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Editorial, Introduction

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Editorial

I thank the contributors for the keen insights their papers have lent to my own understanding of masculinities and imperialisms, and for their generous co-operation and patience during an expedited editing process. Imperialism and Gender: Constructions of Masculinity in Twentieth Century Narrative, the conference from which this book developed, owed much of its success to the co-operation and support of the University of Birmingham’s Faculty of Arts Gender Seminar Group, especially the encouragement and work of Margaret Callander and Marianna Spanaki. To all conference participants, my thanks for creating two days of rigorous engagement with concepts of gender and imperialism.

For granting me permission to use her painting on the cover, and for her support and interest in this project, my thanks to Julie Burnett.

I am indebted to Jan Penrose who first encouraged me to think critically about formations of masculinity while I was studying at the University of Edinburgh. My appreciation also goes out to Anna Rutherford whose interest in and enthusiasm for this project was instrumental in bringing it to publication. I am grateful to Glenda Pattenden for her unwavering commitment to the book in her many roles. Thanks also to Susan Burns for her work with permissions, publicity and administration. Faye Hammill’s able assistance with some of the proof-reading is much appreciated. I am grateful to Stephanie Bird, Nicholas Cull, Matthew Fox, Brian Harding, and Barbara Rasmussen for their support, and useful suggestions during the May 1995 conference and throughout the editing process.

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Introduction

So there I was, suspended in mid-story, in 1951, and there I remain, sometime, waiting for the end, or finishing it off myself, in a booklined [sic] London study over a stiff brandy, a yarn spun to a few choice gentlemen under the stuffed water buffalo head, a cheerful fire in the grate, or somewhere on the veldt, a bullet in the heart, who can tell where such greedy impulses will lead?

Margaret Atwood, 'The Boys' Own Annual, 1911'

Imperialism and Gender

This collection of essays developed out of a conference on imperialism and gender held in May 1995 at the University of Birmingham. Historically, Birmingham served as one of the armouries of the British empire; it was the site of a lucrative munitions industry, producing the canons, rifles, and pistols that helped to arm the men who, by 1897 had imposed British rule on approximately 387,400,000 people. It is not the purpose of this introduction to summarize each paper, but instead to locate individual papers in relation to an overview of the concepts of empire, gender and race raised by the book.

Michael W. Doyle defines the process of empire-building as

The relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, political or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire.

The contributors to this volume consider the roles British and French imperialisms, and American neo-imperialism have played in constructing masculinities. However, Imperialism and Gender: Constructions of Masculinity also includes, by way of an historical antecedent for the imbrication of empire and masculinity, Matthew Fox's essay on Hercules and representations of masculinity in the ancient world. Atlas, Hercules and Apollo, idealized images of masculinity found in classical literature and art, provided the paradigmatic texts that shaped western European concepts of masculinity and empire in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And Fox's paper examines some original
accounts which highlight ambiguities in gender construction even at this early stage.

The writers collected here investigate how the conquest of territory and the imposition of the imperial power's economic, political and cultural systems onto the colony have shaped gender identities. In many narratives of imperialism women remain at home in the centre of empire waiting for, and subordinate to the soldier hero who ventures forth for the benefit and protection of both the metropole and the passive woman. Women, however, were involved in the British colonizing process; as wives of missionaries and military officers, as teachers, nurses, shop assistants, farmers, or travel writers, they helped to translate the alien landscapes of North America, Africa, the Caribbean, India, and Australasia into the British familiar. Considering white women's subordination to white men and the 'borrowed' power imperial women had over colonized men and women, Anne McClintock has argued that white women were 'ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting'.

