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## **UCLA Historical Journal**

### **Title**

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### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/45f3w6fv>

### **Journal**

UCLA Historical Journal, 18(0)

### **Author**

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### **Publication Date**

1999

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**The Fiction of Difference:  
The Afrikaner in British Adventure Fiction**

By Todd Lee

The imperial encounter proved an undeniable obsession to British authors, publishers, and readers alike.<sup>1</sup> The success of David Livingstone's *Missionary Travels* in 1857 sparked an entire genre of travel literature by missionaries, soldiers and explorers that continued in popularity until at least the end of the century. Britons seemed to thrive on the vicarious excitement and exoticism of their wandering countrymen's diaries and journals.<sup>2</sup> Alongside these arose a new literary genre, the adventure novel. Its primary function was, of course, entertainment. Yet adventure fiction could also be bent to serve the ends of patriotism and imperialism. What better method to inform British subjects of their fast-growing empire than an exciting novel, set in an exotic locale, which could entertain as well as instruct? These tales were potential tools in the construction of a national mood supportive of imperialism. Novelists worked to construct a fiction of difference which delineated British colonizers from their native counterparts throughout the world, forming a justification for colonization and imperial domination. This popular strain of adventure fiction formed an important component of what John MacKenzie has styled an "imperial nationalism" in late nineteenth-century Britain "through which the British defined their superiority vis-a-vis the rest of the world."<sup>3</sup> When Britain went to war against the Afrikaner republics for control of the valuable gold and diamond reserves of southern Africa, novelists took up the cause, establishing a series of negative stereotypes of Britain's enemy. These stereotypes further served to enhance a British self-image as a sober, industrious people whose national character had earned them the right to rule over other, less economically, scientifically and morally advanced peoples. By studying mental constructions like stereotypes, historians can glean important insights into the ethos that drove

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Ian Christopher Fletcher of Georgia State University, Dr. Donal Lowry of Oxford Brookes University, and Dr. Antoinette Burton of Johns Hopkins University for their assistance in the production of this article. Several of the points made here were first presented to the South African Historical Society Conference in Pretoria in July 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the face of the country; or, what Mr. Barrow saw in the land of the bushmen," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985), 119-43.

<sup>3</sup> John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960*, (Manchester University Press, 1984), 253.

Britain's imperial venture. The stereotypical Afrikaner figure of British adventure fiction adds a particularly revealing component to the portraits of Britain's colonial enemies. The following article attempts to establish the nature of the British literary stereotype of the Afrikaner, an image of a far-off enemy in the South African War of 1899-1902, whose unromantic figure formed an antithesis to the confident self-image of imperial Britain.

The Afrikaners of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State who took up arms against the British Empire in 1899 had a long history in southern Africa as well as a tradition of anti-British sentiment. Afrikaners, the descendants of Dutch, German, and French settlers, were originally planted at the Cape of Good Hope in the 1660s to provide a way station for Dutch ships sailing from the Atlantic to the riches of the East Indies. Over time, the Afrikaners slowly developed a distinct language, culture, and economy of mixed farming and pastoralism in the unique environment of the Cape. When the British took over the Cape Colony as part of the spoils of the Napoleonic Wars, the conservative, slave-owning Afrikaners soon clashed with the spirit and the law of nineteenth-century British liberalism and abolitionism. As a result, thousands of Afrikaners embarked on a series of "treks" to the north and east in the late 1830s in order to escape British rule, eventually founding two republics in what is now the northeastern corner of the modern South Africa. The experience of the Great Trek<sup>4</sup>, as this migration became known, and the campaigns waged against Xhosa and Zulu armies to secure grazing lands in the interior, became part and parcel of Afrikaner folk memory throughout the nineteenth century and proved essential in the slow formation of an Afrikaner identity. Afrikaners proved unable, however, to escape from British power when Natal was annexed in 1843 as a result of endemic warfare with the Zulus. The situation had changed by the 1880s, when large gold and diamond reserves were discovered in the Transvaal. Britain actually annexed the Transvaal in 1877, but was forced to relinquish it after a short war against the Afrikaners during 1879-80. Yet British mining companies, headed by wealthy and politically powerful landlords like Cecil Rhodes, began to play a very large role in the Transvaal's only industry. During the 1880s and 1890s,

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<sup>4</sup> The Great Trek, lasting from 1836 to 1854, became one of the founding folk myths of Afrikaner nationalism around the time of the Boer War. It resembles in some ways the migration of American pioneers across the Great Plains regions of North America to destinations like Oregon and California, suggesting at times Turner's thesis of the American frontier as a safety valve. The southern African interior, however, was more populated with warlike African groups like the Xhosa, Sotho and Zulu. No doubt this experience of exodus, punctuated by incessant frontier wars as Afrikaners vied with native Africans for grazing rights and labor, contributed to the individualist tone of Afrikaner nationalism.

thousands of British subjects entered the Transvaal as miners, engineers, managers and other related occupations. These new arrivals were termed Uitlanders, literally "outlanders," by Afrikaners in the Transvaal, and served as a source of tension between the British and Transvaal governments for two decades. In 1899, Britain went to war in southern Africa ostensibly over the civil rights of these British subjects living under an allegedly corrupt Afrikaner rule.<sup>5</sup> Although military advisers predicted a short war, the British Army would require more than three years to subdue the few thousand mounted Afrikaner farmers pitted against them in what soon became a guerrilla-style campaign. The drawn-out struggle resulted in much European condemnation of Britain as well as a lasting anxiety among British imperialists regarding the fitness of their military and its ability to face rival European powers.<sup>6</sup> Bad press for the British empire and insecurities about the fitness of British subjects to retain it made the creation of negative stereotypes of colonial enemies like the Afrikaners even more important. Juvenile literature and adventure novels served along with press coverage to keep far-flung possessions in the public mind; while the glorification of militarism and "just" wars served to unite Britons behind the course of empire.

Many historians have recognized the power of these novels of empire upon the nineteenth-century reader. As early as the 1940s, Suzanne Howe was portraying colonial Africa as an open field for European nationalities to define themselves, a thesis borne out through her readings of British, French, and German novels with African settings.<sup>7</sup> Her work foreshadowed studies of later decades, where identity, race, and gender have come to dominate imperial historiography. In 1978 Edward Said's *Orientalism*, though later refined and somewhat revised through the work of subsequent scholars, opened a new road to cultural studies of imperialism. Said conceptualized a new framework for the examination of identity through the textual deconstruction of imperial literature written about colonial peoples and illustrated the patterns and techniques that Europeans employed to define the

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Thompson provides the best survey of these events in *A History of South Africa* (Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> See Geoffrey Scoble, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A study in British politics and political thought 1899-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). Also Jay Stone, *The Boer War and Military Reforms* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Howe, *Novels of empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949; repr. New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1971), 114.

colonized world and themselves through a formulation of the Other.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, the University of Manchester's Studies in Imperialism Series began to expose the impact of the empire upon British popular culture, revising older histories, which had assumed that colonial developments impacted only lightly on affairs at home.

Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness*, which attempts to cover eighty-five years of imperial literature up to the First World War, is among the most ambitious of those studies which employed literature to study British national and imperial identity. For Brantlinger, the British empire, especially Africa, was a stage upon which British authors could play out their darker fantasies, centering on regression and moral degeneration. His work also reveals a "blame the victim" mentality among British authors, whereby evil products of European greed and acquisitiveness, such as the slave trade, are portrayed as inherently African evils, thereby reducing European guilt for these crimes.<sup>9</sup>

Brantlinger has written of the continued theme in imperial literature of "going native" in the primeval testing ground of Africa. As an example, Brantlinger charges that Kurtz, a character in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, fails in his mission as civilizer because "he betrays the ideals of the civilization he is supposedly importing from Europe."<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, Satya Mohanty has studied Kipling's works to analyze the divergent style of the ruler's relations to the ruled. Mohanty found that at times colonizers discover they must "go native" and adapt in order to learn skills necessary to survive in their new environment, and at other times they must assert their own, more modern European identity, making a spectacle of cultural difference in order to awe their subjects.<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Richards has exposed the impact of adventure fiction on Britain's middle-class youth and its role in the creation of generations of willing imperialists.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Anne McClintock has explained the gendering of empire through various mediums from popular literature to advertising, stressing the means by which the perception of imperial conquest reflected Victorian and Edwardian social mores on race and sexuality. Graham Dawson has examined the late

<sup>8</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978; New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British literature and imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 193, 194.

<sup>11</sup> Satya P. Mohanty, "Kipling and the Culture of Colonial Rule" in *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on hegemony and resistance*, Dominick La Capra, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 311-43.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Richards, ed., *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, Studies in Imperialism Series (Manchester University Press, 1989).

Victorian phenomenon of hero-worship as played out in imperial literature and film, stressing the role of popular fiction as a vehicle for the communication of a masculinity in keeping with the imperial ethos.<sup>13</sup>

Said's thesis on the formulation of the stereotypical Other has provided the initial framework for my study. But I have attempted to go beyond his focus on ethnicity to embrace the methodology of subsequent scholars like Brantlinger and Mohanty, with their emphasis on cultural and racial pollution, and McClintock and Dawson, who focus on gender identities and sexuality to reveal the psycho-sexual aspects of the imperial encounter. British authors were indeed preoccupied with all these issues in writing about southern Africa, using race relations as a primary justification for the war while portraying Afrikaners as racially compromised, and focusing on gender relations and identities in an effort to discredit them in the eyes of British readers. The Afrikaners' unique historical circumstances forced British writers to offer a complex stereotype of their alleged shortcomings as imperial masters in southern Africa.

Unlike most foes of the British Empire in the colonial wars of the late nineteenth century, Afrikaners were not an indigenous people but the descendants of the original European colonizers of southern Africa. This point is central to the nature of the British verdict on Afrikaner society. In the fictive portrayal, Afrikaners are, in a sense, doubly guilty. Not only have they abandoned the qualities that make Europeans naturally superior and fit to rule the land and peoples of southern Africa, but they have also taken on the native savagery and primitive violence attributed to the Africans they aspire to rule. Such a picture of the Afrikaner people would validate Britain's imperialist war for the right to rule these mineral rich regions.

The relations between Afrikaners, Britons and Africans in southern Africa form a tripartite system of cross-cultural experience. This three-dimensional relationship makes the task of interpreting the literary record all the more difficult. Yet such a study can prove immensely insightful. In the late nineteenth century, Britain was obliged to adapt what Said would later describe as an ideology of the Other to a white society, thereby nullifying any clear black / white racial dichotomy. Yet such a dichotomy is precisely what British authors attempted to delineate as they worked to ascribe a sense of "Otherness" to their Afrikaner characters. They did so by identifying

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<sup>13</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British adventure, empire and the imagining of masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Afrikaner society and culture with Africa rather than Europe. Indeed, the literary portrayal was infused with just such a feeling of difference. I contend that British portrayals of Afrikaners at the turn of the century offer a look inside the construction of a fiction of difference that furthered the cause of imperialism by defining and describing imperial relationships.

Several guiding questions have steered my inquiry. How is the Afrikaners' relationship with Africans portrayed, and to what extent does it conflict with the British ideal of their own relationships with native peoples? Is Afrikaner society and culture portrayed as a bastardized blend of European and African? Do British authors focus on the Calvinist religious beliefs of the Dutch Reformed Church as a source of backwardness in the Afrikaner world-view? And what patterns of difference can we see in the actions of Afrikaner and British characters? Lastly, what do such comparisons say about the British view of themselves as imperialists?

The works of fiction considered here fall loosely into the genre of the adventure novel, with the focus on action and romance in far-off southern Africa.<sup>14</sup> Several of them can be further defined as juvenile literature. After the success of Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days*, writers discovered the immense market for juvenile literature. Often given as prizes at school or church, these novels sought to entertain as well as instruct. Jacqueline Bratton and Jeffrey Richards have used juvenile fiction to suggest the transference of British values and institutions abroad.<sup>15</sup> Several writers made their careers by catering to the juvenile market. G. A. Henty, R. M. Ballantyne and Captain Mayne Reid all wrote dozens of novels for boys. Through characters their own age, boys could vicariously experience the empire which was Britain; they could also absorb the prejudice, arrogance, and racism of the Victorian imperialist mentality. The remaining books considered were written primarily for the adult market and can be termed adventure romances. Main characters were adults, and the central plotline usually involved a Briton absorbing the strange environment of southern Africa and finding adventure and romance along the way. These often focused on the supposedly mystical or sensual aspects of African life. Among the authors writing in the romantic genre were H. Rider Haggard,

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<sup>14</sup> The body of research employed in this article incorporates novels published several years, in some cases as many as thirty years, before the outbreak of the South African War of 1899-1902. I have done so in order to broaden the scope of my study.

<sup>15</sup> Jacqueline Bratton, "Of England, Home and Duty: The image of England in Victorian and Edwardian juvenile fiction" in *Imperialism and popular culture*, John MacKenzie, ed. (Manchester University Press, 1986). Also see Jeffrey Richards, ed., *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*.

Francis Dodsworth and Bertram Mitford. The cheap press of the late nineteenth century made all these novels affordable to a much wider audience than before. Further, one must consider that the actual readership far surpassed sales figures since books were often passed around among adults and traded by the young. Popular literature could create a vivid mental picture of imperial relationships for youth and adults alike. I will discuss the British characterization of the Afrikaner in three ways: depictions of Afrikaner men and women; Afrikaners and Africans; and, Afrikaners and Britons.

### Afrikaner Men and Women

The proper relationship between the sexes was a central aspect of Victorian society. With this emphasis on the family, Britons insisted that a familial order was essential to the maintenance of an orderly state. Men and women were to cultivate their separate spheres: women as the nurturing guardians of moral propriety in the protected sphere of the home, and men as the providers, making their way through the tougher world of business in order to secure that protected space. Although the historiography has shown that Victorian gender relations were much more complex, the ideal of separate spheres was strongly upheld in art and literature. A sense of duty and chivalry further infused this strong Victorian self-conception.

Several historians have examined the image of "manliness" in late Victorian literature. Norman Vance has viewed British masculinity largely in the religious sense, analyzing the works of Charles Kingsley, Thomas Hughes and Rudyard Kipling for evidence of a true "Muscular Christianity." Others have used literary studies to define masculinity in terms of either a colonial psycho-social authoritarianism or as a simple by-product of hero-worship.<sup>16</sup> In British popular fiction, Afrikaner males seldom exhibit such qualities. They exhibit none of the British sense of chivalry towards their own or any other women. Further, the literary portrait of Afrikaner women is in many

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<sup>16</sup> See Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The ideal of Christian manliness in Victorian literature and religious thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1985). Also Preben Kaarsholm, "Kipling and Masculinity" in *Patriotism: The making and unmaking of British national identity* v. III, Ralph Samuel, ed. (London: Routledge, 1989), 215-26. Graham Dawson has examined the issue of a late Victorian and Edwardian tendency towards hero-worship and the place this plays in the boyhood culture of Britain. See "The Blonde Bedouin: Lawrence of Arabia, imperial adventure and the imagining of English-British masculinity" in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds. (London: Routledge, 1991), 113-44.



ways antithetical to the Victorian ideal of wife and mother, a topic I will discuss later.

