

Dis/Connecting Whiteness: Biographical Perspectives on Race, Class, Masculinity and Sexuality in Britain c. 1850–1930

T. G. Ashplant

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, scholars have begun a renewed interrogation of whiteness as a racial category. This work has analysed the ways in which that category has been used to differentiate white people from ‘non-whites’, as those who occupy a position at the centre rather than at the margins, who stand at the head of the hierarchy stretching from animal to fully human, and who represent what is universal, unmarked and generic rather than particular, marked or specific.¹ The research has also demonstrated the ways in which racial classifications intersect with other categories of difference, especially those of nation, class, gender and sexuality. In the Euro-American white imaginary of the nineteenth century, the bourgeois heterosexual white man stood at the pinnacle of a hierarchy in which women, and non-white men, occupied lower places.

However, ideological constructions of whiteness were riven by multiple contradictions. In both the metropolises and the colonies, it proved impossible to suture the signifiers of whiteness seamlessly to the complex realities of national, class, gendered and sexual differences; consequently, both the boundaries and the internal hierarchies of whiteness were in practice uncertain and fluid. This tension between the ideological imperative that different modalities of domination should interlock with and reinforce each other, and intractable social realities which resisted matching these binary classifications, was manifested and experienced in diverse ways. For state legislators and administrators, it meant complex efforts to try to shape racial classifications to fit with other social demarcations.

1 Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, London 1997; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, London 1995; Catherine Hall ed., *Cultures of Empire: A Reader – Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Manchester 2000. A common, though by no means universal, view among whites regarded coloured races as close to, if not merging with, animals (that is, not fully human); even when this view was not explicitly held or defended as a “scientific” statement, it could still shape unconscious/semi-conscious perceptions which might be revealed in (verbal or visual) imagery.

Among social, cultural and scientific commentators, it elicited strenuous theorizing and debate over the nature of racial types.²

This article explores both interconnections and disjunctions between various categories of difference among individual bourgeois men in Britain c. 1850–1930. Social classes attempt to reproduce themselves, at the level of the individual, by socialising the new generation into an adult identity which is shaped by interlinked ideologies, institutions and practices of class, nation, race, gender, sexuality and (for Britain c. 1900) religion. This socialisation takes place first through the family and household of origin, and then through a succession of institutions designed to prepare them for their ascribed adult social identity. Ideological discourses, such as those of race, are effective not simply by offering cognitive frameworks for perceiving and understanding the world, but also because they are internalised psychologically through the patterns of emotional affiliation and attachment with which they are intertwined, patterns formed within the family and other institutions of socialisation.³ Some individuals, in response to interpersonal and psychological conflicts which they experience, come to reject, wholly or partly, the composite identity proffered to them via their families and early socialisation; and instead choose to identify with social groups far removed from their own.

Such cases, where individuals' ascribed identities came to conflict – rather than mesh – with one another, can reveal starkly the mutually reinforcing mechanisms of power which in normative cases remained concealed. This article uses three examples, two biographical and one fictionalised, to explore the relationships between whiteness and other dominant ideological categories of difference circulating in British society in this period, and between these categories and the prescribed identities which individuals were expected to adopt. It examines how a reading of their life-histories, and the narratives they produced, can illuminate on the one hand the mechanisms whereby various categories of difference could overlap with and reinforce one another, and on the other the ways in which a disturbance of individual identity formation could not only undermine the interconnections between those categories but also disrupt the very categories themselves.

1. Rigid boundaries: Izzart

Some men strove to maintain a unified identity that accorded fully with dominant ideological prescriptions; if any disjunction arose between their sense of self and their prescri-

2 Ann Laura Stoler, *Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves*, in: Hall, *Cultures*, see note 1, 87–119, 91–100, 110p (Dutch East Indies); Luke Gibbons, *Race against Time. Racial Discourse and Irish History*, the same, 207–223, 207p and McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 52p (Ireland).

3 Robert W. Connell, *Gender and Power. Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, Cambridge 1987; Stephen Frosh, *The Politics of Psychoanalysis: an Introduction to Freudian and post-Freudian Theory*, Basingstoke 1999.

bed role, they struggled to conceal this completely. In terms of race, a major source of social concern was miscegenation, a blurring of the lines of racial distinction and purity. A short-story by the bisexual writer W. Somerset Maugham (1874–1965), “The Yellow Streak” (1926), vividly depicts the anxieties this aroused.⁴ The central character, Izzart, a minor colonial official in 1920s Borneo who had served as an officer in the First World War, passes himself off as a typical product of an English public school (seeking to stabilise his identity by emphasising his class). But he knows that he is not pure-blooded English (his mother was half-Malay), and fears that this “native blood” will one day reveal itself in his “yellow [i. e. cowardly] streak”.

The narrative presents the Eurasian Izzart as utterly bound by the negative stereotypes of racial miscegenation. It codes his recognition of his hated inner self in emphatically physical terms. His skin colour, which always threatens to give him away (“By God, Izzart, you’re looking green about the gills ... I never saw such a filthy colour”), he tries to explain away by claiming a Spanish grandmother.⁵ But the rest of his body also testifies against him. “He passed his hands reflectively along his bare and hairy legs. He shuddered a little. Though he had done everything he could to develop the calves, his legs were like broomsticks. He hated them. He was uneasily conscious of them all the time. They were like a native’s.” Only during his war service had he been able to conceal this side of himself to his own satisfaction. “Of course they were the very legs for a top-boot. In his uniform he had looked very well.” But the character weaknesses which his breeding supposedly guarantees, Izzart now rehearses in fluent internalised self-hating diatribes (whose certainties are only fleetingly questioned in the final clause).

