SERIOUS DUTIES OF NATIONAL LIFE: WOMEN'S SPORTS AND SERVICE IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Abby Wolf

At the turn of the century, and as the result of decades of colonial uprisings and challenges to British strength, the male body of the soldier was the naturalized representative of British inviolability. I begin with this thought and with Claudia Nelson's suggestion that "[...] the opposite of 'female' is not 'male' but soldier" (113). That is, the English female body opposes an array of functional qualities embodied by the soldier, including courage, perseverance, self-control, discipline, and selflessness, designated as manliness. While a woman may attain the "manly" skills and qualities associated with the soldier, she cannot attain the body of the soldier; and the female body limits the woman's participation in a culture in which imperial usefulness equals the ability to defend the Empire. The sportswoman in particular is an ideal figure in which to explore the incompatibility of the body and imperial usefulness, for Victorian sport is a fundamentally physical activity justified as useful and serious in terms of military performance and preparation. Thus, the figurative understanding of sport – as strengthening the military body – excludes the literal female body of the sportswoman. This essay explores whether it is possible for the female body to serve the British Empire when "practical" and "serious" service is attributed to militarized, masculine qualities. The first part examines late Victorian anthologies dedicated to women's sports, in which the spectre of "the serious duties of national life" (Slaughter II: 8) calls into question the practical uses of sports for women. The second part takes up the travel narrative *A Sportswoman in India*, in which the hunter-author Isabel Savory suggests that the only way out of such Victorian damnation is to abandon both femininity and seriousness.

In a culture in which the sportswoman was often vehemently condemned as mannish, to be manly was also the apotheosis of Englishness. Claudia Nelson argues that, for most of the nineteenth century, manliness had less to do with the actual body than with the figurative connotations of gender, and applied to both men and women in equal measure: the term suggested a "code of selflessness, emotional warmth, purity, and concern for others" (4) that transcended sex. Drawing on a Christian model of self-sacrifice, manliness as an ideal connoted moral strength and physical forbearance. The national instability fostered by mid-century war and colonial uprisings pushed manliness as an ideal of self-improvement and self-maintenance toward an ideology and practice of imperial strengthening: instead of a

condition of internal well-being and goodness, manliness becomes, after 1857, an outward-turned militarized performance of strength and reliability. This externalization of manliness effectively renders it inapplicable to women, whose work for the national good remains domestic, if not limited entirely to the home; and inward-looking womanliness becomes the domestic counterpart to outward-reaching manliness. At the end of the century, manliness is at least as much about physical strength and the resistance to domination as it is about spiritual rectitude. For women, "manliness" reaches its apogee in spiritual and physical preparedness for motherhood, for producing sons for the defence of the Empire – in womanliness. But the equation of manliness and Englishness is carried by the body of the soldier, or at least by the body that can be a soldier. For Nelson, this gives rise to the polarization I began with: "[...] the opposite of 'female' is not 'male' but soldier" (113).

There is, then, a shift in the way bodies signify, defined by the physical work they do as much as by conviction about that work. To be English is to do the work of maintenance which the Empire requires. Such an equation increases anxiety about women's sport, and makes impossible an easy compatibility of the female body and Englishness. In writing by sportswomen, this anxiety manifests itself as the question of what exactly women can do for empire. In the publications for sportswomen that began to proliferate in the 1880s, women wrote not only for the purpose of instruction, but also to justify their participation in sport.[1] This desire to justify, and the impossibility to do so in imperially useful, soldierly terms, is evident in "Rifle-Shooting," an essay by Winifred Louisa Leale published in the 1894 anthology *Ladies in the Field*:

> [...] I believe that studying all these minute but necessary particulars is a good training for those who may have to use their rifles for more serious purposes than competing for prizes at rifle meetings. For, although in practical shooting they will be obliged to use the rifle just as it is served out, they will prove themselves to be experienced shots, and know how to handle their weapons with that skill which is always the result of careful training and practice. (171-72)

Throughout the essay, Leale has been authoritative about and convinced of her technical expertise; here, at the end, authority and conviction turn into resignation to systematic exclusion from courage, perseverance, self-control, discipline, and selflessness. That Leale will never have use for "practical shooting" obviously occurs to her: the female "I" that begins this passage and narrates the entire essay

[1] See McCrone, chapter 9, for a thorough review of the literature of sportswomen, including newspapers, books, and encyclopedias.

here drops out to make way for an implicitly male "they." Leale's female body bars her from serious purposes: her accomplishment (she is the Ladies Champion of the Bisley Meeting of 1891) means less than "theirs" does, and her practice of sport amounts to less, because the imperial justification for sport – preparedness for battle – is not accessible to her, as it is to the men performing the serious work of empire.

