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ABSTRACT

Recent studies of late 19th-century imperialism have challenged postcolonial arguments for the existence of a uniform imperial culture in colonial Britain that unquestioningly supported its overseas expansionist agenda. Through a cultural materialist reading of Thomas Hardy's *Two on a Tower* (1882), this article extends these critical challenges to claims for a cohesive colonial society by exploring moments of textual and biographical dissent in relation to African adventure and travel writing. It demonstrates the way in which colonial pursuits in the African interior control and devastate metropolitan worlds. It additionally considers a range of oppositional responses that unite the novel's metropolitan heroine and labourers against the African colonizer. Examples in Hardy's tale of radical scepticism in relation to debasing representations of autochthonous cultures are likewise evaluated in this article for the riposte they offer to 19th-century travel writing about Africa.

Feminist and postcolonial critics have focused their critical attention on endorsements of male heroism and colonial interests within late Victorian depictions of African adventure (Straus 1987; Showalter 1992; McClintock 1995; Stiebel 2001; Mallett 2015). Anne McClintock's reading of Rider Haggard's African romances considers how African adventure also extends out of upper-class interests, specifically a desire on the part of Britain's "withering [...] ancient squirearchy" to recover wealth and thereby patriarchal and national power (1995, 234). Her critique of imperialism concludes that metropolitan differences were brought into alignment with these upper-class colonial aspirations (232–257, 352–389), thus reinforcing perspectives within postcolonial criticism that have argued for the existence of a unified imperial Britain in the late 19th century (Said 1994, 99–100; Gikandi 1996, 29; Parry 2004, 113).

A growing body of work in postcolonial studies and in other critical studies of empire has interrogated notions of imperial unity, thereby problematizing Edward Said's conceptualized "consolidated vision" of empire within the British colonial heartland (1994, 73–229). The arc of 21st-century enquiry into divided British responses to its empire spans three key areas. It covers questions surrounding the degree of metropolitan knowledge of, involvement with, or even profiting from the empire (Porter 2004; Thompson 2005; Abu-Manneh 2019). Another prominent area of research examines chronicles of

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immigration/emigration and other Victorian crossings in order to identify cultures of hospitality or transformation through domestic encounters with colonized "others" (Gandhi 2006; Tabili 2011; Thrush 2016), or otherwise to engage with cultivated ambivalences towards the very idea of Englishness and its imperial portability (Godeanu-Kenworthy 2015; Wagner 2016). A third critical dimension covered within this arc, in this case mostly historical and political in strain, boldly salvages examples of radical scepticism, dissent and even anti-colonial resistance within the imperial centre itself (Claeys 2010; Gopal 2019).

The location of gender and class politics within this rich ferment of late-19th-century British dissent – whether in the form of radical scepticism in the virtues of empire, subversions of Englishness or open opposition to the colonial project – remains a recognizable strength of historical and political enquiry. Thomas Hardy's fiction, known for its domestic plots but rather less for its engagement also with global developments at the peak of imperial expansion, offers fertile ground for exploring female and working-class critiques of imperialism.

The following study of Hardy's ([1882] 1999) novel *Two on a Tower* considers social divisions that imperialism creates between colonizers and their dependents within the British colonial centre. In Hardy's novel, this can be seen in the restrictive impacts of African adventure on the female protagonist, Viviette Constantine, namely upon her freedom to move and to forge a cross-class alliance with the lower-class Swithin St Cleeve. The labourers on the estate, meanwhile, protest the effects of these constraints upon the female protagonist and express deeply unsympathetic views of the stock upper-class male heroism of African travel. These disavowals are likewise recorded in the tale's rejection of the kinds of negative depiction of African cultures that circulated in late-19th-century Britain and which can be traced to well-heeled male travel.

To explore expressions of dissent in Hardy's novel, I compare its conceptualizations of African adventure and representations of race with those present in "Africanist" writings of the late Victorian era, including Rider Haggard's ([1885] 1994, [1887] 1925, [1887] 1991) African romances, Conrad's ([1902] 1992) novella *Heart of Darkness* and William Garden Blaikie's (1880) *The Personal Life of David Livingstone*. By investigating examples of metropolitan dissent within Hardy's fiction, this article seeks to enrich not only postcolonial but also Hardy studies, where insights into Hardy's objections to British imperialism have so far been explored via appraisals of his war poetry and letters (Whitehead 2004; Bownas 2012, 9–20; Richardson 2016).