He knew very well what to expect if they ever found out. ... Oh, it was so unfair! What difference could it make, that drop of native blood in his veins, and yet because of it they would always be on the watch for the expected failure at the critical moment. Everyone knew that you couldn’t rely on Eurasians, sooner or later they would let you down; he knew it too, but now he asked himself whether they didn’t fail because failure was expected of them.⁶

In the course of the narrative, he meets with a boating accident in which he saves himself at the cost of abandoning a fellow Englishman. When his companion turns out nevertheless to have survived, it seems to Izzart that his moment of cowardice has fatally betrayed his secret – a fear which produces acute panic and paranoia. The presentation of Izzart, through the coding of racial difference, allows Maugham to depict vividly the acute strain

4 Philip Holden, *Orienteering Masculinity, Orienting Nation*. W. Somerset Maugham’s Exotic Fiction, Westport 1996, 105–109.

5 W. Somerset Maugham, *The Yellow Streak* (1926), in: *idem, Collected Short Stories*, 1, Harmondsworth 1963, 418–441, 425, 437.

6 Maugham, *Streak*, see note 5, 423p. cf. 437.

of striving (through assertions of class education and patriotic performance) to inhabit a unified white English middle-class identity which the character (for reasons of race) feels himself fundamentally to lack.

The need for concealment also weighed powerfully on homosexual men, at a time when male same-sex desire was ideologically and socially prescribed, and legally risky.⁷ Recently, historians have begun to map the complexities of homosexual life in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, and the varied intellectual frameworks and social networks through which some men were able to explore and to an extent enact their same-sex desires.⁸ But it remains true that for many, the recognition and/or acceptance of such desire was difficult, and the need to keep it secret imperative. Indeed, "The Yellow Streak" could also be read as a vivid demonstration of how such a hidden dimension of sexuality could be coded, and hence written about, in the displaced form of a racial narrative. The criticisms of which Izzart lives in such fear ("sooner or later they would let you down") could derive from a discourse of homophobia as much as racism.⁹ Read in this way, Maugham's story shows how taken-for-granted categories of racial difference allowed a fictional exploration of the threat posed to hegemonic white identity not only by the possibility of racial mixing, but also by a divergence of sexuality which could not be openly expressed.¹⁰

2. Destabilising categories: Munby

Historians of nineteenth-century Britain concerned with identities of class, gender and race have given considerable attention in recent years to Arthur Munby (1828–1910), a lawyer and minor man of letters, as a figure whose writings and practices reveal much about the overlappings and slippages between these categories.¹¹ Munby had a life-long obsessive fascination with working-class women, whom he interviewed and had photographed dressed in their working clothes; and he formed a relationship with, and later secretly married, a domestic servant, Hannah Cullwick (1833–1909). Those encounters, and that relationship, are documented in an archive which includes an extensive diary, letters, photographs and drawings.

7 Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out. Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, London 1977, 14p, 39p.

8 Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century. Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment*, New York 1994; Graham Robb, *Strangers. Homosexual Love in the 19th Century*, London 2003; Harry G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences. Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century*, London 2003; Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914*, Cambridge 2003.

9 Holden, *Masculinity*, see note 4, 106.

10 Holden, *Masculinity*, see note 4, 108; Dyer, *White*, see note 1, 20, 25.

11 Barry Reay, *Watching Hannah. Sexuality, Horror and Bodily De-Formation in Victorian England*, London 2002, 175 note 5. The archive also includes writings by Cullwick.

If the character of Izzart depicts a man struggling to normalise his identity, Munby's life offers a more complex and contradictory pattern. Two themes become apparent from studies of Munby's life. Firstly, the ease with which signifiers from one mode of domination could slide over to represent another. Munby's attention recurred obsessively to the figure of the physically powerful woman, whose body (and clothing) displayed signs usually indicative of masculinity (height, musculature, work-roughened hands, etc.) But, as his attention brought this 'anomalous' figure into (verbal and/or visual) focus, the effect was to refract both the woman under observation, and Munby himself as bystander/observer, through the lens of other displaced signifiers. As both Anne McClintock and Barry Reay have shown, Munby's drawings of these powerful working women present them not simply as masculine, but also as a racial and species Other. His depiction of their dust- or dirt-covered faces elides them into stereotyped facial features – negroid or simian. Simultaneously, Munby himself, with his small feet and delicate hands, is feminised.¹² What Munby's texts thereby lay bare are not simply his personal, idiosyncratic fantasies, but rather the unconscious workings of the white, bourgeois, imperial male imaginary.

Munby's long-lasting and intimate relationship with Cullwick both provided him with an arena for scripting and enacting complex scenarios in which class and gender regulations were parodied and transgressed; and also allowed him to explore further images of the subordinated Other.¹³ In these scenarios Cullwick acted out, that is self-consciously 'performed', her social role as a domestic servant: sometimes directly vis-à-vis Munby, and sometimes in her usual employment but with him present as observer/voyeur. These performances could be heightened or intensified in various ways, one of the most important of which involved her blackening herself. This could be by an exaggeration of the results of her usual daily work (dirtying her hands or arms), or by a deliberately excessive self-blackening (climbing a chimney or crawling in a coal-hole), but in its most powerful form it presented her as that most abject interracial figure, the black slave. This linked to other elements of Cullwick's submission to Munby: she addressed him as "Massa", and wore a slave band on her wrist and a locked chain round her neck.¹⁴ (This servitude and devotion was framed within a Christian discourse of self-sacrifice.)¹⁵ This racialising of Cullwick – like that of the pitwomen and other working women whom Munby repeatedly sought out to inspect and interrogate – represents an intensification of Othering, of defeminisation, so

12 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 104–112; Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 31p, 91–100, 104–116, 127–132.

