

‘A Fresh Access of Dignity’: Masculinity and Imperial Commitment in Britain, 1815-1914

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‘Imperialism was a massively important event in gender history’.¹ When R.W. Connell made that statement in 1993, he primarily had in mind the modification or obliteration of gender regimes in colonised societies. The small amount of work he was able to draw on then has been significantly expanded during the past six years by scholars chiefly concerned to include women in the ranks of the ‘subaltern’.. But imperialism raises another set of questions with regard to the colonising society: what did the acquisition of empire imply about the gender order of the imperialists? Answers to this question certainly require attention to the role of women in supporting or opposing imperialism within Britain. But the main focus needs to be on men, because empire was above all a massive assertion of masculine energies. That imperial history is today one of the last bastions of gender-blind history merely reflects the near-monopoly which men had on the colonial enterprise itself. The agenda of the gender historian here is to examine imperialism as an expression of masculinity. We need to ask in what senses the empire was ‘a man’s world’; how it addressed specific masculine needs; and whether the relationship between masculinity and empire was a dynamic one, contributing to the ebb and flow of imperial commitment in the metropolis.

To date work in this field has been dominated by the post-colonial strand of cultural studies. Here, following in the wake of Edward Said, the focus of interest is on representation – the images of empire consumed by both popular and elite audiences, and the discursive strategies which they reveal. In the context of nineteenth-century Britain one of the most distinguished of these works is Graham Dawson’s *Soldier Heroes*. Using Kleinian psycho-analysis alongside cultural theory, Dawson analyses the different levels at which the lives of Sir Henry Havelock and T.E. Lawrence were invented and re-invented in the British press, to address the changing emphases of hegemonic masculinity.² Other work has analysed the ways in which English masculinities were constituted in opposition to the colonial ‘other’ -

¹ R.W. Connell, ‘The big picture: masculinities in recent world history’, *Theory & Society* 22 (1993), p. 606.

² Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (1994). Other work in this genre includes Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (1995).

from the docile ‘sambo’ through the ‘effete’ Bengali to the instinctual savage.³ Though richly suggestive of the motifs of popular culture, the problem with this approach is that it operates almost entirely at the level of discourse and representation, and hardly at all in terms of social experience and material forces. This leads to the impression that imperialism was essentially a mind-set - a set of metaphors even - whereas it demands to be treated in the first instance as a matter of power and authority. Regarding empire and masculinity as essentially cultural phenomena imposes a perverse constraint on our understanding of their place in history.

The most recent collection of historical essays on gender and empire begins by conceding that British imperialism needs to be explored as ‘an essentially masculine project’, but then largely ducks the issue.⁴ The areas of ignorance are daunting. This is most true of the working-class dimension, including both the motives and circumstances of the ordinary emigrant, and the attitudes of working men to the public aspects of imperialism (as distinct from the propaganda directed at them from above). Research in these areas has hardly begun. As a comprehensive survey, this paper is thus entirely premature. But I hope it will at least point to the main areas of interest and suggest avenues of enquiry which may be fruitful in the future. I begin with the most familiar and best supported area, the interplay of class and gender in British imperial expansion, analysing the reasons for the close association of upper-class masculinity with the imperial project. I then argue that empire also spoke to a number of important masculine aspirations which owed their power to the fact that they transcended class. This prepares the ground for the final section, in which I suggest that tensions and uncertainties in masculinity within Britain influenced the public commitment to the empire, notably during the period of the New Imperialism. My approach is speculative and intended to provoke - not, I hope, outright rejection but at least some suggestive lateral thinking.

I

Tom Brown's Schooldays (1857) is not ostensibly about imperialism. The hero of this most masculine of Victorian best-sellers is engrossed almost entirely in the microcosm of school life at Rugby. But the story nevertheless has a clear imperial frame. The Browns, we are told in the first chapter, ‘are a fighting family’; from the Hundred Years War to the Napoleonic Wars they have been in the thick of every conflict; they are ‘scattered over the whole empire on which the sun never sets’, leaving their mark on American forests and Australian uplands. Thomas Hughes makes clear that he is extolling not merely a fictional family but a class – the English squirearchy or landed gentry who had been the effective rulers of the countryside since Tudor times. Their diffusion across the globe is, in Hughes’ opinion, ‘the chief cause of the empire’s stability’.. At the end of the novel Tom Brown himself is destined for Oxford, but the tradition of colonial service is upheld by his oldest

³ John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas de Quincey: a Psychopathology of Imperialism* (1991), and Catherine Hall, ‘Going a-Trolloping’, in Clare Midgley (ed), *Gender and Imperialism* (1998), p.180.

⁴ Midgley, *Gender and Imperialism* (1998), p. 14.

schoolfriend, Harry East who – true to his name - leaves to join an Indian regiment with the confident prediction that ‘he will make a capital officer’. In short, the empire is the special concern of the landed class, and its sons are inculcated with a masculine ethos intended to equip them for ‘service’ overseas.⁵

Hughes himself came from the landed gentry, and all his political life stood for the community cohesion and social responsibility which was threatened by liberal individualism. By the late 1850s the gentry were losing out economically to the entrepreneurs and the financiers, and their political influence was on the wane. In those circumstances the empire became all the more important as a source of employment and public standing. In theoretical terms this is well trodden terrain: J.A. Schumpeter long ago decided that modern imperialism was ‘an atavism in the social structure’, an expression of aristocratic energy which could not be subsumed in modern capitalism.⁶ In Connell’s terms, gentry masculinity survived and prospered as ‘frontier masculinity’ overseas, when it was giving place to bureaucratic, technical masculinity at home.⁷ In the British case, the landed class found lucrative openings in ‘gentlemanly capitalism’ (i.e. investments from the profits of land in the City), but its presumption of authority was less easily accommodated, as local government was modernized and the franchise extended to the point of including farm-workers by 1885. Bureaucracy and democracy, the two principal enemies of the aristocratic principle in the modern world, were seriously eroding landed power in Victorian Britain. The empire provided an ample consolation prize, allowing the landed to sustain their claim to be the governing class *par excellence*.. This was least true at the very top: peers of the realm showed comparatively little interest in colonial postings.⁸ But it certainly held true of the gentry who provided the majority of officers in both the British Army and the Indian Army, and were prominently represented in the civilian administration. The more desirable career openings were completely dominated by men of ‘good county birth’, like the Sudan Political Service, founded in 1901. For men from a landed background, the colonies offered a life in the saddle, hunting on a grand scale, and military campaigning with comparatively low risk: constant reference to war as a ‘sport’ or a ‘game’ was a particularly revealing reflection of aristocratic values.⁹ Above all, the colonies provided opportunity for the unfettered exercise of face-to-face hierarchical authority. This was not true of the colonies of white settlement where representative institutions were introduced very early on, leading to self-government in Canada in the 1840s and parts of Australia in the 1850s. (That probably explains why official positions in these colonies were not much sought after.¹⁰) But in the majority of dependencies, including most

⁵ Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown’s Schooldays, 1989 reprint of 1869 edn, pp. 2, 3, 5, 362.