African adventure, big-game hunting and the sciences of exploration

Since *Two on a Tower* is among the more neglected works of Hardy's oeuvre, I offer a brief plot summary, including information that is relevant to the argument. The narrative revolves around the absence of the country squire Sir Blount Constantine, who pursues his passion for animal blood sports in Africa. He leaves behind his wife Viviette and his estate Welland and charges Viviette "to avoid levity of conduct in attending any ball, rout, or dinner to which I [Viviette] might be invited" (23). As there are no communications from Africa for some years, Lady Viviette forms a friendship and in due course a romantic attachment with the much younger and lowly Swithin St Cleeve. Sir Blount is eventually reported to have died in Africa, leaving

his wife and estate in terrible financial straits. Viviette secretly marries Swithin, only to have the union nullified with news from Africa that Sir Blount had not died on the date first announced but some months later, that is, *after* Viviette and Swithin's marriage. Viviette learns that her late husband had not died of malaria as first reported but by shooting himself after joining an African tribe and marrying a native princess.

A bequest made by Swithin's paternal great-uncle is discovered, in which Swithin is urged to postpone marriage until the age of 25 in order to pursue his ambitions in astronomy by travelling to study the southern constellations. With added pressure from Viviette's brother Louis to accept this bequest, Swithin succumbs and departs from England. Without a contact address for Swithin, Viviette is unable to summon him back when she discovers she is bearing his child. She quickly marries an unwanted suitor, Bishop Helmsdale, to avoid scandal. Years later, having more than fulfilled the terms of his bequest, Swithin returns to English soil to find Viviette widowed a second time. Out of a sense of moral obligation, he declares to Viviette his preparedness to marry, only to have her die of shock in his arms.

The troubles that afflict Viviette, literally to death, originate with her husband Sir Blount's imperial misdemeanours and continue to mount as other male oppressors exploit her misery (Grundy 1989, 56; Fjågesund 1998, 91; Thomas 1999, 113–130). These oppressors include both Louis and Swithin's great-uncle, who are themselves complicit with imperial activities. However, this article dwells principally on the linkages between imperial participation and metropolitan tragedy as they pertain to Sir Blount. His movements in Africa are here the objects of analysis because they control plot development throughout the novel. In this respect, Sir Blount's power to direct metropolitan activities from his remote place in Africa contrasts with the role in Austen's *Mansfield Park* of Sir Thomas, who, according to Moretti (1998), is sent away from his estate to Antigua because "Austen needs him out of the way. Too strong a figure of authority, he intimidates the rest of the cast, stifling narrative energy, and leaving Austen without a story to tell" (26). In *Two on a Tower*, Sir Blount's departure does not free up the plot from his stifling presence. In placing ever-greater constraints on the social and economic life of Welland, his absence powerfully directs plot development.

The kinds of pressure Sir Blount's absence exerts on the plot (to be enumerated more fully in the next section) are twinned to the kinds of attractions that the African interior held for well-heeled upper-class males. Feminist literary critics have charted gender fault lines existing in 19th-century "Africanist" writings that generally lead to the exclusion of women from imperial participation or critique (Straus 1987, 128–130; Showalter 1992, 96; Mallett 2015, 156). Historical interventions also supply evidence to show that the different social classes in Britain had unequal access to African adventure. Cain and Hopkins (2001) confirm that English travellers and explorers to the African interior were primarily members of the established gentry and of the professional classes in the south (308). The costs of exploration, including native guides and attendants, food, stock, medicine and supplies, and, no less importantly, goods with which to engage in local trade, all required substantial investment (Kennedy 2013, 2, 112, 164, 237).

Private parties and the British government had vested commercial interests in sponsoring African exploration. The intensely practical discipline of geography, notes Andrew Thompson (2005), "provided the information that helped officials to demarcate spheres of influence, to negotiate with rivals over territorial acquisition and to identify a colony's

resources and how best to exploit them" (24). The Royal Geographical Society had few doubts about the importance of geographical knowledge to an expanding imperial state and sought to popularize exploration in the second half of the 19th century by securing official funding (24). In this sense, "it was the people involved in establishing the disciplines of geography, geology, botany and anthropology [...] who provided the real impetus for overseas expansion" (24). African exploration, then, fostered close connections between Britain's social elite and official bodies with a view to abetting profit-driven ambitions. As James Epstein (2006) maintains, the heart of imperial economic activity in the late Victorian era consisted of an alliance between London and a commercially driven oligarchy of landowners in the south of England (254).