Violence is central to the British characterization of the male Afrikaner. His capacity for this, and little else, pervades the literature. As a frontiersman, he excels at the basic skills necessary to pursue his pastoral way of life. He is an excellent horseman and a proficient marksman. The Afrikaners' capabilities for action with horse and rifle sometimes earn a kind of grudging respect from British authors. In two novels by G. A. Henty, these powers are alluded to favorably.<sup>17</sup> In the juvenile novel *The Young Colonists* (1885), Henty tells the story of Dick Humphreys, a British-born teenager who immigrates to Natal with his family to start a stock farm in 1878. Going along with the ox-wagons his father leases to the British army, he witnesses battles in the Zulu War, is captured and then bartered back in a prisoner exchange. A few years later, he arrives with his wagons in the supply train in time to witness the British defeat by the Afrikaners at Majuba Hill. Young Dick admits that in the earlier conflict, the Afrikaner commandos (irregular cavalry units) distinguish themselves as admirable soldiers.<sup>18</sup> In *With Buller in Natal* (1900), another Henty novel, young Chris King, son of a Pretoria businessman, forms a troupe of teenage scouts to aid the British campaign in 1899. Before Chris leaves with the army, his father warns him not to underestimate the Afrikaners' talent for war: "The Boers are no cowards; courage is, indeed . . . the only virtue they possess."<sup>19</sup> Likewise in *An Exiled Scot* (1899), H. A. Bryden's adventure romance about Ranald Cameron, an eighteenth-century Jacobite who must flee Scotland for the Cape in the 1740s. Ranald comes to Africa and discovers a fortune in diamonds. Ranald notices the same propensity for violence in his Afrikaner neighbors along the frontier: "The South African Boer is slow and excessively deliberate . . . and hard to stir into activity. But upon occasions . . . when fighting or hunting is in the air . . . few men are brisker at need."<sup>20</sup> The Afrikaners have acquired the skills necessary to support their frontier existence, yet this is the only area in which British novelists extended their

<sup>17</sup> G. A. Henty wrote over a hundred books for boys, usually placed in exotic settings and carrying a strongly imperialist message. He had been to Africa as a war correspondent during the Ashanti wars. An avowed imperialist, Henty used his juvenile fiction to criticize the handling of various imperial crises by government and military.

<sup>18</sup> G. A. Henty, *The Young Colonists: A story of the Zulu and Boer wars* (London: Blackie and Sons, 1897; repr. of 1885 edition), 97.

<sup>19</sup> G. A. Henty, *With Buller in Natal: or, a born leader* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1900), 8.

<sup>20</sup> H. A. Bryden, *An Exiled Scot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1899), 285-6.

rather grudging admiration. Such prowess is portrayed as a natural consequence of the Afrikaners' brutal environment.

Turning to the impact of religion, British authors often made reference to the conservative Dutch Reformed Church and its effects upon the Afrikaners' world-view. The seventeenth-century Dutch settlers had brought their strongly Calvinist theology with them to the Cape of Good Hope. The subsequent impact of this theology upon the Afrikaner farmers of the interior was emphasized by British authors and often manifested itself in the form of the Afrikaner covenant, a perception among Afrikaners that they enjoyed divine favor and protection in the process of wresting land from Africans. Such a vision of the Afrikaners as a special people is frequently voiced by Afrikaner characters. H. Rider Haggard's<sup>21</sup> novel *Swallow* (1899) is interesting because he chooses an Afrikaner woman, Vrouw Botmarr, to narrate the tale of a shipwrecked British lad, Ralph MacKenzie, and his adoption by her Afrikaner family. The boy grows up to fall in love with Swallow, his adopted sister. After her abduction by the evil Swart Piet van Vooren, the separated lovers have many adventures before finally being reunited years later. Temporarily hopeless of ever regaining his kidnapped daughter, Jan Botmarr decides to trek to the interior to escape British rule. He is convinced of divine guidance on the journey: "The Lord will be our guide, as He was to the Israelites of old."<sup>22</sup> An edge of the fanatical sometimes finds its way into these characterizations of Afrikaner religious zeal. The last words of a captured spy in the wartime-romance *Gilbert Logan V.C.* (1900) reflects a similar trust in divine favor: "Kruger and his people are crying to the God of Hosts, and the God of Hosts will protect them. We trust not in the sword or spear; we trust in the strength of our Lord."<sup>23</sup>

Such naive religious views have also left the Afrikaners of adventure fiction deeply conservative, and in matters great and small, they stoutly resist change. A third Henty novel, *With Roberts to Pretoria*, puts another British boy, Yorke Harberton, at the head of a band of scouts in the western theater of the South African War. His maternal uncle, Mr. Allnutt, a British farmer

<sup>21</sup> H. Rider Haggard popularized the African adventure novel in the 1880's with his *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*. He had served as a colonial official in South Africa from 1875-1879. A great student of South African culture, he spoke Afrikaans and some Zulu. His treatment of the Afrikaners in his work is sometimes ambiguous, but all in all he condemned them for their mistreatment of Africans. See Martin Cohen, *Rider Haggard: His life and works*, (London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., 1960): 29, 42. Also Wendy Katz, *Rider Haggard and the fiction of empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *Swallow: A tale of the Great Trek* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1899), 233.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Dodsworth, *Gilbert Logan V. C.: A tale of the South African War* (London: R. E. King, 1900), 111.

in Cape Colony, tells Yorke of the unreasonably old-fashioned ways of his Afrikaner neighbors: "The Dutch hate change of any kind, and would still rather travel in their lumbering wagons, and take a week over it, than make a railway journey of a few hours."<sup>24</sup> According to British authors, the outmoded religious views of the Afrikaner's Dutch Reformed Church left him with an unreasonably conservative nature, manifested by a deep distrust for change, intellectual views determined solely by the Bible, and an equation of the Afrikaner people with the Hebrews of old, struggling as God's chosen people to carve a promised land from the wilderness.

Afrikaner characters, although not always villains, seldom treat women with the respect accorded them by any sort of chivalric code of the gentleman. Instances of Afrikaners striking women are common in popular fiction. G. A. Henty has whip-wielding Afrikaner ruffians attacking helpless British refugees on a train siding in *With Buller in Natal*. Mrs. King, the protagonist's mother, is marked with a nasty whip gash on her cheek.<sup>25</sup> Such violence is also ascribed to the enemy at home. The Afrikaner girl Hilda in *Derwent's Horse* (1901) berates Dermot, her British suitor: "If I spoke like this to Piet [a rival Afrikaner suitor], he'd strike me. He's not afraid of a woman like you damned Englishmen!"<sup>26</sup> Even rape is alleged in Bertram Mitford's *Aletta* (1900), when Colvin Kershaw's friend comments upon the looting of a British family's farm: "Good job that pretty sister of his was away from home, for they were the lowest down type of Boer."<sup>27</sup>

In addition to these more overt instances of abuse, British authors accused Afrikaner men of not assuming their protective duties of shielding women from life's harsher realities, especially warfare or politics. In another Mitford novel, *Tween Snow and Fire* (1892), the British adventurer Eustace Milne frowns upon the "selfish coarseness" of his Afrikaner ranching partner, who by telling his wife of impending conflict with the neighboring Zulus, has caused her undue stress and anxiety.<sup>28</sup> In several instances, Afrikaner women actually come to the battlefield with their husbands, sons and brothers. Henty hints that the Afrikaner republics even employed women as

<sup>24</sup> G. A. Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria: A tale of the South African War* (London: Blackie and Sons, 1902), 35.

