

Love on the Veldt: Romance and Ideology in Gertrude Page's 'A Terror That Saved' (1912)

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Abstract

The following essay offers a close reading of an obscure imperial short story, Gertrude Page's 'A Terror That Saved' (1912), in order to question the assumptions that short fiction about imperial adventure is necessarily masculine, and that short stories with empire settings are primarily vehicles for colonial ideology. When the story in question was written, its author had recently moved from Britain to Rhodesia, a colony whose owner-administrator, the British South Africa Company (BSAC), had strong financial and political incentives for promoting itself to settlers, investors, and the reading public in Britain. Even so, I argue, it would be a mistake to view this tale as being 'about' empire in any simple sense, to infer that its huge audience was actively endorsing imperialism, or to equate its generic conventionality and moral conservatism with a static, traditional, and collective worldview. Instead, I draw on Richard Ohmann's landmark analysis of magazine short stories to sketch an alternative framework within which to understand the popularity of such short stories and to reconstruct the ways in which they were likely read, in particular by women.

They are there, self-dependent and complete, with the eternal rocks and veldt around them, watching in silence, neither condemning nor approving. [. . .] We feel with them, see with them, think their thoughts, and have to fight their battle.

—review of Gertrude Page's *The Edge o' Beyond* in *The Academy* (June 1908: 911)

Until recently, most histories of imperial short fiction in English have assigned a marginal role to women, whether as authors, protagonists, or readers. Their case studies are almost always of works by the likes of G. A. Henty, H. Rider Haggard, John Buchan, Rudyard Kipling, and Somerset Maugham, whose narratives are centred, in turn, on masculine experience (Liggins et al 2011: 90-117; Boccardi 2008). It is mostly taken for granted that the readership of these stories, both intended and actual, was overwhelmingly male, even when, as with Joseph Conrad's magazine serializations, the available evidence suggests otherwise (Donovan 2012). And in contrast to male-authored short fiction, which is treated primarily as an expression of imperialist ideology, stories by

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women typically secure inclusion in anthologies and critical studies of colonial literature when they also exemplify innovations in Modernist aesthetics (Katherine Mansfield), emergent national traditions (Dorothea Fairbridge, Sara Jeanette Duncan), critiques of racial prejudice (Olive Schreiner, Cornelia Sorabji, Alice Perrin), or opposition to the class and gender constraints of settler life (Flora Annie Steel, Edith Joan Lyttleton). Neither generic romances nor bestsellers, these texts illustrate the precept that imperial adventure—to adapt the title of Joseph Bristow's influential study—is for boys.

A further unstated assumption governs how imperial short stories are typically analysed, namely in relation to colonial policy and propaganda, and ideas about race. For scholars, the popularity of imperial short stories between roughly 1880 and 1930 was due not merely to rapid growth in magazine publishing and the empire itself, but to a wider cultural mobilization in support of imperialist ideology. On this view, the British public's hunger for fictional representations of explorers, soldiers, and settlers reflected its endorsement, conscious and otherwise, of colonialist and racist attitudes. The imperial short story repays study, it is implied, because of what it reveals about the relational dynamic between British audiences and their empire, relaying far-distant imperial realities to domestic readers while also ensuring that those readers' prejudices found expression in colonial relations on the ground. The imperial short story was, so to speak, an imaginative proxy for direct participation in the imperial project. And the consequence of this assumption is that when scholars do consider women in relation to imperial short fiction—again, whether as authors, protagonists, or readers—their focus is almost always on the gender dimensions of empire (e.g. Richardson 2003; Teo 2012).

This approach, though often couched in formidably theoretical terms, is curiously literal. In effect, it narrows the significance of literary texts to their explicit subject-matter or theme. Nonetheless, this approach has become so familiar that it now takes considerable effort to imagine how an imperial short story might be read *in terms other than imperialism*. What is more, it sits awkwardly with the very different logic which is applied to the other categories of short fiction that came into vogue in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For instance, numerous studies have examined the science-fiction tale and the detective short story in terms of contemporary technology and crime, respectively, but

no-one would seriously claim that these are their only, or even their principal, horizons of meaning. Richard Jeffreys's 'The Great Snow' (written c.1875) is no more a vision of urban preparedness for eco-catastrophe than Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Adventure of the Norwood Builder' (1903) is an account of the forensic methods of private detectives. Yet imperial short stories, we are to believe, refer solely to their ostensible subject matter.

The following essay offers a close reading of a single short story in order to challenge both these premises—namely, that short fiction about imperial adventure is necessarily masculine, and that short stories with empire settings are primarily vehicles for colonial ideology. When the story in question was written, its author had recently moved from Britain to Rhodesia, a colony whose owner-administrator, the British South Africa Company (BSAC), had strong financial and political incentives for promoting itself to settlers, investors, and the reading public in Britain. Even so, I argue, it would be a mistake to view this tale as being 'about' empire in any simple sense, to infer that its huge audience was actively endorsing imperialism, or to equate its generic conventionality and moral conservatism with a static, traditional, and collective worldview. Instead, I sketch an alternative framework within which to understand the popularity of such short stories and to reconstruct the ways in which they were likely read, in particular by women. My aim is neither to exculpate the author from her imperialist sympathies and racial prejudices, nor to argue that there are overlooked aesthetic or philosophical merits in her writings. Rather, I want to make this seemingly self-evident text into something strange and new, and, in the process, to show that a revision of our understanding of the relationship between colonial writing and imperial ideology is long overdue.