The types of imperial activities that Sir Blount embarks on are highly representative of the historical aspirations of the upper classes in Africa, ones that became crucial to colonial expansion in the late 19th century. The links are clarified in Viviette's summary of her husband's motives for travel: "a mania for African lion-hunting, which he dignified by calling it a scheme of geographical discovery; for he was inordinately anxious to make a name for himself in that field" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 23). Thus, Sir Blount in many regards meets his match in other big-game hunters in Africa, including Kurtz, who is obsessed with ivory in *Heart of Darkness*, and Allan Quatermain, "born a gentleman", who boasts in Rider Haggard's tales of his extensive hunting experience. Their ambitions, in turn, reflect the activities of famous Victorian hunters in Africa, including Samuel Baker (1890), who published an account of his adventures in *Wild Beasts and Their Ways*, and Frederick C. Selous (1881), who published his accounts in *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa*. This kind of colonial celebrity does not seem to have met with Hardy's approval since he made note following a meeting with Selous in 1894 that he was not "in sympathy" with a man who "could live for killing" (Hardy [1984] 1985, 279).

Tyranny by distance and metropolitan dissent

Sir Blount's upper-class pursuits in Africa, including a taste for animal blood sports, mirror the tyranny he inflicts upon subjects at Welland. His violent disposition towards his wife prior to his departure can be inferred from a passage in which one of the labourers recalls an incident in which he had seen "Sir Blount a-shutting my lady [Viviette] out-o'-doors" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 136). Viviette herself notes that her husband was "a mistaken – somewhat jealous man" (22); her physical responses to possible sightings of him confirm a history of abuse. As Swithin reflects, "Nothing told so significantly of the conduct of her first husband [Sir Blount] towards the poor lady as the abiding dread of him which was revealed in her by any sudden revival of his image or memory" (138). Sir Blount's brutality towards his wife and the animals he hunts reinforces Nandy's opinion that imperialism gains traction from "a world view which believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman and the subhuman, the masculine over the feminine" (1983, x). Hardy's picture of global expansion offers a realistic image, to return to Nandy's point, of imperialism's true mode of operation, as colonial and domestic environments become satellite extensions of the colonizer's aggression.

The key to the survival of Sir Blount's reign of tyranny over the metropole from his location in Africa rests on his demand for loyalty from his wife before he leaves. A life cut

off from company and society not only guarantees subservience to the colonial aggressor, but also delivers the kind of economic austerity at home that will help finance the colonizer's reckless pursuits abroad. As a result of Sir Blount's bidding, Viviette lives "like a cloistered nun" and "go[es] into no society whatever", declaring "my life has become a burden" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 23). The many years of withheld communication on Sir Blount's part and ensuing rumours about his activities, including a sighting of him in London and conflicting accounts of his death, lead to a recurrence of Viviette's fear of his sudden return and of his finding her in breach of her loyalty vow. The local labourers observe how "my lady is a walking weariness", remarking that Sir Blount's prolonged failure to communicate has left her "neither maid, wife, nor widow" (17). The sympathy with which working-class members of the local community regard Viviette's travails under the yoke of misogyny and colonial greed is sustained across the tale.

Despite the cloistering effects of Sir Blount's tyranny from afar, Viviette courageously articulates her disdain for her husband's many flaws. Her critiques of his jealousy, travel charades and "mania" for blood sports set her apart, for example, from Kurtz's Intended in *Heart of Darkness*, whose deferential summary of Kurtz as having a "noble heart" (Straus 1987, 129) fails to subject to scrutiny Marlow's "protective lie" that conceals from her the crimes of the African colonizer. Other forms of female assertiveness are exemplified in moves to oppose and even subvert Sir Blount's style of lordship over land and subjects. These acts register more subliminally in the conquest of masculine spaces, including Rings-Hill Speer, in the early chapters of the book. Rings-Hill Speer, where stargazing and romance with Swithin eventually take place, is described in phallic terms (Fjågesund 1998, 90), as "a tower in the form of a classical column, which, though partly immersed in the plantation, rose above the tree-tops to a considerable height" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 3). Curiosity and "self-assertiveness" (6) spur Viviette to infiltrate the tower and thereafter assist Swithin with his astronomical activities.

