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Captain Henry Butler's *South African Sketches*: Victorian Vanity Publishing and the Lure of Africa

In April 1852, the anonymous author of an article in the *Westminster Review* contended that 'the facts connected with the production and distribution of books, though little heeded by the public, are nevertheless, of great social and political importance.'[1] Captain Henry Butler's *South African Sketches*, an illustrated hunting book published in 1841, illustrates the relevance of this comment in relation to a subset of travel writing particularly associated with the British intellectual appropriation of Southern Africa in the nineteenth century. Butler's book, its visual and textual contents and the facts surrounding its production and distribution are informatively illustrative of the concerns of a socially exclusive section of the Victorian book-buying public. This paper demonstrates how Southern Africa, its landscape and fauna were inextricably connected to the expression of these concerns by presenting an arena for aristocratic and gentlemanly activities for a very particular audience. The representation of Southern Africa, through the medium of this book, became a vehicle for elucidating and exploring these particular notions of identity. In effect the book becomes an artefact – embodying and providing us with what Sidney Mendelssohn calls 'the colour of the life of the times.'[2]

The book under consideration was written and illustrated by Captain Henry Butler of the 59th Regiment, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin (TCD). The circumstances leading to the publication of Butler's book can be related in some detail on the basis of a body of documentary material in the library of Trinity College.[3] An analysis of this material points to the fact that Butler's book is an example of 'vanity publishing' in the nineteenth-century. In other words, it is a book produced not for profit, nor to disseminate scientific information. Rather, the accounts, letters and comments in TCD archives suggest that it was published at the instigation of the author and with a limited potential

[1] Anon., "The Commerce of Literature" in *Westminster Review* (April 1852): 511-54; 512.
[2] Sidney Mendelssohn, *South African Bibliography*, introduced by Ian D. Colvin, 2 vols. (London : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1910), Vol. 1, xxv.
[3] I will be dealing with the archive material that relates to Butler in the Trinity College Library, filed in Box OLS x-2-171. Hereafter it will be cited as TCD and according to correspondent, addressee, date and position in that file.

audience. The production and consumption of Butler's book is dependent on the class and professional status of its author and anticipated readership. This does not diminish its importance and interest as an example of a particular genre of publishing. Indeed, it seems to me that this material is especially valuable when read in conjunction with an analysis of the contents of the book and in aiding our understanding of the illustrations that form an integral part of Butler's work. It helps us to appreciate the role of the Southern African environment in the construction, expression and bolstering of specific masculine and aristocratic identities in mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

Books about hunting in Southern Africa, such as Butler's, were such a popular feature of the nineteenth-century publishing world that they form a critical part of the British cultural encounter with the landscape and fauna of this region. However, their explanation and analysis, while valuable and interesting, can often lack the grounding in historical veracity provided by primary documentary material. This paper interweaves the evidence of both primary documents and the published text and images in order to suggest to whom such illustrated hunting books were directed and to explain more fully the role of hunting in the imperial context. The contents of Butler's book and its status as an item of conspicuous production and consumption are invaluable tools in corroborating theories and ideas about the role of hunting in nineteenth-century Southern Africa.

It has been suggested the European excursion and incursion into colonial space is one of the most important vehicles by which Europe is re-created. Hunting scenes as a manifestation of cultural identity were both solidified and manipulated by their filtering through the distorting prism of geographical dislocation. The evidence provided by the example of Butler's book suggests that the disruption of place and location might be employed in order to confirm and cement notions of identity that were being eroded in the maelstrom of contemporary British culture.

Butler was not an author by profession. This book, along with an article written for the *New Monthly Magazine*, are the only known works that he published.[4] He was born at Kilmurray, Thomastown in Co. Kilkenny in 1805 into the prominent Anglo-Irish

[4] Mendelssohn, *South African Bibliography*, Vol. 1, 235.

family headed by the Viscount Mountgarrett.[5] Entering TCD in 1823, he graduated with a first class honours degree.[6] In May 1827 he was commissioned in the 27th or Inniskilling Regiment of Foot and later served in South Africa.[7] He was promoted to Lieutenant on 8th September 1832 and served with the 27th Regiment until 1841, when he transferred to the 59th Regiment assuming the rank of Captain. He retired from the army in 1850 as Captain Henry Butler.[8] This social background and professional status had a vital impact on the content and sale of the book.

Amongst the material in TCD is a trade prospectus of 1841 from Ackermann & Co in which Butler's forthcoming work is announced:

> To be published by Ackermann & Co., 96 Strand, London
>
> South African Sketches : Illustrative of the Wild Life of a Hunter on the Frontier of the Cape Colony by Captain Henry Butler, 59th Reg.
>
> The work will be published in Imperial Quarto, and contain Sixteen highly-coloured plates and Fifteen Etchings, from Drawings taken on Spot [sic] during a Series of Excursions to the Bontebok Flats, and Other Hunting Grounds, beyond the North East Border of the Cape Colony : with Notes and Observations descriptive of the Scene, the Game and the Mode of Hunting.
>
> Price £1 11s 6d neatly bound.[9]