In February 1912, a monthly one-shilling London magazine called *The Quiver* published a short story titled 'A Terror That Saved'¹ about two white settlers who are romantically united by a lion attack on the *veldt*, the Southern African prairie. Like countless other stories in early-twentieth-century magazines, it garnered no special attention at the time

¹ See http://s000.tinyupload.com/index.php?file_id=66498185627081099514.

and was never collected or republished. (In the United States, the story was first published in *The Story-Teller* in September 1918.) As such, it mirrors the literary fate of its author, Gertrude Page, a British-born novelist from Rhodesia who, unlike her imperial contemporaries Rudyard Kipling, John Buchan, and H. Rider Haggard, is today utterly eclipsed. Her works, though international bestsellers in their day, have long been out of print; her name is absent from most bibliographies of South African and women's writing; and some of her novels are now held by only one or two libraries in the world. Like the British empire which she championed so passionately, Gertrude Page has been relegated to the dustbin of history.

Modern readers may be forgiven for thinking that this is just as it should be. cursory inspection reveals 'A Terror That Saved' to be sentimental, hackneyed, and openly racist. As in her previous, novel-length treatments of Rhodesian frontier life—*Love in the Wilderness* (1907), *The Edge o' Beyond* (1908), *The Silent Rancher* (1909), *Jill's Rhodesian Philosophy* (1910), and *The Rhodesian* (1912)—Page portrays Africans as lazy and incompetent children who are oblivious to their good fortune to live under white rule. (When she describes them at all, that is; Africans are a somewhat marginal presence in her writing.) Judged on its aesthetic or ethical qualities, the story certainly has little to recommend it. Far from innovating in the short story form, Page mobilizes the creakiest of narrative conventions while making a thinly-veiled assertion of white superiority that exhibits no trace of the racial and sexual anxieties found in other popular colonial texts such as *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Kim* (1901), or *Prester John* (1910). A hundred years after its debut appearance, it is not immediately apparent why this mini-epic of stylized colonial heroism should warrant closer attention.

While 'A Terror That Saved' is now of interest only to literary historians, matters were very different in Page's lifetime. Most of her dozen or so novels sold in the hundreds of thousands, and collectively in the millions, fuelled in part by their dissemination in mass-circulation serials. Publication in *The Quiver* (about which more shortly) brought 'A Terror That Saved' to a readership numbering in the tens of thousands, and Page regularly placed other short stories and novels in popular magazines such as *Girl's Own Paper*, *Cassell's*, *Short Stories*, *The Windsor*, and *Hutchinson's*; annual miscellanies such as *Sundrops* and

The Empire Annual for Australian Girls; and daily newspapers from London to New Zealand. Page's exceptional commercial appeal led publishers and reviewers to nickname her 'The Wizard of Rhodesia', and in 1912 she was being acclaimed as one of the most popular novelists of the hour. 'Gertrude Page,' observed the *Boston Evening Transcript* with an up-to-date stockbroking metaphor, 'is making a 'corner' in Rhodesia' (13 April 1912: 8).

Two completely different readerships, then. Different most obviously in their size and demographic composition, but also in their relationship to the story as readers. Among other things, 'A Terror That Saved' reminds us of the complexity of the factors shaping a literary work's production and reception as well as its afterlife in the literary canon and the classroom. Why do we read the texts we read? Which of them should we teach, and how? More specifically: Why do we read empire fiction, that is, novels and short stories that thematize and in many cases celebrate empire? And when we do, what exactly it is that we are reading? Are empire fictions merely instances of what Edward W. Said, in his landmark study *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1975), identified as a transhistorical discourse that represents the world in order to dominate it? Or is there more to these distasteful texts than meets the eye?

In what follows I offer three related arguments. To begin with, I take it as read that 'A Terror that Saved' and countless works like it have no significant literary or moral qualities. Nevertheless, my first claim is that this obscure and politically repugnant specimen of Edwardian genre fiction has something important to tell us about the relationship between literature and imperialism, and perhaps also about imperialism itself. My second argument is that 'A Terror That Saved' is in some ways better suited to this kind of investigation than the stories we usually examine for this purpose—canonical texts such as *Heart of Darkness* or Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). It is not just that Conrad's and Achebe's works are regarded as exceptionally well-written and philosophically complex but that they come to the reader embedded in commentary, debate, and all manner of ideological lobbying. One can no more read them for the first time than one can see the *Mona Lisa* for the first time. Finally, I argue that Page's text has a particular value for those teaching or studying the relation between literature and empire by virtue

of its being a short story, which is to say, because of its compressed form and the fact of its publication in a popular magazine.

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The plot of 'A Terror That Saved' is easily told. Elizabeth and Gladys Murray are living with their elderly father on a remote farm in Rhodesia, which they have recently moved to from South Africa. A letter arrives (Figure 1) announcing a visit from a former neighbour named John Tremayne, who is also moving to Rhodesia to farm. Elizabeth is in love with John and knows that he cares for her, but she worries that Gladys, her pretty but selfish younger sister, will lure him into a disastrous marriage. Another letter arrives, asking Elizabeth to come to the aid of their younger brother, Ted, who is dangerously ill with malaria. Elizabeth sets off with the African messenger across the 'trackless veldt' (Figure 2). The following day John arrives, and for a week Gladys does her best to seduce him while hiding the real reason for her sister's absence (Figure 3). Two more letters reach Gladys. The first, from their elder brother Hubert, is a warning about lions in the vicinity. The second is from Elizabeth, announcing that she is setting off on her return journey with the sick brother. John, now thoroughly alarmed, gallops off to intercept her. In the action-packed finale, Elizabeth defends the cart and marshals a cowardly African servant against repeated attacks by a lioness (Figure 4). At the last moment, John arrives and shoots the savage beast, and the lovers are reunited (Figure 5). As they embrace, John calls Elizabeth 'the bravest woman that ever lived' and begs forgiveness for his own weakness of character.

