



# Heroic Fear

## Emotions, Masculinity, and Dangerous Nature in British Colonial Adventure Narratives

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**Abstract** The image of the heroic adventurer, who shot big game or traveled remote regions of the earth, populated the British Empire's exploration and hunting narratives. Scholars have done much to deconstruct this image but have so far barely touched on the emotional dimensions of encounters between Britons and dangerous natural environments in tropical colonies. This article combines literary-historical criticism with a history of emotions perspective to show how the expression or, alternately, elision of fear in adventure memoirs helped to frame encounters with wild animals and sheer topography as part of imperialism's moral project. It analyzes texts that recount events in and around India and parts of Africa, published between the 1890s and 1940s. The article's author discusses a range of authors from obscure settlers and army officers to well-known proponents of the adventure genre such as Mary Kingsley, Jim Corbett, and Francis Kingdon-Ward. Together, these accounts demonstrated that fear held a legitimate and powerful place in heroic imperial narratives by helping readers to identify with the danger that a narrator had to overcome. Narratives of fear increased in number and forthrightness after the First World War, highlighting the impact of the wider British questioning of prewar models of heroic masculinity on imperial adventure literature.

**Keywords** hunting, exploration, emotion, imperialism, masculinity

### Introduction

The heroic individual, a tough, usually male adventurer, was one of the most enduring figures of the British imperial age. He typically hunted big game or explored remote regions of the earth, encountering exotic peoples and environments. Scholars have thoroughly deconstructed the imperial adventurer, highlighting the role of women and the agency of Asians and Africans whose labor was essential for expeditions and hunting parties.<sup>1</sup> Yet they have missed something important: the role that fear played in generating the adventurer's authority, particularly during encounters with hostile

1. Thompsell, *Hunting Africa*; Kennedy, *Reinterpreting Exploration*; Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa*.

environments. In this article I use a literary history of fear to reevaluate the way that travel narratives engaged with and understood the natural world between the 1890s and 1940s.

Environmental humanities scholars have rethought the themes of dominance, exploitation, and conflict that characterized earlier scholarship on modern cultures of nature.<sup>2</sup> Studies of emotion and affect are key to this project. Feelings about nature have inspired conservation, and species extinction generates a range of emotions beyond the obvious candidate, mourning.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have identified relationships between emotions and environment in specific forms of cultural production. For example, Adrian J. Ivakhiv argues that cinema's representation of environments has power because it moves us affectively as well as imaginatively.<sup>4</sup> Emotions, in short, shape the relationship between human selves and the natural world and infuse texts, images, and motion pictures.<sup>5</sup> Nicole Seymour has called for ecocritics to bring affect into the practice of criticism itself.<sup>6</sup>

Adventurers encountered particular forms of nature in spaces coded as wild and divorced from everyday life by symbolic and physical distance from settlements. These were different from the "nearby nature," such as suburban frogs, which generates complex systems of feeling, sympathy in tension with revulsion.<sup>7</sup> Out-of-the-ordinary environments with distinctive impacts on the human senses can trigger overwhelming but similarly complex emotions.<sup>8</sup> Between the mid-eighteenth and twentieth centuries, experiencing wilderness—frequently in the shape of mountains—brought together positive and negative emotions labeled sublime.<sup>9</sup> By the early twentieth century, the sublime's place in cultural production increasingly emphasized bodily experience, which adventure narratives focused on.<sup>10</sup> The texts analyzed here show that representations of hunting and exploration shared a common framework of emotional norms that encounters between imperial humans and dangerous nature generated.

In parallel, there is a growing body of work on the culture and history of fear, including in environmental contexts.<sup>11</sup> Fear is commonly understood as an affective response to threat stimuli in humans and other mammals that involves cognition (recognizing a threat) and bodily changes such as an elevated heart rate (responding to it). The

2. See Saha, "Do Elephants Have Souls?"

3. Jørgensen, *Recovering Lost Species in the Modern Age*.

4. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image*.

5. Kals and Müller, "Emotions and Environment"; Bladow and Ladino, "Toward an Affective Ecocriticism"; Flack and Jørgensen, "Feelings for Nature"; Ronda, "Affect and Environment in Contemporary Eco-poetics."

6. Seymour, "Toward an Irreverent Ecocriticism."

7. Gaynor, Broomhall, and Flack, "Frogs and Feeling Communities."

8. Flack and Jørgensen, "Feelings for Nature," 241–47.

9. Simpson, "Modern Mountains."

10. Brown, "Modern Romance of Mountaineering."

11. Bourke, *Fear*; Lazier and Plamper, *Fear*; Laffan and Weiss, *Facing Fear*; Egan, "Chemical Unknowns"; Panu, "Anxiety and the Ecological Crisis"; Schlegel, "Between Climates of Fear and Blind Optimism"; Dörries, "Climate Catastrophes and Fear."

precise definition of fear is, however, slippery. The introductions to two major collections of humanities scholarship on fear prefer instead to discuss changing ways that scientists and thinkers have understood the philosophical, psychological, or biological dimensions of fear over time.<sup>12</sup> Joanna Bourke's landmark work argued that fear "is fundamentally about the body—its fleshiness and its precariousness"—but also like other emotions plays a part in ways that "agents are involved in creating the self in a dynamic process." Fear and other emotions are constituted both through processes that occur in the body and in the construction of a subjective self, which becomes essential to the formation of social relations with others. In this way, she asserts, "the body plays a role in social agency."<sup>13</sup> In a related vein, Monique Scheer has argued that emotions, including fear, are both an embodied process and a constituent part of social relations.<sup>14</sup> Bourke and Scheer both offer ways of going beyond a distinction between inner or felt emotions and their outward expression or performance.