Motherhood was, of course, serious work women could do for empire, and debates about the compatibility of athletic activity and reproduction used much ink in the late Victorian press. On one side, advocates saw sport as strengthening the female body specifically in preparation for motherhood. On the other, opponents viewed sport as too taxing and potentially damaging to the female reproductive system.[2] But even if the body strengthened by sport is suitably maternal, nowhere in three major anthologies of women's sports – Lady Violet Greville's *Gentlewoman's Book of Sports* (1891) and *Ladies in the Field* (1894), and Frances Elizabeth Slaughter's two-volume *The Sportswoman's Library* (1898) – is motherhood presented as the useful end of sport. Only two of the writers included in Greville's and Slaughter's volumes – over fifty writers among them – refer to motherhood at all. One does so by example: "Diane Chasseresse" says in her article on "Saithe-Fishing" for Greville's *Gentlewoman's Book of Sports*, "Sometimes my little daughter [...] rowed the boat" (66). The other does so by implication, referring to the many limitations on a woman's full participation in sport. Slaughter writes in "The Chase of the Carted Deer": "[...] there is the woman who from whatever cause, whether from the care of a large household, or the pressure of the duties that her literary or artistic, or it may be her political taste have involved her in, finds it extremely difficult to take a whole long day for her pleasure in the field ...]" (I:129). In neither case does the writer offer maternity as a rationale – let alone *the* rationale – for women's participation in women's sports.

It must be noted that the maternal body considered by both the mainstream press and those publications aimed specifically at sportswomen was either middle-class or aristocratic. In fact, one of the most alarmed (and often quoted) opponents of women's exercise, Arabella Kenealy, held out the working woman's body – "of sinewy build, hard and tough and set" – as an object of fear, and the inevitable result of overtaxing the delicate female system (quoted in Guttman 96). And while a number of sports historians subscribe to a "diffusionist" model of the spread of sport, wherein popularity travels "down" the social scale from the aristocracy on top and on through the middle classes, with some variant making its way to the working classes, the sportswoman's reading material rarely acknowledged those women who lacked the resources – including leisure time – for participation.[3] Mrs. L. Wardell, writing for Slaughter's *Sportswoman's Library*, is singular in her inclusion of poor

---

[2] For discussions of women's reproductive fitness and sport, see McCrone; Hargreaves; Marks; Vrettos; and Haley.

[3] See Mangan, McCrone, and Lowerson on the "diffusion" of sports in the nineteenth century.

women, although she, too, overlooks the element of available time: "Otter-hunting is a sport that is followed on foot and is therefore one that any woman, rich or poor, possessed of a good pair of legs and a thick pair of boots, can join in whenever the meet is within reach" (Slaughter II: 173).

The targeted maternal body toed a conservative line as well, in spite of the arguably progressive embrace of sport and exercise. The team sports, such as cricket and field hockey, that were all the rage in women's colleges at the turn of the century received little positive attention until the early 1900s, when their rise among elite young ladies could hardly be ignored (Lady Milner's impeccable social credentials excused her writing about cricket for Greville, but Kenealy's warning was pointed at devotees of field hockey). For the most part, the anthologies and the mainstream press eschewed any sports for women that included a strong element of competition, which was thought antithetical to the more gentle and individualized structure of a woman's life. If the late Victorian writers were interested in motherhood, then, it is apparent only implicitly in their choice of ladylike and refined sports, fox-hunting, ice skating, fencing, golf, and tennis among them (and even as critics today tend to presume an overweening interest in maternity among these writers).[4]

The language, then, that precisely expresses the qualities of body and character engendered by sport and physical activity is the language of militarized usefulness that excludes the female body from exercise of that character. Leale, the rifle-shooter, has the most profoundly ambivalent reaction to the usefulness of the female body because her sport is the one directly associated with imperial service: according to Robert Baden-Powell, "the Colonial boys consider marksmanship the most important thing to practise, because it is for their country. They put cricket and football second, because they are for their own amusement" (quoted in MacKenzie 177). Militarized sport produces the greatest conflict between leisure and purpose, between sport and war, for women. Agnes Baden-Powell, in the Girl Guides handbook, suggests that "[...] [Girl Guides] should know how to load and fire a gun or other firearm so as not to be at a loss for a means of defense should an emergency arise. It is one of the best means to 'be prepared'" (81-82). But the possibility of such an emergency is challenged elsewhere by Agnes's brother Robert, who fails to consider such an emergency: "The principles on which [Girl Guides] are trained are very much the same as those which guide the education of Boy Scouts, but the details are those which apply to womanhood, in the shape of nursing and housekeeping, and the many details connected therewith" (*Memories* 118).