The modern reader discerns a narrative strain in this story, what might be called a tension between romance and reality. On the one hand, Page is using romantic contrivances and coincidences. The hero arriving in the nick of time. All those letters. All those brothers! On the other hand, she makes extensive use of the formal devices of literary realism in order to make the story feel plausible and verisimilar. The narrative contains numerous physical descriptors, such as 'October, one of the hottest months in Rhodesia's year' (361), itself a reminder of how little readers were expected to know about the story's location. Likewise, there is an overriding emphasis on causality, as when Gladys is presented as wanting to seduce John, not for vague reasons of sexual desire or bored

petulance, but precisely in order to realize a social ambition ('When Gladys married she meant to live in the town and have her "At Home" day, and go to Government House' [362]). The text is also sprinkled with exotic Afrikaans terms such as *inspanning* (harnessing), *drift* (ford), and *kopje* (hill), which, though not necessary, enhance the story's believability by asserting the specialist credentials of its author—reviewers often equated Page's terminological exactitude with first-hand knowledge—and by connecting its fictional setting to a topography familiar to British readers from media coverage of the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902).

Romance and reality are necessary complements here. A romance entirely lacking in material plausibility would give readers diminished pleasure, a strictly realistic account of courtship in rural Rhodesia none at all. But the narrative tension of 'A Terror That Saved' is also an integral feature of all genre fiction. As its title awkwardly indicates, this is a story about, not concrete places or things, but emotional abstractions—jealousy, desire, self-knowledge, intimacy, independence, and, above all, love. Colonial life in Rhodesia is clearly an arbitrary setting; Wales or Kansas would have served equally well. The lion, too, is merely a device: Page could have achieved the same dramatic effects with a flash flood or an escaped criminal. (The *Manchester Guardian* observed that Page's use of an irritated bull to join the protagonists of *The Veldt Trail* [1919] was a 'little too symmetrical' [28 December 1919: 7].) Characterization in 'A Terror That Saved' similarly relies on clichés and standard formulations. Elizabeth is the 'household drudge' (363) with 'serious eyes' (363) and 'quiet resolve' (364), Gladys is 'the very essence of freshness' (362), John is a 'Cornish giant' (363) and a 'young viking' (366), and so on. Like the stylized illustrations which collectively form a visual summary or storyboard of the plot, these are labels or tags, denoting not so much individuals as types. Indeed, Page explicitly describes Gladys as hoping to convert John into 'a certain very small, somewhat pretty *type of man* in the town' (363, emphasis added). All genre fiction does this, to be sure, but short genre fiction must do it to an exceptional degree because of the constraints of space, particularly in magazine publication.

There are two reasons to be cautious, then, in connecting this short story to empire. The first is theoretical and methodological. Reading a fictional text is not an endorsement of its ideological perspective but an

interpretative mode—and for all readers, not just liberal intellectuals. A generation ago, Janice Radway ingeniously showed that women readers of genre fiction tended to map romantic plotlines onto their own experiences in surprisingly complex ways (Radway 1984). Her example was the correlation between a reader's stated desire for greater intimacy with her life partner and a penchant for fictional narratives in which a man, even one prone to violence, is suddenly changed or reformed by the love of a good woman. In a challenge to the condescending view of such formulae as merely 'escapist' or 'ideological', Radway teased out a compelling dialectic. Despite (and possibly even by virtue of) being weakly motivated, the utopian element in such narratives attracted women readers because it matched their own strategies for resolving real-life challenges ('because I identify with the protagonist's good qualities this *could* happen to me').

At the same time, Radway argued, the narrative arc of genre romances provided the reader with a libidinal gratification which, by validating her discernment and integrity, served as an end in its own right ('because I identify with the protagonist's good qualities this *should* happen to me'). The result—a representation of female agency that variously reinforced and challenged real-life gender roles—confounded any simple notion of women genre readers as passive. And Page can be seen to be deploying precisely this trope in 'A Terror That Saved'. John may have rescued Elizabeth from a lion but, as the story's final line makes clear, ultimately it is she who must save him:

'Elizabeth, I've really loved you all the time, only—only,' with bitterness, 'even a strong man can be a fool at times. Will you ever understand?'

'I understand already,' she told him simply, 'and it nearly broke my heart to have to go just then.'

'God bless you,' he breathed, and folded her in his arms. 'Perhaps some day I can grow to be worthy of you. You must help me.' (371)

That Radway's hypothesis holds good for early-twentieth-century fiction by female colonists finds support in two recent studies of the so-called 'Kenya novel' of the 1920s. In the writings of Florence Riddell, Nora Strange, and Nora St. John Beale, Patricia M. E. Lorcin discerns, as one might expect, an explicit invitation to identify with racist and proto-fascist sympathies as well as with an emergent settler class defined by exclusivity and entitlement. Less predictably, however, she also finds

that their appeal for contemporary readers partly derived from the way they portrayed Kenya as being a field of opportunity, a country that, unlike Britain, was both open to women and awash with marriageable men. C. J. D. Duder similarly concludes that these Kenyan novelists, while also clearly responding to public debate over imperial policy, were supplying a spectacle of exotic romance and illicit sexual adventure to readers in Britain—for example, the 750,000-strong audience for Riddell's 'Love and the Lions' (later *Kenya Mist* [1924]) in the *Daily Express*—whose ignorance of Kenya and its inhabitants was total. Exceptionally, Duder has hard evidence for this claim:

