality, the colonial administration was forced to recognize the dissolution of the ostensibly bounded body (individual and institutional), the inadequacies of government, and the disintegration of legitimacy. Chapter five analyzes Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, urging that this new angle of reading imperial writing opens up fresh understandings of how empire operated and how national gendered identities mutated.
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Introduction

Bodies/Spaces/Texts:
British Masculinity and the Failure of Colonial Efficacy

Mystery has, for centuries, hung above [the Dark Continent] like a gruesome pall, the wild riot of a boundless superstition has hovered over its strange people until the world has whispered the very name with a feeling of dread and given to it that regard which attaches only to ghostly and ghastly things of distempered fancy. But dark as has been the mantle of dread which enveloped her during the long centuries, Africa has at last been revealed, through the search-light of bold exploration, and now meets our scrutiny with the interest of a newly discovered world.

-J.W. Buel (17)

J.W. Buel’s 1889 volume *Heroes of the Dark Continent: A Complete History of all the Great Explorations and Discoveries in Africa, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* speaks to a strong desire for enlightenment. The work’s unabridged title, which occupies nearly a full page, has entertainment very much in mind when it promises “a full, authentic and thrilling account of … astounding incidents, wonderful adventures, mysterious providences, grand achievements, and glorious deeds,” not to mention the “Heroism and Unparalleled Daring,” of three central nineteenth-century celebrity adventurers, Henry Morton Stanley, Emin Pasha, and General Gordon. Stanley, a Welsh explorer who disguised his impoverished heritage by posing as an American, started out as a journalist before gaining fame for his discovery of the renowned missing missionary David Livingstone and charting Lake Tanganyika from 1871-2, travelling across uncharted territory in Africa, working for King Leopold in the Congo River in early 1880s, and then again for heading the expedition to relieve Emin Pasha in Equatoria from Mahdist attack in the late 1880s (Driver). Emin Pasha was a Silesian physician and quarantine officer by turns who had spent time in the Ottoman Empire and eventually ended up in Khartoum, where General Gordon, then governor of the province of Equatoria in the Sudan, employed him as a medical officer. From this position, Emin
Pasha succeeded Gordon when the latter became governor-general of the Sudan in 1877 (Davenport-Hines). Gordon had forged his reputation serving in the British army in the Crimea in the 1850s and in China in the 1860s. His subsequent posting and experience in the Sudan in the 1870s led the British government to send him back to Khartoum in 1884 during the Mahdist uprising. While Stanley and Emin Pasha both made it safely back to Britain, Gordon died during the Siege of Khartoum in 1885, remaining a symbol of British sacrifice in Africa.

In many ways, these three European men of empire, each of whom performed imperial services to the British government—working on securing order in Africa and mapping it—and each of whom was threatened and overwhelmed by the ostensible chaos of Africa itself, became icons of national fortitude and endurance. In turn, Buel’s book sought to capitalize on their fame and to propagate further fantasies of Britain’s cultural and social superiority. But if the superfluity of adjectives in Buel’s title proved to be insufficient enticement, the final portion of the title also promised “stories of marvelous hunts and wonderful adventures among wild animals, ferocious reptiles, and curious and savage races of people who inhabit the dark continent,” just to seal the deal. Buel’s book fulfills these promises, not only with sensationalist prose but also with hundreds of illustrations catering to voyeuristic and gnostic desires. The work’s illustrations, as artifacts catering to these kinds of enthusiasms, are fascinating insofar as they belie an indulgence in fantasies of white (sexualized) dominance, various forms of suffering, and racialized chaos. At one level, this would seem to be business as usual. This is neither the first nor the last book that would associate African people with dangerous beasts, that would treat Africa as a spectacular mise-en-scene, that would
understand the continent as a homogeneous arena whose complete history can be contained within a single volume, or that would use African space as a foil for defining heroic British masculinity.

But the frontispiece to Buel’s volume is a valuable starting point for this dissertation because it collates the history of myths about the African continent in a way that cannot be separated from a seemingly gratuitous sexualization of both figure and ground (Figure 1):
Figure 1: Frontispiece of *Heroes of the Dark Continent* (1889)
All in one image, we are shown a massive African Cyclops, a giant roc, a dwarf, a man with his head in his chest (an example of ‘Mandeville’s’ “Blemmyers” [44]), a man reclining in the shade of his single giant foot (one of ‘Mandeville’s’ “Sciapodes” [44]), a woman cooking a baby (probably an amazon boiling a male child), and, perhaps best of all, a unicorn. These subjects are arranged in such a way as to offer the viewer a clear glimpse of them in action. However, a number of curiosities did not make it in to the frontispiece, notably, griffons (83), “cats with faces exactly like those of men,” the men “who have tails like dogs” (85), and other “human monsters, many supernaturally endowed” (89).

Endowment, meanwhile, seems to be one of this illustration’s central preoccupations—most of the ‘curiosities’ here have some kind of phallic instrument: the Cyclops has a massive club that hangs casually but visibly at his side. That he seems the most passive of the subjects, being more or less relaxed and mostly looking with his giant eye, may work to counter his otherwise intimidating size and weapon. The Blemmyer is more aggressive, wielding a spear in the vague direction of the viewer, but by contrast is much smaller, and thus, as a threat, is subdued. The dwarf behind him points an arrow off to the side (possibly at the unicorn), and thus is even less of a threat and rather offers his body up for ethnographic scrutiny. Meanwhile, the woman boiling the child holds out a knife, and even the unicorn boasts its own phallus. Emphasized,

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1 Buel meanwhile insists that these are legends that Africans themselves, “a superstitious people” believe, offering the explanation that “It is quite natural for the human mind that has not been educated in the science of natural phenomena, or schooled … in the vagaries in which nature sometimes indulges, to ascribe to the preternatural those things and creatures which appear insulated or out of apparent harmony with their surroundings” (86), never thinking that it might be in the natives’ interest to maintain European beliefs in such things for purposes of repulsion, or even of trade, as in the case of selling powdered ‘unicorn’ horn.

2 This national ideal has been described variously as “the Englishman’s ‘stiff upper lip’” (Dowling 1),
then, is the significance of power in the African space—it is signaled as a potential threat, but then carefully contained.

Why is this? As I meditated on this object and tried to make sense of this image, a number of questions arose: What is the power dynamic between the viewer and the subjects in the illustration? What is the significance of the fact that this implied danger (again partially contained by the margins of the page and by the illustrator’s arresting of the subjects, rendering them frozen for viewing) is augmented by the unfamiliar, Othered space with its unruly vegetation, giant central crevice, and uncontained lake in the background—all elements encoding the feminine that seem to threaten to infringe in various ways on different kinds of borders? What does it mean that such danger is signified sexually—first by the phallic signs (even the sexual sign of the reclining man gets displaced onto his massive foot), second by these elements of landscape, and third by the abundance of nakedness, skin, and muscle? Is it important that the boundaries of humanity seem to be pushed here, that Africa is represented as a space where transgressions occur across understandings of the human body? I think that in order to properly answer these questions, we need to consider the function of Africa in the late-Victorian imagination as an altogether imaginary space alongside the fact that the public had to rely on narratives and tales from travel-writers (I use that term in the broadest possible sense), but we also need to investigate the relationship between the space as narrated and the identity of the narrator.

Even though the publication recognizes these myths as such within its prose, it nevertheless exploits them, relying on public appetite for invention and for gazing in
order to sell copies. At the same time, Buel pointedly blurs the division between reality and imagination, presenting Africa as a fantasy space:

the line between fact and fiction is never very distinct, and when we come to discuss Africa the division becomes absolutely indistinguishable. One after another the superstitions connected with that country have been exploded, which old, quaint, fear-inspiring stories told hundreds of years ago about hideous and monstrous creatures that roamed the wilds of Africa, and which everybody accepted as nothing more serious than interesting fables, have been proved by modern travellers to be actual realities. (80-81)

Buel supports this illusion by reiterating, “the geography of Africa is not yet thoroughly known, and there remain several extensive regions in which explorers have not entered” (20). Thus, despite the obvious mythological tenor of the illustration, Buel continues to suggest that Africa remains a mysterious place where the most outlandish tales could be true. Since, evidently, the space that Buel narrativizes is a product of fantasy, this image indicates much about the manufacturing of that fantasy.

Buel maintains that he seeks to present both “a history of ancient Africa” and “a summary of the principal expeditions and individual explorers that have entered the continent” (19). Crucially, he argues that “By doing so I have been able to follow the advancing lines of conquest and reclamation” (20). Buel’s use of “follow” is ambiguous; it has two possible meanings: first, as in the tracing and reporting of “the advancing lines,” and second, as in imitating—the sense that Buel himself is enacting this “reclamation.” In the latter signification, writing itself is figured as a form of conquest—
and in this sense, the writer becomes a kind of hero parallel to those chronicled. This dissertation takes up this double meaning of “to follow” by attending not only to actants—both historical and fictional—engaged in the imperial project in Africa, but also to the acts of writing that attempted to capture, however tenuously, complex intercultural encounters in colonial space. As we will see, following these actants and these acts of writing will involve a thorough engagement with both the history of British colonial activity in the region and its continual re-structuring of the fantasies that ostensibly secured British masculine identities in the period.

**Bodies**

As Judith Halberstam has argued, “Negotiations over the meaning of masculinity and its relation to national identity were paramount to turn-of-the-century definitions of meaning and identity” (105). In order to foreground that questions of British identity were central in imperial projects in Africa, I want to return to Buel’s frontispiece and look specifically at the rendition of the figures as sexualized, and how this relates to the British reader. Though I will be focusing on bodies in this section, because of the ways in which relationships between bodies, spaces, and texts are so tightly woven, there will be some overlap in my focuses in each subsection. Thus, regarding the figures in this image, size obviously matters here, as do the phallic augmentations already discussed, but there are also more subtle implications of sexual threat. First, everyone is mostly naked. Bodies are emphasized over faces as shoulders, breasts, and leg and arm muscles are softly lightened, glistening while faces tend to be darkened, turned away, or subsumed within the body itself. Secondly, the limbs of each body tend to form lines
radiating outward; arms are either thrust or spread to the side while everyone’s legs are splayed, except for the Sciapodes, who rests his hand over his groin. Because the eye lands first on the dominantly positioned Cyclops, his figure determines the direction of the eye’s movement as his left arm and leg point to the line of the earth’s crevice that leads to the amazon in the bottom corner. The eye then moves upwards, jumping from figure to figure in a vaguely vertical line until it reaches the roc, moves leftwards across it, and finally back to the Cyclops. These figures’ relation to the landscape and its features is significant, but I want to return to this in a moment. Meanwhile, this composition of figures thus moves the viewer’s eye in a circle, although other than the Cyclops, no human figure is really given dominance—rather, their disorganization gives the general effect of an undifferentiated mass of bodies, each posing some kind of sexual threat. And, at the centre of this encircling mass, we find the unicorn.

The unicorn is set apart from the others because, next to the roc, it arguably possesses the most mobility, but also its whiteness appears in stark contrast to the darkness of the other figures. If its agency and whiteness didn’t forge the link, the unicorn’s appearance on the national coat of arms alone would have signified Britishness. Furthermore, the unicorn traditionally symbolized purity and chastity (Williamson 206)—in other words, the preservation of bodily borders. However, it was also most closely associated with Scotland, which was historically colonial in relation to England and thus associated more closely with the primitive, but which had by this time been brought under control, so to speak (hence depicted as chained in the coat of arms), and thus subsumed into British identity. Nevertheless it remains a liminal, slippery symbol, which is perhaps why it functions as so suitably an object by which to
vicariously place the metropolitan self in the realm of fantasized danger. For the unicorn here is threatened—hunted by the dwarf, dwarfed by the roc, surrounded by a mass of sexually aggressive beings—but not too much so. The menacing figures are frozen, but also the unicorn seems to be escaping. Thus the tension of a trial is present as this image generates anxiety about danger while simultaneously containing it; its capacity for survival amidst these challenges is being tested as this image works to find just the right balance of threat in order to promise entertainment.

When we recognize that Britain seems consistently to find itself at the centre of the foreign, it is impossible to understand fin de siècle identities separately from empire. As the rate of imperialist growth increased in the late-Victorian period, dominant constructions of imperial masculinity were built around the foundations of the idea of a stable, solid, authoritative masculine identity, physically and mentally capable, sound of judgment, and trustworthy. To understand the men of empire—whether soldiers, colonial administrators, policy makers, or adventurers who narrated experiences at and beyond colonial frontiers—as efficacious, competent, and reliable was also to conceive of the imperial project in the way it was most prominently and primarily narrated in both cultural and institutional writing. In other words, the capabilities of the men who were acting for empire were inseparable from the pride and legitimacy infusing narratives of empire.

This linkage of masculine imperial identity to the power of empire more broadly is also dependent on analogies of boundaries and borders traversing different kinds of bodies understood to be within male domains. For Klaus Theweleit, the experience of the body in physical space is crucial for understanding how truth gets inscribed: “The
relationship of human bodies to the larger world of objective reality grows out of one's relationship to one's own body and to other human bodies. The relationship to the larger world in turn determines the way in which these bodies speak of themselves, of objects, and of relationships to objects" (24). Thus, all narrative is refracted through the body's relationship with its environment. Issues of contact and exchange are of central concern here, and have implications for both the individual and larger social body. As Jules Law has recently noted, “the practice of linking the portals of the individual body to the contours and health of the body politic has a long history” (2-3). Mary Douglas’ foundational work on cultural analogies between the bodies of the individual and the community also underpins my linkage of narrative solidity to stable bodies, for the image of society “has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack … For symbols of society, any human experience of structures, margins or boundaries is ready to hand” (141). Thus, for both national and martial bodies, “all margins are dangerous[;] … orifices of the body … symbolise its specially vulnerable points” (150), which means that bodies that seek to retain the image of solidity must continuously preserve their figurative and analogous borders. What was at stake, then, for fin de siècle Britain was spiritual as well as physical soundness: “Victorian intellectuals … all thought physiologically: they adopted the well-knit body as their model for the well-formed mind, and the mind-body harmony as their model for spiritual health, the harmony of the self with external principles of growth and order” (Haley 4). An ordered mind with a grounded and informed grasp of reality was thus bound up with a healthy, capable, strong body.
This kind of stable, impermeable white male body therefore gets relied upon to maintain—physically through its martial capacities and conceptually through its narratives—stable, impermeable geopolitical and territorial bodies. The psychic space that both of these notions of boundaries creates relies on a fantasy of virile, solid, masterful masculinity that can repulse external threat. In discussing ‘masculinity,’ I approach the concept with the premise that it is, at any given point, plural, complex, contradictory, ephemeral, and historically specific. As Gail Bederman cautions, rather than a state, it is “a historical, ideological process,” but nevertheless a process through which “men claim certain kinds of authority, based upon their particular type of bodies” (7, emphasis in original). I understand gender as negotiated through material experience—it is an ideology that functions “through a complex political technology, composed of a variety of institutions, ideas, and daily practices. Combined, these processes produce a set of truths about who an individual is and what he or she can do, based upon his or her body” (7). As a result, masculinity itself is nebulous, which is why Herbert Sussman, James Eli Adams, Dustin Friedman, and many others insist that the critical discussion acknowledge the existence of “masculinities” rather than one unified set of ideals. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Christopher Lane, Jonathan Dollimore, and Joseph Bristow have done valuable work on non-normative forms of Victorian masculinity, dealing with homoeroticism and homosexuality, and I take as one of my premises here Sedgwick’s valuable contribution that heterosexuality and homosexuality comprise a range of points on the same spectrum, rather than occupy oppositional orientations (1-2). To be sure, it is because of this potential slipperiness between the positions that homosociality and homoeroticism, as I explore in my work here, have
such subversive implications for imperial projects—indeed, Lane argues in *The Ruling Passion* that homosexuality defied coherent, unified, normative master narratives of masculine ideals. While these and other scholars focus on non-normative masculinities, my central focus in this study is the process of destabilization of hegemonic, martial masculinity, one outcome of which is the demonstration that, echoing Sedgwick, fantasies of normative and non-normative imperial masculinity are linked in a continuum, and that the boundaries between these classifications are troubled by an easy slippage.

Perhaps because of the shifting imperial imperatives emerging in the final decades of the nineteenth century, this ideal of heroic masculinity appeared and tended to dominate the public sphere. Recognizing the variety of forms of masculinity that Sussman, Adams, and Friedman point to in their valuable work, the iterations of manhood I focus on here are imperial figurations of masculinity that, generally transcending class, were institutionalized through literature and through the system of public schools. As Joseph Bristow puts it,

> As the upper classes devised strategies for maintaining their military prowess, new middle-class liberal demands for education fed into the

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2 This national ideal has been described variously as “the Englishman’s ‘stiff upper lip’” (Dowling 1), “combative masculinity” (Friedman 1082), and “neo-Spartan virility as exemplified by stoicism, hardiness, and endurance” (Mangan and Walvin 1). This kind of manliness also required what Sussman calls “psychic discipline” (3).

3 I recognize that these values were held neither uniformly nor to the same degree, especially across classes. As J.A. Mangan and James Walvin suggest, “ideals [of masculinity and femininity] were severely constrained by the overriding effects of social class and economic reality. The ideas of masculinity and femininity were unlikely to prove persuasive, even assuming they reached them, to the untold legions of urban poor who seemed forever beyond the reach (and understanding) of their social superiors … Nevertheless determined efforts were made to force those ideals through the barriers of social class. They were set before the proletariat by pedagogues and publishers and pressed on them by charitable organisations and philanthropic activists” (4). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I will continue to use the notion of hegemonic masculinity in order to talk about the dynamics of imperialism, while at the same time acknowledging that there exist class, as well as ethnic, complexities that I do not address in detail.
public schools, particularly where practical forms of training were concerned. Both worked together to open up an institutional space where a different kind of masculinity could emerge. From Tom Brown onwards, the educated male turned into a much more admirable and moral hero—the kind of man all boys (regardless of class) could try to be. (EB 58)

John Tosh agrees that the education system was significant in the formation of this martial masculinity: “The origins of middle-class athleticism can be traced back to the promotion of team games by the public schools in the 1850s,” since concerns of imperial prowess and national defense were put forth to insist that “the country needed men who were fit in body as well as in mind” (MP 187). In response to this need, “Sports were promoted not only for their training in physical fitness, but for their character-building qualities of courage, self-control, stoical endurance, and the subordination of the ego to the team. The requirements of sport, taken in deadly earnest, were perfectly attuned to the 'stiff upper lip' character formation so common among men brought up in conventional middle-class families at this time” (188-9). In this configuration, manliness was furthermore understood through “metaphors of control, reserve, and discipline, that were placed in opposition to images of chaos, excess, and disorder” (Dowling 13). The maintenance and appearance of order was crucial to Victorian manhood, as “the proper regulation of an innate male energy,” including sexuality and other forms of desire, became a “central problematic” for nineteenth-century practices of masculinity.

Furthermore, the question of violent energy was ever present: “Self-defence, whether individually or as part of a collective assertion, placed a premium on physical prowess and readiness for combat … Popular forms of sport, or ‘manly exercises’, kept men in a state of alertness and physical fitness, ranging from fox-hunting and cricket to archery and rowing. First impressions of an individual were strongly conditioned by physical indicators—countenance, voice and hand-clasp could (and should) all be ‘manly’. But a manly appearance suggested more than physical health and strength; it indicated virility. In common usage manliness always presumed a liberal endowment of sexual energy, and this feature was commended quite independently of the moral issue of male sexual conduct” (Tosh, MP 111-12).
(Sussman 3). The values that were being propagated at this time, emerging in part from a doctrine of Muscular Christianity, resonated strongly with Victorian conceptions of chivalry and knighthood. Thus, it was alongside this trend of venerating the heroic male body and moral responsibilities that a revival of interest in medieval knights developed (Dowling 14). This set of values was one that, as Bristow suggests above, could generate mass appeal across the social spectrum and prescribe both physical and psychic regulations. As John Kucich explains,

> Chivalric ideals long held by the upper class, which were appropriated by gentrified and professionalized middle-class ranks in the second half of the nineteenth century, revolved around the honor conferred by both physical and emotional trials. The ideals of stoic masculinity exalted by late-century adventure fiction were already present, in one form or another, among all Victorian social classes, including working-class cultures, whether conservative, militaristic, or radical. (9-10)

What is fascinating to me is that the excessive force with which this ideology gets sustained and replicated points to an extant fragility of this myth of what we might call ‘hypermasculinity.’ In his exploration of Victorian conceptions of the gallant knight, Joseph Kestner underscores that “In the iconography of chivalry in the nineteenth century, this inscription of maleness and dominance is marked by armour, which transforms the male body into the supreme signifier of masculinity, the permanent erection” (97). The knight’s armour, so prevalent in late-Victorian representations of errantry, “is an exaggeration of the phallus, making permanent its erectile state; … [is] bellicose, aggressive, combative, martial, all qualities distinguishing masculinity; …

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5 See also Joseph Kestner 92-140.
explicitly links the masculine with the moral, since it conceals the fallen flesh abhorrent to Christianity; …[and] protects the genitals against castration and castration anxiety” (98). This logic of the supplement, certainly, indicates a palpable lack; the need for such complete protection gestures not only to the vulnerability of the physical body and its susceptibility to “castration,” but also to the fragility of the idea of martial masculinity itself, which needs to consistently present itself as impenetrable. This pattern of compensation is one that will emerge throughout the texts examined in this dissertation. As I discuss below, this “permanent erection” thus indicates fear of the environment surrounding the body, a desire for the body to remain separate, regulated, and impermeable, and a need to define masculinity as such.

In the mean time, it’s important to emphasize that this ideology of morality and toughness was emerging in the context of rising imperial expansion: “warfare dominated Victorian consciousness and contributed to the formation of ideologies of masculinity, constructing paradigms of activity, aggression, dominance, endurance, heroism, comradeship, patriotism and power” (Kestner 189). Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, British militarism “was a genuinely popular movement which reflected acceptance of war as a means of achieving national goals, an admiration for and pride in the exploits of the army and its heroes; a belief that military values and attitudes would improve the health of the people, create a more efficient work force and eliminate social ills” (Paris 49). This meant that a certain degree of rough violence was admitted into the realm of acceptable behaviour. Recently, Bradley Deane and Merrick Burrow have argued that, within certain spheres, imperial barbarianism became embedded in fin de siècle conceptions of virile manhood. In terms of exerting prowess in the contact
zone, this “ideological bulwark of the New Imperialism’s aggressive militarism” (Deane 26) may have been an empowering fantasy, but I think at the same time this is only true insofar as this image is understood as a fantasy. As I demonstrate in chapters one and four especially, when this fantasy is indulged and becomes a reality the image of the British imperial man as barbarian, which is necessarily problematic, becomes a paralyzing anxiety. As Burrow recognizes, this image—its “obscene limit” made visible through “the imperial souvenir,” or war trophy—“is imbued with a horror that is intolerable to metropolitan domesticity” (85). But this is precisely where the figure of the knight errant becomes so ideologically useful to the motivations of empire. Tempering the more “carnal impulses” (Tosh, MP 189) with Christian imperatives, the violence of martial masculinity gets regulated by the disciplining code of the heroic knight. As Michael Paris puts it, “Chivalry … removed the most brutal elements of war by creating a strict moral code for the warrior—the generally accepted ‘rules of war’” (23). However, as this study will show, these ideals of regulation were exposed as fantasies, and, across the texts I discuss, begin and complete the process of unraveling.

Spaces

Understandings of space, landscape, and environment became crucial in the dissolution of these fantasies of control and impermeability. If we return to Buel’s frontispiece it becomes clear that any consideration of the figures cannot be separated from the ground on which they stand. For instance, the lines of the landscape are fundamental in guiding the viewer’s eye in a circuit around the mass: as we saw, the crevice took us from the Cyclops to the amazon, but the vegetation and lake, both
parallel to the roc, as well as the tree leaning out from behind the giant, help to return the eye back to the Cyclops. Thus the landscape composes pictorial space in such a way as to threaten the figure of white purity. But the relationship between the ground and the African bodies in this image is still more complex. It forms a reclining body on which the figures are posed—all being clustered around one particular region. This body’s undoubtedly focal feature is the giant vaginal crevice, with legs forming on either side, occupying the centre of the page. Around this are jagged ground, serrated rocks, toothy ferns, and wild vegetation—thinly symbolic pubic hair—all indicating the presence of the terrifying vagina dentata. Notably, while the black figures are concentrated around the mouth of the crevice, the unicorn is positioned up toward where the body’s head would be; thus the racialized division of sexual impulse and reason and logic is imagined as part of a project of entertainment. This sexual threat surrounding the unicorn is furthermore evident in the fact that if the ground kept splitting along the same upward line, it would swallow it up. Thus this space serves as an imaginary realm with which to conceive of a titillating danger to the constitution of British identity as the African landscape itself is figured as a sexual threat. At once a seemingly passive, reclining ground over which active bodies walk, it is simultaneously dangerous, engulfing, and consuming, being figured as an unknown toothed darkness with which African bodies also become aligned.

One of the reasons that I have narrowed in on the constitution of imperial masculinity in Africa in this study is that my work explores the relationships between narration and prowess. As Buel’s illustrations and prose symptomatically demonstrate, Africa, more than any other space in the globe at this time, remained an epistemological
vacuum. The British public and the military both knew less about it than they did of colonial spaces such as Australia, India, and the Americas, and most frequently, the term “Africa” was applied to that continent without recognition of manifold and complex differences across its diverse spaces and its complex historical formations.

Furthermore, it was a difficult space for the British to colonize—the climate, topography, and ecosystems of many coastal regions in Africa seemed to repel British efforts to establish a foothold and build settlements the way they had in other locations. Thus, very few Britons had direct experience with the continent, and to a large extent, Africa existed as an imaginary space in much of the public discourse. This was also the case in terms of attempts to survey the land—maps, especially of interior spaces, were often constructed from conjecture. As a result, understandings both of Africa and of British experience and behaviour within it depended largely on narratives from imperial adventurers or imperial agents. Furthermore, as a result of Africa being understood as an environment physically unforgivable to the European, survival ‘in the wilds’ also functioned as a test of manhood. If one was capable of withstanding corporeal as well as psychic hardships, then one’s hardiness and stamina was proven, and he lived to tell the tale. The tale thus became an artifact of manly achievement, narrating, but also itself an embodiment of, sound judgment, reliability, and provision of reassurance through the imperial man.

However, if the relationships between the male body, masculine authority, and narrating were codependent and co-legitimizing, they were also potentially mutually destructive; while Douglas approaches the notion of the body as a cultural tool for symbolizing social collectives and their boundaries, I ask, what are the results of
investigating power relations between these entities from the other direction, where the body is not just used to map other concerns, but where these issues arise out of understandings and representations of the body? If manliness and masculine prowess are understood in terms of the ability to write, forge, and normalize reality, then a sustained attack on any point in this triangle of imperial legitimacy also entails the weakening of the frame of governmental power as a whole. In the fin de siècle texts I explore in this study, this is exactly what happens. Representations of masculinity and male domains of the kind I have outlined here were susceptible to the weakness of their own excess; the fact that imperialism was so reliant on this kind of identity construction meant that narratives figuring it were overwrought, contrived, and therefore fragile. What I set out to argue here is that these narratives ostensibly forging powerful imperial masculinity were a) remarkably cognizant of their own instability, and b) exposed this instability through metaphors that countered dominant representations of martial imperial masculinity through tropes, images, and evidence of perforation, penetration, and dissolution of bodies that were constructed as being firmly bounded, contained, and unshakeable. In this process of exposure, the ties between white male, martial, geographical, political, and psychic bodies are exploited in order to demonstrate the chain of crumbling.

On a fundamental level, the supposedly solid body is threatened by penetration, the transgression of its borders, the dissolution of the boundaries separating its insides from its outsides, and its deterioration into grotesqueness. This becomes a particularly fearsome prospect for Victorian men whose identity was defined by regulation and impermeability. The containment of internal fluids and the repulsion of external forms of
fluctuating currents were central for the imperial man. This concern appears as an extension of a trajectory of early Victorian preoccupations with maleness, which they understood as “the possession of an innate, distinctively male energy … This interior energy was consistently imagined or fantasied in a metaphorics of fluid, suggestively seminal, and in an imagery of flame” (Sussman 10). The ability to control this hydraulic dynamic determined one’s ‘manliness.’ By the end of the nineteenth century, this yearning for a bounded, stable body, minimally porous to its environment is reflected in what Kestner points out is an anxiety about “Spermatorrhoea” (which is exactly what it sounds like): “Loss of semen from masturbation or nocturnal emissions was thought to be a harbinger of insanity, derangement, mental instability or physical debilitation” (Kestner 36). By contrast, Ruskin offers an ideal of manhood that embodies the values of heroism, strength, gallantry, and toughness, and that is able to resist these kinds of threats of fluidity:

The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary … The man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial; —to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offense, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued, often mislead; and always hardened.

(Ruskin 84, emphasis in original)

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6 Kestner quotes Bigelow, *Sexual Pathology* (1875).
As will be seen in this study, a recurring figuration of this process of disintegration is manifested in the threat of flow. Fluidity, leakiness, currents, and surroundings continually menace the bounded male body, as entities possessing such characteristics come into contact with, engulf, and overpower it, signaling not only a loss of masculine prowess, but also of individuality and autonomy. As I will show in the fictional and institutional writings about Africa that this study examines, the threat of flow assumes different forms: sometimes it is crowds of hostile bodies, sometimes a manifestation of a forbidding environment, sometimes a conglomerate of Otherness figured through an embodied fantasy, sometimes it is desire in its multiple incarnations, and sometimes it is narrative itself—the confounding and confusing stream of words that claims to make sense of experience, enacts moral assertions, and threatens individual critical autonomy. Flow is thus a means both of demonstrating weakness in ostensibly bounded bodies, and of igniting anxieties about the underpinnings of identity.

Another crucial mode of demonstrating inadequacy that appears in the texts of this study is auto-critique. This is a tactic that I argue is employed in all four of the fictional works I bring in here—H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She: A History of Adventure*, Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*, and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. As I will show, it is through the very enactment of imperial discourse that these texts illustrate its failings, as well as the shortcomings of the imperial man. In this sense, imperial writing functions to eat itself from the inside out. The same is true of the institutional texts on which I draw—newspaper reports, private letters, dispatches, and

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7 Jules Law has recently explored the troubling of bodily boundaries by the exchange of fluids across bodies and households in Victorian England, and the importance of mastery of these exchanges for identity. See *The Social Life of Fluids: Blood, Milk, and Water in the Victorian Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2010).
ethnographical reports from the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 and the Sierra Leone colonial administration’s confrontation with a series of indigenous murders surrounding the settlement. Although the ethos of this kind of imperial writing is ultimately the bolstering of imperial efficacy, as it turns out, these archives belie not only penetrations of individual, martial, territorial, and legal boundaries, but also the dissolution of the legitimacy of the British Empire itself. Thus while writing is on the one hand a potentially powerful tool, on the other it is a profound weakness, a tracer of faults, a sign of insufficiency, and a porous, gaping body.

In reading these works, my methodological aim is to attend to their textual nuances against historically specific contexts, employing both popular and institutional writing to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the anxieties to which I point. In attending to popular fiction as well as historical archives, I investigate how cultural concerns inhere across genres and British society. While certainly this is a historically situated study, because it also deals with fantasy and psychic boundaries, engagement with psychoanalytic criticism is not only useful but also necessary, and I draw on it at various points throughout the dissertation. Lane has drawn attention to psychoanalysis’ argument “that the gap separating consciousness from unconsciousness, and thus distinguishing agency from psychic drives, throws awry the very idea of coherent individualism” (Bl 10-11); what this means for my study is that the psychoanalytic tools I employ enable me to discuss a complex set of contradictory impulses and ideas and emphasize their potential incoherence and incompleteness. Studying fantasies by tracing the language and imagery that expresses and constitutes them, in other words, benefits from a theoretical framework that accounts for non-material aspects of
experience of reality, such as repression, which “exists regardless of the historical and cultural conditions in which it occurs,” even while its forms and mechanisms “are contingent on social forces” (Lane, Bl 27).

This study is centrally situated within the large body of scholarship on imperialism in Africa with which I am in dialogue throughout, seeking as it does to understand the history of representation and the private anxieties that impinged on the politics of narrativization. However, the work that this study does is also important for Victorian studies more generally, as it helps to better identify the nuances of gender construction during the late nineteenth century, and certainly the complexity of the fraught perspectives on empire in Africa at the fin de siècle. Understanding these conversations helps open up more layered, detailed scholarship into not only economies of desire, capitalism, and governmentability, but also the ways in which Victorian fictional and archival texts work to both produce and unmake knowledge. At the same time, this project is constructive for African Studies. While fundamentally limited in that it does not attempt to investigate the deterioration of the myth of British imperial masculinity and validation through the lens of African history or texts, or for that matter, of British women writers, this study nevertheless demonstrates the recognition of illegitimacy from within the ranks of the ostensible proponents, agents, and figures of imperial masculinity. To that end, this dissertation is about the history of the construction—or more specifically, the failings of the construction—of patriarchal imperialism in historically specific African contexts. Operating under the premise that knowing fin de siècle British imperialism inside and out is crucial to understanding its weak points through history and also in our present moment, this project seeks to exploit the discourses of imperial decay in order
to suggest critical examination of imperial narratives and Western liberal humanist identities that have inhered across time. The deconstruction of these kinds of identities through the implications of narrative complicity is explored in more detail in chapter four and in the conclusion.

In working through these investigations, there are a number of concepts that I have found to be central. For instance, in discussing masculinity, although I frequently qualify it as “martial” or “imperial” masculinity, it is this kind of more violent form of gender identity with which this study is concerned. As I have explained above, I certainly acknowledge that in Victorian Britain, and in the fin de siècle more precisely, there were indeed multiple forms of contradictory and competing masculinities, but the brand I’m specifically working with here was that which was indoctrinated into the cult of sport, was constituted by conflict and adventure, and which idealized chivalry and the notion that Britain’s mission included protecting the weak from savagery and barbarity. In this dissertation’s assessment of the effectiveness of such a model of masculinity, the terms “efficacy,” “prowess,” and “power” frequently appear. In the contexts of this discussion, I understand these concepts to be fundamentally forged relationally—that is, because their establishment within the discourse of martial masculinity depends on violence, they are terms inherently bound up with antagonism and dominance. Within the same dynamic of struggle, this dissertation repeatedly addresses violent tactics of “penetration” and “engulfment.” While these terms and actions are not inherently aligned with signs of vulnerability and emasculation, the martial culture in which they are read constructs them as such. Thus, within the context of this project, “penetration” and “engulfment” are understood to be sexual encodings of power. Lastly, I make the crucial
argument in this study that bodies and spaces that have been penetrated are inevitably depicted as perforated, unbounded, porous, and leaky—the dissolution of the barrier between inside and outside necessitates the dissolution of the concept of such bodies and spaces as solid entities. Thus they become “grotesque” in the Bakhtinian sense, which is how this term is used throughout this work. The grotesque emphasizes the continual transgression of boundaries, and here becomes a mechanism to undermine imperial masculinity. Consistent with what we have seen in Buel's frontispiece, and as we will see in the chapters that follow, “the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all else” (Bakhtin 317). It is that “through which the world enters to be swallowed up” (317). Because this “wide-open bodily abyss” (317) is a site where internal and external mingle, the mouth, materially and as metaphor, represents a threat to the body that seeks to remain fortified. But in addition to holes, the phallus is central to this concept, for the grotesque also involves “that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out from beyond the body’s confines” (316). In sum, “All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation” (317). But where Bakhtin emphasizes that “the grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon” (318), we will see in the texts explored here rather that the grotesque *explodes* the impenetrable body.
As I have explained above, recognizing the appropriation of Africa as a space for forging imperial masculine identity and narrative authority is crucial for understanding the operations of authorization and legitimation. As it is impossible in a study of this length to cover the British invasion of the continent in its entirety, I choose to focus here on three major regions in which certain events had profound repercussions in the metropole and imperial networks at large. I also explore these contexts more or less chronologically, beginning with what I consider to be a military event that crucially shifted British conceptions of imperial experience in Africa. The Cape Colony was an important territory in the global network of British imperialism. Not only did it remain a key outpost in the trade route between Britain and India, as well as in military deployments to the South Pacific, but furthermore the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly in 1867 meant that it had significant commercial appeal. Since it was important for the British to protect their interests there, the regions surrounding the Cape Colony became of crucial concern to the administrations in South Africa. Meanwhile, the events of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 profoundly shifted British understanding of martial efficacy in Africa—having entered the war with a vast degree of overconfidence, the redcoats encountered numerous disasters, most notably the Zulu victory at Isandlwana. As a result, the British public began to understand their army as vulnerable to African forces. British military brutality ensued, but was profoundly tied up with their own vulnerability that had been unearthed by the early events of the war, and with their representation. I explore the resonance of these martial failures in Haggard’s early romances, which emerge in the mid 1880s, and importantly figure South Africa as an
imaginary space. In doing so I argue that popular adventure novels were crucial in the process of imperial identity formation. As Kucich explains, novels were instrumental in shaping late century attitudes toward imperialism, a cultural fact that has been long recognized. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, as debates over imperial expansion intensified and questions about the rise or fall of the empire seemed to cut to the very heart of the national character, British readers turned increasingly to colonial fiction for coherent models of British identity. (15)

Not only are Haggard’s texts useful in illustrating the relationship between masculine prowess and narrative, but they also enact a complex criticism of imperial manhood using the strategy of auto-critique that I outline above. The circulation of this discourse in popular fiction suggests that the inadequacies of martial masculinity were becoming apparent not only at the peripheries, but also in the metropole. From South Africa this study moves to Egypt, another crucial site of British imperial investment. The Suez Canal came to be understood as a kind of spinal cord of the Empire because of its position in the global trade network, and thus was simultaneously a facilitator of imperial wealth and marker of vulnerability. Meanwhile, Egypt signified in the British metropole in a number of ways, not least as a site of heritage, history, and plunder. As a kind of gateway to the East, “Egypt” also connoted fantasy and desire. Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897) both deals with British fantasy about Egypt, and continues Haggard’s tactic of auto-critique while thematizing threats to imperial masculinity, forms of penetration, and dissolution. However, while Haggard’s texts focus on imperial space, Marsh explores the impacts of the failings of imperial masculinity on the metropole itself. Not only this,
he takes Haggard’s critique yet further, demonstrating that these failings have still more profound implications than Haggard’s works envisioned. From Egypt the project moves to West Africa and zeroes in on Sierra Leone. This colony occupied a special place in the narrative of British imperialism because it was originally established under the ostensible project of abolition and ‘legitimate trade’ in 1787. On one hand intended to be a commercially viable territory, on the other it was expected to reflect Britain’s philanthropic identity. A century later, however, the colonial administration was still attempting to wring a viable trade economy out of the regions surrounding Freetown while also facing the consequences of subversive indigenous violence. Exploring the representation of these events in the colonial archive not only brings this project to its ultimate conclusion in terms of the disintegration of the martial body, the efficacy of writing, and imperial legitimacy, it also situates these problems against the historical trajectory of British notions of ‘civilization’ in Africa. Structuring the dissertation in this way enables me to trace shifting understandings of imperial masculinity chronologically, as well as across major British establishments in Africa, but it also allows me to demonstrate that these penetrating critiques operate across and between genres and at different political levels.

Chapter one begins at the moment of the crucial shift in British attitudes towards the relationship between imperialism in Africa and British martial prowess. As the myth went, the powerful redcoat army, invulnerable and superior to African retaliation, was more than capable of easily exerting military dominance in Zululand. But as real events unfolded, the image of efficacious British troops came under intense strain after the military disaster at Isandlwana as soldierly writing from the war front revealed tropes of
emasculating emerging in tension with the persistent construction of heroes by the media. This chapter traces how during the war the British, despite ultimate victory, registered their own engulfment and penetration by the Zulus. Importantly, the landscape, as a space traditionally signifying the boundaries to be protected or transgressed, itself worked as a figure of resistance, bound up as it was with representation of African men themselves—seeming to both perform the function of engulfment and symbolize penetration. I demonstrate here that imperial retribution against Zulus was brutal and savage, as well as shocking to members of the metropolitan public as the British had come to enact the very barbarism that they claimed characterized their enemies. In other words, this chapter, considering the construction of the African landscape, the military body, and the white male body itself, lays out the means by which the image of British martial masculinity began to shatter. In suggesting that imperial writing, though most frequently understood as bolstering the legitimacy of empire, in fact becomes pivotal in its demise, I argue that narratives from and about the Anglo-Zulu War powerfully begin to call into question the validity of the Victorian myth of martial masculinity and mark an important transition into metropolitan doubt that similarly adopts metaphors of engulfment in various forms and with respect to multiple kinds of bodies. This skepticism regarding imperial identity would also begin to appear in popular British fiction.

In chapter two, I examine this critique as it emerges in H. Rider Haggard’s most popular works of adventure fiction, *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) and *She: A History of Adventure* (1887), and use them to flesh out a theorization of the relationship between different levels of male authority and broader political narratives. While the dominant
trend in Haggardian criticism has been to argue various angles of the suggestion that 
Haggard’s texts enact fantasies of masculine recuperation, by contrast I argue here that 
these works, appearing on the heels of growing doubt about martial manhood—its 
efficacy as well as its morality—fostered by the literature surrounding wars in South 
Africa, highlight irredeemable flaws in both traditional conceptions of imperial 
masculinity and in accounts of Africa. Haggard criticizes dominant narratives of imperial 
prowess by deploying auto-critiques of his narrators, undermining their authority and 
offering parodic renditions of British manliness. In these manoeuvres, the fearsomeness 
of the African landscape reappears and again functions as both feminized and phallic— 
as well as possessing a threatening libido. As Haggard interrogates unbridled desire, he 
reveals imperial authority to be morally bankrupt—and because writing figures as the 
central mechanism of authority, it gets represented as inadequate, flawed, and 
profoundly limited.

Richard Marsh, as chapter three demonstrates, takes this notion of limited 
imperial narrative one step further, and illustrates its grotesqueness—that is, its 
uncertain boundaries, its fluidity, and its uncontainability. Drawing on the same tropes 
of penetration and dissolution, his novel *The Beetle* (1897) considers not just the 
significance of narratives about Africa as they concern imperial agents operating in the 
periphery, but also the impact of inadequacies of imperial male authority within 
metropolitan Britain. This chapter, moving to representations of Egypt in order to 
consider shifting British perceptions of African efficacy that events of the Anglo-Zulu 
War had instigated, situates Marsh’s concern with national masculinity against

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8As Cyndy Hendershot has suggested, gothic novels (such as *The Beetle*) “[fragment] stable identity and stable social order” (1), including gender norms and authority.
historical, economic, and military events surrounding the Suez Canal and the loss of Colonel Gordon that so traumatized Britain and its sense of martial and political efficacy. Like Haggard’s works, *The Beetle* examines the failures of masculinity to adhere to its late-Victorian standards, and uses parody to ridicule traditional manliness. In doing so, it enacts a dark fantasy of male subjugation. As male characters are penetrated in various ways—being mesmerized, bereft of autonomy, surveilled, physically assaulted, and humiliated—a sexualized dynamic of control underlines their limitations. The violations to which men’s bodies and minds are subject underlie these characters’ inability to provide stable narratives; their attempts to make sense of reality are indeed as leaky as the bodies from which they materialize. While the threat of the Eastern Other is pivotal in bringing on these fractures, it, like the dangers that *She’s Ayesha* embodies, becomes aligned with British male desires and imaginations. Thus, while the foreign is frequently cast as infiltrating the domestic, in this novel, the domestic itself bears and enacts the violence that has been projected onto the foreign. That is, although on one level there exist anxieties that British culture is penetrated by the East, on another, these national imaginations, perversions, and fears are shown to be always already circulating within the ‘bounded’ nation. The instabilities of narrative that this novel explores open up questions of reading practices as the reader is urged to question the discernment and reliability of its narrating characters. It is their written stories, in other words, that betray the limitation of their authority. In this sense, writing becomes the opposite of a concretizing power; it is confusing, distorting, and mesmerizing, threatening the reader’s understanding of reality and enacting transgressions of
ostensibly bounded bodies through activating affective registers. The novel then itself becomes both an artifact and an enactment of gendered violent fantasy.

The same destabilization of narrative certainty that *The Beetle* exposes also pointedly plagues the colonial archive and institutional writing. Chapter four returns to institutional writing, this time in Sierra Leone, in order to examine the complete dissolution of martial authority and imperial legitimacy in the colonial archive explored here. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, British imperialism confronted the subversive violence of the Human Leopards and the Tongo Players, two different fraternities whose rationales, resistance to surveillance, and modes of organization and operation disrupted physical, geographical, and legal boundaries that the administration had taken for granted. This violence was a complex, multi-layered disruption of colonial order that could not be contained—and in fact, the problematics it opened up migrated from the local colony up the imperial system to the metropole, threatening the legitimacy of the project of empire at large. This chapter traces the distortions of how violence in “the contact zone” (Pratt 4) registers in the imperial centre, exploring the investments of metropolitan media in sustaining omissions, sensational fillers, and emphases, as well as examining technologies of narrativizing in colonial reports and dispatches between the Sierra Leone administration and the Colonial Office in London. Highlighting moments of uncertainty, contradiction, failure, and complicity, I explore both the role of the production of different kinds of fantasy in maintaining colonial power, and the impossibility of sustaining it, given the weaknesses and failings that this colonial archive itself betrays, embodies, and enacts. Tropes of flow, engulfment, penetration, the grotesque, and ultimate dissolution reappear across representations of landscape,
territory, the military body, and the imperial network—fatally impinging on governmental
efficacy and legitimacy. Because imperial writing, supposedly a tool of surveillance,
discipline, and bolstering of imperial strength, is actually the conduit of a crisis in
morality and power, it thus becomes ineffectual in terms of its primary role, but
consequently potentially quite potent in terms of destabilizing the concepts of
impenetrable martial masculinity and imperial rhetoric surrounding morality. This
chapter concludes by gesturing to similar patterns of imperial violence and complicity in
a contemporary “contact zone” that threaten modern identity and autonomy in our own
historical moment.

Taking this problem of the narratives of complicity and desire as a final launching
point, my conclusion analyzes Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* using the patterns and
anxieties I identify throughout this study not only in order to explore new ways of
reading this enigmatic text, but also to suggest that this modernist work points to
problems of legitimacy that pervaded imperial narratives of the fin de siècle and have
continued to inhere across time.

Highlighting imperial weaknesses, along with the failures of martial masculinity,
which is codependent with empire, remains a contemporary imperative. Certainly,
understanding how the mechanisms of oppression and control operated and were
critiqued not only illuminates the workings of imperial self-justification, but also opens up
ways of thinking about how desire becomes an engulfing force, a seductive flow
underlying narratives that provide certain forms of satisfaction at the cost of critical
autonomy. Thus, it is my hope that the practice of historically nuanced close reading
that characterizes the case studies constituting this dissertation provides a model for
engaging with the ethical issues and dynamics of representation that remain the legacy of British colonialism in Africa.
Chapter 1

Permeable Boundaries: Violence and Fantasy in Zululand

When the British invaded Zululand on January 11, 1879, Britons expected that the ensuing war would be a short one: Cetshwayo, the Zulu monarch, and his forces would be promptly suppressed, their army disbanded, and the indigenous threat to British confederation of South Africa eliminated. Upon reaching Isandlwana, a few miles from the border of Natal, the central column of the three-pronged British invasion pitched camp but did not entrench; Lord Chelmsford, its commander, concluded that native forces were no real threat to the colonial army, and deemed it unnecessary. On January 22\textsuperscript{nd}, Chelmsford led half of his troops further into the country in search of the Zulu warriors that had been spotted from the camp early that morning. Meanwhile, the main body of the Zulu army, hidden behind the undulating hills, attacked the unprepared camp in force. Startled, disorganized, and panicked, the body at Isandlwana was almost completely annihilated in a humiliating defeat. Though the British forces ultimately overtook Cetshwayo in July/August of that year, they were also defeated outright during other embarrassing clashes at Ntome Drift on the Pongola River (12\textsuperscript{th} March) and Hlobane Mountain (28\textsuperscript{th} March). The war would cost eight months, £5,000,000 pounds,\textsuperscript{9} and a shattered national confidence.

After the disaster at Isandlwana and the other early defeats, the task of bolstering the public image of British martial manliness required no small effort. Indeed, the tension between British efficacy and inefficacy would become a central consideration for

the British public and government during this war. As Michael Lieven\textsuperscript{10} and John Laband and Ian Knight\textsuperscript{11} have argued, war heroes were manufactured as feats of courage and manliness were presented to a news-hungry metropolitan public in order to support the ideals of empire: “if newspaper reports of slaughters in exotic places were read by many people rather as if they were imaginative literature removed from daily and mundane realities, then the purpose was to provide them with reassurance in their own apparent invulnerability” (Laband and Knight x). However, these documents also register a tension between the need to celebrate gallantry and a profound anxiety about entrapment, engulfment, and penetration by African forces. As these tropes signifying emasculation recur again and again in the soldierly correspondence post-Isandlwana, the paranoia they betray triggered both the exaggerated production of heroism and the enactment of phallic violence used to realize it: testimonies of British prowess developed by letter-writing, the metropolitan printing press, and war trophies simultaneously evinced intense brutality.

Thus, as the recuperation of British manhood in the Anglo-Zulu War depended on violence, the crisis facing British identity became two-fold: not only was martial masculinity shaken by the Zulus thoroughly routing the redcoats on multiple occasions, but furthermore, that British soldiers needed to prove themselves men by acting like barbarians entailed a profound reconsideration of the efficacy of the chivalric ideals that, as I discuss earlier, had reified alongside the Victorian revival of interest in medieval knights. Tracing the double function of evidence from this war, this chapter demonstrates that because this crisis in masculinity could not be discursively contained


and the image of the gallant war hero fragmented in the public imagination, the stability of military and narrative authority was profoundly called into question. In turn, doubts about the imperial project thus began to fester while normative models of British masculinity were to face an important re-examination in the upcoming decades. I aim here to demonstrate the transition from British arrogance towards the Zulus to a pervasive sense of paranoia; to identify a recognition amongst the British populace of the failings of the traditional ideals of imperial masculinity; and to outline the problem of discursive containment and the subsequent breakdown of male narrative authority.

**Porous Boundaries**

South Africa was of strategic economic and military importance to Britain in the 1870s. The Cape route to India was of high commercial value and still materially the main freeway of trade, even though the Suez was by this time up and running; 91 million pounds’ worth of commercial goods passed via this route, compared to 65 millions’ worth through the Suez (Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny 59). Furthermore, it was of strategic significance in terms of military deployment—the Cape route would be key for distributing troops to India, Mauritius, Ceylon, Singapore, China, and Australasia, should mobilization be required (60). And, of course, the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867 sparked new industrial interest in this region. To secure these prospects, the British sought paramountcy in South Africa, which meant suppressing Boer power by controlling the coastlines and maintaining political and economic dominance over the Boer republics (54), as well as quelling any native threats (62). At the same time, there was concern over Boer treatment of natives, which was
thought to require policing by a firm government and a uniform ‘native policy.’ In order to deal with these factors as cheaply as possible, the government deemed confederacy the most effective option. The British had annexed Natal in 1844 (54) and from 1875-6, Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, attempted to secure confederation through settlement (Bhebe 169). When this failed, Carnarvon seized the opportunity afforded through the Boer-Pedi wars in the Transvaal to annex that vulnerable and bankrupted republic in 1877, appointing Theophilus Shepstone, who at this time was Secretary of Native Affairs for Natal, to lead the take-over (171). The aggressive Sir Bartle Frere was then appointed as High Commissioner of Native Affairs and Governor of the Cape Colony, and was ordered to execute Carnarvon’s confederation plan (Bowman 121). Though the various republics in South Africa were nowhere near agreeing to relinquish their independence, Frere decided that it was an essential step that all native societies had to be brought into the British sphere of control either through extending protectorates or through conquest (Bhebe 172).

The most militant and organized of African powers were the Zulus, led by Cetshwayo, whose forces and independence seemed to Frere the main obstacle to federation; his solution to the threat of Zulu military strength was complete subjugation. A strip of disputed territory had put the Transvaal Boers and the Zulus at further odds in the Utrecht district. Though Frere and Shepstone supported the Transvaal claims, an independent commission established in early 1878 by Sir Henry Bulwer, the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, ruled in the Zulus’ favour (Bowman 121).\footnote{While Bulwer wanted to maintain peaceful relations with Cetshwayo, Frere’s aim was to subjugate the Zulus because he feared attack, against which the ongoing guarding would be costly.} A surprised Frere, having hoped to use the findings, which were presented to him on June 20, 1878 (Knight ZR,
to provoke the Zulus into open conflict, decided to suppress the boundary commission’s verdict. Instead, he did not release the ruling until he was able to attach to it the ultimatum he was to give to Cetshwayo in December. In the mean time, three issues, all involving questions of boundary violations, developed over the course of the year that enabled Frere to openly oppose Cetshwayo. In July, two wives of chief Sihayo, MaMtshali and MaMthethwa, left their husband and absconded from Zululand with their lovers, taking refuge in Natal—counting on Sihayo not to risk agitating the British by crossing the national border after them (Knight ZR, 131). However, the jilted chief’s son, Mehlokazulu, insulted by the dishonour not only to his father but to Zulu customs enacted by his mother and step mother’s choice to take refuge amongst Europeans, led a band of warriors across the border into Natal and violently seized the escapees and took them back to Zululand, where he executed them.\(^\text{13}\) In September, two British surveyors illegally operating in Zululand were briefly detained as trespassers and, though roughly handled, were not injured. Finally, in October, an ex-Swazi chief, Mbilini, who was living in Zululand, crossed the border into Swaziland and the Transvaal and attacked some kraals (Bowman 122; Knight ZR, 147). Frere used all of these incidents as evidence that the Zulus needed to be subdued, and argued that the Zulu were preparing for war against the British. Cetshwayo, meanwhile, had been unaware of these infractions. Nevertheless, in December, Frere issued to Cetshwayo what was clearly an impossible ultimatum: the complete disbandment of the standing Zulu army, which was integral to the Zulu way of life, and an extortionate fine as reparation for the border incursions—all to be satisfied within 30 days. When these conditions were not

\(^{13}\) Knowing that Sihayo would not condone this, Mehlokazulu waited until his father was summoned away to Cetshwayo before acting (Knight ZR, 132).
met, though Cetshwayo was bargaining for time and trying to collect funds to pay the fine, Lord Chelmsford, Lieutenant-General of the British forces, headed 15,000 troops (Bhebe 174) across the Zululand-Natal border on January 11th, 1789. Chelmsford was entirely on board with Frere’s analysis of the Zulu threat, as he later reflected: “The peculiar nature of the Natal and Transvaal border, its great extent and the fewness of the troops to watch it, rendered to my mind any attempt to defend it directly almost impossible, and I came to the conclusion, the accuracy of which I still maintain, that the best chance of saving the two colonies from the consequences of such an inroad, was to invade Zululand ourselves” (Wade 98\(^\text{14}\)). Mr. Brownlee, Secretary for Native Affairs in the Cape Colony, was of the same mind: “At present the Zulus are a standing menace to us; their influence is felt by the tribes from the Zambesi to the mouth of the Orange River; and so long as they are in a position to exercise this influence, the peace of the tribes around us and in our midst rests on a most unstable foundation” (Moodie 15). In other words, the decision to attack directly was rooted in a sense of the vulnerability of boundaries, infractions against which the colonists felt they could not tolerate.

The discourse underlying the Anglo-Zulu tension thus hinged on anxiety about penetration, and the British frequently depicted the Zulu army as a phallic threat. Shepstone wrote in a dispatch to Carnarvon in January 1878, “The question is, what is to be done with this pent up and still accumulating power … Zululand is from some cause or another in a great state of excitement” (Moodie 19). Sir Bartle Frere had similar ideas, describing the “Large, powerful, and growing” (Martineau 251) Zulu force as “a volcano,” from which “an explosion” was impending (244).\(^\text{15}\) The British

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\(^\text{15}\) Written in letters to Sir M. Hicks-Beach, 8 Dec. 1878 and 30 Sept. 1878.
preoccupation with the Zulu tradition of ‘washing their spears’ (or doing battle) being tied up with breaking celibacy did nothing to decrease their anxieties about penetration of colonial boundaries. Accordingly, this threat was used as justification to subjugate the militant African body.

Alongside of the promulgation of this anxiety, the rhetoric of needing to go in and civilize barbarity also worked to garner military momentum. Brownlee further wrote, “No treaty or obligation can be binding on such a perfidious race as the Zulus, ruled by a treacherous and bloodthirsty sovereign like Cetywayo. Our future safety, as well as the voice of humanity, demand that the power of the Zulus be broken, and that the innocent blood which is daily shed upon our borders should cease to flow” (Moodie 15). As Frere was one of the strongest proponents of a war, he had a distinct interest in describing Cetywayo as “an ignorant and bloodthirsty despot” (Martineau 258-9), a “savage with thirty or forty thousand armed men at his command, whose system of government and personal pleasure rest equally on bloodshed” (265). Even Sir Henry Bulwer, who was by comparison less interested in agitation, supported the fact that “conditions” on Cetywayo were “laid down” by the British administration “for the better government of the Zulu people and for their great advantage” (249-50). Thus, a proposed project of “stopping the wolf’s ravages” (231), or putting an end to ‘barbarity,’ was a crucial justification for pursuing war with the Zulu kingdom. Meanwhile, a few months later, barbarity would precisely characterize the set of impulses in which the British forces themselves would indulge.

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16 Letters to Sir M. Hicks-Beach, 28 Oct. 1879 and 23 Dec. 1878.
17 Memorandum from 16 Dec. 1878.
18 Letter to General Ponsonby.
**Overconfidence**

For all the discussion about the threat of “pent up” Zulu aggression, a quick victory was so certain that the invasion of Zululand was not considered a significant event in the metropole; only one newspaper, the *London Standard*, sent a correspondent—Charles Norris-Newman—but as soon as his report of the disaster at Isandlwana appeared in that paper, the public were riveted, and “for the next few months, reports from Zululand dominated the newspapers” (Best and Greaves 80).

Likewise, British soldiers were pretty confident of a swift and complete victory—and expressions of this sense of superiority were frequently couched in images of phallic dominance. Sackville Lane-Fox, a young soldier in the Native Natal Infantry, wrote home just before the war: “There will be a howling fight as the Zulus always come out in great masses and charge and of course they will be shot down by the thousand, but after the first fight the fun will be over and the nasty work of hunting them in the bush will begin, as they will get such a lesson that they will not show their faces in the open … The soldiers here think they will shoot a thousand of them by Sunday” (Wade 10). Lane-Fox’s vicious enthusiasm about using British rifles to exert control points immediately to the deeply racist fantasies of colonial adventure propagated in post-1850s school-boy culture, and it exemplifies three key tropes often used in soldierly correspondence describing the war against the Zulus. Gesturing to the “howling fight” not only works to liken Zulus to animals, as does the ideas of their coming out in “masses,” reinforcing their representation as insects (this imagery recurs copiously in British accounts) and of “hunting them in the bush”, but it also points to the ‘civilized’ soldier indulgence in primal violence. These two concepts, as I will go on to

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10 Qtd. from the Lincolnshire Archives, Conyers Papers.
demonstrate, are mutually enabling in colonial communications. Secondly, the notion of disciplining the natives, of teaching the defenders “a lesson,” becomes prominent—both before and after the battle at Isandlwana. And thirdly, the celebration of the superior technology and weaponry of the British, bound up of course with phallic prowess, becomes key in the representation of Zulu men as subjugated animals, of punitive action, and of British colonial efficacy. While the British carried Gatling guns, rockets, revolvers, and Martini-Henry rifles— all designed for distant killing—Zulu weaponry was more basic. Though Cetshwayo’s warriors did possess a large number of European guns, most of these were “obsolete military muskets” disposed of by European traders in the African markets (Knight, “ZA” 37). The assegai, the trademark Zulu weapon, was a short stabbing spear with an oblong, pointed blade, usually 18 by two and a half inches, set into a shaft two and a half feet long. This was designed for close-quarter fighting and, contrary to the remote slaying enacted by most British weapons, rendered bloodshed immediate and primary. In this sense, this war would highlight differences between technologies of killing, and distinctions between modernity and primitivism.