This summary description of the project appeared in the 480 prospectuses that Ackermann had printed in March 1841 to be distributed to the various provincial booksellers with which he traded.[10] The book consists of just fifteen pages of text along with fifteen plates. The majority of the plates consist of a coloured lithograph juxtaposed with an engraved line drawing, each numbered separately (thirty-two illustrations in total), signed by the author with dates ranging from 1837 to 1839.[11] The book appears in

[5] R.F. Kennedy, *Catalogue of Pictures in the Africana Museum* (Johannesburg : Africana Museum, 1966-72), 7 vols., Vol. 1, 241.
[6] TCD, No. 48 records "Henrico Butler" receiving a First Class B.A. degree in 1824.
[7] Catalogue of an exhibition held at Falkner Greirson & Co., 4 Molesworth Place, Dublin 2, Monday 6th August 1979; TCD, No. 62.
[8] Kennedy, *Catalogue of Pictures in the Africana Museum*, Vol. 1, 241-2.
[9] Trade Prospectus; TCD, No. 26.
[10] Ackermann to Butler, 22nd March 1841; TCD, No. 25. See also John Ford, "Ackermann Imprints and Publications" in Robin Myers & Michael Harris, eds, *Maps and Prints : Aspects of the English Book Trade* (Oxford : Oxford Polytechnic Press, 1984): 109-122; 118.
[11] A list of the illustrations is included as an appendix to this article.

imperial quarto (15" by 11"). Mr. Charles Wood of Poppin's Court, Fleet St., London printed it. The expeditions Butler undertook in 1837 and 1838 to the hunting grounds of the Bontebok Flats (between the Klipplaats and Windvogel Rivers in Eastern Cape Province, about eighty miles north of King William's Town) form the basis of the text and the illustrations. It was on these excursions that he gathered the verbal and visual material which was then worked up into publishable form. Some of the illustrations in the book correspond to drawings in the five volumes of preparatory sketches, held at MuseumAfrica, Johannesburg, suggesting that the illustrations in the text represent the culmination of a process of selection on Butler's behalf.[12] Butler sailed for England in 1839 and presumably began corresponding with publishers almost immediately regarding the writing and sale of a book relating his travels and hunting experiences.

This provides the basic information as to the structure and production of the book. However, when one considers the circumstances of its publication in conjunction with archival material pertaining to the book, one appreciates that it was a book written by a member of, and aimed at, a definite social group. The preface to the published version suggested a rather unambitious aspiration for the book:

> To record a few scenes and adventures, which have served to relieve the dreariness of a two year's residence upon a barbarian frontier, and among which, even in better days, memory will still love to linger, this volume of South African Sketches is devoted to the Bontebok Flats.[13]

Butler's repeated reference to his 'sketches' emphasises the character of the book. It refers to both the drawn, visual records and the written commentary that accompanies them. As a kind of gentlemanly insouciance, Butler does not assert his comprehensive knowledge on this subject. Rather, he posits his work as that of a gentleman amateur. It is constructed as representing his subjective impressions and responses to what he has seen and experienced during his time in South Africa. His sketches are a mess-room diversion for fellow officers and huntsmen, delineating their common interests, as opposed to being more public pronouncements on African affairs. Thus, Charles Bunbury, a guest of the

[12] See Kennedy, *Catalogue of Pictures in the Africana Museum*, Vol. 1, 241-54.
[13] Capt. Henry Butler, *South African Sketches* (London : Ackermann, 1841), 3.

incumbent governor of the Cape Colony, was amused by Butler's sketches at the military barracks at Fort Beaufort in May 1838:

> Captain Butler entertained us much by showing us his very clever sketches of South African Sports.[14]

Butler's book is very much orientated around the illustrations of hunting endeavours in the landscape. The limited amount of text merely recounts the adventures of the hunter as an adjunct to their display in the plates. It does not purport to give a comprehensive guide to the hunting grounds of Southern Africa. Instead, it is an illustrated hunting adventure with an accompanying and limited letter-press delineating and narrating the scenes depicted. It seems to me that Butler's illustrations, their ideological import and the role of Southern Africa in conveying these are deeply expressive of the concerns of Butler's prospective readership. This readership is identified throughout the gestation period of the book as Butler makes decisions relating to its publication. By exploring how *South African Sketches* came into being and for whom it was written we can arrive at a better understanding of the lure of Africa for the subscribers to Butler's work.

In the first instance, Butler's choice of publisher highlights the fact that his work was intended for a small and exclusive coterie of friends, family and colleagues. It suggests a premeditated and clear target audience for his book. If one considers the example of David Livingstone one can understand this point more clearly. Livingstone was a member of John Murray's African 'stable.' In a letter to James Stewart, he recalled his pleasant surprise at Murray's response to his university lectures of 1857:

> I did not expect a *volume* from the lectures, but thought that Mr. Murray would issue a cheap edition. If it does good [sic] it's all right.[15]

Here Livingstone acknowledges the fact that various types of book could be issued depending on its appeal and likely audience. It stands to reason that cheaper production costs facilitated the selling of large numbers of books to a mass audience at a lower price. However, publishers were also capable of producing expensive and exclusive editions of books for a small coterie of bibliophiles and conspicuous consumers. While Murray had