Even as a cultural discourse grows up around the ways in which women's sports can be useful, their practicality cannot hold up under the weight of the metaphor most "natural" to them. Concerning sport, war holds a stronger claim on the English woman's imagination than does housekeeping: throughout these

4 See Hargreaves, McCrone, and, to a lesser extent, Guttmann for examples of this critical tendency.

anthologies, sport is far more like a battle on the field than a battle with daily accounts and dinner. For men and boys, the playing fields provide a seemingly uncomplicated metaphor for the battlefield (uncomplicated because it is literally part of their training).[5] According to James Eli Adams, the British Army's failings in the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny produced in the public schools an emphasis on "physical hardiness, corporate identity, and submission to authority – qualities epitomized in success on the playing fields" (109), and symbolized in what J. A. Mangan calls "the secular trinity – Games, Corps and Empire" (203). Eccentric to the playing field ethos, the female body erupts through texts that invoke it in a hail of superfluity, as the sign of the limitations of the war metaphor and the inevitability of the female body's exclusion from it. In Greville's *Gentlewoman's Book of Sports*, Lady Milner writes of the frequently militarized cricket:

> [Cricket] ought to teach us many things beyond the technicalities of the game, that will stand the player in good stead when cricket is a thing of the past; perseverance, endurance, courage, and self-control are all brought into play at cricket, and many things are to be learnt there which, if learnt properly, will fit us well for the battle of life. And then what fun it all is! [...] [A]fter all it is only a game, and you have had a great deal of pleasure in a short space of time, and you will soon 'perk up' quite ready to start again, feeling perfectly certain that you will make your fifty – next time. (162-63; 164)

The familiar array of imperial characteristics is theoretically as useful to girls as to boys, to women as to men, as equipment for the "battle of life"; like the riflewoman Leale, Lady Milner for a moment sounds like a liberal feminist.[6] But for Lady Milner, the "battle of life" for women does not translate into the larger battle of men's lives; "pleasure" signifies only itself, not the serious, justifying work of Baden-Powell. It is, "after all [...] only a game," and it is only the devalued originary term, stripped of its metaphorical weight, to which women have access.

Warnings were sounded throughout the second half of the nineteenth century about giving too much weight to the militarized metaphor, to, in Trollope's words, "overdoing our Sports, and making it [sic] too grand in its outlines, and too important in its details" (5). The metaphor itself was not troubling to Trollope, but rather the scale of relative importance. For many of the sportswomen writing, it is the metaphor itself that causes problems, however, because it gives the lie to the usefulness of women's own participation. Lady Milner's cheery resignation to

---

[5] See Inness for a discussion of the failure of the war metaphor in American writings about women's college sports around the turn of the century.

[6] For a good discussion of Victorian liberal feminism's insistence on the continuity of women's training for private and public life, see Pedersen.

merely playing at the "battle of life" is one response. "Diane Chasseresse," who writes for both Greville and Slaughter, is more antagonistic to the metaphor itself. In the essay "Deer-Hunting" in *Ladies in the Field*, Chasseresse (the mother of the "little daughter") challenges the naturalized connection between recreation and war:

> I have often wondered how soldiers behave on a field of battle, where there is danger to life and limb, added to the noise, smoke, bustle and excitement. Do they ever hit a man at all except by accident? And is it likely that the time, ammunition and money annually wasted on firing at a mark will teach men not to lose their heads on a field of battle, with the enemy advancing towards them, when they cannot even keep their cool at a deer drive, where there is absolute silence and stillness, and the deer are often too frightened and bewildered to do more than stand still and be shot at? (189-90)

If the markswoman Leale asserted that the cool developed at shooting contests makes a better soldier, Chasseresse exposes the correspondence as a wishful imperial fantasy. Complicating her subversive stance is her position throughout the rest of the essay, though: nowhere in her account does Diane Chasseresse allude to the sports*woman*, her own (pseudonymous) authorship notwithstanding. The sportsman with the excitable nature is the opposite of Leale's well-trained soldier, but he still possesses the male body of the soldier. Chasseresse implicitly measures her own cool during a hunt against the *men* in the field, all nerves and anxiety (what the ladies are so often presumed to be off the field). In a stroke of weird machismo, Chasseresse makes herself visible (or invisible) on the field only in terms of men: she is a better sportsman than all combined. But if she makes us believe that her sex is irrelevant on the field, that a sportswoman can be as distinguished as a sportsman, and even distinguished as a sportsman, her reference to the field of battle, however mocking, makes us see her ultimate irrelevance to both fields.

