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Empire of the Imagination: Imperialism and the Child Reader of Victorian and Neo-Victorian Children's Literature

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EMPIRE OF THE IMAGINATION:
IMPERIALISM AND THE CHILD READER OF VICTORIAN AND NEO-
VICTORIAN FICTION


by

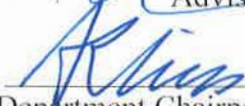
Megan Elizabeth Hicks

(A Thesis)

Presented to the Faculty of
Bucknell University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

Approved:


Adviser: Virginia Zimmerman


Department Chairperson: Alfred K. Siewers

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He considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam.
He was one insignificant person in all this roaring whirl of India, going southward to
he knew not what fate.
Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*

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Abstract

My thesis explores the depiction of the British Empire in Victorian and Neo-Victorian children's fiction. Though scholars may expect to find simplistic imperial triumphalism in texts written in the late Victorian period and incisive critiques of empire in contemporary texts, my work demonstrates that the ideology of empire is much more contradictory, unstable, and incohesive than one might assume. By looking at the instability of imperial ideology through the lens of children's fiction, I examine the ways in which that ideology is contested in the text rather than a stable site of ideological transference from adult to child. Thus, my thesis is divided into two parts. Part I examines two giants of late-Victorian imperial fiction. Chapter 1 concerns H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, and how that text reveals anxieties about British racial superiority through its depiction of African characters. Chapter 2 is centered on two works by Rudyard Kipling, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" and *Kim*. In this chapter, I trace Kipling's depiction of the ideal native subject as at once affectionate and undermined by notions of British racial superiority. Part II of my thesis examines two contemporary children's novels set in the Victorian period, with characters who have connections to the British Empire. Chapter 3 examines Philip Pullman's *The Ruby and the Smoke* and deconstructs Pullman's critique of the British Empire by demonstrating how Pullman reifies imperialist aesthetics. In Chapter 4, I turn my attention to Libba Bray's novel *A Great and Terrible Beauty* and its two sequels, to show that Bray's more subversive depiction of a romance between an Anglo-Indian girl and an Indian boy is incapable of escaping from imperial ideology. My hope is that, by exploring these instabilities, I further our collective understanding of how imperial ideology is both reproduced and undermined.

Introduction

The germinating seed of this thesis was planted many years ago, when I was about ten years old and my best friend gave me a book she thought I'd like. That book was Philip Pullman's *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985), and my best friend was correct: I devoured the novel and soon went to the library in search of its sequels. *The Ruby in the Smoke* has many elements that appealed to me as a child reader: mystery, a historical setting, a plucky heroine, villainous adults, and something of the flavor of the exotic. I can still remember the tingling of excitement as I entered Madame Chang's smoke-filled opium den and followed Sally Lockhart through the bustling streets of London. *The Ruby in the Smoke*, for a time, was given a privileged place as one of my favorite books.

Many years later, as an undergraduate, I read somewhere (the details of what I was reading and why are lost to the fog of memory) that opium dens in London's East End were more myth than reality. The lush, scarlet interior of Madame Chang's opium den was nothing more than a Victorian fiction. It would go too far to say that this new information disturbed me; I was by that time too old to believe that everything I read in novels reflected reality. But I was troubled by the fact that I had been carrying the idea of London opium dens around in my head for ten years, an idea that was not only fictive but had troubling implications about *The Ruby in the Smoke* itself.

My thesis, then, is both inspired by and interested in that interaction between the child reader's experience of a text and the imperial ideologies of the texts themselves. What ideologies are reified and reinscribed (consciously or unconsciously) in books read by children? How does reading these texts affirm or

destabilize child readers' identities and place within imperial hierarchy? What have contemporary child readers unwittingly inherited from the Victorian period? Is it possible to escape, undermine, unravel our colonial past, or will we carry it forward as the continued legacy of the nineteenth century? The texts that I examine in this thesis will, I hope, provide a path towards some kind of answers to these questions. By reading two influential Victorian writers in conversation with two contemporary writers engaging with the history of the British Empire, I can explore the dynamic interplay of past and present, colonial and postcolonial, ideology and aesthetics, and how this dynamic plays out in children's literature.

Theorizing the child reader has been a consistent problem in the study of children's literature. Despite the anecdote with which I began, I am no longer a child, and nor is any other scholar of children's literature. The child's perspective is therefore necessarily distant from us, just as the adult author is necessarily distant from the experience of childhood, even as s/he sets out to write a book for child audiences. Several scholars of children's literature have theorized that the gap between child and adult is an uncrossable chasm, most notably Jacqueline Rose in her seminal work, *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. Building on this sort of analysis, in an influential essay on child readers, "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature," Perry Nodelman goes so far as to refashion the theoretical framework presented by Edward Said in *Orientalism* so as to understand the relationship between adult author and child reader as one of colonization. With regards to the adult-orientation of children's literature, Nodelman writes that "We may claim to study childhood in order to benefit children, but we actually do it so that we will know how to deal with children; and as Rose suggests,

we write books for children to provide them with values and with images of themselves *we* approve of or feel comfortable with” (30).

My thesis rests upon the most tentative of agreements with what Nodelman says here. My discussion of child readers flows from the presumption that adults (by and large) give children books of which they approve, and that said books reflect ideologies and values which we wish to impart. Nodelman’s argument may seem strident and over-broad; if he is to be agreed with fully, I cannot see how any interactions between adults and children can be viewed as anything *but* authoritarian, imperialist impositions of the adult perspective onto the child (a fact which Nodelman himself acknowledges). However, that stridency can also serve as an entryway into further nuance of understandings of child readers. At the end of his piece, Nodelman hints at a recognition of the individual humanity of children, an acknowledgement that attempting to universalize childhood is a colonizing gesture (34). This problem leaves us scholars of children’s literature in something of a double-bind. To make an argument about children’s literature as literature read *by children* (rather than solely as texts that might be studied like any other text) will inevitably involve some kind of generalization; to build an argument around the fact that no experience of any text is universal leaves one wondering if anything can be said about the literary experiences of children at all.

Though Nodelman does not cite her directly,¹ Gayatri Spivak makes a similar argument in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, wherein she wonders if we can produce any knowledge that does, in fact, express the concerns of the subaltern, or whether we are simply replicating the discourses of colonialism in new guises. Spivak’s question is

¹ Except as the translator of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*.

one that haunts postcolonial studies; it places us on consistently unstable ground. Our attempts to find Spivak's "elusive figure," whether she be an Indian woman under British rule or the child within the text, are always going to be somewhat uncertain. However, I do not think that this means that the naming and description of the dominant discourse has to be elusive, too; my bibliography is abundant with scholarship that looks to uncover literary depictions of empire. The value of Edward Said's naming and cataloguing of the West/East divide in *Orientalism*, for example, has been indispensable. At the same time, though, I can understand Spivak's concern that in this naming and description of colonial ideas, we may be, in some way, reifying them.

In Nodelman's framework, then, both the child and the colonized person have similar concerns and may lead any scholar into similar traps. In attempting to find the child/colonized in the text, we may inadvertently push the child/colonized further from view. One authoritarian ideology may simply be replaced by a similar one in more benevolent wrappings. But I think that in *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*, Seth Lerer offers us a counterweight to this notion. Speaking of the relationship between the child and the book, Lerer writes that "the imaginative lives of children develop both in reading and in listening" (14). The experience of the text, whether it be by independent reading or a reading-out-loud experience shared with a parent, teacher, or other adult, helps the child find and define herself. While Nodelman might point to this process as one of colonization, in his history of child readers, I think that Lerer instead gives us an attempt to find children finding *themselves*. That is not to say that this process is free of adult contamination, but that the child's experience of the text is not (necessarily) that of an adult

delivering the text to a child with absolute authority.

I do not think that I can say that I have resolved this troubling issue in my thesis; however, I hope that turning my eye to the instability of the texts themselves with regards to imperial ideology will have value. All of the texts that I examine contain contradictions that bely notions of a stable, unchanging relationship between Self and Other, colonized and colonizer. If we are to read children's literature as a place where ideology is transmitted from adults to children, we can also see that that transmission is not always smooth and easy. In other words, I hope that my thesis is written in appreciation of children's ability to explore the ideologies they are presented with in ways that adults might not expect. Children are not, then, *tabulae rasae* onto which we inscribe our thoughts and values, but find themselves in the text in part by navigating its contradictions. Just as imperialist texts contain instabilities and contradictions, the child's relationship to the adult-authored text may not always produce a stable, consistent identity.

Because my work here is an examination of the dominant discourse of empire, I am particularly interested in those young audiences that benefit from that discourse. Broadly, when I speak of "Haggard's readers," "Pullman's readers," etc., I am looking to investigate the responses of children who are part of the colonizing nation—children who are likely to be white and middle class. To broaden my analysis to include colonized children, a quite different audience, is unfortunately outside the relatively narrow scope of this thesis. The reaction of colonized children to these texts is an area deserving of investigation. Transmission and navigation of imperial ideology will necessarily differ on each side of the colonizer/colonized divide; I leave that work to critics better equipped to that task than I am. As a potential subject for

scholarly investigation, the reception of colonial texts by colonized children seems rather neglected. While some scholarship exists that addresses the topic indirectly (such as Judith Plotz's article "Whose is Kim?", which describes the use of *Kim* in postcolonial fiction, and Blanka Grzegorzczuk's article "Rewriting Colonial Histories in Historical Fictions for the Young: From Below and Above," which examines postcolonial narratives in contemporary children's and young adult fiction), no scholar seems to have addressed that issue so directly.

My thesis is divided into two parts that are each subdivided into two chapters. Part I concerns two Victorian-era authors; Part II examines two Neo-Victorian authors. In Chapter 1, I examine the work of H. Rider Haggard, specifically his novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). Haggard and *King Solomon's Mines* are, of course, not the origins of literature of empire, as many critics have shown a long tradition of imperialism in earlier works. However, I choose Haggard as a jumping-off point because of his enormous influence, both direct and indirect, on the adventure fiction of future generations. Though less known by contemporary readers, Haggard is a grandfather of our own adventure stories. While Haggard is unique in this thesis in that his primary audience was not intended to be children, *King Solomon's Mines* was frequently read and enjoyed by children. In following many of the tropes and conventions of children's adventure books like, for example, *Treasure Island*, Haggard created a work that does not only lend itself to appropriation by child audiences, but that seems of a part with children's fiction. Regarding the depiction of empire in the text, I will particularly examine Haggard with regards to Patrick Brantlinger's notion of the "imperial gothic" as a mixture of adventure, exoticism, and mysticism. Despite the imperialist ideology underpinning Haggard's work, I will

show the odd, fractured contradictions in the text's conception of Self/Other.

Haggard's imperial gothic, I suggest, allows for a place where readers can play out anxieties about the British Empire itself.

In Chapter 2, I will turn my attention to the work of Rudyard Kipling. As the preeminent author of empire in the late nineteenth century and a prolific writer of children's literature, Kipling seems particularly deserving of attention. My focus here is on Kipling's construction of the ideal native subject. Building off the work of Indian scholar Suit Mohapatra on the Mowgli stories, I will examine Kipling's ideal native subject in two works, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi," one of the stories in *The Jungle Books* (1894), and his novel *Kim* (1901). Read in light of the English reaction to the Indian Rebellion of 1857, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" gives us a portrayal of the ideal native subject as a potential source of protection against the ever-present threat of violence colonial subjects may inflict on their rulers. Kipling's later work, *Kim*, provides a more nuanced depiction of the ideal native subject, in which the title character's ability to traverse racial and cultural boundaries might (or might not) be used to further the interests of the British Empire. While *Kim* gives us a more complex and unstable ideal native subject than "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" does, both stories invite Kipling's child readers to empathize and identify with the native, providing a less clear distinction between Self and Other.

Part 2 of my thesis transitions to contemporary children's fiction, where I examine the fragments of imperial ideology that still remain in our culture. While both of my Neo-Victorian texts engage with the British Empire as a restrictive, exploitative force in the world, they are also both, in some ways, the inheritors of Haggard and Kipling, not able to express a completely "postcolonial" point of view.

Both texts have the potential to shed light on our present relationship to our (both British and American) imperial past, and how that imperial past is understood by the children reading these texts. Both texts also shift their gender perspective from male to female protagonists, a feature which demonstrates contemporary concern with the agency and empowerment of young girls.

Philip Pullman's *The Ruby in the Smoke*, the book that I explained above inspired this thesis, is the focus of Chapter 3. *The Ruby in the Smoke* is a book openly critical of the British Empire in ways that neither Haggard nor Kipling are. My aim, then, is to investigate how successful Pullman's criticism of the imperial project is. Despite the depth and clarity of Pullman's criticism of the British government's involvement in the opium trade, that criticism is hindered by his reliance on the tropes and conventions of Victorian fiction. While Sally Lockhart's adventure in an opium den might be entertaining, that entertainment also sacrifices something of the force of Pullman's postcolonial critique. Similarly, the mystery and mysticism of Sally's past regarding the Indian Rebellion of 1857 makes the issue murkier still. Thus, *The Ruby in the Smoke* has the potential to provide unclear ideas about the British Empire, particularly for readers first approaching the topic through fiction.

Chapter 4 concerns Libba Bray's *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003) and its sequels. Because Bray is an American writer, I will necessarily consider how Americans use the history of the British Empire to explore their own status as global superpower. Bray's explicit feminism and the manner in which she speaks to adolescent girls provide an avenue for readers to find themselves in the text. The protagonist of *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, Gemma Doyle, has a complex and often tense relationship to her own identity as a young Anglo-Indian woman, with India

both a source of exoticism within the text and a locus of love and comfort. This tension is particularly salient in Bray's depiction of Gemma's romantic relationship with a young Indian man, which presents their interracial relationship as an impossibility. These features make *A Great and Terrible Beauty* an expansive playground in which Bray's contemporary readers can navigate their own identities as young, female beneficiaries of American global hegemony.

Finally, my epilogue provides some insight into the depiction of the British Empire in contemporary culture, and how we are to assess the questions that preoccupy this thesis. The difficulty of the questions posed does not lead us to any easy, sweeping conclusions about how we are to read empire in children's fiction. However, I hope that by pairing two classics of Victorian literature of empire with contemporary depictions of the empire, I can bring us closer to an answer to the question: "can we ever truly be postcolonial?"

Part I

Chapter 1

In his monograph *Rule of Empire*, Patrick Brantlinger traces the development of British imperial ideology throughout the literature of the nineteenth century, responding to earlier critics who had commented on the relative lack of attention paid to empire in early- and mid-nineteenth century British writings (3-8). According to this view, such ideology reached its fullest expression in the latter years of the nineteenth century, when an explosion of popular interest in literary tales of empire coincided with an increasing prominence of the expansion and maintenance of the empire in public consciousness. Brantlinger demonstrates that the late-nineteenth-century interest in imperial adventure fiction was not a new phenomenon, but the culmination of the decades-long development of that ideology. Aptly, Brantlinger refers to this literary development as the “imperial gothic”—the alchemical combination of empire and occultism into tales of adventure and mysticism (227-28). The undisputed master of this genre was H. Rider Haggard, whose novel *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) became not just its prototypical example, but an enduring influence on adventure stories into the twenty-first century.

Upon the publication of *King Solomon’s Mines*, Haggard’s publisher, Cassell & Company, advertised the novel as “The Most Amazing Book Ever Written” (Monsman 11). Hyperbolic praise aside, the book went on to be a bestseller, selling 30,000 copies a year (*KSM* i), and to influence a generation of writers who set their European adventurers loose into the mysterious realms of distant continents in search

of fame and fortune. Though the book was not marketed specifically towards children, it was quickly appropriated by child audiences as a part of the corpus of boys' adventure fiction. *King Solomon's Mines* is the first of Haggard's many novels and short stories about Allan Quatermain, a gentleman big-game hunter based in Durban, South Africa in the late nineteenth century. Before the events of the novel, Quatermain acquired from a Portuguese trader an antique map that claimed to lead to the location of the legendary diamond mines of King Solomon. Because of his special knowledge, he is approached by Sir Henry Curtis, a wealthy Englishman seeking someone to help him find his brother, who was lost searching for the mines. Quatermain, Curtis, and Curtis's friend Captain Good hire an African porter, Umbopa, and venture into the hinterlands of British South Africa. After the party meets a fictional community of Africans called the Kukuana, whom they manage to convince that they are deities in order to find both protection and access to Kukuana resources, they become embroiled in an intra-African dispute. When brought before the king of the Kukuana land, Twala, and his witch-advisor, Gagool, Umbopa tells the Englishmen that he is actually Ignosi, the rightful king of Kukuana land. The white men are drawn into the African political conflict and manage to help Umbopa/Ignosi overthrow Twala and regain his throne. They then convince Gagool to lead them to King Solomon's Mines, where she is killed by a young African woman who had become the lover of Captain Good. After a nail-biting escape from the mines, the white men leave with just enough diamonds to make them wealthy. They bid farewell to Umbopa/Ignosi, find Sir Henry's brother on their return journey, and go home to England all very rich men.

For most readers in the twenty-first century, the specifics of this plot may be

unknown; Haggard is likely more familiar as refracted through those he influenced. The most culturally relevant expression of the imperial gothic today is probably the *Indiana Jones* films, and the protagonist of *King Solomon's Mines*, Allen Quatermain, is better known through Alan Moore's graphic novel, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999-present) and its film adaptation than through Haggard's original texts themselves. The popularity of, for example, the *Indiana Jones* franchise speaks to the enduring appeal of the conventions Haggard codified. Haggard and those he influenced give their audiences adventure, mysticism, and heroism in exotic settings, transporting them from the realms of the "ordinary" and into the realms of the strange and mysterious.