Exemplifying this technology-based bias is a letter to his father from Private Owen Ellis of the 1/24th regiment, written at Helpmakaar on Dec. 31, 1878: “The farmers who live in the surrounding country say that the Zulus will only be tempted to fight the Europeans once and that they will afterwards fly away for their lives, because they have not the weapons which we have” (Emery 65). Ellis continues buoyantly in a letter dated Jan. 11, 1879, written just after entering Zululand:

20 Though “distant,” these weapons were by no means quick and painless; “the Martini-Henry bullet, which flattened on impact, caused massive tissue damage and splintered bones lengthwise, with devastating effect” (Laband 186-7).
After arriving there [the Grand Kraals], the Queen’s flag will be hoisted and King Cetshwayo will be made into atoms if captured by us … This war will be over in two months’ time and then we shall all be hurrying towards England. We are about to capture all of the cattle belonging to the Zulus and also burn their kraals; and if they dare to face us with the intention of fighting, well, woe be to them! As in Transkei formerly they shall be killed as they come across us. (Emery 66)

Not everyone was quite so assured. Lieutenant Henry Curling wrote to his mother on Dec. 11, 1878, from Greytown: “Everybody seems to think they [the Zulus] will make a stubborn fight at first so we shall have probably severe losses on our side. They are ten times as numerous as the tribes we fought against in the last war and have never been defeated” (Best and Greaves 82). However, even Curling adjusts his expectations less than a month later in another letter to his mother written from Rorke’s Drift on Jan. 18, 1879: “The total number of troops that have gone into Zululand amounts to 13,000 a sufficient number to beat them 10 times over” (Best and Greaves 87). And again, also in the public sphere, the anticipated disciplining of the Zulu people was projected to be unequivocal: “the General [Lord Chelmsford] is determined to let the Zulu King and nation know once and for all that nothing except complete submission will now satisfy the demands which Sir Bartle Frere has seen fit to make” (Moodie 25-6).

Even as the camp at Isandlwana was under siege, deep-seated arrogance lingered, as Curling, one of the few survivors of this clash, admits: “When we turned out again about 12, the Zulus were only showing on the left of our camp. All the time we

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21 Qted. from "From the War Correspondent of the Natal Mercury, Intalala River, Near Usirayo's Kraal, January 13, 1879."
were idle in the camp, the Zulus were surrounding us with a huge circle several miles in circumference and hidden by hills from our sight. We none of us felt the least anxious as to the result for, although they came in immense numbers, we felt it impossible that they could break through” (Wade 40\(^{22}\)). Though this attitude of aggressive dominance did not change, the assumption of superiority and a sure win shifted abruptly after Isandlwana.

**Engulfment**

British realization of the desperateness of their situation was indeed latent, and was a direct result of cockiness at all levels of command. Chelmsford’s column\(^{23}\) had arrived at Isandlwana—the vantage afforded by its elevation seemingly rendering it the perfect camp—in the afternoon of January 21\(^{st}\). The standard camp procedure was to laager the wagons and entrench around a perimeter, but, as he did not intend to stop long and his experience fighting other South African peoples had led him to believe that these measures were a waste of time, Chelmsford decided not to bother with this. A band of scouts having reported Zulu movement to the southeast, Chelmsford decided to take half of his force out in search of them. Meanwhile, a force of roughly 20,000 Zulus waited unseen just a few miles to the north of the camp. Once Chelmsford’s men had left the vicinity, the Zulus attacked in force in their traditional fighting formation of a charging bull. As survivor Lieutenant W.F.B. Cochrane described in the account he submitted to the Assistant Adjutant-General for the Court of Inquiry that was formed after the disaster, “The Zulu system of attack … is easily traceable, the main body being opposite the left centre of the camp; the horns thrown out to the left rear and right front”

\(^{22}\) Qtd. from Adrian Greaves and Brian Best, *The Curling Letters of the Zulu War* (2004), 94.

\(^{23}\) This was the central prong of three—Colonel Wood led a mass of soldiers to the north (towards Hlobane) and Colonel Pearson brought in a body of troops to the southeast (towards Eshowe).
(Emery 80). A reserve force advanced in behind the main body, supplementing the right or left horn of the attack as needed. Cochrane was under the command of Colonel Durnford, who was so confident he could halt the attack that he, against the judgment of Colonel Pulleine, who was left in charge of the majority of troops in camp, took his men away from the encampment and into the field to fire against the Zulus, thus further dividing the British forces, fragmenting the martial body and exposing those left at the base. Meanwhile, the Zulus had encircled the British, and, while occupying Durnford’s force just outside of the camp, attacked them by surprise in their exposed rear. As Cochrane further noted, this strategy was extremely effective: “Had the Zulus completed their scheme, by sending a column to the Buffalo River to cut off the retreat, not a man would have escaped to tell the tale” (Emery 80).

Accounts of other survivors, almost without exception, emphasize a sense of being mobbed, overwhelmed, and perforated. Commandant Browne attested that the Zulus advanced in “a dense swarm” (Sole 295). Richard Stevens of the Natal Mounted Police told in a letter of how, as the attack came on, “we saw the hill black with them coming on in swarms” (Emery 92), while Gunner Arthur Howard of the N/5 bemoaned, “The awful black devils watched the General out of camp, and then, as soon as his command had got clear away, they came down like bees out of a hive, and there was an awful slaughter” (Best and Greaves 106). In both of these accounts, the crowding is directly linked to race—blackness is coterminous with swamping. Trooper Barker of

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24 “This was known as the impondo Zenkomo, ‘the beasts’ horns’, and consisted of a frontal assault by a body known as the ‘chest’ (isiFuba), comprised of senior or married men, and encircling flanks, the ‘horns’ (izimpondo), by younger men. A reserve, the ‘loins’ was kept some distance away.” (Knight, “ZA” 37)

25 Though Pulleine had sent a message to Chelmsford that camp was under attack, no rescue materialized: one of Chelmsford’s men viewed the camp through a telescope and reported that it seemed to be alright.

26 Gunner was a survivor of the stand at Rorke’s Drift, but describes Isandlwana presumably as he understood it from an escapee or rumours of the attack.
the Natal Carbineers wrote, “The Zulus were advancing … I noticed, or rather heard, a rush from behind, and on looking round I saw the soldiers who were left in camp literally surrounded by Zulus, who had evidently come in from the rear … Zulus seemed to be behind, before, and on each side of us” (Sole 206-7). In Barker’s account, the sensation of rear penetration facilitated by engulfment is significant. The depiction of swarming Others the Zulus, not only insofar as likening them to insects or animals, but also in terms of denying individuality, insisting on only one great, shadowy, inhuman mass.27

Letters about Isandlwana were not the only accounts of battle that convey this particular brand of panic. On March 12th, an impi (or Zulu corps) decimated a company of the 80th regiment that was camped on either side of the Pongola River at the Ntombe drift. 70 men occupying the north side were attacked in the early morning fog while their 36 comrades on the opposite side attempted to provide cover for them to escape across the river. Only 12 made it across.28 The remaining company then retreated back to Luneberg, although, pursued by Zulu warriors, four were killed on the way. In the midst of this, the sense of being enveloped by the enemy was palpable. Josiah Sussens, who managed to escape, testifies, “I … went to the adjoining wagon to call Whittington … and I told him the niggers were all around[.] He immediately came out and jumped down, but was caught almost as soon as he hit the ground, [and] assegaied on every side” (Moodie 113). Similarly, Major Tucker reports of this attack that “the Zulus had fired a volley, thrown down their guns … and were around the wagons and on the top of

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27 For an account of Isandlwana by Mehlokazulu, the same who crossed the border into Natal to capture the absconded wives of his father, see Emery 26-7. This account was originally printed in The Royal Engineer Journal X (1880): 23-4. Emery also provides an account from a warrior named Uguku (86-7), a narrative that was originally printed in Francis E. Colenso and E. Durnford’s History of the Zulu War and its Origin (London, 1880) 410-13. For accounts from anonymous Zulu warriors, see Emery 82-4 and Mitford 89-95.

28 In addition to the soldiers in the 80th, also killed were three European conductors, 15 natives employed with the wagons, and a civilian surgeon (Sole 119).
them, and even inside with the cattle, almost instantly. So quickly did they come … The sight in the river, they tell me, was frightful—Zulus and white men all mixed up together, yelling, howling, and screeching” (Emery 159). Here, it’s not only the sense of swarming that’s terrifying, but also the image of unruly blending of the races “all mixed up together” in chaotic tumult.

Shortly afterwards, on March 28th, Colonel Buller led his forces to attack a Zulu fortification at Hlobane Mountain; engulfment was still a fearful prospect amongst the redcoats. After gaining substantial elevation and engaging in fire, the British realized the Zulu were trying to close round them and cut off their descents. A young volunteer by the name of Mossop recounted, “As the rearguard passed over the brow [of the mountain] a Zulu impi closed in behind. We were trapped on top of the mountain” (Sole 121). More dramatically, an anonymous letter by a survivor of this battle, printed in the Natal Mercury, describes the realization of this moment: “Colonel Buller … perceived that strong bodies of Zulus were climbing every available baboon path, with the intention of cutting us off from the only two passes by which it was possible to descend. At the same time two large columns were seen approaching along the top of the mountain to the eastward, and another dense black mass of men, the main Zulu army[,] were observed coming on from the Southward” (Laband and Knight 88). Like the accounts of Isandlwana, the sense of being surrounded is accompanied by a figuration of the attacking Zulus as a “dense black mass,” and emphasis on the formation of “columns” seems to gesture to trepidation of impending penetration. The next day, at the battle of Kambula, a correspondent from Colonel Wood’s column similarly observed
“immense black masses of Zulus” approaching the British camp (Moodie 12229).

Imagery of swarming continues to be prevalent throughout accounts of Hlobane. A witness testified that Colonel Weatherley, who died at Hlobane, was overcome in this way: “the last that was seen of him was when surrounded by the Zulus; he was then seen slashing at his foes with a sword” (Laband and Knight 8930).

But perhaps the best example of the representation of the Zulus as a phallic, all-encompassing rush comes from Sir Evelyn Wood’s account of Hlobane:

Down the rugged mountain side streamed and tumbled a resistless
surging torrent of black creatures, which constantly smitten with leaden
hail, and checked by the difficulties of the descent, broke indeed, but like a
huge on-coming wave, only to spread our encircling foam-like smaller
bodies, which, gathering in volume, again swept on with renewed force
down and round the track. (Moodie 13931)

Wood dehumanizes the Zulus by rendering them a part of nature, comparing them to a rushing torrent or giant wave. This ‘naturalizing’ of the “surging” forces also works to cast both the warriors and the African landscape as phallic spectacles hostile to the colonial agents. Meanwhile, these British are established here as “bodies” that are subject to this “encircling.” Not only does this mean that British boundaries and thus the male status of impregnability are directly at risk, but furthermore, because they are positioned in this way as targets, the soldiers gather sympathy by seeming to have no

29 Qtd. from the Natal Mercury, Zulu War Supplement, April 1879: account “from our own Correspondent”, dated “Kambula Camp, April 1st, 1879.”

30 Qtd. from the Natal Mercury, Zulu War Supplement, April 1879: account “from our own Correspondent”, dated “Kambula Camp, April 1st, 1879.”

31 Qtd. from Pearson’s Magazine, “The Bravery of Colonel Buller.”
other choice than to fight desperately the faceless force that threatens to annihilate them—which licenses lawless ferocity among the British troops.  

Klaus Theweleit’s analysis of fascist discourse in Germany between World Wars I and II and its obsession with the threat of the “Red Flood” provides a useful heuristic for understanding the broader implications of this figuration of British panic during the Anglo-Zulu war. Theweleit argues in *Male Fantasies* that fascist “soldier males” of this period were motivated in their aggression toward communists and, more precisely, communist women by a deep fear of the dissolution of the self and body. Bolshevist forces were widely represented as a red wave, a surging mass, an overpowering flow, and therefore—for all the reasons of the supposed permeability of women’s bodies, transgressive in their leakiness and ready exchange of fluids; the long tradition of associating women with water in Western history; and the imagined outward streaming of women’s sexual energies—were figured as feminine. Furthermore, Bolshevik women, while at once, and indeed because they were, attractive to the sexually inexperienced and thus powerless soldier male, were profoundly threatening as potentially castrating forces. Theweleit uses Freudian analysis of this fear, as instigated by the primary glimpse of the vagina, to get at what he argues is the real root of this male anxiety. Freud suggests, “The sight of Medusa’s head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone … we have here once again the same origin from the castration complex and the same transformation of affect! … Since the Greeks were in the main strongly 

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32 While tropes of penetrations are common in martial discourses, the intersection of penetration with imagery of engulfment seems distinct from representations of other European warfare as well as other moments of colonial uprising because of the particular conditions of the Anglo-Zulu War. The rolling landscape in Zululand, the well-practiced and efficient battle tactics of the Zulu—the impondo zenkomo, for instance—and imperial unfamiliarity with the territory all contributed to the specific sense of sudden engulfment and penetration appearing here.
homosexual, it was inevitable that we should find among them a representation of woman as a being who frightens and repels because she is castrated” (qtd. in Theweleit 197-8). Theweleit, however, disagrees: “Even those men who see the vagina as a ‘Medusa’s Head’ aren’t afraid of the vagina’s castrated condition, but of its castrating potential … what men who fear vaginas must really be afraid of is the vagina’s ability to take the male member into itself (to devour it, to swallow it up)” (201). Striking here is the similarity between the fear of dissolution identified by Theweleit and the terror—and realization—of engulfment expressed 30 years earlier by the British in 1879. Crucial, then, is the recognition of the opposing force’s potency and the corresponding impotence and emasculation of the imperial troops.

Indeed, in returning to consider patterns of figuration during the Anglo-Zulu war, I suggest that the attacking, emasculating mass of Zulus, a “resistless surging torrent,” a fluid “wave,” is frequently described with imagery that oscillates between a penetrating phallus and an engulfing vagina dentata. In Captain Edward Essex’s private letter about Isandlwana written a few days after the battle and published in The Times on Apr. 12, 1879, he suggests exactly this combination: The Zulu line was about 1,000 yards in extent, but arranged like a horn—that is, very thin and extended on their right, but gradually thickening towards ours.

They did not advance but moved steadily towards our left, each man running from rock to rock, for the ground here was covered in large boulders, with the evident intention of outflanking us. The movement

33 Indeed, Brownlee’s earlier association of the Zulus with the flowing of “the innocent blood which is daily shed upon our borders” was telling.
34 Here, the African landscape is crucial in facilitating engulfment. As I show below, the prominence of landscape reappears in documents from this war. See pages 60-66.
of the Zulus towards our left still continued, and their line, which was now
assuming a circular form, appeared to be constantly fed from their left and
was increasing in thickness in that direction. (Laband and Knight 58)

Here, the horn-shaped mass thickens as it reaches toward the rear of the camp, but
then morphs into an encompassing force, spiked with assegais:

The enemy's left had hitherto been concealed by the hill, but the attack
now became developed, and I could see their troops formed a dense black
semi-circle, threatening us on both flanks. Their line was constantly fed
from the rear of its centre, which seemed to be inexhaustible. Affairs now
looked rather serious as our little body appeared altogether insignificant
compared with the enormous masses opposed to us. (58)

The "enormous masses," "dense," "threatening," and "inexhaustible," push toward the
British flanks, becoming a giant mouth that moves to swallow the "little body" whole: "I
looked around and was horrified to see that the enemy had nearly surrounded us and
was beginning to fire from the rear, coming up in that direction at a tremendous pace"
(58-9). The actuality of a sharp rear penetration is, in Essex's words, horrifying. But this
observation also marks a crucial flipping of metaphors: whereas until this moment of
invagination the African army has been feminized in its association with fluidity,
grotesqueness, and female anatomy, it suddenly launches up into the British rear "at a
tremendous pace" and thus transforms into the piercing phallus. Chaos ensues,
according to Lieutenant Horace Smith-Dorrien: "they came right into the camp,
assegaing everybody right and left … On looking round we saw that we were
completely surrounded and the road to Rorke's Drift was cut off" (Emery 88). This sense
of penetration was manifested in a realization of lost prowess—even the phallic rifle dropped in estimation. Lieutenant Newnham Davis, who managed to escape from Isandlwana, referred in retrospect to his weapon as “a foolish thing that has a 9-in. knife attachment”; during the chaos, “the [Zulu] man caught hold of it and pulled it out of my hand” (Moodie 47). With the British military phallus disabled and its body punctured—a transgression of the male body amounting to emasculation—the perforation of individual bodies begins, and the British soldiers then become the feminized bodies. A sense of infantilization also occurred on the battlefield. Fleeing Isandlwana, Lieutenant H.D. Davis confessed that when he attempted to stab an attacking Zulu with his bayonet, the fellow “got hold of the rifle, and pulled it out of my hand as if I had been a child” (Sole 321).

Zulu emasculation of the British gets registered not only in terms of engulfment and penetration but also via dismemberment. Stevens laments, “The Zulus were in the camp ripping our men up, and also the tents and everything they came across, with their assegais. Never has such a disaster happened to the English army … There will be an awful row at home about this” (Emery 92-3). Stevens’ sense of violation comes through strongly here, and right on its heels is his sense of embarrassment. And he was right about the empire sharing in the humiliation—the sense that the British forces had been emasculated was strong in the metropole. The following cartoons from Fun illustrate this precisely (Figures 2 and 3):

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35 Anne McClintock identifies all three of these transgressions as the focal points of colonial figurations of vulnerability during exploration into the unknown. See chapter one, “The Lay of the Land” in Imperial Leather.
Figure 2: "The Mother's Pet" from *Fun*, 19 Mar. 1879

Mrs Dizzy: 'Did he get himself into a nasty mess? And did they say unpleasant things about him? Never mind, my dear; here are some more soldiers to play with.'

Gordon Thomson, *Fun*, 19 March 1879
Here, Chelmsford is depicted as a young boy who, playing soldier, has managed to “get himself into a nasty mess.” His “mother” (Disraeli, presented here as a feminine body), meanwhile, humours him by giving him more lives as if they are toys. Popular confidence in the government, in other words, was ebbing. The sketch below depicts a later moment in the war, when after the redcoats suffered other losses, General Wolseley was brought in to ensure victory.

Figure 3: “The Double Perambulator” from Fun, 11 Jun. 1879
Here, he pushes Lord Chelmsford and Sir Bartle Frere, thus far unable to quell the Zulu threat, in a pram. Not only are the latter two men figured as infants, but Wolseley, as a nurse figure, is also feminized. Infantilization in addition to feminization further buttresses the sense that the British male body is being refigured here not as fixed and impenetrable but rather as unbounded, since babies—sites of uncontrolled leaking of all sorts—were also figured alongside women as having no firm borders.

If the image of martial masculinity was suffering back in the metropole as a result of this surprising war, it was also under more immediate duress in South Africa in the aftermath of the major disaster of Isandlwana. Dismemberment, signifying the violations of boundaries of the male body and the extension of flow, was particularly horrifying to those who returned late on the night of January 22nd with Chelmsford, and saw their comrades in pieces on the field. Fearful of attack and not wanting to move further in the dark, Chelmsford pitched a quick camp amongst the slain, and then hustled his soldiers back to Rorke’s Drift as early as possible on the morning of the 23rd. Wagons, equipment, and bodies were left as they lay, and a recovery mission was not sent out until May. Archibald Forbes, possibly the most famous war correspondent of his time, reported on this return to Isandlwana in what became a very well known passage:

“Some [of the bodies] were almost wholly dismembered, heaps of yellow clammy bones. I forebear to describe the faces, with their blackened features and beards bleached by rain and sun. Every man had been disembowelled. Some were scalped, and others subject to yet ghastlier mutilations” (Laband and Knight 102). The public disturbance generated by descriptions like this was considerable, and became a focus of national concern. This was doubtless bolstered by affect conveyed in the personal

37 Qtd. from the Daily News, 21 May 1879.
accounts of Chelmsford’s men who wrote home about their experience of returning to Isandlwana late on the 22nd after the devastation of the battle. Many of these letters were published in the news-hungry papers. Private James Cook wrote to his father, “The sight at the camp was horrible. Every white man that was killed or wounded was ripped up, and their bowels torn out; so that there was no chance of anyone being left alive on the field” (Emery 98). Also writing to his father, Sergeant W.E. Warren divulged, “You could not move a foot either way without treading on dead bodies. Oh, father, such a sight I never witnessed in my life before. I could not help crying to see how the poor fellows were massacred. They were first shot and then assegaied, the Zulus mutilated them and stuck them with the assegai all over the body” (Emery 94). These accounts mark an extremely important shift in attitude; the affect generated here hinges on the vulnerability of the adult male soldier who “could not help crying” and calls out for paternal support (“Oh, father”), as well as on the dissolved male bodies on the field. No longer steadfast pillars of empire, the dead men lie prostrate, their organs and blood spilling out and seeping into the soil, becoming one with the traditionally feminized earth. No longer are even the surviving soldiers invincible; their open grief and tears render them vulnerable boys.

Thus the strategy of justification for this war evolves—in this moment post-Isandlwana, British masculinity becomes stripped of its power and colonial soldiers become “massacred,” “mutilated” victims. This trend is strong. Private William Meredith, also of Chelmsford’s group, conveyed a similar grief: “I could describe the battlefield to you, but the sooner I get it off my mind the better. It was a pity to see about 800 white

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38 Olive Schreiner’s *Trooper Peter of Mashonaland* illustrates just how young many of the British men sent to South Africa were.
39 This profuse bleeding finds an analogy in menstruation.
men lying on the field cut up to pieces and stripped naked. Even the little boys that we had in the band, they were hung up on hooks and opened like sheep. It was a pitiful sight” (Emery 95). In this instance, images of disemboweled, victimized boys works to associate violated innocence with attack on empire. Likewise, Meredith’s own candidness about the experience of trauma not only augments the sense of suffering but also asserts his own vulnerability. Secondly, the real focus of “pity” is the evisceration of white bodies. Racialized exposure becomes the hinge of affective generation, as in Patrick Farrell’s description: “It was enough to make your blood run cold to see the white men cut open, worse than ever was done in the Indian Mutiny” (Emery 96). This assertion gestures directly to the panic surrounding the Sepoy Insurrection of 1857 and thus implies a need for swift imperial response. And importantly, this urgency is bound up directly with sentiment that gets registered in the sympathetic bodies of those whose “blood run[s] cold” with knowledge of loss. The Natal Mercury took this strategic move one step further on March 12th, 1879, in an article entitled, “Honor to the Slain”: “There is not a heart in the country that does not feel sore with constant contemplation of the distressful theme, nor a tongue that has not spent itself in discussing it. There has been a morbid fascination in the topic that has proved irresistible to all of us, and made sustained attention to other subjects a moral impossibility” (Moodie 43). If affect was registered in sympathetic bodies, bodies that

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40 In response to another case of imperial resistance, Tennyson used the Mutiny to argue for harsh punishment for the Morant Bay uprising: “The outbreak of our Indian Mutiny remains as a warning to all but mad men against want of vigour and swift decisiveness” (qtd. in Metcalf 53). Michael Paris notes that “horrendous accounts of Indian atrocities caused a widespread demand for revenge,” citing Thomas Macaulay: “The cruelties of the sepoys have inflamed the nation to a degree unprecedented in my memory” (38). See also Anna Johnston’s suggestion that “righteous outrage” was the response to the perception that British womanhood was under attack during the Mutiny (51) and Christopher Herbert, War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008) for a discussion of the British public’s formation of community and unity in response to the “trauma” of the insurrection (esp. 207-10).
claim shared community through physical compassion, then the ensuing emotional outpouring demanded reparation—in both senses of compensation and repair.

**Gendered Landscape**

These fears of engulfment and penetration by the Zulus and the subsequent focus on loss and vulnerability that generated colonial affect required recourse and vengeance—not only through the subjugation of Zulu warriors themselves but also of the landscape of Zululand that was both, in British representations, intertwined with African men and functional in the problem of engulfment. Colonial writing about the war projected onto the country itself characteristics of the state of Anglo-Zulu relations. Toward the end of the conflict, once Ulundi was taken, an article in the *Natal Witness* argued,

Riding through the country one is struck by the marked contrast between the appearance of the country at the present time and a few weeks ago. Not long since the neighbouring fertile lands were the scenes of battle, desolation, and other evils attending war, no matter where or how conducted. Now everything presents a peaceful aspect, and those who until very recently were anxious to meet the invading forces of the white

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41 Lauren Berlant argues in her introduction to *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* that although “the experience of pain is pre-ideological, the universal sign of membership in humanity” and that thus spectators of pain “are obligated to be responsible to it” (10), compassion is also necessarily a choice: spectators “must make judgments about which cases deserve attention” (11). In this understanding, participation in compassion requires voluntary social membership—in other words, communities are formed on the basis of who is deemed to be worthy of compassion and its material accoutrements. In the case of Britain circa the Anglo-Zulu War, public compassion and communal affect had the function of strengthening national bonds, on which some leaders would draw to call for reparations.
man in battle, are now industriously engaged rebuilding their old kraals.

(Laband and Knight 150)  

The country appearing “desolate” or “peaceful” as per the conditions of fighting probably had much to do with the incredible significance of the landscape in the outcome of the battles. African topography proved challenging for the British: “with the deep-cut valleys, the dongas and the sheer number of undulations of all kinds, communications were always going to be problematical, and were to prove fatal at Isandlwana” (Wade 31). Curling complained in September of 1878 that British intelligence of the land was minimal, which interfered with efficient movements: “there are no maps of the country at all. Those printed in England are entirely imaginary and are probably compiled from books of travel. Several times on the march to this place we found that the rivers marked on the map had not existed and we always had to send on the day before to find out whether water was certain to be found at the halting places” (Best and Greaves 65-6). Curling’s frustration here indicates the reality that the British invaders had little objective knowledge of the space, and relied instead on an imaginary construction of the landscape. Thus, when the way the British imagined Zululand was proved to be inaccurate, it became clear that they had been overconfident in their ability to comprehend the space, to know the Other. Furthermore, this meant that the superior ability to map—a technology of war—belonged to the Zulu, who knew the space. The British therefore struggled in the most practical of matters. Crossing rivers and passes was a problem, especially with supplies and wagons. (Here, again, flow threatened to carry the imperial forces away.) Finally, there was also the challenge of the daunting

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climate, its alternately hot and frigid conditions, frequent rain, as well as bacterial
collection (Wade 36).

But if the very landscape seemed to thwart British efforts, it also was an asset to
the Zulus, who frequently get tied in with the countryside in colonial renditions of the
war. As Catherine Anderson points out, Zulus often appear almost a part of the African landscape itself, however, and British soldiers voiced a particular fear of such an enemy who could conceal himself amongst the grasses and rocks of the landscape, able to creep forward and attack while remaining almost unseen (as opposed to their own hindered movement and visual prominence in scarlet tunics).

Zulu forces advancing on the hospital outpost of Rorke’s Drift were said to be “as thick as grass and as black as thunder” by one British eyewitness. Other soldiers likened Zulu warriors to native vermin: “On coming up [over a ridge] we saw the Zulus, like ants in front of us, in perfect order, quiet as mice and stretched across in an even line.” (15)

In this sense, the landscape works alongside the Zulus themselves to engulf the invaders. Similarly to Anderson’s eyewitness, Harry Lugg, a trooper in the Natal Mounted Police and a defender of Rorke’s Drift, quoted his comrade in describing the attacking Zulus “as black as hell and thick as grass” (Emery 132). He also suggested,

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43 See Anderson’s article, Red Coats and Black Shields, for an investigation of how the Anglo-Zulu War forced a reconsideration in the British imagination of African masculinity, as well as augmented a shift in conceptions of British masculinity. Anderson notes that representations of Zulus changed from classicized depictions in the earlier half of the nineteenth century, when they were of little threat to European settlement, to portrayals of the Zulus as barbarians in the latter half, when they had become a significant obstacle to British designs. In contrast to the movement and wildness that characterized paintings of Zulus, images of British soldiers portrayed bravery, gallantry, and control. This, Anderson argues, was fundamental in the reworking of dominant ideas of martial masculinity in the nineteenth century.
“The place seemed alive with them” (132\textsuperscript{44}). Another soldier present at Rorke’s Drift, Private Henry Hook of the 2/24\textsuperscript{th}, recalled that in the middle of the night “a war-dance … roused them up again, and their excitement was so intense that the ground fairly seemed to shake” (Emery 130).

Even in death, the warriors, becoming part of the environment, seemed to work against the British. Smith-Dorrien, after escaping from Isandlwana, described the aftermath of the stand at Rorke’s Drift: “We are expecting pestilence to break out here, to add to our enemies, what with the rain and the air tainted with dead bodies, as there were about 350 Zulus killed here and some are buried in the ruins” (Emery 91). While disease threatened all around the survivors at Rorke’s, back at Isandlwana, Lieutenant Q. McK. Logan of the 2/24\textsuperscript{th} regiment sensed a different kind of engulfment during the night they camped alongside their slain: “We could see the Zulu signal fires all around us, and I never expected to get out of Cetshwayo’s territory alive, as we appeared from the position of the fires to be completely surrounded” (Emery 104-5). With the fires lit on the surrounding hills, visually the enemy entirely encircled the company. However, as in the heat of the battle at Isandlwana, metaphors suddenly invert as this sense of enclosure overlaps with a phallic presence. Norris-Newman was with Chelmsford’s force at this time, and as he took in the scene of conquered British soldiers, he encountered another striking sight:

we began to tumble over dead bodies lying in every direction, and in some places where there was a ditch or any kind of shelter, men were found lying thick, as though they had fought till every cartridge was gone, and had then been surrounded and assegaid. Within a few hundred yards of

\textsuperscript{44} Qtd. from The North Devon Herald, 24 Apr. 1879.
At the very moment that Norris-Newman acknowledges the state of the now dissolved army, indeed having been “surrounded and assegaid,” the towering African landmark “rear[s] up” in the face of British loss as a dominant presence standing in for Zulu power. In these accounts of Zululand, the traditional representation of the colonial landscape as passive or waiting to be conquered begins to change; here, the environment becomes agent and even aggressive—in both its vaginal and phallic renditions. This shift in imperial perspective gets registered in the romances of H. Rider Haggard, which are the focus of my next chapter, and which begin to impact the relationship between the gendered landscape and imperial prowess.

Meanwhile, concerns about spatial transgressions during the war also took the form of panic about border invasion. After Isandlwana, the majority of white survivors struggled into Helpmakaar, where they, shaken and unequipped, for days fully expected an onslaught of Zulu warriors. Though hindsight has shown that Cetshwayo had no desire to invade Natal, British colonials awaited this event with terror. Major Francis Grenfell, a Welshman in the 60th Rifles in Chelmsford’s column, confided, “We are working night and day at the defences of Natal. There is nothing to prevent an invasion” (Emery 107). Tom Turner, a civilian, originally from Hereford, echoed this

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45 Qtd. from *Natal Mercury*, Zulu War Supplement, January 1879: Report “From the Times War Correspondent,” dated “Pietermaritzburg, Jan. 26th, 1879”, Charles Norris-Newman. This sight and its significance clearly left a strong impression on Norris-Newman, for he writes later in his *In Zululand with the British* (1880), “we began to stumble over dead bodies in every direction … the men were found lying thick and close, as if they had fought till their ammunition was exhausted, and then been surrounded and slaughtered … within a few hundred yards of the top of the ridge … the large and grotesque form of the Isandwhlana Mountain loom[ed] up in front of us …” (61).
sense of exposure, writing from Pietermartizburg that the danger “lies in our large
border so unprotected, nearly all our men away in the country, and an extensive border
lying quite open to the enemy, for disastrous inroads to be organized against the farms
and even towns lying near” (Emery 109). These shared fears of penetration buttressed
the discourse of exposure and dissolution manifested in letters home. In order to
recover itself, the empire needed a hero or two.

**Hero Factory**

The perception of the British army as far more efficacious than “a savage army
like that of Zululand” (Norris-Newman 10) thus shifted to the realization that these
African warriors had hammered the imperial forces in the field central to Victorian
conceptions of ideal manhood. Because this realization yielded an outpouring of grief
that was channeled through the construction of the British soldier as innocent lad,
national masculine identities needed to be rebuilt and images of heroism needed to be
reasserted in order to reconcile national mourning. British print culture was fundamental
to this reworking of manhood and to the reassurance that the army retained the capacity
to do the work of empire.

Part of the reason the metropolitan media had such a strong hand in the
representation of events in South Africa was that detailed reports from the front could be
weeks or months in arriving at home; longer and less incomplete dispatches were
transported via steamer while only the most basic of information arrived via official
telegram.\textsuperscript{46} Filling in the blanks, publications frequently took poetic license in their
depictions. As Lieven has argued,

The papers published wonderfully detailed accounts of what had
supposedly happened, accounts that in places bore only a fleeting
resemblance to actual events. The report in \textit{The Graphic} was among the
most splendidly inaccurate:

At the last moment, in the Battle of Isandula [Isandlwana],
the officers in command charged two young subalterns
[Coghill and Melville] \ldots to save the colours. Horses were
then given to them, and they cut their way through the Zulus,
bearing the sacred symbols. They were probably wounded in
this noble feat of arms, to which an eye witness has borne
testimony. They succeeded however, in making their way to
Rorke’s Drift, which they must have found surrounded by
Zulus \ldots They ultimately reached the Buffalo River, and
swimming their horses across it gained the British Territory.
We may presume that the wound of Coghill necessitated
dismounting. The other, tending him with all the care of a
comrade, must have witnessed his death. He himself, too,
spent with loss of blood, could not remount, and with the
colours wrapped around him, sank down to die, happy in the
soldierly conviction that honour was saved.

\textsuperscript{46} See also Mary A. Favret, \textit{War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime}
Other newspapers carried even more detailed accounts of the last moments of the camp. *Lloyds Weekly* reproduced a report from the *Kaffrarian Witness*:

> When the loss of the camp seemed quite certain Colonel Pulleine called Lieutenant Melville and said to him, “Lieutenant Melville, you and the senior lieutenant will take the colours and make the best of your way.” He shook hands with him and turned round and said, “Men of the 24th, we are here and here we stand and fight it out to the end.” He was quite cool and collected. (Lieven 423)

Similarly, the *Bendigo Advertiser* asserted that the heroic Melville was last seen cutting his way through over 100 natives, cutting them down like grass with his sword, as he was determined to save the colors of the regiment, which had fallen into the hands of the enemy. After being mortally wounded in seven places he rescued the colors, which he had tied around him, and swam the river in time to lie down and die, knowing, as the papers say, that he had saved the honor of his country and regiment. A more noble or glorious death, of course, no soldier could possibly die. (Moodie 61-2)

In reality, it seems Pulleine appointed Melville to carry out the colours, but the details of what was said are unknown. Coghill happened to encounter Melville while they were attempting to escape across the Mzinyathi (Buffalo) River and, though when Melville was struggling in the water, having by this point lost the colours, Coghill turned mid-
stream to help him, both were killed on the opposite bank. The papers’ projection, however, of traditional ideals of martial masculinity is palpable; the Mercury’s and the Bendigo’s emphases on honour, noble death, and glory, and Lloyd’s on composure are as wide of the mark as the assertion that Rorke’s Drift was on the near side of the Mzinyathi River.

The survivors’ accounts of the battle demonstrate, predictably, incredible terror and confusion. J.F. Brickhill, an interpreter, gives his report of his escape down Fugitive’s Trail:

Our way was already strewn with shields, assegais, blanket, hats, clothing of all description, guns, ammunition belts, saddles (which horses had managed to kick off), revolver and belt and I don’t know what not. Whilst our stampede was composed of mules, with and without pack saddles, oxen, horses in all stages of equipment and fleeing men all strangely intermingled—man and beast, apparently all infected with the danger which surrounded us. (Best and Greaves 97)

The sense of chaos confronting the “fleeing men” conveyed here points to a very different idea of what happened at Isandlwana than what the newspapers invented before survivors’ letters started to arrive at home. Not only did the papers focus on the durability of martial masculine qualities, but they also maintained a narrative of the militaristic efficacy of the soldiers.47

47 Bowman also argues that correspondence during the war “emphasized the superior quality of the British troops and made them seem like ‘super soldiers’. Many reports of actual encounters with the Zulu claimed, for example, that there were often over two hundred times as many Zulu warriors as British soldiers and yet the British were able to hold their line and push the Zulu back. Several reports on the casualties of both British and Zulu forces were written but it is difficult to accept many of the figures because they seem to be rough estimates, intended to make the British army look good.” (127)
A basic example of this is the publicizing of the unlikely British victory at Rorke's Drift, where a small body of about a hundred soldiers withheld an attack of three to four thousand Zulus for 12 hours from the evening of January 22\textsuperscript{nd} to the morning of the 23\textsuperscript{rd}. Though this raid was just an attempt to pillage following the victory at Isandlwana, the British media construed it as an integral stand against the invasion of Natal.\textsuperscript{48} The Natal Mercury asserted that the Zulus’ “intention was to enter Natal and lay waste to the colony. The reserve made the attack on Rorke's Drift, and their repulse saved the colony” (Moodie 74).\textsuperscript{49} The notion that the British still retained the ability to withstand military penetration was fundamental in reviving both national morale and images of British manliness. In fact, much would be made of the notion of British fortification (or at least those attempts that were successful) in the face of Zulu onslaught throughout the war—and indeed it was the tactic of entrenchment and laagering that enabled the British to take Ulundi in July. This celebration of fixity can be understood in light of Theweleit’s suggestion that fascist stiffening up in the face of the red flood is a strategy by which “the man holds himself together as an entity, a body with fixed boundaries … He defends himself with a kind of sustained erection of his whole body, of whole cities, of whole troop units” (244). In other words, fortification works to reaffirm male boundaries, to recuperate the phallus; “Our soldiers … want to avoid swimming at all costs, no matter what the stream. They want to stand with both feet and every root firmly anchored in the soil. They want whatever floods may come to rebound against them” (230), as one ‘flood’ did at Rorke’s Drift. These stiffenings were attempted to

\textsuperscript{48} Interestingly, Cy Enfield’s 1964 film, Zulu, also depicts the attack on Rorke’s as a planned, strategic move against British forces, and additionally replicates nineteenth-century portrayals in British media of redcoat composure.

\textsuperscript{49} Melton Prior also maintained in retrospect, “Their action [at Rorke’s Drift] no doubt saved Natal from invasion by the enemy” (90).
counter the liquidity at Isandlwana; evidence of the sustained fantasy of fortification can be seen in the particularly Theweleitian example of phallus-recuperation in the photo below (Figure 4\textsuperscript{50}):

![MONUMENT](image.jpg)

\textbf{Figure 4: Monument to the Natal Carbineers at Isandlwana}

As if to offset the symbolic prowess of the African landmark, this monument to the Natal Carbineers who had fallen at Isandlwana asserts its own solidity—fittingly fenced off from the surrounding sea of grass, which itself has been mowed down near the obelisk.

Drawing on the same strategy of fixity, newspapers lauded the stand at Rorke’s Drift as the quintessential example of British stalwart self-possession and duty. British print culture made heroes of Lieutenants Bromhead and Chard, whose alleged unflappability and presence of mind served to rally their men when they got word of the impending attack. Lugg’s account in the *North Devon Herald* was suitably dramatic: when news of Isandlwana and the impending attack on Rorke’s arrived at the outpost, the messenger supposedly said, ‘‘You will all be murdered and cut to pieces,’’ and the only answer he received was, ‘We will fight for it, and if we have to die we will die like Britishers’’ (Emery 131). However, preparations didn’t unfold quite like this. While this defense was sustained against incredible odds, it was not, as the papers would have it, the result of stoicisms and levelheadedness. The lieutenants’ first panicked impulse was in fact to begin packing up camp and mobilizing the wounded immediately for a trek back to the comparative safety of Helpmakaar—and this after, as Hook testifies, “a note was received by Lieutenant Bromhead from the Column to say that the enemy was coming on, and that the post was to be held at all costs” (Emery 126). It was only when Commissioner Dalton convinced them that if they ran, all of them, including the invalided men, would be slaughtered in the open, that the lieutenants agreed to hunker down. When the attack came, the resistance at Rorke’s was a matter of desperate fighting, as Hook twice put it, “like rats in a hole” (Emery 127, 129). Though the defenders at Rorke’s had little other choice than to fight frantically for their lives, the victory would be lauded as a gallant forestalling of a Zulu invasion into Natal. As Lieven suggests, “The need for national reassurance ensured that Rorke’s Drift would be presented in the newspapers as an epic of youthful heroism, and the military authorities
and the government were happy to endorse that version of events” (430). No fewer than 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded to the soldiers at Rorke’s.

Presentations of “youthful heroism” lasted throughout the war. They also became increasingly nuanced and narrative. For instance, Forbes published a confrontation between opposing champions during a skirmish on the Mfolozi drifts, near Ulundi, on July 3rd, in which the British achieved the advantage.51 Lieutenant William Beresford, a close friend of Forbes', had become an iconic warrior around whom national visions of manhood coalesced. As Beresford, ahead of his comrades, chased after the retreating Zulus,

The Zulu induna [leader], bringing up the rear of his fleeing detachment, turned on the lone man who had so outridden his followers. A big man, even for a Zulu, the ring round his head proved him a veteran. The muscles rippled on his glistening black shoulders as he compacted himself behind his huge flecked shield of cowhide, marking his distance for the thrust of the gleaming assegai held at arm's length over the great swart head of him. Bill steadied his horse a trifle, just as he was wont to do before the take off for a big fence; within striking distance he made him swerve a bit to the left—he had been heading straight for the Zulu, as if he meant to ride him down. The spear flashed out like the head of a cobra as it strikes; the sabre carried at ‘point one’ clashed with it, and seemed to curl around it; the spear-head was struck aside, the horseman delivered ‘point two’ with all the vigour of his arm, his strong seat, and the impetus of his galloping horse; and lo! in the twinkling of an eye, the sabre’s point

51 This account was reprinted in his book, *Barracks, Bivouacs and Battles* (1891).
was through the shield, and half its length was buried in the Zulu’s broad chest. The brave induna was a dead man before he dropped; the sword drawing out of his heart as he fell backward. His assegai stands now in the corner of Bill’s mother's drawing room. (Forbes 144-5)

The image of clashing male bodies here is central, although only the Zulu man's is objectified. His physical stature, rippling muscles, and his “glistening black shoulders,” render him an intimidating opponent. Crucially, he’s represented as a worthy adversary for the pursuing Englishman, being a commander, a veteran, a clearly powerful man, and, indeed, “brave.” These qualifications are necessary for Beresford’s pursuit to be understood as heroic and not as simply an act of butchery. The induna’s virility, however, is kept markedly in the realm of the primitive; not only does his body occupy Forbes’ main focus, but he’s aligned with the animalistic via his “cowhide” shield and his spear that flashes like a “cobra.”

By contrast, Beresford is not just a body but rather a character whom the passage constructs as familiar. He’s immediately presented as a leader of men, not only having “followers,” but also outriding them. The informal appellation of “Bill” suggests a comradely relation available to the reader not unlike that which might be available concerning the hero of some boys’ adventure fiction, while the reference to Beresford’s habit of steadying his horse, “as he was wont to do before the take off for a big fence,” further adds dimension to his character and thus render him known or recognizable. Furthermore, fencing entails notable connotations of class. Beresford thus becomes the familiar gentleman hero who hunts the animalized Zulu man.
The fencing or sporting trope is also key here, not only in its relation to the cult of sport so central to Victorian conceptions of masculinity, but also in its figuration of penetration: the outcome of this clash is determined by whose force strikes home. From the imagery of the Zulu recoiling his muscular frame in order to “thrust” his “gleaming assegai” towards the Englishman, to that of the phallic cobra, and finally to the lieutenant’s lunge of his sabre that, “with all the vigour of his arm, his strong seat, and the impetus of his galloping horse,” pierces the induna’s “broad chest,” this passage is rife with connotations of libidinal struggle.\(^{52}\) Thus, as if in response to the Zulus’ rear infiltration of the British army at Isandlwana, Forbes’ passage works to reassert that it is the British who do the penetrating. That masculinity becomes figured in terms of either a penetrating or penetrable body becomes key, as I argue in the following chapters, for how Victorian manhood gets reworked in fictional and institutional writing from the 1880s through to the early twentieth century.

After Beresford’s victory, the passage closes with the striking observation that the induna’s assegai was taken as a souvenir. The hunting imagery again has disturbing implications for Beresford’s and Forbes’ treatment of the induna: given that the Zulu warrior has been likened to wildlife here, the captured assegai functions quite clearly as a trophy, marking British subjugation of what is understood as primitive. Such invidious behaviour is completely in line with what John Hoberman identifies in the colonial Victorians as “the perverse impulse to treat killing as sport” (113). Hoberman suggests, “the most vicious aspect of the colonial world was the emergence of Negro-killing as a sportive exercise. ‘Man-shooting is the finest sport of all,’ said General Wolseley, who

\(^{52}\) John Hoberman’s argument that both war and sport were areas “in which Caucasian men displayed both physical mastery and the masculine qualities of character that established their right to command other races” (100) is particularly relevant here.
(like others) saw the Zulus as ‘dangerous black game that made the hunt especially exhilarating’” (113). With the importance of hunting to Victorian manhood, the assegai as memento acts as a physical representation of British virility, while the idea that a material signifier of Zulu prowess sits in a British woman’s drawing room is part of a fantasy of castration—a fitting rejoinder to British emasculation.

**Panic and Brutality**

However, this construction of heroism was only so effective; accounts of British panic and rather unmanly nervousness nevertheless managed to emerge in both imperial correspondence and the metropolitan press. Major Tucker, of Colonel Wood’s column, wrote to his father on March 19th that his soldiers “were still very uneasy [since Ntombe] … off went a couple of rifles and all went into laager and fort; the nights are very dark and no doubt they fired off at imaginary Zulus … These young soldiers are more bother than they are worth. A fellow nearly let off his rifle last night at a log of wood, but an officer happened to visit him at the moment he was challenging it for the third time and so saved an alarm” (Emery 162). Even as the war drew to a close, the troops remained paranoid. Melton Prior was one of the few correspondents who disclosed this state of anxiety amongst the soldiers. During the march to Ulundi on June 6th,

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our alarm bugle sounded … Suddenly some of our officers imagined they could see a black mass approaching, and gave the word to fire, and instantly a most terrific fire was going on all around the laager … the
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53 Merrick Burrow observes that “In the case of the imperial souvenir, the killing of an adversary (animal or human) produces its body as a trophy—an object by means of which the adversary’s power is projected back onto the gentleman barbarian who takes possession of it” (73).
danger we ran of being shot by our own men was horrible; as it was, five of our own men were wounded by our own fire … A more disgraceful scene I have never witnessed, more particularly when we realised that six rounds of canister were actually fired by the artillery, without having seen a single enemy. (Prior 108)

This embarrassment over such a display of agitation was not unique. Another false alarm occurred on July 1st, as Telegraph correspondent Phil Robinson attested:

Another of the Native Contingent, who were sleeping outside the shelter trenches, took alarm and rushed over men of the 2-4th [sic; 1/24th?] regiment. Seeing these naked figures rushing past them, assegais in hand, the men were sized [sic] with a panic, imagining that it was a great Zulu surprise, and rushed in the greatest confusion into the laager. All on this side of the camp was in the direst disorder, the men quite demoralised, and refusing, until officers actually used physical force in the shape of kicking, to return to their posts outside … The conduct of the young soldiers has been admirable in respect of bearing fatigues, but their steadiness in the face of the enemy has, on more than one occasion, shown signs of shortcoming. (Laband and Knight 132)

Prior describes a similarly mortifying scenario that, if he remembers the chronology of events correctly, occurred after dark on July 3rd, the night before the charge on Ulundi:

I heard a shot fired, and then another, and in a few moments a kind of whirlwind seemed to be coming towards us, which proved to be the native

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54 Qtd. from the Natal Mercury, Zulu War Supplement, 14 Jul. 1879: Report “Compiled by the Witness from Mr. Phil Robinson's telegrams to England.”
and white troops all mixed together dashing for the laager. Some clambered over the wagons, while others crawled underneath, in their mad endeavour and haste to get inside.

… It was certainly much to be regretted, but still more so that two hundred men of a certain regiment, which shall be nameless, actually left their rifles in the trench in their haste to get into camp. Had it been a genuine Zulu charge the whole affair might undoubtedly have turned out a disaster … (Prior 117)

This state of evident paranoia, which continued to last throughout the war, found an outlet in violent retribution, as I explore below. Meanwhile, despite the reality of anxiety in the ranks, the press continued to laud the bravery of the troops. The *Daily Telegraph* of London asserted,

There is nothing except mournful glory in the behaviour of the officers and men who have fallen, however seriously the affair may reflect upon the military dispositions of their leaders … so far from being a blot upon the British annals, the conduct of these men and officers in their desperate strait casts new lustre upon our arms. They were not conquered, but overwhelmed; and upon their record not only without shame, but with sorrowful pride and satisfaction … At any cost, with whatever necessary strength, the reverse must be effaced, the savage victors chastised, conquered, and disarmed, and these daring Zulu made as harmless as the Hottentots. (Moodie 56)
Asserting the valour of the common soldier came at the expense of recognizing problems in martial leadership, which would have been nearly impossible not to do anyway. But this passage also illustrates a crucial shift in Victorian attitudes during the war because it exemplifies at once a profound sense of loss, mourning, and sorrow; the production of a fiction that traditional male ideals had endured with the soldiers’ “conduct” preserving “pride” and “lustre”; and an assertion that the profound loss the nation had suffered—not just in terms of numbers fallen but also concerning imperial dignity—demanded a particular kind of retribution, “at any cost.”

If the emasculation suffered at Isandlwana, Ntombe Drift, and Hlobane Mountain required a recuperation of British heroism then this process of recovery was in turn predicated on brutal violence as martial prowess was asserted. However, crucial to both the justification of this assertion of disciplinary power and the maintenance of some degree of military dignity was the acknowledgement of Zulus as worthy adversaries whose strength required severe force. In April, the Westminster Review made the following admission:

The terrible disaster in Zululand which has lately befallen our usually victorious troops has roused the whole nation to desire to know more of a people and a country perhaps hitherto too slightly regarded. We are so apt to consider a war with barbarous tribes on the frontiers of our remote colonies as a matter of small moment, and to look upon victory as certain, that the news of the massacre of eight hundred of our gallant troops … by a horde of naked savages took everyone by surprise … (Wade 135, qtd. from “Our South African Colonies” 187)
Cetshwayo’s military strategy and theoretical aptitudes came to be widely recognized amongst the British, as were the skills and determination of the Zulu warriors—however, these were frequently represented in terms of animal qualities such as ferocity and fearlessness. The Brecon County Times published a letter about the return of Chelmsford’s column to Isandlwana written by Sergeant W. Morley of the 2/24th to a comrade in Brecon from Rorke’s Drift on February 1st. Morley describes how they camped at the battlefield the night of January 22nd and then fled as early as possible the next morning, for,

We had not ammunition to stand against them [the Zulus] for they were like lions and not afraid of death. As soon as one man fell another took his place, and those that think the niggers in Zululand will not fight, are sadly deceived. The way our camp was taken could not be more cleverly taken by any of our Generals, for they shewed fight about a mile and a half from the camp, and drew our troops on them at the same time their main body must have been moving round the rear under cover of the hill that was known nothing about. When they got our troops engaged they came up like bees from behind the camp and other flanks, and got between them and it, and commenced their work of burning out tents, kits, blankets, etc. (Emery 101)

Morley represents the Zulus as cunning, relentless, replaceable, swarming, and indiscriminately destructive.55 Thus while he asserts that they “shewed fight,” and even hints at admiration for their tactics, he nevertheless depicts a primitive and unstoppable

55 Sir Bartle Frere, too, in a letter to Sir M. Hicks-Beach on Jan. 29th, 1879, described the Zulus in this manner: “Theirs is the courage of maniacs and drunkards, or of wild beasts infuriated and trained to destruction” (Martineau 278).
force whose knowledge of the landscape gave them the advantage over the redcoats.

In other words, in order to conquer these warriors, the British would need to apply harsh methods.

What was not acknowledged after the battle of Isandlwana, though much of it was made beforehand when an easy victory was considered a foregone conclusion, was the superiority of British weaponry to that of the Zulus. One correspondent for the Natal Mercury even suggested, “the assegai in the hand of the Zulu is quite as efficacious as the breech-loader in the hand of the European, because the Zulu makes up by agility and quickness of movement for the differences in the weapons” (Laband and Knight 70). While this certainly recognizes Zulu prowess, it simultaneously attempts to gloss over the huge technological advantage that the redcoats possessed. Although the Zulu army did possess a quantity of rifles, the warriors were neither fully trained in using them nor did they possess comparable numbers of arms. Furthermore they didn’t possess the rockets, newer Martini-Henry rifles, or Gatling guns that the Europeans used. The declaration that the two armies were equally matched in the respect of weaponry worked to license the relentless violence in which the British indulged after the major defeats of Isandlwana, Ntombe, and Hlobane.

While it was not good press to emphasize the ruthlessness of British persecution of the Zulus, it was difficult to demonstrate in reports and letters home the British

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56 These kinds of observations can also be understood in the context of Hoberman’s claim that “Scientific speculation about what we would call the athletic potential of non-Western people has been a part of the Western racial imagination for at least two centuries” (103). Europeans were largely obsessed with racialized comparisons of strength, physique, movement, speed, and so on, and evaluating the physical prowess of non-Western men directly impinged on British constructions of Anglo-Saxon manhood.

57 As Laband and Knight note of war correspondence, “since the required emphasis was on adventure, heroism, glory, and noble death, preferably selflessly offered up for a comrade, they habitually did not dwell on the horrors of the battlefield, and certainly not on British corpses. It was permissible to praise the
“strength” for which the *Telegraph* calls without betraying the shocking degree of imperial brutality. Up to the battle at Kambula Ridge, the British army really struggled in Zululand, and morale and victory both were tenuous. However, at Kambula, the day after the disaster at Hlobane, the tables turned. In retrospect, this battle would be understood as an act of vengeance, as Lieutenant Alfred Blaine’s account makes clear: “Buller led us out to shoot them down as they retreated. The soldiers cheered us as we went out, and we all declared that now we would pay them out for the day before. ‘Remember yesterday’, we all shouted out, and I can assure you we did, and had our revenge” (Sole 125). Another soldier waxed lyrical about British determination at the commencement of the attack: “the alarm sounded, and every man was at his post, fully resolved to avenge our comrades’ lives that had been lost on the 22nd January, only too well known throughout the wide world” (Emery 171). As this combatant makes clear, retribution wasn’t just a matter of payback for lost lives, but a tattered national reputation. Thus, gaining the upper hand at Kambula, the British were merciless toward the fleeing Zulus, and indeed, as Private Joseph Banks attests in a letter to his parents, “the affair … gave them [those who had lost comrades] ample revenge, and wiped out effectually every other disaster that has happened” (Emery 172). The violence of Kambula, then, was understood specifically as making up for previous martial failures. Captain D’Arcy wrote in a letter that was published in the *Eastern Star*, “We killed a little over 2300, and when once they retired all the horsemen in camp followed for eight miles, butchering the brutes all over the place. I told the men, ‘No quarter, boys, and remember yesterday,’ and we did knock them about, killing them all over the place …
We are all in high feather at having such a good fight with the Zulus” (Emery 169). The same dehumanizing brutality appears in one Commandant Schermbrucker’s account of the pursuit that was printed in the *Natal Mercury*:

> They fairly ran like bucks; but I was after them like the whirlwind, and shooting incessantly into the thick column, which could not have been less than 5000 strong. They became exhausted, and shooting them down would have taken too much time; so we took the assegais from the dead men, and rushed among the living ones, stabbing them right and left, with fearful revenge for the misfortunes of the 28th inst. No quarter was given.

(Laband and Knight 9158)

In likening the warriors to routinely hunted animals, Schermbrucker works to undermine the humanity of the men that he and his followers slaughter. Further, as is typical in front-line representations of Zulus, Schermbrucker treats the men, whom he describes as a “thick column,” like one faceless mass. More crucially, however, in enacting this carnage, the British opt to kill with assegais instead of their longer-ranging guns. Schermbrucker’s claim that “rush[ing] among the living ones” and stabbing the fatigued men took less time than “shooting them down” makes almost no sense—this method had to have taken longer. As I explain earlier, because a thrust with an assegai is a closer-range, more physical tactic than killing with bullets, the assailant registers each kill individually, and ultimately the experience is drawn out. And note, Schermbrucker describes himself as a “whirlwind”—becoming at once closer to nature and a free-flowing force. In other words, the imperial forces chose here to embrace primitivism over modernity as a form of indulgence. That the imperial army opted to use this more

58 Qtd. from the *Natal Mercury*, Zulu War Supplement, April 1879.
‘personal’ method when they had the quicker option of guns is one thing; that they insisted on relentless slaughter of a defeated foe is another. Of course, much of the rhetoric that was used to justify imperial invasion of Zululand was rooted in a discourse that pegged Zulus as barbaric and bloodthirsty; now, the British had come to embody the very stereotype that they had ostensibly set out to overcome.

Even Norris-Newman, the war correspondent, drew on this brutal tactic of animalizing the Zulus in order to establish male prowess. In his description of how, at the battle of Gingindlovu, he and a friend were picking off Zulu men with their rifles from the top of a wagon, sniping skill is directly linked to shooting animals: “Palmer (who is a crack shot, having hunted large game in the interior for years) brought several to the ground … After the battle … Palmer and I took and divided the trophies of war, including their native dress, arms, and accoutrements; and we keep them yet, as most prized and hardly-won trophies” (Norris-Newman 138-9). As John M. MacKenzie has argued, hunting, because it “required all the most virile attributes of the imperial male; courage, endurance, individualism, sportsmanship” (179), was for late-Victorians directly linked to masculine capacity. Meanwhile, trophy-collections work to testify to prowess. Material evidence was thus necessary for Norris-Newman, as for Beresford, to give substance to a theretofore beleaguered sense of martial abilities. However, while this evidence, whether in the form of objects taken from fallen warriors in the field or in testimonies lurking in letters home or in war reporting, was supposed to recover diminished British pride, it simultaneously exposed horrendous brutality on the part of the supposedly gallant agents of empire.
One testimony from the battlefield caused outrage in the metropole. Private John Snook’s record of some ruthless killing after the heat of the battle was printed in the *North Devon Herald*: “about eight miles from camp, we found about 500 wounded, most of them mortally, and begging us for mercy’s sake not to kill them; but they got no chance after what they had done to our comrades at Isandhlwana” (Emery 173). The Aborigines’ Protection Society vehemently objected to this conduct; Wood, who was in command at Kambula, denied the occurrence of the slaughter. In response to this denial, the *Hereford Times* argued, “On these official contradictions of ruthless cruelties perpetuated in the open face of day, an additional slur is cast upon England. Europe is led to believe English officers untruthful as well as cruel” (Emery 24). With the knowledge of British brutality entering the metropolitan sphere, the image of the war hero would never be quite the same in the public imagination.

