

Imagining and Living the Exotic: A Context for Early Rhodesian Novels¹

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Summary

The paper discusses some early Rhodesian novels within the context of nineteenth-century debates about the exotic and recent theories about exoticism. The exotic has various temporal and spatial locations that are always sites of desire constructed from what is perceived to be absent in the present. Technological developments and radical social changes created different and competing absences in Victorian England and the paper compares responses to these by Tennyson and Ruskin. Pater, by contrast, rejects social contingency and celebrates instead the power of the individual imagination to create alternative and pleasurable realities. The competing demands of the lived and the imagined exotic can be seen in early Rhodesian writing. In Haggard's novels, written before Rhodes's occupation of Mashonaland, the interior of Africa is a landscape of romance. After Haggard had met Rhodes the interior is written as a potential colony and the colony denies the exotic its discrete existence. Early settler writers often claim that Rhodesia has given their characters a liberating individuality but this claim is never sustained within the novels as the expectations of the settler collective are given precedence over the individual. Invariably the novels turn away from the esoteric in favour of realist negotiations of public and private meanings.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel handel oor enkele vroeë Rhodesiese romans binne die konteks van negentiende-eeuse debatte oor die eksotiese, sowel as van hedendaagse teorieë oor eksotisme. Die eksotiese het verskeie tyd- en ruimteplasinge wat altyd dien as setels van begeerte, gekonstrueer uit die wat waargeneem word as afwesig in die hede. Tegnologiese ontwikkeling en ingrypende maatskaplike veranderings het verskillende mededingende afwesighede in Victoriaanse Engeland laat ontstaan, en die artikel tref vergelykings tussen Tennyson en Ruskin se onderskeie response tot hierdie afwesighede. Pater, daarteenoor, verwerp die eise van die samelewing en vier eerder die mag van die individuele verbeelding om alternatiewe en aangename werklikhede te skep. Die mededingende aansprake van die self-beleefde eksotiese aan die een kant en die verbeelde of denkbeeldige eksotiese aan die ander, kan in die vroeë Rhodesiese letterkunde waargeneem word. In die romans wat Haggard voor Rhodes se besetting van Mashonaland geskryf het, is die Afrika-landskap 'n landskap van romantiek. Nadat Haggard Rhodes ontmoet het, beskryf hy die binneland eerder as 'n potensiële kolonie, en die kolonie ontken die afsonderlike bestaan van die eksotiese. Vroeë setlaarskrywers het dikwels beweer dat Rhodesië hulle karakters 'n bevrydende individualiteit geskenk

het, maar hierdie aanspraak word nooit in die romans self bevestig nie, aangesien die setlaargemeenskap altyd voorrang bo die enkeling geniet. Sonder uitsondering draai die romans die rug op die esoteriese ten gunste van 'n realistiese verhandeling van openbare en private betekenisse.

Many early Rhodesian novels reveal the influence on their authors of the writings of contemporary European decadence which is unexpected since decadence privileges the intuitive and the private over the rational and the public. The acquisition of the British South Africa Company's territories had observed legalities that were a matter of public record: concessions whose dubious legality or indeed authenticity was known to few, a royal charter, capital raised from trading stocks in the City, an advanced column of paramilitary settlers, wars in which the Company defended its lands from aggression or repressed rebellions against legally constituted authority and the successful settlement of immigrants who, by the turn of the century, called themselves Rhodesians. These episodes form a purposeful imperial narrative and as they combine frontier thrills with the rhetorical and more practical necessities of colonial expansion, Rhodesian authors should have felt no need to reach beyond the conventions of nineteenth-century realism in reproducing Rhodesian experiences that were both typical and personal. One explanation for their partial repudiation of realism lies in decadence's kinship to the exotic that is always located somewhere else at some other time until it becomes the lived experience of the colony when only through art can it remain within the domains of the imagination. The locations of the exotic are both temporal and spatial, in the past or the future or in the far-off place. By the mid-nineteenth century in Britain these backward, forward and sideways glancings are multiply focused. Utopian socialists propose a secular millennium alongside people yearning for the secure belongings of pre-industrial England. Technology has made the contemporary world a site of oppression and alienation but, paradoxically, through technology the world made anew has become a literal possibility. Curiosity about the world of which England is a part locates the exotic in the far-off place but colonialism refuses to allow it to remain exotic and draws it into Europe's order. The Rhodesian novelists would have been aware of these multiple tensions if only because they inform some of the most widely read English writing of the fifty years preceding Rhodesia's founding. The context that my title refers to is a literary context of which Tennyson, Ruskin and Pater are representative. The trajectory on which I have placed these writers moves from Tennyson and Ruskin whose imagined other worlds have their origin in the new technology and the imagined pasts and future of the British nation to Pater who privileges the visionary power of the individual imagination over the contingent. For Pater art itself is the only material context in which the imagination operates and his relationship to his predecessors

recalls what Frederic Jameson identifies as the “strategy of modernism whose function is to derealize the content and make it available for consumption at some purely aesthetic level” (Jameson [1981]1991: 214). Most early Rhodesian novelists employed one of the “‘degraded’ sub-genres into which mass culture [had been] articulated” (Jameson [1981]1991: 207) such as the adventure story. There were some, however, who aspired to the “high culture” of contemporary decadence. Haggard’s early novels show the influences of both “mass” and “high” culture as he allows symbolist preoccupations to provide an unexpected dimension to adventure stories in order to create his particular version of the imperial romance. As familiarity obliterated the Rhodesian exotic, no Rhodesian novelist offered the country at a purely aesthetic level.