In adventure literature, reportage of emotional experience highlighted the connection between the external natural environment and a sense of interiority. Will Jackson has argued that historians of emotion should use private letters and diaries to "move away from [studying] the public circulation of emotion."<sup>15</sup> But by focusing on published accounts this article highlights the public, textual performance of emotion in order to draw out the relationship between humans and the environment in the social context of empire. Hunters and explorers actively sought out fear because it was central to their construction of a heroic image, something that they faced down and overcame in order to demonstrate bravery. It was the inversion of what Ricardo Roque has described, in another context, as the sense of vulnerability that rendered empire an exercise in "avoiding being hurt or harmed."<sup>16</sup>

I combine literary-historical criticism with a history of emotions perspective to show how the expression or, alternately, elision of fear in adventure memoirs helped frame encounters with wild animals and sheer topography as part of imperialism's moral project. To maintain focus on the embodiment of emotion, I focus on performances of fear that took place in response to mortal danger (or at least, what narrators reported as such). These performances were time-bound, occupying specific moments in response to concrete external events or circumstances.

This article focuses on narratives of adventure in India (broadly defined to include the trans-Hindu-Khush-Himalayan borderlands with Tibet, Burma, and Afghanistan), and West, Central, and East Africa. These constituted the principal "tropical" spheres of the British Empire in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tropical

12. Weiss, "Introduction"; Lazier and Plamper, *Fear*, introduction.

13. Bourke, *Fear*, 8.

14. Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?"

15. Jackson, "Private Lives of Empire," 4.

16. Roque, "Razor's Edge," 112.

landscapes and environments had a strong association in British imaginaries with the threatening and alluring.<sup>17</sup> They therefore formed a rich part of the dynamic between humans and the natural world that adventure literature narrated, particularly in wild-coded spaces. They were also social spaces in which white expatriates and settlers rarely if ever outnumbered Indians and Africans, unlike colonies in North America. Britons in tropical colonies hailed from a variety of backgrounds and occupied diverse spaces but were joined in a common imperial culture.<sup>18</sup>

The narratives I include do not make for a comprehensive overview of all the voluminous life-writing that fell into the adventure genre during the late British Empire. Instead, the authors ranged from obscure settlers and army officers to well-known proponents of the adventure genre such as Mary Kingsley, Jim Corbett, and Francis Kingdon Ward. Even these three hardly attracted the intense fame of nineteenth-century explorers of Africa or early twentieth-century polar explorers.<sup>19</sup> However, their publications appealed to heroic tropes. Together they demonstrated that the narration of fear had currency across the British Empire. The texts themselves were largely published in the United Kingdom and therefore presumably aimed at metropolitan audiences (though some, like Corbett's books, were also popular among expatriate Britons). I consider the texts primarily as part of a metropolitan conversation around heroism, empire, and nature.

My texts span the late nineteenth century up to the 1940s. The beginning of this period was when adventure writing first gained a newly intensive currency in Britain. It was prompted by violent imperial expansion in Africa and the dominance of sporting ideology in schools, which made reading publics attentive to tales of individual achievement; even while both the entrenchment of organized state power in British colonies and the rise of German imperialism seemed to circumscribe the actual scope for heroic individualism, making escapism through adventure narratives all the more appealing.<sup>20</sup> The end of this article's period, the 1940s, saw the beginning of decolonization in Britain's tropical colonies.

This is mainly a study of the construction of representations rather than of reception, but where available I use contemporary reviews to gauge some reactions and to highlight the way that understandings of adventure, heroism and appropriate performance of emotion were coproduced between the author, text, and reader. Scholars debate how far the humanities can or should draw on the biological sciences to inform our theories of emotion, including whether we are limited to analyzing representations of emotions or can actually access the emotions of humans who create and consume them.<sup>21</sup> I focus on representations, but I recognize that reading, as Alexa Weik von Mossner has shown, prompts readers to cognitively process the bodily experiences

17. Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*.

18. Bickers, "Britains and Britons over the Seas."

19. Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa*, 1–24, 291; Howkins, *Frozen Empires*, 32–42.

20. Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction*, 2–4, 99–101.

21. Schaefer, *Evolution of Affect Theory*; Eustace et al., "AHR Conversation."

and external environments depicted in a text through affective mimicry.<sup>22</sup> Narratives of fear and danger in imperial adventure texts were central to the construction of the protagonist's authority because they were likely to evoke strong responses that readers felt as well as thought.

My argument follows three stages. I first argue that many adventure narratives actively promoted the image of the imperialist's stiff upper lip by eliding the role of fear or other emotions in their accounts of dangerous moments during hunting or travel. This was one strategy for establishing the adventurer's authority as an author by exemplifying a culture of bravery. However, as the next section argues, the First World War marked a turning point in British constructions of masculinity and made fear a legitimate part of heroism so long as it was confined to specific moments in the narrative. Third, I use the example of women travelers' narratives to highlight both the specifically masculine-coded aspects of the broader genre of adventure literature and the common ways that both men's and women's accounts constructed an adventurer's authority. Before examining adventure narratives in detail, however, the state of the scholarship on hunting and exploration needs unpacking.