Despite their continued delight at Haggard's newer offshoots, contemporary audiences often feel anxiety about these new adaptations of the imperial gothic, especially in terms of their portrayal of imperial subjects and their attitudes about empire generally. Though the *Indiana Jones* franchise has enduring appeal, the second film in the series, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), has received particularly harsh criticism for its portrayal of India and a Thuggee cult. Considering that the film features Indians as either helpless victims or menacing practitioners of human sacrifice in service of a vengeful and destructive goddess, the charge is impossible to refute, even if it has done little to damage the enduring popularity of the franchise. The fraught relationship between contemporary audiences' enjoyment of the imperial gothic's descendants and their problematic elements are even more apparent in the example of the most recent Hollywood adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan* stories, *The Legend of Tarzan* (2016), wherein former feral child Tarzan works to oppose atrocities in the Congo Free State—a sort of twenty-first

century marriage of *Tarzan* with *Heart of Darkness*. *The Legend of Tarzan* is indicative of an impulse to retain the adventure and mysticism of the imperial gothic while excising the elements that contemporary audiences find troubling, problematic, or offensive. That film, for example, transforms Tarzan himself from an emblem of the superiority of white colonizers into a friend of the oppressed colonized subject.

This impulse to sanitize, however, is fraught, because texts like *King Solomon's Mines* are not just products of their time, but expressive of deep anxieties about imperialism and European cultural superiority that have not yet been excised. Twenty-first century audiences may consider themselves quite unlike the Victorians in that they are fully aware of imperialism as an oppressive, racist force, but the Victorians themselves did have an awareness—both conscious and unconscious—that the ideology of white British superiority that supported the empire rested upon shaky foundations. As Brantlinger explains, “[i]mperial gothic expresses anxieties about the waning of religious orthodoxy, but even more clearly it expresses anxieties about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of imperial British hegemony” (229). In other words, nineteenth-century audiences were concerned about how thin the line between civilization and barbarism can be, particularly when Darwin’s theories of evolution and other scientific and technological advancements destabilized widespread assumptions about the unimpeachable truth of Christianity, which was believed to have buttressed white European civilization above all others. These anxieties, of course, have not fully abated, even more than 125 years after *King Solomon's Mines* was published. But for Haggard’s audiences, they were particularly potent, and perhaps contributed to the novel’s popularity.

Literary critics of the last thirty years have devoted not insignificant time and energy to the study of Haggard's own imperial anxieties. In particular, the intersection of gender and empire in Haggard's work has come under sustained attention from feminist scholars, who have been particularly interested in his later novel, *She* (1887). Early critics of Haggard, such as Elaine Showalter and Laura Chrisman seek to investigate the exact contours of his imperial ideology and how that imperial ideology is reflective of masculinist conceptions of the world. In this view, the manner in which Quatermain's heroes conquer Africa mirrors a gender dynamic in which men rule over women; this is not indistinct from Said's explication in *Orientalism* of the masculine West's domination of the feminized East. In his 2011 survey of Haggard criticism, Neil E. Hultgren suggests that Showalter and Chrisman, along with Brantlinger, Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and other postcolonial and feminist critics have more or less exhausted the topic of Haggard with regards to imperial anxieties (653), but I would contend that the relationship of Haggard to his young readers has as of yet been little explored.

Seth Lerer, in his study of the history of children's literature, dedicates a chapter called "From Islands to Empires" to the issue of children's literature and imperial ideology. Though Lerer's interest lies primarily in texts such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days*, he does devote some time to H. Rider Haggard. Drawing on previous criticism such as that of Joseph Bristow in *Empire's Boys* as well as previous feminist Haggard criticism, Lerer argues that *King Solomon's Mines* is essentially a metatext that teaches its readers how to construct stories of adventure (160-61). This metatextual element might explain why Haggard has had such a long-standing influence on other writers of adventure

fiction: he provides a roadmap for how to write a thrilling yarn; he essentially uses Africa to write about writing. Lerer also suggests that Haggard's writing, along with other late-nineteenth-century fiction for boys, is instrumental in the construction of boyhood itself. Connecting Haggard not just with his closest peers like Rudyard Kipling, Lerer directly associates the imperial gothic with opportunities for adventure closer to home, such as sports and scouting. The mixture of gender and empire results in imperial adventure novels' becoming self-justifying objects. According to Lerer:

By the late nineteenth century, books are continents. They loom before us, much like Haggard's Africa, daring our conquest . . . The books themselves take on the massivity of land. Look at the late Victorian and Edwardian covers, with their embossed fronts, their engraved letter, their colored leather stretched over the binding boards. These are hefty volumes, made of leather, gold, and heavy paper, with marbled boards and gilt edges. The boy's book is now a treasure in itself. (166)

The boy's book here is not just a space for the exercise of the male, imperial imagination, but is itself a treasure. Lerer's implication is that the physical construction of the Victorian children's book holds some kind of value for their readers. The object of the book reflects something of the ideas within the text itself: it is a fabulous piece of empire the reader can bring into his home.

While Lerer's analysis of Haggard's work as an instrument in the construction of imperial boyhood and as an object ("treasure") is apt, he spends little time on a close reading of Haggard's texts themselves. Lerer demonstrates that the texts were part of the general late-Victorian canon of boys' adventure books, despite boys not having been Haggard's intended audience. *King Solomon's Mines* was read alongside

texts like *Treasure Island* and magazines like *The Boys' Own Paper* as adventure tales for boys (157). Thus, for these young readers, Haggard's novels were likely indistinguishable from other adventure texts that they read. Building on Lerer's work, I hope to demonstrate that Haggard is not just a part of a cultural movement toward constructing imperial boyhood, but is also important in influencing how Haggard's young readers think of themselves in opposition to the imperial Other more broadly. In Haggard's work, Africa is a space for self-identification and exploration. As in all instances of ontological exploration, how the imperializing reader defines himself² is both oppressive and contradictory. Other critics have shown how Haggard's work displays the fault-lines inherent in an oppressive and dehumanizing ideology; however, for the Victorian reader, the contradictions seem but a whisper drowned out by the triumphalism of the imperial adventure.

Fittingly, Brantlinger opens his chapter on the imperial gothic with a quote from Haggard's *She*: "How thinkest thou that I rule this people? ... It is by terror. My empire is of the imagination" (227). This passage foregrounds Brantlinger's argument that the imperial gothic functions as an extension of the white European imagination, a space for probing various imperial anxieties about the rightness and viability of the British Empire. Lerer echoes the passage, too, in his assertion that the novel itself is the adventure, the treasure. One wonders if, when Haggard puts the words "My empire is of the imagination" into the mouth of Ayesha, the *She* of the text's title (and a terrifying immortal witch-goddess), he isn't letting her, however briefly, speak for him. Part of Haggard's power is not in the truth or fiction of his portrayals of Africa,

² Because my first chapter concerns texts written by and (largely) for men and boys, I will use masculine pronouns throughout as my default singular pronoun. In my second part, which concerns texts written (largely) for girls, I will use feminine pronouns as my default singular pronoun.

but in how they act in the white imagination. As Lindy Stiebel articulates in *Imagining Africa: Landscape in H. Rider Haggard's African Romances*, “Onto this topography . . . Haggard projected his contradictory imperialist impulses, his intense and fearful sexual desires, his misgivings on one of the central issues of his age, such as civilization and barbarism, and cultural relativity” (xi). The “Africa” of *King Solomon's Mines* is, then, an imagined Africa.

Contrary to Stiebel's description of the Africa of Haggard's novels as a dark—almost menacing—imagined space, Haggard's Africa also is imbued with a sense of play and adventure, which is perhaps connected to its enduring appeal, especially to children. Despite the trials that the characters experience, Haggard's decision to present the story as a narrative written by Quatermain after the fact (and at the insistence of Sir Henry and Captain Good) will assure the reader that the white protagonists, at least, will escape the South African hinterland unscathed. Thus, these trials seem more like adventures than real dangers; the Englishmen's conquest of the land is never truly in doubt. If Africa is dark, that darkness is more like that in a child's ghost story or other forms of literature that allow us to feel fear and horror in a protected space. Just as Quatermain will leave Africa and return home to England, the reader can leave the text and return home to the domestic sphere.

The inevitability of the characters' colonial success is reinforced by how, in constructing this imagined Africa, Haggard grounds the space in a European, rather than an African past. Though the setting of *King Solomon's Mines* is Africa, the mines of the title are taken from Judeo-Christian lore. King Solomon was, of course, a legendary Biblical king and ruler of ancient Israel; he is connected more to Haggard and his protagonist Quatermain's cultural heritage than that of the South African

setting. Haggard performs a similar rhetorical trick in *She*, where he connects the ancient history of Ayesha to unbroken descent from Ancient Egypt via Greece. Though the account that sets the protagonists of *She* on their adventure is written by “Amenartas, of the Royal House of the Pharaohs of Egypt” (24), the account is in Greek—“very good Greek of the period..., considering that it came from the pen of an Egyptian born” (25). The proof of the legendary account is carried out not in Arabic, Coptic, or another language spoken in Egypt, but in medieval Latin. This feature locates the story of *She* not in Africa, but in a European heritage that stretches back to the Greek empire of antiquity.

These presumptions about a European history in Africa were present not just in fantastical storytelling like *She*, but in real-world thinking about Africa’s past. Heidi Kaufman explains the King Solomon connection with contemporary accounts of remnants of Western civilization in Africa during Haggard’s time:

In the years immediately prior to the publication of *King Solomon’s Mines*, popular fiction and newspaper accounts helped produce the myth of Solomonic history in South Africa. While most of these accounts were completely spurious, designed to entertain rather than educate audiences, they helped fuel the popularity of Biblical anthropology while also offering a justification for the presence of white men in Africa – in keeping with Solomon’s empire tradition and in competition with it. Accordingly, Europeans mistakenly assumed that the ruins of the Great Zimbabwe were the remains of King Solomon’s Golden Ophir, built by Phoenicians and financed by the Queen of Sheba. (518)

Haggard’s placement of King Solomon’s mines in South Africa is, then, connected to

British racism, as both Kaufman and Brantlinger (195) emphasize. While this point is incontrovertible, Haggard's use of King Solomon (and an Ancient Greek heritage for *She*) serves a dual purpose. The European and Judeo-Christian origins of Haggard's adventures also provide an entry-point for his white British readers, a point of familiarity in a landscape that is otherwise alien and exotic.

The need for this entry-point is, of course, as much rooted in the Otherization of the African continent as the assumption that Africans are incapable of building anything that Europeans might admire. This aspect of the text is particularly salient for young readers, who, as Lerer explains, learn to find and define themselves within the text. The young white reader is, it is presumed, incapable of finding and identifying himself in a purely African story; he requires instead something familiar (some part of his own heritage) to grab onto.

Haggard further emphasizes this feature of the text by the manner in which Quatermain and his companion, Sir Henry Curtis, discover the legend of the mines. Rather than hearing of the legend directly from an African, Quatermain instead learns of it from a dying Portuguese trader, who hands him an old "rag" that contains the tale of a dying Portuguese man writing in 1590 (14). The author, José da Silvestra, is apparently dying because of "the treachery of Gagool the witch-finder" (15). This note is embedded in Haggard's text along with a rudimentary map reminiscent of that in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (a connection underscored by Haggard himself—who claims to have been trying to write a book as good as *Treasure Island*).³ Just as that the story of *She* has passed from Ancient Greece to medieval

³ The connections and similarities between *King Solomon's Mines* and *Treasure Island* have also been explored in Sally Bushell's article "Mapping Victorian Adventure Fiction: Silences, Doublings, and the Ur-Map in *King Solomon's Mines* and *Treasure Island*."

Europe to Victorian Britain, the transfer of the map to King Solomon's mines constitutes a demonstration of a long and mysterious history of European incursion into Africa. Quatermain's adventures are justified not just by moral and cultural superiority, but by a long precedent. And, even in José da Silvestra's short note, we see the appearance of a hostile native—Gagool the witch-finder—who prevents the Europeans from rightly accessing their cultural heritage (and riches) in Africa. The reader is thus primed both to feel that Quatermain and Curtis are right to search for the mines and to hate and distrust any African person who attempts to prevent them.

The first appearance of Gagool begins a continual division in how Haggard classes the colonial subjects and white colonizers in his text. At the outset of the novel, Quatermain would have the reader (and Sir Henry Curtis) believe that he is a man with progressive attitudes towards race⁴. He, apparently, judges men by their character rather than their racial classification:

And, besides, am I a gentleman? What is a gentleman? I don't quite know, and yet I have had to do with niggers—no, I'll scratch that word "niggers" out, for I don't like it. I've known natives who *are*, and so you'll say, Harry, my boy, before you're done with this tale, and I've known mean whites with lots of money and fresh out from home, too, who *ain't*. (4)

This passage is, perhaps, the most obviously instructive in the novel with regard to revealing Haggard's aforementioned imperial anxieties. Quatermain is interrogating definitions of the "gentleman." For Haggard's first readers in late-nineteenth-century Britain, Quatermain's initial claim that he is a "gentleman" would, of course, been a class marker, defining him as a member of England's landed, ruling elite. However,

⁴ At least, progressive by the standards of his time.

Quatermain also seems to consider “gentleman” a behavioral classification, so that any man whose behavior Quatermain approves of is a gentleman and any man whose behavior Quatermain does not approve of is not.

This definition is, of course, inherently destabilizing, as it allows for colonial subjects to be considered the equals of white Britons. Whiteness and class status are not inherent markers of superiority. Instead, in Quatermain’s view, superiority is an unstable prospect defined solely by the subjective assessment of every person’s behavior. When Quatermain elaborates that most royal naval officers are, in fact, gentlemen, he explains that, in his view, “the wide sea and the breath of God’s winds . . . washes their hearts and blows the bitterness out of their minds and makes them what men ought to be” (6). Therefore, we see that Haggard, through Quatermain, defines “gentleman” by what might be called pure heart or good character.⁵ For children finding themselves in the text, this may lead to search more for good character in the text than for affirmation of racial superiority. Furthermore, Quatermain implies that contact with colonial subjects will eventually bring all people around to his views when he tells Sir Henry, “so you’ll say [too], . . . Before you’re done with this tale.” In other words, Haggard through Quatermain suggests that notions of inherent British superiority cannot survive the actual business of running an empire. By actually interacting with African people, Quatermain believes that white men will come to recognize if not an inherent equality, then potential equality.

Of course, Quatermain’s assertion is not without its problems, ones that correlate with the placement of European, Judeo-Christian cultural heritage in South

⁵ Whether or not late nineteenth-century naval officers generally had these qualities is, of course, not as certain as Quatermain seems to think.

Africa. The equality of African subjects is dependent not on any inherent qualities that they all share, but in qualities valued by Europeans. This problem is most fully seen in the character Umbopa, who begins the novel as one of Sir Henry and Quatermain's porters and is later revealed to be the rightful ruler of the Kukuanialand. From Quatermain (and the reader's) first meeting with Umbopa, he is set apart from the other colonial subjects seen in the novel:

I was rather puzzled at this man and his way of speech. It was evident to me from his manner that he was in the main telling the truth, but he was somehow different from the ordinary run of Zulus, and I rather mistrusted his offer to come without pay . . . He was certainly 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 than dark, except here and there where deep, black scars marked old assegai⁶ wounds. (27)

Haggard emphasizes multiple times here and elsewhere that there is something extraordinary about Umbopa. Quatermain even decides to trust him despite his misgivings. Umbopa seems unusually eager to come along on the journey, and the reader will certainly find his offer to come without pay as suspicious as Quatermain does. Though the mystery surrounding Umbopa serves Haggard's need for creating additional suspense for the reader, it also imbues Umbopa with a sort of magnetic draw or nobility of character that makes him appear above the concerns that would ordinarily guide a white man in hiring native workers. Quatermain admits that he has reason to be suspicious of Umbopa, and he would not ordinarily hire a man he cannot

⁶ An assegai is a type of spear commonly used in South Africa.

trust, and yet Umbopa has such force of personality as to override that convention.

But what seems to particularly draw Quatermain's attention is the lightness of Umbopa's skin. Unlike Goza, Tom, Ventvögel, and Khiva, the expedition's ordinary African workers, Umbopa seems more white than black. We are repeatedly told that he is "very light-colored for a Zulu," and his good looks are frequently remarked upon (25). Umbopa's apparently inherent nobility—present in the way that he carries himself—and the color of his skin both seem to confirm a sort of allegiance with the British rather than other Africans. This image of the European black man has a history that extends back to Aphra Behn's seventeenth-century text *Oroonoko*, in which she describes the title character (also an African prince) in European terms:

His face was not of that brown, rusty Black which most of that Nation are, but a perfect Ebony... His eyes were the most awful that cou'd be seen, and very piercing; the White of 'em being like Snow, as were his Teeth. His Nose was rising and *Roman*, instead of *African* and flat. His mouth, the finest shap'd that could be seen. (13, emphasis mine)

Like Behn—one of the writers who codified the concept of the "Noble Savage" in literature—Haggard focuses on Umbopa's handsomeness, his familiarity, his difference from ordinary Africans. And Behn was only an early example of the trope, which became pervasive in Europeans' understanding of native peoples, particularly after Rousseau's description of the Noble Savage in the eighteenth century. This gesture would be familiar to Haggard's young readers, and signal to them that, despite Quatermain's distrust of Umbopa, they should be aware that there is more to him than meets the eye. He is someone with whom they can sympathize. An African like Umbopa has inherent value, but that value seems predicated on his also being

familiar. The African “gentleman,” to use Quatermain’s words, cannot be too Other; Quatermain’s praise is rooted in shared (European) values.

Umbopa might be further contrasted with the text’s treatment of the other Africans. Second to Umbopa in prominence is, perhaps, Gagool, the apparently-immortal witch-finder who conspired to deprive Umbopa (whose name is really Ignosi) of his rightful throne. Gagool seems to be Umbopa’s antithesis; while he may be in some ways like white men, she is entirely Other. Her inability to die seems to have even cut her off from humanity, as Haggard describes Gagool in dehumanizing terms. When she first appears on the page (rather than through accounts of other characters), she is crouching by the false king Twala’s feet. She gives “a wild yell” and “squeak[s],” making animal noises, and she leads the Kukuana in primal chants (90-91). As Gagool’s villainy becomes increasingly clear, she becomes even less human, even less animate: “Nearer and nearer waltzed Gagool, looking for all the world like an animated crooked stick or comma, her horrid eyes gleaming and glowing with a most unholy lustre” (92). Gagool, in Quatermain’s imagination at least, degrades from animal to object. A young reader will find nothing sympathetic or familiar about Gagool. She represents Africa at its most threatening and alien. Laura Chrisman points out that, as it is Gagool who eventually brings the white treasure-hunters to King Solomon’s mines, she represents the ambivalence of the British towards imperialism itself. Gagool is undoubtedly an evil figure, but she is a necessary one—implying that sullyng oneself with association with bad Africans is an unfortunate part of imperial success (53). Unlike Umbopa, Gagool is not to be admired or identified with—she is only to be used.