Different sitings of the exotic are present in Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall” published in 1842 but written in 1837 or 1838, a five- or six-year period that corresponds with the most intense Chartist agitation (Tennyson 1972: 688-99).² “London flaring [in the night sky] like a dreary dawn” is one way of imaging the new England (line 114). But it is also possible to see in London’s multitudes a great creative agency:

Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new:
That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do
(Tennyson 1972: “Locksley Hall”, lines 117-118)

The creativity of the age will lead inevitably towards global unity, signalled by “the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world,” and “universal law” ruled by “the common sense of most” (Tennyson 1972: “Locksley Hall”, lines 128-129). Humanity drawn towards a single end is a rational probability growing inevitably out of the urges to progress contained within the present. In the decade before *The Origin of the Species* which provided a scientific framework to support Schopenhauer’s grim vision of humanity futilely imposing categories of meaning on nature’s blind impulses, Tennyson was no more immune to the idea that social change is progressive than were Engels and Carlyle but he shared with Carlyle other anxieties. The great unanswered question of the age was the question asked by the Manchester operatives in *Past and Present*. “What do you mean to do with us?” Carlyle has them asking as they look in vain to their natural leaders, the new industrialists, for an inspiration that will “draw them from the darkness that is in them and round them” (Carlyle [1843]1919: 15). Tennyson echoes these concerns:

Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion creeping nigher,
Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly-dying fire.
(Tennyson 1972: “Locksley Hall”, lines 135-136)

The narrator, however, refuses to be agnostic at the inevitability of progress:

Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns.
(Tennyson 1972: "Locksley Hall" lines 137-138)

The menace of London and a proletarian mob bent on destruction are obscured in that other world that the eye of visionary faith has glimpsed.

That visionary future is only one version of the exotic, a literal other world that can only be imagined and as such is a utopia, a nowhere, but infinitely desirable. The narrator of the "Locksley Hall" envisages journeying to a place radically separated from mass industrial society:

Or to burst all links of habit – there to wander far away,
On from island onto island at the gateways of the day.
(Tennyson 1972: "Locksley Hall" lines 157-158)

This last metaphor performs a characteristic shift in exotic imaginings providing a distancing both in place and time. If the nineteenth century observes a chronology that empire has ordered, the narrator becomes an exoticist in refusing both its institutions and the promise of progress with which contemporary empires justified their presence. In his imagined retreat far beyond the East India Company's territories "Never comes the trader, never floats an European flag" (line 161). And

There methinks would be enjoyment more than in this march of mind
In the steamship and the railways and the thoughts that shake mankind.
(Tennyson 1972: "Locksley Hall", line 165-166)

Not only is the narrator distancing himself from the clutter of the new industrialism but he is also rejecting the competing claims on the political imagination of utilitarianism, radical socialism and what Marx mocked as feudal socialism which all locate themselves in purposeful time. For the purposes of this paper, the more radical imaginative transcendence is his attempt to move beyond the space and temporality of empire.

Dorothy Figuera observes that "[e]xoticism is not a discursive practice intent on recovering 'elsewhere', values 'lost' with the modernization of society". She argues instead that the exoticist's spirit "moves to the strange and unfamiliar, finds a home there and makes it its own or recognizes what had previously been perceived as alien to be its genuine home" (Figuera 1994: 11). The genuine home may be a place that does not order our sexuality and the "Locksley Hall" narrator imagines a place that releases the narrator from nineteenth-century English sexual conventions:

There the passions cramp'd no longer shall have scope and breathing space
I shall take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race.
(Tennyson 1972: "Locksley Hall", lines 167-168)

The children of this union will be at one with nature, "[i]ron jointed, supple-sinew'd (line 169) ... not with blinded eyesight poring over miserable books" (line 172). This dream of a saving exotic is hardly articulated, however, before it is repudiated as dangerous fantasy that defies the findings of current racist biology.

Fool, again the dream, the fancy! But I *know* my words are wild,
But I know the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child.

I, to herd with narrow foreheads, vacant of our glorious gains,
Like a beast with lower pleasures, like a beast with lower pains?

Mated with a squalid savage – what to me were sun or clime?
I the heir to all the ages, in the foremost files of time
(Tennyson 1972: "Locksley Hall", lines 173-178)

This celebration of Europe's progress and the biological evolution of the European race that sets it above and apart from the rest of the world moves to its climax with "Better fifty years of progress than a cycle of Cathay" (line 184). At the end of "Locksley Hall" the narrator has rejected the attractions that the "primitive" might hold for a nineteenth-century Englishman. Dreams of that alternative and almost infinitely remote world are fanciful diversions from the purposeful creativity of the new world. That change is both inevitable and positive is stridently proclaimed:

Forward, forward let us range,
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.
(Tennyson 1972: "Locksley Hall", lines 181-182)

Figuera sees the exotic as erecting "sites of an imaginary contestation of the symbolic order of existing society" (Figuera 1994: 17). In "Locksley Hall", Tennyson confirms all that is most positive in existing society. If, as Figuera implies, our sense of the social is largely a sense of symbolic order, the symbols that construct Victorian perceptions of their society are unchallenged in the poem. Notoriously the "ringing grooves" are Tennyson's misunderstanding of the function of railway lines in keeping a train on track but his choice of a mechanical rather than an organic metaphor implies that the future of mankind unified in love and reason will grow out of industrial England. The exotic possibility is most obviously in the savage woman who stands for a

world beyond Europe's boundaries. She is linked, metaphorically at least, with the hungry people, the predatory proletarians, who are imaged as a glaring lion waiting to spring on the person drowning before a dying fire. The lion is of course exotic to Tennyson in the most literal sense of the word and the use of that simile serves to see the pain and anger of Britain's huge underclass as outside of and threatening an acceptable symbolic order. If the exotic can be realised only by forcing a disjunction with the present, Tennyson refuses to allow that break. The exotic is intensely alive in his language but the optimistic argument of the poem refuses it as telos. The savage woman should be civilised insofar as she is capable of it and the hungry people fed and soothed or forcibly restrained and that involves their submitting to the progressive movements that Europe's technology and political enlightenment has set in motion.