Her takeover of Rings-Hill Speer during Sir Blount's absence makes for an illuminating and productive contrast with the African romances of Rider Haggard, in which male travel is often described as the conquest of feminine spaces (Etherington 1991, xxxiv; Showalter 1992, 86–87; McClintock 1995, 1–4). In *King Solomon's Mines*, for example, Allan Quatermain and his party must travel between two mountains known as "Sheba's Breasts" on the way to a treasure cave in a hidden valley. Disparity emerges therefore between male invasion of feminized African geography in Haggard's African romances and feminine expropriation of masculine spaces during male truancy from the metropole in Hardy's novel.

More explicit examples of opposition to her husband's possessiveness and jealousy in *Two on a Tower* are recorded when Viviette decides to invest in an equatorial telescope, the price of two grand pianos (Hardy [1882] 1999, 44), and to initiate sizeable alterations to the column itself in order to facilitate the astronomy pursuits of the impecunious Swithin. The permanence of these significant alterations contravenes Sir Blount's more "severe" method of granting short leases: "a distinctive arrangement [...] as between landlord and tenant, with a stringent clause against driving nails into the stonework" (52). Viviette's bold magnanimity continues in the arrangements she makes for Swithin to pay with her own cash for the equipment and later to own in perpetuity the "equatorial, dome, stand, hut, and everything that has been put here for this astronomical purpose" (56). These alterations and provisions not only defy Sir Blount's heavy-handed

running of his estate, but also transgress the terms of Viviette's seclusion, as spaces of social mixing are enlarged to include Swithin and local labourers, who are invited to the column to "look at the comet through the glass" (77).

Despite moments of female defiance, the fear of the absent squire looms heavily over moments of insubordination. Remarks about the risks entailed in Viviette's support for the changes to the column – principally of provoking the ire of the absent landlord – lead to "a sudden displacement of blood from [Viviette's] cheek" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 45). The changes also invite comments about her alliance with Swithin, in response to which she steps up intermittent efforts to avoid his company. In due course, she withdraws from him altogether: "She [...] did her utmost to eradicate those impulses towards St Cleeve which were inconsistent with her position as the wife of an absent man, though not unnatural in her as *his victim*" (70; my emphasis). The allusion to Viviette as Sir Blount's victim emphasizes that the squire's imperial absence has only increased Viviette's cruel treatment at his hands.

Sir Blount's whereabouts continue to remain unknown until a report of his death is received. Mr Torkingham, the parish parson, has been entrusted with the task of preparing Viviette for the news. As he stalls for time, Viviette insists on knowing the full truth instantly: "No, tell me here", and "I am quite ready" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 72). Her agency and determination stand apart from the situation of Kurtz's Intended in *Heart of Darkness*, who, as Straus asserts, becomes the target of a "protective lie" through Marlow's sacrifice of truth. Unlike Conrad's Intended, Lady Viviette is far from being cast in the role of the "white lady in the tower" (Straus 1987, 129). Her demands for the truth attest to the empowerment of the female voice in Hardy's tale.

Viviette learns that she has been a widow for 18 months and that Sir Blount had died of malaria on the banks of the Zouga. The misery she has already experienced under the loyalty vow is doubled with news of financial ruin on account of the squire's imperial profligacy. The "seriously involved condition" of Sir Blount's affairs are such that pecuniary difficulties assail Welland: "The horses were sold one by one; the carriages also; the greater part of the house was shut up, and she [Viviette] resided in the smallest rooms" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 73). Once again, the locals register their objections to Sir Blount's misconduct and offer sympathy to Lady Viviette: "His [Sir Blount's] goings-on made her miserable till 'a died", observes Hezzy Biles to his companions (79); and "my lady seems not to mind being a pore woman half so much as we do at seeing her so", exclaims Sammy Blore to Swithin on behalf of his fellow-labourers (74). The labourers' solidarity with Viviette and disapproval of Sir Blount's behaviour, here and throughout the tale, are distinctive of the way in which Hardy unites labour and gender concerns against a patriarchal elite. As in Viviette's case, the dissenting working-class voice is empowered in passages of direct speech. Strong dialect forms in the workers' communications heighten the immediacy and authenticity of the critique.

The workfolk additionally extend their solidarity for the victim of imperial tyranny by venturing their support for Viviette's union with the lowly Swithin: "I'd up and marry him, if I were she", opines Hezzy Biles, "since her downfall has brought 'em quite near together, and made him as good as she in rank" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 79). The labourers' endorsement of the cross-class marriage contrasts with upper-class justifications for keeping Swithin and Viviette apart, namely on the pretext that their alliance would create financial insecurities (105, 114). Indeed, Viviette's fear of upper-class reprisals results in a secret marriage and a pact with Swithin that the true nature of their union should not be divulged.