13 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 132–137, 142–149, 155–160, 173–180; Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 26–28, 30–35, 69, 75p, 111–116.

14 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 149–152, 154p, 178; Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 73p, 78, 87; Leonore Davidoff, *Class and Gender in Nineteenth Century England: the diaries of Arthur J. Munby and Hannah Cullwick*, in: Judith L., Newton, Mary P. Ryan, and Judith R. Walkowitz ed., *Sex and Class in Women's History*, London 1983, 17–71, 44, 52, 54, 58.

15 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 158.

that the subsequent uncovering of her/their concealed femininity renders him all the greater reward and relief.¹⁶

As well as demonstrating the displacement of meaning along a chain of signifiers, Munby's texts also reveal the impact of individual psychic reality on perceptual categories. His obsessive recurrence to the figure of the powerful woman is linked both to fear, anxiety and desire, and relatedly to his inability to inhabit, fully and comfortably, the normative role of the bourgeois male. Munby was troubled by sexual difference. He both feared and desired the significant women of his childhood. This anxiety can be read in psychoanalytic terms as fear of the phallic woman/mother, who unmans him. But that psychic figure can be historicised, as McClintock does, by linking it to the role of female servants in bringing up the children of nineteenth-century bourgeois families. The presence of two significant female attachment figures made the boy's task of individuation more difficult, leading to "a fragility and uncertainty of identity".¹⁷ The split between the ethereal, disembodied, pure, white mother responsible for the moral education of her children and the carnal, earthy, dirty female servant who physically fed, washed and dressed them is (almost too perfectly) present in Munby's own recollections of childhood. The two key figures were his mother, with her "fair delicate face and golden-auburn hair", of delicate health, offering a "tremulous and tender" love; and Hannah Carter, his nurse, whom he was to keep in contact with and visit all her life, and for whom he provided a pension.¹⁸ Yet, as McClintock demonstrates, within the middle-class home those two (classes of) women had to be kept separate, physically and psychologically. The purity and class status of the former could be secured only by the physical seclusion, and psychic devaluing, of the latter.¹⁹ Growing up in a culture which demanded such sharp divisions, Munby, who was strongly attached to both his mother and his nurse, struggled against this socially sanctioned segregation.

Moreover, Munby's experience further complicates this familiar dichotomy of the spiritual and the sensual woman so often discerned in Victorian culture. For the woman servant might embody not only a sensual, proto-sexual femininity, but also a robust physical competence which that culture could only code as masculine. There were now three psychic figures from which he had to individuate himself: not only the spiritual and the sensual female, but also the strong 'masculine' woman. Munby, insecure in his own masculinity, seems to have partially displaced it into that third figure – the dirty, powerful, working woman. As a result, his perception of these women was as ambiguous figures, whom he himself termed "hybrid".²⁰ In the face of this ambiguity, unconscious emotions of fear or anxiety led to an elision of a masculinised femininity with one also racialised and

16 Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 111–113.

17 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 84–95, quoted at 95.

18 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 79–81, 83p; Davidoff, *Class*, see note 14, 32, 57.

19 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 163–165; cf. the harsh treatment by her employers of the fourteen-year-old Cullwick when both her parents died: 150p.

20 Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 46p, 67p, 96–110, 120–124.

dehumanised, an exaggerated superimposition onto working women of the gender, racial and species images of the rejected/excluded Other, and a concomitant diminishing of himself. Munby's personal anxieties here reveal, in heightened and intensified form, conflicts of categorisation central to his society: white, male, middle-class identity is secured at the expense of constructing an internally undifferentiated Other. It was to counter this underlying unconscious anxiety that he embarked on his obsessive, voyeuristic investigations into the nature of femininity.

It is difficult to locate the precise nature of Munby's desire. Viewed in one way, he simply wanted the servant woman of his childhood; after all, he formed a lifelong bond with and married Cullwick. This second Hannah represented the (re)discovery of the loving, devoted woman who was also strong and capable, and could therefore relieve him of some of the burden of masculinity.²¹ But this was not a straight-forward cross-class romance (analogous to such lasting homosexual relationships as Edward Carpenter's bond with the working-class George Merrill), since it was apparently never consummated sexually.²² Looked at from another perspective, Munby wanted to emphasise the dual nature of Cullwick and the other working women whom he sought out: they are both strong, rough and dirty (like working-men, blacks and animals), and they are also loving and devoted. Yet it is not the case that he simply wants to reclaim them for conventional femininity. As Davidoff points out, he delighted in mocking middle-class women who conformed to this ideal; he had no time for working-class women whom he saw as displaying "fine ladyism", aspiring to or aping gentility; and he wanted working women to retain their independence.²³

Instead, Munby could be seen as someone who rejoiced in the destabilising of binary classifications (of gender, class, race, even generation), who revelled in what he termed "hybrids" or "anomalies". One might say that, as well as the containment of desire, he also eroticised this destabilisation of categories, that is he eroticised "in-between-ness".²⁴ On the one hand this temporarily freed him to perceive, and at times comment critically on, the limitations of the dominant, normative categories of the world within which he was located. He evinced an acute awareness that the realities of skin and physique bore no necessary relation to gender or class position: not all men are strong, not all women weak; a (middle-class) man might have "slender white" hands, while a (servant) woman's might be

21 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 144p.

22 On Carpenter, see Weeks, *Coming Out*, see note 7, 78–83. Reay, *Hannah*, see note 11, 147, 153–155, 161–165, has argued, in my view convincingly, that Munby's should be understood as a particular type of Victorian masculinity, that of the celibate bachelor, one who was most attracted to resisting temptation and compulsively deferring pleasure, so that he eroticised the containment of desire. This suggests that he succeeded at times in connecting the idealised spiritual and the robust physical feminine, but could not link them with the sensual.