The exoticist not only dreams of the future or longs for a place that registers its alterity in its disdain for European rationalism and its celebration of instinct and the physical. Chris Bongie argues that

exoticism necessarily presumes that, at some point in the future, what had been lost will be attained "elsewhere", in a realm of adventure that by-passes the ... contemporary present. But if exoticism partakes of modernity and its promise, what the future promises – and here, of course, is the central irony of this particular project – is a recovery of the past and of all that a triumphant modernity has effaced.

(Bongie 1991: 15)

A third of Tennyson's work consists of his Arthurian poems or poems that draw on the European classics for their inspiration. His retreat through *The Idylls of the King* into an age that even in the Middle Ages was mythic suggests that for him an English past is the principal location of the Victorian exotic. As Figuera observed, however, the exotic must be more than nostalgia for a lost world. Instead, as Bongie implies, it is a dialectical process that can recognise the past only in its experience of the modern and only as the exoticist recognises and dismisses modernity's governing ideologies.

In the *Poems* of 1842, "The Epic" which is a prologue to "Morte D' Arthur" registers anxiety at a poetry that tries to recover the past (Tennyson 1972: 582-584). Everard Hall has burned his Arthurian epic defending this act of destruction because "truth / Looks freshest in the fashion of the day" (Tennyson 1972: "The Epic", line 32). And he asks:

why take the style of those heroic times?
For nature brings not back the Mastodon,

Nor we those times; and why should any man
Remodel models?

(Tennyson 1972: "The Epic", lines 35-38)

The only fragment that has survived the flames is "Morte D'Arthur" and Everard is persuaded to read it aloud (Tennyson 1972: "Morte D'Arthur", 585-98). When the reading is over his audience sits rapt and the narrator ponders anxiously why the poem should have held their attention and explains their absorption with the dismissive comment that:

Perhaps some modern touches here and there
Redeemed it from the charge of nothingness.

(Tennyson 1972: "Morte D'Arthur", lines 278-279)

But the poem has entered his imagination and dreams of Arthur trouble his sleep.

Till on to dawn, when dreams
Begin to feel the truth and stir of day

(Tennyson 1972: "Morte D'Arthur", lines 290-291)

he sees a boat in which there is

King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
Of stateliest port; and all the people cried
"Arthur is come again; he cannot die".

(Tennyson 1972: "Morte D'Arthur" lines 294-296)

This is John Bull in a costume drama. Arthur as modern gentleman confirms the present rather than provides in his portly person any reasons for reaching beyond it. Bongie's irony of the exoticist project is refused in the narrator's insistence on the poem's possessing a single meaning that can be grasped in the present because of its "modern touches here and there". I would argue, however, that that is not an adequate account of how we experience "Morte D'Arthur". If Everard's audience listens to his poem with rapt attention, it is because they have been drawn through language into a surreal world in which glimpses of familiar experience recombine to create an alternative reality. Thomas Richard says that "[t]he ideology of mid-Victorian positivism ... led most people into believing that the best and most certain kind of knowledge was the fact ... thought of as raw knowledge, knowledge awaiting ordering" (Richard 1993: 4). Tennyson's narrative displaces the facts of Malory's history onto the dream and as image merges into image and historical and mythic narratives flow seamlessly into one another, the poem refuses the ordering

categories of the present. Bongie captures something of this experience of “Morte D’ Arthur” when he describes the exoticist project as attempting “to re-present what has ‘always-already’ been lost and forgotten; only once this project has been exhausted does the possibility of truly remembering the exotic arise – of remembering it, that is, as what can never be truly remembered, as what is absent, vanished” (Bongie 1991: 26). With Arthur’s knights dead, the Round Table destroyed and the king dying, Camelot is recognised as a vanished ideal rather than a fact secured within the chronologies of historical narrative. Camelot can only be experienced as absence, lost to the present and only able to be re-presented to use Bongie’s word through the imagination. As the decadents were to claim at the end of the century, the principal location of the exotic is in art.

The English nineteenth century is marked with nationalist imaginings, inventions and reinventions and a distinction should be made between an exotic recovery of the past and merely re-writing nostalgia as an empowering narrative. The Gothic revival was a conscious invocation of medieval England through the employment of what was claimed to be a national idiom. Ruskin sees an essential character of Gothic forms in “this wildness of thought, and roughness of work; this look of mountain brotherhood between the cathedral and the Alp” and these are the material cultures of people who, unlike dwellers in the Mediterranean or the tropics, “may not gather redundant fruitage from the earth, nor bask in a dreamy benignity of sunshine” (Ruskin 1851-1853: I 144). Gothic is not a savage substitution for the formal symmetries of classical design but instead it grows naturally from the northern European character. What is savage is the modern machine-age that sets people to work making multiple reproductions of a perfectly shaped original. These satisfy “the modern English mind ... that ... intensely desires, in all things, the utmost completion and perfection of their natures” (p. 146). Ruskin’s aesthetic theories are deeply rooted in Romanticism and for him completion and perfection are unnatural. “The finer the nature, the more flaws it will show through the clearness of it”, Ruskin writes (p. 146). The medieval city allowed its craftspeople to grow. The modern mill-town and the great cities of the Mediterranean flourish on the stasis of their people. In *The Two Paths* Ruskin imagines a third space:

between the picture of too laborious England, which we imagined as future, and the picture of too luxurious Italy, which we remember in the past, there may exist – there will exist, if we do our duty – an intermediate condition, neither oppressed by labour nor wasted in vanity – the condition of a thoughtful temperance in aims, and acts and arts.