Sir Blount's legacies of oppression and austerity mean that free movement and freedom of association continue to be circumscribed even after his presumed death. Following her secret marriage to Swithin, Viviette's "immured existence" resumes; she does not have "a friend in the parish" and she and Swithin are "compelled to behave as strangers to each other" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 128). Welland House is in a complete state of disrepair by this point and no longer "thrown open to gaiety" (129). One of Sir Blount's distant relatives is to inherit Welland but, until such a time, one of the "capricious conditions" – the text is not explicit in relation to what arrangements – is that Viviette is "bound to occupy the house" (130). Viviette is thus essentially condemned to reside in a country house that can no longer offer security or a sense of belonging.

Her travails, then – ones which she puts down to "her situation as a woman" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 198) – cannot be read apart from her position as the excluded spouse of a squire whose title and means have facilitated adventure in Africa and simultaneously led to the destruction of domesticity. This example of domestic disarray and degradation might be counterposed to Said's reading of Sir Thomas's restoration of order and social harmony at Mansfield Park, a reading which, in Said's estimation, symbolizes the colonizer's making of a cohesive national imperial identity (1994, 108–109). Domestic upheaval in *Two on a Tower* also contests McClintock's view of colonial participation, based on her reading of Rider Haggard's African romances, as a drive for "patriarchal regeneration" or "imperial recuperation" extending to familial bonds within the metropole and "the national body politic" (1995, 241).

In Hardy's narrative, the divisions created between a colonizing elite and its domestic subjects within the imperial centre are especially stark in an instance of ghostly stalking. Invited to Welland House for the first time since his and Viviette's return from London, the married Swithin arrives only to have to flee the house undetected after Viviette's brother arrives unexpectedly. Unable to retrieve his own coat and hat from downstairs without exposing his and Viviette's secret, Swithin is forced to dress himself in Sir Blount's "old moth-eaten great-coat, heavily trimmed with fur" and "a companion cap of sealskin" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 133). His "shadowy fur-clad outline" frightens Viviette, who "raised her hands in horror, as if to protect herself from him [presumed to be Sir Blount] [...] uttered a shriek, and turned shudderingly to the wall, covering her face" (134). The same apparition startles the workmen wandering near Welland, who later remember his "high smell, a sort of gamey flavour [sic], calling to mind venison and hare, just as you'd expect of a great squire, – not like a poor man's 'natomy" (137). The workfolk record that the apparition "closed in upon us" and then "closed in upon us still more" (136), thus evoking images of a hunter closing in on his prey. This metaphor places the labourers, along with Viviette and other hunted animals, squarely within the colonizer's path of destruction. The labourers are convinced the "walking vapour" is Sir Blount returned from the dead to avenge himself after the workmen had agreed that, due to his mistreatment of Viviette, "it seemed a true return that he should perish in a foreign land" (136). It seems fitting that the furs of dead animals left behind at Welland, which are signatures of Sir Blount's wealth, status, cruelty and global sprawl, should be the sources of intimidation in these scenes.

The episode of ghostly stalking anticipates the freakish scene that is ultimately to precipitate the tragic outcome of the story with news received that the squire had not died at the date that was first announced. Viviette's chance to move outside Sir Blount's

yoke of remote tyranny is crushed as her secret marriage to Swithin is nullified, and as other minor upper-class players with links to the empire, including Swithin's great-uncle, Dr St Cleeve, and Viviette's brother Louis, step in to push for the ill-fated separation between the pair.

Sir Blount's imperial recklessness and subsequent impoverishment of Welland chimes in part with Thompson's view that the imperial aristocracy's excesses of travel and habits of lavish entertainment resulted in heavily encumbered family estates in England in the second half of the 19th century (2005, 14). As such, *Two on a Tower* provides a realistic picture of the way in which the colonial activities of the well-to-do have the capacity simultaneously to devastate colonial and domestic worlds: devastations which invariably give rise to cultures of protest and opposition in both contexts.

