Abstract

Hundreds of poems were published in British daily newspapers during the South African War. Serious poets and enthusiastic amateurs, serving soldiers and anonymous correspondents chose newspaper publication, self-consciously assuming a range of public roles.

The thesis begins by considering the functions of bard, priest and prophet as alternative models for wartime newspaper poets, who were called upon to contribute to public debates about British character and culture, imperial ambition and international policy. Poems circulated nationally and internationally, and readers responded with performances, parodies, censure and debate, subjecting newspaper poets to political and literary scrutiny.

The second section of the thesis is concerned with representations of masculinity and gentlemanliness, showing how poets took on Kipling’s voices and verse forms in order to articulate different visions of military manliness, and thus to proffer alternative ways of conceptualising imperial Britain’s national character. The third section is concerned with representations of the South African landscape, showing how wartime newspaper poets mediated the war to civilian newspaper readers by adapting and subverting tropes of earlier imperial landscape writing, in particular in their representations of war deaths. Meditating on this ultimate intimacy between body and land, poets both perform and moderate imperial anxieties through a cartography of remembering.

A short concluding chapter centres on a figure in the metropolitan landscape: the ragged newspaper boy. The newsboy is closely related to Tommy Atkins; but he is also connected, in a number of poems, with the newspaper poet: the bodies – and the contested roles – of the British soldier, the newsboy and the wartime poet coincide.

The stereotype of newspaper verse as uniformly patriotic doggerel, compounded by a disciplinary bias against ephemeral and anonymous material, has contributed to critical neglect; this thesis argues that the newspaper poetry of 1899-1902 is an important site of social and literary engagement.
Impact Statement

I intend to develop a range of academic outputs from this thesis, beginning with a scholarly monograph. The newspaper poem as literary object has been neglected by scholarship, having been read and written by those who did not consider themselves 'literary'. This thesis argues for its interest and value, inviting English literature scholars to find ways to incorporate extracanonical material in research and teaching. My work contributes to debates about how best to use increasingly accessible digital archives of nineteenth-century newspapers. My methodology, which blends a focused research design with opportunities for serendipitous discovery, will be of interest to colleagues working in periodical studies, exposing as it does informal networks involving newspaper editors and reader-correspondents, between national and regional publications and colonial and international titles, allowing a single newspaper poem to travel the English-speaking world.

This research brings to light a body of poetry otherwise lost in the archive. For a more general audience, I plan to prepare for publication a wider selection from my database of more than a thousand poems transcribed from microfilm and digital copies of late-Victorian newspapers. No anthology exists of South African War poetry; in hindsight, the significance of the conflict pales in comparison with the trauma of the First World War hardly a generation later; more British men died on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in 1916 than in 1899-1902 altogether. But the cultural impact of the South African War cannot be measured only in deaths, and the shock of Britain’s failure to win a swift victory, the ethical questions raised by concentration camps and scorched-earth anti-guerrilla tactics, and the implications of the conflict for the future of British imperialism and South African politics are enormous. Moreover, the poetry of the South African War is the poetry that the poets of 1914-1919 read; inviting scholarly attention to the poetry of 1899-1902 opens up avenues of possibility for further work. My database of poetry addresses topics of contemporary interest, including debates about Britain’s imperial history. Motivated by an interest in the ways in which literature and the press contribute to national culture and discourse, my analysis of representations of military masculinity and British imperialism in the newspapers of the fin-de-siècle contributes to historical scholarship, but it also speaks to an ongoing – and highly current – debate about the construction of British identity, about who gets to speak to, and speak for, the nation, how fractures and tensions between different versions of national character can be acknowledged, and anxieties mediated or assuaged.

War literature is a perennial feature of GCSE and A level syllabi. As a teacher-educator I can collaborate with academic and school colleagues, drawing on my doctoral research to enrich and extend teachers’ subject knowledge. There is also scope to develop teaching materials and classroom resources with a focus on newspaper poetry which could encourage A level and undergraduate students to consider important issues of canonicity and authorship, developing their critical engagement with English as a discipline.
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Voters in the 2016 UK referendum on the country’s ongoing membership of the European Union were told that the debate was about British sovereignty. The term was a powerful one, uniting an emotive appeal to macho nationalism with a rhetorically useful semantic vagueness. Just over a hundred years earlier, politicians had made use of the same concept for similar reasons, though they amplified its incantatory power, as well as further concealing its legal meaninglessness, by using the more obscure term ‘suzerainty’. In 1899, ‘suzerainty’ was invoked to justify an imperial war against two small South African republics, after a political dispute over the rights of expatriate gold-miners provided the pretext for an attempt to bring the whole of Southern Africa, together with its rich mineral resources, into the British Empire.1 In 1899, as in 2016, what was at stake was a question of Britain’s place in the world. In both cases, a ‘smokescreen term’ was used, behind which any number of implicit and explicit promises and threats about British exceptionalism, reputation and national character could cluster; in 1899, as in 2016, newspapers were central to the way this message was shaped and communicated to the British public.2 This thesis interrogates the diverse roles of poetry published in British newspapers in 1899-1902 in mediating British experiences of the South African War. At a time when notions of masculinity and imperialism were in flux, newspaper poems were a site of political and literary engagement, contributing to and disrupting the constructions of imperial national identity which underpinned the rationale for the conflict, and which the war called into question.

When it began in October 1899, the perennial confidence that the war would be over by Christmas seemed for once well-founded: imperial forces were facing two of the world’s smallest states, whose populations, an MP pointed out in a letter to the Times, totalled ‘less than half the population of Aberdeen’.3 Against the globe’s preeminent naval and military power were ranged two tiny and largely agricultural societies –

republics which required all boys and men old enough to ride a horse and strong enough to carry a rifle to muster as part of a citizen army, and to provide their own horse and rifle, as there was no standing army. Instead of conceding a swift defeat, however, the South African Republic and Orange Free State Boers struck a number of astonishing blows to the under-prepared and under-resourced British forces. The conflict dragged on for three and a half bloody years, until deadly British concentration camps and scorched-earth tactics – policies which devastated the landscape and decimated the Boer population – persuaded the remaining guerrilla fighters that their cause, and their countries, were lost. By the end of the war, the number of British service personnel who had travelled to South Africa outnumbered the entire populations of the two nations they were trying to subdue. Half a million British soldiers had faced no more than 70,000 Boer fighters, of whom no more than about 30,000 were ever on active service at any time. 22,000 British men died, with almost two-thirds of them killed not in battle but by preventable and treatable diseases. The shock to British military and imperial self-confidence would shape the history of the empire in the twentieth century, while the crushing Boer defeat paved the way for an extremist form of Afrikaner nationalism, the effects of which are still evident in South Africa. 4

In Britain, the conflict was ‘a watershed imperial moment’, ‘a pendulum that swung not only between centuries, but between national assurance and introspection, […] between a national character that knew exactly who it was and one which was confused’. 5 After the war, the country would have to come to terms with a victory that was so long in coming it felt more like a defeat, and by a peace agreement which paved the way for Boer self-government within five years, an outcome which left imperialists like Rudyard Kipling seriously disillusioned. 6 Long before any retrospective analyses of political and military strategy were possible, however, the war’s opening weeks produced self-consciousness and introspection on the part of the newspapers and their poets. Three days after the war’s outbreak, the Daily Chronicle’s regular poet objected to the nation’s new obsession in their customary cockney slang: 7

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4 Bill Nasson, pp. 304-16.
7 ‘War’, Daily Chronicle, 14 October 1899, p. 4.
The poem enumerates a set of related complaints: ‘the man in the street’ is simultaneously unhealthily obsessed with and deluded about Britain’s military abilities, but also personally too squeamish to ‘thump’ anybody himself, while unscrupulous newspapers profit from a national crisis by participating in what Michael Paris has called ‘the pleasure culture of war’, producing ‘speshuls’ and printing ‘lies’. The point about profit is, of course, ironised by the poem’s position in a newspaper, and the poet’s complicity in the production of war-related copy. These concerns – about British national character, the demands of masculinity, the function of the press and the role of poetry (‘Rool, Brittaner’) – are ones to which the newspaper poets of 1899-1902 repeatedly returned, and they are at the heart of this thesis.

Poetry has featured in newspapers for as long as there have been newspapers; in the late nineteenth century it appeared in almost every issue of almost every local, regional and national newspaper published in Britain. Jingling or serious, popular or profound, poetry makes a claim on the attention of readers, taking its place alongside news, comment, advertising and argument. Stanza breaks and varied line-lengths make poems stand out against the surrounding blocks of text, in an inviting margin of white space (see Figures 1.1, 1.2). Newspaper poems are distinct from but read alongside other kinds of content, participating in the cacophony of the newspaper page (Figure 1.3), while the uncomfortable and surprising ways in which verse jostles against non-literary material draws attention to aspects of the poetry itself, and of the news with which it interacts.

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Fig. I.1: *Times*, 11 October 1899, p. 7, with Algernon Swinburne, 'The Transvaal' in column 5.

Fig. I.2: *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 January 1900, p. 2, with (Anon.), 'Write it in Manly Tears' in column 3.

Fig. I.3: *Morning Post*, 5 January 1900, p. 5, with (Anon.), 'Our Imposing Fleet' in column 7.

Fig. I.4: *Times*, 16 January 1902, with 'A Prologue' by 'An Islander' amongst the personal ads in column 2.
The poets represented in late-Victorian newspapers include well-known figures like Kipling, Hardy, Swinburne, and poet laureate Alfred Austin, invited by editors to provide a splash of literary colour, or feeling they had something to say to readers beyond the reach of their books. Some newspapers, like the Daily Chronicle, had their own in-house poets, who responded to the news of the day or provided comic relief. The majority of newspaper poetry, however, came from ordinary readers and correspondents, who had ‘thrown’ their contribution ‘into rhyme’ in the hope that ‘it may, in this dress, strike the eye of some who might otherwise have passed it over’, as a contributor to the Daily News wrote in December 1899.9

The work of these anonymous and mostly untraceable figures is uncollected in anthologies or volumes, and so it has remained largely invisible to literary scholarship. Newspaper poems remind us that poetry can be as much at home in the clamour of everyday political debate as in the slim volume, and that far from demanding austere and hushed deference, poems can exist in a much noisier, more crowded and less respectful space. In contrast with the stereotype of periodical and newspaper poetry as sentimental ‘filler’, the newspaper poets of the South African War assumed an active role in public discourse. The extent of some contributors’ faith in the combined power of their poetry and the national newspaper press to move readers and inspire action is marked by a small number of poets who, unsuccessful in securing the favour of editors, resolved to pay by the line to insert their verses into the personal columns on the front page of the Times (Figure I.4). Jane H. Oakley, called ‘the advertising poetess’ by the mischievous Westminster Gazette, was the most prolific ‘poetical “front-sheeter”’, with ten poems on the Times front page between September 1899 and May 1900, but she was not the only one.10 That this was a form in which such voices could really be heard in the late nineteenth century is clear from the intensity and reach of the debates that newspaper poetry sometimes provoked. For instance, Swinburne’s sonnet ‘The Transvaal’ was printed in the Times on the day that war was declared.11 It elicited a response from celebrity big game hunter Frederick Selous, who expressed ‘feelings of intense disgust’ that Swinburne’s poem had ‘been written with the sole object of

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embittering feeling in this country’ against the Boers. Both Swinburne’s poem and Selous’s critique were so hotly disputed in readers’ correspondence columns that they featured in a parliamentary debate about the role of the press in generating public support for the war. When the MPs’ speeches were reported in the Times, the circle was completed: a newspaper poem which began by participating in the news cycle, reflecting on the events of the day and exhorting the nation to respond in a particular way, had itself become the news.

Studying newspaper poems
In the thriving field of periodical studies, scholarly interest in the place of poetry in magazines and daily newspapers is still developing. Walter Houghton’s rationale for excluding poetry from the otherwise ‘magisterial’ Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals set the tone for decades of scholarship; to have included poems ‘would have added an enormous number of worthless items [...] and a large number of obscure authors to be identified and then described’. In the past twenty years, researchers have done invaluable work to show that periodical poetry in monthly and quarterly publications does merit scholarly attention, demonstrating the significance of magazines and journals for individual poets, and illuminating the selection processes of individual titles. Scholarship on poems published in daily and weekly newspapers is less abundant. Building on the foundational work undertaken by Brian Maidment in the 1980s, Mike Sanders has explored the poetry of working-class and self-taught poets published in the

12 F.C. Selous, Letter to the Editor, Times, 24 October 1899, p. 15.
Chartist newspapers of the 1830s-50s. Kirstie Blair has pursued a comparable line of enquiry into the local verse-cultures supporting poets publishing in Scottish newspapers, especially in Dundee, and has edited the only existing anthology of British Victorian newspaper poetry, while Andrew Hobbs has uncovered a lively and productive literary network of community leaders, literary editors, pub landlords, and aspiring poets in Victorian Blackburn. Together with Claire Januszewski, Hobbs has also undertaken a large-scale quantitative analysis of poetry published in local and regional newspapers across Britain, making the case that the local press constitutes the ‘most common type of publication in which poetry was encountered in the Victorian era’, and estimating that approximately four million poems found their readership through the pages of the regional press – ‘far more than were published in books’. Work on poems published in English national newspapers is rarer still, though Natalie Houston has written about poems in the London *Times* during the 1860s, and Elizabeth Gray has investigated the function of poetry in the *Women’s Penny Paper* in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Together, these works provide a broad framework for the study, in this thesis, of poems published in national daily newspapers during the South African War, which builds on them by drawing on a range of newspapers, rather than focusing on a single publication or poet. This approach sheds light on the ways in which poems and conversations about poems circulated both nationally and around the English-speaking world, building up a picture of poetry as a key mode for social and political debate, and thus helping to answer some of the scholarly reservations which have contributed to the critical neglect of the form to date.

In accounting for the fact that Victorian newspaper poems have attracted so little attention, many of the assumptions and objections that formerly led to the neglect

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of periodical poetry arise, somewhat amplified. If monthly or quarterly periodicals were
deemed a low-status and unliterary vehicle for works by established canonical writers,
which scholars have preferred to read in their more ‘disciplined’ volume form, the
thousands of anonymous and pseudonymous poems published in the cheap print of a
mass-circulation daily newspaper stretch the conventions and expectations of literary
scholarship still further. In the period covered by this thesis, this is compounded by
the changing character of newspapers; elite ‘literature’ sits uncomfortably next to the
sensationalist tactics of late nineteenth-century New Journalism designed to appeal to
the working-class reader. Scholarship on the poems themselves has been hampered by
the assumption that newspaper verse was merely ‘filler’, selected by editors to fill
physical space rather than for aesthetic or other positive qualities. There exists a
disciplinary bias against ‘occasional’ verse written for a specific date, which assumes that
‘topical’ is the inverse of ‘literary’. Research on newspaper poetry is further burdened by
problems associated with anonymity – the ‘obscure authors’ disdained by Houghton –
which does not fit well within the disciplinary structures of literary scholarship that
assume ‘the primacy of the relationship of author and text’. Finally, the practical
methodological difficulty of finding and collating poems published in newspapers, even
in an era of expanding access to digital collections, presents its own challenges.

In her important essay, ‘What the Wellesley Index left out’, Hughes argues that
‘[t]he presumptive association of poetry with “filler” is belied by the sheer extent of
poems first published in Victorian periodicals that are now deemed canonical’. Apart
from a small number of poems by high-profile figures, the same cannot be said of
poems in the newspapers of 1899-1902, the vast majority of which were ‘written by
poets who were neither famous in their day nor canonical in ours’. However,
assumptions about the ephemerality of their work should be challenged. Rather than
casting it aside, readers re-read and circulated material they encountered in newspapers,
and indeed some newspapers issued their own ‘annual and semi-annual bound
volumes’. These, together with publications like The Newspaper Reader's Index of Reference

22 Hughes, ‘What the Wellesley Index Left Out’, p. 91; Katherine Bode, ‘Thousands of Titles Without
Authors: Digitized Newspapers, Serial Fiction, and the Challenges of Anonymity’, Book History, 19 (2016),
284-316 (p. 284).
26 Brake, Print in Transition, p. 3.
(1889) which ‘enabled readers to assemble their own catalogue of useful articles in daily and weekly newspapers’, indicate that ‘the “better” newspapers’ at least were seen ‘as permanent and valued records rather than as throwaway ephemera’. Thanks to ‘the Victorian craze for collecting press cuttings’, periodical and newspaper poems could be ‘re-read, conversed upon, and kept as household treasures’, cut out and pasted ‘into scrapbooks or on the walls of [...] workplace[s]’. The supposed ephemerality of newspaper verse is further contradicted by the poetry itself, both by self-referential comments made by newspaper poets and by the fact that, as in the case of Swinburne’s sonnet ‘The Transvaal’, newspaper poems could be the subject of high-profile debate and discussion. Importantly, this discussion was not confined to the political import of newspaper verse. Newspaper poems were both the prompt for and the medium of sustained literary debates, ‘the field in which battles over metrics and genre were fought’, both in critical commentary and in poems themselves, ‘that variously experimented, satirized, and otherwise intervened in debates about the propriety of poetic form’. As well as critiquing one another on the grounds of literary quality, Victorian newspaper poets were lambasted by newspaper editors for failures of imagery, metre or rhyme. The day after Austin’s ‘Inflexible as Fate’ was published in the *Times*, for instance, the *Daily Chronicle* gleeefully printed a parody calling it ‘dismal twaddle’, while the columnists at the *Westminster Gazette* were merciless to Oakley every time a new poem appeared. Finally, the ephemerality of newspaper poetry needs to be placed in the context of a global network of circulation.

Many of the poems which form the basis of this thesis are topical responses to current events, often incorporating a quotation from a news report as a headnote. Even for major poets, these ‘entirely context-dependent’ poems were unlikely to be republished in volume form. In Brake’s memorable phrase, they would be ‘deselected’ and ‘left to the limbo of ephemera’ rather than appearing in a poet’s ‘collected’ work,

32 Ibid., p. 275.
and this designation as ephemera excludes them from mainstream scholarly analysis.\textsuperscript{33} Occasional poems by unknown, anonymous or forgotten figures are still less likely to receive critical attention.\textsuperscript{34} Moreover, the rationale for the research which does exist tends to reinforce the notion that newspaper poems are primarily ‘valuable to us as documents of historical interest’, rather than as literary texts.\textsuperscript{35} But to read these poems solely as artefacts of political or sociological importance is to neglect the fact that their creators chose poetry as their medium. Claims about ephemerality and topicality are often an indirect way of approaching the issue of literary quality while avoiding the appearance of snobbishness; Blair puts it bluntly when she states that ‘most’ newspaper poetry ‘does not meet the aesthetic criteria we (professional literary critics) would apply to “good” poetry’.\textsuperscript{36} However, while some newspaper poetry is certainly metrically clumsy or linguistically clichéd, much more falls outside the categories of ‘good’ poetry for less technical reasons, for ‘qualities not usually seen as aesthetic virtues, such as sentimentality, nostalgia, patriotism, jokes and puns’, alerting us to the circular and often class-inflected processes of evaluation and exclusion by which the canon is defined.\textsuperscript{37}

Poems published in newspapers are tainted by association with the popular press; amidst concerns about the cultural consequences of cheap newprint, industrial production methods and a ‘socially undifferentiated market’, late-Victorian journalism was defined in opposition to a ‘narrowing definition of what constituted English literature’.\textsuperscript{38} Within academic debates, distinctions between the ‘literary’ and the ‘popular’ were inflected with anxieties about justifying a discipline that might look like ‘mere chatter about Shelley’.\textsuperscript{39} As Brake puts it, ‘the twentieth-century construction of “literature” […] is predicated on [the] defeat, devaluation and invisibility’ of lower-status forms of printed text and on a firm distinction between ‘literature and journalism’.\textsuperscript{40}

Such a distinction does not adequately account for the place of poetry in the lives of ordinary Victorians, however. Poetry was ‘ubiquitous’: ‘[a]s with singing or conversation, everyone had the right to rhyme’; it was ‘an integral part of daily life’ and a ‘mode of

\textsuperscript{34} Blair, \textit{Poets}, p. xix.
\textsuperscript{35} Houston, ‘Newspaper poems’, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{36} Blair, \textit{Poets}, p. xix.
\textsuperscript{38} Jones, \textit{Powers}, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{40} Laurel Brake, \textit{Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century} (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. xi, xiv.
self-expression available to all readers and writers. As Hobbs contends, ‘the fact that these readers treasured and used such poetry, in ways we tend to reserve for only the “best” poetry, challenges our judgements of poetic quality and the limitations of “bad art”’. Like Blair’s poets of the Dundee People’s Journal, the newspaper poems discussed in this thesis ‘participate in and help to shape a topical, politicised, satirical, and self-aware literary culture; one that genuinely offered pleasure, inspiration and a sense of self-worth to writers and readers who were excluded from other forms of cultural participation’. The idea that topical and popular poetry lies outside the scope of literary studies implies too narrow a conception of ‘poetry’, and a definition of ‘literature’ that is critically limiting, anachronistic and self-fulfilling: the fewer occasional poems that we encounter in the course of our literary studies, the less like ‘literature’ they seem when we do come across them.

The anonymity or pseudonymity of many newspaper poets operates as a further bar to literary scholarship. In their study of American Civil War newspaper poetry, R. J. Weir and Elizabeth Lorang observe that anonymous publication is generally framed in one of three ways: as ‘a stop along the way to professional authorship, as a mark of inconsequential or ephemeral literature, or as only a puzzle to be solved’. These assumptions obscure ‘a fundamental characteristic’ of nineteenth-century literary culture. As Katherine Bode shows, ‘the separation of author from title’ in Victorian newspapers is not simply ‘an “enigma” of original publication that has been resolved’ but an ongoing fact: ‘in many cases we do not know, nor do we have any hope of discovering, the identities of the authors of these titles’. In order to do justice to the actual conditions under which readers encountered newspaper poems we need to tolerate this uncertainty: an ‘author-centred approach’ intent on resolving literary anonymity or pseudonymity creates ‘composite figures and bodies of work that did not exist and could not have existed in the era in which th[el][se texts were written’ and

43 Blair, Poets, p. xxvi.
45 Houston, ‘Newspaper poems’, p. 234.
47 Weir and Lorang, ‘Will not these days?’.
obscures the potential for a kind of playfulness over authorship which frequently accompanied the poems on their original publication. Anonymity could be defensive: a way to avoid the threat of libel, or a means of ‘cover’ for gender or class identities to enable ‘access to […] broad audiences and subject matter’. But poets also used anonymity more creatively, ‘as a strategy designed to complicate the authorial position’, enabling them ‘to be at once creators and constructions’, and to ‘spoil […] the author position in their society’. Pseudonymity could also be symbolic – a way of signalling a distinction between separate public roles. Anonymity and pseudonymity are not necessarily stable conditions, and contemporary readers did not all experience them in the same ways. While this thesis will certainly wonder at times whether a poet asserting a particular gender, class or military position is really writing from the experience they claim, it is often more productive to focus on the ways in which the signature constructs the identity of the poet for the purposes of reading the poem. Catherine Gallagher offers encouragement: ‘to concentrate on the elusiveness of these authors, instead of bemoaning it and searching for their positive identities, is to practise a different sort of literary history’.

Traditional constructions of authorship in the attribution of newspaper poetry are further challenged by traces of the many hands involved in the design of a page of newsprint. Original line-endings are reformatted to fit into a column; poems are surrounded with deliberate paratextual features outside the poet’s control, such as editorial commentary, illustration, other poems, and thematically related readers’ correspondence; and a reading is affected by what Brake calls ‘chance parallels’ with the other features of the newspaper page, including news, casualty lists, political cartoons or advertisements. This ‘textual heteroglossia’ can work powerfully to shape a reading of the literary text in ways that point to a more ‘corporate’ authorship. Whether signed or

49 Ibid., pp. 284, 292.
51 Easley, First Person Anonymous, pp. 5, 1.
52 Ledbetter, Tennyson, pp. 104, 114-115, 118.
55 Easley, First Person Anonymous, p. 6; Brake, Subjugated Knowledges, p. 63.
56 Brake, Print in Transition, p. 45.
57 Ibid., p. 27; Brake, Subjugated Knowledges, p. 66.
unsigned, the way that authorship functions in newspaper poetry is complex and unfamiliar, and related to the range of functions that newspaper poetry was understood to perform, for poets, newspapers, and readers.

The low status of newsprint and uncertainty about the ways in which the newspaper page might disrupt a reading of their work made newspaper publication a risky business for both major and aspiring poets. Indeed, the widespread use of periodical and newspaper publication by established poets is strikingly at odds with the attitudes of hostility they often expressed to these forms of publication. In 1868, after Tennyson published a series of poems in different periodicals, Swinburne implored a mutual friend to ‘prevent his making such a hideous exhibition of himself’; another reader noted that the poet ‘is making himself very common’, and a third offered friendly advice: ‘Don’t write any more in Magazines if you can help: indeed, it […] will do you harm.’ Tennyson himself was disparaging about Thackeray ‘let[ting] your brains be sucked’ by association with a monthly magazine. Similarly, Chapman describes Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s concern ‘that poetic devaluation results from mass circulation’. Nonetheless, like almost all of their contemporaries, Swinburne, Tennyson and Barrett Browning all chose newspaper publication when it suited them. As Tennyson put it in a letter to a fellow-poet, sometimes a ‘good cause’ demanded poetry that would be accessible to a mass audience, and in such cases the immediacy of newspaper publication was precisely its appeal. Unknown, aspiring and minor poets likewise made use of newspaper publication for political or ideological purposes, with ‘moments of excitement about a local, national or international cause or event’ – like the South African War – prompting particular flurries. But Victorian newspaper poems were by no means all political, and poets had other motives for braving the uncertainties of newsprint, including as a way of establishing a reputation and as a means of making money.

60 Ibid., p. 53.
64 Peterson, ‘Writing for periodicals’, p. 87.
The potential for newspaper poems to earn fees was variable. While major poets like Kipling and Swinburne did receive remuneration for individual poems, as a rule lesser- and unknown poets publishing in newspapers were not paid. Editors used their discretion, however, and some of the poems in this study imply that regular anonymous poets also earned money for their work. Publication in newspapers and periodicals helped major poets attain the status of ‘popular poet’, while for others newspaper publication offered a way of ‘drumming up patronage’ and establishing ‘a fanbase of potential subscribers and admirers’. Poetry could lead to other kinds of paid journalistic work, too, as article writers, newspaper staff, or in the production of publicity verse for advertisements or political campaigning.

Poems were of economic value to newspapers, as well as to poets. Editors capitalised on the names of well-known poets in their publicity materials, but even poetry by minor and unknown writers could increase a publication’s appeal, with readers of the Dundee People’s Journal attesting ‘that they came for the fiction and poetry, and stayed for the news’. Newspaper poems could serve ‘as a kind of relaxation for the mind wearied’ by the denser content of the rest of the page. Indeed, poetry of all kinds ‘literally lightened up […] pages’ with its margin of white space, simultaneously demanding attention and offering refreshment by contrast with the surrounding ‘close newsprint’. But poetry brought more than literal and intellectual light relief; New York Independent editor Theodore Tilton claimed that poetry was essential to his newspaper’s political aims, since ‘the highest literary reputation’ was necessary for ‘the greatest moral influence’. This poetry did not need to be directly connected to the news cycle. Indeed, both Sanders and Blair argue that for reformist and radical editors, the writing and publishing of poetry on any subject constituted ‘an important strategic activity’ and was itself a political act: as Sanders puts it, ‘if you can recognise and produce high-quality

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67 Ledbetter, Tennyson, p. 103; Blair, ‘Newspaper Press’, p. 268.
69 Blair, Poets, p. xii.
70 Houston, ‘Newspaper poems’, p. 236.
71 Hughes, ‘Poetry’, p. 133; Ledbetter, Tennyson, p. 102.
poetry, you ought to be allowed to vote.’ As well as giving support to the Chartist ‘argument from culture’ and lending moral weight to the publication, the poetry column was valuable to local newspapers’ attempts ‘to feed a local patriotism’ from which the newspaper itself could benefit. In national newspapers with a geographically dispersed readership, poetry likewise helped create a sense of a community of readers. Newspapers provided ‘the shared stories and cultural references which enable social life to occur’, thereby making ‘the nineteenth-century concept of the public possible’, and poetry had its part to play in this creation of an imagined community. Religious or patriotic themes appealed to and reinforced shared values, while humorous poetry assumed ‘consensus about what […] was laughable rather than outrageous’. When related to news items, readers’ correspondence and other poems, newspaper poetry ‘participate[d] in a textual conversation’ which offered ‘the pleasures of serial reading’, and which could stretch out over weeks, months and even years. Poetry could also be a way of ‘mediating the modernity and ephemerality of periodical publication’ itself. In this reading, the very ‘indistinguishability and abundance’ of pious or sentimental poetry ‘points to the performative function’; poems affirming ‘time-worn’ ideas of faith, home and nationhood assumed ‘the function of prayer, sermons, and hymns’. To dismiss such poems as ‘filler’ is to miss one of the functions of poetry in the press – and indeed in society. Although political and topical poems are at the heart of this thesis, they are not the only poems to perform a significant function for newspapers.

As this thesis demonstrates, the social role of poems explicitly linked to the news cycle was similarly varied. Newspaper poets could write as journalists, offering eyewitness accounts. But topical newspaper poetry could go beyond reportage, using a ‘hybrid voice’ to mingle journalism with interpretation and even ‘political prophecy’. By examining not only an event itself but also ‘its interpretation in the minds of the paper’s readers’, poems could offer alternative readings of a news event. The poet’s

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73 Sanders, ‘A jackass load’, p. 48; Blair, Poets, p. xvi.
78 Hughes, ‘Poetry’, p. 131.
79 Ibid., pp. 131, 136.
80 Chapman, ‘Vulgar needs’, pp. 82, 87.
82 Houston, ‘Newspaper poems’, p. 240.
ability to take on the voices of those involved in news events could make the news more intelligible and introduce ‘human interest’ angles. By offering ‘emotional responses’ in language different from ‘that of the daily news’ a poem could ‘memorialize’ a news event, turning it ‘into an aesthetic object suitable for contemplation’. Memorial poems could serve ‘as counterparts to obituaries’, offering ‘the sonorities, rhythms, and evocation of feeling usually missing’ from the prose accounts of a death or disaster. Such poems could even enable ‘far-distant readers to participate in the simulacrum of memorial service’, especially when they used the forms and meters of familiar hymns.

Poems were thus able ‘to refine, amplify, or comment upon the emotional responses that news reporting could produce’. Westminster Gazette editor J.A. Spender hints at the potential importance of poetry as a vehicle for political thought in his 1927 memoir, where he describes his astonishment at the effect of the South African War on the Liberal party, which was fatally split on the subject. Describing his activity as an editor as ‘labouring to keep the party together’, he recalls being ‘remonstrated with’ by ‘old and intimate friends’ on both sides who counselled him that there was ‘no room for the subtleties and mental reserves which I wished to impart’. Newspaper poetry could be the place where ‘the paper’s politics come through most clearly’, introducing ‘subtleties’ which the demands of wartime made impossible in editorial prose. Conversely, poems published in newspapers could offer perspectives which contrasted sharply from those articulated by the publication’s editorial stance. Indeed, it was safe to articulate doubts and uncertainties in anonymous and pseudonymous poems which would have been inadmissible in prose, both because of the obscurity over authorship and because of poetry’s special ability to be playful with voice and character, to sustain points of view in tension, rather than resolving them into straightforward political positions, and to elicit complex and nuanced responses to issues which were elsewhere presented as simple.

All this implies that a study of poems published in newspapers will have much to contribute to an investigation of what Houston calls ‘poetry’s ideological function within the public sphere’. However, any discussion of the social function of a

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84 Houston, ‘Newspaper poems’, p. 239.
86 Ibid.
90 Houston, ‘Newspaper poems’, p. 234.
newspaper needs to take account of a number of complicating factors. The most obvious is that ‘the public’ is not a singular entity.\textsuperscript{91} The diversity of the newspaper press in 1899-1902 is just one way of visualising the range of discrete ‘publics’ into which metropolitan British society could be divided, and which newspapers played a part in creating, but the relationship between the newspapers and the views and opinions of their various publics is not straightforward.\textsuperscript{92} During the House of Commons debate about the role played by Swinburne’s ‘The Transvaal’ in 1899, Irish Nationalist MP Michael Davitt described newspapers ‘pour[ing] out falsehoods’ in a ‘campaign of calumny’ which had ‘led, or misled, the public’ and ‘forced on the war’.\textsuperscript{93} Here, Davitt expresses a ‘belief in the power of newspapers to influence society’ which Aled Jones claims was ‘axiomatic’ in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{94} Other speakers in the debate gestured towards a more complex view of the relationship between press and public opinion, however, as in the contradictions and tensions expressed by Liberal MP Henry Du Pré Labouchere:

The war is very popular at this moment […]. At present it is popular, and the poets of war—Mr Swinburne, for instance—write poems upon it, and war songs are sung in the music-halls of London. But I do not think that represents public opinion. […] I wonder the war is not more popular at the present moment, in view of the lies that have been published by the Yellow press. […] We are not going to be led by the Jingo press of this country.\textsuperscript{95}

Labouchere appears to take Swinburne’s poetry and the music halls’ programmes as evidence of the war’s popularity, only to deny that it is possible to draw conclusions about ‘public opinion’ from such evidence, while he both confirms and denies the power of the press. The inconsistencies are in line with changing perceptions of the function of the press mapped out by Mark Hampton.\textsuperscript{96} In his lament over the power of newspapers to form public opinion, Davitt articulates what Hampton terms an ‘educational’ view, dominant from the 1850s, according to which newspapers aim to “influence,” “inform,” or “elevate” readers.\textsuperscript{97} From the 1880s, however, Hampton describes an emerging ‘representative ideal’, according to which the press reflected, rather than influenced, public opinion, conveying ‘the opinions, wants, or needs of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Krebs2} Krebs, \textit{Gender}, p. 5.
\bibitem{House} House of Commons, vol. 77, col. 618.
\bibitem{House2} House of Commons, vol. 77, cols. 637-638.
\bibitem{Hampton2} Ibid., p. 9.
\end{thebibliography}
readers’ in ‘a powerful form that could bring pressure to bear on Parliament’. Labouchere’s mingled reluctance to accept that what the newspapers print is ‘representative’ of ‘public opinion’, and suspicion that it is possible for both public and parliament to be ‘led’ by newspapers, evinces a sense of uncertainty about the potential power of the press; this uncertainty is in line with Hampton’s findings that while the ‘educational ideal […] reeded in prominence’ at the end of the nineteenth century, it was not wholly superseded.

The influential potential of poems published in Victorian newspapers has also remained open to debate. For instance, commenting on the newspaper poetry of 1899, the Glasgow Herald credited poets with simultaneously representing and shaping the British mood; claiming that it was possible to measure ‘the intellect of a nation […] by the utterances of its greatest literary craftsmen’, the writer praised Swinburne and Kipling for eliciting the kinds of responses from readers that prove ‘that our poets still have the power of moving the popular mind on great occasions’. Likewise, Ledbetter claims that Tennyson’s role was ‘to give public opinion a poetic voice’ while noting that his ‘poetry had long been a tool for editorial propaganda and political influence’; Tennyson was ‘a “poet of the people” who could reach the public as no other spokesman could’. Krebs makes the case that references in the press to ‘public opinion’ are involved in ‘constructing the very subject whose existence’ they appear to acknowledge. She gives the example of Mafeking Night in May 1900, when British streets resounded with celebrations of the relief of the third of three besieged towns in South Africa. In these events, Krebs argues, ‘we see the emergence of a British public that observers had been assuming existed all the while that they were creating it. The newspapers were considering “what the public wants” while teaching it what to want.’ In the poems of the South African War, newspaper poets participated in this circular activity of determining ‘public’ responses to the conflict by claiming to reflect or describe them. However, by introducing diverse and sometimes disruptive voices and forms, newspaper poems could also be involved in encouraging a sense of critical

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98 Hampton, Visions, p. 9.
99 Ibid.
100 ‘Our London Correspondence’, Glasgow Herald, 12 October 1899, p. 7.
101 Ledbetter, Tennyson, p. 138-139.
102 Krebs, Gender, pp. 4-5.
103 Ibid.
distance, drawing readers’ attention to the characteristics and limitations of the newspaper medium itself.

**Researching the newspaper poem: analogue and digital approaches**

This research benefited from a body of work which reflects explicitly on the methodological opportunities afforded by the increasing accessibility of digitized nineteenth-century periodicals and newspapers, but a comprehensive survey of the newspaper poems of the 1899-1902 war is beyond the scope of this thesis.\(^{104}\) While poems in the local or regional press often appeared under a ‘Poet’s Corner’ heading, those appearing in national newspapers tended to be printed without generic headings or introductory commentary, and are thus not amenable to digital research strategies such as Bode’s use of keyword searches to identify serial fiction.\(^{105}\) Moreover, in most daily newspapers, poems moved around the main news and comment pages rather than appearing in a consistent place. Visually they can be hard to distinguish from advertisement columns, which also feature uneven white space, and digital projects proposing to make use of such topographical features are yet to make newspaper poems more accessible.\(^{106}\) In contrast, research into periodical poetry is slightly better served by the structures of existing databases, with researchers benefiting from the *Periodical Poetry Index*, ProQuest’s *British Periodicals*, which indexes poetry as a distinct document type, and the *Wellesley Index’s* successor, the *Curran Index*, where users can search for poets among more than three thousand contributors.\(^{107}\) Since these platforms ‘are designed

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\(^{106}\) Ibid., p. 286.

around searching at the expense of browsing’, even these sophisticated resources are not without problems. Poems published in periodicals and newspapers are ‘methodologically resistant to whole-scale, comprehensive mapping’, Chapman and Ehnes argue, being ‘deeply contingent upon their particular print context.’

Keen to preserve as much as possible of this print context, to enrich analysis and construct something of the original reading experience, this thesis is based primarily on the manual search for poems, allowing the researcher to attend to material surrounding each poem as well as the text of the poem itself. The research process began with a selection of six national newspapers intended to represent a cross-section of social groupings: the *Times*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Daily News*, the *Morning Post*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Westminster Gazette*. It was important to review poems published in the *Times*, but as the most expensive daily (3d) and with very distinctive qualities, the paper must not be seen as representative of late-Victorian newspaper culture more generally. At the end of the century it was outsold by both the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily News*, and by provincial dailies including the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Glasgow Herald*. The *Daily Chronicle* was a halfpenny morning paper aimed at the middle market – the suburban reading public, rather than the political elite. It claimed to have the highest circulation of any of the London papers, and its proprietors sympathised with the government’s position on the war. Indeed, its editor Henry Massingham was forced to resign in November 1899, being unable to meet the ‘impossible’ condition of ‘maintain[ing] absolute silence on the policy of the Government in South Africa until after the conclusion of the war’. Massingham’s fate is often cited as an example of the

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109 Ibid., p. 5.
absolute hegemony of pro-war politics in 1899. His counterpart at the liberal *Daily News* is less frequently mentioned, but E.T. Cook was also replaced in the first months of the war, his strong imperialism bringing him into conflict with his paper’s liberal stance.\(^{115}\) The *Daily News* (1d) became more openly pacifist and anti-imperialist in 1901, when it was taken over by the Quaker Cadbury family.\(^{116}\) The ultra-conservative *Morning Post* (1d) was reportedly the newspaperfavoured by Queen Victoria, and appealed to ‘the jingo vote’.\(^{117}\) The *Pall Mall Gazette*, an evening penny newspaper edited in 1899 by former Conservative MP Douglas Straight, also supported the government, though it had not always taken that line. Having been ‘a leading liberal paper’ in the 1880s, American conservative William Waldorf Astor bought it in 1892 and dismissed its entire editorial staff.\(^{118}\) The *Westminster Gazette* (evening, 1d) was founded by the outgoing *Pall Mall* editor, and was affectionately termed the ‘pea-green incorruptible’ because of the colour of its pages.\(^{119}\) Influential and highly respected – ‘unchallenged as the honourable, influential, Liberal, heavyweight newspaper’ – the *Westminster Gazette* never made a profit.\(^{120}\) Of these titles, only the *Times* has been fully digitized. The *Daily News, Morning Post* and *Pall Mall Gazette* are available with institutional access via Gale’s *British Library Newspapers Parts I and II* digital archive up to the end of 1900.\(^{121}\) For the *Westminster Gazette*, the *Daily Chronicle*, and the other titles in 1901-1902, the research depended on microfilm copies in the British Library Newsroom.

Poetry had a different place in each of these newspapers. Considerably fewer poems appeared in the *Times* than anywhere else, but each one was a newsworthy event in itself, the appearance of a new piece by the poet laureate, or by other high-status figures like Kipling or Swinburne, receiving notice and commentary in the columns of the evening papers and in the local, regional, colonial and international press. In addition, as noted earlier, a small number of aspiring poets bypassed the normal editorial processes by paying to have their work inserted into the personal advertising columns.

\(^{115}\) Vick, *Edward Lloyd*.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{118}\) Brake et al, *Dictionary*, p. 478.
\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 672.
\(^{121}\) Issues from 1901 onwards are available via private subscription to the *British Newspaper Archive*, a collaboration between the British Library and findmypast.
keen to take a share in the cultural weight of the pre-eminent London newspaper. In 1899 and 1900, the regular poem in the *Daily Chronicle* appears to be the work of a single anonymous figure; the speaker calls himself ‘Tompkins’ in the title of two poems in 1900 and makes overt and often highly critical political statements.122 The poems all appear in the bottom right hand column of the main news page (p. 4). Later in the war Tompkins’ cockney poems are replaced by a signed poem, usually initialled M.S., which appears as part of the editorial column on page 5 and which introduces a wider range of topics and voices. There are fewer original poems in the *Daily News*, though those that do appear come from a wider range of contributors, both signed and unsigned. The *Pall Mall Gazette* featured a daily poem in a regular position on page 2, almost always unsigned, as well as a combative reviews column. In contrast, the *Westminster Gazette*’s daily poem was almost always signed (often with initials), was more likely to be political, and moves around the paper.

The result of this manual search across digital and microfilm copies was a database of 1181 original poems, in addition to records of poems appearing in reviews, correspondence and other articles. From this database, critical attention was focused on those poems ‘that constitute themselves as newspaper poems, usually by directly engaging with political, economic, social and cultural issues featured in the columns of the press’.123 From this subset, the focus was refined once more to concentrate on wartime poems – poems which capture the experiences of ‘war at a distance’, ‘mediated’ for ‘those living through but not in a war’.124 This amounted to 432 relevant poems.

The analysis of this material opened up a range of possible directions for study. There is much to be said about representations of Greater Britain, the roles and voices of women, poetry of the South African sieges (and what these poems owe to earlier representations of Lucknow and the Indian uprising of 1857), and on devotional poetry as part of national days of prayer and humiliation. The focus in this thesis on representations of soldiers and landscapes, as a way of talking about constructions of imperialism, privileges themes which emerged as predominant concerns across

123 Blair, *Poets*, p. xxi, emphasis original.
publications. However, this activity of sorting, selecting and excluding necessarily imposes shape and constraints on the material and presents it as an unnaturally coherent whole. Furthermore, the focus in this thesis on London newspapers – a ‘minority of the newspaper press’ – means that the findings are necessarily limited. Metropolitan newspapers are not representative of the whole field, and nor were they ‘more popular or influential than provincial papers’. Most problematically, the dominance of the *Times* and other London papers in scholarly accounts of the Victorian press contributes to an enduring but fallacious sense that power emanates ‘from the centre to the periphery’ of the nation as well as of the empire, which risks distorting the experiences of readers and citizens. On the other hand, one special characteristic of the poetry published in newspapers is the way it introduced dissonant and non-metropolitan voices. Another is the way in which it circulated, meaning that many of the poems which appeared first in London dailies moved around the country (and, indeed, the world) in the pages of the local and regional press, as the footnotes in this thesis demonstrate. In order to trace some of those journeys in the argument that follows, the core body of source material was augmented using keyword searches of the British Library Newspapers digital databases. As well as making use of keywords searches, it was important to make space for serendipity, allowing the digital search functions, the limitations of current optical character recognition (OCR) technology, and the diversity of the newspaper page to generate ‘chance encounters’ and bring to my attention material that was not part of the formal search intentions. In this way, it was hoped to preserve something of the experience of ‘browsing’ a newspaper page even in more structured digital research; as Paul Fyfe has said, ‘Victorian periodicals were […] a technology of serendipity in print. They allowed and rewarded a full spectrum of programmatic and random ways of discovering their contents’.

The final source for this thesis is a multi-volume collection of cuttings from newspapers compiled by Pera Muriel Button, held in the Cape Town Library of Parliament. According to a marriage certificate in the Johannesburg parish registers,

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126 Ibid., p. 493.
127 Ibid., p. 487.
Button was 19 in 1895 when she married army captain Parker Thurston Button; a note in volume three of her enormous scrapbook indicates that in 1899-1900 her husband was among the soldiers besieged at Ladysmith. It is easy to imagine the young woman in Pietermaritzburg, Natal, participating in ‘the Victorian craze for collecting press cuttings’, scouring the Natal newspapers for every mention of the war in which her husband was fighting (see Figure I.5). Although her clippings usually cut off the surrounding margins that would make it possible to link each poem decisively to a particular newspaper without access to South African newspaper archives, glimpses of paratextual material and an occasional handwritten note indicate that she regularly clipped from the Times of Natal, Natal Witness, Cape Argus and the Cape Times (Figure I.6). In total, her collection gathers more than two hundred poems. Headnotes and signatures signalling places of original publication attest to the practice of reprinting poems from international newspaper sources. Indeed, Button’s collection is a striking snapshot of the global circulation of newspaper poetry, featuring poems which appeared first in British dailies (Express, Morning Post, Times, Echo, Globe, London Evening News, Pall Mall Gazette) and weeklies (Black and White Budget, Outlook, People’s Friend, Punch, Saturday Review),

131 Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, Marriages 1895-1906, p. 18, no. 742, available online via <www.familysearch.org> [accessed 16 February 2021]; CTLP Button, iii, p. 150.
newspapers from other colonies (the Sydney Mail and Sunday Times, Brisbane Courier, Melbourne Argus, New Zealand Herald, Montreal Family Herald) and from America and the Philippines (Chicago Record, Denver Colorado News, Manila Times). Button’s scrapbook thus overlaps with the main database, but also contributes a large number of new poems, giving a sense of the vast networks of international exchange on which the late Victorian newspaper industry depended, and which enabled some newspaper poems to travel far beyond their original publication contexts.

As well as undertaking close readings of individual poems, this thesis responds to Hughes’ challenge to read ‘laterally across poems’, investigating how such an approach might ‘relativize any single poem, suggest the value of poetry as editorial, or expose the commodity value of brief verse that could augment attention to debates or events capturing widespread interest’. The aim is not to establish a sense of a uniform discourse; in Steve Attridge’s words, ‘[w]orks may be put together in order to be usefully differentiated, may be combined to be individuated’. Reading individual poems as multiple voices in a single symphony, each one both deeply rooted in its own original print context and able to call across time and space, appearing in new places and inviting responses in poetry and prose, allows for harmonies and dissonances to chime across the material. Looking back from the 1920s, Westminster Gazette editor J.A. Spender recalled the 1890s as a time when ‘one heard the strains of the big brass band playing the new imperial tunes. Chamberlain was its conductor, and there were many sorts of instruments in it. Kipling played incomparable solos, and after him Henley. The newspapers crashed their accompaniments’. Spender’s image is a reminder that ‘the importance of periodical poetry […] extends well beyond periodical studies’, encouraging ‘re-evaluation of the role and contribution of poetry in a politically charged and dynamic environment’. This thesis aims to contribute to scholarship on war literature and colonial and post-colonial studies, with a special focus on the representations of soldiers and landscapes that contributed to and disrupted a changing sense of Britain’s imperial role and the country’s right to demand ‘sovereignty’.

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133 Hughes, ‘Poetry’, p. 125.
134 Attridge, Nationalism, p. 190.
135 Spender, Life, p. 78.
Imperialist masculinity

As well as representing a pivotal moment in terms of Britain’s understanding of itself as a colonial power, the South African War helped accelerate a change in public attitudes towards the private soldier. Indeed, representations of soldiers can be seen as a way of articulating and debating a sense of national identity and imperial purpose, either conforming to or rebelling against ‘a dominant ideology’.\(^{137}\) For much of the nineteenth century, the regular soldier was unloved; Stephen Miller describes how, even after the 1870s Cardwell Reforms,

the army remained stigmatized by dishonest recruiting measures, poor terms of service, and a lack of discipline that resulted in its exclusion from a variety of public spaces. Public spectacles of drunkenness were all too common a sight both at home and abroad, and perhaps as many as one-third of the home force was stricken with venereal disease. [...] ‘Tommy Atkins’ was hardly someone to invite over for dinner.\(^{138}\)

This was not just middle-class squeamishness; Nicholas Mansfield notes that ‘for most of the working class, it was considered a disgrace to have a son who served in the Regular Army’.\(^{139}\) Yet in 1899-1902, British civilians with no personal connections to the army turned out in their thousands to wave off departing troopships, celebrate the army’s successes, welcome back returning soldiers and raise funds for them and their families. Both Miller and John Peck credit Kipling with bringing about this change in Tommy Atkins’ reputation, insisting that the poet was ‘not only the spokesman for but also, in large measure, the creator of these new attitudes’.\(^{140}\) Reviewing Kipling’s *Barrack-Room Ballads* in 1897, Charles Eliot Norton noted that the poet had incorporated the nineteenth-century stereotype – ‘[t]he recklessness, the coarseness, the brutality of Tommy Atkins, the spirit of the beast in man’ – but combined it with a drastically different set of qualities to make a case for the soldier’s ‘courage, his fidelity, his sense of duty, his obscure but deep-seated sentiment’.\(^{141}\) Kipling’s soldier poems of the 1880s and 1890s, most of which first appeared in newspapers, were transformative because they elevated the ordinary soldier from ‘a rogue in uniform’ to ‘a figure to be admired’.

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\(^{137}\) Attridge, *Nationalism*, p. 190.
\(^{141}\) Quoted in Attridge, *Nationalism*, p. 76.
making ‘military values seem like core values for the nation as a whole’. Kipling’s Tommy Atkins is not only individually ‘down-to-earth’, ‘streetwise’ and ‘dutiful’ but also represents ‘heroism and patriotic fervour […] harnessed to a notion of “national character”’. Attridge argues that such a representation became increasingly important during the South African War as the conflict called into question the ideology underpinning Britain’s imperial mission.

In print, the figure of the soldier could be highly ‘volatile’, ‘stage-managed’ for diverse ideological and political purposes and focalising a range of intentions and anxieties. While the Barrack-Room Ballads insist on continuities between Tommy Atkins the working-class regular soldier and John Bull the middle-class British civilian, they do so in surprising ways, leading some readers to conclude that Kipling’s ground-breaking sympathetic portrayal of soldiers might nevertheless reinforce traditionally negative attitudes. Kipling inspired a host of newspaper poets to explore the implications of the characters and concerns of Barrack-Room Ballads, both civilian and military poets borrowed his poetic forms and his cockney idioms to celebrate or contest his idea that ‘the military code’ might be expressive of ‘common-sense values’ or national character. Kipling’s poems elicited particularly dichotomous responses for their representations of military masculinity, which did not deny the potential for ‘drunken and licentious behaviour’, but rather reframed such activity as an expression of authentic, even admirable, manliness.

As a version of ideal masculinity this was both novel and familiar in the late nineteenth century. Bradley Deane describes the classic Victorian stereotype of the ‘morally-upright paterfamilias’ being ‘elbowed aside’ in the final years of the century by constructions of masculinity favouring ‘the untamed frontiersman, the impetuous boy, and the unapologetically violent soldier’. These figures recalled the mid-century doctrine of ‘muscular Christianity’, which developed a theory of violence as ‘a sanctified

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142 Peck, War, pp. 147, 141; Miller, Volunteers, p. 24.
143 Attridge, Nationalism, pp. 49-50.
144 Ibid., p. 8.
145 Miller, Volunteers, p. 69; Attridge, Nationalism, p. 47.
146 Spiers, Late Victorian Army, p. 203.
147 Peck, War, p. 147.
148 Spiers, Late Victorian Army, p. 203.
force of male behaviour, a definitive quality of “real” men. As Thomas Hughes’s narrator puts it in Tom Brown’s Schooldays:

What would life be without fighting, I should like to know? From the cradle to the grave, fighting, rightly understood, is the business, the real highest, honestest business of every son of man. Every one who is worth his salt has his enemies, who must be beaten, be they evil thoughts and habits in himself, or spiritual wickednesses in high places, or Russians, or Border-ruffians, or Bill, Tom, or Harry, who will not let him live his life in quiet till he has thrashed them. [...] I am as sorry as any man to see folk fighting the wrong people and the wrong things, but I’d a deal sooner see them doing that than that they should have no fight in them.

David Rosen shows that the ‘deep structure’ of mid-Victorian Christian manliness was grounded in the personal, internal struggle (against ‘evil thoughts and habits’), rather than external competition – the private battle that underpins the Victorian stereotype of the stiff upper lip. The devout and stoic manly figure is central to the assumption of British moral superiority that implicitly justifies claims of international political sovereignty. In contrast, Kipling’s fin-de-siècle soldiers are more likely to take literally the exhortation to ‘thrash’ one’s enemies, and to conform to a set of ‘particular behaviours and traits [that] might serve as a masculine code’. They represent sovereignty assured by means of physical superiority – an endeavour that felt both urgent and uncertain as doubts about the virility of urban working-class male bodies were exposed by army recruitment for the South African War.

Scholarship in recent decades has questioned formerly persistent accounts of nineteenth-century masculinities, with John Tosh’s seminal work setting the tone for a new understanding of Victorian men as ‘less emotionally stifled, more domesticated, and more concerned with hands-on care than we once thought’. Tosh, together with more recent scholars, emphasises the diversity of Victorian constructions of masculinity, challenging the assumptions of firm lines between ‘masculine’ civilian and ‘feminine’

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151 Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown’s Schooldays (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1857), pp. 315-16.
153 Ibid.
private spheres. In this context, however, Holly Furneaux points out that ‘scholarship concerned with Victorian military masculinity’ – even Tosh’s own work on soldiering – has tended not to reflect these changed understandings, instead continuing to ‘reinforce[…], rather than challenge[…], a separate spheres model’. In contrast, Furneaux argues that literary representations of a ‘more tender and nurturing form of soldiering’ gained cultural appeal during the Crimean War, reflecting new possibilities in the construction of military masculinities. Furneaux shows that mid-Victorian war stories which turned away from violence to focus on ‘healing and restoration’ were a response to the particular demands of the Crimean War. Reporting which emphasised the ‘blunders’ of the campaign and exposed the suffering of the ordinary soldier effected a change in public attitudes. The character of the ‘ideal soldier’ was increasingly likely to be defined not by class or rank but by measures of ‘gentleness’ and ‘manly tenderness’. Where violent combat was previously represented as ‘the dominant, or perhaps the only, acceptable form of soldierly masculinity’, Furneaux presents evidence that the ‘military man of feeling’ could be characterised by acts of mercy rather than bravado, that war stories could feature images of ‘the fathering or healing soldier’, and plots could climax ‘in the self-sacrificing relief of others’ suffering’.

Deane suggests that by the end of the century shifting conceptions of masculinity had all but closed down the possibility that martial masculinity could encompass ‘tenderness’ alongside ‘valour’, while both Peck and Attridge’s accounts of the high status of the roguish Tommy Atkins cast doubt on the idea that the ‘gentle soldier’ endured as a popular concept. However, Deane himself notes that ‘a society’s most authoritative construction of masculinity’ exists alongside other ‘subordinated or marginalised’ but nonetheless significant versions. The gentle warrior ideal did survive into the final decades of the nineteenth century, as Furneaux shows in her discussion of public responses to a stage adaptation of Thackeray’s novel The Newcomes in 1906. Critics were concerned that Herbert Beerbohm Tree, ‘famous for his performances as

157 Ibid., p. 15.
158 Ibid., pp. 1, 6.
159 Ibid., p. 8.
160 Ibid., pp. 9, 43, 2.
161 Deane, Masculinity, p. 6.
charismatic villains’, had been cast as Colonel Newcome, ‘that most tender and pathetic character in the whole of modern English literature’. Their objections demonstrate ‘a persistent valuation of manly feeling through the supposed high point of “stiff upper lip” mentality’ – indeed, ‘the colonel’s capacity for emotion is invoked […] as a matter of national pride’. In the aftermath of anxieties raised by the South African War about Britain’s national character and imperial ambitions, ‘the most gentle of soldiers remained a popular hero’ and one who had the capacity to express something about the nation’s vision of itself.

Culturally dominant constructions of masculinity at the fin de siècle depended upon an understanding of ideal manliness very different from that represented by Colonel Newcome. The soldier, even in his more violent aspect, was newly admired; indeed, violence was a key indicator of manly character. While the ideal man of the 1860s mastered his baser instincts and disciplined himself to moral maturity through an internal struggle, by the end of the century this internal battle was largely replaced by an outward one, with a new emphasis on competition and an intense vulnerability to shame. As Deane writes, ‘just as the new imperialism was not merely an escalation of earlier political commitments but a seismic revision of the empire’s purpose, so too was imperial masculinity marked by its readiness to reject earlier masculine values’. And yet this thesis presents evidence that the newspaper poets of 1899-1902 also drew on the alternative tradition of gentle manliness described by Furneaux in their efforts to negotiate space for complex responses to the war and to its soldiers. The qualities of imperialist masculinity that Deane describes are both exemplified and called into question by the newspaper poems of the South African War. Newspaper poets signalled their awareness of ‘the ideological ramifications of imperialist masculinity’ with representations of soldiers that appealed explicitly to notions of a British national character, with diverse political consequences. Newspaper poems were a site of political and literary engagement with questions about imperialism, masculinity and national character which cut to the heart of the struggle for sovereignty in South Africa.

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164 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
Overview of the thesis

Chapter one characterises the diverse functions of newspaper poetry during the South African War by developing definitions of the bard, priest and prophet as alternative models for the public poet associated with distinct literary registers. It begins with a discussion of the high-profile poets alongside and against which other newspaper poets defined their role; contemporary responses in newspapers and periodicals to poems by Tennyson, Swinburne and Austin articulated anxiety about the poet’s social responsibility. The chapter proceeds to discuss a number of anonymous and pseudonymous newspaper poets who satirised their own position, arguing that one key function of the newspaper poem was to call critical attention to the power of the newspaper itself.

Chapters two to four consider representations of masculinity in poems by Kipling and his hosts of imitators and parodists. Chapter two looks in detail at Kipling’s *Barrack-Room Ballads*, tracing the development of new constructions of ideal masculinity and showing how Kipling turned the common soldier into an exemplar of British national character – physically strong, and characterised by a transgressive energy which, however unruly, presages positively for British manliness. The newspaper poems collected in Kipling’s *Barrack-Room Ballads* represent deliberate interventions in a self-consciously public space, and both affirm and contest the versions of masculinity which seemed to be on offer. By extension, they make their own contributions to broader political debates about the aims, values and anxieties of imperialism. Chapter three demonstrates the wide-ranging influence of Kipling’s soldier-figures on the newspaper poems of 1899-1902, indicating the triumph of the portrayal of Tommy Atkins as a robust, single-minded and hypermasculine soldier of the Empire, and of the *Barrack-Room Ballads* as the model for wartime newspaper poems. Kipling’s version of Tommy Atkins was a reassuring figure in times of imperial anxiety, especially when military values were shown to be in line with the values of the nation at large. The physical presence of Tommy asserted the health of the national character, underpinning imperial claims and standing in flattering contrast with the effeminate products of modern urban life in the imperial centre. The final part of Chapter three argues that responses to Kipling’s ‘The Islanders’ (1902) are a key index of how far this construction of masculinity, and the imperialism with which it was associated, had achieved normative status by the final months of the war, as well as how disconcerting readers could find it
when wartime newspaper poets put the figures of soldiers to different kinds of uses. In contrast, Chapter four focuses on more antagonistic voices. The chapter begins by analysing the constructions of soldiers, military values and imperial masculinity in the South African War’s defining charity-fundraiser poem, Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’. It shows how soldier and civilian newspaper poets responding to the paradigmatic newspaper poem of the war sought to make space to reassert qualities of earlier or alternative incarnations of the ideal military man, including the appeal of tender-heartedness. These poems of parody and protest often make broader social appeals, using an alternative vision of Tommy Atkins to voice uncertainties or anxieties about the Britain, if not the Britons, at the heart of the imperial project. Poets inspired or provoked by ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ used the structures and idioms that Kipling popularised to claim their own place in newspaper debates about the nature of the soldier, British imperial masculinities and the questions of social justice raised by the war.

Chapters five and six explore the ways that the newspaper poets of 1899-1902 used and responded to images of the landscape of South Africa in poems which mediated war news and memorialised war deaths. Ian Baucom draws attention to the ways in which ‘the rhetorics of spatiality and the subrhetorics of locatedness […] are central to the ideologies of English nationalism, the cult of English memory, the discourses of Englishness and Britishness, and, above all, the imperial and post-imperial reformations of English identity’. The distant, wartime landscapes of South Africa could trouble newspaper poets, or be deployed to unsettle questions of national identity and national memory. Chapter five argues that the newspaper poems of 1899-1902 were shaped by and responsive to an existing colonial discourse in which South Africa was represented both as invitingly empty and strangely hostile, simultaneously inviting and collapsing comparisons with European landscapes. While the familiar tropes are widely and sometimes anxiously repeated, these poems also depart from some of the dominant discursive strategies of South African landscape writing, their distinctiveness as war poems complicating their presentation of landscapes. Making space for haptic experiences of the terrain in close-up, the wartime newspaper poets produced new and more unsettling images of an encounter with a landscape which posed a threat not just

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to soldiers’ survival, but to their British identities. Apophatic descriptions, where what is absent rings louder than what is present, contribute to a sense that this landscape stretched the limits of language and even threatened to undermine perception and cognition; the threat registered in these texts is not just representational but epistemological. Poets circled obsessively around the image of the soldier’s body in the landscape, returning to questions of wartime masculinity and the stability of ‘Britishness’ as a concept. Chapter six focuses on the ultimate intimacy between solider and landscape, looking at representations of death in South Africa in the newspaper poems of 1899-1902. The chapter argues that poets writing elegiacally performed two related mapping exercises; in a cartography of loss, they reflected anxiously on a landscape strewn with the bodies of British dead, both exposed to the extremity of the South African elements and threatened by the landscape’s otherness and apparent emptiness. Simultaneously, newspaper poems attempt a reparative cartography of remembrance, in which the shared consciousness of buried British bodies and shed British blood turns topographic locations into beacons in a cultural memory map.

In a short conclusion, the thesis considers the metropolitan urban newsboy as a figure that could focalise diverse characteristics of newspaper poet and serving soldier. In the poems discussed in this chapter, the newspaper poets are at their most self-conscious, using their playful hybrid voices to redirect the attention of the newspaper reader. References to newspaper hawkers are a way of drawing attention to the social injustices of Tommy Atkins’ life, while simultaneously calling critical attention to the wartime newspaper itself.