23 Davidoff, *Class*, see note 14, 32p, 55, 57, 59p; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 83.

24 Reay, *Hannah*, see note 11, 78. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 103, comments on his going to see Siamese (conjoined) twins: "Perhaps the sight of a human being who is 'not completely rounded off from every other' offered an unbidden analogy to his own identity."

“of a yellow-brown hue” or “deep red-brown”.²⁵ This recognition Munby both observed in the normal encounters of daily life, and dramatised in domestic scenarios which he (with Cullwick’s collaboration) staged. These scenes of recognition were then repeatedly revisited in conversations between Munby and Cullwick, memorialised in his diary, and fictionalised in his poetic narratives.²⁶ In his most striking analyses, Munby set out starkly the conventional, near-arbitrary relations between the generic signifiers of class, gender and race, and the individuals to whom those signifiers were attached, and revealed an awareness of “the potential fluidity of class identity”.²⁷ Observing, at a dinner, the contrast between the large hands of the serving women, and the medium and small hands of the male and female middle-class guests, he pondered:

Are the relations of the sexes really inverted when three men sit at table with hands delicate and jewelled, and a woman stands behind and waits, offering the dishes with so large coarse a hand that makes her master’s look almost lady-like ... If *this* is right for one class, is *that* for the other? In short, what, in the Equation of Life, is the respective value of the terms *sex* and *station*?²⁸

On the other hand, this collapsing of classification necessarily aroused in him considerable anxiety. Hence his constant endeavour to discover and demonstrate that within that multiply Othered figure there was nevertheless to be found the pure, devoted, feminine woman. This search had the character of a repetition-compulsion; no matter how many times the discovery was (re)made, it was never secure, and must be re-enacted.²⁹ His anxiety can also be seen in his anger at situations in which he was not, or no longer, in control of the scenarios in which he (alone or with Cullwick) staged that destabilisation.³⁰ This anxiety led him ultimately to reinstate, however precariously, the boundaries of gender.³¹

Munby’s perceptions, and their limitations, arose from the degree of his absorption into, or (partial) detachment from, his prescribed role. He found the full inhabiting of that role difficult, but not unduly oppressive. He never felt driven to relinquish, or even question,

25 Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 70, 77–79, 125–132.

26 Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 9, 16–19, 23–28, 30–35, 42–45, 66–69, 75p, 83–86, 125–132, 157p.

27 McClintock, Imperial Leather, see note 1, 84.

28 Davidoff, Class, see note 14, 62; Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 132.

29 Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 30–35, 39–45, 157p, 167–169.

30 McClintock, Imperial Leather, see note 1, 130, 148.

31 McClintock, Imperial Leather, see note 1, 104–107, compares two of Munby’s drawings, showing a masculinised, blackened working woman faced in the first by a middle-class lady, in the second by Munby himself. Drawing attention to the similarities between Munby and the lady, she suggests they reveal “an unbidden logic of desire ... Munby reveals a secret identification with the female upper class in relation to the masculinized working-class women.” I suggest that it precisely the fear of this inner logic which drives Munby to rediscover and reinstate the femininity of these women, and hence his own masculinity.

the privileges of his position; to an overwhelming extent it was he who, with the aid of his social status and money, orchestrated and dictated the terms of his encounters with working women, and even to a considerable extent with Cullwick.³² He never dared to reveal, except to a few very close friends, his greatest transgressive act – the fact of his marriage to a servant. He was able partially to occupy his prescribed role, while his literary writings and his social investigations (together with his secret marriage) allowed him to explore and express at length, but in private (diary, marriage) or in socially acceptable but muted forms (poetry), his conflicts and desires.³³

3. Liminal positioning: Macfie

Conflicts between ascribed and experienced identity might be handled in different ways. Munby oscillated between an overdetermined reinforcement of the boundaries of difference, and the opening up of a space for recognising the constructed nature of dominant stereotypes. The character of Izzart, as imagined by Maugham, portrays a determined if despairing endeavour to resuture the supposed gap between class and racial identities. But such a conflict could also provide an emotional impetus to challenge such ascribed identities. As Robert Aldrich has shown, relationships of transgressive homosexual desire across the boundaries of empire could range from exploitation, via reciprocal (if unequal) exchange or genuine if temporary affection, to determination to defy bourgeois norms or resist imperial imperatives.³⁴ My final example will explore an ambiguous instance through a key episode in the life story of one such 'outsider'.

Robert Andrew Scott Macfie was born in 1868 into a comfortably-off bourgeois family, of Scottish origins, which had owned and operated a sugar-refining business in Liverpool since the 1830s. After education at an elite private school, and from 1886–1891 at the Universities of Cambridge, Göttingen and Edinburgh, he joined the family firm, where (with the interruptions described below) he worked until retirement, ending as chairman of the board of directors.³⁵

During his twenties (the 1890s), there is evidence of significant conflicts with his ascribed identity: he rejected the Christian faith to which he had previously been a socially-concerned adherent; and twice 'ran away' from the firm, first to enlist in the army as a pri-

32 Though feminist historians have stressed Cullwick's counter-agency, and her ability to determine at least in part the terms of their relationship: McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 139–145, 149pp, 155–160; Liz Stanley, *The Auto/Biographical I*, Manchester 1992, chapter 6.

33 Davidoff, *Class*, see note 14, 31.

34 Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, London 2003, 367–396; Dyer, *White*, see note 1, 5p.