⁶ J.A. Schumpeter, Imperialism and Social Classes (1951), p. 85.

⁷ Connell, ‘The big picture’, pp. 610-12.

⁸ David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy (1990).

⁹ Robert H. MacDonald, The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918 (1994).

¹⁰ Lady Antrim remarked in 1885: ‘Fancy, Lord Carrington going as governor to New South Wales. I cannot understand a real man taking that!’ Quoted in Pat Jalland, Women, Marriage and Politics in England (1986), p. 227.

importantly India, real responsibility was given to young officials, often with minimal supervision: decisions were made and enforced on the spot, supported by the consciousness of being part of a ruling caste not unlike the traditional sense of rank among the gentry in England.

This identification between aristocracy and empire was fully reflected in the cultural sphere. Despite the commercial rationale of imperialism, it was associated in the popular mind with the squire and the gentleman, rather than the trader or the planter. As A.P. Thornton once observed, 'Henty's British Empire was the gentleman's patrimony overseas..... He never took a hopeful lad *With Barnato to the Diamond-diggings*'..¹¹ The adventure literature of the era of Henty, Rider Haggard and the rest served to shore up the social prestige of the class from which nearly all their heroes were drawn.

Thomas Hughes was correct in assuming that the public schools reinforced the class character of the empire. Until the mid-nineteenth century the overwhelming majority of their pupils came from the gentry. The schools hardened them physically, compelled them to acquire a certain self-reliance, and socialised them to a hierarchical social world, first by subjecting them to authority, and then by introducing them to the delights of exercising it. In the 1830s Dr Arnold of Rugby tried to reform the public schools by placing greater stress on moral and intellectual values. Within the sphere of his personal influence he had some success (and a great deal of public adulation). Elsewhere his programme was a failure. The traditional class rationale of the public schools remained intact. The late Victorian public school stood for muscular prowess, stoical devotion to duty, respect for hierarchy, and emotional self-containment (the 'stiff upper lip').

In the late Victorian era two significant innovations were introduced, neither of which owed anything to Arnold. The first was the invention of organized team sports, designed to teach boys to work as a team, to bear pain, and to control their tempers. The second was the spread of the Cadet Corps, beginning in the 1860s (in the wake of the French invasion scare of 1859) and almost universal by the 1890s; this taught boys to submit to pointless routines, and to shoot (if they did not already know). There was much self-conscious talk of 'character' and 'manliness', but in essence the public schools were inculcating the traditional masculine values of the landed class: 'the capacity to govern others and control themselves', as the Clarendon Commissioners pithily put it in their enquiry of 1864. The only difference was that those values were increasingly intended for export. Leading schools like Uppingham and Haileybury were now dispatching about one third of their leavers overseas each year, some as 'gentlemen emigrants', the rest as servicemen and officials.¹² By the end of the century the public schools claimed credit for providing a steady stream of

¹¹ A.P. Thornton, *For the File on Empire* (1968), p. 19.

¹² Patrick Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier* (1981), p. 60.

imperial recruits, and for promoting an ‘imperial manliness’ which conditioned the outlook of those who stayed at home as well as those who went overseas.

If from an imperial perspective my focus here on the aristocracy seems inescapable, in a British context it looks peripheral. Recent writing on masculinity in Victorian England has concentrated overwhelmingly on the middle class, since this was not only the ‘coming’ class politically, but the one with the greatest cultural power. Yet *Family Fortunes* – the major work on bourgeois masculinity in the first half of the century – scarcely mentions empire at all.¹³ In recent work Catherine Hall has sought to correct this omission. Her argument is that middle-class men stood behind abolitionism because they believed that free market conditions would promote self-help, thrift and domesticity among the former slaves in the West Indies and elsewhere.¹⁴ Yet that vision of bourgeois values for blacks had faded by the 1850s, and I would question whether it had ever been as central to middle-class gender ideals in Britain as Hall claims. In fact bourgeois masculinity related very uncertainly to empire. As compared with the gallery of upper-class imperial heroes, only Henry Havelock – Baptist, devotee of domesticity, and saviour of Lucknow – carried complete conviction as a middle-class hero.¹⁵ With a certain amount of selective viewing, empire gave grounds for a self-congratulatory estimate of the blessings conferred by British trade. It also tended to confirm a ‘providential’ view of national affairs in tune with the Evangelical attitude to business.¹⁶ But against this had to be weighed the unmistakably aristocratic provenance of empire. Much of the anti-imperialism of the mid-Victorian generation flowed from the perception that empire was a vast system of outdoor relief for the upper classes.

The sting was only drawn from that perception when the middle class joined in the spoils too. Their route in was the public schools. By the 1870s over seventy schools claimed this status, compared with a mere seven in the 1820s. Of the 4000 to 5000 school-leavers turned out every year at the turn of the century, the gentry must have accounted for under a half. The balance was made up of a rising proportion of middle-class parents. Their motives were mixed. Some may have believed the claim of the schools to offer a godly education. Others regarded boarding school as the best antidote to the effeminizing charms of the bourgeois home presided over by the ‘angel mother’.. But social and educational advantages probably loomed largest. Apart from hob-nobbing with the sons of the gentry, that meant qualifying for university, securing an army commission, or winning a place in the coveted Indian Civil Service by examination. Ultimately the middle class took its place in the imperial sun by

¹³ Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (1987). See also J.A. Mangan & James Walvin (eds), *Manliness and Morality* (1987), and John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (1999).

¹⁴ Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class* (1992). Her major work on gender, class and ethnicity in Britain between the 1830s and 1860s is imminent.

¹⁵ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*.

¹⁶ John Tosh, ‘From Keighley to St-Denis: separation and intimacy in Victorian bourgeois marriage’, *History Workshop* JI. 40 (1995), pp. 193-206.

assimilating the values of the landed class. Their sons became 'gentlemen', with the imperial opportunities and awareness that the term implied.