Hardy's African imaginary as a form of protest

To further emphasize the presence of a non-uniform imperial culture in the latter part of the 19th century, this section argues that metropolitan literary and biographical representations of African space and race were heterogeneous. Hardy, unlike Rider Haggard and Conrad, for example, had no contact with colonial "others" at this point in his career.[1] Also unlike his counterparts, he did not possess the kind of lineage or capital that could facilitate first-hand experiences of Africa (cf. McClintock 1995, 232–257; Batchelor 1994, 2, 23, 25, 28–29, 41, 42). Furthermore, Hardy did not yet have an established reputation as a writer to bring him within the social circles of an Africa-linked aristocracy.[2] This uneven access to Africa tallies with historical studies summarized in the opening section, positing that the links between the landed elite, African travel and commercial and colonial interests were especially strong.

Without direct modes of access to African geographies and cultures, Hardy turned, as most members of a reading public might have done, to a written account in which direct links are represented. Hardy read and clearly drew upon the travel accounts of the missionary Dr David Livingstone for his Africa plot (Hardy [1985] 1988, vol. 1, 144, 376; Blaikie 1880). Livingstone's experience of Africa, like those of Rider Haggard and Conrad, was made possible through affluent or well-connected sponsors (Blaikie 1880, 99, 101, 108–109). Editorial practices in the case of Livingstone's accounts meant that published versions of his travels strengthened a trend in late-19th-century writings about the empire, as Parry (2004) has argued more broadly, of communicating "the colonized's unwholesome nature and proclivities" (113).[3]

In this sense, Hardy's version of Africa is in a unique position to put to the test a number of claims about the way metropolitan society received these printed and visual representations of colonial cultures. Kennedy argues that African travel accounts "fed the public's hunger for heroes who could embody some of the country or colony's ideals and ambitions" (2013, 235–236). This public desire, in turn, required explorers to accentuate in their journals and memoirs "their drive, insight, and courage while minimizing their fears, doubts, and confusion" (236). In Ali Behdad's (2016) study of orientalist photography, British culture "voraciously consumed" images of the Orient, which were received as "factual and truthful" representations (2). For Parry, signs of empire within metropolitan spaces formed or confirmed "an elevated self-image in the reader/viewer" (2004, 113). Underpinning these studies about the circulation of imperial knowledge

within metropolitan culture is a tendency to read the process of reception and, indeed, impacts on perception as being rather unvaried or uncontested. The following comparative study disputes these claims insofar as it shows that Hardy was able to handle such materials circumspectly and even critically.

Two on a Tower replicates place names that appear in Blaikie's biography of Livingstone, appropriates some of Livingstone's encounters with other Englishmen, and borrows details from Livingstone's character for the profile of Sir Blount. The river Zouga in Bechuanaland (the Botletle or Boteti river, north of the Kalahari Desert in the Okavango Delta, modern Botswana), where Sir Blount is first rumoured to have died of malaria, was an important location in Livingstone's early journeys. Renowned for its wildlife and safari attractions, its "discovery" brought Livingstone recognition from the Royal Geographical Society (Blaikie 1880, 102). On the river Zouga, Dr Livingstone "found that fever had recently attacked a party of Englishmen, one of whom had died" (104). It is from this episode that Hardy likely drew inspiration for the rumoured death of Sir Blount from malaria on the Zouga. The African travels of Sir Blount and other members of his party are likewise heavily based on Livingstone's own movements across the continent (1853–56), which entailed travelling further north into the interior, then westward to Angola (the "Portuguese West Coast" in Hardy's tale) and subsequently crossing the continent to its east side.

The fellow-traveller's quest to find Sir Blount echoes Henry Morton Stanley's own search for Livingstone when the "missing" missionary went out of contact with Britain to "discover" the source of the Nile in the late 1860s. Stanley's quest to find him was launched in 1869 and met with success in late 1871, when Stanley "discovered" an ailing and poorly supplied Livingstone in Ujiji, Tanganyika (modern Tanzania). At Unyamwesi (also in Tanzania) they eventually parted company, and Livingstone then waited for a number of months to receive fresh supplies from the wealthy James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*, who had also funded Stanley's mission. In *Two on a Tower*, a telling metaphor, invoked in relation to Swithin's astronomical fascination with comets, refers to these key locations: "Compared with comets, variable stars, which had hitherto made his study, were, from their remoteness, uninteresting. They were to the former as the celebrities of Ujiji or Unyamwesi to the celebrities of his own country" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 67). The Livingstone context clarifies that the "celebrities of Ujiji and Unyamwesi" are white travellers and adventurers rather than celebrities of indigenous cultures.