35 For biographical information, see the memorial issue of *Journal of the Gypsy Law Society* (3rd series) 14 [Special number] (1935), comprising Frederick George Ackerley, *Friend of all the world: a memoir of Robert Andrew Scott Macfie*, 16–43, and *Memories of R. A. Scott Macfie*, by his friends, 47–110.

vate soldier, and then to dress and work as a labourer.³⁶ For a member of the British bourgeoisie to dress up in this way and 'play' at being a proletarian was not without precedent at this time. But usually it was associated with a claim to some wider purpose, often that of social investigation. Macfie was unusual in offering no such justification, but undertaking the adventure unashamedly for his own benefit. Joining the Army as a private was even more unusual. Taken together, these successive acts of class transgression, in response to work and personal crises, suggest a considerable degree of discomfort with the role expected of him by his family and society – a role from which he too could be considered a 'deserter'.

Thereafter, Macfie seems to have found an acceptable way of living with those tensions. For the next twenty years, he played his managerial role in the family firm, displaying a particular concern for the workmen, but taking on a wide range of responsibilities. In his spare time, he first became an early and very active member of the Liverpool Scottish, a volunteer infantry battalion (1900–1907); and then, having developed an interest in Gypsy studies and the Romani way of life, became Secretary of the *Gypsy Lore Society (GLS)* and Editor of its "Journal", dealing with both the editorial and business sides and providing the inspiration and driving force behind its research (1907–1914).

Since the late eighteenth century, two apparently opposed strands had developed in European writing about Gypsies. One perceived them as nomads or vagrants, a threat who needed to be either civilised (which meant in part being settled) or expelled. The other saw them as a precious link to a pre-industrial way of living, closer to nature and retaining the virtues of such a life, democratic and resistant to authority.³⁷ Both these attitudes to Gypsies were present in British social commentary and literary writing throughout the nineteenth century; but that strand which celebrated the virtues of Gypsy life flourished particularly strongly towards the end of the century (especially among writers and artists), when it connected with a wider promotion of the virtues of the open road and a back-to-the-land movement.³⁸ The *GLS*, while by today's standards extremely modest in its political or sociological (as opposed to philological, historical or antiquarian) efforts on behalf of Gypsies, took a broadly liberal position, including challenging hostile reporting of Gypsy affairs in the press.³⁹

36 Ackerley, Friend, see note 35, 6p, 15–18; J. A. Angus, *Memories*, see note 35, 64.

37 Katie Trumpener, "The Time of the Gypsies": a "People without History" in the Narratives of the West, in: *Critical Inquiry*, 18, 4 (1992), 843–884, 854, 863–872; Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century*, New Haven 2000, 54, 65.

38 Tickner, *Modern Life*, see note 37, 53, 62p; Michael Holroyd, *Augustus John: a Biography*, Harmondsworth 1976 (rev. edn.), 356–360, 394–402.

39 David Mayall, *Gypsy Identities 1500–2000: from Egipcians and Moon-Men to the Ethnic Romany*, London 2004, 131, 166, 172p; Angus Fraser, *A Dim Lot*, in: Matt T. Salo, *100 Years of Gypsy Studies: papers from the 10th Annual Meeting of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Cheverly, MD 1990, 1–14, 6, 8pp; Ken Lee, *Orientalism and Gypsyism*, in: *Social Analysis: Journal of Cultural and Social Practice*, 44, 2 (2000), 129–156, 135. Macfie himself repeatedly challenged negative stereotyping of Gypsies as a social problem.

Macfie's engagement with Gypsies and Romani culture offers an arena for analysing more fully his negotiation of his conflicts of identity. In May to June 1913, after an invitation from the British Vice-Consul at Varna who was a contributor to the "Journal", Macfie visited Bulgaria for four weeks. He treated the visit as a much-needed holiday and break from hard work, rather than a serious attempt to gather information about Gypsy life and language in Bulgaria. When the Bulgarian government, in the weeks before the start of the Second Balkan War, took control of the railways, Macfie, not wishing to be trapped in the country if hostilities broke out, seized what he himself termed this "pretext" to arrange to travel from Varna to Rustshuk (modern Ruse) – and thence to cross the Danube to Romania – in the company of a band of Gypsies, disguised as one of them. He subsequently published an account of this seven-day trip entitled "With Gypsies in Bulgaria" (1916).⁴⁰

Macfie's engagement with British working men, as paternalist employer and as army Volunteer, was paralleled by his strong attachment to Gypsies – both as individuals, and as a group whose language and culture he worked tirelessly to record and analyse. This identification with Gypsies was a complementary if subordinate aspect of Macfie's identity, a form of romanticism which counterbalanced and in part mitigated the demands on him as a businessman of capitalist rationality. Alongside positive aspects in the pioneer Gypsiologists' presentation of the Gypsies and their way of life, there were substantial elements of stereotyping and patronage.⁴¹ Macfie certainly shared this perception, viewing Gypsies as absolutely different in nature from *Gadzho* races. The nature of his romantic attachment and identification can be explored more fully through a reading of "With Gypsies in Bulgaria".

Desire for a romantic Other of contemporary western society pervades the book, structuring two central strands in the text. Its representation of Mohammedans and Turks is based on Macfie's constant reiteration of the superiority of the (clearly idealised) "Mohammedan" religion and practical ethic over the Christian, and by a preference for what he saw as a more leisurely way of life under the Ottomans, in contrast to the commercial hustling of the West.⁴² If Mohammedans stand for tolerance, cleanliness, moderation – supposedly Christian virtues, but actualised by an Other religion – then the other key group, Gypsies, are by contrast positioned as outlaws. At first he planned to travel with a group of Zagundzhis, Mohammedan Gypsies whom he celebrated as colourful outsiders.⁴³ His account presents them as the romantic Other fully fledged: instinctive and natural as

40 Robert Andrew Scott Macfie, *With Gypsies in Bulgaria*, by Andreas ("Mui Shuko"), Liverpool 1916, 3. I use Macfie's language in referring to Gypsies and Mohammedan, although the preferred terms today would be Roma/Sinti and Islamic.