There can be little doubt that it was the attempt to have a child without marriage that attracted the huge amount of popular interest in *Kenya Mist*. Florence Riddell received a number of letters from spinster readers asking how to duplicate Michaela's feat in a Britain where talk of the 'two million surplus' women left by the First World War was common. Mrs Riddell, a woman of stern moral character, warned them off trying it, but her success in touching a sensitive nerve is evident and thereafter illegitimate children kept appearing in her Kenya novels. The collective image of white settlement in Kenya provided by both Riddell and Strange can be said to be exemplified in another moment from *Kenya Mist*, when Michaela Dundas pushes a pram with her illegitimate child in it across the African 'veldt' while carrying a rifle to protect against lion attacks. (431)

Non-imperial, feminine, and domestic: these, then, were the themes which ran through—indeed, male reviewers complained, defined—popular fiction by female African colonists in the first decades of the twentieth century. As Melissa Free has noted, 'Though broadly speaking, Page neither condones adultery nor premarital sex, she tantalizes readers with these illicit possibilities' (Free 2016: 306). Or as *The Academy* remarked drily: 'Gertrude Page inclines to manly heroes whose shirts, open at the neck, reveal muscular chests. That those heroes are to the taste of the great reading public is revealed by her large sales' (26 June 1915: 411).

The second reason for caution when connecting Page's story to empire relates to imperial history. Rhodesia, where 'A Terror That Saved' is set, was a very untypical colony, having been created and administered not by the crown but a stock-exchange-listed company which had already dragged Britain into two wars and which was widely seen as corrupt and predatory. Its founder, Cecil Rhodes, had threatened to secede entirely, and by the time Page's story appeared in 1912, many

of its farmer settlers were demanding an end to Company rule. It was, in other words, anything but an instance of the stable, state-sanctioned ‘imperial project’ whose existence is readily taken for granted by literary scholars. Rhodesia, its name barely a decade old, was synonymous with modernity and vigorously promoted in terms of geographical and social mobility (Donovan 2013). In its prospectuses, the BSAC took care to foreground the plentiful availability of African labour for hire, a perquisite of settler life which would have appealed strongly to readers struggling to afford domestic servants in Britain.

As heralded by its subtitle ‘The Story of a Rhodesian Woman’s Courage,’ Page’s story thus needs to be understood as a double projection: a new kind of settler identity yoked to a new kind of feminine agency. Page’s own status as a ‘Rhodesian woman’ was closely implicated in this, not only through her authorship of novels that were playing a significant role in the consolidation of Rhodesian settler identity, but also because she herself had come to be publicly identified with Rhodesia. By 1912, Page was enjoying extraordinary commercial success in Britain and the colonies, with publishers’ advertisements routinely crediting her with the creation of a new literary entity, ‘The Rhodesian Novel’. The *Boston Evening Transcript* proclaimed her ‘an ‘Imperialist in fiction’ [. . .] [who] herself ha[s] passed through all the hardships, humorous and otherwise, which beset the usual woman-settler in new lands’ (21 February 1914: 37). This valuation was echoed by the *Athenaeum*, which observed that ‘she is qualified by residence to write a convincing novel of Rhodesia’ (26 June 1909: 751). All these factors would have played into how contemporary readers, particularly women, visualized the main protagonist of ‘A Terror That Saved’ – a young woman who must make her way in the world, who worries about her origins and manners, who has not attended a ‘[s]mart Cape Town school’ (261), and whose hoped-for mate is socially hampered by a limited education and ‘uncouthness’ (363).

In light of these considerations, it is not apparent how Page’s story operates as imperial propaganda or even whether this perspective makes much sense. I therefore propose that we try broaching this question from a different theoretical angle, one set out by Richard Ohmann’s *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (1996). In this landmark study, Ohmann examines the impact of advertising upon American magazines in around 1895, when, he argues,

something magical happened: the cover price fell below what a magazine cost to produce. As he shows, when manufacturers, advertisers, and magazine producers responded by joining forces to solve a crisis of overproduction, they established an economic and social basis for modern mass culture. Ohmann's bravura account bears directly on the present enquiry because short stories were integral to the revolution he describes. Magazine producers no longer sold magazines, he explains, but purchased readers' attention, using short stories as currency (not exclusively, of course, but principally). For Ohmann, a magazine's table of contents offered not merely a bill of fare, an easy-to-digest serving of thrills, romance, or drama, but a compacted or encoded worldview specific to middle-class, white-collar professionals—a perspective which shared, not coincidentally, the style, rhetoric, and ideological premises of the ascendant discourse of advertising. Like the ads which surrounded them, magazine short stories reoriented readers in a society that had entered a new phase of capitalist modernization.

Ohmann's case study is Juliet Wilbor Tompkins's 'On the Way North', an obscure short story in *Munsey's Magazine* for October 1895 about two young people who find love aboard a runaway train. Through comparison with an adjacent advertisement for Quaker's Oats, Ohmann ingeniously teases out the structural, thematic, and stylistic mechanisms by which both texts interpellate their readers, readers for whom the text's ideological and gendered premises are so naturalized as to be invisible. This mode of reading, Ohmann emphasizes,

does not look *behind* or *through* the text to 'background' conditions but reconstructs meanings that were 'there' in the text for properly schooled contemporaries. Like the Quaker Oats ad, the story called tacit knowledge of old and new into play and also of class-based values and ideas. An interpretative strategy not grounded in such knowledge and in such habits of decoding would have given the reader an experience of the story almost drained of tension, affect, and satisfaction. (Ohmann 1991: 38–39)

There are, in other words, obviously ideological dimensions of a magazine short story (in Ohmann's example, the depiction of a white Southern train conductor as work-shy and an African-American nanny as incompetent) but they are less important than how Tompkins's story, by its form and publication context, engages a reader able to identify with the idiom and worldview of its protagonist and, above all, with its narrative voice. On this view, exotic material settings and dramatic plot

incidents were no more intrinsic to a reader's personal experience—its meaning for a reader of *Munsey's* in 1895—than marshes or dragons were to a seventeenth-century reader's experience of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Popular fictional narratives, we might say, supplied allegories of social mobility and gender identity using a lexicon of experience which readers recognized as their own.