<sup>25</sup> Henty, *With Buller in Natal*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Victor Emanuel Rousseau, *Derwent's Horse: A novel about the Boer War* (London: Methuen, 1901), 114.

<sup>27</sup> Bertram Mitford, *Aletta: A tale of the Boer invasion* (London: F. V. White, 1900), 238.

<sup>28</sup> Bertram Mitford, *Tween Snow and Fire, a tale of the last Kaffir war* (London: William Heinemann, 1892), 19.

combatants.<sup>29</sup> Yet in other respects, novelists sometimes chide Afrikaner men for not being more liberal in their views of a woman's place. Mitford's *The Weird of Deadly Hollow* (1899), tells the story of a lone Briton named Herbert Custance living among the Afrikaner frontiersmen. When he assures his Afrikaner hunting partner that in Britain women often take part in the hunt, that worthy Nimrod responds with incredulity to the suggestion of women taking the field with men.<sup>30</sup>

Thus a picture emerges of the Afrikaner male as an able fighter, easily prone to violence. His desire for knowledge and innovation go no further than the Bible. He believes himself to be of a chosen people, and this belief can verge on the fanatical. As shown during the South African War and many instances elsewhere, such people can be formidable antagonists for precisely the reasons which British authors supplied to explain their supposed inferiority.

But what of the Afrikaner women themselves? The typical Afrikaner "vrouw" or housewife of popular fiction is a coarse-featured woman, strongly inclined to corpulence by her mid-twenties, who makes a life of sitting in her huge arm chair, feet propped on a coal brazier, ordering her African maids about the housework. In *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), Olive Schreiner injects a wry humor into the figure of the traditional Afrikaner wife in an otherwise humorless novel.<sup>31</sup> It follows the relationships of three children who grow to maturity on a poor ostrich farm on the Karoo plains of the Cape Colony. They are raised by Tant' Sannie, a portly vrouw who serves as a mouthpiece for Afrikaner conservatism and ignorance and also plays foil to the novelist's feminist theme. When asked about the necessity of marriage and family, she retorts: "If a woman's old enough to marry, and doesn't, she's sinning against the Lord ... does she think the Lord took all that trouble in making her for nothing?"<sup>32</sup> Tant' Sannie's short frame carries two hundred and fifty pounds when she ventures to move it, for she spends most of the time in a "great wooden-elbowed chair."<sup>33</sup> Like most Afrikaner men,

<sup>29</sup> Henty, *With Buller in Natal*, 324. See also Dodsworth, *Gilbert Logan V. C.*, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Bertram Mitford, *The Weird of Deadly Hollow: A tale of the Cape Colony* (London: F. V. White, 1899), 99.

<sup>31</sup> Olive Schreiner, a native South African of German descent, spent five years in three different situations as a governess in Afrikaner households in the northern section of Cape Colony from 1874-1879, and thus had a first-hand experience of daily contact and a shared existence within the Dutch frontier household. See Ruth First and Anne Scott, *Olive Schreiner* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 56-58.

<sup>32</sup> Olive Schreiner, *Story of an African Farm*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894; orig. Published 1883), 365.

<sup>33</sup> Schreiner, 65.

she sleeps in her clothes at night, seldom risking a wash for fear of illness.<sup>34</sup> But such lethargy and poor grooming are not just a product of class. Vrouw Rhyneveld, wife of a prominent Afrikaner landowner in *An Exiled Scot*, is likewise "a lady of ample proportions" who "falls with a sigh into her great arm chair," which we assume to be her usual occupation. Like Tant' Sannie, she retires to bed each night in her day dress.<sup>35</sup>

In the middle-class Victorian household, cleanliness was of central importance. If we take on faith the old axiom of "cleanliness is next to godliness," then the Afrikaner women of popular literature were a godless lot indeed. Bruce Haley calls the late Victorian obsession with health and sanitary reform "a national mania, perhaps the most widespread and long-lasting of any in the Victorian Age."<sup>36</sup> This movement was based on the pseudo-medical philosophy of holism, which combined healthy living conditions with a quest for mental alertness in order to achieve total health.<sup>37</sup>

According to most British writers, no such mania made its way to the interior of southern Africa. The filth of the Afrikaner household was a constantly recurring literary image. A typical Afrikaner farmhouse on the plains of the interior Karoo was "a wretched mud hovel" hardly distinguishable from an African hut,<sup>38</sup> according to R.M. Ballantyne's<sup>39</sup> juvenile story of the 1820 Natal settlers, *The Settler and the Savage* (1877). The British character Colvin Kershaw in Bertram Mitford's war romance *Aletta* had lived among the Afrikaner farmers for years before falling victim to the mistrust and greed of his more rebellious neighbors. Although used to the Spartan living conditions of the frontier, he was nonetheless sickened by the state of a certain Afrikaner dwelling. The filth was everywhere — in the beds, on the children, even in the food he ate there.<sup>40</sup> Descriptions such as

<sup>34</sup> Schreiner, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Bryden, *An Exiled Scot*, 240, 285.

<sup>36</sup> Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978), 124.

<sup>37</sup> Haley, 35.

<sup>38</sup> R. M. Ballantyne, *The Settler and the Savage: A tale of peace and war in South Africa* (Toronto: A. G. Watson, 1877), 123.

<sup>39</sup> Ballantyne penned many books for boys with imperial settings between the 1840's and the 1880's. An adventurer himself, he spent several months travelling the interior of Cape Colony in 1875. This novel and one other, *Six Months at the Cape* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1879), were both products of his trip. See Eric Quayle, *Ballantyne the Brave: A Victorian writer and his family* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1967), 297.

<sup>40</sup> Mitford, *Aletta*, 63. Mitford seems to have styled himself an apologist for Afrikanerdom. He wrote many romantic adventure stories about Britons in South Africa. Despite his self-described aim of showing that not every Afrikaner was "the blackest ruffian unhung," his novels do little to vindicate the Afrikaner character, except to impose a British-style class system on South African society.

these must have horrified many middle-class British readers. In their social framework, the weight of these shortcomings would fall on the women, whose "sphere" should include the home and the maintenance therein of a clean and healthy environment for the family. In a literary sense, an environment of filth brings with it connotations of impurity or pollution of character. Ballantyne's comparison of Afrikaner dwellings with those of Africans should not go unnoticed.

Another common trait of Afrikaner women in popular British fiction is their tendency to be strong patriots in the Afrikaner cause. Aletta is a shrill advocate for Transvaal independence until her love for a British settler and her horror at the carnage of war serve to enlighten her political views. Mrs. Allnutt of *With Roberts to Pretoria* is also an Afrikaner patriot, although married to a Briton. When her young Afrikaner cousin tries to ambush her British nephew, Yorke Harberton, she refuses to credit the story despite all the evidence her husband puts forth.<sup>41</sup> Hilda van der Walt in the army tale *Derwent's Horse* receives the affections of Dermot, a British cavalry trooper. Yet she has a brother with an Afrikaner commando, and in the end, she spurns his love and all things British to flee with her family as a refugee.<sup>42</sup> Such scenes do not express approval of the dedication of Afrikaner women to their cause but censure them in an age when women were assumed to be apolitical. Even though some middle-class British women were becoming socially and politically active at the turn of the century, the idea of a politicized Afrikaner womanhood would still bring connotations of societal imbalance to the minds of many British readers.