If the place of middle-class masculinity in the fashioning of empire is obscure, that of working-class masculinity is almost invisible. The hundreds of thousands who left Britain as common soldiers or as steerage passengers bound for a colony of settlement accounted for the bulk of the flow of British manpower overseas. Yet there was almost no recognition of this at home. The experience of soldiers serving in the empire did not, as far as I can tell, feature much in working-class culture until the 1890s, when rank-and-file heroics began to be depicted on the music hall stage, alongside the exploits of the great names.¹⁷ Hardly any military autobiographies of common soldiers were published.¹⁸ There was no national epic of working-class emigration to set against the endless tales of public-school boys engaged in conquest or government in distant places. David Livingstone, who laboured as a cotton piecer in a Blantyre mill from the age of 10 to 23, made a common man's hero of formidable authority; but his experience as missionary and explorer was utterly remote from that of the typical emigrant or soldier. One reason perhaps why such a huge slice of working-class life disappeared from view is that it stood outside the collectivist traditions of working-class culture. Men took the queen's shilling as individuals, and must often have trod a lonely path of reintegration when they left the colours. Emigrants acted as individuals too, responsible for no more than their immediate family. And for all the bracing talk in emigration propaganda of a new life, the emigrant was performing an act of renunciation and withdrawal. Unlike his upper- or middle-class counterpart, he did not enjoy the privilege of 'furlough', when friends and relatives might learn something of the realities of his life, nor did he come home to reminisce and die. As a result the cultural expression of working-class masculinity - in the work-place, the neighbourhood or commercialised entertainment - took very little account of empire.

My first conclusion, then, is that the British Empire in the nineteenth century was not only a man's sphere, but an upper-class man's sphere. The landed classes were disproportionately represented in the ranks of those who subdued and administered the colonies. The empire made a virtue of traditional styles of ruling which were increasingly redundant in Britain, and it offered members of the elite not only rewarding activity but social prestige back home. Indeed this prestige was such that the empire was largely associated in the popular mind with the landed class. This had important educational consequences. In the late Victorian period, when the empire was not only constantly expanding but gaining enhanced cultural prestige within Britain, training in the masculine values of the aristocracy appeared to be not an anachronism, but a rational response to the opportunities held out by 'Greater Britain'. Middle-class men assimilated those values to create a confident imperial service class, composed of both bourgeoisie and aristocracy.

¹⁷ Dave Russell, "'We carved our way to glory': the British soldier in music hall song and sketch", in John M. MacKenzie (ed), *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (1992), pp. 57-9.

¹⁸ But see Carolyn Steedman, *The Radical Soldier's Tale* (1982).

II

So far I have employed a very modest conception of the place of masculinities in historical explanation. Since all class identities wear a gendered aspect, and since all class relations are partly played out in gender relations, masculinity must obviously feature in our analysis of British imperialism. But nothing very momentous is likely to emerge from following up the gender implications of a well-worn class analysis. I want now to test a more ambitious proposition: that masculinity does not merely mirror class attributes, but in some respects transcends them. To the extent that men of every class define and recognise masculinity in similar ways, we may speak of *hegemonic masculinity*. There is an assumption that all men will match these requirements, not because they are innate, but because they are the passport to acceptance by other men and will therefore be striven for by the vast majority. (Hence the otherwise incomprehensible injunction ‘Be a man!’) Someone who falls short of these requirements is less than a man and forfeits the privileges of masculinity. In nineteenth-century England masculine status was commonly recognised to depend on attainment in four areas, which I will call physicality, authority, independence and homosociality. How these requirements were defined in practice varied according to one’s social status, but in one form or another they were universal. They were all premised on strenuous individual effort. As one advice-book writer put it, men are made ‘not by passively yielding to an internal pressure, but by the putting forth of an internal force which resists and masters, if it cannot change, the outward’.¹⁹ These socially validated criteria of masculinity also provided a common set of values through which men of one class could partly identify with men of another and stand together in support of certain social goals. Of course ‘hegemonic’ here does not mean conflict-free. Considerations of class identity – not to mention personal morality or political principle – prompted many men to contest the interpretation of hegemonic masculinity accepted by their fellows (John Stuart Mill is a preeminent example). But it is clear that on certain issues a broad mass of masculine opinion could be mobilised on gender lines, and on a scale which went beyond class politics. Resistance to women’s suffrage was one such issue;²⁰ the promotion of British settlement and rule overseas was another.

Physical manhood was fundamental to masculinity. Whatever moral gloss churchmen tried to impose on it, manliness retained its physical associations in common culture. A ‘manly figure’ was athletic and robust; a ‘manly visage’ suggested vigour and virility; a ‘manly handshake’ was firm and direct. Boys were sent to school to be hardened as much as educated. Even in the peaceful conditions of mid-Victorian England, the need for fighting readiness was not forgotten, and on occasion it galvanised the nation (as during the invasion scare of 1859). When sport was strongly promoted from the 1860s onwards, it was the demanding or dangerous

¹⁹ William Landels, *How Men Are Made* (1859), pp. 8-9.

²⁰ Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: the Opposition to Women’s Suffrage in Britain* (1978).

sports like running, rowing and mountaineering which commanded most prestige.²¹ Empire was quintessentially the sphere of physical manliness. It was widely depicted as a strenuous open-air life, requiring energy, resilience and physical adaptability – of the pioneer farmer, the hunter, the surveyor, the soldier and the lone administrator. The empire was also a school of physical manliness, conferring full manhood on those who might be weak in body but had the guts put themselves to the test of colonial living. Carlyle's vision of 'an ocean empire' hardening her sons into men 'by the sun of Australia or the frosts of Canada'²² was an insistent theme of imperial apologists until Baden-Powell and beyond. Paternal anxiety about the prospects of cosseted inactive sons was one reason for considering emigration. As Thomas Phipson said of his decision to sail to Natal in 1849,

Had my bonny boys [then mere babies] remained in London, their rosy cheeks must have grown pale on high stools or behind shop counters, but an irrepressible thirst in my own mind for nature and her charms made me resolved that at any sacrifice that fate should never be theirs.²³

Recruits to colonial administration were expected to show a high standard of physical fitness as a matter of course. Periodic alarm about the calibre of the Indian Civil Service centred on a lack of 'manliness' among appointees who had swotted and crammed for the stiff entrance exam.²⁴ Given these associations, it is hardly surprising that the empire also attracted men who were determined to overcome some disability in themselves, like Kipling, Henty and the journalist G.W. Steevens. Men with a stammer were, we are told, no rarity in colonial administration.²⁵ In cases of this kind, empire served as proof of physical manliness, in the eyes of others as much as oneself.