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What about the present story? Where does Page's imperial tale, taken from a British magazine, fit in Ohmann's scheme?

Published by Cassell, *The Quiver* (1861–1956) had begun life as a vehicle for promoting traditional Christian piety by means of moralistic short fiction, sermons, and Biblical commentaries (Ashley 2006: 261-2). By the time Page's story appeared, however, the publishing revolution inaugurated by *Munsey's* had led *The Quiver* to embark upon a process of reinventing itself as a modern fiction magazine, one now targeted primarily at women. This strategy involved publishing more 'advanced' narratives involving independent female protagonists and dramatic romance plots, an objective to Rhodesian stories were evidently well suited. *The Quiver's* 1910 Christmas number had featured a story by Margaret Batchelor, a Rhodesian author specializing in juvenile fiction, and it would later serialize Page's own semi-autobiographical novel *Jill on a Ranch* in 1921. Indeed, when *The Quiver* launched a publicity campaign in 1919 to promote itself as 'A Live Magazine for the New Times', it trumpeted the serialization of another Page novel, *The Veldt Trail*, as proof that *The Quiver* was now a magazine which 'sets a standard of its own, and in place of the record of the past [. . .] establishes a new tradition'. As graphic embodiment of this bold postwar sensibility, it carried an illustration of Page's protagonist—a young war widow who boldly takes charge of an estate in Rhodesia—in military-style khaki trousers and knee-length boots (Figure 6).

We come, then, to the potential meanings of 'A Terror That Saved' for readers in 1912. It would be easy to think of the story as mere propaganda for BSAC-administered Rhodesia or the empire as a whole. And yet, as Bernard Porter has shown, relatively few people in Britain had either direct experience of the empire or particular enthusiasm for imperialism as a policy (Porter 2005). 'A Terror That Saved' appeared

on *The Quiver*'s table of contents as merely one item on a variety programme of exotic diversions for domestic readers. And the crux of Page's story is a romance between two white settlers: they supply its narrative perspective and its emotional core. True, there are colonial subjects and they are presented offensively, right down to their assigned names 'Bucket', 'Peter', and 'Charlie'. Yet their presence is instrumental, marginal, almost invisible; only in the final scene does Page, arguably, use an African protagonist to showcase white racial superiority. The focus is always on the white settlers, even when they are interacting with Africans. When Elizabeth asks Gladys for help setting the table, her sister gives a colonist's reply—get the African servant to do it—which, tellingly, Elizabeth does not dignify with a response, choosing instead to quietly do it herself. Her values, it is implied, are those of the *Quiver*'s readers, Ohmann's rising professional classes: self-reliance, hard work, physical and emotional independence, education (in moderation and preferably practical), and, above all, recognition that the future belongs to those new men and new women who can work together to overcome the societal challenges which lie ahead.

Still, Page's story is permeated by ugly, casual racism. Gladys blithely uses a racial slur when reassuring John that Elizabeth is in no danger from the lion: "Oh, she had our old driver, Charlie; and he is really as good as a white man; but somehow one gets out of the way of remembering that about a nigger" (366). When Charlie's courage fails him, Elizabeth rebukes him violently, 'You cur, you coward!' (368), and after Elizabeth shows her own mettle, Page's narrator observes that 'her courage seemed to have inspired the black boy' (370). The racial prejudice manifest in such statements was unimportant, and perhaps even invisible, to *The Quiver*'s editor. What it meant to the magazine's readers is less clear, however. Did it reinforce in them the same sense of racial superiority which provided an ideological underpinning of empire? The default critical response today would be, unequivocally, yes. But what if this is a literalist fallacy, a conflating of fictional matter with material reality? What if British readers were untroubled by Page's belittling portrayal of Charlie for the same reasons that they were untroubled by the obvious implausibility of Sherlock Holmes's deductions? Is it possible that readers with no direct experience of Africa or Africans derived more complex and reflexive pleasures from 'A Terror That Saved' than vicarious racial pride or self-flattery?

Approaching Page's narrative structurally offers potential answers to these questions. In the examples above, the main function of referring (derogatively) to a colonial African subject is to characterize the white settler speaker, not relay salient information about the object of her contempt. Racist as they are, their comments provide key information about Gladys and Elizabeth: Gladys is a dangerously poor judge of people (Charlie, as Page sees it, is anything but 'as good as a white man') and Elizabeth holds everyone to the same moral standard that she sets for herself (otherwise, why blame Charlie for cowardice?). And yet, with only a slight modification of the text, each statement could be made by the other sister, in which case its function would change accordingly. Coming from Elizabeth, Gladys's assertion of Charlie's equal humanity would become an index of generosity; coming from Gladys, Elizabeth's outburst would signify a lack of self-control. This is, after all, how a genre story works. Its typological elements—here, cowardly Africans and stalwart Cornishmen—are structurally interchangeable, and the meanings they generate are necessarily relational, not, of course, for Africans like Charlie, who will always be presented more or less obnoxiously, but for the British protagonists with whom readers in 1912 are being invited to identify.

