Modern Subjects/Colonial Texts

Holden, Philip

Published by ELT Press


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/25264

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=894135
IN THE PRECEDING chapters, we have seen how gender, empire, and writing are linked in Clifford’s work as technologies of control, the management of natural forces. We have also seen how, as a late-Victorian writer, Clifford expresses uneasiness regarding these forces which for earlier writers such as Kingsley and Carlyle are benign. There is, first, a haunting suspicion that the energy which the technologies manage may be an atavistic one, a reversion to primordial, almost Darwinian, drives. This energy ultimately finds its expression in commercial rapacity: rather than promising a new governmental order, the introduction of free trade may provide a field for primordial reversion to a universe red in tooth and claw. Second, Clifford is uneasy about the target of such masculine energy, whether it can be harnessed into good governance and heterosexual monogamy. Written with a growing awareness of the specification of the homosexual, Clifford’s writings are often haunted by the spectre of homoeroticism, with the suggestion that energy may tend in other, subversive directions, that it may need not so much channelling, but damming up.

This chapter examines more closely Clifford’s construction of masculinity in his texts, and its close imbrication with typologies of race. Central to the author’s and to most nineteenth-century constructions of manliness as regulation was the notion of the gentleman, a concept that was substantially refurnished in the Victorian era. From being a concept denoting rank in the late eighteenth-century, the idea of the gentleman increasingly, due to middle-class discourses of self-improvement, became “a moral and not just a social category.”¹ This conception of the gentleman incorporated many of the other features of Victorian domesticity: the separation between work and leisure time, for instance, and the gendering of domestic space. At the same time, it provided a means by which the middle-classes could demand an enlarged franchise through separating themselves from a decadent aristocracy which no longer lived up to the gentlemanly ideal: “The moral dimension in the gentlemanly ideal made it accessible to reinterpretation and modernisation, while its relative independence from the aristocratic code on the one hand, and the grosser associations of ‘trade’ on the other, meant that in the rapidly changing and increasingly class-conscious society of the nineteenth century it provided a social standing-ground which could be occupied with dignity.”² This process accelerated in the latter half of the
nineteenth century, when the institutionalisation of public school education led to it being “almost universally accepted that a traditional liberal education at a reputable public school should qualify a man as a gentleman, whatever his father’s origins or occupation.”

Despite its use within bourgeois modernity, however, the figure of the gentleman is clearly atavistic. The gentleman operates according to a refurbished chivalric code: he is repeatedly compared to a medieval knight. This Janus-faced aspect of the gentleman hints at his connection to the nineteenth-century creation of the British nation-state, part of the process of “the crystallization of new units, suitable for the conditions now prevailing . . . using as their raw material the cultural, historical and other inheritances from the pre-nationalist world.”

The gentleman emerges from an imagined English past: he is part of a feudal, pre-capitalist order of life, his values dissociated from those of mere profit and accumulation of capital. The new gentlemen of the nineteenth century, however, would clearly be capitalists, or if not, the sons of capitalists. What distinguished Victorian society from its past—and from other, by its own definitions, less “advanced” societies—was the industrialisation which capitalism had enabled. The gentleman is thus an ambivalent figure, a management of a central contradiction: his code of honour may be both as “civilised” but also “primitive,” as a necessary masculine survival in a technologized, unnatural present.

Such ambivalence can be illustrated by Victorian constructions of one gentlemanly activity, hunting. John MacKenzie notices an interesting duality to the popular discourse of hunting in late nineteenth-century England. On the one hand, it might be associated with Darwinism and notions of “fitness,” while on the other hand it was an elaborate, elitist code, reliant upon notions of fairness and conduct and, ultimately, “civilisation.” This “confusion between hunting as the pioneering archetype of freedom and the role of the Hunt as an elite ritual with an elaborate code,” MacKenzie observes, “was never fully resolved.”

Imperial governance clearly incorporated notions of gentlemanly conduct. P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins have noted that the qualities necessary for imperial exploration and, later, governance, are also those associated with the gentleman:

The imperial mission was the export version of the gentlemanly order. In some respects, indeed, the gentlemanly code appeared in bolder format abroad to counter the lure of an alien environment. . . . When confronted with the challenge of new frontiers, gentlemen assumed proportions that were larger than life and at times became heroic figures. The empire was a superb arena for gentlemanly endeavour, the ultimate testing ground for the idea of responsible progress, for the battle against evil, for the performance of duty, and for the achievement of honour.

The transformation of gentlemanliness from a social to a moral category is paralleled in the recruitment of British men to serve in the colonies. The East India Company enlisted many younger sons of the aristocracy as officers, and this
practice persisted in the early days of formal Colonial and India Office control. Weld and Clifford were both aristocrats. Gradually, however, competitive examinations opened up the Colonial Service to men from public school and university background, the new, middle-class gentlemen produced by Victorian Britain.