Moreover, the sign systems of empire are replete with the bodies of women who have been imported into the visual iconography of patriarchal political systems to personify the imperial state; for example, Marianne in France, and Britannia in the United Kingdom. Britannia was modelled on Athena the Goddess of War, but Britannia herself was originally conceived of as a subordinate, half-naked woman at the feet of the conquering Roman Emperor Claudius. The British empire allegorized its hegemonic relationship to its colonies in a mother-daughter image, a representation more palatable to nineteenth-century Victorians than the lascivious emblem of Roman imperialism, although perhaps not as honest. Mother or Britannia had hermaphrodite powers and could transform herself/itself into a penetrating phallic entity. This phallic potential was manifest in male colonists who were invited to inscribe their British authority on feminized overseas territories.

Julie Burnett's cover painting, Pieta, plays with this image of Britannia as a phallic mother. Burnett's Britannia conceives, births and nurtures the male war machine, infantilized here as a ridiculous child at play with a toy globe and an impotent phallic sabre. Barbara Rasmussen's essay avers that Virginia Woolf also responds with reductive parody to the ludicrous figure of the imperial soldier hero in Three Guineas and To the Lighthouse.

Gender identity is formed by many factors. In the epigraph to this introduction Margaret Atwood genders imperialism as male. 'Boys' Own Annual, 1911' interrupts the masculinized narrative of imperialism to ask questions about the production of a destructive and debilitating martial masculinity that is suspended in time: 'the issue with the last instalment had never come' (p.11). The legacy of imperial masculinity
lives on for both men and women. Atwood’s response to the colonizing
British text *Boys’ Own Annual* – a collection of narratives representing
aggressive and frequently racist British boys plundering the
‘playgrounds’ of Africa and India – constitutes a postcolonial counter-
discourse or decolonizing narrative.

Before venturing any further with a reading of Atwood, a few words
on concepts of the postcolonial. Simplifying to the extreme, post-
colonialism describes a critical practice dedicated to addressing the
types of cultural marginalization propagated by imperialism.
Problematically, the term is ascribed to both invader-settler cultures
such as Canada and Australia, and former European colonies in Asia,
Africa and the Caribbean. As one of the principles of postcolonial
critique is the articulation of difference in resistance to imperial
assimilation, the ascription of the term to a culture must be continually
recontextualized and reconceptualized so as to avoid the potential for
homogenizing the colonial experiences of diverse groups. Arun P.
Mukherjee reminds postcolonial critics who ‘erase differences’ that ‘we
have not all been colonized in the same way. “Race” has made a
tremendous difference in how the empire treated us’.10

The *Boys’ Own Annual* serials disciplined an exclusive gender
identity for white-settler Canadian boys, inculcating English values that
equated masculinity and honour with military service and the sacrifice
of life for the empire.11 In Atwood’s re-writing of imperial discourse, a
Canadian female voice, a voice on the periphery of empire and power,
assumes narrative control over the male space of the *Boys’ Own
Annual* from the centre of the British empire, refiguring narratives of
imperialism as destructive and ‘greedy impulses’ that could place a
bullet in the heart of their reader. The prose piece ends with the
appearance of just such a damaged reader, the narrator’s half uncle
‘gassed in the first war and never right since’. We learn that ‘the books
had once been his’ (p. 11). Here is a ramification for consuming *Boys’
Own Annuals* and companion texts like *Chums*, and here also is the
ending that Atwood writes for imperial power struggles. ‘Boys’ Own
Annual, 1911’ and the essays in this book deconstruct imperial systems,
and the nexus between imperialism and masculinity, arguing that
masculinity is socially engineered, and that imperialism is an agent of
this process. Atwood’s prose piece would suggest that the reading
materials of young boys and girls help to determine gender identities.
John Martin’s paper develops this theme, examining the prescriptive
role ‘Boys’ Own’ Annuals played in forming Australian masculinities,
while Peter Hunt’s essay considers the textualization of empire and
masculinity in a range of English children’s literature. Susan Bassnett
also interrogates the stultifying influence of British imperialism’s heroic
male narratives for both men and women at home in the metropole.