The second feature of metropolitan masculinity which resonated strongly with conditions overseas was *personal authority*. Manliness was always measured partly in terms of mastery: over one's immediate dependants in the form of domestic patriarchy, and over men of inferior social status in the public sphere. Not for nothing did Walter Houghton, in the first modern analysis of the word, discuss manliness under the heading of 'the worship of force'. Predictably, Houghton was not alert to the imperial dimensions of this, but they are plain enough. Racially stratified colonies promised the satisfactions of personal authority not only to men who were 'born to rule', but to those whose authority in the normal run of things would have extended no further than a wife or an apprentice. Indeed acceptance of the empire as an upper-class preserve played on precisely this admiration for men who 'instinctively' knew how to master a situation. John MacKenzie has speculated that service in the Indian Army was attractive because soldiers from the poorest background in Britain were no

²¹ Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (1978).

²² The phrase was actually Froude's, but credited to Carlyle. J.A. Froude, *Oceana* (1886), pp. 132-3.

²³ R.N. Currey (ed), *Letters & Other Writings of a Natal Sheriff* (1968), p. xxvii.

²⁴ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (1993), pp. 107-8.

²⁵ L.H. Gann & P. Duignan, *Rulers of British Africa* (1978), p. 208.

longer at the bottom of the pile once they reached their postings.²⁶ Equally, many comparatively poor emigrants must have been attracted to South Africa by the promise (not always redeemed) of cheap local labour in the house and on the farm. In these cases the privilege of race was available to all whites, however lowly their social origins in Britain.

Tales of authority imposed in a colonial setting exerted a strong imaginative appeal on the metropolitan imagination. Since the moral and social complexities of the situation were usually unknown, Englishmen could applaud the firm smack of government and the resolution of the man on the spot. Sometimes colonial exploits wore a decorous clothing of chivalry and crusade, as in Gordon's 'martyrdom' at Khartoum. But violence was much more to the fore. Intense vicarious pleasure was taken in the exploits of generals like Napier, Wolseley and Kitchener who destroyed their adversaries. Writers from Thomas de Quincey at the start of the period to Rudyard Kipling at the end, bear witness to the popular appetite for narratives of penetration and victory. Conquest itself was sexualised, the victim represented as a woman half inviting and half resisting rape.²⁷ The savage reprisals taken against the Indian rebels in 1857 were certainly applauded in this spirit. In some ways the furor over Governor Eyre of Jamaica in 1866-67 is even more revealing: partly because the repressive measures (439 executions) were so disproportionate to the disturbance, and partly because Eyre's critics were so completely outmanoeuvred by his champions. Jamaican blacks, it seemed, were born to be the objects of 'mastery'; Eyre was hailed as 'one of the very finest types of English manhood'.²⁸ Fantasies of violent reprisal which were completely inadmissible in England could be freely indulged in a colonial setting.

Maybe this appetite for brutality is a potential which must always be reckoned with. But there is a more specific context to be borne in mind. One reason why Eyre's riding roughshod over normal restraints attracted such plaudits was because those restraints had become much tighter in the last two generations. Male violence was subject to increasing restriction within England itself. The use of force for social purposes was now concentrated in the hands of a regular army and a trained police force. The risk of violence was also considerably reduced in the case of personal disputes of honour. By the time duelling was made an offence for army officers in 1844, it had already succumbed to middle-class respectability.²⁹ The penalties for assault and manslaughter became more severe. Rape charges became more difficult to evade after a change in the law in 1828 which made proof of seminal emission no

²⁶ MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, pp. 11-12.

²⁷ Barrell, *Infection of Thomas de Quincey*, p. 192.

²⁸ The phrase was Carlyle's, quoted in Catherine Hall, 'Imperial man: Edward Eyre in Australasia and the West Indies, 1833-66', in Bill Schwarz (ed), *The Expansion of England* (1996), p. 163.

²⁹ V.G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History* (1988), Ch. 12.

longer a requirement.³⁰ And even domestic violence ('wife-beating') was brought more firmly within the scope of the law, particularly in suits against husbands for divorce or separation.³¹ During the nineteenth century male defendants in indictable cases steadily rose in absolute numbers, and as a proportion of the total in relation to women. Martin Wiener interprets this formidable body of evidence as 'the Victorian criminalization of men', or 'the masculinization of crime'.. He does not even pose the question of what it meant for the British Empire.³² But it is at least worth considering the suggestion that a masculine culture not yet reconciled to the outlawing of interpersonal violence was drawn to the empire, as a career posting and as an imaginative space where less stringent controls operated.

The third aspect of masculinity to be considered is the central Victorian preoccupation with *independence*, current among both the elite (as in 'independent gentleman') and the labouring classes (as in 'independent working man'). It had two dimensions. It meant firstly the ability to make one's way in the world by one's own efforts. The gentleman who secured a public position without patronage, the middle-class professional who lived off the market value of his skill, the artisan who was 'steady' enough to keep charity from his door – all these could claim to be 'independent'. They were self-reliant, un beholden to anyone, and able to hold to their opinions in the company of men. The second meaning was more restricted, and in fact a vital prerequisite for independence in the first sense. An 'independent' man was an autonomous household head - someone who was not a dependent in another man's house, but was master of his own, and able to provide for its material needs. Traditionally the position of head of household had long been premised on domestic production, in which the man directed the labour of his dependants. During the nineteenth century, as production moved out of the home, that model gave way to the notion of the 'breadwinner', solely responsible for his family's needs and thereby meriting authority over them.³³

The association between empire and independence was a strong one. This was perhaps most true of working-class emigrants whose prospects of family formation were blighted by harsh economic conditions. Of course the empire exercised a far from exclusive appeal, since most emigrants went to the United States. But a diminishing proportion did so from mid-century onwards, and by the Edwardian period emigrants to the empire outnumbered those to America.³⁴ 'The emigrant' was always assumed to be male ('emigration is a career which calls for pluck, bottom,

³⁰ Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845* (1987), pp. 60-63.

³¹ A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (1992).

³² Martin J. Wiener, 'The Victorian criminalization of men', in Pieter Spierenburg (ed), *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America* (1998), pp. 197-212.

³³ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, Ch. 1.