### Fear, Hunting, and Exploration

Work on exploration outlines the role of explorers in assembling knowledge of unknown spaces into taxonomies that helped extend European domination over Africa, Asia, and the polar regions.<sup>23</sup> While historians of colonial hunting have expanded focus to include women hunters and sustained attention to race relations, hunting remained central to constructions of elite white imperial masculinity.<sup>24</sup> Yet the scholarship has relatively little to say about emotions. Peter Boomgaard's study of big cats in the Dutch East Indies treats tigers mainly as symbols of the wild rather than a source of actual experience for specific individuals.<sup>25</sup> For exploration scholarship, Mary Louise Pratt examines romantic love and contrasts travel narratives that foreground the "sentimental hero" against "scientific, informational travel writing." But her sentimental (anti-)hero is another conqueror, a "seeing-man" . . . whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess.<sup>26</sup> She left little space for the ways that emotions complicated the very construction of imperial subjectivity. Fabian's systematic takedown of the figure of the rational nineteenth-century explorer dwells far more on cognitive dissonance, which produced unreconcilable tensions in how they discoursed on Africa and Africans, than on emotions

22. Weik von Mossner, *Affective Ecologies*, 3–13.

23. For a recent review, see Leshem and Pinkerton, "Rethinking Expeditions." Dane Keith Kennedy demurs, arguing that explorers really discovered the limits of imperial power in the face of their dependence on Indigenous peoples (Kennedy, *Last Blank Spaces*).

24. MacKenzie, *Empire of Nature*, ix; Thompsell, *Hunting Africa*; Kennedy, *Last Blank Spaces*; Hunter, "New Zealand Hunters in Africa"; Sramek, "Face Him like a Briton"; Mangan and McKenzie, "Imperial Masculinity Institutionalized."

25. Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear*, 29, 225–27.

26. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 6, 75–76.

per se.<sup>27</sup> Work on high-altitude places such as the Himalaya has also examined subjectivity and knowledge production, emphasizing embodied experience but usually stopping short of analyzing emotions.<sup>28</sup>

The absence of fear in adventure scholarship is surprising because we know that anxiety and fear played a major role elsewhere in colonial experience.<sup>29</sup> Scholarship on colonial India in particular has highlighted imperialists' anxiety about violence from Indians in the wake of the 1857 rebellion in North India. Anxiety consistently generated extreme colonial violence, including the 1919 massacre of unarmed civilians at Amritsar.<sup>30</sup> This scholarship has important lessons for research on imperial adventure by recasting colonial power as weakness and specifically as a source of fear.

We can assume that hunters and explorers were subject to the same structural anxieties as other Britons. But the existing literature on colonial anxiety needs further elaboration to account for adventure narratives. First, the insights of history of emotions scholarship that takes the body as the site in which emotions are generated and experienced will help to reveal the ways that adventure texts put individual subjectivity at the center of the relationship between author and reader. Second, there were important differences between the sources of generalized anxiety and those of fear during adventures. The former was a product of the limitations to imperial systems of political control. The threat of violence, or even laughter, from subjugated people emerged from within the colonial political order and was threatening because it could overturn a status-based hierarchy. The fear of a lion, or of falling off a cliff, was by contrast grounded in the materiality of the environment, even if the specific emotional performances that adventurers rendered in these moments—or at least claimed to render in their narrative accounts—were embedded in the context of social status and ideologies of racial prestige.

Arnold offers one major scholarly precedent for considering the broader connections between experience, emotion, and environment in imperial travelogues through his analysis of an “empire of affect.” Here, fear does appear as a significant factor in Europeans' encounter with the tropics: specifically, fear of death and disease brought on by high rates of white mortality and theories regarding the “unhealthy” nature of tropical environments.<sup>31</sup> Other scholars have given further attention to the anxieties that disease has caused in modern empires more broadly.<sup>32</sup> Again, though, the focus is on broad social norms, and we lack understanding of individuals' experience of emotions. A rare exception is Mueggler's work on botanists in West China and Tibet, which emphasizes

27. Fabian, *Out of Our Minds*, chap. 2.

28. Simpson, “‘Clean out of the Map’”; Fleetwood, “‘No Former Travellers’”; Sarma, “‘Tropicality’ and Wildness”; Bergwik, “Elevation and Emotion.”

29. Reinkowski and Thum, “Helpless Imperialists,” 9–11.

30. Condos, *Insecurity State*; Fischer-Tiné and Whyte, “Introduction”; Wagner, *Amritsar, 1919*.

31. Arnold, *Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*.

32. See Peckham, *Empires of Panic*.

the central place that bodily discomfort and negative affect, especially disgust, had in the Viennese-American Joseph Rock's experience of travel.<sup>33</sup> Building on Mueggler, this article expands the geographical scope to identify broader circulations of emotion. How did hunters and explorers represent the emotions of adventure, and why?