Despite the efforts of Atwood and others, imperial formations of
masculinity persist in the late twentieth-century. Individual societies continue to require the manufacture of soldier heroes to secure the interests of the state in conflicts such as the Falklands and the Gulf Wars. Investigations into historical formations of masculinity and imperialism can provide insights into contemporary constructions of masculinity. Ken Lukowiak, a veteran paratrooper of the Falklands conflict (an operation arguably designed to resurrect Britain’s imperial past), describes the process of making martial masculinity in a newspaper article entitled ‘Break ‘em, make ‘em’.\(^9\) As the title implies, Lukowiak delineates a systematic breaking down of civilian gender identity through humiliation, and physical exertion at the hands of the British military’s paratrooper training personnel, ‘then once you are broken they build you up the way they want you’ (pp. 2.2-2.3). Lukowiak joined the Parachute Regiment ‘because [he] wanted to be a man’ (p. 2.2), and to accomplish masculinity he believed he had to learn aggression (p. 2.3). Paratrooper masculinity is constructed as a definitive and hierarchical gender identity, one that feminizes what it reads as inferior formations of masculinity. Lukowiak describes a group of soldiers not in the paras as ‘a gaggle of crap hats. Chewing their little-girl sandwiches and sipping poopy Ribenas’ (p. 2.2). Here, paratrooper culture abrogates the homosexual subject’s male gender identity, and inferiorizes the feminine. The work of Graham Dawson\(^{14}\) and R.W. Connell\(^{15}\) argues convincingly that the military has been of fundamental importance to the definition of the soldier hero as a hegemonic and idealized form of masculinity in European and North American cultures.

**Social Construction Theory and Gender**

The discussions of gender formation articulated above, and the essays which follow this introduction, assume that gender is a social construction. Masculinity and femininity are not categories that exist organically, but are produced socially. Social structures like the family, and institutions such as the church and the military instil myths of gender which punish peripheral gender identities, and reward dominant ones.\(^{16}\) Our understanding of ourselves and our world is shaped by the society in which we live.\(^{17}\) Peter Jackson’s and Jan Penrose’s encapsulation of social construction theory provides a useful lens through which we can read the category of gender:

social construction theory argues that many of the categories that we have come to consider ‘natural’, and hence immutable, can be more accurately (and more usefully) viewed as the product of processes which are embedded in human actions and choices.\(^{18}\)

One other category inextricably linked, and sometimes mistakenly
confused with gender is sex. Sex – male or female – has been read as a biological and therefore ‘natural’ category determined by anatomy, hormones, and physiology. However, the research of endocrinologists, biologists and social scientists suggests that the chromosomal, gonadal and hormonal elements determining sex roles ‘work in the presence and under the influence of a set of environments’; they are tempered by the process of socialization. Socialization encompasses psychosexual development, the learning of social roles and the shaping of sexual preferences, processes constructing gender identity (Lorber and Farrell p.7).

Sexual preference and choice of sexual object are closely related to gender identity. As Lorber and Farrell write ‘Boys who consider themselves male and girls who consider themselves female are supposed to be sexually attracted to each other’ (p.7). Same sex attraction is interrupted and disciplined by what Adrienne Rich calls ‘compulsory heterosexuality’. Connell defines the ruling or socially dominant heterosexual masculine as

the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell p. 77)

This totalizing masculinity oppresses women and other formations of masculinity: heterosexual ‘nerds’ or ‘wimps’ (p. 79) and all formations of gay masculinity:

Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal pleasure. Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. (Connell p. 78)

We can see this hegemonic masculinity at work in Ken Lukowiak’s narrative of paratrooper masculinity, and in many of the texts investigated in the essays that follow, where behaviour that does not fit a ruling group’s concept of masculinity is derided as feminine or homosexual. Susan Hayward’s essay analyzes how French imperialism reads race and gender to construct a subordinate and feminized subjectivity for the African houseboy Protée in the film Chocolat. British imperialism also responded to racial difference in this way, subordinating African and Bengali men as feminine.