Overall, the thesis aims to demonstrate the range and literary interest of newspaper poetry at the end of the nineteenth century. In literary history the fin-de-siecle is characterised by literary decadence. The newspaper poets of 1899-1902 have a different story to tell, of a robust literature at work in the world, speaking to and inspiring a broad constituency of readers and writers who encountered poetry not as the preserve of the literary elite but as a mode of engaging with the events, issues and cultural questions of the day. The poems discussed below demonstrate that images of the soldier, and of the British body in South Africa, could be used to explore and articulate a fractured and complex set of views about British imperialism.
In the time that I have been working on it, I have become conscious of the ways in which a study like this contributes to the inequalities of representation that exist within academia. This conflict that for so many decades was seen as the quintessential ‘white man’s war’, fought literally for ‘equal rights for all white men’ in South Africa, affected hundreds of thousands of black men, women, and children. Both Boer and British forces made use of non-combatant black African scouts, guides and service personnel. Between 100,000 and 120,000 men of colour were involved in the British war effort, including more than 1000 Natal Ambulance Corps bearers under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi, while Boer commandos relied upon up to 14,000 black African gun-bearers (‘agterryers’) as well as 10,000 labourers. At least 120,000 black African refugees, three quarters of whom were women and children, were held in the world’s first concentration camps where, to Britain’s shame, at least 20,000 of them died from disease and starvation. In spite of Peter Warwick’s important 1983 study Black People and the South African War, the roles played by Africans during the war, and its profound effects on their communities, have been largely ignored. When new research was reported in the mid-1990s to coincide with the centenary of the war, it was met with astonishment in the South African press. Even that outraged astonishment took nearly two decades to produce permanent public recognition: the Sol Plaatje wing of the War Museum of the Boer Republics in Bloemfontein, dedicated to the involvement of black South Africans in the conflict, was finally opened in early 2015. The occlusion of the narratives and experiences of black people during the South African War is not a neutral accident of history but the result of conscious and concerted effort on the parts of colonial officials who acted as gatekeepers to the press. Paula Krebs has shown particularly powerfully how Baden-Powell, for example, insisted that only certain representations of the African community besieged with him and his forces in Mafeking were allowed to reach the British public through Sarah Wilson’s Daily Mail reports. As a consequence, neither their contributions to the defence of the town, nor their

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173 Krebs, Gender, p. 20.
starvation as a result of racist inequalities in food rationing, were recognised until much later. The voices and experiences of these men and women are also missing from this thesis, which focuses on those with the privilege of access to the columns of colonial newspapers. Even where the newspaper poets are comparatively underprivileged in terms of class or gender, they are among the global minority in terms of power; even where their poetry offers resistance, they are to varying degrees complicit in and beneficiaries of the iniquities of imperialism. I acknowledge and regret the limitations of this thesis in respect of making space for the voices of the oppressed.

I have intended by analysis to expose some of the means by which poetry with a mass readership contributed to popular constructions of chauvinistic imperial identities. Over the years I have spent on this thesis, whether in the context of debates about British sovereignty and the EU, displacement and migration, or the Coronavirus pandemic, there have been many examples of ways in which this discourse continues to underpin and justify global inequalities. I hope that my work therefore makes a small contribution to understanding the means by which populations are brought to accept, even to welcome, violence and oppression perpetrated in their name, as well as some of the strategies that literature has always offered for resisting the claims about British history, character, and destiny by which the crimes of imperialism have been and continue to be justified.
Chapter one

Bards, priests and prophets: the poets who make heroes

Soon after the first appearance of ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ in December 1854, Alfred Tennyson sent two thousand copies of his poem to the Scutari military hospital where, according to the chaplain who had requested them, they had ‘a most heart-stirring effect’.¹ Tennyson’s poem could ‘do more than encourage, it can comfort and inspire our soldiers’, the chaplain wrote in thanks: ‘The poet can now make heroes, just as in days of yore, if he will’.² A military doctor described the miraculous healing power of Tennyson’s words on a soldier who had been ‘thrown into a state of torpor from which nothing could rouse him’ by a kick from a horse: ‘In a few moments the sick man’s eye lit up and he began a spirited description of the Charge. Before many hours had passed he was completely restored to health.’³ Tennyson’s poem ‘make[s] heroes’, in the chaplain’s terms, by translating the painful reality of battle’s aftermath into a glorious narrative. As Thomas Carlyle put it in his 1840 lectures On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, ‘It is a great thing for a Nation that it get an articulate voice; that it produce a man who will speak-forth melodiously what the heart of it means!’⁴ Here, Tennyson functions as the classical, heroic bard, ‘maker and guardian of tribal myth and history’, in Brian Maidment’s words.⁵ The bardic celebration of military achievements imparts structure to difficult-to-process experiences and renders them meaningful. Tennyson thereby pronounces a blessing on the men of the Light Brigade, transforming chaotic reality into something dignified and solemn, and granting the wounded man at Scutari the status of national hero. The poet combines the distinct but overlapping roles of bard, priest and prophet, performing the formal priestly functions of exhorting, blessing, consoling, commemorating and offering sacrifice, and at the same time acting as prophetic interpreter, spokesperson, truth-teller or visionary.

² Ibid.
The first calamitous months of the South African conflict coincided with the lapse of copyright of Tennyson’s early work, resulting in what his biographer Arthur Waugh described as a ‘sudden raid’: ‘at least five publishing houses are announcing cheap editions of Tennyson for the present season’. The phenomenon prompted Waugh to expound in the *Daily Chronicle* upon the poet’s ‘strong and far-reaching […] hold upon the affections of the people’:

The truth is that Tennyson still remains the typical poet of modern English thought and character. […] What England is—what we are so proud to claim for her—she has been made by men who have shown in action the qualities that Tennyson has sung in verse. […] To-day, with the echo of cannon once more in our ears, his words come back with a fresh significance—

Not once or twice in our rough island-story,
The path of duty was the way to glory.

Our soldiers recited his lines to one another […] among the trenches before Sebastopol. There will be some who will remember them in Africa to-day.

Tennyson had been both popular and successful as poet laureate since 1850. Writing in the *Quarterly Review* in October 1859, W.E. Gladstone described Tennyson as ‘intimately and essentially the poet of the nineteenth century’, and Christopher Ricks noted that responses to his death in October 1892 confirmed this sense of epochal significance:

Such was the sense of national loss that the abolition of the office of poet laureate was solemnly mooted when Tennyson died. It was not until 1 January 1896, more than three years later, that a successor was announced: Alfred Austin, poetaster laureate.

Ricks’s disparaging assessment of the new laureate chimes with the general dismay at his appointment at the time. Indeed, the frequency with which Tennyson’s name appears in the newsprint of 1899 and 1900 seems to testify both to the older poet’s enduring significance and to the feeling that no adequate replacement had been found; as a correspondent wrote to the *Daily News* in March 1900, ‘Where are the latter-day English poets who will celebrate the heroic defence of Kimberley, Ladysmith, and Mafeking as

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7 Ibid.
Tennyson sang of the Defence of Lucknow? […] Tennyson’s poem appeals to us at present with renewed interest.\textsuperscript{11} Quotations from Tennyson’s writing in the newspapers of 1899-1902 reinforced a sense of unified British national identity, enabling a nostalgic appeal to socially simpler times and recalling another war which had begun disastrously but which had eventually been brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

The demand for poetry to perform a social and even a military function is clear from an article in the\textit{Spectator} from October 1902. Violet Brooke-Hart described the response of an audience of soldiers to a line of Browning quoted in a camp lecture:

I was promptly asked to say it over again slowly; pencils and odd scraps of paper were produced, and all over the tent I saw laborious efforts being made to scribble down the verses. […] More than three hundred men […] carried away the words […]. ‘Mind you give us a fresh one next time, Miss,’ remarked a private in a Lancashire regiment. ‘Words like that stick in a fellow’s head, and come to his mind more than once or twice, I can tell you.’\textsuperscript{12}

The poems most cherished were characterized not by ‘the mawkish sentiments which alone are supposed to appeal to the soldier’, Brooke-Hart claimed, but by the ‘really fine’ feeling of the poet in his or her public pulpit:

They express ideals which the men love to translate into facts, when the ideals are stripped of all their glamour and only the realities, lurid and awful as they often are, stand out. But herein lies their value, for they bring to the front that side of a soldier’s life which is neither painful nor material, and give both a romance and a glory to the plain hard word,—duty.\textsuperscript{13}

Poetry precedes and motivates action, in Brooke-Hart’s account, as the priest-poet exhorts the listener to ‘translate’ ‘ideals’ into ‘facts’; it also follows it, as the Tennysonian bard lends ‘romance’ to a soldier’s work, turning ‘duty’ into ‘glory’ and allowing him to see the ‘glamour’ in an experience that has felt ‘lurid and awful’.

Brooke-Hart’s appeal for ‘a soldier’s book of verse’ might seem redundant, given the hundreds of poets striving to assume the Tennysonian mantle of bard, priest and prophet during the war years of 1899-1902, but the efforts of these poets were more frequently met with ridicule or disparagement than with gratitude. Nobody was above the critical notice of editors and letter-writers, whose responses and ripostes repeatedly

\textsuperscript{11} Daily\textit{News}, 5 March 1900, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
articulated dissatisfaction with the poets of the day, from the poet laureate down to the host of anonymous and pseudonymous poet-correspondents. Some suggested that the circumstances of the South African War offered a particular challenge to the public poet. A Glasgow Herald contributor predicted that it ‘will not be a poets’ war in the strictly poetical sense of the word’; ‘We have not in the past had much success in that line—[…] And it seems not unlikely that the failures of our minor and even major poets in connection with the Transvaal War will be even more conspicuous.’

The Dublin Freeman’s Journal put it more bluntly:

[I]n all combats between a giant and a stripling the Muse must of necessity be at a certain moral disadvantage in the somewhat ludicrous task of enheartening the giant. It is the valour of David with his sling, and not the arrogant bulk of Goliath, that kindles the imagination of poets, and captures for ever the sympathies of man.

There is a tension between Brooke-Hart’s soldiers on one hand, expressing their thirst for poems to uplift them as Tennyson had uplifted the men in the Crimea, and those readers on the other who felt that any efforts at ‘enheartening the giant’ were doomed to appear ‘ludicrous’, a concern related to T.S. Eliot’s later sense that the only kind of patriotic feeling amenable to ‘expression in poetry’ was ‘patriotism on the defensive’.

And yet, while Britain might have been a ‘Goliath’, the country’s military recruits were often abject underdogs – indeed, literally undernourished – and, like Tennyson’s Light Brigade, the victims of fatal blunders and mismanagement by army leaders. In other words, as later chapters of this thesis show, the British soldiers of the South African War were precisely the kind of figures to appeal to bardic poets seeking to operate as ‘representatives and vox populi of the nation’, mediating between the ordinary newspaper-reading individual and the social world of collective experience. In this context, the distinct functions of bard, priest and prophet are helpful for unravelling the motivations and justifications of the wartime poets. By casting light on the ways in which newspaper poetry was read, they also help to explain the dissatisfaction with contemporary public poetry. Indeed, one source of discontentment is traceable to

15 Freeman’s Journal, 18 October 1899, p. 4.
17 Bill Nasson writes: ‘the wartime rejection of virtually one-third of army recruits because of poor physical condition […] brought into sharp relief a proliferation of the unfit amongst the mass urban working class, and an assumed physical deterioration of the “racial stock” of the population.’ The Boer War: The Struggle for South Africa (Stroud: Spellmount, 2010), p. 306.
tensions within the image of the bard itself. As Maidment explains, the heroic conception of bardic poetry inherited from classical and medieval traditions was complicated, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by alternative associations of bardic poetry with "unlettered", "unlearned" or "self-taught" poetry.\(^{19}\) The significance of this to fin-de-siècle newspaper poetry is clear from the dozens of writers taking up a position as a "slightly more articulate neighbour" rather than as a cultural warrior, contributing to "the collective history of the tribe" not in a high-status elite literary mode but by making use of a link established by the Romantic poets between the bardic mode and orality, and by writing in the vernacular.\(^{20}\) Alongside many poems which fall at either end of this spectrum of bardic practice, the newspaper poetry of 1899-1902 includes examples of poems in which the classical heroic mode is blended with a demotic, popular position, where the bardic poet attempts simultaneously to function as a representative […] by articulating what was widely felt and perceived and to be outside time and space, a "voice" of wisdom and authority.\(^{21}\) Poems which attempted to reconcile these contradictory bardic associations could elicit uncomfortable responses.

Austin’s first poem as laureate was ‘Jameson’s Ride’.\(^{22}\) It was published in the Times on 11 January 1896, while the country was reeling from the news of the ‘Jameson Raid’, an illegal invasion of the Transvaal by a band of British colonial policemen, including Frank Rhodes (brother to Cecil), led by the future Prime Minister of Cape Colony, Leander Starr Jameson, and facilitated by a mysterious transfer of British land on the Transvaal border to Cecil Rhodes’ British South Africa Company.\(^{23}\) While the British government distanced itself from the raiders’ plot, Austin’s poem – which appeared on the same page of the Times as an editorial comment describing ‘all that was painful and deplorable in the South African imbroglio’ – instead justified the raiders:\(^{24}\)

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\begin{align*}
\text{Wrong! Is it wrong? Well, may be:} \\
\text{But I’m going, boys, all the same.} \\
\text{Do they think me a Burgher’s baby,} \\
\text{To be scared by a scolding name?} \\
\text{They may argue, and prate, and order;} \\
\text{Go, tell them to save their breath:}
\end{align*}
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\(^{19}\) Maidment, ‘Class and cultural production’, p. 152.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., pp. 159, 151, 154 (emphasis original).
\(^{21}\) Maidment, ‘Class and cultural production’, p. 154.
\(^{24}\) Times, 11 January 1896, p. 9.
Then, over the Transvaal border,
And gallop for life or death!

(‘Jameson’s Ride’, ll. 1-8)

With his anapaestic trimeter evoking and celebrating exuberant belligerence, Austin aligns himself (and, as their poetic spokesperson, implicates the British government) with Jameson, the architect of the event that fatally undermined Anglo-Boer diplomacy in the late 1890s. The speaker’s claim that the raiders were riding to the ‘rescue’ of ‘girls in the gold-reef city, [...] mothers and children too’ (ll. 17-18) was quickly exposed as mendacious propaganda; the speaker of ‘Jameson’s Ride’ was wrong. Although in the poem he hides behind the anonymous speaker, offering the possibility of distance between the poem’s politics and the poet’s, Austin himself was required to withdraw the implication ‘that Dr. Jameson went as a gentleman to the rescue of British women and children in Johannesburg who were in danger of their lives and honour’, as William Redmond MP reminded parliament in 1899, since nobody had been able ‘to instance one case’ of ‘outrage, intrigue, ill-treatment, or insult’ against British women in the Transvaal. The fiasco was deeply embarrassing for the British government, but Nicholas Freeman points out that publication of the laureate’s ‘manifestly unapologetic’ poem in the Times ‘made it appear the official British response to the crisis’; Austin’s poem appeared ‘politically provocative as well as poetically maladroit’. If a poet can ‘make heroes’, in the words of the Scutari chaplain, then that poet ought to be very careful about who is thus elevated. Indeed, Redmond insisted that ‘this Poet Laureate [...] instead of being given positions of honour, ought to be punished’ for ‘telling [...] outrageous falsehoods’ in order ‘to play on the passions of the people of this country’ by making heroes out of unworthy men.

Austin’s poem certainly appealed effectively to ‘the passions’ of at least some of ‘the people of this country’; ‘Jameson’s Ride’ was taken up by music halls such as the

29 Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 288.
30 House of Commons, vol. 77, col. 687.
Alhambra, which advertised nightly recitals. Its appeal to a popular imperial imagination smarting from the Boers’ defeat of the British forces at Majuba in 1881 is understandable, despite the fact that the Raid was a failure even on its own terms. The raiders were intercepted, forced to surrender, handed over to the British government and served prison sentences and heavy fines. In an act of bardic transfiguration, Austin converts this disaster into a narrative of glorious and characteristically British imperial adventure. The speaker’s ambiguous claim that ‘we aren’t half sorry’ (l. 61) is followed, in the poem’s concluding lines, by the rousing assertion that:

As one of the baffled band,
I would rather have had that foray,
Than the crushings of all the Rand.

(‘Jameson’s Ride’, ll. 62-64)

Austin casts the Raid’s protagonists as men too chivalrous to ‘care one straw’ for ‘points of law’ when called upon by ‘kinsfolk’, and so spirited that the potential costs of failure are more than compensated by the delights of ‘our sword, our saddle, | And gun-gear’ (ll. 10-12). ‘Jameson’s Ride’ represents a rare experiment on Austin’s part with the role of military bard. Though prompted by an event comparable with Tennyson’s ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ – an incident very far from triumphant, which called into question British military and political leadership – Austin’s undiplomatic celebration of lawlessness contrasts starkly with Tennyson’s achievement. Valerie Pitt’s description of Tennyson’s poem honouring ‘the capacity of the human spirit to stand out against odds’ might seem to apply to Austin’s lines, but the speaker of ‘Jameson’s Ride’ celebrates actions motivated by a transgressive enthusiasm for the thrills of physical experience quite unlike the horrors of ‘The Charge’. The courage Austin’s speaker praises is egotistical, looking forward to personal accolades rather than corporate heroism:

‘There’s many a man lives famous | For daring a wrong like this’ (ll. 23-24). Duty is conceived and enacted individually, rather than expressed through discipline. Through his galloping anapaests and his demotic appeal to ‘boys’, Austin attempts to elicit and to share in popular approbation of the hyper-masculine ‘Raiders’, a move out of keeping with his public office and one which – particularly after he was forced into an embarrassing climb-down – casts the poet more as a schoolboy than a statesman.

Whereas Tennyson sustains a dignified position through formal decorum and solemn verbal restraint in ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ and through a strict dactylic

31 E.g. Times, 14 January 1896, p. 8.
dimeter, the exuberance of Austin’s much looser trimeter communicates a boyish enthusiasm that compromises his own authority as much as does his challenge to the official narrative of the episode.

This experiment with demotic appeal was not one which Austin repeated. The voice of ‘Jameson’s Ride’ is out of keeping not only with the rest of his South African War poetry but with Austin’s own expressed views on the role of public poet. In this respect it is comparable to the ‘battle poems’ published by Tennyson in the press in 1852. In these anonymous newspaper poems, which biographer Robert Martin claims ‘any admirer would wish had never seen light’, ‘Tennyson slips across the narrow line dividing ardent patriotism from hysteria’. Mary Brotherton objected at the time that the ‘warlike spirit’ of the verses, falling ‘into the commonplace of dignifying patriotism as a first-class virtue’, was ‘below the divine mission of a Great Poet’. Accordingly, the ‘Light Brigade’ is treated as representative of Tennyson’s war poetry, while the newspaper poems tend to be dismissed as an embarrassing but momentary lapse from literary decorum and political propriety. However, Tennyson’s Epilogue to the 1882 ‘Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaklava’ (written to be added for its republication in 1885) reads as an apologia for the more popular, bardic writing of the kind that Austin attempted in ‘Jameson’s Ride’. Accused of ‘praising when you should blame | The barbarism of wars’ (ll. 3-4), Tennyson’s Poet insists that the ‘patriot-soldier’ deserves ‘His meed of fame in verse’ (ll. 29-32), regardless of the merits of the campaign in which he is engaged:

Nay – tho’ that realm were in the wrong
For which her warriors bleed,
It still were right to crown with song
The warrior’s noble deed.
[…]

And here the Singer for his Art
Not all in vain may plead

36 The Charge of the Light Brigade is the only one of Tennyson’s many war poems to feature in either the Oxford or Penguin anthologies of Victorian poetry; see The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse, ed. by Christopher Ricks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); The Penguin Book of Victorian Verse, ed. by Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin, 1998).
‘The song that nerves a nation’s heart
Is in itself a deed.’

(‘Epilogue’, ll. 33-36, 77-80)

The critical denunciation of Tennyson’s 1852 newspaper poems, like that of Austin’s ‘Jameson’s Ride’, points to tensions between the bardic patriot-poet’s duty to the nation’s ‘warriors’, the political responsibilities involved in the role of national spokesperson, and the expectations of an elevated literary mode to accompany this public position. Austin may have intended to ‘crown with song’ the deeds of the Jameson Raiders, honouring their verve and courage, but the ‘deed’ undertaken in his ‘song that nerves a nation’s heart’ failed to conform to standards of either political or literary decorum.

Austin was not the only high-profile poet censured for his attempt to unite an authoritative public role with a more popular bardic appeal. Algernon Swinburne, another candidate for the laureateship in 1892, published ‘The Transvaal’ in the Times on the day that the South African War was declared.\(^\text{38}\) The message of the sonnet is conveyed in its three short sentences: ‘Patience, long sick to death, is dead’; ‘Speech and song | Lack utterance now for loathing’; ‘Strike, England, and strike home.’ (ll. 1, 8-9, 14). Swinburne’s opening line performs the waiting which the poet describes as characterising British policy in South Africa, with the subordinate ‘long sick to death’ enacting a sense of tolerance which balances and moderates the blunt statement that ‘Patience […] is dead’. The rest of the poem belies this impression of forbearance, however. Indeed, the gesture towards failure in the claim that ‘Speech and song | Lack utterance’ to convey the extent of the speaker’s ‘loathing’ is amply borne out by the poem’s two much longer sentences, which almost defy paraphrase. In the first of these long sentences, Swinburne denounces patience:

\[
\text{Too long}
\text{Have sloth and doubt and treason bidden us be}
\text{What Cromwell’s England was not, when the sea}
\text{To him bore witness given of Blake how strong}
\text{She stood, a commonweal that brooked no wrong}
\text{From foes less vile than men like wolves set free}
\text{Whose war is waged where none may fight or flee—}
\text{With women and with weanlings.}
\]

(‘The Transvaal’, ll. 1-8)

The syntactic inversion of lines 3-5, in which ‘the sea […] bore witness given of Blake how strong | she stood’, undercuts the image of Cromwell’s secure ‘commonweal’, as the evidence of England’s strength appears to strain against the formal demands of the sonnet, feeling more like rhetorical failure than anastrophe. The sentence pivots uneasily on the ‘foes’ of line 6, who simultaneously represent dishonourable Boer combatants waging war ‘where none may fight or flee’, contrast with the ‘less vile’ antagonists against which ‘Cromwell’s England’ demonstrated its strength, and evoke the image of ‘wolves set free’. The sense is obscured by the compression, and by the way the focus shifts as subordinate clauses take over the subject of the sentence. The poem’s second long sentence demonstrates the same awkward tendency to shift the subject:

Scarce we hear
Foul tongues that blacken God’s dishonoured name
With prayers turned curses and with praise found shame
Defy the truth whose witness now draws near
To scourge these dogs, agape with jaws afoam,
Down out of life.

(‘The Transvaal’, ll. 9-14)

‘Scarce we hear | Foul tongues […] Defy the truth’ implies that the ‘loathing’ which exceeded the capacity of ‘speech and song’ (ll. 8-9) also impedes hearing, though this is immediately contradicted by the detailed description of the prayers of those ‘tongues’, which are heard very clearly. The comparison between foes and wolves is extended as England, the ‘witness’ of ‘truth’, ‘draws near | To scourge these dogs’, but the assonance of ‘agape’ and ‘afoam’ unfortunately aligns the reader with these open-mouthed ‘dogs’, rather than against them. Indeed, although the syntactic complexity of the long sentences points to an effort to sustain an elevated literary style, the rhetorical power of the alternating short sentences owes more to the tradition of popular jingo journalism than to dignified literary discourse. Throughout the poem, the language is as crudely violent as in its uncompromising closing couplet, which exhorts England ‘To scourge these dogs […] | Down out of life. Strike, England, and strike home’ (ll. 13-14).

It is clear that Swinburne aimed for populist appeal in this poem, arranging for its appearance on the day that war was declared, incorporating a startling description of the famously devout Boers ‘blacken[ing] God’s dishonoured name’ with ‘curses’ (ll. 10-11), and alluding to an apocryphal atrocity story like the one that Austin had to retract, in the suggestion that the Boers wage war ‘With women and with weanlings’ (l. 8). To an extent, this popular appeal met with success. In the fortnight following its publication,
‘The Transvaal’ was reprinted in dozens of local, regional and national newspapers, as well as featuring in nightly recitals at London’s Alhambra, where the performer commented that ‘at the present moment, when war was in the air, it was well to voice the feelings in the hearts of the majority of the English people’, and audiences were provided with copies of Swinburne’s text to take home.39 Like ‘Jameson’s Ride’, however, as it travelled the country in the pages of the nation’s newspapers, ‘The Transvaal’ inspired critique as well as approval. The Hampshire Advertiser introduced it as ‘a stirring if somewhat ragged sonnet’; less circumspectly, the Dublin Freeman’s Journal denounced its ‘drunken rhythm and foaming rhetoric’.40 An editorial in the Sheffield and Rotherham Independent enjoyed equating Swinburne’s poem with the Transvaal government’s ultimatum, describing ‘two very alarming things in Wednesday’s papers’ and concluding that ‘the Boer request was the result of deliberation; Mr. Swinburne’s poem was not’:

Mr. Swinburne is not content with wanting to slay his brother Boer; he swears at him with a voluminosity of objurgation that is powerfully Swinburnian. […] If Mr. Swinburne were exhorting Tommy Atkins to enter into physical conflict with the embattled hosts of Satan, he could hardly have strewn his epithets about more profusely. Our present business is to beat our enemy not to slang him. Undignified prancing in print is not likely to bring our armies to Pretoria any more speedily; it merely makes a great poet cut a most unpleasing figure.42

The poet’s role in ‘exhorting Tommy Atkins’ is not in question, and neither are the politics behind the war itself, but the critic laments the incongruity of ‘a great poet’ stooping to ‘undignified prancing’ as incompatible with Swinburne’s public status. This chimes with the objections of a parodist in the Echo, who used Swinburne’s own words to critique his belligerence: ‘Where are the dogs agape with jaws afoam? | Where are the wolves? Look, England, look at home.’43

A third candidate for the laureateship was William Watson, whose conception of ‘The Sovereign Poet’ contrasts markedly with the populist efforts of Swinburne and

39 Era, 14 October 1899, p. 19.
41 ‘Odds and Ends’, Sheffield and Rotherham Independent, 14 October 1899, p. 6.
42 Ibid.
Austin. The true poet, Watson wrote earlier in the decade, ‘sits above the clang and dust of Time’, unmoved by the promise of ‘converse or companionship’ which concessions to popular tastes might appear to offer, and instead devoted to a life ‘in the cold starlight where thou canst not climb’ (ll. 1, 3-4). But Watson’s model of chilly isolation was not necessarily the goal of the newspaper poets of 1899-1902, and nor does it describe his own South African War poetry. Austin himself described such a condition in order to reject it in ‘At the Gate of the Convent’ (1885), in which the poet-speaker pauses on the threshold of life in the world, registering the appeal of the convent’s ‘solitude’ and ‘calm silence’, but choosing to resist this temptation in order ‘to fling my matin notes abroad’. He describes balancing the demands of ‘the patriot’s pen’ with ‘the poet’s song’ as a ‘dual life’ (ll. 67-68); in the voice of the Prior he recognises the potential for awkward tensions: ‘Loving your Land, you face the strife, | Loved by the Muse, you shun the throng’ (ll. 65-66). By capitulating to the popular enthusiasm of the ‘throng’ for transgressive models of masculinity, ‘Jameson’s Ride’ falls short of this ideal. Moreover, its language, like the ‘foaming rhetoric’ of Swinburne’s ‘The Transvaal’, is out of keeping with the image of a decorous poet-priest. Addressing the Prior, Austin’s poet-speaker in ‘At the Gate of the Convent’ claims an equivalence between their modes of divine service:

While you with sacred sandals wend
To trim the lamp, to deck the shrine,
Let me my country’s altar tend,
Nor deem such worship less divine.

(‘At the Gate of the Convent’, ll. 209-212)

The poet makes a patriotic offering; as the Alhambra’s reader of Swinburne told audiences, ‘it was by poetry that patriotism was inspired’. But this solemn ‘worship’ cannot be marked by the bardic appeal to jingo sentiments. The poet-priest’s nationalism must be couched in euphemism or the language of divine appointment; they might speak to the people, but not in the people’s voice. The Athenæum noted in 1897 that ‘patriotism, an excellent virtue in a citizen, is to a poet a somewhat dangerous master’; Henry Beeching reflected in the Quarterly Review in 1900 that ideal patriotic

45 Watson’s ‘Past and Present’ is discussed in Chapter five.
46 Alfred Austin, ‘At the Gate of the Convent’, in At the Gate of the Convent and Other Poems (London: Macmillan, 1885), pp. 1-16 (ll. 130, 139, 208).
47 The description of Swinburne’s ‘foaming rhetoric’ is from ‘The Honest Truth’, Freeman’s Journal, 13 October 1899, p. 4.
48 Era, 14 October 1899, p. 19.
poetry required both literary quality – ‘the heroic style’ – and something more: ‘what
underlies heroic style – dignity of thought, passion of conviction, self-restraint’. What
John Mackinnon Robertson rejected in Tennyson’s 1852 newspaper poems as ‘the
chronic hysterical war-whoop of the muse’ is incompatible with the dignified discourse
required of a poet who conceives of his writing as ‘tend[ing] my country’s altar’,
undertaking a form of ‘worship’ no less ‘divine’ than the service of a cloistered monk.

Austin turned away from the populist appeal of ‘Jameson’s Ride’. ‘Inflexible as
Fate’, his first South African War poem, is pompous rather than boyish, retreating into
classical analogy and euphemism – precisely in line with the Athenaeum’s 1897
recommendations that patriotic sentiment should be expressed ‘in the grand manner
and with sufficient intellectual remoteness’. Austin’s speaker compares England to
‘manly’ Rome, ‘Facing foul fortune with unfaltering hands […] With cries of nor
mising nor lament’ (ll. 1, 12, 4),

Till, having backward rolled the lawless tide
Of crafty treason, tyranny, and pride,
Her Sword hath brought, inflexible as Fate,
Charter of Freedom to a fettered State.

(‘Inflexible as Fate’, ll. 17-20)

As in ‘Jameson’s Ride’, strict accuracy is subordinated for effect; this poem depends on
a partial concept of ‘freedom’ and a loose interpretation of the political situation. As
Brian Gasser puts it, this mode relied on ‘laudable but inscrutable ideals’ and
communicated ‘no exceptional comprehension of the issues’. ‘Inflexible as Fate’
presents British losses as an opportunity welcomed by soldiers longing to sacrifice
themselves, ‘fill[ing] the gaps of death with eager life’ (l. 15) and ‘contending […] who
should purchase the spot | On which the Victor stood’ (ll. 5–6). In spite of its change in
tone, however, the reception of this poem was scarcely less mixed than that of
‘Jameson’s Ride’. After appearing in the Times it was reprinted and discussed in

newspapers around Britain and the empire, \textsuperscript{53} but so too was a satirical response, originally published in the \textit{Daily Chronicle}.\textsuperscript{54} The parodist takes great delight in pointing out the laureate’s ‘most unpoetical’ mixed metaphors (l. 4), asking ‘How England “faces” fortune with her “hands”’ (l. 12), and concluding:

\begin{quote}
Poor England, ‘mid disaster and despair
Finds (in the “Times”) she’s something worse to bear
Jejune as dust, insensible as Fate,
The dismal twaddle of her Laureate.
\end{quote}

(‘When for a passing hour…’, ll. 15-18)

What Gasser calls the ‘impeccable high patriotic style’ of ‘Inflexible as Fate’ could not protect Austin from the ridicule of editors and correspondents.\textsuperscript{55} As the \textit{Daily Chronicle} parodist points out, ‘such phrases as “of nor”’ are liable to ‘ope for us | A gulf—of bathos’ (ll. 9-10). Six months later, another parodist skewered Austin’s technical failures in the \textit{Daily News}, imagining Austin’s heart sinking at an occasion which would require an official response from him:

\begin{quote}
Here’s a vexatious thing,
‘Relief of Mafeking.’
Now must the Laureate sing,
Sing for the many.
Poorly the rapture climbs,
Yet must I send some rhymes
Fit for to-morrow’s ‘Times’,
From Abergavenny.
\end{quote}

Kimberly, Ladysmith—
What must I rhyme it with?
Strange from its wedded ‘kith’
‘Kin’ thus to sever:
Here’s a confounded name,
Hard in a verse to frame;
‘Baden’ must lack his fame,
‘Powell’ for ever!

Rhymes are galore with ‘year,’
‘Near’ I’ve used twice, I fear,
Perhaps they may kick at ‘spear, ’
‘Cos they don’t use ’em:

\textsuperscript{53} ‘Inflexible as Fate’ was reprinted or quoted in: \textit{Aberdeen Weekly Journal}, 3 November 1899, p. 4; \textit{Glasgow Herald}, 3 November 1899, p. 6 and p. 8; \textit{Yorkshire Herald}, 3 November 1899, p. 6; \textit{Northern Echo}, 3 November 1899, p. 5; \textit{Morning Post}, 4 November 1899, p. 6; \textit{Morning Post}, 6 November 1899, p. 4; \textit{Pall Mall Gazette}, 6 November 1899, p. 1; \textit{Derby Mercury}, 8 November 1899, p. 7; \textit{Cape Town Weekly}, 29 November 1899, p. 26.


Making ‘fierce cannon leap’
Is perhaps a little steep,
Hope they will think it deep,
Fear ’twill confuse ’em.

Confound this wretched verse,
So plaguey hard and terse:
Just makes a poet curse
Working for hours:
Bother old Drayton’s shade,
Bother the verse he made,
Bother ‘The Light Brigade,’
Now for my flowers. 56

The comic portrayal of the laureate clutching about for rhymes and applying a
disgracefully low bar for his judgement of what will suffice paints a clear picture of the
poet as emotionally detached as well as artistically compromised. Sharing neither his
readers’ joys nor their concerns, he fails to join in the communal euphoria over
Mafeking’s rescue, while refusing to pay appropriate respect to his more successful
predecessors.

If Watson’s line about the poet sitting ‘above the clang and dust of time’ evokes
classical associations of the heroic bard, the appearance of poetry in the columns of
wartime newspapers sometimes called attention to the ethical price of such an attempt
at timelessness. On 9 June 1900, the Times printed quotations from Swinburne’s ‘Astrea
Victrix’ which had appeared in that day’s Saturday Review, describing it as ‘a pæan of
gladness at the success of the British arms’. 57 In the lines quoted, Swinburne asserts ‘We
scarce may mourn our dead’, since the ‘living breath’ of ‘Freedom, whose nam
England’ and ‘Whose life puts death to death’ stirs the ‘darkness’. As Figure 1.1 shows,
the poem appeared between an obituary of the Duke of Wellington, a retired
Lieutenant-Colonel, and the day’s casualty lists – a column and a half of small print in
which readers might find the names of their loved ones ‘severely wounded’, ‘prisoners’,
‘invalided home’ or dead ‘of wounds’ or ‘from disease’. The effect of the juxtaposition is
to expose Swinburne’s euphemistic rhetoric as inadequate. The Times only rarely
reprinted poetry like this; it is tempting to speculate that the editor responsible wanted
to draw attention to the moral distancing performed by this poetic positioning, to imply

56 ‘With Apologies to Mr. Alfred Austin’, Daily News, 22 May 1900, p. 5.
57 Times, 9 June 1900, p. 12.
that wartime called for something more humane from its public poets – something less ‘far above’ the griefs and anxieties of readers.

Austin may have presented an easy target for columnists drawing attention to the shortcomings of South African War poetry, given the ‘dismay in the literary world’ which greeted his appointment to the laureateship.\footnote{Gasser, ‘A study’, p. 210.} The \textit{Manchester Guardian} wrote in May 1899 of frustration that the laureate’s ‘doggerel’ provided ‘a sorry ending’ to state occasions, lamenting that ‘one could have bitten one’s lips with vexation’, while E.K. Broadus would later judge that Austin had fulfilled ‘the obligation of his office with that sort of undistinguished adequacy which his previous work […] had taught the public to expect’.\footnote{Manchester Guardian, 18 May 1899, p. 7; E.K. Broadus, \textit{The Laureateship: A Study of the Office of Poet Laureate in England, with Some Account of the Poets} (Oxford, 1921), p. 205.} But the failure of Austin’s poems to meet with the approval of the newspaper critics also points to a more general challenge faced by wartime poets, who found themselves caught between the temptations of jingo rhetoric on one side and vague ‘twaddle’ on the other, struggling to find the elusive Tennysonian balance between passion and decorum, and certain to be lambasted by editors and correspondents for failures in either direction. Newspaper poets were exposed to critical censure within and beyond the columns in which they published, as the status of bard or poet-priest to
which they seemed to aspire spoke to contemporary anxieties about the purpose and power of the press, and its poets, more generally.

The poems discussed thus far have been by high-profile literary figures. Though they were written for a particular moment and with the wide readership of newspaper publication in mind, they were destined for more distinguished afterlives in their poets’ high-status poetry volumes. These poets could provide their work to the press with confidence that editors would be glad to receive it; the presence of a poem by the laureate or another household name, however dubious might be its literary or ethical qualities, could help and certainly would not harm the newspaper’s circulation figures. The status of a poet like Austin or Swinburne ensured that, if debate or controversy like that occasioned by ‘Jameson’s Ride’ or ‘The Transvaal’ did arise, any censure would fall on the poet himself, rather than on the newspaper which chose to publish the offending lines. When it came to the majority of newspaper poets, however – unknown, anonymous or pseudonymous – both editor and poet were in a more vulnerable position. These were newspaper poets who ‘wrote to order’, as Kirstie Blair puts it: ‘Their ambition […] was to see the poetry in print, and those who succeeded possessed a very clear and often cynical understanding about the best means to achieve this’. This understanding of what would be acceptable to editors comes across particularly clearly in a series of poems published in the Westminster Gazette and the Pall Mall Gazette over the opening months of the war. Among the avalanche of newspaper poems which were, in Van Wyk Smith’s phrase, ‘more or less bovinely jingo’ in their attempts to fulfil the role of Tennysonian bard, these poems stand out for the self-consciousness with which they anatomize the role of the newspaper poet. With wit and irony, these texts interrogate the position of poetry in the press of a nation at war, indicating the poets’ own interest in and anxieties about the relationships between poetry, the press and ‘public opinion’. Whether satirizing the demotic jingo bard or positioning the newspaper poet as prophet or interpreter, these self-referential newspaper poems expose the material and economic contexts in which they are written and read. While they speak directly to ‘constraints imposed by the newspaper locale’, as Maidment put it, they go

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61 Van Wyk Smith, Drummer Hodge, p. 42.
beyond what Blair calls ‘write-by-numbers’ poems that were ‘entirely, reassuringly, predictable’, either formally or intellectually.\(^62\)

Writing in the *Westminster Gazette*, A.R. (Adrian Ross, the pseudonym of popular dramatist Arthur Ropes) paints a humorously unflattering picture of the newspaper poet so constrained by the context within which he or she works that they can claim neither literary nor moral integrity.\(^63\) In a single stanza of short lines which appear helpfully designed to fit in a newspaper column, the speaker claims that the war has radically changed what editors will accept.\(^64\) Aligning themselves with the Stop the War Committee (‘Though of course I do not claim | That our motives are the same’, ll. 26-27), the speaker foresees ‘disaster’, not to country or military, but to themselves: ‘Poets’ genius must fail’ when ‘Gentlemen of [military] “rank” prevail’ (ll. 19-20):

> Sonnets once oft welcomed by Editor’s approving eye;  
> Rondeau, quatrains, villanelles,  
> These, alas! no longer sell.  
> All my verses are returned,  
> And my genius is spurned;  
> Khaki-ng cares have now opprest;  
> (Please excuse the feeble jest!)  
> Shall I craven-like withdraw?  
> Never. Better, stop the war!  
> Literature, alack! is dead,  
> Tommy’s ‘line’ alone is ‘red’.

(‘Stop the War’, ll. 5-16)

Like the echo of the archaic ‘carking’ in ‘Khaki-ing’, the homophonic pun on redcoats, battle lines and poetry-reading is ‘feeble’ because it is anachronistic – British soldiers had been fighting in khaki for decades – and therefore humorously confirms the poet-speaker’s objection that they are out of their element. The suggestion that this wartime practice contrasts with the newspaper poet’s usual skilful range of sonnets, rondeaux and villanelles is undermined by the way the clunky couplets slyly link ‘villanelle’ and ‘sell’. The appropriately march-like tetrameter self-consciously wrenches the stresses, for instance by insisting on drawing out three syllables of ‘genius’. As the subtitle proclaims, this is a deliberately and comically un-literary ‘Wail of a Minor Poet’. Ross satirizes both

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\(^{64}\) A[drian] R[oss], ‘Stop the War’, *Westminster Gazette*, 17 February 1900, p. 2 (ll. 19-20).
the host of ‘Minor’ poets filling columns with predictably martial poems, and the
newspaper editors who created and sustained the vogue for poems on military subjects.
The phenomenon was noted elsewhere; in March 1900 the Daily Paper observed that
‘Anacreon’, poet of classical love-lyrics, was ‘out of date’: ‘The minor poet who would
sell his wares must needs be a Tyrtæus’. The remark ironically juxtaposes the role of
the bardic military elegist with more worldly concerns and, like Ross, presents an image
in line with Blair’s poet writing ‘to order’. According to this view, going beyond what
Maidment calls ‘the simple and conservative conventions of banal public utterance’ is
unlikely to meet with success. And yet the ironic mode introduces a more subversive
subtext: in both Ross’s poem and the Daily Paper observation, the implication is that the
jingo ‘effusions’ of newspaper poets might be less than heartfelt, however warmly they
might have been received by some readers.

A similar implication arises from an anonymous Pall Mall Gazette poem which
takes the Daily Paper’s comment as an epigraph. ‘Anacreon-Tyrtæus’ describes an uneasy
alliance between editors and poets in which the editor states explicitly what sort of
material will appeal to readers. Describing himself as ‘a lover of the fair’ like Anacreon
(l. 24), the poet-speaker laments that while he ‘fain would sing the wonder | Of
woman’s winning charms’, he is forced instead to ‘scrape’ out Tyrtæan ‘martial ditties’
(ll. 3-4, 18, 23):

I love not blood and thunder,
I love not war’s alarms;
[…]

But when I haw my lyrics
The editors irate
Refuse my panegyrics
Of Phyllis, Maud, and Kate.
‘Give us,’ they cry, ‘the rattle
Of rifles and the battle
Of Boer and Briton—that’ll
Be something up-to-date.’
[…]

And that’s the reason why, Sir,
My prentice hand I try, Sir,
At martial ditties—I, Sir,

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65 Quoted in Pall Mall Gazette, 27 March 1900, p. 2.
67 Maidment, ‘Class and cultural production’, p. 158.
A lover of the fair.

(‘Anacreon-Tyrtæus’, ll. 1-2, 9-16, 21-24)

Writing about Chartist poetry in the *Northern Star*, Mike Sanders describes a ‘dialectical interplay’ between editors and ‘readers (as writers)’ in which editorial pronouncements articulated an ‘uncompromising […] commitment to literary quality’, as editors explicitly refused submissions on the grounds of ‘literary merit’.69 Here, in contrast, reader, poet and editor are locked into a negative feedback-loop in which the editor’s construction of readers’ demands becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; the poet playfully alleges that the low quality of newspaper poetry is down to the narrow interests of the imagined newspaper readers which the editor feels themselves bound to serve, and which constrain the poet. Except that, as in the case described above, the use of humour and irony works as a counterpoint. The *cccb* rhyme-scheme of the second half of each stanza, like a curtailed habbie stanza, has the effect of a bad joke, building up to fall flat and, like Ross, this anonymous poet juxtaposes archaic and elevated diction, implying a kind of pure literary detachment (‘war’s alarms’; ‘my panegyrics’, ‘my prentice hand’), with moments of bathos that emphasise the marketplace context in which the poet must ‘scrape’ out his work (‘hawk my lyrics’, ‘editors irate’, ‘something up-to-date’). The humour is self-deprecating, but also exposes to critical attention the network of relationships and pressures that determine the poetic contents of the daily newspaper. The mercenary newspaper poets, submitting shallowly jingoistic verses for financial or reputational gain, are targeted by this satire, but so too are newspaper editors and gullible readers who value these ‘ditties’.

The ironic presentation of newspaper poems as mere commodities for sale, the rejection of which harms only their hopeful creator, contrasts with more pointed accounts of the function of newspaper poetry in poems that engage with concerns that newspapers and their poets might both ‘represent’ and also ‘move’ the ‘public mind’.70

As rumours of war began to circulate in the spring of 1899, well-known poet and journalist Richard Le Gallienne published ‘The Illusion of War’ in the *Westminster Gazette*.71

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War
I abhor,
And yet how sweet
The sound along the marching street
Of drum and fife, and I forget
Wet eyes of widows, and forget
Broken old mothers, and the whole
Dark butchery without a soul.

(The Illusion of War, ll. 1-8)

At a time when excitement about the prospect of conflict was mounting in some quarters, the poem’s opening enacts the process of being beguiled by ‘heady music, sweet as hell’ (l. 10), as the determined single stresses of the first two lines succumb to the tempting military beat – a march-like iambic, here, rather than the irresponsible anapaests of ‘Jameson’s Ride – with no end-stops to interrupt their progress. The trochaic inversion in ‘Broken old mothers’ is the last flicker of metrical resistance before the speaker is swept along with ‘the marching street’ in the second and third stanzas:

Without a soul—save this bright drink
Of heady music, sweet as hell;
And even my peace-abiding feet
Go marching with the marching street,
For yonder, yonder goes the fife,
And what care I for human life!

The tears fill my astonished eyes,
And all my heart is like to break,
And yet ‘tis all embattled lives,
A dream those little drummers make.

(The Illusion of War, ll. 9-18)

In the fourth stanza, the speaker’s defiance is reasserted, his aversion to the crowd’s belligerence succeeding in disrupting the rhythm in each of the next three lines:

O, it is infamous to clothe
Yon hideous grinning thing that stalks
Hidden in music, like a queen
That in a garden of glory walks,
Till good men love the thing they loathe.

(The Illusion of War, ll. 19-23)

The use of metre to trace both the surrender to jingo enthusiasm and the struggle against it makes clear that poetry, as much as military music, is implicated in Le Gallienne’s reprimand. The poem’s appearance in a newspaper suggests that the poet had fellow newspaper poets particularly in mind. Poetry disguises the ‘dark butchery’ of war, hiding it ‘in music’ and rendering it impossible for ‘good men’ to resist the ‘dream those
little drummers make’. In Le Gallienne’s lines, poetry must either contribute to the ‘infamous’ process of disguising the horrors of war with the seductive rhetoric of ‘glory’, or it must take a stand to expose the ‘hideous grinning thing’ beneath:

    Art, thou has many infamies,
    But not an infamy like this.
    O, snap the fife, and still the drum,
    And show the monster as she is.

(‘The Illusion of War’, ll. 24-27)

For the first three stanzas, apart from the first two lines of stanza two, the rhyme pattern is tightly controlled. But the rhyme-scheme breaks down: in the final stanzas ‘queen’, ‘infamies’ and ‘still the drum’ all stand alone. The beguiling and misleading ‘queen’ – the lies told in poetry about the glory of war – is one of the few end-words that are never answered in rhyme, emphasising Le Gallienne’s challenge to newspaper poets and to readers.

Le Gallienne was not alone in imputing responsibility to material published in newspapers, including poetry, for bellicose attitudes. A Westminster Gazette poet expressed it bitterly in March 1902: ‘Rallied by poet, hounded on by priest, | The people raven for the lust of war’. Likewise, former MP Auberon Herbert, who had participated in anti-Jingo demonstrations in 1878, emerged from retirement to contribute his views to the same paper in a poem which parodies the children’s rhyme ‘Old King Cole’:

    The Demon of War stood bold to the fore,
    And a musical soul had he;
    As he called for his sword, as he called for his gun,
    So he called for his poets three.

    ‘Now sing me a song, my poets three,
    Shall strike to the people home,
    A song, as the storm that maddens the sea,
    And lashes the waves to foam.

    ‘And take the cup and mix it up,
    And stir the brimstone well,
    And serve it hot from the cooking-pot
    That merrily boils in hell.’

So the poets sang, all three in a row,
    As dicky-birds sing for a prize,
Till the crowd was stirred with the jingling word
    And the red flame leapt in their eyes.

(‘The Competition of the Poets’)

The allusion to Swinburne’s ‘The Transvaal’ in line six suggests that this poem was written specifically for 1902, when expressions of popular patriotic sentiment in the closing months of the war prompted Herbert to return to his previous cause. Poetry is presented as the natural companion of ‘sword’ and ‘gun’ in preparing the nation for war, a necessary step in kindling ‘the red flame’ of popular support. The nursery-rhyme form and the portrayal of poets as ‘dicky-birds’ singing ‘for a prize’ denounces the poetry of the day as facile and irresponsible, while the ‘crowds’ who can be ‘madden[ed]’ and ‘lash[ed] by their rhetoric are condemned as foolishly childlike. The instruction to ‘serve it hot from the cooking-pot’ suggests that Herbert had the immediacy and timely appeal of newspaper poetry particularly in mind.

The ‘poets three’ condemned by Herbert are presumably Austin, Swinburne and Kipling, but these ‘dicky-birds’ were by no means the only poets contributing ‘jingling word[s]’ to stir the crowds. Indeed, the sheer volume of war-related verse being published led one anonymous Pall Mall Gazette poet to observe in January 1900 that ‘For every man at the front | There’s a couple of poets behind’. While some commentators condemned what Mabel Birchenough called the ‘violent epidemic of doggerel verse-writing’, Birchenough herself advised readers of the Nineteenth Century to see such writing as a laudable expression of generous patriotic impulses, whatever its literary shortcomings. Like ‘the manifold and sometimes eccentric collections of objects despatched for the kit of our fighting men’, Birchenough argued that the mass of unskilled literary ‘effusions’ inspired by the war deserved ‘a respectful tribute’ in recognition of ‘the immense relief and satisfaction which it gave at the time to a certain number of people’. Other critics were less willing to excuse Britain’s anonymous bards, however. For the Pall Mall poet, the low literary quality of patriotic poetry was objectionable because it did a disservice to the subjects of these would-be bards:

    And shrill as the shriek of his shells
    Is our glory and honour and gush,

74 ‘Though his blade seems (a bit of it) blunt’, Pall Mall Gazette, 2 January 1900, p. 2 (ll. 3-4).
75 Mabel Birchenough, ‘Wanted—A New War Poet’, The Nineteenth Century, 48 (October 1900), 639-647 (p. 640).
76 Ibid.
And bloody our stageyfied yells
As his bayonet after the rush.

(‘Though his blade’, ll. 5-8)

Metaphorically ‘behind’ the men at the front in both courage and understanding, these jingo poets are ‘shrill’, their writing is ‘stageyfied’ (implicating a music hall enthusiasm for military subjects) and superficially sentimental – a far cry from Tennyson’s dignified poet-priest whose words ‘crown […] The warrior’s noble deed’ in ‘The song that nerves a nation’s heart’. 77 The point is reinforced by the lines’ awkward caesurae and simplistically alliterative language, but as the poem develops it becomes clear that this critique is not of genuinely ‘untutored’ bards with what Maidment describes as ‘their unfocussed poetic energy, their over-dramatic language, and their lack of metrical facility’. 78 In fact, like Ross and the speaker of ‘Anacreon-Tyrtæus’, this writer condemns precisely the opposite, emphasizing the insincerity of some poets in the juxtaposition of the horror of a violent death with the self-conscious posing of a feigned grief:

We can strike the pathetic, and pore
On the hole in his head—so uncurled;
We can rhyme with the big British roar
As it rolls from the ends of the world.

[…] So of empire and victory rant,
And shed, when it’s wanted, the tear

(‘Though his blade’, ll. 9-14, 17-18)

The injured soldier’s ‘uncurled’ head speaks of youth, but fails to prompt an authentic ‘tear’ from the poet seeking only to ‘rhyme with the big British roar’, to join their voice to the popular ‘rant’ of ‘empire and victory’. The fourth stanza asks, ‘Is there anything we may not speak? | Is there anything we cannot feel?’ (ll. 13-14, emphasis original). The answer comes in a coda, separated from the rest of the poem by a row of asterisks:

But on earth there are just one or two
Who are worthy—and they do not dare.
Are we men? Is it I? is it you?
Oh, then honour the brave—and forbear.

(‘Though his blade’, ll. 21-24, emphasis original)

There is some irony in the use of a newspaper poem to exhort other poets to lay down their pens, and a curious tension in the notion that the only poets who might be

77 Tennyson, ‘Heavy Brigade’, Epilogue, ll. 77-80
'worthy' to make the poetic record of the war identify themselves by their hesitancy to do so. It is clear that this small band of 'worthy' poets does not include Austin or Swinburne, who certainly did 'dare' to try, along with countless others, within and beyond the newspapers. Once again the impression is that, since the death of Britain's ideal bardic poet-priest in Tennyson, no adequate poet-spokesperson has stepped forth to honour with appropriate authenticity, decorum and solemnity the sacrifices of Britain's soldiers – and that those who try might better be silent.

Later in January 1900 another Pall Mall Gazette writer struck a further note of caution at the efforts of newspaper poets to 'ennoble' the events of the war. The tone of 'The Cure' is ambiguous, slipping between a comically self-deprecating self-portrait, arrogant fantasies of British successes, and a more disquieting mood. Like the poets 'behind' the 'men at the front' in every sense, this speaker is safely at home. From his sickbed he hears good news from South Africa, from which he instantly extrapolates ultimate victory:

When Buller took Potgieter's Drift,
   'A feat that ends the war in wise most fit,'
I cried, 'and by my lyric gift
   In deathless lays I will ennoble it.'

('The Cure', ll. 1-4)

This poem participates in a tradition among working-class poets of the 1860s, in which, as Blair describes, newspaper poets 'satirize the intense desire of young working men (and, less commonly, women) to see their poems in print'. The anonymous Pall Mall poem conforms to the 'generic norms' which Blair identifies, demonstrating the would-be poet's 'comically inflated sense of his own self-importance, modelling himself on the literary image of the poet as a frail, delicate individual entirely dedicated to his craft', and humorously showcasing unsuccessful 'attempts' at literary language. The following stanzas of 'The Cure' elaborate on the promised 'deathless lays', describing the 'rarer ecstasy' with which the bard sings his martial songs (l. 9). The poet's playful purpose is clearly indicated by the failure to sustain his elevated diction and the clumsiness of the speaker's efforts to conform to the demands of the metre:

I sang, I sang in many a lay,
   How he outflanked the Boers, smashed and disarmed,
And passing on his pleasant way

81 Ibid.
Gave aid to White, a hero and unharmed.

[...] And all the Boer artillery
And arms were ours, and all was wond’rous well.

(‘The Cure’, ll. 5-8, 11-12)

The self-satisfied newspaper poet imagines readers seeking historical truth in his poem, and congratulates himself for the pleasure afforded both by the good news he imparts and by the melodious delights of his ‘deathless lays’:

The public hear me (I suppose),
And rave with rapture (I suppose this too),
For I have cleared Natal of foes,
And blest our happy England through and through.

(‘The Cure’, ll. 13-16)

The key moment comes in the fourth stanza:

Thus on my influenza bed
I lie and rhyme—I should say, rhyme and lie—
Quite careless what the Doctor said
That any kind of work (even of the most trivial, frivolous style, even mere jingling, to which, he regretted to learn, I was addicted—he is an exceedingly charming man, this doctor, and has as many virtues as there are syllables in this line) would make me die.

But influenza’s ills have fled:
I saved the Empire and my joy is deep.

(‘The Cure’, ll. 17-22)

The absurd interjection about the doctor’s orders is comic. ‘[J]ingling’ evokes ‘jingo’, turning the poem into a snide comment on the quality of the verse that found its way into the papers. ‘I have cleared Natal of foes’ and ‘I saved the Empire’ are obviously ludicrous claims about the power of newspaper poems to shape reality. But there is a serious point, too: the poet is ‘careless’, and his mendacious words ‘lie’ as he lies in bed, distant physically and in understanding from the reality in South Africa. His ‘lays’ are ‘deathless’ insofar as they euphemize the cost of war, obscuring the price paid by Britain’s soldiers and South African civilians. But the ‘public’ do ‘hear’ such poems, and even ‘trivial, frivolous’ writing can contribute to a misleading impression of the situation.

Actual events in South Africa corroborated the implication that confidence in the British position would come to seem foolish. After much blundering and bloodshed, General Buller’s forces did manage to cross the Tugela River at Potgieter’s Drift on 16
January, a few days before the publication of ‘The Cure’; but the British troops were on their way to ‘dismal defeat’ at Spion Kop where, on 24 January, a mistaken British withdrawal left the hill in the possession of the Boers. The breezy confidence of the speaker of ‘The Cure’ that the ‘feat’ of crossing the Tugela ‘ends the war’ (l. 2), already presented ironically in the poem, would come to seem still more brutally misplaced, as news that the subsequent disaster had left ‘corpses stacked three deep’ reached London, less than a week after the poem’s appearance. The unlooked-for (but surely not entirely unexpected) timing of this poem’s publication between triumph and disaster strengthens its ironic and unsettling effect. Le Gallienne’s challenge in May 1899 was to ‘show the monster as she is’ or be complicit in the ‘infamy’ of blinding ‘good men’ to the ‘dark butchery’ of war. ‘The Cure’ indicates that the idea of poets fancifully fabricating their material, speeding far beyond the facts for which they had any grounds, continued to trouble thoughtful observers during the war’s opening months. Even if only for a moment, the poet’s erroneous words ‘have cleared Natal of foes’ and ‘saved the Empire’. Appearing in newsprint alongside (hopefully) more accurate accounts, the newspaper poet’s work has an effect on the shape taken by reality for the newspaper reader; when the poet has overreached his or her basis in fact, the best that might be said is that the poem contributes to confusion. A more critical reading is that such poetry impedes the ability of the press to speak the truth, and of the public to hold the powerful to account.

Another poem marked by irresponsible enthusiasm, though without the ironic subtext of ‘The Cure’, is Kipling’s ‘Cruisers’, which appeared in the Morning Post in August 1899, when politicians claimed that they were doing all they could to prevent a war with the Boers. Kipling’s poem is a celebration of the work of the Navy’s fastest ships. Before wireless telegraphy enabled communication between vessels, ‘cruisers’ sought out enemy boats and drove or enticed them towards the main British fleet, ensuring the kind of naval battle that Britain’s adversaries would never willingly enter. Kipling’s speaker, the personified ship, expresses delight in its work. Though it describes the ‘toils we endure’ in the ‘wet sea-lanes’, the speaker’s overwhelming exhilaration at

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83 Ibid.
85 Rudyard Kipling, ‘Cruisers’, Morning Post, 14 August 1899, p. 5.
the prospect of military engagement is emphasised by the poem’s italicized coda:

Now peace is at end and our peoples take heart,
For the laws are clean gone that restrained their art.
All about the near headlands and adown the far wind
We are loosed (oh be swift!) to the sport of our kind!

('Cruisers', ll. 41-44)

Discomfited by the timing of this poem’s publication as the nation awaited the declaration of war, the Westminster Gazette commented:

We have read, without always understanding, Mr. Kipling’s spirited poem on ‘Cruisers’. […] Our own criticism upon it, as a literary production, is merely that Swinburnian alliteration is a dangerous art for others than Mr. Swinburne. The last verse, however […] fills us with apprehension. 86

These remarks are followed by a parody entitled ‘Screws, Sirs’ by a poet signing themselves ‘Gradus’. 87 Alluding to gradus ad parnassus, the pseudonym implies an interest in literary qualities; accordingly, like the editor’s note, the parody begins with apparently light-hearted jibes about the literary qualities of Kipling’s poem, quipping that ‘the laws still exist that should temper Kip’s art’ (l. 14):

In the days of our grandmother ’twasn’t thought fine
To move to the right by one m-space the line
That rhymed with our first; and a licking he’d cop
Who’d close up a sentence without a full stop.

('Screws, Sir’, ll. 1-4)

In the second stanza, Gradus’s parody moves beyond literary criticism:

But this is a trick of the trade of a sort
That causes to-day’s Morning Post to be bought.
You call that rhyme quisby? It catches the ear,
And ‘war’ and ‘afar’ look all right, but sound queer.

('Screws, Sir’, ll. 5-8)

The accusation that Kipling’s poem is ‘a trick of the trade’ – a mere gimmick to sell papers – seems to be confirmed by its presentation in the Morning Post (see Figure 1.2). Rather than fitting within a single column, as was conventional for newspaper poems, ‘Cruisers’ luxuriates in abundant white space, in a frame half a page long and spanning two columns; its enlarged typescript and generous line-spacing clearly differentiate it from the news items which surround it. Moreover, Kipling’s poem gets its own notice in the newspaper’s Contents list. 88 This ‘trick of the trade’ serves both the newspaper and

86 Westminster Gazette, 14 August 1899, p. 2.
the poet – both are amplified by this publicity. This might be justified if the poem were better, Gradus implies, pointing out its reproduction of a hackneyed form – indenting ‘by one m-space’ the second line of each couplet – and its inconsistent rhymes.

But the criticism goes further. In ‘Cruisers’, Kipling describes the ships’ skills in luring enemy crafts with a startling metaphor: ‘half of our trade is that same merry sort | As mettlesome wenches do practice in port’ (ll. 7-8). While mocking Kipling’s archaisms and his aurally unsatisfying eye-rhymes, Gradus draws attention to this bawdy image:

Well, Kipling has told us of bruisers in port
Who go for those mettlesome wenches have caught,
And ‘about the near headlands and adown the far wind,’
His cruisers play games of a similar kind.  

(‘Screws, Sirs’, ll. 11-12)

Gradus’s title literalizes the ‘merry’ prostitutes towards whom ‘Cruisers’ euphemistically gestures. The parody makes explicit the distasteful implications of Kipling’s metaphor, which casts the cruisers in the role of playful lure but swerves away from articulating the violent consequences of the enemy’s subsequent encounter with ‘bruisers’. But ‘Screws, Sirs’ is not merely smutty, and contemporary definitions of ‘screws’ indicate that the title is susceptible to other suggestive readings.89 The prominent position of the poem on the main news page of a daily paper might be considered ‘a means of “pressure” or coercion’, or even an attempt to ‘swindle or cheat’ readers, as Kipling’s excitement at the anticipated conflict contrasts with the reporting of apparently sincere efforts to prevent a war.90 Just as when Austin’s ‘Jameson’s Ride’ contradicted the official position alongside which it appeared by inspiring enthusiasm for reckless and illegal violence, news and poetry sharing a page pull in opposite directions; in the case of ‘Cruisers’, the reading public are simultaneously reassured that their leaders are suing for peace, and being primed to accept – even to welcome – failure in this attempt. Though the parody does not explicitly censure Kipling’s bloodthirsty enthusiasm for the ‘sport’ of war, this reading of its title chimes with the Westminster Gazette’s editorial ‘apprehension’ at the thought that Kipling’s poem constitutes ‘a topical and rather “previous” allusion to our controversy with the Boers’.91 Read alongside the editorial comment, Gradus’s poem hints at the potentially coercive effect of the Morning Post’s selection and presentation of poetry. Simultaneously, the title’s more obvious and crude connotations, reinforced by the allusion to Kipling’s ‘mettlesome wenches’, emphasises Gradus’s objection that this ‘trick of the trade’ serves both poet and newspaper proprietor, with literary or ethical qualities as a secondary consideration.

Both ‘The Cure’ and ‘Screws, Sirs’ call attention to the ways in which newspapers and newspaper poets might be complicit in a coercive project to direct readers’ reactions

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90 OED, 2a: ‘a means of pressure or coercion’, citing examples from the Illustrated London News (1855), the Times (1861) and the Pall Mall Gazette (1883). Partridge suggests ‘to swindle or cheat someone’ (1900), Partridge Dictionary, p. 1939.

91 Westminster Gazette, 14 August 1899, p. 2.
to news events. Reflecting on the publication process and examining the potential political or social impact of poetry, these poems address readers directly and exhort them to read more carefully. They bring the shadowy figure of the anonymous newspaper poet into focus, inviting readers to reflect on what the poetry is doing in the columns of the newspapers they consume. By parodying bad writing they demonstrate a commitment to aesthetic qualities in keeping with an understanding of newspaper poetry as a valid cultural product, different from but not necessarily less significant than the poetry published for elite consumption in poetry volumes. In the antagonistic or critical relationship they establish with the rest of the paper’s news content and with other newspaper poems, they open up diverse interpretive possibilities and challenges, calling readers’ attention to their own position as newspaper consumers, and to the special qualities and limitations of the medium. The newspaper poet emerges as a powerful and complex figure.