(Ruskin [1859]1898: 147)

That which is aimed at and progressed towards has a greater value than that which is accomplished. But the existence of the third space is modified by the tentativeness of a subjunctive and the dutifulness necessary to attain it, grammatical and semantic shifts that question its accomplishment. If this is a desirable exotic, like all exotics it tantalises by being always out of reach. When Ruskin writes of this other imagined future, he is also proposing an exotic of the sort that Bongie and Figuera describe. The mill has unhoused the English workers. Their genuine home is a place where they can practise the creativity of the craftsmanship of a pre-machine-age, flawed and imperfect as are all great creative projects but its exoticism derives partly from its origins in the imagination because only the imagination can conjure such a worker and such craft out of the mill-towns and their degraded inhabitants. Ruskin seeks to efface an aspect of modernity when he attacks the artificial perfection that emerges from the factory. The division of labour of which political economy boasts and on which the new industrialism depends is for Ruskin more accurately the division of men. "Divided into mere segments of men – broken into small fragments and crumbs of life ..." (Ruskin 1851-1853: 150). If one of these men is tasked to imagine and create what is both necessary and beautiful and refuse to copy that which already exists, "out will come all his roughness, all his dullness; all his incapability ... but out comes the whole majesty of him also" (Ruskin 1851-1853: 150-151). The spirit of the Middle Ages is rediscovered in an England so totally transformed that it becomes another place where the spirit of the English workers will acquire a command over their lives denied to them within contemporary industrialism.

A problem in claiming Ruskin for the exotic is that he makes his enterprise recoverable in the present, going to the extent of listing the practical steps that need to be taken if the slaves of the mill-towns are to be transformed into free craftspeople (Ruskin 1851-1853:151-154). Of its nature the exotic is only an imagining, an end to a quest that like all quests can never be completed and much of Ruskin's later life was concerned with the creation of institutes that would educate the workers within a moral environment that instilled in them the worth of manual labour and taught them to labour to create original things of beauty.³ One way of retaining Ruskin as an exoticist is to recall the very impracticality of his projects. Machine-made products prevailed and continue to prevail over the productions of craftspeople if only because the latter cost so much to produce. If there is an irony in the fact that the economics of industrial production shattered Ruskin's dreams, it is an irony that pursues exoticism. The conclusion of the exotic quest, the attainment of the desired end, must always be deferred. When Ruskin writes specifically of empire, he tests its morality in the "practical outcome" (Ruskin [1870]1894: 148) of what he has called the "desire of dominion" (p. 139). He tells the cadets at the Royal Artillery Institute at Woolwich that the benefits of empire will be measured not

by “whatever apparent increase of majesty and of wealth may have accrued to us from our possession of India” but “wholly on the degree in which our influence on the native race shall be benevolent and exalting” (Ruskin [1870]1894: 149). In a sentence like that benevolence and exaltation are rhetorical flourishes for Ruskin’s practical has no referent within a utilitarian or any system through which its efficacy can be tested. The lecture is entirely uninterested in India or indeed anywhere except an England that exists only in Ruskin’s imagination, an England so transformed that it is uniquely humane in a world of suffering:

Is it so impossible ... after the world’s eighteen hundred years of Christianity, and our own thousand years of toil, to fill only this little white gleaming crag with happy creatures, helpful of each other? Africa, and India, and the Brazilain wide-watered plain, are these not wide enough for the ignorance of our race? Have they not space enough for its pain?

(Ruskin [1870]1894: 183)

India is to be left to its pain and England saved by turning its back on the machine and learning again from nature as it once did in the remote past. Only then in purified “heaths and hills, and waters” will be

every kind of lovely natural organism, in tree, herb, and living creature. All land that is waste and ugly, you must redeem into ordered fruitfulness; all ruin, desolateness, imperfectness of hut and habitation, you must do away with; and throughout every village and city of your English dominion, there must not be a hand that cannot find a helper, nor a heart that cannot find a comforter.

(Ruskin [1870]1894: 202)

The first sentence consciously echoes *Genesis* but Eden is recoverable in a process of secular redemption that draws more inspiration from utopian socialism than the Christianity in which Ruskin no longer believed.

Throughout this paper, I have implied that the exotic is seen, sometimes proposed, as a collective project and to that extent must have political dimensions and its origins must be social. The desires of exotic imaginings change from epoch to epoch because desire can propose only what is absent. Absent from the regimented classes, both bourgeois and proletarian, of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism is the possibility of unique individual growth. Bongie makes the point that “individualism was *reborn* at the turn of the nineteenth century, specifically as part of the agonistic response to the emergence of mass society” (Bongie 1991: 15). We can identify this individualism in Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* ([1873]1922), a book that could serve as a preface to English decadence with its rejection of conformity and insistence on the subjectivity of each individual’s experience of the world. For

Pater those who do not give their imaginations the freedom to reach beyond the importunities of the present allow “experience ... to bury [them] under a flood of external objects, pressing upon [them] with a sharp and importunate reality, calling them out of themselves in a thousand forms of action” (Pater [1873]-1922: 234). A strikingly original insight offers us escape from this living immurement. The objects around us, Pater argues, have only the “solidity with which language invests them” (Pater [1873]1922: 235). The play of the imagination, however, frees us from the illusion of a stable external reality and indeed from the illusion of our stable selves. The imagination will reveal

impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them Everyone of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.