**The Growth of Doubt: Implications for Traditional Models of Masculinity**

What this meant for British masculinity was that after the humiliating defeats of this war and the devastating perfusion of paranoia, the fact that recuperation of lost martial prowess was predicated on and celebrated through barbaric violence equated to a hollowing out of the traditional ideals of chivalrous martial fighting. As H. Rider Haggard, who had served as Master and Registrar of the High Court for the Transvaal during the war until tendering his resignation in May 1879 (Cohen 41), afterwards wrote, “the naked truths of such a business as the Transvaal surrender, or of the present condition of Zululand, are unpleasant reading for an Englishman, there is no doubt”

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59 See Michael Lieven’s “‘Butchering the Brutes All Over the Place’: Total War and Massacre in Zululand, 1879” (1999) for a longer discussion of British brutality.
(CWN). Having been relatively close to events and learning of them without the filter of the metropolitan press, Haggard did not buy into the contrived narrative of heroism—neither in terms of the idea that the British had behaved well or that they had valiantly saved Natal from invasion:

The details of the Zulu war are matters of melancholy history, which it is useless to recapitulate here. With the exception of the affair at Rorke's Drift, there is nothing to be proud of in connection with it, and a great deal to be ashamed of, more especially its final settlement … Cetywayo was never thoroughly in earnest about the war. If he had been in earnest, if he had been determined to put out his full strength, he would certainly have swept Natal from end to end after his victory at Isandhlwana. There was no force to prevent his doing so: … [he] was only anxious to defend his country. (CWN)

In other words, British martial conduct during this war had been shameful, inefficacious, and aggressive. Sharing this sense that honour was missing from this war, Henry Curling wrote in a personal letter, “This fighting is not glorious work: it is dangerous as fighting against Europeans and there is little credit to be got in fighting savages” (Best and Greaves 114).

The carnage of the war was protested in literature, such as Bishop Colenso’s Digest upon Zulu Affairs (1883) and Frances Ellen Colenso’s The Ruin of Zululand (1884), and in political cartoons such as the following that was made into a postcard in 1880 (Figure 560):

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60 Bryant 78
As Disraeli (by 1880 he was Lord Beaconsfield, the “great big B”) reads the reports of numbers of men “killed” and “wounded,” the caption at the bottom critiques the capitalist outcomes of the war at the expense of the loss of African and British life. The British cheer, formerly associated with pride and victory, is mocked here as it is shown to reflect poor governmental judgment and martial bungling.

Thus despite the bolstering efforts of institutional writing, the image of the colonial war hero was profoundly changed after the Anglo-Zulu War. Haggard remained amongst those unconvinced of the imperial agent’s efficacy, and suggested that the
deterioration of these ideals were also transparent outside of the metropole: “The lessons of our performances in the Zulu and Boer wars, more especially the latter, have not been lost upon them [the Zulus], and they are beginning to think that the white man, instead of being the unconquerable demigod they thought him, is somewhat of a humbug” (CWN). This perspective of the “white man” as “humbug” is pursued, a few years later, in Haggard’s first adventure romances, the success of which, I would argue, was in part dependent on the indulgence in the romantic idea of the “unconquerable white demigod.” What wasn’t widely realized, however, was that this ostensible celebration of traditional masculine ideals played out in Haggard’s adventure novels was in actuality what the redcoats had already demonstrated: an illustration of the failure of British men to live up to such impossible fictions. Furthermore, the evident inability of British discourse to contain these martial failings itself reflects that governmental narrative authority was also starting to come apart at the seams.
Governmental policy was a narrative with which Haggard had come to take issue, being less than satisfied with Britain’s behaviour surrounding the Anglo-Zulu as well as Anglo-Boer Wars. Haggard had arrived in Africa in August 1875 to work as aid to Sir Henry Bulwer, a neighbour of Rider’s father, in Natal (Cohen 28). While his duties initially involved domestic organization and scheduling, he in time was required to accompany Bulwer on diplomatic expeditions (31). He was present for the British annexation of the Transvaal in Pretoria on April 12, 1877 (39) and actually raised the British flag after the declaration. While he ended up becoming Master and Registrar of the High Court for the Transvaal in August 1877, serving under Justice Kotzé, Haggard in May 1879 “broke all ties with the Government” (49) and went in for ostrich farming, remaining politically opinionated and disillusioned about British martial prowess. As we have seen in Cetywayo and His White Neighbours, Haggard felt “there is nothing to be proud of in connection with it [the war in Zululand], and a great deal to be ashamed of …” Adding to this sense of shame, the British Government, in order to make peace with the Boers after the devastating British losses at Majuba Hill in 1881, agreed to give independence back to the Transvaal, a move that Haggard protested in a letter to Sir Bartle Frere.61 In his book, Haggard laments that the Transvaal was yielded “under

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61 On June 8, 1881, Haggard wrote to Frere: “The natives are the real heirs to the soil, and should surely have some protection and consideration, some voice in the settlement of their fate. They outnumber the Boers by twenty-five to one … Leading all these hundreds of thousands of men and women to believe that they were once and for ever the subjects of Her Majesty, safe from all violence and cruelty, and oppression, we have handed them over without a word of warning to the tender mercies of one, where natives are concerned, of the cruellest [sic] white races in the world” (Cohen 60, qtd. in John Martineau, The Life and Correspondence of Sir Bartle Frere [1895]).
stress of defeat” to the Boers, or rather, that “the country was abandoned,” and that “the vast majority who had remained faithful to the Crown, was handed to the cruel despotism of the minority who had rebelled against it” (CWN). He goes on: “Such an act of treachery to those to whom we were bound with double chains—by the strong ties of a common citizenship, and by those claims to England's protection from violence and wrong which have hitherto been wont to command it, even where there was no duty to fulfill, and no authority to vindicate—stands—I believe—without parallel on our records, and marks a new departure in our history (CWN). 62 Haggard’s disappointment in British policy in South Africa remained deep: “Never shall I forget the scene on the market square of Newcastle—it must have been about the 21st or 22nd of March—when it became known that peace had been declared as a corollary of our defeats … I saw strong men weeping like children, and heard English-born people crying aloud that they were ‘b[lood]y Englishmen’ no more. Soldiers were raging and cursing, and no one tried to stop them” (Cohen 62, qtd. from Haggard, The Days of My Life [1926]). Thus, “a new departure in our history”—a departure away from a fiction of martial standards long since held in the British imagination—was marked by disgraced martial practice, the breakdown of manly resolve and composure, and the ideals of chivalry left unfulfilled—

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62 Cohen’s assessment is that Cetywayo and His White Neighbours was an astute work: “he [Haggard] foretells accurately and devastatingly what would occur—and what later actually did occur—when Cetywayo was restored to the throne. He predicts also another war between Boer and Britain. And when he points a warning finger to a future where Britain's star will be in descent as a result of current political negligence and administrative complacency, he is again proved remarkably right” (72-3). Haggard’s ideas in this political work were well-received by The British Quarterly review, The Spectator (even though this publication disagreed with Haggard on various points), The Saturday Review, and Vanity Fair, suggesting that Haggard had attained a complex understanding of the political situation surrounding these regions (73).
especially in terms of Haggard’s notion that that the natives in the Transvaal were being left to the wolves, denied protection by the ostensibly strong and righteous nation.

This sense of imperial failure was also emerging against a larger context of instability; despite an upsurge of imperial feeling emerging in the 1870s (Sandison 3), partially as a mode of responding to the great depression, imperial control was beginning to slip globally. Colonial rebellions had begun to proliferate from the 1850s onward, with the 1850-53 Khoekhoe resistance to white colonists in the Cape Colony, the 1857 Sepoy insurrection in India, the formation in 1858 of the Irish Republican Brotherhood working for Irish independence, the Morant Bay uprising in 1865, the wars in South Africa mentioned above, and the Egyptian National Movement sparking off at the same time being just a few examples. Haggard represents the configuration of such a prospect of violence in Zululand and surrounding British colonies (for Haggard argues in Cetywayo that Sir Garnet Wolseley’s settlement left the country unpredictable and ready to boil over) in imagery similar to the kind of phallic engulfment described by other British soldiers in the Anglo-Zulu War. Like Frere, Haggard, drawing on Shepstone’s rhetoric, depicts Cetshwayo’s forces as a pent-up “engine” whose “forces have continued to accumulate and are daily accumulating without safety-valve or outlet” (CWN). Haggard thus points back to the remembrance of a threat of “some fifty thousand men, comprising the whole manhood of the nation … continually on the boil” (CWN). Elsewhere, he refers to Cetshwayo’s “clamouring regiments” as “Charybdis”—the mythological whirlpool that threatens to suck in, surround, and swallow its victims.

As will be seen, the importance of these forms of penetration again shows up in Haggard’s fiction. Meanwhile, even aside from colonial resistance, other global threats

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63 See Hobsbawm, Age of Empire 35-9.
to empire, such as the increasing circulation of sexual diseases, marked by the 1860s Contagious Disease Acts, and rising fears about new commercial competition enabled by the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, both of which I will explore more fully in chapter three, indicated that the ideal figure of empire, imperial authority, and longstanding modes of writing the empire were no longer sustainably efficacious.

The efficacy of white British masculinity was a matter of crucial concern for the imagination and operation of the British Empire in the nineteenth century. From the male bodies that encountered, were tested by, and survived what Mary Louise Pratt calls the “contact zones” (4), to the male-operated colonial administration system and the production of what Thomas Richards calls the “imperial archive” (6), to the national technologies and institutions that depended upon and perpetuated male dominance, both narratives and practices surrounding imperial power hinged on the representation of male prowess. By way of demonstrating the pervasiveness of preoccupations within the metropole with colonial manliness, as well as within contexts of colonial war, as in Zululand, this chapter moves to the genre of popular adventure fiction. Frequently, adventure fiction is understood to bolster, in various ways, vigorous imperial masculinity. While the exuberant celebrations of manliness and prowess can certainly indicate prevalent, underlying insecurities, I want to consider the possibility that imperial masculinity was being directly critiqued from within the ranks of its ostensibly most enthusiastic proponents. I argue here that Haggard’s adventure romances of the 1880s were in fact deeply anxious about the credibility of imperial masculinity. His first major commercially successful works, *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She: A History of Adventure*, make use of humour, parody, and jocularity to play with the dynamics of masculinity
while simultaneously making more serious comments about the limits of imperial prowess. Contrary to much of the critical reception of these texts, which tends to read adventure fiction primarily as championing masculinity, I suggest that Haggard’s romances offer critiques of this dominant presentation of male prowess in profoundly unique and unprecedented ways.

The popularity in late nineteenth-century imperial Britain of *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She*, as well as their enduring legacy through the twentieth century, have in many ways centred around an ostensible celebration of male imperialist masculinity, rendering these adventure novels an easy target for contemporary critics. One longstanding central argument in the scholarship about Haggard’s romances is that they tended in various ways and through diverse strategies to seek to recover, protect, or recuperate imperial masculinity through celebrating virility, muscularity, and patriarchal strength. While Neil Hultgren in his thorough survey of Haggardian criticism since 1980 has suggested that issues of imperialism and gender are “well-worn” (647), I submit that critical pursuit of the complexities of these issues isn’t simply ‘done’; there

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64 *King Solomon’s Mines* has been made into five motion picture films: 1937, 1950, 1985, 1986, and 2004; *She* has never been out of print since its first serialization (Stauffer 23).

remains ample space for engaging with how these romances critique and invert, in complex ways, late-Victorian imperial masculinity, and subsequently effect a rethinking of how fin de siècle adventure fiction conceived of the nation and its identity, empire, and global power relations. Furthermore, the way criticism has understood the operations of gendered imperialism in these works has continued to underpin the fresh and compelling recent scholarship that has read these novels in broader directions. Accordingly, scholarship still needs to continue to re-examine how the relationship between gender and imperialism is figured in order to move forward with what Hultgren calls “fresher lines of inquiry” (647). In my readings of Haggard’s romances, I want to move away from the critical tendency to take his prose at face value, and move beyond understandings of his works as simply acting out fantasies of empire. In order to read the strategies behind Haggard’s playfulness, although critical practice certainly requires taking its objects of study seriously, in this case, it perhaps requires taking them less seriously.

The model for imperial expansion demanded repopulation and sexual reproduction, whether in the colonies themselves or as supplied by emigration from the metropole. Haggard’s works, by contrast, emphasize homosociality and homoerotic tensions on a number of levels. In what follows, I argue that King Solomon’s Mines and

She use the parallels between the interdependently authorizing technologies of male body, imperial authority, and writing, and, interrogating each of these, suggest that the traditionally valorized masculine ideals of physical strength, chivalric command, and credible history were tools of empire that were no longer sustainably efficacious. Crucially, my argument is not that Haggard isn’t concerned with appropriating and subduing black labour, nor do I suggest that he isn’t pursuing white male prowess—quite the contrary. It is because he’s interested in both of these questions that he’s critical of the kind of white masculinity that had traditionally been lauded up to this point in the Victorian period, especially since the outcomes of the Anglo-Boer and Anglo-Zulu Wars. Rather, for Haggard, the problem was that prominent traditional formulas for heroism weren’t holding up in the face of contemporary military, political, and economic challenges. Contrary to arguments purporting Haggard’s subjection of female power embodied in the landscape, I will also demonstrate its complex centrality and its at times intoxicating, terrifying, and even unmanning agency and power that confronts white masculinity in his works. Ultimately, by parodying the established idea of the quintessential British hero and undercutting the notion of masculine credibility, capability, and impenetrability, Haggard suggests that prominent formulas of masculinity espoused within the traditional male adventure and romance novel leave Britain’s narratives of imperialism deeply fissured and inadequate.

**Norms of Colonial Masculinity in Adventure Fiction**

Haggard’s works, in departing from the tradition of triumphant Christian British masculinity, make a discursive intervention through parodying the forms of masculinity
that dominated the popular imagination at the end of the nineteenth century. In popular
adventure fiction, especially that by seminal authors such as Captain Marryat, R.M.
Stables, and Thomas Hughes, the role of muscular Christianity was key in the
construction of normative masculinity. Thomas Hughes’ immensely popular Tom
Brown’s School Days (1857) offered a new model of masculinity to which young boys of
empire could aspire: Tom Brown “still had the traits of his raffish forebears, in terms of
‘grit’ and ‘pluck’. But he now tried to combine the fighting spirit with the even older, more
honourable ideal of the polite gentleman who based his very being in what the middle
classes most admired: respect” (Bristow, *EB* 58).67 Tom, though an exemplary
character, is situated within a larger culture of martial honour:

The Browns are a fighting family. One may question their wisdom, or wit,
or beauty, but about fight there is no question … they are a square-
headed and snake-necked generation, broad in the shoulder, deep in the
chest, and thin in the flank … no failures knock them up … [they] are
scattered over the whole empire on which the sun never sets, and whose
general diffusion I take to be the chief cause of the empire’s stability …
(Hughes 3-5)

The emerging imperial male ideal, then, was strong, broad, athletic, capable, quick-
thinking, steady-nerved, Christian, bodily and culturally impenetrable, militarily adept,
and, of course, British, and was deeply structured on particular kinds of denigrating

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67 Sandison also notes that “about 1870 Tom Brown had become a pattern for schoolboys, and Arnold’s
teaching had given way to a new code in which manliness, animal spirits and prowess at games figure as
the attributes most to be admired in a boy” (14). What emerged was “an insistence on … firmness of
caracter, strength of will, sense of duty, reserves of fortitude” (15).
representations of African men. Ballantyne’s extremely influential adventure novel, *The Coral Island* (1857), set in the South Pacific, contrasts the islanders—the “wild, blood-thirsty savages” (3-4)—with the heroic chivalry of Jack, the leader, who asserts that the damsel Avatea “was a woman in distress, and that was enough to secure to her the aid of a Christian man” (333). In Ballantyne’s sequel, *The Gorilla Hunters* (1875), the same group of boys, now men, travel to Africa, the supposedly ideal setting, as Ralph, the narrator, understands it, for the development of manhood: “I firmly believe that boys were intended to encounter all kinds of risks in order to prepare them to meet and grapple with the risks and dangers incident to a man's career with cool, cautious self possession … founded on experimental knowledge of the character and powers of their own spirits and muscles” (52). The rational composure of white men in this work is juxtaposed with the emotional nervousness of their guide, Makarooroo: Ralph muses, “I never saw a man so deeply affected as was our poor guide, and when I looked at him I felt extremely anxious lest his state of mind should unfit him for acting with needful caution” (107). Ballantyne thus imagines the African’s composure, understood here as indicative of manly development, as deficient compared to that of the Britons.

Henty, also strongly influential in the adventure genre, set a number of novels in Africa, and, though published in the decade after Haggard’s early imperial romances, they nevertheless indicate the prevailing didacticism concerning masculine ideality. In his fiction the qualities of athleticism, capability, and Christianity help boys consolidate themselves into men. His African adventures, *Dash for Khartoum* (1892), *By Sheer Pluck* (1897), and *With Kitchener in the Sudan* (1900) all feature the transition of young boys with absent mothers into military figures who resist the advances of African culture
and religion and become successful, manly subjects in the process. A few brief examples from these works illustrate the cultural valuation of patriarchy, physical strength, chivalry, and militarism. In Henty’s personal “Preface” to *Dash for Khartoum*, he advises “My dear Lads” that “cowardice is of all vices the most contemptible” (v). Furthermore, he reaffirms patrilineal tradition and the idea of male stability by suggesting, “when you are in serious trouble always go to your best friend, your father, and lay the case frankly and honestly before him” (v-vi). Prescriptive emphasis on physical strength is also clear within the story: the young football players at Cheltenham decide on a “strict training” regime of “getting up early and going for a three or four mile run every morning, taking another run in the afternoon, cutting off pudding and all that sort of thing” (42); they consider “it a mere waste of bone when a fellow doesn’t put some flesh on him” (32). This disciplining of the male body within and beyond the text valorizes a capable body prepared for imperial war and works to establish respectability associated with martial endeavours. This pays off for Edgar, this novel’s hero, who rescues two ladies being robbed by tramps. These derelicts are “no match for Edgar, who was in hard exercise, and in regular practice with the gloves, and whose blood was thoroughly up” (103). He refuses all thanks, insisting, “it is a pleasure to punish such ruffians” (103). In *With Kitchener*, independence from family finances is applauded, as Gregory discovers that his father, refusing to bend to his own father’s wishes in exchange for financial support, furthermore “looked for no pecuniary assistance from his brother” (163), and that his father “was daring, full of resource, [and] quick to grasp any opportunity” (160). These novels suggest that for the man who admirably makes his own way in life, the military is a respectable opportunity to develop character and “attain
an honourable position” (163). While Frank, the hero of *By Sheer Pluck*, establishes his independence not through enlisting but by joining an expedition to West Africa, the same qualities of heroism, adventurousness, and military acumen are acclaimed in a growing man. Frank performs numerous valorous deeds, including showing courage in delivering a helpless girl from a mad dog; “Frank stood perfectly cool” (32) in the face of the charging animal, for which he is rewarded with praise: “That’s bravely done, young master … and you have saved Missy’s life, surely” (33). He furthermore employs his physical skill and stamina to rescue four of his fellow schoolmates pinned against an incoming tide, for which his worth is acknowledged:

“I owe my life to you, Frank, I shall never forget it, old fellow.”

“It’s been a close thing,” Frank answered, “but you owe your life as much to your own coolness as to me, and above all Ruthven, don’t let us forget that we both owe our lives to God.” (59)

Humble *and* Christian, Frank will go on to prove his merit in the wilds of Africa, not only surviving captivity, but demonstrating his white man’s knowledge and military aptitude to the Ashanti and earning a necklace of gold nuggets from them for his resoluteness, courage, and honesty. This is the sort of muscular Christian ideal that young boys had been inspired to emulate for decades.

*Parodying Colonial Masculinity in King Solomon’s Mines*

These traditional examples of imperial manhood would seem to provide the discursive parameters within which masculinity is represented in *King Solomon’s Mines*. But the structure of the text is crucial for understanding Haggard’s intervention in the
genre. In reading this novel, a number of questions arise that signal that Haggard’s conception of colonial masculinity moves in a different direction than that of other works of adventure fiction. What do we make of the fact that Quatermain, upon closer reflection, is an unstable and “unmanly” narrator? How can the strong overtones of male homoeroticism that centre around white desire be understood? What do we make of the continual, unresolved limitations placed on white male efficacy? And how do we reconcile the subtle but forceful narrative disruptions of the imperial male construction of power?

Alan Quatermain, narrator and seasoned elephant-hunter, writes the story from his hospital bed while recovering from an unrelated lion attack. Throughout the text, a fictional editor asserts his presence, framing Quatermain’s tale. The story begins when Quatermain agrees to guide Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good into unfamiliar African territory in search of Curtis’ estranged brother. Their clue is an ancient map (famously resembling a woman’s torso), with two mountains labeled “Sheba’s breasts,” and a deep pit, marked as “mouth of treasure cave” (Haggard, *KSM* 55), that charts the path to King Solomon’s Mines, of which Curtis’ brother went in search. The three British explorers procure an African guide of fine frame and stature, Umbopa, and cross the mountains into Kukuanaland, ruled by the evil usurper king, Twala. Rescuing the helpless damsel Foulata from execution, defeating Twala and his treacherous witch, Gagool, and restoring Umbopa, who turns out to be the rightful king (now known as Ignosi), to the throne of Kukuanaland, the British men press on to the mines in search of treasure. Foulata and Gagool die, the men barely escape alive, they locate Curtis’ brother in the desert, and then return to their lives. It isn’t difficult to see how these acts
of heroism can be read in terms of colonial gender politics. But while, for example, Anne McClintock reads Curtis’ reunion with his estranged brother as an analogue of a fantasy of “paterfamilial restoration” (IL 240), I suggest that just because the British men survive the excursion and return a little richer doesn’t mean that the details of the ending aren’t problematic. More precisely, the stability of the plot is troubled by the particular encoding of masculinity in the text.

68 McClintock’s argument, while ground-breaking and important for its insistence on the examination of suppression of colonial female labour by the imperial economy, becomes unstable when she insists that the novel enacts a reinvented patriarchy. This assertion largely relies on an incomplete biographical sketch of Haggard himself; that is, she uses his familial situation—specifically, his position as a younger son, his stern and formidable father, and the death of his own son, Jock—in order to establish his motivations for writing and to outline his supposed project to restore patriarchal inheritance. However, these broad psychologizing connections don’t consider the textual operations of his work. Additionally, McClintock presents biographical information anachronistically—Jock actually didn’t die until 1891 (Cohen 134)—years after King Solomon’s Mines had been written and successfully devoured on the market, and thus what became for Haggard an impossibility of continued patterns of inheritance couldn’t have been a factor in the creation of King Solomon’s Mines in the way that McClintock portrays it to be.

Further, McClintock’s notion of patriarchal re-invention in this novel is backed by her assertion that Haggard viewed writing incessantly as the means by which to stabilize white patriarchy in the colonies. However, we need to consider the chronology of Haggard’s writing and success. He did indeed eventually become “an ‘increaser’ and ‘founder’ by fathering an astonishing body of letters, forty-two romances, twelve novels, ten works of non-fiction, and a two-volume auto-biography” (IL 235), but at the time of writing King Solomon’s Mines, he had been largely unsuccessful and ineffective as a writer. In getting his first work, Cetywayo and his White Neighbours, published, he personally lost £50, and it was “a financial failure” (Cohen 73) for the publishers—it didn’t actually start selling until after Haggard had established his name through the success of his imperial romances (74)—resulting in “indignation and hurt pride” (74) for the young aspiring author. Then, after finishing his draft of Dawn, his first work of fiction, “he sent the bulky manuscript round to one publisher after another—but with no success” (77). He rewrote this text, and “toiled at that book morning, noon, and night” (Haggard qtd. in 79), and when it finally was published, it received discouraging reviews and was on the market ultimately unsuccessful (81). Though his next work, The Witch’s Head was received more favourably, it too fell short of shining literary triumph. Considering his potential for a literary career, Haggard realized that “This was obviously no vocation on which he could hope to support his growing family” (84); “I determined to abandon the writing of fiction” (Haggard qtd. in 84). We know, of course, that this resolution dissolved, but it had become clear to Haggard at the time of working on King Solomon’s Mines that writing certainly brought no assurance of success, economic returns, or social capital. In fact, even after the commercial success of King Solomon’s Mines and She, writing for Haggard continued to have no guarantees—his “About Fiction” (1887), an embarrassing wholesale assault on the writerly craft of English, French, and American authors, was so viciously criticized, as were, in the backlash, his own writing faculties, that Haggard was quite discouraged about the lack of validation that writing returned: “Both Haggard and his reputation were damaged irreparably by the attacks” (126). So, the process of writing King Solomon’s Mines, rather than relying on the creative act as a way to celebrate patriarchal patterns of inheritance, would actually have been much more fraught, uncertain, and vulnerable than McClintock acknowledges; it was not, for Haggard, the virile, powerful device she suggests it signifies for him. Writing would not, as McClintock asserts, “relieve some of the frustration of his impotence” or “return him to health and manhood” (IL 240).
The question of masculinity in this novel plays out on many fronts. The relationships between narrating, masculine authority, and the male body are essential for Haggard’s suggestion that the efficacy of masculine prowess is tenuous indeed. Furthermore, the framework established in *King Solomon’s Mines* for questioning imperial narratives is in turn crucial for understanding the tension between masculine agency and its subjection to the feminized landscape. I also want to address, in the contexts of these frames and underlying suggestions, the complexity of parody in this novel: the triad of writing, authority, and the male body acts as a frame for the legitimization and control of empire—and I want to consider what happens when these structures within male power become deeply fissured within the novel.

**Credibility**

Crucially, the novel itself hinges on the relationship between the authority to write and the maintenance of masculine prowess and credibility—and this authority comes from Quatermain’s righteous claim to deliver the tale simply as it unfolded, to tell the story in a plain, straightforward manner ... it only remains for me to offer my apologies for my blunt way of writing. I can only say in excuse for it that I am more accustomed to handle a rifle than a pen, and cannot

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This might, at least, be Quatermain’s idea, but whether he succeeds or not in proving his credibility and prowess through the story of his adventure is another question entirely. McClintock makes what seems to be a very convincing point about the inscription of the feminized landscape into the imperial male narrative through the mapping of the land by “male body fluids” (*IL* 3). The crux of McClintock’s argument is that the reinvention of white patriarchy hinged on the suppression of female generative authority; however, McClintock’s use of biography is dubious here. Her primary evidence for “Haggard’s fear of female generative authority” (236) is a surmise that Haggard experienced “guilt...for usurping his mother’s generative authority,” which in turn rests on the fact that a year after her death, he published a memorial volume of her work and that he once wrote that her life was “all love and self-sacrifice” (235). From this, McClintock concludes that Haggard struggled with a “pathological anxiety about female generative authority” (235). Meanwhile, Ella Haggard didn’t even die until December 1889 (Cohen 123)—long after his two major works had been published.
make any pretence to the grand literary flights and flourishes which I see
in novels … I venture to hope that a true story, however strange it may be,
does not require to be decked out in fine words. (40)

In other words, Quatermain claims that his style is simple, realistic, and therefore
authoritative. This formal trait of plainness contributes to the aesthetic of the fin de
siècle adventure novel genre as a whole. Elaine Showalter has suggested this may be a
reaction to the domestic triple-decker novel associated with feminine writing (76-83),
and Nicholas Daly suggests that romance was touted as “an antidote to the feminizing”
realist text. Meanwhile, Haggard himself was dissatisfied with the English market’s
affection for “American” novels. He complained of the readership’s taste for works
whose “heroines are things of silk and cambric, who soliloquize and dissect their petty
feelings … Their men—well, they are emasculated specimens of an overwrought age,
and with culture on their lips, and emptiness in their hearts, they dangle round the
heroines till their three-volumed fate is accomplished” (“AF” 293). This taps into the
discourse surrounding gendered writing and national identity, and suggests that the
tastes of the reading public were perhaps not manly enough. That the practice of writing
itself was deeply connected to gendered authority and narratives about the British
character becomes still clearer when we consider the broader historical and
contemporary representations of Africa: those who had been there, seen it, and
survived it, simultaneously demonstrated hardiness, capability, and prowess; and their
representations of that experience both embodied and perpetuated a two-pronged

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70 As Stephen Arata notes, Max Nordeau’s extremely popular Degeneration (1895) associated works that
“signify promiscuously” (Arata 29) as degenerate; by contrast, Quatermain’s claim to a “blunt way of
writing” is a claim to clarity, directness, and what Nordeau would come to understand as a healthy sort of
writing.
authority. Thus the rhetorical formation and representation of the self are inextricable from the act of writing.

But was the simple “truth” that Quatermain claims to reveal Haggard’s solution to the problem of a literary “atmosphere like that of the boudoir of a luxurious woman, faint and delicate, and suggesting the essence of white rose” (“AF” 293)? Haggard gestures to “the swiftness, and strength, and directness of the great English writers of the past” (293)—but the realization of these qualities is nevertheless confined to the past. As Stephen Arata explains, fin de siècle “romance writers continually announce their inferiority to their predecessors. This is the best out shrunken age can produce, they say … [Robert Louis] Stevenson agrees. ‘It is a small age, and I am of it” (93). Authority over ‘truth’ was now dubious: after the British wars in what was to become South Africa, the context had certainly changed, and the authority of contemporary claims to “directness” had to be challenged. In King Solomon’s Mines, this rooting of authority in masculine simplicity gets destabilized in at least three ways. First, there are pointed discrepancies between the narration and the editorial comments; second, Quatermain is unable to refrain from romanticizing the landscape, falling into those “grand literary flights and flourishes”—or, at least, a bathetic attempt at them; and third, his eroticization of male characters not only undercuts his claim to straightforward representation, but also paves the way for what I will submit is the parodic rendition of manliness that results in undermining the traditional exemplary masculinity that I discussed earlier.

The editorial hand that frames Quatermain’s rendition enables the narrator’s reading practice, and hence his claims, to be undercut (even aside from the fantastical
nature of the adventure), despite his avowal to deliver “a true story.” Upon first spotting Curtis, which, he admits, “excited my curiosity” (44), Quatermain describes him as looking like “an ancient Dane” (44), and notes, “I found out afterwards that Sir Henry Curtis … was of Danish blood” (44). The editor, however, contradicts this interpretation, suggesting, “Mr. Quatermain’s ideas about ancient Danes seem to be rather confused; we have always understood that they were dark-haired people. Probably he was thinking of Saxons” (44). It’s possible that Haggard’s source for this information may have been, and I speculate, James Bonwick’s 1880 ethnological text, Our Nationalities (Pt 1, 60), which was published a few years before King Solomon’s Mines and shared a similar interest in ethnological traits. Bonwick writes that the Danes “were of a kindred blood to the Saxons, and had not that disinclination to a toss on the ocean wave. Their conquest and settlement of nearly every port in Ireland gave the country the blessing of foreign trade” (Pt 1, 59). He also notes, “One of the handsomest races in the world, some would trace their origins to the Tartars of Asia … Whatever their source, they were the grandest race of conquerors, perhaps, known in history … They knelt to no man” (Pt 4, 92-3). Conversely, of the Saxons, Bonwick writes, “They were much nearer the Franks, conquerors of France; but of whom Kingsley said, ‘They were always false, vain, capricious, selfish—the worst of all Teutons … The Saxons,’ he declared, ‘were famous for cruelty. I know not why, for our branch of the Saxons has been, from the beginning of history, the least cruel people of all’” (Pt 4, 58). At the very least, this opens up a tension surrounding how to orient Sir Henry Curtis in terms of conquering and cruelty.
However, this kind of lapse or inconsistency is not singular; Quatermain makes frequent errors in reading and attribution. For example, in a later scene, Quatermain describes the battle between Ignosi’s troops and Twala’s by quoting a verse that he thinks is from the *Ingoldsby Legends* (his favourite book, next to the *Old Testament*):

“The stubborn spearsmen still made good / The dark impenetrable wood; / Each stepping where his comrade stood / The instant that he fell” (183). The passage is not from the *Ingoldsby Legends*, but from Sir Walter Scott’s *Marmion*. It’s highly unlikely that this misquote was Haggard’s mistake, not only because of Scott’s enduring popularity but also because Haggard’s editor, Andrew Lang, was a huge Scott fan. Furthermore, this is an “error” that would have been legible to a reading public for whom Scott’s *Marmion* was essential reading.

“[T]owering above us”: *The Agent Landscape*

But Quatermain’s ability to remain factual should also be called into question upon consideration of his romanticization of the African landscape. His rooting of authority within a “masculine” simplicity of writing gets repeatedly undercut as the novel progresses. When it comes to the landscape, he gets fanciful. At sunrise on their journey, the east began to blush like the cheek of a girl … the golden moon waxed wan, and her mountain ridges stood out clear against her sickly face like the bones of a dying man; then came spear upon spear of glorious light flashing far away across the boundless wilderness; piercing and firing the

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71 See Gordon 297; Bautz 75-114; Cohen 87; and as Nicholas Daly notes, the genre of romance “often strived to establish links to Scott” (17).
veils of mist, til the desert was draped in a tremulous golden glow, and it
was day. (88)

Similarly, when the troop mounts the gigantic rock breasts and approaches the nipple-
like formation, “the flying rays of light from the setting sun … stained the snow blood
red, and crowned the towering mass above us with a diadem of glory” (99). Once they
make it into Kukuanaland, “The brook of which the banks were clothed with dense
masses of gigantic species of maidenhair fern … babbled away Merrily at our side, the
soft air murmured through the leaves of the silver trees, doves cooed around … it was
like Paradise. The magic of the place … seemed to charm us into silence” (108-9).

Thus, despite his earlier intentions, Quatermain cannot resist imbuing his writing with a
whimsical quality; fancy does have a place in his narrative.

Indeed, various other forms of fancy become pervasive in his narrative, but here,
these descriptions employ the language of penetration, prompting a reconsideration of
the relationship between these masculine ‘agents’ and what McClintock calls the
passive landscape in this novel.72 Returning to the passages above, we can see that
this supposed passivity is complicated by the degrees of activity happening in the
feminized landscape. As “spear upon spear of glorious light flashing” shoot “far away

72 McClintock has rebuked the work for its subordination of the eroticized, feminized landscape as well as
female African labour to the penetrative colonial project, arguing that the novel “figures the reinvention of
white imperial patriarchy,” producing “a regenerated white patriarch,” and that “this Victorian bestseller …
is symptomatic of fundamental tendencies emerging in the culture of conquest at the time” (IL 248). For
McClintock this novel is the means by which Haggard “played out his phantasms of patriarchal power in
the arena of empire” (233), and it acts as a fantasy of regenerated white male authority. This restoration
in turn hinges upon the argument that the novel attempts to resolve the problems encountered in
subduing black female labour by explicitly sexualizing the land through the rendition of a mapping of the
feminized landscape “in male body fluids” (3). The writing tool—that is, da Silvestre’s cleft bone,
McClintock argues, invests the white male heirs to history and fortune “with the authority and power
befitting the keepers of sacred treasure” (3). Thus, writing, for McClintock, is equal to the exercise and
exertion of male dominance. For Haggard, however, writing had other associations: “a kind of terror
seizes me lest this fair place should be but a scented purgatory where, in payment for my sins, I am
doomed to write fiction for forever and a day! … For truly it would be a horrible fate to be doomed from
aeon to countless aeon to the composition of romance” (The Days of My Life 88).
across the boundless wilderness” the image of phalluses—belonging to the feminized environment—imbues the landscape with a specifically sexualized power. It is penetrative and culminating, “piercing and firing the veils of mist, til the desert was draped in a tremulous golden glow,” which suggests it has a particular kind of prowess of its own. This implication is strengthened through the breast-turned-phallus, that “the towering mass above us,” but which here is brought in closer relation to the men, positioning them as insignificant next to it. They sit against the snow, which has been “stained … blood red” by “the flying rays of light” in the African sky. The landscape is thus becoming sexually active—and these men are subjected to this activity. Once they cross Sheba’s breasts and descend into Kukuanaland, this subjection intensifies as the “dense masses of gigantic species of maidenhair fern … seemed to charm us into silence.” The British men are enchanted by the “magic” of the place; the landscape is not passive but actively sexual—and sexual in terms of details (such as “maidenhair fern[s]”73 that were not typically disclosed in Victorian representations of idealized female bodies. Thus, not only does this vast body penetrate the men, but the very depiction of this body intervenes in the traditional conceptualization of female sexuality. This echoes strongly with the representations of phallic engulfment that suffused reports of conflict in the Anglo-Zulu War—in terms of both threats from the Zulus themselves and of the environment of Zululand.

73 As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas points out, loose hair was frequently associated with unruliness in the Victorian period (79). This female body is more than ornamental.
“I like your looks”: Male Erotics

In addition to his romanticization of the landscape, Quatermain gets romantic in his descriptions of the story’s other men. In a crucial turn in the plot, the British men and a number of Kukuana loyal to Ignosi unite to wrench authority from Twala. This resistance culminates in a massive battle. Not only is this battle scene romanticized—through the quotation of poetry I noted earlier, as well as through the highly dramatized battle-axe wielding of the gigantic Sir Henry Curtis—but the men’s bodies are also eroticized throughout. While McClintock understands Sir Henry Curtis as the ideal man, the “inheritor” (240) in the system of patrimony, I argue that he is rather the figure around whom homosocial desire and the romance’s homoerotics revolve. That important confrontation and mutual admiration between Curtis and Umbopa near the beginning of the journey where they measure each other up and approve of one another is a perfect example of these dynamics:

Sir Henry told me to ask him to stand up. Umbopa did so, at the same time slipping off the long military great-coat he wore, and revealing himself naked except for the moocha round his centre and a necklace of lions’ claws. He certainly was a magnificent looking man; I never saw a finer native. Standing about six foot three high, he was broad in proportion, and very shapely. In that light, too, his skin looked scarcely more dark, except here and there where deep, black scars marked old assegai wounds. Sir Henry walked up to him and looked into his proud, handsome face.

“They make a good pair, don't they?” said Good. “One as big as the other.”
“I like your looks, Mr. Umbopa, and I will take you as my servant,”
said Sir Henry in English.

Umbopa evidently understood him, for he answered in Zulu, “It is
well”; and then, with a glance at the white man’s great stature and breadth,
“we are men, thou and I.” (70)

It is an interesting mirroring, in which Umbopa is “almost the same but not white,” to
borrow from Bhabha (89), and it plays the sense of mutual embrace on top of a
sexualized description while connoting betrothal. Male erotics continue as Umbopa later
reveals a phallic tattoo:

he slipped off the ‘moocha’ or girdle around his middle, and stood naked
before us … he pointed to the mark of a great snake tattooed in blue
round his middle, its tail disappearing in its open mouth just above where
the thighs are set into the body.

Infadoos looked, his eyes starting nearly out of his head, and then
fell upon his knees. (137)

Building on the eroticization of Umbopa from earlier in the novel, the narrative suggests
that this ‘snake’ legitimates Umbopa’s rule for male onlookers; men here are fixated with
the sign of physical and symbolic maleness itself. On one level, Infadoos’ reaction is a
gesture of submission to his king, but on another it is strongly sexualized. The
homoerotic dynamics transcend the text as readers become drawn into this voyeurism,
likewise becoming implicated in this fixation with sexualized prowess. Indeed, the
persistent popularity of King Solomon’s Mines speaks to an enduring cultural inclination
towards this scene of desire.
Of course, white bodies are also sexualized in this narrative, and Quatermain uses African bodies in order to displace a white, racially homogenous homosexuality. When Good is forced to carry on through half the novel without his trousers to the continual delight of Kukuana individuals who admire “his beautiful white legs” (115), he embodies one fantasy of the white male desired by his Others. But the more obvious object of desire, Sir Henry Curtis, who comes to be “looked on throughout Kukuanaland as a supernatural being” (194), enters into a more complex sexual relationship with the usurper king. As Curtis and Twala prepare for a duel to the death, they face each other while “the setting sun caught their stalwart frames and clothed them both in fire. They were a well-matched pair” (188). This of course recalls the earlier ‘marriage’ scene between Curtis and Umbopa, and its attendant sexual tension—except it seems to move to a post-matrimonial climax: “The excitement grew intense; the regiment which was watching the encounter forgot its discipline, and, drawing near, shouted and groaned at every stroke” (189). Quatermain goes on to describe “Sir Henry himself with his great arms twined around Twala’s middle. To and fro they swung, hugging each other like bears, straining with all their mighty muscles for dear life and dearer honour. With a supreme effort Twala swung the Englishman clean off his feet, and down they came together, rolling over and over on the lime paving” (189). The careful overlay of sexual language in this passage allows for both an intense sexualization of the fight and a protective resistance to precisely this eroticization. Discursively the text has it both ways. When Curtis be-heads the usurper king the corpse crashes to the ground, and in his final exhaustion “Sir Henry, overpowered by faintness and loss of blood, fell heavily across it” (190). In light of the available erotics established earlier in the fight scene, this
climax is doubly coded. The idealized male form, then, becomes a sexually penetrable object.

The line between Haggard’s conformity to the male erotics of the adventure genre and his caricature of them may be fine, but the function of his particularly sexualized depictions of the male form can also be understood as excess when considered alongside other parodic moments in the novel. One example of such excess is the treatment of the men’s decision that “we must eat raw meat” because they could make no fire: “Our life and our vigour came back to us, our feeble pulses grew strong again, and the blood went coursing through our veins” (105). This reads as a hyperbolical rendition of what constitutes manhood, thus parodying dominant conceptions of manliness. Similarly, Foulata’s plea to Captain Good for protection appears as parodic excess. Crucially, Good is notoriously receptive to female advances, of which Quatermain is deeply suspicious. When Foulata offers a pathetic plea to Good to save her from Scragga’s phallic spearhead, the context of her utterance is critical. When a melodramatic wail (“Oh, cruel; and I so young! What have I done that I should never again see the sun rise out of the night, or the stars … Woe is me … Oh, a

74 In Rule of Darkness Patrick Brantlinger, suggesting that “For Haggard … the Dark Continent must be made light” (192), argues that Haggard “maintains a sharp division between savage and civilized; his white heroes penetrate the darkness as representatives of vastly higher levels of social evolution” (192). This perspective, I think, still neglects the complexity of Haggard’s work, and tends to read it as a straightforward fantasy celebrating British imperialism. In a more sophisticated echo of Katz’s pruning of Haggard’s novels to mouthpieces for the author himself, Brantlinger writes, “All of Haggard’s romance, from King Solomon’s Mines onward, can be interpreted as journeys into the dreams of the protagonists and ultimately Haggard himself” (246). He also offers the example of Quatermain’s reaction to Foulata’s death as evidence of Haggard’s stance on the necessary perpetuation of binary forms, taking Quatermain’s description at face value: “I consider her removal was a fortunate occurrence, since, otherwise, complications would have been sure to ensue … no amount of beauty or refinement could have made an entanglement between Good and herself a desirable occurrence; for, as she herself put it, “Can the sun mate with darkness, or the white with the black?” (qtd. in 192). Brantlinger leaves this citation hanging, as if the text’s ostensible positing of white distinction and greatness speaks for itself. In doing so, he disregards the surrounding contexts and signposts of Quatermain’s musings.

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cruel, cruel!” [155]) receives no response from her captors, she appeals to Good, who, we’ve just been told, “was, like most sailors, of a susceptible nature” (153) when it came to women:

With all a woman’s quickness, the doomed girl interpreted what was passing in his mind, and with a sudden movement flung herself before him, and clasped his “beautiful white legs” with her hands.

“Oh, white father from the stars, throw over me the mantle of thy protection; let me creep into the shadow of thy strength, that I may be saved.” (156)

This is not simply an appeal to white strength. The narrative acknowledges Good’s inclination towards women—in contrast to the crustiness of Quatermain, “being elderly and wise” (153)—and demonstrates that Foulata attempts to take advantage of this ‘weakness.’ Additionally, it invokes humorous moments from earlier in the novel, such as Good’s lack of trousers and the absurdity of the story that the British men offer of coming from outer space. Thus here, Foulata’s excessive utterance underlines the male propensity to adopt an identity of protective strength—one that is elsewhere in the novel variously undercut.

Finally, male closeness is something that these characters come to indulge; the three white men hold hands as they creep through the darkness of the eclipse, and again when locked in the mines they “gave way to despair. Laying my head against Sir Henry’s broad shoulder, I burst into tears; and I think I heard Good gulping away on the other side … Had we been two frightened children, and he our nurse, he could not have treated us more tenderly” (223). As the novel plays with this notion of manhood between
the poles of virility and dependency, the homoerotics established throughout the text as part of the discourse of adventure romance rupture the dominant imperial narrative, which insists on a particular kind of normative heterosexual masculinity.

Unhinging Imperial Authority

The inability of the narration of *King Solomon’s Mines* to conform to the aesthetic of masculine straightforwardness so typical of the boys’ adventure fiction genre is key for understanding appropriation and undercutting of this formal trend. Quatermain’s inability to deliver the story either truly or frankly, numerous fissures in the narrator’s claims, and his repeated romanticization and eroticization connect directly to the issue of masculine imperial authority precisely because such authority itself hinges on the axes of the capable manly body and credible male writing. Because imperialism was so dependent on narratives about the nature of manhood, this problem for writing has devastating implications for the justification of imperialism.

Without ignoring *King Solomon’s Mines*’ participation in discourses of racism and misogyny, I contend that it can yet be read, to a certain extent, as an historically specific critique of imperial practice, and is a much more complex text than criticism has acknowledged. Therefore, within the context of the British African imperial project we need to reconsider more carefully, and with more precision, the basis, targets, and mechanisms of colonial anxieties in order to work out how they are actually operating. Haggard, in identifying the inadequacy of one of the ideological armatures of imperial discourse, generates a critique aimed at creating new norms and more effective governmental tactics. To ignore this is to fail to track how imperial fantasy performs its
own symptomatic diagnosis and repair. However, the full implications of this kind of ongoing critique of imperial culture come more fully into focus with the publication of *She*.

**Encountering *She*: The Symptoms of Moral Weakness**

Much of the criticism of Haggard is aware that his texts are discursively volatile, but this volatility tends to be downplayed by assertions regarding the politics of the author or text.\(^{75}\) Whereas much of the scholarship argues that *She* works to recuperate masculinity and assuage anxieties, I suggest that the sense of loss widely acknowledged as pervading this novel is based on a degeneration of traditional chivalric and heroic ideals. These ideals are in fact the target of Haggard’s critique. *She* is concerned with the status of masculinity, but the novel operates by first pointing out the irredeemable flaws in its current conception as confident, heroic, powerful, and so on.

Haggard undermines the conventional model of reproductive heterosexuality that was so fundamental to the model of empire that Victorian Britain espoused in order to legitimize colonialism by foregrounding homosociality and homoerotic tensions between not only male characters but, in figuring “She” as the imperial man, explores homosexual desire across performed genders. Against this backdrop, tragic flaws in the novel’s characters render the conventional masculinity they supposedly inhabit inadequate.

\(^{75}\) Arata, for instance, acknowledges a sense of inadequacy behind the writing of *She* and other texts within the adventure genre: “the theory and practice of the male romance reveals an array of anxieties at once personal, ‘racial,’ political, and aesthetic: anxieties concerning the dissolution of masculine identity, the degeneration of the British ‘race,’ the moral collapse of imperial ideology, and the decline of the great tradition of English letters” (89).
Crucial to accessing Haggard’s critique of ideals of male prowess in the age of imperialism is recognizing She, like King Solomon’s Mines, as playful, silly, humorous, self-deprecating, complex, and ultimately parodic; its central characters resonate with but fall considerably short of traditional exemplarity. The story is framed by an introduction by an anonymous editor who supposedly received Horace Holly’s manuscript of the adventure. On a cold night at Cambridge University, Holly, a distinguished scholar in mathematics, hears a pounding at his chambers and admits his friend, Vincenzo, who, at death’s door, relates to him the long story of his family ancestry. Over two thousand years previously, his Grecian ancestor, Kallikrates—also an Egyptian priest—fled Egypt with his beloved princess, Amenartas, down the coast of Africa. There they encountered a terrible white queen who, as her love for Kallikrates was unrequited, killed him in a fit of rage; Amenartas escaped to Athens and there bore Kallikrates’ child. The princess recorded her story on a potsherd, which passed down the generations until reaching Vincenzo, who then asks Holly to become guardian to his young son, Leo, and to give the boy an iron chest (containing said potsherd), to be opened on his 25th birthday. When Leo does this 20 years later, he finds a letter from Vincenzo Senior suggesting that the said terrible white queen was still alive and that Leo investigate the legend, along with the potsherd, on which Amenartas inscribed a call for vengeance against the undead queen. Consequently, Leo, Holly, and Job, Leo’s nurse, head to Africa in search of the truth of Amenartas’ claims. Off the coast, they and their hired servant, Mohammed, get shipwrecked by a squall and end up in the hands of the Amahagger, who turn out to be cannibalistic subjects of the undead despot, Ayesha, or, She-who-must-be-obeyed. On the way to her lair, the caves of Kôr, Leo inadvertently
marries a local, Ustane, and suffers a deep spear wound in a deadly fight with the Amahagger (who also put a red-hot pot on Mohammed’s head so that they could eat him). He and the other white men are taken to Ayesha, who recognizes in Leo the reincarnation of her beloved Kallikrates. Accordingly, she kills off Ustane, seduces Leo (both he and Holly are entirely defenseless against She’s beauty and fall hopelessly in love with her), and commences plans to take over the world, starting with Britain. Fortunately for the globe’s free citizens, when Ayesha attempts to guide Leo to everlasting life by first passing through a magical pillar of fire herself, her immortality is reversed, and she withers and dies. Job expires of shock, but Leo and Holly escape back to Britain, and Holly’s narration of the strange tale makes its way to an anonymous editor, who publishes and circulates the story.

As the novel unfolds, it enacts three central inversions. Leo, I argue, is not really a normative ideal, as he is often understood, but, effeminized in the neoclassical overtones of his description, is rather camp. I read She not under any of the various frameworks of feminine threat, but as gendered Other—bearing the trace of the dominating male, embodying excessive imperial masculinity, and, in doing so, representing colonialism as monstrous. Holly’s role I consider to invert the tradition in triple-decker British literature of the narrative position of moral centre—he is instead a figure that makes deeply unreliable assertions and whose authority is profoundly undercut, thereby calling into question the historical legitimacy of travel narratives. Understanding Haggard’s text in this way forces a reconsideration of what has tended to be scholarship’s basic approach to cultural roles, motivations, and subtexts of adventure
fiction from this period, and sheds new light on discourses amongst fin-de-siècle masculine coteries.

*An Illusory Ideal*

In exploring the status of masculinity, Haggard first invokes a recognition of an ostensible imperial hero in the blonde, broad-chested Leo76 but then highlights his irredeemable shortcomings. His heroic ideality would seem to be manifested in his crusade for imperial adventure and his dedication to resolving the mystery of the Sherd of Amenartas, and he is also physically desirable within the context of the novel, as women indiscriminately “insist on falling in love with him” (52)—this possibly because, as the editor and his brother observe, Leo is “a statue of Apollo come to life … the handsomest man in the University,” and a “glorified specimen of humanity” (35). Holly repeatedly signals Leo’s physical prowess throughout the novel, frequently noting his size and strength. Leo thus immediately becomes an object of male fascination whose ongoing association with historical grandeur serves to further fetishize him.

The novel’s homosocial saturation is conspicuous. From the overt fetishization of masculine grace, to the primacy of Leo’s patrilineal history (his nameless dead mother is only important enough to temporarily distract Vincey Senior from the legend of Amenartas, who herself plays only a brief functional role), to the male-dominated university, exclusively male society is actively, anxiously, maintained. Holly’s exaggerated tone of jealousy of any form of heterogendered love concerning Leo is made clear when he asserts, “I would have no woman to lord it over me about the child,

76 The success of Haggard’s gesture here is reflected in the fact that criticism has tended to associate Leo with the figure of imperial adventure. See Showalter 78-88; Arata 94-100; Chrisman, “Imperial Unconscious” 46; David 189, 196; Murphy 34; Deane 399.
and steal his affections from me … I set to work to hunt up a suitable male attendant” (50). The narrative thus distinguishes the obsession with male relations that occurs at the expense of women.

But even when women do enter the equation (mostly to further entrench Leo’s desirability and displace the desiring male gaze onto women), Leo remains an object of desire. Women fall in love with him. Leo, in all of his love plots, is rendered passive, and conventionally gendered power dynamics seem to be reversed. His ongoing passivity throughout the novel, from nearly drowning but being saved by Holly’s iron grip to getting rescued by Ustane though still being stabbed by the Amahagger, to being carried across the African interior to being rescued from the brink of death by She to ultimately being compelled to embrace her, is one of his most prominent features.

Nevertheless, the fictional editor, after initially marking Leo as an ideal, reflects on his character after reading Holly’s manuscript of the adventure: “there appears to be nothing in the character of Leo Vincey which in the opinion of most people would have been likely to attract an intellect so powerful as that of Ayesha. He is not even, at any rate to my view, particularly interesting” (39). Meanwhile, to balance this criticism and retain the formula for the romance, the editor surmises that perhaps “Ayesha, seeing further than we can see, perceived the germ and smouldering spark of greatness that lay hid within her lover’s soul … [which,] watered by her wisdom, would bloom like a flower and flash out like a star, filling the world with fragrance and with light” (39). However, floral imagery is atypical for the figuration of a late nineteenth-century muscular Christian hero, even if he is pretty. Thus, rather than recuperating martial

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77 Andrew M. Stauffer summarizes Leo more bluntly: “he remains a beautiful, empty-headed, flat character who moreover is almost entirely passive, someone hardly worth a two-thousand year wait” (17).
masculinity, Haggard uses the figure of Leo to undermine notions of heroism, to feminize and render passive the heretofore celebrated figure of imperialism. Feminized, objectified, and weakened in this way, Leo is thus not the novel’s figure of virile imperial masculinity; in fact, imperial masculinity in its most aggressive form is actually embodied in She.

**British Imperial Masculinity at its Logical Conclusion**

The character of Ayesha has been interpreted variously as “a focus of desires and anxieties related to women’s power” (Stauffer 11), “the ultimate virginal site for exploration and discovery” (15), “an all-powerful mother” (Showalter 84), “an odd blend of the two types [of angel and monster]—an angelically chaste woman with monstrous powers, a monstrously passionate woman with angelic charms” (Gilbert and Gubar 6), as “the quintessential New Woman” (Murphy 58), and as “the ultimate in feminine ‘evil’” (Sinha 35). In other words, She is typically understood as antithetical to the patriarchal, masculine society to which Holly and Leo belong.²⁷

Ayesha is indeed a threatening force, and, taking my cue from Laura Chrisman who rightly points out that Ayesha indicates the complex “ambiguities, ambivalences,

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²⁷ For instance, Arata suggests that She is about “the struggle between ‘eternal’ femininity and male writing” (96), contending that “the power of the pen” is associated with Horace Holly; meanwhile She’s femininity and “beauty [is] at once enslaving and destructive”—she is both “the source and negation of life” (97). Furthermore, She is not just an “embodiment of transhistorical femaleness” (97)—she is multifaceted: a representative of a figure of European legends of African tribes tyrannized by white women, a symbol of oriental decadence, and indicative of the Victorian New Woman. As such, Arata submits, She threatens to displace masculine dominance. David argues that “She discloses late-Victorian fear of assertive intellectual women bent upon visibility in the public sphere” (197). See also LeeAnne M. Richardson’s reading of Ayesha as punished New Woman who refuses to provide biologically reproductive labour in New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction in Victorian Britain: Gender, Genre, and Empire (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2006); and Rebecca Stott, The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press, 1992) for her reading of Ayesha as penetrated colony whose consequent sexual arousal threatens to retaliate on Britain.
and indeterminacies” of imperialism (45), I suggest that the menace She embodies is bound up with two things: desire and government. The first association is two-pronged: She is both the object of desire, to which men become subjected and in the process lose restraint and self control, and the subject of desire, to which She herself is enslaved. The question of government then stems from desire: Ayesha’s obsession with Kallikrates directly determines her despotic control over the descendants of Kôr, and, as other critics have noted, there are some key parallels between her methods and British colonialism. She is thus not set in opposition to imperial masculinity, but rather, she embodies British masculine power at its worst.

Derrida’s notion of alterity provides a key framework through which to read Ayesha. In the chain of signification, the trace of différance “relates no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not” (142-3). Thus, in terms of concepts, the determination of différance “no more allows the opposition between activity and passivity than that between cause and effect, or in-determination and determination,” (147) or the poles of extreme femininity and extreme masculinity, I would add. This dissolution of polarity ties directly back to the kind of Freudian approach to She explored here: “all the conceptual oppositions that furrow Freudian thought relate each concept to the other like movements of a detour, within the economy of difference. The one is only the other deferred, the one differing from the other” (150). The concept of différance thus demonstrates that the two identities of self and ostensible other are

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79 Deane and Reid have also suggested that Ayesha represents a figure of imperialism, though to different effects.
80 As numerous scholars have observed, She seems to gesture to Queen Victoria; Ayesha’s imperial prowess is thus directly linked to Britain’s.
fundamentally linked. In the same way that Ayesha’s eternal life bears traces of death and ghostliness, her extreme femininity, her “greater loveliness” than an “angel out of heaven” (Haggard 260) is not an autonomous concept but rather bears the trace of masculinity. Meanwhile, masculinity in the novel is simultaneously shadowed by Ayesha’s qualities—these supposedly polar depictions are integrally linked, and there are moments of profound slippages between the two.

Scholarship has long since understood the relationship between British identity and British representations of Africa within this framework of slippage. As Patrick Brantlinger argues, Africa typically functioned in the nineteenth century as a kind of darkened mirror of British imperialism itself. The representation of the African Other was a kind of projection of undesirable, repressed qualities of white British subjectivity onto an external form. In this sense, representations of Africa in popular fiction may have elicited a sense of uncanniness amongst readers. Conrad recognized this in his rendition of Kurtz as the embodiment of colonial exploitation and the logical conclusion—madness—of acknowledging the ethics and mechanics of the imperial project. Brantlinger suggests that when the Victorians “penetrated the heart of darkness, only to discover lust and depravity, cannibalism and devil worship, they always also discovered, as the central figure in the shadows, a Stanley, a Charles Stokes, a Kurtz—an astonished white face staring back” (195).\(^{81}\) Brantlinger also remarks that Ayesha figures as an example of the myth of white rule behind African creations when he argues that the “Dark Continent turned into mirror, reflecting on one level the heroic and

\(^{81}\) Ayesha herself is associated with the uncanny. As Holly confronts She for the first time, he experiences that eerie fright associated with recognition of a repressed element: “I felt the gaze of the unknown begin sinking through and through me, and filling me with a nameless terror, till the perspiration stood in beads upon my brow” (143). Sure enough, a “ghost-like apparition” appears, “and my hair began to rise upon my head as the feeling crept over me that I was in the presence of something that was not canny” (143).
saintly self-images the Victorians wanted to see, but on another casting the ghostly shadows of guilt and regression” (195). This reflection of self is not only explored through the imagination of a white presence within these ‘depths,’ but also through the projection of repressed impulses of imperial society, such as going native,\(^\text{82}\) onto the racialized Other.\(^\text{83}\)

However, I want to take She’s reflective quality in another direction and suggest that Ayesha, while at once a reflection of concerns within British society such as the question of the New Woman, is also a representation of white male imperialism: She materializes from a projection of repressed anxieties surrounding male behaviours, institutions, and identities onto the gendered Other. In other words, concerns and critiques about masculine efficacy, eternality, and vulnerability are played out in the dynamics between Ayesha and the primary male characters. Considering the palpability of the homoerotic overtones in She that threaten to tip the work into a steamy tale of

\(^{82}\) The works of Henry Morton Stanley and Richard Francis Burton, to offer just two notorious examples, demonstrate particularly poignant instances of this kind of fantasy.