Notwithstanding objections like those articulated by Gradus and the Westminster Gazette, the figure who assumed the Tennysonian mantle of public poet most clearly during the South African war was Kipling. Having declined the laureateship, he was nonetheless widely recognised as the unofficial ‘laureate of the empire’. 92 Addressing readers directly through the newspapers, he evinced a conception of the public poet as necessarily independent of political allegiances, able to speak to the public in different modes to suit the demands of the moment, and through a range of speakers, rather than in a singular authoritative voice. It is tempting to divide Kipling’s poetic oeuvre into ‘priestly’ or ‘prophetic’ poems like the stately and hymn-like ‘Recessional’ on one hand, and the popular soldier ballads on the other; as a Review of Reviews writer put it in 1899, ‘Until the “Recessional” appeared England did not know that Kipling could on occasion lay down the banjo and strike with master hand the lyre of the Hebrew bard’. 93 But for the Glasgow Herald in 1898 it was precisely the range of voices and positions taken up by Kipling which confirmed his reputation ‘as par excellence the literary prophet of the empire’. 94 Indeed, combining the different associations of bardic discourse discussed above, the Review of Reviews’ hagiographical ‘Character Sketch’ calls him variously ‘the

92 The label ‘laureate of empire’ was widely applied to him; for example: ‘The Song of the English’, Review of Reviews, May 1893, p. 507; Manchester Courier, 1 January 1896, p. 5; Sheffield Independent, 4 April 1900, p. 8; Agnes Deans Cameron, ‘Kipling and the Children’, English Illustrated Magazine, 10 (1904), 470-474 (p. 470).
94 ‘The Literary Prophets of Empire and Alliance’, Glasgow Herald, 26 November 1898, p. 4.
vates sacer’ (holy bard), ‘the prophet of the imperial idea’ and the ‘banjo bard of Empire’ – epithets which have to be taken alongside his other monikers: ‘Bard of bloodshed’ and ‘sweet psalmist of jingoism’. A contributor to the Daily News complained that ‘the spell of Kipling’s virile muse is so potent that some people imagine that patriotic verse began with him’, arguing that ‘to Tennyson belongs the distinction of having first given voice to our latter-day Imperialism’. The letter-writer notes that ‘the divergencies between the literary styles of Tennyson and Kipling are about as great as possible’ (a fact highlighted by the recital of ‘a poem of each in succession the other Sunday at Queen’s Hall) and ponders wistfully ‘the thought with what fervent sympathy the late Laureate would have observed the momentous outbreak of pan-Britannic patriotism during the last months’. Tennyson was ‘truly prophetic’, the correspondent claims – a title awarded to Tennyson presumably to Kipling’s detriment. The objection to ‘the spell of Mr Kipling’s virile muse’ indicates the power of that ‘spell’, however. Banjo bard or Hebrew bard, prophet, priest or psalmist, the terms in which the Review of Reviews celebrates Kipling’s achievements before the start of the South African war echo the faith that poetry – and Kipling’s poetry in particular – could effect change as well as reflect popular opinion:

Kipling now stands revealed as the man who most of all has impressed the popular mind, fired the popular imagination, interpreted the popular consciousness. Both in prose and verse he has struck ‘that bard’s true lyre, a nation’s heart.’ Other men may be greater poets. […] But no other man has with such unerring precision struck the notes to which the public heart responds most readily. […] Kipling is a revolving mirror reflecting many moods of myriad men. But he is more than a mere mirror. He is a prophet with a message of his own.

Not only in his formal occasional poems but also in what the Glasgow Herald called ‘verse that is distinctly “powerful,” even if it is also grotesque, or at least Tommy Atkinesque’, Kipling claimed the roles of bard, priest and prophet. The introduction of demotic or dialect language into newspaper poetry was by no means new in the late nineteenth century. But the grudging admission that ‘verse that is […] grotesque’ can nonetheless

96 Daily News, 24 March 1900, p. 4.
97 Ibid.
be socially powerful chimes precisely with Maidment’s account of responses to the vernacular bards of mid-century industrial Manchester:

the ‘bardic’ became the way of describing those kinds of poetry which lay outside polite discourse. The bard and his work suggested energy, perhaps even ‘genius’, but he was viewed predominantly as an untutored, grotesque, even aberrant figure, whose ‘wildness’ was socially valuable only in the most circumscribed way.100

In spite of their different and apparently contradictory voices, between the dignified speaker of ‘Recessional’ who exhorts a boastful imperial power in scriptural language to cultivate ‘An humble and a contrite heart’, and the speaker of ‘Cruisers’ who ‘take[s] heart’ at the prospect of being ‘loosed’ to war, there is a coherent project.101 The coda of ‘Cruisers’, in which the battleship looks forward with troubling glee to the prospect of war, points to an anti-decadent ideology which finds fuller expression in ‘The Islanders’, a much more obviously ‘prophetic’ harangue published in the Times in the final months of the war.102 As Chris Baldick notes, ‘The Islanders’ presents British military failings as a consequence of metropolitan decadence, ‘a creeping process of softening and emasculation’ which is itself ‘the consequence of prolonged and leisured peace’, and which can only be reversed through ‘military vigilance’.103 Likewise, Kipling’s ‘cruisers’ welcome the end of a period of emasculating peace and the opportunity to shake off the enervating effects of ‘the laws […] that restrainèd their art’.104 Kipling’s demotic soldier poems which appeared in newspapers throughout the 1890s, though bardic in appearance and appeal, have a comparably prophetic intention, speaking to larger social and political concerns about British masculinity, national character and imperial ambition. Through these poems, Kipling sought to ‘make heroes’ of the nation’s ordinary soldiers, just as the Scutari chaplain said of Tennyson.105 Moreover, his ‘virile muse’ inspired hosts of imitators, calling forth a crowd of military and civilian poets to contribute their perspectives to the poetry columns of the nation’s newspapers.106

100 Maidment, ‘Class and cultural production’, p. 152.
101 Kipling, ‘Recessional’ (l. 10); ‘Cruisers’ (ll. 41, 44).
104 Kipling, ‘Cruisers’ (l. 42).
105 Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 288.
So you’ve come, Mynheer Kiplin’, so you’ve come:
Wot a chap you are to foller up the drum!
S’pose yer’s gwine to make some verse?
Well, there’s lots wot does it worse,
You’d ’ave made a better Laurrytte than some. […]

Now I arsks yer, Mister Kiplin’, ain’t yer proud
Of the ‘absent-minded beggars,’ how they’ve ploughed
Through ’ard ground to ‘Bobsfontein,"
Dorp of late departed Steyn,
Ain’t yer proud of this great ragged Kharki crowd?

Glad to see yer, Mister Kiplin’ and the ‘boys.’
Old Bloemfontein never knew such times—and noise,
There’s paradin’, drillin’—and
Every night we gets the band,
And there’s nothin’ now our upiness alloys.¹

Kipling arrived in Bloemfontein in March 1900, days after the Orange Free State capital was captured by the British. He had come to contribute to a new military newspaper, the Bloemfontein Friend, established by the Daily Mail war correspondent Julian Ralph in response to what Ralph described as ‘the gigantic kopje’ of the occupying forces’ ‘thirst for news and entertainment’.² Ralph appealed to his readers:

Come, then, ye gentles and geniuses, ye poets, ye anecdotists, ye thrillers and movers with the pen—join our staff […]. Your pay shall be the highest ever meted out to man—the satisfaction of souls content. Your company shall include a Kipling. Your readers shall be the bravest, noblest, proudest soldiers who ever served an earthly race.

You can ask no more. You can ask nothing else.
But in the meantime we want ‘copy.’³

These ‘bravest, noblest, proudest soldiers’ had been ‘counted upon for valuable and voluminous help’ in filling up the pages of the Friend, and help they provided, fired by this rousing plea and inspired by the presence of Kipling.⁴ In his 1901 history of the

² ‘The Silent Army’, Friend, 22 March 1900, in Ralph, War’s Brighter Side, pp. 102-105.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ralph, War’s Brighter Side, p. 102.
Friend, Ralph recalls Kipling rebuking his colleagues’ scorn for ‘all the “Tommy poetry”, as we called it, that came into the office’, insisting ‘that all soldier poetry should be religiously read, and the best of it published’, and earning the astonishment of his fellow editors for his enthusiasm in the face of ‘miles of’ soldiers’ verses: ‘when we derided much of it as outrageous twaddle, he praised its quality’.5

Directly and indirectly, in Bloemfontein and through his broader influence elsewhere, Kipling played an active role in championing soldier-poets like B. Charles Tucker, whose ode ‘To the Soldier’s Poet’, above, was published in the Friend in the first weeks of Kipling’s co-editorship. Tucker articulates the simple pleasures of a homosocial peer group basking in the satisfaction of military achievement, in terms which resonate clearly with Kipling’s own portrayals of soldiering in his immensely popular soldier poems written from the 1890s. Most of these had first appeared in newspapers, before being collected in Ballads and Barrack-Room Ballads (first published 1892) and in a section of The Seven Seas (1896) called ‘Further Barrack-Room Ballads’; Kipling’s biographer claimed in 1955 that the 1892 collection was ‘the most popular collection of poetry in the English-speaking world’.6 The way Tucker characterises himself and his fellow soldiers owes everything to Kipling. In his lines, they are ‘absent-minded beggars’, a ‘great ragged Kharki crowd’ defined by the language of Kipling’s 1899 poem ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, and speaking in the demotic cockney of the Ballads. Drawing attention to the particular physical challenge of the South African terrain (‘they’ve ploughed | Through ’ard ground’), the poet seeks the approval and praise of ‘The Soldier’s Poet’ as a harvest for the soldiers’ labour. The poem thus articulates a sense of the public and social purpose of Kipling’s writing. He was the soldiers’ unofficial ‘Laorryte’, his poetry more suited to their public needs than the bombastic ‘twaddle’ of Alfred Austin. Most importantly, he made it possible for the serving private to speak for himself, carving out a space in poetic discourse for the disruptive voices of ordinary soldiers.

5 Ibid., pp. 132-33, 81.
Kipling’s writing has been credited with drastically re-shaping the relationship between civilian society and the military in the final decade of the nineteenth century. The poems in Barrack-Room Ballads played a key role in this change, reflecting and participating in a cultural reimagining of the standards and expectations of masculinity, as ‘the bravest, noblest, proudest soldiers who ever served an earthly race’ were welcomed into the spaces of urban civilian life as exemplars of ideal British manliness, rather than being rejected as an uncomfortable reminder of national decline, as had been the case for much of the nineteenth century. Bradley Deane argues that representations of masculinity in the late Victorian period are significant, among other reasons, because they are an index of imperial thought. Tracing parallel trajectories, he demonstrates that both imperialism and masculinity underwent radical changes from mid-century to the fin-de-siècle. As so-called liberal imperialism, exemplified by the figure of the earnest, hard-working missionary, was replaced by the aggression of High Imperialism, the shift was mirrored in ‘popular exemplars of masculinity’. Traditional tropes in the representation of admirable men, such as the emphasis on sporting prowess, were articulated with different emphases. The mid-Victorian expression of moral self-discipline through physical strength was a version of ‘manliness’ increasingly eclipsed by an emphasis on bloody competition and the valorisation of brute force for its own sake, in what Deane calls ‘the consolidation of […] a new hegemonic masculinity’.

Emerging arguments about the meaning of manhood and the purpose of Empire turned to each other for cultural authority, and popular literature, which was undergoing changes of its own, mediated the combination and disseminated to a wide and enthusiastic audience new fantasies of an imperialist masculinity.

Poems published in newspapers, responding with a special immediacy to current affairs and trends, and intimately related to other forms of popular culture (especially theatre and the music hall) make visible aspects of this shift, as well as the anxieties and doubts accompanying it. They also had the power to shape a reader’s engagement with war news by providing an insight into the experiences of soldiers on the battlefield beyond the euphemisms or sanitised platitudes of news reporting. This chapter defines the

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9 Ibid., p. 6.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
qualities and characteristics of Kipling’s Tommy Atkins in the soldier poems of the 1890s, in preparation for an exploration (in Chapter three) of the ways that the newspaper poets of 1899-1902 who were inspired by Kipling’s example developed his account of martial and imperial British masculinities.

In contrast with what Peter Howarth has called ‘the cardinal modern principle that a true poem can have no obvious persuasive design on a reader’, Kipling’s persuasive purpose shaped everything about his soldier poems, causing T.S. Eliot to ask ‘the question that everyone asks—whether Kipling’s verse really is poetry’. 12 Eliot’s own answer was equivocal; in Kipling, he noted, ‘the poetry, when it comes, owes the gravity of its impact to being something over and above the bargain, something more than the writer undertook to give you’. 13 Writing poetry, Eliot claimed, was ‘not what [Kipling was] setting out to do’, and indeed, ‘from his point of view more “poetry” would interfere with his purpose’. 14 For Eliot the key distinction between ‘poetry’ and ‘verse’ was ‘the subordination of musical interest’. 15 As Howarth puts it, rather than making space for ‘the unconscious suggestions of meaning offered by the music of the form’, as Eliot would in his writing process, ‘Kipling began with a meaning and used his form to drive it home’. 16 As a ‘ballad-maker’, he could not afford to allow the ‘harmonics of poetry’ to interfere with ‘his singleness of intention’. 17 Rather than creating work with ‘the capacity of exciting […] a considerable variety of different responses from different readers’, Eliot claims that Kipling’s poems were ‘intended to act—and for the most part […] to elicit the same response from all readers, and only the response which they can make in common.’ 18

Linda Hughes points out that Kipling’s soldier poems draw on three distinct ballad traditions, using demotic cockney and music hall patter to evoke the popular ballads of oral folk tradition and the minstrel ballads of professional entertainers, and

14 Ibid., pp. 9, 35.
15 Ibid., p. 35.
16 Howarth, ‘Kipling Plays the Empire’, p. 605.
17 Eliot, A Choice, pp. 6, 10.
18 Ibid., p. 18, emphasis original.
combining these with the topical or political impact of more modern urban broadsides. They participate in a nineteenth-century ‘ballad revival’ which ‘became associated with British identity and aesthetic principles of simplicity, directness, and spontaneity’. The apparent artlessness of this popular patriotic writing is illusory, of course. In contrast with the poems by Swinburne and Austin discussed in Chapter one, Kipling may have been ‘writing transparently, so that our attention is directed to the object and not the medium’, with a ‘metrical form […] which will not call attention to itself’, but Eliot asserts that ‘no writer has ever cared more for the craft of words than Kipling’, noting the ‘remarkable […] variety of form which Kipling manages to devise for his ballads […]; each is distinct and perfectly fitted to the content and the mood which the poem has to convey’. This carefully-crafted appearance of artlessness, capitalising on the supposed guilelessness of the ‘unlettered folk’ whom the ballads claim to represent, in contrast with Kipling’s explicit didactic purposes, underlies Orwell’s description of Kipling’s poetry as ‘almost a shameful pleasure, like the taste for cheap sweets that some people secretly carry into middle life’; ‘even with his best passages one has the same sense of being seduced by something spurious, and yet unquestionably seduced’.

The ballad form ensured that Kipling’s soldier poems were both immediately meaningful and memorable. Howard argues that his use of ballad forms made the poems ‘easily taken up by people who would never normally think poetry had anything for them’, while their publication in newspaper columns, rather than ‘the slim volume issued in small quantities which hopes one day to be recognised by the discerning few’, made it likely that they would indeed encounter such a readership. The ballad form also provided the mnemonic quality that Orwell grudgingly acknowledges: ‘the one thing that was never possible, if one had read him at all, was to forget him’. This memorability was confirmed by the ‘oral retransmission’ Kipling encouraged ‘by using music hall, comic-song and hymn-settings’ which were ‘duly taken up by composers,

20 Hughes, *Victorian Poetry*, p. 65.
churches, and the organisers of military parades’. Indeed, the newspaper poems of 1899-1902 discussed in Chapter four show that these familiar metres invited and enabled poetic imitation too, so that both admirers and parodists could speak back to Kipling in his own verse forms. The most obvious ‘oral retransmission’ of Kipling’s poems was on the music hall stage, a destination which Kipling seems to have had in mind ever since he expressed his conviction that ‘the people of London require a poet of the Music Halls’ in 1889.26 However, Howarth calls attention to the fact that the way Kipling’s ballad forms ‘ask to be performed’ frames the ‘commands’ they make ‘rather differently’ from the way one might expect, given what Eliot describes as the poet’s ‘singleness of intention in attempting to convey no more to the simple mind than can be taken in one reading or hearing’.27 As Howarth puts it, the Barrack-Room Ballads are characterised by a ‘prickly ambivalence’, which in performance could ‘puncture’ the ‘ebullient atmosphere’ of the music halls’ ‘tribalistic patriotism’.28 Howarth quotes Peter Bailey’s description of music hall audiences ‘flushed with enthusiasm for themselves’, in order to point out the deflating potential of ballads which could ‘make them something of a target too’:29

A would-be patriotic audience […] hear soldiers who are either reprobates, angry, or unconsolable, and often thoroughly fed up with the England listening to them. And this sense of discomfort between the soldiers on stage and their audience opens up an essential dimension of what the songs are about: the feeling of army privates that they are more menaced by those on their own side than the enemy.30

Orwell pointed out that ‘[f]ew people who have criticized England from the inside have said bitterer things about her than this gutter patriot’, and music hall audiences may well have found themselves shocked or discomfited by ‘the prophet of Empire who frequently hated England itself’.31 As Eliot put it, ‘the causes [Kipling] espoused were not popular causes when he voiced them’.32 ‘Making music-hall dynamics the animating poetic of Barrack-room Ballads’, in Howarth’s words, meant something other than providing a straightforwardly patriotic public with reassuringly familiar or comically

32 Eliot, A Choice, p. 29.
transgressive narratives. Instead, Kipling’s soldier poems destabilise the targets of their critiques, so that readers and audiences compelled to sing along with the accusers might find themselves suddenly aligned with the accused. The ballads’ formal qualities participate in this unsettling experience; as Howarth puts it, ‘the rhythmic performance of the ballad in time to the marching forces the audience to pay attention at someone else’s pace’.34

Kipling dedicated the first volume of Barrack-Room Ballads ‘To T.A.: ‘I have made for you a song’ as a mark of ‘my best respects to you’.35 Holding the soldier up as the final authority (‘only you can tell me if it’s true’, l. 3), the poet establishes himself as a mediator between Tommy Atkins and the wider public, with the aim of elevating the soldier’s status and ameliorating the injustices of his working and living conditions.

Kipling’s collection is offered in the hope that, as a result of better knowledge of ‘your pleasure and your pain’, ‘there’ll surely come a day | When they’ll give you all your pay, | And treat you as a Christian ought to do’ (ll. 5, 7-9). In this dedicatory poem, Kipling as poet-speaker positions himself outside either group – he is neither ‘you’ nor ‘they’ – but in the poems themselves he takes on the personae of the soldiers he speaks for, ventriloquizing characters from across the social world of the army in order to make military life visible to civilian readers. The newspapers were full of references to soldiers and descriptions of their behaviour, both heroic and roguish, but for the most part Tommy Atkins was talked about, rather than talked to. Meanwhile, although the editor of a compilation of Pen Pictures of the War by Men at the Front (1900) noted that ‘the newspapers have teemed for months past with letters from the front’, these were ‘brief and fugitive accounts’, ‘written in spare moments’; moreover, ‘in the letters which the newspapers print much is of necessity omitted’, leaving ‘a great gap […] which must be filled in by the imagination’.36 Promising an encounter with regular soldiers, Kipling’s poems opened a window onto their lives and experiences, making their voices both audible and memorable.

The novelty of Kipling’s approach comes into clearer view when his poems are contrasted against other representations of soldiers in the newspaper poems of the day.

33 Howarth, ‘Kipling Plays the Empire’, p. 615.
34 Ibid.
James Rhoades’ ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’, published in the Daily News in November 1899, is a striking example of a very different set of relationships between poet, reader and soldier.37 The opening lines imply that the poem is addressed, like the Barrack-Room Ballads, to the ‘rank and file of England, | Bold privates of her line!’ (ll. 1-2), but it quickly becomes apparent that the soldiers named by Rhoades are already dead. The speaker appears to lament their low status:

Too cold the lips that praise you,
Too few the eyes that weep,
Too oft with dull oblivion
In nameless graves ye sleep;

(‘Dulce et Decorum Est’, ll. 5-8)

The stately trimeter and elevated diction lend the poem a sense of graveside priestly exhortation, as though Rhoades speaks as the champion of the fallen soldiers to a society which does not know how to value them. And indeed, the poem makes a case that they should be valued. However, rather than counter the conventional images that contribute to social ‘oblivion’, the poet (educated at Rugby and Trinity College, Cambridge) instead reinforces them with a set of assumptions about the private’s education and motivation: ‘Untaught and roughly nurtured’, the speaker suggests that ‘the flame | Of loftier aspiration | That fires the soul to flame’ is likely to be ‘faint in you’, and ‘life’s best lore’ out of reach (ll. 9-13) of the ordinary soldier. In the poem’s longer second stanza, the speaker’s address shifts to a different constituency of listeners, a group in which he numbers himself. Among the ‘We’ of the second half of the poem, superior education goes hand-in-hand with a more developed moral sense:

We, nursed in high traditions
And trained to nobler thought,
Deem death to be less bitter
Than life too dearly bought:
Sharp spurs we have to honour,
But ye without their aid
Rush on the deadly breaches
And storm the barricade

(‘Dulce et Decorum Est’, ll. 17-24)

In a patronising reversal, the poem asserts that the lowly character and limited understanding of the soldier ought to earn him more praise and admiration than that

bestowed on his social superiors. The ‘rank and file of England’ may be unlettered and unrefined,

Yet this at least ye know:
To fight and die for England,
When England bids you go.


Their supposed ignorance of the causes for which they fight and the absence of ‘nobler thought’ as ‘spurs’ to ‘honour’ render their willing self-sacrifice the more remarkable; these soldiers deserve more respect than they currently enjoy because they lack the benefit of education or inspiring notions of glory to motivate their bravery. It is significant that the soldiers honoured in these lines are the ones who both ‘fight and die’.

These individuals can ‘shine transfigured | In Death’s apocalypse’, ‘From less than man grown Godlike’ (ll. 27-28 and 31), without prompting any inconvenient questions about pay or living conditions, or requiring action to help assimilate the returning hero into civilian society. The soldier’s death places him firmly and permanently outside the civilian world in which Rhoades’ speaker and his social equals share their newspapers and their ‘high traditions’ (l. 17), as well as outside the standards of masculinity (‘less than man’, l. 31). Kipling’s poems, in contrast, repeatedly collapse distinctions between the values of civilian and military masculinity. Kipling insisted upon the inclusion of soldiers within civilian spaces, not as a patronising reward for useful activity but on the basis of the common ground his poems establish, a family likeness between soldier and civilian. Indeed, he condemns the sedentary civilian as falling short of the ideals of masculinity exemplified by and developed through military discipline.

In Kipling’s military ballads, soldierly bad behaviour is recast as an admirable expression of authentic manliness, held up as an ideal to which the civilian can only aspire. Another key contrast between Kipling’s soldiers and those who appear elsewhere in the literature of the period emerges in John Peck’s discussion of Thomas Hardy’s 1880 novel, The Trumpet-Major.38 In what Peck calls ‘a significant rewriting’ of the Napoleonic era in which the novel is set, Hardy presents ‘peaceful’ and ‘thoroughly decent young men from respectable families […] making a career choice of the army’.39 As Peck shows, ‘Hardy repeatedly emphasises the quiet respectability and good manners of his soldiers […]; these are young men of some education and with considerable

38 Peck, War, pp. 113-114.
39 Ibid.
degree of delicacy of feeling’, notwithstanding the ‘historical evidence’ which shows the ‘common soldiery’ of the time to be made up of ‘social misfits, the unemployed, and those who by mere chance had fallen into soldiering’. The militarism of Hardy’s novel is conditional upon soldierly characters who are ‘reconcilable with the views of the middle-class majority’. In contrast, while Kipling’s poems certainly make space for ‘some education’ and ‘delicacy of feeling’ in representations of Tommy Atkins, there is no sense that such delicacy requires ‘quiet respectability’. Indeed, many of the Barrack-Room Ballads imply that, where military values feel at odds with civilian expectations, it is the latter that are at fault, artificially constraining the expression of true Britishness and true masculinity.

The second of Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads, ‘Tommy’, is the poem which captures most fully Kipling’s indignant objection to public attitudes to the military. Addressing a civilian reader, Tommy Atkins insists that he is ‘most remarkable like you’ (l. 26). Rejecting stereotypes both positive and negative (‘We aren’t no thin red ’eroes, nor we aren’t no blackguards too’, l. 25), and freely admitting to ‘goin’ large a bit’ at times – indeed, implying that such an expression of full-blooded masculinity is preferable to ‘single men in barricks’ turning ‘into plaster saints’ (ll. 19, 28) – Tommy calls out society’s hypocritical standards:

I went into a theatre as sober as could be,  
They gave a drunk civilian room, but ’adn’t none for me;  
They sent me to the gallery or round the music ’alls,  
But when it comes to fightin’, Lord! they’l shove me in the stalls!  
(‘Tommy’, ll. 8-12)

Hughes notes that in this poem Kipling ‘calls into question what is and is not “poetic”’ by uniting ‘an urban, downmarket lexicon’ with the ‘loping lines’ of the fourteeners which Chapman had used to translate Homer. The associations of the form might elevate ‘the martial context of his speaker’, but the iambic heptameter sounds very different in Tommy’s voice, with its comedically theatrical interjections (‘Lord!’). Nevertheless, in contrast with the ignorance which Rhoades assumes in ‘Dulce et

40 Peck, War, p. 114.  
41 Ibid., pp. 114-115.  
43 Hughes, Victorian Poetry, p. 70.
Decorum Est’, Kipling’s Tommy ‘ain’t a bloomin’ fool—you bet that Tommy sees!’ (l. 40). What Tommy ‘sees’ is the contrast between appealing promises – ‘You talk o’ better food for us, an’ schools, an’ fires, an’ all’ (l. 33) – and the continued reality of low pay which makes the soldier ‘starvation cheap’ (l. 18). In line with Deane’s account, Tommy is acutely conscious of being shamed: the experience of being turned away by the publican who will ‘serve no red-coats here’ smarts because ‘the girls be’ind the bar […] laughed and giggled fit to die’ (ll. 2-3).44 ‘The Queen’s Uniform’ (the poem’s original title) becomes ‘the soldier-man’s disgrace’ when society rejects him (l. 36). But alongside an awareness of his own fragile social position, the speaker asserts his value as a man in direct contrast with the civilians who denigrate him:

Yes, makin’ mock o’ uniforms that guard you while you sleep
Is cheaper than them uniforms, an’ they’re starvation cheap;
An’ hustlin’ drunken soldiers when they’re goin’ large a bit
Is five times better business than paradin’ in full kit.

(‘Tommy’, ll. 17-20)

The couplets invite the reader or audience to anticipate the rhyme-words and thus to participate in the speaker’s censure. But they remain civilians, even if they recognise the ways in which they might be ‘most remarkable like’ Kipling’s speaker (l. 26), and they might well be guilty of the very behaviours they are joining in to condemn.

Kipling’s poem is an extension of a much-repeated quatrain.45 The Naval and Army Illustrated quoted a version in early 1900 to express their scepticism about the wartime fervour of enthusiasm for soldiers:

How long will red coats and khaki tunics be welcomed with cheers in places of public entertainment, instead of being frowned upon, and in some cases shut out altogether? As the old rhyme effectively puts it,

In time of danger and in time of war,
Our God and soldiers we alike adore;
The danger o’er, our honour righted—
Our God’s forgot, our soldiers slighted.46

The comparison between ‘Tommy’ and these lines highlights the way that Kipling shifts the locus of authority. In the traditional lines, ‘our soldiers’ protect ‘our honour’; the

44 Deane, Masculinity, pp. 7, 15.
46 Naval and Army Illustrated, 24 March 1900, p. 1.
apparently-inclusive ‘we’ of the second line doesn’t include military men. ‘We’ civilians are responsible for adoring or slighting them; the soldiers are passive – they are not even credited with bringing about an end to the ‘danger’. Like a forgotten God, they are something apart from the orbit of civilian society and experience. In contrast, Kipling uses Tommy Atkins’ voice to reflect hypocritical civilian disapproval back to civilian readers:

O it’s Tommy this, an’ Tommy that, an’ ‘Tommy, go away’;
But it’s ‘Thank you, Mr Atkins’, when the band begins to play, […]

Oh it’s Tommy this, an’ Tommy that, an’ ‘Chuck ’im out, the brute!’
But it’s ‘Saviour of ’is country’ when the guns begin to shoot.
(‘Tommy’, ll. 5-6, 37-38)

In comparison with the lively physicality of Tommy’s iamb, the traditional sententious quatrain seems facile. Kipling’s innovation is not only to have Tommy Atkins speak for himself about his own experience, but to create a character who, in the face of negative assumptions about his intelligence, is capable of recognising and articulating the hypocrisies he sees around him. Demanding access to high culture, and unwilling to be fobbed off with ‘the music ’alls’ when he seeks a good seat in the theatre, ‘Tommy ain’t no bleedin’ fool’ (ll. 11, 40). ‘Tommy’ constitutes a radical departure from previous representations of soldiers, refusing to sugar-coat or caricature, and instead making the case that soldiers can be complex, contradictory, good and bad in combination – indeed, ‘most remarkable like’ everybody else (l. 26). As Eliot put it, Kipling’s ‘concern was to make the soldier known, not to idealise him. He was exasperated by sentimentalism as well as by depreciation or neglect – and either attitude is liable to evoke the other’.

Kipling’s refusal to sentimentalise means that Barrack-Room Ballads includes poems which stretch the boundaries of social acceptability. A particularly startling example of Tommy’s claim to resemble the civilian reader comes in ‘Loot’, in which an experienced soldier teaches a rookie ‘Ow to pay yourself for fightin’ overtime’. Cautioning new recruits to ‘work in pairs’ ‘When from ’ouse to ’ouse you’re ’unting’ in order to avoid getting ‘bottled on them twisty-wisty stairs’ (ll. 25, 27), the speaker gives tips about where best to find booty:

When you’ve turned ’em inside out, an’ it seems beyond a doubt
As if there weren’t enough to dust a flute

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Notwithstanding the aggressive racist language and the flippant account of torture and extortion in the poem’s notorious advice to ‘treat’ the victim ‘to a dose o’ cleaning rod’ in order that he will ‘show you everything ’e owns’ (ll. 19-20), the soldier’s behaviour is portrayed as a boyish transgression – no worse than the petty youthful poaching with which, in the poem’s opening lines, the reader is assumed to identify:

If you’ve ever stole a pheasant-egg be’ind the keeper’s back,
If you’ve ever snigged the washin’ from the line,
If you’ve ever crammed a gander in your bloomin’ ‘aversack,
You will understand this little song o’ mine.

In both content and metre Kipling’s ballad recalls a popular folk song, ‘The Northamptonshire Poacher’, linking the soldiers’ wartime looting with familiar and less heinous crimes:

When I was bound apprentice in famed Northamptonshire,
I served my master truly for almost seven year,
Till I took up to poaching, as you shall quickly hear,
It’s my delight of a shiny night, and the season of the year.

As me and my companions was setting of a snare
The gamekeeper was watching us—for him we didn’t care;
For we can wrestle, fight, my boys, jump over anywhere
It’s my delight of a shiny night, and the season of the year.

The hexameters of the folk song divide each line in two, with three stresses on either side of an invisible caesura. Kipling’s opening stanza amplifies the ‘delight’ of looting by replacing the caesura with an additional stress, creating an irresistible iambic heptameter, with the alternating pentameters leaving space for musical directions to the cornet, a detail which extends a playful invitation to performance. Roger Ayers suggests that Kipling used ‘this direct link to a popular and well known song in an attempt to ensure that it was seen as comic from the start, and hence not to be taken too seriously’, and Christie Davies likewise describes this poem as ‘outrageous[ly] comic’ and ‘utterly

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50 Ibid.
The fact that both Ayers and Davies feel the need to insist on the poem’s comedy is significant. Responding with some scorn to Eliot’s suggestion that in ‘Loot’ Kipling was ‘acting merely as a reporter and does not necessarily approve what he describes’, Orwell instead identifies ‘a definite strain of sadism’, concluding that the poet ‘is morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting’. Noting that ‘if taken seriously these verses would strongly offend many readers’ – would, indeed, have ‘outraged Kipling’s contemporaries’ – Davies argues that it must therefore be understood as ‘pure farce’. Kipling avoids ‘the danger that someone might take [the poem] seriously’, in Davies’ account, by being ‘wildly humorous’, playing ‘with the obviously forbidden’ in ‘the language of carnival and disorder, of absurd time off from the constraints of normal life and normal language’. For Davies, the key fact is Kipling’s ‘use of a particularly crude form of generic lower class English’, which he calls ‘a bizarre, baroque, exaggerated form of synthetic cockney’. The problem with this argument is that, as Davies acknowledges in the same article, Kipling used cockney for poems that were not at all facetious, while Kipling’s comic poetry – like other poets’ – could aim for, and achieve, serious purposes. Meanwhile, complicating Davies’ sense that Kipling’s speaker clearly ‘breaks all the rules of decent behaviour,’ official looting had in fact only been forbidden since the 1860s, and evidence from the Bloemfontein Friend during the South African War indicates that it was still common practice in 1900. Moreover, as Orwell observed, ‘there is not the slightest sign’ in the poem itself that Kipling ‘disapproves of that kind of conduct’; indeed, the comparison with poaching minimises its atrocity, while the ballad’s form entices the reader to join in. The thrice-repeated appeal (‘If you’ve ever...’) in the poem’s opening lines invites readers to consider the extent to which Tommy Atkins is ‘most remarkable like you’, while unconsciously turning them into Tommy by tempting them to sing along and ‘become one of the “dogs and men” in the process of being carefully whooped forward with the prospect of “Loo! loo! Lulu!”: pack hounds, whose safety is in numbers’. In ‘Loot’, the speaker’s rueful admission

53 Davies, ‘Comic and Serious’, pp. 51, 49.
54 Ibid., pp. 49, 51-52.
55 Ibid., pp. 51, 49.
56 Davies’ example of a serious cockney poem is ‘Follow me ‘ome’, from Kipling, Seven Seas, pp. 200-202; Davies, ‘Comic and Serious’, pp. 35-39.
57 Ralph, War’s Brighter Side, pp. 28-62; Davies, ‘Comic and Serious’, p. 51.
59 Kipling, ‘Tommy’ (l. 26); Howarth, ‘Kipling Plays the Empire’, p. 616.
that ‘I could never keep my pickin’s’ (l. 35) may be a half-hearted attempt to assure the reader that the army did not condone such plundering, but the exuberant choruses, complete with musical directions (ff, fff) and comic interjections from the cornet, invite them to share indulgently in the speaker’s sense that the ‘service rules’ which forbid such tricks are “ard” (l. 5).

An anonymous poem entitled ‘Commandeering’ which appeared in the Bloemfontein Friend in March 1900 sustains a tone which is comparable to that of ‘Loot’. 60 Noting that ‘nowadays […] when a man is ‘on the make’:

We never use such words as steal, or ‘collar,’ ‘pinch’ or ‘shake’:
The fashion is to say he ‘commandeers’ it.

(‘Commandeering’, ll. 5-8)

The poem’s ‘simple-minded hero’ begins by complaining: ‘A fellow has to carry every blooming thing he’s got, | For whatever he lets fall they’ll commandeer it’ (ll. 9-12), but discovers that the custom has advantages when he finds ‘a bottle on a shelf | In a cottage’ when ‘there’s no commandin’ officer to come and interfere. | “So here’s my bloomin’ health,” says he, “I’m on the commandeer”’ (ll. 15-16, 18-19). In contrast with Davies’s conviction that looting was an abhorrent transgression, Ralph’s account in War’s Brighter Side of having to mediate between two colleagues with very different opinions on the topic of horse-stealing indicates that contemporary views could be more complex. 61 Ralph initially blames the practice of looting horses on the pernicious influence of living in ‘the neighbourhood of the Boers’ which he claims ‘affected the moral atmosphere and demoralised our earlier views of property rights’, but his account makes clear that this kind of misdemeanour prompted admiration, rather than condemnation, in the context of wartime South Africa. 62

Being a born diplomat I agreed with both my colleagues, praised both their articles, and voted that both should ornament the columns of THE FRIEND.

I was in a position to behave with this impartiality. My character and reputation at home forced me to the side of the indignant moralist, and yet, on the other hand, certain episodes in my recent experience inclined me to view the confessions of the horse-stealer with leniency. […] I have had time to reflect, and I see how weak I was; but at that time I was in the Boer country where stealing is

60 ‘Commandeering’, Friend, 24 March 1900, in Ralph, War’s Brighter Side, p. 156.
61 Ralph, War’s Brighter Side, p. 31.
62 Ibid., p. 29.
called ‘commandeering,’ and seems a trifling thing, rather creditable if practised successfully and with a high hand.63

In the disingenuous move to distance himself from his earlier transgressions, designed to elevate Ralph’s status as a dashing and risk-taking exemplar of masculinity by emphasising the behaviour he purportedly renounces, Ralph gestures towards a different set of ethical standards from the restrictive ‘English morals’ which ‘Loot’ denounces (l. 5). Illegal acts, performed with flair, can appear ‘rather creditable’ in the eyes of an admiring peer-group far away from the strictures of home. In spite of the illegality of the crimes described in ‘Loot’, then, Kipling’s speaker tempts the civilian reader to wish ‘good luck to those that wears the Widow’s clo’es, | An’ the Devil send ‘em all they want o’ loot!’ (ll. 39-40) – not least because of the suggestion that ‘the sweatin’ Tommies’ are merely paying themselves what they are owed ‘for fightin’ overtime’, which society refuses adequately to recompense. Howarth argues that ‘[t]he mixture of nastiness and jollity in these poems is not meant to stop the English identifying with their soldiers […] but it makes the identification happen through fear as much as sympathy, taking the audience into unsafe territory’.64 Perhaps part of the ‘fear’ is the ease with which a reader might be seduced into acquiescing to conduct which they would normally deplore; a reader of ‘Loot’ might find themselves fearing not only the soldier, but also themselves.

It is important that ‘Loot’ be understood as connected to reality, albeit in an exaggerated, sensationalised form because, like the drunken antics in ‘Cells’ and the violence of ‘Belts’, it captures the aspect of army life which the speaker of ‘Mandalay’ most prizes: the appeal of ‘Somewhere East of Suez, where the best is like the worst, | Where there aren’t no Ten Commandments an’ a man can raise a thirst’.65 In contrast with Davies’s sense that ‘Loot’ represents an unrealistic carnival universe, in Barrack-Room Ballads the military sphere itself is portrayed as affording ‘time off from the constraints of normal life and normal language’.66 Lawlessness of this kind is exhilarating because it permits demonstrations of hot-blooded masculine competitiveness and violence which are censured in the metropole, but which constitute the fullest

63 Ralph, War’s Brighter Side, p. 29.
64 Ibid.
66 Davies, ‘Comic and Serious’, p. 52.
expression of authentic male identities and natural instincts. This corresponds with the shift in constructions of masculinity which Deane describes, demonstrating a revived emphasis on competitive masculinity and the pleasures and challenges of physical endurance, and a sense that these values are to be enforced externally, by the disciplinary structures of the army, rather than through spiritual discipline. The advice offered to new recruits in Kipling’s *Barrack-Room Ballads* develops this idea, not just in ‘Loot’ but in other poems which hold out exemplars of ideal manliness. For example, in ‘Soldier an’ Sailor too’, the Marines’ physical hard work is described by the admiring soldier-speaker as turning them into, as well as proving them to be, ideal men. The Marine is gifted with superior physical endurance: ‘is work begins by Gawd knows when, and ‘is work is never through’ (l. 5). The description sets up a comparison with the soldier ‘o’ the reg’lar Line’ (l. 6), but the Marine consistently outclasses him: ‘they’re up an’ fed before our bugle’s blew’ (l. 20). Their capability is captured in vivid terms: ‘there isn’t a job on the top o’ the earth the beggar don’t know, nor do | You can leave ‘im at night on a bald man’s ‘ead, to paddle ‘is own canoe’ (ll. 12-13), while their impressive physiques mark

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them out from the rest of the forces. Similarly, in ‘The Men that fought at Minden’, which the subtitle calls ‘A Song of Instruction’, novice soldiers are encouraged with the examples of military heroes.\(^{69}\) Reminding them that these role models were ‘rookies in their time’ (l. 1) the poem exhorts them to follow the example of their heroes by taking pride even in ‘fatigues’ such as ‘clean[ing] the cook-house floor’, and by prizing their appearance, making their ‘Two-an’ twenty dozen’ buttons shine ‘bright as gold’, even if it takes ‘an hour’s extry work’ (ll. 11-12, 17-20). The drawings by the *Pall Mall Gazette’s* political cartoonist (and future editor) George Roland Halkett which accompanied this poem on its first appearance emphasise these themes (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2), portraying an experienced soldier who is physically strong, splendidly dressed, and carrying himself with impressive self-assurance, in contrast with the pyjama-clad and hesitant-looking ‘rookies’. Appearances, and the approval of a male peer-group, mattered.

Also offering advice, the speaker of ‘The Young British Soldier’ counsels ‘all you recrui[tes] wha’s drafted to-day’ to aspire to become ‘a soldier wha’s fit for a soldier’ by avoiding drink, sunstroke, cholera and moaning, and above all, in the second half of the poem, by acting with courage:\(^{70}\)

\begin{verbatim}
When first under fire an ’you’re wishful to duck,
Don’t look nor take ’eed at the man that is struck,
Be thankful you’re living and trust to your luck
   And march to the front like a soldier. […]

If your officer’s dead and the sergeants look white,
Remember it’s ruin to run from a fight:
So take open order, lie down, and sit tight,
   And wait for supports like a soldier.

When you’re wounded and left on Afghanistan’s plains,
And the women come out to cut up what remains,
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
   An’ go to your Gawd like a soldier.
\end{verbatim}

(‘The Young British Soldier’, ll. 37-40, 49-56)

\(^{69}\) ‘The Men that Fought at Minden’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 May 1895, pp. 1-2, collected in Kipling, *Seven Seas*, pp. 182-185. The British Library copy of the *Pall Mall Gazette* is missing the right-hand column of page 1; the poem has obviously been clipped out by a reader who wanted to keep it.

The sing-song anapaests, simple *aaab* rhymes and repetitive fourth-line refrain give the impression that the speaker’s advice is straightforward, even patronisingly simple, establishing a frisson of tension between the sound of the poem and the scenes it depicts. The advice to ‘blow out your brains’ casts British soldiers as Roman heroes escaping the threat of emasculation (being ‘cut up’ by ‘women’), and frames death as less dreadful than reputational ‘ruin’, but it also implies indifference to the novice soldier’s grisly fate. On the other hand, while this poem appears to acknowledge the peril and fear of war, it assumes that a soldier will only be ‘wishful to duck’ when *first under fire*, and before he has learned to appreciate the thrill of battle. The speaker of ‘Soldier an’ Sailor too’ revels unashamedly in precisely this exhilaration, moving between iambs and anapaests to draw the reader in to ‘the thick of a rush, with firing all about’ and helping them imagine the strangely liberating sensation of having ‘cover to ’and, an’ leave an’ likin’ to shout’ (ll. 29-30). *The Young British Soldier* might face such a scene with trembling, but he is not a full man: ‘arf-made’, no more than ‘a babe’, in contrast with ‘a soldier what’s fit for a soldier’ (ll. 1-4).

The marines in ‘Soldier an’ Sailor too’ are the example of ideal manliness because they behave with fortitude even in the face of certain death. The speaker of that poem appears to distance himself from these heights of heroism, acknowledging the superior manly courage of the ‘Jollies’. But he nonetheless insists on a family resemblance, not only between himself (an experienced soldier) and the marines, but including his listener – perhaps the ‘arf-made recruity’ or ‘rookies’ addressed by the other poems:71

[...] once in a while we can finish in style for the ends of the earth to view,  
The same as the Jollies—’Er Majesty’s Jollies—soldier an’ sailor too!  
They come of our lot, they was brothers to us; they was beggars we’d met an’ knew;  
Yes, barrin’ an inch in the chest an’ the arm, they was doubles o’ me an’ you;  
For they weren’t no special chrysanthemums—soldier an’ sailor too!

[...]

We’re most of us liars, we’re ’arf of us thieves, ’an the rest are as rank as can be,  
But once in a while we can finish in style (which I ’ope it won’t ’appen to me).  
But it makes you think better o’ you an’ your friends, An’ the work you may ’ave to do,  
When you think o’ the sinkin’ Victorier’s Jollies—soldier an’ sailor too!  

(‘Soldier an’ Sailor Too’, ll. 24-28, 36-39)

71 Kipling, ‘The Young British Soldier’ (l. 1); ‘The Men that Fought at Minden’ (l. 1).
If the speaker and his audience cannot hope to match the marines’ exemplary standard, they are nonetheless glorified by association with their impressive colleagues. Meanwhile, the superior masculinity of the experienced soldiers is gained by their experience of suffering under attack; they become ‘a soldier that’s fit for a soldier’ by being a soldier. Redvers Buller, the British Commander-in-Chief in South Africa for the first part of the war, pointed to the same trajectory when he claimed that ‘if his troops got some hard knocks at Spion Kop and elsewhere they got “compensating advantages” in the shape of experience which transformed them from recruits into veterans, and enabled them eventually to force their way into Ladysmith by sheer hard fighting.’

Two poems in *Barrack-Room Ballads* explore the process by which the military can make a man out of unpromising raw materials, presenting the army as a force for good in the lives of men who might have little hope of success in civilian life, not only by keeping them safely occupied, but by making them into a better version of themselves. In ‘Back to the Army Again’, ‘William Parsons, that used to be Edward Clay’ takes on a new identity in order to re-enlist, signing on as a new recruit having ‘done [his] six years’ service’ under his former name. Keen for his military experience to go unnoticed – ‘A-layin’ on to the sergeant I don’t know a gun from a bat’ while he’s ‘learnin’ the damned old goose-step along o’ the new recruits’ (ll. 2, 4) – William inadvertently proves that he is ‘A man that is ’anded and made’ (l. 59) when his posture marks him out from the rest of the new recruits:

The sergeant arst no questions, but ’e winked the other eye,  
’E sez to me ‘Shun!’ an’ I shunted, the same as in days gone by;  
For ’e saw the set o’ my shoulders, an’ I couldn’t ’elp ’oldin’ straight  
When me an’ the other rookies come under the barrack-gate.  
(‘Back to the Army Again’, ll. 25-28)

Having been subjected to the discipline of army training, he can’t help but present a better image of masculinity than the ‘other rookies’; as well as helping him ‘Out o’ the cold an’ the rain’ (ll. 55-56), army life has changed the man physically and, it is implied, morally. The illustrations which accompany the poem in the *Pall Mall Magazine* draw this out, as the slouching, shadowy figure of the opening stanza, ‘in a lousy ulster an’ a broken billycock ’at’ (l. 1), standing hesitantly with his hands in his pockets, transforms (back) into the assertive, strong-chested soldier in a well-fitted uniform, striding into the

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72 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 November 1900, p. 2.  
future with purpose (Figures 2.3 and 2.4). The poem describes William as ‘A man that’s too good to be lost you’ (l. 58) in order to make the case for allowing re-enlistment, arguing that a man can constitute ‘the pick of the Army’ even if he ‘asn’t learned of a trade’ outside the ranks (ll. 62, 17). The speaker’s return to ‘Er Majesty’s Barracks’ (l. 20), where he can wash off the dirt and failure of civilian life, is described as a homecoming akin to a romantic reunion:

I took my bath, an’ I wallered—for, Gawd, I needed it so!
I smelt the smell o’ the barricks, I ’eard the bugle go.
I ’eard the feet on the gravel—the feet o’ the men what drill—
An’ I sez to my flutterin’ ’eart-strings, I sez to ’em, ‘Peace, be still!’
(‘Back to the Army Again’, ll. 33-36)

Throughout the poem, the speaker’s ‘flutterin’ ’eart-strings’ are audible against the marching iambs of the military into which he must reintegrate himself. This speaker certainly appears ‘Untaught and roughly nurtured’, in the words of Rhoades’ ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’, motivated by the basic need to earn a living rather than any ‘flame | Of loftier aspiration’, but Kipling’s poem insists in both metaphor and rhythm on the heart beating beneath the grubby and broken-down exterior, requiring the reader to consider William in his full humanity, ‘most remarkable like you’.74

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74 Rhoades, ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ (ll. 9-13); Kipling, ‘Tommy’ (l. 26).
‘The 'Eathen’ demonstrates in closer detail how a new recruit learns to conform to army discipline – a process spurred on by the persuasive ‘kicks’ of his peers.75

Transforming from an ‘aughty’ and ‘silly’ rookie who ‘mutters’, ‘sulks’, and ‘thinks o’ suicide’ when disciplined for failing to ‘lay ’is mattress square’ (ll. 9-17), the recruit achieves his ‘pride’, along with his ‘mustaches’, in proportion to his ability to hold his temper and ‘drop the “bloodies” from every word ’e slings’ (ll. 25-36). Rewarded with the rank of Colour-Sergeant, he demonstrates how far he has come:

> An’ now the hugly bullets come peckin’ through the dust,
> An’ no one wants to face ’em, but every beggar must;
> So, like a man in irons which isn’t glad to go,
> They moves ’em off by companies uncommon stiff an’ slow. […]

> ’E’s just as sick as they are, ’is ’eart is like to split,
> But ’e works ’em, works ’em, works ’em till he feels ’em take the bit;
> The rest is ’oldin’ steady till the watchful bugles play,
> An’ ’e lifts ’em, lifts ’em, lifts ’em through the charge that wins the day!

(‘The 'Eathen’, ll. 53-56, 65-68)

Leadership qualities and masculinity are characterised by endurance and developed through hardship, as the Sergeant’s leadership drives his colleagues on to overcome the hesitancies that present a flicker of resistance in the caesurae in lines 54-56 and 65, to achieve the purposeful movement of the final lines of the poem (ll. 66-68). The poem suggests that the manly thing is not to deny the fear but to keep going in spite of it, through the ‘bloody murder’ of battle (l. 63), and to find beyond the pleasures attending victory, over the enemy and over one’s fears. The ordinary British soldier ‘from Gawd knows where’ (l. 9), the poem shows, is capable of impressive transformation. From an unpromising beginning, he comes to represent ‘the backbone of the Army’ (l. 72) – just as the unpromising civilian demonstrated the manly character he assumes in the role of a soldier in ‘Back to the Army Again’ through the set of his shoulders.

As the quotation above from ‘The 'Eathen’ indicates, in *Barrack-Room Ballads* Kipling offered readers a vivid insight into the wartime experiences of the soldier. This is still clearer in ‘That Day’, in which the speaker relates his experience during a chaotic ‘knock-out’ with shame and bitter regret.76 The poem invites the reader to reflect on the

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horrors of battle, and to judge the speaker more sympathetically than he judges himself. ‘We was sick o’ bein’ punished’ (l. 9), the speaker explains, in a skirmish that had ‘got beyond all orders an’ it got beyond all ‘ope’ (ll. 1-2). ‘Ole Companies was lookin’ for the nearest road to slope’ (l. 3), but the enemy took the opportunity presented by a disorderly retreat to ‘cut us up like sheep’ (l. 15). The soldiers’ actions are portrayed as shameful, ‘shammin’ wounded’ (l. 2), ‘idin’ under bedsteads’ and ‘lyin’ up like rabbits’ (ll. 21-22), and the illustration which accompanies the beginning of the poem in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in April 1895 emphasises this aspect (Figure 2.5). Halkett portrays the uniformed man kneeling awkwardly, looking upwards and back in open-mouthed fear as he attempts to squeeze into a space which appears much too small for him and his rucksack. The detail of the unmade bed amplifies the indignity, implying that the soldier is hiding childishly beneath his own bed, while also reinforcing the sense that the troops’ behaviour corresponds with a lack of attention to the details of military order and presentation: ‘We was rotten ’fore we started. We was never disciplined, | We made it out a favour if an order was obeyed’ (ll. 25-26). In this sense, ‘That Day’ echoes the inexperience of the ‘aughty’ recruit in ‘The ’Eathen’ who ‘calls it bloomin’ nonsense’ when he is asked ‘to lay ’is mattress square’ (ll. 10-11). However, ‘That Day’ counters the speaker’s shame and self-deprecation by capturing the horror which precipitates the
retreat. The soldier’s trauma is registered though his cognitive dislocation; he experiences the battle as if outside of himself:

I ’eard the knives be’ind me, but I dursn’t face my man,
Nor I don’t know where I went to, ’cause I didn’t ’alt to see,
Till I ’eard a beggar squealin’ out for quarter as ’e ran,
An’ I thought I knew the voice an”—it was me!

(‘That Day’, ll. 17-20)

The speaker’s primary aim is to articulate his own shame at a failure of courage; as the refrain puts it: ‘I wish I was dead ’fore I done what I did, | Or seen what I seed that day!’ (ll. 7-8 and 39-40). The traditional ballad rhyme scheme (abab, unlike the couplet-rhyme of many of the other poems quoted here) invokes the ballad conventions which do not require an ‘excavation of psychology’, but the poem has another agenda: ‘That Day’ uses black humour to expose the real psychological impact of battle on a soldier.77

As Orwell notes, Kipling has ‘a vision of war’ that is ‘realistic. He knows that bullets hurt, that under fire everyone is terrified, […] and that British troops, like other troops, frequently run away’.78 Unlike Tennyson, Orwell goes on, Kipling ‘knows that men ordered to attack impossible objectives are dismayed’; these battle poems offer an implicit rebuke to the euphemisms of popular war poems like ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’.79

‘The Men that fought at Minden’, which comes immediately after ‘That Day’ in Barrack-Room Ballads, reads as a consolatory response to the speaker’s misery, reassuring him that even those who ‘fought at Waterloo’ were ‘once dam’ sweeps like you!’ (ll. 2, 4). Indeed, as in General Buller’s comments in 1900, the speaker of ‘That Day’ suggests that the appalling experience was a necessary lesson to correct the raw soldiers’ lack of discipline: ‘We had to pay for teachin’—an’ we paid!’ (l. 28). But the real power of ‘That Day’ is the way that it positions itself against two other forms in which war is represented. The first is the popular war-song: in place of the rousing refrains seen in many of the other Barrack-Room Ballads, this speaker insists: ‘there ain’t no chorus ’ere to give, | Nor there ain’t no band to play’ (ll. 5-6 and 33-34). This refusal of military musical ceremony takes on further significance in light of the final stanza, which in the original Pall Mall Gazette version of the poem is as follows:

The papers ’id it ’andsome, but you know the Army knows;

77 Hughes, Victorian Poetry, p. 68.
78 Orwell, ‘Rudyard Kipling’, p. 190.
79 Ibid., p. 191.
We was put to guardin’ camels till the regiments withdrew,
An’ they gave us each a medal for subduin’ England’s foes,
An’ I ’ope you like my song—because it’s true!

(‘That Day’, ll. 29-32)

In the Barrack-Room Ballads version, the unmanly indignity is further enhanced by a change from ‘guardin’ camels’ to ‘groomin’ camels’; the disgraced soldiers are demoted to the role of ostler. The rousing tunes played by ‘band’ and ‘chorus’, and enjoyed by music hall audiences or city crowds, strike a false note when the soldiers themselves feel that they have not earned them. Kipling’s ‘song’ proposes to take the place of these unmerited honours, uncomfortable but ‘true’, setting itself up in explicit contrast to what appears in ‘The papers’. Once again, Halkett’s illustration for the Pall Mall Gazette lends further emphasis to the poem’s political import and takes up over a third of a page (see figure 2.6). The newspaper seller holds up a ‘special edition’ advertising a ‘Great Victory’, but the typography of the headlines suggests that the ‘gallant behaviour of British troops’ is just as significant as the outcome of the battle for civilian readers, who seek glory-by-association with the demonstration of an extreme and simplified version of masculinity they are never required to demonstrate themselves. The newspaper-seller’s expression – which could be distaste, scepticism or cynicism – corroborates the poem’s sense that the newspapers have got this wrong. Without any understanding of what a ‘great victory’ involves on the ground, reports of ‘gallant behaviour’ are meaningless. In contrast with Tennyson’s ideal and un-‘dismayed’ soldier in ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’, ‘That Day’ gives us his opposite.80 Kipling’s poem asserts that in rewriting the story of the battle, the sanitised newspaper version hides from public scrutiny the real horror of the experience of war.

Only by introducing realism to the discourse does it become possible for civilian readers to understand

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the character of Tommy Atkins, and to appreciate his strengths. The Tommy Atkins who emerges from the poems in *Barrack-Room Ballads* might appear less impressive than his ideal counterpart, the story-book hero who faces cartoon conflicts with unshakeable equanimity, but the honours due to the soldier increase in proportion to the extremity of the experiences he is understood to undergo. Rather than being lionised as superhuman, this soldier is ‘most remarkable like you’.

Kipling chose to publish his poems as correctives in the very columns that contained the kinds of war stories which Orwell describes as ‘glorifying war […] by pretending that [it] is a sort of football match’, or which caricatured ordinary soldiers as either ignorant brutes, wisely excluded from polite society, or military machines incapable of fine feeling and far removed from the usual emotional and ethical standards and experiences of civilian life. As poems, Kipling’s ballads could make use of undertone and implication, imagery and rhythm to say more than they stated explicitly; using the voices of soldiers in dialogue with each other, and with the subtexts drawn out by publication paratexts like Halkett’s illustrations or other news items, they could introduce the civilian reader to a version of Tommy Atkins that was complex and varied, even if it also had the capacity to be shocking or unsettling. The Tommy Atkins whom Kipling introduces to society was no angel – indeed, as the speaker of ‘Soldier and Sailor Too’ puts it, ‘We’re most of us liars, we’re ’arf of us thieves’ (l. 36). Kipling’s way of winning public support for the army was not to present a simplistically ideal man, but to insist on collapsing the experiential gap between civilian and military life. Atkins’s qualities are only visible when the conditions in which he is called upon to work are also properly understood.

As part of their celebration of violently transgressive excesses of military masculinity, the *Barrack-Room Ballads* introduced a new way of engaging with realism in war writing. When other poets, whether soldier or civilian, assented to or contested contemporary depictions of military masculinity, by Kipling and others, in poetry and in the news, they were doing so with this Tommy Atkins in mind: a man who was capable of immense bravery and of fear, of foolishness, criminality, loyalty, friendship and personal growth. Above all, a man who was self-conscious, aware of his own position in

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81 Kipling, ‘Tommy’ (l. 26).
82 Orwell, ‘Rudyard Kipling’, p. 190.
society, critical about his own identity and sensitive to threats to his masculinity represented by the forms in which he was written about and spoken for, especially in newsprint. Poets who made use of the voice and figure of Tommy Atkins – and they did so in their hundreds during the 1899-1902 war – were taking on a figure bound up with representations of military masculinity and imperial war which still felt new and radical in the late 1890s.

In a pair of articles for the *Contemporary Review* in January 1900, respected poet-critics Robert Buchanan and Walter Besant debated the significance of Kipling’s soldier figures. Both articles were republished as a pamphlet entitled *The Voice of ‘The Hooligan’: A discussion of Kiplingism*, indicating the broad appeal their debate about literary and social values was intended to have. Their arguments are a striking reminder that, while Kipling’s Tommy Atkins was gaining the status of an authoritative representative of the real-life soldier, with poems in the style of the *Barrack-Room Ballads* being met with what Buchanan calls ‘instantaneous and clamorous approval’, this version of soldierly masculinity was by no means universally accepted as representing the best either of literature or of society. For both, as for twentieth-century critics, the question of Tommy Atkins’ cockney voice was central to the issue. As Leticia Henville puts it, ‘Kipling makes English strange. […] Kipling loots from Standard English, from class-inflected English, from military jargon, and from the languages of colonized peoples; he then presents this argot as the voice of Tommy Atkins’. Henville argues that Kipling makes Tommy’s voice ‘acceptable and recognizable’ by placing it ‘within the context of a conventional ballad collection’. However, the invitations issued by Kipling’s ballads for ‘oral retransmission’ counteract the potential for what Henville calls their ‘artifactualization’ – the attempt to ‘pin them to the page’ as traditional ballads. Readers could – and did – take up Tommy’s words in drawing-room adaptations, their own mouths singing the “Loo! loo! Lulu! Loot!”’ Besant called Kipling ‘the Poet of the Empire. Not the Jingo Rhymer: the Poet with the deepest reverence for those who have built up the Empire: the deepest respect for the Empire; the most profound sense

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84 Henville, ‘Late Victorian Ballad Translation’, p. 78.
86 Ibid.
of responsibility’.88 In contrast, what Buchanan saw as the ‘Barbarism’ of Kipling’s cockney poems was of a piece with the ‘barbarism’ of a society won over by the appeal of the New Imperialism, the ‘Hooligan spirit of Patriotism’.89 In Buchanan’s account, Kipling’s popularity was both cause and effect of a ‘fierce and quasi-savage militant spirit’ which differed from ‘True Imperialism’, being characterised by ‘the mere lust of conquest’, a ‘savage, pitiless, and cruel’ politics involving ‘a greed of gain, a vain-glory, a cruelty, and a boastful indifference to the rights of others’.90 Buchanan’s objections to Kipling’s popular representations of soldiers thus involved far-reaching objections to new conceptions of both masculinity and imperialism, as well as fears about Kipling’s dangerously infectious cockney idioms, capable of penetrating from barrack-rooms to drawing-rooms.

In Buchanan’s reading, the cockney voice that ‘reeks on every page’ of Kipling’s soldier poetry is a marker of moral qualities, representing the ‘vulgarity, the brutality, the savagery’ of the soldiers themselves.91 Calling soldiers ‘mercenaries’ throughout, Buchanan describes Kipling’s Tommy Atkins as ‘a drunken, swearing, coarse-minded Hooligan’ who ‘deserves drumming out of all decent barracks as a monstrosity and a rogue’, having nothing ‘except brute courage, to distinguish [him] from the beasts of the field’.92 Language and social status are intimately intertwined with moral values: the use of ‘the lowest cockney vulgarity […] set[s] the teeth on edge’ in poems which betray a ‘disregard of all literary luxuries, even of grammar and the aspirate’, while they transport the reader ‘to the region of low drinking-dens and gin-palaces, of dirty dissipation and drunken brawls’.93 With ‘no glimpse anywhere of sober and self-respecting human beings’, ‘[t]he voice we hear is always the voice of the soldier […] who is ignorant of the aspirate in either Heaven or Hell’ and whose ‘God is a Cockney “Gawd”’, […] chiefly requisitioned for purposes of blasphemy and furious emphasis’.94 Scarcely human, these soldiers represent ‘only a wild carnival of drunken, bragging, boasting Hooligans in red coats and seamen’s jackets, shrieking to the sound of the banjo and applauding the English Flag’.95 Faced with the uncomfortable fact that these poems were received, ‘not
as a cruel libel on the British soldier, but as a perfect and splendid representation of the red-coated patriot’, Buchanan is bewildered, baffled by the lack of ‘protests awakened by these Cockney caricatures in the ranks of the Army itself, and mystified at the poems’ effect in society; that, far from inviting censure for soldiers ‘our sympathy is eagerly entreated’ by the poems.\textsuperscript{96} Orwell likewise considered Kipling’s use of ‘stylized Cockney’ insulting to those who really spoke it, a mark of the poet’s ‘class-prejudices’ and ‘air of patronage’ towards ‘the private soldier’ who, ‘though lovable and romantic, has to be a comic’.\textsuperscript{97} Orwell’s criticism is primarily literary rather than social; ‘Kipling ought to have known better’ than to mar what could be ‘very beautiful lines’ by failing to override ‘his impulse to make fun of a working-man’s accent’.\textsuperscript{98}

Notwithstanding his own distaste for it, Buchanan suggests that Kipling’s use of cockney accounts for his appeal, acknowledging that ‘even fairly educated readers were sick to death of the insincerities and affectations of the professional “Poets,” […] [and so] turned eagerly to any writer who wrote verse, doggerel even, which seemed thoroughly alive’.\textsuperscript{99} Besant corroborates this point, admiring the ‘directness, force and simplicity’ of Kipling’s writing, the absence of ‘false-colouring’, ‘affectations’ or the sense of ‘straining after a phrase’.\textsuperscript{100} But Besant goes beyond the poems’ cockney style to argue that while the individuals in the \textit{Barrack-Room Ballads} might fall short of the normal standards of civilised society, Kipling succeeds in securing the reader’s sympathy for these figures by representing ‘the man’ behind the label, for what Besant considers the first time in literature: ‘not an actor: a man with the passions, emotions, weaknesses and instincts of humanity […]; always the real man whom the reader sees beneath the uniform and behind the drink and the blackguardism’.\textsuperscript{101} Kipling has ‘the coarsest and roughest materials to deal with’ in the form of ‘private soldiers of the lower type […]’, foul-mouthed and drunken and tricky: ‘yet, such is the force of reality in fiction, the result is that we see the real men behind their vices, and that we understand Tommy Atkins as we never understood him before’.\textsuperscript{102} What neither Besant nor Buchanan accounted for is the fact that according to the changing standards of masculinity against

\textsuperscript{96} Buchanan, ‘The Voice of the Hooligan’, p. 780-81.  
\textsuperscript{97} Orwell, ‘Rudyard Kipling’, pp. 188-189.  
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{100} Besant, ‘Is this the Voice of the Hooligan?’, pp. 32, 34, 31.  
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 32.  
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 34.
which Kipling invited his readers to measure his soldiers, those supposed ‘vices’ were proof of a more authentic manliness than that represented by the sober good behaviour of late-century urban Victorian men. The qualities of physical strength and endurance, and the celebration of violent excesses, are precisely those which Deane identifies as characteristic of the new constructions of masculinity prevailing at the turn of the century.  