### Refusing to Perform Fear

One reason that fear in adventure literature has been overlooked might be that many authors actively elided it in their narratives. The accounts of hunting that filled sporting magazines, for example, frequently made no mention of fear. Colonel H. Wylie, a Briton who accompanied a Nepali elephant-capturing party during the 1900s wrote of the "wildly exciting" experience of chasing down a wild elephant but the author reported no particular emotion while helping rescue a mahout from attack by a supposedly tame animal.<sup>34</sup> A cavalry officer in India, H. D. Fanshawe, described shooting three tigers, including one instance of being charged by the angry animal, without making any mention of his own emotions. He did compliment his Indian assistant's coolness and bravery; the author's own was implicit.<sup>35</sup> Another soldier's 1913 memoir of hunting in Kashmir "frankly confess[ed] to feeling not a little uncomfortable" during bear-hunts, and described one instance in which being charged by an angry bear was "rather unsettling to the nerves."<sup>36</sup> These references were embedded in longer passages in which the narrator acted calmly and decisively, and stopped well short of admitting outright fear. By appearing to link action directly to visceral bodily experience, such accounts provided a romantic counterpoint to the mundanity that more usually constituted everyday empire.<sup>37</sup>

Reducing the role of embodied emotion in hunting accounts to nil, however, risked making them too tame to serve the conventions of the genre. An earlier example, by the indigo planter James Inglis, who lived in Bihar, North India, highlighted strategies for putting across the visceral experience of predator hunting without compromising the narrator's stiff upper lip. Under the pen name Maori he narrated an encounter with a "cunning brute" of a tiger, writing that "My heart was bounding with excitement. We were all intensely eager, and thought no more of the hot wind and blinding dust."<sup>38</sup> Hunters in India particularly valued tiger trophies, perhaps because, as Harriet Ritvo has argued, they were widely believed by the British to epitomize "what man had to fear from the animal kingdom."<sup>39</sup> While not explicitly mentioning fear, in this passage Inglis did allude to the embodied performance of emotion by linking his heartbeat to the sense of excitement.

33. Mueggler, *Paper Road*, esp. chap. 5.

34. Wylie, "Elephant Hunting in Nepal."

35. Fanshawe, "Ten Days' Shooting Leave in India."

36. Haughton, *Sport and Folklore in the Himalaya*, 26, 35–36.

37. Auerbach, *Imperial Boredom*.

38. Inglis, *Sport and Work*, 305.

39. Ritvo, *Animal Estate*, 28.

In another tale, Inglis shot a tiger on a river bank from a boat that was midstream. He described the commotion that his Indian servants and boatmen caused: “My peon with excited fingers fumble[d] at the straps of my gun-case”; “the boatman call[ed] out . . . in tones of piled up anguish and apprehension. . . . We soon got the frightened boatmen quieted down.”<sup>40</sup> The image of the frightened Indian in this case not only underlined the supposed racial difference between a steadfast Briton and his Indian employee but, by proxy, indicated the mortal danger that Inglis faced.

Explorer-travelers, too, could narrate risk without admitting directly to fear. The archaeologist Aurel Stein wrote of descending “a goat track down a side of the mountain so steep and so slippery that if previous inspection had been possible I might well have felt tempted to leave them alone” during a 1920s expedition across India’s North-West Frontier. Stein did not directly admit to fear. In fact, we could read his statement as a sly boast about his disinclination to think through dangers properly. But in dismissing the experience of fear, he implicitly acknowledged its possibility. In another passage he wrote that an “ascent past . . . precipitous cliffs” was “exacting enough for the fatigue of it to be vividly imprinted on my memory.”<sup>41</sup> Although he did not invoke fear as an emotion, he did articulate a way in which the natural environment impacted on his mind and body.

The examples so far enacted a refusal to perform fear without reflecting on it explicitly. George Orwell’s celebrated 1936 essay “Shooting an Elephant” was different. It made the claim that the performance of white supremacy itself altered the emotions of an encounter with hostile nature. Orwell described a purported incident in which he, as a police officer in colonial Burma, killed an elephant. In front of a Burmese crowd, he “was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn’t be frightened in front of ‘natives’; and so, in general, he isn’t frightened.” It was instead the prospect of a humiliating death, trampled by an elephant in front of “those two thousand Burmans,” that troubled him.<sup>42</sup> Doubts have been raised about the veracity of the story.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless it suggested that the performance of anxiety in a colonial context could be driven by concerns about status as a white, and in this case male, imperial actor so powerfully as to override fear of physical danger, highlighting their distinctiveness as two modes of fear.

Orwell’s and Stein’s denials of bodily fear, written in the 1920s and 1930s, were superficially similar to the late nineteenth-century elephant-botherer and tiger-hunter whose accounts opened this section, but they were written in a markedly different context. During the earlier period an Edwardian culture of emotional repression had been inculcated in public schools and militaristic youth organizations and had become characteristic of a broad cross section of the middle and lower-middle classes in Britain by

40. Inglis, *Sport and Work*, 299–300.

41. Stein, *On Alexander’s Track to the Indus*, 109, 118–19.

42. Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant,” 9.

43. Rodden and Rossi, *Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell*, 64.



the beginning of the twentieth century. The idealized image of the imperial adventurer and the “soldier hero” were, as Jessica Meyer has argued, two of the most important and widespread images of masculinity in circulation by the late nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> In India, according to Sinha, a descending scale of perceived manliness placed senior soldiers and officials at the top, with other groups and classes (both European and Indian) taking lower places based on how far they were considered to share the elite group’s characteristics.<sup>45</sup> Even then the specter of mental breakdown, brought on by chronic overwork, haunted celebrations of masculine staunchness by the late Victorian era.<sup>46</sup>

Orwell and Stein wrote after a turning point that the First World War marked in British masculinity. The inculcation of emotional regulation had failed to prevent soldiers from giving in to fear during the traumatic experiences of trench warfare. During the 1920s, a public inquiry into shell shock by the War Office and a proliferation of veterans’ memoirs that explicitly recounted the debilitating experience of fear did much to undercut the image of the fearless soldier, and man, in public culture.<sup>47</sup> Soldiers tended not to cast moral judgments on comrades who suffered war nerves.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps most importantly, courage and fear came to be understood not as mutually exclusive facets of someone’s character but as phenomena that would manifest in particular contexts. Even a brave man could experience fear on the battlefield. Yet Stein and Orwell performed fearlessness in colonial social spaces, suggesting ways in which the imperial context continued to valorize the refusal to perform fear.