\(^{83}\) The casting of Ayesha as a figure of imperial masculinity taps into the trope of British narratives using Africa as a place in which to consider the self, to contemplate the nature of existence. She offers a vivid example of this in Holly’s wrestle with “the infinite”: “I lay and watched the stars come out by thousands, till all the immense arch of heaven was seen with glittering points, and every point a world! Here was a glorious sight by which man might well measure his own significance! Soon I gave up thinking about it, for the mind wearies easily when it strives to grapple with the Infinite, and to trace the steps of the Almighty as he strides from sphere to sphere, or deduce His purpose from His works … Full knowledge is not for man as man is here” (123). Holly then goes on to say, “Above me, as I lay, shone the eternal stars, and there at my feet the impish marsh-born balls of fire rolled this way and that, vapour-tossed and earth-desiring, and me-thought that in the two I saw a type and image of what man is, and what perchance men may one day be” (123, my emphasis). This example links the search for ‘the white face’ directly to Ayesha herself. Immediately following his musings about the nature of man as he understands him, Holly “Then fell to reflecting upon the undertaking on which we were bent … Who was this extraordinary woman, Queen over a people apparently as extraordinary as herself, and reigning amidst the vestiges of a lost civilization?” (124). She is thus associated both with questions about the nature of man and with the relationship of knowledge to power. In considering how She maintains her rule, Holly suggests, “The person who found [the indefinite continuation of life] could no doubt rule the world. He could accumulate all the wealth in the world and all the power, and all the wisdom that is power” (124, my emphasis). In switching his gender pronoun, Holly reveals a slippage between Ayesha and masculine rulership as he knows it. Thus questions about male knowledge/power/governance are raised to the level of consciousness, but explored through the body of the Othered woman.
male love that nevertheless maintains a popular heteronormative appeal through the presence of the femme fatale, it is no wonder that Ayesha, the figure of anxiety about the nature of masculinity, is made a woman.84

The Freudian analysis of the figuration of Ayesha offers a framework through which to understand how the novel deals with repressed anxieties about the imperial masculine prowess though the mechanism of Othering. For instance, as the white survivors of the squall (plus the sidelined Mohammed) approach the great rock marking the path to She’s domain, Holly observes that it “was shaped like a negro's head and face, whereon was stamped a most fiendish and terrifying expression … there were the thick lips, the fat cheeks, and the squat nose standing out with startling clearness against the flaming background” (Haggard 74). This construction of racial alterity operates as an expression of the uncanny—the landscape as radical Other links to a dehumanized yet recognizable humanity—and that which is rendered racially, geographically, and radically Other powerfully impacts the subject, Holly. This imposing geological structure is “terrifying” and “startling”; Holly reads it as “an emblem of warning and defiance” (75). In this way the traditionally passive and feminized landscape is rendered agent and threatening.

Elsewhere in the novel, the environment threatens engulfment by a symbolic vagina dentata. Through the squall, personified through its “awful shriekings” and “duller, deeper roar,” comes “the voice of the breakers” (71). The “torn bosom of the ocean” marks the sea as female, while “a little space of open-mouthed blackness”

84 Similarly, in a Hollywood adaptation of King Solomon’s Mines, the sexual tension between males in the original text is managed through the replacement of Sir Henry Curtis with a female character (“the Lady of the Fiery Hair” in the 1937 version) and eventually of the male triumvirate altogether, leaving only Quatermain and the female love interest in the 1985 edition starring Richard Chamberlain and Sharon Stone.
threatens consumption, as do the breakers, “smiting and gnashing together like the gleaming teeth of hell” (71). And, as Rebecca Stott suggests, the description of the treacherous chasm through which the party enter towards the Pillar of Life strongly resembles a vulva (96-97). This threat of being overcome continues as Holly contemplates the sublimity of the African landscape: “To the right and left were wide stretches of lonely, death-breeding swamp, unbroken and unrelieved so far as the eye could reach … To the West loomed the huge red ball of the sinking sun, now vanishing down the vapoury horizon, and filling the great heaven … with flashes of flying gold and the lurid stain of blood” (80-81). The violence apparently underlying “that measureless desolation” (81) is important not only as a dominant and seemingly worn-out trope about Africa, but also because it suggests that the feminized, racialized, radical Other directly threatens male characters and undermines their fortitude. In various ways the British characters are consistently at the mercy of this Other. Crucially, this activity of that which is Other also works to reposition subject and object: agency is subtly and powerfully transformed. There is an important slippage here through which the British subjects become men to whom things happen—rather than saving themselves, external factors come to their rescue—and this in turn creates a slippage between the more concrete positions of self and Other. Because each pole is no longer defined by agency or passivity as antithetical, the locations of subject and object can begin to overlap and blur. This is key for foregrounding precisely how and why She both threatens and embodies masculinity.

If in the nineteenth century Africa becomes a darkened mirror of Britain, then this distancing of repressed fears also happens through the projection of repressed male
anxieties about competency and stability onto women. In Vincey Senior’s letter to Leo, uncertainty, traditionally an ‘unmasculine’ state, is cast onto a female subject: “you will choose to investigate what, if it is true, must be the greatest mystery in the world, or to put it by as an idle fable, originating in the first place in a woman’s disordered brain. I do not believe it is a fable” (58). In other words, Vincey asserts his belief in Amenartas’ tale, but distances himself from the undignified quality of gullibility by setting the responsibility of fallaciousness on his ancestress’ shoulders. Women continue to be construed as embodying the loci of male anxieties; Job’s terror of the forward Amahagger woman who kisses him (99) parallels Ustane’s desire for Leo and foreshadows Ayesha’s fixation on him. English men thus become the objects of desire. As the British arrive amongst the Amahagger, the women “examined us with curiosity, but without excitement. Leo’s tall, athletic form and clear-cut Grecian face, however, evidently excited their attention, and when he politely lifted his hat to them, and showed his curling yellow hair, there was a murmur of admiration. Nor did it stop there” (93). Holly thus projects this fascination with Leo’s idealized form onto the Amahagger women; they take up the place of his desire.

If, however, this projection enables all sorts of homosocial manoeuvres from the preservation of masculine dignity to the erotic gaze, then the novel also demonstrates, by virtue of its resilient silliness, its own awareness of the ridiculousness of the prominent male insistence on pride and its attendant refusal to take women seriously. For instance, Holly, for the very reason of his self-proclaimed misogyny, becomes an object of ridicule. As he approaches She-who-must-be-obeyed with inward trepidation, he refuses the mandatory custom of slithering in subservience and “marched in boldly
after Billali,” (141) his native guide, who himself obeys She’s mandate. But the result is not quite what Holly intended: “it was more or less of a failure … It is so absurd to advance into the presence of savage royalty after the fashion of an Irishman driving a pig to market, for that is what we looked like, and the idea nearly made me burst out laughing then and there” (142). Though reasserting a racialized hierarchy through this comparison, Haggard also satirizes masculine dignity. Similarly, in an earlier conversation between these two characters, when Billali explains to Holly, “In this country the women do what they please. We worship them, and give them their way, because without them, the world could not go on; they are the source of life,” Holly replies, “‘Ah,’ … the matter never having struck me quite in that light before” (120). A joke is made at Holly’s expense, as he, in consciously refusing to respect women, misses what should have been obvious. Through this running tone in the novel, the masculine projection of anxieties onto female figures becomes silly and susceptible to ridicule.

However, beyond the landscape and the Amahagger women, Ayesha is ultimately the most threatening feminized projection of these anxieties; her desire and power surpasses any of those previously explored. Indeed, her strength is one of her most prominent characteristics from the point of her first introduction: “It was rumoured also that she was immortal, and had power over all things … She was obeyed

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85 Again, here surfaces an underlying threat of women taking over.
86 Holly goes on to joke with Billali: “In short,” I replied, quoting the saying of a great man whose wisdom has not yet lightened the darkness of the Amahagger, “thou hast found thy position one of greater freedom and less responsibility” (120). As Stauffer notes (120), this references Gladstone’s 1880 apology to Austria for using “the polemical language” when he had been in “a position of greater freedom and less responsibility” (The Newfoundlander). As a critic of Gladstone, Haggard here highlights problems in the line of reasoning Billali presents, as well as applying it to the notion of intellectual darkness. This also demonstrates Haggard’s willingness to be sarcastic through the earnestness of his narrator in a complex critique of government.
throughout the length and breadth of the land, and to question her command was certain death. She kept a guard, but had no regular army, and to disobey her was to die” (100). Thus, as the narrative reveals that “her word overrides all rights” (120), the idea of rule by force gets further tied into the monstrous—just as the reliance on brutality for the recuperation of masculinity during the Anglo-Zulu War underscored a vicious truth about the mechanics of empire. A reconsideration of Ayesha’s character within this framework of monstrous force thus allows us to read the masculine qualities associated with her as problematic and subject to critique. As the novel explores the use of absolute power as frequently extended by British imperial practice though the distanced, Othered figure of She, who is neither eternal nor invulnerable, it problematizes moral relativism.

In many ways, Ayesha herself reflects the dominant image of British imperialist masculine extremes back to the readership: she rules with an iron fist and her word is law; she is an enterprising scientist whose proficiency surpasses what is known in the rest of the world; and she knows what she wants and takes it without question. Ayesha does not embody the characteristics of passivity, gentleness, comfort and patience that have been traditionally associated with middle-class British women. Rather, her rulership is forceful, impulsive, and unforgiving: “sometimes when they [the Amahagger] vex me I could blast them for very sport, and to see the rest turn white” (146). This gesture to “sport” links back to Leo’s and Holly’s earlier enthusiasm for shooting and further indicates Ayesha’s masculine orientation. Ayesha also occupies the world’s foremost position of technological prowess. She sustains her great age because “I have, half by chance and half by learning, solved one of the great secrets of the world”
(150). She is able to see beyond the immediate through her “font-like vessel” not by “magic,” as Holly cries out, but via her science (150). The same idea applies to her ability to blast and to heal. In addition, She has bred a race of servants, mute and deaf, to attend to her needs: “it hath taken many centuries, and much trouble; but at last I succeeded. Once I succeeded before, but the race was too ugly, so I did away with it … Once, too, I bred a race of giants” (152). If Ayesha, as Holly suggests, is a terrifying creature, then her breeding technology is monstrous—especially since she has no qualms about performing genocide. In associating breeding technology with Ayesha as draconian figure, one of the most celebrated achievements of English science is here associated with immorality.

In true despot fashion, Ayesha’s desires drive all of her decisions. Her longing for Leo impels her to murder Ustane; She, in her dominance, knowledge, power, and desire, embodies the logical conclusion of British martial imperial masculinity. She is, in fact, directly aligned with imperialism: “her proud, ambitious spirit … would, I had little doubt, assume absolute rule over the British dominions, and probably over the whole earth, and though I was sure that she would speedily make ours the most glorious and prosperous empire that the world has ever seen, it would be at the cost of a terrible sacrifice of life” (232-3). It is the confrontation with this truth that renders Holly at once so terrified, yet desirous, of She.

**An Illusory Moral Centre**

While Ayesha is not only herself an unrestrainedly desiring figure, she also raises the problem of uncontrollable desire for the novel’s male characters; indeed, Holly’s
inability to put reason before passion becomes the key factor in his undoing as a trustworthy narrator. She warns Holly who seeks to see her face that “thou wouldst eat out thy heart in impotent desire” (152); men who gaze upon her become inevitably, irretrievably lost in fascination. Leading up to this, Holly is dubious—his supposed self-control is what he identifies as the source of his strength: “I fear not thy beauty … I have put my heart away from such vanity as woman’s loveliness, that passes like a flower” (152). Nevertheless, Holly’s own “curiosity overpower[s]” (153) him, and, of course, his overconfidence in his ability to resist temptation means that he ultimately succumbs to it; it is “by the ban-hounds of thine own passions” that Ayesha predicts he will be “torn to pieces” (154). His manly resolve gets undermined, and She’s power continues to stupefy him. When She questions him about Leo’s scarab beetle, he becomes unmanned: “I fell, then and there, on the ground before her, babbling confusedly in my terror”; his explanation can only be “gurgled feebly” (156). She continues to overpower Holly: “her fragrant breath played upon my face, and made me faint and weak” (182).

This problem of resistance is not really about a male fear of women’s tempting beauty, but rather male fear of becoming subjected to the self’s desires; as Ayesha says, “blame me not if passion mount thy reason, as the Egyptian breakers used to mount a horse, and guide it whither thou wilt not” (153). Although in numerous critical interpretations, Holly is frequently conflated with Haggard, it is absolutely crucial to recognize that Holly as narrator, through his own ethical failings and, as I discuss in the next section, narrative discrepancies and pen-ile inadequacies, is distanced from the reader and rendered an object for scrutiny. His manly resolve undermined, Holly

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87 Ayesha invokes the Greek myth of Actaeon and Artemis. 88 See Katz; Brantlinger; Gold; and McClintock, Imperial Leather.
becomes subject to his lusts, just as Ayesha is—and her subservience proves to be the very reason that “this beauty, with all its loveliness and purity, was evil” (153), for “passion leads me by the hand—evil have I done … and from age to age evil shall I do” (154). Meanwhile, the narrative pointedly extends this struggle between wants and restraint to men generally when Holly suggests, “I would give my mortal soul to marry her … and so, indeed, would any other man, or all the race of men rolled into one” (182). Since this struggle is projected onto woman as external object, She represents the male confrontation with the failure to overcome physical temptation.

This problem foregrounds the trap into which Leo later falls, as he kisses Ayesha over Ustane’s corpse immediately after She murders her. Ayesha’s excuse, “If I have sinned it is for love of thee; let my sin, therefore, be put away and forgotten” (212), uses her end to justify her means—which is the same very simple but misguided logic that underlay violent British imperialism. And, it is the native Ustane who gets wiped out in the fray, a sacrifice that plays into Leo’s vanity. Further, like Leo, our narrator also becomes complicit in She’s justifications. Though initially condemning Leo’s and Ayesha’s wrongs, denouncing, “those who sell themselves into a like dominion, paying down the price of their honour, and, throwing their soul into the balance to sink the scale to the level of their lusts, can hope for no deliverance here or hereafter” (213)—a narrative judgment that clearly highlights the moral inadequacy in Leo—Holly moves to forgive Ayesha’s violence: “No doubt she was a wicked person, and no doubt she had murdered Ustane when she stood in her path, but then she was very faithful, and by a law of nature man is apt to think but lightly of a woman’s crimes, especially if that

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89 He also later asserts, “if anybody who doubts this statement, and thinks me foolish for making it, could have seen Ayesha draw her veil and flash out in beauty on his gaze, his view would exactly coincide with my own” (222).
woman is very beautiful, and the crime is committed for the love of him” (221). Holly’s narrative simultaneously reveals the moral fallacy here and seems to buy into it. His ethics continue to slip as he considers Leo’s luck in attracting the gifts of:

such awful beauty … such divine devotion, such wisdom and command over the secrets of nature, and the place and power that they must win …

it is not wonderful, that though Leo was plunged in bitter shame and grief … he was not ready to entertain the idea of running away from his extraordinary fortune.

My own opinion is that he would have been mad if he had done so. (222)

In this discussion of man’s temptations, notions of “bitter shame and grief” and “awful[ness]” are fundamentally intertwined with “divine devotion,” “wisdom and command,” and “power”; the latter, in the context of force, are inextricable from the former. In this way the narrative concertedly emphasizes that Holly’s ethics are indeed degrading. This can be tracked temporally. In editing his own narrative, Holly adds a footnote to his description of Ayesha as “a mysterious creature of evil tendencies”:

After some consideration of this statement, I am bound to confess that I am not quite satisfied of its truth. It is perfectly true that Ayesha committed a murder, but I shrewdly suspect that were we endowed with the same absolute power, and if we had the same tremendous interest at stake, we should be very apt to do likewise under parallel circumstances. (221)

Holly’s initial impression of “evil,” points to the transformation he undergoes—his morals deteriorate as he succumbs to desire and bends principles in order to authorize immoral
actions through legitimizing the pursuit of lust. Passions thus subdue and unman both men: “We could no more have left her, than a moth can leave the light that destroys it” (221). The slope is slippery: first yielding to temptation, then justifying moral lassitude, and then finally moving to permit murder, Holly’s ethical dissolution illustrates one of the central problematics plaguing imperial Britain. In addition to withering as the text’s supposed moral centre,90 Holly also demonstrates further the alignment of his inner self with the desiring, dominating, despotic She. Their fallible morals91 are entirely commensurable, further stressing Ayesha’s figuration as the repressed, feared, and distanced self that martial imperial masculinity projects onto the Other.

*The Demise of British Masculine Prowess*

This understanding of Ayesha as Othered self rather than Othered woman has implications beyond the rethinking of textual anxieties surrounding the New Woman, female authority, and female power; it necessarily implies an important criticism of male behaviour and male writing. The scene of She’s demise illustrates this precisely, demonstrating both her transformation into a relic of writing and the men’s rather ‘unmanly’ reactions:

“Oh, *look!*—*look!*—*look!*” shrieked Job, in a shrill falsetto of terror, his eyes nearly dropping out of his head, and foam upon his lips. “*Look!*—*look!*—

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90 Because of this he fails to occupy the role that the moral centres of Jane Austen’s and George Eliot’s works occupy; Haggard’s centre comments on morality by failing to live up to it.

91 Reid also draws attention to Holly’s willingness to deceive when he shoots the eland buck, “exploit[ing] the Amahaggers’ primitive, fetishistic response for his own ends” (162).
look! she’s shriveling up! she’s turning into a monkey!” and down he fell upon the floor, foaming and gnashing in a fit.

True enough—I faint even as I write it in the living presence of that terrible recollection—she was shriveling up; the golden snake that had encircled her gracious form slipped over her hips and fell upon the ground; smaller and smaller she grew; her skin changed colour, and in place of the perfect whiteness of its luster it turned dirty brown and yellow, like an old piece of withered parchment. She felt at her bald head: the delicate hand was nothing but a claw now, a human talon like that of a badly preserved Egyptian mummy, and then she shrieked—ah, she shrieked!—she rolled upon the floor and shrieked!

Smaller she grew, and smaller yet, till she was no larger than a she baboon. Now the skin was puckered into a million wrinkles, and on the shapeless face was the stamp of unutterable age. (261-3)

What remains is a “hideous little monkey frame, covered with crinkled yellow parchment” (264). She is represented here as becoming aligned with writing itself, as her white skin “turned dirty brown and yellow, like an old piece of withered parchment.” But if Ayesha represents the dark side of a male imperialist frame, this final scene means that rather than submitting to the inscription of male writing, as has been argued, she, in her shriveling, effectively embodies the demise of male writing itself. This passage also emphasizes the failure of masculinity to live up to its own ideals of fortitude even as it confronts this truth. Holly confesses, “I faint even as I write it,” and

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92 Arata, by contrast, reads her shrunken form as the degraded female body: “Ayesha’s abasement into ‘completed Womanhood’ marks her submission to patriarchy’s ‘eternal law!’ It is also a submission to the power of male writing” (103).
that he and Leo, “Overcome with the extremity of horror … too, fell on the sandy floor of that dread place, and swooned away” (263). Leo’s hair turns white from the shock (265), and meanwhile Job, frothing (in hysterics?) and collapsing from “shattered” (265) nerves, is no nearer to the idealized manly state of stoicism. Indeed, up to this moment, the text has left a trail of evidence of failed male prowess; both central male ‘heroes’ frequently indulge in high-pitched exclamations of panic. From when Holly loses Leo in the squall (70) to Holly’s awakening from a nightmare (88) to Mohamed’s death by hot pot (109), and, finally, to witnessing Ayesha’s final torments, feminizing shrieks abound. Male prowess, in these and other ways, is rendered the object of teasing.

Within this jocular framework, the novel’s repeated play with the notion of the phallus takes on the tone of self-deprecation. Holly’s first encounter with the Amahagger men—those against whom the British pitch their own strength—is mediated by “the flash of cold steel, and a great spear was held firmly against my throat, and behind it other spears gleamed cruelly” (88). The fact that Holly finds himself in this position after waking, shrieking, from his nightmare further emphasizes his vulnerability. Holly then stresses sexual dynamics by noting, after Job “ejaculate[s]” at their arrival, that the Amahagger are all “tall and strongly built … and nude, save for a leopard-skin tied round the middle” (89). The Amahaggers’ fixation on Mahomed (which is later revealed to be rooted in their desire to “eat” him) suggests predation as “Mahomed came tumbling between us, followed by a shadowy form with an uplifted spear … The man advanced, and the tall shadowy form bent forward. ‘Yes, yes,’ said the other, and chuckled in a somewhat blood-curdling tone” (89). The association of the Amahagger men with rapaciousness, with the fear of personal vulnerability here partially displaced
onto Mahomed as racial Other, returns in full force during the hot pot scene. Mahomed continues to be sexualized as his would-be-but-rejected Amahagger lover leads him to the fire: “it was rather owing to the resources of barbarism behind him, in the shape of a huge Amahagger with a proportionately huge spear, than to the seduction of the lady who led him by the hand, that he consented to come at all” (106). Formulaically, white prowess has to prove itself against ‘savage’ sexual aggression at some point. Thus, when Job says “I have, sir [got his revolver] … but Mr. Leo has only got his hunting-knife, though that is big enough, surely” (106), the stage gets set for a racio-phallic confrontation.

Physical struggle involving these phallic weapons—a struggle analogous to colonial wars—then becomes both a key moment of excitement in the novel as well as a way of commenting on the limitations of white prowess. Importantly, the white men in this scene don’t win—they get overwhelmed. Holly depicts Leo “in the centre of a surging mass of struggling men”; the Grecian ideal becomes a phallus himself:

Up above them towered his beautiful pale face crowned with its bright curls (for Leo is six foot two high), and I saw that he was fighting with a desperate abandonment and energy that was at once splendid and hideous to behold. He drove his knife through one man—they were so close to him and mixed up with him that they could not get at him to kill him with their big spears … it was more than man could do to hold his own for long against so many and at last he came crashing down upon the rock floor, falling as an oak falls … (111-12)
Considering the importance of the oak as an old symbol for British imperial strength, this passage is particularly charged, especially in light of the recent failure of the British soldier “to hold his own for so long against so many” at Isandlwana. The prominence of engulfment in this scene seems to gesture directly to representations of British battles with Zulus, with the spears evoking assegais and the imagery of sexually aggressive men swarming the white “tower” from all sides again revisiting numbers of Africans overwhelming the ‘solid’ British force. Thus, Leo’s crashing fall, while at once bound up with the sexualized innuendoes of penetration, simultaneously works as a metaphor for the loss of illusions of insurmountable strength, and readily ties in to the novel’s ongoing preoccupation with the cyclical rise and fall of empires.

In fact, the novel continuously explores the trope of strength turning over as part of a cyclical process. During his discussion of fallen civilizations with She, Holly explains that the great civilizations that Ayesha knows have fallen:

The Persians have been gone from Egypt for nigh two thousand years, and since then the Ptolemies, the Romans, and many others have flourished and held sway upon the Nile, and fallen when their time was ripe … the Greeks of to-day are not what the Greeks of the old time were, and Greece herself is but a mockery of the Greece that was … The Jews are broken and gone, and the fragments of their people strew the world, and Jerusalem is no more. (146-7)

While, as Holly reflects, to “one day … be among those who are lost” is “the lot of man” (74), Ayesha represents the resistance to this cyclical rise and fall of power: “the imperial She” (267, emphasis in original) “would have revolutionized society, even

93 See Bunn 307-8.
perchance have changed the destiny of mankind. Thus she opposed herself against the eternal Law, and, strong though She was, but it was swept back to nothingness—swept back with shame and hideous mockery” (264). This potentially instructional reflection may take on more charge when we consider Billali’s warning to the British: “venture no more into lands that ye know not, lest ye come back no more, but leave your white bones to mark the limit of your journeyings” (278). Thus She gestures towards imperial recalibration.

Since she is aligned with this preoccupation with male wilting and the downfall of imperialism, Ayesha’s death throes need to be reconsidered again in light of both her association with parchment, and the triumvirate of male power I discuss earlier in this chapter: the relations between the prowess of the male body, authority, and writing. Diverging from Arata’s conclusion that “Ayesha is at last fit to be inscribed upon with the ‘inventive pen’ of the male writer” (103), I suggest that Ayesha and her death are used to present this male pen as inadequate.

This suggestion of inadequacy represented through failures of writing is an argument that also threads through King Solomon’s Mines. Arata rightly observes that the connection between writing and the male body is exemplified in Jose da Silvestra’s use of his own blood to produce the map to the diamond mines, as well as his use of a pen made from the bone from a corpse, which Quatermain takes up and continues to use. Just as King Solomon’s Mines makes connections between male prowess and the efficacy of writing, She links competence to narrative: Holly’s and Leo’s abilities to resist desire, their moral judgments, and their physical strengths are certainly overpowered, but most crucially, there exist profound limitations for Holly’s narrative in its entirety.
Holly frequently asserts that his writing is unable to capture experience. As Ayesha unveils and Holly perceives the tension between her “radiant countenance” and the “shadow of sin and sorrow” he confides, “The man does not live whose pen could convey a sense of what I saw” (153). During her demise, he writes, “a kind of change came over her face, a change which I could not define or explain on paper” (260-1). Beyond this, Haggard explores the idea that the act of writing is potentially not as powerful as the act of interpreting. The fictive editor divests himself of responsibility: “of the history itself the reader must judge. I give it him, with the exception of a very few alterations, made with the object of concealing the identity of the actors from the general public, exactly as it has come to me … To me the story seems to bear the stamp of truth upon its face. Its explanation I must leave to others” (38-9). In leaving “truth” to the reader’s judgment, the editor claims to provide the raw materials, while the reader is figured as actively interpreting or crafting the reading. This positions writing as craftless—thus renouncing reliability as well as power.

Further, as in *King Solomon’s Mines*, there are clear narrative discrepancies. For instance, She’s editor asserts that he changed the names of the protagonists for the protection of their privacy. However, Holly’s narrative records Ayesha as reflecting on our ‘ideal’s’ name: “Leo! … why, that is ‘lion’ in the Latin tongue. The old man hath named happily⁹⁴ for once” (152). She also notes that “‘Holly’ is a prickly tree” (145). But because the relation of “lion” to our protagonist’s name, and the semantic connection of our narrator’s name to the tree, either the editor didn’t change the names, or Ayesha didn’t say these things. For another example, Holly’s inability to recognize what was

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⁹⁴ Billali referred to Leo as “the lion,” just as he named Holly “Baboon” and Job “the pig.”
about to happen to Mahomed while the fire for the hot pot ceremony was being stoked is an unlikely slip-up for an Oxbridge professor at the top of his class.

Finally, the narrative is consistently self-reflexive at the same time that it enacts the prejudices it represents. For instance, Holly distances his record from Job’s racism by categorizing it as an object for observation and mocks Job’s suspicion of their hired crew (68-9) even while indulging in racist comments. As well, Holly names and acknowledges both his own and Job’s misogyny, rendering both characters the potential objects of readerly mirth as they suffer female advances (98). Lastly, as I explored earlier, the narrative distances itself from the glorification of male pride as Holly reflects on his absurd refusal to bend before a “savage queen” (143). Certainly, this treatment is problematic as it can enable to novel to contain potentially dissenting discourses, but my point is that the narrative is more complex than simply propagating racism and sexism.

Thus the narrative of She is much more slippery and more profoundly questioning of male competence than critics have heretofore recognized. But, if the reader misses the moral problematics of Holly’s rationalization of Leo’s desires, his own perspective, and She’s actions, and the double narrative voice that condemns this, Haggard offers a final clue that something else is amiss in Holly’s narrative—and it comes down to the professor’s credibility. He writes of She’s last moments:

I never saw anything like it; nobody ever saw anything like the frightful age that was graven on that fearful countenance, no bigger now than that of a two-months’ child, though the skull remained the same size, or nearly so,
and let all men pray to God they never may, *if they wish to keep their* reason. (263, my emphasis)

The implication here is that the shocking events that instigated Job’s mortal fit and that aged Leo 20 years, were so traumatic as to deprive onlookers of their senses. Thus, Holly indicates here that his own ability to reason—and his failure to provide an ethically sound analysis of the adventure supports this—has been lost before he even sat down to write this narrative. In turn, everything in this ostensibly imperial adventure needs to be questioned because the male pen, far from being “recuperated” has been profoundly undermined. This ultimate instability is Haggard’s comment on imperial masculine writing.

**Vulnerability**

Haggard’s novels thus undercut the efficacy of the muscular male body, male history, and their attendant imperial authority all at once, and in playing up the queerness of their adventuresome protagonists, invert the model of heterosexual reproductive labour that the rhetoric of colonialism demanded. This critique from Haggard’s early adventure romances also resonated within a larger literary debate about the efficacy and sustainability of traditional models of what was understood to be masculine writing. While Andrew Lang, working to “counteract modern ennui” (Arata 92), applauds romance as a genre of escapism at the same time as claiming that romance texts were powerful because they related experience in plain, ‘real’ language, Haggard’s works expose the fallacy that experience can be captured in the sort of writing that Lang championed. In highlighting the instability of frame narration and
'history' more broadly, these texts not only comment on representations (of Africa, of colonialism, of male identity, of history) in fictional literature, in which the use of imagination is foregrounded by the nature of the genre, but they also impinge upon the ways in which travel literature, as well as the eyewitness accounts, testimonials, and reports from colonial outposts are read and understood. Pushing hard on the notion of reliable narrations and accounts, *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She* suggest instead that in the face of desire for the African body—whether it is sexual desire or desire for approval—British manhood collapses, becoming vulnerable to the fissures of its own construction of self. Because, as this work underscores, the traditional model of masculinity was losing relevance in the face of fast-paced global changes, the unsustainability of imperial manhood—and imperial narrative—comes into focus. If these works suggest that severe consequences would come of not rethinking traditional conceptions of masculinity for the British male, national, and literary body, then the subject of my next chapter, Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*, explores the terror of the arrival of these consequences for the legitimacy of imperial writing.
Haggard's imperial romances sold extraordinarily well, *King Solomon’s Mines* selling 31,000 copies in its first year of publication (Monsman, “DD” 12) and *She* 30,000 in the first few months (Cohen 232). Their success not only indicates that the British market was primed for this kind of imperial fantasy, but also that Haggard's critique of the genre was co-extensive with its propagation. This complex relationship between the writing and the un-writing of imperial fantasy is a crucial issue for subsequent imperial romances. In many ways, *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She* carve out the discursive space necessary for later writers to explore the instability of imperial fantasy and its attendant fantasies of colonial masculinity. Perhaps the most important successor to Haggard’s strategy of auto-critique is Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* of 1897. While *The Beetle* is most frequently read in relation to Stoker’s *Dracula*, \footnote{Reasonably so; *Dracula* and *The Beetle* share thematic and structural similarities but were also published within months of each other.} it echoes in important ways, as I explore later in greater detail, Haggard’s critique of narratives of empire in Africa. Haggard’s and Marsh’s works certainly explore similar preoccupations with the threat of foreign invasion from an imagined African Other, anxiety surrounding gender and heteronormativity, and the perturbation elicited from the confrontation with alternative knowledges. But they also share similar strategies of critiquing imperial writing, likewise playing with the relationships of authority between the impermeable male body, narrative, and governance. In all three texts, the narratives are framed by an editorial force; Haggard’s and Marsh’s works are deeply suspicious of narratives of
governmental policy, use the frame narrative to demand critical reading of the claims of figures of authority, and point to imperial decay and problems of governance. Lastly, while Haggard sets his imperial adventures in far away, imaginary exotic lands and Marsh brings his concerns to within the physical bounds of the nation, both authors clearly managed to execute their arguments using motifs that tapped in to timely and popular fears, imaginations, and desires, for all three works were incredibly successful commercially and widely read—*The Beetle* proved to be a very popular work similarly attuned to its audience’s interests and reaching 15 printings by 1915 (Wolfreys 11).

Like *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She*, *The Beetle* explores similar dangers of gender disruption, capture, physical dissolution, bodily penetration, and threats to normativity and to “white skin” (Marsh 86) in imperial fin de siècle Britain. In a four-part narrative, we begin with the perspective of Robert Holt, an unemployed clerk, who, emaciated and exhausted, crawls into a mysterious house in search of shelter. Inside, he is hypnotized, assaulted, and possessed by the Lord of the Beetle, a priest(ess) in the cult of Isis. He’s sent on a mission across London to steal a packet of letters from celebrity parliamentarian Paul Lessingham, written by the latter’s fiancé, Marjorie Lindon, which the Beetle then uses to draw both her and Sydney Atherton, her confidant and would-be lover, into its schemes. Sydney’s narrative relates his supposed devotion to Marjorie, his fiery competition with Paul, and key aspects of the Beetle’s plan for vengeance. Marjorie’s story then takes over to recount her dedication to Paul, her encounter of the near-dead Holt, and the events leading up to her capture by the Beetle. Detective Champnell’s narrative follows, accounting for Sydney and Paul’s truce in
order to rescue Marjorie, the newly formed band’s chase after the Beetle and its victim, her ultimate (if incomplete) rescue, and the culmination of various narrative threads.

One way to read the search for Marjorie is as a quest that galvanizes male bonds, establishes the efficacy of the British network of communication, patriarchal social networks, technology, railways, transportation, the telegraph, and so on. This would complement a reading of Paul Lessingham as a broken man rebuilt, having overcome his cowering fear of his Eastern adversary and being sparked into action by the threat of losing his prized fiancé.96 Seemingly affirming this transformation, Champnell observes Paul’s arousal into activity: “he was getting a firmer hold of the strength which had all but escaped him ... he was becoming more and more of a man” (315). This narrative of recuperation of “men [who] are like women” (Halberstam 100) runs parallel to the trajectory of recovery undergone by one key protagonist from Dracula. Jonathan Harker, whose imprisonment and symbolic cuckolding by the count gets avenged when he defeats the vampire by driving a stake through his heart, reversing the dynamics and becoming the penetrator. However, not only is this resolution absent from Marsh’s The Beetle, but, upon closer examination of the dynamics between characters, genders, and narration, the idea of noble male lines of defense is profoundly troubled. Critics of this text tend, to varying degrees, to recognize the gender-disrupting work this novel enacts, but frequently read The Beetle as participating in, rather than challenging, an extant imperialist patriarchal ideology. For instance, Kelly Hurley takes an Orientalist reading of The Beetle, suggesting that textual stereotypes that construct the oriental as ‘Other’ serve a unifying function for the culture that produces them, a culture which, in the service

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96 Jennifer McCollum (180) and Patricia Margree (77) read Lessingham in precisely this way.
of a coherent and idealized self-definition, denies those qualities that threaten or undermine its own self-image and projects them onto extracultural groups (or marginal groups, like women, within the culture).

On a level of more material and more insidious effects, a paranoiac text like *The Beetle* serves to reflect and feed into British suspicion of contempt for Egyptians during a period of heightened British military activity in Egypt. The perceived inhumanity of the Orient becomes a rationale for subjecting it to the humanizing civilizing process of British colonization.

(196-7)

While recognizing that Said’s seminal model of the West’s construction of the East is crucial for understanding the terms by which *The Beetle* engages the Egyptian Question and its impact on British manhood, I also want to suggest that the novel’s rendition of the East is more complex than Hurley allows; rather, while on one hand activating numerous stereotypes about the Orient and articulating various forms of threat, Marsh’s text at the same time points to these fears in order to draw readers’ attention to his real target: British conduct. Julian Wolfreys is less condemning than Hurley, arguing that “the human-scarab pursues the politician Paul Lessingham, less from some irrational and barbaric Oriental blood-lust, than out of a sense of injustice for the ‘barbaric’ English defilement of ancient Egypt’s sacred locations” (24). The critical turn here towards British morality is important, but I want to focus in further on Victorian gendered power dynamics, and explore the register on which morality and reliability are played out in the novel.
Victoria Margree refreshingly examines an ostensible conflation of Marjorie as the masculine New Woman and Holt as the emasculated vagrant clerk, contending that “this conflation constitutes an attempt to safeguard a version of virile British masculinity against what are perceived to be the joint threats of gender and class instability” (64). Recognizing that the novel explores problems within the nation and suggesting that the novel presents London as a place of “of social and psychic disintegration” (65), Margree goes on to argue that this degeneration is, as far as The Beetle is concerned, bound up with the New Woman’s ambitions and therefore disruption of gender norms. In other words,

If nineteenth-century culture saw the New Woman as desiring masculinity, then The Beetle performs what would be a particularly pointed punishment for wishes that are seen to be impertinent: that of fulfilling them, in order to reveal to the wisher the inappropriateness of their desire, and to allow them to suffer the consequences of their own impropriety … The full meaning of Marjorie’s punishment is this: that if she, as representative of the New Woman, desires masculinity, then the novel will give her what she wants, but in doing so will reveal to her that this is the only type of ‘man’ a woman could hope to be: one that is equivalent to the dissolute, enfeebled and emasculated Holt. The masculinised woman is like the emasculated man, the text seems to be saying; each is only a desperately inadequate embodiment of the masculinity to which they enviously aspire. (74)

In this reading, The Beetle is dedicated to maintaining patriarchal dominance. However, Margree’s observations here might ring truer if the novel presented any other model of
masculinity that the British public could venerate. Margree notes the unreliability of Holt's and Marjorie’s narratives but stops there; she does not explore how Atherton’s, Lessingham’s, and Champnell’s are also problematic. In fact, she writes, “The narrative authority that comes from telling and knowing what one has told, being able to retain it in consciousness, potentially to defend or confirm it, belongs solely with the male establishment figures” (78). This is precisely what I want to contest; I maintain that the male characters that Margree identifies as stable and authoritative are in fact just the opposite. She points out that Marjorie is “presented as a thoroughly domesticated wife in a merely supporting role, and as a rather fragile being who is somewhat infantilised by her husband’s benevolent paternalism” (78), but fails to interrogate the terms of Paul's weaknesses as well. Diverging from Margree’s assertion that “The Beetle seems to achieve a position of stability, as the threats presented by foreign invader, New Woman, urban destitute and emasculated man have been defended against, and the virility of British masculinity and political institutions thereby confirmed” (78), I suggest that when we consider the flaws—both personal and narrative—of the other male characters, it becomes clear that this novel is less a critique of the aspirations of the New Woman and more a condemnation of the narrative of British manliness—and of governmental policy. Thus, my methodology in this chapter involves a detailed consideration of the relationship between character, body, and narrative stability that my analysis of Haggard’s texts established.

As I have suggested, The Beetle lends itself to being read alongside Haggard’s work. The archetypal invaders, The Lord of the Beetle and Ayesha, share some strong and obvious similarities: both possess magic of sorts; are lusty, ostensibly female but
transcend boundaries of gender, monstrous, the object of both fascination and 
repulsion, driven by their desires, associated with wealth and sexual aggression; and 
hold men in subjugation via the power of either gazing or being gazed upon. Because of 
this last quality, these figures suggest disruption because they possess power over the 
will of their male subjects. But in Marsh’s novel, this “foreign” threat actually succeeds 
in entering the metropole, penetrating not just narratives instantiated from travel abroad, 
but those materializing from within the metropolis. In other words, it’s not just 
imperialism beyond the nation’s borders that embodies deficiency, but also the national 
body of writing—imagination itself—that gets penetrated.

Within *The Beetle* itself, there are reasons to consider that Marsh may be 
gesturing directly to Haggard’s highly popular texts. Marsh had entered the popular 
literary scene by the time Haggard’s best-sellers were published, and would almost 
certainly have read them. As Wolfeys surmises, Marsh makes an indirect allusion to 
*She* when Sydney says to Paul, “I think it possible, even probable, that, here and there, 
in Africa—Africa is a large order!—homage is paid to Isis, quite in the good old way” 
(111). Outside Lessingham’s house, Atherton and Woodville glimpse a shadowy figure 
most likely indicating the Beetle’s presence. Sydney’s confession that “I feel as if I were 
in the presence of something uncanny” (134) gestures to Holly’s discomfort as he 
approaches She and admits, “the feeling crept over me that I was in the presence of 
something that was not canny” (Haggard, S 143). But there are other commonalities 
that capture both a preoccupation with bodily destruction and with masculine physicality. 
*The Beetle*’s reference to cannibalism amongst the cult of Isis insofar as “The ashes of 
the victim had been consumed by the participants” (Marsh 244), along with the thematic
of live burnings (244) and “human sacrifices” (243), hearkens back to the hot pot and ghastly bonfire scenes in *She* and the mass sacrifices in *King Solomon’s Mines*. Meanwhile, a parallel with the Lacanian scene where Curtis and Umbopa admire each other as mirror images emerges as Sydney relates his encounter with the London constable: “I looked at him, and he looked at me, and then when we’d had enough of admiring each other’s features and striking proportions,” the constable offered crucial information about Marjorie’s abduction (281). This last quotation is particularly useful for articulating Marsh’s tone—he at once gestures to the earlier parody and amplifies the ridicule of masculine militant normativity. With this in mind, I suggest considering the ways in which Marsh may not only be picking up Haggard’s central considerations, but may also be using some of the strategies Haggard employs in critiquing imperial manhood, especially using xenophobic discourse about the Other in order to comment on the state of domestic matters.97

Situated within the genre of late Victorian Gothic fiction, *The Beetle* exhibits the theme of decline and loss so typical of texts of this period. As Stephen Arata has noted, fin-de-siècle works frequently articulated “unwieldy … anxieties, including but not limited to the retrenchment of empire, the spread of urban slums, the growth of ‘criminal’ classes, the proliferation of ‘deviant sexualities’”(2), and, as I will argue, questions of the efficacy of trade, Western knowledge, and national masculine prowess. There was also concern with “reverse colonization,” which was often expressed through narratives where “what has been represented as the ‘civilized world’ is on the point of being

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97 Numerous critics have used Freudian analysis to comment on the ways in which the Beetle as foreign other represents repressed Victorian fears about imperial practice and colonial guilt; my argument here aims to show that the novel is a strategic critique of imperial masculinity and its narratives.
overrun by ‘primitive’ forces,” and which often featured a linkage “to perceived
countries—racial, moral, spiritual—within Great Britain itself” (108).

Working through this lens, my intention is to explore cultural preoccupations with
the instability of masculinity, the penetration of the male body, and the dissolution of
narrative efficacy. As these concerns are instantiated in The Beetle, the novel needs to
be situated against the context that British institutions were facing international
challenge, that trade was coming under increased pressure, that anxieties about sexual
exchange and contagion were coming to the fore, and that the Egyptian Question and
the Mahdist menace loomed on the horizon. I argue that this text, in the face of these
considerations, investigates but leaves unresolved the possibilities of dissolved
masculinity, an unraveled Western knowledge system, and the institution of British
history and written discourse formation as insufficient foundations for reality at the turn
of the century. As I’ve noted, Marsh pointedly sets his text not in the colonial sphere but
in the heart of the metropolitan empire, in readily recognizable space. For instance, as
Holt enters the Beetle’s lair, he compares the plush carpet to the turf of Richmond Park
(48), and as he embarks on the Beetle’s mission, he crosses London eastwards through
Walham Green, Lillie Road, Brompton, Fulham Road, Sloane Street, Lowndes Square,
and so on (Marsh 70). Later, when Marjorie is captured, she is “borne through the heart
of civilized London” (293). Thus Marsh’s novel literally brings the impacts of imperial
projects in Africa—especially Egypt—on British masculinity to the home front.

A short bit of context is useful for understanding this impact. Egypt featured
prominently in late nineteenth-century British affairs. Although as early as the 1780s,
British notions of Africa as merely miserable and impoverished, influenced by
“stereotypes determined by the slave trade [that] governed European ideologies” began to yield somewhat to “[t]he idea of a heavily populated African interior with established cities and states, commercial networks, and markets for British goods” (Pratt 70), it was really in Victorian Britain that Egypt, as Gilbert and Gubar put it, “became more than ever a focal point for imperialist anxieties and passions,” and came to symbolize “the mystifyingly obdurate power of what we might call geopolitical otherness” (26). This was due in no small part to the significant role of Egyptian campaigns in the Napoleonic Wars. As a result, Egyptian lore and imagery was increasingly infusing British art and literature. Volney’s *The Ruins; or, Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires and the Law of Nature* (1791) and Flaubert’s letters to his mother and friends, along with his journal entries during his travels in Egypt are just a couple of culturally significant testaments to this. Even J.W. Buel described Egypt as “the parent of human advancement” that “gave to the world the genius of substantial progress, which developed the highest intellectual faculties, builted [sic] magnificent cities, established museums of arts, set examples of human aggrandizement, produced surprising results in engineering, created sciences, and gave form to government and law” (33). In the political sphere, Egypt was also venerated. As Joseph Chamberlain publicly acknowledged in 1890,

> Thousands of years before this country [Egypt] was inhabited by the English race, thousands of years before we have any record whatever of our history, of our conditions, of our population, Egypt was a powerful Empire with a great and refined civilisation; and even to this day in Egypt there exist the ruins of this civilisation to attest the influence, and the
power, and the cultivation of dynasties which held their sway there, at a
time which goes back to the earliest records of our biblical history … I
could go on for a considerable period … in telling you of this marvelous
picture of a long-lost civilization, which has been unveiled for us by recent
discoveries. (32-3)

Thus, Britons were beginning to recognize “the complexity (or at least the potency) of
cultures that had been thought simple and the sophistication of societies that had been
thought crude,” a process which was tied up with the fact that “anthropological and
archeological researchers dramatized the haunting enigma of human otherness that
might not be, as many Europeans still struggled to believe, inferior, but merely different”
(Gilbert and Gubar 27).

More than this, resistance to the notion of African inferiority was strong, as
African voices globally embraced different forms of nationalism, even aside from forceful
rebellion. Some venerated eastern Africa as the source of civilization and as an
alternative motherland. Edward Blyden, for instance, in From West Africa to Palestine
(1873), a travel narrative of his journey to Cairo, contemplates the great history of
Africa, and uses pyramids and architecture to gesture to the magnitude of African
history:

While standing in the central hall of the pyramid I thought of the lines of
[Hilary] Teage, the Liberian poet, when urging his countrymen to noble
deeds:

From pyramidal hall,
From Karnac's sculptured wall,
From Thebes they loudly call—

Retake your fame.

This, thought I, is the work of my African progenitors, Teage was right; they had fame, and their descendants should strive, by nobler deeds, to “retake” it. Feelings came over me far different from those which I have felt when looking at the mighty works of European genius. I felt that I had a particular “heritage in the Great Pyramid” … (Blyden 152)

By the late nineteenth century, African and African-American ministers were establishing independent churches as means of resistance to European and American domination. In South Africa, Wesleyan minister Nehemiah Tile formed a tribal church in 1884 (Shepperson 9), and eight years later, Rev. Mangena Mokone inaugurated the Ethiopian Church (Okigbo 47). These nationalist churches established bonds with similar Ethiopianism movements in America (Shepperson 10-16), as African separatism in the United States was indeed gaining momentum. Celebration and reappropriation of African heritage also appeared in literature. For just one example, Pauline Hopkins published serially from 1901 to 1903 a rewriting of Haggard’s She, in which the plot circulates not around an ancient white woman ruling dark-skinned indigenous people, but the restoration of a descendant, “the long-looked-for king of Ethiopia” (554), to the throne of an ancient and glorious African city. Although this particular novel came six years after The Beetle (and thus Marsh’s novel could not have been a direct response to the assertions Hopkins made), the dialogue about claims to originary civilization was nevertheless circulating internationally for a large part of the late nineteenth century.

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98 Sutton E. Griggs’ Imperium in Imperio (1899) is a powerful example of this.
Certainly though, British preoccupations with Egypt were not confined to forms of cultural fascination and competition, but also encompassed economic and political anxieties—and of course, the Suez Canal (built 1859-69) was pivotal in these spheres. As Arthur Nichols, reflecting on the Mahdist threat, wrote in 1899, “As England’s possessions and colonies beyond the Red Sea are of vital interest, and as her shipping is three-quarters of the world’s (seventy-five per cent of all the ships passing through the Canal being British), it was of paramount importance to her that Egypt should not fall into anarchy or become a prey to some hostile power” (306-7). British stakes in the country were substantial, as Alfred Milner was well aware in 1892,

Here was a country, the very centre of the world, the great highway of nations, a country which during the last half-century had been becoming ever more and more an appendage of Europe, in which thousands of European lives and millions of European capital were at stake, and in which of all European nations Great Britain was, by virtue of its enormous direct trade and still more enormous transit trade, the most deeply invested. And this country … was now threatened, not with bankruptcy merely, but with a reign of blank barbarism. (15-16)

As this demonstrates, for contemporary writers, slipping from economic to moral imperative was easy. Milner goes on: “Let it always be remembered that Great Britain did save Egypt from anarchy, and all European nations interested in Egypt from incalculable losses in blood and treasure” (17). But the country was commercial in other ways, for as Wolfreys notes, “The opening of the canal did not merely serve in the facilitation of trade for the British Empire. It also served as a departure point for an
increasing tourist trade” (21): Egypt provided “the advantages of climate, exoticism, [and] monuments of ancient culture” (Hobsbawm, AC 205). However, as Alise Bulfin rightly points out, “While its codevelopers France and Egypt pinned great hopes on the canal, Britain was understandably suspicious of an endeavor that could potentially undermine its global imperial dominance—it would bring India nearer, but also make it more vulnerable to rival powers” (411). And though the British would end up with control of the Suez in 1875, due to the failing financial resources of France and Egypt and Disraeli’s purchasing of shares, the canal would continue to signify a potential weakness, especially considering emergent threats to British command over the region. Four years later, Egyptian resistance to the Khedive would increase as the National Movement took root⁹⁹ and in 1881, the Mahdi would declare himself spiritual leader of Muslims in the Sudan, with which the British were also involved. This resistance culminated in the siege of Khartoum (1884-5), in which the iconic General Gordon lost his life, subsequently sparking public outrage in Britain and a call for military retribution. Importantly, the question of dubious efficacy had already been raised; the Nile Expedition that aimed to rescue Gordon was unsuccessful, reaching Khartoum just two days before he was executed, and thus inevitably reinforced an extant sense of vulnerability in the East. Vulnerability, however, was not exclusively manifested in military and economic contexts; there existed a “long-fostered myth that British soldiers, returning from foreign campaigns, such as those in Egypt and the Sudan throughout the 1880s, would bring with them STDs” (Wolfreys 14). As this chapter will show, Victorian anxieties about penetration and masculine efficacy are investigated through the

⁹⁹ As Wolfreys notes, resentment had been building since the British “created a divisive system of rule by placing certain Egyptians in positions of governing power, over both the Egyptians and the Sudanese” (21).
exploration of the effects of invasion of the body—both as physical entity and as narrating, history-making authority. *The Beetle*, in other words, registers the relationship between body and author-ity that Haggard’s texts highlight, and seeks to highlight the various forms of dissolution with which fin de siècle British society was confronted.

*The Beetle*

If the institutions comprising late Victorian British identity—law, order, parliament, science and technology, industry, commerce, and the military—embodied masculine prowess, then *The Beetle* explores the effects within the metropole of threats—of sexual permeations, competing knowledge systems, and the Egyptian Question—to these institutions via a consideration of the efficacy of their various representatives. In other words, Paul’s weakness, Atherton’s moral questionability, and Champnell’s capabilities can all be understood as an investigation into the state of parliament, science, and the law. As I mention above, another way to read Marsh’s novel is as a galvanizing effort that first activates British anxieties about invasion and efficacy, but then calms them by resolving the potential fissures in national cohesion. However, my reading here is different from this in that I argue that the primary preoccupations of this novel are the ways in which manliness fails to uphold itself, the mocking of male attempts to assert honour, and the parodying of masculinity through ridicule and humour. I thus read this text as both anxiety-provoking and playful at the same time.100 Understanding Marsh’s tone is crucial for registering the complexity of his investigations into masculinity. But if it is teasing in this way, this text also, like Haggard’s work, draws its reader into a

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100 As Hurley rightly points out, “the novel even indulges in the traditional comic ending of a triple marriage” (207)—that is, Paul/Marjorie, Sydney/Dora, Percy/Dora’s bridesmaid form couples.
particular fantasy of male subjugation, but indeed a somewhat darker one. In doing so, it illustrates that the fear and fantasy of penetration in fact come from within an imagination that is supposedly bounded by national ideology. As in She, that which is understood as Other is shown to emerge from within—except Marsh takes this revelation to a new level of disconcertion by illustrating the complex relationship between fantasies about the penetration of masculinity and writing, understood as a phallic extension of male prowess, itself.

Marsh’s text extends the fantasy of penetration explored in Haggard’s adventure romances by revving up the sexual energies surrounding desire through narrative form and execution, through the construction of fantasy via what Arata calls the erotics of reading and writing. Moving through an analysis of the novel’s characters and their destabilization of gender boundaries, and then onto a discussion of the problems of narration, I demonstrate the ways in which The Beetle depicts masculinity crumbling, the male body dissolving, and ultimately narrative, as the vehicle of constructing male authority, disintegrating. The Lord of the Beetle is, of course, the ostensible threat to masculinity and Western civilization. It is a figure of hostile penetration: it hypnotizes, mesmerizes, and participates in the cult of Isis, which deploys rape, mutilation, and burning to yield the disintegration of the English body. The threat of hypnosis was particularly unsettling. As Wolfreys explains, “mesmerism provides the opportunity for the unscrupulous predatory alien to control and devastate not merely through physical attack and corporeal destruction, but also through the psychic erasure of the boundaries which one imposes on oneself as the necessary limits of self-definition … mesmerism is analogous with sexual penetration” (13). Natasha Rebry expands, “mesmeric practice
came to symbolically stand in for a number of social issues ranging from the nature of
gender roles to questions of national identity to the strength of individual character”
(139). Thus, the Lord of the Beetle threatens these forms of identity. Further, as a figure
of gender ambiguity, the Beetle resists categorization. As Holt reflects that upon first
seeing this “someone,”

I could not at once decide if it was a man or a woman. Indeed at first I
doubted if it was anything human. But … it was impossible such a creature
could be feminine … His age I could not guess … The cranium, and
indeed, the whole skull, was so small as to be disagreeably suggestive of
something animal. (Marsh 53)

Foreshadowing the transmogrification occurring later in the story, this passage uses
zoological language in an unsuccessful attempt to offer an identifying description of the
creature. As in the accounts that follow, the Beetle resists narrative confinement and
avoids being pinned down as an object of study—and in fact it literally bursts out of the
bucket under which Sydney attempts to pin it (151). Holt later reconsiders the Beetle’s
gender: “I wondered if I could by any possibility have blundered, and mistaken a woman
for a man; some ghoulish example of her sex, who had so yielded to her depraved
instincts as to have become nothing but a ghastly reminiscence of womanhood” (61).
Sydney is likewise unable to place her in terms of age, race, class, caste, or nationality
(140). The creature’s ability to transmogrify and mesmerize constitutes competition
from an alternative knowledge system, while its characterization of both Holt and
Lessingham as thieves (85) provides a counter-narrative to those of the white British
men in this novel. Its voice, likened to a “rusty saw” (85)—an object that coarsely
divides things in to two—comments on Holt’s “white skin” as it entices him to stand by its bedside, objectifying Holt’s race even as it interrogates his sexuality (86). And, certainly, it embodies direct sexual threat, emasculates as it mesmerizes, and haunts those it has penetrated. Just one example of this appears in Sydney’s lab: “There was a sound of droning … the fashion of his [Paul’s] countenance began to change,—it was pitiable to witness. I rushed to him. ‘Lessingham!—don’t be a fool—play the man!’” (183). Thus the Beetle is a lingering presence that threatens to overthrow masculine composure. As Wolfreys puts it, “Marsh’s beetle-human hybrid provides a powerfully exemplary grotesque embodiment of late Victorian anxieties” (19). But where Wolfreys suggests that its “body is grotesque because it is unstable, excessive, ambiguously traced by so many fragments of identity” (19), I want to suggest that the Beetle’s grotesqueness really works to emphasize that maleness and male authority, traditionally associated with fortification and solidity, itself undergoes permeation, lysis, and dissolution. Close attention to the construction of character in the text makes this dissolution evident.

**Subjugation: Robert Holt, Marjorie Lindon, and the Blurring of Gender Identity**

The topic of degraded male pride is presented from the start of the novel in the figure of Robert Holt. Indeed, readerly sympathies may align with Holt because his circumstances suggest that his poverty has more to do with national contexts than with personal deficits. As a clerk, his social position was constantly threatened with the

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101 For a thorough discussion of the ways in which the Beetle’s power to mesmerize undercuts British masculinity, see also Rebry’s “Disintegrated Subjects: Gothic Fiction, Mental Science and the fin-de-siècle Discourse of Dissociation.” (Diss. University of British Columbia, 2013).
slippage from the lower-middle-class downward.\textsuperscript{102} Holt is “not … of the lowest class” (Marsh 165), being “an educated man” (208), and yet he has the door of a casual ward slammed in his face (41), rejected by even the nation’s ‘charity.’ The suggestion is that although there is room inside, those in control won’t admit him in order to preserve space. A fellow tramp remarks, “This is a—fine country, this is,—I wish every—soul in it was swept into the—sea” (44). His narrative suggests that despite unceasing attempts to find honest work, none has been available, which indicates a market unable to support employment for a capable worker: “I had trudged all over London in search of work,—work of any kind would have been welcome so long as it would have enabled me to keep body and soul together. And I had trudged in vain” (55). Even on the day his circumstances drove him to seek shelter in what we learn is the Beetle’s lair, “I had not given up my quest for work till all the shops were closed” (45). In being driven by desperation of hunger and fatigue to this dark house—and in doing so, “leaving civilization behind me” (45)—Holt seems to be failed by the system ostensibly established to protect its citizens: “I had learned, in a hard school, the world’s ingratitude” (47). In one sense, Holt’s departure from “civilization” highlights the failures of a domestic economy that won’t support Holt’s autonomous sustenance. Indeed, Sydney later articulates the denouement of the unfortunate clerk as the responsibility of parliament, admonishing Paul, “Pretty passes you politicians bring men to!” (255), the suggestion being that the system had become emasculating.