41 Fraser, *Dim Lot*, see note 39, 7–9; Lee, *Orientalism*, see note 39, 129–156; Mayall, *Identities*, see note 39, 41, 125–132, 174–179.

42 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 35–38, 96.

43 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 8p.

children or animals, these Gypsies are located in fantasy outside the bounds of humanity.⁴⁴ When he was prevented from travelling with the Zagundzhis, he then met a group of Christian Gypsies, comb-makers, who were willing to take him. At first disappointed, seeing them as boringly respectable and lacking in colour, he began to warm to them only when he discovered that the wife of their leader stole chickens for their dinner. His sense of involvement grew as the rest of the party, inspired by her example, gradually revealed to him that they were also horse thieves.⁴⁵ Macfie's text engages in a complex negotiation with his readers on this theme. Forever teasing those readers, he celebrates the Gypsies' law-breaking, while refusing an invitation to join them (in case he faced a prison sentence). He seeks simultaneously to defend Gypsies against claims that they are all criminals, while recounting and enjoying their various law-breaking escapades.⁴⁶ In doing this, Macfie is also negotiating between different impulses within himself, positioning himself liminally between the law-abiding and the law-breaking, as he had previously between bourgeois and worker, Anglo-Scot and Gypsy.

The third key theme in the text reveals more of the energies creating and sustaining this liminal positioning. That theme is Macfie's homoerotic desire, figured in his relationship with Turi, the son of the Gypsies' leader. His attitude towards Turi evolves gradually in the text, until on the fourth day the relationship blossomed.⁴⁷ They go together to visit the Turkish bath in Razgrad. The bathing scene is a homoerotic trope going back at least to Walt Whitman; it offered a legitimate location for men to be naked together.⁴⁸ Macfie reports the episode as an erotic epiphany, where he envisions Turi transformed in a doubly admirable way. First, he figures as a guardian spirit, lamenting the fate of the great baths.

Turi's dark and muscular body seemed to be an ancient bronze statue that had been part of the building ever since the good Turk reared it in the centre of their town, between the mosques, houses of God, to be a temple of cleanliness, temperance, and health. And Turi, as he sat there, magnificent in his nakedness, head bowed, hands clasping his knees, might well have been the genius of the place, mourning that the present generation of Bulgarian Christians have done nothing to preserve its beauty and protect it from decay ...

Secondly, his beauty and desirability mitigates his criminality.

44 His extended comparison with children here replicates tropes common throughout the writing of the Gypsiologists; cf. Mayall, *Identities*, see note 39, 129; Anthony Sampson, *The Scholar Gypsy: the Quest for a Family Secret*, London 1997, 21.

45 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 19–28, 75p.

46 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 27, 77p, 82p, 106, 108p, 113–116, 125, 134.

47 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 21, 56, 72, 74.

48 Parminder Bakshi, *The Politics of Desire: E. M. Forster's Encounters with India*, in: Tony Davies and Nigel Woods ed., *A Passage to India*, Buckingham 1994, 23–64, 40, 154 note 12.

His skin ... had a rich mat velvety surface, the dark equivalent of a child's "peach-bloom"; and his body and limbs, though muscular, were gracefully proportioned. And after the shampooer had scrubbed and soaped us, when the Gypsy stood under the great vault, pouring warm water over himself from a silvered cup, it seemed as though one of the three thousand statues which were erected at Olympia to commemorate athletes, had been discovered, and I found it difficult to refrain from touching him to feel whether he was really bronze. I knew that, to one who could be so beautiful, much must be forgiven – even horse-stealing.⁴⁹

In this quasi-baptismal scene water and beauty together transform Turi, a Christian Gypsy horse-thief, variously into a Mohammedan *genius loci*, a victorious Greek athlete, and a redeemed sinner – at once a religious and a pagan ideal.

The relationship which now developed between Macfie and Turi had a fraternal dimension; they became blood-brothers.⁵⁰ The closing scene of the journey and the text, as Macfie and Turi were joined by Marko Markoff, a local Gypsy expert, portrays vividly the inner division which resulted.

It was strange to sit there in Turkish disguise, and burned brown as a Gypsy by the sun, enjoying intellectual intercourse after a week with semi-savages, and hearing again my own language. But it was difficult to relapse suddenly into civilization, and perhaps the effort to present myself alternatively to Dr Marko as an educated man, and to the Gypsies as a comrade, intensified the pain of those last minutes.⁵¹

The intensity of Macfie's bond with Turi, and through him the Gypsies, meant that he had for the moment left his liminal position, for a stronger identification with his romantic/rebellious other self. In England, Macfie had had his body covered with Gypsy tattoos, thereby inscribing a hidden identity. Early in his journey, he felt able to reveal this aspect of his self, proudly relating how, on one particular visit to a Gypsy quarter, he had repeatedly to remove his coat and waistcoat so that each newly-arrived group of Gypsies could admire the tattoos. Now, however, his transformation had gone further, he was "burned brown as a Gypsy".

It was Macfie's growing attachment to Turi, as much as his discovery of the Gypsies' horse-thieving, which made the narrative of his journey a story of thwarted love and painful parting. For an Englishman of this period, to act on such homoerotic desire was to break the law as much as was stealing a chicken or a horse. So while the ambivalence towards the law which Macfie's text reveals, and revels in, explicitly concerns laws of property, it is also infused with the power of forbidden desire. That desire, transmuted

49 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 88p.