Chasseresse advocates the pleasure of play: pleasure is winning the game and the thrill of the chase, not the metaphorical implications of war. This opposition of pleasure and war is fundamental to military training as well. In the preface to the Robert Baden-Powell collection *Sport in War*, Alfred E. T. Watson, the editor of the *Badminton Library*, where the articles first appeared, writes that after receiving Baden-Powell's essay on pig-sticking, the great soldier's submissions ceased: "Then came a pause, while this most wonderful of all-round men was occupied with sterner work" (*Sport in War* 8). Watson refers here to the siege and subsequent relief of Mafeking. Sport may be a training ground for military endeavours, according to Baden-Powell himself, but "sterner work" suspends frivolity and pleasure. In peacetime, he writes, "the work involved in the military operations was sufficiently sporting in itself to fill up a good measure of enjoyment" (*Sport in War* 17). That is,

scouting and the like are versions of sport, and vice versa, with the dividend of pleasure equal to the investment of serious energy. But in wartime, such pleasure-seeking is abandoned in favor of the sterner work of actual military operations. Thus, even if pig-sticking, for example, is "*par excellence* a soldier's sport," as "it tests, develops, and sustains his best service qualities, and stands without rival as a training-school for officers" (*Sport in War* 162-63), it is not to be mistaken for the soldier's (or officer's) work. Women have access only to the peacetime metaphor; thus, the military metaphor itself corroborates the uselessness of this training for the female body. For women, the peacetime metaphor is left hanging while the sterner work of war is performed and conducted.

In Baden-Powell's account, women participate in a sport like pig-sticking, which is very fast and potentially very violent, only by "witness[ing] the sport" (*Sport in War* 83). Its usefulness is pointedly not for them:

> [...] in pigsticking and polo, just as in hunting at home, the British officer has the benefit of an exceptionally practical school for the development of horsemanship and of handiness in the use of arms when mounted, and it is a form of training which appeals to every young officer so much that he learns for himself instead of having the knowledge drilled into him. Consequently it is a genuine, permanent education to him instead of a form of ephemeral instruction. (*Memories* 30-31)

But for Isabel Savory, not a soldier but an Englishwoman who writes a colourful account of her year-long hunting tour of India, pig-sticking becomes a testing ground of sorts for the compatibility of imperial manliness and the *female* body. Savory's *A Sportswoman in India*, published in 1900, fits comfortably into the tradition of late Victorian travel and sport writing; at the same time hers is an account that stands radically – and uncomfortably – outside of it. Savory's profound sadness at the dramatic loss of her horse, the noble horror she experiences at seeing an Indian servant mauled by a bear, and the bravado with which she recounts pelting Indians with stones (twice) are all well in keeping with the range of feeling and sentiment allowed to a sportsman in India. Indeed, Isabel Savory does not immediately disown a masculine identity. The book's title and frontispiece notwithstanding, we have read fifteen pages about a pig-sticking expedition before Savory identifies herself – disingenuously – as a woman: "If a woman's opinion is worth having, I should say that the two sports *cannot* be compared: I *love* fox-hunting for a thousand reasons [...] but 'the runs of a lifetime' are few and far between. Pig-sticking is *always* wildly exciting" (15). Savory speaks in the voice of Victorian female modesty (the qualifying phrase, the added emphasis) but subverts it in the final three words. Fox-hunting may be exciting for ladies at home in

England, but the Indian adventure flouts the very language reserved for English womanhood.

Savory also flouts the conventional metaphor of military training. Savory's later remark – "We hunt to please" (45) – acknowledges not the usefulness which the metaphor attempts but the pleasure it excludes. The exercise of the body has no end but itself, conditioning for neither maternity nor military service. Savory does not share the view of Mrs. Kate Martelli, who writes in "Tiger-Hunting in India" in *Ladies in the Field*:

> Tigers are shot in India [...] to save the lives of the natives and their cattle. If you don't kill the tiger he will kill you. But although the odds are on the shikari and against the tiger, whether you fire from the back of an elephant, from the top of a rock, or in the branch of a tree, there is always room, unfortunately, for misadventure, and consequently tiger-shooting will always be a useful school for endurance, judgment and self-reliance. (156)

The "you" addressed here is unlikely to be the lady reading Greville's book; Martelli displaces her own experience hunting tigers on to the imperial frame of the soldier who needs endurance, judgment, and self-reliance to maintain order in the Empire. Unlike Martelli, Savory suspends the military metaphor, and in so doing detaches the female body from the system of reference that denies it imperial significance.

Savory also defies the significance figuratively hers: she is neither the narrowly self-important memsahib nor the pamphleteering New Woman; nor is she the nurse or teacher proposed as a useful model for English women living and travelling in India. Rather, she attempts to assume through her writing an English identity not constituted as sexual identity. But what makes Savory so interesting is more than her gender transgression: after all, most Victorian sportswomen transgress gender expectations to some degree. It is, instead, the way her body appears and disappears throughout the course of her narrative, at times threatening, at other times confirming the terms of her self-definition. Such slipperiness is certainly an effective discursive strategy for Savory: she removes herself and inserts herself when it suits the needs of her narrative. But I stress the bodily nature of this strategy because her account fixes on or ignores the physical details of femaleness as a means of deploying this strategy. That is, it is not just an "I" who slips in and out for dramatic effect, but rather a physical, female presence who appears and disappears in moments of crisis.