But one other key factor is the emergence of the working woman, who took up positions of typist and secretary, and threatened the economic position of men who held

\textsuperscript{102} Further on the topic of degradation, John Tosh suggests that the figure of the clerk works as “a symbol of emasculation and dangerous domesticity” (\textit{Man’s Place} 181).
those jobs (Daly 8; Roper and Tosh 19). As critics have variously noted, Marjorie Lindon figures for the New Woman in this novel. Marjorie exposes from another angle the dissolution of masculinity because she is able to inhabit it; through her, boundaries of embodied gender, both physical and constructed, deteriorate. Although Marjorie doesn’t work, her forthrightness alludes to the socio-economic threat of her kind. She is a disruptive figure, certainly because of her disobedience, her interest in politics, and her assaults on Atherton’s manhood, but also because she provides a critique of “gentlemen,” aristocratic snobbery, and patriarchy through ridicule of her father’s uncontrolled rage at her insubordination: “He [Papa] is always talking about the magnificence and the high breeding of the Lindons, but anything less high-bred would be hard to conceive” (200). She also infantilizes him and his inept utterances: “The rest of papa’s conversation was a jumble of explosions. It was all so sad” (201). Similarly, she reproaches Sydney’s facilitation of her father’s spying: “I have always understood that, in this sort of matter, men pride themselves on their sense of honour being so much keener than women’s” (208). Here, she establishes herself as an authority on honour and, in doing so, creates a gendered inversion of moral jurisdiction.103

So, ostensibly representing the New Woman, her perforations of male institutions are instantiated in her forced cross-dressing (this, to the horror of the novel’s representatives of longstanding British institutions: Paul, Sydney, and Champnell as the

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103 This is a timely strategy. As Marian Sawer argues, it was in the late nineteenth century that gendered metaphors for the state were beginning to shift from a masculine minimalist government to a feminine welfare state, concerned with the political rights of women. The deployment of the “[f]emale personifications of the imperial state, as in the figure of Britannia” (119) helped to shift collective attitudes towards a more favourable view of the social liberalist state, which “had a moral or ethical nature of the kind previously associated with the private sphere” (120).
law, science, and police, respectively. Dress is demonstrated in the novel as quintessential for self-composure. As Holt articulates,

I realized what a ridiculous figure I must be cutting, barefooted and bareheaded, abroad, at such an hour of the night … Apart from all other considerations, the notion of parading the streets in such a condition filled me with a profound disgust. And I do believe that if my tyrannical oppressor had only permitted me to attire myself in my own garments, I should have started with a comparatively light heart on the felonious mission on which he apparently was sending me. I believe, too, that the consciousness of the incongruity of my attire increased my sense of helplessness, and that, had I been dressed as Englishmen are wont to be, who take their walks abroad, he would not have found in me, on that occasion, the facile instrument, which in fact he did. (69)

Once again, Holt’s discomposure here is evident in his rambling prose and the deferral of his ending. In a similar vein, Paul also voices the importance of dressing, critiquing Holt when he finds the “thief” in his study: “Why do you stand there in that extraordinary garment,—it’s worse than nakedness, yes, worse than nakedness!” (77). This is why, when Champnell reveals his theory that “Miss Lindon, at this moment, is … attired in a rotten, dirty pair of boots; a filthy tattered pair of trousers; a ragged, unwashed apology for a shirt, a greasy, ancient shapeless coat; and a frowsy peaked cloth cap,” Atherton and Lessingham are appalled; they “stared at me, open-eyed” (285). They respond to this disclosure with numerous exclamations: “man-alive!”, “Good God!”, “the Deuce!”, and so on. In fact, they become comically rhythmic:
“As soon as the coast was clear he discovered himself to Miss Lindon, who, I expect, was disagreeably surprised, and hypnotised her.”

“The hound!”

“The devil!”

… “He then constrained her to strip herself to the skin—”

“The wretch!”

“The fiend!” (286)

Notably, Atherton and Lessingham were much less indignant of the circumstances when they believed Marjorie to be dead. This might be understood through Margree’s theorization of cross-dressing:

If women behave as men do, then upon what can a distinction between the sexes be based? And if they are able to perform successfully as men, then does this mean that masculinity is always a matter of performance? The questions about the real nature of masculinity that confronted late-Victorian culture are thus the same as the question that The Beetle creates around the masculinity, virility and authority of the figure of the politician Lessingham, whom it charges with the task of defending British identity. If both sexes are (now) in men’s clothing, can a real distinction be found? (73)

In other words, it may not so much be Marjorie’s dignity that is in question here as that of Victorian men themselves. As Wolfrey’s puts it, “the fear for Victorian masculinity is that the New Woman presents a form of parodic masculinity, thereby transgressing both

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104 If this is so, I suggest in what follows that Lessingham fails in this task.
the boundaries of her own supposedly ‘proper’ gendered identity and that of a certain self-defining Victorian masculinity” (29).

Meanwhile, Holt, in approaching what turns out to be the Beetle’s lair in search of shelter, encounters an entrapment that destroys any remaining autonomy. As Jennifer McCollum suggests, the house is presented with “vagina-like imagery” (183): “When he [Holt] sticks his arm through the hole [of the window] he finds that ‘it was warm in there!’” (McCollum 183). While Holt starts out as the penetrator of the space, once inside, the sexual metaphor flips, and he becomes engulfed by “panic” at “the presence … [of] something evil” (Marsh 49). In an attempt to resist this presence in the darkness, Holt becomes rigid and frozen, “stricken by a sudden paralysis” (49), much like Theweleit’s Freikorps officers terrified of flow. As a result, he becomes emasculated: Holt admits, though “I made an effort to better play the man[,] I knew that, at the moment, I played the cur” (49). His bodily control fails, as he is overpowered and “constrained”: “I could not control a limb; my limbs were as if they were not mine” (50). This acute inability is due to the Beetle’s power of mesmerism, but for Holt, the external conditions of poverty are also unmanning:

I take it that the stress and privations which I had lately undergone, and which I was, even then, still undergoing, had much to do with my conduct at that moment, and with the part I played in all that followed. Ordinarily I believe that I have as high a spirit as the average man, and as solid a resolution, but when one has been dragged through the Valley of Humiliation, and plunged, again and again, into the Waters of Bitterness
and Privation, a man can be constrained to a course of action of which, in his happier moments, he would have deemed himself incapable. (50)

Note, even here, his sentence structure renders him a passive figure. But further, in Holt’s condemnation of his own failure to act, there are two possible implications. Either he condemns the political system that has unmanned him and left him vulnerable to this penetration, or, having the “spirit” of the “average man,” he condemns the efficacy of British masculinity in general, with his own domestic failings reflecting the limits of imperial prowess through the shared issue of masculine competency.

With this tension established, the notion of the male body as incapable grows as Holt renders himself sexually dominated by the creature:

On a sudden I felt something on my boot, and, with the sense of shrinking, horror, nausea, rendering me momentarily more helpless, I realized that the creature was beginning to ascend my legs, to climb my body … it mounted me, apparently, with as much ease as if I had been horizontal …

Higher and higher! It had gained my loins. It was moving toward the pit of my stomach. The helplessness with which I suffered its invasion was not the least part of my agony … I had not a muscle at my command. (51)

This, much like the revulsion that Holt describes as the creature “enveloped my face with its huge, slimy, evil-smelling body and embraced me with its myriad legs” (52) presages Lessingham’s description of being captured and sexually assaulted in “that horrible den” (243) in Cairo, where, as I explore below, he is “emasculated” (245) and rendered “incapable of offering even the faintest resistance” (243). Lack of control thus becomes one of the major problems for both men. Indeed, frozen by the voice of “the
man in the bed,” Holt reflects, “such passivity was worse than undignified, it was galling” (52).

There is no question about the centrality of subjugation in these passages—and the characteristics of the subjugator are key for understanding the ostensible threat to masculine prowess. When the man in the bed bids Holt “Undress!”, “A look came on his face, as I stood naked in front of him, which, if it was meant for a smile, was a satyr’s smile, and which filled me with a sensation of shuddering repulsion” (55). The connotations of “satyr” would not only have registered with the readership in terms of lasciviousness and lechery, but also as signaling the blurring of lines demarcating species, the union of two orders coming together in one monstrous body. It is this unclassifiable body, this unknowable menace, that renders Holt “impoten[t]” (62)—thus this power dynamic yields a struggle between forms of knowledge.

The ramifications of this subjugation for the male body, the power/knowledge dynamic, and authorship are shown to be devastating. Returning from his burglary mission, Holt’s body is in quite a state:

I was in a terrible sweat,—yet tremulous as with cold; covered with mud; bruised, and cut, and bleeding,—as piteous an object as you would care to see. Every limb in my body ached; every muscle was exhausted; mentally and physically I was done; had I not been held up willy nilly, by the spell which was upon me, I should have sunk down, then and there, in a hopeless, helpless, hapless, heap. (84)

In other words, the Beetle’s possession of him is destroying his body, which is in turn becoming grotesque. Fluid exchange with the environment through sweat, blood, and
mud renders his body porous and open, as opposed to bounded and closed. This is significant in light of Elizabeth Grosz’s suggestion that it is

woman’s corporeality [that] is inscribed as a mode of seepage … The metamorphics of uncontrollability, the ambivalence between desperate, fatal attraction and strong revulsion, the deep seated fear of absorption, the association of femininity with contagion and disorder, the undecidability of the limits of the female body … its powers of cynical seduction and allure are all common themes in literary and cultural representations of women. But these may well be a function of the projection outward of their corporealities, the liquidities that men seem to want to cast out of their own self-representations. (203)

If the female body is traditionally represented as grotesque and the male body as bounded and closed off, then Holt’s description of his own state becomes fascinating for its challenge to the ontological characteristics of the male body.105 This absence of boundaries is reflected in the very form of this passage from Holt’s narrative. The sentences run on, ramble, and are held together by semi-colons—in other words, closure is continually deferred. At each possible point of suture, Holt’s narrative repeatedly extends through it, refusing to be stitched shut. Additionally, the alliteration in the final sentence here doubly prolongs the closure, not only through repetition, but also through the use of soft sounds. The fricatives of “h” and “s” serve to defy both the boundary of the sentence and of the body; these four words together produce a panting

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105 Minna Vuohelainen makes the point that in this novel, the city of London seems to shrink around and envelope characters through fog, rain, and wind, thus employing the gothic motif of spatial transgression (30-31), but I would also suggest that these elements work to saturate the body and thus threaten its borders.
sound, as the breath quickly moves in and out of the body, circulating convulsively. Thus this passage, both thematically and formally, pushes against the assumption of the male body as bounded.

Meanwhile, the crucial vehicle of Holt’s penetration is surveillance. He reflects that leading up to his invasion, “I had the horrible persuasion that, though unseeing, I was seen; that my every movement was being watched” (49). It is the creature’s eyes that “held me enchained, helpless, spell-bound. I felt that they could do with me as they would; and they did” (53). The erotics of looking are overtly intertwined with power here. Holt’s experience with the Beetle in many ways foregrounds numerous narrative problems to which I will return in the final section of this chapter, but for now I want to recognize the way in which this scene once again foreshadows Paul’s description of his captor in the den: “And, while she talked, she kept her eyes fixed on my face. Those eyes of hers! They were a devil’s. I can positively affirm that they had on me a diabolical effect. They robbed me of my consciousness, of my power of volition, of my capacity to think,—they made me wax in her hands” (240). This surveillance, this visual penetration, is disabling for both men. They are certainly physically powerless, but significantly they also lose the power of utterance. Paul confesses, “I do not think that after she touched my wrist I uttered a word” (240), just as Holt becomes incapable of speaking his own story: “they [the words] came from me, not in response to my will power, but in response to his … what he willed that I should say, I said. Just that, and nothing more” (54). This loss of power over his own narrative has a profound effect on Holt’s sense of prowess: “For the time I was no longer a man; my manhood was merged in his” (54). Thus, as the novel establishes authorship as deeply intertwined with
masculinity and efficacy it becomes important to consider the impacts on British masculinity of narrative inadequacy.

**The Failure of Sydney Atherton’s Narrative Prowess**

But if Holt, as the ultimately subjugated man, has lost his power to narrate, then Sydney Atherton, the man against whom the Beetle’s subjugation through mesmerism fails, “The sensitive something which is found in the hypnotic subject happen[ing], in me, to be wholly absent” (105), retains the privilege of narration. As Rebry points out, the dynamics of mesmerism were gendered (145): the mesmerizer was associated with active masculinity while the mesmerized was associated with passive femininity. Thus, Atherton’s ability to resist the Beetle’s hypnosis affirms his manliness. Sydney, “tall,” “handsome,” and possessing “a grasp of steel,” not to mention a “long, drooping, moustache,” (83) seems formidable to Holt, being “a big man, and very strong” (223), but he also holds a general appeal amongst women. As Marjorie explains: “He is tall, straight, very handsome, with a big moustache, and the most extraordinary eyes” (194). She also admits “that he was quick, and cool, and fertile in resource, and that he showed to most advantage in a difficult situation” (209). For reasons of his substantiality and nerves, not to mention, as Robert Luckhurst does, that Sydney’s “breeding counts” (211), he’s a candidate for the novel’s ostensible traditional hero. And, he succeeds in convincing numerous readers of this, including Margree, who asserts that Atherton is a “largely positively depicted character” (73). Nevertheless, as I go on to argue, this identity acts as a straw man in order to show the ways in which traditional masculinity faces critique.
Indeed, Sydney becomes an object of humour because his embodiment of traditional manhood is repeatedly undercut. In her narrative, Marjorie makes fun of Sydney, belittling his marriage proposal: “It is too comical. The best of it was that he took himself quite seriously” (193). He’s also feminized in various ways. For instance, Marjorie comments on his penchant for fluff: “When he is in the mood on the vital subject of trimmings a woman could not appeal to a sounder authority. I tell him, if he had been a dressmaker, he would have been magnificent” (194). For Sydney’s part, he resents that Marjorie is able “To speak to me … like a woman” (120), as she confides in him, as to a ‘bosom friend,’ regarding her love for Paul. Indeed, she continues to emasculate Sydney by keeping him in the ever-detested friend-zone: “You’re the best of friends, and the worst of lovers,—as the one, so true; so fickle as the other … you have never been in love with me before,—but that’s the merest accident. Believe me, my dear, dear Sydney, you’ll be in love with someone else tomorrow—if you’re not half-way there tonight” (122). (Marjorie proves extraordinarily perceptive, for Atherton has already been admiring Dora Grayling and her hint of providing financial support for his experiments.) Marjorie also infantilizes him, cutting him for his display of jealousy towards Paul: “‘Poor Sydney!—I understand!—It is so sad!—Do you know you are like a little boy who, when he is beaten, declares that the victor has cheated him. Nevermind! as you grow older, you will learn better.’ She stung me almost beyond bearing” (128).

Distanced in these ways from the role of traditional hero, Sydney is also shown to be consistently inconsistent. While Marjorie’s words allegedly devastate Sydney, he, nevertheless, asserts that—and frequently acts as if—words are often meaningless. When Paul appeals to him, “Don’t I tell you that I love her?” Atherton replies, “I know
you tell me, but that sort of thing is easy telling” (133). This is interesting, considering Sydney’s own confessions of desire. When he first professes his love to Marjorie, she calmly replies, “I believe that you yourself have only discovered the state of your own mind within the last half-hour” (94). This rings true for Sydney: “her words … came so near the truth they held me breathless” (94). Further, his reasoning, if it can be called that, can be circular. Berating himself for leaving Dora Grayling “in the lurch” (96), that is, without a dance partner, Atherton fumes, “If any man of my acquaintance allowed himself to be guilty of such a felony in the first degree, I should cut him. I wished someone would try to cut me,—I should like to see him at it. It was all Marjorie’s fault,—everything! Past, present, and to come!” (97). Unable to be consistent in terms of his position as judge or accused, he also vents his emotions by blaming Marjorie, the very object of his desires. Atherton is thus utterly ruled by his emotions. His behaviour doesn’t improve: “Like the idiot I was, I went out into the middle of the street and stood awhile in the mud to curse him and his house,—on the whole, when one considers that this is the kind of man I can be, it is perhaps, not surprising that Marjorie disdained me” (98). From here, Sydney does in fact proceed to stand in the road to curse at Lessingham’s abode.

Atherton’s status as the gentleman scientist is undermined because he is both flawed in his logic and capricious in his emotions. But Marsh furthermore suggests that Sydney’s scientific profession is also morally questionable. He excitedly “plan[s] legalized murder—on the biggest scale it had ever been planned” (102), and there are certain obvious kinks in his ethics:
If weapons of precision, which may be relied upon to slay, are preservers of the peace—and the man is a fool who says they are not!—then I was within reach of the finest preserver of the peace imagination had ever yet conceived.

What a sublime thought to think that in the hollow of your own hand lies the death of nations,—and it was almost in mine. (102)

His ambitions are indeed imperial, tying him directly to an expansionist, belligerent stance of which the Aboriginal Protection Society would have been quite critical (and certainly debates about the effects of colonialism on indigenous populations had been ongoing since before the Society’s foundation in 1837), as we find when we read that Sydney wants to take his experiments of destruction “to one of the forests of South America, where there is plenty of animal life, but no human” (118). Dismissing both the presence of indigenous and animal life, Sydney reveals the morals of his projects to be profoundly misdirected concerning the impacts of military research. Anna Maria Jones likewise finds Sydney problematic, to say the least, fittingly taking issue with his propensity for killing street cats at random:

Arguably, a Victorian audience might have been less shocked by Atherton’s impromptu animal testing than many twenty-first-century readers; however, given the popularity and visibility of the anti-vivisection movement and of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which had been instrumental in passing the Drugging of Animals Act (1876) and the Cruelty to Animals Act (1876), it seems likely that many of Marsh’s readers would have understood Sydney’s actions as at least
legally culpable if not morally reprehensible. Indeed, Sydney’s killing of the
cat violates at least three articles of the Cruelty to Animals Act, which was
designed specifically to regulate experimentation on animals. And, many
readers in 1897 would, no doubt, have been familiar with such anti-
vivisection novels as *Heart and Science* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*
and, thus, would have been prepared to connect Sydney in this scene to
other mad scientists. (78)

As Jones so aptly puts it, “Of all people, Sydney Atherton seems ill-suited to hold ‘the
life and death of nations’ in his ham-fisted hands” (79).

If Sydney weren’t at the same time so charming, charismatic, and self-
deprecating, it would be easy to see him here as the epitome of evil. Within the
narrative it may be tempting to overlook his problematic pursuits because of his
ostensible devotion to Marjorie, his sense of humour, wit, and, apart from his inclination
to orchestrate mass murder, his general likeability. We might even be tempted to focus
disproportionately on the ironic quality of his tone when describing “some of the finest
destructive agents you could wish to light upon” (102). But ultimately, it matters little
whether the readership likes Sydney Atherton; what’s important is that he fails to uphold
the masculine ideals of control, restraint, and honour.

In many other ways, Atherton is unreliable. His moods frequently vacillate and his
impulsive behaviour is the persistent cause for his own regret and self-reproach.
Repeatedly overlooking his commitments to Dora Grayling (96, 153), facilitating Lindon
Senior’s spying on Marjorie’s disclosures from behind a screen (163), and nearly
accepting the Beetle’s suggestion that they join forces against Lessingham (144),
Atherton vacillates continually. But most importantly for my purposes here, there are a few discrepancies in Atherton’s narrative. His perspective doesn’t always line up with those of others. For instance, while Holt describes Paul as “broad shoulder[ed]” (75), Atherton describes him on one occasion as “a stick of a man” (92) and on another as “well hung” (108). Others doubt Sydney as well. Both Lessingham and Champnell wonder why he didn’t stop Holt as the latter escaped from Paul’s house; as Champnell reflects, “at certain seasons, Atherton is a queer fish,—but that sounds very queer indeed” (250). But most significantly, when Sydney and Percy Woodville return to Atherton’s lab after an evening of dining and drinking, Sydney is probably quite drunk (considering their time spent at the club, his boisterous behaviour in the carriage and in the lab, and his absurd decision to conflate Paul Lessingham with a black cat found on the latter’s street), though he never directly admits it. This, along with the likely fuzziness of cogitation brought on by inhaling some of his toxic vapours—indeed, in Sydney’s words, “My own senses reeled” (138)—indicates that his whole rendition of what follows in the lab and his encounter with the Beetle become questionable. As Atherton confesses, “whether or not I had been the victim of an ocular delusion I could not be sure” (145). But yet another reason we need to mark Atherton as unreliable is that he admits to the Beetle that its attempts to con him won’t work, since “I’m a bit in that line myself, you know” (142). Unsurprisingly, he never expands on the particulars of his swindling. Thus, if the ostensible standard of British manliness is feminized, infantilized, vacillating, and profoundly unreliable, then the standard British ideal is very much in trouble.
But not only does Sydney indicate this because he in some ways seems to approach but ultimately fails to embody an idealized normative masculinity, but also because, as a scientist and technological producer whose role is very much bound up with militant imperial imperatives and national prowess, he destabilizes British masculine identity through his embodiment of the disruptive qualities belonging to the very Other to which he’s ostensibly opposed. I suggest, in other words, that Atherton becomes aligned with the East and its attendant threats.

There are numerous hints, for instance, that position Sydney as Other. Although it’s clear that Sydney’s inventions are scientific and technological, this isn’t the way the novel’s prose describes his work. The chapter entitled “Atherton’s Magic Vapour” (131) introduces Sydney’s association with sorcery. His lab is described as a “wizard’s cave” (154), and he boasts to the Beetle, “You may suppose yourself to be something of a magician, but it happens, unfortunately for you, that I can do a bit in that line myself … my stronghold … contains magic enough to make a show of a hundred thousand such as you” (145). Indeed, though he has his own “magic,” Atherton finds himself drawn to the mysterious powers of the Beetle: “If the thing had been a trick, then what was it? Was it something new in scientific marvels? Could he give me as much instruction in the qualities of unknown forces as I could him?” (146). He recognizes the Beetle’s extraordinary abilities, musing, “there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of in our philosophy” (149-50). But Marjorie describes Atherton himself as having extraordinary powers as she explains his sex appeal: “I have heard it said that he possesses the hypnotic power to an unusual degree, and that, if he chose to exercise it, he might become a danger to society” (194). This is seemingly very teasing and
lighthearted in tone, but when we consider Atherton’s other disruptive, destabilizing, qualities and the very real danger to humanity he poses through his “pleasant little fancy … for slaughtering my fellows” (155), his alignment with the Beetle as threat materializes. And, as the Beetle draws a comparison between Atherton and itself, it remarks, “Those who hate are kin” (143). What this means is that threats that have traditionally been associated with the foreign are now being shown as emerging from within male British bodies, within the metropole.

**Paul Lessingham, Foreigner**

With this in mind, I want to turn now to Paul Lessingham and consider the ways in which he, too, represents infiltration of the supposedly foreign into the domestic male body. Similarly to Holt, Lessingham starts out as emasculated. His becomes even more clearly a story of penetration as he relates his capture in Cairo by the Children of Isis. Furthermore, as a public figure, he has no privacy; his identity needs to be protected and his private life preserved. Significantly, by the close of the novel, he doesn’t recover fully and it is implied that he never will. But though Paul may in these ways be a figure of complete penetration, a consideration of who and what Paul Lessingham is and how he functions within the nation reveals him at the same time to be a figure of undecidability.

Descriptions of Lessingham are vague. Holt describes him as “a fine specimen of manhood” (64). The Beetle only says that “he is good to look at”: “He is straight,—straight as the mast of a ship,—he is tall,—his skin is white; he is strong” (64), giving an
idea of manly qualities rather than a physical image of Paul. Sydney, as we know, gives a different account altogether. But while Lessingham’s body resists being confirmed, the same is true of his character; the back-story is heterologic. The Beetle describes him as “all treachery,” “false,” and “hard as the granite rock,—cold as the snows of Ararat. In him there is none of life’s warm blood” (64). Importantly, the Beetle’s story doesn’t match up with Paul’s; while the latter maintains he was taken prisoner and subjugated, the Beetle purports to seek revenge on Lessingham for “Her whom he has taken to his bosom” only to “steal from her like a thief in the night” (64). While the Beetle gives over to these reflections, Holt notices in its voice “a note of tenderness,—a note of which I had not deemed him capable” (64). Meanwhile, for Marjorie, Paul is “stronger, greater, better even than his words” (187). And then again for Sydney, Paul is an empty person: “If you were to sink a shaft from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, you would find inside him nothing but the dry bones of parties and politics” (97). This last typification catches at the insubstantiality of both Paul’s character and body. Elsewhere, readers are discouraged from being certain about Paul Lessingham; he’s secretive, reticent, and very keen on hiding his past from Marjorie (251). Further, no interiority for Paul is offered—glimpses of his internal state are only provided through the lenses of other characters. And what these characters seem to know of him is only what “all the world knows” (63, 75, 121, 158, 170, 250); a public persona is presented, but the private remains hidden, without substance. His presence is iconic rather than material; he is “the god of my [Holt’s] political idolatry” (76), while the phrase, 

106 The emphasis on height and whiteness, however, is reminiscent of Haggard’s treatment of Leo in She.  
107 This anticipates Marlow’s description of the brick maker, the “papier-mâché Mephistopheles,” in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, as hollow: “it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe” (26).  
108 “what is known to all the world” (250).
“The Great Paul Lessingham” (75), is loosed repeatedly and inherently signals inadequacy. But most importantly, like the Beetle, Paul is unclassifiable and resists really being known.

This discrepancy between outward greatness and inward weakness is crucial for understanding Paul’s dual functions of penetratee and penetrator, especially considering that Holt’s characterization of Paul articulates his importance as national figurehead for the turn of the century. Publicly, Lessingham is steadfast: “Paul Lessingham’s impenetrability is proverbial. Whether on platforms addressing excited crowds, or in the midst of heated discussion in the House of Commons, all the world knows that his coolness remains unruffled” (75). However, his supposed “invulnerable presence of mind” (75) deserts him when Holt calls out “THE BEETLE” (76): Paul is reduced to a “frightened figure,” “crouching his back against the bookshelves, clutching at them”109 (76). In other words, “the manhood had gone out of him” (208). Later, in Atherton’s “wizard’s cave,” a photogravure of a beetle renders Paul “a nerveless terror-stricken wretch, groveling, like some craven cur, upon the floor, frightened, to the verge of imbecility, by a shadow” (126). This is of course because he is haunted by the being that made him a “fibreless, emasculated creature” (245) in the Cairo den.110

But in so many ways the public shell is important to the people. And indeed, more than anything else, Lessingham’s identity and substance are comprised of and constructed by his words. They are, in fact, his means of enchanting. As Sydney

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109 This mirrors Holly’s reaction when Ayesha angers at the sight of Leo’s scarab ring, and he falls to the floor gibbering.
110 Like Holt, Lessingham claims that his subjugation was due to previously having been compromised: “I was still weak from the fever which I had only just succeeded in shaking off, and that, no doubt, had something to do with the result” (240).
observes, Paul in the House is “To his finger-tips a fighting man … He was coolness itself. He had all his faculties under complete command” (126). Thus, even Atherton buys into the exterior performance:

It did me good to hear him … It was very far from being an ‘oration’ in the American sense; it had little or nothing of the fire and fury of the French Tribune; it was marked neither by the ponderosity nor the sentiment of the eloquent German; yet it was as satisfying as are the efforts of either of the three, producing, without doubt, precisely the effect which the speaker intended. His voice was clear and calm, not exactly musical, yet distinctly pleasant, and it was so managed that each word he uttered was as audible to every person present as if it had been addressed particularly to him. His sentences were short and crisp; the words which he used were not big ones, but they came to him with an agreeable ease. And he spoke just fast enough to keep one’s interest alert without involving a strain on the attention. (126)

Not only is Paul’s particular rhetoric identifiable in contradistinction to other national styles (and thereby appealing), but also, he seems to speak directly to the British citizen, appealing to his or her values and identity. And significantly, it’s not what Paul says that’s important—Sydney doesn’t focus on content—but rather how he says it that creates an impact through affect. What’s operating successfully for Paul is form and presentation. This is where his manly bearing is manifested—masculinity is tied up with efficacious performance. So, Paul represents—somewhat emptily, for we are never shown the substance of his words—a focal point of hope for British citizens (including,
even, his rival), a belief in British politics, and faith in the British governmental system. In fact, rhetoric continues to take on greater and greater import as Paul disarms his opponents:

He found their arguments, and took them for his own, and flattered them, whether they would or not, by showing how firmly they were founded upon fact; and grafted other arguments upon them, which seemed their natural sequelae; and transformed them, and drove them hither and thither; and brought them—their own arguments!—to a round, irrefragable conclusion which was diametrically the reverse of that to which they themselves had brought them. And he did it all with an aptness, a readiness, a grace, which was incontestable. (127)

We begin to see here that Paul’s skill in manipulating words becomes fundamental to understanding his significance within the novel. Because Atherton concentrates on Paul’s modes of expression, his grace, and his performance—suggesting that these are the elements that make writing convincing—readers of this text are asked to be aware of performance, and thus to consider what its motivation is and why it is effective, for “It is something, after all, to be able to appeal successfully to the passions and aspirations of your peers” (127). Marjorie as well, though she notes that one key speech was about “the Eight Hours Bill” (187) and gives a few more details about Paul’s left reformist stance, responds to his rhetoric emotionally: “The speaker’s words showed such knowledge, charity, and sympathy that they went straight to my heart. After that I read everything of Paul Lessingham’s which I came across. And the more I read the more I was impressed” (187). Notably, his written words are the means of her enchantment
and of “the first stirring of my pulses” (187). In light of these emphases, I suggest, first, that Paul functions here as a kind of word wizard, or mesmerizer, of the citizenry, occupying a position that is very much aligned with two other magicians in this text—Atherton and the Beetle. Secondly, Marsh argues in this novel that the efficacy of narrative and narrative forms are limited by instabilities and contradictions highlighted by the foreign threat but instantiated within British male narratives themselves.

The instability of Paul’s narrative demonstrates this precisely. The Beetle’s earlier prediction of the violent dissolution of Paul’s body does seem to unfold, from the parliamentarian’s professed “local lesion” (115)—a breakage in the internal membrane and rupture of blood vessels—to his demonstrable crumbling: “I was conscious of his pallid cheeks, the twitched muscles of his mouth, the feverish glitter of his eyes … The mental strain which he had been recently undergoing was proving too much for his physical strength … he was nearer to a state of complete mental and moral collapse than he himself imagined” (292). Importantly, his physical weakness is linked to his narrative prowess,¹¹¹ which also threatens to fold in on itself. While I have illustrated above the ways in which gendered bodies are shown to be unstable and grotesque, I want to turn now to the ways in which the novel argues that narratives emerging from these bodies are also frighteningly unstable, and therefore anxiety-producing.

**Leaky Narrative: Penetration, Flow, Decay**

Indeed, the solidity of narrative comes under strong critique. The four-part narrative structure enhances the possibility of heteroglossic representations while also

¹¹¹ Another example of this can be seen in the inability of Holt—physically the weakest character—to narrate for himself in the larger documentation of this case.
purporting to cover numerous sides of the case and thereby presenting a more objective, informed perspective. As D.A. Miller discusses in his treatment of Wilkie Collin’s *The Moonstone*, a seminal work of detective fiction that shares this kind of structure, there are problems with taking for granted that a multitude of narrative voices will deliver a heterologic rendition. Miller identifies in Collins’ *The Moonstone* Bakhtin’s notion of a monologic voice—that is, a voice that “continually needs to confirm its authority by qualifying, canceling, endorsing, subsuming all the other voices it lets speak” (25)—despite the multi-perspective structure. But in Marsh’s *The Beetle* the narratives, while in many obvious ways may seem to confirm one another, as *The Moonstone*’s narratives do, are actually profoundly unreliable and contradictory.

The late-Victorian interest in hermeneutic method and close reading is instantiated in this novel in at least three ways. First, it engages with the problematic, so fundamental to detective fiction, of using information to track down truth. Secondly, it asks readers to themselves be critical of narrative, not to passively imbibe it. Thirdly, it cultivates criticality in the readership by forcing evaluation of characters’ discernment. And certainly, the reading practices of these characters are by no means infallible. There are issues with Sydney’s reliability that I have already explored. Holt’s narrative likewise opens up a number of problems. For one thing, as Champnell discloses at the end of the novel, Holt himself did not in fact write ‘his’ narrative; rather, it has been compiled second-hand through Marjorie and Sydney—but I’ll return to this later. Secondly, in assuming the Beetle is male because “it was impossible such a creature could be feminine” (53), Holt opens up his powers of discernment to critique. In fact, Holt admits to being suspicious of tricks being played on his “abnormally strained
imagination” (76) in the first place. Further, unanswered questions arise from Holt’s narrative. He notices, when he breaks into Lessingham’s house, “examples of various kinds of weapons—among them, spear-heads” (73). These are not for display: this “fine, spacious apartment [was] evidently intended rather for work than for show” (72). So, why are there spearheads in Paul’s study? In fact, why doesn’t Paul provide the filler for this encounter in the reconstruction of Holt’s narrative? He, rather than Marjorie and Atherton, would be the obvious choice to illuminate these events. But again, this gestures back to the novel’s refusal to offer any interiority from Paul or to link him directly to the reader in any way, maintaining him as an enigma. Thus, while Holt’s narrative—a good chunk of the novel—and Sydney’s, for reasons already explored, are dubious, it is Paul’s story of his capture in Egypt, framed by Champnell, that may most unsettle the notion of narrative stability.

Paul’s story about his captivity in Egypt at the hands of the Priestess of Isis is not a cleanly enclosed, complete, or contained story; he rambles, interrupts himself with metanarrative reflections, and refers back to the present moment, disrupting boundaries of time and locations of the present. These incisions into his narrative are frequent: “You will smile,—I should smile, perhaps, were I the listener instead of you” (240); “I say with little appearance, for some appearance of exaggeration I fear is unavoidable” (241); “You must forgive me if I seem to stumble in the telling” (241); “I do not, of course, pretend to give you the exact text of her words, but they were to that effect” (241); “And here, Mr. Champnell, I wish to point out, and to emphasize the fact, that I am not prepared to positively affirm what portion of my adventures in that extraordinary, and

112 Considering the violent implications of ‘trophy’ collecting that I explore in chapter one, the presence of spearheads here suggests that there may be more to Paul’s past and inner desires than is made explicit.
horrible place, was actuality, and what the product of a feverish imagination” (242); “I have hesitated, and still do hesitate, to assert where, precisely, fiction ended and fact began” (242); and so on. Not only does he keep disrupting the flow of events in his tale, he also pokes holes in its own truth value—in other words, his own methods of narration make it leaky, uncertain, and unbounded.

And while he is able to offer what I am arguing is a narrative in grotesque form, his mode of expression has been yet further compromised. Paul’s trauma manifests itself in the inability to recognize written language, to produce it, and to speak: “I suffered from a species of aphasia” (246). When he tells his story to Champnell, he can’t utter the name of his tormentor—and this reflects his impotence: “You see for yourself, Mr. Champnell, what a miserable weakling, when this subject is broached, I still remain. I cannot utter the words the stranger [Holt] uttered, I cannot even write them down” (249). Significantly, this unraveling of narrative prowess is sexualized: “The most dreadful part of it was that I was wholly incapable of offering even the faintest resistance to her caresses. I lay there like a log. She did with me as she would, and in dumb agony I endured” (243). Thus, the British subject is seemingly depicted here as penetrated as a consequence of Eastern desire. However, it nevertheless appears that desire for the exotic, to be desired by the exotic, and for possession of qualities traditionally associated with the East simultaneously underlie the British imagination.

This is clear in the mundane references to the East throughout the novel. Sydney refers to the East via “the Koh-i-noor” (95), gesturing to the Punjab, in his mention of “hieroglyphics” (95), gesturing to Egypt, and, by describing Percy’s writing as “cuneiform” (96) (as reflective of the fact that he’s a “champion hasher” [95]),
hieroglyphics are reduced to “a study in madness” (95), something non-sensical. The ways in which the East features in the novel can be as direct as these references, or as subtle as the framing of invasion, as in the case of Atherton registering “A keen north-east wind, warranted to take the skin right off you” (96). Meanwhile, there is the suggestion that the foreign space and the domestic space collapse into one another. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Holt’s comparison of the Beetle’s carpet to the city commons, his eastward passage across London, and the sense that he leaves “civilization behind” even in the heart of the capital all suggest this. In fact, the notion that there is a difference between foreign and domestic is directly challenged: Atherton highlights an ostensible difference in geographical spaces, claiming, “this is London, not a dog-hole in the desert,” to which the Beetle replies, “what does it matter?” (106).

But making sense of these imbrications of culture and space is an imperative explored through the quest to arrive at some concrete knowledge of the East and its agent—and that’s where Champnell comes in. Since he’s a detective, “it falls on him to draw together the various strands, to decipher the clues and provide a sense of closure, though … as it turns out, this can hardly be said to happen” (Wolfreys 26), for Champnell’s narrative is entirely inconclusive. And in this way, Champnell’s analysis of this case forces a reconsideration of the notion of writing as a concretizing power. Its ostensible function is to record and nail down events, but it cannot contain the disruption the Beetle instigates. Champnell’s narrative fails to capture history, and it does not contribute to a stable reality; in other words, this encounter with empire refuses to be contained. This is interesting in light of Thomas Richard’s argument that the imperial archive, the obsessive control of knowledge and the accumulation of data, was used to
build empire; *The Beetle*, I suggest, demonstrates some considerable limitations to the solidification of knowledge through ‘authoritative’ male writing. Indeed, Champnell’s narrative, instead of providing satisfaction, explanation, and demarcation of boundaries, in fact does quite the opposite.

Champnell’s narrative, in my reading, serves two major functions. First, in terms of dealing with masculinity, it provides a critique of fin de siècle romantic and militaristic male prowess. Second, in terms of dealing with narrative inadequacies for the project of consolidating masculinity, it illustrates leakiness and instability, profound contradictions in questions of protection and fortification of boundaries, and the grotesqueness of fantasy and erotic experience.

In providing a somewhat removed perspective, Champnell’s narrative works to parody the forms of masculinity in which both Atherton and Lessingham attempt to indulge. Champnell presents the idea that violence seems to make Paul a man once more; when Lessingham “shook Sydney as if he had been a rat,—then flung him from him headlong on to the floor,” Champnell reflects, “Never had I seen a man so transformed by rage. Lessingham seemed to have positively increased in stature” (253). Even Sydney rewards him for this:

> By God, Lessingham, there’s more in you than I thought. After all, you are a man. There’s some holding power in those wrists of yours—they’ve nearly broken my neck. When this business is finished, I should like to put on the gloves with you, and fight it out. You’re clean wasted upon politics.—Damn it, man, give me your hand! (254)
This episode activates and presents one model of masculinity—the lover sparked into violent action at a threat to the object of his interest, while at the same time, through physical dominance, forging or repairing fraternal ties—but ultimately one that fails to be sufficient. As we know, Paul’s recovery is incomplete, for soon after this boost of energy, we find “this Leader of Men, whose predominate characteristic in the House of Commons was immobility, was rapidly approximating the condition of a hysterical woman. The mental strain which he had been recently undergoing was proving too much for his physical strength” (292).\textsuperscript{113} But also, Sydney’s characteristically unpredictable reaction to Paul’s attack on him works to establish a parodic treatment of masculine competition where yielding to the stronger victor supersedes all other considerations. Indeed, Sydney continues to render himself a ridiculous character through his love of violence: “I stood cooling my heels on the doorstep, wondering if I should fight the cabman, or get him to fight me, just to pass the time away,—for he says he can box, and he looks it” (281). Violence and competition are thus here presented as consequences of boredom and frustration rather than as necessary or noble.

As the search for Marjorie proceeds, Champnell’s narrative goes on to ridicule this competitiveness, which in some ways is more about male honour and devotions than about Marjorie. For instance, Atherton and Lessingham are both dramatically indignant at the prospect of Marjorie’s death, but Champnell’s treatment of their lamentations undercuts the possibility of pathos by contrasting their expostulations with drier, more subdued descriptions and by illustrating the competitiveness underlying their

\textsuperscript{113} Arata describes Nordeau’s notion of hysteria (as explored in his widely-read 1895 publication, Degeneration) as “the last station on the road to degeneracy” (29). Paul’s ‘hystericia,’ which implies narrative dissolution, thus signals the crumbling of stability.
expressions of grief. For instance, Paul establishes his devotion to Marjorie by
threatening Sydney: “If hurt has befallen Marjorie Lindon you shall account for it to me
with your life’s blood” (265). Sydney then counters by bidding his own dedication: “Let it
be so … If hurt has come to Marjorie, God knows that I am willing enough that death
should come to me” (265). Enter Champnell to frame their antics: “While they wrangled,
I continued to search” (265). In other words, while these two lovers continue to quarrel
over which of them is more dedicated to the maiden, the detective focuses on her actual
rescue.

Subsequently, when Marjorie’s discarded garments are found, both lovers jump
the gun in assuming her death and professing to avenge it. Snatching at a tress of
snipped hair, Paul exclaims,

“this points to murder,—foul, cruel, causeless murder. As I live, I will
devote my all,—money, time, reputation!—to gaining vengeance on the
wretch who did this dead.”

Atherton chimed in.

“To that I say, Amen!” He lifted his hand. “God is my witness!” (265)

Champnell’s use of “chimed in” matches the register of neither Atherton’s nor Paul’s
noble vows of retribution; instead, through its contrast, it signals to the readership to
understand these declarations as melodramatic. Further, this treatment frames these
men as being a bit too eager to accept that Marjorie is dead, and instead leap to
establish their own nobility. In effect, the position of righteous indignation at an imagined
wrong\textsuperscript{114} is undercut, leaving open the possibility of rethinking the legitimization of
‘revenge missions.’

Historically, the notion of revenge was in the air in connection with Egypt.\textsuperscript{115} General Gordon’s stand at Khartoum had been a hot public topic for the previous thirteen years, and the outcry after his death was still active. Writing in 1886, Thomas Archer said of Gordon,

Of this hero—whose noble and simple character, and marvelous personal authority over all those who came within his influence, eminently fitted him for a leader of men\textsuperscript{116} … he is still the central figure in the later history of British intervention in Egypt and the Soudan. The attention of the whole civilized world has been fixed upon him, the admiration of people of every nation has been aroused by his simple, unselfish courage and devotion, and men and women throughout Europe and America have mourned his death. (136)

Gordon’s death was like an open wound in Britain; it was regarded as evidence, in the public’s perception, of the empire being in danger (Laffer 15). As John Tosh puts it, “No imperial event at this time occasioned more alarm or soul-searching” (\textit{MM} 194). Importantly, this had direct implications for imperial manhood. Because Gordon was “regarded as a prototypical figure of British masculinity within its African Empire” (Laffer 14), his death was “seen as a failure of the British system, and by extension a failure of the imperial man” (15). And in addition, this death was never resolved, as his remains

\textsuperscript{114} While Marjorie’s kidnapping is real, her murder is prematurely imagined.
\textsuperscript{115} And, as Wolfreys notes, one of the reasons Marsh’s novel was so popular was the prominence of recent events in Egypt and Khartoum (22).
\textsuperscript{116} Note the echo of Champnell’s description of Lessingham (see page 186).
were never recovered: "Without a body, there was never a sense of finality about the life of Gordon—which allowed different people with different political agendas to project what they wished into the void he left behind" (15). One of these agendas involved a revenge mission to “smash the Mahdi,” as Gordon had propounded (53). This “Re-conquest of the Sudan” (13) was not imposed until 1898, but politically the question of retribution was present since the Siege of Khartoum. This means that Marsh was navigating a very politically and emotionally charged topic in writing about a perceived threat from the East; any critique of imperialism would therefore have to be fairly subtle.

Considering this gesture toward vengeance upon the East, the introduction of the ill-spoken ex-soldier turned cab driver is timely—as is Champnell’s short reflection about him. When Sydney hands him a revolver and instructs him to shoot the foreigner if he spots him, Atherton promises the driver, “it won’t be murder” (267) (Atherton’s own implications in the constitution of “murder” resonate here). The cabbie replies, “I don’t care if it is … I used to fancy my revolver shooting when I was with the colours, and if I do get a chance I’ll put a shot through the old hunks, if only to prove to you that I’m no liar” (267). Champnell’s processing of this exchange—“Whether the man was in earnest or not I could not tell,—nor whether Atherton meant what he said in answer. ‘If you shoot him I’ll give you fifty pounds’” (267)—subtly but clearly troubles the normalcy of militaristic aggression towards the Other.

Thus we can begin to see how, while this narrative draws attention to problems of masculinity, it simultaneously demands critical reading practice by unraveling itself, giving indications of profound instability. Problems with Champnell’s narrative go beyond his inability to wrap up the story with a clean suture. In this sense, it fails to
provide a complete archive of the events related. But the contradictions in Champnell’s story indicate that reading cannot be a passive experience. For instance, as he wraps up he writes that an English boy was brought in to authorities in Egypt in “a state of indescribable mutilation” (296). This continues the theme of dissolution; his body, but also his mind, had been rent, for he died “without having given utterance to one single coherent word” (297). However, this statement comes on the heels of Champnell’s other note that the boy had screamed, “They’re burning them! they’re burning them! Devils! Devils!” (297). While they may not explain the entire situation, these words obviously do express a clear meaning. Soon after this, Champnell writes that “Paul Lessingham … has ceased to be a haunted man” (320). Well, almost: “None the less he continues to have what seems to be a constitutional disrelish for the subject of beetles, nor can he himself be induced to speak of them … Also I have reason to believe that there are still moments in which he harks back, with something like physical shrinking to that awful nightmare of the past” (320). From this, it sounds like Paul, despite Champnell’s assessment, is still very much “haunted.”

Indeed, as the novel gets closer and closer to its conclusion, more and more narrative problems are opened up, not least significantly the perforations in the notion of authenticity. It is only in the last chapter that we read that “Paul Lessingham” is a front name (319). Because this is not disclosed at the start, it works to force a rethinking of what we’ve been asked to believe all along. Furthermore, we learn that Marjorie’s narrative was written during a period of madness; “she was for something like three years under medical supervision as a lunatic,” and then her “restoration … was a matter of years” (319): “while mentally, she still hovered between the darkness and the light,
her one relaxation was writing” (321). Although “she told, and re-told, and re-told again, he story of her love, and of her tribulation … [h]er MSS invariably began and ended at the same point” (322)—but not necessarily did they contain the same ‘middles.’ This, undoubtedly, colours the reliability of her rendition. Even Champnell cannot offer a particularly reliable account, as it is “several years since I bore my part in the events which I have rapidly sketched” (319). As for Holt, we learn that his narrative is a composition of information related to Atherton (who we can only assume has been asked to provide an account at the same time Champnell and Marjorie have set theirs down—that is, many years after the fact) and Marjorie (who, as we know, has to work back across the divide of madness to recount what Holt had divulged to her [321]). Further, the choice to present Holt’s narrative as first person belies an aesthetic value rather than a valuation of presenting information as it was gathered—another strike against the objectivity seemingly claimed by this genre of multi-voiced narration. Thus, much like Holly’s, Champnell’s narrative seems to cannibalize itself.

But perhaps the most significant discrepancy evident in Champnell’s prose is his simultaneous loathing for the foreign entity assaulting Marjorie and his fantasizing about her fate. In dialogue with a larger collective imagination, the novel ostensibly depicts Eastern desires in a particular way, namely, the burning of white women and the emasculation of white men via their subjugation and consequent impotence in failing to protect said white women. 117 Accordingly, the narratives within the novel use violence against women in order to solidify the vilification of the Other; this process hinges on both the objectification of women’s bodies—i.e. as things that experience pain and

117 This resonates with the question of British intervention in sati, which I explore more fully in the following chapter.
assault—and an eroticization of torture via the circuitous route of the lusty foreigner. These violent erotics are expressed both in idea and in form, as Champnell’s reverie illustrates. When Paul queries, “what must this wretch have done to her? How my darling must have suffered,” Champell muses, “That was a theme on which I myself scarcely ventured to allow my thoughts to rest” (293). But he does:

The notion of a gently-nurtured girl being at the mercy of that fiend incarnate, possessed … of all the paraphernalia of horror and dread, was one which caused me tangible shrinkings of the body. Whence had come those shrieks and yells, of which the writer of the report spoke, which had caused the Arab’s fellow-passengers to think that murder was being done? What unimaginable agony had caused them? What speechless torture? And the ‘wailing noise,’ which had induced the prosaic, inundated London cabman to get twice off his box to see what was the matter, what anguish had been provocative of that? The helpless girl who had already endured so much, endured, perhaps, that to which death would have been preferred!—shut up in that rattling jolting box on wheels, alone with that diabolical Asiatic, with the enormous bundle, which was but the lurking place of nameless terrors,—what might she not, while being borne through the heart of civilized London, have been made to suffer? What had she not been made to suffer to have kept up that ‘wailing noise’?

(293)
No new information is given here—we already know the details from the reports received; Champnell lingers here for emphasis. The idea of suffering is repeated conceptually through references to “horror,” “dread,” “torture,” “agony,” “endured,” “anguish,” and so on, and is emphasized through sensory language such as “shrieks,” “yells,” and “wailing,” and kinetic signifiers like “rattling,” “jolting,” and “tangible shrinkings of the body.” This impact on the body is significant; Champnell physically feels the effects of the assault he’s conceiving, and the implication is that due to this process of reading sensational language, a parallel dynamic between the reader and the text occurs. This impact, however, is certainly specific: Champnell’s rendition emphasizes penetration, and not only in terms of the reverie resonating throughout his body. In addition to the phallic connotations of the “enormous bundle, which was but the lurking place of nameless terrors,” the idea that “the helpless girl” suffers as she is “borne through the heart of civilized London” suggests an ultimate invasion of the nation, a transgression that is augmented by the fact that Britain seems powerless to protect its “own flesh and blood” (298). Yet what enables this violation to occur is the gender slippage that the Beetle instigates. In addition to its own gender being ambiguous, the creature also presents Marjorie as masculine, thus averting suspicion of sexual assault. But because both of these bodies are at once male and female, both sexes become subjugated. And on another level, masculinity gets perforated: if the Beetle and Marjorie can perform passable masculinity, then not only have women in a sense permeated maleness, but also maleness becomes uprooted from essential ontological categorization.

Vuohelainen suggests that “The Beetle dwells excessively, even titillatingly, on the unseen horrors that take place inside the train compartment and the public cab” (31); I would qualify this by emphasizing Champnell’s role in their narration.
But if the supposedly invulnerable body is variously penetrated, we also need to consider the penetration of the supposedly invulnerable mind. Sydney, as we've read, is resistant to mesmerism. Holt and Paul both intimate that they would have been better able to withstand the hypnotist had they not been physically weakened. Champnell, the private detective with the objective perspective who proves the most rational in the face of daunting evidence about Marjorie’s fate, would seem to possess the most impenetrable faculties; so why does he let his imagination run away with him?

The narrators emphatically state that they do not know for certain about what happened in Cairo, or possess solid evidence about the burnings, tortures, outrages, mutilations, and so on. Paul, especially, says he’s never sure if he imagined it:

I am not prepared to positively affirm what portion of my adventures in that extraordinary, and horrible place, was actuality, and what the product of a feverish imagination … The happenings were of such an incredible character, and my condition was such an abnormal one,—I was never really myself from the first moment to the last—that I have hesitated, and still do hesitate, to assert where, precisely, fiction ended and fact began.

(242)

This harkens back to Sydney’s confession that “Were I upon oath, and this statement being made in a solicitor’s office, I standing in fear of pains and penalties, I think that, at this point, I should leave the paper blank” (149). Paul’s blurring of fact and fiction also echoes, because of the possibility of fancy, with Champnell’s imaginative exploration of horrors currently under discussion. Thus, the violent fantasies considered in this novel, I suggest, are rooted in the minds of these male characters and in the circulation of their
narratives. Indeed, this is the very function the novel itself, as cultural artifact, fulfills. Crucially, as this passage illustrates, the central focus of violence is not Marjorie herself as an individual, but English women in general. Champnell thinks of her not as *that* gently-nurtured girl, but as “a gently-nurtured girl”—she stands in for all white women of a certain class and nationality. Similarly, the victim in Paul’s story is a random woman, “a young and lovely Englishwoman” (244)—a generic female body that suffers—while the women in the youth’s story are just nameless “members of a decent English family” (295). Meanwhile, I would argue that their brother’s disfigurement is bound up with his inability to either save them or to adequately narrate the story of what happened to them. Finally, we learn explicitly that the offending cult seems to prefer “white Christian women, with a special preference, if they could get them, to young English women” (297). For Champnell, Marjorie is an abstraction and the notion of her suffering is rooted in a larger titillating fantasy that produces a sensual reaction: “The blood in my veins tingled at the thought” (298). Yet, as I’ve argued above, this fantasy is equally about male subjugation—in various ways, their mental, physical, and narrative powers are penetrated and rendered grotesque.

**The Auto-Grotesque**

I want to close with the idea of narrative grotesqueness, both in order to rethink how we read popular British fiction of the fin de siècle and to contextualize my explorations of historical disintegration in the following chapter. Popular literature and its circulation plays out, through textual representation, the very stereotypes of Eastern desires they construct. In other words, what *The Beetle* shows us is that literature
depicting these desires can itself enact them. Thus, writing becomes a profoundly destabilizing force because it reveals this and thus tracks the process of masculinity’s disruption. If the Beetle commits violence directly, and Paul and Champnell enact it conceptually, then writers—other word wizards—similarly do violence by conjuring visions of women as primarily objects of abuse and sacrifice—and in this, women as individual identities are sacrificed in literature to the production and circulation of fantasy. They become reduced to beings that suffer. This process highlights the dependence of sexual energies on literature that activates fantasies about the East. In this way, British writing that betrays anxiety about penetration from the East in actuality demonstrates a kind of self-penetration, being from the start a body of leaky holes continuously circulating and recirculating different forms of violent fantasy.

Thus, Champnell’s narrative is not only unstable because of factual insufficiencies; it is grotesque in the sense that it transcends the ostensible boundary between text and reader via the vehicle of what Arata identifies as the erotics of reading, and the use of prose to elicit bodily excitement. If “the act of reading is itself erotic, especially when reading takes the form of critical apprehension—with apprehension being understood in all three of its senses at once: anxiety, perception, seizure” (Arata 68), then, at the risk of implicating my own reading practice, the transcendence of boundaries happens on numerous levels through erotic acts: information gathering and fantasy production within the novel (which registers as sensual experience), the process of reading popular fiction for pleasure, and various acts of critical reading. Because of this, the narratives within the novel continuously expand, leak out, shift according to interpretation and apprehension, and resonate in
different bodies in diverse ways. In this reading, narrative becomes inherently grotesque and refuses to be contained within a stable body; in The Beetle this is especially clear. Particularly in detective fiction, the delaying of conclusions and the deferral of information parallels the experience of reading. Precise details, concrete evidence, and the final climax are all continuously postponed. In this way, it’s easy to read The Beetle as anti-climactic, with resolution being deferred even beyond the novel’s conclusion.

Writing is thus represented as being profoundly unstable. It is limited, as Holt asserts: “Pen cannot describe the concentrated frenzy of hatred with which the speaker dwelt upon the name,—it was demonic” (87); it betrays fissures, as he further observes: “In his [Lessingham’s] bearing there was a would-be defiance. He might not have been aware of it, but the repetitions of the threats were, in themselves, confessions of weakness” (80); and it traces the circulation of unacknowledged desires: while penetration is on one level represented as coming from the East, the novel shows that narrative and the imaginative body of literature was always already grotesque, dependent on circulations and influences, and threatening to leak out of the body at any time—and this destabilizes national literary identity even further; just as Paul’s and Champnell’s fantasies of penetration are demonstrated as emerging from within their own imaginations, the fantasy of various forms of penetration emerges from within the national literary body.

Ultimately, the Beetle’s function as a destabilizing force bringing on madness works as a metaphor for the inability to distinguish reality from imagination. In this, and in its disconcerting repulsiveness, the Beetle parallels the instabilities of writing, speaking, and weaving narrative. This is why the confrontation with the creature brings
on the dissolution of manhood—because manliness and masculine prowess is understood in terms of the ability to write, make, and normalize reality. As a result, the male body is shown here to be penetrated beyond repair: Holt literally wastes away, Paul never recovers properly, Sydney, continuing with his fratricidal experiments, carries on as an example of non-ideal masculinity, and Champnell’s narrative fails to live up to its function of tying up the history and providing closure and understanding.

The dissolution of narrative certainty, so evident in Marsh’s text, is thus arguably the condition of historical narrative itself: especially history derived from the complex archive of colonial violence. Chapter four moves from the realm of literature to consider institutional writing generated by the agents of British colonialism in Sierra Leone. The events considered became the source material for a host of cultural materials (from late-nineteenth and early-to-mid-twentieth-century fiction, to comics, to children’s books, to film, to videogames), but for my purposes I want to consider how the archive in question not only resonates with the works of Haggard and Marsh, and with the archive of writing from the Anglo-Zulu War, but also how the reading practices employed thus far help to comprehend the stakes of a particularly complex and disturbing intercultural encounter. If, as Grosz argues, “Bodily fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside (this is what death implies), to the perilous divisions between the body’s inside and its outside” (193), then just as Marsh’s text emphasizes this bodily permeability in order to unhook the fabrication of narrative solidity, the archive surrounding the historical events explored next enacts the dissolution of “the perilous divisions between the … inside and outside” of narratives of governmentability.
Chapter 4

Bodily Disintegrations:
Forensic Exposure and the Human Leopard Cult in Sierra Leone

Shifting from a contemplation of how what is conceived as foreign—and what is projected onto the foreign—seems to perforate the metropole in domestic fiction, this chapter moves outwards again to the colonies to consider how confrontations with the foreign in empire create similar problems for the deployment of white male power.

Chapter one explored British confrontation with African prowess and emergent imperial fears of impotence. In chapter two, Haggard’s texts were shown to reveal fundamental inadequacies in traditional masculine exemplarity. Chapter three argued that Marsh’s *The Beetle* explores a profound disruption of male authority and that it interrupts British imperial fantasy. These literary works articulate, at different historical moments, widely circulating concerns about the vulnerability, invasion, and penetration of male bodies, about writing, and about authority itself; what I want to do now is test the argument I’ve built thus far—that texts of imperial culture, rather than merely working to build empire, simultaneously, by destabilizing the prowess of writing itself, excavate its foundations—against one historical episode that is a particularly apt example of the kinds of insecurities and disintegrations I’m discussing in this study.

In November of 2011, I came upon a file in the India Office Records, a letter from the Colonial Office appealing for advice on “the serious problem created in Sierra Leone by the activity (which there is some reason to suppose is on the increase) of … certain secret societies of a murderous character, known as the ‘Human Leopards’. “119 The Acting Governor of Sierra Leone was, in 1910, requesting information about how the

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Indian Government had gone about suppressing *thuggee*, another illegal and thus subversive network, in hopes of using similar methods in West Africa “to stamp out this evil,” for “ordinary means have been comparatively unsuccessful.” Pursuing this, I found that some of the weapons that members of the Leopard Society used to slay their victims were held at the British Museum.

Off I went to Bloomsbury, only to find that because the “Africa” section of the museum consists of two small rooms in the basement, the items I sought were not then in the display rotation. Accordingly, I made my own journey to what “also … has been one of the dark places of the earth”—Hackney—to an unmarked secure warehouse in which the museum stored offstage items, and where I was able to handle and photograph the items at my leisure (Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6: Human Leopard Weapons

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120 In the early-mid nineteenth century the British discovered that *Thuggee*, or ‘thagi,’ was a fraternal, religious Indian practice transcending caste, religion, and region, predicated on the worship of Kali, the Goddess of Destruction, and expressed through the strangulation using a talismanic silk scarf of unwary travellers. Throughout the nineteenth century the British worked to extirpate the Thugs; they were able to begin prosecutions through the capture of the bandit Feringheea, who turned state’s evidence (Roy 124).

121 IOR/L/PJ/6/986 File 379. The British Library.

122 Conrad 5.
Turning over these claws forced me to think about the material conditions not only of using these weapons (were they to be held with handles and used like human devices, or were they grasped between the fingers, so that the hand spread, mimicking or embodying the society’s eponymous emblem?) but also of forging, disseminating, and hiding them—what methods were used to challenge British surveillance? Using this artifact to think about “history” clinched for me the prevalence of the themes of bodily transcendence and subversion that have already been expressed in the popular fiction I’ve considered; but it also pinpointed for me the potential seduction of the artifact as material evidence that could in some way gesture to past truths. Just as the fenced-off obelisk at Isandlwana commemorating the Natal Carbineers resonates with fears of penetration, as de Silvestre’s map points the way to King Solomon’s Mines, as the Sherd of Amenartas records the lineage of one great “British” genealogy, and as the photogravure of the beetle offers proof of its existence, this “leopard” claw—an item that both literally and conceptually rends open the human body—hints at, but ultimately can
never reveal those historical realities which remain fundamentally unattainable targets. It seems likely that this elusiveness continues to fuel colonial impulsiveness to possess these artifacts and thereby access and know the Other. At the same time, I take note of Paul Basu’s suggestion that while it is necessary to make explicit the ‘politics’ implicit in any object collected in one place and transported to another, particularly in the contexts of colonial domination…

… the diasporic location of these collections also reminds us that such objects exist in a space between one sociocultural context and another—they mediate across the different worlds encompassed in their biographies… they generate networks of exchange that entail obligations and responsibilities. (37)

Thus, I choose to explore the ways in which these artifacts mediate between temporal and geographical contexts as well as dynamics of power. With this in mind, I aim in this chapter to analyze the British experience of confrontation with perceived disruption. The exact historical conditions and particular stories of the Human Leopard activities may never be known with precision, and as will become clear, exactly ‘what happened’ in Sierra Leone over a hundred years ago is consistently unclear, but a consideration of the anxieties registered in the historical archive that I introduce here can illuminate some crucial limitations of imperial power, and can mark the moments at which the supposed efficacy of martial masculinity begins to unravel.