Buchanan’s essay explicitly connects the objectionable character of the soldier, held up for commendation as society’s ideal man in Kipling’s poems, with the broader aims and concerns of that society and, especially, with the way that its imperial project was marketed to the lowest classes:

The Mob, promised a merry time by the governing classes, just as the old Roman mob was deluded by bread and pageants—*panem et circenses*—dances merrily to patriotic War-tunes […]. There is an universal scramble for plunder, for excitement, for amusement, for speculation, and above it all the flag of a Hooligan Imperialism is raised, with the proclamation that it is the sole mission of Anglo-Saxon England, forgetful of the task of keeping its own drains in order, to expand and extend its boundaries indefinitely, and, again in the name of the Christianity it has practically abandoned, to conquer and inherit the Earth.

In this view, Kipling’s Tommy Atkins was not only a representative of the lower-class lives which for Buchanan lie firmly outside the remit of literature, but also of a distorted version of imperialism. The inadequacy of Kipling’s soldiers for the noble task of ‘spreading abroad in every country the glory of our Imperial Flag’ reflected back on the nation which sent them; the very validity of the imperial project was threatened by the morally compromised figure of the soldier upon whose labour it depended.

For the most part, in fact, the Tommy Atkins of Kipling’s poems of the 1890s neither knows nor cares where or what he is going to fight. The actual politics of the wars for which the British soldier was recruited generally fall outside the frame of the *Barrack-Room Ballads* – with some significant moments of exception. The speaker of ‘The Widow’s Party’ claims that he and his comrades are ‘called […] out of the barrack-yard’ and sent ‘To Gawd knows where’ (ll. 5-6). Asked ‘What was the end of all the show?’

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Jonnie initially replies ‘Ask my Colonel, for I don’t know’ (ll. 41, 43). This disavowal of engagement in national policy is immediately contradicted, however, as the speaker goes on: ‘We broke a King and we built a road— | A court-house stands where the reg’ment goed’ (ll. 45-46). The ‘raw blood’ that ‘flowed’ (l. 47) is a sacrifice to order, discipline and command. This is a version of imperialism in which British institutions are imposed upon unruly peoples, whose leaders and traditions are removed to make way for the structures of superior European societies. ‘The ‘Eathen’ makes the colonial context even clearer, linking its own representation of British masculinity with the army’s role in imperialism. As discussed above, the British ‘Eathen’ – the working-class recruit in need of training and discipline to grow into his full manhood – is shown to be capable of a certain degree of civilisation. But the poem’s opening and closing stanzas draw a direct contrast between this character and the colonised people invoked in the title. Kipling borrows the first of his opening lines directly from a popular missionary hymn, ‘From Greenland’s Icy Mountains’: ‘The ’eathen in ’is blindness bows down to wood an’ stone; | ’E don’t obey no orders unless they is ’is own’ (ll. 1-2). The supposed unteachability of colonised people is significant because it signals a shift in imperial attitudes, from the assumption that colonies would eventually become self-governing – the Gladstonian ideal – to the belief that non-European peoples would never be politically independent of their colonial rulers. Imperial politics generally remain outside the frame of these poems, but when they do appear, such as in the contrast between the raw British recruit who can be taught to give up swearing and ‘lay ’is mattress square’ (l. 17) and the unimprovable ‘Eathen’, they are revealed as being intimately connected to a version of manliness in which the army – with its freedom from urban or commercial constraints, structures of external discipline, and opportunities to experience the liberating thrill of violence – provides the ideal context for the development of truly ideal masculinity.

Notwithstanding the scarcity of explicit references to the politics that would come to characterise New Imperialism in Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads, then, his representations of soldiers participated in a lively social debate about the aims and methods of the colonial project. As Attridge puts it,

By identifying Kipling with both ‘cockney ignorance’ and a belligerent imperialism, Buchanan voices contemporary anxieties about both the direction of imperialism and the dangers of forms of culture traditionally associated with the British working class, such as music

106 Deane, Masculinity, pp. 10-12.
halls, and which constituted, for some, a threat to national identity. The fact that Walter Besant was moved to offer a considered reply to Buchanan suggests that Kipling and his creation of ‘Tommy Atkins’ occupied a notorious place in this debate in the 1890s.  

Kipling presented an ideal target for anti-war campaigners because he brought together each of the strands of influence which contributed to Buchanan’s sense of ‘a great back-wave […] in the direction of absolute Barbarism’. For Buchanan, Kipling represented the parlous state of popular English literature (‘long past praying for’): ‘The vogue of Mr Kipling’ might be baffling – Buchanan wondered at ‘the cheerful acceptance of his banalities by even educated people’ – but it was ‘a sign of the times’, and ‘[b]ehind that vogue lies, first and foremost, the influence of the Newspaper Press’.

The relationship between Kipling and the newspapers in Buchanan’s tirade is multivalent. Buchanan claimed that Kipling’s writing appealed to precisely the same tastes which were cultivated by contemporary cheap journalism. Newspapers were deeply implicated in the social changes which Buchanan deplored, and in propagating the version of Britain’s imperial identity which Buchanan felt to be so distant from a ‘nobler Imperialism’ of the past. Moreover, as well as being philosophically in sympathy with what Buchanan saw as ‘the wave of false Imperialism’, Kipling’s poems appealed in form and style to the reader of the ‘yellow’ press accustomed to sensationalism:

> the spirit abroad to-day is the spirit of ephemeral Journalism, and whatever accords with that spirit—its vulgarity, its flippancy, and its radical unintelligence—is certain to attain tremendous vogue. Anything that demands a moment’s thought, or a moment’s severe attention, anything that is not thoroughly noisy, blatant, cocksure, and self-assertive, is caviare to that Man in the Street on whom cheap Journalism depends.

As a writer for the *Morning Post* put it in a summary of Buchanan’s article, the poet ‘has prostituted great talents in order to outdo the journalists at their own game’. But Kipling’s success was not attributed simply to the poet’s being in tune with the press in language and political philosophy, writing a kind of journalism-in-verse perfectly fitted

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109 Ibid., p. 777-787.
110 Ibid., p. 788.
111 Ibid., p. 783.
112 *Morning Post*, 30 November 1899, p. 6.
to the newspaper-reader’s existing prejudices and preferences. Buchanan notes that Kipling was ‘hailed at every street-corner and crowned by every newspaper’, arguing that the newspapers themselves were complicit in assuring Kipling’s success, promoting and ‘booming’ his poems while using his increasingly famous name as a marketing strategy.\textsuperscript{113} It is therefore apt that the newspapers continued to provide a medium for the ongoing exploration of the representations of masculinity, military heroism and imperial ambition by poets replying or retorting to Kipling, making use of his characteristic idiomatic cockney style, taking on his characters and trying to imitate their voices.

The soldier-poets who emulated Kipling – whether to assent to his representations of them or to offer contesting versions – were not simply making an aesthetic choice. Kipling’s version of Tommy Atkins enjoyed such far-reaching popular appeal that Major General George Younghusband claimed in his memoirs that ‘Kipling made the modern soldier’.\textsuperscript{114} Though Orwell suggested in 1941 that ‘[i]t is very hard’ to ‘imagine any private soldier, in the nineties or now, reading Barrack-Room Ballads and feeling that here was a writer who spoke for him’, Peck recounts Younghusband’s assertion that, having ‘never heard the words and expressions used by Kipling’s soldiers’ as a young soldier himself, in later years he observed that ‘the soldiers thought, and talked, and expressed themselves exactly like Rudyard Kipling had taught them’.\textsuperscript{115} Paula Krebs says of the newspapers and public opinion that ‘[t]he newspapers were considering “what the public wants” while teaching it what to want’; analogously, Kipling’s soldier poems claimed to represent real military values and characters while, by their own success, they brought those realities and characters into being.\textsuperscript{116} Constructions of masculinity and imperialism were in flux, and Kipling’s representations of Tommy Atkins could feel novel, provisional, and available for critical scrutiny, as Buchanan’s response makes clear. This Tommy Atkins was both a fictional and a historical figure, a textual phenomenon closely linked to the newspaper page, and a real man of flesh and blood – and, as the next chapter shows, often with a pen in his hand. Kipling’s ballad forms and demotic cockney voices evoked an oral tradition of

\textsuperscript{113} Buchanan, ‘The Voice of the Hooligan’, p. 783.
\textsuperscript{114} Deane, \textit{Masculinity}, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{116} Paula M. Krebs, \textit{Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 4-5.
unlettered poets which empowered ‘people who would never normally think poetry had anything for them’ not only to read but also to write poems, offering apparently simple but vivid rhythms and rhymes which could carry a reader along and enhance a poem’s mnemonic qualities.\footnote{Howarth, ‘Kipling Plays the Empire’, p. 607.} Indeed, as Henville points out, ‘Tommy’s rousing, catchy rhythms […] can be easily picked up and taken home; their stringing in the trendy rhythms of the music hall suggests they […] were made to be looted’.\footnote{Henville, ‘Late Victorian Ballad Translation’, p. 93.} Meanwhile, like Kipling himself, the imitators and respondents to the Barrack-Room Ballads found that newspaper publication afforded poets the opportunity to intervene actively, to contest and critique representations of soldiers, the military, and British imperial masculinity, and to write back to culturally powerful voices.
Chapter three

Soldiers and civilians: Tommy Atkins, imperial masculinities and Rudyardkiplingese

Julian Ralph, journalist and editor of the Bloemfontein Friend, claimed in 1901 that Kipling had ‘stirred the Tommy’s heart […] so deeply […] with those verses which treat of or appeal to the soldier that […] every tenth man in the ranks aspires to be regarded as a disciple of this inspired and inspiring writer’.

But not all soldier-poets expressed gratitude for Kipling’s powerful social and literary influence. A writer calling himself ‘Mark Thyme’ contributed to the Bloemfontein Friend ‘A Recipe’ for verses in the style of Kipling’s Barrack Room Ballads:

The man what writes a poem
In praise of our Tommy A.’s
Ain’t got no call to study
Their manners, nor talk, nor ways,
E’s only to fake up something
What’s Barracky—more or less—
And civilians don’t know as it’s rubbish and so
The Ballad’s a big success. […]

Take the slang of the camp
(What’s easy to vamp)
And some delicate soldier wheeze,
Call the Guard-room the ‘Clink,’
And describe any drink,
As a ‘Fall in’ or ‘Stand at ease’;
Then you mix the ‘ole lot
And you serve it up ‘ot;
From ingredients sich as these
Form that singular salad
A Barrack-room Ballad
In Rudyardkiplingese.

Van Wyk Smith reads this ‘unflattering recipe’ as deploring ‘the effect of Kipling on the khaki muse’, noting the ‘problem’ that ‘most of Kipling’s imitators’, even ‘the man in khaki’ himself, ‘stopped short at the obvious attractions of the “barracky” style’, rather than engaging more thoughtfully with the political and ideological implications of

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Kipling’s representations of soldiers, masculinity and imperialism.³ Tim Kendall, meanwhile, cites Thyme’s lines as evidence that ‘not every British soldier in South Africa was persuaded of the authenticity of [Kipling’s] portrayals’ of them, seeing it as a criticism of Kipling himself and a ‘pointed’ suggestion ‘that the famous poet need not bother researching his subject’.⁴ If Kipling is part of the target of the poem, however, it also has a wider reach. Rather than deploring the efforts of his fellow soldier-poets, Thyme criticises civilians who took Kipling’s poems as an infallible formula for their own efforts, seeking to achieve ‘a big success’ without bothering to ‘study’ the ‘manners’, ‘talk’ and ‘ways’ of the soldiers themselves. Poets making use of ‘Rudyardkiplingese’ as a way of claiming spurious ‘autopsy’ – McLoughlin’s term for the authority of eyewitness experience – effectively silenced the voice of the real soldier, contributing to rather than redressing civilian ignorance, and widening the breach between civilian and military perspectives.⁵ If part of the legacy of the Barrack-Room Ballads was to prove that ‘Tommy’ was ‘most remarkable like you’, those civilian poets who appropriated the soldier’s cockney voice without taking the trouble to get to know the man behind the label did the serving soldier as much of a disservice as those who denigrated him as a scoundrel or a hooligan.⁶

Novelist Marie Corelli lambasted exactly this phenomenon in ‘The Laurels of the Brave’, a short story published in the London weekly newspaper The Sphere. In Corelli’s tale, the fashionable Mrs Arteroyd achieves ‘society laurels’, more valuable to her than her husband’s Victoria Cross, by attempting to ‘Do a poem’.⁷ Thyme’s poem describes Mrs Arteroyd’s verses precisely: the mixture of ‘a ’aporth of ‘Industani | And a pennorth of Sergeants’ mess’ results in incomprehensible nonsense; ‘the meanin’s all wrong’ (ll. 13-15). In spite of this, in the story, as in the poem, the combination of civilian ignorance of and disdain for the realities of the soldier’s life means that, far away from the war itself, such efforts are rewarded with ‘a big success’ (l. 8). Kipling’s

influence is lamented as a means by which lazy writers could avoid their duty to their subjects, reinforcing rather than overthrowing the stereotypes that kept the real-life Tommy underappreciated. Read in this way, Mark Thyme’s ‘Recipe’, which itself makes playful use of Kipling’s characteristic Cockney style, asserts the right of the soldier-poet to speak up for himself, in the privileged space of the newspaper, in reply to Kipling’s non-military imitators whose imagined readers are an audience of civilians (who ‘don’t know as it’s rubbish’, l. 7) rather than Tommy himself. Kipling’s style and the newspaper page together provided the structure within which soldier-poets, and other sympathetic writers, could respond to the representations and misrepresentations of them, and could articulate their own versions of military and imperial masculinities.

It may seem surprising that soldiers of the rank and file should be capable of making such literary interventions to a national cultural debate, in light of the facts of late-Victorian army recruitment. However, army and social reforms of the final decades of the nineteenth century had transformed the educational landscape for the common soldier. Edward Spiers has shown that, thanks to the Forster Education Act of 1870 and changes to the military’s own education requirements, ‘illiteracy […] diminished sharply (from an affliction of 90 per cent of rankers in 1860 to virtual elimination by the end of the century)’. While ‘the standard reached by the majority of those in the ranks was elementary at best’, a ‘literary aptitude’ was nonetheless ‘far from rare’. As the anonymous editor of Pen Pictures of the War by Men at the Front (1900) writes in the Preface to that collection, ‘[n]ever before has Britain sent forth to the battlefield so large a force of men sufficiently educated to write home. The war, therefore, has been described from day to day, not like all other wars, by professional journalists or by literary officers, but by the rank and file’.

Some of the poems discussed in this chapter and in Chapter four are by serving soldiers. More are by unknown or anonymous figures, most of them probably civilians, though not all are guilty of the crime of ‘Rudyardkiplingese’. As Thyme’s ‘Recipe’ indicates, the poetry which appeared in the Friend was richly influenced by the characters

10 Ibid.
and forms of the *Barrack-Room Ballads*, even when what the soldier-poets had to say contradicted or complicated Kipling’s representations of them. The same is true of civilian newspaper poets in Britain and around the empire. As a body of work, these texts demonstrate how dominant Kipling’s vision of soldierly masculinity had become by the opening months of the South African War, by which point assertions of continuities between military and civilian values were commonplace and uncontroversial. However, while claims about a ‘family likeness’ between Tommy Atkins and his civilian counterparts allowed non-military men to share in the glories of Tommy’s successes, they also rendered the civilian vulnerable to damage by association with the imperial army’s setbacks and failures in South Africa. If British manliness was epitomised in the figure of the ordinary soldier, then British masculinity in general – and, indeed, the imperial project as a whole – could be undermined by events that called into question the superiority of the British army. Poems that represented or endeavoured to speak for Tommy Atkins, and the newspapers in which they appeared, could make powerful interventions in debates about aspects of British national character and military behaviour. Poets were inspired and provoked by news items, while the poems themselves took their place in a dynamic context of publication, circulation and performance, becoming artefacts of the significant interplay between the different forms in which late Victorian imperial military masculinity was articulated, on the newspaper page and the music hall stage. Aspiring to the mnemonic qualities of Kipling’s ballads, and issuing the same invitations to onward oral transmission, blurring the lines between social commentary and entertainment, newspaper poems written after the pattern established by the *Barrack-Room Ballads* could perform a range of functions, both journalistic and literary. The chapter begins with poems that, like Kipling’s ‘That Day’, had the potential to disrupt satisfying journalistic platitudes about troops’ ‘gallant behaviour’. Others offered imaginative reassurance to readers troubled by news of disasters at the front, or anxious or angry about failures of army equipment. A satirical alphabet book, published as a collaboration between *Daily Chronicle* writer Harold Begbie and *Westminster Gazette* cartoonist and assistant editor Frances Carruthers Gould, points to Kipling’s status as preeminent poet of the empire in 1900 (see Figure 3.1). ‘When the
Empire wants a stitch in her | Send for Kipling and for Kitchener'; big K and little k, the diminutive poet and the towering military general, were presented as equally vital to the wartime empire, fulfilling linked or comparable roles. In his 1902 poem ‘The Islanders’, however, Kipling assumed the mantle of the poet-prophet, using the figure of the soldier to make a very different set of appeals to the reader from those in the Barrack-Room Ballads. Critical responses to representations of the soldier in ‘The Islanders’, and in Hardy’s ‘Christmas Ghost-Story’, expressed resentment and bewilderment; both poets were felt to be risking Tommy Atkins’ fragile reputation by deviating from the pattern established by Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads. Kipling’s soldier poems had a clear influence on the representations of soldiers in later poems, and arguably on their real status in society, but Barrack-Room Ballads also shaped readers’ expectations of the wartime newspaper poem.

In its 15th edition by 1899, Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads continued to inspire direct imitations during the South African War, as newspaper poets sought ways to respond to news items. One comment in the Daily Paper in January 1900, noting that ‘deserters from the army and navy continue to give themselves up under the stimulus of war and the hope of seeing active service’, prompted two poets to turn to Kipling’s example in order to explore the experiences of these former deserters.12 One was Begbie, a journalist who achieved popular success with his naval ballad ‘The Handy Man’ in 1899 and published poems in the Morning Post, Westminster Gazette and Pall Mall Gazette as well as in weekly and monthly periodicals throughout the war, collecting many

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12 Quoted in Pall Mall Gazette, 13 January 1900, p. 2, as the epigram to ‘Deserters’.
of them in a 1900 volume. Begbie’s Kiplingesque ‘Deserter’, like the rookies in ‘The Young British Soldier’ and ‘The ‘Eathen’, rebels against the constraints of military training and is incapable of keeping his belongings in a manner which satisfies the corporal. ‘He wasn’t the man who could understand the grind of the Army mill— | Why the tongue of a buckle must gleam like a bit, with the first six months of it drill’ (ll. 25-26). He does not look the part of the soldier either, ‘With his boots in kinks from the foot to the knee, and as dull as a busby case; | There wasn’t an awkwarder gawk in the troop’ (ll. 4-5). The ballad tells of the corporal’s sharp tongue, the sneer of the sergeant and the frowns of the captain which eventually induce the disappointed recruit to ‘run away from the barrack-square’ (l. 30), his disgrace complete when he pitches himself over the barrack wall to land ‘on his pusher’s shawl’ (l. 10). The poet’s note explains that ‘pusher’ literally means ‘nursemaid, one who pushes a perambulator, but applies to any sweetheart’; the deserter is both infantilised and emasculated by his escape, and so demeaned by his inability to conform to military expectations that his superiors do not ‘hustle to fetch him back’: ‘There was better men than a swob like him to take their ease in the clink’ (ll. 11-12). The inability to conform with military strictures is presented as a failure of masculinity, especially since Begbie uses the loose anapaestic heptameters of Kipling’s ‘Soldier an’ Sailor Too’, recalling the earlier poem’s model of ideal military manliness. While Kipling uses a septet each with five lines that repeat or rhyme with the title, so that the exemplary ‘soldier and sailor too’ resounds throughout the poem, Begbie uses the aabb quatrain of many of the other Barrack-Room Ballads. These couplets invite the reader to anticipate the rhyme pair, with the potential to introduce humour, as in the description of the runaway soldier’s civilian life on a ‘Yorkshire farm’: ‘They gave him a cottage with fourteen bob, his work was the worst of the lot, | And he married the ugliest maid in the place, and she called him a drunken sot’ (ll. 15-16). At the outbreak of war, the deserter is inspired to return to the army: when ‘the bugles rang, and the village talked, and he borrowed the farmer’s Post, | He spelled it through with a muttering lip and a face that was white as a ghost’ (ll. 17-18); but even this reversal begins ignominiously. After he has ‘slunk away’ from home, his wife seeks him in the tavern, ‘And just at the edge of her apron peeped the end of a rolling-pin!’ (l. 20). The

13 Harold Begbie, _The Handy Man: And Other Verses_ (London: Grant Richards, 1900).
threat of domestic violence is represented as a further comic emasculation. The woman’s low opinion of her husband is revealed to be undeserved:

He wasn’t there: he was far away, and he’s farther away by now,
Riding a horse that would split in two if you hitched him on to a plough,
Riding a horse at the back of French, riding him straight and well,
With a lance that drives like a flame of fire through the guttering lines of hell.

(The Deserter’, ll. 21-24)

The horse mirrors its rider: an unpromising candidate for glory who turns out to be capable of surprising focus and courage. The redemption is only temporary, however. Begbie is keen to distinguish the momentary valour of this returning deserter from the superior masculinity of ‘the men who last, who go through the mill, and stay’, even while he commends the returner who ‘knew it was right to go, | [Who] has run away from the barrack-square and [who] won’t run away from the foe’ (ll. 28-29). In order to preserve the highest honours for the loyal soldier, the deserter’s fate is bleak: ‘when it’s over he’ll slouch away to the peace of a dalesman’s life, | He’ll carry the buckets of wash to the pigs and his fourteen bob to his wife’ (ll. 31-32). The potentially idyllic ‘peace of a dalesman’s life’ is scornfully (and misogynistically) exposed as a shameful degeneration, from the incandescent glory of battle to the degraded life of a swineherd who is dominated by his ugly wife.

The second poem to cite the Daily News’ comment about returning deserters as its epigraph quotes Kipling’s ‘Young British Soldier’ directly when it addresses deserters as ‘You that once were a young “recruit”’, but this anonymous poem offers the prodigal soldier a more comprehensive redemption than Begbie does.¹⁵ Like Kipling’s Edward Clay, who goes ‘Back to the Army Again’ as William Parsons when he finds himself ill-suited to civilian life, the subjects of this Pall Mall Gazette poem turn out to have been more marked by military values than their short-lived army careers might have suggested. Notwithstanding their dubious appearance – ‘slinking’ in ‘taverns’, ‘starved and sodden with drinking’, having learned to ‘stagger’ and ‘slouch instead of swagger’ (ll. 9-12) – these ‘renegade’ soldiers (l. 13) find themselves unexpectedly moved by the appeal of duty: ‘Come! for your heart after all, through all, | Leaps to answer the bugle call’ (ll. 7-8). Rejoining in wartime the forces they had deserted during peace, they are promised not just the rewards of dutiful service but an experience of manly pleasure: ‘Bring your foolhardy self that runs, | Fiercely glad, on the roaring guns’ (ll. 15-16). The

¹⁵ ‘Deserters’, Pall Mall Gazette, 13 January 1900, p. 2 (l. 3).
experience of battle, rather than training and drill, amplifies the redemptive potential of military life, though it is the military beat of the parade-ground drums that calls the soldier back in the regular pattern of trochees and dactyls in each line, *tum-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta*.
The returning deserters’ ragged appearances are revealed as ‘disguises’ (l. 17); the image of a ‘Hungry vagabond, houseless vagrant’ turns out to be just ‘the mask wherein you lurk’ (ll. 119-21). The poet exhorts the deserter to ‘prove yourself still a man’ (l. 24), and so the soldier does, finding ‘Once again you can lift your head, | With pulse that throbs to the tingling drum’ (ll. 30-31). In a final surprising move, in keeping with Kipling’s example in poems like ‘Tommy’, the closing stanza exalts this ‘ne’er-do-well and tatterdemalion’ above ‘the staid civilians’ and ‘toiling millions’ whose city lives leave no space for the expression of such martial manliness (ll. 25-29), though perhaps a newspaper reader who found that their own ‘pulse’ began to ‘throb’ to ‘the tingling drum’ of the poem’s rhythms might identify more firmly with the soldier than with their ‘staid’ civilian neighbours. These examples show poets responding directly to Kipling’s recruits and returners in the *Barrack-Room Ballads* to affirm the transformative power of the military to redeem the damage done to masculinity by poverty, disadvantage and modern urban living.

A similar story is told in a newspaper poem published in South Africa and preserved in the Button scrapbooks of newspaper clippings from Natal, in which W.H. Paddon of Port Elizabeth describes the transformation of ‘brother Jim’, from a wastrel, good only for ‘keeping City pavements down’ in his daily dawdle about the town in search of work, to ‘a gallant soldier’ in a mounted corps of Colonial volunteers raised from the British colonies in South Africa: ‘Gallant fellows every one—all true grit, of course; | For the best Colonial blood goes to Brabant’s Horse’.16 The speaker addresses the apparent paradox of this claim which unites his brother with ‘the best Colonial blood’ by explaining that while civilian life has not shown Jim to his best advantage, the characteristics which make him apparently ‘disinclined for work’ (l. 2) are actually those which fit him particularly well to ‘stir his stumps’ in the military (l. 3):

But although they’re down on Jim, he’s the best of all the lot,
And if he has a failing, ‘seems to me
’Tis a hatred of confinement and of every kind of ‘shop,'

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And a very natural longing to be free.

(‘The Good-For-Nothing Beggar’, ll. 17-20)

The army is the place where Jim’s positive qualities, in uncomfortable tension with civilian society’s demands, can find full expression and be valued. But as well as providing the context in which his existing qualities can shine, the army is also credited with contributing to the transformation which his brother proleptically imagines witnessing at Jim’s homecoming:

And the lad, with manlier stride, will trot off by father’s side,
And the street will be alive at sight of him,
And we’ll bless the happy day when the bugle called away,
And made a gallant soldier of our Jim.

(‘The Good-For-Nothing Beggar’, ll. 33-36)

Jim’s whole family is pictured basking in the glory of Jim’s improvement, participating in the credit for destroying the enemy (‘when the war is over, and we’ve polished off the Boer’, l. 31) and anticipating personal accolades for Jim himself, for which ‘we daily search the papers for some story of his capers, | And of something very daring he had done’ (ll. 27-28). The manliness Jim attains is pictured as being established by public recognition, in line with Deane’s thesis about the increasing emphasis on external validation rather than internal self-assurance. The importance of newspapers to the construction and confirmation of these kinds of masculine identities is corroborated by the poem’s epigraph, a quotation from a newspaper which reports: ‘Brabant’s Horse are doing well. They are here, there, and everywhere, and always at the right spot at the right time’ – just the kind of note for which Jim’s family so eagerly scan the columns.

The story this poem tells is disrupted, however, by closer attention to this epigraph, the second sentence of which reads: ‘The motto of the regiment is said to be “Follo Brabantia enni ware”, which being interpreted, is “Where he goes, we go”’. The quotation purports to come from the Daily Lyre – not the name of any real South African or British publication, but a recognisable satirical title, as in the siege newspaper the Ladysmith Lyre, which (in Brian Cheadle’s phrase) ‘underline[d] the pun in its title by proudly announcing on its masthead: “News you can actually rely on as false”’. It is possible that Paddon was responding in earnest to a line he had read and not recognised

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as parody. But there is an alternative, satirical reading of the poem, in which the epigraph plays on the convention in newspaper poetry of citing a line from a news report in a headnote. In this reading, the presentation of Brother Jim with his ‘gee-gee’, the touching fear and pride of ‘Mater’, ‘Pater’ and the brother who narrates the poem, and the ‘jingle, jingle, jingle, and the tramp of horses’ feet’ which heralds the arrival of ‘another Troop of Horse trotting down the street’ in the poem’s ‘Chorus’ are ironic comments on popular expressions of patriotism and the values of masculinity which they imply. In this light, the poet uses the Kiplingesque trope of military redemption, a tripping iambic metre and a familiar music-hall-style structure of verse and refrain to suggest that the apparently ‘Gallant fellows’ of colonial volunteer regiments are no more than ‘Good-For-Nothing Beggar[s]’. The title’s direct allusion to Kipling’s ‘absent-minded beggar’ and the two references to newspapers, in the epigraph and the image of Jim’s family ‘search[ing] the daily papers’ for news of his glorious exploits, indicate that the press and Kipling are both implicated in the valorisation of ‘good-for-nothing beggars’ as glorious heroes, and in the process which involves constructing a lack of discipline as a form of ideal masculinity. Read in this way, the poem’s speaker takes up a position equivalent to that of the Prodigal Son’s older brother in the parable, resenting the honours accorded to someone he sees as less deserving than himself. The poem appears to contest not only Kipling’s admiration for the ordinary soldier, but more broadly to reject his construction of military masculinity as superior to civilian manly values. The ‘hatred of confinement’ and ‘longing to be free’ which make civilian life intolerable to Jim are depicted as ‘very natural’, implying that the real credit should go to the neglected, hardworking brother who denies these urges and masters his ‘natural’ instincts.

In either reading, though it develops the trope of the army being the making of a man familiar from *Barrack-Room Ballads*, Paddon’s poem departs from Kipling’s example by setting up military and civilian values in tension with one another. In contrast, a poem entitled ‘John’s Way’, which appeared originally in the *Spectator* and was subsequently reprinted in newspapers around the empire, sets out to prove that the martial values exemplified by Tommy Atkins in South Africa are paralleled by a civilian

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equivalent to those values in London. The poem’s John Bull is a stock character representing England, traceable at least as far back as John Arbuthnot’s 1712 satire *The History of John Bull*. Over the nearly two hundred years since Arbuthnot’s text, which was still in print in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the figure of John Bull had become an instantly recognisable national symbol: middle-class, middle-aged but virile, with a drum-like belly and round, ruddy face, usually dressed in a shallow top hat and buff waistcoat. The illustrated front page of a pamphlet of poems by R. Adams Foster indicates the traditional relationship between Tommy Atkins and John Bull (see Figure 3.2); a well-fed and well-dressed John surveys Tommy, with a patronising smile of appreciation at his point-device uniform and shiny shoes. The scrawny Tommy salutes John, his rotund authorising father-figure (presumably rather more well-fed than the actual fathers of most British privates). Tommy is ‘Thankful’, but so, the illustration implies, is John. This John Bull of popular culture tended to be more interested in beer than politics, but he was stubborn and strong, and ready to cudgel anybody who insulted him or his friends; appeals to John Bull’s patriotic feeling would fall on fertile ground. In one characteristic music hall song widely quoted in the opening weeks of the

Figure 3.2: R. Adams Foster, ‘Thankful Tommy’, illustrated by A.S. Forrest (London: Dean and Son, 1900). © British Library Board. British Library, Pamphlets on the Boer War, Cup 21 ff 1 16.

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20 Hosea, Jun., ‘John’s Way’, *Spectator*, 11 November 1899, p. 15. Reprinted in the *Ross-shire Journal*, 17 November 1899, p. 7; *Bridport News*, 17 November 1899, p. 3; *Larne Times*, 18 November 1899, p. 8; *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 18 November 1899, p. 3; *Wrexham Weekly Advertiser*, 18 November 1899, p. 3; *Cape Town Weekly*, 13 December 1899, p. 32; *Newcastle Morning Herald* (New South Wales), 6 January 1900, p. 12; *Evening Star* (Western Australia), 20 January 1900, p. 4, and in the *Evening Post* (New Zealand), 20 January 1900, p. 3.


war, the image of John Bull the Englishman is layered on top of another traditional image of imperial Britain as a lion:

Then take the muzzle off the Lion,
And let him have a go!
Is Boer or Briton going to rule?
That’s what we want to know!
Whisper to him ‘Majuba Hill,’
Then at his chain he’ll pull;
There’s only room for one out there,
And that’s John Bull.\(^{23}\)

W.H. Auden’s ‘Letter to Lord Byron’ looked back on John Bull from the 1930s as the epitome of ‘the good old days’, a ‘swaggering bully’ with ‘acres of self-confidence’, who could not survive ‘Ypres and Pascchendaele’.\(^{24}\) In 1899, however, he was very much alive, and in Hosea Junior’s *Spectator* poem ‘John’s Way’ demonstrates his family resemblance to the working soldier by his readiness to resort to fisticuffs in a tavern brawl. But the poem offers a more thoroughgoing account of the characteristics of British martial (or at least pugilistic) masculinity, unsettling familiar assumptions about the social distance between John and Tommy. The poet describes John Bull as peaceful until provoked, but decisive in violence when attacked:

He’s glad to tread the peaceful track
Till others hits him fust, ker-smack!
An’ then he’ll turn tu hit ’em back.
Fur thar’s John’s way.

(‘John’s Way’, ll. 5-8)

As the accented English indicates, Hosea uses Kipling’s model to disrupt John Bull’s formerly secure middle-class status. This may reflect fin-de-siècle concerns about the expanding middle classes; it certainly allows for a much closer identification between John and Tommy than was typical, as a cockney speaker describes in admiring and familiar terms the Britishness exemplified by John Bull. The relish of ‘ker-smack!’ indicates the pleasure with which the speaker pictures John Bull embracing the chance to use his fists to right a perceived wrong. In this account, John Bull is fond of military spectacle, enjoys ‘paradin’ up an’ down | With all the rabble in the town | A’shoutin’

\(^{23}\) Here, There and Everywhere, *Westminster Gazette*, 14 October 1899, p. 8; *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 16 October 1899, p. 3; *Lancashire Evening Post*, 16 October 1899, p. 2; *Workington Star*, 20 October 1899, p. 6; *Era*, 21 October 1899, p. 17; *Halifax Courier*, 21 October 1899, p. 7; *Buckingham Advertiser*, 21 October 1899, p. 7; *Brighouse News*, 27 October 1899, p. 3; *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 28 October 1899, p. 3.

out “Hurrah!” (ll. 10-12). He has no false modesty, but unlike those ‘Thet brags uv what they dursn’t do, | J. B.—he meks his boasts come true’ (ll. 30-31):

‘I know thot I’m a man of worth,‘
Ses John, ‘an’ great an’ good by birth;
I’ll lick the biggest foe on earth
Es dares me to the fray!’
Such blusterin’ mayn’t be highly-bred,
But, all the same, he goes ahead
An’ does exactly what he said,
Fur ther’s John’s way!

(‘John’s Way’, ll. 16-23)

The strenuous insistence that John Bull can be relied upon to keep his promises is offered as reassurance in anxious times. The opening weeks of the war had seen defeat follow defeat; Hosea obliquely insists on the inevitability of ultimate victory through his claim about English national character. The poem makes an implicit appeal to examples from military history where success followed failure, bolstering spirits that might have been wavering in the face of the challenge faced in South Africa: ‘when the little job’s begun, | He don’t leave off until it’s done’ (ll. 14-15):

But when he’s took his coat off—my!
Yer can’t prevent him ef yer try,
He’ll do the business thoroughly,
    Fur ther’s John’s way!

(‘John’s Way’, ll. 45-48)

Looking forward to triumph, the poem also claims that John will be magnanimous in victory.

In Barrack-Room Ballads, Kipling’s ‘Tommy’ appeals to readers to recognise continuities between the qualities of soldiers, both good and bad, and the equally mixed characteristics of civilians: neither ‘thin red eroes’ nor ‘blackguards’, Kipling invites the reader to notice that the serving soldier is ‘most remarkable like you’.25 Hosea’s poem makes the same demand:

John he’s a foolish trait or so,
He’s vain, he’s noisy, yet we know
He hes a lion heart, although
    He tries so hard ter bray; […]

An’, after all, he might be wuss.
He ain’t a vicious kind uv cuss,
But rather like the rest uv us,

25 Kipling, ‘Tommy’ (ll. 25-26).
A mixer—gold an’ clay.  

(‘John’s Way’, ll. 25-28, 33-36)

If Tommy Atkins stands for the whole British army, reflecting and consolidating constructions of masculinity based on aggression, freedom from physical and psychological constraints exemplified in the transgression of civilian norms and rules, and the justification of behaviour by a male peer-group, this poet’s version of John Bull is cut from the same cloth. Acknowledging that ‘J. Bull has got his faults’ (l. 1) and appearing to refute any claim to national or racial superiority (‘There’s furrin’ chaps es good as he, | An’ some thert’s wuss’, ll. 2-3), the poet insists that ‘He’ is like ‘us’—uniting in that ‘us’ the cockney speaker, who may be Tommy Atkins himself, and the newspaper reader. Appearing in the Spectator in November 1899 and making its journey around the British Empire in the pages of English newspapers during the disasters of ‘black week’ (10-17 December), through a bleak new year and into the first months of 1900, ‘John’s Way’ offered a reassuring counterpoint to news of British setbacks. It encouraged the anxious civilian reader to keep faith, presenting them with an irreverent but flattering portrait of John Bull with which it invited them to identify, offering them a share in what it presents as John Bull’s inevitable glory. Furthermore, the sense that the cockney speaker looked at his social superiors with admiration, confident that they were working together with a shared goal, counterbalanced reports of failures in military planning or resourcing which generated sympathy for the ordinary soldier at the expense of his leaders.

This blurring of class lines in the relationships between different expressions of Britishness foreshadows a debate prompted by celebrations after the lifting of the siege of Mafeking in May 1900, when ‘hysterical, euphoric relief’ was expressed in riotous street parties in London.\textsuperscript{26} So astonishing was the outpouring of public exuberance that it introduced a new word (‘Mafficking’) to the language, to describe (mostly in a derogatory way) ‘extravagant’ celebrations.\textsuperscript{27} J.A. Hobson, a fierce critic of imperialism and jingoism, called the Mafeking festivities a ‘democratic saturnalia’, a ‘pulsation of the primitive lust which exults in the downfall and the suffering of an enemy’ and an expression of ‘animal hate, vindictiveness, and bloodthirstiness’.\textsuperscript{28} In line with many

contemporary newspaper commentaries, regardless of whether these were taking a condemnatory or an indulgent tone, Hobson assumed that the uproar began with the working classes: ‘the mob-nature [had] seized the coarser and more reckless elements in the community’.29 But historian Bill Nasson has found that the crowds who responded to ‘a festive social opportunity […] to run music hall onto the streets for a communal knees-up […] tended to be composed heavily of patriotic middle-class and lower-middle class men’, rather than the ‘mindless […] mob’ which Hobson imagines.30 Paula Krebs observes that ‘[n]ewspapers and journals touted the mixed-class nature of the Mafeking festivities’, the image of ‘costermongers mingled with gentlemen’, precisely because the celebrations represented a significant shift: ‘Mafeking Night made jingoism safe for the middle classes by blurring the distinction between jingoism, which had been seen as working-class over-enthusiasm for the empire, and patriotism, that middle-class virtue of support for one’s country against foreign opposition’.31 Indeed, notwithstanding his anxious insistence to the contrary, Hobson’s horror at the public expression of patriotic passion implies an awareness of precisely this point. Hobson describes the temptations of euphoria as a social ‘leveller’ against which ‘Sex, age, nurture, education, refined surroundings, are of little avail’.32 Hobson saw the mafficking crowds ‘disclosing human nature in its common character, and teaching an equality which is no flattering ideal, but a convincing testimony to the descent of man’.33 For Hobson, this threatened the very essence of British masculinity:

[T]he distinctive feature of ‘Mafeking’ was the wide prevalence of a sudden fury which broke down for the nonce the most sacred distinction of classes, and fused the most antagonistic elements of London life for a brief moment into anarchistic fraternity.

Under the force of this passion collapse all those qualities upon which Englishmen, in their normal life, most plume themselves. The true John Bull, whether he be farmer, merchant, shopkeeper, or artisan, is an orderly man, a respecter of persons and property, a lover of fair play, a hater of unnecessary pain and cruelty: such are the solid foundations of his respectability and success in life.34

For Hobson, ‘the true John Bull’ is firmly middle-class, exemplifying the ‘qualities’ of an ‘Englishm[an]’ which are fundamentally inconsistent with the characteristics represented

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29 Hobson, Psychology, p. 31.
32 Hobson, Psychology, p. 31.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 32.
by Tommy Atkins. Hobson distances his conception of Englishness from both New Imperialism and the changing models of masculinity exemplified in Kipling’s soldier poems – and thus places the ideals of Englishness out of reach of the soldiers themselves. ‘Mafficking’ behaviour was a threat because it disrupted the social order; Hobson’s hopeful suggestion that such disruption would last ‘for a brief moment’ is belied by his own observation that what the Mafeking celebrations revealed was not a temporary ‘collapse’ in standards but a general truth about ‘human nature’, with unflattering implications for constructions of British masculinity. While Hobson deplored the family resemblances revealed by patriotic and jingoistic feeling, the Spectator poet Hosea embraced them, bringing John Bull and Tommy Atkins together in terms and accents reminiscent of Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads. The poet assents to a changing view of masculinity as he traces a line of family resemblance directly between Tommy Atkins in South Africa, through the riotous middle-class ‘Jingoes’ who would be condemned later in 1900 for their ‘mafficking’ behaviour, to the newspaper poet himself and the reader: both John and Tommy are ‘rather like the rest uv us’ (l. 35).

The idea of a family resemblance is taken further in a poem depicting ‘Cousin Billy’ by Robert C. Russell in the Black and White Budget. Using a version of Kipling’s demotic cockney, the speaker sketches the lines of family characteristics:

‘Tommy ’as a sturdy cousin,
     Servin’ with ’im at the Cape
’Ain’t a reg’lar, but ’e doesn’t
     Want much lickin’ into shape.
Quite a stranger to the Barracks—
     Can’t explain each pipe-clay rule
But ’e’s got the pluck ’istoric
     Of ’is uncle, Johnny Bull.

(Cousin Billy’, ll. 1-8)

The debt to Kipling is clear, though in contrast with Kipling’s representations of the Army playing a key role in disciplining recruits in order that their masculine qualities are expressed, in Russell’s poem martial masculinity is more a question of natural instinct and inheritance than training. While Atkins’ military background makes him ‘a linesman’ (l. 9), his colonial cousin has been drafted into a volunteer corps from civilian life. His role in South Africa is as a kind of advance guard: Billy ‘Scouts the donga, clears each

kopje’ (l. 13). The physical traits which render him well-fitted for this are represented as proof of his British heritage: he is ‘Slippery as a Thames-bred eel’ (l. 14). Courage and valour likewise elicit expressions of mutual admiration which centre on notions of family likeness and loyalty:

John’s ‘dead nuts’ upon ‘is nephews—
Billy’s never ‘eard of ‘flinch;’
Though ’e ain’t been classed at Sand’urst,
When the old shoe begins to pinch,
’E’s as steady as the Gin’ral,
’E’s a solider—every inch.

(‘Cousin Billy’, ll. 21-26)

Together, Tommy and Billy are ‘a pair it’s ’ard to floor’ (l. 12). Billy’s work in support of Tommy sustains the British soldier’s position at the top of the hierarchy; although Billy ‘Quits—and more, for any Dutchman’ (l. 15), implying that he is capable of striking the fatal blow if necessary, he is honoured with being called ‘a soldier’ primarily because he ‘Paves the way for Tommy’s steel’ (l. 16), allowing the ultimate accolades to accrue to Tommy Atkins himself.

The speaker here is neither regular nor colonial soldier but, it seems, an admiring civilian. Through the cockney-accented speech and boisterous trochaic tetrameter with its blunt masculine rhymes, he both observes and participates in the family likeness between Tommy and Billy. This resemblance allows John Bull to bask in the glory of Tommy’s military successes, but it also renders him vulnerable to shame by association with any criticism of the British soldier’s character or masculinity. In this respect the mention of ‘Tommy’s steel’ in ‘Cousin Billy’ is significant. Hinting vividly at the physicality of late nineteenth-century warfare, at least in the imagination of civilian commentators, Russell calls upon an image of the soldier’s work which was surprisingly prevalent in the newspaper poetry of the time. Long-range and smokeless rifles were transforming the experience from the soldiers’ perspectives, as Chapter five discusses, but much of the poetic imagery of the period recalls representations of warfare from earlier in the century, when cavalry and infantry charges led to hand-to-hand combat involving the bayonet. Indeed, in ‘Song of the Bayonet’, also published in the Black and White Budget in 1900 (with musical rights reserved, indicating the author’s hope for a future in music hall), Walter Ragge explicitly calls up those earlier military successes as evidence that, though the enemy in South Africa may turn out to have ‘the latest arms...
and ammunition’, such modern technologies are no match for ‘British steel’ in the hands of British men:36

It was British steel, with British arms to back it,  
That struck the Frenchman down at Waterloo;  
It drove the Sepoy back in Fifty-seven,  
And still it brings us glories ever new.  
In many a bloody battle have we tried it,  
And our trust is in the weapon that we know.  
We proved it on the Russians in the trenches,  
We proved it on the Boers at Glencoe!

CHORUS  
As it was at Inkerman, so it is to-day;  
Steel it is that proves the man, steel that wins the day.  
Charge, boys, charge! and drive the foe before us,  
Seize their guns and break their ranks and sweep them down the hill.  
Cheer, boys, cheer! and shout it out in chorus,  
That the good old British Bradawl is the master still.  

(‘Song of the Bayonet’, ll. 39-42)

Notwithstanding Ragge’s delight in the power of the bayonet for winning battles and ‘proving’ the masculinity of British soldiers, there is remarkably little actual physical contact in his picture. The British soldiers get close enough to ‘seize’ their enemies’ guns, but the racing iambic monosyllables which call them to ‘break their ranks and sweep them down the hill’ implies a gap between bayonet blade and enemy body; the ‘steel’ seems to work most effectively as a motivator to the Boers to get going under their own steam.

Such distance between blade and body is dramatically and delightedly collapsed in Durban poet Mapega’s poem ‘The Sniper Sniped’, which was published in a Natal newspaper and appears in Pera Muriel Button’s scrapbooks.37 In stanzas which appear to cut the heptameter ballad couplet to the width of a newspaper column, Mapega sets the scene with an image of a Boer fighter exaggerated into caricature:

He sat in the stones  
With a dead man’s bones,  
And laughed ‘Ha ha, he he’—  
As he heard the moans  
And the shrieks and groans  
Of the Royal Artillery.  

(‘The Sniper Sniped’, ll. 1-6)

The impression of this man as a superior soldier (‘on war he fed | And his hands were red | With the blood of the Terrible’s crew’, ll. 10-12) is immediately undermined by the information that the sniper’s body count is due to his contravention of the laws of war, rather than to his skill: he might have been ‘a splendid shot’ (l. 15), but his victims were tricked into their deaths: ‘a white flag flew | Where a red flag ought to be’ (ll. 17-18). Although the horrid juxtaposition of the sniper’s laughter with the ‘shrieks and groans’ of dying men appears to condemn the Boer’s elation at his enemy’s downfall, the speaker goes on to exemplify precisely the same bloodthirsty glee as he pictures with cinematic intensity a British soldier approaching the Boer:

    But he tore his beard
    As a step he heard,
      For he then fell sore afraid;
    And he gave a yell
    As a sun-streak fell
      On the tip of a bayonet blade.

    And behind that tip
    Was a soldier’s grip,
      And a soldier’s leering grin—
    And the grin was hard,
    As the cold steel jarred,
      On the bone of the sniper’s chin.

(‘The Sniper Sniped’, ll. 25-36)

The sequence of close-ups (glinting bayonet blade, soldier’s hand, soldier’s ‘grin’) and the compression of assonant and rhyme words (tip, grip, grin, grin, hard, jarred, chin) amplifies the shock of the sudden movement as the blade comes into jarring contact with flesh and bone. Triumphanty visceral, the soldier’s action serves the cheating Boer with poetic justice, asserting the supremacy of the British soldier’s courage and physical prowess over the Boer’s transgression of the rules of fair play. The sniper – reliant on cover, cutting men down at a distance – is overpowered by the proximity of an enemy not afraid of close physical contact:

    ’Twas the sniper sniped,
    And the soldier wiped
      His bayonet till it shone—
    With the same old rag
    Which had acted flag
      To the sniper, dead and gone.

(‘The Sniper Sniped’, ll. 37-42)

The speaker’s delight is mirrored by the soldier’s, who ‘raised his voice’ in a ‘tuneful lay’ (ll. 43, 45): “I’ve got one Boer, | Of that I’m sure, | So, ’ip, ’ip, ’ip, ’ooray!” (ll. 46-48).
Van Wyk Smith calls this type of poetry an expression of ‘music hall belligerence’, acknowledging the ‘Cockney honesty’ of lines like the following, but implying that they represent no more than the enthusiasm of the working classes:

When Tommy joins the ‘unt,
With the stabbin’ of the baynit,
The baynit, the bloody baynit,
Gawd ’elp the man in front! […]
And ’e’ll get ’ome with the baynit,
The flashing, gashing baynit,
The ruddy, bloody baynit,
Or ’e’ll know the reason why!38

Mapega’s newspaper poem, with its moments of elevated diction (‘he then fell sore afraid!’) and archaic inversions, serves as a reminder that such sentiments were by no means unique to the music halls or appealing only to the ‘Cockney’ working-classes; indeed, as Van Wyk Smith acknowledges, the same ‘mood of savagery’ characterises the supposedly ‘more sophisticated expressions’ of the poems appearing in the Times, by the poet laureate and others, which relish the horrors of battle, communicate equally ‘ecstatic sadism’, and betray the same fascination with the bayonet.39

For historian Michael Brown, there is more to the late-Victorian obsession with the bayonet than bloodthirsty jingoism. Brown argues that new military technologies ‘existed in an ambiguous relationship with contemporary ideals about martial masculinities and in many cases served to fuel anxieties about the physical prowess of the British soldier’.40 As Brown shows, the guns introduced to the British army over the second half of the nineteenth century required less and less from soldiers in terms of either skill or drill; ‘basic infantry tactics’ were transformed, and from the breech-loading Martini-Henry of the 1880s onwards, the rifle ‘became a battle-winning weapon in its own right’.41 The veneration of the bayonet seen in the poems quoted here was certainly anachronistic, in this war of smokeless, long-range guns and repeating rifles, but according to Brown it can be explained as an expression of anxiety about the credit that

38 Walter Walsh quotes the stanza from a poem called ‘Ode to the Bayonet’ published in the Express, but does not give a date: Walter Walsh, The Moral Damage of War (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), p. 72. Van Wyk Smith cites Literary World, 6 July 1900, in Van Wyk Smith, Drummer Hodge, p. 25. The lines were also printed in Welsh language newspaper Y Golauad, 5 December 1900, p. 9.
39 Van Wyk Smith, Drummer Hodge, p. 25.
41 Ibid., p. 162.
accrues to British masculinity in conflicts where ‘the pigeon-chested, slum-dwelling “Tommy” obliterate[ed] the muscular “noble savage”’ using not his physical prowess but ‘a weapon no more distinguished than a power loom’. The ideals of fair play upon which ‘The Sniper Sniped’ depends are threatened by scenarios in which one side is armed with lances or spears while the other benefits from all the firepower of technological modernity. Assumptions of racial superiority are undermined by colonial wars being won by means of guns that ‘could literally be “kept firing by a boy”’, as a striking picture from the ‘Lassies and Laddies’ page of *Hearth and Home* magazine from 1897 indicates (see Figure 3.3). Rather than reassuring symbols of Britain’s superiority, therefore, new technologies could also serve to ‘fuel those anxieties that bubbled away below the surface of jingoistic bombast’. On a very practical level, those anxieties were amplified by problems with military technologies that were exposed by the war in South

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**Figure 3.3: Hearth and Home, 4 March 1897, p. 667. © British Library Board (LOU.LD107).**

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42 Brown, ‘Cold Steel, Weak Flesh’, p. 158.
43 Ibid., pp. 169, 171.
44 Ibid., pp. 164.
Africa – for instance by the revelation that the rifles with which 25,000 soldiers had been equipped ‘consistently fired eighteen inches to the right of the target’.\footnote{Sarah Lefanu, \textit{Something of Themselves: Kipling, Kingsley, Conan Doyle and the Anglo-Boer War} (London: Hurst and Company, 2020), p. 183.} In Mapega’s poem, the sniper’s perfectly accurate rifle, in the hands of the enemy at least, represents a failure of military manliness, almost on a par with the abuse of the flag of surrender. In contrast, images of the visceral bayonet support a narrative in which Britain’s imperial claims were corroborated by the superior masculinity of her soldiers.\footnote{Brown, ‘Cold Steel, Weak Flesh’, p. 158.} The appeal of this image to readers across the social spectrum is clear from its prevalence in the newspaper poems of 1899-1902. Alfred Austin’s response to the lifting of the siege at Mafeking, for instance, describes British soldiers ‘Ne’er knowing what to fear, \ldots ‘Gainst death’ (l. 53). Another poem by the poet laureate, first published in the \textit{Daily Telegraph}, imagines ‘mailed myriads with the light \ldots glitters’ around the world (l. 5), the glinting blade of the bayonet, like the anachronistic ‘mail’, symbolising British imperial supremacy by harking back to earlier forms of warfare in which the physicality of the soldier was all-important.

A renewed emphasis on the bayonet was not a merely literary phenomenon. Brown finds that ‘in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the bayonet came to play a central role in British army training’, seen as the best way to develop ‘that “muscle” and “personal skill” seemingly lacking in the average urban recruit’.\footnote{Brown, ‘Cold Steel, Weak Flesh’, p. 172.} Its psychological significance is still more profound; acting ‘as a focus point for national mythologies of martial prowess’, the bayonet was an appropriately phallic symbol of British imperial masculinity:\footnote{Ibid., p. 173.}
In the face of the first truly modern war that the British army had fought and against the background of widespread concerns about national efficiency and the national physique, the bayonet gripped the public imagination, functioning as a kind of symbolic relief from the anxieties of fin de siècle modernity.51

Tommy Atkins was called upon to redeem British masculinity more generally, his physical skill in close combat evoked to reassure readers of newspaper poems like ‘Cousin Billy’ of the robust health of British manliness, by introducing the image of ‘Tommy’s steel’ in connection with a family likeness between Tommy and John Bull. Featuring in the same newspaper columns as casualty lists or reports of British disasters, poems like Walter Ragge’s ‘Song of the Bayonet’ and Mapega’s ‘The Sniper Sniped’ transformed scenes of extreme violence into pantomime or music hall skit. They allowed the anxious newspaper reader to indulge in a fantasy version of colonial warfare, in which the challenges presented by the South African terrain and the surprisingly skilful Boer fighters could be replaced with a tightly-framed image of the encounter between individuals in single combat, from which the British soldier could emerge heroic. Images of the bayonet might offer ‘symbolic relief’ from the anxieties of modernity and modern warfare, but they also operate as a marker of the depths of that anxiety.52

Ragge and Mapega’s poems make their appeal to what Hobson dismissed as the ‘bloodthirstiness’ of the ‘mob’, transgressing traditional social codes and instituting in their place a new appreciation for embodied expressions of vicious masculinity.53 Such extremely violent poems are not in the majority, but the continuities between these texts and those, like Austin’s, which aimed for a more high-brow mode but drew on the same repertoire of thought and image indicate the increasing acceptability of new expressions of manliness, not only amongst soldiers but in civilian circles, too. Physical strength and the appearance of fearlessness celebrated in Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads, together with a clear-sighted dedication to Britain’s imperial aims, were normative expressions of masculinity, against which more pacifist perspectives appeared inadequate. Hardy’s ‘A Christmas Ghost-Story’, appearing in the Westminster Gazette on the day before Christmas Eve 1899, differs radically in form, content and purpose from Kipling and his

52 Ibid.
53 Hobson, Psychology, p. 31.
Rather than intervening directly in the news cycle or providing a way of reframing troubling war news, it offers a momentary pause, an invitation to remember the war dead but also to consider the war in longer perspective. Notwithstanding the compatibility of Hardy’s reflective mode with the associations of the season, his poem elicited a critical response from the *Daily Chronicle* which argued that Hardy’s newspaper poem failed to fulfil the responsibilities of the public poet in terms of either patriotism or manliness. As well as exhorting Hardy himself to evince a more martial spirit, the *Daily Chronicle* uses the critique of Hardy’s poem as the pretext for an appeal to civilian society more generally to take on the aims and values of the army at war. In order to do so, they hold soldiers up as the masculine ideal, indicating how far Kipling’s vision of martial manliness had come to feel like the natural expression of British imperial masculinity.

Hardy’s Christmas poem has much in common with ‘Drummer Hodge’, which had appeared a month earlier; both portray a soldier who does not seem personally invested in the politics of the war. The Christmas poem’s more outrageous move is to refuse to differentiate between Boer and British dead, using an elevated register to imply a divine perspective, as the speaker wonders – as the *Daily Chronicle*’s critic summarised it – ‘where is that peace on earth which is the Christian ideal of Christmastide?’

South of the Line, inland from far Durban,
There lies—be he or not your countryman—
A fellow-mortal. Riddled are his bones,
But ‘mid the breeze his puzzled phantom moans
Nightly to clear Canopus—fain to know
By whom, and when, the All-Earth-Gladdening Law
Of Peace, brought in by Some-One crucified,
Was ruled to be inept, and set aside?  

The *Chronicle*’s response to Hardy appeared on Christmas Day 1899. Keenly aware of the seasonal relevance of Hardy’s appeal, and the irony of contradicting it on this of all days, the critic acknowledges that ‘this is not the theme that any man would choose for

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56 Hardy added the following quatrain when the poem appeared in his *Poems of the Past and the Present*:

And what of logic or of truth appears
In tacking ‘Anno Domini’ to the years?
Near twenty-hundred liveried thus have hied,
But tarries yet the Cause for which He died.

reflections on Christmas day.\textsuperscript{57} Notwithstanding the associations of the season, the article makes the case for meditating on and celebrating British martial masculinity, rejecting the idea implied by Hardy’s poem that such a practice is incompatible with festive Christian obligations. Indeed, positing Hardy as antagonistic towards the exercise of imaginative engagement with the soldier, the\textit{Daily Chronicle}’s editorial argues that the idealism in Hardy’s poem is at odds with the demands of patriotism at a time of war:

\begin{quote}
[W]e are not masters of our necessities […] Peace on earth is not possible to us this Christmas; but let us so distribute our goodwill towards men as to make it of the most practical benefit to all who are serving the country in this time of need. It is not only by benevolence […] that this can be achieved; it is by patience, by abstinence from random croaking, by resolution that the business shall be done at any sacrifice, but without exaggerated alarms.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Doubts about the justification for or conduct of the war reflect on the poet who articulates them, evincing irresolution and the failure to hold firm to a purpose. The implication is that Hardy fails as a man, as well as in his duty as a poet and a Briton, by giving way to ‘exaggerated alarms’ and dishonouring those ‘who are serving the country’. This dishonour is expressed not only through doubts about Britain’s foreign policy, but more particularly in the poem’s portrayal of soldiers; the\textit{Chronicle}’s article argues that Hardy’s soldier is a ‘self-righteous’ conceit, a figment of the poet’s imagination and a mouthpiece for his own agenda, rather than a true representation of those British men actually in South Africa:

\begin{quote}
[W]e fear that soldier is Mr. Hardy’s soldier, and not one of the Dublin Fusiliers who cried amidst the storm of bullets at Tugela, ‘Let us make a name for ourselves!’ Here is another ideal which conflicts, alas! with the sublime message we celebrate to-day; but it is at least an ideal of duty and of heroism.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

The Dublin Fusilier at Tugela, steadfast beneath ‘the storm of bullets’ is contrasted against Hardy’s unmanly capitulation to ‘exaggerated alarms’; the soldier represents a model of masculinity for civilian emulation, however great the distance between this ‘ideal of duty and of heroism’ and the usual peacetime values of civilian society. The critic ends the article with a reference to another Christmas newspaper poem, one which appeared on the same day as Hardy’s, in which the speaker uses the familiar cockney

\begin{footnotes}
\item[58] Ibid.
\item[59] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
voice of Kipling’s Tommy to join civilian Briton with serving soldier, in support of the call to align civilian and military values and experiences:

This, then is the spirit of our Christmas. There is no mirth in it; we have too many grave thoughts and sorrowing hearts for that. But this nation is not cast down by untoward beginnings. As our poet wrote in these columns on Saturday—

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{We’ve took ar punishment stannin’ up,} \\
\text{An’ so we ought, my friend:} \\
\text{An’ dìn’t lose ‘eart at a blund’rin’ start,} \\
\text{Fur we gits theer in the end.}
\end{align*}
\]

It is no merry Christmas to-day; but

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{We’ll let this by, an’ kip ar eye} \\
\text{On Chris’mus time next year.}\text{60}
\end{align*}
\]

Stoicism and patience in the face of physical hardship, expressed in a version of Tommy’s familiar demotic cockney more exaggerated than Kipling’s, unite civilian and military man. The newspaper poet speaks for the resolve of ‘the nation’; ‘We’ – soldier, civilian, poet, reader – share the ‘punishment’ and demonstrate the masculine strength of national character by ‘stannin’ up’ and refusing to ‘lose ‘eart’.

In some ways, of course, the Chronicle’s critic was right: Hardy’s soldier was ‘not one of the Dublin Fusiliers’.61 Hardy responded to the Chronicle’s critique in a letter to the editor, in which he insisted that the defining characteristic of his ‘phantom’ was the fact that it represents a ‘slain soldier’; however ‘martial’ they may have been in life, Hardy argued, departed spirits cannot ‘show either courage or fear’, having ‘no physical frame to defend or sacrifice’.62 The ‘plaintive’ and ‘embittered’ expressions of his imaginary soldier’s spirit, regretting ‘the battles of his life and war in general’, are therefore not supposed to imply that the living, serving soldier experiences such emotions: indeed, the dead man may well ‘have shouted in the admirable ardor and pride of his fleshtime, as he is said to have done, “Let us make a name for ourselves!”’ Hardy’s response is significant because it places his poem in two different contexts; first, it reminds the reader that the poem was ‘intended for Christmas Day’. It is a topical

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60 ‘Christmas 1899’, Daily Chronicle. The lines quoted are from the final stanza of ‘This Christmas’, Daily Chronicle, 23 December 1899, p. 5.
61 Ibid.
wartime poem, destined initially for the newspaper publication that could ensure it would be read in the moment for which it was written. Hardy claims ‘moral and religious propriety’ in the expression of sadness ‘at the prevalence of war during a nominal Era of peace’, noting that ‘the teaching of Christmas Day’ was what ‘moved the humble Natal shade to speak at all’. Secondly, it is a poem which participates in a literary tradition of ghosts in ‘the works of great imaginative writers’; Hardy’s letter cites ‘ancient fancy’ (Homer and Virgil), Biblical precedent (the story of the witch of Endor from 1 Samuel 28), Dante and Shakespeare. This tradition lends ‘artistic propriety’ to Hardy’s ‘creatures of the imagination’, justifying his portrayal of them as ‘uncertain, fleeting, and quivering’, and capable of feeling ‘more or less sorrow for the acts of their corporeal years’. The letter reminds the Daily Chronicle’s critic, and its readers, that newspaper poems might do more than present politics in verse – that they might aspire to the condition of literature, with all the diverse associations and functions that this implies. The Daily Chronicle’s critic appears to have been persuaded, printing Hardy’s letter in full and adding the comment: ‘Mr. Hardy’s dead soldier is rightly admitted to the best company of Christmas ghosts, and we feel the pathetic beauty of the conception, whatever we may think of its metaphysics’. The reservations about Hardy’s ‘metaphysics’ suggest that the poet’s reasoning over what a dead spirit can and cannot be expected to feel had less persuasive power than his insistence on the literary precedents for his portrayal. This in turn suggests that behind the Daily Chronicle’s objection to Hardy’s poem was a fixed sense of what a wartime newspaper poem ought to do or be, particularly in terms of its portrayal of soldiers. The critic might well have objected, not that ‘Hardy’s soldier was not one of the Dublin Fusiliers’, but that he was not like Kipling’s Tommy Atkins. Pitting newspaper poem against newspaper poem by responding to Hardy’s ‘puzzled phantom’ with the vigorous cockney exhortation not to ‘lose ’eart at a blund’rin’ start’, the critique of Hardy’s ‘Christmas Ghost-Story’ suggests that the conception of the proper purpose of the wartime newspaper was shaped by Kipling and his imitators.