These texts, then, deployed strategies for constructing the adventurer’s authority by acknowledging danger, and implicitly the possibility of experiencing fear, without performing fear itself. As Robert Macfarlane has argued, the European culture of mountaineering in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries revolved around assessing and braving risk.<sup>49</sup> The same dynamic clearly applied to the hunting of large, dangerous animals. Without using other sources to cross-check the claims of the men discussed in this section it is not possible to say whether they represented their feelings and behavior honestly, what role memory played in their writings, or indeed how far editors might have shaped the narratives to make them more sellable. Publishers’ revisions in at least the mid-nineteenth century routinely emphasized narratives of heroic individuals overcoming nature and local peoples, which appealed to the book-buying public through excitement and by reasserting the supposed moral purpose of empire.<sup>50</sup> Orwell was unusual in reflecting explicitly on the social dynamic that produced status

44. Meyer, *Men of War*, 5.

45. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 2–3.

46. Milne-Smith, “Work and Madness.”

47. Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 351; Winter, *Remembering War*, chap. 2; Reid, *Broken Men*.

48. Roper, *Secret Battle*, 247.

49. Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, chap. 3.

50. Finkelstein, “Unraveling Speke”; Withers and Keighren, “Travels into Print”; Kennedy, *Last Blank Spaces*, 236–60; M. Robinson, “Manliness and Exploration.”

anxiety instead of fear of physical danger. But all the authors discussed in this section used the refusal to perform fear in their texts as a way to establish their authority in the context of an imperial culture of physical bravery.

### Postwar Fear and Changing Masculinity

If Stein and Orwell's refusals to perform fear represented some continuity with other accounts dating from the 1880s through the early 1910s, the First World War's disruption to models of masculinity created a space in which other men invoked fear more liberally. This was not completely new. Alfred Pease, a Kenya-based hunter, had portrayed the experience of fear as an essential element in the construction of a heroic adventurer in 1913. "I never envied the man," he wrote, "not that I ever met him, who 'did not know what fear is.' . . . Fear is the very essence of pleasure in sport. . . . Where there is no fear there can be no courage."<sup>51</sup> For Pease, fear was integral to his subject-positioning in relation to nature, although his view did not sit well with at least one reviewer who criticized his "irritating" digressions on "the physiology of courage and cowardice."<sup>52</sup>

More authors wrote of experiencing fear, however, after the war. The well-known mountaineer Frank Smythe meditated extensively on fear in a chapter titled "Fear," in his 1940 discourse on his personal relationship to mountains. "Latent in every precipice . . . in the shadowed gorge . . . in the appalling sweep of the ice-slope . . . lurks some quality of fear," he wrote. Like Pease, Smythe articulated the roots of bravery in overcoming fear. Mountain climbers faced risks because of "the desire, inherent in every virile man, to rise superior not only to his environment but to himself."<sup>53</sup> Smythe's framing of mountain climbing was strongly gendered and appealed to a vision of stoic masculinity. He wrote elsewhere of the inspiration he drew from famous explorers such as Robert Scott and Ernest Shackleton.<sup>54</sup> But Smythe rejected the pursuit of fear as its own end and indeed the very framing of mountaineering as heroic. It was instead "a pleasurable sport" that relied on "prudence, skill and good judgement," he wrote. He likened an example of reckless, and therefore frightening, climbing on Kanchenjunga in the Himalaya during 1930 to mounting a "mass attack in the face of the deadliest barrage."<sup>55</sup>

Even if he rejected the heroic framing of mountaineering, Smythe did view overcoming fear as a necessary part of manly pursuits. He admitted that a modicum of fear "quickens the appreciation of beauty" in mountain landscapes and that the charm of pursuit lay in "the great range of emotions provoked through these physical experiences." Climbers who did not fear falling were foolhardy rather than brave, he thought, because bravery lay in overcoming fear.<sup>56</sup> Among all the narratives discussed in this

51. Pease, *Book of the Lion*, 20–22, 75.

52. H. P. Robinson, "Lions and Other Matters."

53. Smythe, *Mountain Vision*, 186.

54. Smythe, *Kangchenjunga Adventure*, 14. I am grateful to Dr. Nicholas Green for this reference.

55. Smythe, *Mountain Vision*, 186–90.

56. Smythe, *Mountain Vision*, 196, 200.

article, Smythe alone described fear as a kind of failure—not of nerve but of technique. An ill-advised descent of Mont Blanc was not heroic but “foolish.” During another frightening Alpine incident, an unavoidable jump over a chasm left him feeling weak (a somatic translation of nerves) and ashamed at his “stupidity” and “clumsiness” in getting into danger.<sup>57</sup> This attitude was unusual, as the examples of Francis Kingdon-Ward and Jim Corbett will show below. But Smythe’s narrative did reinforce the sense that fear could more legitimately be expressed retrospectively, on paper, than to other people in the moment. Every time he felt afraid while losing balance, he wrote, he regained it so quickly that his companions “had no inkling of anything untoward.”<sup>58</sup>