**Building Empire: Constructing Race**

Western European imperial projects were predicated on the dominant
white patriarchal construction of difference to itself as inferiority. This type of alterity or othering is sexual, gendered, racial and cultural. The European colonizer can, as Brian Harding’s essay illustrates in the case of George Catlin, project a romanticized image of the male colonial subject as ‘noble savage’ onto the colonized, thereby identifying with this idealized indigene built from white materials. Frantz Fanon argued that the white male colonizer’s relationship to the black colonized male subject, or extrapolating for our purposes here, the indigene, is always other – black, red, yellow – ‘in relation to the white man’. Diana Fuss’s gloss on Fanon elucidates the colonizer’s subjugating construction of racial otherness:

The colonized are constrained to impersonate the image the colonizer offers them of themselves; they are commanded to imitate the colonizer’s version of their essential difference.

This problematic paradigm is traced here in Susan Hayward’s essay on Chocolat, Nicholas Cull’s analysis of Gunga Din, Graham Dawson’s reading of Lawrence of Arabia, and Joseph Bristow’s exploration of the relationship between E.M. Forster’s autobiographical representation of his Egyptian lover, and the mixed race union in the author’s late short story ‘The Other Boat’. Gargi Bhattacharya’s polemical essay ironizes and deflates the power of the white heterosexual masculine in the late twentieth century by revealing its decaying and impotent image as constructed in the eye of its other: the ‘Mahogany Princess’.

Europeans could rationalize their invasion and conquest of Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Caribbean as missions civilisatrices designed to bring the ‘light’ of Christianity to ‘benighted’ peoples by replacing their cultural systems with European ones, to erase difference, and create ‘Empires of the self-same’. Of course, no matter what the success of cultural assimilation, the colonized would always be marked by race, a distinction that, within the imperial cosmology, perpetuated the perceived need for ‘white fathers’ to administer the lands and resources of ‘dark children’.

**Imperialism’s White Homosocial Landscape**

The martial and hierarchical terrain of imperialism is marked by white homosocial codes. In the case of the British army and empire, a racially homogeneous community (albeit one stratified by class and marked by region) of men in partial isolation from white women form strong homosocial bonds. Paradoxically, the potential for homosexual tension threatens the very ideal of ruling heterosexual masculinity that facilitates the formation of those bonds. These tensions are investigated here in my essay on Timothy Findley’s The Wars, and in contributions from Joseph Bristow, Christopher Lane, Andrew Michael Roberts, and
Alan Williams. In turn homosocial relations, as Bristow, Cull, Lane and Roberts observe, are frequently represented as threatened by the presence of women.

Diana Brydon's essay delineates a correlation between the imperial narrative of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the malignant homosocial world of Timothy Findley's Club of Men in *Headhunter*. The legacy of nineteenth-century Canadian colonial masculinity, Brydon argues is visited upon late twentieth-century Toronto in the form of a corporate masculinity.

Contributions from Peter West and Brian Matthews supplement the fictional and legendary representations of imperialism and masculinity hitherto discussed. West provides a history of male socialization in one colonial Australian town, while Matthews' autobiographical essay moves away from the theoretical to reflect on the lived experience of becoming a 'bloke' in the Australia of the last half-century.

This book contributes to understandings of the relationships between masculinity and imperialism, and the ramifications of these relationships for men and women. Formations of masculinity in the metropole are considered in relation to how these formations translate to the empire and onto the colonized. The anthology traces imperial and colonial formations of masculinity in the ancient world, twentieth-century Africa, Australia, Canada, England and India, as well as nineteenth-century America and England.

NOTES

1. Margaret Atwood, 'The Boys' Own Annual, 1911', *Murder in the Dark* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1983), p. 11. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.


7. For a discussion of imperialism and the gendering of colonized territory as female see McClintock, pp. 24-30, p. 354.


9. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*:...


12. See Dawson, pp.2-5.

13. *The Guardian*, 7 June 1995, pp. 2.2-2.3. All further references are to this issue and are included in the text.


26. See Christopher Lane's consideration of Britain's 'Empire of the Selvesame' in 'Passion's "Cumulative Poison": Colonial Desire and Friendship in Kipling's Early Fiction' in this collection.