Two years later, with the war still ongoing, Kipling himself reasserted his insistence on continuities of values between military and civilian worlds, though in very different terms from the Barrack-Room Ballads, and with very different effect from the

63 Hardy, ‘To the editor’.  
64 ‘Christmas 1899’, Daily Chronicle.
lines by the *Daily Chronicle*’s poet.⁶⁵ Kipling’s ‘The Islanders’ appeared amidst a national debate about conscription, and makes an impassioned plea for compulsory national service. The poem targets comfortable civilians, ‘Fenced by your careful fathers, ringed by your leaden seas’ (l. 1), who have come to regard war as something ‘far from our ken’ (l. 3). As a result, Kipling’s speaker argues, ‘ye made a sport of your shrunken hosts and a toy of your armed men’ (l. 4). Motivated by keener regard for ‘your beasts of warren and chase’ (l. 7) than for their country’s welfare, ‘Ye grudged your sons for their service and your fields for their camping-place’ (l. 8). Distracted by ‘the flannelled fools at the wicket or the muddied oafs at the goals’ (ll. 27-28), lazy civilians had allowed critical time to pass: ‘Ye saw that the land lay fenceless and ye let the months go by’ (l. 30):

Ye hindered and hampered and crippled: ye thrust out of sight and sway
Those that would serve you for honour and those that served you for pay.
Then were the Judgements loosened; then was your shame revealed,
At the hands of a little people, few, but apt in the field.

(‘The Islanders’, ll. 11-14)

Responsibility for long-postponed success in South Africa is laid at the door of those who ignored or denied the needs of the army in peacetime and then responded with reckless haste when war demanded action, leaving ‘strong men’ boasting at home and sending untrained ‘striplings’ off to fight (l. 16). As this language suggests, the picture of ordinary soldiers in the poem is not flattering to Tommy Atkins:

Sons of the sheltered city—unmade, unhandled, unmeet—
Ye pushed them raw to the battle as ye picked them raw from the street.
And what did ye look they should compass? War-craft learned in a breath?
Knowledge unto occasion at the first far view of Death?
So! And ye train your horses and the dogs ye feed and prize.
How are the beasts more worthy than the souls you sacrifice?

(‘The Islanders’, ll. 17-22)

As he had in *Barrack-Room Ballads*, in these final lines, Kipling denounces the way that the ordinary soldier continued to be undervalued by the powerful classes who sent him out to die but, unlike in those earlier poems, these lines make little effort to stand up for Tommy’s reputation. Indeed, the argument – in which the solider is unfavourably contrasted with the landowner’s hunting dogs – depends upon a condemnation of inadequacies of military training which fails to transform the raw recruit into ‘a soldier what’s fit for a soldier’.⁶⁶ Although the primary target of Kipling’s critique of the quality

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of soldiers is the Imperial Volunteers (those ‘Sons of the sheltered city’ delivered to South Africa without the benefit of adequate training or equipment), as the insults to failures in British military masculinity mount up (‘Striplings’, ‘unmade, unhandled, unmeet’, ‘raw’ ‘children or servants’ acting in ‘servile panic’, to be shamed by the more impressive performances of ‘kinsfolk called from afar’67) the criticisms seem to reach every corner of the Army, made more biting by the fact that their source is the soldiers’ own erstwhile champion. In the final lines of ‘The Islanders’, Kipling asks whether ‘the kept cock-pheasant’ who provides the pretext for landowners to refuse access to their lands for military training exercises will ‘keep you’ safe from the European war which he feels sure to be imminent. Claiming that ‘He is master of many a shire’, the poet’s catalogue of derogatory adjectives is clearly meant to apply to the men of the country as a whole as much as to their game birds: ‘Arid, aloof, incurious, unthinking, unthanking, gelt’ (l. 63) – the final word spat out with astonishing bitterness. Tommy Atkins does not appear to be excluded from this universal condemnation of British masculinity; in line with the insistence in Barrack-Room Ballads of vital continuities between military and civilian worlds, the weakness of the one reflects on and exposes the weakness of the rest.

The unflattering portrayal is compounded as the poem continues. Having realised the inadequacies of British soldiers, Kipling claims, ‘ye fawned on the Younger Nations for the men who could shoot and ride’ (l. 26), implying that Tommy himself could do neither. Newspaper poets in their hundreds had responded warmly to the contribution of volunteer soldiers from the settler colonies in Canada, Australia and South Africa itself, welcoming these volunteers as an outpouring of the noble spirit of Greater Britain. Though the actual number of such ‘colonials’ was comparatively small (approximately 30,000 to the 100,000 British volunteers, and as many professional soldiers), the gesture was received as a sign of the vitality of the empire. Demonstrating the kind of filial pride which reflected as well on the British motherland as on the character of her colonial ‘offspring’, the military support of the colonies was received as proof that the empire was worth fighting for, in the face of disasters and setbacks, and that the British character, wherever expressed, contained the potential for glory. Turning this reassuring narrative on its head, Kipling recasts the imperial centre as a desperate

67 ‘The Islanders’ (ll. 16-18, 39, 52).
flatterer, seeking at the fringes of empire the masculinity that Britain had failed to nurture at home, making a plea that was an insult to Britain’s own soldiers.

Kipling imagines an alternative world in which British civilians are trained for war from childhood as seriously as they are trained for cricket, so that when faced with a European war British soldiers would exemplify the qualities of masculinity they currently lacked:

Men, not children, servants, or kinsfolk called from afar,
But each man born in the island broke to the matter of war.
Soberly and by custom taken and trained for the same;
Each man born in the island entered at youth to the game—
As it were almost cricket, not to be mastered in haste,
But after trial and labour, by temperance, living chaste.
As it were almost cricket—as it were even your play—
Weighed and pondered and worshipped and practised day on day.
(The Islanders, ll. 39-46)

Kipling’s scornful repetition of ‘almost cricket’ represents a drastic – and, to readers, astonishing – rejection of a belief in the power of sport as a ‘transformative endeavour […] that actively created men out of boys’. This belief – so ‘commonplace’ in the final decades of the nineteenth century as to be ‘largely taken for granted as a truism’, according to Patrick McDevitt – is articulated clearly in the following passage from the Sporting Times, in March 1897:

The most spontaneous expression of individual and national character is found in the great democratic sports of the country […]. [T]he patriotic citizen cannot set too great a store on the development of the natural force—the physical energy—of his race. And sport promotes not merely bodily health and vigour, but all the higher forms of manliness […]. Sport promotes, in a word, that magnanimity of soul which is the noblest characteristic of British statesmanship, and the redeeming Grace and glory of our ubiquitous empire.

Although the Sporting Times writer describes ‘the disciplined temper to accept defeat without degradation’ as well as ‘victory without vaunting’ as among the qualities to be developed by a rigorous physical education, ultimate British supremacy is assumed: sporting prowess is identified closely with victorious imperial masculinity. McDevitt argues that ‘the belief that skills were transferable from the playing fields to the empire

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was virtually unquestioned before 1916’. In ‘The Islanders’, and with the disasters of the South African War as his evidence, Kipling laid down a challenge to this belief. Cricket had failed to develop the manly strength required of British soldiers, and the British Army was failing in what was taken to be the last test before the coming European war; instead of demonstrating ‘bodily health’, steadfastness and ‘magnanimity of soul’, ‘The Islanders’ claims that British soldiers behaved like ‘children or servants’, subject to ‘servile panic’ and scarcely worthy of being called ‘men’ (ll. 52-53).

It is perhaps not surprising that the poem did not receive a very warm reception. In the weeks after its appearance, during which more than twenty letters had appeared in the _Times_ from readers with something to say about ‘The Islanders’, Kipling wrote to Rider Haggard to express his dismay that his ‘meaning’ had not been ‘clearer’: ‘as usual people have gone off on a side issue’. In fact, they had ‘gone off’ on at least three ‘side’ issues, responding with indignation to what was perceived to be a multi-pronged attack on the untouchable pillars of imperial British identity: the integrity and loyalty of the settler empire, expressed through the imperial volunteers; the masculinity of Tommy Atkins; and the life-or-death importance of cricket. Kipling wrote to Rider Haggard that he regretted having written ‘flannelled fools’, which provoked particular outrage on behalf of cricket-lovers everywhere, and wished he had written ‘hired fools instead’, making ‘clearer’ the criticism he claimed to have intended, of specific, highly paid ‘d—d hired pros’ who were making money in Australian Test matches and then ‘hiding behind the names of good men, who happened to be cricketers, dead at the front as some excuse for their three day £1000-gate performances’. This feels disingenuous, however; the poem’s critique of the seriousness with which sporting events were treated goes beyond an objection to the pay of sports stars who ought to be fighting. In the poem’s closing lines, Kipling scornfully imagines his listener responding to ‘the low red glare to southward when the raided coast-towns burn’ by pitching ‘some white pavilion,’ and trying ‘lustily’ to ‘even the odds | With nets and hoops and mallets, with racquets and bats and rods’ (ll. 59-60), asking whether ‘Idols of grassy altars built for the spirit’s ease’ will ‘come down to the battle and snatch you from under the rods?’ (ll. 72, 74).

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70 McDevitt, _Sport, Masculinity and Nationalism_, pp. 11, 138.
72 Ibid.
Some critical responses to ‘The Islanders’ drew attention to the disjunction between the poem’s scorn of British attitudes towards cricket and Kipling’s own former words on the subject. Several correspondents contacted newspapers to quote from An Almanac of Twelve Sports (1898), to which Kipling had contributed the following:

Thank God, who made the British Isles  
And taught me how to play,  
I do not worship crocodiles  
Or bow the knee to clay!

Give me a willow wand, and I,  
With hide and cork and twine,  
From century to century  
Will gamboll round my shrine.\(^3\)

Although Nicholson’s illustration makes clear that it is a beefy John Bull rather than Tommy Atkins who is likely to be playing cricket (see Figure 3.4), Kipling’s lines are entirely in keeping with the picture McDevitt paints of the centrality of British games to constructions both of late-nineteenth century masculinity (“success at athletic

endeavours were primary measures of the worth of a man as a man) and British imperial identities; devotion to cricket is considered part of the Englishman’s superiority over nations of idol-worshippers. God himself is credited with teaching the game to Englishman throughout the ages (punning on ‘from century to century’), as well as with creating Britain itself – and, implicitly, the empire. One ‘Old Wykehamist’ who wrote to bring these lines to the attention of the Pall Mall Gazette accompanied them with the following arch comment:

This interesting old relic of bygone ages would seem to have been published some time in the Middle Ages (A.D. 1898), and the author of the words was evidently an enthusiast [...]. [I]n these days of ‘beflannelled fools’ and ‘muddied oafs’ it is interesting to note how even the most obscure among our lesser poets saw good rather than evil in our national games.

The Daily Chronicle similarly ignored or misunderstood Kipling’s attack on upper-class neglect of the nation’s defence, summing up ‘The Islanders’ as Kipling’s ‘uncomplimentary couplets on cricket’. Just as in the response to Hardy’s Christmas newspaper poem in 1899, the critic quoted another newspaper poet by way of corrective contrast; in this case it was by an Australian newspaper poet, George Essex Evans, who had been inspired by the same Test Match in Australia that aroused Kipling’s fury to write a poem in which ‘Soldiers of the Willow’ prepare for imperial war by playing ‘the grand old game’.

Though the Daily Chronicle does not quote it in full, the original poem makes clear that, in this case, sportsman and soldier are one and the same, and that the skills and loyalties developed through cricket are precisely those that fit the player well for war:

North and South, the Old and New,  
Striving hard together,  
Cut and drive, and pace and screw,  
Punishing the leather,  
Eye a-watch and nerve a-strain,  
For the slightest chance of gain,  
All alike in heart and brain  
Soldiers of the willow.

Soldiers of the Willow  
Playing round the world,

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74 McDevitt, p. 2 (emphasis original).
75 Letter to the editor, Pall Mall Gazette, 18 February 1902, p. 4.
76 Daily Chronicle, 24 January 1902, p. 5.
78 George Essex Evans, ‘Soldiers of the Willow’, Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 14 December 1901, p. 9 and Brisbane Courier, 14 December 1901, p. 5.
But Soldiers of the Empire,
  When the Flag’s unfurled.

But when loud across the world
  Sounds the bugle calling,
And our front is backward hurled
  And our blood is falling,
Side by side for Empire then
  Stand the Anglo-Saxon men,
Side by side as keen as when
  Soldiers of the Willow.

(‘Soldiers of the Willow’, ll. 13-32)

The link between athleticism and military masculinity was so well accepted that a parodist in the *Daily Chronicle* turns Kipling’s insult to ‘flannelled fools’ back on its author, in a poem called ‘The Slanders; Or—which amounts to the same thing, “The Islanders” with their “I” knocked out’, which mimics Kipling’s limping hexameters to make its protest:79

What means his scorn for the sportsman, his hate of the playing-fields?  
Has he forgotten his boyhood, although he writes of it yet,  
Or has he a boyhood’s grievance the man is too small to forget?  

(‘The Slanders’, ll. 22-24)

The jibe implies that the only possible explanation for such animosity is that the poet was a poor cricketer as a boy, and has failed to outlive his disappointment, both presaging and proving impaired masculinity in the famously diminutive man.

If Kipling’s deviation from his former championing of soldiers inspired indignation, the *Daily Chronicle*’s rebuttal poem also objected to ‘The Islanders’ on literary grounds. Beginning with the observation that Kipling’s reader had been ‘Slapped by your favourite author, kicked in his leaded verse’ (l. 1), the poet goes on to lament ‘violence screamed in a writing that should have been sober and strong’ (ll. 7-8). Kipling’s alliteration in ‘flannelled fools’ is decried as ‘cheap […] phrases abrasive’ (l. 25), his characteristic ‘last-line repeat’ and ‘use of italics’ scorned as mere ‘tricks’, bringing Kipling down to the level of the disparaged poet laureate: ‘A.A. with his dignified bleating, his sagely protesting “O! O’s!”’ (l. 10). The parodist concludes: ‘Feeble indeed are the lessons that feeble corrosives enforce’ (l. 27), urging Kipling to

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return to ‘the spell of music and colour bright’ which characterised his most popular works (l. 29):

You that have loved the Empire, loved it and served it well,
Turn from your exhortations and turn again to your spell;
Or if you must exhort us, and we do patience wait,
Let it be ‘almost cricket’—well-mannered and fair and straight.

(‘The Slanders’, ll. 35-38)

The parodist’s description – and mimicry – of “The Islanders” ‘leaded’ verse calls attention to the ‘rather ill-fitting anapaestic hexameters of clearly Swinburnian derivation’ which Chris Baldick describes.80 The same metre had a very different effect in ‘Back to the Army Again’, united with the popular ballad stanza and Tommy’s lively cockney, and where each line’s central caesura corresponds to the natural rhythms of demotic speech rather than dragging the line out and making it feel ponderous or laboured.81 The limping lines of ‘The Islanders’ are out of keeping with the tone ‘of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah lashing his people mercilessly for back-sliding into idolatry’.82 Indeed, although the parodist picks up on local infelicities (‘last line repeats’, ‘cheap phrases’), their objection is more broadly to what Baldick describes as a ‘sweepingly intemperate condemnation of institutionalised national decadence’.83 The ‘feeble corrosives’ of ‘The Islanders’ do not strike this reader as ‘well-mannered and fair and straight’. The comparison with Austin, however, indicates that the answer would not be to be more ‘dignified’, or even ‘sober and strong’. Rather, the parodist wants to encourage the poet to turn aside from the urge to ‘exhort’ at all, and ‘turn again to your spell’, to bring back the ‘music and colour bright’ that had made his former work so appealing. The desire for ‘music’ suggests that the parodist misses the rhythmic and aural qualities of the Ballads. ‘The Slanders’ implies that readers were dismayed to find Kipling writing in a new mode, or to discover that newspaper publication could allow a well-known poet to appear in discomfiting new guises, taking on different roles as they found need without the expectation of continuity of voice or perspective that the publication of a volume of poems might involve. Meanwhile, the disdain for ‘tricks’ recalls objections to Kipling’s ‘Cruisers’ discussed in Chapter one: the concern that the

83 Ibid., p. 352.
newspaper poem, in the powerful space of the newspaper page, might have the potential to act coercively on readers with either economic or political ends overwhelming literary considerations.84

A newly-consolidated sense of identification between civilian newspaper-reader and embattled Tommy Atkins, together with a rigid sense of the purpose and appeal of the newspaper poem, help to explain the outrage prompted by ‘The Islanders’. The newspapers themselves were implicated in what many readers felt to be a misjudged publication, as the Daily Chronicle poet’s outraged question indicates: ‘was no printer’s reader at hand, | To strike out a blunder so cruel from wounding the heart of the land?’85 Ironically, the strength of feeling evinced by responses to Kipling’s poem is testament to the success of his own Barrack-Room Ballads at reframing the public debate about soldiers and imperial masculinity, and in establishing expectations around newspaper poetry. The soldier’s status had been transformed – at least for as long as the war lasted – and while newspaper poets signalled their willingness to lay some blame for the disasters of the war, Tommy Atkins himself was presented as being beyond reproach. In a poem called ‘The Men are Splendid’, the Daily Chronicle’s cockney poet ‘Tompkins’ captures what had become a maxim.86 One may ‘Grumble at the guvunnmint’ and ‘the War Office’ (which is ‘strong on awlmost ev’rythink but war’), and even ‘critercise […] gin’rals’ (though the poet notes that ‘they’ve never made a plan | Thet mister Storp-at-’ome ’as nort amened’),

But yer ’as ter pul up when
It’s a questshing of the men,
Fur theer ain’t no dart o’ thet—the men are splendid.

(‘The Men are Splendid’, ll. 7-9)

The poet’s title is a quotation from a telegraph sent by General Buller to the War Office in January 1900, on the occasion of Britain’s heaviest defeat of the war – a defeat that was the result of incomprehensibly bad military leadership, from generals whom Pakenham describes as having ‘the power to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory’.87 A ‘grisly’ photograph of ‘hundreds of dead British infantrymen stacked up in their trenches, some visibly mutilated’ intensified the growing sense at home that all was not

85 Kipling, ‘The Slanders’ (ll. 17-18).
well in South Africa, and indeed contributed to Buller’s own demotion and eventual dismissal. General Buller was certainly ‘criticised’, but his telegraph to London indicated his determination to protect his men from the condemnation levelled at their leaders. In Britain, it was taken as a reassuring promise about the character of the nation itself. As the *Times* put it:

Sir Redvers Buller’s comment on the behaviour of the troops […] coming from a commander who is not by any means prodigal in praise, is significant. Independent evidence of the bearing of the troops during the battle of Colenso is unanimous as to their wonderful steadiness in peculiarly trying circumstances. The war in South Africa has so far provided little ground for pride or satisfaction, but our regimental officers and men have proved themselves worthy of the best traditions of the nation.

Even as the full extent of the disaster at Spion Kop came into view, an MP was quoted in the *Times* taking Buller’s words of faith in the British soldier as a pledge of eventual victory, stating ‘that he was not in the least anxious as to the final result of the war’:

He re-echoed, with the utmost heartiness […] the words of the telegram from Sir Redvers Buller, ‘the men are splendid.’ As long as there was that undaunted courage and absolute devotion and splendid spirit amongst the English troops, they might be positively certain that the issue was secure. It might take longer than any one thought to accomplish the object they had in view […] [but] he had no doubt that they would see a triumph of the British arms. The great task which we had undertaken would be accomplished, and the authority of the English race in South Africa would be placed on a permanent footing which nothing would be allowed to again disturb.

The admirable character of the British Tommy was a vital guarantee not only of ultimate success in the current war, but of the rightful future success of the imperial project more generally. British masculinity underpinned and assured the British Empire.

Among newspaper poets, Buller’s succinct statement of faith in his men struck a chord, prompting at least two poems (the other which takes Buller’s words for its title is discussed in Chapter five). The *Daily Chronicle*’s poem acknowledges that reading war news can be both bewildering and depressing: ‘Yuss, the noos is good an’ bad, shiftin’ dye by dye, | Nar we’re up and nar again we’re low’ (ll. 10-11). The newspaper poet

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90 ‘Comforts for the Troops’, *Times*, 29 January 1900, p. 11.
offers comfort to the wearied reader, presenting the character of the solder as a reassuring constant: ‘whortever else is wrong—the men are splendid’ (l. 19):

   Theer’s on’y one thing right
   In this ‘ere bloomin’ fight.
   And theer as right as rine—the men are splendid.
   ('The Men are Splendid', ll. 25-27)

The poet signals his indebtedness to Kipling through the strongly-accented voice of his speaker, but he also takes up the invitation issued by Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads to stand up for the soldier, looking forward to the day ‘When they’ll give you all your pay, | And treat you as a Christian ought to do’, as Kipling put it in ‘To T.A.’. In Tompkins’ lines, assertions of the ‘splendid’ qualities of the soldier – with the weight of Buller’s authority behind them – are interleaved with pointed acknowledgements of the inadequate structures within which Tommy Atkins is required to work, and the pitiful recompense he can expect for his labours:

   Though ‘e’s overworked, art-numbered, under-fed, or short o’ sleep—
   Or all o’ them misforchoons keeftly blended,
   Yer can bet yer all, yer can,
   On thet sime misfortshnit man,
   For whortever else is wrong—the men are splendid.
   ('The Men are Splendid', ll. 14-18)

Aurally the stanza form evokes the 8/5/8/5 iambic ballad quatrain of Kipling’s ‘Loot’ or ‘Gentlemen-Rankers’, though on the page the Daily Chronicle poem splits the third line into two shorter units, so that the rhyme of ‘Yer can bet yer all, yer can, | On that sime misfortshnit man’ contributes to the sense of an aphorism.92 Echoes of the Barrack-Room Ballads resound in the portrait of the soldier, too; in both Kipling’s poems and this, the soldier’s ‘misforchoons’, in terms of the rigours of his profession, are compounded by his treatment in civilian life. Indeed, this poem can be read as a reworking of Kipling’s ‘Tommy’ – itself a reworking of a much older quatrain about the status of soldiers amongst civilians. Kipling’s poem begins: ‘I went into a public ’ouse to get a pint o’ beer, | The publican ’e up an’ sez, “We serve no red-coats here”.’93 ‘The Men are Splendid’ alludes directly to these lines, issuing the injunction: ‘Let no pot-bellied publican sye, “nort in this ’ere bar” | Ter soldiers when this little matter’s ended’ (ll. 23-24). Nor are readers more generally let off the hook, with the speaker cautioning them:

93 Kipling, ‘Tommy’ (ll. 1-2).
And mindjer don’t forget it when the troops is ’ome agen,
when the war’s a triflin’ hitem in the pawst;
Fur gretitooode’s a lovely thing ter these ’ere fightin’ men,
But gretitooode ain’t nutthink thet don’t lawst.
(The Men are Splendid’, ll. 19-22)

Though this speaker is a civilian, speaking to other civilians, relegating Tommy Atkins himself to the third person, he makes his appeal in an exaggerated form of the cockney which Kipling had made so characteristic of the serving soldier. But this is not the ‘Rudyardkiplingese’ which Mark Thyme scorns. Thyme’s poem criticises civilian poets who attempt to claim spurious authority by appropriating the voice of the soldier, mangling details from ‘the drill book’ in the hope that ‘a pennorth of Sergeants’ mess’ idioms will prove ‘enough for a song’. Rather than trying to evoke the realities of barrack-room life, the Daily Chronicle poet appears to take seriously the challenge laid down by Kipling to value the soldier’s work more. By making use of Tommy Atkins’s familiar idioms, the poet claims not authority but solidarity, emphasising the continuities of family-feeling and values which Kipling set out to establish between soldiers and society.

The poet uses his place in the columns of the Daily Chronicle to issue a challenge to his civilian readers. But the challenge extends to the writers whose words fill the columns around his poem, too, sounding a note of caution that the criticism that was building with respect to the War Office’s handling of the situation in South Africa, and the Government’s slow response to evidence of inadequate equipment, horses and medical provisions, should not spill over into criticism of Tommy himself. The disappointed outrage with which Kipling’s ‘The Islanders’ would be greeted by readers of the Times, two years later, indicates how firmly this principle would become established as a rule. Uniting a cockney dialect with a solemn appeal for social justice, the Daily Chronicle poem offers consolation while asking to be taken seriously. In its reminder that ‘gretitooode ain’t nutthink thet don’t lawst’ (l. 22), the poem also insists that professions of respect for soldiers must be matched by action, from individual civilians and their government, in order to move beyond being a mere anxious reflex expressing more fear for the future of the empire than concern for Tommy himself. In ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, the most famous and influential newspaper poem of the period, Kipling himself makes the same case.

94 Thyme, ‘Barrack-Room Ballads: A Recipe’ (ll. 9, 14-15).
Chapter four

The Absent-Minded Beggar: gentleness and gentlemanliness in imperial war

After an evening at the Palace Theatre in London on 31 October 1899, a reporter for the Pall Mall Gazette recounted the following conversation:

‘Not a bad programme, this,’ observes a young fellow, smoking a stumpy briar pipe.
‘Oh, not too bad,’ drawls another youth, coaxing a fat cigar and, after a pause, ‘I came here for Kipling, you know.’
‘Same here,’ rejoined the first; and with this common bond established they discussed the war news in exactly the same spirit as it was discussed all day all over London.¹

The ‘Kipling’ these young men had come for was the first performance of the poet’s much-boomed new poem, ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’. It is the paradigmatic newspaper poem of the South African War, an astonishing global success which owes more to the power of the press to create a literary sensation than to any ‘high poetic inspiration’ in the poem itself, as the Pall Mall reviewer was early to recognise.² In twenty-first century terms, Kipling’s poem went viral, becoming a meme that spawned imitations, refutations, parodies and protests, informing the language in which real soldiers talked about themselves and reshaping civilian attitudes towards the army in powerful, if not always entirely positive ways.

The absent-minded beggar – Kipling’s character, his real-life counterparts and his literary heritage and legacy – is at the heart of this chapter. As Chapter three showed, poets inspired by Kipling took up his portrayal of Tommy Atkins from the Barrack-Room Ballads, using Kipling’s models to reinforce, develop or contest the versions of military masculinity on offer in 1899-1902. Poets responding to the version of Tommy Atkins captured in ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ tended to assume a more explicitly critical position with respect to Kipling’s original, in particular by asserting the real soldier’s tender-heartedness against Kipling’s ‘absent-minded’ stereotype. Holly Furneaux demonstrates that gentleness and gentlemanliness were aspects of the military man

² Ibid.
important to representations of soldier-figures earlier in the 1800s. In reasserting the values of an earlier version of military manliness against an increasingly hegemonic image of the hyper-masculine soldier, fin-de-siècle newspaper poets made an appeal to alternative visions of imperialism, using their versions of the absent-minded beggar to voice anxieties about the imperial project.

The publication of ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ was carefully stage-managed to guarantee maximum exposure. Kipling’s poem first appeared on 31 October 1899 in the Daily Mail, as well as in at least twenty-two other papers whose editors had responded to the Mail’s aggressive advertising campaign and paid five guineas apiece for the right to simultaneous publication. That night it was performed by the celebrated Maud Beerbohm Tree at the Palace Theatre. This performance took place twenty days into the war, following three disastrous weeks for the British in which a third of the troops currently in South Africa found themselves locked up in sieges. Nonetheless, the atmosphere in the London theatre – according to the Pall Mall’s reporter – was ‘of the happiest optimism […] as if the outlook were the very brightest’, a fact which the writer attributes to excitement about the Kipling premiere. Beerbohm Tree’s audience heard four stanzas of alternating hexameter and pentameter lines, ababcdcd-rhymed; the driving iambic rhythm is softened by the chatty anapaests in each line’s opening foot, as well as after the caesurae in the hexameters, infusing the written text with the unmistakeable vitality of spoken language – a quality in Kipling’s poetry that a reviewer in 1893 described as ‘the true contagion of the best Music-hall patter song’. ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ is patterned so distinctively as to make imitation inevitable and immediately recognisable:

When you’ve shouted ‘Rule Britannia,’ when you’ve sung ‘God save the Queen,‘  
When you’ve finished killing Kruger with your mouth,  
Will you kindly drop a shilling in my little tambourine  
For a gentleman in khaki ordered South?  
He’s an absent-minded beggar, and his weaknesses are great—  
But we and Paul must take him as we find him—  
He is out on active service, wiping something off a slate  
And he’s left a lot of little things behind him!

The verses are interleaved with choruses patterned differently, though equally distinctively. Here, the iambs are interrupted in each line by a kind of military drum-roll flourish, *tum-ta-tum-ta-tum*, a cadence which finds its way into many of the response poems which ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ elicited.

Duke’s son—cook’s son – son of a hundred kings
(Fifty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay!)
Each of ’em doing his country’s work
(and who’s to look after their things?)
Pass the hat for your credit’s sake,
and pay—pay—pay!

(‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, ll. 9-14)

If the *Pall Mall* reporter was disappointed about the lack of ‘high poetic inspiration’ in ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, he or she seems to have felt that its reception nonetheless testified to Kipling’s talent for capturing the zeitgeist:

[I]t fell through a pleasant medium upon sympathetic ears, and moved all hearts. The effect was remarkable. It was not a Union Jack outburst, the prevailing note is not struck in that key—it was a warm but steady and somewhat restrained outburst, as if the sentiment of pride in the army was at the moment dominated by the determination that the nation would do its duty to the absent-minded beggar. […] [F]or the time being the warlike sentiment was chastened by a deep touch of pathos. […] Here was the deeply pathetic side of soldiering, and the loud patriotic outburst in ‘God Save our Queen’ came as a relief to saddened feelings.⁷

The poem was a worldwide publishing phenomenon, achieving celebrity status and becoming ‘famous for its fame, as success bred more success’⁸. Arthur Sullivan ensured its life in and beyond the music halls, composing a tune which Kipling described as ‘guaranteed to pull the teeth out of barrel-organs’.⁹ Indeed, neither Kipling nor Sullivan were reportedly complimentary about their work. In April 1909, *Pearson’s Weekly* presented both poet and composer among a list of artists who have ‘done their best to destroy the works of their youth’:

Mr. Kipling wants to destroy one of his poems, and also the author of it. He was sitting in his garden one day, when a street organ struck up ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ […]. Mr. Kipling was silent for a minute; then he turned to someone near.

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⁷ ‘Patriotic Demonstration’, *Pall Mall Gazette*.
‘If it were not suicide,’ he remarked viciously, ‘I would kill the man who wrote that.’

Sir Arthur Sullivan liked his own setting of the song no better. A lady persuaded him to play it, and when he had finished he swung around and asked abruptly, ‘Well, what do you think of it?’

She thought very little of it, but she hesitated to tell him so. Instead, she ventured to remark that the words were rather vulgar.

‘So is the music,’ was the composer’s comment.\

The verbatim reappearance of this column across the five years following its initial publication can be explained not only by Kipling and Sullivan’s colourful irreverence in speaking of ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, but also by the poem’s status as a unique international publishing phenomenon. The poem in its various forms became an inescapable part of everyday life. The *Daily Mail* noted on 23 March 1900 that ‘it is practically impossible to walk along a London street without it being whistled or hummed or barrel-organised in your ears’.\(^{11}\) It also travelled around the world, inspiring equally enthusiastic responses. John Lee quotes the *Mail*’s description of the poem in January 1900 ‘as a kind of imperial and military Puck: “The A.M.B. can put a girdle round the earth as long as he is on top of it to keep it for the Queen”’, eliciting donations to The Absent-Minded Beggar Fund ‘from Gibraltar, Australia, British Guiana, Trinidad, Canada, [and] British America’.\(^{12}\) A favourite with military and civilian bands and their audiences, ‘the poem became a part of the experience of most soldiers travelling from England and Ireland to South Africa, as well as of other soldiers from countries of the empire when arriving, and whilst in, South Africa’.\(^{13}\) While Lee argues that the poem tapped into a ready vein of imperial and patriotic fervour and generosity, becoming ‘a kind of small scale liturgy’ through which readers or audiences might ‘express their own desire to help, as part of a statement of political and social aspiration’, Stephen Miller goes much further, arguing that the success of the poem did not simply rely on or reflect public responses to the military but radically reshaped them: ‘Thanks

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\(^{10}\) ‘Destroyed by their Authors’, *Pearson’s Weekly*, 8 April 1909, p. 15. The column was widely reprinted; its journey through Australian newspapers is particularly well-documented thanks to the Trove database [<www.trove.nla.gov.au>](http://www.trove.nla.gov.au) [accessed 18 March 2021]. In 1909 the column appears in the *Melton Times and Rodney Advertiser* (Victoria), 1 July 1909, p. 6; *Horsham Times* (Victoria), 2 July 1909, p. 6; *Eurma Advertiser* (Victoria), 2 July 1909, p. 3; *Narracoota Herald* (South Australia), 2 July 1909, p. 6; *Richmond Guardian* (Victoria), 3 July 1909, p. 3; *Camperdown Chronicle* (Victoria), 10 July 1909, p. 6. The column reappears in flurries across the following years.

\(^{11}\) *Daily Mail*, 23 March 1900, p. 16.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 10.

In Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads, ‘Tommy’ Atkins insists on his own worth, demanding credit for his ability to ‘guard you while you sleep’ and to endure the physical rigours of ‘paradin’ in full kit, and contrasting these achievements with the sedentary civilians who ‘mock’ and ‘hustl[e]’ him.\footnote{Rudyard Kipling, ‘Tommy’, first published as ‘The Queen’s Uniform’, Scots Observer, 3.67 (1 March 1890) pp. 409-410. Collected in Rudyard Kipling, Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses (London: Methuen, 1892), pp. 6-9 (ll. 17-20).} In “The Absent-Minded Beggar”, the carping civilian ‘killing Kruger with your mouth’ (l. 2) is contrasted even more explicitly with the real activity of the soldiers who are tasked with putting that civilian enthusiasm into action. In a significant change from the Ballads, though, the poem speaks for and about Tommy Atkins, in the voice of the music-hall performer. In the service of its didactic fundraising purpose, the poem shifts Kipling’s representation of soldier-figures from the soldier’s own perspective to one which is external – and, in contrast with the Barrack-Room Ballads, also indulgent, paternalistic and patronising. Tommy is neither speaker nor imagined reader, while the audience needs reminding that they are Tommy’s ‘mates’: ‘that’s you and me’ (l. 46).

The soldier portrayed in ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ is quick to respond to ‘his country’s call’ (l. 33); like the returning soldier in ‘Back to the Army Again’, and those in the poems discussed in the first part of Chapter three, ‘his reg’ment didn’t need to send to find him’ (l. 34).\footnote{Rudyard Kipling, ‘Back to the Army Again’, Pall Mall Magazine, 3.16 (August 1894), pp. 589-594, collected in The Seven Seas (London: Methuen, 1896), pp. 163-167; Harold Begbie, ‘The Deserter’, Morning Post, 3 February 1900, p. 7. Collected in Begbie, The Handy Man: And Other Verses (London: Grant Richards, 1900), pp. 67-71.} The poem promises the soldier credit for having ‘hammered Paul’ Kruger and ‘saved the Empire’, after the war is won (l. 49. 45). But unlike his comrades in the Ballads, who exist in the separate military world of barracks and battlefield, the ‘absent-minded beggar’ is pictured in the context of civilian society, with ties and expectations that he cannot help but disappoint. He has ‘left a lot o’ little things behind him’, including the ‘girls he married secret’, bills for ‘gas and coals and vittles’ and ‘the house-rent’ (ll. 8, 15, 17). Not only is he unable to support those he has left at home, who are left to ‘live on half of o’ nothing paid ‘em punctual once a week’ (l. 31), their
out-of-sight plight is fully out-of-mind: as the poem repeatedly insists, ‘he’s an absent-minded beggar’. This failing of social and familial responsibilities is presented as hardly surprising, being of a piece with the character of a man who wouldn’t ‘ask permission’ to marry his sweetheart, ‘For he knew he wouldn’t get it if he did’ (ll. 15-16), who walks with girls ‘casual’, and thinks ‘it’s more than rather likely there’s a kid’, though he can’t be certain (ll. 18-19). The speaker exhorts his audience to postpone their censure (‘it ain’t the time for sermons with the winter coming on’), and instead to play their part to ‘help the home that Tommy’s left behind him’ (ll. 21-22). The poem’s chorus repeatedly attempts to collapse class distinctions and align Tommy Atkins with the whole social range of the military:

Cook’s son—Duke’s son—Son of a belted earl,  
Son of a Lambeth publican—it’s all the same to-day!  
Each of ’em doing his country’s work—and who’s to look after the girl?  
Pass the hat for your credit’s sake  
and pay—pay—pay!  
(‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, ll. 23-28)

In contrast with this ideal of egalitarian social levelling, however, the family pictured in the poem’s verses is in the direst economic straits, in which escaping ‘the workhouse’ constitutes a success (l. 49). Indeed, the admirable endurance in harsh circumstances with which Tommy is credited in the Barrack-Room Ballads is here attributed not to the soldier but to his family, ‘far too proud to beg or speak’, who will pawn their pitiful belongings – ‘put their sticks and bedding up the spout’ – rather than ask for help (ll. 29-30).

Although the tone is indulgent, and Kipling’s charitable purpose certainly seeks to needle the consciences of his affluent civilian audiences, their sympathy is engaged on behalf of Tommy Atkins’s family, not of the soldier himself; they are expected to assent to a portrayal of Tommy as ‘absent-minded’ when it comes to his domestic responsibilities and invited to postpone, rather than cancel, their censorious moralising. Writing about the Victorian music halls and variety theatres, Peter Bailey argues that the stage-soldier was ‘redeemed from his previous outsider status’ and ‘humanized with the depiction of family or romantic ties back home’.17 In ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, however, this humanization brings with it serious risks to Tommy’s fragile reputation. If

the Barrack-Room Ballads established the soldier as a complex and equivocal figure who nonetheless asserted his own dignity and agency, ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ reverts to an earlier negative stereotype of the soldier as socially disgraceful, seeing Tommy Atkins from a civilian perspective, and silencing the soldier’s own voice. Richard Caton Woodville’s image (see Figure 4.1) became, in Lee’s words, ‘a kind of “logo” for the poem and the fundraising campaign,’ and ‘the dominant image of the war’, appearing in countless souvenirs and artefacts as well as on the many special editions of Kipling’s text.18 Woodville’s Tommy has a firm stance and a chiselled jaw, and the strong brows and moustaches of a manly hero. However, with his helmet tossed aside, his bandana rakishly askew, and a glint in his eyes, this image has more of the wild imperial adventurer than the disciplined and purposeful figures in the Barrack-Room Ballads illustrations discussed in previous chapters; for example, compare Figure 4.1 with Figure 2.4 (p. 95).

This portrayal of the ‘absent-minded’ Tommy Atkins was taken up by writers reluctant to accord the serving soldier the kind of dignity which Barrack-Room Ballads

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18 Lee, pp. 16, 20.

implicitly claims for him. Kipling’s poem could play a part in sustaining multiple positions within the public’s complex and unreliable attitude towards soldiers, as exemplified in an exchange between the Bishop of Chester, who wrote a letter which appeared in the _Chester Courant_ at the beginning of January 1900, and the clergyman-newspaper poet H.D. Rawnsley, who quoted the letter as an epigraph to ‘Our Departing Reservists’ which appeared in the _Westminster Gazette_ the following week.\(^{19}\) The _Westminster Gazette_ provides the relevant context for letter and poem: ‘By the Service regulations the Reservists are allowed to withdraw the balance of their reserve pay, which usually amounts to about £3, at the moment of mobilisation and departure.’\(^{20}\) The editorial comment that ‘This is questionable wisdom’ indicates the writer’s assent to the Bishop’s ‘strong […] regret that, through well-meant but most cruel kindness, our Reservists are being tempted at the solemn and touching hour of farewell to become the victims of drink.’ Rawnsley’s poem uses Kipling’s language to paraphrase the Bishop’s letter:

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He’s an absent-minded beggar—that’s no reason we should take
Advantage of poor Tommy’s absent mind.
Blow him up with pies, at parting, till his belt begins to break,
Fill him full of parting liquor till he’s blind.
(‘Our departing reservists’, ll. 1-4)
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Apparent deference to ‘the solemn thing he’s got to do, | To pound away at Kruger and his Boers for you and me’ (ll. 6-7) is immediately undercut by the way Rawnsley collapses the distance between Southampton and Cape Town, imagining ‘Reservists rolling down the street’ in England and directly into battle, still full of ‘pies’ and ‘parting liquor’ (l. 14). He exhorts the Service authorities to ‘Keep his pay! And give him baccy for a pipe along the way! | And send him brave but sober on his foes’ (ll. 11-12). Allowing a soldier to spend his own money is reframed as civilian generosity: ‘Please remember in our kindness we are cruel all the same | When we stood the absent-minded beggar treat’ (ll. 15-16).

Rather than offering any kind of critical response or development, Rawnsley does little more than amplify the Bishop of Chester’s message, transposing it from a local to a national newspaper and uniting it with the rhetorical power of Kipling’s

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\(^{19}\) ‘Our departing reservists – mistaken hospitality’, _Westminster Gazette_, 11 January 1900, p. 10; reprinted in the _Newcastle Chronicle_, 12 January 1900, p. 4; _Whitby Gazette_, 19 January 1900, p. 8; _Weymouth Telegram_, 23 January 1900, p. 5; _Sydney Daily Telegraph_, 21 February 1900, p. 5.

\(^{20}\) _Westminster Gazette_, 11 January 1900, p. 10.
familiar tag (‘absent-minded beggar’ appears five times in the poem’s sixteen lines, with another ‘poor Tommy’s absent mind’) in order to gloss over the actual facts of Tommy’s inadequate wage by describing reserve pay as a ‘treat’. This textual phenomenon is worth noting: a letter in a regional newspaper prompted a poem printed in another newspaper, which itself made substantial intertextual use of ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, the most famous newspaper poem of the period, and the resulting poem made its way around the world in English-language newspapers. Throughout, the agreement resounded: Tommy Atkins was passive, childlike, incapable of exercising self-discipline, and requiring paternalistic policy. He might ‘give his life for Queen and country too’ (l. 8), but he could not be relied upon to make wise decisions, let alone to speak for himself. Moreover, his bad behaviour is presented as regrettable not because of its impact on Tommy himself, on his military abilities, or even upon his family, but because a drunken Tommy disturbs what the Bishop of Chester calls ‘the solemn and touching hour of farewell’, spoiling the gratifying spectacle of military masculinity which is imagined to exist for civilian consumption.21

As this use of the absent-minded beggar indicates, Kipling’s 1899 poem presented a more equivocal soldier-figure than the Tommy Atkins of the Barrack-Room Ballads. Allusions to those earlier poems abound in the newspaper poetry of the 1899-1902 war, but ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ was also phenomenally influential; as New Zealand’s Evening Post put it in January 1900, ‘Kipling’s [poem] has only been in print a few weeks, yet it has already brought forth hosts of imitations.22 If the experiences of that newspaper’s editors – who report that ‘most’ of these responses to Kipling’s poem ‘are only fit for the waste-paper basket’, with occasional ‘exceptions worth publishing’ – can be taken as indicative of the situation around the world, then the poems quoted in this chapter represent just a fraction of an enormous body of material inspired by Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ and submitted to newspaper editors. Notwithstanding the contrasts between the figures of the soldiers in Barrack-Room Ballads and ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, Kipling’s new poem influenced the language used to talk about soldiers, and the attitudes expressed. Indeed, it may be that the discontinuities between the Ballads and the ‘beggar’ were themselves a source of creative tension,

21 Westminster Gazette, 11 January 1900, p. 10.
22 Evening Post (New Zealand), 20 January 1900, p. 3.
opening up a space for readers to articulate alternative visions of the character of the soldier.

The implicit denigration of the soldier in ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ is the aspect of Kipling’s poem to which popular author and campaigner Marie Corelli objected most indignant. Her pamphlet *Patriotism—Or Self-Advertisement?* imagines the righteous outrage of Tommy who returns from South Africa to find ‘that through the efforts of a few pushing journalists, […] he should have the taunt “Beggar!” flung in his face from one end of the world to the other.’ It is also the aspect which *Punch* highlighted, in a parody purporting to be an Italian translator’s misunderstanding which renders the absent-minded beggar ‘Il Mendicante Distratto’: ‘He’s a mendicant distracted, and his feebleness is great’. In place of the principled and political action to recover the country’s honour (‘out on active service, wiping something off a slate’, in Kipling’s poem), in this version Tommy is ‘actually a servant, wiping something off a plate’, his humble position reduced still further as ‘The man who earns the wage’ in Kipling’s poem becomes ‘the man that begs the alms’, and reaches his nadir when he is bestially translated into a ‘Billy’ goat who has left ‘the little goats’, ‘his kids […] behind him’. Other satirists directed their parodies at fundraising efforts which ‘thwacked’ the “patriotic” drum for ‘self-advertising and pocket-filling purposes’, as the *Westminster Gazette* put it; music hall comedian Arthur Chevalier performed a skit which invited audiences to ‘hear a cry from the slums, | And pay, pay, pay!’ as ‘a well-meant reminder of needs at home, less picturesque, though not perhaps less urgent, than those of our gallant soldiers at the front’.

‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ opened up a space for critical interpretations of its own representations of the soldier, as well as of the practices and politics of charitable giving more generally. Kipling’s verse-form (with the help of Sullivan’s tune) proved remarkably amenable to imitation, while the ubiquity of the poem on page and stage, on imperial memorabilia and artefacts (tea-sets, handkerchiefs, biscuit tins) as well as in advertising text and imagery, meant that it was an immediately recognisable point of

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24 ‘Il Mendicante Distratto’, *Punch*, 117.6 (6 December 1899), p. 269 (l. 5).
25 Ibid. (ll. 7, 12, 16, 14).
cultural reference. Readers and poets were sensitive to the implications for military masculinity of this new and ubiquitous representation of Tommy Atkins. Some soldier-poets responded with straightforward gratitude for the poem’s charitable impulses, while other writers appropriated Kipling’s form and voice to make a claim for other charitable and social causes or to assert alternative and more complex or admirable versions of working-class military masculinity.

Many of the response-poems to ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ assume Tommy Atkins’s own voice to contradict Kipling’s suggestion that the ‘absent-minded beggar’ may ‘forget it all’ and fail to give thanks for, or even to notice, the help his family has been given.27 These were not all by military poets: Daily Chronicle journalist Begbie was one, his poem ‘Thanks’ appearing in the Morning Post in December 1899.28 ‘Thanks’ asserts the dignity of the military man whose family benefits from the Absent-Minded Beggar Fund. The cockney accent is faint — this is not full ‘Rudyardkiplingese’ — but it is clearly present in occasional contractions: ‘though we ain’t passed resolutions we’re all of us saying, “Thanks”’ (l. 4). This Tommy’s voice is a far cry from the raucous speakers of Barrack-Room Ballads. Instead, the careful metrical balance of each line, three stresses either side of a strong caesura, fits the measured and decorous way in which Begbie’s speaker acknowledges the significance of the public’s generosity. The poem opens by insisting on the fact that Tommy ‘didn’t ask for’ charity (l. 1): ‘you’ve opened your purses wide’ in what is pictured as a spontaneous and generous gesture, rather than in response to a ‘beggar’ — a word which is notably absent from Begbie’s text. The material support is welcomed: ‘you’ve done a good turn to the chappies as all up her Majesty’s ranks’ (l. 3), and the speaker looks forward to ‘a beano’ from ‘The missus […] out o’ the shiners you’ve given her’ on his return (ll. 9, 11-12). But far more important, to this speaker, is what this financial support says about public esteem for the soldier: ‘You’ve given the missus a handshake and a kind o’ military pride’ (l. 2). A public statement of the soldier’s value affects the whole family, so that rather than feeling the indignity of charitable sympathy, the household shares in a ‘military pride’ more commonly experienced by the families of the upper ranks. Begbie alludes to Kipling’s collocation of

27 Kipling, ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ (l. 47).
28 Harold Begbie, ‘Thanks’, Morning Post, 1 December 1899, p. 4. Reprinted in Bradford Daily Telegraph, 1 December 1899, p. 2; Gloucester Citizen, 1 December 1899, p. 3; South Wales Echo, 1 December 1899, p. 3; Portsmouth Evening News, 2 December 1899, p. 2; South Wales Daily News, 2 December 1899, p. 6; Taunton Courier, 6 December 1899, p. 3; Hampshire Telegraph, 9 December 1899, p. 11.
‘Duke’s son’ and ‘cook’s son’ (‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, ll. 9, 22) when he calls to mind an image of ‘the missus […] boiling the tea, | Talking o’ Duke and Duchess, and bucking (first time!) about me’ (l. 10), but though this is phrased positively, the scene evokes powerfully the way that the more usual denigration of ordinary soldiers might have played out in communities, households and marriages.

The first and third stanzas of Begbie’s poem express gratitude for the dignity which public generosity accords to the figure of the soldier. The poem honours Tommy Atkins by insisting on his sensitivity to his family’s experience of ‘military pride’; Begbie offers a tacit repudiation of the claim that Tommy is ‘an absent-minded beggar’ oblivious to the plight of the ‘little things […] left behind him’. However, the middle stanza asserts a different model of military masculinity:

What brings the butt o’ the rifle with a thud to the collar-bone?
What sends the bayonet home with a ring and gives it a kind o’ tone?
What harks us over the boulders and bounds us over the banks?

(‘Thanks’, ll. 5-8)

Begbie’s Tommy may be attentive to his wife, insisting on his ability to call her vividly to mind from thousands of miles away, but this sensitivity does not preclude a full-blooded relish for the violence of battle. Personal physical strength and courage – the ability to ‘bound’ over rough terrain and ‘cheer’ in spite of ‘a splintered knee’ – is coupled with a strangely dislocated portrayal of violence. The soldier’s body is reduced through metonymy to a disembodied ‘collar-bone’, as though the only meaningful physical sensation is the one that comes from being in contact with a weapon. Selected sounds of battle are made uncomfortably present; the ‘thud’ of the cocked and loaded rifle-butt on the soldier’s shoulder introduces a level of realism which is very strangely undercut in the following line, in which the gory image of a bayonet piercing flesh is reframed as an almost mechanical procedure. The enemy body itself disappears, as the blade is sent ‘home’ with a ‘ring’.

The traces of ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ in Begbie’s ‘Thanks’ are barely perceptible in the faint cockney, and in the ‘Duke and Duchess’ so gratifying to the speaker’s ‘missus’. But they are also present in the rhythms of the middle stanza, where in contrast with the rest of the poem the anaphoric lines begin with a stressed syllable, evoking the military flourish of Kipling’s refrain. Begbie’s poem appeared in December
1899, at the height of the ‘Absent-Minded Beggar’ boom, and replied explicitly to the charitable giving inspired by Kipling’s poem. Its silence about the figure of the absent-minded beggar himself makes it clear that Begbie was deliberately repudiating some of the famous poem’s implications. The Tommy who emerges from Begbie’s portrayal is characterised by both more sensitivity and more aggression than his absent-minded counterpart, whose business in South Africa is euphemised as ‘doing his country’s work’.

In another poem characterised by a voice strikingly unlike that of Kipling’s absent-minded beggar, though which paradoxically replicates the verse stanza-shape of Kipling’s poem precisely, W.B.’s Tommy Atkins takes up a rhetorically powerful position, insisting on his own dedication to duty, his self-denial, discipline and determination.29

We’ve heard out here in Africa of Britain’s latest ‘rage’,  
We’ve read the lines of Kipling with delight.  
We’re told they’ve been recited from almost every stage,  
And brought forth showers of money every night.  
We rejoice to know that Britons have responded to the call  
To help the ones we had to leave behind us,  
But while we’re crushing Kruger for the good of one and all,  
We’re sure you will not absent-minded find us.  
(Tommy’s Reply to Kipling, ll. 1-8)

As ‘crushing Kruger’ implies, this poem rejects the euphemisms of Kipling’s ‘wiping something off a slate’ and replaces them with a reminder of the harsh realities of battle. ‘Amid the fighting, […] When the bullets round us fly, | Or a treacherous shell with which we may be blinded’ (ll. 9, 20-21), the speaker argues, it is hardly surprising if ‘we are liable to forget | And think of nothing else but what’s our duty’ (ll. 9-10). In this poem, apparent absent-mindedness is reimagined as wholly appropriate focus. Indulgent reminiscences of home, by contrast, are something the disciplined soldier allows himself only when time and duty allow, ‘when we lie in camp at night, and a few spare moments get, | We’re thinking then of England, home and beauty’ (ll. 11-12).

The title proclaims the speaker to be ‘Tommy’, a figure who challenges negative stereotypes of the common soldier by presenting himself as educated and dutiful,
waiting hopefully for ‘the long-expected letter’ from home (l. 14) but resigned ‘to follow where our leaders take us’ in spite of the emotional hardships (l. 36). The charitable effusions of Tommy’s civilian admirers, even the generosity of the Queen herself, are exposed as trifling in comparison with the service which Tommy is doing; a ‘puff’ of tobacco and ‘a nice tin’, in return for imperial victory:

I hear the British public are sending Christmas fare,  
I’m sure we won’t forget their noble deed;  
For they will be rewarded—of that we’ll take good care,  
And at Christmas hope to puff their fragrant weed;  
We appreciate the kindly act, we’ll do our best to win,  
Strengthened by that chocolate from Queen Victoria  
And when the war is over, in return for her nice tin,  
We hope to make a present of Pretoria.

(‘Tommy’s Reply to Kipling’, ll. 25-32)

The speaker twice insists ‘Don’t call us absent-minded’ (l. 19), ‘do not say that we are absent-minded’ (l. 24). While he appears to concede partially to Kipling’s assertion that Tommy’s ‘weaknesses are great’ when he acknowledges that ‘we have our little weaknesses’ (l. 33), the poem makes clear that any such ‘weaknesses’ are insignificant in comparison with the strength of character demanded of wartime service: ‘We may be absent-minded, but we never yet have lacked | The pluck to follow where our leaders take us; ‘We’re absent-minded beggars, but we’ll always hold in view | The welfare and the honour of the nation’ (ll. 35-36, 39-40). W.B.’s soldiers both are and are not absent-minded beggars. With dignity and restraint they acknowledge their gratitude for charitable giving. They recognise their caricature on ‘almost every stage’ (l. 3), but they insist upon an alternative reading of the characteristics so humorously expounded in Kipling’s poem. Capitalising on the familiar stanza shape, W.B. excises the jovial chorus in order to mark the difference between this speaker and the music hall figure. Norfolk newspaper the Eastern Evening News mentions this poem as having been sent in as a cutting from the Natal Witness by a soldier from Norwich ‘who is now in South Africa’.  

Though the paper does not print the poem, the soldier’s attempt to take a part in its onward transmission, by submitting his newspaper clipping to his local paper at home, indicates a nod of assent to the response poem’s portrayal of him and his colleagues as a counterpart to Kipling’s, as well as demonstrating an understanding that newspaper poetry could play a part in public debates about the soldier’s character.

30 Eastern Evening News, 30 April 1900, p. 2.
South African poet Keppel Howard makes much more enthusiastic use of Kipling’s characteristic cockney style in ‘The Beggar’s Thanks’.31

I’m one of your Tommy Atkins, Brown of the Royal Blanks,
A gentleman in khaki ordered south.
(They calls me Pious Peter, does the fellows in the ranks,
Because I’m rather ‘andy with my mouth.)
I’m a fightin’, long of others, rubbin’ somethink off a slate,
A’ rubbin’, rubbin’, rubbin’ till I’m sick,
And I’m thinkin’ of what Billy said—says he to me, ‘Say, mate,
The bloke what did the writin’ laid it on thick.’

(‘The Beggar’s Thanks’, ll. 1-8)

Howard’s other newspaper poems of the period indicate that he was not a soldier. As well as utilising the same stanza form (though without the change of pace introduced by the refrain), ‘The Beggar’s Thanks’ quotes liberally from Kipling’s poem, establishing its own claim to authority in Kiplingesque style by individualising ‘The khaki-coloured lad’ (l. 15) into a cast of distinct characters. The poem establishes a light-hearted tone, suggesting that the romantic infidelities which Kipling depicts are due to ‘Tommy’s pals’ being so ‘soft about the ’eart that They can’t bear to see gals lookin’ lonesome like’ (ll. 19-20). But this indulgent comedy is in the service of Howard’s more solemn refutation of Kipling’s premise; the poem’s refrain insists: ‘I’m a’ absent-minded beggar, but I’m ‘omesick sometimes, too, | A-thinkin’ of the gal I wed afore I joined the ranks’ (ll. 9-10, 21-22), reassuring civilian listeners that the recipients of their charity aren’t ‘forgettin’ what you gents is tryin’ to do’ (l. 11). Moreover, the poem refuses to leave readers with the jovial image of soldiers ‘pass[ing] the grog round, mateys’ to ‘drink a vote o’ thanks’ (ll. 12, 24). The middle of the poem asks:

D’yer remember Mike O’Leary,—’im as used to make us laugh
With ’is way of tellin’ stories round the fire?
Well, old Mike got ’it at Belmont, ’e got nearly blewed in ’arf—
God ’elp that gal of ’is (remember ’Ria?)
And when I stooped and whisp’rin asked ’ow things was going with ’im,
He turned white and sort of soft-like says—says he—
‘I’m going, Pete, but, matey, give my love to ’er and Jim—
Does yer think that some’ll care for sake o’ me?’

(‘The Beggar’s Thanks’, ll. 25-32)

31 Keppel Howard, ‘The Beggar’s Thanks’, Cape Town Weekly, 3 January 1900, p. 30. The poem is reprinted, citing the Cape Times as a source, in a number of Australian newspapers, including the Maitland Daily Mercury, 3 February 1900, p. 3; Sydney Daily Telegraph, 3 February 1900, p. 14; Maitland Weekly Mercury, 10 February 1900, p. 13; Clarence and Richmond Examiner, 13 February 1900, p. 6; Armidale Chronicle, 24 February 1900, p. 8; Inverell Times, 28 February 1900, p. 4.
Tommy’s capacity to be ‘omesick’ (ll. 9, 21, 33) is related to his ability to ‘be grateful’ (l. 45). The painful specificity of Mike O’Leary’s death, and the soldiers’ regret for his widow’s sorrow, ensures that this gratitude is weighted with a kind of personal history completely absent from Kipling’s stage caricature.

Several responses to ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ explicitly portray Tommy’s capacity to be tender-hearted, both to lovers at home and to comrades in arms – indeed, the moment of a colleague’s death is often the moment when thoughts of home are most vividly present. These poems take their place alongside a significant number of other newspaper poems of the war which contest the hegemony of the hyper-masculine, bloodthirsty rebel of the Barrack-Room Ballads, proposing an alternative vision of the common soldier which harks back to the mid-century models of ‘military men of feeling’ which Holly Furneaux identifies in literary responses to the Crimean war.32 Allan Johnson’s ‘The Thistle’, written in Aberdeen but published, like Howard’s, in the Cape Town Weekly in December 1899, is representative.33 Johnson’s project is comparable with Kipling’s; exploring shared characteristics between ‘The Scottish National Emblem’ and Scotland’s soldiers overseas, the poem insists that the values which typify Scotland’s military ‘sons’ are those of the nation at large. However, while Johnson’s soldier shares certain qualities with the men in Kipling’s Barrack-Room Ballads, this figure has one strikingly different virtue. Johnson describes the Scottish thistle as:

A rugged flower, that wins a hardy way
O'er barren rocks and moorland bleak and bare
Mid northern storm and mist and biting wind,
And rears its blossoms 'neath their nurturing care

(‘The Thistle’, ll. 1-4)

Like the flower, Scotland’s soldiers are ‘bold and barbed and shaggy’, raised in ‘a rugged land’ and ‘Hardened by centuries of warring sore’ (ll. 7, 13-14). However, though it might not possess the ‘gorgeous hues of poppy or of rose | Nor perfume sweet of woodbine wild and shy’ (ll. 5-6), the thistle hides a surprising secret:

And yet, at heart all delicate and soft,
A silken bed for elves to nestle in,
Whence float its winged little nurslings forth
Like gossamer, when Autumn winds begin.

(‘The Thistle’, ll. 9-12)

32 Furneaux, Military Men of Feeling.
Campaigns against their ‘Southron [sic] foe’ and an inhospitable landscape of ‘grey sky, and grudging soil’ reveal Scotland’s soldiers to be, like their emblem, ‘loyal, true, and tender at the core’ (ll. 15-16). Tough but also gentle, hardy but also delicate, Johnson’s Scottish soldiers make Kipling’s Tommy Atkins seem single-dimensional. Likewise, his contemplative iambic tetrameters, in abcb quatrains woven together with assonant half-rhymes between first and third lines (soft/forth, sons/soil), open up space for reflection; the contrast accentuates the potentially coercive effects of Kipling’s driving rhythms which compel the reader or audience to sing along, requiring them ‘to pay attention at someone else’s pace’.

Edgar Wallace’s ‘Legacies’, dated 10th February from Modder River in the Cape Colony, was published in the Daily News in March 1900. Like ‘The Thistle’, Wallace’s poem seeks an effect very different from that generated by the music hall rhythms of Kipling’s Ballads or ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, using alternate-rhymed iambic pentameter to elevate the narrative of a soldier’s death by according it literary significance. The poem tells its story in the dying soldier’s own voice – a voice strongly reminiscent of the Tommy Atkins from Barrack-Room Ballads, but offering itself as a rebuttal of a vision of Tommy Atkins which presents him as ‘absent-minded’. This soldier is keenly aware of the material consequences of his impending death:

My public clothin’—that goes back to stores—
My kit’ll sell by auction on the square;
An’ other fellers will be ‘formin’ fours’
An’ markin’ time’ in boots I used to wear.

(‘Legacies’, ll. 7-10)

The iambic and firmly end-stopped lines convey the sense of a speaker determined to talk in spite of pain, supported by military discipline. Edgar Wallace served as a private in the Royal Medical Corps for five years, before a meeting with Kipling inspired him to leave the army in order to pursue his poetic ambitions; 1899 found him acting as war correspondent in South Africa for Reuters and the Daily Mail. In some Australian newspapers the poem was accompanied by a note introducing Wallace as the “Soldier

34 Howarth, ‘Kipling Plays the Empire’, p. 615.
35 Edgar Wallace, ‘Legacies’, Daily News, 5 March 1900, p. 2; reprinted in the Penrith Observer, 13 March 1900, p. 6; also reprinted under the title ‘Legacies from Modder River’ in colonial newspapers including New Zealand Mail, 23 August 1900, p. 9; Brisbane Courier, 8 September 1900, p. 9; Observer (New Zealand), 8 September 1900, p. 21; Express and Telegraph (Adelaide), 21 September 1900, p. 3; Chronicle (Adelaide), 6 October 1900, p. 44. Collected in Edgar Wallace, Writ in Barracks (London: Methuen, 1900), pp. 42-44.
Rather than the mangled half-truths of ‘Rudyardkiplingese’, the knowledgeable specificity of this poem’s detail serves as a striking reminder of the soldier-speaker’s poverty; there is very little that he has the authority to distribute after his death. The personal ‘Legacies’ which he seeks to pass on to his silent companion are trifles, as well as treasures:

The dog is yours; and so’s the photo frames,  
Them pictures what I cut, an’ my new box.  
The pack of cards, the dominoes, an’ games  
The knittin’ needles, an’ the knitted socks,  
An’ all, except the letters and the ring—  
You’ll find them all together tied with string.  