³⁴ Statistics of emigration in Donald Read, *The Age of Urban Democracy*, 2nd edn (1994).

energy, enterprise, all the masculine virtues'³⁵), but prior to the 1880s most emigrants travelled as family groups, and it is obvious that the capacities of emigrant women were quite as crucial to the venture as those of their menfolk. It is impossible to generalise about the balance of decision-making between spouses. But to the tenant farmer facing annual increases in his rent, or the artisan thrown out of work, or the shop-keeper losing custom in a market down-turn, emigration held out the promise of manly independence. The voice of the emigrant is only fitfully audible, though something of his aspirations is caught by a popular poet of the 1830s who wrote of 'The pride to rear an independent shed/And give to lips we love unborrowed bread'.³⁶ Promoters of emigration laid heavy stress on its capacity to make men independent. James Methley enthused,

When you pluck the first ripe fruit from the trees you planted, and see comfort and plenty springing up around, you feel *a fresh access of dignity*, as you consider that it was by your unaided effort that all this was accomplished.
[emphasis added]³⁷

The single agricultural labourers who were the preferred immigrants into New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century were probably aspiring to patriarchal independence too, though the demography of settlement meant that a lifetime of bachelorhood awaited most of them.³⁸ Jeremiah Goldswain was more fortunate. A seventeen-year old sawyer, he joined a party emigrating to the Cape in 1819. He was determined to 'tuck care of number one [sic]'; 'I thought that at my age I could do sumthing [sic] for myself'.. Three years later he was married and soon had a growing family..³⁹

Higher up the social scale, empire had traditionally meant patronage, the very negation of manly independence. Peers could still secure plum jobs in the colonies through the old-boy network. Comparable openings were sometimes put in the way of the sons of the gentry: Henry Rider Haggard owed his posting in Natal to a family connection with the lieutenant-governor. But patronage was on the decline during the Victorian period, displaced by meritocratic recruitment by examination. More typical of the upper-class entrée to the colonies was Haggard's contemporary, Charles Smythe, younger son of a Scottish landed family. In 1872 on his last day at sea before disembarking at Durban, he wrote, 'Henceforth I shall have to work hard, keep up character, and make a name in a new world without one person that I know beyond two months' acquaintance'.⁴⁰ In fact the second half of the century saw a steadily

³⁵ Charles Hursthouse, writing about New Zealand in 1857, quoted in Jock Philipps, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male – a History*, 2nd edn (1996), p. 5.

³⁶ Quoted in Hall, 'Imperial Man', p. 130.

³⁷ James Erasmus Methley, *The New Colony of Port Natal*, 2nd edn (1850), p. 39.

³⁸ Phillipps, *A Man's Country?*, p. 18.

³⁹ Una Long (ed), *The Chronicle of Jeremiah Goldswain* (1946), p 4.

⁴⁰ Charles Smythe, diary, quoted in Daphne Child, *Charles Smythe: Pioneer, Premier and Administrator of Natal* (1973), p. 17.

increasing flow of ‘gentleman emigrants’, low-achieving public school boys who lacked qualifications or wealth for a gentlemanly occupation in Britain but hoped to become landholders in the colonies. (There was even an agricultural training college set up in Suffolk in 1887 to meet their needs) The ranch lands of western Canada were the most popular destination, followed by Australia and New Zealand.⁴¹ Respectable settlers in the host colonies tended to be dismissive of these impecunious new arrivals – ‘the offal of every calling and occupation’, as one Natalian put it in 1870.⁴² But the aspiration to achieve independence was one which men from every class could identify with, and the empire was widely regarded as an advantageous place to do so.

My fourth and last constituent of masculinity is *homosociality*. It is a clumsy but indispensable word to denote those activities which men pursue in, or for the appreciation of, groups of age-peers from which women are excluded. ‘Fraternity’ might be preferable, but it has a narrower application, implying both an institutional context such as a lodge or union, and an ethos in which brotherhood prevails over competition. Homosociality was both less formal and more pervasive than fraternity. It represented in the first place the social world which young men inhabited prior to marriage. In nineteenth-century Britain, for all except the devout, drinking, gambling and the notching up of sexual exploits were at the heart of this bachelor men-only sub-culture. Marriage did not end the claims of homosociality, though it tended to limit their scope. The respectable married man took his seat at public bodies and learned societies (also of course men-only); those more careless of their reputation frequented the taverns and clubs where every aspect of the bachelor style of life could be kept up. The extent of men’s devotion to hearth and home was measured by how much of their leisure-time they spent in the company of men. It has often been pointed out that all-male society oiled the wheels of business and politics by offering a network of personal contacts in the public sphere. But its significance went much deeper. For both bachelors and married men, the homosocial world was the jury before which masculine status was tested and validated. A man who could not secure that recognition and hold the esteem of his peers was seriously undermined in his masculinity.⁴³

From a metropolitan perspective the empire was a men-only sphere *par excellence*, where work and leisure were pursued alongside ‘mates’ or ‘chums’. Popular culture highlighted the soldier, the hunter, the ‘bushman’ and the lone administrator, rather than the settler family or the missionary couple. Demography fully confirmed this picture. In a few mature settler colonies there was a balanced sex ratio, but in the empire as a whole white women were heavily outnumbered by white men (a situation which organised female emigration did little to rectify). In New Zealand in 1861 there were only 622 females for every 1000 males; in Queensland a

⁴¹ Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants*.

⁴² G.C. Lewis, quoted in A.F. Hattersley, *Natal: Portrait of a Colony* (1940), p. 3.

⁴³ Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, Ch. 6.

generation later the figure was 580 females for every 1000 males.⁴⁴ In India and all commercial dependencies the imbalance was even more pronounced. Many postings were deemed unsuitable for white women until after 1914. Some postings were off limits to married men (as in the Sudan in 1896-8, when Kitchener refused to accept married officers in his invasion force⁴⁵). For junior officials and army subalterns marriage was strongly frowned upon, and neither accommodation nor free passages were provided for wives.