Writing during the opening stages of the Second World War and likening the sound of falling bombs to the horror of hearing avalanches rush past his camp, Smythe had particularly acute reasons to distinguish mountaineering from war. But even if he sought to decenter the pursuit of fear from mountaineering, it remained part of both his sense of masculinity and the mechanics of his narrative. One contemporary review suggested the traction that his exciting descriptions of danger might have with readers accustomed to the adventure genre. While condemning his “very nearly unreadable,” cliché-ridden “philosophy,” the reviewer praised the “tense excitement” of dangerous episodes.<sup>59</sup> Another review found Smythe’s accounts of “adventure, narrow escapes” and “the sensations involved in these—for example, fear” to be “persuasive and evocative.”<sup>60</sup> Both reviewers seemed to find Smythe’s careful and systematic, not gung ho, approach to mountaineering compatible with the danger and excitement that made adventure narratives appealing. Nor did they castigate him for frank admissions of fear. Like other good adventure protagonists, he had braved risk and lived to tell the tale, and his fear was confined to particular moments in the narrative.

Other postwar adventure writers trod a similar path, albeit without articulating an explicit theory of the importance of fear. The celebrated explorer-botanist Francis Kingdon-Ward made a nervousness of heights a common theme in his writings about expeditions in the hilly frontiers between India, China, Tibet, and Burma between the 1910s and 1950s.<sup>61</sup> Crossing a river via a rope-and-pully system in northern Burma, he “could not suppress a shudder”—a brief, subtle moment in which the explorer’s emotions threatened to break through into outward behavior.<sup>62</sup> In another memoir, Kingdon-Ward wrote of crossing an unstable rope bridge in southern China. Halfway across he “repented of [his] rashness” but “did not dare turn round . . . though I felt more like going down on all fours and crawling than standing upright.”<sup>63</sup> The passage, despite its

57. Smythe, *Mountain Vision*, 160–66, 188.

58. Smythe, *Mountain Vision*, 197.

59. *Times of India*, “Some Recent Books,” 1942.

60. Mavrogordato, “High Refuge.”

61. Kingdon-Ward, *Plant-Hunting on the Edge of the World*, 347.

62. Kingdon-Ward, *In Farthest Burma*, 204–5.

63. Kingdon-Ward, *Land of the Blue Poppy*, 16.

self-effacing tone, confined fear to a particular moment in the narrative and cast it as something that Kingdon-Ward felt at the time but only admitted later to the reader. He did not, after all, fall to his knees. The way that he framed fear in his narratives served to underscore his toughness and determination, since he always managed to complete his journeys.

The viscerality of Kingdon-Ward's descriptions of fear were especially noticeable because they departed from his typical mode of writing, which Mueggler has described as an "absorptive wandering" that privileged the sights he saw while virtually excluding the people he met or traveled with.<sup>64</sup> Dangerous nature generated the fear that enabled an adventurer to demonstrate their bravery. Nevertheless, Kingdon-Ward did on one occasion admit to experiencing a fear that significantly changed his behavior, in his 1941 book *Assam Adventure*. While climbing a ladder to a high ledge in Tibet, "I went up five steps, and clung there almost overhanging the river, too frightened to go another step. So I came down again feeling sick with terror."<sup>65</sup> This incident failed to produce a narrative performance of bravery—a signal that Kingdon-Ward was not simply preoccupied with constructing a heroic persona, and hinting that his writing went at least some way toward representing real emotional experiences.

Kingdon-Ward's admissions of fear, unlike those of Frank Smythe, apparently went unnoticed by literary reviewers. One, writing about *Assam Adventure* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, argued that "no living Englishman has a more distinguished record as a traveller than Captain F. Kingdon Ward [sic]" and that his "book is a gallant and often moving record of danger and hardship squarely faced in the cause of science."<sup>66</sup> It made no mention of Kingdon-Ward's fear of heights. Other reviewers praised him for his triumphs over physical adversity rather than any ability to overcome his own emotions. "He paid for his knowledge with all manner of hardship," wrote one of *In Farthest Burma*, but "after a desperate march" merely "asked nonchalantly for the news."<sup>67</sup> A review of *Plant Hunting at the Edge of the World* emphasized Kingdon-Ward's endurance even while accusing his writing of being dull.<sup>68</sup> By eliding Kingdon-Ward's own admissions of fear, these reviewers helped perpetuate the British explorer's stiff-upper-lip stereotype.

Perhaps the most striking examples of heroic fear, however, appeared in the works of Jim Corbett. A Briton in India who specialized in shooting "man eaters"—tigers and leopards that attacked humans—Corbett was a famous hunter. His multimillion-selling books followed what Johnson has termed the "jungle idiom" of imperial hunting narratives.<sup>69</sup> While scholars have recently reassessed Corbett's life and writings, emphasizing his unusual sensitivity to the natural and human culture of northern India's Kumaon

64. Mueggler, "Lapponicum Sea."

65. Kingdon-Ward, *Assam Adventure*, 68.

66. Rutter, "Journey through Assam."

67. Mavrogordato, "In Farthest Burma."

68. Hall, "Plant Hunting."

69. Johnson, *Out of Bounds*, 241–42.

hills, they barely acknowledge his admissions of fear.<sup>70</sup> In fact his books include lyrical descriptions of nervousness and outright terror. In his first book with a major publisher, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1944), Corbett described tracking one notorious tiger during the 1920s and finally lodging a bullet in the animal's head. The tiger survived the shot. "I nearly died of fright," Corbett wrote, and for the next half hour was "too frightened to even re-charge the rifle for fear the slight movement and sound should attract the attention of the tiger." Corbett's admission of fear emphasized the dangerousness of the situations and offered his readers (putatively located in India for the Bombay-published first edition, but extending to the United Kingdom and United States in a 1946 edition) a vicarious thrill. It also provided a narrative counterpoint to his second, successful attempt to kill the cat, four days later. This time, his description betrayed no nerves. Its dispassionate tone attested to Corbett's ability to get the job done.<sup>71</sup>