[14] Charles J.F. Bunbury, *Journal of a Residence at the Cape of Good Hope; with Excursions into the Interior, and Notes on the Natural History, and the Native Tribes* (London : John Murray, 1848), 163.

developed a reputation as a publisher of African travel books, Butler took his material to Ackermann, who specialised in illustrated books. Ackermann had published a forty-three volume series of books between 1821 and 1827, entitled 'The World in Miniature' which combined informative text with numerous colour engravings. He also catered for the hunting fraternity – his *Memoirs of the Life of the Late John Mytton* by 'Nimrod' (Charles James Apperley) was first published in 1835 and was in its second edition just two years later. Thus, Butler chose one of the most suitable people to deal with his book – a publisher with a reputation for, and an interest in, producing books concerned with both travel and hunting. Indeed, in an unsigned letter in TCD archives, the author informs Butler of Ackermann being 'very kind + expressed much interest in your works.'[16] However, the anonymous author proceeded to proffer some advice to the literary novice:

> It occurs to me that before you call upon Ackerman [sic] with your work it might be advisable to see one or two others just to put yourself in possession of what the others would do by which means you will know how to deal with them as this is your first essay in authorship you must learn the trade and by hard experience if you do not look out.[17]

Butler, however, seems not to have any problems with Ackermann. Indeed, as my analysis indicates, Butler was not particularly concerned with establishing a publishing career for himself and the choice of Ackermann as publisher was based more on the expected quality of the prospective publication than on any mercenary impulses on Butler's behalf.

Butler's book was to retail at the price of £1 11s 6d – a guinea and a half.[18] This was a standard sum at the time, with contemporary three-volume ('triple-decker') novels also selling at 31s 6d.[19] However, despite the similarities in price, these two genres occupy widely divergent places in the mid-Victorian world of publishing. Novels catered to a popular audience of the newly literate classes. I would suggest that by comparing the costs of production between a standard novel and Butler's book one can further

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[15] Livingstone to Stewart, 26th January 1860; Quoted in James Stewart, *The Zambesi Journal of James Stewart, 1862-1863; with a selection from his correspondence*, ed J.P.R. Wallis (London : Chatto & Windus, 1952), No. 1, 207 [his emphasis].
[16] Unsigned letter to Butler, ca. 1840; TCD, No. 24.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Trade Prospectus; TCD, No. 26.

appreciate its status as an article of conspicuous consumption for a limited readership. For example, Anthony Trollope's novel, *The Three Clerks* was purchased by Richard Bentley in 1857 who set about organising a first edition run of 1000 books. The total cost of production was £582 3s 11d. The majority of the cost of a novel involved the purchase of paper and printing costs. The account for *The Three Clerks* was principally comprised of the £130 5d paid for printing and £91 6d for purchasing paper along with the £230 that Bentley paid Trollope for the rights to the book.[20] Butler's book, according to an account sent by Ackermann to Butler in August 1842, cost £247 17s 6d to produce, which would seem relatively similar to Bentley's costs for *The Three Clerks* if one allows for the divergence in copies printed.[21] However, a more detailed analysis reveals the salient differences between the two forms of literary production. Based on these figures, it would cost approximately twelve shillings to produce the three-volume Trollope novel whilst Butler's single volume of *South African Sketches* cost fourteen shillings each to produce. Assuming that all outstanding copies were sold, Bentley could expect a return of about £980 on his initial investment. However, Butler's book would only reap a profit of slightly over £300 for the publisher and the author. This information, added to what we know of the promotion and marketing of the book, suggests that this is an instance of 'vanity production' where the author shouldered the costs and risks of production in order to publish a text. Judging from the evidence surrounding its production, Butler's book appears to fall into this category.

The expense of the illustrated book explains the small number of books that were produced in each edition with publishers unwilling to invest the large sums of money required in potentially hazardous literary ventures. It also further emphasises that the market for them consisted of a small coterie of individuals who bought the book for personal interest, or out of a sense of friendship and comradeship with its author. Unlike Trollope, who sold the rights of his novel to Bentley for £230 and thereby defrayed any liability to himself, Butler was liable for the entire costs of his own book.[22] The lack of dividend expected from its sale is a contrast to the profit-led motives in other forms of

[19] John Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (London : The Athlone Press, 1976), 13.
[20] Ibid., 14.
[21] Ackermann to Butler, 10th July 1841; TCD, No. 29.
[22] Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*, 12.

publication. This is confirmed by a letter of August 1841 where Ackermann sets out what Butler owes him.[23] The total cost of £247 17s 6d at 10th July 1841 and discussed above had grown to £252 7s 6d with the addition of sundry expenses and interest. The account confirms the receipt of a £80 draft sent by Messers. Cox on behalf of Butler on 7th August 1841.[24] It also includes some additional subscriptions and some interest accrued, meaning that Butler had effectively paid £93 13s 9d to Ackermann by this date. The role of subscriptions in the production of a book like Butler's was vital. Very often, the publisher would not take on the risk of publishing the book and would only proceed if sufficient numbers of people had agreed to take a copy in advance, thus effectively covering the costs of production and ensured the publication of the book. The account proceeds to inform Butler that, at the end of August 1841, he still owes Ackermann & Co. £158 13s 9d in respect of the costs of producing *South African Sketches*.[25] The interest charged at 5% on £147 7s 6d is an intriguing entry. It implies that Butler was paying interest on the publisher's costs just as Ackermann was paying Butler interest on subscriptions received. It further confirms the social status surrounding the authorship and production of this sort of book. The sums of money required to support such a project meant that it was only open to a small group of authors who were independently wealthy and wrote for others with similar preoccupations and concerns. It was these people who were likely to purchase the book more for its physical status as an artefact of conspicuous consumption rather than any inherent literary or artistic merit that it may have.