The empire was also very much a young man's world. The donkey work of trade and administration was performed by men who were often scarcely out of school or university. Colonial postings were sought by junior officers, for whom they provided far more operational scope than home duty. In 1889 the journalist Grant Allen reflected on the current shortage of marriageable men of the upper and middle classes:

He is in the army, the navy, in the Indian Civil Service, in the Cape Mounted Rifles. He is sheep-farming in New Zealand, ranching in Colorado, growing tea in Assam, planting coffee in Ceylon; he is a cowboy in Montana, or a wheat-farmer in Manitoba, or a diamond-digger at Kimberley, or a merchant at Melbourne: in short, he is anywhere or everywhere, except where he ought to be, making love to the pretty girls of England.⁴⁶

Hannah Arendt described the British Empire as the preferred destination for men who could not outgrow their boyhood ideals.⁴⁷ It would be nearer the truth to say that the empire attracted those who were fixated on the freedom of youth. Back home the greatest constraint on that freedom was the conventions of domesticity as practised throughout the middle class and among the 'respectable' working class. In the parlour and the drawing-room, so it was often claimed, women imposed a social discipline on their husbands and sons which was experienced as boredom if not sexual subordination.⁴⁸ In the colonies, on the other hand, men could put behind them 'the conventionalities of English life'⁴⁹ and enjoy the company and tastes of their peers. At one level this represented a prolongation of the homosocial culture of the public school which had already accustomed boys to hold the feminine at arms length while developing a taste for teamwork, ragging and horseplay. Among working-class emigrants we can infer a comparable mind-set from the vigorous bachelor culture found in some colonies. Australians celebrated the Lone Hand – the worker on the

⁴⁴ Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p. 7; Marilyn Lake, 'Australian frontier feminism and the marauding white male', in Midgley, *Gender and Imperialism*, p. 129.

⁴⁵ George W. Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartoum* (1898), p. 50.

⁴⁶ Grant Allen, 'Plain words on the woman question', *Fortnightly Review* 46 (1889), pp. 454-5.

⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd edn (1958), p. 211.

⁴⁸ Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship*, Ch. 5; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp.178-82.

⁴⁹ As in Samuel Butler, *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement* (1914), pp. 71-2; see also Walter Peace, *Our Colony of Natal* (1883), p. 4.

sheep farm who enjoyed the company of his mates but had no domestic ties. In the words of one settler father,

You're me all over again, lad. There's only one thing that will tie you down, and that's responsibility. A wife and children will put the hobbles on you. You'll look over the fence at the horses who are going somewhere; but you'll have to stay in the paddock.⁵⁰

Empire represented an intensified version – on a global scale - of the bachelor world which most young men inhabited between their mid to late-teens and marriage in their late twenties or early thirties.

The pattern of British sexual life overseas fully bears out this picture. As Ronald Hyam has established with somewhat tasteless exuberance, the empire provided highly attractive conditions in which young men could enjoy sexual relations of every kind – partly for pleasure, and partly in order to acquire sexual prestige with their fellows. I reject Hyam's notion of colonial sex as 'an act of racial conciliation', which shows complete disregard for the power element in encounters between – say – district officers and African concubines, or between white soldiers and under-age Indian boys. But Hyam is on much firmer ground in analysing the sexual appeal of the colonial world for men in Britain. The empire was associated with distant and exotic locations where sex was cheap, diverse, and above all hidden from censorious prying eyes. The advance of Mrs Grundy in Britain increased the appeal of the empire as the site of forbidden pleasures as the century progressed. Following the campaign against the Contagious Disease Acts in the 1870s, Evangelical morality began to make significant inroads on the double standard (as it applied to young men). Hyam argues that the enactment of much tighter controls on prostitution and homosexuality in the 1880s contributed significantly to the attractions of life overseas. There followed a 'golden age' of imperial sex, during which British men could expect to find a much greater degree of license than at home. The efforts of Social Purity campaigners to clean up the colonies had little effect, until the Colonial Office imposed a tighter personal code on administrative officials overseas in 1908-10 (and this had no bearing on the non-official majority of Britons resident in the colonies). It is clear that the empire held an important place in the British man's sense of the available opportunities for claiming his sexual birthright.⁵¹

Robert Morrell has taken me to task for exaggerating the association between empire and bachelorhood.⁵² That is fair comment on an earlier foray of mine into this

⁵⁰ Sydney *Bulletin*, 3 Nov. 1888, quoted in Marilyn Lake, 'The politics of respectability: identifying the masculinist context', *Historical Studies* 22 (1986), p. 118.

⁵¹ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: the British Experience* (1990).

⁵² Robert Morrell, 'The family man and empire: Sir Albert Hine of Natal, 1875-1903', *JNZH* 18 (1998), pp. 20-44.

field.⁵³ I hope that in juxtaposing the homosocial appeal of empire with its role in creating the conditions for household headship I have produced a more balanced account. My argument is that empire met the masculine aspirations of Englishmen in a range of complementary ways. For some it held out the promise of founding or maintaining a household. For others colonial life beckoned as an intensification of homosociality at home, in exotic conditions. For others again the empire represented a test of manhood in a physical sense, and a place where personal authority could be freely exercised, or applauded in others. It was because empire was relevant to each of the main features of hegemonic masculinity in England that it could, at times, engage the commitment of a very wide cross-section of the male population.

III

To put that last assertion to the test would entail a major review of imperial history going far beyond the scope of current research. All I can do here is to sketch an outline for one period, that of the New Imperialism from about 1880 to 1914. Two arguments can be made about gender and the New Imperialism. The first or 'weak' argument is that a heightened awareness of opportunities and threats overseas induced a harsher definition of masculinity at home; if the empire was in danger, men must be produced who were tough, realistic, unsqueamish and stoical.⁵⁴ The second or 'strong' argument, which I want to briefly indicate here, is that enthusiasm for the empire at the end of the century was itself a symptom of masculine insecurity within Britain. Leonore Davidoff suggested ten years ago that the vogue for military values in the decades leading up to the First World War was in part a masculine backlash against the advances of women. The same general idea was elaborated in Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy* (1991), which interpreted the *fin de siècle* in Britain as a time of gender panic.⁵⁵ How does this perspective relate to the analysis of masculinity which I have adopted in this paper?

There are three senses in which we can speak of masculinity as having been under strain towards the end of the nineteenth century. The first was economic. The Great Depression (1873-96) signalled the end of the mid-Victorian plateau of prosperity. Unemployment grew rapidly, peaking in 1879, 1886, 1893-4 and again in 1908-9.⁵⁶ The very word 'unemployment' entered the language during the 1880s.⁵⁷ The social and political fall-out recalled the travails of the 1840s. For hundreds of

⁵³ John Tosh, 'Imperial masculinity and the flight from domesticity in Britain, 1880-1914', in T. Foley et al (eds), *Gender and Colonialism* (1995).

⁵⁴ This argument runs through the recent secondary literature on manliness, but is most clearly stated in H. John Field, *Toward a Programme of Imperial Life: the British Empire at the Turn of the Century* (1982).