Savory, the imperial hunter,[7] defends hunting specifically against the conventional limitations of the female body:

---

[7] MacKenzie discusses the hunter as the stock figure of British imperialism. He also notes that "Many hunters stressed the fact that the imperial hunt was no place for women, though some women did participate and some turned it into a powerful expression of female emancipation of sorts" (179).

> Are these the feelings, aroused in all thinking minds by the nobility of creation, which we have often heard censured and mis-called unwomanly and hard? The staid matron and the Society butterfly may, through a touch of jealousy, or by reason of their narrow prejudices, condemn women whom happy occasion has enabled to call into play those latent forces and capabilities with which they have been endowed; but the trophies which decorate the walls of their sanctum sanctorum call forth admiration and reverence, rather than constitute the mute witnesses of outraged womanhood. (28-29)

Savory flatly rejects the social positioning of womanliness, and she also challenges the singular definition of useful femininity, and of the useful female body. The "latent forces and capabilities" that conventionally indicate the potential of the maternal body now are directed outward, toward earning and securing a place in the hunt. "Admiration and reverence" do not derive from feminine beauty and grace, but instead from the execution of feats of strength. But the same body that performs these feats disappears in this passage: objects – trophies – stand in for the hunting female body. These trophies do not testify to an abuse of womanhood, but rather to a transcendence of it.

Savory also negotiates the limitations on the female body via the apparatus of hunting, that is, saddles and habits. Shortly after she extols the wild virtues of pig-sticking, Savory issues a stern reminder that "there is no reason why a woman on a side-saddle should not quite easily carry a spear" (16); in fact, for safety's sake, the side-saddled rider is in an ideal position to do so. Later, Savory saves herself from near-disaster, and her clothing and saddle have much to do with her success: "The shock of what had happened stunned me beyond expression [...] Sphai [her horse] lay, literally smashed to pieces, down below; and but for the facts that I had just happened to pull out my skirt, and, being on a man's saddle, slipped off at once, the rocky gorge would have held us both side by side" (142). In both instances, Savory controls the apparatus of hunting: while luck is involved in her narrow escape, Savory's actions – not the gear – save her. Savory sounds like advocates on either side of the saddle debate, with both camps emphasizing the freedom of the body.[8]

---

[8] Advocates of the side-saddle stressed that skill and grace would make up for whatever constraint the side-saddle placed on the female body; in the name of modesty, such constraint was necessary. See O'Donoghue, especially the series of letters debating the issue which she reprints from the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*. 235ff; Karr, Beach, and Hayes. Advocates of the cross-saddle (man's saddle) stressed freedom of movement without the constraints of modesty. One of O'Donoghue's correspondents, "Hersilie," has a nearly religious experience of the cross-saddle: "It is a new existence on horseback, and nothing indelicate about it" (246). Even for a side-saddle advocate like O'Donoghue, the cross-saddle is seen as acceptable in "the wilds of a country whose inhabitants

As in the saddle debate, at stake for Savory are the form and performance of the female body.

Savory is confined, however, by the limitations of her body as a traveller. This would not seem to be the case when, near the close of her narrative, Savory endorses a ringing universalism: "Travel dismisses the notion that we are each of us the biggest dog in the kennel" (404). Susan Morgan claims that in much travel writing by women at the end of the nineteenth century there appears "an argument for the universality of the human condition and the relativity of its cultural manifestations" (219). But for Savory, universality is a cloak she puts on in those moments when her particular identity cannot bear the weight of scrutiny. Savory frequently articulates exactly what makes the English and herself big dogs in the world kennel: her accounts of numerous sporting contests and adventures do not stray far from the inept native servants and appallingly primitive conditions that in other sporting and travel memoirs suggest an imperial opposite to her statement, that travelling in India *confirms* the notion that each Briton is the biggest of dogs in the world-kennel. But in such statements, which Savory presents as convictions of British nobility, generosity, sportsmanship, and manliness, she reveals herself to be at the discomfiting intersection of "English" and "woman," as she tries to fit herself into imperial definitions of Englishness and manliness. It is not that Savory ultimately pulls back from staking out a claim to universal authority because being a woman means that she cannot fully participate in the rhetoric of empire. Rather, her reluctance arises from her unwillingness to be a fully participating Englishwoman in India, to be limited to particular kinds of conquest by the fact of her female body. Her travels as a hunter enable Savory to earn her imperial status, but only if she first learns to recognize the English woman as as much an "other" to herself as is the male Indian servant or the wild boar she hunts. That it is India, where both English customs and the English traveler are "at home," means that Savory must define herself against English rites of feminine passage at the same time that she must maintain the masculine identity that gives her the right to play the imperial game. She concludes her narrative by saying that in the "Fool's Paradise" of traveling, "the last thing I can lose is myself" (408). But it seems to me that Isabel Savory quickly wants to lose the "self" constituted by the conflicting properties of womanliness and Englishness. In a narrative that alternately claims human universality and British superiority, the way in which the author slips in and out of her female body at moments of articulation of her identity as a sportswoman, a traveler, and a Briton, exposes the rhetorical effects of and on the female body and Englishness.