123 Shelley Ruth Butler has also stressed the importance of an object’s “multiple meanings depending upon the context in which we view it”—suggesting that we need to think about an artifact, for example, “now as ritual artifact, now as missionary souvenir, now as museum artifact” (29), as well as the historical struggles surrounding these shifting positions and ongoing forms of the gaze.
Meanwhile, as I attempt to theorize the colonial framework surrounding the possession and understanding of these artifacts, I come up against another methodological problem. Recognizing the brutality of this weapon is uncomfortable, not only because of its deeply violent multivalent signification, but also due to my cognizance that I examine it from a position of relative safety; that to me this claw is ultimately an object of study while to others it had either posed a direct and gruesome threat, a means of taking what was wanted, or a piece of evidence eliciting punishment, seems to warn against missing the material brutality of the historical context while simultaneously to point at the profound impossibility of grasping it. Since registering affect is rarely easy, and articulating it is harder still, in order to attempt to make sense of these feelings, it seems necessary to investigate a number of different archives in order to work through the socio-historical impact of these objects. Later in this chapter I examine British institutional writing and consider the ways in which the government told the story of the Human Leopards to themselves, but to begin with, I turn to the late nineteenth-century metropolitan public sphere in order to think about tracing this process of how violence in the contact zone gets registered in a similarly asymmetrical context.

Most Britons at the fin de siècle, contrary to encountering traces of colonial dynamics within a critical framework, received sensationalized accounts of Human Leopard crimes through the newspapers. Though rumours of were-leopards had reached Britain by the early 1880s at least, it was towards the end of this decade that reports of murder and cannibalism took on a more graphic tenor. In 1889 the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* circulated information that “One woman was caught by the cannibals
in a town called Morockor. A portion of her leg was found by the roadside, and this was all that was seen of her after the capture. It would be seen that the cannibals are really a band of natives who prowl about the country feeding on the bodies of other natives whom they capture and kill” (“Cannibalism in West Africa”). Into the nineties, the shock value was increasingly played up. Headlines such as “Strange Stories from West Africa. Black Jack the Rippers,”124 “Cannibalism in West Africa. Shocking Atrocities,” “Terrible Story of African Cannibalism,”125 “A Human Leopards Society. Horrors of a Cannibal Feast,” “The Human Leopards. More Horrible Details,” and so on, appeared in gazettes across Britain. These articles tended to focus with alacrity on the visceral brutality of Human Leopard attacks. For example, the York Herald reported that

in the Imperi [Imperri] country, which has recently been taken over by England there are a number of natives known as “leopard men.” They dress themselves up in leopard skins, and hide in the bush until dusk. If any person should pass the leopard men spring upon him or her … and kill them on the spot. The leopard men then mutilate the body in a dreadful manner, taking away certain portions, and leaving the horrible spectacle on the roadside. It is said that the parts which they take away the leopard men eat. The last body found was that of a man. The head had been

124 The Northern Echo had published a similar article entitled “Jack the Ripper in Africa,” as did the Dover Express entitled “Black Jack the Ripper.” “Jack the Ripper” was the ‘street name’ of a notorious killer of female sex workers during 1888 in the impoverished borough of Whitechapel, London. The crimes of Jack the Ripper registered in these reports for both the eviscerative nature of the murders and the fact that the cases, never having been solved, the killer remaining at large, resisted closure. The other potential implication of the gesture to Jack the Ripper is that the African victims of Human Leopard attacks get feminized because the analogous victims in London were women.
125 The story in this article was printed with only minor variations across England under such various titles as “Horrors of African Life,” “Cannibalism in a British Colony,” and “Shocking Story of Cannibalism,” among others.
opened, and the brains taken out, the right hand and left foot cut off, and
the heart also taken away. (“Strange Stories”)

Similarly, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* suggested that

The outrages in many features resemble the horrible exploits of the
mysterious London murderer,¹²⁶ but the motive of the savages is more of
cannibalism than anything else, as the leopard men butcher men, women,
and children indiscriminately … One boy was caught and scalped,
afterwards his eyes, heart, liver, right arm, and left foot were taken by the
cannibals to eat. The bodies of two girls were also found on the road
mutilated in a shocking manner, the cannibals having taken out their
hearts, &c. (“Cannibalism in West Africa. Shocking Atrocities”)

Violence was sensationalized as fear and terror were commercialized in print culture,
causing a stir of emotion and titillation in the metropole directed towards the Sierra
Leone colony. Meanwhile, this information was of course distantly removed from
important material circumstances in West Africa.

Historically, the Human Leopard Society was a fraternal group who, for reasons
still not fully understood by historians today, conducted premeditated murders and
sacrificial rites involving cannibalism and fetish-making, notoriously terrorizing native
communities.¹²⁷ They were said by some to have dressed as leopards during these

¹²⁶ The article is referencing Jack the Ripper.
¹²⁷ The Leopard society in Sierra Leone was not the only one of its kind in West Africa. The Alligator and
Baboon Societies were also active in the protectorate; the Panther Society occupied the Ivory Coast; the
Tiger Men Gabon, the Lion Men Tanganyika; and meanwhile the Human Leopards operated in Nigeria,
Liberia, the Congo, French and Portuguese Guinea, the Cameroons, Upper Volta, and Senegal, as well
as in Sierra Leone. Each of these societies was similar in that its members dressed as their totem animal
in order to enact the killings of its victims for purposes of consuming and sharing. These societies
emerged at different times and with different intensities, although there was a marked concentration of
activity in West Africa. For a detailed discussion of the regions occupied by the Leopard Men, see
attacks, while by others they were said to be shape-shifters. The Leopards were a secret society; they met, killed, and ate in secret while living double lives as members of the community. Membership in this group seems to have been, on some occasions, coerced through the consumption, unbeknownst to the consumer, of human flesh hidden within the larger meal,\textsuperscript{128} much like the British press gang trick (whether myth or truth) of sneaking shillings into men’s toasting steins. The choice was then to join the society or die. New fellows were also usually required to provide a relative for sacrifice. One or two members would then attack the intended victim, frequently at dusk and with the aid of accomplices, in the guise and style of a leopard. The body would afterward be cooked and distributed amongst the fraternity for consumption, while fat from the kidneys would be used to lubricate a charm called borfimah (a contraction of boreh fima, meaning “medicine bag”\textsuperscript{129} [Beatty 23]), the purpose of which was to bring power and wealth to its bearer.\textsuperscript{130} As Birger Lindskog puts it, borfimah granted “immunity from detection and success in the society’s different, often nefarious, operations” (61). He also surmises, possibly from D. Burrows\textsuperscript{131} assessment that borfimah was used in “securing allegiance to resistance, passive or otherwise, against the British government”

\textsuperscript{128} For Victorians, this gruesome detail may have resonated with the popular iterations of \textit{Sweeney Todd}.\textsuperscript{129} According to Lindskog, R.G. Berry asserts that “borfimah” comes from the Sherbro words for “bag” (boroh) and “black” (fimah) (17).\textsuperscript{130} Beatty asserts that the borfimah package “contains, amongst other things, the white of an egg, the blood, fat, and other parts of a human being, the blood of a cock, and a few grains of rice; but to make it efficacious it must occasionally be anointed with human fat and smeared with human blood. So anointed and smeared, it is an all-powerful instrument in the hands of its owner, it will make him rich and powerful, it will make people hold him in honour, it will help him in cases in the White Man’s Courts, and it certainly has the effect of instilling in the native mind great respect for its owner and a terrible fear lest he should use it hostilely” (23).\textsuperscript{131} Burrows was a member of the West African Medical Staff.
(Burrows 144), that “the ritual sometimes served political and xenophobic purposes” (Lindskog 61). In writing up this possible opposition as xenophobia, however, Lindskog crudely misses the profoundly disruptive impositions with which British colonialism hit West Africa.

The Leopard Society arose out of very specific socio-economic contexts. The British colonists had been, throughout the nineteenth century, actively regulating against the Atlantic slave trade and advocating ‘legitimate trade,’ based on agriculture, in the region. This resulted in a number of key economic shifts. First, the production of agriculture and the demand for palm nuts relied on the labour of productive bodies—these labourers were acquired through the raiding of weaker neighbouring groups, or a system of domestic slavery (Shaw 235). The crops that these slaves were set to harvest were then sold to European traders while the cash they brought in was used, in part, to equip raiding parties. Secondly, while the British worked at putting down domestic slave-trading and raiding, this prohibition meant that chiefs, instead of garnering wealth from neighbouring groups, turned to taxing and enforcing labour levies on their own people, which fomented discontent and encouraged revolving chieftaincies (237). This meant that power, influence, and economic advantage were subject to shift in new and rapid ways. The use of borfimah may be contextualized against this setting, as may the outbreaks of accusations of supposed Human Leopards—when an individual was found guilty of being a member of this society, his property was taken from him and his family by the residing chiefs.

Though T.J. Alldridge, an agent for the Randall and Fisher trade company, a district commissioner for Sherbro (as of 1894), and a prolific writer about Sierra Leone,
estimates that this secret society was operative from 1860, it was in the 1880s that
Human Leopard attacks began to register with the British administration in Freetown.
With villagers being terrorized, native courts employed medicine men to hunt out
members lurking amongst the community. The alleged members of the society were
then burned (Lindskog 89-90). Colonial records indicate an awareness of these
executions, but the reaction was nowhere near the intensity of the alarm raised in the
early 1890s, when the local chiefs, again apparently fed up with repeated Leopard
attacks on villagers, sent for an alternate authority from the interior—the Tongo Players.
These “witch men,” as the administration described them, were very likely the same or
very similar to those who arrived almost a decade before for the same reasons, and
were supposedly able to divine through ritual dance which members of a community
were Human Leopards. They then set to “pulling” (that is, discovering) and burning
alleged shape-shifters in large numbers. Furthermore, the second time around, colonial

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132 A.R. Wright (425) and A. Gray (196) also estimate the 1860s.
133 Furthermore, newspapers from London, such as the London Standard and the Pall Mall Gazette,
indicate that those in the metropole were also aware of the procedures of native courts in persecuting
alleged Human Leopards. Correspondence from Sierra Leone, dated April 13, was printed:
A native trial on a large scale is proceeding at Tyamah, Mendi country, concerning more than one
hundred people charged with cannibalism; the native belief being that these people transformed
themselves into leopards or tigers by evil fetish or gre-gre … There is no doubt that cannibalism
is still secretly carried on, and murders committed to satisfy this horrible craving. The native
punishment for this offense is roasting alive, and this barbarous ceremony will take place with
fetish rites early in May. (“The West Coast of Africa,” LS)
There was considerably little concern over this in London. The York Herald’s publication on discussions in
“The House of Commons” reported,
The officer administering the district stated that in May last, having received intelligence that there
was a palaver of chiefs and would probably be a sacrifice of life, he sent a letter to the assembled
chiefs advising them to end their proceedings; and on the 18th he received a reply from the chiefs
that before the arrival of his messenger they had burned 34 persons for witchcraft and
cannibalism, but on receipt of the letter they had liberated the rest of the accused, and promised
to discontinue the practice in the future. The officer, in reply, thanked the chief for meeting his
wishes—(laughter)—and expressed the abhorrence of the British Government for these
barbarous customs.
Perceived racial and geographical distance enable those at the House to make light of the fate of the
accused, and overlook the material violence of the situation. In addition, considering that the Sierra
Leonean correspondent knew in April the likely outcome of this trial, it’s unlikely that the administrative
c officer referred to here was unable to anticipate it before May.

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agents—African constables and white officers—became implicated in the brutality. It was this climax of events—and the attendant challenge to British authority and liberatory discourse that focalized around Tongo judgment—that finally demanded a higher degree of imperial attention. From here, the Leopard threat remained a problem throughout the 1890s and on into the second decade of the twentieth century when martial law was introduced.

The imperial confrontation with Human Leopard and Tongo murders amounted to direct evidence of British disorder in four central ways: 1) the murders, eviscerations, and cannibalism fostered discomfort in a visceral sense—again, this resonates with my discussion from chapter one of Klaus Theweleit’s analysis of the fear of flow, 2) they disrupted trade and the economy, 3) they challenged local and national institutions of imperial order in that they proved British legal apparatus remarkably ineffectual, and 4) the idea that men could transmogrify into leopards and furthermore evade British surveillance was in direct opposition to the Western rational knowledge system—as were, of course, the divination practices of the Tongo Players. Understanding the significance of these forms of disruption is crucial for acknowledging that British imperial masculinity was profoundly dependent on the efficacy of the white male body, and that authority was inextricably tied to writing. Here, the question of efficacy surrounding writing functions to underscore the difficulties in the project of asserting ‘order’ in the districts surrounding the colony, as well as the problems of writing an accurate history so that ‘order’ can be demonstrated. As I will show, this colonial archive, understood here as “a site of knowledge production” (Stoler 90), comprises a location at which the British government comes to acknowledge the limitations of writing—which in turn
undermine the virility of the imperial project. Administrative narratives not only
demonstrate that the colonial space refused to be contained, but they also become the
very means by which the ‘disorder’ associated with the Human Leopards and Tongo
Players started to work its way inwards from the contact zone towards the question of
‘Britishness,’ and the means by which the ideal of imperial law ultimately eroded.
Writing, similarly to the cannibalizing effects of the narratives of *She* and *The Beetle*,
becomes at once the evidence, agent, and embodiment of that disintegration.

The collection of materials I draw on here is comprised of widely circulating texts,
such as British and African contemporary newspaper reports about the Human
Leopards, contemporary ethnographical studies, and colonial ordinances; and private,
confidential communications, such as colonial dispatches to the head office in London—
many of which were not meant to circulate beyond a small purview—investigative
reports, and legislative council meetings. Reading these texts together helps to
illuminate the ways in which the anxieties I discuss in this chapter not only resonate in
multiple spheres but also develop across generic dialogues. It also works to develop
important contextual texture. My approach here is to read these archives “both as sites
of the imaginary and institutions that fashioned histories as they concealed, revealed,
and reproduced the power of the state” (Stoler 97), attending to the production of
fantasy that they enact as well as their struggle to govern through narrating history.
Although the asymmetrical power dynamics of colonial domination and colonial writing
need to be acknowledged (for, as Stoler points out, “From the Latin *archivum*,
‘residence of the magistrate,’ and from the Greek *arkhe*, to command or govern, colonial
archives ordered … the criteria of evidence, proof, testimony, and witnessing to
construct moral narrations” [97]), attending to the nuances of this struggle exposes points of contestation and limitation. While recognizing the force of dominant narratives, I aim to highlight moments of uncertainty, contradiction, emphasis, and failures in technologies of imperial rule in order to better understand the state’s deepest weaknesses.

A brief digression on a comparable problematic colonial episode may help to situate how the Leopard Murders and Tongo Play resonated with imperial agents as profoundly disruptive of order. As I mention above, when the Sierra Leone administration registered the similarities between the Leopard killings and thuggee, they immediately appealed to the colonial network of surveillance, policing, and recording in order to work out how to master indigenous subversive violence. Thuggee had posed a remarkably analogous challenge to the imperial system.134 As Parma Roy points out,

Thuggee … introduces a disturbance in the paradigm of information retrieval as well as the notion of native authenticity and ontological purity that is a governing trope of colonial discourse. The thug, through his capacity for disguise and impersonation, and his skill at negotiating multiple and competing identities, usurps the colonizer's privilege of complex subjectivity and of movement between subject positions, and thus can be read to assume some control over both the construction and flow of colonial knowledge. So he never becomes fully naturalized as the

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134 This was recognized not just by colonial officers but also by the public. The Pall Mall Gazette remarked that the Human Leopards “display some analogy with the Indian Thugs” (“Cannibalism in Sierra Leone”). The Colony and Provincial Reporter wrote, “One of the most difficult things to eradicate is a Secret Society the object of whose existence is religious crime or, as it might perhaps, be more accurately designated, crime with a religious significance. We have found that to our cost in India.” (7, 30.8.1913)
disciplinary subject, or in other words, the knowable subject, of the colonial polity.

The Leopard Men’s secret fraternization and rituals were likewise difficult to expose (survivors were rare, the hinterland was shrouding, the crimes were disguised as leopard attacks, member communication was made through secret signs and handshakes—not unlike that of Thugs or Freemasons), not to mention he was supposed to be able to mutate and dissolve into the night. This knowledge of subversion through elusiveness evidently tipped off the Sierra Leone administration to the fact that a like situation in West Africa would undermine their relatively more tenuous hold there.¹³⁵

One more connection between this moment in Sierra Leone and colonial India may be potentially useful for contextualizing British imperatives of intervention. As Gayatri Spivak has so famously argued,¹³⁶ Sati was used as significant grounds for British interjection in indigenous affairs as well as a foil for white masculine heroism. In Sierra Leone, the failure, characterized by both the absence of knowledge (for some of the colonial agents) and action, to prevent Tongo burnings of Sierra Leonean people necessitated at once the registration of the malfunction of British male efficacy and a summoning of its reassertion. In both cases of Sati and Leopard burnings, the impetus to protect natives from one another was foregrounded. At the time of writing, I have not found any direct reference to Sati in the Leopard archives with which I have been

¹³⁵ One key difference, however, between the contexts of thuggee and the Leopard murders was that while West African villagers solicited outside authorities (both the British administration and the Tongo Players) to aid in the suppression of the Human Leopards, “There was no clamour from their [the British administration’s] Indian subjects for measures against thuggee” (Singha 87). On the other hand, in both cases the British were invested in the security of the respective regions for very practical reasons: travel of merchandise and soldiery in India, and the harvesting of palm nuts and trade in Sierra Leone.

working, and I cannot prove at this point a direct comparison by the colonial administration. However, as Tony Ballantyne has shown, print created important transatlantic networks, where political models, evangelical sermons and travel narratives circulated freely within an enlarged public sphere. In a similar vein, the proliferation of newspapers and popular journals, both in the metropole and in the colonies, also ensured the rapid circulation of a shared body of news and energized intellectual debate within the British empire [sic]. Reportage in both English language and vernacular newspapers transcended local concerns, updating the public about developments in distant parts of the empire and beyond. (12)

Print culture indeed worked along lines of what Ballantyne suggests is a “web” (15), rather than a wheel, of imperial structures from India to Sierra Leone. The administration was nonplussed to discover in *The Sierra Leone Guardian* an anti-colonial article entitled “England’s Cattle Farm” that the governor suspected had originally appeared “in the papers of Indian agitators.” Accordingly, he contacted the India Office to pursue the matter. This, along with the administration’s awareness of the subversive thugs, suggests that information did pass frequently between colonies, and it is quite feasible that, because colonial models in India and West Africa were

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137 Ballantyne argues that in “the wheel metaphor … lines of communications, finance and personnel radiate out from London to each colony in the periphery” (14).


139 IOR/L/PJ/6/991 File 746. The British Library.

140 Drawing on the work of S. Feierman, Alan Lester points out, “British ships carried information between colonial sites, in the form of newspapers, dispatches and letters, as well as produce and personnel, enabling far-flung colonies and the metropole to participate ‘in a coordinated metasystem of meaning and action’. Reinforced later in the nineteenth century by the telegraph, such technologies allowed representations of indigenous peoples in one part of the world to act as precedents, guiding imageries of subsequently colonised peoples elsewhere” (6).
strongly linked, confrontations with Sati lurked in the background of colonial thought in
Sierra Leone. This possibility means that in considering the Leopard persecutions, we
might also think about the ways in which this archive may potentially gender West
Africans.

This chapter uses archival materials to trace the historical deterioration of
traditional models of British masculine prowess—particularly martial and institutional
control over geographical space, the notion of a cohesive and disciplined (as least so
far as the white constituents went) military body, and the security of writing. My
exploration of the tensions surrounding this construction of the Sierra Leone colony and
surrounding protectorate aims to illuminate the ways in which this contact zone
fundamentally transforms empire—systemically—by being leaky, disordered,
permeable, unstable, and threatening. Crucially, while the metropole focused on the
sensation of the Leopard killings, the more prominent terror was perpetrated by the
Tongo Players—with the tacit approval of the colonial state. Since, however, this was
both less interesting and less appealing to metropolitan Britain, the circulation of these
events was largely limited to colonial dispatches and confidential reports. Nevertheless,
how the colonial government physically and narratively dealt with this situation suggests
its complicity in the mass murders of West African villagers. The real colonial crisis here
wasn’t the subversive activity of the Human Leopards but rather the question of white
involvement with the Tongo persecution of alleged Human Leopards and execution of
local laws or “country customs” and their attendant challenges to British authority. With

141 As Ania Loomba notes in Colonialism/Postcolonialism, European knowledge of Sati was widespread:
“Another favourite figure in colonial inscriptions was that of the burning widow or sati: almost every
European commentator of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries stops to savour that picture of Oriental
barbarity and female helplessness and devotion” (153).
this acknowledgment, I turn to my reading of the colonial inquest into these persecutions for a consideration of the unraveling of imperial legitimacy and the crisis of white male authority.

“[A] very complicated and unsavoury matter”

British attempts to make sense of Human Leopard and Tongo episodes exemplify the familiar imperial trope that Western civility brings order to a savage space, and in doing so benefits both the British nation and the natives of the contact zone. This justification of British control worked horizontally, across different parts of the African continent. R.H. Fox Bourne, secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, asserted in 1899 that any British development in Africa would need to be beneficial to the natives (“NUB” 202-3); he also, representing the English as the “custodians” of Egypt, wrote, “No one will deny that great advantages have resulted to the people of Egypt from the British Occupation. It has freed them from the most galling of the yokes that weighed them down through centuries, has already improved their lot, and has opened to them possibilities of much further improvement” (216). A paternalistic, “progressive” approach, then, would seem to satisfy even the left-leaning spectrum of Victorian society.

On the other side of Africa in 1891, a banquet was held for Sir James Shaw Hay, Governor of Sierra Leone. The guest of honour, drawing on the Lockean model of colonialism, acclaimed

an active interior policy … Not only have trade and farming operations among the tribes been made general, but there has been a considerable improvement in their conduct and integrity …

It is true I have discovered a large tract of ground unprotected, practically on what we call our Frontier and I find that the presence of our Frontier Police\(^\text{143}\) has made the people feel secure and given them confidence; it has also afforded them an opportunity of farming and becoming a happy and prosperous people. During my last journey through the country I am happy to say I have seen a marked difference. Where two years ago there was no vestige of life or cultivation I found a people who were industrious and happy, which will endorse your opinion of the importance of the interior policy …\(^\text{144}\)

Roughly a year later, Major Moore, the Inspector General of Police in Sierra Leone, describes a military attack on the village of Tambi and celebrates that the conduct of the Frontier Police was consistently satisfactory. They proved themselves good marchers, steady and obedient in quarters and bivouac, reliable and brave in action. No troops could have fought with more élan and dash than the Frontiers when they did battle hand-to-hand with the enemy at the last gate during the first attack on TAMBI. No troops have been actuated by better feeling

\(^{143}\) The Frontier Police were largely comprised of West African men, though some were from the interior, recruited for the purpose of deploying military regulation of the region.

\(^{144}\) Sierra Leone Weekly News, 18 Apr. 1891, enclosed in dispatch CO 267/389 5.4.1891 File 175. National Archives at Kew.
of determination than they when they were going along to attack TAMBI the second time.

... Of the Frontier Officers who served under my command I cannot speak too highly. Their ready and cheerful obedience—their unflagging energy—their courage and coolness under fire, proved them soldiers in both heart and head.¹⁴⁵

In other words, Moore suggests, British influence on African men has developed the latter’s masculine prowess—and demonstrated the former’s. Again, this trope of imperial expansion through training and valuation of soldiers was not unique to affairs in West Africa; similarities will readily be seen between Moore’s endorsement of British influence in Sierra Leone and Arthur Nichol’s legitimization of British rule via his comparison of Egyptian martial masculinity before and after British training:

There is a great contrast for the better between the Egyptian soldier of today and the soldier of ten years ago. In the earlier battles in the Soudan they ran like sheep from less than half their number of the dervishes. The new army, created by British officers, and composed of the same material, is a credit to the British generals who undertook the task of its creation ... (318)

Thus British right to rule in many ways rested on a perceived improvement, not only in production, hygiene, religious devotion, and many other familiar litmus tests of civility, but also in martial prowess and masculine exemplarity. However, the self-congratulations such as those conveyed by Hay and Moore were deeply undermined by

¹⁴⁵ CO 267/394 26.4.1892 No. 169. This example also strongly resonates with the British Indian trope of the loyal sepoy.
the unruly events in Sierra Leone—and by the inability of the British administrators to control them or of the Frontier Police employed to enforce order. The ways in which the administration dealt with the Human Leopards and Tongo Players crucially indicate the terms on which the modes of British efficacy were so deeply challenged.

What is known now about the Human Leopard Society is gleaned in large part from the assertions of earlier ‘documenters.’ The British were fascinated with the idea of the fetish and the ritualistic aspects of the society’s practice of cannibalism. Strong, writing on the society in 1930, explained that

The leopard is the emblem of the society and constitutes its totem. When on killing expeditions the members dress themselves more or less in leopard skins and either paint their bodies with annatto dye or rub yellow clay upon then. In some instances they carry a net which they throw about the body of the victim. They are armed with sharp iron hooks in the form of leopard’s claws and teeth, and also carry short spears. They are said to imitate the movements of leopards by bending and crawling. Usually the victim is attacked suddenly along the trail at night, and if he escapes, he is sometimes at a loss to know whether he has been actually attacked by an animal or by a human leopard, for in some instances leopard fur is placed around the iron claws, bits of which may adhere to the clothing of the victim or to his wounds. (100-101)

Alldridge, in his book, *The Sherbro and its Hinterland*, asserted that after the victim had been killed, “The body was then opened, and some of the internal parts were removed for the purpose of obtaining the fat, which was considered necessary to preserve the
magical powers of the Borfimor. The Borfimor was a highly prized fetish, believed to be a panacea against all evil and capable also of procuring all good” (154). The borfimor was thought to provide protection and power to its bearer. Alldridge also asserts, however, that “Happily the persistent and effective measures adopted by the government have been so successful that I quite believe the Human Leopard Society is now simply a matter of history” (156). Alldridge couldn’t have been more wrong when he wrote this in 1901; Human Leopard activity would continue glaringly until the trials in 1912-13, and even beyond that into the twentieth century.

Since the 1890s historians and ethnographers have pursued the question of the society’s motivations for killing. Mary Kingsley commented on “murder societies” in her Travels in West Africa, noting, “I was informed by the natives that there was a society of which the last entered member has to provide, for the entertainment of the other members, the body of a relative of his own, and sacrificial cannibalism is always breaking out, or perhaps I should say being discovered, by the white authorities in the Niger Delta” (312). Interestingly, Kingsley goes on to quote from newspaper reports to foreground the importance of fetish worship—in doing so both appealing to these accounts as authoritative, despite experiencing elements of West Africa herself, and demonstrating the co-legitimizing relationships between different kinds of circulating print culture. Speaking with more specificity, Sir William Brandford Griffith, a former

146 Strong suggests, “The valuable qualities of a charm are acquired either through contact and association with it, or through its incorporation into one’s person. The possession of the skin and head of a leopard in one’s hut or even its claws or teeth when worn, gives power and strength to the person to whom they belong … The manufacture of charms is the particular business of the medicine men, or witch doctors. Various parts of human or animal bodies, particularly the viscera, but also the flesh, skin, hair and even the sputum and saliva, are often dried and ground into a powder and put into a little bag, which is either worn or in some instances kept in some safe place in the hut, perhaps in a bottle.” (94)  
147 David Pratten’s book, The Man-Leopard Murders (2007), is a fascinating analysis of the society’s activity in colonial Nigeria, which continued up and in to the 1950s. Lindskog’s work, meanwhile, offers detailed reporting of references in historical archives to locations and dates of big-cat society attacks.
Chief Justice from the Gold Coast who presided at the circuit court of the Human Leopard trials, wrote,

it is not possible to state definitely why the members of the Human Leopard Society ate their victims. There was, however, one outstanding fact: all principal offenders were men of mature age, past their prime; they were the ones who, so to speak, managed the concern, who arranged for victims, and who received the most coveted portions of the slaughtered bodies; and I formed the opinion that when they devoured the human flesh the idea uppermost in their minds was that they were increasing their virile powers. (vi-vii)

In his piece, Griffith doesn’t specify quite how he formed this opinion. Robert Gordon Berry, writing for the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy in 1912, had a similar notion, suggesting that the cult’s ritualistic killing worked to gain wealth and influence.

The borfimah was supposed to confer

supremacy over the white man, in the white man not being able to find out what was being done, and that the eating of human flesh would give power over the white man. For, say they, the white men have more power than the black men; but in this cannibalism you get some power so that when you do wrong you will not be found out by the white man. (Berry qtd. in Jackson 71)

Whether or not these assessments are accurate, it is interesting that for Griffith and Berry, motivation for this society of men came down to questions of male potency, whether in terms of social, economic, or defensive power; questions of black virility
seem to be to the forefront in British probing, indicating that prowess was the explanation that made the most sense to imperial figures. \(^\text{148}\) Burrows suggested that “the eating of some of the flesh of the victims is … a means of securing the loyalty of the members and ensuring their unquestioned adherence to the strange cult to which the sacrifice is but an inevitable necessity" (143).

More recently, Birger Lindskog has also explored the possibility that flesh itself was a fetish:

there was also the belief in reinvigoration, in which strength transference could take place by direct or indirect means. In the direct method, the consumption of the blood and flesh of the victim transferred to the consumer his strength and energies. In the indirect method some of the blood and flesh of the victim were preserved in medicine. This method could be used over a longer period of time and permitted greater numbers to participate in the benefits. (Lindskog 185)

Lindskog has noted that cannibalism has been associated with vengeance (185).

Meanwhile, A.R. Wright suggested that the Leopard killings may have been a means of “obtaining human flesh in time of peace” (425). The Bristol Mercury similarly declared that the killings were rooted in an “undoubtedly inherited … horrid appetite” (“The Human Leopards”). The Pall Mall Gazette even asserted in a “gruesome, though at the same time interesting, account” about the origin of the cult, that “It is the story of a fiendish revenge instituted by one tribe as a punishment for the treachery of another, and a strong illustration of native superstition and fear of the powers wielded by the

\(^{148}\) Jackson also concludes that the objective in killing was to activate the borfimah fetish in order to increase strength, wealth, and influence (71).
fetish” (“How the Human Leopards Originated”). However, I haven’t come across any information that supports this suggestion.

None of the criticism I’ve encountered on this subject seems to have considered the possibility that the Leopard Men of Sierra Leone were using violent cannibalism not as a means to gain magical power, but rather as a way to deploy terror and fear as defensive mechanisms against the British. Gananath Obeyeskere has argued of a different historical situation that Maori in the late eighteenth century began to employ the discourse of cannibalism as “a weapon to terrify them [British sailors] in the context of unequal power, where their real weapons were nothing in comparison to European guns” (646). It is distinctly possible that the society in West Africa was making a similar use of the British anxieties surrounding cannibalism.

Whether the Human Leopards were motivated by virility, rejuvenation, materialism, vengeance, or colonial resistance, however, my aim is not to unlock the secrets of the Leopard Society, critique their activities in terms of moral acceptability, or surmise how and why the Human Leopards choose, killed, and ate their victims. As Michael Jackson rightly suggests,

> Explanations of the cults have invoked notions of savage mentality, cannibalistic appetites, totemic fixations, vengefulness and criminal conspiracy, and mindless obedience to cult leaders—essentialistic notions that by reducing the cults to the status of savage otherness deny the

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149 Obeyeskere also suggests, “The Hawaiians ... imputed cannibalism to the British; some also, perhaps more in fun than seriousness, threatened the British with their (feigned) cannibalism. Maoris it seemed employed a similar threat: they admitted their cannibalism, but emphasized and exaggerated it and, like the Hawaiians and the Northwest Coast Indians, seemed to enjoy the European reaction of disgust and fascination. Cannibalistic discourse then was a weapon, one might say, employed by all the parties” (646).
violent situation in which those who voice such opinions conspire, and
deny the indigenous person recognition as a subject and maker of his own
history. (70)
The history and shifting economic context of the Leopard Society need to be pursued
through a separate, focused, detailed, and comprehensive study—that is, through a
lens that does not take as its central subject white masculinity and that explores the
functions of the society in its own right.¹⁵⁰ My concern here, then, is primarily with British
discomfort with the Leopard killings—colonial incapacity to control them, administrative
inability to capture their meaning in the records of empire, and the imperial confrontation
with what this meant for martial masculinity. But what really set the British on edge was
the question of white moral culpability—and this did not arise in full force until the early
1890s. Because the Leopard cult was terrorizing villages and the colonial administration
was effectively useless in preventing the murders, local chiefs at this point sent for an
authority from the interior: thus entered the Tongo Players, who arrived in the Imperri
district to persecute alleged Leopard cult members.

As news of the subsequent mass burnings of supposed Human Leopards
reached the British administration, the Colonial Office in London struggled to
understand the circumstances in the region. Mr. Bramston wrote,

¹⁵⁰ Thus, while refusing to reduce the society’s killings to a comparison of “Nazi atrocities,” as Milan
Kalous does (ix), I’m also somewhat wary of Jackson’s other standpoint: “Although Colonial statutes and
records insist that the leopard societies of Sierra Leone were ‘formed for the purpose of murder and
cannibalism and existed merely to gratify the depraved tastes of [their] members’ (Lindskog 1954:60), it
is, in my view, more edifying to see the cults as a response to socio-political deprivation—a form of
defiance, negation, inversion, and revenge” (70). Although in his larger piece from which I quote Jackson
does examine some very important socio-political contexts in Sierra Leone along with the ontology of
shape-shifting, his preference for the viewpoint that the Leopard Society was one of colonial resistance
because of the comparative benefit of edification of this outlook seems to me problematic because it
continues to appropriate subaltern narratives for utilitarian purposes, even if they are well-meaning. In
other words, I’m trying to resist claiming insight into an event that may be desirable to read as a
concertedly anti-colonial effort; to do so would be to propose a complete understanding of the dynamics
of the historical agents in question—and I would be doing this from a politically invested location.
There is a double process of extermination going on in this Imperi [Imperri] District. Firstly by the Human Leopards, that is the members of a secret society who disguise themselves with leopard skins and lie in wait to murder unwary travellers. Secondly by the Tongo men, (i.e. the witch men of the tribes) who are supposed to be gifted with supernatural intelligence and to be able to tell at sight who is a Human Leopard, the result of which is that a Tongo man, if he desires to obtain the land of some unfortunate native, promptly denounces him as a Human Leopard, gets him burnt, and takes his property.\footnote{CO 267/393 5.02.1892 File 55. National Archives at Kew.}

Mr. Brett, the Acting Queen’s Advocate at this time, described how the Tongo judgment worked:\footnote{Governor Fleming also wrote to the Colonial Office that “The Tongo Man is a fetish individual who professes to discover cannibals or as they are at times called ‘Human Leopards.’ These latter form a kind of secret society the object of which is to kill, not so much with the idea of eating human flesh as to obtain blood, fat and certain parts of the human body to mix with medicines or smear over their bodies in the belief that such will bring honour and prosperity. When it is determined to discover a cannibal or human leopard, as many native chiefs and headmen as can, assemble together. The Tongo man and his followers then dress up and after going through some fetish ceremonial point out certain individuals as cannibals who are immediately arrested and stocked. It appears that some kind of trial, the nature of which I have been unable to ascertain, is then gone through, and on a fixed day those condemned are brought out when they are killed with clubs and their bodies thrown upon a pile of wood and burnt.” (CO 267/395 30.8.1892 Conf. 26. National Archives at Kew.)}

The process of deciding who are guilty consists of a number of Tongohs (having been previously promised considerable payment for their services) holding a fetish dance or orgie, the principle man carrying about with him a large horn filled with an unknown substance which towards the end of the Entertainment he proceeds to point at some of the surrounding villagers and at length calls out that he has discovered the guilty man and pronounces him to be a Human Leopard. Thereupon the poor wretch so
chosen is set upon by the Chiefs and their satellites, beaten to death and
his body burnt. Some times it happens that the man is not quite dead
when the burning commences. About that it seems the murderers are by
no means particular. After this the chiefs proceed to the dead man’s
house, take possession of everything belonging to him, and send their
followers to seize any property of persons known to be his relatives they
can lay their hands upon.\footnote{CO 267/384 26.8.1890. National Archives at Kew.}

This passage demonstrates an important dynamic in British imperial self-positioning in
relation to violence in the contact zone that is described at once as a) savage and
contrary to humane concerns and b) being completely isolated from the contexts of
foreign invasion by the colonial forces. Significantly, this Othered violence is deeply
sexualized. The connotations of “orgie” conveying debauchery and revelry charge this
representation with libidinal tenors, while the phallic overtones of the “large horn filled
with an unknown substance” (which plays a central role in British representations of the
Tongo Play) is rendered as a key element of the power to condemn a victim to suffering.
Other accounts emphasize that the moment of “discovery” is immediately followed by
beating the accused with the Tongo cane. Here he is “set upon”; language connoting
rapaciousness is deployed purposefully.\footnote{Elsewhere, accounts of Human Leopard attacks also tend to invoke images of rape. As Alldridge
sketches at a meeting of the Royal Geographic Society where H.P.F. Marriott gave a paper on secret
societies in West Africa, “some person in the guise of a leopard … rushed upon the unfortunate and
unsuspecting victim from behind” (Marriot, “SSWA” 26). The Sierra Leone Weekly News described a
Leopard Man attack similarly: “The time and place being opportune, the selected offering is pounced
upon from behind and a sharp three-pronged fork is thrust into the back of the neck, severing the spinal
cord” (“The ‘Human Leopards’”). The Hampshire Telegraph offers a similar rendering, wherein the victim
“was attacked suddenly from behind” (“Human Leopards. Three Cannibals Hanged, More Cannibals
Captured”). In the excerpt from the Sheffield Daily Telegraph from page 206 of this chapter, “outrages”
bears the connotations of sexual assault.} Furthermore, if we entertain the likelihood
that Brett had a background awareness of sati, then the resonance of widow immolation in India would serve to further feminize the men being burned and reinvigorate the imperative for the British rescue of victims from savage gendered aggression. At any rate, the existence of this testifies that, thus far, white male prowess has failed to assert itself.

These dynamics underlie another significant element of sexuality in this, which is but one example of the Tongo Leopard hunt. As John M. MacKenzie has argued, hunting out wild animals, especially dangerous ones and especially in colonial spheres, widely symbolized white mastery. Repeated references to the Tongo horn resonate with the trophies collected, sold, and displayed in Victorian imperial culture. MacKenzie notes that “the collection of horns and skins represent[ed] in their very inutility western man’s dominance of the world. Horns perfectly symbolised the war of males for sexual conquest” (180). Except, here, the horn is held and utilized by men from the African interior. Thus this judgment scene is profoundly unheimlich: while the phallic horn would be readily recognized as an indication of hunting prowess (as, in a sense, it is used in the Tongo Play) and zoological, scientific knowledge—“a mastery of environmental signs and knowledge of natural history” (179)—here, the same item is employed in a very different kind of hunt by an ostensibly very different master. Once again, because “Hunting can readily be interpreted as sexual sublimation” (180), and the dominance belongs not to the white hunter but the African authority, the Tongo Play becomes cause for intense discomfort within the colonial record.

Perhaps in part because of these libidinal nuances, the violent subject matter of the Tongo Play was, along with reports of Leopard cult murders, seized by British
newspapers as a sensational subject for reporting.\footnote{This was in line with the emergence in Britain and Europe of the ‘New Journalism,’ which, though it “took a serious interest in political affairs, public welfare and working conditions and took the side of the working men and women in the city,” it also “used emotional and sensational appeals of the popular press to attract the new, unsophisticated readers and provide them with a sense of the wonder, excitement and danger of the modern city” (Marzolf 529). In other words, the context of the press in domestic Britain enabled the publication of this kind of news.} An expansion on the examples I gave earlier in this chapter reveals the British public’s marked sense of removal from the scene of colonial violence: the material contexts are nearly completely effaced while the gory, sometimes sexy, details are dramatized. For example, the *Sunderland Daily Echo* reports

>A native of the Imperi [Imperri] country was brought down in a boat to the mission-house for treatment of wounds caused by the cannibals … he was stabbed first in the back of the neck with sharp knives, and gashes were then scored down his back which, to an unskilled eye, might suggest their having been caused 

**BY A LEOPARD’S CLAWS.** (“The Human Leopards. More Horrible Details”)

The capitals are a clear attempt to attract the reader’s attention.

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Figure 8: “The Human Leopards. More Horrible Details,” 30 Aug. 1895.
The article goes on, “Father Brown corroborates the story of a slave girl who had been tied to a tree and was about to be killed. She was brought into the mission at Bonthe and supplied by the nuns with civilized dress. Considerable amusement was caused by the difficulty in inducing her to wear the garments.” So, this particular article moves from a story about the gruesome method of killing to focus on a subjugated woman rescued by Christians that ultimately turns into a weird pseudo-comical conversion tale. In other words, it attempts to tick numerous entertainment boxes at once.

Crucially, bound up with the fascination factor was the pressing question of the role of the British administration in all of this. In an earlier story about the rescue of girls from the clutches of the Leopard Men published in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, an old woman gathering pine apples in the bush heard screams, and on rushing to the spot and making as much noise as possible she disturbed a number of Leopard men, who at once bolted for their lives. The old woman found a girl stretched on the ground unconscious. The girl had large punctured wounds on her back, and had the old woman not disturbed the fiends the poor girl would have been cut in pieces in minutes … The poor girl who was found insensible was taken by Captain Soden’s men to Bonthe for medical treatment. (“Cannibalism in West Africa. Shocking Atrocities”)

I mention this account not only because of its emphasis on the curious ability of the elderly woman to frighten off a group of supposedly virile Leopard Men, but also

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156 This story is also repeated in “Human Leopards. Three Cannibals Hanged, More Cannibals Captured,” “Terrible Story of African Cannibalism,” and “Human Leopards. Three Cannibals Executed,” among others. Her status as a “slave girl” and having been tied to a tree is always emphasized, foregrounding her subjugation.
because of the position of the invoked white officer, Soden, as rescuer. Indeed, notes the *Telegraph*, “The frontier police [a section of which Soden commanded] were becoming a powerful force and showing themselves very energetic in suppressing these cannibal *outrages*. Captain Soden with a force of police was scouring the Bargroo district in search of the Leopard men.” However, as we know from the historical record, the military body had a very difficult time catching the society on their own terms. In the mid-1890s, when the first British-run trials were beginning to be publicized, a conviction in the capabilities of the colonial courts was celebrated as it was asserted that the organization of the society “is gradually being laid before the world by the energy and perspicacity of the Prosecuting Counsel” (“The Human Leopards”). But there was also a palpable tension between the ideas of a government that could effectively control the disturbances and the existence of a phenomenon that defied British dominance. Even when the British started to execute those convicted, it was acknowledged that the society was still unmanageable:

> Such a stern, swift meting out of punishment seemed likely to put a stop to the horrid deeds of blood committed by the society, and there was every reason for believing that its members would give up all connection with an organization that had so thoroughly fallen under the suspicion of the Government. But the whole colony was roused into excitement by the news of another of these murders in the Emperi [Imperri] country.” (“The Human Leopards”)

As the nineties progressed, the newspapers became increasingly critical of British capabilities. The *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* remarked, “Although several men have
been hanged for these murders the authorities still believe they have not stamped out
the practice” (“The Human Leopards. Two More Hanged), while the Bristol Mercury
noted, “The English authorities hanged a dozen ‘Leopards,’ but our Frenchman [likely a
correspondent] is doubtful whether the society is stamped out” (“The Last 24 Hours”).
The London Daily News suggested, “The ‘Human Leopards,’ in spite of the recent trial,
are still busy … in the Imperri district, Sherbro, the crime of murder still continues
frequent … it appears to be the result of a secret society, and so far, the Government
have failed to put a stop to the ‘custom’” (“This Morning’s News”). And the Pall Mall
Gazette took the administration to task: “That such a state of things should exist in a
small colony like Sierra Leone, which has been a British possession for close upon one
hundred years, is little short of a national disgrace, and it is high time the authorities of
Sierra Leone were brought to book” (“Cannibalism in Sierra Leone”). Thus, amidst the
sensation and titillation associated with the Leopard murders, the pressure was on for
the colonial government to prove its capacity to regulate the natives.

There was one case that held a special valence in the British imagination. In
1895, a man named Jowe, supposedly a Christian school teacher in Sierra Leone, was
found to be a Human Leopard and was convicted of murder and cannibalism. He was
publicly executed along with two other men, but his role as a colonial intermediary
caused particular alarm for the public, since his case was evidence that those within the
bounds of ‘civilization’ could also perhaps be secret members of a murderous cult.
Reports of this particular incident flared up in newspapers in late August and early
September of that year, frequently remarking on the “extraordinary” nature of the
conviction (“Human Leopards. Three Cannibals Executed”). One newspaper worked to
challenge Jowe’s affiliation with colonial regulation: “The statement that Jowe, the principal character in this last murder trial is an ex-Sunday school teacher is quite incorrect. He is a member of the lowest and most superstitious tribe, and cannot even speak English” (“How the Human Leopards Originated”). It’s extremely likely, however, that Jowe’s liminal position went a long way towards ‘inspiring’ numerous fabrications about the details of his particular case. John Cameron Grant even wrote an extremely racist and melodramatic novel called The Ethiopian, published in 1900 and based on the figure of Jowe.

Nor, predictably, were the newsprints above sensationalism. Two newspaper articles even asserted that the Human Leopards raised boys like cattle for consumption:

there is a hideously genuine appetite for fresh human flesh still existing among the negroes of West Africa … Young boys are brought from the dark interior, kept in pens, fattened upon bananas, and finally killed and baked. To these Thyestean feasts come not only the savage chiefs of the interior, but also, it is whispered, black merchants from the coast. Men who appear at their places of business in English territory in broadcloth and tall hats, who ape the manners of their white masters, are said to disappear annually into the interior where, we are told, they might be seen, in naked savagery, taking part in the banquets on plump boys in which they delight.157 (“Cannibalism in Africa”; “Cannibalism in Africa. A Refinement of Gluttony”)

157 The tension here between “savage” and “civilized,” both of which appear on the same spectrum, was a source of anxiety at the fin de siècle. Olive Schreiner, for instance, explores the pervasiveness of “animal appetites” in “the foundations” of “humanity” in The Story of an African Farm (140), attempting to break down the same boundary markers deployed in the passage above to distinguish selves and others.
The unsupported excessiveness here would be priceless in its ridiculousness if it were not so problematic.

That these representations of the murders and trials are dramatized in the British public sphere gets registered directly in print culture, which, whether self-reflexively or not, recognized the narrative appeal of criminal cases. For instance, the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* wrote,

> The moral does not work out quite properly in the story of cannibalism from Sierra Leone. The good young man who taught in a Sunday school should have been caught by the cannibals, and all that should have been found of him should have been a boot lace, a watch chain, and a diary containing pious reflections … Unfortunately it appears that Mr. Jowe so far fell away from grace as to become a cannibal himself … The “Human Leopards” is a title fetching enough to grace the cover of a penny dreadful. ("Notes on News")

In casting this case as a piece of low-brow fiction, the contributor articulates the British public’s capacity to read these histories as quite far removed from reality, and through the highly refracted lens of sensation and entertainment.

Thus when the Colonial Office euphemized the multi-faceted violence that was happening in the protectorate in the early 1890s as “a very complicated and unsavoury matter,” it was, first, an understatement, and second, in contradistinction to expressions of wider cultural fascination with the attacks. This focus on sensationalism in the 1890s and early twentieth-century accounts anticipates the lingering preoccupation with and distortion of the Leopard Society and Africa at large into the

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1900s. As David Pratten notes, “The sensational nature and high profile of these incidents and the way in which they seemed to confirm the most sinister of European colonial fantasies about Africa meant that the figure of the ‘leopard man’ featured prominently in fictional depictions of the continent in novels and films from the turn of the twentieth century onwards” (9). Some of this enduring fascination can be seen in a number of fictional texts conceptualizing this cult, including Grant’s *The Ethiopian*, which I mention above, Hergé’s *Tintin in the Congo* (1931), Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Tarzan and the Leopard Men* (1935), the 1946 film, *Tarzan and the Leopard Woman*, Juba Kennerley’s *The Terror of the Leopard Men* (1951), James Shaw’s *The Leopard Men* (1953), Willard Price’s *African Adventure* (1963), and Rene Guillot’s *Fodai and the Leopard-Men* (1966), to name only a few. Thus this set of historical episodes and Western responses together comprise a crucial example of how Africa gets represented globally. In other words, the Leopard Men have an ongoing role in Western depictions of Africa. Acknowledging this fraught fascination enables us to point with precision to the kinds of anxieties that contemporary writing about these events activated, and what they mean for the imperial structure.

**Disruption**

British society faced jarring effects from the Leopard murders in multiple ways. The threat of evisceration was dramatic enough to warrant attention from both colonial institutions and wider society, as the newspapers’ use of shock to titillate its readership demonstrates. A close second concern, however, were the interests of trade. In February 1892, Sub-Agent Thomas Buckley of the trading company Messrs. Fisher and
Randall complained to the Acting Colonial Secretary that when an employee had visited the village of Bogo, “the place where the Country people have burned to death” and where cannibalism “notoriously prevailed,” he found that “The Country through which he passed was full of Palm nuts but not a soul was seen during the journey.” That is, no one was out harvesting them. Buckley laments, “The spot where the burnings have taken place was a sickening sight, there being a heap of white Ashes and remains of human bodies, sufficient evidences of quite a number of Executions,” at the same time as he conveys the consequent setbacks for trade operations: “Our agent experienced much difficulty in prevailing on his men to accompany and guide him, so great was the terror they felt.” He goes on in this letter to implore the Acting Colonial Secretary “to put an end to a state of affairs, which being within a few miles of Bonthe and easily accessible is a crying disgrace to our nation and to humanity itself.” Here, the “disgrace” Buckley identifies is at once tied to both humanitarian concerns and the disruption of European economic networks. Similarly, two years later, T.J. Alldridge, the district commissioner of Sherbro, meditated,

With reference to the Fetish Customs … I do not believe that they affect the trading community to any appreciable extent, although it is but reasonable to suppose that were these diabolical customs eradicated entirely from the neighbourhood it would probably be the means of an increased population between Bambaiya and Bogo, which in its turn, with

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159 Bonthe was the location of the key administrative station outside of Freetown.
160 CO 267/393 16.02.1892 File 77. National Archives at Kew.
confidence restored amongst the farming people, might be expected to
produce very beneficial results …

Trade for the British was always a central concern, and interference with its progress remained a problem in the colony for decades. An ordinance (one of many to come) was established in 1895 rendering it criminal to possess any of a leopard skin, a two pronged knife, or borfimah. This was done in response to the claim that “This Society has created a general insecurity of life and limb, and caused stagnation of trade in the Imperri District.” The coordinating conjunction does not favour one or the other of these clauses; these concerns are shared in one breath.

Thirdly, the murders were problematic because their perpetuation reflected a loss of imperial control over the region. For example, respecting Alligator murders, W.A. Noel Davies, Assistant District Commissioner, submitted a report on the Shaingay District: “The natives are beginning to think that the Government has no power over these people as they have seen them brought before the Circuit Court on several occasions and they have always succeeded in being acquitted …” One way for the administration to deal with this evident impotence was to provide information or to demonstrate knowledge of indigenous practices. Thomas Richards argues that the British Empire was crafted with paper and that unqualified imperial agents sought to compensate for lack of knowledge by providing reports that were exhaustive, but whose material usefulness was ultimately questionable (3-4, 6). A candid example of this

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161 Ellipses in Kalous 39; Sierra Leone Government Archives, Minute Papers, Confidential 53/1894.
163 The Human Alligators were a society operating in the Protectorate, similar to the Human Leopards, but their emblem was obviously the reptile, and their mode of stalking victims involved canoes with underwater chambers.
164 Ellipses in Kalous 16; Sierra Leone Government Archives, Governor’s confidential dispatches 21.6.1909 80/1909.
impulse appears in Acting Civil Commandant S.M. Bennett’s attempt to record in detail all of the property that was allegedly stolen by villagers accusing others of being Human Leopards. ¹⁶⁵ This thorough documentation registers the impulse to assert some control through information-gathering in the face of being unable to effectively suppress the Tongo Play. However, Bennett also used these lists to help substantiate his conclusion that “the Tongoh people are imposters and Tongohism as practised in Imperri is a conspiracy on the part of the Chiefs of Imperri to kill people and enrich themselves by plundering …”¹⁶⁶ Here, then, information is utilized to buttress British legitimacy through denying the authenticity of Tongo judgment.

The problem of uncontrollability is also reflected in the representation of the murders as a sort of outbreak or contagion. At a legislative meeting in 1912, Governor Sir Edward Marsh Merewether opined, “Nobody knows how far this state of things may go, and unless drastic steps are taken it may spread to Freetown, or to the parts of the Protectorate adjoining the Colony and it would be very unpleasant to hear that the peaceful inhabitants of Freetown had fallen victims to the Society.”¹⁶⁷ This suggests not only that the administration registers a struggle for containment that comes down to a question of power, but also that there is a spatial order at risk of deformation. Registering this becomes important later in my argument that figurations of different kinds of bodies—geographical, human, social—ran parallel to one another and were co-dependent.

¹⁶⁵ CO 267/384 26.8.1890 File 368. National Archives at Kew; When Human Leopards were “discovered,” their property was frequently taken by chiefs.
¹⁶⁷ CO 270/52 25.10.1912. National Archives at Kew.
Lastly, the underlying ideologies of the Human Leopards and the Tongo Players contradicted the Western worldview to which the British subscribed. The threat of an alternative knowledge system, for Mr. Brett, came close on the heels of the basic problem of killing. He identified two key difficulties: “1. The undoubted existence either of actual Cannibalism or of murdering for the sake of obtaining portions of the human body for fetish purposes. 2. The extraordinary ignorance and superstition of the Aborigines.” Because it is so well recognized that derisions of “superstition” and “ignorance” pervade texts of empire I will not rehearse further examples here. However, a consideration of the ideology underlying indigenous beliefs about the Leopard Society and Tongo Players in West Africa is crucial for my argument that the British found this system so threatening because it unhinged what was supposedly known about the body’s solidity (especially the male body). Pratten explains, “While European thought considers shape-shifting an interior process of altered consciousness, the peoples of the Guinea Coast perceive it as a change in objective reality and hence describe it as an exterior event” (9-10). Physical boundaries and the “division between humans and animals” were understood differently in West Africa, where they were “regarded as permeable,” than they were in Europe, where they held “incontestable validity” (Lindskog 144). And as Jackson notes, “Shape-shifting is a form of witchcraft. It suggests faculties outside the domain of secular activity and control. It conjures up images of the dark, trackless forests beyond human clearings and settlements—the domain of animality, the antithesis of social order” (59). Thus, the idea of transmogrification was itself particularly disconcerting because it defied Western rationality and scientifically determined, stable boundaries of the body.

Perhaps most problematic about this challenging worldview was not merely that it differed from the European rationale, but that it began to infiltrate British logic. When writing to Lord Knutsford at the Colonial Office, Governor Hay feels the need to pointedly disavow the possibility of instability of form: “the natives hold that the culprits ‘transformed’ (or more correctly, dis-guised) as leopards pounce upon their victims who are killed and shared amongst their companions of the ‘Committed Club’.”

Furthermore, in reporting on the Tongo forms of judgment, Mr. Brett speculates on the beliefs of one Chief Gbannah Bunjay, who allegedly joined in summoning the Tongo, but was then found by them to be a Human Leopard and thus killed. Brett surmises, “He may or may not have believed in their powers. But, I should say the latter was the case; since had he in reality been a Cannibal he would scarcely have voluntarily run the risk of discovery.”

This is a key moment in Brett’s writing that betrays his uncertainty: Brett’s assumption here that Bunjay mustn’t have believed in the Tongo divination is based on the supposition that the chief was a cannibal, and as such, would have feared discovery if he had believed. But in turn, Brett’s assumption that Bunjay was indeed a cannibal is based on this discovery through Tongo practice. His reasoning is circular.

Thus Brett’s own attempt to make sense of these events is riddled with instabilities.

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171 By the 1920s, American researchers had begun to admire use of native methods in order to elicit confessions from alleged Human Leopards in Liberia (a concoction of sasswood was “prepared from the bark of a tree of the Papilionaceous order … This concoction, owing to the action of an alkaloid, erythrophlein, constitutes an irritant poison the strength of which varies greatly according to the amount of bark employed” [Strong 102]): “Government officials have employed the trial by ordeal with sasswood successfully in a number of instances, particularly in the interior of the country, in detecting members of the human leopard society, suspected of murder and cannibalism … After undergoing trial by ordeal and being compelled to drink cup after cup of sasswood and after repeated attacks of vomiting, retching, and pain, they finally confessed to their crimes. On recovery from the effects of the poison, they were placed in chains and sentenced to hard labor for life” (103). Meanwhile, amongst British travellers in West Africa, these practices had been labeled ‘superstition.’ See late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century writers on Sierra Leone such as John Matthews, A Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone (London, 1791),
On some level, Brett accepts the validity of the Tongo Play. This hint of ‘irrationality,’ had it been less subtle, would have left Brett open to rebuke; one of the more poignant fears of the upper administration was the ‘regression’ of the white male and the embracing of native practices. In Patrick Brantlinger’s words, when the colonial figure approaches too closely native behaviours, “he betrays the ideals of civilization he is supposedly importing from Europe” (193). However, given that the lower classes were most commonly associated with susceptibility to regression and that most of the officials working in the colonies would have come from the middling or lower classes, this fear would have seemed a valid one. Meanwhile, although ‘less civilized’ methods of deploying ‘justice’ amongst the natives was frequently justified by the suggestion that these were the only means that the indigenous people would understand, the fact that, as will be shown, the British were surreptitiously open to native methods of trial nevertheless becomes extremely important for understanding the alarm provoked by white turning towards or ‘straying’ into indigenous practices—displays of attraction that were much less subtle than Brett's confusion over Bunjay’s status as a cannibal. In what follows, I will discuss various forms of the disintegration of what the British understood as ‘civility’ from the level of the individual white officer to the level of administration and legislation.