These examples so far show relatively straightforward uses of Livingstone's various journey routes. However, a striking feature in Hardy's imaginary emerges in the glaring absence of exoticized landscapes, flora and fauna, despite frequent descriptions of this kind in published versions of Livingstone's notes. The Zouga river, for example, is noted in Blaikie's biography for the "abundance and luxuriance" of its "products", both animal and vegetable. In a letter to his friend Watt, Livingstone describes the Zouga as "a glorious river [...]. The banks are extremely beautiful, lined with gigantic trees, many quite new. One bore a fruit a foot in length and three inches in diameter. Another measured seventy feet in circumference" (quoted in Blaikie 1880, 102). Blaikie's account of Livingstone's first encounter with the Zouga tells of elephants existing in crowds "and ivory so abundant that a trader was purchasing it at the rate of ten tusks for a musket worth fifteen shillings" (101–102).

Not only does *Two on Tower* avoid the kind of exoticization of landscape witnessed in Blaikie's biography, it also contains no debasing images of African peoples and native rites. Blaikie's biography of Livingstone makes plenty of references to native aggression,

including slave trade, murder, treachery and alleged cannibalism. In Hardy's novel, by contrast, what is offered in the form of encounter with native populations is sympathetic to their ways. Sir Blount's marriage to a native princess takes place "according to the rites of the tribe" and the traveller hunter "was living very happily" with his new bride for a year or so (Hardy [1882] 1999, 195). Indeed, Sir Blount's new situation was one that "afforded him greater happiness than he could hope to attain elsewhere" (196). This validation of African culture tallies with Hardy's numerous acknowledgements in his letters, fiction and poetry of the positive transformative potential of other places and cultural practices, even as alternatives to western civilization and its oppressive norms (Bownas 2012, 19–30; Richardson 2016, 125–126). In this respect, Hardy's angle contrasts not only with Livingstone's, but also with Rider Haggard's approach to native encounters, in which treacherous (usually female) natives must be resisted and subdued (Showalter 1992, 86; Mallett 2015, 156).

Further examples in which colonial cultures, especially female subjects, are humanized in Hardy's tale are presented in the suicide scene. The native princess is quicker than Sir Blount's fellow-traveller to arrive at the scene of death, as she "rushe[s] frantically past [him]" when the shot is heard from Sir Blount's dwelling and is "broken-hearted all that day" on finding him dead (Hardy [1882] 1999, 196). In this portrayal, the native princess assertively faces the scene of death and pays her respects to the dead via a process of mourning. Here, some telling contrasts emerge also with the scene of Kurtz's demise in *Heart of Darkness*. Kurtz's native princess is banned from his deathbed because the men protecting Kurtz are prepared to shoot her:

> "If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would have tried to shoot her," said the man with the patches, nervously. "I had been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house." (Conrad [1902] 1992, 89)

Kurtz's native paramour is denied physical access to his expiring body even as his Intended is denied access to the truth about his dying moments. In Hardy's tale, however, the native princess's unhindered approach to Sir Blount's scene of death bears witness to a creative sensibility that is able to redress the injustices of racial and feminine exclusions. The distinct absence of tropes of primitivism and savagery in Hardy likewise contrasts with the description of Kurtz's native lover following his death as "draped in striped and fringed cloths [...] with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments [...] savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent" (Conrad [1902] 1992, 88–89). Given Hardy's version of Sir Blount's native princess, in which descriptions of this kind are totally absent, it seems that more work needs to be done to recover more sympathetic approaches to colonial cultures in the metropolitan fiction of the late 19th century.

The final and perhaps most clinching example of radical scepticism in relation to racial prejudices commonly found in "Africanist" writings is offered in the case of false rumours circulating about Sir Blount's death. Blaikie's biography provides a productive point of contrast. In 1867, rumours of Livingstone's death during his travels in Zanzibar had reached Britain. These rumours, originating with Livingstone's Johanna men, who had been hired as part of his native African retinue, were eventually proven to be incorrect. The biography recounts that Sir Roderick and his friends of the Royal Geographical Society organized a search expedition under the direction of Mr E.D. Young, "who had had dealings with Musa [one of the Johanna men], and knew him to

be a liar" (Blaikie 1880, 378–379). Livingstone was discovered within eight months of the expedition's launch. As a result of this episode, "African truthfulness" came to be widely questioned, and "distrust of indigenous authority" was "deep-set" by the time reports of Livingstone's death, eventually proven to be true, started to reach England in 1874 (Livingstone 2012, 18).