Thus the British portrayal of Afrikaner men and women in popular fiction reaches a certain point of ambiguity. On the one hand, male Afrikaners prove far too conservative, reflecting the patriarchal patterns of a rural society in their consideration and treatment of women. Allegations and intimations of abuse are leveled freely at Afrikaner men in these novels. Yet on the other hand, Afrikaner men are also accused of being overly liberal in their tolerance of a politicized Afrikaner womanhood. For their own part, Afrikaner women shun domestic tasks and succumb to an unhealthy lethargy, yet they also take too much initiative in matters political. In an age when the social order began at home with a clear definition of gender roles, the Afrikaners created by British novelists are aimlessly adrift in the domestic sea.

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<sup>41</sup> Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria*, 68.

<sup>42</sup> Rousseau, *Derwent's Horse*, 114.

### Afrikaners and Africans

The South African historian Michael Streak, in his study of *The Afrikaner as viewed by the English*, maintained that the Afrikaners' treatment of indigenous African peoples was the central determinant in the British perception of Afrikaners.<sup>43</sup> Recent scholarship has done much to reveal the roles played by Africans as suppliers, servants, and even combatants in both armies during this supposed "white man's war." This work has further revealed the British as far from blameless in their own treatment of native subjects.<sup>44</sup> Still, the abuse of Africans is a central feature of the British literary condemnation of Afrikaners.

From the early nineteenth century, British reformers, politicians, and humanitarians chose the treatment of Africans as the locus of a reform movement in the administration of the Cape colony. Their efforts to improve matters through such legal ploys as the "Black Circuit" judges, who allowed Africans' testimonies to be used as evidence against white defendants, and Ordinance 51, which extended political status to the Khoi-San of the Cape Colony, did much to strain the relationship between Britons and Afrikaners in southern Africa throughout the nineteenth century. These differences over the proper status of Africans had at their root the conflicting roles for black Africans in the dominant religious movements of each nation. The Afrikaners, with their Dutch Reformed theology, still viewed Africans in the Old Testament sense of a people born to serve whites, the "sons of Ham" of the book of Genesis.<sup>45</sup> The subjugation of Africans to white rule was thus of divine origin and not subject to governmental legislation. Britons, on the other hand, went through a half-century of evangelical revival following 1800, and had since come to view non-white subjects as candidates for salvation, raw clay to be molded by representatives of the London Missionary Society into enlightened, educated, productive and Christian subjects of the Crown. These alternative views proved a continual source of conflict

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Streak, *The Afrikaner as viewed by the English* (Cape Town: C. Spruik, Ltd., 1974), 221.

<sup>44</sup> See Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House, 1979). Also Peter Warwick, *Black people and the South African 1899-1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), and Bill Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> For an in-depth study of Afrikaner theology and nationalism, see J. Alton Templin, *Ideology on a Frontier: Theological Roots of Afrikaner Nationalism 1652-1910* (London: Greenwood Press, 1984). Also, Michael Streak claims that religion is central to the Boer view of the black South Africans. See *The Afrikaner as Viewed by the English*, 47.

between British missionaries and Afrikaner farmers on the frontier. Afrikaners often viewed these missionaries, despite their officially non-political status, as a threat to their economy and society as well as political intriguers.

In popular fiction, the worst of the Afrikaner characters are invariably abusive masters to their African servants.<sup>46</sup> In Ballantyne's *The Settler and the Savage*, Jan Smit was a typical example of a "bad Boer" because he beat his servants mercilessly for the most trifling offenses. Likewise, many of the Trekkers of 1832 are termed "selfish savages who scorned the idea that a man might not wallop his own nigger."<sup>47</sup> The result of such abuse is obvious to Ballantyne, for Jan Smit's disaffected servants run away to join the forces of Dragoener, leader of a band of escaped slaves who pillage farms in the area. Dragoener is himself a former victim of such abuse at the hands of Afrikaner masters.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, H. Rider Haggard in his romance *Swallow* created an Afrikaner character of irredeemable evil in Swart Piet van Vooren, bastard son of the local landsroost who practices intrigue and black magic with native shamans. The heroine of the novel chastises him as he is about to execute Sihamba, an African seer and healer, without even a trial or a chance to speak: "No wonder the English sing such a loud song about us Boers and our cruelty to the natives when such a thing as this can happen."<sup>49</sup> Rarely does a literary character make such a telling statement of national prejudices.

The indifference of the Afrikaners to brutal crimes upon Africans is well illustrated in Bertram Mitford's *The Weird of Deadly Hollow*. Herbert Custance is a Briton who deserted his wife in England and lives a hermit's existence on a farm in a dark and secluded mountain vale of inland Cape Colony known as Moordenar's Hoek, or "Murderer's Hollow." The place took its name from the case of its earlier inhabitants. When two brothers named van Niekerk argued over a woman, the elder killed his sibling with an ax, then brutally murdered all the African servants on the farm who might have witnessed his violence. The author comments on the probable response of neighboring Afrikaners to the burning alive of a Khoi-San woman and her six children in her hut by van Niekerk: "Hottentots were proverbial as the most shiftless of creatures. All Drunk, would be the consensus of opinion, if

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<sup>46</sup> Quayle, *Ballantyne the Brave*, 297.

<sup>47</sup> Ballantyne, *The Settler and the Savage*, 36, 322.

<sup>48</sup> Ballantyne, 201.

<sup>49</sup> Haggard, *Swallow*, 76.



the event ever even transpired at all in that wild and lonely region."<sup>50</sup> And if they happened to suspect van Niekerk in the deed, then "the destruction of a nest of Hottentots would be looked on as more of a good joke than a crime by the half-savage Boers who then inhabited that wild and scantily-settled region."<sup>51</sup> Such attitudes would hardly be conducive to a sympathetic view of Afrikaner character by a British reader and portray the Afrikaner farmers as a people who have taken on the primitivism of their African neighbors and left the enlightened rationalism and justice of nineteenth-century Europe far behind them.

British authors also blame Afrikaners for the series of frontier wars pitting European settlers against native peoples, primarily the Zulu and the Xhosa. Cruelty to Africans is at the root of these problems. G.A. Henty was the strongest in his condemnation of the Afrikaners on this matter. Henty often leveled stinging allegations about Afrikaner character and society in his three South African novels. According to Jeffrey Richards, Henty's test for an appropriate level of white civilization was the treatment of non-white races, and in this respect Henty's Afrikaners prove sadly deficient.<sup>52</sup> In all three Henty novels, the Afrikaners are responsible for any conflicts arising between the black and white communities of South Africa. In *The Young Colonists*, Mr. Humphreys, recent British immigrant to Natal, tells his son Dick of the rough treatment of natives in the Transvaal and the resultant problems it brings upon the colony. He cannot blame the coming of the race war on the Zulus, for "The Boers are always encroaching on their territory, and any remonstrance [by the Zulus] is answered by a rifle-shot."<sup>53</sup> In other novels, raids by Afrikaner commandos on native villages are often the basis for later reprisals and violence by Africans. In *An Exiled Scot*, the Khoi-San who attack and loot the homestead of protagonist Ranald Cameron, killing his servants and kidnapping his wife and child, "were no doubt kinsmen and remnants of the clan which had been raided and partly destroyed five years ago by the two Dutchmen, Hans Nel and Pieter Rhyneveld."<sup>54</sup> Clearly, in the British fiction of difference, frontier tensions were the result of the Afrikaners' unenlightened attitudes towards native peoples. Olive Schreiner's *Tant' Sannie* excludes the African servants from the family's

<sup>50</sup> Mitford, *The Weird of Deadly Hollow*, 61.