*The Colony as Male Body*

In proposing that the colonial administration in Sierra Leone was imbued with anxieties about the efficacy of writing this imperial archive and the authority of British

Anna Marie Falconbridge, *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone, during the years 1791-2-3* (London, 1794); Thomas Winterbottom, *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone* (London, 1803); see also Buel 86 and E.G. Ingham, *After a Hundred Years* (London, 1894).
masculine prowess in stabilizing legitimate colonial management, I illustrate here that these two integrally related forms of efficacy were embodied in the metaphoric representation of the colony and its internal circulations of economy, humans, and questions of human rights and ‘moral’ management, as a male body. This embodiment was in turn used to reactivate and subsequently attempt to reconcile longstanding misgivings about the relationship between British prowess, duty, and heroism in the supposedly ruthless contact zone, and by extension, about imperial legitimacy itself. This, I suggest, was part of a cyclical process of crisis in masculinity that spread upwards in the structure of imperial authority to undermine understandings of a bounded, permanent, and virile masculinized national body.

Critics of British imperial literature have identified a longstanding traditional construction of colonial geography as female\textsuperscript{172}; here, this representational economy changes. When the colonial body, figured in Sierra Leone at the end of the nineteenth century as male, is not just understood in opposition to empire’s emissaries as needing to be conquered—such dynamics relied on longstanding structures of gendered oppression and its justification—but is constituted as a part of the body of empire, lines demarcating identity and nationality become blurred and confused. The colony, the masculine frontier, is revealed as a site of porousness, vulnerability, and disintegration of some of the most fundamental aspects of British masculine identity.

In my reading of this archive, the Sierra Leone colony and surrounding protectorate were rendered a physical body in a number of key ways. One is that disorder in the districts adjoining the colony was represented as bodily infection. Further

\textsuperscript{172} See, for instance, McClintock, \textit{IL} 1-74; Loomba 77-81, 152; David 168-72, 182, 193-8; and Bristow 133.
to this model of physicality, there was a clear attempt in this archive to demarcate boundaries of the colony. The discourse of frontier consolidation was inextricably linked to the pervasive Anglo-imperial cultural fantasy of the impermeable male body, and this imaginative connection was certainly reformed and revisited in these particular archives. In another sense, trade was understood as biologically foundational to the imperial body—and such circulations were crucial to what was depicted as a living colonial entity. Lastly, an embodiment of healthy masculinity within colonial geography and society was certainly imagined through and reflected in the process of writing: all of the anxieties surrounding health and invasion appearing in these examples of embodied masculinity are manifested in the institutional writing of colonial administrators. Because of the contradictions and fissures illuminated within these archival conversations, these particular colonial records need to be understood not only as the medium of fabricating imperial masculinity, but simultaneously as the undoing of British masculine prowess.

The physical proximity of the Imperri country, where the majority of the attention on cannibalism and Tongo play was focused, to Freetown is key for understanding the district’s significance to the British colony, both in terms of trade and cultural contact. The Imperri country, though initially beyond British jurisdiction, was strategically important for collection and distribution, lying between two key rivers, the Bargroo and the Jong, and with the river Mamaligi running through it. Mr. Brett in 1890 reported, it seems to me imperative that this slip of country should be kept free of all internal derangement. I am of opinion that the people can be easily governed … the inclusion of the Imperreh [Imperri] Country within our active jurisdiction would swell the Customs Revenue at Bonthe to an
extent greatly in excess of the cost involved thereby. This course would assuredly do away with what at present is a festering sore upon our immediate borders, and an evil, the growth of which may tend to depopulate the country intervening between that part of the Continent which is one of our important Southern sources of supply and the Port with which it is immediately connected.\textsuperscript{173}

Brett offers the metaphor of bodily infection to describe the effect of Human Leopard and Tongo activities on the colonial space, as well as the idea of a deranged environment impacting the process of trade and the colony’s sustenance. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, the “narrative on the infectious lawlessness and disorder of the frontiers” was “well-established” (Banivanua Mar, “FS” 24). This relationship between the colony and its surrounding region, along with the permeations between these spaces, becomes a crucial point of concern for the administration. The idea of protecting and regulating the colonial space—“restoring tranquility”\textsuperscript{174}—by expanding the frontier became a popular one. Tracey Banivanua Mar makes a similar point about the South Pacific, arguing that “British colonialism … was bound by its own rhetoric of bringing to the savage world benevolent civilisation with impartial and universal rules of government. The language of the Rule of Law, and the application of colonial jurisprudence contributed to the production of an air of moral authority around the British colonial enterprise, which was critical to the manufacturing of consent of both colonisers and colonized” (“FS” 38). Employing this kind of rhetoric, Governor J.S. Hay wrote to Lord Knutsford from Bonthe, Sherbro, on Oct. 27\textsuperscript{th} 1890 of his conversation with a

\textsuperscript{173} CO 267/384 26.8.1890. National Archives at Kew. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{174} CO 267/384 26.8.1890. National Archives at Kew.
deputation of merchants who wanted to open up access to palm nuts in the country and who also submitted concerns about cannibalism. With reference to this issue of access, Hay writes,

I took occasion to point out that I did not think it one which government could conveniently take action. Whilst ready and anxious as I was to advance the commercial interests of the Colony I was not prepared to accept the proposition that Government should dictate to the Chiefs in what manner they should conduct their commercial transactions with the traders. I further informed the deputation that the police along the Frontier road were not placed there for the protection of traders, the Government not giving protection to those who choose to live beyond the jurisdiction.175

Not only does the process of dispatching enable Hay to construct himself as benevolent and non-interfering, but it also repeats and reinforces boundary formation and clearly demarcated spheres of order and chaos. He goes on to position the administration outside of and distant from the discomfiting events:

With respect to Cannibalism in the Imperri, I informed the deputation that the recent events in that country had been watched by the local government with the deepest regret and concern and a careful enquiry into the subject had been made with the result, as they were aware, that Her Majesty’s government had decided to assume active jurisdiction over the country in order to put a stop to such inhuman practices. I assured them that the local government was fully alive to the importance of the matter

175 CO 267/385 27.10.1890 File 441. National Archives at Kew.
and that every effort would be exerted to bring to justice the perpetrators of such horrible crimes.

Here Hay again positions himself as a paternal arbiter of morality, and he ties this position to geographical space.¹⁷⁶

Enclosed in the same dispatch is a summary of a conversation between the governor and the Imperri subchiefs: “His Excellency … said … that Constables were quartered along the Frontier to protect the people from the slave raids that had unhappily so long spoilt the country and prevented the cultivation of the farms.” Beyond the transparency of agricultural production being a key priority and the British presence being ‘protective,’ this excerpt also conveys the image of the colonial border being guarded with male bodies; these soldier’s bodies themselves become the gendered skin of the colony, the impenetrable outer layer of the organism. This frontier separates safety from danger, Hay suggests as he continues: “Traders from the Colony who visit towns beyond jurisdiction should clearly understand that they do so at their own risk and cannot claim protection.” In other words, beyond the protection of the border lies a wild realm whose ostensible laws and practices have already been characterized as atrocious.

¹⁷⁶ Banivanua Mar points out that the deployment of the discourse of cannibalism for the opening up of colonial spaces has had a long history:

“As the sixteenth-century soul-searching of Spanish defenders of Amerindian rights would find, although Native Americans were deserving of natural justice, pre-emptive war via which conquest of sovereignty and territory could be claimed was legal when waged against a people known to live against the Laws of Nature. Anthropophagy, particularly of the cannibalistic variety known to exist amongst natives, was the ultimate unnatural act, and being systemic it condemned entire societies to legitimated and legal conquest.” (CC” 260)

Again writing of Fiji, Banivanua Mar furthermore argues that “Cannibalism and savagery tended to appear as a flag that signaled both progress and rebellion, and the accompanying imperatives for suspending normative moral and judicial standards” (CC” 268). We see exactly this manoeuvre in the early twentieth century in Sierra Leone when the administration decided to deploy martial law.
However, this regulation of the colony as body signifies beyond enabling a particular representation of imperial power; it also becomes a tangible vehicle for enforcing male authority. As Alldridge wrote in his report to Hay of his mission to the interior concerning some “refractory sub-chiefs” who were refusing to obey orders to maintain roads, “upon my speaking severely to them they all promised to, at once, have their several portions of the roadway cleared and upon my leaving the town the following morning and retracing the road for some 5½ miles to the town YANDAHU I met a great many people at work upon different sections of it creating quite a transformation.” The paternalism here is typical, as is the trope of the road acting as an imperial vein transporting goods as well as signaling civilization, but of greater consequence is the concern with the regulation of the landscape as body. Roberta J. Park’s thorough discussion of the healthy, muscular, and disciplined body as a symbol for moral soundness in the late Victorian period paves the way here for seeing how the disciplining of the landscape was an attempt to ensure a moral space, maintain psychic hygiene (which, crucially, is about the policing of the body’s borders), and regulate internal health. But, if the constitution of borders as stabilizing forces aimed to stave off threats to the colonial administration’s sense of security, any idea of safety derived from the notion of boundaries was to become directly undermined through Human Leopard and Tongo activity; cannibalism threatened to dissolve firm boundaries between self and other through the physical incorporation of the other into the self.

It’s also crucial that the colonial administration registered all of this activity as dangerous not only to physical human bodies, but also to the system of imperial trade.

At Hay’s 1891 banquet, a toast was made that indicates the need to maintain a threshold between order and wilderness:

His Excellency took up the reins of this Government at a most critical period in the commercial history of the Colony. Owing to one cause or another, but chiefly to the absence of any clearly defined frontier policy and petty wars between the various tribes, just outside British jurisdiction, trade had fallen to a very low ebb indeed and the revenue of the Colony had declined … His Excellency recognizing that the back-bone of the settlement is its commerce, has been indefatigable in his exertions for the improvement and development of that commerce … he has put an end to those petty wars, which for so many years, paralysed trade in the Sherbro district.178

The metaphor of the settlement as body emerges here: while earlier we saw that military forces form the skin, here trade is the very backbone of the Empire. The threats to trade posed by Human Leopard and Tongo activity imperiled the imperial body globally—the idea of ‘paralysis’ connotes systemic problems. This account of Hay’s banquet was printed in the Sierra Leone Weekly News, but the fact that he enclosed a copy in his dispatch not only enabled him to demonstrate his own success to his supervisors, but also exemplifies the layered material functions of writing and reading, and the reinforcement of the body as metaphor.

Grotesque Bodies

If both the landscape and the imperial network are rendered through metaphors of male bodies, these bodies prove to be grotesque ones—bodies that, as we saw in *The Beetle*, seem to become contiguous, leaky, and permeable. This state of affairs leads to the dissolution of the bounded male body as it was understood, whether that body represented the colonial military, writing and authority, or national identity.

The Penetrated/Penetrating Landscape

If, as we have seen, the Sierra Leonean landscape was figured as male, then because it was both passive in its ostensible insentience and active in its resistance, mutability, aggression, and porousness, then understandings of maleness—and the colonial space—were left open to be reworked. The geography surrounding the colonial establishments was understood to be a threat that was directly tied up with Leopard activity. Burrows suggests that membership flourishes “in the islands of the Sherbro district, which, having numerous rivers and mangrove creeks with their dark, noisome, and intricate passages, afford excellent facilities for the meeting of the ‘lodges,’ and an equally rapid means of dispersal to the members, in their swift canoes, after the terrible and mysterious rites have been performed” (143). Burrows’ focus on water signals a concentration on the instability of markers and the fluidity of boundaries. The mangroves, with their twisted roots and dense, tangled thickets further defy the determination of space between the water-land border. Furthermore, the problem of flow is also linked to “the terrible and mysterious rites” as the movement of the river enhances transgressions. The landscape is thus described as slippery, inaccessible,
and unsurveillable to the Western eye, perfectly enabling the practice of cannibalism and the dispersal of flesh. This happens outside the borders of the colony, but only just. Burrows sketches the Society’s meeting call: “At the appointed hour, when it is quite dark, a strange flute-like whistling, like that of the Pipes of Pan, and produced by blowing over short lengths of bamboo, is heard in the bush which comes right up to the outermost houses of the town or village” (147). The landscape again is registered as encroaching on human settlement, and is inherently dangerous.

Even when discussed positively, the frontier space, in contradistinction to the notion of a boundary line of ‘civilization,’ is rendered grotesque. Alldridge, offering his opinion on the state of affairs of the interior, submits,

I am satisfied that the people now experience and realize a feeling of security with which until recently they were unacquainted, and so long as the present Interior policy of your Excellency is carried out and so long as European officials continue to move about amongst the people of the Interior mixing freely with the chiefs—gaining their confidence and adjusting their country palavers when invited to do so, then I venture to think so long will that peaceful and prosperous condition of things continue in which through the arduous exertions of your Excellency we happily find the country to-day.179

In other words, regional permeability was essential to imperial ventures; exchange was a requirement that could not be ignored, even though it inevitably complicated the notion of independent bodies. On the other hand, the frontier space was of course also considered potentially threatening. This is precisely the understanding of the landscape

that Griffith fosters in his preface to Captain K.J. Beatty’s Human Leopards: An Account of the Trials of the Human Leopards before the Special Commission Court:

there is something about the Sierra Leone bush, and about the bush villages as well, which makes one’s flesh creep … The bush seemed to me pervaded with something supernatural, a spirit which was striving to bridge the animal and human. Some of the weird spirit of their surroundings has, I think, entered into the people, and accounts for their weird customs. (viii-ix, my emphasis)

Here, the perceived grotesqueness of the landscape is clearly rendered as threatening to the human body—and enabling that body itself to defy its own physical boundaries. Notably, Griffith also plays up the phantasmagoric angle of the Leopard problem, downplaying the socio-economic contexts of the increased activity. This relegates the Leopard threat to the realm of incredulity and, while articulating a certain leakiness of feeling, attempts at the same time to contain it.

However, it was also the spatial proximity of Human Leopard murders and rituals to the colony that was disconcerting. About a decade before the assertion of Tongo authority and judgment forced the British administration to react, the cannibalism of the Human Leopards was registered in the metropole as a kind of infringement on the colonial geography. In 1883, the London Pall Mall Gazette published an article entitled “The West Coast of Africa—Invasion of British Territory,” consisting of two paragraphs and a map.

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180 Beatty was one of the circuit judges in Sierra Leone at the Human Leopard trials.
The first paragraph detailed an impending confrontation between imperial troops and Chief Gbow, who had seized the town of Bamyah, within British control. The second gestured to an upcoming native trial of alleged Leopard Men who “preyed on unsuspecting travellers and traders on the outskirts of towns.” Placed beneath this paragraph, the map outlining “the locality of the expected conflict” with Gbow works to sandwich Leopard activity amidst the danger of invasion. That cannibalism was on the rise so close to British-controlled establishments was a direct threat to imperial control. As Mr. Garrett, the trade manager of Sherbro, explained in April of 1893, “I … came out with the determination to root it [cannibalism] out, as I felt it a disgrace to my self as
Head of the District that Cannibalism should be raging in a spot within active jurisdiction and not more than 15 miles in a line from Bonthe the Head Quarters.” Mary Kingsley also implies that Victorian imperial institutions should expect to possess more control over these activities: “these things are known and acknowledged to have taken place in a colony like Sierra Leone, which has had unequalled opportunities of becoming christianized [sic] for more than one hundred years, and now has more than one hundred and thirty places of Christian worship in it” (313). The close pairing of British presence and a murderous cannibalistic society is, to put it mildly, disagreeable.

_The Military Body_

Nevertheless, the landscape was not the only body recognized as grotesque. Neocolonial indirect rule meant that “The protectorate is policed by the natives, and the men are designated messengers. They are vested with the authority and protection of a police-constable when wearing their badges, and are employed for punishing or arresting persons who may be wanted. The headmen and head chiefs give them their orders and badges, and the system is working satisfactorily” (Bourne, _BWWA_ 47). In other words, the imperial force, in order to operate “efficiently,” had to imbibe into its ranks African bodies. Because of this, the British were not the immediately visible colonial authority; Africans occupied that liminal space between foreign and native influence. This permeability of colonial authority troubled the British idea that the Frontier Police were to be a stabilizing force. As Bourne recognized from afar, “there are manifest dangers in the creation of an army, however small, and however well

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182 The policy of indirect rule would come to rest on chiefs also being mediators of imperial authority.
disciplined the men composing it, of which a main recommendation is that its divers components are acquainted with languages and localities unknown to the European officers placed over them” (BWWA 52).\textsuperscript{183} Shared native knowledge potentially subverted British authority especially when held by men of subaltern status who had access to a limited degree of power. And, in the particular case of Sierra Leone, colonial military presence itself becomes a site of leakiness; as I go on to demonstrate, it contributed to disruption and acted as a catalyst in what was understood as chaos. As events were desperately but inadequately tracked, the records indicate a deep lack of the structure in the colonial military body that British imperialism so championed, as well as a dearth of order in the process of reporting itself.

In March of 1892, it came to the attention of Acting Colonial Secretary Mr. Quayle Jones that communications in the chain of command had failed miserably, and had resulted in the burning of many villagers in the Imperri district. Writing to Lord Knutsford at the Colonial Office in London, he reported that the Sierra Leone government had recently become aware of a suppressed report from one Sub-Inspector Sawyer, a West African man in the Frontier Police, who, on rounds in the Imperri district back in November of 1891 had at the village of Bogo encountered a chief held in stocks:

Chief Basshie of this village … is a very aged man. [H]e assured me that he would soon be killed by one Neppoh who has ordered him to be placed in stock, for being found out to be a cannibal, but that I should pity his condition and save his life.

\textsuperscript{183} This anxiety would have certainly resonated with the discourses surrounding colonial mutiny proliferating after the Sepoy Insurrection of 1857.
This being their country custom I ask no more question [sic].

Sawyer was reluctant to interfere in native affairs because non-interference beyond the colony’s borders was the general rule in this military organization. What Sawyer didn’t realize at this time was that Bogo, by this point, had been absorbed into British jurisdiction. However, since it was his understanding that he was not authorized to act on the situation, he pressed on up the river, leaving Bashie in stocks. While his seemingly brusque denial of Bashie’s pleas stands in stark contrast to his establishment of pathos for the aged, pitiable man locked up and on public display, it is precisely in this contrast that affect is discharged. In leaving Bashie’s condition hanging—Sawyer visually creates an ellipsis by starting a new paragraph—and following up with a response that is directly dictated by colonial instruction, the sub-inspector’s report highlights a problem of empathy in military policy. He repeats, with increased intensity, this mixing of sterile facts with extremely affecting descriptions:

From Bogoe we started at 4 p.m. About 250 yards off this village is found a terrible sight, or ‘the torment of Hell,’—Human bodies were seen blazing and tormenting in a large flame on this side of the road, these (I am informed) are those engaged in cannibalism. Proceeded on, we arrived at the village Gangarmah, at 5.15 p.m. Remained here for the night.

That Sawyer is only able to offer times and measurements—the most basic of facts—in response to witnessing this brutality speaks to a constraint surrounding written representation of the violence. Nowhere in relation to what he saw does he use the first person to narrate his experience; his report notes that a terrible sight “is found,” and human bodies “were seen.” This rhetorical distancing with the passive voice points to

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the requirements of colonial inspection; all he is licensed to do is “[proceed] on.” Sawyer finished his rounds of inspections in the rest of the villages and made his way back down the river: “From this place [Manoh Bargroo] we started at 12 midnight, and reached Bagoe at 4:15 A.M. Chief Basshie whom I left in stock (I am informed) has been burnt to death. Left Bagoe for Bendoo at 8 A.M. and arrived at 4.40 p.m.”

By this point, a pattern of parenthesizing poignant details with detached observation emerges very clearly, as does Sawyer’s restrained critique of his liminal position. Also materializing, however, is his repetition of “I am informed.” This signals three key things: one, Sawyer, despite his belief that he wasn’t supposed to intervene, did go so far as to make inquiries—both of Bashie’s situation and the events surrounding the burnings; two, that he continues to keep himself distanced from these murders with the slippery reference to an unspecified mediator who informs him; and three, that he preserves a margin of doubt about the victims being cannibals. The second “I am informed” gestures directly to the first instance where Sawyer refuses to confirm that those executed were cannibals, and thus applies the same connotation to Bashie’s death. Further, in his post-script, Sawyer adds, “I beg respectfully to suggest that these stations be reinforced as early as possible and Sub Officers who could read and write be placed in charge of each of the above Stations. The roads and Bridges throughout the District are all clean and in good order.” This first sentence is a careful hint that the colonial administration has thus far failed to fulfill its self-appointed role of protecting villagers while the second is a blunt demonstration of the limits of Sawyer’s agency. Thus what may at first seem a callous response, as indeed the Colonial Office interpreted it, was rather a subtle protest from an incredibly constrained position.
Although the secretariats would make much of the issue of jurisdiction and its transparency, Sawyer’s report demonstrates that the central issue was, rather, one of liminality and dubious colonial principles.

Sawyer submitted his report to the Acting Inspector General, Captain Lendy, who, for reasons that puzzled the administration, suppressed this document. This was a difficult situation confronting the Colonial Office, and they recoiled from taking any definitive action. In fact, in the minutes for Quayle Jones’ dispatch, the secretariats note variously, “I think we should await further information before expressing any opinion” and “Express general approval of the steps he has taken.” The key questions that now faced the administration were, who was to be held responsible for Sawyer’s inaction? Who was to be held responsible for the suppressed report? What were the consequences of villagers perceiving British inaction when confronted with Tongo Play? And what did this mean for the state of order within British ranks?

In April of 1892, Captain Lendy was held to account for not sending Sawyer’s report upwards. His explanation was that he did so because he thought Sawyer’s

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185 Quayle-Jones’ dispatch regarding this runs as follows: "In the course of our enquiries it came to our knowledge (a) that sub. Inspector Sawyer of the Frontier Police had been present in BOGO last November and had actually seen persons being burnt (b) that Chief Bashie of that place who was then in stock had appealed to him for help as otherwise he should be burnt but that Sawyer declined to interfere this being country custom and passed on (c) that on his return journey he found that Bashie had been burnt as a Cannibal (d) that he had reported all this to the Inspector General by letter at the time (e) that this letter, a copy of which I enclose, for Your Lordship’s information was not communicated to the Governor until I called for it last Friday upon its existence coming to my knowledge while we were examining Captain Cockburn Inspector of Police in the Council on Friday afternoon.

3. It is needless to say, My Lord, that I am calling upon Major Moore to explain how this letter of Sub Inspector Sawyer’s came to be suppressed by Captain Lendy, who was Acting Inspector General at the time of its receipt, and why Major Moore, when he ascertained the state of affairs, if he knew of the existence of Sub Inspector Sawyer’s letter, did not himself communicate it to the governor.

4. This letter, My Lord, explains what had before seemed inexplicable viz: how the country people in the face of the governor’s distinct instructions to the contrary could have supposed that the Tongo play was permitted by the government and would explain Mr. Macfoy’s belief that such was the case also.” CO 267/394 7.3.1892 Conf. 14. National Archives at Kew.

186 Ibid.
inaction would reflect badly on the Frontier Police. The Colonial Office secretariat’s comment that “It is astonishing that Capt. Lendy should have allowed a feeling of ‘esprit de corps’ to carry him so far, and that Major Moore should support him”\(^{187}\) gestures to the underlying threat of the racially mixed body—and to the potential for fraternal bonds to render that body leaky and ungoverned. Importantly for appreciating the earnestness of this comment, the secretariat went on to stress,

> I would express the extreme surprise with which the S. of S. [Secretary of State] has perused this despatch, and say that the Constabulary officers must be made aware [I] warned that it is their duty to report fully to the Governor, whether they think that the matters to be reported may reflect on the Frontier Police or not, and that neglect to perform such a duty will entail serious consequences.\(^{188}\)

Significantly, the degree of seriousness here suggests that the reference to a sense of fellowship and common loyalties is in fact not sarcastic, as it may seem upon first reading. What this means is that this threat of interracial bonding was interfering with the structural ranking of national loyalties; the military body was supposed to be a well-oiled machine—disciplined, hierarchical, and \textit{British} (that is, white and metropolitan)—not an unruly system of parts empathetic to the racial other at the expense of protocol. Affective bonds were becoming sites of resistance to British procedure as the soldiery was becoming transgressive.

But the fact that the requirement of mixing was essential to the operations of empire only furthered the threat that imperialism would be the undoing of the order so

\(^{187}\) CO 267/394 23.4.1892 Conf. 17. National Archives at Kew.  
\(^{188}\) Ibid.
foundational to Britain’s national identity. In the coming years, the rhetoric employed by
the colonial administration, in order to cope with this perceived emergent “esprit de
corps,” would ultimately have to shift so that understandings of Britain’s identity, and the
race of the “British” subject, would expand, absorbing that which was previously Other
so as to rework fictions of a cohesive body. The other important ideology that emerges
from this strengthened order to report is the notion that writing and documenting are a
manifestation of “duty,” or moral grounding, and as such are bound up with national
authority; what is written, or not, would directly impinge upon imperial legitimacy. The
secretariat’s next thought seems to be a direct extension of this realization:

It ought to be impressed on every police officer from the highest to the
lowest that their attitude must never be one of indifference: that the Queen
views with abhorrence all such customs (This is what we have impressed
continually upon … the King of Ashanti, the King of Dahomy and others,
and every officer in such regions should know it and have views of this
kind on his lips[]).\textsuperscript{189}

The national standpoint, in other words, needs to be a humane one; it determines
British identity and works to authorize colonialism. And importantly, this identity must be
shared; for the police to operate as representatives of the British, that militant body
requires cohesive ideology.\textsuperscript{190} However, the very fact that the moral features of

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{190} This appeal to an understanding of the military as a single body is repeated in a strikingly similar
response from the Colonial Office to Governor Fleming in a minute dated May 27 1892: “Constabulary
Officers must be made aware that it is in their duty to report fully to the Governor whether they think that
the matters to be reported may reflect on the Frontier Police or not, and that neglect to perform such duty
will entail serious consequences. It shall also be impressed on every police officer from the highest to the
lowest that their attitude must never be one of indifference when brought into contact with crimes of their
nature, and that the Queen views with abhorrence all such customs as those which are unhappily
Britishness needed to be forcefully upheld in the colonial military body underscores the ideological deviations occurring at the frontier.

There were other activities worse than Sawyer’s lack of interference in Bashie’s murder that would bring colonial governance into disrepute. Later that same April, the Sierra Leone government found that the constabulary were taking part, or were at the very least complicit, in the Tongo burnings. The administration had ordered an inquest; it was held surreptitiously. Mr. Huggins, who was appointed Special Commissioner to “enquire into the truth of certain charges, made against the Frontier Police, of having taken an active part in or connived at the practice of that Native Custom known as the Tongo Play,” interviewed 23 witnesses and provided their translated statements. Fleming wrote in his dispatch summarizing these findings, “there can be little doubt, that the Police have taken part in the practices alluded to, but under what circumstances and to what extent I cannot as yet say.” The secretariat reflected on Fleming’s report:

Police evidently knew of the brutal scenes enacted close to their station and did not interfere … There can be no doubt that the Frontier Police

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192 Ibid.
193 Huggins reported to Fleming: “I visited the village of BOGO where the so-called ‘human leopards’ were burnt and found that the barré where these unhappierates were ‘stocked’ is only a yard or two distant from the house the Sergeant lives in – in fact the roofs almost touched each other. The open space cleared of bush especially for the TONGO play can easily be seen by any one in the yard of the Sergeant’s house; and it was here that NEPPOH the TONGO man struck the so-called human leopards on the head, and where they were sometimes killed at once, at other times tied and then ‘stocked’ in the barré. The spot where the human leopards were burnt is from 180 to 220 yards from BOGO; I saw a heap of ashes – the remains I should say of about 50 to 90 human beings, although the evidence of a witness whom I have no reason to disbelieve goes to show that the number might be nearer 90 than 50. It is quite impossible that the Sergeant and Police at BOGO – sometimes 3, sometimes 5 men [–] could live in the Village and not be quite cognizant of what was going on. It is true that a person at BOGO cannot actually see the place where the human leopards were burnt; but the yells and cries for mercy must have been heard only too plainly. The evidence of seven persons shows that the constables – not the Sergeant [–] were sometimes dancing the TONGO dance, sometimes looking on while the human leopards were burning.” Ibid. National Archives at Kew.
have greatly neglected their duty with respect to the actions of the ‘Tongo’ men, but it must be remembered … that the men of the force are drawn from uncivilized tribes, with whom similar practices are common, and would therefore see nothing unusual or revolting in what was done. It can hardly be expected that the … traditions of their life time [sic] should be immediately eradicated by their being turned into policemen.\footnote{CO 267/395 30.8.1892 Conf. 26. National Archives at Kew.}

A clear move is made here to explain the constables’ non-compliance with British orders—even though the clarity and directness of those orders was a matter of dispute—and the justification is rooted in a divisive move; the Colonial Office emphasizes the Otherness of these men, even though they at the same time comprise the imperial force.

The other key problem for the administration in Sierra Leone and the Colonial Office in London was how to reconcile the problem of white involvement: who was supervising all of this? Governor Fleming downplays the degree of responsibility attributed to Sub-Inspector Sawyer: “Whatever may have been his fault or want of discretion in not releasing the old man from the stocks and thus indirectly having caused his death, I cannot think that he was nearly so much to blame as some of his superior officers.”\footnote{Ibid.} And, as the plot thickens, there seems to be good reason for this. Two British officers, Captain Soden (the same mentioned in the \textit{Sheffield Daily Telegraph}) and Inspector Campbell, were implicated in the Tongo burnings; Imperri chiefs had contacted both men, and had conveyed their intentions of using Tongo Play to discover and burn Human Leopards. Fleming reflects that “it seems strange that no
communication was made to the Government by Inspector Soden of the letters which
the Chiefs addressed to him when they asked permission to employ the Tongo men,“197
while at the same time deflecting blame that could potentially land on himself:

That certain communications having reference to it [the Tongo Play] were
made to the Police and not transmitted to Government seems pretty
certain while the evidence tends to prove that either Captain Campbell or
Inspector Soden or both of them did not, to put it in its mildest form, do
what they should have done to discountenance or prevent what they knew
to be contrary to repeated instructions from the Government of this
Colony.198

Culpability thus became the central question for the Colonial Office: “The Tongo men
have been banished, and the atrocities are we may hope and expect, at an end: we are
only concerned now with the conduct of the government officials.”199

But how concerned were they actually about really getting to the root of matters?
Though anxiety surrounding the possibility of white men ‘regressing’ due to the
influence of the contact zone—that is, abandoning British structure and procedure—is
piqued here, the impulse to deny it dominates.200 In the draft minutes, the secretariat
seem to be satisfied with the explanation that the white officers were largely in the dark
about the Tongo play, and that they generally did not need to be held responsible.

197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
200 Furthermore, cultural memory of the Coath Trial (1871) and the Carl massacre (1871) would have
resonated in this situation. “The ‘civilized world’ was stunned and appalled” at the news of the kidnapping
and massacring of Pacific Islanders by British subjects; see Tracey Banivanua Mar, “Frontier Space and
the Reification of the Rule of Law: Colonial Negotiations in the Western Pacific, 1870-74.” The Australian
However, considering the nature of the inquest reveals much about British anxieties regarding white involvement. In Huggins’ report it is clear, due to the highly structured narratives, lack of transitions, and occasional repetitiveness, that these testimonials were comprised in response to a series of queries asked by Huggins but not included in the transcriptions. It is nevertheless certain that there were a number of particular questions to which he sought answers, including whether the deponent witnessed any of the following occurrences: 1) white men participating (whether beating, dancing, or burning) in Tongo play; 2) white men seeing alleged Human Leopards in stocks; 3) white men giving Neppoh, the head Tongo man, money; 4) white men announcing support for Tongo play or that Human Leopards should be burnt; 5) or constables (who were generally West African) participating (whether beating, dancing, or burning) in Tongo play. In other words, the real question for the British administration was, what did the white officers do? As I indicate earlier, metropolitan and imperial fears about different forms of “regression” were pervasive; concerns about all kinds of degeneration underlay metropolitan discourse. Whether these took the form of the post-Darwinian unease regarding physical devolution of the British body towards a more primitive state, the social apprehension about dandyism and decadence (which didn’t apply directly to what was going on in Sierra Leone but nevertheless comprised the fabric of social anxiety about national identity), or the notion that British citizens abroad would fall into the temptations bound up with ‘going native,’ threats of the disintegration of British civility occupied the forefront of the imperial imagination. The administration had begun to appreciate that what they had on their hands here was what would in a decade be recognized as a Kurtz situation.\(^{201}\) As they attempted to work out which white

\(^{201}\) And what Conrad would sooner explore in “An Outpost of Progress” (1897).
men were involved and to what degree, the particular fractures in the ranked structure of the military responsible for these transgressions, and how to contain this problem, the inquest became not only a manifestation of the anxieties concerning regression, but also a means of generating further iterations of them.

The witnesses answered Huggins’ questions variously, but the general agreement on the findings was that constables of the Frontier Police certainly enabled the mass burnings; and while it is never formally recognized by the Colonial Office in the conversations surrounding the Tongo, it seems very likely from the records that Campbell and Soden were both complicit in the burnings. William Stonewall Jackson, who took a letter from the Chiefs to Inspector Campbell, “asking whether the leopard people were to be burnt or not,” testified,

I gave Captain Campbell this letter and told him that the people said the Government has allowed them to play the Tongo and now they have caught over thirty persons. The chiefs ask you what is to be done with these leopard-men—so I said to Captain Campbell. I was downstairs in the yard and he was in the piazza upstairs. He saw me while I was speaking to the Serjeant to tell him what I have just said. The Serjeant said that Captain Campbell was in a hurry getting ready to go to the Kittim. The Serjeant said the Captain could not tell me whether the people were to be burned or not. Captain Campbell himself told me that he had no time to give me an answer and that I must go back.\footnote{CO 267/395 30.8.1892 Conf. 26. Enclosure 1. National Archives at Kew.}

This was a clear opportunity for Campbell to condemn and prevent the intended burning, and he pointedly missed it. Buarké Gpangobah was accused of cannibalism
through the Tongo play; he was tied and put in stocks but before being burnt was able to pay a sufficient amount to procure his release. The fortunate man testified, “I was under the barré the whole of the fifteen days in stock. I saw a white man at Bogo. He came and looked at us in the barré at Bogo but he asked us nothing.”

There are also multiple statements that at least one British man was on cordial terms with Neppoh. As Margay, another witness, relates, “I saw a white man come to Bogo … Nepoh was at Bogo when this white man came. He had caught many persons and burnt them before the white man came”—which means that the human remains and ash could easily have been seen by this official—

    Neppoh did not hide from this white man. He was in the town of Bogo itself and the white man sent for him. Neppoh dressed himself in the same way as when he dresses when he plays the Tongo and himself and all his boys came to the white man. The white man filled a tumbler full of rum and gave it to Neppoh and he drank it. The white man asked Neppoh to ‘play’ for him. Neppoh did so with all his boys.

Meanwhile, Gombee testifies, “I saw a white man come to Bogo … he made Neppoh and his boys dress in their Tongo dress and he then ‘drew’ them. He looked through a small box standing on legs and put a black cloth over his head and ‘so’ drew them.”

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203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
The photograph has survived and is presented below (Figure 10\textsuperscript{206}):

![Figure 10: Tongo Players](image)

As it was discovered about eight months later, the photographer here turned out to be Mr. Garrett, the trade manager of the district; the Colonial Office was relieved to find that it was not one of their military men\textsuperscript{207} who had (possibly inadvertently) given tacit

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\textsuperscript{207} Mr. Bramston from the Colonial Office wrote: “It is satisfactory, at any rate, to find that no constabulary officer was concerned in this. The point of course was that the taking of a photograph of the principal persons connected with the ‘Tongo Play’ would naturally be looked upon by the natives as implying a certain recognition if not condoning of the practice; and this, in the care of constabulary officers who were specially charged to suppress the ‘Tongo Play’, could have been a [very] serious matter.” (Ibid.)
approval of the Tongo play, but nevertheless was in favour of “further reprimand”208 of Garrett.

The inquest also revealed (and other records support this), that in the summer of 1891,209 the Imperri chiefs met with a white officer overseeing the region, Inspector Soden, at a factory owned by the French West African Company in Mohbondoh, in order to follow up on a letter written to the governor asking for permission to employ Tongo Players for discovering Human Leopards.210 Soden did not report the full details of the outcome of this meeting. Mr. Huggins took the testimony of Agent Kittell, who was present at the meeting between the chiefs and Soden and interpreted for both parties. Soden had asked Kittell to translate the governor’s written response to the chiefs:

The Governor said in the letter which was addressed to the three chiefs that about the Tongo affairs he has nothing to do with the Tongo nor would he give them any advice respecting it. If the human-leopards caught persons the chiefs must have their towns properly cleaned and the bush cut down. The people should go in numbers and not singly so that they

208 Ibid.
209 Deponent in Huggins’ inquest James Benjamin Kittell dates the time of this meeting in June (CO 267/395 30.8.1892 Conf. 26. Enclosure No. 1. National Archives at Kew.); Lawyer Sam Lewis, commenting on Huggins’ report, gathers from Soden’s minutes that the meeting took place in early September, but also concluded, “I attach no importance to this obvious error of Mr. Kaitell [Kittell] on the point of time.” He also notes, “At this distance of time, it is not surprising either that he should, in telling the contents of the Governor’s letter which he interpreted to the chiefs at the request of Inspector Soden, have added what the letter did not contain but might have been said verbally on the same occasion” (Ibid. Enclosure 6), suggesting that words were exchanged that were not documented in the governor’s own records.
210 In 1890, chiefs had also petitioned for British allowance of indigenous methods of hindering Human Leopard attacks, protesting, “That in consequence of the prevailing craft or cannibalism in and around our District, preventing free traveling for the purpose of trade, or farming, and especially endangering the lives and safety of our wives and children who dare not move about without a guard of from four to six men, and 2. That these clubs of cannibals taking shelter from the lenient treatment of the British Government in cases brought before their notice are becoming bold, and destructive to our lives, welfare and interest, and therefore 3. That we be allowed and permitted to adopt our native course, in finding out and treating these cannibals as provided by our native polity” (CO 267/385 27.10.1890 File 441. Enclosure 2. National Archives at Kew).
could protect themselves against the human leopards. If the human leopards continued to catch people he would hold the chiefs of the Imperri country responsible.\textsuperscript{211}

The governor’s disavowal of responsibility here—his assertion that “he has nothing to do with the Tongo nor would he give them any advice respecting it”—is damning for British efficacy, but it also demonstrates what the administration saw to be the real problem: an unruly landscape. The British rationale held that order could be attained by ensuring the “towns [were] properly cleaned and the bush cut down.” This idea again illustrates the dominant imperial trope of security in clearly defined borders and boundaries—a panacea that on many levels clearly failed to be effective, in part because borderlines become so uncontrollably blurred in this context.

In reply to this translated letter, “the Chiefs and their followers abused Captain Soden in the Mendi and Sherbro languages saying that he did not wish to make the country good. They said the country is theirs so they would see that the Tongo is played and whatever happens they don’t care.”\textsuperscript{212} Soden’s response to this was “I have told them what the Governor has written and I have nothing more to say.” Then Captain Soden got up and went off in a boat in the direction of Bonthe.\textsuperscript{213} In other words, Soden did nothing to prevent the burnings, knowing that the chiefs intended to go ahead as announced. The Colonial Office’s interpretation of this, meanwhile, was to assert, “Capt. Soden appears to have refused all sanction, and the Chiefs are said to have declared that they could play Tongo in spite of him.” Conveniently for them, by this time, “Capt. Soden is no longer in the force, so that no action can be taken with regard to him.” And

\textsuperscript{211} CO 267/395 30.8.1892 Conf. 26. Enclosure 1. National Archives at Kew.\textsuperscript{212} Ibid.\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
in other news, “Captain Lendy (who has just been promoted) was censured in the Executive Council by the Gov[ernmen]t, I understand and was lectured in this office by Sir A. Flemming and Mr. Meade, so I do not think we can go any further with him; on account of his having kept back Sawyer’s report.” Suffice it to say, even while conducting the inquest, Huggins makes sure to remove blame from white colonial structures, assuring the governor that even if orders—whatever they were—had been properly communicated to the Frontier Police, the constables would have behaved in the same way. But he does this at the expense of the fantasy of a cohesive military body:

These men of the Frontier Police are … not natives of the Colony but belong to uncivilized tribes in its vicinity, and retain without doubt their superstitious notions. Men of this description have been enlisted in the Frontier Police as it was thought they had better fighting qualities than the ordinary ‘Creole’ of Sierra Leone. Even if it had not always been the practice—as I mentioned to Your Excellency on Monday last—to issue both verbal and written instructions to the Civil as well as to the Frontier Police not to interfere in any way with the people or their native Customs,

I feel sure that men like BONAR and FAHANDEH would

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215 It was colonial policy not to interfere with country customs in regions lying outside of British territory. As of October 24, 1890 (CO 267/395 30.8.1892 Conf. 26. Enclosure 3), however, the Imperii was proclaimed to be within imperial jurisdiction. The problem was that this was not sufficiently made known; members of the Frontier Police, such as Sub-Inspector Sawyer, were thus unaware of colonial orders to treat native customs within the Imperii differently. This demonstrates that the lines of communication between British hubs here are grossly inadequate. Fleming explains Sawyer’s lack of intervention in the following way: “He [Sawyer] stated that in so doing he considered that he was only obeying the strict orders he had received not to interfere in the country customs of the natives and this more especially so as he did not know at the time that the Imperi [Imperii] was under the active jurisdiction of this Colony.” (Ibid.)
see nothing wrong in dancing the TONGO or watching human leopards burn. I say this after a continuous residence in this Colony of seventeen years (less 2¼ months only) during which time I have been wholly employed in the Imperial and Colonial Service, and have had ample opportunities of knowing the peculiarities of the people.217

So this body employed for its “fighting qualities” is, almost by definition, a mixed and uncontrollable body. In fact, the Frontier Police weren’t even solely West African men, but were actually comprised also of men from the interior who had migrated to the coast. It was actually a large percentage of these migrants that were “absorbed into the Frontier Police.”218

But while Huggins was quick to excuse white officers,219 others were more reluctant.220 Colonel Ellis argues that “Either the police at Bogo knew this [that the Imperri was under active jurisdiction and that Tongo play had been prohibited], or did not know it. If they knew it they should be punished, and if they did not know it, the officer or officers whose duty it was to make these facts known to them should be called to account.”221 Ellis points here to the need for the military body to be more strictly regulated.222 He also highlights problems with white conduct:

216 Constables whom multiple witnesses had identified as participants in the Tongo Play.
219 He also wrote, “The evidence of J.B. Kittell and R. J. Jackson shows clearly that Inspector Soden treated NEPPOH with scant courtesy and that he was always against the TONGO,” which is a clear extrapolation of the evidence given (CO 267/395 30.8.1892 Conf. 26. Enclosure 2. National Archives at Kew).
220 A number of men of status in the colony offered remarks forwarded to the Colonial Office on the situation, including Colonel Ellis (Commander of the West African Troops), C.B. Mitford (Acting Colonial Secretary), Bayldon Walker (Acting Queen’s Advocate), Sam Lewis (a lawyer), and Dr. Ross (a surgeon). CO 267/395 30.8.1892 Conf. 26. Enclosure 3. National Archives at Kew.
221 The broader public also seemed to share this sentiment. A writer for the Sierra Leone Weekly News opined that regarding the Human Leopard murders, “the interference of the Police and their native officers
it also appears that a European officer acted in such wise [sic] as to lead the people to believe that the Tongo Play was sanctioned. For instance Beah Youngah … says a white man made the Tongo people dress, and then photographed them. Marjay … says a white man gave Neppo a tumbler of rum and made Neppo and all his boys play for him: Goombee … says a white man made Neppo and his boys dress and then photographed them: and Brimah … says a white man told Neppo to dress and dance, and Neppo did so. Beah Hai … gives similar evidence. What would be the effect of such conduct on the natives? Neppo and his followers had been brought into the country for the special purpose of discovering human leopards and the Tongo-play was held solely for that end. When the natives saw an officer of the Government talking in a friendly manner with Neppo, making him dress and play for him, and photographing him, would they not naturally suppose that the Government did not wish to interfere with the Tongo play? Thus it is not surprising to find that, after a photograph had been taken, the chiefs said to the people that the whiteman said they could play Tongo … No one could suppose from the conduct of this officer that the Tongo Play had been absolutely prohibited, and he is largely responsible for the loss of human life that followed.\textsuperscript{223}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[223] has hardly ever been satisfactory; our local experience extending over a period of nine years gives us the right to speak in this matter” (4, 10.8.1895).
\end{footnotes}
Ellis also contends, “It appears certain that a European officer did see persons confined in the stocks and took no steps to release them, and this merits further enquiry.”\textsuperscript{224} He later suggested that Huggins was “a very useful Officer to employ when the Government wanted a matter to be hushed up, and everybody concerned to be whitewashed. We had evidence of that in the matter in which Mr. Huggins conducted the Imperi [Imperri] enquiry when no one was ever punished for the terrible atrocities that had there been committed.”\textsuperscript{225}

Similarly, Sam Lewis, a lawyer in the colony, condemns Soden’s lack of action in response to the letter from the Imperri chiefs requesting support for the Tongo play:

“Among the papers, no Letter or Minute of inspector Soden is found advising his transmission to the Inspector General in Freetown of the two letters of the chiefs. It is important to know what he did say in so transmitting them; because a silence on his part appears to me as significant as, and as tantamount to, an approval, or to no disapproval of the employment of the TONGO men for discovering alleged cannibals.”\textsuperscript{226} Lewis in his remarks concludes that Soden connived in the Tongo practice; he also censures Captain Campbell’s inaction:

Besides the letter [that Stonewall Jackson took to Campbell from the chiefs requesting permission to burn alleged human leopards,] he

[Jackson] through the Sergeant at Bendoo asked Captain Campbell what was to be done with the ‘leopard people.’ The Sergeant to whom Jackson

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{225} Executive Council Minutes; CO 270/32 16.11.1893. National Archives at Kew. The matter in question at this meeting was who to send to investigate and report back on problems the administration was then facing regarding the Sofas. Huggins’ name was put forth, and Ellis was contending this suggestion. Whether in spite of or as a result of Ellis’ assessment of him, most at the meeting were in favour of sending Huggins to do the job.

spoke in the presence of Captain Campbell, said, ‘the Captain could not
tell Jackson whether the people were to be burnt or not.’

This evidence suggests two important particulars,
(1) That the chiefs must have previously held some directions given
authoritatively for discovering leopards by the TONGO.
(2) That Captain Campbell must have, at least, been cognizant of that fact,
and not disapproving, did not therefore at once repudiate, the action of the
chiefs.

… With the fact that Interpreter Parker was found among the Chiefs by
himself delivering a message which was understood to allow the
burning, the evidence of Jackson is very strong as to a positive direction
and approval by Captain Campbell. At least, it proves connivance if with
the knowledge communicated by Jackson’s message and the letter
delivered to him, Captain Campbell did not take steps to prevent the
burnings, which as Jackson says in his evidence only commenced after
his mission to BENDOO.

Lewis also points out that “Captain Campbell at least passed to and from BOGO after
the burnings had commenced. As these atrocities were enacted within a very few feet of
the road he passed … it is surprising that he should have failed to see the burning

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227 Then there is also the unanswered question of Interpreter Parker’s role in communicating whether Tongo Play was sanctioned. A number of witnesses testified that they heard him say that the white administration permitted it; some of the colonial reports denied this suggestion while some supported it. This was a question that not only implicated the white officers in charge of the region, but also revealed the potentially disruptive liminality of black officers or colonial employees to the larger imperial system of regulation. This uncertainty and uncontrollability is highlighted here. For a study of the disruptive role of African intermediaries, see Benjamin N. Lawrence, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds, _Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa_ (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 2006)

remains of human beings which attracted the attention of Sergeant Sawyer, unless it was a willful determination not to see them."  

Despite Ellis’ and Lewis’ demand for follow-up regarding British conduct, the dominant trend in the conversation is to minimize white culpability. The minutes also indicate a general agreement with Mr. Bayldon Walker, the Acting Queen’s Advocate at this time, who denies that Soden and Campbell were culpable, downplays the significance of the photographing of Tongo Players, and assigns blame to African figures in question—Parker, Bonar, and Fahbandeh; and with the Freetown surgeon, Dr. Ross, who makes use of a standard imperial strategy for marginalizing indigenous, especially non-Christian, testimonies: “I … consider, from my experience of the uneducated and half civilized Aborigines of the Colony, that their statements are to be received with caution as they do not understand the exact nature of an oath or the sacredness of speaking the Truth especially when they have a purpose to serve.” As for the constables in question, he notes “I am [of] opinion [that they] have acted under a misapprehension of their responsibilities and duties, and have been influenced by their Native superstitions.” Nothing is mentioned in the minutes of the Secretary of State about the comments of Sam Lewis, who performed the most meticulous and contextualized reading of Huggins’ report, and argued that, because of Soden’s silence regarding the chiefs’ insistence on playing Tongo, because of the absence of a white

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229 Ibid.
230 Ibid. Enclosure 5.
231 Ibid. Enclosure 7.
232 Lewis notes, “Among the papers, no Letter or Minute of inspector Soden is found advising his transmission to the Inspector General in Freetown of the two letters of the chiefs. It is important to know what he did say in so transmitting them; because a silence on his part appears to me as significant as, and as tantamount to, an approval, or to no disapproval of the employment of the TONGO men for discovering alleged cannibals.
commandant when the interpreter Parker delivered his hotly contested message that the British were supporting the Tongo, because Jackson’s testimony suggests some prior discussion between Campbell and the chiefs regarding burning Human Leopards, and because Campbell, though he passed through Bogo during the period of Tongo play and mass burnings, did absolutely nothing, these white officers had colluded in the hunting out and mass killings of villagers: “The awful character of the foul secret murders with which cannibalism was credited, and the failure of reaching the offenders by legal means appear to have unfortunately influenced the Officers implicated, to connive at an unlawful practice which promised discovery and a way of stamping out

11. It appears improbable that the chiefs, after their bitter experience suffered in 1890 for employing the TONGO, would have [so] soon called in the TONGO men openly and without some assurance, open or covert, that their act would be supported or allowed.” He also points out, “if it was the intention of Captain Soden to prevent the carrying out by the Chiefs of their expressed determination to play, he would have given instructions to at least watch and report to himself at BENDOO, a short distance of 5 hours from BOGO, or when Captain Soden next went to BOGO. I do not believe that any such instructions were given to the Police and this part of the case demands investigation.” Ibid. Enclosure 6.

233 He argues, “The evidence given by more than one witness … relative to the message sent by the whitemen though Interpreter Parker though some of the witnesses say it was delivered in the absence of the whiteman, presents a more serious aspect of the conduct of these officers, or one of them; for if Parker, the Interpreter, brought a message, either with or without a letter to the Sergeant of Police at BOGO from one of the Inspectors for the chiefs, to authorize them to deal ‘according to their country fashion’ with any cannibal admitting his guilt … or to ‘play the TONGO’ … or they must play the TONGO and ‘pull’ the bad people out of the bush … or ‘that NEPPOH was not to be afraid if he knew any person that was a human leopard he was to catch him but he must not tell lie upon any man’ … or ‘that the white man said to the people they could play the TONGO and that he was the Captain of BENDOO and he had charge of the country and of the constables’ … the fact of the absence even of the Inspector when such a message was delivered does make most necessary the further inquiry how far Parker had the authority to do so. As from the evidence it appears that the same Interpreter accompanied the Inspector to BOGO after the delivery of the message, when it is said by some of the witnesses ‘the white men said nothing about the TONGO,’ it is to be regretted that it did not occur to Mr. Huggins to inquire whether on any of these subsequent occasions the white man said through Parker anything different from the message Parker had delivered … My own opinion, therefore, is that taking the evidence furnished by Interpreter Parker’s message, as to his authority for delivering which a further inquiry is necessary, the graver charge of one or both of the European Inspectors having given authority, though in a round about way, to the chiefs to play the TONGO with all its consequences is strengthened.” Ibid.

234 Lewis suggests, “Captain Campbell at least passed to and from BOGO after the burnings had commenced. As these atrocities were enacted within a very few feet of the road he passed … it is surprising that he should have failed to see the burning remains of human beings which attracted the attention of Sergeant Sawyer, unless it was a willful determination not to see them.” Ibid.
the crime…” Thus, in pointedly ignoring Lewis’ important reading of the evidence provided, the Colonial Office acted on, for obvious reasons, a vested interest in confirming the ‘correctness’ of its officers’ behaviours.

Nevertheless, while both the administration in Sierra Leone and the Secretary of State in London downplayed the extent to which the moral decay in the chain of white command had been made visible, the Colonial Office was still forced to acknowledge that imperial structures were weak in the handling of both the Human Leopard attacks and the Tongo Play:

This is a curious state of things … the hideous horror of the burnings and human leopards and cannibalism real or alleged have been going on without being stamped out as things that could not be allowed to exist on British soil; they have been handled by the British Officials in a gingerly sort of way as though the country was a sphere of influence in which our right to exercise authority was doubtful instead of being as it is an integral part of the colony.236

This short passage identifies and clinches a number of the key problems I’m arguing that this historical case exposes: the violence in the contact zone that disavows British control and runs contrary to British forms of violence; the inefficacy of the military in maintaining the illusion of imperial order; the dubiousness of solid boundaries of influence; and, far from being reconciled in the accounts and reports about these challenges, this colonial archive reveals that these issues remain crucial points of weakness for the imperial project.

235 Ibid.
236 CO 267/401 10.4.1893 File 125. National Archives at Kew. My emphasis.
Thus, the function of writing as both a mechanism and limitation of colonial power is important to consider if the extent to which imperial inefficacy is confirmed here is to be understood. In addition to the means by which laws were created and actions legitimated, writing was a key medium of deploying imperial power and of making British presence known. For instance, Governor Hay wrote in 1890, “Having heard, however, that fifteen persons have been burnt in the Imperreh [Imperri] … I have deemed it my duty to write to the Chiefs requesting them to stop this cruel mode of punishment at once and have threatened to hold them responsible should any more cases be reported to me…” It is a disciplining tool that operates by instruction, but also by surveillance—hence the copious, almost compulsive recording and cataloguing within colonial spaces, as Richards notes in *The Imperial Archive*.

But as a disciplining agent, writing came up against a wall in the attempt to contain Human Leopard murders. Hay optimistically wrote to Knutsford in August of 1890:

I again sent Mr. Brett to Bonthe together with the chiefs who were in custody, and it will be noted by his Report No. 38, that he has not only caused the goods plundered by the chiefs to be restored to the owners as well as the captives, but has, in accordance with my instructions, seriously warned the chiefs as to their future conduct, and he does not think there will be a recurrence of such conduct.

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Although Hay conveys to the Colonial Office that his written word was sufficient to elicit obedience, records show that within a year, persecutions of alleged Human Leopards had again begun, the resurgence being still more violent and still more visible to the frontier constabulary; Hay’s stern instructions were of course hardly adequate.

The challenge of surveillance and written documentation was another problem for the Sierra Leone administration in handling Human Leopard and Tongo activities. I quote Hay: “it is always difficult to procure sufficient evidence to ensure a conviction for murder against the accused in a Court of Law as the society is a secret one, and I am informed that most prosecutions have hitherto been abortive on this account.” Hay also appeals to Knutsford: “I would be pleased to be favoured with your Lordship’s views on this subject which is one with which it is most difficult to deal.” This tension surrounding the efficacy of writing reveals deep uncertainties about masculine prowess and control. I want to look closely at just one example—Knutsford’s response to Hay—and suggest that his hesitancy concerning this difficult subject is manifest in his actual writing (Figures 11 and 12).

240 Ibid.
Numerous words are crossed out and replaced (for example, there’s indecision regarding the use of “convicted” vs. “guilty”), sentences are begun and then scratched,
and his vague advice is to use “such influence as you may possess” over chiefs in
areas outside of jurisdiction to advocate for executions to be conducted “in a more
humane manner.” In this way, writing leaves traces of uncertainty, tracks
indecisiveness, and betrays a lack of control. Richards suggests that through the
construction of colonial archives, empire is built—based on the power of the written
word, knowledge is circulated and worlds are catalogued. But what I want to suggest is
that here in Sierra Leone, the efficacy of writing the empire and the effectiveness of
deploying power through writing both enter crisis in the act of producing textuality itself.

This question of manly writing—form, style, and penmanship—underlying British
culture has already appeared in some of the popular fiction I’ve discussed in previous
chapters. Quatermain in Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* states that he refuses to
populate his tale with “grand literary flights and flourishes” (40)—though of course his
narrative is replete with these. According to his claims, what gives his story authority is
his “blunt way of writing,” his “plain, straightforward manner,” and his resistance to a
work that is “decked out in fine words” (40). In other words, the desirable qualities of
manliness are supposed to be bound up in Quatermain’s writing itself. Similarly, in
Marsh’s *The Beetle*, Sydney makes Percy Woodville out to be “a champion hasher,”
specifically because his writing is like “hieroglyphics” (95). Thus, this problem of the
effectiveness of writing has serious repercussions for imperial masculine competency.

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242 CO 267/383 23.7.1890. National Archives at Kew.
243 And then there’s the more explicit correlation between writing and British civility that we see in Robert
Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. When Utterson brings Hyde’s letter to
Guest for analysis, Guest is able to tell from the handwriting that Hyde is “not mad” (53) and, when
comparing Hyde’s letter to an invitation from Jekyll, that though one hand is more sloping and one more
upright, they are in fact written from the same hand. The underlying graphological implication here is that
Jekyll’s character—not only Hyde’s—is in fact deeply afflicted with the problem of regression.
If in Victorian society at large, exemplary writing itself is understood to embody desirable qualities in the British man, I want to suggest that this was especially true in the colonies. For instance, after the first set of burnings in the summer of 1890, Hay writes, “Mr Brett seems to have dealt with this matter [reporting on the burnings] with much acumen and good judgment, and his reports are clear and well written.”\(^{244}\) In Mr. Meade’s reply from the Colonial Office in London, he expresses “entire approval of your action in this matter, and of the manner in which Mr. Brett carried out the mission entrusted to him. He appears to have dealt with the case with much acumen and good judgment, and his reports are clear and well written.”\(^{245}\) As an aside, I would suggest that this repetition of phrases so typical of notes throughout this correspondence signifies a limitation of language to achieve a unique and meaningful expression; instead, a kind of shorthand, relying on what has come before, is employed as a way to convey only a very basic idea. At any rate, this example also shows that “acumen and good judgment” go hand in hand with “clear and well written” reports. Meanwhile, the problem for the colonial administration is, first, as we’ve seen, that events in and just beyond the colonial space resist encapsulation through writing; second, that writing itself, despite representations to the contrary, is itself deeply inefficacious; and third, that justification of imperial involvement, of intervention in human rights discourse, and of protection of trade, are all activated through the use of the male body as metaphor for the larger colonial animal. This means that in the writing of the colony as male, both spatial and literary vulnerabilities underlying masculine associations function to destabilize the concept of impenetrable masculinity.

\(^{244}\) CO 267/384 26.8.1890. National Archives at Kew.  
\(^{245}\) CO 267/384 24.9.1890. National Archives at Kew.
On a more material level, the structures in place comprising the system of recording, reporting, and distributing information are revealed here to be highly inefficacious and unstable. With the example of reports from the discovery in 1892 of mass burnings of people by the Tongo Players it becomes clear to the secretariat that clarity in colonial communications were sorely lacking:

It appears that he [Sawyer] had received strict orders not to interfere in the Country customs of the Natives and being a Native himself he believed that he was implicitly bound to follow these orders rather than interfere even in such a case as the one in question. I must say this much for him that he kept nothing back in his report and after mentioning therein that the Chief Basshie, who was a very aged man, had appealed to him for mercy to prevent his being killed for being a cannibal he added ‘This being their country custom I asked no more questions.’