Furthermore, Gagool has conspired to deprive the rightful ruler of

Kukuanaland his throne. To defeat her and reinstate Umbopa requires British intervention. Though Umbopa's rebels are outnumbered, British superiority prevails, and Umbopa—a new king sympathetic to British interests—is installed. If this scenario seems to echo the real-world practices of the British, with their tendency to support sympathetic local rulers who help rule the colony, that is not likely to be accidental. And Umbopa/Ignosi is more sympathetic to the British than most. When the expedition leaves his lands, he declares that

What will ye—wives? Chose from out the land? A place to live in? Behold, the land is yours as far as ye can see. The white man's houses? Ye shall teach my people how to build them. Cattle for beef and milk? Every married man shall bring ye an ox or a cow. Wild game to hunt? Does not the elephant walk through my forests, and the river-horse sleep in the reeds? (168)

In other words, Umbopa/Ignosi offers Quatermain, Sir Henry, and Captain Good all the resources of his kingdom, while Gagool must be pressed into service. The two characters occupy the extremes of a continuum from Good African to Bad African.

However, Haggard also presents more minor African characters who seem to occupy varying places on this continuum. Ventvögel, a “Hottentot,”⁷ is “one of the most perfect ‘spoorers’ (game-trackers) I ever had to do with, and tough as a whipcord . . . But he had one failing, *so common with his race*, drink. Put him within reach of a bottle of grog and you could not trust him” (25, emphasis mine). Ventvögel is emblematic of a stereotype of his race. Though he has an almost primal connection

⁷ Ventvögel is referred to in the text as a “Hottentot”; this term is today considered offensive because it originates in European mockery of their language's click consonants. Ventvögel would more properly be called a Khoikhoi man. I mention this designation primarily because it differentiates him from the rest of the expedition's African workers, who are all Zulu.

to the natural world in his ability to track game, he is also subject to primal failings in his weakness for liquor. Unlike Umbopa, Ventvögel is, then, firmly classed as Other. He is not a character with whom a young Victorian reader would find himself identifying, nor is he a character whom said reader would inherently trust. In fact, Quatermain warns us that Ventvögel cannot entirely be trusted, and this quality is only mitigated because the expedition will take him far outside alcohol's reach. However, unlike Gagool, he is not a necessary evil, either. He instead seems a tolerable and useful tool, even if one that must be manipulated in order to serve the Britons' ends most efficiently.

Khiva, another of the expedition's African workers, falls somewhere in a liminal space in which imperial anxieties seem most fraught. As a character, Khiva is insignificant until a scene in which the party's elephant hunt goes terribly awry. Captain Good, "fell a victim to his passion for civilized dress. Had he consented to discard his trousers and gaiters as we had, . . . it would have been all right, but as it was his trousers cumbered him in that desperate race [away from an elephant bull]" (34). Khiva, however, saves Good:

Khiva, the Zulu boy, had seen his master fall, and brave lad that he was, had turned and flung his assegai straight into the elephant's face. It struck in his trunk.

With a scream of pain the brute seized the poor Zulu, hurled him to the earth, and, placing his huge foot on his body about the middle, twined his trunk round his upper part and *tore him in two*.

We rushed up, mad with horror, and fired again and again, and presently the elephant fell upon the fragments of the Zulu. . . .

. . . Umbopa stood and contemplated the huge dead elephant and the mangled remains of poor Khiva.

“Ah, well,” he said, presently, “he is dead, but he died like a man.”

(34-35)

Of particular interest in this passage is how Khiva seems to occupy a space somewhat different from Umbopa and Ventvögel. He does not, like Ventvögel, possess any quality that Quatermain would consider a failing. But in order to gain the admiration of the white men who employ him, he has to sacrifice his own life in order to save one of them. At the end of the passage, Khiva has been reduced to “fragments” and “mangled remains”—he hardly seems to even be a human body. But it is also in this moment that he ceases to be a boy and becomes a man. If, as I suggested earlier, Haggard’s young readers are primed to most sympathize with those African characters who are most like themselves, Khiva seems to have qualified. Quatermain demonstrates his admiration for Khiva when he calls him a “brave lad,” connecting Khiva with Victorian masculine values of bravery and physical prowess. Additionally, for child readers, Khiva represents the only character who, like them, is a child. Therefore, he seems particularly likely to be a point of interest and identification for this audience. Haggard’s child readers may see something of themselves—or, at least, a brave fantasy of themselves—in Khiva and come to develop a more nuanced attitude towards the colonized Other, but this does not diminish the fact that this identification is bought at the cost of Khiva’s life.

What’s more, the elephant hunt scene demonstrates the tensions surrounding the concept of “civilization” in *King Solomon’s Mines*. As much as I have shown that English values and ways of thinking (“civilization”) are privileged in the text, the

elephant hunt calls into question whether or not civilization belongs in Africa. The situation was precipitated by Captain Good's ignorance about how one should dress when adventuring in South Africa and his desperate clinging to the trappings of civilization. One would be right to question how British civilization can be superior if a matter as seemingly-benign as Good's choice of dress puts him and his companions in genuine danger. However, immediately after Khiva's death, the elephant is felled, not by Khiva's assegai, but by British guns, which fire "again and again" until they bring the elephant down. The British, not the Zulu, are the true masters of South Africa. In fact, their munitions are so powerful that, when the hunt is over, they have killed nine elephants and harvested from their bodies what seems to be a small fortune in ivory.

This interlude (the party stops for two days to collect the spoils of the ivory hunt) is highly suggestive. The purpose of their mission is supposed to be a humanitarian one—to find Sir Henry's brother. But the mission is waylaid for days as the white men pursue wealth. For them, the creatures of the African landscape seem to exist solely to provide profits. Haggard may here be reflecting concerns about the imperial project in a microcosm. The British Empire was often justified in humanitarian terms; the traders, missionaries, and civil servants who poured out over the globe to cement Britain's imperial rule were meant to be a civilizing force in the world. David Spurr describes this justification as "affirmation"—of British superiority, the "White Man's Burden" of Rudyard Kipling's famous poem. Spurr mentions a common phrase used in Parliamentary debates, "the trusteeship of the weaker races" to reflect broader views of the empire as a positive force for good (114). However, this apparently benevolent attitude "veil[s] the threat of [the White

Man's] terrifying power" (113). But even this alleged benevolent superiority and the threat of violence that underlies it cannot completely account for all the Englishmen's interactions with the colonized world. The danger caused to the group by Good's clothing demonstrates the horrible consequences that a lack of adaptability in favor of continuing to display the "superior" culture can have. In *King Solomon's Mines*, these forces erupt into the violence of the elephant hunt. The ugly and disturbing scene in Haggard's novel might reflect those anxieties that, whatever the colonizers' stated objectives (spreading their superior culture to unenlightened natives), their real interest is in bringing wealth home and sustaining British civilization. Quatermain is, in fact, a big-game hunter. Mastering the natural world in Africa is how he makes his living.

Haggard reinforces this fact at the end of the novel, when the characters finally find the diamonds that they were searching for. The trip into the mines kills both Gagool and Captain Good's African love interest, Foulata. Thus, when the characters finally find the legendary diamonds, they are objects of tension rather than of pure celebration because of the trouble and suffering the characters have gone through in order to obtain them: "We had not thought much of the diamonds for the last twenty-four hours or so; indeed, the idea of the diamonds was nauseous, seeing what they had entailed upon us; but, thought I, I may as well pocket a few in case we should ever get out of this ghastly hole" (161). The spoils of imperialism are, then, almost detestable objects, but too valuable to give up, and the seeming casualness with which Quatermain remarks that he "may as well pocket a few" seems at odds with his insistence that the diamonds were abominable objects. Though Quatermain may be disgusted by them, he, Sir Henry, and Good still take back enough of them to make all

three wealthy men. Few of Haggard's young readers would have questioned the British right to the diamonds or suggested that they should have stayed where they were, in African hands. They had already been primed both by their wider culture and by the text itself to accept that Quatermain and his companions are perfectly entitled to take what they find in Africa. But the uneasy feeling with which Quatermain puts those diamonds in his pockets symbolizes the anxieties attendant to imperialism generally. Even if Quatermain's claims of disgust are feigned, they gesture towards an acknowledgement that the diamonds come with an ugly history.

All of my observations about *King Solomon's Mines* seem suggestive of the anxieties surrounding British racial superiority, with an attempt by Haggard to conceal them. Although as we have seen, British superiority was unstable, with Quatermain asserting that some Africans are gentlemen and some wealthy white men are not, Haggard imbues certain African characters with qualities his readers would have associated with whiteness in order to make them sympathetic. These more sympathetic characters are those that correspond to or ally themselves with notions of whiteness and Britishness; they are those in whom Haggard's readers can see something of themselves. Those characters who are completely alien are the colonial Other at their most abject. Thus while the African subjects in *King Solomon's Mines* represent a continuum from almost Self in the case of Umbopa/Ignosi to completely Other in the case of Gagool, these differences in general reinscribe rather than call into question the readers' identity as white British colonizers.

King Solomon's Mines is a strange text in that it manages both to undermine and to uphold the ideology of British racial superiority. I suggested above that Quatermain recognizes the impossibility of upholding this ideology when in

protracted contact with colonial places and peoples. He is perfectly willing to acknowledge the individual humanity of some Africans—that some, in fact, may be superior to certain white men. Likewise, we can see through Captain Good’s foolish clothing choices that British culture may not seem so superior outside of Britain itself. Consequently, the child reader might develop a more nuanced attitude towards the colonized Africans—and to their own status atop the imperial racial hierarchy—through contact with the text. However, the presence of the inhuman and terrible Gagool and the white characters’ conquest of Kukuanaland’s diamond mines call any instabilities or contradictions we see into question. Any recognition of the fragility of British racial superiority is subordinated to the characters’ ultimate goal of acquiring wealth.

Chapter 2

Unlike H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling remains a writer still relatively well-known to contemporary audiences. Particularly through *The Jungle Books*, Kipling is still, to some degree, a part of the fabric of Anglo-American culture directly and not just through the works he inspired. During his lifetime, Kipling was among the most widely-read and respected writers alive. He was considered for the position of Poet Laureate, and in 1907, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature, which cited “the power of observation, originality of imagination, virility of ideas and remarkable talent for narration which characterize the works of this world-famous author.” Having won the prize at forty-two, Kipling remains the youngest-ever winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (*Nobel Prize*). These facts speak not to Kipling’s enduring legacy, but to the power of his sway over late-Victorian and Edwardian audiences.

However, for readers in 2018 who do not know him solely as the source for film adaptations of *The Jungle Books*, Kipling seems remarkable not as much for his “power of observation” and “originality of imagination,” but as the chief literary writer of empire. Kipling is, in many ways, the arch-imperialist, a writer whose considerable literary skill was turned not just to observation of empire, but propagation of its underlying ideology. The title of his poem “The White Man’s Burden” has become a byword for the European (and particularly British) white supremacist belief that empire was a civilizing force for good. In *The Rhetoric of Empire*, David Spurr uses “The White Man’s Burden” as a model of what he calls affirmation rhetoric. Additionally, according to Spurr, the poem “in fact points to its deeply rhetorical nature, implying that in the face of the silent, sullen races, the white

man's power resides in his own language" (113). Kipling was, then, the master of the rhetoric of empire.

Of course, Kipling today is known mostly as the author of *The Jungle Books*, which, though still read, are perhaps better known to most audiences through their Disney adaptations. The first, a traditionally-animated film released in 1967, departs significantly from Kipling's text, in part because Walt Disney felt that much of the subject matter in the source material was too dark for the company's brand ("Disney's Kipling"). This adaptation, with its rougher edges sanded off, spawned various representations of Kipling's characters, particularly Mowgli, Baloo, and Bagheera, in Disney's media empire. In 2016, a new live-action/CGI film was released with a slate of Hollywood stars voicing Kipling's animal characters. It may perhaps displace the 1967 hand-animated adaptation in popular culture, but this film is as much an adaptation of the earlier Disney movie as it is an adaptation of Kipling's books. The film makes sure to retain the well-known musical numbers from the 1967 version (more like any number of jazzy songs from the 1960s than the poems Kipling includes in his texts), even if it embraces some of the darker elements of the original book. For my purposes, the 2016 film's existence is significant mostly in that it speaks to a certain entrenchment of Kipling's Mowgli stories in popular culture. A story of a feral child navigating a dangerous jungle, helped along by friendly animals, still has the ability to light up the popular imagination. (The film has grossed almost a billion dollars world-wide.)⁸

Scholarship of Kipling's work has tended towards an analysis of these two combined legacies both as arch-imperialist and as writer of beloved children's stories

⁸ These numbers are available on *Box Office Mojo*.

by examining how *The Jungle Books* reflect an imperial point of view. While Haggard's stories feature white protagonists venturing into colonized spaces, Mowgli, the protagonist of most of the stories in *The Jungle Books*, is a native Indian boy. When he is forced to leave his community of animals in the jungle, he enters not white society but a small Indian village. But, as John McBratney, pioneer of imperial readings of *The Jungle Books*, reminds us, "the Raj⁹ announces its quiet yet mighty presence on the edges of the wild, fabulous jungle" (290). McBratney also catalogues the complexities of Kipling's conceptions of race and caste—the two prevailing hierarchies in the Raj at that time:

We might suspect that a man born in Bombay,¹⁰ whose first language was Hindustani, whose early companions were Indian servants, and who spent seven years of his early adulthood working as a journalist in India would question the truth of a discourse that made such hard-and-fast, invidious distinctions among races. Indeed, in many ways, both in his personal life and his work, Kipling quietly rebelled against the particularist and hierarchical premises of racial typology. Although many of his Indian works echo with irritating frequency the clichés of British racial ideology (e.g., the superiority of the "martial" Muslim to the "effeminate" Hindu), others reflect a more heterodox conception of race. Against the official attempt to draw lines between racial groups, these works feature the elision or transgression of racial boundaries. (281)

Here, McBratney emphasizes the inherent instability of Victorian pseudo-scientific

⁹ "The Raj" is common shorthand for the British Raj, the direct rule of India by the British government.

¹⁰ The city's modern name, Mumbai, came into use only in 1995.

racial classification. Kipling, much like Allan Quatermain of *King Solomon's Mines*, spent too much time with Indian people for these hierarchies to hold together completely. Kipling was likewise, according to McBratney, “fascinated by the idea of castelessness”¹¹ and the destabilization of that system, a point to which I will return in my discussion of *Kim* (282). All these points suggest that, much like Haggard, despite Kipling’s not-unjustified reputation as arch-imperialist, his ideology is much less internally stable than that reputation would suggest. Furthermore, McBratney suggests that childhood in Kipling’s work represents a degree of freedom from these hierarchies, and that “given the requirements of empire, the power of this uncasted figure [the child] to inform adult imperial ideology is sharply limited” (291).

Work on the Mowgli stories by Indian scholar Suit Mohapatra suggests that Mowgli, though Indian, represents a colonizing force in the natural world. As Mohapatra notes, “Again and again in the stories, Mowgli is presented as a thinking being, and it is due to his superior intelligence that he eventually becomes lord of the jungle” (82). In this reading, though Mowgli is neither white nor British, he is a representative of imperial ideology, wherein intellectual and technological superiority (Mowgli tames fire, as none of the animals of the jungle can do) gives him the right to rule. Mowgli’s superiority is both reflective of what Spurr calls affirmative rhetoric, discussed above and in my chapter on Haggard, and of what Spurr calls “naturalization,” wherein imperial dominion is justified both because “primitive” peoples are still a part of the natural world, and because the colonizer’s superiority is a part of “natural law” (156-57). Mohapatra also argues that Mowgli simultaneously

¹¹ Though caste hierarchies are native to the Indian subcontinent, British imperial policy did a great deal to make caste a more rigid and universal system for classifying human beings.

represents an ideal native subject:

He is not agonized by his hybridity either. The ideal native subject has no agony, no anxiety. He knows the jungle better than anyone else because he is a part of it. Hence, he is the best subject the white man can have to lord over the jungle and by extension the colony. (89)

Mowgli thus represents both sides of the imperializing paradigm, both colonizer and colonized. This aspect of Mowgli's character is not dissimilar to Umbopa/Ignosi of *King Solomon's Mines*—both characters are able to demonstrate their superiority within their native land and their obeisance to the British colonizers.

Regarding the ideal native subject as articulated by Mohapatra, I want to turn my attention to "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi." The story, included in *The Jungle Books*, has not received the scholarly attention that Kipling's Mowgli stories have attracted.

However, I suggest that "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" contains a second, perhaps less ambiguous portrayal of the ideal native subject, in this case allegorized by animals. Because of the popularity of the Disney adaptations, "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" is perhaps less-known than the Mowgli stories, though animator Chuck Jones (most famous for his work on *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies*) did create a television short based on the story in the 1960s. The title character of the story is a young mongoose, adopted by an English family living in a bungalow in India after he saves their child, Teddy, from a snake. Two cobras living in the family's garden, Nag and Nagaina, are angry that the family has entered their territory. One night, Nag enters the bungalow with the intention of harming the family; Rikki-Tikki alerts the family and Nag is killed. In order to rid the home and garden of the angry and dangerous Nagaina (Nag's wife), Rikki-Tikki hatches a plot to destroy Nagaina's eggs and kill her. The story ends with

Rikki-Tikki saving Teddy's family from Nagaina and remaining as the family's beloved pet and protector.¹²

In order to contextualize the relationship between the British family whom Rikki-Tikki protects and the imperial subjects, it is perhaps necessary to backtrack somewhat to colonial British history. The British Raj, where Kipling spent so much of his life and where so many of his stories are set, was created in 1858 after a thwarted rebellion that began among the sepoys¹³ working for the British East India Company.¹⁴ The most immediate cause of the rebellion was allegations circulating among the sepoys that new rifle cartridges were being greased with pig and cow fat. Loading the new Enfield rifles required that the soldier bite the cartridges; if the cartridges had been greased with pig and cow fat, doing so would involve a violation of religious dietary restrictions for both Muslims and Hindus (who made up the army of the East India Company). These rumors were assuredly inflamed by the increased presence of British missionaries in India, who seemed to indicate a desire by the British to (perhaps forcibly) Christianize India. Combined with the multitudinous complaints of a people being ruled by a colonial minority (in this case, that colonial entity being only a quasi-government whose main aim was to create profits for shareholders), the rumors sparked a rebellion against East India Company rule mostly

¹² Teddy is the only member of the family given a name; the English family is therefore referred to throughout as "Teddy's family."