The relatively small amount of money spent on advertising and promoting the work is a compelling fact and again deeply illustrative of the kind of audience for which the book was produced. One can deduce from these facts that Butler's book was unlikely to be launched onto the free market. Rather it was going to be a personal authorial project. In August 1841 only £3 8s 6d had been spent on advertising.[26] This compares with a huge £63 7s 8d that the publisher Richard Bentley spent promoting Trollope's *The Three Clerks*.[27] Obviously, the aggressively competitive world of mid-Victorian publishing was not a concern to Butler and his book was not going to rely on the usual

[23] Ackermann to Butler, 10th July 1841; TCD, No. 29.
[24] Cox to Butler, 18th August 1841; TCD, No. 28.
[25] Butler to Ackermann, August 1842; TCD, No. 34.
[26] Butler to Ackermann, 27th August 1841; TCD, No. 30.

commercial channels to boost its sales. In November 1841, Ackermann sent a letter to Butler stating that he had placed advertisements for *South African Sketches* in diverse publications. These include the *York Herald*, *Liverpool Mercury*, *Bristol Mission*, *Devonport Independent*, *The Times, Morning Post, Morning Chronicle, Standard*, *United Service Journal*, *United Service Gazette*, *The Athenæum* and the *New Sporting Magazine*.[28] The publisher informed Butler that the average cost was five shillings. The tone of these advertisements may be judged by the small notice that appears in Vol. XIV of *The Athenæum*. Sandwiched between the many other notices on the page and only to be descried by the eagle-eyed collector of hunting books, it comprises the sum total of Ackermann's promotion of Butler's book in that literary organ: 'South African Sketches by Capt. H. Butler, imp. 4to. 31s 6d.'[29] The curt, matter-of-fact style of the advertisement is more like a notice of information than a piece of writing intended to seduce people into subscribing to the book. The discrepancy between the costs of advertising and promoting Butler's and Trollope's work can be partially explained by the intended audience for these quite distinct types of books. Novels like Trollope's, although they may have been published in small runs of 1000 copies and priced at 31s 6d, had a potential readership many times greater than this suggests as the principal subscribers to the works were the lending libraries such as Mudie's.[30] A period of sustained advertising could generate demand among readers who were members of these libraries and thus increase sales proportionally. However, Butler's book was marketed as a semi-precious object of conspicuous consumption, targeted at the collector, written by a devoted amateur and sumptuously illustrated with scenes of hunting at the colonial frontier. It appealed to those with an interest in such pursuits, principally the aristocracy who, not uncoincidentally, were also the people who could afford to add such books to their private libraries.

The list of subscribers to the work confirms what the production costs and advertising already indicate. Indeed, the names do not take the form of a list but rather Butler is informed by a series of personal letters written by leading members of the

[27] Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*, 13.
[28] Ackermann to Butler, 15th November 1841; TCD, No. 37.
[29] *The Athenæum*, Vol. XIV, No. 720 (14th August 1841), 619.
[30] See John Hall, *The Sociology of Literature* (London : Longman, 1979), 116-7.

gentry expressing interest in his work. Some of these include Lord Farnham, Lord and Lady Belmore, the Viscount Corry, Lady Pembroke and Lady Clanwilliam.[31] These were the class of people who could afford to pay for the privilege of having fifteen plates and fifteen pages of print adorn their drawing rooms and libraries and who obviously didn't require the sort of persuasion needed to sell novels in a sea of literary outpourings. The fact that many of them have Irish connections emphasises how much Butler used family and professional networks to secure subscriptions for their work. Thus, Butler relied on getting and collecting subscriptions on a more personal level of acquaintance and recommendation. His letters are replete with friends and former military colleagues writing to him to inform him of their success or otherwise in gaining him more patrons for his work. On 3rd August 1841, Lord Vesey wrote from Broadstairs in Kent to inform Butler that the Ladies Pembroke and Clanwilliam, as well as Sir George Corby would 'take a copy each of your book.' He proceeded to reassure Butler that 'I will do what I can to get you some more subscribers.'[32] In the previous month, John Dewar had written from Scotland undertaking to collect money for copies forwarded to him but inquiring as to why only seven of the eight previously mentioned copies had arrived.[33] In a letter dated the next day, M.C. Johnstone, also writing from Scotland, confirmed arrangements for distributing the work there and for making payment.[34] This illustrates that Butler became a pseudo-publisher during the course of distributing the book, relying on a network of friends and acquaintances to distribute books and collect money, while also assuming the role as trouble-shooter for any difficulties that arose in the delivery of the books.