All of which returns us to the empire setting of this 'Story of a Rhodesian Woman's Courage'. Elizabeth exhibits a combination of traits—selflessness, resourcefulness, and moral superiority, coupled with a sense of social inferiority or disadvantage—which is a hallmark of Page's white settler heroines and around whose resolution her narratives are organized. This typological cluster mobilizes a historically specific conception of what I have elsewhere called 'colonial pedigree' (Donovan 2012), an aristocracy of character which supposedly manifests itself under the exceptional circumstances of life on the frontier of empire. In one of Page's earliest literary efforts, 'The Story of a Stupid Woman', which was syndicated in British and colonial newspapers in 1901, a shop-girl heroically breaks off a romance with an aristocrat and returns to her dreary existence so as not to curtail his stellar career in politics (Page 1901). Only in old age and after being widowed can they at last be reunited, discreetly, in marriage. Written several years before its author moved to Rhodesia, 'The Story of a Stupid Woman' is unable to visualize for readers an actually existing space in which to solve its heroine's social predicament. It is this narrative lacuna, I propose, which

Rhodesia, and the empire more generally, can be seen as remedying. Among other things, it means that the racism exhibited towards black Africans in 'A Terror That Saved' did not—in *this context*, it should be stressed—function primarily as an argument for imperialism. Indeed, for many readers of *The Quiver*, I would argue, Page's story could be imperial without being imperialist, in much the same way as Janice Radway's romance readers could express a preference for narratives in which female protagonists are reconciled with once-violent partners without thereby condoning rape or domestic violence.

Since our abhorrence of racial prejudice is an obstacle to appreciating such nice distinctions, let us consider a less provocative instance of this dynamic: the lion. While John M. MacKenzie and others have shown that big-game hunting was an integral part of imperialist discourse and colonial masculinity (MacKenzie 1997), the lion of 'The Terror That Saved' is a straightforward plot device which, as already noted, could have been substituted with almost any natural danger. It is not ideological *per se*, because, to state the obvious, this is not a story about the perils of proximity to wild animals: in 1912, a big cat was simply an available signifier. Indeed, it dominated the cover image of the October number of *The All-Story Magazine* which introduced the world to Tarzan (Figure 7), who would become a unique object of readerly identification and domestic desire (Kasson 2002). And the following year the Women's Social and Political Union used it as a symbol for what they saw as the monstrosity of The Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act—the so-called 'Cat and Mouse Act'—which enabled the Liberal government to discharge and reincarcerate hunger-striking Suffragettes (Figure 8). In each case, the big cat's function is to visualize a specific attribute of the protagonist (heroic sacrifice, superhuman strength), not to convey factual information about the creature itself. As such, and without wishing to appear frivolous, the lion can be seen as metonymic of the meaning of empire as a narrative setting for readers of imperial genre stories. Not for all but certainly for a great many of them, it was incidental, its meaning relational and contingent to the protagonists whose thrilling adventures, in varying degrees of implausibility, gave them diversion, delight, and a degree of personal, class-based identification.

With the advent of postcolonial criticism, it has become axiomatic to view empire stories as colluding with, enabling, and normalizing actually

existing imperialism. In their lurid and stereotyped narratives, we now see how distant lands and their peoples were fetishized, misrepresented, and marginalized as the Others of a colonizing culture. Missing from this account, however, is the extent to which imperialism and the empire were themselves Others for many in that culture. In 1939, the *Manchester Guardian* observed of Ethel M. Dell, a bestselling author of romances set in India and other British colonies, none of which she had ever visited in person: ‘People liked the exotic Eastern settings of her stories, as they liked the African settings of the novels by Gertrude Page, who at one time closely approached her in popularity’ (19 September 1939: 6). Unlike Dell, Gertrude Page was a colonialist in real life, a farmer who actively endorsed and personally benefited from the structural racism and exploitation which colonies like Rhodesia relied on. Yet the same cannot confidently be said for most of her readers in Britain. Historians debate the extent to which Britain’s finances were boosted by revenue from colonies – but not from Rhodesia. From its inception, Rhodes’s fiefdom was a net financial loss for British taxpayers, who met in full the cost of the BSAC’s violent local wars in the 1890s and, contrary to the original terms of its Charter, gave BSAC shareholders full compensation for the transferral of judicial authority over the colony to the Crown in 1922. Imperial short stories such as ‘A Terror That Saved’ provided domestic readers with not so much a prospect of ‘their’ colonial possessions as a likeness of how they perceived—and were directed to perceive—themselves.

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Appendix: Figures



Figure 1. A letter arrives. *The Quiver* (London), February 1912: 364.



Figure 2. The trackless veldt. *The Quiver* (London), February 1912: 371.

ness.

Elizabeth, at her post, nursed her brother night and day, and brought him safely out of the valley of shadow; trying to fulfil to her best endeavour the work that lay to her hand and leave the future out of her thoughts. Gladys waited impatiently in the little bungalow for John Tremayne's return, and made up her mind definitely that if she could win him to ask her, she would marry him and persuade him to her way of life afterwards.

And John Tremayne, in a perplexed frame of mind, went about his business, thinking again of both sisters, marvelling anew at the change in Gladys, and questioning much within himself why Elizabeth had gone off a few hours before his arrival without leaving any message for him, although there was apparently no immediate haste. Did it mean that she purposely left him a free field, more willing that he should be her brother-in-law than forge a closer tie?