¹³ "Sepoy" is a term for an Indian soldier; most of the soldiers of the East India Company were native Indians, though the officers, unsurprisingly, remained British.

¹⁴ Naming of this event is, perhaps unsurprisingly, politicized. Contemporary British accounts referred to the event as the Sepoy Mutiny or Indian Mutiny. As this nomenclature carries imperialist overtones and minimizes the event as a dispute within the army, it is not preferred. Indian nationalists prefer to call the event the First Indian War of Independence; however, Sikh and Southern Indian groups have objected to this name, as their history includes rebellion against East India Company rule before 1857. (See S. Muthiah, "The First War of Independence?"). As the term "Indian Rebellion of 1857" describes the event without either buying into the British imperial propaganda or taking a side in the intra-Indian dispute about the naming of their history, it is the term I will be using throughout.

concentrated in Northern India. The rebellion was eventually put down, the East India Company abolished, and rule by the British government instated in India. This change in government led to an overhaul of British colonial military and administration.

Though the Rebellion of 1857 was defeated, its events occupied a significant amount of psychic space among Britons living in India as part of the colonial administration. One particular incident became a symbol of the potential for cruelty and barbarism that the British believed inherent in the native Indians—the Siege of Cawnpore.¹⁵ After British forces at Cawnpore surrendered to the rebels, they, along with the British women and children in the garrison, were allowed to leave by way of the Ganges River. When the group reached a location known as the Satichaura Ghat,¹⁶ rebel forces attacked, killing or capturing the escaping British men. Afterwards, the captured British women and children were held captive at what was known as the Bibighar,¹⁷ and eventually were killed and their bodies thrown into a well. The grisly details of the events of the Siege of Cawnpore provoked outrage among the British public, but along with this story were numerous accounts of dubious veracity that portrayed the British (particularly British women) as helpless victims of unrestrained violence by Indian men. In her explication of the historical memory of the rebellion as portrayed in *A Passage to India*, Jenny Sharpe explains that, in the British popular imagination in 1857, “Mutineers, the story went, [were] subjecting ‘our countrywomen’ to unspeakable torments. Natives, the story continued, [were] systemically raping English women and then dismembering their ravished bodies . . .

¹⁵ Though the preferred spelling of the city’s name is now “Kanpur,” references to the historical event usually use the older spelling.

¹⁶ A path of descent to a river; hence a landing-stage, a quay, the place of a ferry. (*OED*).

¹⁷ The bibighar had been the residence of a colonial administrator’s Indian mistress. The term translates as “House of Women.”

Our popular perception of 1857 has been colored by the years of myth-making that have gone into popularized narratives of the revolt” (31). That popular perception was one of unrestrained savagery.

I will return to Sharpe’s work and a discussion of the gender dimensions of this particular narrative of the British presence in India in my reading of Philip Pullman’s *The Ruby in the Smoke*, but for the purposes of analyzing “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” it is important to note the fear and hatred the events of the rebellion inflamed in the Anglo-Indian colonizers. In the rebellion’s immediate aftermath, the British unleashed a brutal campaign of violence and terror against the native Indian population. At Cawnpore, buildings were burned and looted. Sepoys suspected of having taken part in the Bibighar Massacre were forced to lick the floor of the Bibighar while being whipped; they were force-fed pork and beef, and some were executed by being shot out of canons (Rough 89). Across India, British military forces put down the rebellion with excessive punitive force. But in addition to the atrocities committed by the British in the aftermath of the rebellion, these events also lodged themselves in the popular imagination as a constant threat of potential violence that might be unleashed by the colonized Indians. While ideas about Indian barbarity were embedded in and intertwined with the racial hierarchies discussed above, for the Anglo-Indian colonizers, the “ideal native subject” was not just about the smooth and prosperous running of the empire but keeping back the specter of native violence.

With this in mind, we return to “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi.” As with Kipling’s Mowgli stories, the protagonist of the story is a native Indian, though in this case, that protagonist is an animal rather than a feral child. Rikki-tikki is, of course, anthropomorphized. Though he certainly engages in mongoose-like behavior (very

few humans would be as eager as he is to fight with snakes), he also has some identifiably human desires and interests. Rikki-tikki is curious, he wants to protect the creatures that he likes, and he desires to be a hero.

The English family with whom Rikki-tikki lives are rather nondescript and generic in contrast to Rikki-tikki, the story's only fully-drawn character, but they are immediately familiar and identifiable. That Rikki-tikki becomes attached to an *English* family rather than an Indian one is a crucial point. Unlike the native village that Mowgli lives in, for Kipling's young readers, this family would have been instantly familiar: there is a strong father who shows physical courage, a mother who spends most of her time fretting over her child, and the boy, Teddy, who is curious and loves animals—he insists that Rikki-tikki spend the night “sleeping under his chin” (93). Rikki-tikki's exploration of Teddy's family's bungalow thoroughly establishes the family's Englishness:

He nearly drowned himself in the bath-tubs, put his nose into the ink on the writing-table, and burnt it on the end of the big man's cigar . . . At nightfall he ran into Teddy's nursery to watch how kerosene lamps were lighted, and when Teddy went to bed Rikki-tikki climbed up too . . . Teddy's mother and father came in, the last thing, to look at their boy . . . (89)

For a late Victorian reader, Teddy's family is much like his own—excepting the fact that they live in India. The material culture of their house is familiar, and the scene of a mother and father coming in to check on their son before they go to bed seems the ideal picture of loving parents. They are, therefore, despite being strangers to Rikki-tikki at the beginning of the story, “naturally” worthy of the mongoose's protection.

Teddy's family's worthiness is particularly apparent in the story's first scene.

After being washed away from his home, Rikki-tikki is found by Teddy, who wants to give him a funeral. His mother, instead, suggests that Rikki-tikki might not really be dead, and they “[take] him into a house, and a big man pick[s] him up between his finger and thumb and [says] he [is] not dead but half choked; so they wrap[] him in cotton-wool, and warm[] him over a little fire” (88). As if it were the most natural thing in the world, Rikki-tikki now takes to the family, particularly Teddy, who initially saved him, and “jump[s] on the small boy’s shoulder” (88). This interaction between the boy and the wild mongoose prompts the mother to say, “Good gracious! . . . And that’s a wild creature! I suppose he’s so tame because we’ve been kind to him.” (89).

In the context of the Anglo-Indian relationship to the native Indian subject, the mother’s comment here feels particularly revealing about prevailing attitudes. The family has, of course, been relatively kind to Rikki-tikki, though at little cost to themselves. But the mother speaks not just of reciprocal kindness, but of Rikki-tikki’s “tamelessness.” The attitude that seems to be expressed here, however subconsciously, is that kindness is not just a moral good in its own right. Nor is it that kindness might be returned. Rather, the kindness shown to Rikki-tikki has a taming or civilizing effect on him. English benevolence, then, has turned Rikki-tikki from a “wild creature” into Teddy’s friend, who curls up in his bed and spends his nights sleeping under the boy’s chin.

This picture of English domestic tranquility is threatened by the cobras who live in the family’s garden, Nag and Nagaina. Nag and Nagaina are, from their first appearance, threatening creatures. When Rikki-tikki meets Nag, he attempts to intimidate him:

“I am Nag. The great God Brahm¹⁸ put his mark upon all our people, when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off Brahm as he slept. Look, and be afraid!”

He spread out his hood more than ever, and Rikki-tikki saw the spectacle-mark on the back of it that looks exactly like the eye part of a hook-and-eye fastening. [Rikki-tikki] was afraid for a minute; (90)

Here, Nag emphasizes not just how potentially dangerous he is, but for Kipling’s young readers, his Otherness. Nag identifies himself with a Hindu god foreign to English readers. His creation story likely would seem particularly un-Christian, as Victorian Christianity does not generally conceive of a god who requires a snake to give him shade. The association of snakes in Western culture with deceit and temptation makes Nag and Nagaina seem all the more frightening and Other. For Kipling’s readers, Nag is a detestable creature before he even begins to threaten Teddy and his family.

What makes Nag and Nagaina’s threats to the English family interesting is the justification the cobras develop. Nagaina, the female snake, is actually the instigator in this situation. Nagaina’s instigation, as well as the garden setting and the conspicuous casting of snakes as villains, has Edenic resonances, making Nagaina a sort of Eve who tempts her husband into violence. The couple initially argue about the usefulness of killing the English family:

“When the house is emptied of people,” said Nagaina to her husband, “*he* will have to go away, and then the garden will be our own again”

“But are you sure that there is anything to be gained by killing the people?”

¹⁸ Brahma, the supreme god of Hinduism (344, fn 6).

said Nag.

[Nagaina replies] “Everything. When there were no people in the bungalow, did we have any mongoose in the garden? So long as the bungalow is empty, we are king and queen of the garden, and remember that soon as our eggs in the melon-bed hatch (as they may tomorrow), our children will need room and quiet.” (94)

The conflict here is framed as one over the right to territory; Nagaina wants the garden to belong to her and her husband as it did before. They previously lived as “king and queen of the garden.” The cobra couple, Nagaina in particular, see the bungalow and its surrounding gardens as rightfully theirs; they consider themselves its original inhabitants and rulers. Rikki-tikki, a mongoose, presents a more immediate threat to Nag, Nagaina, and their eggs than the English family does. (Mongooses often eat eggs as well as being capable of killing cobras.) However, Nagaina identifies the English family as the truly disruptive force in their land. Before they arrived, there was no mongoose at all, and the garden was uninhabited by humans.

Because Nagaina is a cobra plotting to kill a human child and his parents, her perspective would have been a terrifying one to Kipling’s young readers. They already sympathize with Teddy and his family and see Rikki-tikki as their defender. Teddy’s family’s right to occupy their house is questioned in the story only by the hateful Nagaina, who, despite her understandable desire to protect her eggs, chooses to do so by murdering a child and his family. However, Nagaina is not wrong in identifying Teddy and his family as the disruptive force in their garden and Rikki-tikki as their agent. This is, in fact, how Rikki-tikki sees himself. Nag and Nagaina, then, might be read as hostile native Indians, opposed to the British presence and

willing to resort to violence (and even the killing of children) to overcome them. She not only embodies a British fear of the native population, but, by her despicableness, discredits any arguments they might make against British rule. The cobras are hated not just by Rikki-tikki, but by all the other inhabitants of the garden, including the bird Darzee and his wife, who help Rikki-tikki to defeat Nag and Nagaina. Even if they *were* the original inhabitants of the garden, they are despotic rulers whom the other natives hate and fear.

Rikki-tikki, on the other hand, is an ideal native subject. He never questions Teddy and his family's right to occupy the bungalow and is quick to defend them. Furthermore, in defeating Nag and Nagaina, he chooses to completely obliterate their family:

[H]e could see the baby cobras curled up inside the skin, and he knew that the minute they were hatched they could each kill a man or a mongoose. He bit off the tops of the eggs as fast as he could, taking care to crush the young cobras, and turned over the litter from time to time to see whether he had missed any. At last there were only three eggs left, and Rikki-tikki began to chuckle to himself . . . (98)

From a non-human perspective, a mongoose eating a nest of cobra eggs is a part of the cycles of the natural world, however grisly that may be. But Kipling's anthropomorphization of the mongoose makes Rikki-tikki's destruction of the nest considerably darker and more disturbing. Rikki-tikki annihilates all the cobras in the garden and "chuckles to himself" as he does it. This action is justified because "they could each kill a man or a mongoose." Rikki-tikki's justification seems to echo fears of the native population's ability to rise up and kill the colonizers; his choice to

destroy Nag and Nagaina's eggs is only a preventative measure.

Consequently, at the end of the story, Rikki-tikki is lauded as a hero by both the English family and the other animal inhabitants of the garden. A Coppersmith bird¹⁹ even gives him a procession in celebration of the deaths of the cobras: “ ‘Nag is dead — *dong!* Nagaina is dead! *Ding-dong-tock!*’ That set all the birds in the garden singing, and the frogs croaking” (100-01). Teddy's mother exclaims that “He saved our lives and Teddy's life . . . Just think, he saved all our lives.” Considering the danger that Rikki-tikki undergoes to kill Nag and Nagaina, it is hard to imagine how Kipling's readers could have conceived of as his behavior as anything but heroic and admirable. In fact, considering the Edenic echoes of the story (a beautiful garden inhabited by snakes, a woman tempting a man to evil), Rikki-tikki even bears Christological resonances. But, as with all native subjects, “Rikki-tikki had a right to be proud of himself; but he did not grow too proud” (101). He continues to keep the garden cobra-free. There seems to be a recognition here that, despite Rikki-tikki's status as beloved pet, something uglier lies underneath. Rikki-tikki cannot become *too* proud, and his continued place of privilege is predicated on his continuing to kill other native creatures. This fact suggests the strategy of divide and conquer that has enabled so many imperial powers to cement their rule.

The concept of the ideal native subject in Kipling's oeuvre is complicated by the complex portrayal of racial identity and mastery of the Indian subcontinent present in his masterwork, *Kim*. First published in 1901, *Kim* is a novel about identity in the colonial subcontinent set against the backdrop of the Great Game, Kipling's coinage for the political and military conflict between the British and Russian empires in

¹⁹ Coppersmiths, native to South Asia, apparently have voices that sound like a hammer striking metal.

central Asia, particularly Afghanistan. The text's title character, Kimball O'Hara, is the son of an Irishman who had been serving in a British regiment in India. Born poor and orphaned young, Kim is raised by a half-caste²⁰ woman in the city of Lahore²¹. Because of his unusual upbringing, Kim is both racially identifiable as white and culturally Indian. When he meets a Tibetan lama²² on a pilgrimage to free himself from the Wheel of Things by finding the River of the Arrow, where the lama believes that the Buddha once shot an arrow and a river sprang up, Kim goes on an adventure. He joins the lama on his pilgrimage as the lama's chela²³, and the two travel on the Grand Trunk Road²⁴, heading to the holy city of Benares²⁵. Kim uses the opportunity to participate in spying for Mahbub Ali, a Pashtun horse trader and agent of the British civil service, though he grows close to the lama. On their journey, Kim's identity is discovered by his father's old regiment, and he is sent to St. Xavier's, a British school in Lucknow, where the lama funds his education. Aware that Kim's unusual upbringing makes him a valuable asset, the British secret service continues to train him as a spy. When Kim leaves school and reunites with the lama, he is able to use his secret service training to obtain information from Russian agents attempting to undermine the British empire, even as he helps the lama on his spiritual journey. Despite Kim's accomplishments with the secret service, the novel ends when the lama finds enlightenment and turns back to help Kim, his chela, achieve enlightenment also.

Though the protagonist of *Kim* is white, because he was raised by a poor, half-

²⁰ Mixed race.

²¹ Now in the nation of Pakistan, Lahore was then part of the British Raj.

²² Buddhist monk.

²³ Disciple or student seeking enlightenment.

²⁴ A major road that connects India to Central Asia.

²⁵ Contemporary Varanasi.

caste woman in Lahore, he is able to move through India as though he were racially Indian. Kim's ability to navigate different castes and ethnicities, slipping into and out of different identities in ways impossible for most characters in literature of empire, is a potentially destabilizing feature of the text. One can read *Kim* as critical of a bounded conception of race with tightly policed borders; Kim's facility with crossing presumed racial and hierarchical boundaries demonstrates how porous and constructed those boundaries are. In fact, as Tim Christensen points out in work on *Kim*, "One of the most powerful impressions that contemporary readers have taken away from Rudyard Kipling's stories of India is the sense that Kipling understood the difficulties of maintaining strict racial, ethnic, and national boundaries" (9). Trained as many contemporary readers are to recognize the contradictions of racial categories, we can see how Kipling portrays racial identity as unstable and culturally constructed. Of course, the contradictions within Kipling himself—as both keen observer and literary champion of empire—can also be extracted from the text, such as when Edward Said describes *Kim* as an imperialist novel, and emphasizes the fact that Kipling, like the rest of his contemporaries, never questions the assumed superiority of the white race (*Kim* 338). According to Said, "The division between white and non-white, in India and elsewhere, was absolute, and is alluded to throughout *Kim* as well as the rest of Kipling's work; a Sahib is a Sahib,²⁶ and no amount of friendship or camaraderie can change the rudiments of racial difference" (*Culture and Imperialism* 134-35). Adding to the complications of how to read *Kim* in a postcolonial context is the continued references to the novel (and Kipling's other works) as literary and cultural touchstones by postcolonial writers. In her article, aptly called "Whose is

²⁶ A title for Britons living and working in India.

Kim?”, Judith Plotz details how contemporary Indian writers such as Arundhati Roy and Timeri Murari reference *Kim* as a genuinely “postcolonial document” that reflects the concerns of a postcolonial people, rather than a novel of imperial triumph as suggested by critics such as Said (4). To attempt to reconcile all these contradictory elements of the text, I suggest a reading of Kim O’Hara as a more nuanced and developed portrayal of the ideal native subject than is seen in *Rikki-tikki* or *Umpoba of King Solomon’s Mines*.