… I am further disposed to think that, some misapprehension exists among the Frontier Police regarding the Imperri. It was, as Your Lordship is aware, in virtue of an Order in Council 4 Nov. 1890, copy of which I enclose, taken under British Protectionism in 1890, but I question whether this is generally known and it may be that Sub Inspector Sawyer considered that where he saw the Chief Basshi was a part of the country in which he had no authority to interfere.\textsuperscript{246}

Communication is directly related to masculine efficacy; the British failure to maintain order in the ranks was an immediate result of the administration’s failure to effectively deploy written regulations. And if the deployment of written information is fundamental

\textsuperscript{246} CO 267/394 21.4.1892 Conf. 20. National Archives at Kew.
to imperial prowess, so too is the gleaning of information in written form. The notion of power underlying acts of recording, narrating, and creating archives was of the utmost significance to the larger colonial machine. Governor Fleming writes of the second Tongo episode, “There remain some points which are not cleared up as well as they might be, while evidence such as that taken must no doubt be scanned with a careful eye and not too eagerly digested as containing nothing but the truth.”

Once again, the metaphor of the body underlies this discourse. The suggestion here is that that which is taken into the body—what the eye discerns, what is imbibed—comes to determine or comprise that body.

Taking in narratives that are untruthful is, of course, undermining, and Fleming had good cause indeed to question the information supplied from the inquest. These records, and others potentially corroborating or contradicting them, were so inadequate that the Colonial Office could not even agree on the circumstances surrounding the Tongo Play. One secretariat asserted, “I disbelieve the cannibalism and believe that this was only a pretext by the Chiefs for plundering their victims[,] that the alleged cannibal murders were done by the Tongo men[,] and that the whole affair was a counterpart of the ‘smelling out’ of the South African Tribes.”

The consequences of the inability to accurately surveil are that the resulting dubious grasp on reality undercuts an authoritative rendering of history. If writing is directly linked to power, the male body, the colonial body, and national identity, and if writing is a fraught, unstable, and porous mechanism that cannot ultimately substantiate imperial rule, then, like the body of empire writing itself, these other spheres of masculinity, geographical space, and

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248 Ibid.
subjectivity also become grotesque, mutable, and defiant of boundaries. Thus, if this colonial archive is heteroglossic, divergent, and internally inconsistent, so too was the question of identity in the liminal zone of the frontier—a question that had particular implications for conceptions of British identity at large.

“[T]he Queen’s Children”: Implications for British Identity

What all of this ongoing construction of the British male body in the particular context of fin de siècle Sierra Leone meant was that through the process of writing, understandings of white masculinity themselves mutated. For one thing, as understandings of the colonial British male subject came to include not just the white Anglo Saxon (though this ethnicity undoubtedly remained the primary connotation), but also the Mende, the Temne, the Creole, and so on, the composition of the imperial body shifted; as the administration asserted of natives within Sierra Leone and its surrounding districts, “they are British subjects.”

Elsewhere, in a palaver with Mende and Temne chiefs, Governor Hay interpellates them as “the Queen’s children”—a move that figures asymmetrical kinship across colony and metropole and positions Sierra Leoneans as disciplinary subjects in a structure of familial authority.

Another important shift was that because the Sierra Leonean landscape is constructed in this archive as a male form, the metaphoric linkage of the male body to the colonial geography itself meant that the longstanding tradition of identifying both national and

249 Kalous 51.
251 This figuration of a biologically shared body is in some ways offset by the British attempt to distinguish men of the Human Leopard Society by identifying an initiatory mark made on the buttocks (made by the use of a needle to raise the skin and a knife to slice it lengthwise). However, these attempts were thwarted by the fact that, to British eyes, the mark was altogether indistinguishable from other natural scarring.
colonial landscapes with passive femininity was being reworked here in late nineteenth-century Sierra Leone. Now a colonized space and thus an extension of national geography was being melded together with a new idea of maleness, one that was both inherently passive (as landscape) and agent (as environment—threatening, dynamic, communicable).

As fundamental understandings of gender were being reworked in this way—understandings that have so long been wrought in conjunction with geographical space and notions of passivity and agency—the effects were negotiated not just in an isolated space, but across empire. The Human Leopard problem was directly compared to other colonial challenges. One British writer suggested, “The best way of putting down these hideous practices would probably be to institute a detective police with special powers, upon the plan that was successfully adopted for extirpating the Thugs, who were a secret society of stranglers and poisoners in India” (Marriott 3, quoting ‘Origins and Interpretations of Primitive Religions’ in the Edinburgh Review, July 1897). Mr. Bramston of the Colonial Office expressed, “I certainly think that the Tongo men should be got rid of as soon as possible, and the system of making districts responsible for murder has been found to work well in Ireland.”

Quayle Jones suggested that an ordinance be enforced whereby if an offender was not discovered for a murder, a fine of £100 could be imposed upon the district in question—and failure to pay would result in the arrest and detainment of its chief; “This was, as I understand … the course of procedure adopted with great success upon the Goldcoast [sic] when we first actively interfered with Human Sacrifices etc.” These comparisons serve to illustrate the

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252 CO 267/393 5.02.1892 File 55. National Archives at Kew.
253 CO 267/393 5.02.1892 File 55. National Archives at Kew.
systemic, horizontal practice of imperialism and the fact that events in one colony impinge upon not only other colonies, but the functioning of the imperial body as a whole. As Beatty suggests, although commercially Sierra Leone was not the most important of the West African colonies, it “is probably the best known to the British public … Sierra Leone is a valuable link in the great chain of Imperial communication” (117). What happened in Sierra Leone, especially in terms of its status as oldest British colony in Africa, had direct implications for empire globally, as my account of newspaper reports earlier in this chapter has demonstrated.

I have underscored the manners in which metropolitan, colonial, and imperial encounters are linked in fundamental ways in order to foreground the impact on the empire at large. Crucially, Human Leopard activity pushed British idealism to and beyond the limits of its own dogma. Faced with an uncontrollable, uncontrollable threat that seemed to destabilize the ‘order’ that the white administration attempted to impose, the imperial agents resorted to rulings that could hardly be considered to represent British exemplarity. Having in 1890 lamented the native system's lack of “supreme authority,”²⁵⁴ the administration was, by the early years of the twentieth century, resorting to martial law. As the Attorney General said during a legislative meeting in 1912, “This is a very serious state of affairs and one that has to be dealt with in a drastic manner.”²⁵⁵ The implementation of extreme measures, including the retrospective ruling that membership in what was legally written up as an “unlawful society” was illegal and punishable,²⁵⁶ that trials for alleged Human Leopards would occur not in the supreme

²⁵⁴ CO 267/384 26.8.1890; Reports 37 and 38. National Archives at Kew.
²⁵⁵ CO 270/52 25.10.1912. National Archives at Kew.
²⁵⁶ As Radhika Singha points out, Act XXX of 1836 in colonial India, which was implemented to suppress Thuggee, was also applied retrospectively (84). The other commonality between colonial acts against
court of the colony but in a special tribunal consisting of three judges, and an alteration
to the law of evidence, was justified by comparison: “If special powers were given to
deal with such cases in another Colony, I see no reason why special powers should not
be given in this Colony.”

A number of these proposed measures were opposed by honourable members
of the legislative committee, of which Mr. Shorunkeh-Sawyerr, a lawyer, was the most
vociferous. The rhetoric that these members tend to employ is key because it appeals to
an image of British lawfulness. Respecting the proposal to make belonging to what the
committee called an “unlawful society,” retrospectively illegal, Shorunkeh-Sawyerr
protested “that it is not a principle of English law.” Regarding the implementation of a
tribunal, he objected,

I was in England in 1883 when Mr. Burke and Mr. Cavendish were
murdered. The horror and indignation excited by such a crime did not lead
[to] the British Parliament passing a law by which Fenians and others were
to be tried not by a tribunal consisting only of legally qualified men. If in
more advanced civilised countries the necessary precaution was taken to
have proper Judges, how much more necessary is it that the same thing
should be done here.

these indigenous fraternities was that conviction could be based on membership, not crime. Men could be
punished for being Thugs or Human Leopards without actually having committed a murder.
Witnesses, to have their evidence admitted in court, previously had to be present during the trial; this
ordinance proposed to enable the witness to offer testimony only once, so that the defendant would only
have one chance to cross-examine him or her.
Governor Merewether referenced special measures that were passed in regards to British suppression
Ibid.
CO 270/52 8.11.1912. National Archives at Kew.
Mr. J.H. Thomas, another honourable member, in opposing the same motion, said, “Power is given to Kings and Emperors to govern their subjects and deal with them righteously and also to punish those who act wickedly. I object to the Bill because it provides for suspected persons being tried without jury or assessors; this I consider is unfair and unjust.”261 Shorunkeh-Sawyerr, in protesting the proposed alteration to the law of evidence, argued, “In England, and even in Ireland when matters were at their worst on account of agrarian crime, the law of evidence was not altered in this manner which places an accused at a greater disadvantage. And if it has not been done in England or Ireland, why should it be done here?”262 The governor, betraying a clear logical fallacy, responded,

> It is impossible to compare what is done in England with what is done in West Africa. The circumstances of the two places are entirely different … I agree with the view that it is better than [sic] ten guilty persons should escape than one innocent man should suffer, but in this matter we do not want any of the guilty to escape. Members of this society are not only murderers but cannibals. As I said at the last meeting we ought not to waste any sentiment on them.263

Though this is obviously problematic for a number of reasons (the regional hierarchy of rights to due process, the presumed guilt of the accused, the refusal to acknowledge their humanity, the conflation of justice with sentiment), what I want to emphasize for the sake of my argument is that, confronted with a force whose logic transgressed the Western rationale, the British in Sierra Leone chose to fold English principles and

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261 CO 270/52 25.10. 1912. National Archives at Kew.  
262 CO 270/52 8.11.1912. National Archives at Kew.  
263 Ibid.
slipped into, perhaps without realizing it, what they had long conceived of as the trap of regression. British morality became grotesque; of course this is by no means a ‘first,’ but the records in this colonial archive demonstrate this dissolution very clearly.

Thus, the fantasy of the solid, invulnerable, impermeable male body gets exploded by the crises with which the Human Leopard and Tongo episodes confronted imperial imagination of authority and legitimacy. With imperial legitimacy and British moral ideology fundamentally undermined here, the role and impact of writing itself comes under intense scrutiny. In other words, this archive comprises a regulatory fantasy that ultimately fails: white British men have been exposed as being complicit in atrocities that time and time again have been characterized as peculiar to African cultures. Though both colonial writing and print circulation work to efface the socio-economic components of history—the material motivations and parameters surrounding the Tongo Play and accusations of Human Leopardism—and emphasize the phantasmatic elements of accounts of Africa, such as ritual murder, superstition, and shape-shifting, these texts also make visible their particular investments in such accounts in, for instance, the legitimation of racism, governmental brutality, and military prowess. As, however, this colonial archive profoundly fails to create a seamless or even viable history of British morality, it exposes the fissures in governmentability, discipline, and regulation. These archives thus make visible the dissolution of the bases of British identity; as masculine efficacy, male author-ity, the legitimation of governmental rule and state policy become grotesque, mutable, and arbitrary, fantasies about personal, social, cultural, and moral boundaries end up crumbling away.
This imperial situation on the cusp of modernism bears striking similarities to regulatory fantasies in our own historical moment. Much like imperial Britain, the United States is a nation obsessed with policing its boundaries, both in terms of the fortification of its domestic borders and the regulation of its imperial investments—especially in the Middle East. Another obvious likeness is the use of moral rhetoric—the selling of the crusade against the “Axis of Evil,” and that “long-held US claim of moral and cultural exceptionalism, the traditional self-identity … as the uniquely superior, universal standard-bearer of moral authority,” adhering to “a tenacious, national mythology of originary innocence,” which is likewise “now in tatters” (McClintock, “PE” 52)—and the careful regulation of the circulation and containment of information in order to legitimize war and its corollaries. And thirdly, as I will suggest here, its military has in some cases come to replicate, as did the British in the Anglo-Zulu War and in the suppression of the Human Leopard Society in Sierra Leone, the same signs of barbarity that it ostensibly and professedly set out to eradicate.

If we understand the proliferation of the US occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq as harnessing the impetus of the 9/11 attacks, then we can immediately discern a pattern amongst these historical events in the relationship between penetration and brutality. The infiltration of US security and demonstration of the nation’s vulnerability crucially characterized that moment of terror; the perforation of national boundary lines entailed the threat of dissolution of American martial identity. But the US also suffered

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264 Another contemporary eruption of this kind of imperial racial violence was enacted by Canadian peacekeepers in what has come to be known as the Somalia Affair. See Sherene H. Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (Toronto: UT Press, 2004).

265 Drawing on Tara McKelvey’s work, McClintock argues that Iraq, although it was not connected with the attacks on September 11, was “symbolically territorialized” (58) as a space of retribution through the naming of the first camp inside Abu Ghraib after Peter Ganci, a firefighter who was killed during 9/11.
exposure in another sense, becoming the object of international gaze. As Anne McClintock puts it, “it was as if the globe had swung on its axis and the ex-colonized world was now gazing at the West with technologies of vision believed for centuries—by the West—to be under the West’s control … a wounded United States was looked at, watched, and surveyed during a moment of great exposure, devastation, and loss” (“PE” 56-7). Quite arguably, the order professedly characterizing the military body of the imperial nation was once again faced with recuperating masculine prowess. It having been determined by the American government that al Qaeda could not have orchestrated the sophisticated attacks without the sponsorship of a state hostile to America, Iraq was targeted as the ostensible terrorist backer. McClintock argues in “Paranoid Empire” that the need to identify and embody previously unseen enemies has entailed the incarceration of innocent people at military prisons such as Abu Ghraib, Iraq, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Casting back to chapter one, I might suggest here that the dehumanizing acts of tortures at Abu Ghraib (2003-4) that were photographed and disseminated, and at Guantanamo that have continued to be sanctioned (since 2002), in some measure gesture to the need to reassert or regain a position of dominance that was destabilized. Meanwhile, although these violations of human rights have been laid bare, they have remained largely unresolved. As Stephen Eisenman notes, after the physical cruelties, humiliations, and sexual torments of Muslim prisoners at Abu Ghraib came into the public eye,

266 Richard Clarke, the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism at the time of the attacks, recalls that factions within the US government, along with President Bush, were for using 9/11 to move in on Iraq: “I realized with almost a sharp physical pain that [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld and [his deputy Paul] Wolfowitz were going to try to take advantage of this national tragedy to promote their agenda about Iraq … I vented. ‘Having been attacked by al Qaeda, for us not to go bombing Iraq in response would be like our invading Mexico after the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor’” (30-31).
The US Congress in 2004 received just twelve hours of sworn testimony … and issued no final reports. Four additional investigations … yielded 150 allegations of torture (euphemistically labelled 'abuse'), but only a handful of prosecutions and convictions. The US Army confirmed that at least 27 prisoner deaths at Abu Ghraib were homicides, but the longest sentence received by a solder convicted of murder was three years. Though journalists, lawyers, and human rights advocates have unambiguously exposed the responsibility of senior military and civilian authorities for policies that condone or legitimize torture, none have been charged with crimes, none have been dismissed, and none demoted or censured. (7-8)

These acts, while on one level condemned by the upper administration of the invading forces, were in large part sidelined and, just as in Sierra Leone, official complicity in homicides was more or less tolerated. This toleration pervades the pattern of martial masculinity’s reliance on brutality to which I keep returning, but the perception of engulfment remains a pivotal feature. McClintock explains that, at ground level in Abu Ghraib, the American military police were considerably outnumbered by Iraqis. While the standard “prisoner-to-guard ratio in the United States is 4:1; at Guantánamo it is 1:1; at Abu Ghraib it was 75:1. Most of the MPs [military police officers] lived in filthy, squalid conditions, many of them sleeping in jail cells themselves. They were exhausted, frightened, undersupervised [sic], and in some cases very depressed and traumatized” (“PE” 69). Notably, this harkens back to British perceptions of both people and landscape in Zululand and in Sierra Leone as encroaching from all sides. As for
Guantanamo, like the colonial space in Sierra Leone that the administration so clearly understood as a location where laws and rights could be suspended, the military base remains a space of geopolitical uncertainty, a “non-place,” a “legal black hole” (Reid-Harvey 631). If Guantanamo Bay is configured, as Simon Reid-Harvey has suggested, as a quasi-imaginary space, as a place that is not quite real, then, like Africa, it has been appropriated into an imperialist configuration of a ‘peripheral’ geography so as to render it of another world, not subject to the same regulations as the metropole, and its inhabitants (“prisoners” is more accurate in the case of Guantanamo) as Other, as barbarian.

These representations are fundamental in the prevention of cumulative public action, the lack of which is sustained by the ideologies that cultivate what Eisenman identifies as “a moral blindness” in the case of Abu Ghraib that enables the public, as well as the military police at the prison, “to ignore, or even to justify, however partially, or provisionally, the facts of degradation and brutality manifest in the pictures” (9)—a complicity often concealed by the rhetoric of imperial narratives that frequently refuse to name it. By “complicity” I mean here a range of relationships that agents may bear to an event or set of events, including the standard, non-discourse-specific notion of criminal involvement in an injustice as well as Jennifer Henderson’s understanding of complicity as “implication,” being “the effect of discursive entanglements, figurative entailments, and presuppositional thicknesses” of enfolding discourses (18). Using this spectrum to conceptualize complicity enables a consideration of what I suggest is an important relationship between its poles, one that is characterized by narratives of provisional permission.

267 This Eisenman calls the “Abu Ghraib effect” (9).
Acts of complicity bear a complex and layered relationship to the conditions of torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. On one level, complicity is manifest in the engagement of military police in acts that were either illegal or would be illegal in any nation state. On another, as we know, the structure of the imperial force remained complicit in the violence—as in Sierra Leone, there followed after the inquiry no serious reprimand of agents on the ground, their supervisors, or the upper administration. Thirdly, the lack of sustained and efficacious critique on the home fronts suggests a disturbing form of compliance. Of course, there are a number of ways that the control of the circulation of information and media managed this: in Sierra Leone, the spectacle of violence was displaced from the Tongo burnings and the government’s responsibility in them onto the phantasmagoric elements of Human Leopard cannibalism; in the case of Abu Ghraib, outrage at the uncovered brutality in the prison was displaced onto what McClintock identifies as the spectacle of pornography, and the shift in focus to “the ‘culture wars’ within the United States, averting the public gaze away from the calamitous scenes of imperial misrule unfolding in Iraq, which fell once more under the administration of forgetting, and pointing the media spotlight instead at the familiar cultural bogeymen of gender misrule inside the United States” (“PE” 61).

Thus, the complexity of the notion of complicity—the multitude of variations of distance of those implicated from the violence, along with the slipperiness of these distances—means that, far from being a static state, it is mutable and fluid. Henderson’s notion of complicity as a kind of enfoldment—indeed, the New American Oxford Dictionary mentions that the Latin complicare means “fold together” (“Complicity”)—thus does not need to exclude legal definitions of implication, since more directly involved
agents are also enfolded into larger discourses of assimilation; or, if I may put it another way, are engulfed by surrounding currents and structures of thought.

Thinking about being complicit as being encompassed helps to situate Eisenman’s assessment of metropolitan responses to the Abu Ghraib atrocities. He argues that this brutality and the lack of sustained prosecution resulted from a reemergence of a behaviour rooted in the Hellenic veneration of victorious conquest. Such martial achievements of course entailed the subjugation of war's victims.\textsuperscript{268} Hellenistic artwork depicting capture, torture, and sacrifice celebrated this, and was designed to evoke not pity for the defeated, but admiration for the victors. Such a strategy employed the “pathos formula,” that is, the depiction of “passionate suffering” (53) that suggested that those who were subjugated yielded to or even welcomed their fate (hence, some of the photographs from Abu Ghraib featured evidently coerced men posed as if engaged in homo- or auto-sexual activity), ultimately rationalizing basanic practice.\textsuperscript{269} Eisenman traces the “mnemosyne—the collective memory of images” (54) and the utilization of the pathos formula to rationalize “the subordination of self to authority, hierarchy and doctrine” (72) through to the seventeenth century, illustrating its role in the maintenance of Church and state power. However, in the eighteenth century, with the Enlightenment and the questioning of such authority, came a rejection of the subordination that had theretofore been valorized. By the mid-nineteenth century, the

\textsuperscript{268} In a reading that similarly echoes Hegel's master-slave dialectic, McClintock suggests that the rationale of the Abu Ghraib photographs is rooted in a paranoid desire to embody and catalogue enemies and the domination of them; “without the barbarians the legitimacy of empire vanishes like a disappearing phantom” (“PE” 55).

\textsuperscript{269} Basanos is the Greek word for both “torture” and “touchstone” (Eisenman 46), suggesting a belief in the connection between torture and truth.
physical reality of suffering was being foregrounded in artistic images. But Eisenman also points out that around the turn of the twentieth century, global imperialism and the rise of authoritarian regimes and the extension of clashes of capitalist claims began once again to “[fan] new flames from dying [the] embers” of Hellenistic artistic strategy (88). Empire thus employed cultural practice in its project of legitimation.

If this is so, then what if it is the enfoldment—or the engulfment—in the ideology that accepts the necessity of brutality for the maintenance of imperial order that has become, recognized or not, a trans-centurial threat to modern identity and to the idea of morality? As Colonel Ellis remarked of the colonial agents’ implication in the mass burnings in Sierra Leone, the matter was entirely “whitewashed”; Eisenman’s argument helps to suggest that part of the reason for this same outcome after Abu Ghraib was that the government agents and administration both understood this torture as ultimately crucial to the establishment and maintenance of imperial order—in other words, dominance and imperial power were venerated at the cost of humanity. Thus the possibility arises that the complicities in Sierra Leone are part of a shift back towards a widespread acceptance of basanos that has again found footing in the twenty-first-

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270 Eisenman analyzes, as an example of this, Edouard Manet’s The Mocking of Christ (1865): “Here, Christ is a pasty-skinned, knobby-kneed Frenchman with a well-trimmed beard; his torturers are a motley group of oddly dressed workers of varied age and pallor, with calloused and bunioned feet, sunburned arms and necks, and uncertain expressions. Torture is shown here to degrade both torturer and victim and to hold no promise of revelation. By the late nineteenth century, the pathos formula in any form—oppressive or redemptive—was only rarely visible in the artistic media and venues for which it had been devised: painting and sculpture exhibited in churches, palaces, salons, academics and museums.” (88) 
271 George Bush’s statement that “Their [the prisoners at Abu Ghraib] treatment does not reflect the nature of the American people” along with Senator John Kerry’s that “we cannot let the actions of a few overshadow the tremendous good work that thousands of soldiers are doing every day in Iraq and all over the world” (Shanker and Steinberg) points directly to this anxiety, as does journalist Thomas Friedman’s concern that “We are in danger of losing something much more than the war in Iraq. We are in danger of losing America as an instrument of moral authority and inspiration in the world” (“Restoring Our Honour”). Meanwhile, Jasbir K. Puar furthermore argues that the case of Abu Ghraib is by no means an anomalous example of American depravity. See “Abu Ghraib: Arguing Against Exceptionalism” (2004). 
century American Empire, and that also, pointing directly to instability, is a sign of imperial decay.

If empire is held together by narratives that permit such violence, then it also requires public complicity in these narratives. If we conceive of complicity as a relation to injustice that is always in flux, always fluid, then, in its integral relationship with narrative, it too becomes a kind of all-encompassing flow, an ever-present ideology suffusing modern Western experience. The stories that we are told and that we tell ourselves that work to make sense of our local and global positions in relation to not only the kinds of exploitation that Conrad describes in *Heart of Darkness* but also those that remain elided, indeed work to obfuscate complicity itself—the acknowledgment of which threatens conceptions of the self as autonomous, moral, and bounded. In the scenario that the threatening flow of complicity is staved off with powerful illusions of isolation, distance from injustice, and boundaries, the importance of narration, of mediation, becomes crucial to maintaining the moral legitimacy of this position. Conrad recognized this, which is one of the reasons that his critique of the narrative of imperialism, seductive and engulfing, utilizes the importance of mediation in order to underscore that such stories need to be rigorously resisted. In the concluding pages of this study, I examine Conrad’s critique of imperial narratives in order to consider the ways in which analytical reading and writing practices impinge not only on masculine authority but also on the constitution of critical thought.

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273 Friedman’s concern is apposite here: “the war on terrorism is a war of ideas, and to have any chance of winning we must maintain the credibility of our ideas” (“Restoring Our Honour).
Conclusion

Getting to the Hearts of Darkness

This study has been concerned with how imperialism in Africa fundamentally altered British conceptions of masculinity in the late nineteenth century. Going beyond tracking perceptions of British masculinity, it has demonstrated how gendered and racialized power relations became fractured; it has explored the centrality of space in the maintenance and/or breakdown of male identities; and it has encountered the futility of narrative authenticity in the zones of intercultural relations. I have argued that narratives that seemed most strongly to champion a triumphant imperial masculinity were in fact not only deeply riddled with doubts about masculine identity, but in some cases extremely critical of it. Ultimately, the devastating failures in British male behaviour that were bound up with colonial aggression were registered in various facets of the imperial archive, and they forced recognitions of the profound illegitimacy of the British empire and rendered it a hollow project.

Importantly, what I have not argued was that the British military was technologically vulnerable in the colonies. Acknowledging that the powers of physical force were completely asymmetrical, I nevertheless insist that, for one thing, there was certainly a perceived sense of exposure – à la the Sepoy Insurrection in 1857, the Morant Bay uprising in ’65, the Fenian uprising, the issues of national trade surrounding the Suez Canal and the Cape route, and, of course, the embarrassing loss at Isandlwana. Understanding this perception of vulnerability is crucial for considering how such anxiety influenced imperial motives, cultural discourses surrounding masculinity.
and the gendered body, the figuration of spaces, and finally the representations of Africa and Africans. Secondly, the crisis I have identified in this study—a dissolution of legitimate male authority in the writing of history—is rooted not in an inadequacy of force, but in what is at its core an ethical problematic. As the institutional writing and the popular fiction I have explored has shown, not only was the reality of imperial oppression excruciatingly incompatible with the traditional and fictional masculine ideal, but, furthermore, fin de siècle imperial society recognized this truth and was haunted by it. Letters from Zululand were troubled by this failure, Haggard parodied it, Marsh articulated its devastating pervasiveness, and the administration in Sierra Leone ultimately became complicit with it. That male ‘virtues’ were leaky, the body itself grotesque, and narrative authority in turn entirely contrived meant that those who were invested in the fiction would ultimately be faced with the choice of vehemently countering this truth, or finding alternate modes of justifying imperial force.

Thus, much more complex, fraught, and critical approaches to imperialism and masculinity were circulating throughout Victorian culture than has heretofore been adequately recognized. In chapter one we saw that British overconfidence led to emasculation as metaphors of engulfment and penetration by the Zulu permeated private letters and publications during the Anglo-Zulu War. Because the reassertion of white prowess was predicated on brutality and the reappropriation of the trope of penetration, a crisis in the post-1850s schoolboy culture of heroism began to fissure the conception of the ideal imperial man. Chapter two pushed further on this fracture by arguing that in Haggard’s most popular works, *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She: A History of Adventure*, his rhetorical strategies hinge on a parodic treatment of
adventuring males while his critique of the frame narrative undermines the imperial adventurer’s authority. Following this, my analysis of Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* found that the text, in its linking of a representation of the male body as grotesque with the ostensibly authoritative narrative’s leakiness, works to critique governmental legitimacy. I returned to institutional writing in chapter four, where colonial confrontation with the subversive violence of indigenous groups in Sierra Leone resulted in a breakdown of British principles of just colonial rule along with the notion of a structured and disciplined British military body. Finding white officers complicit in various forms of brutality, the colonial administration was forced to recognize the dissolution of the ostensibly bounded body (individual and institutional), the inadequacies of government, and the disintegration of legitimacy.

These findings have a number of implications. My insistence on treating popular literature with formal rigor entails a reconsideration of what have thus far been prominent assumptions about authors like Haggard and Marsh and the political investments of their works. In attending to the contradictory, layered, and complex aspects of male writing, this study points out that, in some cases, quite penetrating critiques came from within the sphere of dominant masculinity itself.

Detailed, situated, and nuanced readings of popular texts are therefore necessary before criticism can look more broadly at the texts’ ostensible themes, assertions, and agendas. If we allow for distinctiveness, attention to contradiction, and precision in our considerations of these kinds of works, then we find that the workings of and reactions to imperialism at the fin de siècle were incredibly subtle. Much of the
complex critique of imperial power emerges from a careful analysis of gender in this archive.

I also hope that this project has made a methodological intervention in so far as it has concentrated on how cultural concerns inhere across genres. Investigating ongoing dialogues between colonial dispatches, wartime reports, private letters, travel writing, newspapers, and novels not only establishes the existence of the widely circulating preoccupation with the authority conferred on the bounded male body and its attendant narratives as well as the cultural anxieties and material underpinnings of fin de siècle imaginations of Africa, but it also foregrounds the relationship between different expressions of print culture. We find in the confidential archives of colonial administration in Sierra Leone the same fear of flow that gets expressed in the private letters (eventually published in newsprint) of British soldiers in Zululand. Haggard’s immensely popular texts employed the problematic of narrative flow to parody masculinity, while Marsh’s used it to evoke fearsome threats of dissolved male bodies, gender stability, and history. Thus, the particular anxiety I identify pervaded fin de siècle imperial thought.

This study has maintained that masculinity is a crucial subject of investigation. In recent years, scholarship has shifted towards an understanding that the dominant narrative of patriarchy needs to be deconstructed because we need to know forces of oppression inside and out, to identify the mechanisms of how they operate, to attend to the fissures in what at times may seem a hegemonic history. Imperial masculinity needs to be denaturalized, historicized, and contextualized against a larger web of social, political, and economic relations. In considering late nineteenth-century British
narratives about martial masculinity, I have tried to use these fissures to find ways to access new histories, and to think about how anxieties about vulnerability may have determined colonial policy, behaviour, violence, and desire. Understanding more precisely how imperialism operated enables more rigorous study into the histories of colonial violence, and the underpinnings of representation of Africans—especially African men. The stereotypes about violence in Africa that have persisted from pre-colonial times through to present day are in no way isolated from the constitution of the narrators’ national identities, at the centre of which I place the question of gender.

Knowing more about how colonial confrontations in Africa impinged upon imperial masculinity—its fears, strategies for constitution, and critiques—is a crucial step in redressing the construction of these representations as well as cultural fantasies about a testing ground for white masculinity.

In this work I have treated imperial masculinity as a broad concept. Without a doubt, a more nuanced understanding of its varied inflections is imperative, and there are a number of lenses that could be used to conduct further investigations about the constitution of imperial masculinity and its vulnerabilities. One obvious focus would be the ways in which male-female relations influenced the notion of the penetrability in the colonies. Women’s participation in the construction of masculinity was absolutely part of the cultural fabric, and it would be useful to trace the ways in which the authority of male writers—metropolitan and colonial—was threatened by the presence of powerful female authors, such as those of the morally weighty triple-decker novel. Equally important is the consideration of women’s political groups agitating for rights and social change and their effect on male narratives of impenetrability. Much scholarship has been done on

274 See Showalter 76-83.
the problem of women’s impact on fin de siècle crises in masculinity, but a consideration of the ways in which these dialogues intersect with the pervasive fear of grotesqueness confronted by the British imperial project in Africa would yield new insights into the terms of gender identity.

Another critical approach would be to make class a central point of inquiry. Though class absolutely informs both my focus (the economic conditions of imperial soldiers are foundational, as are the determining factors for which men become colonial figures and need to seek a living abroad; the rise of the New Woman threatened jobs and masculinities, especially of clerical workers; social status impacts which men are most able to speak and write with authority) and my conclusions, I do not make it the principle theme of this project. Going forward, such a focus would require a more nuanced historical tracing of metropolitan and imperial economics, male-female relations, and metropolitan racial relations than the scope of my dissertation has allowed for. Nevertheless, examining more precisely how class informed the particulars of male fears of dissolution would be an incredibly valuable study.

A further possible way to view critiques of imperial masculinity would be through the prism of British ethnicity. Men of both pen and sword who were involved in African colonial projects came from England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, not to mention, on

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occasion, South Africa. Although in my dissertation their contributions have been
classified under the subsuming category of Britishness, my sense is that a nuanced
reading of how the spatial divisions between factions within Great Britain and the
histories of white ethnicities would deeply inflect the recognition of male
vulnerabilities.²⁷⁶ Such an investigation would perhaps involve a study of regional
papers publishing on imperial wars in Africa, attending to a comparison between
different representations of ethnicized bodies and locating these findings within a larger
narrative of the composition of the British martial body. It may also involve a
consideration of parliamentary debates, and reading for regional concerns and
anxieties. An examination of popular fiction would thus also be rooted in a
contextualization of local and national relations within the text and surrounding its
production.

In my view, however, the most imperative research that needs to emerge from
this study entails an engagement with the other side of the conversation that developed
in and as a result of contact zones in Africa. My conjecture is that African constructions
of white masculinity as well as black masculinity significantly impacted how British men
conceived of and articulated their own prowess; the challenge would be to trace this
conversation in the archives. The limited scope and resources of this project have thus

²⁷⁶ This critical conversation would work both ways. For instance, scholarship on the solidarity between
nationalist Irish with Boers (see, for example, Keith Surridge, “‘All you soldiers are what we call pro-Boer’:
The Military Critique of the South African War, 1899–1902” History 82. 268 [1997]: 582–600; Julie
Cairnie, “Imperial Poverty in Robert Tressell’s The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists” The Journal of
Commonwealth Literature 37.2 [2002]: 175-91, and “‘From the Cradle to the Grave’: Bodies, Class, and
Masculinities in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists” in Revisiting Robert Tressell’s Mugsborough:
Donal P. McCracken, Forgotten Protest: Ireland and the Anglo-Boer War [Belfast: Ulster Historical
Foundation, 2003]; and Elleke Boehmer, Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920:
Resistance in Interaction [New York: Oxford UP, 2005]) might be expanded and inflected through an
examination of how and why white masculinities are reconfigured during this period, just as scholarship in
this area would shed light on the nuances of imperial masculinity across colonial spheres.
yielded a significant gap in my work here. Nevertheless, a number of avenues appear promising for such an inquiry. Within the particular histories I’ve pursued, there exist a number of published narratives of Zulu fighters \(^{277}\) as well as several accounts of the monarch Cetywayo. Researching missionary writings would also be a fruitful direction, as would travel writings immediately following the war. Similarly, in Government House in Sierra Leone there is a rich archive relating to the shift in colonial attention towards Human Leopard activity, to the attempts to contain it, and to the trials of the alleged perpetrators that I believe would shed crucial light on the contexts, activities, and rulings of the circuit courts, and which would in turn illuminate aspects of colonial anxiety surrounding the impact of subversive indigenous violence on white masculinity. Though, again, accessing these archives are beyond the scope and resources of this project, an extended study of them would be an incredibly useful contribution to addressing the problematic I have attempted to tackle here. It is extremely likely that this archive would not only shed further light on governmental complicity in tortuous practice in the Imperri, but also extend, complicate, and enrich my discussion of the reworking of white martial masculinity at the turn of the century. Additionally, in following a potentially new direction for the project, these archives of the trials in Sierra Leone may help us understand how the imagination of the Human Leopard Society continues to inhere in white Western cultural productions.

Nevertheless, my findings here mark out fresh directions for literary scholarship concerned with how gendered national identity mutated and how empire was critiqued. The concerns of my study impact how we might think about other texts in the genre,

especially as our focus moves further into the twentieth century and approaches World War One and the beginning of a massive change for the British Empire. Offering here a short analysis of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, I hope to demonstrate not only that the tropes used by popular and institutional writing to critique imperial masculinity remain pervasive in a canonical literary text such as Conrad’s, but also that the trends exposed in this study shed new light on ways of reading this extremely widely read work.

II

The debate surrounding whether *Heart of Darkness* was pro- or anti-imperial has been taken up by numerous scholars in the twentieth century. Critics have argued the degrees to which Conrad supported or critiqued imperialism, as well as condemned or attempted to make sense of the text’s racist elements. Reading the novella through the lens of the particular crises in masculinity that this study identifies—the perceived dissolution of physical boundaries of the male body, the inefficacy of martial masculinity, and the grotesqueness of imperial narratives—I argue that it is not so much imperialism itself that Conrad critiques in this work as the European narratives that permit it.

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279 Hawkins has rightly argued that it is erroneous to conclude that imperialism “was essentially the same in all areas, varying only according to such subjective factors as the culture and benevolence of the mother country. Actually, imperialism was not monolithic. Important discriminations should be made in terms of imperial aims, systems of administration, degrees of exploitation, and even types of exploitation”
My reading here intervenes in the debate about *Heart of Darkness* by focusing on what I believe to be the novella’s underlying focus—the enfolding and threatening power of narrative—and emphasizing the subversive potential of frame narratives as well as tropes that work to hollow out imperial masculinity, just as my dissertation at large argues for an examination of the intersection of narrative form and content. In making this argument, I suggest that many of the various aspects of critiques of imperial masculinity in its diverse expressions that have emerged in other historical and fictitious texts investigated in this study also appear in *Heart of Darkness*, including gestures to penetration, despotism, desire, and the problem of flow.

From the beginning, this text is interested in the failures of turn-of-the-century imperial masculinity, and with what Andrew Michael Roberts describes as “the powerful,

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(288). Making the point that the central colonial practices under examination in *Heart of Darkness* are Belgian, Hawkins nevertheless suggests that although “In judging imperialism according to the criteria of efficiency and the ‘idea,’ Conrad could appeal to his British readers to condemn Leopold without impugning themselves, since such abuses as forced labour and the absence of currency were not characteristic of British colonies” (292). Conrad meanwhile publically denounced the use of efficiency as a moral standard and rejected the validity of the philanthropic ‘idea’ (295). Thus, if the primary critique of empire is directed towards Belgium, this in no way exempts Britain from the implications for British imperial practice that the novella brings to bear. This is part of what Atkinson fails to recognize in stressing the text’s critique of imperial France. Moreover, however, Atkinson’s insistence that because of the pro-imperialism of *Blackwood’s*, the magazine in which Conrad’s text first appeared, the novella itself supported British imperialism. In making this argument, Atkinson not only sets a disproportionate value on William Blackwood’s textual perceptions, thus understanding the Tory owner and editor’s perspective to be the gold standard of *Heart of Darkness*’s meaning, but also provides an extraordinarily over-simplistic assessment of Conrad’s text, concluding “it is fully a part of the moral and political discourse of *Blackwood’s*, whose basic rule is that good imperialists are British and bad imperialists are not” (390). Indeed, for Atkinson’s argument that Conrad’s text was using the paratexts within *Blackwood’s* to draw out lessons for contemporary readers and support British colonial practice to be convincing, Conrad would have had to have written his story around these other works, or at the very least would have to have made editorial decisions about their inclusions. In taking Marlow’s ostensible praise of “the devotion to efficiency” (qtd. in 377) and the ‘idea’ that red points on a map of Africa indicate “that some real work is done there” (qtd. in 379) at face value, Atkinson misses the ways in which, as I will go on to show, the frame narrative demands that the reader be critical of Marlow.

280 Andrew Michael Roberts addresses a similar concern from another angle, investigating the novella’s preoccupation with epistemological certainty. See *Conrad and Masculinity* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 2000).
knowing, speaking male subject of knowledge” (125-6). In what is perhaps nostalgia for exemplars, Marlow reflects on the Romans’ invasion of Britain, suggesting, “They were men enough to face the darkness” (Conrad 6). This establishes a standard of masculinity, however fabricated, and thus implicates the modern colonialists in a comparison of manliness. The efficacy of white men is then set against “the immensity” of Africa, as Marlow ponders from the interior: “What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that big dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there?” (27). As it turns out, pretty much without exception, the imperialists get “handle[d].” Fresleven, the captain whom Marlow replaces, dies because, in an argument over a couple of chickens, he fails to achieve manly composure and control. Marlow’s sixteen-stone companion who accompanies his trek to the Central Station is “rather too fleshy” to make it in Africa and has “the exasperating habit of fainting on the hot hillsides” (20), prompting Marlow to ask him “what he meant by coming there at all” (21). The station manager, although resilient against tropical diseases, “had no learning, and no intelligence … He originated nothing” (22). He alludes to his own emptiness in his suggestion that “Men who come out here should have no entrails” (22); in other words, this man has no internal substance. Then there’s the manager’s corpulent (read: intemperate) uncle who leads the “Eldorado Exploring Expedition,” comprised of men who are “reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them” (31). And of course, the “faithless pilgrims” (23)—Europeans in the trade whose

281 Here I use Linda Hutcheon’s understanding of nostalgia in “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue,” which suggests that nostalgia expresses desire for a past that is imagined, but never real (19-20).
idol is ivory—don’t know how to handle themselves, or their Winchesters, in the bush. When attacked on the river, they “fired from the hip with their eyes shut” (53), causing “a deuce of a lot of smoke” (46) and seriously impeding the steering of the steamer. There’s also the sense that Marlow himself isn’t taken seriously by his listeners. The narrator reflects, “we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences” (7). Marlow also shares “the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear” (7); indeed, it seems the listeners are patiently bearing his story—one of them sighs in a “beastly way” (48) and it’s implied that someone suggests that Marlow’s emotive obsession with Kurtz is “Absurd” (48).

Importantly, these failures in masculinity are directly bound up with imperial greed and/or identity. Fresleven “had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause, you know, and he probably felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect in some way” (9)—beating an elderly chief during the quarrel then provokes an attack from the latter’s son. Meanwhile, the sixteen-stoner only came to Africa “To make money, of course” (21). As for the fat uncle’s Expedition, “To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe” (31). The pilgrims carry the “taint of imbecile rapacity” (23), while Marlow himself ventures to Africa for “all the glories of exploration” (8). Thus, as Conrad signals the deficiencies in imperial masculinity, it becomes necessary to consider what I argue are its defining problematics at this time: the ostensibly bounded body, the modes through which it is transgressed, and what these transgressions signify for prowess and authority.
In *Heart of Darkness*, space is once again used to indicate the absence of boundaries between colonies and the imperial core. While Conrad treats Africa as a baffling, threatening enormity that is profoundly other, he, at the same time, connects the darkness associated with it to the metropole. Marlow’s remark that “this [passage along the Thames] also … has been one of the dark places of the earth” (5) suggests that darkness is not inherently linked with Africa so much as with the unknown. On one hand, darkness is associated with pre-colonial conditions as Marlow goes on to discuss the Roman invasion, but on the other, at the moment of Marlow’s utterance there’s no context for what “has been” points to; Marlow’s initial ambivalence suggests that “has been” could mean any recent point in British history where surveillance is absent. Meanwhile, the connection of darkness to pre-colonial times is of course problematic, but ‘civilization,’ or colonialism’s transgression across space, hasn’t banished the darkness Marlow identifies, as the many iterations of “brooding gloom” indicate. Such imagery is applied to London (3,4,5), as well as to the African interior. London is described as “the monstrous town” (5), while Brussels is “the sepulchral city” (72), thus connoting death—and hollowness—even in its whiteness. Darkness—a potentially nebulous, boundless, and engulfing image—thus resists containment.

In addition to darkness, the importance of water as a means to link London, Brussels, and the Congo is central in demonstrating flow between them, for though the novella’s initial setting is the Thames, the “old river … [led] to the uttermost ends of the earth” (4)—that is, peripheralized colonial zones. This flow reinforces that what happens in Africa has subtle repercussions in Europe. In fact, Marlow registers this synchronous relationship through an imagined reversal of events as he reflects on abandoned
villages in the Congo: “Well, if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful 
weapons suddenly took to travelling on the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching 
yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage 
thereabouts would get empty very soon” (20). Here, Conrad not only gestures to what 
Stephen Arata argues is a metropolitan fear of reverse colonization\(^{282}\) (which 
foregrounds the material and ethical relations between imperial centre and colony), he 
invokes the problems of aggression and oppression undergirding the narrative of 
civilization and development.

But water and darkness are not the only currents across Europe and Africa. 
Marlow describes ‘civilization’ as “Light … like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of 
lightening in the clouds” (5), but in this text light isn’t necessarily wholesome. That 
“These chaps … were no colonists,” only seems to imply a differentiation between the 
Romans and modern Britons:

They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force—nothing to 
boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising 
from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the 
sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated 
murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for 
those who tackle a darkness. (6-7)

This resembles in many ways Marlow’s description of European exploits in Africa, 
although he claims that what he’s talking about here isn’t colonialism. He addresses the 
narrative of imperialism separately, suggesting that “What redeems it [the conquest of 
the earth] is the idea only … an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up,

\(^{282}\) See Arata 107-11.
and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to“ (7). While this becomes the central problem regarding the seductiveness of Kurtz’s ideas and their legitimating functions, the notion that “the idea” is “something you can set up” already suggests contrivance. As I will go on to discuss, the association of Kurtz with light and flow becomes crucial for Conrad’s critique of how imperialism gets justified. Meanwhile, Conrad’s use here of the fluidity associated with darkness, water, and light works to break down the illusion, generated by geography, representation, and the dynamics of exploitation, of distance between Africa and Europe.

In light of the collapsing of these boundaries, Marlow’s representation of the Congo functions really as a way to talk about European behaviour and anxieties.283 As in accounts from the Anglo-Zulu War, Haggard, Marsh, and in the Sierra Leone colonial archive, there is in Heart of Darkness an entity that, at once fascinating, terrifying, and desirable—territory, a body, wealth—threatens to consume the imperial forces. For Marlow, it is the African landscape, grotesque and immense, that moves to engulf.

From the moment Marlow arrives on the coast of Africa and moves up “the mouth of the big river” (14), the landscape is figured as an invaginating body that absorbs the more vulnerable human bodies. At the central station, a man is beaten for supposedly causing an explosion; “afterwards he arose and went out—and the wilderness without a

283 In asserting this, I do not suggest that Conrad’s representation of Africa is irrelevant to the marginalizing and racist implications of this tactic. Chinua Achebe has rightly taken issue with the representation of “Africa as a setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor” and of “Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril” (788). My aim here, as it has been in the larger project, is to turn the spotlight on the underpinnings of such injurious representations. We know that, just as the texts from witnesses of the Anglo-Zulu War used imagery of swarming, as Haggard and Marsh used African others to embody threats to British autonomy, and as the Sierra Leonean colonial administration wrestled with the what they understood to be physical, political, and psychic ‘encroachments’ of the frontier, this strategy of projection is fundamentally oppressive; what I emphasize in this project is what this strategy indicates about masculine and imperial anxieties.
sound took him into its bosom again” (24). Some time later, the Eldorado Expedition similarly “went into a patient wilderness, that closed upon it as the sea closes over a diver” (33). (Note the allusion to fluidity here.) Eventually, as Marlow himself moves along the fluid body of the river further into the Congo, the forest moves to engulf his unit as well: “To the left of us there was the long uninterrupted shoal, and to the right a high steep bank heavily overgrown with bushes. Above the bush the trees stood in serried ranks”—as though the forest expressed its own version of martial prowess—“The twigs overhung the current thickly, and from distance to distance a large limb of some tree projected rigidly over the stream” (44). Marlow thus conveys a strong sense of dense enclosure.

However, this engulfing landscape is also personified: “to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this tumultuous and mournful uproar arise” (40). Conrad’s deployment of this device is continual. The wilderness is repeatedly attributed with a “face” (16, 27, 33, 44, 60), not to mention other body parts in the examples already mentioned, and as Marlow’s ship approaches Kurtz, he notices that shallow patches of grasses could be “seen just under the water, exactly as a man’s backbone is seen running down the middle of his back under the skin” (44). Thus, a pattern emerges: the African bush isn’t so much given a personality (although this is also arguably true) as given a body. This body threatens to both engulf and penetrate; power is thereby encoded in a sexual dynamic of invasion.

The wilderness’ body is a grotesque body—fluid, borderless, threatening: “We called … all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself
had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair” (14).

Here, the landscape demonstrates the permeability of its own perimeter. The “formless coast” yields to rivers whose menacing currents Marlow calls “streams of death in life,” while their muddy banks are liminal zones, neither water nor soil, on which the “contorted mangroves,” which, as we saw in chapter four, further obfuscate the boundary between solid land and flowing water. The forest’s grotesqueness is extended through the particular libidinal codes that are used to render it. Marlow relates from the steamer, “I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes—the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour” (46). These body parts at no point comprise a whole human; the humanity within the forest is reduced to constituent bodily components. Thus the “naked breasts” and “glistening” limbs are depersonalized, sexualized objects “swarming” in the bush. The use of the heavily loaded term “swarming” gestures immediately to a sense of being overwhelmed, and resonates with the descriptions of engulfment explored in chapter one. The grotesque wilderness is an immensity that the band of European men cannot handle, even though they are the invaders: “The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness” (35). Here, although the white males move further beyond the frontier, their penetration is registered as a potentially one-way trip as the forest “bar[s] the way for our return”; they are rendered vulnerable by the landscape’s threatening prowess. Conrad thus signals
that the European invader’s penetration is not the most prominent action; rather, engulfment intimates the inability of invaders to exert control over the territory.

Considering this against the ways in which Conrad has represented imperial masculinity as bound up with greed and failure, we see that the suggestion that “the immensity ... handle[s]” the capitalists converges with implications of the imperial project’s hollowness. As aspects of the contact zone transgress the (rather unsound) boundaries of white bodies and units, the emptiness inside them is underscored. This theme is developed from early in Marlow’s narrative. Fresleven dies easily; the “tentative jab with a spear ... went quite easy between the shoulder blades” (9). Further, his skeletal remains embody the void of the project of which he had been a part: “the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones” (9). Here, the wilderness literally penetrates the European. The brick-maker at the central station exudes a similar vacuousness. As Marlow reflects, “I let him run on, this papier-mâché Mephistopheles, and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe” (26). The brick-maker’s imperial ambitions, which utterly rule his conduct, are, as for the station manager, inextricable from the strong sense of hollowness that Marlow identifies.

But the imagery of holes is not limited to human bodies. From Marlow’s finding himself upon his arrival at the company’s station “amongst a waste of excavations” (15) to the “vast artificial hole somebody had been digging ... the purpose of which [Marlow] found it impossible to divine” (17), to the “very narrow ravine, almost no more than a scar on the hillside” (17), into which he nearly falls, to the steamer with its bottom torn out by river rock, the physical world that Marlow inhabits appears to be coming apart at
the seams. Marlow then becomes fixated on stitching up the tears in his “command” (21): “What I really wanted was rivets, by Heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work—to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted” (28). The rivets, scarce though they were, were enough to patch up the steamer, but were insufficient for the recuperation of the problematic figure of Kurtz; “rivets were what really Mr. Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it” (29). Though in the immediate sense Marlow means that rivets are required for the steamer to retrieve Kurtz, on another level this also suggests that Kurtz needs rivets because he, too, is full of holes. Thus, the “unselfish belief in the idea” of an efficacious and philanthropic project of “real work” (10) begins to deteriorate before Marlow even sets out on the river towards Kurtz. In a sense, this dissolution of the ideal to which Marlow gestures at the beginning of his tale gets embodied in the following example, such that the unknown in Africa threatens to overwhelm the supposed grounded solidity of the European quest: “what we could see was just the steamer we were on, her outlines blurred as though she had been on the point of dissolving … The rest of the world was nowhere, as far as our eyes and ears were concerned. Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind” (40-1).

By this point in my study, this theme should be sounding familiar—the white male body is unable to resist the envelopment of the contact zone such that the currents of the threatening force permeate, disable, and ultimately dissolve the Western unit. However, in Conrad, there are three expressions of this kind of flow. The first is conceptualized as external, embodied in elements of the wilderness. Once again the “little” white man is rendered insignificant by what is conceived as a vast current:
we stopped, and the silence driven away by the stamping of our feet flowed back again from the recesses of the land. The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons, motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence.

And it moved not. (30)

The forest, along with its silence, is figured as a great wave. That the tension between motion and stillness articulates the anticipation of “invasion” rather than its climax suggests that the uneasiness to which Marlow gestures pertains not just to physical, but also psychological reverberations of confronting the site of imperial invasion.

This confrontation must of course also include African people, who, for Marlow, are one other element of the wilderness. As the expedition reaches Kurtz and attempts to return him to the steamer, people emerge from the bush: “as if by enchantment, streams of human beings—of naked human beings—with spears in their hands, with bows, with shields, with wild glances and savage movements, were poured into the clearing by the dark-faced and pensive forest” (60). And when the steamer tries to leave, “the crowd … flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies” (68). As I have established in this project, flow is both dangerous and, as Conrad echoes here, libidinal. Thus the segmented and sexualized indigenous people here are folded into the larger object of imperial desire that threatens to consume its own zealots.
The second expression of flow is more recognizably internal—something that was already a part of the Western imperial force—and emerges from within the figure of Kurtz, that vortex with an empty core, that “emissary of pity, and science, and progress” (25). Kurtz is distinguished by his ability to orate, to use this power for seduction and to deceive: “of all of his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness” (48). Like Haggard’s Ayesha, that other inexplicable being, Kurtz functions as the logical extension of unchecked imperial aggression and despotic power. He takes without consideration, he “lack[s] restraint in the gratification of his various lusts … and there is something wanting in him—some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence” (58). And while on one hand he remains an incredibly attractive figure, his “gift” of “the pulsating stream of light” is at the same time “the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.” Thus, out of Kurtz, an “emissary” of the imperial project, flows an engulfing narrative of imperialism:

He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, “must necessarily appear” to them [savages] [sic] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity,$^{284}$ and so on, and so on. “By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,” etc. etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent … (51)

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$^{284}$ As chapter two illustrated, Haggard in *King Solomon’s Mines* derides this proposition. In *She*, Ayesha embodies his same perspective on power.
In my reading, Kurtz may have found a literary ancestor in Marsh’s Paul Lessingham.
Marlow at once manages to be drawn in by “the magical current of phrases” (51) and to
distance his audience from Kurtz’s seductiveness; he conveys his ambivalent belief in
Kurtz’s “magnificence” but simultaneously mocks Kurtz’ “peroration” by summing up
his oration with “and so on, and so on” and “etc. etc.”\(^{285}\) In this way, Conrad brings the
seductive narrative of imperialism under critique,\(^{286}\) using the trope of flow to point at
once to its potential power to engulf and to its utter emptiness.

Thus, when Marlow says, “We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of
darkness,” what he’s really talking about is getting closer to Kurtz: “For me it [the
steamer] crawled towards Kurtz—exclusively” (35). If Kurtz is the destination, the dark
knowledge toward which Marlow’s narrative crawls, then the use of the imagery of
gloominess and water to link colonial and metropolitan space gestures to Conrad’s
strategy of using imperial thinking about Africa as a way to confront imperialism itself.
We saw this strategy clearly in Haggard and Marsh; whereas the texts explored in this
study tend to associate flow with a threatening Other (such as Zulus, murderous secret
societies, and narrative instability), Heart of Darkness solidifies the articulation that the
dangerous flow is from the mouth of imperialism itself.

\(^{285}\) Lawtoo suggests that Marlow is not immune to Kurtz’s influence, similarly arguing that “Non-
meditated ‘devotion’ to a tyrannical leader and to the ideological flame he carries, Marlow now realizes, is ‘the most
dangerous thing in every way,’ as it deprives the subject of ideology of a rational ground to operate basic
ethical and political choices” (Conrad qtd. in “Horror of Mimesis” 63). For another discussion of Marlow’s
unreliability, see Parry.

\(^{286}\) Brantlinger similarly suggests that on one level, “Heart of Darkness offers a devastating critique of
imperialist ideology. On another, more general level, however, it offers a self-critique and an attack upon
the impressionistic deviousness of art and language” (273). However, my reading diverges from
Brantlinger’s after this point, for he concludes that from here, “Conrad stops worrying about the atrocities
committed in the Congo and identifies with Kurtz as a fellow-artist, a hero of spirit of that nihilism which
Conrad himself found so attractive” (273). In my reading, the engulfing power of narrative, set alongside
other forms of this threat emerging in this and other texts, can only be understood as dangerous.
Lastly, the third model of flow is muted in comparison to Marlow’s focus on the wilderness and Kurtz, but nevertheless underlies the entire narrative. The material stream of capital is disordered, and perhaps it is this to which Marlow primarily objects: “Everything else in the station was in a muddle,—heads, things, buildings. Strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed; a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire set into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory” (19). Here again, the disordered flow is in a sense internal—instigated by Western powers, capital underpins every European action in the contact zone.

This underpinning situates Marlow’s fascination with Kurtz; his imagination of the “emissary” as foundational to his “belief” and integral to his “destiny” (48) underscores that Kurtz’s narrative is profoundly attractive for Europeans. Kurtz’s Intended reiterates this, applauding “his example … Men looked up to him—his goodness shone in every act” (78). The “idea” (7) of philanthropy and “progress” (25), the notion of moral action, serves to obfuscate the capitalist desire fundamentally underlying the project. Marlow’s problem with Kurtz, however, is that he lacked restraint. According to the Russian devotee, “He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country, because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased” (57). Noting this further resonance of Kurtz with She, we register Kurtz’s similar disassociation from moral concerns: “I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low … He had kicked himself loose of the earth” (67). The object of
imperial desire, while it continues to threaten to consume Marlow with its silent currents, has indeed, he decides, overtaken Kurtz:

the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core … (59)

As desire for the “immensity” that promises territorial, capital, and libidinal fulfillment is projected onto the foreign Othered object itself, the fear of being consumed, of moral grounding being lost, and of male authority dissolving as a result is figured as a “wilderness” that itself extracts “a terrible vengeance” on violently rapacious imperial practice. Marlow’s recognition of Kurtz’s failings, of his hollowness, is crucial; since the latter’s narrative is riddled with holes, his authority dissolves. The implications of this for literature are ambivalent, like so much else in this work. On one hand, Marlow seems to have a sense of his own narrative inefficacy: “Do you see the story? … It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation … No, it is impossible … to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible” (27-8). But then on the other, *Heart of Darkness*, as it follows Marlow’s narrative, itself attempts to reach Kurtz, to “[penetrate] deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness,” to work towards getting at obfuscated realities of the imperial narrative.
I want to close by submitting that, similarly, the institutional writing I’ve examined in this study also helps us to critique imperial legitimacy, even as it remains irretrievably invested in it. That documents tied to the Anglo-Zulu War and to the violence surrounding the Human Leopard activity register martial masculine impotence, penetration, and dissolution of authority at the same time as martial barbarity underscores the relation of desperation to torture and brutality—a pattern we have seen unfold again in twenty-first century imperial practices and narratives. I also want to propose that Conrad suggests in *Heart of Darkness*, as do Haggard and Marsh, that the crux of narrative authority comes down to the efficacy of reading practice. The novels of each author have, in a sense, tested their readerships, and the frame narrative enables the first ‘reader’ to be contained by the story itself. While Quatermain is the reader of his own experience, working to interpret encounters in the contact zone, it is left to the external readers to draw critical conclusions about his assertions. While Holly works to understand She and his desire for her, the external readers have to attend to the process of his moral failings. While the featureless Paul hypnotizes the public with his words, the readers register Sydney getting swept into their current. As for Marlow, an ever morally ambivalent character, if he ultimately succumbs to Kurtz’s seduction, he is aware of it. Recognizing that the narrative of philanthropy is at its core a lie, that the decay pervading the “work” at the outer and central stations is the same “taint of death, a[nd] flavor of mortality … like biting into something rotten” (27) that suffuses lies, he nevertheless concludes his tale with a lie that haunts him. Thus, though he decides that, for him, Kurtz’s “was an impenetrable darkness” (70), the equivocality with which the
story ends signals to the external readers the necessity of activity in making sense of narrative, and the criticality needed to evaluate authority.
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