⁵⁵ Leonore Davidoff, 'The family', in F.M.L. Thompson (ed), *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Britain*, vol 2 (1990), p. 105; Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle* (1991).

⁵⁶ Jose Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: a Study in English Social Policy, 1886-1914* (1972), p. 374.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

thousands of men the prospects of achieving the fundamental masculine requirement of household headship in Britain receded to vanishing point.

Secondly, there was a perceived crisis of physical manhood. Unemployment was only one aspect of the 'social problem'. Urban poverty was restored to the political agenda with the publication of Andrew Mearns' *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* in 1883 (soon followed by William Booth's *In Darkest England*). The philanthropic concerns of these writers soon gave way to alarm that the nation's manhood was being undermined from within, with dire implications for the future of its labour power and its military capacity. The problem was approached from a bewildering variety of perspectives, ranging from the socialist analysis of the distribution of wealth to the neo-Darwinist spectre of physical and mental 'degeneration'; proposed solutions were correspondingly diverse, even contradictory. The common ground was that the physical condition of the men of the 'residuum' was in crisis. The scope of the problem was further enlarged during the Anglo-Boer War, when three out of five volunteers were turned away by the Army as unfit – a clear indication that the problem engulfed more than the very poor.

Thirdly, there was much talk of a crisis of authority. To the late Victorians poverty meant more than the scourge of unemployment and the physical undermining of the racial stock. It raised the spectre of disorder and sedition, evident in the militancy of the trade unions, the violent street demonstrations and the anarchist outrages of the day. These trends were widely seen as a challenge to the social fabric and the authority of those whose duty was to defend it. Commentators called for a recovery of masculine nerve, by which they meant an exercise of authority in order to shore up the hierarchy of society. At the same time the crisis was blamed on the decline of such reflexes during the prosperous plateau of the 50s and 60s. Meredith Townsend, editor of *The Spectator*, regarded 'the love of approbation' as

the real root of the great change which has passed over the management of children, of the whole difficulty in Ireland, of the reluctance to conquer, and of the whole of the new philanthropic social legislation.⁵⁸

But it was in relations between the sexes that the failure of authority was most disturbing. In the 1880s and 1890s few men could recall a time when women had been so subversive or so free. What has rather misleadingly come to be called the beginning of 'first wave feminism' raised 'the woman question' to the top of the social agenda. Greater earning opportunities in office work and teaching gave unmarried young women more freedoms – to live alone, to choose their own male company (or reject it entirely), to dispense with chaperonage, to smoke, to cycle. Coincidentally the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 gave wives control over the funds they brought into the marriage, while the courts were gradually liberalising

⁵⁸ Meredith Townsend, 'Will England retain India?', *Contemporary Review* 53 (1888), p. 811.

the terms on which wives could secure a marital separation or custody of children.⁵⁹ On top of all this the 1890s witnessed a spate of outspoken feminist polemic by journalists and novelists which attacked the institution of marriage and castigated the sexual practices of men. As portrayed in the press, the New Woman - a coinage of 1894 - was engaged in not merely self-improvement but also sex warfare.

To men of the *fin de siècle* each aspect of this crisis had evident imperial implications. As in the 1840s workers reacted to the economic downturn by emigrating in large numbers, but with two significant differences. This time the lead was taken by young single men rather than married couples, and they were now much more likely to go to countries in the empire than to the United States, with Australia and New Zealand establishing a clear lead. This situation was repeated on the eve of the First World War, with over 300,000 emigrating to the colonies between 1911 and 1913.⁶⁰ The relative decline of America as a destination seems to have been more due to the diminishing opportunities there as the frontier closed than to a desire to live under the Crown, but the empire's role as provider of the wherewithal for domestic patriarchy was reaffirmed.

Emigration – and particularly assisted emigration – had a bearing on the second area of strain. If poor physical specimens from the 'residuum' could be induced to go to the colonies, they might become an asset to the empire instead of a drain on it.⁶¹ But most initiatives were designed to raise the standard of physical manhood in Britain itself. The three decades before the First World War were the classic period of sport, physical education, military training and uniformed youth movements. Mounting anxiety about the threat posed by Germany lent urgency to the prescriptions of the degeneration theorists. But the most original feature of this panic was the summoning up of the colonies as the solution. The poor state of English manhood was unfavourably contrasted with the colonies. Kipling compared his 'flannelled fools' with 'the men who can shoot and ride', and Admiral Beresford invoked 'the young up-standing, keen-eyed colonial', with the clear implication that these were models to be emulated.⁶² As early as the 1880s boys' magazines featured the motif of the English boy being guided to manhood by a strong son of the colonies (like 'Canadian Jack').⁶³ The man who most convincingly applied this prescription was Baden-Powell. What made the Boy Scouts so much more appealing than the Boys' Brigade and its imitators was that parades and drilling were kept to a minimum. Instead boys were invited to act out an exciting fantasy of the white man's life (sometimes even the black man's) on the imperial frontier:

⁵⁹ Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship*.

⁶⁰ Read, *Age of Urban Democracy*, pp. 8, 211, 375.

⁶¹ Harris, *Unemployment*, p. 127; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (1971), pp. 101-5.

⁶² Lord Beresford (1904), quoted in Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory* (1986), p. 132.

⁶³ Kelly Boyd, "'Wait Till I'm a Man': ideals of manliness in British boys' story papers, 1855-1940", Rutgers University PhD thesis (1991), pp. 101, 208.

in imagination I was a pioneer pushing my way through impenetrable jungle with the stars as my compass; then a backwoodsman of the great forests with my shelter of brushwood and my cooking fire and the smell of woodsmoke and the aroma of sizzling bacon in my nostrils,⁶⁴

as one early recruit recalled. Open-air skills and an enthusiasm for imperial narratives flowed from this kind of experience. The Scouts owed their success to their founder's vision of a British manhood re-energised by colonial masculinity.