The connections that Butler had in the United Kingdom were mirrored in the Cape Colony where his sojourn with the 27th Regiment on active service proved profitable. Military contacts could be lucrative and many army officers, both retired and current, turned their hand to writing, hoping that former colleagues would boost subscription lists. One only has to scan a list of travel and sporting books from the

[31] TCD, Nos. 34 and 35.
[32] Vesey to Butler, 3rd August 1841; TCD, No. 35.
[33] Dewar to Butler, 27th July 1841; TCD, No. 32.
[34] Johnstone to Butler, 28th July 1841; TCD, No. 33.

nineteenth century to see the literary talents of the British Armed Forces.[35] Therefore, Major Selwyn writing to Butler from Grahamstown, in the Eastern Cape included a list of subscribers to the work. He concluded by commenting that 'the list amounts to 36, some at home as you will know by the names but I shall endeavour to get more and…have no doubt I shall succeed.'[36] The letter's concern with subscriptions is quickly superseded by in-house military banter, belatedly congratulating Butler on his promotion into the 59th Regiment as Captain and jesting that 'I expect to see you back in the 27th [Regiment] who seem to anticipate that such will be the case.'[37]

The network of connections that was proving so fruitful to Butler in marketing and promoting his work should not distract from the fact that the principal requirement in gleaning subscriptions was the production of a book that would reflect the interests of its potential readership. In marketing his 'Home and Colonial Library' of the most popular books, the publisher John Murray chose only those 'attractive and useful works by approved authors [that] displayed variety, readability and good taste.'[38] The large military contingent in the subscriptions lists and the aristocratic patrons only purchased something that they wanted to display or read or form part of their collection. It appears that Butler's book sold quite well. By August 1842 only 62 of the original 350 copies were left with Ackermann.[39] Anandi Ranamurthy has pointed out:

> Images are historical documents. They do not simply reflect the ideological perspectives of an era, but form part of the process through which these ideologies are produced.[40]

Therefore, one must examine the contents of the book in order to fully assess its position in the mid-Victorian publishing world and its evident success in pandering to the concerns of those who purchased it.

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[35] Among the servicemen that were also renowned authors were Capt. William Allen, Capt. James Alexander, Capt. Frederick Elton, Capt. Allen Gardiner, Lt. John Moodie, et al.
[36] Selwyn to Butler, 12th August 1841;TCD, No. 36.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Quoted in John Tallmadge, "From Chronicle to Quest : The Shaping of Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*" in *Victorian Studies* (1979-80), Vol. 23, No. 3: 325-45, 328.
[39] Butler to Ackermann, 27th August 1841; TCD, No. 30, p. 4.
[40] Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders : Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.

The evidence of the archival material has established that Butler's book was an expensive, lusciously illustrated work that depicted a popular pastime in an exotic land and was written with the prescience and experience of one of Her Majesty's officers. It was an article of conspicuous consumption. The buying of expensive books was a symbol of social status. It could also reveal the owner's interest in, and knowledge of, the new regions being added to the fringes of the burgeoning British Empire. The display factor is a recurring trope in the production of the illustrated books of which Butler's is an example. In launching his book, *The Kafir Wars and the British Settlers in South Africa*, the artist Thomas Bowler attempted to appeal to a variety of tastes:

> The artist submits his work to the British and Colonial public in the hope that, if not found very useful in the library among more exhausting [sic] books of travel, it will be thought ornamental in the drawing-room.[41]

In a similar vein, Charles Coxe wrote to Butler, expressing his view of the use-value of Butler's work:

> Allow me before concluding this to express my admiration of the work which is well worthy a place on every Drawing-room Table.[42]

Thus, the content of the illustrations, rather than adding to the font of colonial knowledge, seem to be more useful for the purchaser as an indicator of his social status and cultural concerns.

The contents of the work incorporate many of the concerns that one would anticipate as pertaining to the subscribers of the book. One of those aristocratic patrons seems to have been interested in not just acquiring a well-illustrated, expensive object for his 'Drawing-room Table' but in perusing the work for its value to him as a scion of the hunt. Lord Farnham is described in an anonymous letter to Butler as 'a confident stalker' suggesting that Farnham partook in the mid-nineteenth-century fashion for hunting that riveted the upper echelons of society. The author of the letter confidently asserted that '[y]ou may add the name of Farnham to your [subscription] list.'[43] The comments of Charles Bunbury further corroborate this supposition. His book, *Journal of a Residence*

[41] Thomas Bowler, *The Kafir Wars and the British Settlers in South Africa. A Series of Picturesque Views from Original Sketches by TW Bowler. With descriptive letterpress by WR Thomson* (London : Day & Son Ltd., 1865), Preface.
[42] Coxe to Butler, 25th July 1841; TCD, No. 31.

at the Cape of Good Hope; with Excursions into the Interior, and Notes on the Natural History, and the Native Tribes (1848), referred to his seeing and being much entertained by Butler's sketches:

> When I was at Fort Beaufort, I saw some admirable drawings by an officer of the 27th regiment, which gave a most lively idea of the style of hunting on the Bontebok Flats.[44]

Butler's capturing of the spirit and enjoyment of hunting was obviously a positive feature of the work as perceived by potential subscribers. This kind of comment also illustrates the audience that Butler's book would be directed towards – the upper echelons of society, keen to have a souvenir of their colonial travels and hunting expeditions.