(Pater [1873]1922: 235)

This image of alienation appals even as it beguiles. Implicit in Pater’s imagery are two imprisonments: we are imprisoned in the inescapable isolation of our individual selves but the self possesses the potential to escape from the even greater restriction of the conventional meanings in which we choose to confine ourselves, in what Pater calls “a stereotyped world” (Pater [1873]1922: 236-237).

Those individuals who refuse to accept the certainties of mass society can “grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment” (Pater [1873]1922: 237). Despite our being locked into our subjectivity, if we are living to the full, each moment offers the possibility of horizons lifting on worlds in which the spirit can experience novel delights and at least within the metaphor those delights exist not only in altered consciousness but within another place. Jean Pierrot writes that the decadent aesthetic grew out of a weary conviction “that the material universe is nothing but an appearance” and, echoing Schopenhauer, that “our consciousness can never apprehend anything but its own ideas or representations”, Pierrot sees the decadent writers making “of imagination a kind of higher power by which the world’s reality could be transformed. They were to create secret inner paradises for themselves peopled with creatures of legend, where they could cultivate the dream” (Pierrot 1981: 9). This cultivation of self offers revelations of deeper insights than the prevailing moral and philosophical codes that are mere expedients to mask a society without any purpose except the acquisition of wealth.

Murray Pittock conflates decadence, symbolism, aestheticism and implicitly exoticism into the single term symbolism because, as he argues, common to all “was an attempt to think mythically: to abandon a world of ordinary cause and

effect for one of vision and transcendence; to defeat mundane science with mysticism, magic, and the hidden powers of art” (Pittock 1993: 4). The visionary and the mystic are lonely figures and only in myth is there a possibility of a shared collective memory. The mythic, however, serves a collective purpose in the present (as in the recovery of national and racial myths) only if it serves some practical and partisan scheme. The problem of rendering the exotic practical is given an interesting twist by Figuera. She argues that the “exotic differs from the general interpretative venture by virtue of the fact that the ‘alien’ aspect of the hermeneutical equation is indeed esoteric” (Figuera 1994: 13). Only an adept can access the esoteric and thus become part of an elect or an elite. What appears as alienated individual delighting in pure sensation becomes a new centring of a new collective that knows its own superiority to the majority of people homogenised in the repetitions of the mundane. Pater hints at this elitism: “To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life” (Pater [1873]1922: 236). In the introduction to *The Renaissance*, Pater poses the central question that we ask ourselves of those we encounter, “What is ... this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to me? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure?” (Pater [1873]1922: vii). If the answer to that last question is an eager affirmative, the embryo of a collective is already being shaped. Anyone who deals with imperial literature at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century knows how traces of these versions of the exotic can be seen within literature about a colony or about some imagined far-off place awaiting imperial conquest. There is a theoretical problem, however, in too easily co-opting these writers for the exotic. If they are correctly located among Pittock’s symbolists, their right to that place has to be qualified. Pittock observes that the artists of the various movements that make up what he calls Symbolism delighted in national decay, seeing it as a necessary condition for their own growth as artists. “[T]hey drew strength from what weakened their society, vampires of art sucking the life out of science, commerce and imperialism” (Pittock 1993: 7).

I want to test the idea that the exoticist is necessarily opposed to imperialism against Haggard’s novels, specifically some of those set in southern Africa and deriving their inspiration from what he had heard of Great Zimbabwe.⁴ His formula is already present in *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887). His heroes move from the familiar world of England or the mail ship or an identified colony or coast into a hinterland where the familiar routines of African travel and adventure no longer can be relied on. Here inhabitants regard occult powers with the indifference born of familiarity; death in battle or by witchcraft are looked on with casual unconcern and Gagool and Ayesha were children at a time when the oldest memories of people fade into legend. There is a difference between the two novels, however, that perhaps can be

traced to an intensifying of Haggard's own imperialism that was later to be confirmed by his meeting Rhodes and learning about his schemes. In *King Solomon's Mines* the treasure, imperialism's materialist goal, is associated with death and stasis. The treasure map is written in a man's blood; Silvestre dies from the desert crossing and his ancestor Don Jose da Silvestra sits in frozen immobility in the cave in the Suliman mountains. Inside the rock apartment at the end of Solomon's road, the dead Kukuana kings are preserved for ever as the dripping water transforms them into stalacmites. At the very moment Curtis and his companions find the treasure, Gagool traps them, apparently forever, in the great chamber hewn from the rock. The inspiriting vitality of Kukuana-land lies in the Kukuana themselves. Instead of Arthur coming again as a portly English gentleman, Sir Henry Curtis, the perfect English gentleman, reverts to his atavistic self when, clad only in the chain-mail of the ancients and armed with a battle axe, he engages Twala in single combat. To repeat Figuera's distinction: Curtis is not recovering a lost past, he is uncovering a self that has been forgotten. William Empson writing about pastoral many years ago identified a paradox at the heart of the many varieties of pastoral: all involve the complex thinking itself into the simple: "I must imagine his way of thinking because the refined thing must be judged by the simple thing, because strength must be learned in weakness and sociability in isolation, because the best manners are learned in simple life" (Empson 1966: 20). For Empson pastoral inspires the best of proletarian literature as well as children's books, and I would add the exotic to his various categories and allow the Kukuana to be both exotic and a type of imperial pastoral. This is possible even if it is only a tentative critical gesture because *King Solomon's Mines* uniquely among Haggard's romances refuses the temptations of imperialism. Haggard in *Cetywayo and his Neighbours* had defended the Zulu right to self-determination and he extends a similar right to the Kukuana when he gives to Ignosi his final speech:

"No other white man shall cross the mountains, even if any may live to come so far. I will see no traders with their guns and rum. My people shall fight with the spear and drink water, like their forefathers before them. I will have no praying men to put fear into men's hearts, to stir them up against the king and make a path for the white men who follow to run on. If a white man comes to my gates, I will push him back; if an army comes, I will make war on them with all my strength, and they shall not prevail against me. None shall ever come for the shining stones."