Thus, while the sportswoman may embrace an imperial identity, Isabel Savory the traveller distances herself where she can from her identity as an Englishwoman. Savory deviates in this way from what Susan Morgan offers as a general rule about

are from childhood accustomed to it, and where all ride alike, but not in civilised England" (277). For proponents of such wild riding, see Hersilie's letters, as cited above; Greville, "Riding in India and Ireland." *Ladies*; Herbert, Slaughter, Lowe and, of course, Savory.

travel writing by women in the years between 1870 and 1900: "The authors did not present themselves, and may not even have thought of themselves, as particularly adventuresome or somehow different from other women. They declared their books to have specific, practical aims which were usually political and economic" (207). Savory, in replacing the identity of traveller with sportswoman, rejects such practicality, such usefulness.[9] Her definition of a sportswoman stands considerably outside of such modest utility – no pleasant companion or political actor here – and is not expressly female-identified: "[...] any definition [of sportswoman] should include an appreciation of the free camp life – such as ours. It might run thus: 'a fair shot, considering others, and never doing an unsportsmanlike action, preferring quality to quantity in a bag, a keen observer of all animals, and a real lover of nature'" (140).

As Savory rejects conventional feminine display in her remarks about the other ladies in the field (she loathes the "good lady [who] boasted of a lineless peach-bloom complexion, which hurried her home at the least sign of rain" [47]), she embraces more traditionally masculine displays of conquest and power. Savory makes an interpretive leap from slain and confined animals to the vigorously and violently enthralled native Indian subjects more than once. In addition to the two pebble-throwing incidents which she gleefully recounts, there are many indications throughout the text of Savory's spectacular imperialism. In "a word [...] about natives," an Indian and a pony are equally "eaten up with laziness" (345); a monkey named Bobby "does not compare ill with the Australian aborigines" (97); and finally, "Our kit was all on the backs of coolies, and we soon passed the long, perspiring string of them, resting for a moment by the edge of the path, groaning over their loads, as they always do" (115). Upon viewing a few other servants, she adds, "We were amused at the big umbrellas each man walked underneath to shield himself from the sun" (115). Like the English at home who are asked implicitly and indeed trained to make the connection between the caged animals and imperial subjects (Ritvo 243ff), Savory understands and employs a rhetoric which adamantly strips the Indians of their humanity. Thus, when the Indians demonstrate that they are not at all like the beasts of burden who do the bidding of the English party, when they physically mark themselves as different and human with groans and umbrellas, Savory's only recourse is to mock, to misunderstand intentionally their actions as a

---

9 Like Savory, Agnes Herbert, the author of several travel and sport memoirs, challenges this notion of utility in her *Two Dianas in Somaliland*, from 1908, specifically regarding the popular notion that English women in the fields of the Empire were naturally adept as domestic aides: "At our own camp we found the place invaded by every invalid of the Mullah settlement waiting in serried rows for us to cure them. Why every English person, or European rather, is supposed to possess this marvellous inborn skill in medicine I cannot tell. Some of the complaints presented I had never heard of, much less seen, and even our learned tome of a medical work failed to identify many. It was very pathetic, as we were so helpless. The poor things regarded the book as some saviour come to succour them" (107-08).

failed attempt to claim a position which, for the English in India, the Indians do not and cannot achieve.

I admit that Isabel Savory does not seem particularly uncomfortable with her English position in India. Savory's account of her adventures and expeditions follows closely the "picaresque" model Harriet Ritvo elaborates for late-century narratives which track the development of Britishness and manliness simultaneously. That Savory is a woman does not mean that she is not manly, and according to what she lets us know of herself she possesses Ritvo's manly trio of "coolness, restraint, and humor" in abundance (Ritvo 258). As long as these attributes are foremost in Savory's experience, Savory is happy with herself, and her writing about India reflects a confidence and conviction of her and England's place in India.