This reading relies upon identification of an aspect of Kim’s character that is sometimes overlooked in postcolonial readings of the text: Kim’s rejection of his white identity. Kim’s conscious and continued rejection of whiteness disrupts a reading like Said’s or Christensen’s, which asserts that “the limitations of essentialist notions of identity are projected onto racial others, while the freedom of self-creation derived from a performative notion of identity becomes the exclusive privilege of whites” (11). The ability to slip out of essentialist notions of identity seems not to be the exclusive privilege of whites, but the exclusive privilege of Kim, who can do so because of his particular (possibly unique) background. And in rejecting an essentialist identity, Kim also rejects whiteness. One particularly telling example comes after Kim’s identity has been discovered by his father’s regiment, and he goes to tell the lama of what has happened:

“I knew it [that I was the son of a Sahib] since my birth, but *he* [the regiment’s chaplain] could only find it out by rending the amulet from my neck and reading all the papers. He thinks that once a Sahib is always a Sahib, and between the two of them they purpose to keep me in this Regiment or to send me to a *amdriissah* (a school). It has happened before. I have always avoided

it. The fat fool is of one mind and the camel-like one of another. But that is no odds. I may spend one night here and perhaps the next. It has happened before. Then I will run away and return to thee.” (77)

Here, we learn that Kim has apparently encountered people who wished to turn him into a Sahib before, and that Kim has escaped their attempts to impose a white identity onto him. Although the colonial authorities in India want Kim to accept the privileges that come with his whiteness, Kim instead prefers to maintain his liminality. Kim’s desire to stay with the lama on his pilgrimage, continuing to utilize his hybridity, suggests that Kim wants to be both racially and geographically unmoored. Even at the end of the novel, when Kim has been educated as a Sahib and entered the civil service as a spy furthering British interests in the Great Game, Kim remains insistent that he rejects his white identity, telling the lama: “I am not a Sahib. I am thy chela” after the lama remarks how strange it is to remember that Kim is, in fact, white (225).

Kipling further emphasizes this point at the end of the novel, after Kim, taking advantage of the lama’s spiritual pilgrimage, obtains information from Russian agents that is pertinent to the Great Game. Having done so, Kim falls ill, and has to be nursed back to health by a high-caste woman who had previously offered Kim and the lama charity. Kim’s use of his own liminality to gain a political and military advantage for the British imperial government ought to be his coming-of-age; Kim has used his skills and education to become a valuable member of the British civil service. In an uncomplicatedly imperialist novel, one would expect this accomplishment to be Kim’s final triumph. However, Kim finds himself not just physically but psychically ill. When the papers are finally taken from Kim, the reader is told that “He had been

annoyed out of all reason by the knowledge that they [the papers] lay below him through the sick idle days—a burden incommunicable” (231). Apparently, this symbol of imperial triumph is an almost unbearable burden for Kim, and he is all too happy to hand them off. Once the papers exit the story, Kipling’s narrative takes a hard turn to the spiritual, suggesting that Kim has rejected the glories of imperial service in order to serve the lama, just as the lama rejects enlightenment so as to guide Kim. The lama’s proclamation that “My chela [Kim] is to me as a son is to the unenlightened” indicates that Kim has replaced his white father—the source of his identity as a white man—with the lama (227).

Any identification of Kim as white seems to come not from Kim himself, but from outside, whether the white characters or the narrator’s voice is attempting to force Kim into an essentialist white identity. The white characters’ attempts to make Kim a Sahib are transparent throughout the novel, and make up one of the plot’s main conflicts. More subtle, however, is the narration’s attempts to categorize Kim as white in its observations of Kim’s deviation from stereotypes about Indian people. For example, after arriving at the temple where the lama has been staying while Kim was in school, “Kim felt all the European’s lust for flesh-meat, which is not accessible in a Jain temple” (163). The narrative voice attributes Kim’s hunger not to a change in his diet after three years in a European school, but his identity as a white boy. Similarly, the narrator attends closely to the differentiation between Indian and European in a scene that features Kim flirting with an Indian character called the Woman of Shamlegh. After Kim kisses her on the cheek, the narrator claims that “Kissing is practically unknown among Asiatics, which may have been the reason that she learned back with wide-open eyes and a face of panic”; he then “[holds] out his hand

English-fashion” (221). The narrator attempts to categorize Kim and his behavior according to racial prescriptions. While in these passages, the narrator emphasizes Kim’s Englishness, he previously emphasized the Otherness of Kim to the presumed English reader; Kim at the outset of the novel is “burned black as a native” and “squat[s] as only the natives can” (3, 87). But, as described above, Kim himself stubbornly resists these attempts at categorization, preferring to remain outside of rigid categories and attempting castelessness in his travels with the lama.

Many critics have pointed out that Kim’s liminality is in and of itself a fantasy. McBratney claims that *Kim* “represents a piece of wish-fulfillment on Kipling’s part, a picture of what life might have been like for him had his parents not removed him from India” (104). Said calls the entire premise of *Kim* a “fantasy,” pointing out similarities between the character and figures such as T.E. Lawrence and the fact that native identities cannot be put on or discarded at will (349). Considering Kipling’s biography (he was extremely unhappy to move from India to England as a child) and the historical reality of men such as T.E. Lawrence and Richard Francis Burton, whose exploits disguising himself as non-white surely would have been known to Kipling, these readings are not unreasonable. However, Kim’s rejection of the status of Sahib destabilizes such notions. Kipling, Lawrence, and Burton all eventually returned to white society, and lived with the full advantages of being white men reaping the benefits of empire. Although Kipling ends the novel without telling the readers about Kim’s future, his choice to leave us with an episode of Eastern spirituality that emphasizes the intimacy between Kim and the lama calls into question whether Kim will become a man like Kipling, Lawrence, or Burton.

Kim’s Irishness has explanatory power in reconciling readings like

McBratney's and Said's, which emphasize the fantasy of a white boy able to infiltrate native cultures for the benefit of empire, with Kim's continued rejection of the status of Sahib. The Irish sat at an odd, contradictory junction of the British Empire, colonized at home and colonizer abroad. Tim Watson explains how these contradictions manifested in Kipling's own attitudes towards the Irish:

For his entire writing career, but particularly in his Indian stories, Kipling celebrates the role of these Irish recruits, and their unswerving loyalty to the Empire. This coexisted with a near-fanatical opposition to Irish Home Rule. In 1912, when loyalist politicians in Ulster were beginning to talk openly of armed resistance to Home Rule, Kipling apparently offered £30,000 to the Unionist cause. (107)

Kipling's resistance to Irish self-governance seems important; despite the attempts by the characters in the novel who represent British colonial administration, Kim cannot and will not receive the full benefits of being a Sahib. If one suspects that a character like Creighton, Kim's superior in the civil service, is taking advantage of Kim's skills rather than acting in his best interest, that seems all too familiar. The English did not shy away from the use of colonized peoples to conduct the business of empire, a phenomenon seen in characters like Babu in *Kim* or Rikki-tikki and in the displacement of colonized peoples throughout the empire. Practices ranged from the use of Irish troops in India (such as Kim's father) to the use of indentured Indian labor in other colonies, such as Kenya, Trinidad, and Fiji. Kim's Irishness seems, then, not merely to explain his flamboyant personality, as McBratney asserts (107), but to confirm his liminality. Or, as Watson articulates the issue, "It is specifically Kim's Irishness that allows him to be a 'native' without being Indian, and to be a 'Sahib'

without being English” (110).

I argue, then, that *Kim* represents a different kind of fantasy than the one described by Said. Rather than being a pure fantasy of white power, *Kim* represents a fantasy of the ideal native subject. Rather than demanding all the benefits of being called “Sahib,” *Kim* instead rejects any potential claim to whiteness, preferring instead to occupy a liminal space in which he can serve the empire without asking for much (self-governance either in India or in Ireland, for example) in return. His almost-whiteness makes him an appealing figure for both the colonial administration and for Kipling’s readers—we can rely on *Kim* not being *too* Other while still allowing access into India that would be impossible for a true Sahib. As long as *Kim* has the freedom to explore India with the lama, occasionally taking part in an adventure that advances the cause of the British Empire, he—and the reader—will be happy. This aspect of the text is, perhaps, why Plotz is able to read *Kim* as “a colonial text with a resistant postcolonial text struggling to get out” (3). With Kipling’s intimate knowledge of India, the native subject can’t help but struggle against the confines of rigid imperial categories.

Reading *Kim* alongside “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” we can see two different models for the ideal native subject. Rikki-tikki seems a less nuanced and more reactionary native subject; he is a protective force against the ever-lingering threat of explosive violence against the colonizers. *Kim*, on the other hand, provides a means for expanding the empire’s reach and influence, not merely guarding its borders. The instability of *Kim*’s hybrid identity both undermines the racial categories that the empire depended on and aids in materially reinforcing that empire. Though both characters allow for opportunities for the reader to empathize with the native

subject—much like Mowgli of *The Jungle Books*—they both live in texts that sometimes reinforce and reinscribe Kipling's ideology of imperial superiority. Despite Rikki-tikki's charm, it is difficult not to see his murder of Nagaina's children as horrific if read allegorically. Likewise, while I hope that I have shown that Kim O'Hara himself is a complex, liminal figure who undermines racial categories, to dismiss readings like Said's seems overly apologetic. Kipling's relationship to the native subject is, then, a fraught one, at once affectionate and sympathetic and undermined by his own notions of British superiority.

Part II

Chapter 3

Eighty-four years separate the publication of *Kim* from the publication of *The Ruby in the Smoke*. Those intervening years saw both the British Empire's territorial height following the end of the First World War and its rapid decline. With Britain straining under the burden of the costs of fighting the Second World War, independence and decolonization movements in the empire's colonies led to Britain relinquishing colonial control and allowing for the establishment of independent nations in its place. The transition from colonial rule to self-governance was not often easy, peaceful, or smooth, and the unhappy legacy of the empire in decolonized nations has been described by countless theorists, authors, and historians. When Philip Pullman published *The Ruby in the Smoke* in 1985, he was living in a world that was becoming postcolonial, if it was not already so. Britain had surrendered control of its last African colony, Southern Rhodesia (to become the nation of Zimbabwe²⁷) in 1980 and its last Asian colony, Brunei, in 1984. White settler colonies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand had either severed their constitutional bonds with Britain or were in the process of doing so. And Britain's last imperial war, the Falklands War, was a petty spat described by Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges as "a fight between two bald men over a comb" (qtd in Kington).

The 1980s were, then, ripe for a literary reassessment of the British Empire,

²⁷ Incidentally, when the newly-independent people of Rhodesia chose a name to replace one honoring arch-imperialist Cecil Rhodes, they chose to name their country after the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, discussed in Chapter 1.

not just by postcolonial theorists but by British authors like Pullman. *The Ruby in the Smoke* is unusual in that it attempts this reassessment in the context of a book intended for child audiences. *The Ruby in the Smoke* in many ways is radically different from texts like *King Solomon's Mines* and *Kim*. Whereas the Victorian texts discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 are thoroughly masculine ones, featuring male characters, intended for male readers, and including women only as ancillary afterthoughts, Pullman gives *The Ruby in the Smoke* a female protagonist and surrounds her with several female characters. Though women and girls appear in Victorian adventure novels, they are rarely placed at the center of the story.²⁸ Sally Lockhart is not just a girl protagonist of an adventure novel, but one who eschews Victorian ideologies of gender, preferring mathematics to drawing and dancing, asserting her independence, and willing and able to use a gun. Sally is, in other words, a modern heroine in a historical setting. Furthermore, while any criticism of empire that can be unearthed in *King Solomon's Mines* and *Kim* remains subtextual, Pullman's criticism of empire in *The Ruby in the Smoke* is often explicit in the text, spoken aloud by the characters. The plot of the book is built around imperial exploitation and extraction of resources.

But despite the book's charms and its explicitly critical stance towards Victorian ideologies generally, *The Ruby in the Smoke* still relies on nostalgic, imperialist themes and images, particularly in the evocation of mood and setting. Many of the novel's mystical and mysterious elements draw on Orientalist

²⁸ LeeAnne M. Richardson's *New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction in Victorian Britain: Gender, Genre, and Empire* is, perhaps, the most definitive study of this issue to date (specifically regarding the adventure genre). Though Richardson convincingly demonstrates the connections between the colonial adventure and New Woman genres of the late nineteenth century, I am not sure that even in her study we find a character who is a clear precedent for Sally Lockhart, though we can see how Pullman imbued Sally with something of the New Woman.

conceptions of the East as a place of danger and intrigue. Despite the text's criticisms of empire and its utter lack of nostalgia for other aspects of the Victorian period (as mentioned, Pullman is critical of nineteenth-century ideas about gender, and the text features pointed descriptions of poverty in London's East End), *The Ruby in the Smoke* often relies on nostalgia for the nineteenth-century adventure novel, thus depending on Orientalist tropes and images. In many respects, *The Ruby in the Smoke* most closely resembles Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), which also concerns the search for a missing gemstone of colonial provenance. *The Ruby in the Smoke* at times replicates some of the more Orientalist ideas in that novel. Thus, Pullman gives us a text that seems aware of the British Empire's injustices but longs to preserve its aesthetics, even when they are be problematic.

Set in 1872, *The Ruby in the Smoke* is undoubtedly Sally Lockhart's book. Sally is sixteen years old and newly-orphaned. Her father, co-owner of the shipping agency Selby and Lockhart, drowned in the South China Sea as he returned home from doing business in Singapore; her mother is long dead, having been shot by a sepoy during the Indian Rebellion of 1857²⁹ (she simultaneously shot the sepoy). After her father's death, Sally receives a semi-literate note telling her to "BEWARE OF THE SEVEN BLESSINGS" and to seek out a man named Marchbanks (11). When Sally begins investigating the meaning of the note, she discovers that just the mention of the Seven Blessings is so terrifying as to strike one man dead of a heart attack, and that an immensely valuable ruby that once belonged to a maharajah³⁰ has

²⁹ For a recounting of the history of the Indian Rebellion of 1857, see Chapter 2. Because the event is referred to as "the Mutiny" within the text of *The Ruby in the Smoke*, I will sometimes use that language to describe it in this chapter.

³⁰ An Indian prince or king.

gone missing. As Sally investigates the mystery of her father's death and the whereabouts of the ruby, she makes many friends, including a young photographer, Frederick Garland, and his actress sister, Rosa; a boy working for her father's company, Jim Taylor; and her father's old friend from India, George Marchbanks. When Marchbanks gives Sally a diary that he says will tell her everything she wants to know, the diary is stolen by Mrs. Holland, the owner of a lodging house in Wapping who covets the ruby. Mrs. Holland also imprisons Matthew Bedwell, an opium addict and the only known survivor of the sinking of Mr. Lockhart's ship, using his addiction to extract information about the ruby and Selby and Lockhart's business dealings so that she can blackmail Selby.

Eventually, Sally and her friends, with a combination of pluck, ingenuity, and one-time opium use, defeat Mrs. Holland and discover the truth about Sally's past. The man whom Sally believed was her father, Captain Lockhart, was given the ruby by a maharajah for protecting him during the Mutiny; George Marchbanks, Sally's biological father and an opium addict, traded his infant daughter to Captain Lockhart for the ruby, and Lockhart raised Sally as his own child. The brave mother shot by a sepoy during the rebellion never existed. Mrs. Holland was once the lover of the maharajah, having taken up with him after he promised her that he would give her the ruby. Sally's adoptive father, Captain Lockhart, was murdered at sea and his ship sunk to cover up the crime because he had discovered that his partner, Mr. Selby, had been working with Ah Ling, the half-Dutch, half-Chinese leader of a Triad society³¹ called the Seven Blessings, to steal opium and dilute it so that it could be sold in greater

³¹ In China and amongst Chinese emigrants, Triad societies were secret societies, but were often also organized crime syndicates.

quantities. When Sally confronts Mrs. Holland, she throws the ruby into the Thames, and Mrs. Holland goes into the river after it. Ah Ling then attempts to kidnap Sally, but Sally shoots him and he mysteriously disappears. The novel ends when Sally discovers the money that her adoptive father left to her, knowing that the lawyer left in charge of her estate would not allow her free access to it because she is a sixteen-year-old girl. Sally determines to invest the money in a photography business with her new friends, the bohemian Garland siblings. Pullman went on to write three more novels about Sally Lockhart solving other mysteries, but because *The Ruby in the Smoke* is the only text in the series that deals directly and sustainedly with the issue of empire, I will not address its sequels in this analysis.

Despite the potential for critical readings of the Sally Lockhart novels, particularly with regards to colonialism, gender, sexuality, and class, scholarship of Pullman's work has focused almost exclusively on his more famous *His Dark Materials* series. *The Northern Lights* (1995) (published as *The Golden Compass* in the United States), *The Subtle Knife* (1997), and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) comprise a trilogy of novels written intentionally as an anti-theist response to pro-Christian works of children's literature, particularly C.S. Lewis's Narnia series. *His Dark Materials* also draws heavily on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, refashioning Satan as a man intent on usurping power from Pullman's stand-in for God, the Authority. The complexities of Pullman's portrayal of gender, power, and the nature of the soul as well as the books' purposeful intertextuality has made *His Dark Materials* ripe material for critics of contemporary children's literature.³² Pullman's Sally Lockhart

³² See, for example, Cantrell and Cudmore for ecocritical readings of the text; Greenwell and Bogstad on the text's female characters; and Elridge on childhood and authority for a sampling of the criticism on *His Dark Materials*.

stories share many features with *His Dark Materials*: a young girl as their protagonist, a historical (or, in *His Dark Materials*' case, alternate-historical) setting, a preoccupation with the potential for adults to abuse their authority over children, and an intertextual conversation with the English literary past. However, the *His Dark Materials* series is more widely-read and commercially successful, and whereas that series is in conversation with texts that already receive a wealth of critical attention (Milton and Lewis), *The Ruby in the Smoke* relies instead on adventure novels and pulp fiction. (Jim, Sally's working class friend, is an avid reader of penny dreadfuls, and his knowledge of their plot mechanics is what enables him to find the book's titular ruby.) In her chapter on the Sally Lockhart novels in *Neo-Victorian Families*, Anca Vlasopolos acknowledges the imperial connections of *The Ruby in the Smoke*, writing that "the ruby itself stands for colonial subjection, crimes against persons and peoples, as well as unmerited because unearned wealth" (304), but the bulk of her analysis describes Pullman's portrayal of found and created families in the context of Victorian ideology. Therefore, a careful look at the colonial connections in the novel seems merited.