The depiction of hunting scenes at the colonial frontier was a prime vehicle for conveying, articulating and solidifying colonial hegemony and pretensions to expansion in the period. The quintessentially British pursuit of hunting game often elided and camouflaged the fact that these scenes were occurring in distant lands not yet brought under imperial control. Thus, British cultural norms and forms of activity were projected onto these areas before the politicians had sanctioned or proclaimed their absorption into the Empire. Butler's book forms part of that raft of literature that presented Southern Africa as a Hunter's Paradise. This social construct did not merely involve the killing of vast quantities of game. Rather, it became a cultural anchor around which accumulated ideologies relating to personal character and social status.[45] In the words of John MacKenzie, 'hunting afforded the elite…a symbolic dominance of the environment, a means of asserting boundaries of territory, action and behaviour.'[46] The foreign hunting book lent itself, almost by definition, to more exotic and exciting scenes than one was liable to experience at a hunt in the United Kingdom and thus could cater to those people already in thrall to the exhilaration of hunting in the British Isles. As early as the seventeenth century, Francois de la Rochefoucauld recorded in *A Frenchman's England*: 'One of the Englishmen's greatest joys is in field sports – they are all quite mad about

[43] Unsigned letter to Butler, ca. 1840; TCD, No. 24.
[44] Bunbury, *Journal of a Residence*, 141.
[45] See Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was : Four Centuries of British Writing about Africa* (New York : Twayne Publishers, 1970), 46.
[46] John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1988), 80.

them.'[47] However, the colonial spaces of the British Empire could provide even more excitement for that class of people subscribing to Butler's work. Speaking at Birmingham in 1858, John Bright articulated the notion that the Empire was 'a gigantic system of out-of-door relief for the aristocracy of Great Britain.'[48] A work such as *The Desert Sports of Africa* displays a particular colonial character that could be ascribed to the pursuit of game and encapsulates the essential attraction of hunting in foreign climes on which Butler was hoping to capitalise. The published account allowed English gentlemen 'equally enthusiastic with myself in the love of the chase, and in their admiration of the beauties of mountain scenery' to experience such delights simultaneously.[49]

The number of subscribers in South Africa suggests that Butler also wrote for colonial expatriates who wanted to have a record of their adopted homeland, its sights and scenes. Major Selwyn, writing to Butler, extolled his achievements and expressed satisfaction that 'your spirited and beautiful Sketches of our African sports will have left [your] hands and [that he] should be most anxious to have them arrived in the land of their birth.'[50] The codification of the wildernesses described and depicted in these works perhaps in some way reassured these people as to the ability of Western European culture to mollify and indeed subsume the inhospitable otherness represented by these lands.

The combination of solitary exhilaration and the hunter's freedom to encroach upon this wilderness is evident in Butler's plate of 'The Game Fleeing' (Figure 1). Here, he ascribes the 'magic of the scene' to 'the number, the size and beauty of the game, the prospect ever varying with each fitful change of the atmosphere, the purity of the air, the vastness of the plains over which he ranges [which] all conspire to produce and sustain the tumult of excitement.'[51] These scenes of unspoilt and undefiled nature embody the

[47] Anthony Vandervell and Charles Coles, *Game and the English Landscape* (London : Debrett's Peerage, 1980), 59.
[48] Quoted in A.G. Hopkins, "Back to the Future : From National History to Imperial History" in *Past and Present*, 164 (Aug. 1999): 198-243, 210.
[49] Anon., "The Desert Sports of South Africa" in *The New Sporting Review* (Dec. 1841), 417-25, 418.
[50] Selwyn to Butler, 12th August 1841; TCD, No. 36.
[51] Butler, *South African Sketches*, 7.

idea of the 'colonial gaze' formulated by Mary Louise Pratt.[52] By virtue of its unmolested and limitless powers of seeing, this 'imperial eye' appropriates the foreign landscape into the European epistemological and visual archive. The role of the eye is physically transferred to the hunter's exploits, as he ranges unchecked and unimpeded over the solitary landscape of South Africa.

The same exhilaration is evident in 'The Eland Blown and Tsitse River' (Figure 2). It depicts the freedom and excitement of the European as he chases the game beyond the restraining frame of the image. As he trains his rifle on the animal, the hunter is symbolically exercising his mastery over the South African environment. Thus, the hunter could range unmolested over the countryside and exercise the kind of instinctive behaviour that was unavailable in the home counties of Victorian Britain. The ability of the European to capture and conquer the game, and by extension the landscape, is implicit in these depictions. Butler's work provides an example of the type of acquisitive ideology that was entangled with this pastime of hunting. In ranging over the Bontebok Flats, Butler noted that the lions, kings of the jungle, have been forced to beat a hasty retreat in the face of human, and particularly European, advances by virtue of his 'gunpowder [having] given the hand of man an unfair advantage over him [the lion].'[53] The process of European usurpation of the landscape for hunting and eventually, one suspects, other imperial and colonial activities, is formulated in specifically imperial terminology. The lion watches 'the decline and fall of his empire' and, by implication, the steady rise of the British Empire in the region.[54] At home, hunting was about a literal ownership of the land; in Africa it is symbolically representative of an imperial ideology of control and domination. The status and political imperative of hunting is therefore reflected in Butler's book of sketches.