At the end of the week he had come to the conclusion that it was so, and he started again for the farm, pre-



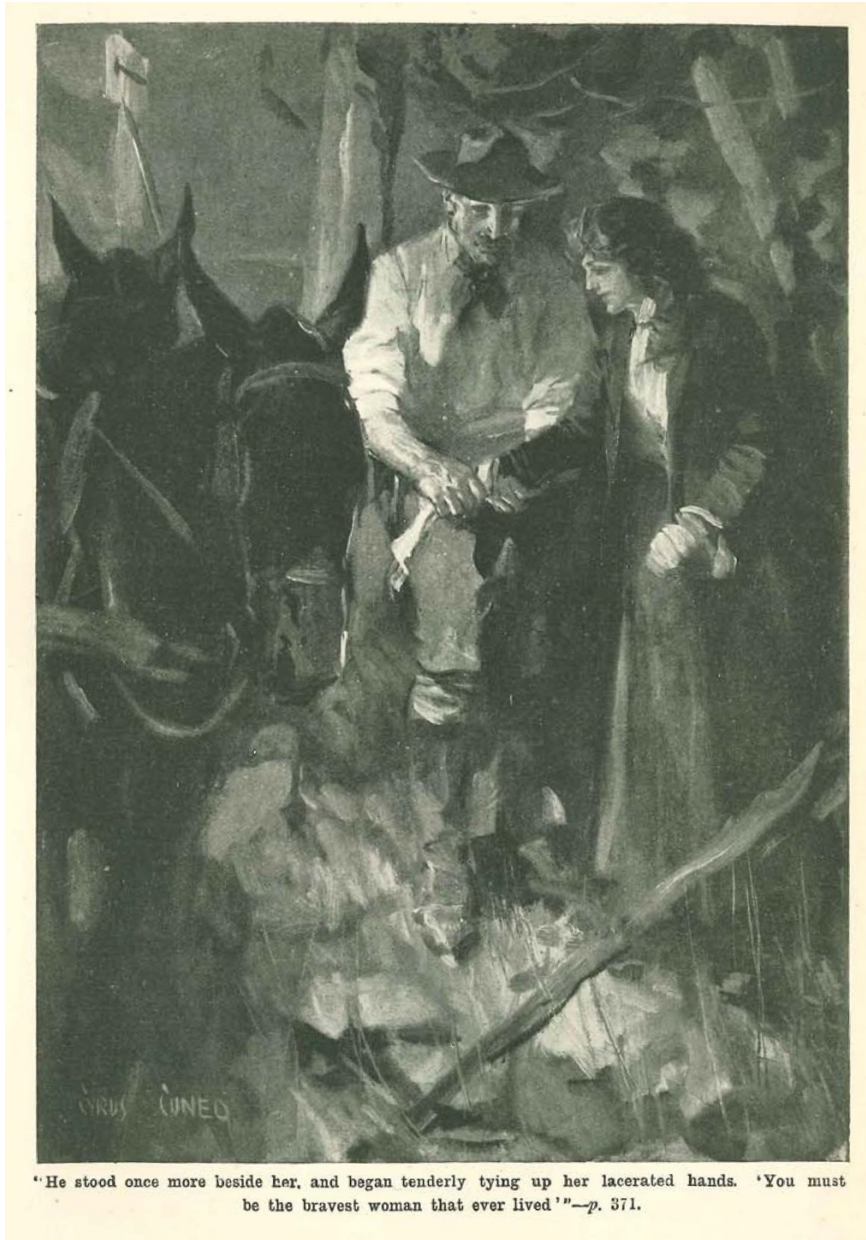
"Gladys paused and took up her embroidery. Why should she tell him the summons had been brief and urgent?"—p. 365.

Figure 3. Seduction. *The Quiver* (London), February 1912: 367.



"In a sort of blank terror he did her bidding, and as the long lash swung in the air the mules seemed to pull themselves together"—see page 370.

Figure 4. Lion attack. *The Quiver* (London), February 1912: 360.



'He stood once more beside her, and began tenderly tying up her lacerated hands. 'You must be the bravest woman that ever lived''—p. 371.

Figure 5. Reunited. *The Quiver* (London), February 1912: 369.

Gertrude Page's
Great New Serial

The New Quiver
will be
Bigger
Brighter
Better

**The
VELDT
TRAIL**

Gertrude Page's finest story. Deals with present-day life—the period immediately after the armistice. Thrilling, dramatic, full of keen, human interest. The heroine is one of society's "butterflies"—a woman leading a gay, irresponsible life in London while her husband is building up a ranch on the Veldt Trail in Rhodesia. Soon after Armistice Day, her husband is killed. Sybil Lack decides to go out to Rhodesia to take over the estate. Her husband's partner—a grim Scotsman—does not want her, and shows it! The ensuing situation is enthralling, described with the power, humour and brightness characteristic of Gertrude Page. Start "The Veldt Trail" to-day in the new QUIVER.

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in the
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Number

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Monthly *Enlarged*



ORDER FROM YOUR NEWSAGENT TO-DAY, or will be sent post-free on receipt of stamps or P.O. value 1s., from:
Cassell & Co., Ltd., La Belle Sauvage, London, E.C.4.

Figure 6. *The Quiver*, May 1919, advertisement.