50 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 116p, 120–130.

51 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 135, 139pp.

through Macfie's perception of Islam, becomes the baptismal water which washes away Turi's, and the Gypsies', crimes; no longer an outlaw, it is Turi who now in the narrative protects Macfie from those who would cheat and rob him.⁵² That concern in turn enables Macfie to sublimate his outlawed desire into the intense and romantic bond of blood-brotherhood. Both Turi and the author, Macfie's text asserts, are not truly outside the law; their love is redeemed and cleansed through beauty and mutual concern.⁵³

Through fantasy, Macfie was able to project another world which was the antitype of that into which he was born. Having initially felt driven to escape from his proffered social identity via complete identification with the Other (soldier, worker), he eventually developed a more manageable strategy by manoeuvring liminal spaces between his prescribed and wished-for identities. In Bulgaria, by temporarily rejecting the patriarchal structures of family, the firm and Christianity, which would compel his attendance and police his desire for men, for an (imagined) Islamic ethic, an Ottoman ease and a Gypsy ethos, he created a framework within which those previous liminal spaces could be temporarily expanded, and his desire(s) to some extent lived.

When the First World War broke out, Macfie immediately volunteered, despite being over age. However, he refused to become an officer (as would have been expected from his experience and social position), and instead served throughout as a sergeant. The war provided Macfie with an exceptional opportunity to bring the various elements of his identity into closer alignment. He could lay aside his daily responsibilities to his family and the family firm for unimpeachable reasons of a national duty. His love for men could be lived out in a whole-hearted and self-sacrificing way: as a Quartermaster-Sergeant, responsible for feeding and billeting, his new family absorbing all his time and energies. No longer separated from working men as an employer, his crossing the boundaries of class could be enacted through his precise liminal positioning as sergeant. In this role with which he was psychically at ease, at once dutiful and a rebel, he could act as brotherly advocate for his men to the officers, father figures from whom he distanced himself and towards whom he evinced a general contempt.

Conclusion

These three examples can be read, to differing extents, in terms of the balance between the need to maintain rigid (and preferably aligned) boundaries of class, race, gender and sexuality, and the ability to tolerate a greater fluidity of identity. In later nineteenth-century Britain, the borders of class, race and gender/sexuality were strongly demarcated, and those who blurred or crossed those boundaries closely policed. Hence marriages, and other ro-

52 Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 116p, 120–123, 141.

53 After his return to England, Macfie made substantial efforts to help Turi when he was arrested and put on trial for murder: Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 131pp.

mantic or intimate relationships, across the boundaries of class, race or ethnicity, were relatively rare and liable to provoke anxiety as transgressive; while same-sex relationships, especially those between men, became the subject of a moral panic.

Relatedly, these examples can also be read in terms of the relationship between the self, and that which was (or might be) displaced from the self into an Other. Joanna de Groot has argued that nineteenth-century images of Otherness and subordination need to be understood not just as means to make white men's control of women or natives easier, but also as "ways for men to explore and deal with *their own* identity and place in the world as sexual beings, as artists and intellectuals, as imperial rulers, and as wielders of knowledge". She points to the contradictions within emergent modes of masculinity following the intensification of separate spheres (involving new forms of work- and self-discipline which allowed men to control others); and suggests that "in the process of attaining such control, men did not so much eliminate emotional and personal needs as transfer responsibility for them to women, whose caring, nurturing, feeling role was to satisfy them." This transfer involved "the *loss* of power to understand and deal with the world of emotion, personal expression, and intimacy", a loss which could be recovered "through male fantasies of the female, who stood not only for the Other which they had created, but for aspects of their selves which they did not wish to lose."⁵⁴ I would add that that recovery could take place not only via fantasies of the female, but also via fantasies of a class, racial or ethnic Other.

Each of these examples displays a tension within white masculinity concerning the rigid gender boundary that had to be maintained, and the resultant displacement of capacities for emotion and nurture. Izzart's efforts to protect his masculinity from the taint of racial otherness can also be read as defending it from other threats, in particular that of his own femininity. Philip Holden notes that the text presents Izzart's feeling towards his mother as "a deep tenderness; it was almost a physical bond between them, something stronger than the ordinary feeling of mother and son"; while at the same time his complaints against her (that she is shockingly familiar and emotional) are the very ones he fears would be levelled against himself if his ancestry were known.⁵⁵ His anxiety about his native blood is first triggered in the narrative by the British Resident's revelation that he has taken a native wife by whom he has two children, an option Izzart has rejected for himself. The Resident's wife and Izzart's mother are, suggests Holden, "two halves of the same woman – Maugham's unruly female who moves from submission to passionate activity, and thus disturbs the ordered world of men".⁵⁶ Hence femininity, his own and a potential partner's, must be excluded from Izzart's normative masculinity.

Munby by contrast relished the transgressive potentials of destabilising dominant binaries. Working women's strength and competence, together with their (unconsciously ero-

⁵⁴ Joanna de Groot, "Sex" and "Race": the Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century, in: Hall, *Cultures*, see note 1, 37–60, 45, 51.

⁵⁵ Maugham, *Streak*, see note 5, 424.

⁵⁶ Holden, *Masculinity*, see note 4, 108.

ticised) dirt and racialised/animal qualities, rendered them superior to middle-class women, while relieving (babyish or effeminate) Munby of some of the burdens of masculinity. Viewed thus, he embraced what Izzart fled from. However, this solution was sustainable only within the dynamics of an (ever repeated) play-scenario over which Munby exercised control. Ultimately, he had to restore the normative order, to re-establish his own masculinity, by (constantly) rediscovering true femininity within the composite masculinised, black, animal Other represented by the working women whom he sought out and desired. Though this destabilisation of categories made clear to him the arbitrariness of those lines of division, it was a division which he nevertheless finally reinstated.