In *Two on a Tower*, however, there appears to be a conscious decision to avoid ascribing the rumours of Sir Blount's false death to black natives, instead assigning the burden of articulation to generic "servants". The humanistic quality of Hardy's African imaginary additionally emerges in the rejection of judgement of the servants' mistake: "the servants who had been with him deposed to his [Sir Blount's] death with a particularity that had been deemed sufficient [by the courts]" (Hardy [1882] 1999, 197). Indictments of "African truthfulness" are clearly forfeited, the effect of which is to destabilize the witness accounts of white, and invariably well-heeled, travellers to Africa rather than the witness accounts of natives.

The corruption in *Two on a Tower* of Livingstone's iconic qualities of virtue and resilience strengthens this argument for inversion. Swithin's astronomical preference for comets over stars, compared earlier with the appeal of "the celebrities of his own country" over "the celebrities of Ujiji or Unyamwesi", comprises a covert example of this undermining gesture, since it offers a dismissive view of white gallantry in Africa. Sir Blount's degenerate attributes likewise distort Livingstone's heroic qualities. H.M. Stanley's location of the "missing" Livingstone during the latter's Nile travels met with well-documented success but disappointingly (for Stanley) with Livingstone's firm resistance to returning to England. This protest, the effect of which is to lionize Livingstone's resilience in Blaikie's biography, is reconfigured in Sir Blount's own "rough" mannered refusal to return home following his bout of malaria on the Zouga (Hardy [1882] 1999, 195). Other distortions include the conversion into "truth" of the false rumour circulating in the metropole (and conveyed to Stanley before his mission) that Livingstone had married a native princess (Blaikie 1880, 422), the effect of which is to exchange the white traveller's virtue with degeneracy. The substitution of Livingstone's avowed teetotalism (124) with heavy drinking in Sir Blount's situation is another example of reversal. In sum, Sir Blount becomes the very antitype of the biographical subject that Blaikie sought to fashion in Livingstone: one who "ranks with the greatest of our race, and shows the minimum of infirmity in connection with the maximum of goodness" (iii–iv).

The more humane conception of African cultures and practices in *Two on a Tower*, taken together with the disavowal of white valour, provides a strong case for revising claims for the harmonized metropolitan reception of visual and printed materials that sought to represent the colonial encounter (cf. Parry 2004, 113; Kennedy 2013, 235–236; Behdad 2016, 2). Hardy's refutation of the "heroic" accounts of African adventure and exploration, in which African cultures are persistently arraigned and white travellers ennobled, offers an important metropolitan riposte to African adventure.

In sum, the social alliances that are forged in *Two on a Tower*, uniting gender and class against the oppressions of upper-class patriarchy, challenge the cult of heroism that defines the more totemic "Africanist" texts of the late 19th century. Sir Blount's hunting activities in Africa, born of aristocratic arrogance and a thirst for fame and fortune, generate social affinities in resistance to the colonizer and his ambitions. This can be seen in strident criticisms of the squire's misogyny, in local solidarity with the metropolitan

victim of colonial ambition and in death wishes heaped upon the colonizer. This united concern to expose the tyrannies of imperialism by confronting the despotism of its chief exemplars is also borne out in humane representations of colonial "others" and in the corruption of white explorers' virtue and celebrity.

Notes

1. During Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, five years *after* the publication of *Two on a Tower*, Hardy encountered the "Anniwalia of Kapurthala" "among the presence of so many Indian princes" in London (Hardy [1984] 1985, 210). This isolated example suggests that Hardy's first-hand encounters with race were limited mainly to national spectacle.
2. In 1885, Hardy records first meeting Lord Carnarvon, formerly Colonial Secretary, who had pushed for the confederation of southern African states. Hardy's criticism of a gathering at the Carnarvons, in which the disappearance of General Gordon in the Sudan was dissected, in addition to his criticisms, generally, of "brilliant and titled people", are renowned for their unusual stridency (Hardy [1984] 1985, 179; Millgate [2004] 2010, 246).
3. A recent digital humanities remediation initiative at "Livingstone Online" (https://www.livingstoneonline.org/) aims to recover a Livingstone who was occasionally apt to question colonial practices. The project examines the missionary's original manuscripts in order to show how 19th-century editorial processes silenced some of Livingstone's critiques and elided or reconfigured those records that could be publicly perceived as acknowledgements of weakness or even failure. Hardy's African imaginary would have been constructed in response to edited versions of the traveller's records.

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