<sup>51</sup> Mitford, 62.

<sup>52</sup> Richards, "With Henty to Africa."

<sup>53</sup> Henty, *The Young Colonists*, 34, 35, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Bryden, *An Exiled Scot*, 261.

Sunday service “because she held they were descended from apes, and needed no salvation.”<sup>55</sup> She berates and then dismisses her German overseer for attempting to preach to them: “Praying with the Kaffirs behind the kraal walls! Go, you Kaffir dog!”<sup>56</sup> Not only does she resent his deeming the Africans as candidates for God’s grace, she also compares the guilty overseer with the African, which in her mind would constitute a great insult. As Hans Marais, an Afrikaner frontiersman, tells the Briton Charles Considine in *The Settler and the Savage*, “Doubtless . . . no savage ought to be trusted, as civilized men are trusted, till they cease to be savages. We trust them too much.”<sup>57</sup> This lack of trustworthiness flows from a state of savagery and, in Afrikaner eyes, condemns Africans to exclusion from white society or even salvation.

In tandem with this emphasis on Afrikaner racial bigotry, British writers evoked the specter of miscegenation in their depiction of Afrikaner society. The villain of *Swallow*, Piet van Vooren, is a fascinating mixture of the savage and the civilized. He embodies the worst of both. But Vrouw Botmar, the narrator, identifies the evil in him with natives and their culture—in short, with his “blackness.” His grandmother had been an African queen, and as a boy “his dark face and savage temper had earned for him the name of ‘the little Kaffir.’”<sup>58</sup> Vrouw Botmar also hints of secret ceremonies wherein Piet’s father invited African shamans to initiate the boy into “secret and devilish rights.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the author, Haggard communicates to the reader a central facet of the enemy’s supposed attitude towards Africans, his (and in this case *her*) equation of African culture and “blackness” with evil.<sup>60</sup> Swart Piet may also serve as a warning to British readers of the supposed regression which Africa can bring about, for as the persecuted Sihamba tells the heroine Swallow, Swart Piet is “born of white blood and black, is false to both and a disgrace to both.”<sup>61</sup> Through his racially mixed heritage, he is a living product and symbol of failed imperialism, of white Europe seduced by a symbolic black mother—Africa herself. Swart Piet has succumbed to the

<sup>55</sup> Schreiner, *Story of an African Farm*, 64.

<sup>56</sup> Schreiner, *Story of an African Farm*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Ballantyne, *The Settler and the Savage*, 19, 20, 25.

<sup>58</sup> Haggard, *Swallow*, 64.

<sup>59</sup> Haggard, *Swallow*, 65.

<sup>60</sup> Sander L. Gilman has discussed the Victorian equation of blackness with cultural and sexual primitiveness, and how this equation manifested itself in late Victorian arts and literature. See “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine and literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 204-42.

<sup>61</sup> Haggard, *Swallow*, 78.

sensual aspects of African culture, including its pagan aspects of magic, sorcery, and superstition.

British novelists made much of this alleged superstition in Afrikaner character. The simple backcountry Afrikaners in *An Exiled Scot* are misled into paying exorbitant prices for "snake stones," magical rocks which when rubbed on a snakebite or wound from a Bushman's arrow will supposedly neutralize the poison.<sup>62</sup> The Afrikaner vrouw Tant' Sannie believes in ghosts and is haunted both sleeping and waking by that of her dead British husband. She refuses to read any other books except the Bible and her hymnbook because "the devil was in all the rest."<sup>63</sup> Although she professes not to believe in such "Kaffir magic," Vrouw Botmar as well as her husband Jan in *Swallow* are respectful and sometimes awed by the mysterious powers of Sihamba, the African seer who serves their daughter. Afrikaner superstition also extends to European science and technology. Vrouw Botmar in part attributes Swart Piet's evil character to his boyhood tutoring by a Dutch astronomer who could predict the movements of the stars.<sup>64</sup> Influenced by the notion that Africans were a childlike inferior race, British readers would have easily recognized the suggestion that Afrikaners had acquired the traits of people originally beneath them in terms of cultural and material development.

Despite the utter contempt shown by Afrikaner characters for the "savages" that surround them, Africans have made their mark upon them. C.W. DeKiewiet wrote fifty years ago of the contact between the frontier farmers and the native people as the "dominant theme of all South African history." The fate of the Afrikaners on the periphery of European civilization was far more involved with Africa itself than with mother Europe; by extension, their culture had become more African than European.<sup>65</sup> British novelists sought to illustrate this development as a source of Afrikaner degradation. Because the Afrikaner had degraded his European culture, he could be relegated to the status of the Other, usually reserved for non-white subjects of the Crown, and consequently replaced as the ruling power in southern Africa.

<sup>62</sup> Bryden, *An Exiled Scot*, 291.

<sup>63</sup> Schreiner, *Story of an African Farm*, 18, 125.

<sup>64</sup> Haggard, *Swallow*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> C. W. DeKiewiet, *History of South Africa, Social and Economic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 48.

### Afrikaners and Britons

British novelists always sought to establish a polarity of character between Afrikaners and Britons. This polarity was illustrated through differences in action and attitude. Writers contrasted the actions of their Afrikaner characters with those of British ones, holding up those of each group to an inferred sense of Victorian morality and manliness. Jacqueline Bratton has suggested that characters in the fiction of Kipling comply with a code of personal behavior, which she characterizes as "chivalric."<sup>66</sup> The same can be said of almost all the protagonists in the novels considered here. Thus, it is not surprising that Jeffrey Richards writes of a "public school" code of behavior that seems to guide the boy heroes of Henty's novels.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the "code of the gentleman" stood at the center of middle-class Victorian gender identity, and governed the moral universe of both juvenile and adult literature. Such a code would be composed of a sort of rulebook of fair play, in warfare or civilian life. It would include kindness to women and inferiors (i.e. Africans in these novels), as well as the sacredness of a spoken promise or oath, and general fair dealing in life and business.<sup>68</sup> In the contemporary fiction written about southern Africa, Afrikaner characters are measured largely by their degree of adherence (or lack of it) to just such an abstract code. Afrikaner characters inevitably fly in the face of such ethics and are guilty of countless acts, which are "just not cricket."

The chivalrous treatment of women and a paternalism towards inferiors were both crucial to the Victorian code of gentlemanly ethics. The previous two sections of this article have shown fictional Afrikaners to be woefully wanting in both these respects. Authors worked hard to depict the opposite in their British characters, letting their virtues shine forth from the pages. Instead of viewing the nearby tribes in Kaffirland as his Afrikaner partner does, as menacing cattle thieves and a block to the progress of settlement, in *'Tween Snow and Fire*, Briton Eustace Milne

had rejoiced in finding ready to his hand so promising a subject as this fine race of savages . . . he had started by recognizing their many good qualities and resolving to make a complete study of the race

<sup>66</sup> Bratton, "Of England, Home and Duty," 81.

<sup>67</sup> See Richards, "With Henty to Africa," in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*.