(Haggard [1885]1956: 229-230)

If the exotic involves an alternative point of view, this is achieved by giving to the Kukuana king his own splendidly defiant point of view. In *King*

Solomon's Mines the treasure quest is surrounded by the stench of death; the noble savage or the Englishmen recovering a heroism beneath the accretions of modernity have all the life.

A shift in Haggard's perception of the exotic is registered in *She*. There is no suggestion in this novel of noble savages living an ordered vitality amidst the splendid relics of a previous civilisation. The temples of Kôr, at the centre of which Ayesha rules with the wisdom accumulated over the millennia, are set apart from and are antithetical to the surrounding savagery. Ayesha is a close relation of Pater's *La Gioconda*. "She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave" (Pater [1873]1922: 125). The Englishmen attain Kôr with enormous effort but when Ayesha lifts the veil from a rock that depicts the religion of the people of Kôr, she reveals an engraving in which Truth stretches out her arms and weeps "because those that sought her might not find her nor look upon her face" (Haggard 1887: 265). Ayesha's wisdom has revealed nothing except that Truth can never be attained. Both she and Truth are cruel and capricious and yet desirable beyond reason or sense. The impossibility of mastering Ayesha, let alone possessing her, suggests the ultimate futility of all great human endeavours, even that of empire itself. The exotic remains intact as something that always lies out of reach.

In 1888 Haggard met Rhodes and although his admiration for the millionaire was always privately hedged with qualifications and doubts, for the rest of Rhodes's life, Haggard supported his ventures and shared his visions (Haggard 1926: II 116-118). The effects of this encounter can be seen in *Allan's Wife* (1889). Allan Quatermain trekking northwards across the Crocodile river comes across Carson, an Englishman, and his daughter, settled in the remote interior in a village of domed buildings of marble quarried by a forgotten people. The landscape in which they are is one that the imagination has conjured up and art has mediated. "The everlasting plains, the great cliffs, the waterfalls that sparkle in rainbow hues, the rivers girdling the rich cultivated lands, the gold-speckled green of the orange trees, the flashing domes of the marble huts" (Haggard [1889]1951: 93). This idyllic scene shows the relationship between the exotic and the decadent. It is an alternative world that is Edenic but the imagined place is self-consciously artificial in the rearranging of natural objects to compose the scene. A further and competing artificial dimension is provided in Carson's history of the place:

I have done all this, Allan QuatermainWhen renouncing civilization, I wandered here by chance Nothing was to be seen except the site, the domes of the marble huts, and the waterfalls. I took possession of the huts. I cleared the

patch of garden and planted the orange grove. I had only six natives then, but by degrees others joined me, now my tribe is a thousand strong.

(Haggard [1889]1951: 101)

Eden came from the hand of God and the romance landscape is shaped by the imagination. Carson's farm is an ambiguous space. We register the exoticist impulse in his renunciation of civilisation but this is not Figuera's exotic where the spirit finds its genuine home in the strange and unfamiliar.

Concealed in Carson's account is the use of the labour of local people to clear the bush for the garden and the orange grove but their labour stakes out Carson's farm as a colony that in its ordering and shaping seeks to reproduce the civilisation that he renounced. The novel refuses to resolve the tension between the exotic as a saving but alien destination and the exotic as a place to be appropriated and changed. London is the London of *The Prelude*:

hard crowds of men and women, strangers each to each, feverishly seeking for wealth and pleasure beneath a murky sky, and treading one another down in the fury of their competition.

(Haggard [1889]1951: 105)

This version of London is opposed to Eden which, if exotic is in part a remembering, is the source of all exotic memories. Stella Carson remarks, "God put Adam and Eve in a garden and that is how He meant their children to live – in peace and looking always at beautiful things" (Haggard [1889]1959: 105). In 1889 with Rhodes's forces already gathering to invade Mashonaland, the alien can no longer be the true home of the English. Carson tells Allan that if he wants to marry, he must agree to live in England. In a passage that recalls the repudiation of the "savage woman" in "Locksley Hall", Carson says that their remote life is "unnatural to [their] race and status ... I had no right to degrade her to the level of the savages around me" (Haggard [1889]1951: 109-110). There is, of course, not the slightest evidence of Stella's degradation. Indeed Allan affirms her superiority: "Was it solitude", he wonders, "that had given such depth and fullness to her? Was it long years of communing with nature that endowed her with such peculiar grace ...?" (Haggard [1889]1951: 195). Bongie uses Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory which he calls "other-talk" or when thinking about the exotic "talk of the Other" that usefully theorises the confusion that lies at the heart of a book like *Allan's Wife*.

In order to posit its object, allegory removes it from the realm of everyday life and transforms it into ruin – an act of shattering that at the same time nonetheless

serves to conserve the object. The image of the object is fixed, immobilized, and yet continues to give a sense of motion and unrest What allegory remembers (and re-writes) can have no real place in the degraded time of the present; it has already come to terms with the essentially memorial, commemorative nature of our relation to what precedes us.