[52] See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes : Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London : Routledge, 1992).
[53] Butler, *South African Sketches*, 3.
[54] Ibid., 3.

The image of the hunter ranging over the landscape was not just an offshoot of the colonial intellectual and visual appropriation of land. It also allowed authors to evince the kind of 'Muscular Christianity' being posited in the United Kingdom as an antidote to the soporific mid-Victorian values of routine and stolid domesticity.[55] It involved a combination of the best aspects of militant Christianity and its moral code with the physicality of instinctive existence in a state of nature, what Philip Mason called 'the strenuous Puritan Romanticism of the Victorians, of Charles Kingsley and Arnold of Rugby.'[56] For what Rider Haggard called 'this sad and trodden world,' the Empire came to be seen as a suitable crucible for future generations of aristocrats and leaders to prove their inherent European superiority and retain it in the face of the cloying banality of Europe.[57] Viscount Wolseley saw 'strength and fearlessness [as] natural characteristics of our race' and he yoked hunting and the physical invigoration together in order to explain the superiority of the British race:

> It is the nature of the Anglo-Saxon race to love those manly sports which entail violent exercise, with more or less danger to limb if not life…This craving for the constant practice and employment of our muscles is in our blood, and the result is a development of bodily strength unknown and unsurpassed by any other breed of men.[58]

In *The Complete Gentleman* (1622), Henry Peacham remarked that 'hawking and hunting are recreations very commendable and befitting a noble or gentleman to exercise.'[59] The link between military prowess, aristocratic power and hunting had classical roots. Peacham reiterated the words of Eusebius in claiming that 'the wild beasts were of purpose created buy God that men by chasing and encountering them might be fitted and enabled for warlike exercises.'[60] Thus, it is no surprise to find Captain William Cornwallis Harris – another military man recounting his hunting experiences in Southern

[55] See Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys : Adventures in a Man's World* (London : Unwin Hyman, 1991).
[56] Quoted in Stephen Taylor, *The Mighty Nimrod : A Life of Frederick Courteney Selous, African Hunter and Adventurer, 1851-1917* (London : Collins, 1989), 180.
[57] H. Rider Haggard, *The People of the Mist* (1890; reprint, Polegate : Pulp Fictions, 1998), Preface.
[58] General Viscount Garnett Wolseley, "The Negro as Soldier" in *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. XLIV, No. CCLXIV (1st Dec., 1888), pp. 689-703; p. 692.
[59] Anthony Vandervell and Charles Coles, *Game and the English Landscape : The Influence of the Chase on Sporting Art and Scenery* (London : Debrett's Peerage, 1980), 59.
[60] Quoted in Arts Council Arts Council of Great Britain, *British Sporting Painting* (London : Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974), 1.

Africa - writing for 'brother officers equally passionate for the chase.'[61] This is part of the audience to which Butler, as we have seen, was also hoping to appeal. Butler wrote for him 'to whose ears the rushing of a herd is music, and for whom the wilderness of a nomad life has charms.'[62] Thus, for Butler's prospective audience the liminal spaces of the imperial frontier allowed for the exercise of those qualities that were seen to be under threat at home and which reaffirmed them as the class of leadership and political control.

In Harris' 'Driving in an Eland' (Figure 3), we see the European astride his horse with his rifle and a native hunter together with his assegei and shield, both training their respective sights on the rather flaccid and helpless-looking eland situated between them. This is the visual playing out of Harris' opinion of the object of the hunt which was 'to sweep rapidly over a great extent of countryside…This method of proceeding not only greatly increased the probability of romantic peril, adventure, and discovery, but also enhanced our prospect of sport.'[63] The visual correlation between the European and native huntsmen adds a primitive quality to the activity, as if this is the eternal role of mankind to hunt and capture the game of the field. The inclusion of the pair seems to suggest that despite his obvious social, cultural and technical sophistication, the European can also return to and rediscover the primordial and common roots of his ancestors in the activity of hunting. However, the image simultaneously works on another level of meaning, whereby the European is invested with an inherent superiority by virtue of his technical and equine prowess. The small figure of the native is rather dwarfed by the eland. However, the suitably attired gentlemen, in full command of their steed and with guns at the ready could plunder an enormous amount of game in a good day's hunting, simply by virtue of their mobility and mastery of weaponry.

[61] Capt. William Cornwallis Harris, *The Wild Sports of Southern Africa : Being the Narrative of an Expedition from the Cape of Good Hope, through the territories of the Chief Moselekatse, to the Tropic of Capricorn* (London : John Murray, 1839), 94.
[62] Butler, *South African Sketches*, 3.
[63] Harris, *Wild Sports*, 22.