During Savory's account of her travels – not of sport – she is most uncomfortable when she has to perform as a woman, when the only experience open to her is not athletic but descriptive. Sara Suleri addresses this descriptive function as a specifically feminine one: within the lines of the "feminine picturesque," the English woman was able "to produce both visual and verbal representations of India that could alleviate the more shattering aspects of its difference, romanticizing its difficulty into the greater tolerability of its mystery" (75). But Savory, loath to class herself with other English women, is uncomfortable with the responsibilities of the picturesque. She assumes the narrative stance of the hunter to avoid precisely this kind of functionality. Only infrequently does Savory comply with the rationale attributed to women's travel writing by a number of critics, in which English women have a particularly keen eye for the situation of Indian women, discovering a sisterhood among women as they describe the land.[10] Early in *A Sportswoman in India*, Savory describes her meeting with a Maharanee, a "Purdah woman": "a little gipsy, childlike individual of refined appearance, weighed down by gold-embroidered garments, chains, necklets, bracelets, rings, necklaces, forehead star, anklets, and nose-ring" (13). Savory uses the occasion to declaim the "narrow, intolerant religion [...] at the root of this crying evil, and the only weapon to be employed against it is knowledge" (14), and seems to demonstrate Susan Morgan's feminine universalism (219). But it must be remembered that, at this point in the narrative, Savory has not yet identified herself as a woman: that does not happen until the next page, in her pig-sticking remarks. This is not to say that Savory speaks as a man here (indeed, her access to the Maharanee suggests the author's sex) or that her remarks about this highly feminized female form can be considered irrelevant.

[10] See David, Foster, Frawley, Lawrence, and Morgan. They draw on more canonical travel writers, like Isabella Bird and Lucie Duff Gordon, whose far-reaching imperial journeys were marked by activities such as nursing and teaching, and who attended to the status of the women they encountered. But it is worth considering that these domestic motivations for travel may well account for why these are the travel writings that have become canonical.

Rather, this moment of earnest political commentary is superseded by Savory's clamouring for the wildly exciting ride of the hunt, and serves ironically to set up sporting inutility, not political usefulness, as the rationale for the narrative.

As long as the physical energy of the hunt trumps the intellectual focus of travel as the concern of the narrative, Savory is able to maintain her equilibrium as an observer of the Indian scene: on the hunt, she is every bit Mary Louise Pratt's "monarch-of-all-I-survey" (201ff). But in her meeting with the Ranee of Chamba, Savory is overwhelmed by sight-seeing anxiety, because the encounter takes place away from the sanctuary of the hunt, and indicates the threat the visibility of the female body poses to her own sense of control over her own body, her sexual identity, and her national identity when the hunt is not available as a narrative option. With only a "very limited" Hindustani vocabulary at her disposal (including "the names of a bear, leopard, tiger, and a few more animals" [102]), communication between the English woman and the Indian woman comes to a quick impasse. After a page-long description of the Ranee that closely resembles the one above of the first Maharanee, Savory writes, "Anything more Oriental, more childish, than such a display upon a single mortal I have never seen. She was a sight to behold; and I repeated fervently again and again: 'Very good – very good; very nice – very nice.' She was evidently delighted to show off everything, and lifted her arms and put back her shawl to display to advantage her bracelets and earrings" (103-04). It is the Ranee's pose of controlling and displaying her own female, feminine body that so unhinges Savory, who tries so hard to control and not to display her own, and that renders her inarticulate. On the Ranee's presentation of a gift, Savory's relief is evident, because the gift distracts from the female bodies circulating in a perilously open system of signification by restoring the hunt to Savory: "[...] I was able to cover quite five minutes in expressing my thanks and in looking at it. It was her own photograph, resplendent in all her jewels; it was folded in two handkerchiefs, worked in Chamba, in the most flaring colours, representing a boar-hunt, with men on horseback, spears, and all complete; inside was a third handkerchief of pink silk" (104). As before, her words to the Indian woman are emptied of significance through repetition. But this is the first and only time that Suleri's "feminine picturesque" apprehends the masculine images Savory produces of the hunt: the Ranee's images exclude her, unless the pink silk handkerchief is a figurative rendering of Savory. In the face of her sight-seeing anxiety, Savory recurs to a feminine means of imperial activity and engages the language of the picturesque as an attempt to stabilize this disruptive moment, to regain control of an uncomfortable situation opened to her by the possibilities of travel, but only by restoring it to the comfortable vocabulary of the hunt.