In *The Ruby in the Smoke*, Pullman offers a sustained and pointed critique of the British Empire, particularly with regards to its involvement in the opium trade. The devastating effects of opium usage are catalogued for the reader through Pullman's portrayal of the opium-addicted sailor Matthew Bedwell. In a scene in which Adelaide, a young girl living with the villainous Mrs. Holland, feeds Bedwell opium, the reader and Adelaide are both horrified by the devastation opium wreaks on Bedwell's mind and body:

When it had stopped smoking, [Adelaide] lit another match and repeated the

process. She hated it. She hated what it did to him, because it made her think that under every human face there was the face of a staring, dribbling, helpless idiot

He was starting to rave. Adelaide sat as far away from him as she could; she dared not leave, for fear Mrs. Holland would ask her what the gentleman had said, and yet she feared to stay, for his words brought nightmares to her. (47-48).

Pullman's horrifying depiction of a man so weakened by drugs that he cannot leave his bed, preferring instead to lay smoking opium even as it gives him nightmares, is enough to turn any young reader off the drug. However, Pullman also explicitly identifies the sellers of opium with unjust imprisonment and mistreatment of other people. Though other opium sellers exist in the book, including Sally's father's business partner, Mr. Selby (who deals in drug trafficking from the safety of his office in London) and the Chinese proprietor of an East End opium den, Madame Chang, the reader's most intimate acquaintance with an opium peddler comes through Mrs. Holland. Though when Matthew Bedwell first arrives in London, he resists the temptations of an opium den, when Mrs. Holland discovers his addiction, "never slow to take up an opportunity, [she] found her venomous old curiosity powerfully aroused" (45). Mrs. Holland's eagerness to take advantage of Bedwell's addiction for her own profit is the first that the reader learns just how villainous a figure she is. Because of his addiction, Bedwell is effectively imprisoned in Mrs. Holland's lodging house, entirely at her mercy.

Of particular significance here is that Pullman makes clear that Mrs. Holland is not disconnected from the larger system of opium trafficking occurring within the

British Empire (and with official endorsement). The reader learns as the plot progresses the sketchy details of the history of Britain's involvement in the opium trade in Asia: that the British East India Company grew opium in India and sold it in China, thinking to profit off an addicted population. The Qing dynasty's (understandable) objection to a British company addicting their population to a debilitating drug led to two armed military conflicts, the First and Second Opium Wars, which resulted in Hong Kong becoming a part of the British Empire and weakening of the Qing dynasty within China. Within the context of *The Ruby and the Smoke*, this is particularly communicated to the reader at the end of the novel, when Sally learns the details of Mr. Selby's corruption from Ah Ling:

“The finest opium . . . comes from India, grown under British government supervision, and there is an official stamp, you know, a sort of mold, to form the stuff into little official cakes with Her Majesty's blessing and approval. Very civilized. It commands a ready sale and a high price.” (218)

Unlike Mrs. Holland's penchant for theft, assault, and murder, her use of opium to control Bedwell is not anti-social, but rather reflective of the attitudes and policies of the British Empire in her time. She is not a unique problem, but the bad behavior of the imperial government writ small.

Pullman highlights this point at the end of the novel, when Sally is able to read a letter written to her by her adoptive father in case of his death. The letter explains both his decision to adopt Sally as a baby and to travel to Singapore to investigate his suspicions about the corruption of his business partner, Selby. In reference to the evil he was investigating in the East, Lockhart tells his daughter, “That evil thing, Sally, is opium. All the China trade we now have was founded on it. The British government

trades in it. But I thought for years that Lockhart and Selby did not; I would not allow it to, because I hate it” (219). Lockhart then explains to Sally what she already knows: that opium addiction was what ruined the life of George Marchbanks, her biological father and Captain Lockhart’s closest friend. These words, placed on the final pages of the novel and spoken by Sally’s adoptive father, who has throughout the text been a paragon of decency and compassion in a world where many adults are corrupt and exploitative, sum up Pullman’s criticism of the British government’s involvement in the opium trade in the nineteenth century. Lockhart’s letter in many ways encapsulates the ongoing themes of the text; he not only criticizes the opium trade and those involved in it, but the poor treatment that Sally, as a girl, will face in society.

Despite Pullman’s clarity with regards to the morality of the empire’s involvement in the opium trade, the anti-imperial message of the book is muddled by his reliance on the association of opium and its consumption with exotic and mysterious Chinese immigrants in London. In her study of the portrayal of China in Victorian literature, *Britain’s Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-century Britain*, Elizabeth Hope Chang describes the opium den as a source of foreign corruption in Victorian literature: “A general reading of these narratives, then, links anxieties about Chinese spaces to broad concerns about urban degeneration, and places the stories of the opium den within a canon of other end-of-the-century novels imagining Britain’s invasion by foreign forces.” (112). Chang traces the foreign, corrupting opium den through major literary works of the period, including Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (a text explicitly mentioned in *The Ruby in the Smoke*), Charles Dickens’ *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Chang describes how

the continuities and similarities between these texts (and others) “demonstrate[] the solidity of the den as a received fictional category” (139); the East End opium den is not, then, a reflection of the reality of life in Victorian London but a construction of the literature of the time. And, as Chang points out, the trope of the opium den carries weight as an Orientalist trope that reinscribes notions about Chinese corruption and inferiority.

The influence of nineteenth-century portrayals of the Chinese opium den in London on *The Ruby in the Smoke* is fairly plain; Pullman—as he does in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy—draws on literary history to construct the world that Sally Lockhart lives in. The association of opium with Chinese immigrants emerges in the text early, when Bedwell arrives in London after his long journey from the East:

[H]e caught sight of an open door, with, an old man squatting motionless on the step. The old man was Chinese. He was watching Bedwell, and as the sailor came past, he jerked his head slightly and said, “Wantee smoke?”

Bedwell felt every cell in his body strain toward the doorway. He swayed and closed his eyes, and then said, “No. No wantee.”

“Good number one smoke,” said the Chinaman. (26)

Though Bedwell will immediately after this encounter fall into the clutches of Mrs. Holland, who will use his opium addiction to imprison him in her lodging house and to extract information from him, the initial threat to his sobriety is a Chinese man. This man “squats” outside the opium den—a posture associated in *Kim* with Asian people, thoroughly un-European³³—and speaks to Bedwell in broken English. The

³³ See my discussion of the narrator’s categorization of Kim’s behavior as either white or Indian in Chapter 2.

Chinese man's bad grammar is, of course, part of a long tradition of stereotyping East Asian emigrants as poor speakers of English. Though upon first encountering the man, readers may not know the danger of what he is advertising, reading this passage with full knowledge of Bedwell's opium addiction and its sad consequences gives the Chinese man an extra layer of menace. He becomes not just another stereotype of a Chinese immigrant hawking goods, but an active danger to Bedwell and anyone who walks into his establishment. Pullman eventually lays the responsibility for Bedwell's continued addiction at the feet of a white woman, Mrs. Holland, but only because the Chinese man failed to get to him first.

Later in the novel, after Sally decides to buy opium, the reader is introduced to a somewhat more sympathetic Chinese opium seller in Madame Chang. A sharp contrast is drawn between Madame Chang and other proprietors of opium dens like the man seen earlier: "Most of these places are abominable," the reader is told by her friend Frederick, "A shelf to lie on, a filthy blanket, and a pipe, and that's all. But Madame Chang takes care of her customers and keeps the place clean. I suppose the reason is that she doesn't take the stuff herself" (96). Though Madame Chang sells opium, she at least is not so despicable as someone like Mrs. Holland, whom the reader knows is keeping Bedwell in squalor so as to take advantage of him. Part of her moral fortitude is, apparently, in her ability to resist taking opium, which would apparently cause moral degradation.

This discussion continues with a question from Sally about the source of opium addiction in London: "Are they always Chinese? Why doesn't the government stop them?" Frederick replies that "Because the government grows the stuff, and sells it, and makes a handsome profit" (96), then going on to explain the history of the

British government's involvement in the opium trade to Sally. The question asked by Sally and Frederick's response represents the odd tension in *The Ruby in the Smoke*: while Pullman is quite deliberate in laying the responsibility for the opium trade at the door of the British Empire, the drug is consistently associated with individual Chinese people. In fact, all of the Chinese characters in the text—the first man Bedwell encounters, Madame Chang, and Ah Ling—are associated in some way with the opium trade. One would not be surprised if a reader finished *The Ruby in the Smoke* with the impression that every Chinese person in nineteenth-century London was making their living by selling opium.

This difficulty is heightened by Pullman's use of Orientalist images surrounding the opium den. Madame Chang's establishment is repeatedly marked as a place of difference and exoticism. When Sally and Frederick enter Madame Chang's establishment:

[A]fter a minute the door was opened by an old Chinaman. He was dressed in a loose black silk robe, and he had a skullcap and pigtail. He bowed to them and stood aside as they entered.

Sally looked around. They were in a hall lined with delicately painted wallpaper; all the wood was lacquered in a deep, lustrous red, and an ornate lantern hung from the ceiling. There was a close, sweet smell in the air.

The servant left, to come back after a moment with a middle-aged Chinese woman in a richly embroidered robe. Her hair was severely pinned back, and she had black silk trousers under the robe, and red slippers on her tiny feet. . . .

Sally looked around in wonder. The light was very dim; only two

or three Chinese lanterns penetrated the smoky darkness. Everything that could be painted or lacquered in the room was the same deep blood red, and the doorposts and ceiling beams were carved with curling, snarling dragons painted in gold. It gave her a sense of oppressive richness; it seemed as if the room had taken on the shape of the collective dreams of all those who had ever gone there to see oblivion. (98-99)

I quote this passage at length because it is the height of Chinese exoticism in *The Ruby in the Smoke*. The details of Pullman's description of the opium den both draw on familiar tropes of Chinese establishments—the carvings of dragons, the Chinese lanterns, the overabundance of red paint—and repeatedly emphasize the place's aesthetic difference. Though familiar to the reader as the visual vocabulary of a Chinese restaurant, the setting is, to Sally, strange, even wondrous. Madame Chang herself, though well-spoken (unlike the Chinese man encountered earlier), typifies a stereotyped East Asian woman, from her gracious attitude to her silk robe to her tiny feet. The “received fictional category” of the exotic opium den described by Elizabeth Hope Chang lives on in *The Ruby in the Smoke*; this passage exemplifies what Chang calls “the broader case of China's profound strangeness to nineteenth-century Britain” (6). That the opium den of the East End was largely a literary construction that emphasized China's exoticism is immaterial to Pullman's readers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The reproduction of the image of the opium den, complete with East Asian aesthetic trappings, is continued in this text; the opium den is still, as Chang calls it a “metonymic vision[] of China itself” (19).

Furthermore, the role of opium within the novel replicates Orientalist tropes about the drug itself. As discussed above, Matthew Bedwell's addiction to opium is

indicative of ideas about the drug as a corrupting foreign force as described by Elizabeth Hope Chang (19). However, opium also serves an important plot purpose as a conduit for mysticism and self-discovery. While in Madame Chang's opium den, Sally happens to inhale some of the opium smoke. She is then transported into what she calls "the Nightmare," a confusing recurring dream she has experienced throughout her life. The opium clarifies the Nightmare for Sally, and she experiences it not as a dream but reality happening to her in the present. For the first time, she is able to determine that the Nightmare is her own memory of the Mutiny. Later, Sally takes opium directly, and the experience allows her to remember the secret of her own past—that her biological father, George Marchbanks, was an opium addict who traded her for a ruby. Opium in *The Ruby in the Smoke*, then, has a dual nature, both as a cause of degeneration and an Eastern source of mystical self-discovery. Madame Chang tells Sally this directly: "The power of the smoke is unbounded. It hides secrets of the past so well that the sharpest eyes in the brightest daylight would never find them; and then it reveals them all like buried treasure when they have been forgotten," and Sally thinks that "Her still figure spoke out of the gloom like the priestess of some ancient cult, full of authority and wisdom" (102). This encounter upends what the reader has previously learned about opium, mainly by Pullman's description of Bedwell's helplessness and squalor.

This mystical, restorative aspect of opium is, in fact, taken directly from Collins's *The Moonstone*, which also features a scene in which a major character discovers the solution to the novel's central mystery by taking opium (in this case, in the form of laudanum). *The Moonstone*, then, seems to be Pullman's model for the degenerative/mystical dichotomy regarding opium within the text. As Susan Zieger

explains in her chapter on drug use in *The Moonstone*, “Opium, like the diamond, thus collapses the distance that insulates the metropole, or imperial seat, from its colony” (213). The drug, then, is a way of bringing the East home to London, both in *The Moonstone* and *The Ruby and the Smoke*.

The notion of bringing the East home to London is an important consideration in *The Ruby in the Smoke*. Unlike *King Solomon’s Mines*, “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” and *Kim*, this novel is not set in the colonies; Sally’s home is Victorian London. This difference represents a reversal of the flow of people and cultures that I discussed in Part I. While the colonial relationship in Haggard and Kipling’s work is one where the people and culture of Britain flow into the colonies, the events of *The Ruby in the Smoke* represent an invasion of the English “home” by the empire itself. Both the ruby and opium can be read as disruptive forces from the colonies. In his article “The Mem Sahib, the Worthy, the Rajah, and His Minions: Some Reflections on the Class Politics of *The Secret Garden*,” Jerry Phillips terms this phenomenon “blowback,” wherein all of empire’s instabilities further destabilize English institutions and ideologies when brought home (169). Though Phillips describes this blowback mainly with regards to the class structures of England, I think that in *The Ruby in the Smoke*, we can see “blowback” as the more general disruption of everyday life at home. The presence of both the ruby and opium in London leads to crime, anti-social behavior, degeneration—and, in opium’s case, a sort of Eastern mysticism.

The problem of using opium as a plot device that reveals the secrets of memory is two-fold. To begin with, presenting opium as a source of mysticism and Madame Chang as the priestess of its cult rather undermines Pullman’s condemnation of the opium trade by the British government. If opium is used—judiciously—to

solve mysteries and restore memory, then its use may be positive and spiritual. The mystical use of opium by a Chinese woman like Madame Chang also places her on one side of a long-standing Orientalist dichotomy in which the East is mystical, spiritual, and irrational, and the West is logical, calculating, and rational. Secondly, the use of exoticized Chinese aesthetics surrounding the consumption of opium replicates nineteenth-century notions about the opium den as metonym for Chinese corruption and degeneration. Pullman essentially attempts to have his cake and eat it too—to criticize imperialism while replicating its aesthetically appealing aspects—and the result is a weakened argument against the British Empire.

This aspect of the text seems particularly problematic when read in conjunction with the portrayal of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 in *The Ruby in the Smoke*. The rebellion, called “the Mutiny” in the text, is, in fact, the catalyst for the novel’s events. Sally’s adoptive father, Captain Lockhart, was awarded the titular ruby for protecting a maharajah who was believed to be sympathetic to the British during the Mutiny; it was during the Mutiny that Sally was then traded by her biological father for that ruby. Sally even believes that her mother was killed by a sepoy during the rebellion. What happened in India in 1857 is, then, of critical importance to the text. However, Pullman gives little attention to the context of the events of the Mutiny, a marked contrast from the careful and repeated history the reader is provided for British involvement in the opium trade. The Mutiny is, essentially, background dressing rather than a site of critical engagement with Britain’s imperial history.

Sally’s fictional mother may exemplify this problem in the text. When the reader is introduced to Sally’s long-dead mother, she is told that “Sally’s mother had

died during the Indian Mutiny, fifteen years before—shot through the heart by a sepoy’s rifle, at the same instant that a bullet from her pistol killed him” (13). Pullman takes it for granted that the reader knows what the Indian Mutiny was and what it was about; that he does not explain its history elides the fact that, in postcolonial understandings of the event, Captain Lockhart and his fictitious wife may be the villains of the Mutiny rather than the heroes. Instead, the sepoy is presented as the villainous figure, having murdered Sally’s mother, and his death is proof of her mettle (and what an unusual woman she was). But we are left with ambiguity as to whether or not this story is any sort of “truth.” Sally’s biological mother, Marchbanks’s wife, died an utterly pedestrian death. When Captain Lockhart tells Sally, via letter, that he is sorry for lying about her mother, he says “forgive me for inventing your mother. There was a girl like that once, and I loved her, but she married another man; and she is long dead” (219). Lockhart explicitly calls Sally’s mother “invented,” and yet we are left to wonder how much of the story Sally knows is contained within the phrase “a girl like that.” Does this only encompass the woman’s personality or is the story of her death true? We learn that the woman is dead, but did she in fact die in the Mutiny, or at some other point in time? Neither Captain Lockhart nor Pullman resolves this issue.

In fact, the story of Sally’s fictional mother’s death seems to replicate the dynamic at play in English and Anglo-Indian reporting of the Mutiny. In my second chapter, I described the creation of the myth of the savage sepoy inflicting violence upon symbols of pure English womanhood during the Rebellion of 1857. In her work on the Rebellion, Jenny Sharpe describes how “the British reading public [was] invited to share the terror of the white settlers, and their revenge, as letters, stories,

and eyewitness reports slowly made their way back from India” (31). Though the violence that occurred during the Siege of Cawnpore and described in the (often invented and exaggerated) eyewitness accounts was more horrific and protracted than Sally’s mother’s quick death by bullet, the story seems to encapsulate the cycle of native violence followed by retribution. As a woman, Sally’s mother ought to be spared the violence of the Mutiny; instead, she is shot, but not without also enacting violence on her attacker. Pullman’s revision of gender dynamics makes Sally’s mother an active agent in this story, rather than a helpless paragon of innocent womanhood who must be avenged, but the underlying assumption about the relationship between colonized and colonizer remains intact. That the particular story (like many of the stories of violence against English women during the Rebellion) is of dubious veracity seems particularly appropriate. The text never questions whether or not Captain Lockhart and his fictitious wife were on the wrong side of the Mutiny.