The crisis of masculine authority had perhaps the most pervasive effects on attitudes towards the empire. At one level, reassurance about men's capacity to act was more easily come by in the periodic blood-lettings overseas than in the comparatively well regulated governance of Britain. As Catherine Hall has argued, the ruthless colonial man of action exemplified by Governor Eyre became increasingly acceptable in the late Victorian popular construction of imperialism.⁶⁵ Confronted by the shocking news of the Phoenix Park murders in Dublin in 1882, Sir Alfred Lyall yearned for firm, resolute action: 'I should like a little more fierceness and honest brutality in the national temperament'.. Had he survived another sixteen years, he would surely have been satisfied by the popular reaction to the massacre at Omdurman.⁶⁶

At another level, the empire offered men a powerful counterweight against women's challenge to their authority. The colonial world, after all, represented in the most emphatic way what differentiated men from women. During the 1880s this was made explicit in popular literature. Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry Rider Haggard created a new genre of adventure story which was exciting, bracingly masculine, and staged in a real or invented colonial setting. Their heroes hunted, plundered or conquered, shored up by the silent bonds of men's friendship, and unencumbered by the presence of females: 'there is not a petticoat in the whole history', Allan Quatermain reassures his readers in *King Solomon's Mines*.⁶⁷ The message of male panic is clearest in Kipling's early novel, *The Light That Failed* (1891), in which death in a desert battle is presented as a wholesome escape from a degenerate London and a New Woman sweetheart. A generation of boys and young men (not to mention many of their sisters) was brought up on an image of masculinity which was self-reliant, extrovert, achieving and un beholden to women.

To a considerable extent that picture mirrored the realities of middle and upper-class engagement with the empire. These classes were disproportionately represented among emigrants to colonial destinations. In the 1890s the middle class

⁶⁴ F.H. Dimmock, *Bare Knee Days* (1939), quoted in Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of Empire* (1993), p. 155.

⁶⁵ Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, pp. 278, 286.

⁶⁶ Quoted in H.M. Durand, *Life of Lyall* (1913), p. 264.

⁶⁷ H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), p. 9.

accounted for 26% of all emigrants, and for 38% of those going to Australia.⁶⁸ Even allowing for the problem of the under-qualified public school boy, it is unlikely that economic necessity explains all of this. Young men were clearly affected by imperial propaganda in boys' magazines, school sermons and the daily press, as well as in adventure literature. They also dreamed of adventure, and of getting rich quick. But it seems highly unlikely that they could have been uninfluenced by the gender regime of the colonies. The New Woman would not be encountered overseas (how many Olive Schreiners were there in South Africa?). Indeed in the mining camps, cattle ranches and paramilitary forces to which middle-class emigrants flocked, there were few white women of any description. It wasn't only the heroes of Rider Haggard who dispensed with female ties. Those real-life imperial soldiers, Gordon, Kitchener and Baden-Powell, were committed bachelors (as, in the civilian field, were Rhodes and Milner). For many who left Britain in these years, a spell in the colonies promised a homosocial paradise, governed by clear-cut masculine values. For those who were bored by feminine domesticity, or frightened of being drawn into marriage, the wide open spaces of prairie and bush and the rough democracy of the frontier stood for a world which was not subject to constant negotiation with the opposite sex.

The implications of my argument on the New Imperialism are best conveyed by an occupational case-study. Office work was a traditional route into the middle class for the upwardly mobile working-class man.. But in the late nineteenth century large corporations and some sections of the Civil Service began to recruit female typists and telegraphists as a cheaper and more 'docile' workforce. By 1901 women comprised 11% of clerks, and in some cities like Birmingham the proportion was as high as 20% by 1891. Male clerks opposed this trend not only because they feared redundancy or wage reduction, but because the gender status of their occupation was at stake. Office work had long had overtones of effeminacy: 'born a man, died a clerk' went the old saying. The point seemed proven by the entry of women into office work. Gregory Anderson's work on Manchester provides suggestive evidence of how male clerks reacted to this feared slur on their manhood. One correspondent in the *Manchester Guardian* in 1886 complained of the spectre of a world turned upside down: of girls 'unsexing themselves by taking men's place at the desk', of men driven to 'seek employment in drapers' and milliners' shops and restaurants'.⁶⁹ One solution was to emigrate. The YMCA administered a scheme in which they provided unemployed clerks with letters of introduction to farmers in Manitoba. The fact that 13,000 clerks applied from Manchester alone certainly testifies to the impact of clerical unemployment; but given the complete lack of agricultural experience that these men must have had, it also suggests a determination to embrace an unequivocally 'masculine' life.⁷⁰ Male clerks were also prominent in public manifestations of jingoism. It used to be thought that the crowds who celebrated the relief of Mafeking on the streets in 1900 were working-class. More recent research

⁶⁸ F. Musgrove, *The Migratory Elite* (1963), pp. 19-21.

⁶⁹ Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (1976), pp. 56-60.

⁷⁰ G.L. Anderson, 'The social economy of late Victorian clerks', in Geoffrey Crossick (ed), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain* (1977), p. 122.

has shown that the predominant element was lower middle-class men, with clerks well to the fore. This same group was strongly represented in the City Imperial Volunteers and the Imperial Yeomanry who fought in the Anglo-Boer War.⁷¹ The clerk who cheered on the Army, or better still enlisted, was less vulnerable to the charge of having soft and useless hands. Noisy enthusiasm for the empire allowed him to rise above the demeaning feminine associations of his occupation. Masculine insecurity was linked to compensatory imperialism, both among those who devoted a career or a life to the empire, and among those who cheered from the sidelines at home.

IV

Lord Curzon on leaving India in 1905 declared that one of the saving justifications of British rule was the ‘sense of manliness’ it left behind.⁷² One is tempted to retort that there was more than enough to spare. During the nineteenth century Englishmen went overseas in their hundreds of thousands to apply their masculine energies at full bent, to confirm their claim to full manliness, to attain ‘a fresh access of dignity’, to follow the more straightforward benchmarks of manly conduct from the past, and to experience the undiluted masculinity of homosocial living. They took with them images of empire imbued with masculinity, and if they returned home, came back with further reinforcement for those images in English culture. As Joanna de Groot has put it, ‘Manliness and empire confirmed one another, guaranteed one another, enhanced one another, whether in the practical disciplines of commerce and government or in the escape zones of writing, travel and art’.⁷³ It is high time that historians explored the implications of this convergence, deepening the analysis offered here, and exploring dimensions which I have not touched on at all.

⁷¹ Richard N. Price, ‘Society, status and jingoism: the social roots of lower middle-class patriotism, 1870-1900, in Crossick, Lower Middle Class in Britain, pp. 89-112.

⁷² Lord Curzon, speech at Bombay, 16 Nov. 1905, quoted in G. Bennett (ed), The Concept of Empire from Burke to Attlee (1953), p. 351.

⁷³ Joanna de Groot, ‘“Sex” and “race”: the construction of language and image in the nineteenth century’, in Susan Mendus & Jane Rendall (eds), Sexuality and Subordination (1989), p. 122.