If hunting lends an imperial coherence to Savory's experience in India, sight-seeing dismantles it. India is difficult for Savory to understand not in the field but in "a street crammed with natives, all walking, all talking"; at moments like these, when Savory is not in control with her rifle, she is "struck dumb with the infinitely

picturesque scene" (55). Here we see Savory assume the feminine italics as an effort to conceal what is essentially speechlessness. For Savory, the detail of the scene is damaging, not empowering, because the detail of the scene depends wholly on the fact, and makes visible the fact, that she is an Englishwoman:

> One realises at once what it is to be the only Englishwoman among thousands of natives. Every eye is on you – not rude or staring, but you feel eyes everywhere; and you begin to realise that were there no cantonments outside, you would probably have one of the many knives in your back, – which reflection puts you on your mettle. The secret of the British power in the East is that they have no fear. (56)

Savory exists apart from the "they" of the last sentence: she is watched as different by the Indians, and marked as different from the British men in power. Perceiving herself as an Englishwoman in India, she recurs to the abstraction of masculine British power, and loses herself in the always threatening battle between British munitions and Indian knives. As with the markswoman Winifred Louisa Leale, the fact of the female body demands the sportswoman's removal of herself from the manly, military "they" in power.

Works Cited

Adams, James Eli. *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.

Baden-Powell, Agnes, and Robert Baden-Powell. *How Girls Can Help Their Country.* Adapted by Juliette Low. Savannah, Georgia: Press of M.S. and D.A. Byck, Company, 1917.

Baden-Powell, Robert. *Memories of India: Recollections of Soldiering, and Sport.* Philadelphia: David McKay, Publisher, c. 1915.

---. *Sport in War.* New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1900.

Beach, Belle. *Riding and Driving for Women.* New York: Charles Scribner's, 1912.

David, Deirdre. *Rule Britannia: Women, Empire, and Victorian Writin*g. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.

Foster, Shirley. *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings.* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.

Frawley, Maria H. *A Wider Range: Travel Writing by Women in Victorian England.* Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1994.

Greville, Lady (Violet). Ed. *The Gentlewoman's Book of Sports.* 2 vols. The Victoria Library for Gentlewomen. London: Henry and Company, 1892.

---. *Ladies in the Field: Sketches of Sport.* New York: D.Appleton and Company, 1894.

Guttmann, Allen. *Women's Sports: A History.* New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

Haley, Bruce. *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.

Hargreaves, Jennifer. *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports.* London: Routledge, 1994.

Hayes, Alice M. *The Horsewoman: A Practical Guide to Side-Saddle Riding.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.

Herbert, Agnes. *Two Dianas in Somaliland: The Record of a Shooting Trip, with Twenty-Five Illustrations Reproduced from Photographs.* London: John Lane, 1908.

Inness, Sherrie A. "'It Is Pluck, But – Is it Sense?': Athletic Student Culture in Progressive-era Girls' College Fiction." *The Girl's Own: Cultural Histories of the Anglo-American Girl, 1830-1915.* Eds. Claudia Nelson and Lynne Vallone. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1994. 216-42.

Karr, Elizabeth (Mrs.). *The American Horsewoman.* Boston: Houghton, 1890.

Lawrence, Karen R. *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition.* Reading Women Writing. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.

Lowe, Helen. *Unprotected Females in Norway; or, the Pleasantest Way of Travelling There, Passing Through Denmark and Sweden.* London: Routledge, 1857.

Lowerson, John. *Sport and the English Middle Classes: 1870-1914.* International Studies in the History of Sport. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993.

MacKenzie, John M. "The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times." *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940.* Eds. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin. New York: St Martins P, 1987.

Mangan, J. A. *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981.

Marks, Patricia. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press.* Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1990.

McCrone, Kathleen E. *Sports and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914.* London: Routledge, 1988.

Morgan, Susan. "Victorian Women, Wisdom, and Southeast Asia." *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power.* Ed. Thais E. Morgan. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990. 207-24.

Nelson, Claudia. *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857-1917.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991.

O'Donoghue, Nannie Power. *Ladies on Horseback. Learning, Park-Riding, and Hunting, with Hints upon Costume, and Numerous Anecdotes.* London: W.H. Allen and Company, 1881.

Pedersen, Joyce Senders. "Life's Lessons: Liberal Feminist Ideals of Family, School, and Community in Victorian England." *The Girl's Own: Cultural Histories of the Anglo-American Girl, 1830-1915*. Eds. Claudia Nelson and Lynne Vallone: 194-215.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Ritvo, Harriet. *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987.

Savory, Isabel. *A Sportswoman in India: Personal Adventures and Experiences of Travel in Known and Unknown India*. London: Hutchinson and Co., 1900.

Slaughter, Frances Elizabeth. Ed. *The Sportswoman's Library*. 2 vols. Westminster: A. Constable and Company, 1898.

Suleri, Sara. *The Rhetoric of English India*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.

Trollope, Anthony. *British Sports and Pastimes*. London: Virtue, 1868.

Vrettos, Athena. *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995.