In his 1954 book *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, Corbett wrote in more general terms about the role of fear in hunting. "Fear may not be a heritage to some fortunate few," he wrote, echoing Alfred Pease, "but I am not of their number. After a lifelong acquaintance with wild life [sic] I am no less afraid of a tiger's teeth and claws today than I was. . . . But to counter that fear and hold it in check I now have the experience that I lacked in those early years." Indeed fear, he suggested, engendered a caution that was necessary for keeping predator-hunters alive, counterbalanced by the skills and determination that enabled a hunter to kill.<sup>72</sup> That this work was first published in 1954, after Indian independence from Britain but while Britain still retained control over many colonies, highlighted the continuing relevance of imperialist literary tropes into the era of decolonization.

Corbett's emphasis on the emotional experience of hunting, and particularly the viscerality of fear, did draw notice during some contemporary discussion of his work. A review of "the most extraordinary of Colonel Corbett's adventures" quoted a passage in which Corbett described the way that several days of sleep deprivation, pain from injury, and lack of food had "made a coward out of me" but went on to praise the author's "humility [and] supreme courage."<sup>73</sup> Earlier, a review of his 1948 book *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* noted that "this formidable creature . . . gave even the intrepid Jim Corbett so many anxious hours."<sup>74</sup> While not extensive, this is at least evidence that Corbett's intimate portrayal of fear was noticed by reviewers, unlike those of Kingdon-Ward. It is difficult to say whether this was due to further changing emotional norms in the wake of the Second World War, a response to Corbett's extensive and frequent descriptions of fear in his narratives, or the reviewers' own personal proclivities (the same point could be made about reviews of Smythe). That reviewers

70. Mandala, *Shooting a Tiger*.

71. Corbett, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, 109, 116–18, 123.

72. Corbett, *Temple Tiger*, 346. This book, while published in India, is included because of Corbett's fame in the metropole.

73. Gates, "Man's Dominion."

74. *Times of India*, "Some Recent Books," 1948.

could so readily incorporate moments of terror into their appreciation of Corbett's toughness, however, reiterated that fear was understood to be a legitimate part of masculine heroism.

### A Feminine Challenge?

Imperial adventure literature often "modelled masculinity," as Joseph A. Kestner has argued, by completely excluding women from narratives.<sup>75</sup> But women did hunt in East Africa and India, as Thompsell has shown in a rare study of women hunters, and usually did so without overturning gender norms.<sup>76</sup> The example of two women adventurers in West and Central Africa during the late nineteenth century illustrates an alternative to the prewar male narratives that excluded fear.

Mary Kingsley, a renowned female British traveler, used fear to strong effect in her *Travels in West Africa* (1897, 1904). Of encounters with wild animals, she wrote, "I will yield to nobody in terror," but "my terror is a special variety. . . . I become preternaturally artful, and intelligent to an extent utterly foreign to my true nature."<sup>77</sup> She linked the explorer's charisma, on and off the page, firmly to the contradiction between feeling fearful and acting calmly: facing down one's fears was necessary to preserving "self-respect, which is the mainspring of your power in West Africa."<sup>78</sup> In the text, Kingsley's accounts of actually encountering danger reported cool and deliberate behavior, emphasizing the artfulness that fear generated and eliding the sense of interiority that her passage on fear delivered. To give just two examples, on one occasion she stumbled, alone, across a group of dangerous hippopotamuses, but "softly returned to the canoe and shoved off, stealing along the bank . . . until I deemed it safe." On another she ran turbulent river rapids by canoe, noting only that "many a wild waltz we danced that night with the waters of the River Ogowé."<sup>79</sup> In these and other examples she kept her nerve and emerged safely.<sup>80</sup>

While fleeting, and scattered throughout different chapters of the book, Kingsley's explicit articulations of the value of fear did underscore her "pluck and . . . powers of endurance," in the words of one obituary writer, which made the best-selling book appealing to readers.<sup>81</sup> Another obituary praised her for behaving "without a trace of the 'new woman,'" referring to the stereotype of women who rejected conventions of femininity in the late nineteenth century.<sup>82</sup> The review suggested that Kingsley could take on a normally masculine-coded explorer persona without invoking social anxiety about unconventional women wrecking the imperial project, which had risen especially in

75. Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction*, 1, 7.

76. Thompsell, *Hunting Africa*, chap. 4.

77. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 391–92.

78. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 268.

79. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 192, 119.

80. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 143, 149–50, 192, 119.

81. *Times*, "Miss Mary Kingsley."