The only detail of the story that destabilizes the text’s presumption that Captain Lockhart is a hero is Mrs. Holland’s revelation at the end of the novel about the maharajah who gave Captain Lockhart the ruby. According to Mrs. Holland,

“You look at me now and you think I’m old and ugly, but twenty years before the mutiny—before I was married—I was the loveliest lass in the whole o’ northern India. . . . The maharajah hisself felt for me, damn him. You know what he wanted. . . . He were crazy with love for me . . . Well, the maharajah promised me the ruby. So I gave in. And then he laughed and threw me out of the palace; and I never saw the ruby again till that night in the Residency cellars.” (212)

If Mrs. Holland is to be believed (and she has agreed to tell Sally the truth in

exchange for the ruby), the maharajah whom Captain Lockhart was rewarded for protecting was, in fact, a treacherous and predatory man who used his wealth to take advantage of a young English woman. This fact both calls into question whether or not Lockhart was acting on the side of good by allying himself with the maharajah and recalls the myth of predation of white women by Indian men described by Sharpe. Thus, while Mrs. Holland gains some of the reader's sympathy by positioning herself as the victim of the maharajah's predation, the story also reinscribes colonial gender dynamics that position white womanhood as constantly imperiled by native men.

Unlike Pullman's interrogation of Britain's history in the opium trade, none of these aspects of *The Ruby in the Smoke* seem to be interrogated within the text itself. The potentially unsettling revelation about the maharajah is followed quickly by Captain Lockhart's final letter to Sally, which reiterates his status as one of the few kind and trustworthy adults in the text. India and the Mutiny, then, seems more backdrop than site of postcolonial interrogation, providing a source of adventure and mystery, but not in need of probing criticism. Because *The Ruby in the Smoke* is intended for young readers, Pullman's critique of the opium trade is fairly lucid and accessible; the lack of a similar critique with regards to the Lockhart family's past in India, therefore, seems troubling.

The ruby itself can, of course, be read as "colonial subjugation," as Anca Vlasopolos does in her chapter on Pullman's portrayal of found families. And the ruby and the bloodshed that follows it are certainly in keeping with other myths of cursed or dangerous objects extracted from colonized lands. As mentioned above, the ruby is not dissimilar from the stone featured in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*. Such stories about dangerous objects that represent absurd wealth can certainly be

read as expressing anxieties about the looting of resources of colonized lands³⁴, but such a reading of *The Ruby in the Smoke* is complicated by the story of the ruby's provenance. Rather than representing the ill-gotten gains of empire, the ruby is given to Captain Lockhart for providing aid and protection. To be sure, that protection takes place in a colonial context, but it is more difficult to read the ruby as a symbol of ill-gotten gains when it was given as a gift of gratitude. A great deal of bad behavior surrounds the ruby, to be sure, but unlike other stories of cursed or dangerous colonial objects (such as the diamond in *The Moonstone*), that bad behavior is not explicitly colonial exploitation. Instead, the dynamics surrounding the ruby involve sexual politics, addiction, and human greed. Mrs. Holland feels that the ruby is rightfully hers because she was promised it by the maharajah in return for access to her body; Marchbanks is willing to trade his daughter for the gemstone because of his addiction. Thus, the ruby in Pullman's text seems strangely divorced from colonial critiques that can be read into similar texts such as *The Moonstone*.

To call *The Ruby in the Smoke* a failure as a postcolonial critique would, perhaps, be unduly harsh. For young readers, the novel presents what may be an early introduction to the ugliness of the exploitative history of empire. However, the text also typifies the problems of engaging in postcolonial critique while also relying on the tropes, aesthetics, and myths that were created in a colonial context. The image of the opium den, cloaked in red and hazy with sweet smoke, as a site of mystery, may still have its own allure, but decoupling the image from the imperial ideology that created it will likely remain a problem for contemporary writers.

³⁴ Scholarship on *The Moonstone* has often considered this question; see Reed, Roy, and Manavalli.

Chapter 4

As we make the final transition of my argument, we move not just across time but across nations. One of the more curious aspects of the Neo-Victorian phenomenon is its trans-nationalism; both authors and audiences across the Anglophone world have an appetite for stories set in Victorian Britain. This is true even in America, where the history of Britain in the nineteenth century is not truly *ours*—we were no longer a part of the British Empire and have our own historical concerns quite distinct from those expressed in *The Ruby in the Smoke*. Nevertheless, American authors seem compelled to nostalgia for this epoch of history. One need not look very far to find examples of the phenomenon—it is visible both in published, professional media such as the Showtime television series *Penny Dreadful* (2014); A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990) and *The Children’s Book* (2009); Sarah Waters’s *Fingersmith* (2002); Julian Barnes’s *Arthur and George* (2005); in countless other examples; and also in amateur work. One only need search the internet for “steampunk”³⁵ to see a wealth of artwork and material culture inflected with a Victorian aesthetic, much of it produced by American enthusiasts.

This phenomenon requires a brief investigation, so that we might situate my final text, *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003) and its sequels, within the legacy of the British Empire. The simplest explanation for the American preoccupation with the Victorian period is that, as a former British colony, we share an Anglophone heritage

³⁵ Steampunk is a difficult movement to define precisely, but at its most basic, it combines Victorian aesthetics and technology with science-fiction. Steampunk narratives imagine, for example, advanced technologies powered by steam and clockwork. For a longer investigation into what, precisely, steampunk is, see Bowser and Croxall, “Introduction: Industrial Evolution.”

that inclines us to repurposing English history. In their work on Neo-Victorianism as a global phenomenon, Antonijia Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger also suggest that globalization and cultural exchange have loosed the Victorian era from its national boundaries and made it become part of the cultural vocabulary of the world at large (5). However, in consideration of the portrayal of empire in Neo-Victorian fiction, I would argue that America stands as the current inheritor of the legacy of the British Empire. Though the United Kingdom remains a developed nation and significant actor on the world stage, England no longer remains the seat of global hegemony. That status transferred in the mid-twentieth century to the United States. Despite our own American imperial past in places such as the Philippines, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico, to name but a few, nineteenth-century American history does not offer the same mirror into our status as global hegemon that the British Empire does.

The final chapter of my thesis, then, considers the memory of the British Empire as a trans-Atlantic phenomenon by examining Libba Bray's Gemma Doyle trilogy. Unlike Haggard, Kipling, and Pullman, Bray is not English but American.³⁶ Like those three authors, she has produced a text read by children that engages with the ideology of the British Empire. Therefore, despite the difference in her nationality, I believe that it is valuable to examine her work as part of a trans-Atlantic—even global³⁷—history of the British Empire.

Published in three parts as *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (2003), *Rebel Angels*

³⁶ Bray is also distinct from Haggard, Kipling, and Pullman in that she is the only woman author considered in this thesis as a primary text. My discussion of Bray's explicit feminism and the girl-centric nature of the trilogy below will hopefully elucidate this difference.

³⁷ Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger, discussed above, were co-editors of a special issue of the journal *Neo-Victorian Studies* that investigates Neo-Victorianism as a global phenomenon. Both their introduction and the issue generally provide an excellent investigation of Neo-Victorianism outside the Anglosphere.

(2005), and *The Sweet Far Thing* (2007), Bray's Gemma Doyle trilogy is, like *The Ruby in the Smoke*, a story about a young woman (Gemma, like Sally Lockhart, is sixteen) living in Victorian England with connections to India. Like Pullman, Bray is concerned with nineteenth-century ideologies of both gender and empire. I would consider my final text, then, a full flowering of the ideas present in *The Ruby in the Smoke*. Bray is even more explicit in her critique of Victorian gender prescriptions than Pullman is, not only seeding the critique throughout the story, but building her plot around the concept of girls' oppression and liberation. Likewise, even more than *The Ruby in the Smoke*, Bray brings to light the restrictions inherent in Victorian racial ideologies. Bray even includes a subplot involving opiate addiction.³⁸ Even more so than for *The Ruby in the Smoke*, because of Bray's mostly-American audience, the Gemma Doyle trilogy may be an early introduction for her readers to the history of the British Empire and Victorian England generally.

Bray, however, shares another similarity with Pullman; despite the critiques of empire present in her work, she also presents some of the more seductive aspects of imperial ideology. Her early portrait of Gemma's life in India has all the hallmarks of Orientalism, as India is tinged with an exotic aesthetic. Likewise, Bray's depiction of empire is complicated by her portrayal of an interracial romance between her lead character and a young Indian man. Though this romance is written with sympathy and tenderness, Bray chooses to end the relationship with the Indian boy sacrificing his life for his white love interest. Bray's readers may be led to believe that a romantic relationship between a white girl and an Indian boy is impossible. The depiction of

³⁸ Because the subplot involving Gemma's father's burgeoning addiction to laudanum is absent the colonial critique and orientalist tropes present in *The Ruby in the Smoke*, I will not spend much time on this similarity between the texts; however, it seems worth noting that the similarity exists.

the interracial relationship as impossible can certainly be read as a critique of the restrictions placed on those people who live inside the ideology of empire; outside forces make the relationship untenable in the real world. However, I hope to show that, when read in contrast with Bray's depiction of her characters escaping gender restrictions, the impossibility of defying imperial ideology is unique in the text.

Because the Gemma Doyle trilogy consists of three distinct texts and a number of complex and involved subplots³⁹, any summary of the series that does not bore my readers in its thoroughness will necessarily omit many details of the texts that warrant further investigation. Thus, I will offer a simplified summary. *A Great and Terrible Beauty* begins in June of 1895, when Gemma Doyle, an Anglo-Indian girl living in Bombay who has just turned sixteen, goes to the market with her mother. A strange man gives Gemma's mother a mysterious message about someone called "Circe," and Gemma's mother commits suicide. This event throws the Doyle family into havoc; Gemma begins having visions of her mother's suicide, and her father slowly becomes addicted to laudanum. Gemma is subsequently sent "home" to be educated in England at a boarding school called Spence Academy for Young Ladies. At Spence, Gemma eventually makes friends with three girls: Felicity, the wealthy daughter of an admiral; Ann, an awkward charity student; and Pippa, a beautiful young woman from a family with lofty ambitions for her. The four girls discover both that Gemma can access a magical land called the realms and an ongoing conflict for control of the realms and their magical power. This conflict involves the female-oriented Order, the male-oriented Rakshana, and a rogue woman called Circe. Gemma's mother, we learn, was a member of the Order, and both she and Gemma have special powers to control the

³⁹ The final book in the series, *The Sweet Far Thing*, is just over eight hundred pages long!

realms.

As Gemma learns more about this conflict and her own power, she also becomes acquainted with a young Indian man called Kartik, a member of the Rakshana. Much of the plot of *Rebel Angels* concerns Gemma and Kartik's blossoming romance and the question of whether his loyalties lie with Gemma or with the Rakshana. At the advice of her mother, Gemma must find a way to keep the realms' power away from the potentially malevolent influence of the Rakshana, the Order, and Circe. To do so, she must seek out a place in the realms called the Temple. At the end of *Rebel Angels*, Gemma defeats Circe and chooses to bind the power of the realms not to one of the groups vying for control, but to all the land's inhabitants; the Temple, she declares, is not a physical location but within her.

The series' final novel, *The Sweet Far Thing*, concerns Gemma's attempts to stave off corruption from within the realms themselves. She begins to question whether or not Kartik, whom she has come to love, envisions a future with her. The corruption within the realms is also ruining the soul of Gemma's friend Pippa, who chose to stay in the realms (and let her physical body die) rather than marry the wealthy, middle-aged man her parents had chosen for her. *The Sweet Far Thing* ends when Gemma and Kartik discover the source of corruption and Kartik sacrifices himself so that Gemma may live. Gemma must also come to accept the loss of her friend Pippa. Gemma and her friends decide to forge their own paths in the world, and Gemma leaves England so that she can attend university in America.

From this abbreviated plot summary, we can see that *A Great and Terrible Beauty* and its sequels seem to have two literary genealogies. The first and most obvious antecedent is the school story. Bray's novels were published in the first

decade of the twenty-first century, when the enormous success of the *Harry Potter* series saw a proliferation of books set in boarding schools, particularly magical boarding schools.⁴⁰ The school story aspect of *A Great and Terrible Beauty* is the legacy of a very different sort of Victorian fiction than that examined in this thesis; as David K. Steege explains in “Harry Potter, Tom Brown, and the British School Story: Lost in Transit?”, Harry Potter and his offshoots (including Gemma Doyle) are influenced by the genre of books for children typified by *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1857). Of course, Gemma is not unique or even unusual in being the girl protagonist of a school story; *Tom Brown’s School Days* had an earlier forebear in Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess, or the Little Female Academy* (1749). Gemma’s background shares particular similarities with Sara Crewe of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess* (1905)—both are motherless Anglo-Indian girls sent to an English boarding school by their fathers, making this girl-centric school story an obvious influence on *A Great and Terrible Beauty*. Like these prominent examples of school stories, *A Great and Terrible Beauty* is a novel of education. Gemma Doyle learns about herself and her true nature; like Tom Brown, Sara Crewe, or Harry Potter, she chooses what sort of person she would like to be.

But in addition to this school story genealogy, *A Great and Terrible Beauty* also seems inflected with the influences of Victorian adventure novels. In some senses, Gemma Doyle is not unlike Kimball O’Hara of *Kim*: both are young people with unique gifts (Kim in his ability to transverse racial and cultural boundaries, Gemma in her ability to control magic) caught up in a much larger conflict over

⁴⁰ Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* series and Lev Grossman’s *The Magicians* are other prominent examples of the genre, which has seemed to have gone out of style in the ten years since the *Harry Potter* series concluded.

control of vast wealth and territory. In *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, this conflict is allegoricalized and depoliticized. The Order and the Rakshana do not represent nations vying for territory, as both are trans-national organizations; the realms are not a real, physical land in which one can plant flags and install colonial governments. The result of this allegorical representation of territorial disputes is that the Order/Rakshana conflict is much more amorphous and indistinct than the machinations of the British and Russian Empires in *Kim*. Similarly, Gemma's search in *Rebel Angels* for the Temple—a mysterious seat of ancient power—bears some resemblance to the search in Haggard for King Solomon's Mines. Gemma's journey as the series progresses into darker and more mysterious landscapes of the realms mirrors the journeys of characters like Allan Quatermain into the darkest and most mysterious corners of the British Empire. To be sure, Bray resolves these conflicts quite differently from either Kipling or Haggard. Rather than presenting her readers with Gemma Doyle as colonial conqueror or servant, she instead gives them Gemma Doyle the democratizer.

Despite the series' literary genealogy, it is perhaps unsurprising that *A Great and Terrible Beauty* and its sequels have received little critical attention. The texts are of recent publication, were targeted towards an audience of young girls, contain fantasy elements, and, unlike the young adult fantasy zeitgeist that was *Harry Potter*, disappeared fairly quickly from cultural eminence⁴¹. All of these qualities do not exactly signal a text that would attract a wealth of critical attention. What scholarship

⁴¹ Though *A Great and Terrible Beauty* has dropped out of the cultural conversation in the ten years since the publication of *The Sweet Far Thing*, Bray has continued to see commercial success. Her most recent series, *The Diviners*, set in 1920s New York, appeared on *The New York Times* Best Seller List and won several awards for young adult fiction.

exists on Gemma Doyle is firmly centered in the books' gender dynamics. Cheryl A. Wilson's "Third-Wave Feminists in Corsets: Libba Bray's Gemma Doyle Trilogy" and Danielle Russell's "Liberating the Inner Goddess: the Witch Reconsidered in Libba Bray's Neo-Victorian Gemma Doyle Trilogy" both take a feminist approach to the material. Wilson particularly maps out the number of ways that twenty-first century feminism is transplanted by Bray into the late Victorian period. Wilson's reading of Gemma Doyle as third-wave feminist is a valuable summation of the text's gender dimensions; she describes how Bray covers topics such as sexual expression and repression,⁴² disability, mental illness and self-harm, female beauty standards, and sexual abuse. Wilson ends by summing up reader responses of Bray's target audience to Gemma Doyle: that they seem to relate to her and find her rebellion against Victorian social mores appealing (134). This suggests that my earlier hypothesis that the Neo-Victorianism of the Gemma Doyle trilogy holds a mirror up for contemporary readers may hold water.

Unconsidered in this scholarship, though, is Gemma Doyle's identity as an Anglo-Indian girl, or the exact relationship between the texts and the empire that Gemma is very much a part of. Of the primary texts considered in this project, Bray's trilogy is perhaps the least explicit and sustained in its engagement with the British Empire. However, it seems unlikely that Bray chose to make Gemma Anglo-Indian as a simple allusion to Sara Crewe of *A Little Princess*. Gemma's upbringing in India is, in fact, a central part of her identity. Likewise, her romance with Kartik and the central plot concern of control of the realms indicate that Bray is interested in the

⁴² In addition to Gemma's interracial relationship with Kartik, the queer romance between her friends Felicity and Pippa is also of particular importance. Bray's presentation of sexuality is a topic which, while outside the scope of this thesis, likely deserves further exploration.

imperial ideology that Gemma is both a part of and resistant to. Therefore, I argue that Gemma Doyle speaks not just to Bray's readers' position in contemporary society as young women (as Wilson suggests), but their position as young women in American global hegemony. Bray's readers have not just a relationship to patriarchy, but to the empire they are a part of.

Our introduction to Bray's India is also perhaps the most troubling aspect of her portrayal of empire in *A Great and Terrible Beauty*. The novel opens with a scene set in a Bombay bazaar. It's Gemma's sixteenth birthday, and she is worried about what her birthday celebrations will be like. As Gemma and her mother traverse the market, Bray treats her readers to the sights and sounds of Bombay, complete with edible cobras:

“Please tell me that's not going to be part of my birthday dinner this evening.”

I am staring into the hissing face of a cobra. A surprisingly pink tongue slithers in and out of a cruel mouth while an Indian man whose eyes are the blue of blindness inclines his head toward my mother and explains in Hindi that cobras make very good eating

. . . The old, blind Indian man smiles toothlessly and brings the cobra closer. It's enough to send me reeling back where I bump into a wooden stand filled with little statues of Indian deities. One of the statues, a woman who is all arms with a face bent on terror, falls to the ground. Kali, the destroyer. Lately, Mother has accused me of keeping her as my unofficial patron saint. . .

. . . Overhead, the clouds are thick and dark, giving warning that this is monsoon season, when floods of rain could fall from the sky in a matter of

minutes. In the dusty bazaar the turbaned men chatter and squawk and bargain, lifting brightly colored silks toward us with brown, sunbaked hands.