The motif of horsemanship and riders being in control of their mounts also had ideological overtones for subscribers to Butler's book. The 'natural' ruler of the land was seen to manifest his qualities of leadership and steady control in the form of equestrian prowess – 'husbanding the strength of his stead [sic].'[64] The motif of horsemanship, whilst on the one hand confirming the status of the protagonists as hunters, also has overtones of control, mastery and dominance. The horse and the symbolism attached to its marshalling was an indicator of aristocratic power, and especially anxiety of class friction in the nineteenth century.[65] The idea of the rider being in control of his mount has a classical basis that has persisted throughout the history of art.[66] Velazquez' painting of 'Don Baltasar Carlos at the Riding School' (ca. 1636, London) is a particularly interesting example. This depiction of the son and heir to Philip IV metaphorically links schooling in horsemanship with learning about leadership. And the ability to control one's horse is a long-standing symbol of one's control over the landscape and the countryside. Van Dyck's 'Charles I on Horseback' (1638, London), corresponds to contemporary texts that imparted advice to the ruler of the nation through equestrian metaphors. Thus, the author of the seventeenth-century Spanish text, the *Idea of a Christian Prince* recommends the 'taming of the colt of power' by means of the 'bit of will, the bridle of reason, the reins of policy, the switch of justice, and the spur of courage' but, above all, 'the stirrups of prudence.'[67] Butler's numerous depictions of the hunter on his horse, in full command of the beast and the landscape, incorporated these traces of his cultural inheritance in order to pander to the tastes and expectations of his supposed readership. For them, Africa was an arena for assertion of masculine and aristocratic prerogatives that were under threat at home. Its landscape and the European command over it, symbolically represented by the ability to publish a book of sketches about the region, provided comforting contrasts to an increasingly fragmented, industrialised and democratic society at home. The lure of Africa was the stimulus for a

[64] Butler, *South African Sketches*, 7.
[65] See David Cannadine, "Nobility and Mobility" in David Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy : Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (London : Penguin, 1995), 55-73.
[66] See Sir Roy Strong, *Van Dyck : Charles I on Horseback* (London : Allen Lane, 1972), 49.
[67] Quoted in Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing :The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 61.

whole raft of hunting and exploration narratives that were produced in mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

Thus, Butler's book and the circumstances of its publication are indicative of the concerns, preferences and prejudices of a socially exclusive section of the mid-Victorian book-buying public. Ackermann wrote to Butler notifying him of a review of his work that had 'escaped my research' when the periodical in which it appears was first published. He states that 'at Page 244 Oct. no. *New Sporting Magazine* which I shall send to you is a notice of your work; it is very short, but states that the sketches are very characteristic [sic] and truthful.'[68] Simon Gikandi suggests that the trope of travel generated narratives that were acutely concerned with the idea of self-realization in the spaces of the Other, and that the European excursion and incursion into colonial space is one of the most important vehicles by which Europe is re-created.[69] Thus, I would conclude by agreeing with the reviewer of Butler's sketches. They are indeed 'very characteristic and truthful.' But the truths that these sketches espouse, and that I have explained in this paper, are those about mid-Victorian book publishing, the class of people who bought Butler's book, and their relationship to the landscape of nineteenth-century South Africa.

[68] Ackermann to Butler, 15th November 1841; TCD, No. 37.
[69] See Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness : Writing Identity in the Cultures of Colonialism* (New York, 1996), 8.

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Appendix

List of Illustrations in Captain Henry Butler's *South African Sketches:*

The following is a list of the illustrations as they appear in Captain Butler's book. There are thirty-one illustrations. Fifteen of these are coloured lithographs. The remaining illustrations are engravings of original line drawings.
The book consists of fifteen plates, with at least two illustrations per plate. The coloured lithographs are indicated in bold type.
Butler's spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

Frontispiece: The Cattle-lifters; Boers on the Spoor.

Plate I: 2. Ascent of the Eland's Berg.
3. **Kat River Bastard and his After-rider.**

Plate II: 4. **Off-saddled near Death Valley.**
5. **Death of a Springbok.**

Plate III: 6. **The wounded Blesbok.**
7. The Quagga chased into the Hills.

Plate IV: 8. The Horse going off, and the Storm coming on.
9. **A Fog on the Flats.**

Plate V: 10. **Travellers pointing out the Route.**
11. The Wildebeest; hit hard in the loins.

Plate VI: 12. **The Wildebeest (Gnu).**
13. A Kaffir Kraal – Return of the Robber.

Plate VII: 14. The Quagga's Foal.
15. **Camp at Modder Key; going out in the Morning.**
16. The Hyena stealing off.

Plate VIII: 17. Baboons on the look-out.
18. **The Game fleeing before the Hunters.**

Plate IX: 19. A Bivouac.
20. **Chase of the Hartebeest.**

Plate X: 21. **Smoking out the Tiger.**
22. Kafir Sportsman – The Quagga hard run.

Plate XI: 23. **The Bontebok or Blesbok.**

24. Sources of the Bashee River – The Lions aroused.

Plate XII: 25. **The Ostrich, near the Klip Plaats River.**
26. An Epitaph.

Plate XIII: 27. Buffalo Hunt; the Game in view.
28. **The Game successfully driven through a bend in the KlipPlaats River.**

Plate XIV: 29. **The Eland Blown – Tsitse River.**
30. Bivouac in the Raw Hide.

Plate XV: 31. **The Death of the Buffalo.**