<sup>68</sup> See Mark Girouard's wonderful study of the rebirth of chivalry in Victorian England, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

and its characteristics. And this he had affected with the thoroughness which marked everything he undertook.<sup>69</sup>

In *An Exiled Scot*, Ranald Cameron refuses to take part in the enslavement of African women and children and gives his share of the human booty to his less conscientious Afrikaner comrades.<sup>70</sup> The contrast between Afrikaner exploitation and British restraint is strong indeed.

Examples abound of African characters that have run away from cruel Afrikaner masters to instead serve the more judicious British. Titus, an African servant who guides his master to a fortune in hidden diamonds in *An Exiled Scot*, had originally been caught and enslaved "by some Boer frontiersmen . . . who kept him in a cruel servitude."<sup>71</sup> In *The Young Colonists*, the African tracker Jumbo abuses the native bearers for cowardice during an attack by a bull elephant, informing them that they "are fit only to be slaves to the Dutch" instead of serving their good British masters.<sup>72</sup> One notes that these Africans have only exchanged a bad master for a better one and are still in a position of servitude.

Yet racial prejudice on the part of British characters and their creators is far from lacking. R.M. Ballantyne, particularly, held a very low view of non-whites in southern Africa. References to their anatomical makeup and lack of morals abound, and the writer underlines their likeness to baboons and their perennially hard skulls.<sup>73</sup> He calls the Khoi-San "that lowest of the human race"<sup>74</sup> and charges that the "whole Kaffir nation, root and branch, is a huge thief, an inveterate liar and a wholesale murderer."<sup>75</sup> Bertram Mitford laments the war between whites "while countless swarms of dark-skinned and savage heathen stood by and looked on."<sup>76</sup> Another Mitford novel, *The Weird of Deadly Hollow*, makes a British character the arbiter of such savage retribution as only Afrikaner characters usually perform. After Herbert Custance's wife is murdered and mutilated by an African servant in revenge for a beating at Custance's hands, the latter captures and tortures him

<sup>69</sup> Mitford, *Tween Snow and Fire*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> H. A. Bryden, *An Exiled Scot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1899), 310.

<sup>71</sup> Bryden, 68.

<sup>72</sup> Henty, 182.

<sup>73</sup> Ballantyne, *The Settler and the Savage*, 162, 65.

<sup>74</sup> Ballantyne, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Ballantyne, *Six Months at the Cape*, 44.

<sup>76</sup> Mitford, 174.

first by mutilation of his ears and hands, then by roasting the lower half of the man's body on a bed of coals. When Custance finishes this grisly deed, the constable arrives to arrest him, not for the murder of the African, but for bigamy, as his deserted first wife has tracked him down from Britain!<sup>77</sup> Later, the author assures us that Custance would be tried for his violence, but of this act "no jury in the colony would have convicted him."<sup>78</sup> Vigilante justice with a sprinkling of the blood feud mentality seems to be a part of Afrikaner society, and accepted by all. Yet this deed is perpetrated by a British character, albeit a troubled and mysterious one. And therein lies the key. Although of British origins, Custance is a man on the run from the law, a refugee from the society that nearly drove him to kill his first wife with his own hand. His surrender to such savage retribution upon the African servant is a warning to potential colonizers, for he has given himself up to the savagery supposedly shared only by Africans and Afrikaners.

British authors are critical of Afrikaner treatment of black Africans, and maintain that the British approach would be a higher, more enlightened and more equitable one. Perhaps the reason for such a condemnation of Afrikaners on this one point lies in the right-to-rule mentality. In British eyes, the Afrikaners as Europeans would "naturally" dominate the "inferior" blacks of southern Africa. Thus, they do not condemn the rule of Europeans over Africans per se; they simply condemn the specifically exploitative and violent character of the Afrikaner system. Rescuing an oppressed people from cruel masters is undeniably a strong argument for conflict and was employed generously by British authors in popular fiction. By making Afrikaner cruelty to Africans a central component of the stereotypical Afrikaner character, a war to wrest power from him became a just war.

The novels also offer a comparison of British and Afrikaner women. As potential wives for British settlers, Afrikaner women often suffer in comparison with English ones in terms of beauty and refinement. The Afrikaner, Bertha Marais, is admired by Charles Considine as "a woman . . . neither so graceful nor so sprightly as the pretty English girl, [although] she was preeminently sweet and lovable."<sup>79</sup> Colvin Kershaw in *Aletta* falls for the rather plain title character, an Afrikaner girl, rather than the pretty May Wenlock, but *Aletta* comes from the very highest class of Afrikaner family.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Mitford, 278-80, 284.

<sup>78</sup> Mitford, 309.

<sup>79</sup> Ballantyne, *The Settler and the Savage*, 246.

<sup>80</sup> Mitford, *Aletta*, 96.

When an Afrikaner woman does exhibit traits of refinement, it is undoubtedly due to some British influence. This often comes in the form of a British education or significant exposure to European culture. Mrs. Allnut, an Afrikaner woman, in *With Roberts to Pretoria* has married a Briton and learned the superiority of British ways. Her house is tidy and clean, complete with a rose garden in the back, largely because "her two years at Cape Town . . . had prevented her from falling into the loose and slovenly ways of the ordinary Boer farmer's wife."<sup>81</sup> Lastly, the British girl Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm* is a strong-willed, intelligent, feminist character, while her Afrikaner step-sister, Em, remains within the limited mental confines of the typical vrouw.

In these novels, personal actions often become the yardstick for measuring the worth of a people. In the late Victorian code of male behavior, warfare became the ultimate proving ground for men. How men performed under the greatest stress would be the true measure of their nature. War is a theme of central importance in all of Henty's work and the best means of distinguishing between the antithetical character of Briton and Afrikaner.<sup>82</sup>

Here, in the ultimate test of battle, Henty's Afrikaners show their true colors. In the field, the Afrikaner enemy misses no attempt to scoff at the more gentlemanly rules of warfare. He frequently abuses the white flag in order to lead unsuspecting British soldiers into ambush. He fires deliberately on Red Cross hospital wagons carrying British wounded, but protests vehemently when a stray shell bursts in his own hospital.<sup>83</sup> Bands of Afrikaner bandits frequently raid and loot the farms of loyal British settlers, actions that Henty condemns loudly through his young hero, Chris King, who holds "some sort of respect for . . . [Afrikaners] who fight manfully and stoutly, but for these raiding scoundrels . . . feels only disgust, and shoots them without the least compunction."<sup>84</sup> Yorke Harberton is shocked to find that the wealthiest of the Afrikaner army keep their thoroughbred horses fresh at all times in order to escape British attacks and leave their unfortunate comrades to fend for themselves.<sup>85</sup> In peacetime as well, literary Afrikaners are oftentimes depicted as a pack of treacherous cutthroats and inveterate backshooters. In *Aletta*, two rebels ambush Colvin Kershaw at night in a narrow mountain

<sup>81</sup> Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria*, 136.

<sup>82</sup> Richards, "With Henty to Africa," 80.

<sup>83</sup> Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria*, 105, 278.

<sup>84</sup> Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria*, 134.