(‘Legacies’, ll. 1-6)

The destination of the final two items (to be sent ‘to my——friend’, l. 12) aligns the speaker’s soldier-colleague with his lover; both are to be the recipients of his treasures after his death. Tenderness characterises both pairs of relationships. The dying man is conscious of the ‘pain’ the news of his death will bring his lover (l. 14); her capacity to ‘feel’ is attributed by the speaker to the fact that she ‘is a woman’ (l. 30), but the steps he asks his friend to take makes clear that he, too, is able to ‘feel’, as do the trochaic inversions which perform his breaking voice:

Ain’t I a wreck! for God’s sake don’t tell ’er;  
Say it was fever—peaceful—in the ’ills;  
An’ write about the wreaths, the ’Jack,’ and band,  
An’—send a bit of hair—you understand?  

(‘Legacies’, ll. 15-18)

Meanwhile, the speechless companion indicates his own capacity to ‘feel’ in the questions implied by the speaker’s responses: ‘The pain ain’t near so bad as wot it were’; ‘Oh no, the Doctor lets me talk’ (ll. 13, 19). Wallace evinces his own tenderness as he imagines the experience of dying:

I ain’t a-tirin’—’cept a funny light,  
An’ just a feelin’ that I’d like to walk  
To where it seems to flicker in the night,  
Better for me to go with aching ’ead  
Than go in trouble with my say unsaid.  

(‘Legacies’, ll. 20-24)

The notion that a soldier might be ‘troubled’ by unspoken words and unresolved disputes (‘I never meant no ’arm, God only knows’, l. 26) speaks to that tenderness ‘at

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37 ‘A Soldier’s Legacies’, South Australian Register (Adelaide), 8 June 1900, p. 5; Coolgardie Miner (Western Australia), 25 June 1900, p. 7; Coolgardie Pioneer (Western Australia), 30 June 1900, p. 25; Kalgoorlie Western Argus (Western Australia), 5 July 1900, p. 34.
the core’ which Johnson insists upon, and which contrasts so firmly with the ‘absent-minded beggar’ s oblivious eagerness to escape his domestic tribulations. Willing to risk even the appearance of absurdity when he asks his friend to send a lock of his hair to the woman at home (‘—it’s foolish—but a little bit’, l. 34), this soldier resists the pressure to perform stoic carelessness amidst his homosocial peer-group. Instead, in its final lines, Wallace’s poem presents the dying soldier as responsive to his companion’s anxious care, and devoted to his lover, to his final breath:

‘Our Father’—Lord, how strange! It’s—all—ri’—sir.  
_The let— an’—th—_ring an’—hair—for—’er!_  

(‘Legacies’, ll. 35-36)

In the relationship implied between the dying man and his loyal friend, as much as in that between the soldier and his lover, ‘Legacies’ insists that the soldier is more feeling than either the _Barrack-Room Ballads_ or ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ allow him to appear. At the same time, through his choice of metre, Wallace places his humble speaker in the highest traditions of English literature, elevating his single experience and connecting him with the literary history of his nation.

An insistence on Tommy’s tender-heartedness could also support a pragmatic argument over the administration of charity funds. John Strange Winter – the pseudonym used by Henrietta Stannard for more than one hundred military novels between 1881 and 1904 – was described by John Ruskin in 1888 as ‘the author to whom we owe the most finished and faithful rendering ever yet given of the character of the British soldier’. Winter was vocal in a campaign administered by the _Morning Post_, pursued in newspaper poetry as well as editorial prose, not just for financial aid for Tommy and his family, but also for such aid to be administered ‘gently, tenderly, secretly’. In an article which describes the administration of patriotic funds for soldiers’ families as ‘a very real stain’ on ‘our nation’s character’, Winter accuses the administrators of ‘robbing beautiful white-robed charity of all her loveliness’, ‘grinding the face of the poor’ and ‘making grief more hard to bear’ by requiring the wives of ‘common soldiers’ to humble themselves ‘as if they were disgraced paupers’ in order to

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access financial assistance. Assuring Tommy Atkins, ‘that in the dictionary of the people at home there is no such thing as a “common” soldier’, Winter makes the case that the soldier’s widow ought to be allowed to maintain her dignity while receiving charity, recognising that both soldier and widow are fully, feelingly human: ‘do the officials of the Royal Patriotic Fund want us to believe that “common” people’s hearts never ache and bleed?’

‘Tommy, His Story’, published in the *Black and White Budget* and reprinted in a South Africa newspaper, takes its place alongside Winter’s prose writing in this campaign. In a newspaper poem which calls attention to the print medium of the newspaper by describing the way that the soldier’s ‘story’ gets told, Winter, like Wallace, focuses on the prospect of death in order to insist upon Tommy’s tenderness. The soldier’s capacity for the full range of human emotions comes across in the ‘sob in his throat’ that ‘half-strangles Tommy as he be-thinks | Him of sweetheart or wife’, facing the uncertainty of ‘his share of the story’ (ll. 22-25). Winter draws on representations of Tommy Atkins familiar from the *Barrack-Room Ballads*, in which the military refines the true man out of unpromising raw material:

Drill the man till you make the machine
Perfect and true—and then ’twill be seen
That Tommy will plump for Glory!

(‘Tommy—His Story’, ll. 12-14)

Alluding to ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, Winter pictures the army as a place of social egalitarianism, suggesting that ‘Tommy’ might be ‘born of a duke or a clod’ (l. 10). Whatever his social background, however, the soldier has the capacity for patriotism which his unsavoury appearance might belie. His decision to join up might have been motivated initially by financial hardship (having ‘taken the shilling, perhaps in a fix, | Perhaps for the old, old story’, ll. 3-4), but it nonetheless expresses a deeper truth about his character:

because some trace remains
Of the old knight-errant and chivalrous strains,
That in bygone days meant Glory[.]

(‘Tommy—His Story’, ll. 5-7)

This spark of British national character, however it may be ‘hid[den] in khaki’, is ‘all of a blaze’ with passion for the ‘story’ that is ‘written in blood on the wall of the world’ (ll. 17, 26). Britain’s global position depends on the reputation of her soldiers ‘hurl’d |

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40 Winter, ‘Patriotism’s Reward’.
41 Ibid.
42 John Strange Winter, ‘Tommy, His Story’, CTLP Button, vi, p. 25, citing the *Black and White Budget*. 
Broadcast as a sample of Glory’ (ll. 27–28). It is therefore vital that ‘Tommy ne’er shrinks | From carving out his share of the story’ (ll. 24–25), whether this story ends with Tommy ‘at rest, | His white face [...] blank and his manly breast’ bearing ‘the blood-red seal of Glory’ (ll. 33–35), or with the soldier ‘Unscathed and buoyant, bright and well’, living ‘To tell his share of the story’ – ‘Covered with wounds and Glory’ (ll. 45-46, 49). The movement from individual honour to the nation’s glory is traced in the poem’s rhythm, too, as the echo of ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’s anapaestic military flourish, tum-ta-tum-ta-tum, provides a drumbeat at the heart of Winter’s poem, linking the patriotic military masculinity that secretly characterises Tommy (the trace of the ‘knight errant and chivalrous strains’), the barrack training ground (‘drill the man till you make the machine’) and the ‘broadcast’ glory that ‘let[s] the land ring with triumph and praise’ (ll. 6, 12, 51).

Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ presents charitable giving as the least the nation can do, as the soldier’s ‘mates’, to provide for Tommy’s family. Winter puts the case more strongly, assuming the reader’s concern for ‘widows and babes, and mothers and brides’ (l. 54) for their own sake, and exhorting them, ‘Don’t let the orphans go hungry to-night, | They’ve drawn a blank in the Glory!’ (ll. 62–63). Alluding to the place of the newspaper casualty lists in the experience of ‘desolation and pain, | Hunger and cold’ experienced by those for whom ‘the light of their days | Went out as they read the story’ (ll. 58–60, 52–53), the poet offers a corrective to the narrative of ‘Glory’ which obscures the cost of the nation’s success. The poem counters the passivity of soldiers’ families in ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ with an image of wives and children making a willing sacrifice of their husbands and fathers for the sake of Britain. Similarly, Winter suggests that her readers will want to ‘give’ not only as a response to Tommy’s impressively ‘manly’ qualities (l. 34) but because such charitable responses represent their own active participation in the ‘story’ of Britain’s imperial success:

We can all help in this, taking a share,  
Giving up something for those who were there,  
And each write a part of the story;  
We cheer Tommy living—don’t forget Tommy dead,  
But pile up a cairn to the thin line of red,  
And all of us share in the Glory!

(‘Tommy—his story’, ll. 64–70)

The rolling dactyls of this closing stanza, exhorting the reader to participate in Tommy’s glory, are interrupted by the rhythm of the pre-penultimate line. As though
acknowledging the way that a fluent, driving rhythm might lull into carelessness, might suppress critical engagement rather than persuade a reader to act with principle, Winter’s speaker momentarily disrupts the pace to call attention to the hypocrisies of social attitudes. In Winter’s poem, Tommy’s tender-heartedness is key to a political argument about the extent to which lower class women and families were othered by the language and imagery of charity appeals, newspaper reports, and even poems like Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ – a process which curtailed the scope for truly sympathetic responses to their experiences and losses. By emphasising the single ‘story’ in which soldier, family, and charitable reader each play a part, united by the encouraging rhythms of the parade ground, Winter insists on a continuity of British humanity which cuts across class and military/civilian divisions, recalling Kipling’s description of the soldier as ‘most remarkable like you’.43

Winter’s is not the only poem to direct attention to the role of newspapers in shaping a public understanding of and response to the army. In ‘Tommy’s Appeal’, which appeared in a British newspaper as well as in South Africa, the soldier’s ‘thanks’ for civilian support is the preamble to a more pointed social plea which directs attention to social conditions in Britain.44 In the process, the poet exposes the British public’s contributions to charitable funds as an inadequate response to these conditions, betraying a limited appreciation of Tommy’s experiences. Although the anonymous poet uses Kipling’s cockney voice to maintain some sense of a humble, apolitical stance, and recreates ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’’s rhyme and rhythm structure, the poem mounts a strong challenge to the representation of Tommy Atkins in Kipling’s poem. The poem opens with Tommy addressing his ‘feller-countrymen’ (l. 1). Although he registers gratitude for ‘partin’ cheers’ which “ave ’eartened us” and ‘loud hurrahin” at the soldiers’ departure, the speaker insists that ‘strength there weren’t no need’, and quickly shows that such patriotic displays are insufficient:

Then yer called us British heroes, an’ hurrahed us as we went;
     An’ we ’opes to prove Gawd’s gorspel all yer said;
But ‘hurrahs’ ain’t legal tender, so the landlord ses, for rent,
     Nur they don’t fill kiddies’ bellies same as bread.
An’ it’s this ’ere kind o’ thinkin’, mates, what makes a man a mouse,
     Fur a Tommy’s got a ’eart and ’e can feel,
And you bet, ’e’ll fight no braver cause ’is kids is in the House,

43 Kipling, ‘Tommy’ (l. 26).
44 ‘Tommy’s Appeal’, Belper News, 1 December 1899, p. 6; the poem was reprinted in South Africa and appears in CTLP Button, i, p. 73.
Or ‘is poor old mother clammin’ fur a meal.

(“Tommy’s Appeal”, ll. 13-20)

The emphasis on what runs through ‘Tommy’s mind’, ‘when ’e lies awake at night a picturin’ issel dead, | And a wonderin’ what the wife and kids would do’ (ll. 40, 11-12), offers an implicit rebuke to the claim of absent-mindedness. Here, the serving soldier is characterised by deep, responsible concern for his family’s material circumstances. Indeed, rather than enthusiasm for the excitement of the soldier’s life causing the neglect of home and family, it is this anxiety about his family’s situation which distracts him from soldiering, or delays his recovery ‘from overdose o’ lead’ (l. 23).

In terms of its charitable appeal, much of the poem is a straightforward recapitulation of Kipling’s: ‘It ain’t a lot we’re askin’, and we knows it ain’t in vain, | Just to lend a ’and to them we leaves behind’ (ll. 37-38). What this poet adds, however, is a critical question about why such charity is necessary, exposing the discrepancy between the inability of the soldier to ‘make […] provision for th’ wife an’ little kids’ and the harsh reality of the serving soldier’s life. In the key central stanzas, the poet challenges the public’s enjoyment of military news as entertainment, the newspapers’ reliance on euphemism, and the way that caricatures like Kipling’s ‘absent-minded beggar’ simplify and misrepresent the real experiences of individual soldiers:

| You chaps’ll read the papers, sittin’ cosy with yer wives, |
| An’ you’ll maybe say our losses wus but slight; |
| But we wants yer to remember that they’re British soldiers’ lives, |
| Them same losses what occurs in ev’ry fight. |

(“Tommy’s Appeal”, ll. 25-28)

Picturing the ‘wives’ of his readers, the speaker makes his own claim to being ‘most remarkable like you’, in the words of Kipling’s ‘Tommy’, inviting them to engage more fully with the reality and implications of what they read:

| That it ain’t no kind o’ novel, nor no fairy tale you read, |
| But sober, bitter, bloody, deadly truth; |
| An’ the chap what’s got his ticket, an’ leaves folks at ’ome in need, |
| Reckons ‘hurrahs’ aint much clarse ’longside of ‘oof’. |
| Fur it ain’t th’ bein’ wounded, nor the dyin’ makes him mourn, |
| When yer kneels a’side yer pal to watch ’im through, |
| An’ yer ’ears ’im ’fore ’e rattles say, ‘Lord ’elp ’em when I’m gawn,’ |
| Streuth, yer thanks yer Gawd Almighty it ain’t you. |

(“Tommy’s Appeal”, ll. 29-36)

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45 Kipling, ‘Tommy’ (l. 26).
As in Howard’s ‘Beggar’s Thanks’, a strong sense of the love and commitment binding together the men of the ranks offers its own opposition to the notion of Tommy as ‘absent-minded’. Here, the effect is strengthened by the contrast the speaker establishes between his own ‘folks at ’ome in need’ and the ‘cosy’ domestic setting of the newspaper-reader. The frankness of the refrain’s closing expression of relief affords a sympathetic image of the soldier, capable of a complex response to a comrade’s death, in which he registers his own good fortune at escaping danger without undermining the tenderness with which he ‘kneels ’aside [his] pal ter watch ’im through’. Both sympathy and complexity are placed in contrast with the smug civilian, whose momentary military fervour and consumption of news as entertainment mark him out as far more ‘absent-minded’. As in ‘Tommy’s Reply to Kipling’, the omission of ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’s refrain from a poem that otherwise mimics its structure feels significant, indicating a departure from Kipling’s comfortable civilian context.\(^{46}\) The enthusiasm of city crowds, music hall audiences, and newspaper copywriters and readers, with their ‘loud hurrahin’, and yer “Soldiers of the Queen”, | An’ yer callin’ of us England’s gallant sons’ (ll. 5-6), is shown to play a part in the commodification of war. Meanwhile, the positioning of war as ‘fairy tale’ exists uncomfortably alongside the kind of real-life social injustice that allows soldiers to worry about ‘what’ll happen if ’e falls’, plagued by ‘the thought that when e’es lyin’ with a bullet through ’is ead, | His kids’ll see inside o’ work’us walls’ (ll. 46-48).

As the image of the newspaper-reader ‘sitting cosy with your wife’ indicates, these poems knowingly take up a position in the same pages as the contradictory discourses of soldierly masculinity. Newspaper-readers contributed generously to the various ‘Tommy funds’ administered by the newspapers themselves, but this poem challenges the reader to go beyond mere symbolic gestures to address the realities, both of a soldier’s experience and of the poverty from which he has emerged and into which he is destined to return. Indeed, one anxious correspondent to the Westminster Gazette expressed his concern that, ‘now that khakiosity is omnivorous’, charitable organisations such as his own (which ran seaside holidays for families ‘who live on a quarter of an acre square’ and ‘whose idea of grass is mainly “wot yer ’as to keep off”’) might struggle to

\(^{46}\) W.B., ‘Tommy’s Reply to Kipling’.
attract the notice of a formerly generous public, drowned out by the more fashionable claims of military fundraising. 47

One gesture of admiration for soldiers mentioned in many of these poems is the gift of a tin of chocolate, sent on behalf of Queen Victoria to the troops in South Africa at Christmas 1899. The end of Chapter three noted the outrage that Kipling provoked when he scornfully highlighted the disjunction between the soldiers’ sacrifice and this tokenistic response: ‘Ye sent them comfits and pictures to help them harry your foes’. 48

Indeed, it was this line in particular which prompted the author of ‘The Slanders’ to counter:

That neat little sneer at the ‘comfits’—was no printer’s reader at hand,  
To strike out a blunder so cruel from wounding the heart of the land?  
That—all unintended, as we know it—would seem to the world to mean  
Her thought for each one of her soldiers, the gift of our dying Queen.  

(‘The Slanders’, ll. 17-20) 49

Kipling was by no means the only poet to ponder the appropriateness of such a response; indeed, many newspaper poets make explicit the gap between this gesture of goodwill and the actual material needs of Tommy and his family. In ‘The Queen’s Christmas Box’ (subtitled ‘a la Rudyard Kipling’), Owen Oliver contrasts ‘arf a pound of chocolate’ with Tommy’s sacrifice, offering alternative responses which would more meaningfully express gratitude: 50

An’ the portrait of ’er Majesty they puts upon the lids,  
It’s right enough to look at, but that don’t feed yer kids,  
If they’d sent another photo on some shining’ ‘arf-o-quids,  
A proper Christmas Box that would ’a bin.  
[…]

But they never builds no barracks for you blokeys w’en yer old,  
Or in anyway disabled—no, they leaves yer in the cold,  
For you’ve bled for Queen an’ country, an’ yer blooming life you’ve sold,  
For ’arf a pound o’ chocolate an’ a tin.  

(‘The Queen’s Christmas Box’, ll. 13-16, 29-32)

Tommy Atkins can look forward to being ‘back in England, minus leg or other limb’ to find that ‘they’ might ‘preach a special sermon and compose a special ’im’, but that in

47 Rev J.W. Horsley, Letters to the Editor, Westminster Gazette, 2 June 1900, p. 3.  
50 Owen Oliver, ‘The Queen’s Christmas Box’, Isle of Man Times, 19 May 1900, p. 6. An amended version of the same poem, unsigned and entitled ‘The Queen’s Chocolate’, appears in CTLP Button, iii, p. 216.
material terms he has had all he can expect: ‘The Queen ’as ’ad ’er whim, | As you’ve ’ad yer arf a chocolate and the tin’ (ll. 25-28). The inadequacy of this ‘kind o’ recompense [...] takes the bloomin’ bun’ (ll. 3, 9). ‘Sweetstuffs’ are hardly likely to help the soldier ‘carve yer way thro’ thick and thin’ (ll. 10, 12). Oliver’s poem was printed in the *Isle of White Times* in May 1900. A version of it appeared in a Natal newspaper, with a note that the original had been ‘picked up from the Boer trenches at Colenso by a sergeant of the Dorset Regiment’.51 This claim about its provenance frames these lines as coming from the Boers themselves, amplifying the revised poem’s assertion that the inadequacy of this gift has made an international fool of Tommy Atkins:

> Yer ridiculed already as the Queen’s own lollipops,
> And we’re very much inclined to think unless this matter drops,
> The German Emperor will be sending acid drops
> As companions to the chocolate and the tin.

> Now you ’ave yer arf a chocolate, and the pretty tin as well,
> Which you’ll fasten round yer necks and your manly chest you’ll swell,
> ‘As that arf a pound of chocolate and the tin.

(The Queen’s Chocolate’, ll. 21-28)

The original poem is dismissive of Tommy’s critical faculties, claiming ‘you’ll chuck yer chin up ’igher, an’ yer manly chest you’ll swell’ in pride at the gift, “Cos you’d never ask no questions if they marched yer into ’ell’ (ll. 22-23). The littleness of the Queen’s gesture diminishes the soldier in the poet’s eyes. The revised version amplifies the negative consequences of this gift by suggesting that it impairs the masculinity of British soldiers. Tommy Atkins might feel more ‘manly’ as the recipient of this mark of his monarch’s favour, but his acceptance of what the revised version calls the ‘pretty tin’ which he hangs around his neck (as medal, or necklace?) diminishes him in the eyes of his current foes, his potential lover, and antagonistic foreign powers.

Notwithstanding the reservations expressed by Oliver and his anonymous South African collaborator, the tin itself became a powerful symbol of the soldier’s status, taken to reflect the Queen’s – and the country’s – renewed esteem and gratitude for his work. This fact is amply demonstrated in a sequence of items in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the autumn of 1900. In a column of miscellaneous news, ‘The Sad Case of Corporal Lingwood’ tells the following story:

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51 ‘The Queen’s Chocolate’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 216.
Dr. Danford Thomas held an inquest at Islington yesterday on a child, six weeks old, of Corporal Lingwood, Oxfordshire Light Infantry, who died of acute pneumonia. The child’s father was wounded in the arm at Paardeberg, and returned home on Saturday. He produced in court one of the Queen’s chocolate boxes, and said he was reluctantly compelled to sell it in order to bury his child. The Coroner made an offer of £2 for the box and its contents, and Lingwood, in tears, parted with the treasure he had kept so long.52

The striking juxtaposition of a reverential attitude towards the Queen’s gift and a reminder of soldierly poverty touched the hearts of readers; a subscription list was proposed by one correspondent, and within three days the editors reported that the impromptu fund had reached over £14, ‘far in excess of the amount required’ to buy back the lost ‘treasure’.53 The paper’s editors invited the readers to reflect with satisfaction that ‘the balance will not only relieve Corporal Lingwood of his immediate necessities, but will, we hope, enable himself and his family to face the world again with a little something in hand’.54 ‘A little something’ is reminiscent of the ‘treat’ which Rawnsley describes in ‘Our Departing Reservists’, recasting as generosity what could be described more accurately as the barest of bare minimums. At no point did the Pall Mall Gazette invite readers to reflect on how or why a wounded soldier could find himself so constrained, or the extent to which Corporal Lingwood and his family were representative of a great many more families; indeed, even the death of his child appears of less account than the loss of ‘the treasure that he had kept so long’. The soldier’s ‘tears’ are all for ‘the box and its contents’. It fell to the poets – Kipling among them – to call attention to the ways in which gestures of goodwill such as the Queen’s Christmas gift might actually work to the detriment of soldiers, allowing civilians to feel satisfied with their generosity without engaging imaginatively or practically with the realities of soldierly life.

Another Natal poet denounces easily-satisfied civilians as ‘selfish-minded beggars’, using an uneasy combination of bleak realism and black humour in a description of ‘Tommy in Hospital’ to ask ‘why don’t you give a thought | To poor old Tommy Atkins, who’s just been up and fought?’55 D.J.’s descriptions of Tommy’s injuries range from the grotesquely comic (one soldier ‘nearly lost his nose’, l. 3) to the

52 ‘The Sad Case of Corporal Lingwood’, Pall Mall Gazette, 26 October 1900, p. 3.
53 Pall Mall Gazette, 27 October 1900, p. 2.
54 Pall Mall Gazette, 29th October 1900, p. 8.
55 D.J., ‘Tommy in Hospital’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 82 (ll. 1-2).
much more serious, with his ‘chums’ who have not yet ‘gone to glory […] groaning and a-moaning and feeling for their legs’, having ‘lost an eye’ or ‘parted with their toes’ (ll. 5-6). This is ‘gruesome company’, in which the physically wounded and psychologically scarred Tommy ‘is despondent and feels unlike a man’:

Now Tommy’s bits and pieces, as not of any use,
Have been left upon the field to scatter to the deuce;
And although the smiling surgeon tells Tom he’ll bring him round,
Yet the beggar feels uneasy ’cause his bits have not been found

(‘Tommy in Hospital’, ll. 17-20)

Echoes of ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ – the poem uses Kipling’s hexameter line throughout – imply that merely responding to Kipling’s injunction to ‘Pay—pay—pay’ is insufficient. ‘Tommy in Hospital’ requests more fulsome imaginative and empathetic engagement, picturing Tommy getting ‘few comforts, ’cept those which kind friends send’ but generously sharing ‘all that he receives […] with his wounded comrades’ (ll. 21, 14). The poet suggests that a little more ‘thought’ about the realities of Tommy’s experience might result in more welcome donations:

There are papers by the thousand that are read and thrown away,
And ’tis these that Tommy wants—to see what the old folks say.

To printing chaps and readers with papers by the reel,
To those who have the kindness, I therefore would appeal;
Tom likes to read the latest news, and pictures he adores;
But all things are acceptable, there’s naught that he ignores.

(‘Tommy in Hospital’, ll. 23-28)

The suggestion that, with a little thought, civilians might help alleviate the monotony of convalescence is connected with the provision of reading material. But there is also an implication that, looking ‘to see what the old folks say’, Tommy seeks evidence that he and his comrades are rightly valued, that their ‘woes’ (l. 4) are appreciated; feeling ‘unlike a man’, Tommy searches for reassurance that his representation in newspapers does him credit.

In ‘Tommy in Hospital’, the poet turns the ‘absent-minded’ label back onto civilians for their reluctance to acknowledge the real consequences of war on the bodies and minds of soldiers. Some poets made use of Kipling’s phrase, and his stanza form, to make more pointed critiques of the ways in which government policy devalued the lives of the nation’s soldiers. They had plenty of provocation. The Westminster Gazette’s assistant editor and cartoonist Frances Caruthers Gould captured a sense of the outrage
provoked in January 1900 by a comment from Conservative Party leader (and future Prime Minister) Arthur Balfour who observed that ‘I do not know a single war which has begun triumphantly for this country’. Gould shows in his cartoon (Figure 4.2) that this resignation towards ‘inevitableness’ marks a deterioration in the relationship between John Bull and Tommy Atkins. Gould’s ‘Mr Bull’ is still instantly recognisable, with his hands-in-pockets stance, top hat, tailcoat and shiny boots, but his smile of smug self-satisfaction has been replaced by a grimly defensive or truculent look; it is clear that the much-bandaged Tommy Atkins who accosts him has the moral, as well as the physical, high ground. Though the dialogue caption calls the soldier ‘The Airy, Absent-Minded One’, John Bull’s question makes clear that it is to him, rather than the soldier, that the label belongs: ‘You seem to have got the worst of it. What’s the matter with your arm?’ he asks; ‘Oh, only the hand of Fate and inevitable incidents’, Tommy replies. The bandage wrapped over his eye and around his helmet interferes with what the viewer imagines to be a steely glare, but his stance is nonetheless challenging as he looks down upon this representative of middle-class Britain. In Gould’s image, Balfour’s disregard for soldierly suffering is taken as representative of attitudes more widely, reflecting badly on the national character.

A poet writing in *Fun* in the same week as Gould’s cartoon appeared uses Kipling’s model to contest this point, aligning the newspaper-reading civilian with Tommy Atkins and against the government. In ‘The Absent-Minded Duffers’,

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57 ‘The Absent-Minded Duffers’, *Fun*, 9 January 1900, p. 11. Reprinted in *Torquay Times*, 12 January 1900, p. 6; *Hampshire Telegraph*, 13 January 1900, p. 11; the poem was also reprinted in a South African newspaper and appears in CTLP Button, iii, p. 73.
dedicated ‘To the War Office’, the anonymous poet takes on Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ stanza form wholesale, including the refrain:

When you’ve finished with your pipe-clay, won’t you try a little change
(It’s useless killing Kruger with your mouth),
By sending out some cannon of a slightly longer range,
For the gentlemen in khaki falling South?
You are absent-minded duffers, bound by routine and red tape,
But the public will not take you as they find you.
They insist you send ‘Long Tom-mies’ to our Atkins at the Cape,
And you ought to be ashamed the nation needs remind you.
New guns, true guns, guns of a modern make,
Ship them out, for Tommy’s sake, out to Table Bay.
J.B. won’t stick at a ‘thou.’ or two, when the Empire’s at stake,
‘We’ve got the men’—but ‘not’ the guns—so we’ll pay, pay, pay!
(The Absent-Minded Duffers)

Uniting allusions to Kipling’s ‘The Absent Minded Beggar’ and the 1878 song popularised by music hall star G.H. MacDermott, ‘By Jingo’, the poet uses British history and popular culture to shame the present government, whose inadequate support for the military is directly responsible for ‘the gentlemen in khaki falling’ in South Africa. Kipling had advised ‘the public’ to ‘take’ Tommy Atkins ‘as they find him’ (‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, l. 6); this poet warns that no such indulgence will be extended to the ‘absent-minded duffers’ in the War Office. The pun on ‘Long Tom’ — the popular name for the Creusot field gun — reminds readers that Tommy Atkins himself is being treated simply as a weapon of the British state, with inadequate attention to his humanity or physical vulnerability. The direct quotation of Kipling in the final phrase of the poem is ambivalent, expressing either popular enthusiasm for army investment or a dire warning that without addressing the under-resourcing of the army in South Africa, ‘the Empire’ will ‘pay’ a price significantly greater than ‘a “thou.”’ or two’. Meanwhile, the masculinity of the ‘absent-minded duffers, bound by routine and red tape’ is unflatteringly contrasted with that of the ‘gentlemen in khaki’ — the real ‘men’ represented by Tommy Atkins.

As well as affording a structure within which civilian and political actions and attitudes could be critiqued, Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ provided a model for still more barbed analyses of the qualities of British masculinity demonstrated by the conduct of and responses to the war, especially as victory continued to evade the British forces in spite of their massive numerical superiority. Shortly after the death of Queen Victoria in January 1901, former Liberal MP George Russell included a stanza from
Stop-the-War activist William Macdonald’s bitter parody in his weekly *Manchester Guardian* column:

You fought your foemen badly, but you boasted all the more;  
You blundered, and felt bigger by a foot;  
You jeered at him for being small, and when that farce was o’er  
You settled down to hate him like a brute.  
And you hated—how you hated! How you slandered more than slew,  
How you slavered silly poison—why remind you?  
You’ve done it, and you’re doing it and still you mean to do,  
For you’ve left the thought of manliness behind you!

Bull’s son, Fool’s son, son of a Scullionaire,  
Son of a Blither and Bellow-Along—every Ass his Bray!  
Squirting slime on a valiant foe, to show how much you dare—  
But what does the Good God think of you? Say, say, say!58

The ‘You’ of Macdonald’s opening line turns out to comprehend the whole of (male) British society – Tommy Atkins, John Bull and the British government – as well as appearing to target the British press in its role as propagandist against the Boers. For Russell, responses to the war in South Africa exemplified the ultimate failure of British masculinity. The Kipling parody comes at the heart of an article discussing ‘true chivalry’, in which historical expressions of patriotism are contrasted with those of the present, in terms which resonate strongly with the language of Buchanan’s renouncement of ‘the Hooligan spirit of Patriotism’.59 For Russell, ‘the true spirit of chivalry’ could be traced back to the beginning of Victoria’s reign, when a ‘very young’ and ‘apparently friendless’ Queen induced even those ‘by no means devoted to the monarchical principle’ to express an ideal patriotic masculinity (‘She was weak: therefore she must be defended’), and thereby to ‘strengthen the foundations’ of her throne, from which Russell claims ‘there has constantly issued a beneficent influence’.60 This is highly gendered ‘chivalry’, a vision of patriotism and benign imperialism inspired by an apparently defenceless woman, and claiming to champion ‘innocence and weakness all over the world […] against brutal tyranny and lawless force’.61 This version of ideal

imperial masculinity is governed by British gentlemanliness: ‘an inborn and dominant instinct, to treat its opponents with all knightly courtesy, to recognise their courage, to give them credit for sincerity and patriotism’. Its inverse, the ‘new chivalry, or what masquerades in that misused name, discards this tradition, and calumniates where it cannot kill’. Although Russell’s article purports to reject ‘the shameless glorification of brute force’, it is striking that in the poem he quotes it is the failure to succeed at arms which provides the first sign of a ‘diminished’ masculinity (‘You fought your foemen badly’), before the other failures of sporting gentlemanliness mount up: misplaced boasting, cruel jeering, and resentful slander towards the enemy who has been the cause of shameful failure.

In ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, the army is imagined as a place of social diversity, where a ‘Duke’s son’ or a ‘belted Earl’ might rub shoulders with a ‘cook’s son’, and where the ‘son of a hundred kings’ takes his place alongside ‘gardener, baronet, groom’ from ‘mews or palace or paper shop’. In Macdonald’s parody, corrupted British masculinity proves similarly egalitarian, with John ‘Bull’s son’ proving no more than a ‘Fool’s son’, and with ‘Scullionaire’ uniting the lowest-ranking domestic servant with an implied ‘millionaire’. In proof-copies of newsprint from a scrapbook of clippings and personal papers from the war made by South African newspaper proprietor J.P. Hess, the stanza quoted by Russell appears, with ‘a Scullionaire’ replaced with ‘the Blunderaire’ (transposed from another part of the whole poem), making the link to faulty military or political leadership more explicit by recalling Tennyson’s ‘Someone had blundered’. Both neologisms echo ‘millionaire’, reinforcing Russell’s contention in the article that ‘the false chivalry […] fights for gold’ rather than for principles, motivated by ‘a reckless determination to be rich’ and demonstrating ‘the bloodthirsty resolve to further financial enterprise with bullets and bayonets’. The poem also draws civilian commentators and mafficking revellers into the fray, with ‘Son of a Blither and Bellow-Along’ condemning those who join uncritically with expressions of jingoistic war fervour, and ‘every Ass his Bray’ recalling the idiom which censures

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., pp. 38-39.
65 Kipling, ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ (ll. 9, 22-23, 35-36).
66 National Library of South Africa (Cape Town), J.P. Hess Collection [scrapbook, microfilm], MSB 259.5 reel 2.2.
those who are overly fond of the sound of their own voice. The newspapers – and the newspaper poets, including Kipling – are therefore implicated in the charge of ‘Squirting slime on a valiant foe’, daring to do more in words than they can follow up with actions, and besmirching their own reputations far more than they harm their enemies.

This Kipling parody struck a chord, making its way around the empire as an example of a critical reading of jingoism (though Russell does not use that word) as a corrosive influence on British masculinity. The poem articulates with particular force a view that the military failures of the British army reflect on the national character of British men more generally – John Bull and his entire family. It is significant that Kipling provides the form; associated with celebrations of a new vision of British military masculinity, with imperial fervour and with a relish for what Russell calls ‘the glorification of brute force’, his status makes Kipling himself a representative of a certain strain of popular British imperialism, as well as the source of a renewed sense of family likeness between Tommy Atkins, John Bull, and the man who reads the newspaper. The final line of the parody invites the reader to consider ‘what […] the Good God think[s] of you’ in light of the ungentlemanly behaviour described, but the preceding lines suggest that the speaker’s objection is far less to the incompatibility of chivalry and jingoistic vitriol as it is to the way such expressions undermine masculinity: ‘For you’ve left the thought of manliness behind you’. The contention that imperialism itself in its late-nineteenth century manifestation was at odds with the demands of ideal masculinity is one which arises in a number of other poems published in newspapers in Britain and South Africa, and by prominent political figures as well as anonymous voices.

F.W. Reitz was brought up in the British Cape Colony before reading law at the Inner Temple in London. In the years before the war, he served as President of the Orange Free State, and in 1898 became State Secretary of the Transvaal.68 He was also a figurehead in the movement to recognise and celebrate Afrikaans language and culture and recognised as a ‘national poet’, publishing in both English and Afrikaans throughout the final decades of the century. His South African War poems, many of which appeared in English- and Afrikaans-language newspapers at the time, were collected in Oorlogs en Andere Gedichten (War and Other Poems) in 1910, each poem

appearing in both Afrikaans and English.\(^{69}\) Having been the one to deliver the South African Republics’ ultimatum to the British agent in Pretoria in 1899, Reitz’s name was familiar to British newspaper-readers. When his parody of Kipling’s Jubilee poem ‘Recessional’ appeared in 1900, the \textit{Daily News} considered it worth reprinting in Britain, together with its dedication ‘To Mr. Mudyard Pipling’.\(^{70}\) In the solemn ‘Recessional’, which had appeared in the \textit{Times} in July 1897, Kipling appealed to the ‘God of our Fathers’ to remind his contemporaries that British imperial ‘dominion’ was only possible ‘Beneath [God’s] awful hand’, warning that being ‘drunk with sight of power’ might result in loosing ‘Wild tongues that have not thee in awe’.\(^{71}\) While the ‘heathen heart[s]’ of ‘lesser breeds’ might put their ‘trust | In reeking tube and iron shard’, this misplaced faith would be revealed as ‘valiant dust that builds on dust’ if it ‘calls not Thee to guard’ (ll. 22, 25-28). Seeking ‘Mercy’ for ‘frantic boast and foolish word’ (ll. 29-30), Kipling’s refrain calls on the ‘Lord God of Hosts’ to ‘be with us yet, | Lest we forget—llest we forget’ (ll. 5-6). The mood of this monitory imperial hymn could not be further removed from the \textit{Ballads} or ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’; ‘Recessional’ is Kipling as ‘the self-appointed prophet of the British Empire’, as Chris Baldick notes, using the cadences of a tetrameter hymn form to admonish his readers while appearing to address the ‘God of our Fathers’, ‘Lord God of Hosts’ in prayerful repentance.\(^{72}\) Reitz’s answer to Kipling’s exhortation is simple. In place of the God of Hosts, Britain has elected the ‘Gods of the Jingo—Brass and Gold’:\(^{73}\)

\begin{quote}
Under whose baneful sway they hold
Dominion over ‘Mine and Thine,’
Such Lords as these have made them rotten,
They have forgotten—they have forgotten.
\end{quote}

(‘Progressional’, ll. 3-6)

The \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} printed an excerpt of Reitz’s parody, with scornful commentary. Noting that ‘Mr. Reitz has been dropping into poetry, and a long drop it is too’, they claimed that his lines ‘would be declined unread by the office boy of the \textit{Pretoria}\(^{\text{8}}\)}

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Oorlogs En Andere Gedichten} (Potchefstroom: Unie Lees en Studie-Bibliotheek, 1910).
  \item \textit{Daily News}, 25 January 1900, p. 7.
  \item Rudyard Kipling, ‘Recessional’, \textit{Times}, 17 July 1897, p. 13 (ll. 1, 3-4, 19-20).
\end{itemize}
In fact, of course, the weak line endings and feminine rhymes in rotten/forgotten which resound in Reitz’s refrain contribute to his derision, exposing Kipling’s stately hymn metre – and his positioning of himself as national or imperial prophet – to ridicule. Reitz describes the British public ‘Drunken with lust of Power or Pelf’, holding ‘nor man nor God in awe’, and caring for nothing ‘but only Self, | And cent. per cent.’s their only Law’ (ll. 19-22). In exact contradiction with Kipling’s advice, Reitz suggests, ‘their valiant hearts have put their trust | In Maxim guns and Metford rifles’ (ll. 25-26), the juxtaposition of supposed valour with modern weaponry calling the values of masculinity into question. Russell’s concern for the neglect of gentlemanly principles like restraint in victory and magnanimity towards enemies is echoed in Reitz’s contention, in a slightly revised version of the poem, that Britain’s forces would ‘crush their foes into the dust | And treat what’s Right as idle trifles’ (ll. 27-28). Such a victory would be as ignominious as defeat. As in Macdonald’s lines, all those who add their voices to the public discourse of Britain’s imperial ambition are implicated: ‘For boastful brag and foolish fake | Th’ Imperialist shall “Take the cake”’ (ll. 29-30).

The accusation that British masculinity was vulnerable to damage by association with the conduct of the war in South Africa was amplified by the British strategy from late 1900 onwards. Faced with humiliating anti-guerrilla warfare against determined and highly-mobile units, the British instituted a scorched-earth strategy designed to cut off commandos from their sources of food and shelter. Farmhouse-burning, alongside the destruction of crops and livestock, created a population of destitute refugee women and children who were rounded up and transported to concentration camps. The ration lists reproduced in Emily Hobhouse’s first-hand investigative reports from these camps, published in 1901, make clear that they had punitive, rather than primarily humanitarian, objectives: the families of men still ‘on Commando’ were designated as ‘undesirables’, and allocated rations even less likely to sustain life and health than the ‘starvation rate’ allowed to those deemed ‘refugees’. As Nasson puts it, ‘internment was a strategy to pressurise the enemy into giving up. In essence, the camps were to serve as hostage sites’. The title of ‘The Refugee Camps (so called)’ indicates Reitz’s derisive attitude

74 Pall Mall Gazette, 25 January 1900, p. 2.
75 Reitz, Oorlogs, p. 17.
towards British claims of good intentions. He accuses the British of conducting the war ‘[i]n a barbarous manner’ (l. 6), citing the suffering of Boer women and children at the hands of Roberts’s army as a damning failure of British masculine ideals:

If he harries weak women and children tender
It is not to induce the men to surrender,
Oh no! that’s a thing he never would do,
He says so himself—so it’s bound to be true.

If the women and orphans he drags away
In his pest-smitten camps are willing to stay
Let no one assert he the Innocents slew,
He says so himself—so it’s bound to be true. […]

Lord Kitchener persecutes woman and child
Because he was always exceedingly mild
And the more they objected the kinder he grew
He says so himself—so it’s bound to be true.

(‘The Refugee Camps (So called)’, ll. 13-20, 25-28)

Although Reitz’s poem does not make any explicit allusion to Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, the repetition of ‘women and children’, ‘women and orphans’, ‘woman and child’ (ll. 13, 17, 25) emphasises the discrepancy between the policy towards Boer families and the British civilian public’s noisy sympathy for the absent-minded beggar’s neglected home. Moreover, if Kitchener and Roberts purported to represent the pinnacle of British manliness, as Reitz suggests they did (‘Lord Roberts he boasts that he stands at the head | Of all that is noble, and nice, and wellbred’, ll. 1-2), then their policy to condemn ‘thousands’ to ‘die of disease and starvation | In those sweet health-resorts they call “Concentration”’ reflected on the whole of British society (ll. 21-22), calling into question the values of chivalry, fair play and honour of which Britons were so liable to ‘boast’ (l. 1). Reitz’s description of the ‘barbarous manner’ in which the war was being carried on (l. 6) chimes with Liberal MP Henry Campbell-Bannerman’s famous question: ‘When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa’. Transgressing the principles of the recently-signed Hague Convention in a ‘perceived perversion of the rules of civilised warfare’, Britain was failing to play fair. Moreover, as Reitz makes clear in another poem in the same

80 Nasson, Boer War, p. 245.
collection, Britain had resorted to such underhand tactics precisely because, playing by the rules, they were doomed to lose.\(^81\)

Lord Roberts burns our houses down,
The women out he drives;
He cannot overcome the men,
So persecutes the wives.

(‘The Lady Roberts’, ll. 21-24)

The failures of the British forces in the South African war prompt a re-evaluation of imperial history; Reitz points out that the ‘mighty titles’ of ‘Lord Roberts of Kandahar’, ‘Lord Kitchener of Karthoum’ and ‘Lord Butler of Colenso’ had been earned by defeating ‘defenceless kaffirs | Armed but with spear and shield’ (ll. 49-54). These earlier foes may have been ‘slaughtered, oh, so merrily | On many a bloody field’ (ll. 55-56), but far from presaging eventual victory in the current conflict, these former imperial triumphs are revealed as hollow by the encounter with ‘White Men | And Mausers’ (ll. 57-58). Facing an equally well-equipped enemy, Britain is forced in desperation to turn its aggression on ‘women and children’.

Newspaper poets not politically committed to the Boer cause expressed comparable reservations about the implications for British masculinity of the conduct of the 1899-1902 war. William Lloyd Garrison’s ‘Onward, Christian Soldier!’ was published in the Boston *Springfield Republican* at the end of 1899 and reprinted by the London weekly *New Age* in February 1900.\(^82\) Garrison’s lyrics parody the 1865 hymn that had been popularised with a tune composed by Arthur Sullivan in 1871, in which the Christian church is figured as a ‘Happy throng […] Marching as to war’ against the enemy, ‘Satan’s host’.\(^83\) Garrison’s version literalises the original metaphor in order to call into question the whole imperial project, exposing both British and American aggression as founded on a distortion of the principles that ostensibly justified their imperial wars:

The Anglo-Saxon Christians, with Gatling gun and sword,
In serried ranks are pushing on the gospel of the Lord;
On Afric’s soil they press the foe in war’s terrific scenes,
And merrily the hunt goes on throughout the Philippines.

What though the Boers are Christians, the Filipinos, too!

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\(^82\) William Lloyd Garrison, ‘Onward, Christian Soldier!’, *New Age*, 8 February 1900, p. 91. This William Lloyd Garrison was the son of the American abolitionist and prolific newspaper poet of the same name.

It is a Christian act to shoot a fellow-creature through;
The bombs with dynamite surcharged, their deadly missiles fling,
And gayly on their fatal work the dum-dum bullets sing.

("Onward, Christian Soldier!", ll. 1-8)

Observing the ironies that ‘chaplains on opposing sides the same petitions lift’ (l. 12),
while ‘Christian people shout with joy at thousands blown to hell’ (l. 16),
the poet suggests that the ‘gospel’ requires a ‘version well revised’
to suit modern conceptions of ideal Christian manliness –
a ‘new Messiah’ to ‘lead the latest way’
and a gospel that teaches ‘how to prey’, rather than pray (ll. 31-32):

The outworn, threadbare precept, to lift the poor and weak,
The fallacy that this great earth is for the saintly meek,
Have both gone out of fashion: the world is for the strong;
That might shall be the Lord of right is now the Christian song.

The Jesus that we reverence is not the lowly man
Who trod in poverty and rags where Jordan’s waters ran;
Our saviour is an admiral upon the quarter-deck,
Or else a general uniformed, an army at his beck.

("Onward, Christian Soldier!", ll. 21-28)

As well as highlighting the distortions of Biblical precedent involved in invoking divine blessing
for imperial warfare, Garrison skewers the fashionable constructions of masculinity
which determine the hegemonic ideal of cultural manliness.
In this degraded modern world, ‘Bibles take a place behind the bullets and the beers!’ (l. 30).
Garrison directly contests the narrative of military redemption held out by Kipling’s
Barrack-Room Ballads. He makes the link to civilian life through the reference to ‘beers’,
and in the similarity between ‘the Christian press’ which ‘applauds the use of bayonet and knife’
and the rejoicing of ‘the pious Turk […] after an Armenian raid’ (ll. 18-19).
The poet scorns the notion that ‘the strenuous life’ of military service could be a force for good in
‘the social order’ (l. 20),
inviting the missionary soldier ‘onward […] through fields of crimson gore’
where ‘The dead and mangled bodies, the wounded and the sick | Are multiplied on every hand, on every field, and thick’ (ll. 33, 9-10).
The poem also refuses to countenance the idea that the ends justify the means by having anything to do with the ‘gospel of the Lord’ (l. 2).
The goal towards which these soldiers strive is economic, not moral: ‘Behold the trade advantages beyond the open door!’ (ll. 33-34).
Fin-de-siècle constructions of military masculinity might hold out war as the ultimate refining fire for men made flabby and weak by the desk-bound city life of the banker,
but Garrison’s soldiers, armed with ‘ledgers’ in which ‘the heathen loss’ is of no account,
fight themselves straight back to that desk-bound quest for financial advantage.
Responses to Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ demonstrate that many newspaper poets took up the invitation of the Barrack-Room Ballads to consider soldiers as men ‘most remarkable like you’, to consider deeply their lives, both at war and at home, and to accept continuities between military values of masculinity and those of the civilian world, in line with changing imperial policies and a broader reconceptualization of the standards of masculinity. These poets used their space in the newspaper columns to draw attention to the ways in which ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ might risk reversing the progress made under Kipling’s influence in bridging the gap between the army’s values and those of society at large, by falling back on earlier, more negative stereotypes of ‘Tommy Atkins’. They show that public enthusiasm for charitable gestures, which Kipling’s ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ both articulated and prompted, might serve as a reassuring distraction from uncomfortable social questions, and participate in the commodification of war as entertainment. Sanitised portrayals of imperial war for the purpose of civilian consumption revert to a portrayal of Tommy Atkins as an unfortunate figure tasked with carrying out the unpalatable practicalities associated with expanding or ‘defending’ the empire. They keep the realities of this work, and the real experiences of the soldier, out of sight, ensuring that the iniquitous circumstances in which he is required to operate (as part of an under-resourced or badly-trained army, pursuing goals that do not accord with the stated principles of the society he represents) and live (in South Africa and at home) remain beyond the purview of the civilian who cheers him off to battle. The newspaper poems which contest this follow Kipling’s example, and use Kipling’s powerful voice, to make a different set of assertions about the relationship between Tommy Atkins and John Bull, the soldier and the newspaper-reader. These poems challenge British readers to consider how far they are implicated in the work and lives of the soldiers who represent them around the Empire. Moreover, as the war reached its ignominious final months, some poets exposed the uncomfortable contrast between the charitable impulses of British civilians and the devastating impact of British policy on South African people and landscapes, highlighting fractures in the narrative of benevolent imperialism.

Kipling’s relationship with the newspapers is at the start of this story. His Barrack-Room Ballads and the hundreds of response-poems they prompted found their first and largest readership through the regional, national and international newspaper press. The newspaper poets who added their voices to the debate often called attention
to the role of the press in mediating war news and guiding their readers’ responses. In
doing so, they modelled a more critical engagement with the content by which they were
surrounded on the newspaper page. Because of the ways in which newspaper editors
around the world borrowed from one another, some of this poetry circulated widely,
reaching international audiences potentially far beyond that imagined by the poet.
Readers were exposed by newspaper poems in voices and forms which felt familiar to
examples and arguments which complicated the stories they were accustomed to tell
themselves about their own (masculine) identities, and their relationship to imperial
military endeavours. These poet-prophets, each with his or her own particular agenda,
built on Kipling’s foundations and made use of Kipling’s cultural weight and familiarity
to issue their own pleas and challenges, requiring from the reader a more active
engagement in the process of consuming their news and constructing their sense of self.
Chapter five

Nothing to see: imagining the encounter with South Africa

‘To an Imperial Yeoman’, which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in early February 1900, is addressed to a departing Volunteer by one of his ‘old companions’.¹ The poem is ‘a rhyme to wish you luck’ (l. 21), a public gesture of good wishes to one of the ‘irregulars’ who left Britain in their thousands to fight in South Africa. It also demonstrates some of the challenges which faced poets seeking to describe the South African War. Presenting the middle-class fox-hunting Yeoman as an ideal of British manliness, the anonymous poet imagines him pursuing ‘a different kind of fox’ (ll. 23-24):

And, just as when the jumps were blind
You were not one to lag behind,
You will, I doubt not, set the pace
In a more dangerous kind of race.

(‘To an Imperial Yeoman’, ll. 25-28)

 Appeals to common knowledge articulated through specific place names (Dingley Gorse, Simpson’s field) and the assurance that ‘you know the line [the fox] takes, of course’ (ll. 5-8) affirm the sense of personal relationship; the poet promises that ‘we shall miss you’, ‘You, always found among the first’ (ll. 9-10). At the same time, the dominance of details from the English countryside contributes to a sense that the speaker cannot help but swerve away from picturing their friend’s destination. When the poet does conjure up an image of South Africa, the effort is sustained for no more than a single line before the poet retreats to more familiar scenes:

While you beside your laager fires
Will sleep and dream about the shires,
The wide wet fields, the peewits’ call,
The clear spring sunlight over all;

The thrushes piping with a will
In your old Midland hedgerows still;
The brisk March wind that whistles free
Across the land where you would be.

(‘To an Imperial Yeoman’, ll. 13-20)

The English countryside is bright, clear and noisy, its birdcall soundtrack rich and familiar. In contrast, the South African terrain is simply ‘stones and rock’ (l. 23-24). It is

¹ ‘To an Imperial Yeoman’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 February 1900, p. 2 (l. 1).
as though the image of sterile blankness the poet has conjured up stuns the imaginative faculties; South Africa is only present as the inverse of the English countryside. The realities of the war and the realities of the South African landscape are equally unthinkable and indescribable.

Newspaper poems like ‘To an Imperial Yeoman’ are part of the way that the war was mediated to and experienced by readers. In a discussion about the challenges facing the war writer to communicate first-hand experience of war to a non-combatant, Kate McLoughlin describes the ‘metaphorical potential of the war zone’ itself.2 ‘The denizen of the war zone’ might mediate their ‘special insight’ to non-combatant readers by ‘using geographical space to figure experiential space’, making conscious use of war zone landscapes to articulate the ways that a soldier might be marked or changed by their encounter.3 ‘To An Imperial Yeoman’ exemplifies the opposite action, whereby descriptions of the war zone terrain (inadvertently) activate a set of ‘experiential spaces’ that are shaped by the poet’s physical and psychological distance from and ignorance of the places they are trying to evoke, and by their own anxieties and assumptions. A version of the war zone landscape is mediated to civilian readers, but the representation is constrained by the limits of the speaker’s empathetic imagination. The newspaper poems of 1899-1902 contain many examples of descriptions which reduce South Africa to a short list of key adjectives (bare, barren, vast, empty), inadequate terms which nonetheless gained cultural valency through repetition and which shaped readers’ imaginative engagement with the landscapes of the war. As Mary Louise Pratt points out, literature ‘produced “the rest of the world”’ for metropolitan readers, speaking back to the colonial ‘centres’ about and for colonial ‘margins’, and circumscribing the terms of the discourse.4 Portrayals of the South African landscape in a wartime newspaper provide a visual context for a reader’s engagement with war news, however flawed a witness the newspaper poet might be.

Reflecting on or obsessing over the landscape of wartime South Africa, these poems are shaped by and complicit in the process of colonialism, taking possession of land and interpreting it, framing it, pinning it down as a certain kind of landscape. In

3 Ibid.
this process, they are circumscribed by a set of assumptions and expectations, able to see only what they are already looking for, and marked by the anxieties and repressions characteristic of colonial writing. The difficulty of representing the landscape was not experienced only by British civilians like the *Pall Mall Gazette* poet, trying and failing to grasp the reality of a wartime landscape from afar. J.M. Coetzee argues that from the time of the earliest British settlers, writers had struggled with a sense that the South African landscape resisted the ‘hermeneutic gaze’ of the English-language poet, refusing to ‘speak’ in terms of the aesthetic schema familiar to European literary and visual art.5 Drawing on Paul Carter’s work on colonial Australian landscape writing, Matthew Shum likewise highlights the way that the South African landscape ‘very rapidly overwhelms any attempt to fit it into [familiar] descriptive formats’, proving ‘resistant to those paradigms of the picturesque to which [the writer] is accustomed’ and therefore disrupting attempts ‘to elicit a “feeling of being at home in the world”’.6 Even with the benefit of first-hand experience, nineteenth-century efforts to describe the South African landscape from a British perspective and for British readers had been experienced as a struggle with a hostile adversary. Coetzee describes ‘the lone poet in empty space’ as a central figure: ‘In the words he throws out to the landscape, in the echoes he listens for, he is seeking a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow him an identity better than that of visitor, stranger, transient’.7 Moreover, the fact that Africa continued to appear silent, empty, or hostile was experienced as a threat to the colonial project more generally:

> The continued apprehension of silence (by the poet) or blankness (by the painter), stands for, or stands in the place of, another failure, by no means inevitable: a failure to imagine a peopled landscape, an inability to conceive a society in South Africa in which there is a place for the self.8

The failure of the traditional representative schemas of English literature to capture the reality of the southern African landscape – often registered as a failure of the landscape to ‘speak’ or ‘to emerge into meaningfulness as a landscape of signs’ – evokes imperial anxieties about the value of the terrain.9 When the colonial and wartime contexts

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8 Ibid., p. 9.
9 Ibid.
coincide, the cost of the struggle comes into uncomfortable contact with questions about the value of the prize.

In its anxious swerve away from descriptions of South Africa, and its retreat into familiarly domestic landscapes, ‘To An Imperial Yeoman’ exemplifies a key characteristic of colonial wartime landscape descriptions in the newspaper poems of 1899-1902. Apophatic descriptions, where what is absent or missed rings louder than what is present, contribute to a sense that the South African terrain stretched the limits of language, sometimes even threatening to undermine perception or cognition. The inarticulacy goes beyond Coetzee’s notion that ‘[t]he landscape remains alien, impenetrable, until a language is found in which to win it, speak it, represent it’.

The threat registered in these texts is not just representational but epistemological. Frantz Fanon describes the context in which the ‘native poet’ wrote during the anti-colonial struggle as a ‘zone of occult instability’. When he glosses the phrase, Homi Bhabha describes ‘the time of liberation’ as ‘a time of cultural uncertainty, and, most crucially, of significatory or representational undecidability’. Baucom uses these terms to illuminate colonial writing more generally, claiming that the whole ‘geography of imperialism’ manifests Fanon’s ‘zone of occult instability’.

The potential for such ‘bewilderment and loss’ inherent in the South African terrain itself was exacerbated by the ways the South African War called into question the principles and the practices of British imperialism. The conflict has been characterised both as the high point of British imperialism and as the moment when pessimistic narratives of cultural and colonial decline appeared to receive their confirmation. What Bhabha calls the ‘significatory or representational undecidability’ of colonial writing is exacerbated in many of the landscape poems of the 1899-1902 war by a further sense of existential undecidability: what did the South African war mean for Britishness?

What did military setbacks and failures suggest about the masculine qualities of the men sent to secure Britain’s imperial sovereignty? Many of the poems

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10 Coetzee, White Writing, p. 7.
14 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
discussed below attest to a profound uneasiness in imagining the encounter between British body and the colonial wartime landscape.

The newspaper poems of 1899-1902 make use of a range of strategies to cope with or evade this anxiety, with mixed success. ‘To An Imperial Yeoman’ refuses to imagine the British soldier in the South African landscape at all, picturing him instead in the domestic landscape to which he must long to return. Other poets take up what Pratt describes as a classic ‘Monarch-of-all-I-survey’ stance, elevated above the terrain and seeing it as a distance. This physical positioning of the speaker involves dynamics of possession and domination, as the land is codified as landscape. As Coetzee puts it, ‘the hilltop situation of the observing eye [...] puts the kind of phenomenological distance between viewer and landscape that exists between viewer and painting, creating a predisposition to see landscape as art.’

Jane Oakley, the poet who published in the advertising columns on the front page of the *Times*, assumes just such a distant, landscape-painting perspective in ‘The Empire Triumphant’, surveying a battle-scape ‘From highest Kopje’ and describing ‘A deeply touching, most impressive scene’ of ‘Our splendid Forces marching o’er the plain’. The same perspective enabled Archbishop William Alexander to argue for the beneficent effects of combat on British soldiers in a poem published in the *Times* in October 1899 which marvels at ‘how nobly natures form | Under the war’s red rain’.

Answering his title’s question, the poet finds he can ‘look beyond it [war] at its worst | And still find blue in heaven’ (ll. 3-4). Not just ‘blue’, indeed: the sublime potential of warfare, its beneficial effect on British masculinity, suggests ‘that He who made the

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16 Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 46.
18 William Armagh [Alexander], ‘Is “war the only thing that has no good in it”?’, *Times*, 31 October 1899, p. 9 (ll. 5-6); reprinted in the *Mail*, 1 November 1899, p. 4; *Londonderry Sentinel*, 2 November 1899, p. 5; *Norwich Mercury*, 4 November 1899, p. 2; *Cheltenham Examiner*, 8 November 1899, p. 2; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 9 November 1899, p. 2; *Bridport News*, 10 November 1899, p. 6; extracts also appear in the *Globe*, 2 October 1900, p. 8, the only poem quoted in a review of Alexander’s new volume, *The Finding of the Book and Other Poems* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), as well as in the *Morning Post*, 6 November 1900, p. 5.
earthquake and the storm | Perhaps made battles too’ (ll. 7-8). In the storm of war, ‘the
gallant private learns to practise well | His heroism obscure’, and ‘his heart beats high’,
having been elevated by a new conviction of his own worth, until he feels like ‘one for
whom is made a mighty music solemnly’ (ll. 27-30). His pride is reflected in the sounds
of battle which resound across the landscape as divinely orchestrated music: ‘The
oratorio of the cannonade | Rolls through the hills sublime’ (ll. 31-32). Just as the
soldiers are ‘tried’ and ‘transfigured’ by the ‘baptismal fire’ of battle (ll. 17-18, 48), the
hills are transformed. The ‘flowers, whose tremulous grace is learnt beside | The
trampling of the surge’ provide the model for the soldier and the terrain, both of which
grow into their true and beautiful potential by being subjected to the refining fires of
war. Alexander’s argument relies on the physical distance of speaker from landscape.
Indeed, the landscape of Alexander’s poem is more often metaphorical than literal, and
the soldiers’ bodies are likewise conceptual rather than solid. When Alexander’s soldiers
feel ‘the wind of battle breathing on their cheek | And suddenly laid them down’ (ll. 55-
56), they are visited by ‘thoughts beyond their thoughts […] lent’ by ‘the Spirit’ which
Teach them the meaning of their ‘high self-sacrifice’ (ll. 67-68):

Thus, as the heaven’s many coloured flames  
At sunset are but dust in rich disguise,  
The ascending earthquake dust of battle frames  
God’s pictures in the skies.
(‘Is “war the only thing that has no good in it”?’, ll. 69-72)

The euphemistic ‘wind of battle’ is yoked coercively with Biblical metaphors of the dead
as ‘sleepers’ in the rhetoric; the archbishop’s claim that it is possible to see ‘God’s
pictures’, beautiful as sunsets, in the chaos of warfare is bolstered by his own high
ecclesiastical status. The speaker is removed from the physical reality of battle,
appreciating ‘the oratorio of the cannonade’ as if in concert, from a perspective which
looks out over ‘the hills sublime’, seeing ranks of soldiers shrunk down to the size of
riverside flowers. But he is also removed from the landscape itself: ‘Sunset’ and ‘flowers’
are present only as the terms of metaphorical comparison; ‘The ascending earthquake
dust of battle’ rises between the scene of battle and the poet’s elevated, distanced
position, working like visual euphemism to cloud the detail. Neither the beauty of the sunset with which Alexander’s poem ends, nor the divine approbation which it represents, are visible to the soldiers themselves, who lie ‘Fast, fast asleep amid the cannon’s roar’, where ‘no reveille and no morning gun | Shall ever waken more’ (58-60). The edifying reassurance that British masculinity has been tested and refined by the experience of ‘The gallant Private’ (l. 27) in South Africa is reserved for those who are able to ‘look beyond’ the experience itself to ‘find blue in Heaven’ (ll. 3-4): the dead soldiers gain nothing by it. Indeed, the redeeming glory of war is visible only in long-shot, from a perspective far removed from the ground on and over which the soldiers fight and die. Alexander’s negative answer to his title question ‘Is war the only thing that has no good in it?’ can only be sustained by maintaining a distance between speaker and subject which undermines the assurances of his argument. Moreover, Alexander’s insistence on the glorious potential of colonial warfare relies on rhetoric so superlative that it calls itself into question, betraying its own anxieties about British imperial masculinity. As Steve Attridge puts it, ‘behind and alongside the bluster of imperialist language, and sometimes pulsing at the heart of it, is anxiety and introspection’. Nevertheless, newspaper advertisements for pamphlet editions of the poem claim that Alexander’s celebration of the sacrifice of ‘boy beauty’ (l. 61) was published alongside a ‘Prayer for the use of our Soldiers’ especially ‘Drawn up at the Request of Lord Roberts’ (see figure 5.1). The poem’s portrayal of the South African landscape as a divinely-

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ordained opportunity for redeeming and refining British martial masculinity may have
depended upon a refusal to contemplate the landscape or the soldiers’ experience in
close-up, but it was thereby able to make a vivid and welcome claim for the war’s
meaningfulness that poems taking up a closer perspective struggled to sustain.

The trope of the wartime landscape as a worthy and welcome opponent capable
of refining British military masculinity is common, but other poems renounce the
landscape-painting perspective to take up a very different position with respect to the
bodies of British soldiers. An anonymous poem published in February 1900 quotes
General Redvers Buller’s recent praise of his troops as its title: ‘The Men are Splendid’.²⁰
In the opening lines the poet makes a domestic comparison to prepare his readers for an
account of South African terrain, recalling the pleasurable challenge of walking up
Snowdon ‘when you’re fresh from your morning bath, | With a sandwich tin and a
whisky flask and the sun on your beaten path’ (ll. 1-2). Physical challenge is the epitome
of manly leisure, here. Although the opening line ironically suggests ‘it’s a business,
getting up Snowdon’ (l. 1), the walker begins it well-rested and equipped, and is
compensated for his effort with liquor, sun and sandwiches. The pleasurable exertion of
climbing Snowdon establishes a contrast between civilian readers’ experiences and the
extreme topographical challenges encountered by British soldiers in South Africa. In
contrast to the imbalance of ‘To An Imperial Yeoman’, the British countryside gets just
two lines in the poem, with the remaining 14 focused on the South African experience:

But it’s harder work for the muscles, and a stiffer job for the bones,
Climbing up hundreds of mountain feet when most of the feet are stones!
Climbing it, too, in the darkness, with a gun for an alpenstock,
Slipping and tripping, and waiting to hear the rifle’s ping from the rock.
Slipping and tripping, but panting on, up thro’ the silent night,
With the sweat running over your hand to your gun and trickling into the sight.