(Bongie 1991: 21)

This is a useful formulation for explaining what I have called Haggard's ambiguity and which is the awkward fate of the exotic within a colonial project. Eden has to be left alone while one gets on with developing the settler colony that earnest of a new nation. This can perhaps be qualified by gendering Haggard's work: his early novels are central to the tradition of male-authored imperial romances. Even in *King Solomon's Mines*, Kukuanaaland is refused because it has no real place in the imperial scheme. It is a memorial as immobilised as are the ruins of Solomon's mines among which the Kukuana live in incomprehension. An England that has recovered its honour is the end of the quest and if any purpose has been served by the journey, it is that men have uncovered an atavistic heroism that can be put to the service of England.

The gendering of these early novels can be profitably pursued but a more significant difference lies between authors who were Rhodesians and those who wrote about Rhodesia but never intended to live out their lives as Rhodesians. This difference can be seen in the imperial romances authored by someone like Haggard who only briefly considered living out his life away from England in Natal and the novels written by Rhodesians whether they are men or women. In the novels of Cullen Gouldsbury, Cynthia Stockley and Gertrude Page, two items within the exotic that I have referred to in this paper are apparent: the growth and deepening of individual insights because one has refused to conform to English life and the elitism of those adepts in the exotic quest who have transcended conformity. In Gouldsbury's *God's Outpost* (1907b), Guy Wrenham has lapsed from the Catholicism that his recusant family has clung to for three centuries. Africa upsets "a preconceived scheme of belief. There is in barren wastes and seas of level grass a kind of latent influence that lies in wait to grip the heart strings of the believer; and ... give the lie to pettifogging superstitions"(Gouldsbury 1907b: 19-20). For Daphne Wrenham, however, what is a liberation for Guy is as feared as it is undesired. "In England" she says, "one seemed to feel the security of one's faith wrapped around one like a cloak – here one is stripped naked as it were. It is all so hard and cruel and elemental" (p. 220). A male author has allowed his male character to discover his genuine home if only because the far-off place allows him to identify preconceived belief as superstition. An equivalent freedom is not extended to a woman. She simultaneously recognises as illusion the faith that offered her security while finding only pain and terror in the revelation

that has taken its place. *God's Outpost* usefully illustrates the differences between the exotic within the imperial romance and the exotic domesticated and denied within the Rhodesian novel. Haggard is content to register the different responses British men and women have to the exotic. Gouldsbury ends *God's Outpost* with a rising that concentrates the minds of both settler men and women on something more pressing than gender differences and metaphysical speculation. As they fight to defend themselves and the colony, they are defending what a character in another of Gouldsbury's novels refers to as "the most unromantic and unspeakable bourgeois territory of Rhodesia" (Gouldsbury 1907a: 188) but which for them has become home. The exotic may have taken their religion from Guy and Daphne Wrenham but Rhodesia has securely corralled them again within the faith of a collective, a space that is both familiar and has its own imperatives.

In Stockley's first novel, *Virginia of the Rhodesians* (1903), a disjunction between England and Rhodesia is marked in a paragraph that smacks of the writing of Stockley's decadent contemporaries.

When at last we did start homeward the sunset was bedazzling the hills and the clean veldt wind blew the scent of wild jessamine and mimosa into our faces and down our throats and intoxicated us, so that we forgot all about the coach and the English mail waiting for us, and dawdled our horses along for pure love of the dying day.

(Stockley 1903: 67-68)

Pierrot sees the decadent project made possible by re-enforcing the imagination in order to "deceive the senses with agreeable illusions, or else by using drugs that modified its action" (Pierrot 1981: 9). It does not matter that veldt wind is an innocent sort of drug. What is important is that the tenuous links of mailship, coach and letters to imperial centre have been broken. The exotic proclaims its difference and Virginia knows it as her genuine home. In most of Stockley's early novels this sense of arrival, of knowing the exotic place for the first time as home, is an epiphany for her characters. In *The Claw*, Deidre Saurin in Zeederberg's post-cart travelling to Fort George remembers dancing with a man at Viceregal Lodge in Dublin.

He had spoken of Africa as *she* with mingled hatred and love that conjured up to my mind a vision of some false, beautiful vampire, who dragged men to her and fastened her claws into their hearts for ever. "It's a brute of a country!" he said But a moment later he was talking of the veldt as tenderly as a lover might talk of the woman he loves.

(Stockley 1911: 11)

Deirdre looking at Mashonaland suddenly understands all that he had said

about it.

Why did I understand? I wondered. Was the lure of Africa on me too? Was this strange brown land of golden days, and crimson and orange eventides, and purple nights, calling to me? Would it keep me as he had said it would always keep people who felt the lure and heard the call? At the thought I trembled a little and felt afraid of I knew not what.

(Stockley 1911: 12)

The exotic is made present there in Stockley's rejection of a contemporary naturalism and her substitution of magic suggestiveness for carefully rendered detail of place. The whole passage contains within it familiar idioms of decadent writing. The mythic vampire is privileged over the bushveld and the simultaneous experience of love and hate confuses the categories on which the rational depends. That she is acquiring a knowledge that goes beyond the merely rational is signalled in the unanswered question "Why did I understand?" and by being lured by something over which she has no control and that may offer fulfilment or horror but which is the destiny that she has never guessed at. The lurid colours of day and night are the artificial colours of *fin de siècle* poetry. Suzanne Nalbantian argues that the late-nineteenth-century novel of decadence provided a

mimesis of a higher degree than mere representation of reality obtained; it captured through formal properties of style and structure an intangible spirit of the times. The intended referentiality became the basis for a leap to symbolization.