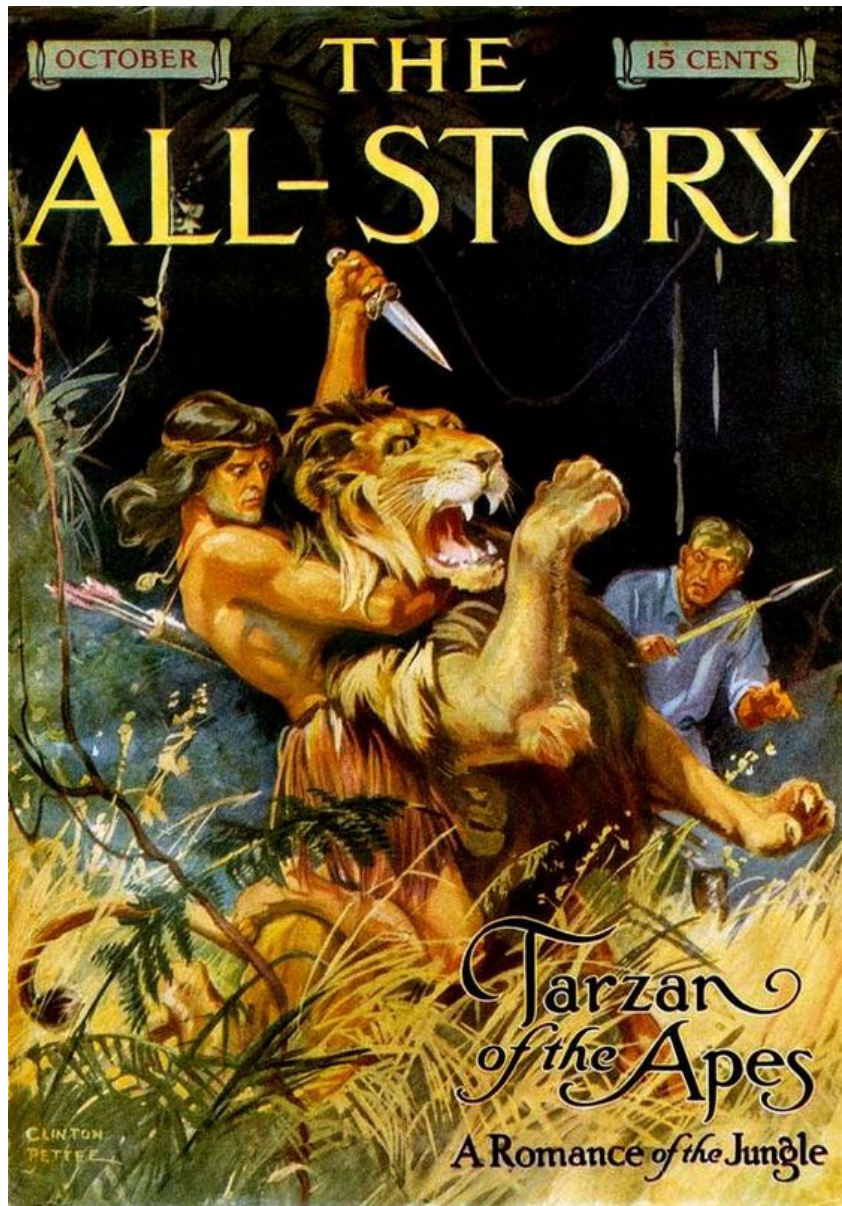


Figure 7. *The All-Story Magazine*, October 1912, cover.
(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tarzan_All_Story.jpg)

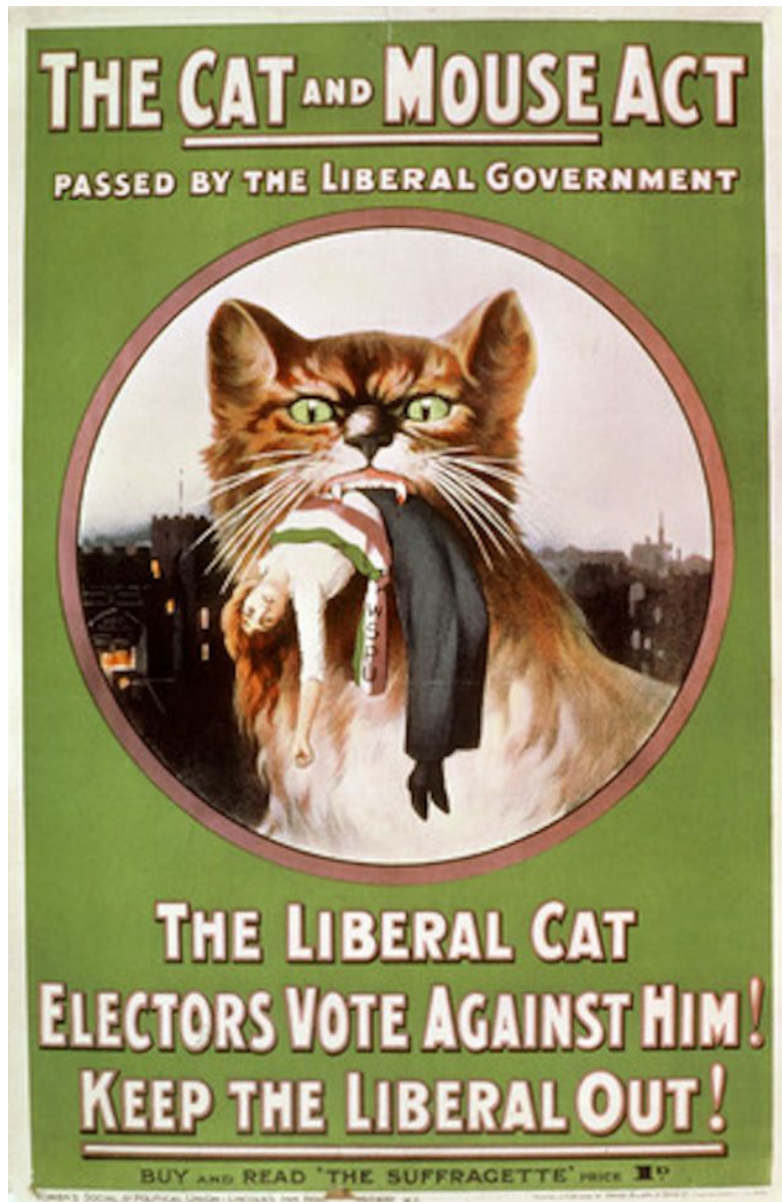


Figure 8. Women's Social and Political Union poster, 1913.
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoners_\(Temporary_Discharge_for_Ill_Health\)_Act_1913](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoners_(Temporary_Discharge_for_Ill_Health)_Act_1913))