(‘The Men are Splendid’, ll. 3-8)

The long lines perform the extended activity the poet describes; the effect of laborious
effort is strengthened in newsprint by the encounter with column margins which force
them to run over (Figure 5.2). An orderly alexandrine with its dignified medial caesura in
line 3 is overtaken by a breathless dactylic heptameter, conveying excitement as well as

²⁰ ‘The Men are Splendid’, Globe, 26 January 1900, p. 1; reprinted in the Manchester Weekly Times, 2
February 1900, p. 5, and in a Natal newspaper, appearing in the Cape Town Library of Parliament
(CTLP), Mendelssohn Collection, Pera Muriel Button, The South African War: Newspaper Cuttings, 6 vols, iii,
p. 113.
exhaustion, while the endurance required for the feat is articulated through dactylic polysendetic participles. The action of ‘climbing up [...] climbing [...] slipping and tripping, and waiting [...] slipping and tripping, but panting on’ postpones the moment of reaching a destination to beyond the end of the stanza, the ‘sweat’ continuing the body’s motion even if movement stops for long enough for the soldier to look down the sight of the gun. The emphasis on ‘darkness’ and ‘sweat’ establishes a firm antithesis to the idyllic memory of ascending Snowdon, and indeed to Alexander’s ‘hills sublime’. Climbing in ‘The Men are Splendid’ is presented in haptic, bodily terms, in line with McLoughlin’s observation that wartime poetry is often intensely focused on the body of the individual in the landscape. The contrasts between Snowdon and South Africa intensify as the poet reaches the summit:

But what of the end of the journey, when you’re ‘safe’ on the mountain top,
And the sun peeps out of the dewy East – and the shells in a welcome drop?
When there isn’t an hour to enjoy the view and examine your broken shins,
When the foe leaps up on the other side and the work of the day begins?

(‘The Men are Splendid’, ll. 9-12)

The ‘dewy East’ is both literal and metaphorical, a description of the sunrise and a parodic reminder of the contrast between this and the leisure of the opening lines. It might be ‘a business getting up Snowdon’ (l. 1), but for soldiers in South Africa ‘the work of the day begins’ after this feat of physical exertion. The ‘crown of the climbing’ (l. 13) for the British soldiers is not a panoramic sunrise. A modern reader familiar with

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the subversions of First World War poetry might expect a very different ending from the one with which the poet concludes the comparison:

Ah! that is the crown of the climbing for the sons of a Northern race,
Look at the joy and the triumph’s light that shines in each sweating face!
Up thro’ the pitchy darkness, up the embattled height,
Up to the rays of the rising sun, and the dawn of the long day’s fight.

("The Men are Splendid", ll. 13-16)

The comparison with Snowdon is introduced not to lament the adversities faced by British soldiers, nor simply to celebrate their physical prowess, but to position this encounter with the South African landscape as more exhilarating, more life-affirming and enriching than anything they could undertake at home. Battle does not darken the horizon here, but comes as ‘dawn light’, the ‘triumph’ shining in men’s faces testament to their sense of having achieved a victory over the terrain before the conflict begins. There is a glimpse of the sublime in this struggle against a land which demands the expression of a wholesome kind of manliness, in line with a long tradition of seeing colonial adventure, as well as colonial war, as a tonic for enfeebled modern masculinity. The implication is that men who prove their physical strength in this way earn the right to conquer the land in the name of British sovereignty.

Mcloughlin describes the war zone landscape as a ‘charged space’ of special ‘intensity’ which demands ‘topographical hyper-awareness’.22 Both ‘geographical and psycho-physiological’, ‘the individual who enters [the war zone] is transformed permanently by its sights, experiences and demands’.23 Representations of this landscape are complicated: the war zone terrain is ‘both subject and venue’ of the conflict, and ‘not only the ground in and on which such transformation is effected: it is also the ground on and through which it is figured’.24 In the colonial context this complexity is further multiplied and amplified. Representations of the British soldier transfigured by contact with colonial terrain reflect back on British imperial identities and national character, contributing to the discourse of imperial masculinity with all its doubts and uncertainties, while the ground-level perspective and intense physicality of the encounter with the South African terrain in a poem like ‘The Men are Splendid’ speaks to a desire for civilian readers to have a share in the soldiers’ ‘topographical hyper-awareness’ as a way of gaining imaginative colonial control over a distant landscape. Both Alexander

23 Ibid., p. 105.
24 Ibid.
and the anonymous poet of ‘The Men are Splendid’ propose the possibility of value in war depending upon the hardships of the soldier’s experience, but the sweaty specificity of ‘The Men are Splendid’, privileging ‘pitchy darkness’ and ‘broken shins’, brings the reader down to stony ground level to share the physical exhaustion and exhilaration of soldiers at ‘the dawn of the long day’s fight’. The intimacy with the land achieved through their climb aligns both soldiers and readers with the rugged landscape, allowing newspaper reader to stand shoulder to shoulder with British soldier at the peak and take imaginative possession of the terrain.

The desire for imaginative or actual possession of the South African terrain in newspaper poems of 1899-1902 frequently comes into tension with the reality of the landscape in its encounter with the bodies of British soldiers, particularly in poems which intervene directly in the news cycle by presenting ‘a true incident’ or citing a particular news event in their headnote. News reports and soldiers’ memoirs often depict their initial reaction to the South African landscape in terms of hostility – both of the viewer towards the landscape, and of the landscape against the body. In an unpublished memoir, Private Rawlings-Venning of the City Imperial Volunteers describes long marches across the South African plains.\textsuperscript{25} His account captures the impression made by the landscape on a visitor:

\begin{quote}
At daybreak we entered some very rough country, passing through two ugly gorges and at 9 A.M. got through the hills and opened out on to an immense, wide grassy plain, nothing but monotonous rolling undulating veldt with some rugged bristling mountains, sticking up miles away ahead.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

The hostility with which the writer approaches the landscape is related to Coetzee’s idea that the South African landscape resists the aesthetic schema through which the Western eye is accustomed to seek meaning in landscape.\textsuperscript{27} What the memoirist sees is ‘nothing’; the landscape is ‘ugly’ because it does not conform to the standards of the picturesque or the sublime through which the soldier is prepared to see it. The terrain is ‘monotonous’, characterised by absences, although the claim that there is ‘nothing but […] rolling undulating veldt’ is immediately undercut by the uncanny image of ‘bristling mountains’. Landscapes empty of human figures are a common feature of colonial

\textsuperscript{25} Pte. 1281 [Rawlings-Venning], \textit{With the Infantry Batallion of the C.I.V.} MS diary/memoir. Private collection.

\textsuperscript{26} [Rawlings-Venning], \textit{With the Infantry Batallion}, 1 May 1900 [n.p].

\textsuperscript{27} Coetzee, \textit{White Writing}, p. 44.
landscape writing – a way of signalling both the availability of the land and its vulnerability to colonial aggression. As McLoughlin puts it, however, ‘absence conjures up presence’. For British soldiers, one of the most unsettling features of the war was the invisibility of the enemy; as one soldier lamented, ‘the Boers will not play the game fairly’.

New smokeless, long-range rifles, combined with the Boers’ genius for camouflage, meant that, in Thomas Pakenham’s words, ‘the enemy were an army of ghosts’. The impression of palpable absences, a fear that apparent vacancy was hiding threatening presences, is indicated earlier in the diarist’s account of the ‘big strain’ on ‘the nervous system’ afforded by ‘outlying picket duty’:

> Whether it was the hot depressing weather or the very bright and weird night lightning that got on ones nerves is neither here nor there, but at 7.15 p.m. the sentry under the South end of the bridge got a bad attack of jumps and fired at a phantom Boer, rousing the whole camp: we searched the thick scrub up and down the river banks thoroughly and then turned in without having seen anything.

The soldier’s description of the mountains as ‘bristling’ is closely tied to the notion of ‘phantom’ enemies. The ‘phantom Boer’ is simultaneously a nervous response to ‘hot depressing weather’ and ‘weird night lightning’, and a real possibility; it is the sentry who makes the noise which wakes the troops, but the syntax seems to give the agency to a ‘phantom Boer, rousing the whole camp’. Similarly, the sentry’s ‘attack of the jumps’ implies that the soldiers’ nervous systems have been co-opted by a hostile terrain and turned upon their owners. Meanwhile, the ‘thick scrub’ refuses to give up its secrets, so that the camp retire ‘without having seen anything’ but without being able to discount the possibility that the ‘phantom Boer’ was a real physical presence. The encounter with hidden combatants in military engagements that were disastrous for the British made this feature of the wartime landscape one that particularly engaged newspaper poets seeking to respond directly to news items during the opening months of the war.

The experience of fighting an invisible army, with its implications for both British and Boer masculinity, is captured in a pamphlet poem which was advertised alongside Alexander’s in the *Standard* in May 1900 (Figure 5.1). Mrs Clement Nugent Jackson’s ‘Shot on patrol! A true incident of the present war’ presents an account of the

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30 Ibid.
31 Rawlings-Venning, *With the Infantry Battalion*, 26 March 1900 [n.p.].
32 Ibid.
Battle of Colenso in December 1899. British losses in this encounter amounted to 1,138 men killed, wounded or missing, while General Buller confessed: ‘I do not think either a Boer or a gun was seen by us all day’. Jackson’s poem tells the story of a specific military engagement in order to offer a soothing interpretation of it, absolving the British by condemning the Boers for unmanly conduct:

it wasn’t a charge. It was murder.
It was death coming out of the air.
Not a puff of smoke to tell them
If the Boers lay here, or there,
Tucked away in their trenches: nothing to see or show;
And our men dropped out of their saddles without one glimpse of the foe!

(‘Shot on Patrol’, ll. 43-48)

Death comes ‘out of the air’ as if of its own volition, apparently unconnected with weapons or human agency. It carries no warning trace, and leaves no mark – the soldiers are not obviously wounded or hit by a visible force but rather drop as if voluntarily ‘out of their saddles’. In the epigraph, Jackson quotes the Daily Mail war correspondent’s claim that ‘the average Englishman at home has no idea’ about the realities of ‘warfare—especially war against an enemy like the Boer’. The poem presents itself as a corrective to the collective failure to understand the special qualities of the Boers, qualities which explain British military disasters. Jackson’s poem describes ‘the little kopjes where the Dutchmen like to hide’ (l. 65). The implication that this strategy transforms wartime aggression into ‘murder’ is clear. The enemy are treated with infantilising minimisation, ‘tucked away in their trenches’ as though in bed, but simultaneously condemned for failing to engage fairly. Likewise, ‘The Man Behind the Boulder’, which appeared in Pearson’s Weekly in February 1900, asserts that the Boers’ behaviour absolves Britain of responsibility for ‘her army’s great reverses’. The reassurance this poem offers the British newspaper reader is reinforced by the claim that the poet expresses an international consensus. In a note reproduced when the poem was reprinted in the Hampshire Telegraph, Pearson’s Weekly introduced it with the information that it was ‘written by a Chicago gentleman; it is printed to show the American view of

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33 [Mrs. Clement Nugent Jackson], ‘By the author of the Gordon League Ballads: Shot on Patrol: A true incident of the present war’ (Skeffington and Son, 1900). British Library, Pamphlets on the Boer War, Cup 21 ff 1 16.
34 Pakenham, Boer War, pp. 239-40.
35 [Peter Grant], ‘The Man Behind the Boulder’, Pearson’s Weekly, 3 February 1900, p. 3; reprinted in Hampshire Telegraph Suplement, 10 February 1900, p. 1. The poem was also reprinted from the Chicago Record in a Natal newspaper and appears in CTLP Burton, v, p. 20.
the war’. The circulation of newspaper poems here positions them as offering a window onto public opinion, so that as well as reassuring the reader that British military disasters do not reflect badly on British soldiers, the poet offers comfort about Britain’s international reputation:

Her defeat is no disgrace,
Let the world forbear to scold her;
For it knows she’s face to face
With the man behind the boulder.

(‘The Man Behind the Boulder’, ll. 5-8)

Jackson’s maternal image of the Boers ‘tucked away in their trenches’ is here transformed into a more clearly critical description of the Boers, contrasting their tactics with those of the ‘brave and true’ British soldier, ‘advancing’ across an ‘open plain’ in full view of his enemy, towards the ‘concealed’ foe who can mow him down from a position of safety ‘behind the boulder’ (ll. 9-11). Boer tactics are derided as childlike, unmanly, dishonourable. The blame for the catastrophic effectiveness of such strategies is laid not on British military misjudgement but on the contemptible character of the enemy:

When they aim the deadly gun,
It would seem to a beholder
That the odds are ten to one
On the man behind the boulder.

(‘The Man Behind the Boulder’, ll. 13-16)

The speakers of these texts are keenly aware that the apparent emptiness of these South African landscapes is illusory; behind each boulder and kopje, potential dangers lie concealed. The less of the enemy you can see, the more their absence weighs on the terrain, infusing perceptions with an eerie sense of ghostly presences and lurking threats. Even when this awareness is used by newspaper poets to protect British reputations by condemning the character of the enemy, the effect is one of anxiousness, compounding Baucom’s description of ‘the territories of British imperialism’ as ‘spaces of bewilderment and loss’; the South African landscape certainly ‘trouble[d] and confound[ed]’ the wartime newspaper poets attempting to portray it.37

36 Hampshire Telegraph Supplement, 10 February 1900, p. 1.
37 Baucom, Out of Place, pp. 3-4.
In many poems, the significance of the terrain to British military disasters is a result of a natural world with a malevolent agency of its own, rather than Boer skill or tactics. Jackson invites her reader to imagine what it feels like,

to walk your horses
  Where every rock may ring
To the cracking of a rifle: where every bush may screen
  Some of the surest marksmen that the world has ever seen.
  (‘Shot on Patrol’, ll. 69-72)

The idea that the bushes are active in hiding the shooters is reinforced by the position of ‘screen’ at the line ending, which performs the act it describes by postponing the revelation of what is being screened. This is reinforced by the fact that the rocks themselves are the subject of the earlier clause – the rifle does not seem to cause the ‘ring’ its ‘cracking’ calls forth. Similar images occur in newspaper poems from Natal and the Cape Colony preserved in the Button scrapbooks. In ‘Sons of the Soil’, Howard pictures British fighters advancing on ‘the hills that hide the guns’, the active meaning of ‘hide’ reinforced by later descriptions of ‘the hills that have defied’, and ‘Hills ceaseless belching shot and shell’.38 ‘Belching’ is a common feature of these landscape descriptions, figuring the terrain as a great beast spewing forth deadly projectiles; W. Harvey Copp describes places ‘among the hills’ where ‘The ground it belched forth smoke, flame, shot and shell’.39 In another poem by Howard, the poet uses the same language (‘when the hills belch forth flame’) in juxtaposition with images which bring the idea of the land as a hungry predator still more clearly into focus: the guns have ‘hot breath’, while ‘far up the vultures soaring scent the feast prepared anew’.40 The problems faced by the British soldiers are explained not by their inadequate preparation or inappropriate tactics, nor even by the Boers’ superior military skill, but by the predisposition of the South African terrain against the British forces.

William Watson’s use of this trope in ‘Past and Present’, a Westminster Gazette poem of February 1900 touched a cultural nerve, prompting rejoinders from around the English-speaking empire.41 Watson’s poem reminds readers of the historical English

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38 Keppel Howard, ‘Sons of the Soil’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 112 (ll. 13, 48, 56). Button’s clipping indicates that the poem was originally published in the Cape Times.
39 W. Harvey Copp, ‘The Battle of Belmont’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 120 (l. 10).
triumph over the Spanish Armada, when ‘The winds of heaven’ were ‘our auxiliaries’ (l. 3), in order to draw a contrast with the present:

Ah, not to-day is Nature on our side!
The mountains and the rivers are our foe.
And Nature with the heart of man allied
Is hard to overthrow.

(‘Past and Present’, ll. 4-8)

The editorial comment immediately below Watson’s poem describes it as a ‘charming poetical fancy’, apparently diminishing the poem’s grave implications.42 Acknowledging that ‘Nature […] has helped the Boer’ in the encounters so far, the editor expresses confidence that ‘the period in which Nature will be his ally seems rapidly drawing to a close’. This optimism is strangely undercut, however, by the fact that the editor also notes the ‘curious confirmation’ of Watson’s ‘theory’ in the Daily News report of a recent Boer escape ‘owing to the serpentine bend in the river’.43 Perhaps it was this coincidence of poetic image with news of a further defeat of the British forces which prompted a range of responses to Watson’s poem. In the Daily News four days later, ‘a poetical contributor’ cited ‘Past and Present’ to make ‘quite the opposite’ argument.44 The Boers might have ‘cried’ ‘Unto the mountains and the streams’ to ‘lend us your aid’ (ll. 1-2), so that the approaching British soldiers fell ‘frustrate on the murderous ambuscade’ (l. 4), but this second poet pointed to ‘the empty trenches’ (l. 5) as evidence that the Boer appeal was eventually denied: ‘Nature brooked not thus to hold at bay | The champions of liberty and right’ (ll. 7-8). The ‘headstrong valour’ of the British soldiers (l. 3), contrasted against the Boers tendency to ‘hide’ and ‘lurk’ (ll. 3, 6), persuaded Nature to support the British after all. Another response to Watson’s poem appeared in the Daily Telegraph from that paper’s former editor, Edwin Arnold, who suggested that if ‘mountains, […] waterways and river fountains’ could express ‘mortal passions’, then ‘The Great Deep’ could also take sides, and would do so in Britain’s favour:45

Enough to answer England’s slanderous son,
And brand his calumny,

42 Westminster Gazette, 19 February 1900, p. 2.
43 Ibid.
44 ‘Unto the Mountains…’, Daily News, 23 February 1900, p. 4.
45 Edwin Arnold, ‘The Great Deep Speaks’, Telegraph, 21 February 1900, reprinted in Yorkshire Evening Post, 21 February 1900, p. 3. Arnold’s poem was reprinted in a Natal newspaper and appears in CTLP Button, iii, p. 224. Watson’s and Arnold’s poems were reprinted together in the Luton Times, 23 February 1900, p. 6; Outlook, 5,108 (24 February 1900), p. 124; Academy, 1451 (24 February 1900), p. 156; Buckingham Advertiser, 24 February 1900, p. 8; Weekly Dispatch, 25 February 1900, p. 5. Watson’s, Arnold’s, and the anonymous Daily News poem were quoted in the East Kent Times, 28 February 1900, p. 7.
'I bore her files to battle, every one,  
'Her Lover—Ocean—I!'  
('The Great Deep Speaks', ll. 5-8)

Anti-war campaigner Anthony Shiell printed both Watson’s and Arnold’s poems, before his own reply claiming that nature is indifferent to petty human squabbles, in a pamphlet of *Pro-Boer Lyrics*. The debate in poetry sparked by Watson’s ‘Past and Present’ fired imaginations across the globe and across the British political spectrum, perhaps because asking about Nature’s allegiances came close to raising the question of divine sanction for a war against a white Christian enemy with a reputation for devoutness. In Watson’s formulation, it was not a human enemy proving ‘hard to overthrow’ but the natural world itself. The hostility of ‘the mountains and the rivers’ of South Africa are contrasted with ‘the winds of heaven’ which helped defeat ‘lofty Spain’, implying that it is the more noble ‘heart’ of the Boers which has won Nature’s, and perhaps God’s, tactical support.

‘Earth and her elements protect the foe’, Oxford poetry professor W.J. Courthope wrote in a poem published in *Literature* and reprinted in a Natal newspaper. Far from implying support for the Boers, poems which present the conflict as taking place between the British soldiers and the land of South Africa itself effectively deny that the Boers themselves represent a military threat to the British. W.H.H. describes a battle scene as a conflict between British soldiers and the landscape, rather than with an enemy: ‘When we rush the bush an’ the artful trench, | Or ford the river’s chilly drench’. Other poets picture the British dead having been swallowed by a greedy land; A.D. Godley describes ‘Magersfontein’s murderous hill’; L.A.C. ‘Call[s] [...] in vain to the veldt-land to give up its slain’, and an anonymous *Pall Mall Gazette* poet characterises South Africa as a love-rival, imagining ‘that too envious land, | That fain would hold in alien chill embrace | The youth and valour of a conquering race’. The enemy’s agency is denied in war scenes emptied of Boer figures. Each of these examples render the

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Boers as passive, while the natural world itself takes on both defensive and offensive capability. In Courthope’s image, ‘The steadfast legions’ of British fighters move ‘Across the streaming flood, the deep ravine, | Through the hurricanes of shot, through hells of fire, | To rocks where myriad marksmen lurk unseen’ (ll. 1-3). Extreme landforms hold back the British approach; though guns are fired, the British forces encounter ‘hurricanes of shot’ divorced from their human instigators and propelled by natural forces. The enemy become the subordinate, degraded partner of an irresistible natural force. They are ‘treacherous’ and ‘secret’ (l. 7), with a ‘stubborn heart’ (l. 10), over which negative characteristics the poem prophesies the eventual victory of ‘the conquering will’ (l. 8), the ‘triumphs’ of the ‘dauntless dead’ spurring the ‘Imperial Race’ to ‘Advance’ (ll. 11-12). Calling the British the ‘Imperial Race’ claims a different kind of natural right, and one which will secure ultimate advantage over the ‘brute cunning’ of an enemy who think it proper to ‘lurk unseen’ (ll. 10, 3). In light of final, inevitable victory, the protection afforded the Boers by ‘Earth and her elements’ (l. 1) makes the anticipated British conquest more impressive, unexpectedly affirming divine sanction. British soldiers prove their worth, and implicitly the worth of their cause, in an encounter with the landscape itself. A metonym for the Boers, this landscape is paradoxically empty of them. This is a development of the colonial trope of empty landscapes. The implication is still of a terrain theoretically available for British colonial appropriation, but this landscape is resistant, putting up a stronger fight than the Boers against British military encroachment. By this rhetorical trick, British setbacks could be ascribed to an impressive and powerful opponent, without having to grace the Boers with any such positive qualities, while British masculinity was presented as being tested and refined by contact with this land of extremes. These newspaper poems appear alongside and offer a way to process the dismaying news of British defeats, combining reportage with softening, reassuring interpretations of news events.

In addition to its capacity for hiding or fighting on behalf of the Boers, the apparently empty South African landscape held another threat to the bodies of British soldiers which began to concern newspaper poets. What one writer called ‘the burning veldt’ was burning in more ways than one, when one of the biggest logistical mistakes made by the British military command was in the failure to provide adequate drinking
water.50 Rawlings-Venning wrote obsessively about water, recording the precise quantities available on day-long marches and the cruel experience of reaching a long-anticipated river to find that ‘the water [...] was absolutely unfit to drink, the river being nothing more than a chain of pools, in which wallowed mules and other live stock and also much dead stock’.51 Elsewhere he describes a camp where ‘but ½ pint’ of the available water ‘will procure a free ticket for the nearest hospital’.52 Waterborne diseases were so rife that increasingly serious punishments were ‘threatened for anyone found drinking river water’ – an unappealing prospect enough, until ‘a small cupful of water apiece’ was the only relief the marching soldiers received, though ‘our throats were [...] thick with dust and our tongues sticking to the roofs of our mouths’.53 Advice and threats notwithstanding, by the end of the war, two thirds of the total British deaths had been as a result of preventable and treatable illnesses like dysentery and enteric fever, brought on by drinking contaminated water.54 The under-resourcing of army medical services, and slapdash planning from generals who assumed that the conflict was going to be a short one and who failed to make arrangements for getting fresh water to thirsty troops, grew into ‘the war hospital scandal’ in the London newspapers by the summer of 1900. But while editorials focused on the political implications of the British army’s struggle with South Africa’s hidden poison, newspaper poets like clergyman H.D. Rawnsley provided a more intimate perspective which reflected anxieties about this new way for the colonial landscape to menace the body of the British soldier. ‘Dead for Joy’ was subtitled ‘A true incident on a Returning Transport’ when it appeared in the Westminster Gazette in July 1900.55 The poem tells of ‘a gunner of Battery A’ who ‘drank of the donga’s pool accurst’ (ll. 1-2). ‘Accurst’ plays into the sense of the terrain itself as hostile to the British presence, even mystically so, but Rawnsley insists on the deadly familiarity of the gunner’s fate: he ‘Sickened slowly the usual way— | Taste in the mouth and a terrible thirst’ (ll. 3-4). In the soldier’s feverish ‘drowse’ (l. 5) he wanders...

50 Bernard Malcolm Ramsey, ‘The Women who Wait’, Aberdeen Press and Journal, 8 February 1900, p. 2 (l. 2); reprinted in the Evening News, 28 April 1900, p. 2; also reprinted, signed ‘X’, in Westminster Gazette, 16 May 1900, p. 2; Western Evening Herald, 17 May 1900, p. 2; Bailey Reporter, 18 May 1900, p. 8; Gloucester Citizen, 18 May 1900, p. 3; Edinburgh Evening News, 25 May 1900, p. 3; and unsigned in Dundee Evening Post, 18 May 1900, p. 1; Newbury Weekly News, 31 May 1900; Hampshire Advertiser, 2 June 1900, p. 2. The Sheffield Weekly Telegraph reprinted it from ‘A Cape newspaper’ on 13 October 1900, p. 3, and it appears in The Scotsman, 22 April 1901, p. 7, as an advertisement for a fundraising pamphlet version.

51 [Rawlings-Venning], With the Infantry Battalion, April 25, 1900 [n.p.].

52 Ibid, 3 March 1900 [n.p.].

53 Ibid., 16 March 1900 and 25 April 1900 [n.p.].


between South African and the more familiar ‘woods in the old home-land’ (l. 6).
Memories of the ‘Hampshire village where leaves are green’ (ll. 13, 15) pull him through
the worst of his illness: ‘home-love was stored | Too deep in his being for death to kill’
(ll. 27-28). But the ‘true incident’ to which the subtitle refers comes as the transport ship
carrying him back approaches the Solent:

‘Now, God be thanked that I see it again,
This dear old land of my heart!’ he said,
And for the joy of the thought of the lass and the lane
And the Hampshire forest, the man fell dead.

(‘Dead for Joy’, ll. 37-40)
The encounter with South Africa has marked him too deeply for him to be assimilated
back into the English countryside for which he has been longing. Throughout the
poem, the gunner’s passion for the flowers and vistas of his ‘old home-land’ intensifies
the contrast with the South African landscape. Having recalled the ‘girl he had left in a
Hampshire lane | With the rose in her bosom, the fern in her hand’, his delirious
babbling juxtaposes quite different scenes:

Then he moaned and muttered of waterless ways,
Of thorns in the scrub, of the earth’s hot crust,
Of hills ever looming in burning haze,
Of leaves like tinder and flowers like dust.

(‘Dead for Joy’, ll. 9-12)

His feverish image of South Africa is one of disappointed seeking along ‘waterless ways’
which appear to promise relief from thirst but which allow no progress to be made. The
terrain is protected against the soldiers’ advances by ‘thorns’ and ‘burning haze’, and
however far the ‘ways’ may take them, the ‘hills’ are ‘ever looming’, never resolving into
actual proximity. In a landscape which is already ‘burning’, the ‘leaves like tinder’ hold
out the potential of greater and more deadly conflagration, while the ‘flowers’ which
ought to signify fertility and life are no more than ‘dust’. No soil here to promise
agricultural plenty in a bountiful colonial future; the terrain reminds the speaker of his
place in a larger, geological scheme, scratching an existence into ‘earth’s hot crust’.
Throughout the poem, the feverish visions of South African landscapes in the gunner’s
‘long wild dream’ (l. 21) are overlaid with the familiar and more pleasing memories of
home. The ‘waterless ways’ (l. 9) have their counterpart in ‘The willows down by the
Hampshire stream’ (l. 23), while the ‘rose’ that the gunner wants to ‘offer the nurse’ is
‘Just plucked from the hedge, all dewy and cool’ (ll. 17-18), quite unlike the ‘flowers like
dust’ of the South African landscape (l. 12).
The reader of ‘Dead for Joy’ shares in the gunner’s disorienting experience of the land, as the unglossed Afrikaans word ‘donga’ (gully) defamiliarizes the scene. The practice of registering an alienating experience of the South African landscape through the use of Dutch or Afrikaans words became so prevalent that, a year into the war, it was parodied by the anti-British South African Times, in a ‘recipe’ for newspaper verse:

Do not forget to mention the word ‘veldt’ at least once and do not on any consideration leave out the ‘t’. It is an absurd affectation on the part of the Dutch to spell it otherwise, and if you were to do so your readers might think you knew another language than your own, and might even doubt your loyalty. 56

In their ironic conflation of linguistic affectation with jingoistic patriotism, the South African Times ridicules simplistically patriotic verse. But Rawnsley’s decision to use the Afrikaans word cannot be attributed to such an agenda. His description eschews euphemism in its powerful evocation of the gunner’s sufferings, ‘in his drowse and his pain’ (l. 5) during ‘his weeks of the long wild dream’ (l. 21). The fever itself is clearly ‘terrible’ (l. 4), but the vision of soldierly life evoked by the feverish dreams paints a grim picture of the realities of soldiering in South Africa, too. Moreover, this gunner might be able to cling to notions of duty and loyalty (to ‘Battery A, and ‘Bobs’, and the Queen’, l. 14) to give his suffering purpose, but the poem ends abruptly with his sudden death, with no moral or meaning allowed to dignify this ending. Instead of using the Afrikaans word as a cheap way to claim spurious authority, Rawnsley uses it to emphasise the difference between the South African landscape and the home of which the gunner dreams, and to point to the limitations faced by an English-language writer attempting to articulate these. Rawnsley’s juxtaposition of a feverish impression of South Africa with the reassuringly familiar British landscape was a recurrent motif; many newspaper poets portrayed a terrain that appeared to stretch their linguistic resources. What ‘Dead for Joy’ adds is the implication that the gunner has been too deeply scarred by his hallucinatory encounter with the burning South African landscape to survive in his beloved Hampshire lanes and woods, raising the troubling possibility that British soldiers might lose something of themselves in the encounter. Reaching for his dream-rose, an emblem of Englishness, to offer his nurse (ll. 17-18), the ‘gunner of Battery A’ clings imaginatively to a version of himself still in the ‘Hampshire lane’ which he longs for. The sense that South Africa appeared as a deviation from a northern

European ‘norm’ helps explains the apophatic descriptions and felt absences described above, but the gunner’s rose is an example of powerful symbolic presences which other poets read into the landscape as a defence against its frightening difference.

Another poem which capitalises on the symbolic potential of roses appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in November 1899. The poem describes ‘city ramparts’ on which ‘the smoke lies grey | From the enemy’s ships without the bay’ (ll. 19-20). The ‘city’ is unidentified in the poem. Newspaper poets of 1899-1902 frequently described the three besieged towns in South Africa as cities, partly through geographical ignorance, perhaps, but partly in an imaginative effort to grace these nondescript backwaters with the kind of military significance that would account for the emotional power of the sieges for British observers, by relating them to the siege at Lucknow during the Indian rebellion of 1857. The day before ‘A Rose on the Ramparts’ appeared, the *Pall Mall*

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**Figure 5.7:** Plan of Ladysmith, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 November 1899, p. 8.

Gazette published a line-drawing plan of Ladysmith, the third and final South African town to be besieged by the Boers in the opening weeks of the war (figure 5.3). The plan itself indicates some of the cartographical challenge of representing the South African landscape meaningfully to a British reader, relying on the same wiggly lines to indicate ‘Small rises’, ‘high ground’ and ‘precipitous hills’ and to fill the apparently empty space surrounding the town. The ‘quaint little […] tin-roofed township […] of two parallel streets’ was certainly not a ‘city’. Moreover, lying 250km distant from the coast, its inhabitants were unlikely to hear ‘their cannon roar | To the answering shore’, as the poet writes (ll. 21-22). Nonetheless, the circumstances of the poem’s appearance invite the reader to draw parallels between the forces besieged in South African towns and the ‘ramparts’ of this poem, seeing if not a literal description then at least a symbolic echo of the situation in South Africa in its portrayal of an embattled town. In an exotic, orientalising description of the landscape, the poet sustains a tension between the lazy heat of a southern Summer, lit by ‘moonbeams’ (l. 12), and the threat of violence:

On the city ramparts the grim guns frown,
And the sentinel paces up and down:
The noon lies hot
On the mounded shot,
And the wind of the south
Blows in at the cannon’s mouth,
Softly, languidly blows:
And over the wall a rose is growing,
A rose is glowing—a rose, a mid-summer rose!

(‘A Rose on the Ramparts’, ll. 1-9)

Although the ‘grim guns frown’, the passivity of the weapons in the noontime heat is emphasised by the fact that the wind ‘blows in at the cannon’s mouth’, rather than the cannon blowing heat out. The irregular metre contributes to the mood, as the sentinel’s marching is overwhelmed by the ‘languid’ movement of the warm breeze in lines 6-7. The only invasion threatening the defensive wall is a natural one: ‘over the wall’ could refer to a point beyond or a movement across the defensive line. The quadruple repetition in ‘a rose is growing, | A rose is glowing—a rose, a mid-summer rose!’ serves to destabilise the term; aural correspondences begin to resound (‘arose’, ‘rows’) as this emblematic English flower blooms in, and perhaps makes its own incursions into, an African landscape. The connection made by the rhyme between ‘rose’ and ‘blows’ juxtaposes natural beauty with the promise of military violence; ‘blows’ now seems to

refer to the process of blossoming and decay, as well as to the wind and the explosive potential of ‘the mounded shot’, while the ‘rose’ also seems to stand for the ‘sentinel’ who appears in line 11 and ‘guards the embrasured wall’.

The symbolic significance of the rose becomes more complex in the second stanza where, as ‘the shadows fall’ on the ramparts, ‘the wind of the west | Blows in a dream’ to the sentinel’s ‘breast’ (ll. 14-15):

Softly, languidly blows:
And deep in his heart a fire is glowing,
A rose is blowing—a rose, a midsummer rose.

(‘A Rose on the Ramparts’, ll. 16-18)

An ambiguous and unstable referent, the rose now symbolises the ‘fire’ in the sentinel’s breast, and also, by association, the ‘dream’ which inspires it – a dream of home, brought from afar on ‘the wind of the west’. It takes on more sinister associations in the final stanza. When the enemy’s ‘cannon roar […], The sentinel’s soul must forth’ (ll. 21-24):

Swiftly, fearlessly goes:
And red on his breast a rose is glowing,
Blood-red and flowing—a rose, a midsummer rose.

(‘A Rose on the Ramparts’, ll. 25-27)

Beauty and horror are brought into violent juxtaposition, as the ‘rose’ of the sentinel’s dream of home is transformed into his death-wound. Just as the warmth of the breeze contrasts uncomfortably with the ‘mounded shot’ and ‘piles of shell’ on which it ‘softly, languidly blows’, the use of the archaic ‘sentinel’ (rather than ‘soldier’ or ‘sentry’) contrasts with the shock of modern long-distance warfare. The bullet or shell which wounds the soldier is not mentioned; instead, his death is signalled by the rose-like bloom on his uniform. Human agency is replaced by a sense of the landscape at war, as in so many other poems. The sentinel’s complete silence and apparent isolation cuts this poem off from many of the reassuring tropes of comradeship and honour in death seen elsewhere: this is an equivocal narrative of an unnamed and unspeaking victim of a siege. Although the second stanza describes him ‘guard[ing] the embrasured wall’ and describes ‘piles of shell’, the sentinel remains completely passive. His presence there, like that of the rose, seems decorative or symbolic, loosely connected with a notional Englishness but out of place and purposeless. The circumstances of the poem’s publication invite a reading of the sentinel as a British soldier trapped in a South
African siege town, but the poem itself leaves his identity, and the meaning and significance of his death, ultimately uncertain.

Many newspaper poets explored the notion that British men might be changed by their encounter with the South African landscape. Some, like Alexander, and the poet of ‘The Men are Splendid’, asserted the value of physical exertion as a welcome opportunity to assert and refine British masculinity, though these poems could simultaneously gesture towards anxieties about the nature of the struggle. Others, like Rawnsley and the anonymous poet of ‘A Rose on the Ramparts’ present more equivocal, uncertain encounters, approaching Fanon’s description of the colonial landscape as a ‘zone of occult instability’.

As its title makes clear, ‘A Private’s Complaint’, written by Imperial Volunteer Lionel Curtis, presents the soldier’s perspective on the encounter with South Africa. Using a jaunty rhythm, the speaker laments ‘the loss of an English spring’:

I am thinking what good reason
We could possibly have had
For this monstrous change of season,
This stride from good to bad,
How we came to sell our springland
For the naked southern fall.

(‘A Private’s Complaint’, ll. 1-6)

Longing ‘for one hour’s clamber | On my soft western hills’ (ll. 29-30), the speaker regrets missing them in their springtime splendour: ‘From top to toe they’re amber, | I know, with daffodils’ (ll. 31-32), the fields are good enough to wear, their ‘divers colours […] meet for necks of kings’ (ll. 35-36), in contrast with the ‘naked Southern fall’ (l. 6). As in ‘To an Imperial Yeoman’, the beauty of the English countryside is contrasted against barrenness. Though he acknowledges that ‘our wages are our praises, | With a medal clasp and ring’ (ll. 17-18), the soldier-speaker asks for a more homely reward: ‘will no one keep us daisies | From our lost English spring?’ (ll. 19-20). His account of what he most misses during his sojourn in South Africa is another example of the apophatic power of negatives to call up what is absent so that it assumes more solid reality than what is present:

59 Fanon, Wretched, p. 183; Baucom, Out of Place, p. 3.
60 Lionel Curtis, ‘A Private’s Complaint at the Loss of an English Spring’, Spectator, 85 (21 July 1900), p. 80; the poem was reprinted in a Natal newspaper and appears in CTLP Button, v, 49-50. It was reprinted in the Portsmouth Evening News, 6 June 1901, p. 2, on the occasion of Curtis’s appointment as town clerk in Johannesburg.
Unheard, the lambs will utter
    Their bleat; I shall not pass
By paths where corn-craiks gutter
    Unseen in seas of grass.

(‘A Private’s Complaint’, ll. 37-40)

The world of home is brought so close to the speaker that he slides into the scene he pictures, leaving the negatives aside:

Till the stars begin to glisten,
    And from far-off woods a wail
Of music bids me listen
    To the throbbing nightingale,
At last to climb the ladder
    Of some patched and creaking floor,
And sleep till larks grown madder
    And madder as they soar,
And the blackbirds wake with laughter
    And song at break of day,
And the sun strikes through the rafter
    On last year’s scented hay.

(‘A Private’s Complaint’, ll. 41-52)

The elongated sentence playfully performs the lark’s flight and the poet’s imaginative journey, made vivid through visual, auditory and olfactory details. Like the speaker of ‘To an Imperial Yeoman’, he seems powerless to resist the temptation to indulge in a nostalgic bucolic idyll. But ‘A Private’s Complaint’ does not end as the reader expects. Having lamented that ‘We have lost our constellations, | Arcturus and the Bear, | And Pleiades’ (ll. 55-57), he finishes by musing:

Yet under
    The blazing Southern Cross
At night we lie and wonder,
    And at times forget our loss,
At the sword of great Orion,
    Sinking down and down and down,
While the golden horse and lion
    Contest the Southern Crown.

(‘A Private’s Complaint’, ll. 57-64)

The equivocal relationship this articulates with the South African landscape is related to a comparably equivocal relationship to the speaker’s status as soldier/hero. ‘When we get back to England | (If we get back at all)’ (ll. 7-8), he knows that ‘The Times will say our race | Is a race all made of heroes’ (ll. 10-11). The speaker imagines his response:

When they praise me to my face,
I shall wrap my virtuous mantle
    Closely round and never tell
How I lurked beneath an anthill  
When the Mauser bullets fell.

(‘A Private’s Complaint’, ll. 12-16)

This antiheroic use of the landscape, like his newfound appreciation for the beauties of the South African sky, takes both speaker and reader by surprise. It turns out that while the intimate contact with the land can operate as a painful reminder of the scenes of home which are so far away, it can also have a simultaneous effect which pulls in quite another direction. This poem begins as if it is going to be a straightforward celebration of the unparalleled perfection of rural England, but it ends up making a more relativistic case, acknowledging that what is familiar is not necessarily any more splendid than what is novel. Along the way, the speaker exposes the rhetoric of heroism as similarly suspect. The poet’s biography casts some light on this mixed conclusion. Curtis served as an irregular in South Africa with the City Imperial Volunteers. Deployed in the cyclist section with two close friends, he spent six months on a variety of tasks for the army, including carrying dispatches and commandeering cattle, only once coming under enemy fire. His letters home convey the impression that this was a tremendous adventure. Meanwhile, his brother Arthur, a regular soldier with the Royal Artillery, died of typhoid three days after the relief of Ladysmith, where his unit had been besieged. ‘A Private’s Complaint’, dated 24 June 1900, was published at the moment of Curtis’s discharge after the capture of Pretoria, after which he would return home to administer his late brother’s estate. Both brothers had been marked by the encounter with South Africa; only one would make the journey back to London – and he wouldn’t stay long: Lionel Curtis returned to South Africa as a colonial administrator later in 1900, where he remained for nine more years.

Many newspaper poems of the South African War were interventions in the news cycle, mediating news of war events to newspaper readers, especially in poems which cited specific military engagements or claimed to narrate ‘a true incident’. Compulsive attempts to portray South Africa in the terms of, or by means of contrast with, the English countryside betrayed a particular consciousness of linguistic

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63 Spectator, 85 (21 July 1900), p. 80.
64 May, ‘Curtis, Lionel George’.
inadequacies. Nevertheless, the South African landscapes conjured for civilian readers by newspaper poems provided a visual context for the consumption of war news more generally. Unlike columnists and leader-writers, poets could make use of a hybrid voice, blending reportage with interpretation or commentary, so that their South African landscapes could communicate, reflect or offer to assuage anxieties about the meaning of news events in terms of British colonial ambitions, imperial national character, or international reputation. Newspaper poets who attempted to convey a sense of the landscapes of South Africa articulated a particular consciousness of the ways in which a soldier’s identity might be marked or shaped by their encounter with the physical territory of the war zone. Indeed, poets who resisted the temptations of the ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey’ stance and represented haptic experiences of the terrain in close-up produced unsettling images of an encounter with a landscape which posed a threat not just to soldiers’ survival, but to their sense of British identity. Baucom paraphrases a line from Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*: “[t]he empire […] is less a place where England asserts control than the place where England loses command of its own narrative of identity.” Colonial landscape writing has always been fraught with linguistic dilemmas, but these poets articulated a struggle to describe South Africa that was existential as well as representational. Fanon’s ‘occult instability’ marks representations of South Africa in the newspaper poems that mediated war news to readers; it posed a still more disruptive challenge to the newspaper poets who were engaged in the processes of eulogy, commemoration and memorialisation.

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67 Baucom, *Out of Place*, p. 3.
68 Fanon, *Wretched*, p. 183.
When Kipling wrote in 1899 of a ‘gentleman in kharki […] wiping something off a slate’, readers were in no doubt about what he meant.¹ The war in South Africa was going to be the second instalment of a story begun two decades earlier, an opportunity to avenge the British defeat at Majuba Hill in 1881. The retreat of the famed Gordon Highlanders, the death of General Colley, and a shocking disparity in losses (92 British to one Boer death) had been followed by a humiliating surrender, and the Boers’ annual celebrations of ‘Majuba Day’ on the anniversary of their victory were a source of ongoing resentment. In British newspapers in 1899, Majuba stood for the disgrace of defeat and the necessity of revenge (Figure 6.1). Kipling’s figure offering to ‘wipe’ the

Figure 6.8: Black and White Budget Transvaal Special, 6 October 1899, p. 10. The caption asks: ‘The Boers remember Majuba Hill: shall we forget it?’

humiliating memory off the ‘slate’ had real historical counterparts; Fransjohan Pretorius quotes British soldiers yelling ‘Majuba!’ as they stormed formidable Boer positions in 1899.\textsuperscript{2} And indeed, far from turning away from the memory of the past defeat, the newspaper poets of the South African War demonstrate an obsessive fascination with the story of Majuba and its ongoing significance.

Kipling’s imagery of cleansing points to the fact that Majuba was a symbol not only of defeat but also of perceived betrayal. British politicians had signed a peace deal returning the Transvaal territory that had been annexed in 1877, a capitulation which was figured as a stain on British honour, ‘the time when our flag was soiled’, as field intelligence officer Joseph Ingram’s ‘Song of the Uitlander’ puts it.\textsuperscript{3} Begbie describes the ordinary people of Britain – ‘the town’, ‘the club’ and ‘the clerk’ – talking of Majuba as ‘a distant, stricken hill’:\textsuperscript{4}

\begin{quote}
\textcolor{magenta}{[...]} a hill where England sorrows, and has shed her bitter tears
Through the weary, weary waiting of the bitter, bitter years,
Of a hill where gambling statesmen dug our honour’s shallow grave—
Dried our blood with coward parchement, and bowed down before a knave!
\end{quote}

(‘Majuba Day’, ll. 9-12)

Literalising Begbie’s image of Majuba as a grave for British honour, a Natal newspaper reported that, on the occasion of the surrender in 1881, a ‘band of retired officers and civilians’ had ‘solemnly buried’ a British Union flag with the word ‘Resurgam’ inscribed upon it.\textsuperscript{5} Exhumed in 1899, the ‘emblem’ was ‘resurrected’ by the promise of a different ending to story of Majuba, and vengeance for the British soldiers whose ‘blood cried for justice from a still reeking sod’.\textsuperscript{6} As war grew imminent over the summer of 1899, newspaper poets looked forward to the prospect of avenging Majuba with an acute consciousness of the British bodies there. ‘The Song of the Uitlander’ accused Britain of allowing ‘her brave sons to lie | In graves dishonoured and nameless’, claiming ‘the earth has called out vainly | For the blood that is in its soil’.\textsuperscript{7} An anonymous Natal poet invoked ‘heralds of glory’ to ‘arouse […] The men of our nation’ to ‘Avenge those who

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Fransjohan Pretorius, \textit{The A to Z of the Anglo-Boer War} (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2010), p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{3} J.F. Ingram, ‘The Song of the Uitlander’, \textit{Otago Witness}, New Zealand, 22 February 1900, p. 61 (ll. 60-62); reprinted in a Natal newspaper in CTLP Button, i, p. 44.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Harold Begbie, ‘Majuba Day’, reprinted from the \textit{Globe} in \textit{Montgomery County Times}, 3 March 1900, p. 3, and in a Natal newspaper, appearing in CTLP Button, iii, p. 236. Also published in Harold Begbie, \textit{The Handy Man and Other Verses} (London: Grant Richards, 1900), pp. 64-66.
\item \textsuperscript{5} ‘The Lesson of a flag’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 170.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Ingram, ‘Song of the Uitlander’ (ll. 50-51, 47-48).
\end{itemize}
sleep in unaveng’d graves’. ‘The Avengers’ willingly anticipates the cost of this vengeance:

They are coming, with banners spread out to the wind,
With hearts like the lion, as fleet as the hind;
And their keen blades will flash in the sun’s golden glow,
Till their faces, like the grass on the broad veld, lay low.

[...]

The vultures’ wide pinions hide the sun’s glowing light,
As they circle in midair and soar o’er the fight;
But vengeance, enrob’d in her garments of war,
Rides on through the strife in her bloody splash’d car.

(‘The Avengers’, ll. 1-4, 25-28)

Though they promise that the foe ‘will fall like the leaves when our braves meet in fight’ (l. 32), the poet foresees British as well as Boer faces felled ‘like the grass’. The vultures look down upon the promise of a feast, a scene of carrion undifferentiated by nationality, while Vengeance appears to relish the stains of the battle which register her moment of glory. Bloodstains – apparently from either side – blot out the stain of defeat. As a music hall lyricist enthused:

They wanted war—they have it—we’ll let them have their fill—
But—we’ll let them have no second version of Majuba Hill. [...]

English—Scotch—Welsh—Irish—and Colonial Volunteers—
Will write us with their blood a tale to tell through all the years.⁹

These lines make a vivid statement about the power of British blood, and the poet’s ink, to rewrite the history of Majuba. The sense that the earlier encounter had left unfinished business is most clearly articulated in the image of living soldiers in South Africa in 1899 being accompanied by their dead predecessors:

Rise! silent brigade on Mount Prospect!
Wake! dead on Majuba Height!
[...]

Our camrades throughout the ages,
Who fought and fell in vain,
Shall rise on the day of battle,
And parade in state again. [...]

The tramp of the armed battalions
Has sent through the land a thrill;
It has stirred the hearts of the living,
And the dead on Majuba Hill.10

Like the flag marked ‘Resurgam’, the dead at Majuba are envisaged as temporarily interred, place-markers for future British victories. British bodies in 1899 are called upon to rewrite ‘a tale’ which had already been told ‘throughout the years’, activating a memory of the bodies from that earlier conflict, like General Colley’s, which turned ‘a few rough boulders’ into ‘a sacred spot’.11

Newspaper poets both confirmed and capitalised on the rhetorical power of Majuba in their celebrations of a British victory on the anniversary of ‘Majuba Day’ in February 1900. As a Natal newspaper editor wrote, ‘It was only to be expected that so fine a theme as the surrender of Cronje on Majuba Day would inspire the poets’.12 The Daily Chronicle’s poet alluded explicitly to the stain which Kipling’s Tommy was ‘wiping [...] off the state’:

And it’s—
Ho, I sye,
Step this why,
Sutthink’s dropped art o’ the ormnack as
they thought was theer ter stye!
It were chalked up pline, no dart,
But Bobs ’as rubbed it art,
An’ theer ain’t no more, theer ain’t no
more, no more Majoober Dye!13

The slate, and the calendar, had been wiped clean; the ‘soiled’ flag, buried in dishonour, could be flown again; the bodies whose falling had marked defeat were symbolically resurrected by the inscription of victory on the date which had been stained with their blood. The postponed glory which their deaths appeared to promise was realised, and the example acted as a guarantee for the other bodies resting on or buried in the South African landscape. In the image of Majuba, 1881 could be overwritten; topographic sites could acquire new significance.

Majuba Hill is a paradigmatic example of Baucom’s ‘memory-haunted locale’, a ‘lieu de memoire’ where an ‘identity-preserving, identity-enchanting, and identity-

10 Ingram, ‘Song of the Uitlander’, ll. 35-36, 41-44, 65-68
11 Black and White Budget Transvaal Special, 6 October 1899, p. 10. See Figure 6.1.
12 CTLP Button, iii, p. 236.
13 ‘Majuba Day’, Daily Chronicle, 3 March 1900, p. 4 (ll. 5-11, 27-33); reprinted in the Gloucestershire Echo, 3 March 1900, p. 4; South Wales Daily News, 5 March 1900, p. 6 and, under the heading ‘Wiped Out’, the Cardiff Times, 10 March 1900, p. 6.
transforming aura lingers.\textsuperscript{14} The South African hill was transformed – by newspaper poets, among others – into a ‘site of memory’ in which British imperial sovereignty was first threatened and then preserved. A similar process shaped representations of the siege towns of Mafeking, Kimberley and Ladysmith; tactically insignificant but emotionally freighted, these were depicted in British newspapers as dramatic re-runs of earlier imperial encounters: one poet described them as ‘Worthy to rank with old Delhi, | And the towers of famed Lucknow’, although their situation differed from the Indian cities in almost every respect.\textsuperscript{15} These towns, and Majuba, were what McLoughlin calls ‘allochthonous’, assuming temporary, almost arbitrary, significance for the duration of a military encounter.\textsuperscript{16} But once battle had moved on, these points did not lose their emotional valency. Instead, they retained the qualities of ‘thickness’ McLoughlin describes, transformed into memorial palimpsests.\textsuperscript{17} The prospect of a fresh encounter between British and Boer at Majuba promised to inscribe the hill with a new narrative, ‘blot[ting] for all time away | The memory, torturing and bitter, | Of the time when our flag was soiled’.\textsuperscript{18} But this overwriting never fully succeeds in occluding the original, obsessively-repeated story of defeat; the ‘identity’ which Majuba ‘locate[d] and secure[d]’ was a doubtful, anxious one.\textsuperscript{19} While Baucom’s \textit{lieux de memoire} are supposed to ‘house […] the nation’s past, and glorious, and true identity’, Majuba operated as an ideal imperial site of memory precisely because its palimpsestic topography was inscribed by failure as well as victory: the ‘glory’ it promised was postponed; the hill stood for both the certainty of ultimate success and the humiliation of defeat.\textsuperscript{20} Its image in the newspaper poems of 1899 reinforced even while it denied the anxious fears of an empire ‘incessantly dreaming the nervous dream of its own demise’.\textsuperscript{21} Images of the bodies of the British dead at Majuba in the newspaper poems of the South African War thus offer a model that is simultaneously reassuring and disconcerting for readers and soldiers in 1899-1902.

Chapter five showed how newspaper poets used a close-up perspective on the

\textsuperscript{15} W.H. Walker, ‘Ballad of the Siege of Ladysmith’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{16} Kate McLoughlin, \textit{Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 91.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ingram, ‘Song of the Uitlander’ (ll. 60-62).
\textsuperscript{19} Baucom, \textit{Out of Place}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. p. 35.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., pp. 93-94.
encounter between British body and South African landscape to bring war news to life and to mediate their interpretations and anxieties to newspaper readers. This chapter examines poetic representations of the ultimate intimacy between body and landscape. In newspaper poems which variously perform the functions of obituaries, elegies, eulogies and memorials, poems concerned with British bodies lying permanently in foreign soil asked what happens to those bodies, and what happens to the land, exposing the processes involved as deeply and anxiously uncanny. Mapping the South African landscape as a place of bewilderment and loss, poets afflicted by an anxious awareness of South African topography and the threat this might pose to British bodies figure death in South Africa as somehow especially undesirable, reflecting on the ways that British bodies might be literally and metaphorically mis-placed, that the graves of the British dead might prove unlocatable, that the ‘barren’ veld might refuse to give up the secret of where bodies were hidden, denying mourners the chance to pay the graves of the British dead the respect that proper commemoration requires. Meanwhile, some memorial poems attempted a compensatory mapping process, a ‘cartography of remembering’ in which the South African terrain was imaginatively marked and changed by the presence of British bodies. In striking ways, newspaper poets of 1899-1902 capitalised on the intimacy between the British dead and the South African landscape to advance more optimistic claims for ways in which the land itself might be vulnerable to the transformative presence of British bodies.

The visual repertoire available to newspaper poets representing the relationship between soldier and land in 1899-1902 had recently undergone a significant transformation. The red coats that had been synonymous with the British army for centuries, and which parts of the army were fighting in as late as 1885, had been replaced. The khaki in which British forces arrived in South Africa may have been less splendid than scarlet, but it had the interest of novelty for newspaper poets, and it also had symbolic significance. The invisibility of the Boers was represented as a token of their symbiotic relationship with a terrain that fought on their side, and as a sign of the cowardice of ‘the man behind the boulder’.22 The idea that British soldiers should camouflage themselves, rather than boldly proclaiming their presence, required a reworking of notions of chivalry and honour. But khaki outfits also signalled a new

22 [Peter Grant], ‘The Man Behind the Boulder’, Pearson’s Weekly, 3 February 1900, p. 3; reprinted in the Hampshire Telegraph Supplement, 10 February 1900, p. 1. The poem was also reprinted from the Chicago Record in a Natal newspaper and appears in CTLP Burton, v, p. 20.
relationship between British soldiers and the South African land. A strange anti-war poem called ‘The Worshippers’ narrates a dream in which ‘ancient Moses’ looks down over a scene ‘Whereon a mighty army fights | A foe that does not show his face’. Able to see only one set of combatants, Moses asks,

And what are these that prostrate lie?
And these that kneel, yet have not prayed?

[...] Can they be worshippers of earth
That each and all her colours wear?

(‘The Worshippers’, ll. 15-16, 19-20)

The poem’s pacifist moral comes in its closing stanza:

One answered, ‘Ay, these worship Earth,
And when they asked for gold she gave;
And now since gold might not content,
She gives them her last gift—a grave.’

(‘The Worshippers’, ll. 21-24)

The soldiers’ deaths are the inevitable consequence of imperial greed, while both death and cupidity are foreshadowed by the khaki clothes of the soldiers, which identify them as bound to and bound for the earth. Their Britishness is not mentioned; seeking ‘gold’, and finding ‘a grave’, these are ‘Worshippers’ of the South African terrain, their new uniforms marking their allegiance to the land on which they die, rather than to their home. Antipathy towards these ‘colours’ of ‘earth’ also comes across in ‘The Khaki Corps’, a poem originally published in the *Natal Witness* and reprinted in the *Westminster Gazette*. As the title suggests, the British soldiers’ identities are defined by their uniforms, which become a point of obsession for the poet. The soldiers are ‘brown-clad’, wearing ‘dull khaki’ and undifferentiated from the surrounding ground, ‘As dust-brown as the ant-heaps’; when the poet calls this ‘our modern chivalry’, it is clear that she or he is unconvinced (ll. 10, 5-6). The moment of the soldiers’ deaths is the point at which they resign their khaki uniforms, making a grisly exchange, when ‘through the brown encasing slow crept the bright red gore | As one by one our boys resigned for ever from the corps’ (ll. 7-8). While khaki uniforms suggest an unsettling affinity between dead men and land, the blood of the soldiers’ death-wounds returns them to the old

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24 ‘The Khaki Corps’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 226, originally published in the *Natal Witness*. Extracts were published in the *Westminster Gazette*, 18 April 1900, p. 8. The same extracts were quoted and ridiculed in the *Cork Examiner*, 20 April 1900, p. 4.
spectacular glory for which the poem is nostalgic, and marks them out visually from a landscape which threatens to hide them forever.

Euphemisms traditionally attached to the wartime dead are so commonplace that they are almost invisible. In some newspaper poems, however, the physicality of the South African terrain serves to expose euphemisms as metaphor, for example by reasserting the distance between sleep and death. The dead soldiers of ‘The Khaki Corps’ are lying “Midst the kopjes, in the krantzes’, ‘sleeping in the trenches, where they fought and where they fell, | Where the eagle keeps his vigil, where the ox-bells toll their knell’ (ll. 10-12). Ox-bells might be reassuringly familiar, but these poems repeatedly trip over reminders of wildness and difference – the presence of eagles, of kopjes and krantzes, of the unreadable wind. Comfortingly familiar platitudes are undercut in these poems by a firm sense of subterranean physicality, as dead bodies are insistently emplaced within, on or under the South African terrain. In ‘A Border Lament’, Rawnsley exhorted the dead soldier to ‘Sleep, Borderer, sleep! Beneath the ground is peace’ while ‘The winds of hate are loud upon the veldt’.25 James Paton, a New Zealander who served in South Africa as a Colonial Volunteer, pictured the dead soldier ‘sleeping his sleep alone’, ‘in the narrow veldland grave’, as ‘the veld winds o’er him blow’ (ll. 36, 32, 37).26 This positioning can bring speaker and reader up short, as in Ethel Clifford’s ‘The Relief of Ladysmith’, published under the signature ‘F.C.’ in the Westminster Gazette, in which the speaker addresses the subterranean dead as though they are still sentient, and nearby.27 The poem’s opening stanza takes up a familiarly euphemistic mode:

Brave heart, where you lie at rest,
   In the long-beleaguered town,
Can you hear the night-wind lift the flag
   Where the southern stars look down?

(‘The Relief of Ladysmith’, ll. 1-4)

In the second stanza, the speaker asks ‘Can you look backward to the earth?’ (l. 7), but the earlier question ‘can you hear?’ sets off a new, more literal, chain of thought. ‘The

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26 James Paton, ‘Father and Son’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 103 (ll. 36, 32, 37).
earth’ becomes something physically above and around the dead body, rather than temporally or metaphorically behind it, and the body’s physical position prompts the poet to wonder whether it is sensitive or insensitive to the ground’s tremors:

Where you lie in your grave, brave heart,
Can you hear the war-drums beat?
Can you feel the pulse of the trampled earth
Beneath victorious feet?

(‘The Relief of Ladysmith’, ll. 9-13)

Addressing the dead, and drawing attention to the physical positioning of their bodies under the ground, Clifford unsettles the idea that victories give meaning to the ultimate sacrifice. ‘The message’ about the besieged town’s rescue ‘goes from the hill | And near and far is read’ (ll. 13-14), but the repetition of ‘can you hear?’ (ll. 3 and 10) reiterates the point that there is one place the news will not reach: ‘The living know it overseas—but who shall tell the dead?’ (l. 16). Clifford’s conclusion is ambiguous; the questions receive no answer; the dead do not speak to confirm or deny their awareness of the victory celebrations going on above their corpses.

Another poem which positions the dead or dying body firmly on the South African ground led the Daily Chronicle to break their customary rule against publishing ‘poems by writers unknown to us’; Herbert Cadett’s ‘War’ ‘appear[s] to us to have a character which promises distinction for [its] author’. The same poem struck Hardy, too, who cut it out of the newspaper and retained the clipping in his literary notebooks, and also prompted the editor of an Alabama newspaper to print it in full.

Private Smith of the Royals; the veldt and a slate-black sky,
Hillocks of mud, brick-red with blood, and a prayer—half curse—to die.
A lung and a Mauser bullet; pink froth and a half-choked cry.

Private Smith of the Royals; a torrent of freezing rain;
A hail of frost on a life half lost; despair and a grinding pain.
And the drip-drip-drip of the Heavens to wash out the brand of Cain.

Private Smith of the Royals, self-sounding his funeral knell;
A burning throat that each gasping note scrapes raw like a broken shell.
A thirst like a red-hot iron and a tongue like a patch of Hell.

28 Herbert Cadett, ‘War’, Daily Chronicle, 26 October 1899, p. 6. Reprinted in the South Wales Echo, 28 October 1899, p. 3; South Wales Daily News, 30 October 1899, p. 6; Cheltenham Examiner, 1 November 1899, p. 2; Arbroath Herald, 2 November 1899, p. 3.
29 The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, ed. by Lennart A. Björk (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 84-85; Journal-Tribune [Gadsden, Alabama], 4 January 1900, p. 3.
Private Smith of the Royals; the blush of a dawning day;
The fading mist that the sun had kissed—and over the hills away
The blest Red Cross like an angel in the trail of the men who slay.

But Private Smith of the Royals gazed up at the soft blue sky—
The rose-tinged morn like a babe new born and the sweet-sunged birds on high—

With a fleck of red on his pallid lip and a film of white on his eye.

Red, white and blue in the final stanza signify something more, or perhaps less, than the flag for which these soldiers die. The syntax refuses to offer the linearity that might confer meaningfulness or relief, as the setting and sensations of the soldier’s death are listed with no verbs that could give them temporal order. The reader is plunged into an extended present during which time appears to stand still, forced to watch alongside the figure sprawled among ‘hillocks of mud’ waiting, and praying, to die. Even the moment of wounding is brought into the eternal present of the dying: ‘A lung and a Mauser bullet; pink froth and a half-choked cry’. When the main verb finally comes in the closing stanza, it is deceptive: ‘Private Smith of the Royals gazed up’ at a morning sky he cannot see. Though it occludes the actual moment of death, the poem eschews euphemism in its portrayal of dying. The soldier is plagued by ‘thirst like a red-hot iron and a tongue like a patch of hell’, while this land of extremity subjects his wounded body to ‘a torrent of freezing rain’ and ‘A hail of frost’. In line with Cadett’s haptic focus, Private’s Smith’s dying is marked not by the idealised calm of knowing self-sacrifice, which might accompany the act of dying with a ‘funeral knell’ of meaningfulness, but by ugly and inarticulate noises: ‘despair and a grinding pain’; a ‘curse’, ‘a half-choked cry’. The poem’s title implies that this soldier’s death stands not just for all such deaths, but for the fact of conflict itself. Through his generic name, rank and regiment, Private Smith of the Royals is an anonymous representative of thousands of ordinary British soldiers, a synecdoche for the whole army, his dying face reflecting the blue of the sky to make a strangely inverted Union flag. The poem rejects the glorifying clichés of sacrifice, honour or nobility; indeed, the extremity of his suffering is linked to divine judgement for a war between two Protestant Christian nations, as the ‘torrent of freezing rain’ is described as ‘the drip-drip-drip of the Heavens to wash out the brand of Cain’. The soldier, and the nation he represents, is marked with the sign of the most ancient crime: the sin of killing a brother. Dawn comes like a benediction, returning the innocence of ‘a babe new-born’ to the scarred landscape stained ‘brick-red with blood’. But the blessing is for the land, not the dead: the sun kisses ‘the fading
mist’, not the ‘pallid lip’ of the soldier; the ‘rose-tinged morn’, ‘soft blue sky’ and ‘sweet songed birds’ are not for him. The ‘dawning day’ seems to ‘blush’ at what the ‘fading mist’ reveals: the dead soldier’s gory face, described with no softening metaphors, ‘With a fleck of red on his pallid lip and a film of white on his eye’. He pointedly receives his deadly wound under a sky that is ‘slate-black’, blankly refusing to offer the comfort of beauty or to signify the ordering or observation of fate or divinity.