<sup>85</sup> Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria* 124, 125.

pass after he discovers their secret cache of rifles.<sup>86</sup> An Afrikaner youth takes a potshot at Yorke Harberton after the British lad bests him in a shooting match in *With Roberts to Pretoria*.<sup>87</sup> Afrikaner characters often break their word to both fellow-whites and to African chieftains. Henty uses a native chief in *With Buller in Natal* to point out the Afrikaners' breach of promise in peace treaties: "Did you not know that a Boer's oath is only good as long as a gun is pointed at him?"<sup>88</sup>

British writers belied their own self-concept of Britain as an imperial power in the particular ways they chose to demonstrate the inferiority of the Afrikaner as a proper trustee of the mineral wealth and productive value of South Africa. This was exemplified in British claims that Afrikaners had rejected the imperialist triad of science, British law, and capitalism. Religion clouds the Afrikaners' views on education and science, and in popular fiction they consistently oppose or scoff at modern learning, while British characters serve as the champions of science. Their lack of education is often impressed upon the reader: "The Dutch Boers" are "very ignorant, being far removed from the means of instruction."<sup>89</sup> Tant' Sannie burns young Waldo's book on political economy (a gift from a British friend) to keep such European evils from her house. The bookish British girl Lyndall in the same novel debates the origins of the surrounding landscape with Waldo, who insists that God created it, not the forces of geology.<sup>90</sup> A limited world-view has left the Afrikaners a backward-looking people unable to escape their ignorance and prejudice, which block their progress towards a level of culture enjoyed by late nineteenth-century Europeans.

The Afrikaners of popular fiction show an innate dislike and distrust for good government and the rule of law—that is, British government and British law. In *The Young Colonists*, a party of hostile Afrikaners are about to attack Dick Humphrey's trading caravan in retribution for the shooting death of a comrade. When the Britons suggest they settle the matter with the local magistrate, the Afrikaner leader replies with a sneer, "We are your magistrates and judges; we want no English law here."<sup>91</sup> The frontier farmers sometimes refuse to pay their taxes.<sup>92</sup> Instead of taking part in the

<sup>86</sup> Mitford, *Aletta*, 71.

<sup>87</sup> Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria*, 60, 61.

<sup>88</sup> Henty, *With Buller in Natal*, 155.

<sup>89</sup> Ballantyne, *Six Months at the Cape*, 98.

<sup>90</sup> Schreiner, *Story of an African Farm*, 125, 36.

<sup>91</sup> Henty, *The Young Colonists*, 242.

<sup>92</sup> Henty, *The Young Colonists*, 236.



democratic process of British government, they trek farther into the interior in order to escape the hated rule of the Uitlander. Yet the Afrikaners do no better, according to G.A. Henty, under their own government. In his novels about the South African War, he alleges that the government of the Transvaal is rife with corruption.<sup>93</sup> This serves to block the industry of good and honest British capitalists in the Republic. The British inhabitants of the Transvaal are "kept in a state of abject subjection by an inferior race, a race almost without even the elements of civilization, ignorant and brutal beyond any existing white community."<sup>94</sup> The Orange Free State men in Henty's eyes are reluctant enemies of the crown, yet their corrupt president Steyn, in cahoots with Paul Kruger, has committed them to war.<sup>95</sup> Consistently, the governments of the two Afrikaner republics are portrayed as oppressive and corrupt, subjecting their own citizens as well as British subjects to gross injustices.

### Conclusions

Writers of British adventure fiction during the period of the South African War worked to create a gulf between the "national characters" of Britain and the southern African republics. Through novels that contrasted Afrikaners and Britons as fictional characterizations, British authors worked to construct such national characters in an effort to demonize these enemies of Britain. Writers worked equally hard to provide a negative view of both Afrikaner men and women. This seems a key point. By emphasizing the failings of Afrikaner gender roles and identities, British authors gave readers the sense of a misshapen culture which lacked the proper order and sense of restraint necessary in all facets of culture if a people aspired to colonial rule. These efforts to write into being a fiction of difference have direct implications for our historical conception of the self-image which imperialists espoused and perpetuated to create and sustain popular support for the imperial enterprise.

The British literary portrayal of Afrikaner relations with Africans is one of overstated cruelty and exploitation. The Afrikaner view of Africans is unenlightened, for he considers them as less than men, almost on the level of beasts, and not even suited to the salvation of his God. This is in part a

<sup>93</sup> Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria*, 21.

<sup>94</sup> Henty, *With Buller in Natal*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Henty, *With Roberts to Pretoria*, 92.

product of the Afrikaner's outmoded religious beliefs. The British, on the other hand, perceive their idealistic mission to these potential subjects as part of a divine charge to bring the light of government, Christianity and learning into the dark places of the earth. In these works of fiction, the Africans themselves seem to prefer the good and just rule of the British to the many indignities suffered at the hands of Afrikaners. The literary portrayal of the relationship between Afrikaners and indigenous Africans is one of unmitigated cruelty, exploitation and bigotry. What, though, has brought about this degradation of the Afrikaner from his (and her) higher European origins? British novelists portray a degenerative process in which the Afrikaner has fallen from the role of the ideal European colonizer in which these novelists cast their British characters. But the reason for his fall lies not in Europe, but in Africa. In the minds of British authors, the Afrikaner has breathed the foul stench of African savagery for too long. This is an example of what Brantlinger has called the "Myth of the Dark Continent," whereby through their literature, Britons attribute the evil they find within themselves to the objects of imperialism, Africa and its peoples.<sup>96</sup> In this way, British authors projected their own doubts about their actions to their enemies in South Africa. Their cruel tyranny has reduced the Afrikaners to the level of those they have come to rule. Therefore, British writers identified Afrikaners more closely with Africans through their squalid living conditions, their superstition and backwards-looking worldview. As a people, the Afrikaners did not prove strong enough to preserve their culture in an alien environment. Their white culture was in a sense polluted and weakened by the encounter with black Africa. The Afrikaners and their society are, like the Africans, relegated to the status of the Other, and therefore subject to the rule of a higher, unpolluted Britain. One may have some respect for the untainted noble savage, these novels seem to say, but for the bastardized Afrikaner we have none.

British novelists and their readers recognized the religiosity of their enemy and viewed it as a source of weakness. Afrikaner religion provided these people with a sense of divine mission and a special destiny in Africa. Their church expounded an outmoded view of indigenous Africans as inhuman tools for white settlement. Coupled with the extremely rural nature of Afrikaner society, such attitudes held in check the forces of modern science. While Europe underwent the Enlightenment and its subsequent two

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<sup>96</sup> Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 195.

centuries of scientific and intellectual advances, isolated South Africa remained within the mental constraints of this Reformation-era Church. In the novels that focus on the South African War itself, Afrikaner characters constantly refer to their belief in divine favor in ridding themselves of the British forever. The gods of science and progress may have ruled in Britain in the late nineteenth century. But in the British imagination, the God of prejudice, ignorance and superstition ruled this fictional South Africa.

The value of studying these fictional stereotypes of Afrikaners is that they were created to be everything that British imperialists wished to avoid in themselves. These fictional Afrikaners, a polluted race, served as foils to their virtuous British counterparts. According to the stereotype, Afrikaners are the dark children of Europe who have fallen from the role of superior colonizers, ensnared by the sensuality and savagery which is Africa in the British imagination. Another, stereotype is created by British writers in the process, one which portrays Britons as the ideal tools for the spread of enlightened civilization, equitable race relations, good government, science and capitalism. In the South African War, Britons would themselves be guilty of many of the brutalities that they found repugnant in the Afrikaners. Africans would suffer immensely under British policies and ultimately be sacrificed to the cause of a Union of South Africa. The cult of masculinity and the gentlemanly code would fade before guerrilla warfare, internment camps, burned Afrikaner farms, and the sacrifice of many thousands of native Africans. The fiction of "difference" was to prove a terrific sham.