Everywhere there are carts lined with straw baskets offering every sort of ware and edible—thin, coppery vases, wooden boxes carved into intricate flower designs; and mangoes ripening in the heat. (1-2)

I quote this passage at length because it contains several distinct features of Bray's portrayal of India. While the paragraphs I have omitted from this passage are doing quite a bit of work establishing the tense but loving relationship between Gemma and her mother before she dies, Bray is also going to some lengths to portray Gemma's home in Bombay as strange, exotic, and unsettling. We see mangoes, turbans, and colored silks, establishing a sense of strange bounty in the marketplace. This scene recalls embedded cultural images of the Eastern bazaar; like the stereotypically Chinese decorations of Madame Chang's opium den discussed in Chapter 3, the bazaar is at once exotic and familiar.

The presence of Kali, who is "all arms," is also of interest here. Bray uses the statues of Kali to make a joke and introduce something of Gemma's character—she is a "destroyer." However, Kali is also one of the most recognizable deities of the Indian subcontinent for Western audiences.⁴³ In their collection of essays on the historical/cultural study of interpretations of Kali in both India and the West, *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, at the Center, and in the West*, Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal describe the association of Kali in the West with features unrecognizable in the Indian subcontinent: "when Westerners appropriate

⁴³ She is the object of worship of the Thuggee cult in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, discussed briefly in Chapter 1.

Kālī,⁴⁴ they tend to turn to the very graphic and excessive features that indigenous cultures have rejected or tried to mollify: sexuality, social rage, and associations with battle” (10). To further elucidate this point, in that same volume, Hugh B. Urban describes the British imperial understanding of Kali as representing India at its darkest, most mysterious, and most seductive (170). At the same time, since the late twentieth century, New Age movements in the West have tended to imagine Kali as a feminist symbol of women’s power (2). These two (quite different) Western interpretations of Kali introduce an interesting tension to Gemma’s identification with the goddess. In Gemma’s world—the Anglo-Indian community in 1895—her mother’s assertion that Gemma ought to take Kali as her patron saint implies that she is a voracious, terrifying source of destruction. In our own world, readers may be more familiar with Kali as a representation of feminine power. In either interpretation, Bray’s use of Kali to explain Gemma’s character and relationship with her mother seems an appropriation of Hindu religious iconography; both understandings of Kali are divorced from the goddess as understood by her indigenous culture.

The final detail of this passage that I would like to draw attention to is Bray’s portrayal of a hissing cobra. While we cannot know whether Bray was consciously considering Nag and Nagaina of “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” as she wrote this passage, the cobra, much like in that story, seems to represent India’s indigenous creatures at their most alien and frightening. Gemma recoils from the snake in horror, while the native man smiles and seems perfectly comfortable with it. This passage also recalls a small detail from *Kim*, in which, after Kim tells the lama that he hates snakes, the narrator

⁴⁴ Though McDermott and Kripal use a more accurate orthography in spelling the goddess’s name “Kālī,” because my primary text spells her name “Kali,” I will be using that spelling when not quoting directly from McDermott and Kripal.

informs us that “No native training can quench the white man’s horror of the Serpent” (40). Gemma is disgusted at the idea of dining on cobra; presumably, Bray believed that her readers would be, too. The depiction of the cobra alongside Kali and the exotic sights of the bazaar present us with an India that we might describe as Orientalist. In introducing us to Gemma and her home, Bray emphasizes Otherness, difference, danger, and alienation.

What makes this exorcized depiction of India by Bray strange is that, for Gemma, India is home, and her attitude towards Bombay changes as the story progresses and she heads to England for the first time. While, at the outset of the novel, Gemma is eager to go to England to be educated (even telling her mother that “in London, you don’t have to defang your meals first” [2]), she finds herself adrift and homesick when she first arrives at Spence.⁴⁵ In a scene towards the end of *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, Gemma uses magic and her imagination to express her longing for the place where she grew up: “I wish I could see those flowers of my childhood, of my mother and India, and then suddenly, they’re everywhere . . . It’s so beautiful, I could stay here forever” (237). In *Rebel Angels*, Gemma explicitly thinks that her grandmother’s house “does not feel like home. For me, that place is India. I think of our housekeeper, Sarita, and see her lined face and gap-toothed smile. I see our house with the open porch and a bowl of dates sitting on a table draped in red silk” (134-35). These scenes express Gemma’s sense of Bombay as her home and a place of comfort and familiarity, in sharp contrast to the weirdness of her interaction

⁴⁵ As an aside, I would note that Gemma’s parents’ decision to wait until she is sixteen to send her to be educated in England would have been somewhat unusual in the Anglo-Indian community. The more usual Anglo-Indian child would have gone to England at a much younger age, as did Rudyard Kipling himself.

with the cobra that begins the book. Gemma also keeps amongst her possessions a white carving of an Indian elephant as a sort of physical representation of the life in Bombay that she lost when her mother died.

I emphasize these scenes in order to draw attention to the odd tension that surrounds India in Bray's texts. For Gemma, India is at once a wild, exotic site of Otherness and undeniably her home, the place where she felt happiest and most loved. Her Anglo-Indian upbringing is also, apparently, the source of her headstrong, independent personality. Gemma asserts that she has been sent to Spence to be "civilized" because India has made her too wild (*AGATB* 49), and yet, as evidenced by the opening passage discussed above, she is quite apart from indigenous Indian culture. In this conflicted depiction of India, we might see a faint echo of the India portrayed by Kipling in *Kim*. I do not want to belabor this point too much, as Gemma lacks Kim's native fluency and ability to transverse racial and cultural boundaries—qualities that, I think, are essential to understanding Kim's character. However, Bray does manage to imbue Gemma with something of Kipling's imperial contradictions, as she is at once at home in India and alienated from it.

This tension is particularly visible in Bray's portrayal of the romance between Gemma and Kartik. Considered in the context of imperial ideology, Gemma and Kartik's relationship can be read as quite subversive. In both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I described to the specter of sexual violence perpetrated by Indian men against English women in colonial India and how that specter was used to reify racial boundaries that upheld colonial rule. Similarly, the relationship between British men and colonized women has often been read as standing in for the relationship between West and East more generally, in which the rational, powerful West dominates the

feminized East.⁴⁶ Both these paradigms present interracial relationships as relationships of domination and subjugation, wherein either the Western man conquers the Eastern woman, or the Eastern man pollutes the purity of the Western woman via violence. Bray's portrayal of Gemma and Kartik's relationship does not fit into either one of these molds. When Gemma's friend Pippa claims that Kartik is handsome "[f]or a heathen," (271), the sentiment does not seem to be endorsed by the text, but rather a symptom of Pippa's narrow-mindedness. In fact, Gemma and Kartik's romance bears more similarities to other relationships in contemporary young adult fiction than anything discussed in either Sharpe or Said. They begin the novel as strangers, and as they start to get to know each other, their attraction slowly grows. Eventually, the two begin to love each other. In fact, *The Sweet Far Thing* ends with Gemma dreaming of Kartik, implying that her memories of him still have great meaning for her—and likely will for the rest of her life.

However, it is difficult to read the Gemma/Kartik relationship as completely subversive when taking the text as a whole. One particularly troubling aspect of Bray's portrayal of Kartik is in the mystery—duplicity, even—that seems to surround him. Gemma—and the reader—are introduced to Kartik as a representative of an organization that Gemma explicitly calls “the great and mysterious Rakshana” (*AGATB* 246). Before Bray gives us specific information about the Rakshana, its foreign-sounding name and Indian representative alert us to the fact that the organization is not English, and, in fact, we do learn that the Rakshana “rose in the East” and is very ancient (*RA* 112). Despite the Rakshana's status as “protector” of the

⁴⁶ See particularly Said's description of Gustav Flaubert's relationship with his Egyptian courtesan, which Said uses as a metonym for East/West relations (*Orientalism* 6).

realms, their motives remain obscure, as Kartik withholds information from Gemma—supposedly for her own good. His intentions and true feelings about Gemma only become completely clear towards the end of *The Sweet Far Thing*; for most of the series, he remains somewhat mysterious, even as we learn more about him.

Kartik's inscrutability is not terribly unusual in the context of contemporary young adult fiction, particularly those books marketed to an audience of adolescent girls; however, Kartik's Indian heritage problematizes this convention. To be sure, male love interests in novels like *A Great and Terrible Beauty* are often mysterious, with their backgrounds, feelings, and intentions hidden from the reader so as to heighten suspense. The pleasurable tension of will they/won't they is part and parcel of much (though certainly not all) contemporary romance. But the context of Gemma and Kartik's relationship means that it is possible to view Kartik as part of a long-standing, Orientalist depiction of the East as mysterious and unknowable. That Kartik also belongs to an ancient organization charged with protecting mystical secrets only serves to underscore this point. Though the details are dissimilar, Kartik and the Rakshana are in keeping with the depiction of Eastern mysticism that I discuss in Chapter 3.

To that end, any reading of the Gemma/Kartik relationship would be incomplete without considering how their relationship concludes. As I alluded to above, the relationship ends when Kartik chooses to sacrifice himself rather than allow Gemma to die. This sacrifice is framed in particularly problematic terms, as, when Gemma begs Kartik not to go, he responds: “[Y]ou are needed in the world. I’ve waited my whole life to feel a sense of purpose. To know my place. I feel it now .

. . . Now I know my destiny” (778). Kartik has been searching for a sense of purpose in life; we readers have learned this slowly throughout three books as Bray unraveled his backstory and personality. This purpose, apparently, is to die for his white love interest. Whereas Gemma is needed in the world, Kartik, apparently, is not; his primary value seems to be in his death. Kartik says this despite how meaningful he has become to Gemma; it seems strange for Bray to position her protagonist’s love interest, a character who has been present since the series’ first chapter, as not needed.

This seeming contradiction fades somewhat if we view Kartik’s death as symptomatic of the impossibility of his relationship with Gemma. The reader has repeatedly been told that Gemma’s relationship with Kartik is forbidden—when she first meets him, she thinks that she is “not supposed to find Indian men attractive” (*AGATB* 6); the emphasis on the taboo nature of their feelings for each is continually emphasized as Gemma attempts to understand her feelings for him. The relationship occurs mostly in darkness and shadows, under the cover of secrecy; the couple meets in alleyways and behind mausoleums. When Gemma and Kartik’s relationship is at last fully actualized, this occurs not in their real world, Victorian England, but in the magical realms. After the couple touches hands in a location called the Cave of Sighs, Gemma dreams that they have a sexual encounter, a dream which Kartik apparently shares. Even within the magical realms, where Gemma is a figure of power rather than a powerless girl, consummation of their relationship is relegated to dreams. Their romance is wrapped up in multiple layers of imagination and unreality, and both characters seem aware that it cannot be realized in the waking world. Because the relationship is impossible, it must be severed by death.

Because Bray is attempting to depict life for a girl in Victorian England, one

might read the impossibility of the relationship as a consequence of the series' setting. To allow Gemma and Kartik to create a happy ending for themselves would be "unrealistic." (Never mind that the texts also involve fairies, centaurs, and magic.) However, when contrasting the impossibility of the Gemma/Kartik relationship with the resolution of the texts' depiction of Victorian gender restrictions, I think that we can see a troubling difference. Despite the obstacles they are constantly presented with as young women in a patriarchal society, Gemma and her friends are left with the possibility of carving out lives for themselves outside the prescriptions of Victorian gender rules. Bray leaves us with the suggestion that Ann will start a career in the theatre and be able to support herself independently; Felicity's future is more nebulous, but the reader will likely find it hard to believe that it will be conventional—she is planning to have a suit of trousers fashioned for herself in London. As for Gemma, we learn that she is traveling alone to New York, where she will attend university. In other words, Bray is able to imagine an unconventional path for Gemma that pushes against the bounds placed on her because of her gender, but not, apparently, for Kartik.

In some respects, *A Great and Terrible Beauty* contains many of the problems we saw in our discussion of *The Ruby in the Smoke* in Chapter 3. While Bray is certainly critical of Victorian ideologies, she also finds herself so immersed in them as to be unable to break free of them. Certainly, the relationship between Gemma and Kartik is explicitly transgressive, and the couple allows the romance to flourish despite the potential consequences. However, the impossibility of that relationship continuing suggests that Bray remains, to some extent, bound within the confines of imperial ideology. Neither Bray nor her characters are able to imagine a future for the

couple outside the realms of dream and imagination. This aspect of the text coalesces with Bray's portrayal of India as a site of both comfort and exoticism. I think that these contradictions point to the difficulty of writing texts within an imperial setting with a postcolonial bent, particularly for those of us who still live as beneficiaries of imperial ideologies. The result is a somewhat confused text. Gemma's relationships with Kartik and to India more generally are portrayed positively, but what we might call the specter of Orientalism constrains and complicates them. The two competing threads cannot quite be resolved into a cohesive, consistent whole.

To that end, I would like to return to where we began this chapter, with American fascination with Victorian England as reflective of our own place as global superpower. If we see the United States as inheritors of the British Empire's status in the world, we might read Gemma Doyle as expressing anxieties about that status. That the series ends with Gemma moving from England to America seems significant in this respect; she is moving from the past and into a space more familiar to her readers. From her relationship with Kartik and rebellion against Victorian gender norms, we can see that Gemma is uncomfortable with her place within imperial ideology. She does not desire a life as an emblem of pure, white womanhood, instead preferring to follow her own desires and interests wherever they might take her. However, Gemma also cannot completely escape from the ideology that she lives within; it constrains the choices available to both her and the people she cares about. Considering Bray's intended audience—young American girls, she may transport something of Gemma's discomfort with her place in the imperial system to America in the twenty-first century. The text, then, becomes a space for exploration. In this sense, while Bray does not offer solutions to the system of empire through Gemma,

we can suggest that she does provide a literary site of empathy and understanding for her readers.

Epilogue: Empire of Whose Imagination?

When I titled this thesis “Empire of the Imagination,” I hoped to suggest something of both the potential and the problems of the study of children’s literature. My appropriation of Haggard’s words implies both a vast space with a wealth of resources at the imaginer’s disposal and a dynamic of domination and exploitation. When applying Perry Nodelman’s paradigm of Child as Other to this rather amorphous idea, we might arrive at the question: “to whom does this empire belong?” I might give the—perhaps unsatisfying—answer that the empire of the imagination, as conceived in this thesis, is a contested space. It is where the dichotomies of adult/child, colonizer/colonized, domination/submission, past/present, (and on, and on), play out and become unbounded. It is the space where Kim O’Hara asks the question “Who is Kim?” and receives no definitive answer.

My decision to examine both Victorian fiction and contemporary fiction set in the Victorian era also reflects something of this contestation. I have proposed several times in my discussion of *The Ruby in the Smoke* and *A Great and Terrible Beauty* the (hardly earth-shattering) idea that Neo-Victorian fiction allows us to hold a mirror up to our present and examine our own reflection. But in that reflection, we will find both our contemporary concerns and values and the past from which we would like to fly loose. This, perhaps, is the central problem and tension of texts like Pullman’s and Bray’s. For child readers, this makes the texts that I have investigated particularly fraught. If, as Seth Lerer proposes, the child reader defines herself in the text, what kind of definition can she construct out of this jumble of ideas?

In deference to Nodelman’s caution against the universalizing, stabilizing

impulse in scholarship of children's literature, I admit that I have no definitive answer. To say that different children will navigate the same texts differently is tautological, to be sure, but it holds true nonetheless. Children who encounter Kipling's work in 2018 are likely to respond quite differently than his first child readers did; they are, after all, likely experiencing *The Jungle Books* mediated through its various film adaptations, and those in Britain and America are quite distant from the colonial context in which the stories were written. (I do not imagine that many contemporary children read *Kim*, with its complexity and distance from them.) Does this mean that Kipling's power as a writer of imperial ideology is dampened? I would not go so far as to say yes.

And yet our distance from the nineteenth century might also have explanatory power with regards to contemporary depictions of empire. It may be fruitful to return us to the example with which I began this thesis—Madame Chang's opium den in *The Ruby in the Smoke*. When decoupled from its original imperial context, the opium den might seem more a site of mysticism and danger than of degeneracy and foreign social pollution. I want to emphasize *seem* here; just because, for many readers, the images and conventions of Orientalism have lost their original context does not mean that they do not reaffirm imperial ideologies all the same. As I said when I began this thesis, when I learned more about the East End opium den as an adult, I was troubled to find out that I had been carrying this Orientalist idea around in my head for years, completely unaware. Perhaps because this experience was in some ways the spark that lit this intellectual project, I think that it is emblematic of how (some) readers (sometimes) experience texts.

Which is to say that our experience with texts is not bounded between the time

we first open books and when we read their last words and set them down. Our relationships to the books we read are constantly evolving, changing as we encounter new ideas, new people, new parts of ourselves. To presume that the child reader encounters a text once while young and susceptible to the author's authority is to assert not only that children are not capable of developing relationships to texts outside of adult prescriptions, but that reading is a static, discrete activity. Recognition of this changing, unstable relationship between child and text seems at least a partial antidote to the concerns raised by Rose and Nodelman which I described in the introduction.

With this in mind, I return to the question that I posed at the end of my introduction: can we ever truly be postcolonial? My readings of Pullman and Bray in particular seem to answer that if we ever can be, we are not now. Despite all the work that has been done, both inside and outside the academy, we have not yet unraveled all of the complexities and consequences of the British imperial project. This fact is reflected not just in the continued life of imperialist images and conventions in literature, but in the material conditions of much of the decolonized world. However, to close off the possibility of becoming truly postcolonial is to conceptualize colonialism as static, discrete, and inevitable.

In his "Afterward" to *Orientalism*, written fifteen years after the book's initial publication, Edward Said expresses some sense of hope for the future of postcolonialism, yet still describes the postcolonial project as a "struggle" (352). Said's word choice here, I think, contains something of the essence of my thesis. A struggle is a process, a push/pull of competing forces. The texts that I have examined in this thesis all contain struggles between the ideologies that girded the British

Empire and something more humane and equitable. I would suggest that, lurking in every oppressive ideology is the humanity of its exploited struggling to get out. My hope is that this thesis has played some part, however minuscule, in furthering that postcolonial struggle.

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