Cadett was a journalist and a writer of detective fiction, but his bleak vision was shared by poets with a closer experience of the realities of war. In ‘Christmas, 1899’, G. Murray Johnston, a captain in the British Army in South Africa, used the exposed and dying soldier’s body to articulate doubts about what the war means for concepts of identity and Britishness.30

\begin{quote}
Something 'uddled 'gainst the sky
Some poor devil dead,
And our squadron riding by
Cursed his gaping 'ead—
Just a man and nothing more,
Smudged across with red.
\end{quote}

\textit{('Christmas, 1899', ll. 1-6)}

The dead man is anonymous, his figure scarcely human. The meaninglessness of the sight is expressed through the idea that he has been ‘Smudged across with red’, marked out for death, but carelessly, imprecisely. At the sight of his exposed corpse, his comrades ‘Wondered what they thought at 'ome’ (l. 7), whether the dead man’s family might ask ‘where is Jack today?’ (l. 10), but their reflections quickly turn back to their own situation:

\begin{quote}
Something 'uddled 'gainst the sun.
What's the odds or why?
One poor devil's work is done—
Might be you or I—
We wondered if it 'urt him much
When 'e come to die.
\end{quote}

\textit{('Christmas, 1899', ll. 13-18)}

If the observing soldiers are callous, it is a callousness born out of a sense of their own interchangeability and insignificance. The body is seen only in silhouette ‘'gainst the sky’, its identifying features – perhaps even its uniform – blanked out and unreadable.

Britishness is implicated: this ‘poor devil’ is called Jack by the passing squadron, but the dead man could be Boer or Brit. In the failure to move from ‘Something’ to someone, and in the poem’s insistence that the corpse was ‘Just a man and nothing more’, the speaker pronounces that verdict over himself and his ‘squadron’ too, rejecting the narratives of honour or glory which might give such a death meaning or beauty. The position of the body ‘gainst the sun’ might seem to endow it with symbolic significance, and indeed Malvern Van Wyk Smith suggests that there is something Christlike about the figure in silhouette, especially in light of the poem’s title, but the repetition of “uddled” asserts the awkward physicality of the corpse, placed heavily on the land, undercutting any redemptive metaphorical reading.31 This exposed body records death on the veld as bleak and careless; its unburied state is an index of the absence at the heart of a rhetoric of meaningfulness.

Edward Shee Evelyn takes up a similar position, using an intimate focus on the dying body in the South African landscape to expose the ‘Scene of horror’ represented by any ‘tale of war most glorious’.32 The opening stanzas of ‘After the Battle’ appear at first to recall McLoughlin’s description of war writing ‘throw[ing] white paint at the red business’, as sanctifying moonlight cloaks the scene of battle’s aftermath:33

The gleam of moon so pale, so fitting,  
Robes the battle-field in light;  
Those in garb of white befitting  
Fallen in the fight.

(‘After the Battle’, ll. 5-8)

There is ‘sobbing’ in this scene (l. 2), but it is not dying soldiers but rather the weeping ‘Of angels watching o’er those sleeping’ (l. 3); the dead themselves are ‘calm and still in death’ (l. 4). Indeed, introducing a ‘soldier lad’, ‘On whose still and upturned face | Lingers yet a smile in dying, | Scorning fear in every trace’ (ll. 9-13), it seems as though Evelyn is doing no more than recapitulating the old clichés and euphemisms. But the poem’s fourth stanza effects a dramatic shift:

There, ’neath bough of weeping willow,  
Where the river gleams so bright,  
There I hear, midst scenes of sorrow,  
Vultures shrieking through the night.

(‘After the Battle’, ll. 13-16)

33 McLoughlin, Authoring War, p. 147.
The shrieking vultures prompt an epiphany, a moment where the viewer comes to understand the brutal realities of a ‘conquering host victorious’, and the deceptions involved in rendering a ‘Scene of horror’ into the satisfying narrative of a ‘well-fought fight’ (l. 27). The devastation might be ‘made lawful, | Sanctified by holy phrase’ (ll. 19-20), but the personal encounter with ‘this scene’ leads the poet to resolve ‘Ne’er again’ to ‘praise’ any ‘Future tale of war most glorious | Of some conquering host victorious’ (ll. 21-24). ‘This blood-set page’ tells a truer ‘story’. The hinge-point that turns ‘sorrow’ to ‘horror’ is in lines 15-16, in which classically English picturesque details – weeping willows, gleaming river – are juxtaposed violently against the specific wildness of the South African land. As in Howard’s ‘The Lads in Blue’, which pictures ‘vultures soaring’ above ‘the feast prepared anew’, vultures represent a physical threat to the bodily integrity of the dead, while in Evelyn’s poem they also operate as a marker of difference, registering the foreignness of the terrain on which the ‘soldier lad is lying’ (l. 9).34

Evelyn’s poem offers two potential transformations, powerfully contrasted. Transfigured by the sanctifying beauty of moonlight, it is possible to read the soldier’s expression as one of calm self-control, ‘Scorning fear in every trace’ (l. 12); the vultures, on the other hand, threaten to transform the dead in much less satisfyingly aesthetic ways, turning corpses into carrion. South Africa was imagined to be particularly inimical to the bodies of the British dead. Accordingly, when Rawnsley committed soldiers to ‘the last of the nurses—| The pitiful earth in whose peace we trust’, another poet was moved to counter with an image of England ‘mourning the sons who, nourished at [her] breast’ have found ‘their abhorred rest | Where Briton never wished his grave to be’.35 England, not South Africa, is the dead soldiers’ nurse. Like Rawnsley’s own ‘Dead for Joy’ and the other poems quoted at the end of Chapter five, the image presents the identity of the British soldier as intimately and physically related to their home landscapes; the physical and psychological distance between the dead in South Africa and their place of true belonging compounds the horror of war deaths.36

34 Keppel Howard, ‘The Lads in Blue’, Cape Town Weekly, 3 January, 1900, p. 18 (l. 53).
In an image of parted lovers separated both physically and temporally, a Westminster Gazette poem attests to the imaginative power and pain of the distance between the English mourner and the South African dead by attempting to deny that distance.\(^{37}\) The speaker of ‘The Southern Cross’ remembers ‘The stars […] | We claimed as ours a year ago’ (ll. 1-2) which the lovers had interpreted optimistically:

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the horoscope
Which laughed at Love foreboding loss,
And traced the shining path of hope
Afar beneath the Southern Cross.
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(‘The Southern Cross’, ll. 5-8)

But the horoscope ends under a constellation invisible from Britain, ‘Afar’ from the speaker, who can only ‘muse where we together stood’, contemplating the ‘stellar gulfs’ which now ‘gape between’ (ll. 9-10). ‘Stellar’ is simultaneously a literal description of different constellations and a metaphorical expression of uncrossable distances. The final image imaginatively collapses space and time when the speaker claims: ‘The cross I see is one of wood | Upon a little mound of green’ (ll. 11-12). The poem makes no explicit reference to the war – like the true place of the beloved’s grave, the speaker allows comforting imagery to obscure harsh realities – but the echoes of Hardy’s ‘strange-eyed constellations’ ensure that the war provides the context that makes sense of the doubly-significant ‘Southern Cross’ of the title.\(^{38}\) Both grave-marker and constellation are divided from the speaker by ‘stellar gulfs’; she can ‘see’ only in imagination. ‘The Voice of England’ enacts a comparable imaginative effort to bring the dead of South Africa closer to the English countryside.\(^{39}\) With an intimate focus on the physical bodies of the dead (‘O hands that fought for me, O lips that spoke | My rugged speech’, ll. 13-14), the poem describes ‘the mother-heart’ of England ‘wildly yearning’ for the dead as Spring returns to the land (l. 4). Reinforcing the sense of nostalgia expressed by poems which picture soldiers in South Africa nostalgic for the British countryside, ‘The Voice of England’ reverses the direction of longing by suggesting that the British landscape ‘dreads to feel the quickening sap astir’ or to hear ‘woodnotes clear | Which those whom I have lov’d can never hear’ (ll. 5, 11-12). Claiming that ‘The tenderest petal falling on the grass | Shall hurt me’ (ll. 7-8), the poet aligns dead soldiers

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with the falling blossom of springtime. But the petals fall on English grass, while the soldiers in the poem’s opening lines are ‘lying ’neath the tropic sun | That shines on veldt and bare karroo’ (ll. 1-2). The physical emplacement of the dead evokes anxieties about burial, sustaining uncertainty about whether these figures are literally exposed, like the ‘tenderest petal […] on the grass’. Meanwhile the English seasons make space for periods of mourning and resting which the South African climate denies; the speaker values ‘the winter days […] | That numbed my wailing lips with frost and snow’ (ll. 9-10). In contrast, the relentless heat of the imagined South African desert refuses the familiar natural rhythms of growth and decay, enforcing instead a stupefying uniformity of ‘tropic sun’ which results in a ‘bare’ landscape, on which the only petals are the dead English soldiers. Nature in South Africa is devoid of the maternal and nourishing compassion of the British land towards British bodies; instead it is ‘bare’, ‘pitiless’, barren and harsh.40

Positioning the South African landscape as somewhere that feels ‘lonely’ to the British visitor, poems which meditate on the dead in South Africa reinforce their lament for the distance between the war graves and the soldiers’ homes by cataloguing everything that the dead must lack or miss from England. For example, Rawnsley lists what the ‘Brave Borderer boy […] Shall not see again’, from the ‘gay green squadrons of the Penrith larch’ to ‘the snowdrifts’ on Lake District mountains which ‘melt to lilac and to grey’.41 Another clergyman-poet, E. Hewlett, uses a moment of comparison between the natural worlds of Britain and South Africa to heighten the pathos of a soldier’s death, when ‘Salford Jack’ picks his own funeral flowers:42

Jack clomb th’ hill beside me, an’ he picks a yaller bloom,
‘Eh, Bob, ’tis like the primroses i’th’ clough, thou knows, at whoam,’
Then up he joomps, and gives a sob, and topples forrad dead,
An’ we’re beawn’ to run an’ leave him, for the crags was just ahead.

(‘Private Bob of Bolton’, ll. 21-24)

41 Rawnsley, ‘Border Lament’ (ll. 1, 2, 5-6).
42 E. Hewlett, ‘Private Bob of Bolton’, Manchester Courier, 14 February 1900, p. 6; North-Eastern Daily Gazette, 15 February 1900, p. 4; Manchester Times, 16 February 1900, p. 5; Manchester Courier, 17 February 1900, p. 15; Star (Guernsey), 6 March 1900, p. 1. Issued as a pamphlet (Manchester: Deansgate and Ridgefield: 1900), British Library, Pamphlets on the Boer War, Cup 21 ff 1 16.
The ‘yaller bloom’ is only ‘like’ the familiar primrose of home; in its more elevated framing stanzas the poem repeatedly insists on the emplacement of Bob and his ‘chums’ in a very different landscape:

By the sad Tugela River,
  So'ry wounded, all alone,
'Neath the twinkling starlight shiver –
  Thus the soldier made his moan: […]

By the sad Tugela River,
  Sweeping down with sullen wave,
Sleeps the soldier lad for ever, –
  Leave him in his lonely grave.

(‘Private Bob of Bolton’, ll. 1-4 and 41-44)

The poet’s prepositions are significant: ‘Bob’ is ‘in his lonely grave’, but it is a grave only in name; like his chum Jack and their friend Tommy, who also die in the poem, he is left behind, ‘lyin’ here and dyin’ all alone’ (l. 8), within hearing of ‘firin’ on th’ hill’ (l. 37) but without a nurse to bring a ‘pillow’ or ‘a pannikin of water’ (ll. 6-7), and with no hope of a timely burial. The yellow flowers seem momentarily reminiscent of primroses, and the river seems ‘sad’, but the ‘twinkling starlight’ ‘shiver[s]’ and then fails: ‘th’ neet is varra chill […] an’ the stars are getting’ dim’ (ll. 38-39). Although the poem is invested in the traditional narrative of war deaths as meaningful and honourable, it cannot swerve the uncomfortable fact of soldiers dying ‘all alone’ in a distant and resolutely foreign landscape, too far away to be consoled by loving friends at the point of death. In this poem, lonely dying prefigures a ‘lonely grave’ (l. 44).

The distance between South African graves and British mourners represents a threat to the rituals of commemoration by which war deaths are rendered meaningful or purposeful. A regular *Westminster Gazette* poet, dedicating a Shamrock ‘to her Majesty Queen Victoria on Saint Patrick’s Day’, brings together praise of ‘our brave ones’ who have ‘fought for thee, bled for thee – died!’ with a symbol which emphasises the distance of their final resting place: ‘Far are some graves from sweet Erin and never a Shamrock | Lies on them, wet with the tears of our love and our pride’.43 The Shamrock represents the graveside obsequies which have to remain uncompleted because the bodies lie so far from those who would mourn them. Likewise, former soldier Smedley

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43 L.A.C., ‘To Her Majesty Queen Victoria on St Patrick’s Day’, *Westminster Gazette*, 17 March 1900, p. 2 (ll. 9-12).
Norton described South Africa as ‘that far-off Southern tomb’, asking for honesty about ‘the price of victory’. There is a pre-echo of Wilfred Owen in his lament:

For those who strew our battlefields
 No passing bell shall toll;
Report the living and the dead,
 Sergeant, call the roll!
Show us the price of victory,
 Just tell us what it’s cost
Say what the Motherland has gained
 And also what she’s lost.

(‘Sergeant, Call the Roll!’, ll. 1-8)

Having asserted that the dead ‘will remain as sweet in mem’ry | As a morn in dewy May’, the poet nonetheless questions how far such memories will satisfy those left behind, asking:

In the hush-tide of the gloaming,
 Will there come, amidst the gloom,
The shadows of our loved ones
 From that far-off Southern tomb?

(‘Sergeant, Call the Roll!’, ll. 49-52)

The dead might ‘strew’ the battlefields, but as the solidity of their bodies fades, they are reduced to ‘shadows’. South Africa itself seems to have become a general ‘tomb’ within which individual places of death are unmarked. Vividly recalling Coetzee’s account of a ‘trackless’ landscape refusing to ‘emerge into meaningfulness’ in order to be ‘read’ by the colonial viewer, the question of ‘what the Motherland […] has lost’ takes on literal, cartographical significance. The editor of the Black and White Budget remarked that ‘nothing has yet appeared so pregnant of real martial spirit or embodying so worthy a tribute to the memory of our troops’ as ‘Sergeant, Call the Roll!’. The newspaper received six hundred requests for permission to recite the poem, indicating the number of ‘literary societies […], entertainments, […] balls and concert-rooms’ that had ‘been stirred by the Author’s impressive lines’. Although Norton’s poem insists on the

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44 Smedley Norton, ‘Sergeant, Call the Roll!’ Society, 25 November 1899, reprinted in South Wales Daily News, 24 November 1899, p. 6; Henley Advertiser, 2 December 1899, p. 8; Devon Valley Tribune, 5 December 1899, p. 14; Black and White Budget, 13 January 1900, p. 32. The Maidenhead Advertiser also printed the poem, attributing it to ‘Priv. George Hermon, C Company 2nd Battalion Royal Berks Regiment, whose mother resides in Penyston-road, Maidenhead’ (4 April 1900, p. 8). Perhaps Hermon enclosed a copy of the poem with a letter to his mother, who misunderstood its origin and sent it to her local newspaper as her son’s own writing. The poem was later collected in Smedley Norton, Bramcote Ballads, with a Brief Diary of the Late Conflict in South Africa (London: S.H. Monckton & Co., 1906).
46 Quoted in Norton, Bramcote Ballads, p. iii.
47 Ibid.
power of memory and memorial to ‘lift the darkness | From the shadowland of pain’ (ll. 71-72), it also gestures towards anxieties on that count.

Hardy’s ‘Drummer Hodge’ is perhaps the most famous poem of the South African War, and exemplifies these tropes perfectly. The child-soldier is too ‘fresh’ from ‘his Wessex home’ to be able to read the landscape himself: he cannot make any ‘meaning’ out of ‘the broad Karoo, | The bush, the dusty loam.’ Similarly, although his body will ‘Grow to some Southern tree’ (ll. 15-16), his ‘landmark’ is an impersonal ‘kopje-crest | That breaks the veldt around’ (ll. 3-4). His loved ones will not be able to read the landscape, either, for any hint of his final resting place. He may ‘forever be’ a ‘portion’ of the place, but it remains an ‘unknown plain’, unknowable either to Hodge himself or to his family (ll. 13-14). The veld will not give up the secret of his ‘uncoffined’ grave (l. 2); his ‘landmark’ is an unreadable sign. Transformed by the alien landscape which receives him, and lost in the frighteningly featureless veld, Hodge is watched over by the triply-strange ‘foreign constellations’, ‘strange stars’, ‘strange-eyed constellations’ (ll. 5,12, 17). In the implied contrast with Hodge’s ‘Wessex home’, this poem captures the uncanniness of the experience which Homi Bhabha describes, of national identity caught between a glance backwards to ‘the heimlich pleasures of the hearth’ and outwards to the ‘unheimlich terror of the space […] of the Other’. In identifying challenges to the processes of ritual memorialisation by which British bodies are supposed to be honoured, the newspaper poets of 1899-1902 position themselves as an alternative.

Like Hardy’s ‘Drummer Hodge’, ‘The Khaki Corps’ pictures soldiers ‘hidden ’neath the sod’, unlocatable within the country ‘on which they fought’. The anonymous poet makes the point explicitly: the dead of this war are not to be found ‘beneath masoleums’ [sic] or ‘under marble monuments where angel figures pray’ (ll. 1-2). The poem attempts to minimise the significance of this, insisting that:

not the grandest sculpture in cathedrals old and grey
Can enhance the earthly glory of our lads of yesterday

(‘The Khaki Corps’, ll. 13-14)

48 Hardy, ‘Drummer Hodge’ (ll. 8-10).
50 ‘The Khaki Corps’ (ll. 3-4).
But the image of the dead, scattered ‘here and there’ (l. 3) across vast tracts of space ‘from Tugela to the Orange, right across the western plain’ (l. 9), like Norton’s picture of soldiers who ‘strew our battlefields’, asserts itself too forcefully to be denied. While insisting that there is no need for monuments to the dead, this poem simultaneously offers itself as just such a monument, undercutting its own claim and betraying the anxiety which pulses through this poetry. An equivalent claim, similarly undermined, appears in A.D. Godley’s description of the ‘Souls of our best! Whose bodies fill | Their unforgotten grave’; the uncomfortable image of multiple ‘bodies’ within a single ‘grave’ registers a flicker of doubt over the assertion, while the fact that it is the grave which is ‘unforgotten’, rather than the dead soldiers, points to anxiety on precisely that point.51 A poem addressed to current students by a former head-teacher at the prestigious Charterhouse School sounds a similar note of uncertainty, holding up as an example the ‘over 100 Charterhouse “boys” at the front as officers’.52 These ‘old boys’, in William Haig-Brown’s lines, are

Those whom duty called to die  
In the front ranks of Britain’s chivalry;  
Tho’ in the barren veldt their bodies claim  
Only a soldier’s grave, their deathless fame  
Lives in our hearts […]

(‘Charterhouse Boys at the Front’, ll. 14-18)

‘Only a soldier’s grave’ implies that the final resting-places of the dead in South Africa, however undesirable, are as all soldiers’ graves. But the ‘barren veldt’ acknowledges that there is something particularly discomfiting about South Africa. The familiar images of the South African terrain as ‘bare’ and ‘barren’ take on, here, a further significance. As well as registering the hostility of the landscape, they perform the poets’ anxieties about the dreadful possibility of British graves being lost. As an anonymous *Pall Mall Gazette* poet puts it in March 1900, the soldiers who die in South Africa exchange ‘this dear land’ and ‘sweet home faces’ for ‘a grave | A lonely grave, ‘midst immemorial sand, | Or parching deserts of the vast Karoo’.53 Unlike the personified earth of England in the poems quoted above, this ground is insensible, ‘parched’ of sentience. The sand is oblivious or indifferent to the English bodies; it can’t, or won’t, remember that they are

53 ‘English Dead in South Africa’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 March 1900, p. 2 (ll. 11-14).
there. But its ‘vast’ aspect represents another threat, implying that this quality of the
landscape might prevent other people remembering, too. The unreadability of a ‘barren’
terrain is menacing because, as in the images of the dead scattered ‘here and there’ in
‘The Khaki Corps’, and Norton’s battlefields ‘strew[n]’ with bodies, it suggests that the
locations of the war dead might be finally unknowable. The juxtaposition in Haig-
Brown’s poem between this acknowledgement and the insistence that the memory of
these soldiers nonetheless (or therefore) ‘lives in our hearts’ (l. 18) comes to seem
anxiously compulsive, when read alongside many other similar moments in poems
published contemporaneously with Haig-Brown’s.

‘By the Graves on the Veldt’, one such poem, by another school teacher,
appeared in the Daily News a week later.\(^54\) In it, Anglo-Irish poet James Rhoades
counsels his readers to ‘spare [the soldier dead] your pity’ (l. 1) and insists that these
fallen heroes do not require the acts of commemoration which an identifiable grave
makes possible:

No need of cross upon the breast,
Or laurel to renown the brow.

Though the bare veldt around them spread,
Not all un-noted of the skies,
There springs above each hero-head
The snow-white flower of Sacrifice.

(‘By the Graves on the Veldt’, ll. 11-16)

The ‘graves’ in this poem are no graves at all, but undifferentiated spots in a ‘bare veldt’.
The awkward litotes of ‘not all un-noted of the skies’ signals dissatisfaction even as it
introduces the fanciful claim that an admiring natural world will provide the ‘honours’
the dead require (l. 9), in place of the reverent grave-markers that would signal ‘earthly
fame’ (ll. 10). Once again, the poem is marked by the internal incoherence of
simultaneous avowals and disavowals of what the dead need or deserve. In filling in an
imaginative map of South Africa with graves, these newspaper poets move from a
cartography of loss characterised by anxiety about the ways that South Africa might
threaten British bodies, to a different kind of mapping which makes South Africa
British, recuperating the terrain imaginatively even while the war over it is in progress,

\(^{54}\) James Rhoades, ‘By the Graves on the Veldt’, Daily News, 9 February 1900, p. 4, reprinted in the
Gloucestershire Echo, 10 February 1900, p. 3; Shrewsbury Chronicle, 16 February 1900, p. 3; St. Andrews Citizen,
17 February 1900, p. 3; the poem was later submitted by a correspondent to the Wells Journal, 3 December
1903, p. 4.
and thus rescuing the bodies from their foreign resting-places. Although this
memorialising remains incomplete or fraught with logical dissonances, these poems
nonetheless present an attempt to move from obsessing over the perilous intimacy of
dead British bodies and South African terrain to reflect on the potential for this to
become a transformative, redemptive intimacy.

Wallace’s poem ‘A Casualty’, published in Britain and South Africa, exemplifies
this redemptive mapping.55

The scultor’d stone, the graven praise,
The tablet in the chancel dim:
The churchyard by familiar ways
Are not for him.

A kind hand turns a stranger sod,
And comrades bear him to his rest,
Far from the homeland paths he trod,
And loved the best.

Whate’er the duty may have been
His humble task is dignified;
He served his country and his Queen,
And serving—died.

The simple dignity of Wallace’s tribute to the South African dead is tonally very far from
the propagandistic encomiums of Rhoades and Haig-Brown, though it relies on similar
rhetorical tropes. Wallace’s more measured tone derives in part from the regularly end-
stopped structure and metre of the poem, while the shorter fourth lines of each stanza
enforce longer pauses. The caesura in the poem’s final line requires two such pauses at
the poem’s conclusion. ‘A Casualty’ is gravestone-tablet shaped, while its regular
walking-pace tetrameter suggests a reflective wander around a ‘churchyard’ of ‘scultor’d
stone[s]’, so that the dead commemorated are after all imaginatively transported to the
graveyard that the poem tries to suggest they do not need. The poem also sustains an
equivocal relationship to the anonymity of ‘a casualty’; the dead man is treated with
gentleness and honour, as though the poem wants to rescue him from the
undifferentiated mass of wartime death statistics, but he remains nameless and
unidentifiable; even the ‘hand’ which buries him is unknown. ‘Not for him’ implies a
simple, perhaps fatalistic, propriety or justice about the lack of ceremony, while the pain

55 Edgar Wallace, ‘A Casualty’, Cornish Telegraph, 14 February 1900, p. 3; Dundee Evening Post, 8 March 1900,
p. 2; Blyth News, 20 March 1900, p. 4; Shields Daily Gazette, 21 March 1900, p. 4; War Pictures, 1 (21 April
1900), p. 324. The poem was also reprinted in a Natal newspaper and appears in CTLP Button, iii, p. 43.
of distance from ‘the homeland paths he […] loved the best’ is assuaged by the complex image of ‘A kind hand turn[ing] a stranger sod’ as ‘comrades bear him to his rest’. The poem imagines a literal truth, as the ‘sod’ is removed to make a grave, overlaid with an equivocal sense of transfiguration, as though the kindness of the grave-maker transforms the earth into something less foreign and ‘strange’, so that the act of burial is a moment in which the South African earth literally ‘turns’ into something more ‘kind’. This suggestive detail in Wallace’s poem provides a bridge from the anxious insistence on ‘unforgotten’ soldiers’ graves to another set of images. If the land threatens to swallow and transform the soldiers who die on and are buried in it, other newspaper poems claim that the soldiers’ bodies also possess the ability to transform the land around them. Corporal P. Jefferson McKenna describes ‘tombs where their bones have commingled with clay’ in a poem published in the Cape Town Weekly, suggesting that the dead do more than lie in the South African land; they become a part of it, and it of them, in a process which has the capacity to change both. The ‘barrenness’ of the land, portrayed in many of the poems discussed above, is imaginatively enriched by the presence of bodies, in an early premonition of Rupert Brooke’s famous image. The imaginative effort by which these newspaper poets achieve their memorialisation of the dead (while, in some cases, paradoxically arguing that their own commemorative role is scarcely necessary), is by making British bodies capable of physically and morally transforming the South African landscape, rendering it imaginatively British, or English. Like ‘The Khaki Corps’, ‘The Cry of the Women’ describes British soldiers willing to ‘dye the veld in their lifeblood | And think it worth the cost’. The British soldier’s blood is the price paid to mark the land, in a Christ-like sacrifice of anointing and redemption.

Of course, this line of thought raises inevitable logical problems, applying as it could to all combatants. Indeed, the Daily Chronicle acknowledged this fact early in the war, printing a translation sent in by a correspondent of a ‘war-song which was sung by the Boers’ during the 1881 conflict:

Our fathers’ sweat, our fathers’ blood
Have soaked the ground on which they stood;

58 ‘Leave us alone!’, Evening Standard, 8 March 1881, p. 5, widely reprinted in 1881; in 1899, it appeared in the Daily Chronicle, 7 October 1899, p. 5; Clarion, 14 October 1899, p. 5; Orkney Herald, 18 October 1899, p. 7; Tower Hamlets Independent, 28 October 1899, p. 3; Derry Journal, 17 November 1899, p. 6; Shetland Times, 17 March 1900, p. 7.
Our mothers’ tears, our mothers’ toil
Have hallowed this our Afric soil.

This is our land! This is our land!
Reclaimèd by our fathers’ hand;
Reclaimèd once, we claim it now
As made a garden by our plough.

(‘Leave us alone!’ ll. 5-12)

The colonial labour which transforms wildness into agricultural productivity is presented as grounds for possession. The logic denies the existence of indigenous peoples and sees productivity only in terms of European industry, but also establishes the precedent whereby later colonial arrivals can claim possession on the grounds of their contribution to greater efficiency or more modern productivity, as indeed the British did, citing the role played by British ‘uitlanders’ in developing Johannesburg from an agricultural backwater into a booming industrial town as an argument for British sovereignty in the region. But the imaginatively powerful image of blood, sweat and tears transcends the legal and logical problems of ‘claim[ing]’ the land as the rightful outcome of having worked it. These emissions work in more subtle ways to ‘hallow’ the soil, making it sacred and setting it apart for the people whose bodily fluids have anointed it.

In ‘Imperial Light Horse’, a poet for the Natal Witness took this image further. The British dead, ‘Stiff and stark on the bare hill side’ provoke ‘Visions […] Of nations still to come’. Dead bodies are transfigured in these visions, and in turn transform the South African landscape:

Visions of cities, fair and grand,
    Scattered o’er the Afric plain—
Here lie the heroes of the Rand
    Fighting for Freedom—slain.

(‘Imperial Light Horse’, ll. 9-12)

Q’s poem elaborates the trope of an empty Africa available for British possession, inviting readers to imagine a city springing up from each point on the veld where a British soldier lies, bringing urban metropolitan order to ‘empty’ African spaces and asserting military presence and might. Meanwhile, in line with Baucom’s idea that the empire’s spaces lay imaginatively ‘inside’ the conceptual ‘boundaries of Britishness’, the

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59 Q, ‘Imperial Light Horse’, CTLP Button, iii, p. 18, reprinted from the Natal Witness.
imaginative transformation allows the poet to rescue the dead from their South African graves by demonstrating that their deaths make the land British:\footnote{Baucom, Out of Place, p. 10.}

Here let them rest on the bleak hillside,
Finished all earthly toil;
Comrades are saying with British pride:
‘Resting on English soil.’

(‘Imperial Light Horse’, ll. 21-24)

‘Sons of the Jack’, which appeared in the Cape Town Weekly, develops the idea that British soldiers transformed the land on which they died in a more complex metaphor.\footnote{E.A.T., ‘Sons of the Jack’, Cape Town Weekly, 13 December 1899, p 25.}

The poem was published in the middle of ‘black week’, in which the British army suffered three defeats in quick succession. In response to the catastrophic opening weeks of the war, which had already seen the British defeated on Talana Hill at Glencoe, at the battle of Modder River, and at Graspan, the poet enumerates the locations of these disasters, portraying them as places where British bodies mark, and mark out, the landscape.

Tears for the dead—the gallant dead—
For soldiers’ souls in flight;
Heroic Symons is laid to rest
By Talana’s bloody height.
The Cannon Kopje counts its dead,
They fall by the Modder’s span,
And Graspan’s plain is hallowed by
The blood of the midshipman.

(‘Sons of the Jack’, ll. 41-48)

The attempt to focus on ‘soldiers’ souls in flight’ seems immediately undermined by the physical groundedness of the following list of body-strewn battlefields, as the dead are emplaced in specific locales. As in a number of other poems, the South African landscape itself is portrayed as the combatant; the description of Talana as ‘bloody’ seems to go beyond the merely literal when juxtaposed with the possessive ‘Cannon Kopje counting its dead’. But if the land seems hungry for British dead, the dead effect their own transformation, in a phrase exactly reminiscent of the Boer soldier song which the Daily Chronicle printed the week before war was declared: ‘Graspan’s plain is hallowed’ by ‘the blood’ of the (British) men who die upon it. Moreover, the poet uses the metaphor of the ‘Union Jack’ (l. 9) to represent British deaths as tactically, imperially significant, even when they come as part of devastating military defeats. In contrast with
the use of red, white and blue in Cadett’s ‘War’, in E.A.T.’s refrain the colours of the Union Flag symbolise the different branches of the military, with reference to the traditional fabrics of their uniforms: ‘the men of the fifteen-pounders, ‘The cruiser’s duck-clad crew’, ‘The coats of the kopje-stormers’ (ll. 53-55), as well as the qualities exhibited by these soldiers and sailors:

White stripe on the flag—unsullied is their honour,
    Blue wedge on the flag—their courage is as true;
Red stripe on the flag—their blood for Queen and country,
    Such are the sons of the Red, White and Blue.

(‘Sons of the Jack’, ll. 13-16)

This straightforward symbolism gives a sense of propriety to the use of ‘the grand old Flag’ to ‘cover [the] forms’ of the dead: ‘They were sons of the Jack,—of the Union Jack’ (ll. 49, 51). But this flag is metaphorical, too. The poem opens by picturing ‘The Sea-Queen’s banner above her Throne’, ‘straining’ in the strength of ‘The voice of the great North Wind’ who ‘shouts with a mighty blast’ (ll. 1-4):

‘Send forth thy sons, O Flag of Truth,
    To pour out their blood again’.
From the fringe of the Jack—the Union Jack—
    The shreds were whirled apace,
From the fringe of the Jack—the Union Jack—
    The flag of the British race.’

(‘Sons of the Jack’, ll. 7-12)

The significance of picturing soldiers as ‘shreds’ of the British Union Flag becomes clear in the poem’s second stanza:

The north wind whirled the shreds to south,
    With swift untiring wing,
And some were dropped on the burnt Soudan,
    And some by lone Mafeking.
By Belmont’s kopjes, boulder-strewn,
    In the streets of the Diamond Town,
By Talana’s height and Tugela’s stream,
    They gathered and fluttered down.
Strong threads from the fringe of the mighty flag,
    They settled by veld and flood,
Brave sons of the Jack—of the Union Jack—
    The pride of the British blood.

(‘Sons of the Jack’, ll. 17-28)

The apparent randomness of British dead strewn or scattered ‘here and there’ across the vast South African land, a source of anxiety in poems discussed above, is reframed. The distribution of English bodies is deliberate; they are both motivated and transported by ‘the great North Wind’ (l. 3). Death is euphemistically softened as these ‘shreds’ of the
Union Flag ‘flutter’ gently down onto the hard facts of the South African land, the ‘kopjes’ and ‘boulders’, mountains and rivers. Against these imposing natural forms, the ‘threads from the fringe of the mighty flag’ might seem anything but ‘strong’, but here they have the power to transform the land; as the scraps of fabric ‘settle’, they operate in the same way as the settler colonists’ labour in the Boer soldier-song quoted above, staking an imperial claim. ‘Imperial Light Horse’ was published in response to British victory at Doornkop in May 1900; its image of dead British soldiers as ‘cities, fair and grand, | Scattered o’er Afric’s plain’ and claim that the British dead are ‘Resting on English soil’ is striking, but grounded in military realities.  

The comparison between that poem and ‘Sons of the Jack’ highlights the audacity of E.A.T.’s earlier claim. By making dead soldiers the physical embodiment of British imperial power represented by the flag, their deaths turn the land into ‘English soil’, representing victory even when they are literally the index of the scale of defeat. The consoling power of such a claim must have been appealing indeed to poets and readers in December 1899, shocked and frightened by the disasters of Black Week, however dubious the oxymoronic image of ‘strong threads’.

In meditating on the British dead in South Africa, the newspaper poems of 1899-1902 fulfilled a range of roles. As elegy and eulogy, they made space for newspaper readers to share in a ritual of commemoration, honouring the dead by elaborating on the lives and deaths of the individuals named in casualty lists or alluded to in the matter-of-fact prose of news reports. The process of humanising the war dead could be put to diverse political uses, from advancing a pacifist or pro-Boer argument to exhorting readers to lend their ongoing support to the government at a time of national and imperial crisis for the sake of the soldiers paying the ultimate price. Newspaper poets could offer consolation that this price was worth paying, presenting readers with a familiar repertoire of euphemistic rhetoric and imagery to help process messy wartime deaths as necessary, valuable or even beautiful. At each turn, however, the South African landscape seemed to assert itself, undercutting bardic celebrations or priestly consecrations with unsettling reminders of the hostility or vastness of the South African terrain. Images of emptiness focused anxieties about the processes of memorialisation, as poets reflected anxiously on bodies exposed and vulnerable to natural processes, but also threatened by the very foreignness of the South African landscape with which they

62 ‘Imperial Light Horse’ (ll. 9-10, 24).
were intimately physically connected. This imaginary South Africa was simultaneously ‘strewn’ with the bodies of British dead and ‘barren’, empty of the features which ought to mark British graves or render them locatable. A compensatory cartography of remembrance sees newspaper poets insisting on the idea that a soldier’s grave ‘gleams like a beacon’, in W.H. Walker’s words, transforming the locations of dead bodies into lieu de mémoire: ‘the places in which England can locate and secure its identity’. Like the dead at Majuba, British soldiers killed in battles which ended in defeat for the British could be redeemed by images of them as ‘terrestrial’ [sic] saints, as Walker puts it, earth-bound for now but awaiting ‘seraphs on the battlements celestial’ to ‘wake’ them ‘from out their tomb’ (ll. 29-32). Place-markers for future victory, they render the land imaginatively British in anticipation, while memorial newspaper poems supply the architecture of remembrance which the vast South African landscape appears to deny. The major imaginative effort by which they achieve this memorialisation and, paradoxically, argue that their own commemorative role is unnecessary, is by making British bodies capable of transforming the South African land itself. Perhaps the clearest expression of this comes in the most famous answer-poem to Hardy’s ‘Drummer Hodge’, written by Rupert Brook just fifteen years later. ‘If I should die, think only this of me’, Brooke pleads: ‘That there’s some corner of a foreign field | That is for ever England’. Brooke’s image of ‘a richer dust concealed’ in the earth over which British blood has been shed and in which British bodies are buried has multiple antecedents in the newspaper poems of 1899-1902. The poets presented here take up an intimate focus on individual deaths, building from them a cumulative cartography of remembering, in which an intense consciousness of buried British bodies and shed British blood transforms topographic locations from points on a chart of South Africa to beacons in a cultural memory map. The tactic could be used to powerful propagandistic effect, but its very repetition comes to feel compulsive. Meanwhile, reminders of the dead from 1881 at Majuba that link ‘unaveng’d graves’ or ‘graves dishonoured and nameless’ to ‘our honour’s shallow grave’ attest to the anxieties and insecurities about British imperial ambition and military capability which characterised the whole literary colonial project.

63 W.H. Walker, ‘The Last Post at Frere: December 6th, 1899’, CTLP Button, i, p. 87 (l. 18); Baucom, Out of Place, p. 19.
65 Ingram, ‘Song of the Uitlander’ (l. 51); ‘The Avengers’ (l. 40); Begbie, ‘Majuba Day’ (l. 11).
In ‘A Tragedy of the War’, published in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* in January 1900, Joseph Lyons depicts a familiar figure in the urban landscape (Figure 7.1):

> ‘Eavy fightin’! ’Ere y’are, Sir; Second Hextry *Hevenin’ Noos*! 
> Cried a ragged little urchin, boasting neither hat nor shoes. 
> I watched his perseverance as he shivered in the cold, 
> And tried to count the coppers for the papers he had sold. 
> He must have seen me standing, and came over with a run; 
> ‘Ere y’ are, Sir; Second Hextry. Yuss, the British troops ’as won. 
> Thank’ee, Sir! it’s worf a penny, an’ it won’t go to the pub.; 
> There’s the kid and muvver waitin’ till I bring ’em home the grub.’

(‘A Tragedy of the War’, ll. 1-8)

The speaker responds generously to the boy, who thanks him with tears running down his cheeks, thinking of ‘a bit o’ fire for weeks | And summat ’ot for muvver!’ he will be able to buy with the ‘arf a dollar’ he has been given (ll. 11-12). These selfless, practical considerations mark the newsboy as older than his years, having been promoted by current events to the head of the family: ‘My farver’s out there fightin’, so I ’as to earn the bread’ (l. 16). The boy fills his father’s place in the household; he also represents him on the streets of the city. A ragged and unpolished creature, he needs to reassure his benefactor that his generosity will be acceptable at home: ‘The old gal wont’ think I’ve pinched it, ’cos she knows I’m runnin’ strite’ (ll. 13). He is Tommy Atkins’ son and double. The image is not unique to Lyons’ poem. A short story published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the same month describes another newsboy as ‘neither a complete saint nor a complete sinner. He is just a sharp-witted son of the slums, and you must take him as you find him’. The depiction links the newsboy unequivocally with Kipling’s absent-minded beggar, whose ‘weaknesses are great— | But we and Paul must take him as we find him’; this urchin is one of the ‘little things’ which the absent-minded private has ‘left behind him’, and the writer capitalises on the reader’s familiarity with Kipling’s poem to make a link between the soldiers who were enjoying enthusiastic (if rare) public

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1 Joseph Lyons, ‘A Tragedy of the War’, *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 6 January 1900, p. 12. The poem was reprinted in South Africa and appears CTLP Button, iii, p. 79. 
support, and the newsboys who could do with a share of the munificence. Likewise, an editorial comment indicates that Lyons’ poem is presented in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* in that hope that it ‘should stimulate thousands of readers to hurry up with their shilling addition to the [...] *Daily Telegraph* War Relief Fund’; underneath the poem the invitation is repeated: ‘I do hope you will point the moral and adorn the tale by at once posting your mites’. The charitable appeal is also a patriotic appeal; the newsboy acts as double for Tommy Atkins, a home-front shadow of the brave soldier ‘doing his country’s work’ in South Africa. Both were a little rough round the edges, slightly distasteful to civilian society, having been pushed to the outskirts and ignored as far as possible; both, in 1899, were elbowing their way into the centre of urban life and popular culture by means of a distant war. The link associates newsboys intimately and personally with the war news they were hawking.

Newsboys appear with striking frequency in the newspapers of 1899-1902. In self-referential accounts of the reception of current events, they were a way of signalling the importance of the newspaper itself. They also served to humanise the news industry, obscuring the impersonal technologies of international telegraphy and modern industrial printing methods behind an image of word-of-mouth transmission. Reports of the outbreak of war in newspapers from Aberdeen, Bristol and Liverpool focused on these messengers in their accounts of reactions in London, describing ‘[t]he first sign of excitement’ when, ‘as the people went to church, newsboys dashed along the streets

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3 Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’, *Daily Mail*, 31 October 1899; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 October 1899, p. 2 (ll. 5-6, 8).
shouting that the reserves had been called out.\(^6\) As the war progressed, those waiting impatiently for news were often figured as listening for the newsboy: an anonymous comic poem in the *Manchester Times* pictured an anxious MP – ‘Every time the newsboy yappeth I most signally perspire’ – but the *Pall Mall Gazette* painted a more democratic picture of the nation united in waiting ‘in a painful state of tension through the dragging hours, at the War Office, in clubs and newspaper offices […] or in our homes, where the newsboy’s cry might be heard at any moment,’ with ‘friends and relations’ of serving soldiers especially ‘starting […] at the shrill cry of the newsboys.’\(^7\) The nightly calls of the evening newspaper-sellers took their place amidst the familiar sounds of the urban landscape, according to one *Pall Mall Gazette* poet in February 1900:\(^8\)

> Night follows night, and with the pale-faced moon
> Rises a harsher croak above the hum
> Of traffic; ’tis the news-boys’ dismal tune:
> _Great British Losses!_—down the street they come.
>
> (‘The Situation’, ll. 1-4)
>
> The perceived timbre of the newsboy’s voice varied depending on the emotional state of the waiting listener, but as war news turned sour, it was increasingly likely to be ‘shrill’ or ‘hoarse’. Words like ‘raucous’, ‘croaking’ and ‘cries’ abound in descriptions of newsboys; a correspondent to the Cardiff *Western Mail* complained of ‘fearful shrieks’, ‘nerve-destroying yells’ and ‘horrid howls’.\(^9\) Elsewhere, the newsboys themselves took on the character of an invading force: ‘Suddenly the newsboys came swarming from Fleet-street with hoarse cries. The Boers had seized Laing’s Nek and the English were flying before them’.\(^10\) And a poem published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* suggested an almost superstitious fear of newsboys as prophets, with voices like weapons:\(^11\)

> There is a voice that London knows,
> A raucous voice that croaks of ill;
> Little enough its owner knows,
> Little he cares, but, sharp and shrill
> His message speeds upon its course—
> “Disaster to the British force!”
>
> (‘Favete Linguis’, ll. 1-6)

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\(^8\) ‘The Situation’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 February 1900, p. 2 (ll. 8, 11-12).

\(^9\) ‘Correspondence: Street Newspaper Vendors’, *Western Mail*, 13 November 1899, p. 3.

\(^10\) *Isle of Man Times*, 28 October 1899, p. 4.

\(^11\) ‘Favete Linguis’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 November 1899, p. 2 (ll. 1-12).
The poem’s title is a traditional warning to ‘hold your tongue’ lest an inauspicious word should disrupt a ritual or displease the gods; its closing question implies that the hawker ceremonially confirm the news they proclaim: ‘Needs it the newsboy to endorse | Disaster to a British force?’ (ll. 23-24).

‘Favete Linguis’ was published in November 1899, at the height of a public debate about ‘the newsboy nuisance’ which reached from the pages of the newspapers to the Chamber of the House of Commons.12 Echoing correspondents to newspapers up and down the country, the Pall Mall poet objected that ‘It is not fitting […] That in our city’s streets should ring | The nation’s sorrow’ (ll. 13-15), or that ‘the mother’s pain | The sweetheart’s grief’ should be used ‘to sell’ newspapers (ll. 20-22). The newsboys’ ‘cheerful’ and ‘careless’ tones (ll. 8, 16) were a point of particular concern, but could also prove a source of comedy; an anecdote in the Manchester Times imagines newsboys competing with each other over which of them can claim ‘the latest latest’: ‘Feel at mine, sir. Hot from the battlefield. Seventy-five Boers killed, and blood-stains on the newspaper into the bargain!’13 ‘Silence, ye croakers’, a less forgiving Pall Mall poet exhorted.14 Outcry in the capital resulted in a new London bylaw which prohibited ‘the calling of newspapers so as to be a public nuisance’, though without much success; police objected that scampering newsboys were too hard to catch.15 Moreover, as the North-Eastern Daily Gazette put it, ‘when a war special containing news of a “great British victory” comes out no by-law ever invented is sufficient to stop the impetuous rush of shouting lads, and the equally impetuous rush of gesticulating buyers’.16 An editorial in the Western Mail likewise observed that, ‘judging by the avidity with which the papers are bought up, the public generally are not averse to the cries of the urchins’.17

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12 The topic was widely discussed. For example: Pall Mall Gazette, 1 November 1899, p. 2; Yorkshire Herald, 2 November 1899 p. 4; Yorkshire Herald 4 November 1899, Supplement, p. 1; ‘Correspondence: Street Newspaper Vendors’ and ‘Editorial Comments’, Western Mail, 13 November 1899, pp. 3 and 4; ‘News of the Day’, Birmingham Daily Post, 4 January 1900, pp. 4 and 7; Morning Post, 3 February 1900, p. 2; Freeman’s Journal, 17 February 1900, p. 6; ‘Bideford and District Notes’, Exeter Flying Post, 17 February 1900, p. 2; ‘Northern Notes’, North-Eastern Daily Gazette, 1 March 1900, p. 2.
14 ‘The Situation’, Pall Mall Gazette, 7 February 1900, p. 2 (l. 18).
16 ‘Northern Notes, North-Eastern Daily Gazette, 1 March 1900, p. 2.
17 ‘Editorial Comments’, Western Mail, 13 November 1899, p. 4.
That newspapers should support newsboys by insisting that they were merely supplying what the public demanded is hardly surprising; as the *Western Mail* acknowledged, ‘What is so intolerable to the tympanum of [a disgruntled correspondent’s] ears sounds like music to the ears of the proprietors of the papers which are cried out’.\(^{18}\) Newsboys and editors alike were complicit in an industry which profited from the appeal of war news. Long before the debate about ‘the newsboy nuisance’ came to a head in February 1900, newspaper poems reflected on the relationship between newsboys, news and truth. In a poem called ‘Enterprise’ which appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* just ten days after the start of the war, the cockney speaker paints a picture of a busy city scene bustling with war excitement, with the newsboy at its heart:\(^{19}\)

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The bills is a-flutterin’ darn the street,
The boys is a-shartin’ “Grite Bo’r defeat!”
The bloke with the pipers slung rarnd on ’is back
Is up on ’is cycle and off in a crack
The cawts goes a—urryn’ inter the gloom
An’ jest nippin’ through wheer there ain’t no room;
An’ the fat-headed public shells art an’ buys
The litest war speshul of enterprise—
   Don’t call it lies;
Thet don’t sarnd so pretty as enterprise.
(‘Enterprise’, ll. 1-10)
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The speaker is a member of this ‘fat-headed public’, recognising but unable to resist the temptation of the newsboys’ tantalising promises:

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We’re fond, thee’r’s no dart, o’ the news what is new,
But it ain’t none the wuss if thee’r’s some of it true;
So you take my tip, sorter word ter the wise,
An’ go a bit slow with that thee’r enterprise—
   We won’t call it lies,
But it’s too enterprisin’ fur fair enterprise.
(‘Enterprise’, ll. 25-30)
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A poem which appeared three days later in the weekly *Fun* assumes the voice of the newsboy himself to reply to this accusation. The column-shaped short lines and capitalised first word emphasise continuities between editor and hawker, translating the newsboy’s speech into the written features most characteristic of newsprint:\(^{20}\)

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LATEST from the front, sir?
   An awful battle fought,
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\(^{18}\) ‘Editorial Comments’, *Western Mail*.
\(^{19}\) ‘Enterprise’, *Daily Chronicle*, 21 October 1899, p. 4.
\(^{20}\) ‘The Latest from the Front’, *Fun*, 24 October 1899, p. 131.
Heavy slaughter of the Boers,
While our loss was nought.

(The Latest from the Front, ll. 1-4)

When his claims are met with scepticism from a reader who notes that ‘the Evening Flame’ has printed a different story, the hawker quickly changes his tune, though this hasty revision does not satisfy the would-be buyer either:

Still that doesn’t please you,
You say it isn’t fair!
Well, editors or newsboys
Cannot live on air!
And we must fain do something
To increase our gain,
If nothing else will serve us,
Well! false news again.

(The Latest from the Front, ll. 9-16)

It is unclear whether the poet accuses or exonerates the newsboy – and, by extension, the newspaper – by presenting the (enterprisin’) practice of inventing reports as a response to economic necessity. Though the poet claims to present the voice of the newsboy himself, the archaic diction (‘our loss was nought’; ‘we must fain do something’) makes it unconvincing; on the other hand, the poem’s final lines suggest an indulgent view of the newsboy as harmlessly creative: ‘The Boers suffered heavily—| Three men sprained their feet!’ (ll. 23-24).

In contrast, a Westminster Gazette poem expresses warm sympathy with the newsboy, in lively cockney dactyls which convey the indignation of both speaker and poet. Referring in the headnote to ‘several cases lately of newsboys being fined for crying out false news’, the poem points out that the ragged hawker was much more likely to be punished for proclaiming fake news than his more powerful industry colleagues were for printing it:

‘I calls it a scandal, a reggeler scandal,
The way they’re a-treating of us;
A fellow can’t do wot ’e likes for a livin’
But wot there’s a deuce of a fuss.
We knows ’ow the public are hankshus and waitin’
For noos of the war with the Boors;
We knows ’ow they buy when there’s plenty of slaughter
Announced in a paper like yours.
And wot if we shouts wot is certain to fetch ’em,
Although it may not be in print?
It does for the ‘green ’un’, and business is business,
Wot else is there bloomin’ well in’?
And yet we are marched to the beak if we does it,
And fined for the orful offence.
I simply observes to a straightforward public,
Well, wot price them Yellow Press gents
Wot tells you a man has been shot when ’e ’asn’t,
And places annexed when they ain’t?
If they can tell lies, why the dickens should we not?
D’yer think it is justice? No, ’tain’t!21

The public’s eagerness to read ‘the latest latest’ translated into an unmissable opportunity for the newsboys, but the speaker claims that there is more to the public desire for news than decorous concern with current affairs: ‘we knows ’ow they buy when there’s plenty of slaughter’ suggests that the newsboys’ bloodthirsty glee is simply the public’s own enjoyment of the ‘pleasure culture of war’ reflected back at them.22 If readers found it distasteful, these poets suggested, they ought to look inward, rather than criminalising the natural commercial instincts of society’s youngest and least powerful businessmen. The worldly-wise expression that ‘business is business’ contrasts with the speaker’s youthful petulance, while the cockney idioms so familiar from Kipling and his imitators give the speaker a demotic appeal and connect the plucky newsboy with his absent father, standing up at last for his rights.

In Lyons’ poem ‘A Tragedy of the War’, the newsboy is shown to be capable of sensitive emotion, drawing on and contributing to the cultural shifts in constructions of Tommy Atkins’ own masculinity discussed earlier. Moreover, Lyons’ newsboy is more intimately affected by the news than the readers who rush to swallow up the latest instalment:

‘Battle, Sir? Well, I believe yer! Here’s a full list o’ the dead; My farver’s out there fightin’, so I ’as to earn the bread. Yus, I allus takes a copy ’ome, and muvver reads the list Ter see if farver’s number’s in the wounded, killed, or missed. No, Sir, I ain’t no scholard, but I gets a pal to see Before I tikes the paper ’ome for seven-nine, sixty-three. Would yer mind just a-lookin’ for me? ’Ullo, wot mikes yer cry! ’Ave you found out you’ve lost a pal? Well, some ’as got to die. Wot? You’ve got my farver’s number! No? For Gawd’s sike s’y you’re kiddin!’ He dropped his papers in the street, his little face was hidden. Then lifting up his head, he cried, ‘Oh, tell us it’s anuver! I can’t go ’ome and break the noos, it’s sure to settle muvver.’

(‘A Tragedy of the War’, ll. 15-26)

The newsboy had long been a familiar part of the urban street scene, both in real life and in literature (Figure 7.1). The wartime newsboy emerged from the shadows, both standing for and suffering for the news he hawked, as well as for the unscrupulous methods of the media industry more widely. As a double of Tommy Atkins, the newsboy could be a reminder of the cost of Tommy Atkins’s imperial service, while portrayals like Lyons’ contributed to the argument that Tommy Atkins himself could be both gentler and tougher than he was given credit for. Newspapers congratulated themselves on the special ‘sharpness’ of their own newsboys, and publicised their generosity towards them; a Cardiff newspaper wrote that ‘[i]t was a kindly thought on the part of the *Express* proprietors to give the little newsboys a Christmas treat all to themselves’, musing that ‘these poor little mites bear their hard, rough lot bravely, and read a lesson in cheery patience to many of their betters’. Charity was fashionable, but like Tommy Atkins, the newsboy’s actual presence was more uncomfortable than the idea of him at a distance, and his commercial relationship with the news he hawked compromised his status as social victim. The newsboy stood for an industry that could be unscrupulous, and that was reviled and mistrusted as much as it was relied upon – an industry with which newspaper poets were also implicated, and on which they reflect explicitly in their work.

Tear-jerking newsboy poems were not new in 1899. Indeed, an old favourite, ‘The Newsboy’s Debt’ by H.R. Hudson, had been a staple of music halls and theatres ever since its publication in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in June 1873, and was as popular as ever in the opening months of the South African War, appearing in concert programmes across Britain. Hudson’s poem offered the community-building pleasures of familiar references in the heart-warming tale of a ragged little urchin whose unpromising appearance belied a strong Christian character, and whose tragic early death could be rationalised as a comfort after a life of hardship: ‘Poor lad! Well, it is warm in heaven’. Though they could appeal to the same kind of popular

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23 “The *Express* Treat’, *Supplement to the Western Mail* [Cardiff, Wales], 30 December 1899, p. 4.
sentimentality, however, and capitalise on what Peter Howarth calls the ‘well-tried journalistic means for working up the reader’s interest by putting them in the know and in the right’, newspaper poems about wartime newsboys could do more than raise a knowing smile of recognition. Indeed, like fin-de-siècle newspaper poems generally, these newsboy poems could perform a range of functions. Intervening in the news cycle by offering commentary on widely-publicised concerns about fake news, or about the painful experience of hearing of the disasters befalling a loved one proclaimed in cruelly ‘cheerful’ voices, newspaper poems could use playfulness and light-heartedness to introduce nuance into a social or political debate. Like the poems about Tommy Atkins discussed in Chapters three and four, they could introduce diverse voices to the newspaper page, allowing newsboys to speak in their own defence, or inviting readers to pause to consider their circumstances and their complex relationship with war news. This could be politically radical: a poem like Lyons’ challenges stereotypes of the working classes as less emotionally vulnerable to loss – stereotypes which could obscure the cost of imperial war for middle-class newspaper readers. They could also draw attention to the function of the newspaper itself and the means by which news was defined and communicated, inviting readers to reflect on their own reading habits with critical distance. Newspaper poems about wartime newsboys could participate self-consciously in the pleasure-culture of war, drawing attention to their own and their readers’ complicity in the commodification of war news as entertainment. Comic wartime newspaper poetry could be deeply serious, and the tragi-comic figure of the newspaper hawker provided a focus for some of the key issues which the war forced upon the attention of the British public – not least, the state of Private Thomas Atkins’s home life.

The idea that the popular poetry of the South African war can be dismissed as sub-literary ‘dismal’ or ‘outrageous twaddle’ has proven remarkably persistent. In the only book-length study of the poetry of 1899-1902, a work of prodigious bibliographic scholarship, Malvern Van Wyk Smith describes ‘popular ballads, music hall songs and newspaper doggerel’ as ‘more or less bovinely jingo’. Perhaps the general critical neglect of this material can be explained by the fact that many of the big-name poets of the period produced some of their worst work in these years, or as a result of stereotypes of late Victorian high imperialism. Certainly the hegemonic view was powerful; for the newspaper editor or the poet to ‘do wot ’e likes for a livin’ was as fraught with difficulties as it was for F.W.’s newsboy, and there was liable to be ‘a deuce of a fuss’ when a poet disappointed expectations or transgressed the unwritten rules of decorum, politics or poetics. Hardy was berated, in the Daily Chronicle, on Christmas Day, for his ‘croaking’ about ‘peace on earth’ in his ‘Christmas Ghost-Story’, and ‘croaking’ is a word also frequently applied to newsboys; the charge of being unpatriotic which was directed at Hardy for his festive peace poem is one that was also levelled at newsboys, those ‘little war fiends’, for the opposite crime of being equally delighted by ‘victory or defeat’. Yet, in spite of pressure both political and economic, newspaper editors and poets between them succeeded in carving out a space in which more thoughtful, cautious voices could be heard, even in the first frenzied months of the conflict. The status of these texts as poems allowed a range of attitudes and perspectives to penetrate the otherwise self-censoring public space of the newspaper page, but it is also significant that political themes were mediated through comedy and playfulness, so that neither poet nor editor were implicated too firmly with any challenging message. Newspaper poetry might be seen as a kind of serious play. Its potential reach and influence is indicated by the routes the poems traced around the globe, from the daily newspapers of the colonies to the South African siege newspapers printed on greaseproof or tissue-paper when more suitable supplies ran out, into concert halls, imperial memorabilia (Figures 7.3 and 7.4), debates in parliament and personal scrapbooks and notebooks. Newspaper poems could inspire and enrage, motivating

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readers to become writers, galvanising even those who ‘would never normally think poetry had anything for them’, to take up their pens and become newspaper poets themselves.\textsuperscript{31} Poems published in large-circulation newspapers were not very likely to be explicitly anti-imperialist, anti-government or anti-war in South Africa, and there is disappointingly little moral outrage about the ‘methods of barbarism’ by which the war was carried out, or about the dismal failures of planning, leadership and medical care which led to the deaths of so many British soldiers and Boer and African concentration camp prisoners.\textsuperscript{32} Nevertheless, in their mediation of and meditation on war questions, newspaper poets could acknowledge and attempt to assuage doubts and questions about imperialism in general and the war in South Africa in particular, and even firmly pro-war poems could betray uncertainties and anxieties about Britain’s imperial mission and the ideals of masculinity by which British national character was defined and circumscribed. As bards, prophets and priests, newspaper poets could narrate, argue, exhort, entertain, console, commemorate and question. They could be topical, political, performative, satirical, and self-aware. Using playful, hybrid voices, they could combine these functions in ambiguous ways. Clamouring to make different voices heard in the crowded and politically narrow world of the newspaper page, speaking on behalf of

\textsuperscript{31} Howarth, ‘Rudyard Kipling Plays the Empire’ (p. 607).
themselves and of others, they could open up a space for interpretive divergence, offering readers a pause for thought, a chance to process or commemorate news of the war differently, and an invitation to consider their own position as the consumers of war news, and as imperial Britons.
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Evening Mail (London)  
Evening Standard (London)  
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Fun (London)  
Gloucester Journal  
Halifax Courier  
Hampshire Advertiser  
Hampshire Telegraph  
Hearth and Home (London)  
Henley Advertiser  
Illustrated London News  
Inverness Courier (twice weekly)  
Isle of Man Times  
Jackson's Oxford Journal  
Justice (London)  
Larne Times (Antrim)  
Leicester Chronicle  
Liverpool Weekly Courier  
Lloyds Weekly Newspaper (London)  
London and Manchester Observer  
Luton Times  
Maidenhead  
Manchester Weekly Times  
Montgomery County Times  
Newbury Weekly News  
Newcastle Weekly Courant  
Navy and Army illustrated (London)  
New Age (London)  
Northern Echo
Norwich Mercury
Orkney Herald
Outlook (London)
Oxfordshire Weekly News
Pall Mall Budget (London)
Pearson’s Weekly (London)
Penny Illustrated Paper (London)
Penrith Observer
Peterhead Sentinel and Buchan Journal
Radnor Express
Reynolds’s Newspaper (London)
 Ripon Observer
Ross-shire Journal
Royal Cornwall Gazette
Sheffield Weekly Telegraph
Shetland Times
 Shrewsbury Chronicle
Southend Standard
Spectator (London)

International publications

Armidale Chronicle (New South Wales)
Ashburton Guardian (New Zealand)
Brisbane Courier (Australia)
Camperdown Chronicle (Victoria, Australia)
Cape Argus (South Africa)
 Cape Times Weekly (South Africa)
Cape Town Weekly (South Africa)
Chicago Record (United States)
Chronicle (Adelaide, Australia)
Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore, India)
Clarence and Richmond Examiner (New South Wales)
Coolgardie Miner (Western Australia)
Coolgardie Pioneer (Western Australia)
Essex Advertiser (Victoria, Australia)
Evening Post (New Zealand)
Evening Star (Western Australia)
Express and Telegraph (Adelaide)
 Friend (Bloemfontein, South Africa)
Harper’s Monthly Magazine (New York)
Horsesham Times (Victoria, Australia)
Indian Daily News (Calcutta)
Interell Times (New South Wales)
Journal-Tribune (Alabama, United States)
Kalgoorlie Western Argus (Western Australia)

South Australian Register (Adelaide, Australia)
Sydney Daily Telegraph (Australia)

Mafeking Mail (Mafikeng, South Africa)
Maitland Daily Mercury (New South Wales)
Maitland Weekly Mercury (New South Wales)
McIvor Times and Rodney Advertiser (Victoria, Australia)
Melbourne Advocate (Australia)
Melbourne Leader (Australia)
Narracoorte Herald (South Australia)
Natal Witness (South Africa)
Newcastle Morning Herald (New South Wales)
New York Times
New Zealand Mail
Observer (New Zealand)
Otago Witness (New Zealand)
Pretoria News (South Africa)
Richmond Guardian (Victoria, Australia)
South African News (Pretoria)
Sydney Daily Telegraph (Australia)
Magazines

*Contemporary Review* (London, monthly)
*English Illustrated Magazine* (London, monthly)
*Fortnightly Review* (London)
*Literary World* (London, monthly)
*Literature* (London, monthly)
*McClure’s Magazine* (New York, monthly)
*Nineteenth Century* (London, monthly)
*Pall Mall Magazine* (London, monthly)
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