82. *Pall Mall Gazette*, "Mary H. Kingsley."

response to contemporary figures like Sarah Grand (Frances McFall) who strongly criticized British colonial officers for sexual promiscuity.<sup>83</sup>

Kingsley's laconic style was echoed shortly afterward by Marguerite Roby, who published her own memoir of travel in the Congo in 1911. Thompsell has argued that Roby's narrative was too understated to be considered feminine by some reviewers and has highlighted elements of the narrative that included "neither modesty nor remembered fear."<sup>84</sup> Yet Roby's narrative sometimes spoke directly of terror, for instance on hearing a leopard snarl nearby while walking at night: "Fear had hypnotised me, and I just stood and stood, absolutely incapacitated, waiting for I knew not what."<sup>85</sup>

The fact that both women wrote explicitly of fear before the First World War, whereas most of their male counterparts whom I have quoted did so afterward, indicates the gendering of emotional norms during that period. Before 1914, masculine narratives usually adopted laconic understatement to speak of bodily responses to danger. The relative availability of accounts of fear written after the First World War suggests that changing understandings of masculinity impacted on the imperial adventure genre. But there was a deeper structural logic to how fear operated in adventure narratives that spanned men's and women's accounts. In Kingsley and Roby's memoirs, fear was described as something confined to specific moments just as in the narratives of male authors. Once it had served its purpose by underscoring their bravery, it disappeared. Fear already had a legitimate place in the construction of at least some kinds of imperial heroism before the war, which male authors would later adopt.

Not everyone who wrote tales of travel in remote parts of the empire, or of tracking and killing game, can be collapsed into a single figure. But there was a common theme. Adventurers deployed allusions to fear, if not extended meditations on it, at moments of their narratives where it served to highlight the dangers that they had overcome. The gap between feeling and acting was all-important. If a narrator overcame fear and acted it was possible, even helpful, to articulate fear within the emotional norms of imperial British culture.

Kingsley, Corbett, and Kingdon-Ward were all leading proponents of the adventure genre in their times. That they made a virtue of fear suggests that it played a greater role in imperial imageries than scholarship has recognized. We can usefully understand the production and consumption of adventure literature as hinging on an imagined emotional community that could valorize fear as well as elide it. The emotional range of imperial heroism, in other words, was wider than we might assume. The legitimate fear of hunters and explorers appealed to the strain of British culture that Stephanie Barczewski has identified as glorifying "triumphalism and the glory of victory" over

83. Jusova, *New Woman and the Empire*, chap. 1.

84. Thompsell, *Hunting Africa*, 122–23.

85. Roby, *My Adventures in the Congo*, 67.

equally imperialist celebrations of heroism in “the nobility of suffering [and] defeat,” even if some authors, such as Frank Smythe, rejected that culture.<sup>86</sup>

Scholars of empire could usefully note the changes that occurred in that image during the later stage of imperialism. An important special issue on decolonizing imperial heroes, for example, perceptively demonstrated the complex afterlife that explorers (alongside soldiers and other famous imperialists) have had in the public discourse of former colonies and of Britain and France after 1945. The figures featured, however, all gained their original reputations between 1850 and 1914, the phase of “imperial propaganda,” which aimed to inculcate the character and values that were thought necessary to expand and sustain empire.<sup>87</sup> Later authors’ representation of their own interior lives was more nuanced. We cannot discount the role of publishers and editors in reworking publications, but the fact that the sophisticated commercial machinery of adventure-genre publishing permitted confessions of fear reinforces the argument that emotional norms were both flexible and changing.

### Conclusion

Attention to the way that fear was embedded in a human subject’s relationship with their own body and their surrounding environment helps us reframe imperial subjectivity as something embodied, rather than a free-floating agent of knowledge production. European adventurers, as they represented themselves in texts, were not only Pratt’s “seeing man” but also feeling women and men. The power and authority of the explorer or hunter came as much from embodied experience, acknowledging but regulating visceral emotions, as from detached vision.

Adventure literature cast the experience of empire as a case of white humans overcoming tropical nature, consistently between the 1880s and 1940s. However, the bullish performance of self-confidence that adventure literature relied on before 1914 began to change after the First World War had put paid to such strict emotional regulation. Constructions of heroic masculinity came to accommodate a greater recognition of fear and vulnerability and highlighted a narrative’s departure from the mundanity that usually lay behind colonial life, even during explorative expeditions.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, literary performances of heroism in imperial spaces perhaps became newly pointed in reaction to the sense of a loss of manliness, both in Britain and in the regulated spaces of the imperial home. For this reason, the discrepancy between interior feelings of fear that authors narrated and the way they behaved was vital. Fear did not have to undermine manliness as long as it did not impede action. Adventure literature reflected ways that colonial gender categories flexed during the mid-twentieth century but did not break.

86. Barczewski, *Heroic Failure and the British*, 4.

87. Jones et al., “Decolonising Imperial Heroes,” 793.

88. See Kennedy, *Last Blank Spaces*, 248.



Beyond the genre constraints of adventure literature, fear has long been a characteristic element in humans' engagement with nature.<sup>89</sup> Environmental humanities scholars are also evaluating other negative forms of affect in the face of environmental degradation and climate change today.<sup>90</sup> We should be attentive to the ways that fear structures humans' relationship with the natural world, and in particular the way that this informs gender, ethnic, and class identities. Imperial adventure literature offers a surprising example of one way to positively value apparently unpleasant emotions. But, for all that some narrators would not have described themselves as imperialists, their appreciation of fear in their relationship to nature was rooted in exploitative relationships among humans and between humans and the environment.

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89. Esser, "Fear of Water and Floods in the Low Countries"; MacKinnon, "Jangled the Belles."

90. Brugger et al., "Climates of Anxiety"; Drew, "Why Wouldn't We Cry?"; Barrios, *Governing Affect*; Smith, "Earthly Passion(s)."

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