Macfie found a different solution to these conflicts within masculinity. Where Munby remained fixated on hybrid identities, on the uncertainties of in-between states, Macfie before 1914 constructed (privileged) opportunities for a more flexible inhabiting of class, racial, gender and sexual identity. He created for himself relatively stable liminal positions, located psychically, and at times practically, between existing identities. By exchanging paternal for fraternal bonds, he enabled himself to exercise capacities for caring and nurturing, within homosocial worlds (the army, the Gypsies) from which women as sexual beings were effectively excluded. The First World War Macfie experienced as a liminal time, rather than space; for a period, his whole being could be invested in such a fraternal, homosocial world, in which he wore himself out in nurturing and caring for his men.

Racial and related imagery is important in all these examples. Their differences can be brought out by examining the images of cleansing which occur in each. In McClintock's analysis of the circulation of colonialist and racist ideologies and imagery in late-nineteenth-century advertising, especially of soap which was one of the first branded goods, the starkest and most vivid example is a Pears' Soap 'before and after' advert in which a white boy uses the soap to whiten the body (but not the head) of a black child.⁵⁷ The character of Izzart depicts an internalisation of this ideology. He seeks to conceal the degree to which the privileges of class and the firmly maintained boundaries of masculinity are defences against the "touch of the tar-brush", fearful that his swarthy skin will betray him. The text allows him one brief moment of respite from this effort at self-cleansing. When he and the Malayan "boy" who has rescued him reached the shore, "[t]hey were covered with black mud from head to foot." Once safe in a Dyak long-house, glad to be alive though fearing his companion is dead, Izzart "caught sight of the yellow new moon lying on her back, and it gave him a keen, almost a sensual, pleasure ... The moon had never looked to him more lovely." Holden comments that "[i]n its association with femininity, the moon recalls the physical bond he has with his mother", its image granting Izzart "a temporary respite, a moment of pleasure, a protected space of counter-discourse".⁵⁸ When his English companion, reunited with him after his own rescue, comments: "I say, old man, you look as though you'd be all the better for a wash", Izzart replies 'I'll wash later.'

57 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 213.

58 Holden, *Masculinity*, see note 4, 108.

For a brief interlude, guilty at his failure but glad to be alive, he relinquishes the struggle to maintain his racial and gendered, 'White Man's', identity; but soon the fear returns that his cowardice would be discovered and "his name would be mud".⁵⁹

Munby's obsession reverses this struggle. He is repeatedly drawn to the woman who is non-White (with ruddy, tawny, reddened, brown or black skin), but always with the proviso that underneath she is really white with all that symbolises. The relief and pleasure of this discovery is enhanced by any prior intensification of her blackness, whether this comes in the regular course of a working woman's life (toiling in the sun or at the pit-head) or through Cullwick's deliberate blackening of herself. In addition, he and Cullwick engaged in various washing rituals. Cleansing here bears overdetermined meanings: it can reveal what is truly there but temporarily and only superficially hidden (Cullwick's femininity); symbolise devoted service (Cullwick washing Munby's feet); enact a chaste but caring sensuality (Munby and Cullwick bathing each other's bodies); or remove any impurity which may have been incurred through what McClintock terms "purification rituals, an exoneration of guilt and transgression".⁶⁰

In her analysis of the imperialist Pears advert, McClintock suggests: "The sacrament of soap offers a reformation allegory whereby the purification of the domestic body becomes a metaphor for the regeneration of the body politic."⁶¹ Macfie's epiphany can be read as a counter-image. Here, the cleansing ritual is certainly imbued with a religious and purifying meaning; but it takes place in a Mohammedan not a Christian setting.⁶² While it cleanses Turi it remakes him into a Mohammedan or a pagan; and it remains ambiguous whether it is his sins which are washed away, or the supposed sinfulness of his acts. The latter is suggested not only by Macfie's repeated textual defences of law-breaking, but by his description which serves to emphasise rather than to dissolve Turi's "dark" complexion (the word is repeated), one to which new lustre is added – "rich mat velvet" and "bronze".

Whiteness was a widespread and powerful idea in later nineteenth century Britain, the more so since it was not only expressed as explicit ideology, but also embedded in (verbal and visual) metaphors which linked it to class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, and which entered into unconscious as well as conscious dimensions of personality. Taken together, what the above examples suggest is that while there were powerful and mutually reinforcing interconnections between the ideologies and imagery of race, class, gender and sexuality, they – and the very categories themselves – were at times capable of disruption. Individual white bourgeois men who found themselves unable or unwilling to take up their ascribed identities could rework this imagery into new constellations which gave

⁵⁹ Maugham, *Streak*, see note 5, 429–431, 434.

⁶⁰ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 148, 158; Reay, Hannah, see note 11, 154p.

⁶¹ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, see note 1, 214.

⁶² Macfie, *Gypsies*, see note 40, 85p claims that under Ottoman rule, every Balkan town had its public *hammam*; once Christian rulers arrived, however, "cleanliness, an easily dispensable adjunct of Christianity, gradually vanished, and godliness with it".

them some greater freedom and the ability to discern, and perhaps challenge, supposedly fixed and natural boundaries. What remains more difficult to trace are the ways in which the subaltern Others of the white racial imaginary could take advantage of these disruptions to secure some greater freedom of action for themselves.⁶³

⁶³ For attempts to do so, see the texts cited in notes 32 and 34.