(Nalbantian 1983: 116)

Stockley's early novels reveal a contempt for allegiance to conventional values and morality and if her allegiance is to the scepticism of the times she requires a style that is a mimesis of what the imagination has glimpsed rather than what is known and categorised. Her problem, however, is a problem that haunts all colonial novelists. The slide to decadence and the lure of the exotic is the privilege of the metropolitan writers for whom knowledge has bred contempt of the claims of imperial power, scientific progress, technological power and the certainties of bourgeois life. *The Claw* is a historical novel that recounts a foundational moment in Rhodesian national history, the 1893 invasion of the Khumalo kingdom. Stockley's language soars into an alternative world while the larger narrative is a mimesis of events that exists not only in the writer's imagination. The knowledge that emerges from the ordering of facts that Richards saw as an aspect of imperial power checks the exoticist ambitions of Stockley's prose. If knowledge is power, rather than flights of fancy, Rhodesia required that its past be known and demanded the illusion at least that the

present had been reduced to manageable facts. For the Rhodesian writer Rhodesia could not be exotic. The esoteric lure of the exotic that creates an elite of its adepts is unsustainable and by 1923, in her *Ponjola*, the elite has become rather shabby. Rhodesians are described as “a race apart and it is one of their idiosyncrasies to stick together They know they are bad people; they are still convinced that it is better to be a bad Rhodesian than a good anything else” (Stockley 1923: 29). The potential of the wilderness has also been transformed.

No one is a farmer in Rhodesia ... but everyone has a farm. Sometimes it's no more than a few acres with a hut and a tree and a rock, but it's the home and refuge of the down-and-outer; the last shot in the locker of the unsuccessful prospector, miner and speculator. When other helpers fail and comforts flee they retire to the farm.

(Stockley 1923: 45)

Gertrude Page follows a similar trajectory into the disillusionment that only the practicalities of nation-building and a solid bourgeois lifestyle can resolve. In Page's first novel *Love in the Wilderness* (1907), Enid Davenport sees in Rhodesia an offer of hope

in this richness of colouring, this early freshness, this sense of a world that was new, and young, and strong indeed ... [and knows she is] stepping out from the Known and Tried, over the threshold of the Strange and New.

(Page 1907: 2-3)

This is a conventional enough account of the exotic that in this novel is marked by freedom from sexual conventions. At the end, Enid is being courted in language that the exotic has engendered:

I found you in the wilderness[C]an we not be perfectly simple and natural? ... Cannot our two wills together face boldly an effete produce of civilization, hideously full of flaws ...?

(Page 1907: 249)

Although the man she loves is married, Enid begins to agree: “in the wilderness, might not one slide back into that primitive simplicity of Race and do as the wilderness did ...?” (Page 1907: 256). In the *Edge o' Beyond* (1908), the tension is more marked between economic and social progress that will draw Rhodesia into the imperial economy and a life that is lived and imagined only by turning its back on England. Dinah Webberly complains about the aristocratic Rhodesians who litter Page's novels that they are not

the right kind to give Rhodesia a good start [Y]ou easy going, happy-go-lucky, don't-care-a-damn gentlemen farmers will only make a sort of playground of her, for the men who don't want the bother of being strenuous at home.
(Page 1908: 12)

And Dinah sets this against an ideal of progress that will be materialised in some other and better world: "it isn't the way empires are built and chasms bridged, and mountains bored, and highways cut, and continents watered" (Page 1908: 12). That looks like a gloss of the celebration of bourgeois creativity in *The Communist Manifesto*, an unexpected repetition that indicates how Marx and Engels raised their vision of an alternative future on conventional pieties about progress. Dinah Webberly scolds Rhodesians who have turned to the wilderness to learn how to live but when she returns to London she sees them as a different and superior sort of people. She says to the mother of one of the men she has met in Rhodesia, "We think they're savages, and they *know* we're mere amateurs, who I tell you haven't grasped the veriest rudiments of true enjoyment" (Page 1908: 181). And lest the point may have been missed by the reader that the exotic exists both in space and time, the mother asks, "Have they gone back to the very beginning of things?" (p. 182). It is, however, only within the metropole that she can affirm the values that the exotic celebrates. Like pastoral the exotic can be imagined only from the centre where it is an absence.

David Medalie traces symbolism's break with realism in part

because it asserts the primacy of the private and the esoteric over the communal, because "shared knowledge gives way to intimation", symbolism violates that balance between public and private meanings which is so crucial to realism.
(Medalie 2002: 85)

What is esoteric in the metropole is the reality of the colony and private meanings become the public meanings of the colony's present and future. Gouldsbury, Page and Stockley may attempt a mimesis of some intangible spiritual quest but in the end the spiritual quest is a quest to make of the other place a home not for a liberated spirit but for people who have given themselves a new political identity. Their referent is not some imagined world but a familiar and contingent reality and their novels are forced to obey the conventions of realism. An exotic Rhodesia exists in the minds of their characters or in descriptions that privilege artificiality over naturalism and sensation over detailed observation of place. This mode, however is never sustained and what disclosures the narratives offer are the public concerns of Rhodesia.

Notes

1. A version of this paper was given at an English Department Seminar in October 2003 at the University of Pretoria where I was a visiting scholar. I am grateful to my Pretoria colleagues for their comments. Chennells (1982: 179-216) discusses the Rhodesian novels mentioned in this paper and several others as examples of colonial pastoral. The exotic provides a different theoretical grounding.
2. Christopher Ricks discusses the dating of "Locksley Hall" in his editorial notes (Ricks in Tennyson 1972: 688).
3. The exotic as fantasy and practical project is curiously combined in a South African context in Gandhi's Phoenix farm in Natal, the prototype of his future ashrams in India and whose foundation was inspired by his reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (Mehta 1993: 116-117).
4. Haggard made contradictory claims about how much he knew about Great Zimbabwe when he wrote *King Solomon's Mines* and *She* (Chennells 1982: 2, 16-25).

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