The Malayan Civil Service, and the various state and colonial services which preceded it, certainly saw themselves as a gentlemanly elite. After recruitment became formally based upon examinations in 1882, the service became more homogenous, comprised largely of “the Public School-Oxbridge class.” There were growing informal links between Oxford and Cambridge and the public schools and the Colonial Service in the early twentieth century, and the Colonial Office was often more interested in questions of “character”—shown by success in sports, or prefectural duties—rather than academic performance. The Malayan Civil Service considered itself an elite group, and “tended to maintain distinctions based upon rank or on different social origins in Britain, and to hold itself aloof from the ‘unofficials,’ the rest of the European community in Malaya.” Members of the European community who were not middle-class, and who could not at least aspire to gentlemanly values, were the cause of considerable concern to the FMS and Straits Settlements Governments.

The reason why the qualities of the gentleman were stressed for service in the Malay States was not merely because gentlemanly qualities matched those of an administrator. Rather, there was also felt to be a congruence between Malay and British racial characteristics. While Malay men were often condemned as barbaric, given to piracy and petty warmongering, they were also frequently eulogised as nature’s gentlemen. Clifford himself felt that this understanding was the key to successful colonial governance:

To begin to understand anything about the Malay, you must realise, from the first, that he is intensely self-respecting. He possesses, in a high degree, one of the most characteristic qualities of the English gentleman,—he is absolutely and supremely sure of himself ... Thus one may make an intimate friend of the Malay, may share the same hut with him for long periods of time ... without their being any risk of familiarity breeding contempt, or of the Malay taking advantage of his position to dig you in the ribs, or call you by your Christian name.

Here Malayness is characterised by gentlemanly restraint and the submission to a strictly observed code of etiquette. British imperialism is successful in Malaya, in Clifford’s terms, because of the similarity between the two races and the insight this gives the gentlemanly Englishman into the forces which drive Malay society.

Clearly, however, the possibilities of identification of traditional Malay rule with gentlemanly governance are limited: if they were not, there would be no rationale for British intervention. The mapping of English onto Malay gentleman is only a partial one and, in its execution, tends to reveal the ambivalence of
the English gentlemanly order. To understand this mapping it is also crucial to comprehend another element within Clifford’s discourse of self and colonial government, that of race.

The nineteenth century, it is generally agreed, saw a hardening of the notion of race, and the elaboration of racial typologies and hierarchies. In the early nineteenth century popular wisdom still maintained an investment in the Enlightenment notion of the brotherhood and fundamental equality of man, but this gave way by mid-century to a growing stress upon the inequality of different races. This process continued despite Darwin’s discoveries, and the resultant victory of theories of monogenesis over those of polygenesis. “Biological determinism”15 which favoured “winners and survivors over losers and victims” replaced earlier theories of human polygenesis, but left racial hierarchies intact, often even reinforced in the late nineteenth century. Imperialism might thus be justified by the fact that Europeans were the victors of a Darwinian process of natural selection: their project might now be, with the fruits of science, to assist in the regeneration of other racial types.

British writing on Malaya follows this pattern in its negotiation with the question of race. Stamford Raffles and other early administrators, Hendrik Maier notes, were influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment, believing with Hulme that “the human mind [could] acquire a knowledge of the world which corresponds completely to that world itself”16 by the rejection of irrational elements. Societies could be graded upon how far they had advanced,17 but each society had the potential for advancement towards the truth. For Raffles, Malay society was more advanced than other Europeans had previously thought, but it still had some way to go on the evolutionary ladder:

By some, who have viewed only the darker side, they have been considered, with references to their piracies and vices alone, a people devoid of all regular government and principle, and abandoned to the influence of lawless and ungovernable passions. By others, however, who have taken a deeper view, and have become more intimately acquainted with their character, a different estimate has been formed. They admit the want of efficient government, but consider the people themselves to be possessed of high qualities, and such as might, under more favourable circumstances, be usefully and beneficially directed. They find the personal independence of character they display, their high sense of honour and impatience of insult, and in their habits of reasoning and reflection, the rudiments of improvement and the basis of a better order of society, while in the obscurity of their early history, the wide diffusion of their language and the traces of their former greatness, they discover an infinite source of speculation and interest.18

Through the application of the universals of reason and reflection, the founder of the colony of Singapore felt, Malay society would progress. Such a view was not necessarily benevolent—it might justify Malay societies being swept aside in the interests of free trade, and would discourage any real interest in a Malay culture
which was clearly an imperfect prototype of an ideal to which European culture more closely approximated.

By the final quarter of the nineteenth century, Maier suggests, this view had changed in alliance with changing perceptions of ethnicity and cultural communities. The word “nation” which Raffles uses to describe the Malay community was replaced with “race”: immutable characteristics were ascribed. Malay culture was the subject of great interest, but it was seen as fundamentally different from European culture: it was an object to be studied by the disciplines of anthropology, ethnography and philology, not a means of knowing in its own right. British discourses of reform and improvement now plotted out a uniquely Malay path for development. Malays were encouraged to reform in such a manner that “their Malayness had to be accentuated, reinforced”. They were imagined as yeomen, kept in a predominantly rural environment, while plantation labour, industrial work and commerce became the provinces of the Indians and the Chinese.

Maier’s schema is perhaps too neat: one way of seeing did not necessarily replace the first. At times the two are superimposed, creating contradictions. It is clear, however, that for Clifford maintenance of the gentlemanly order requires an elaborate typology of race. Chinese men, representing the grossness of trade and the commercial imperatives of imperialism, are disavowed. Malay men, in contrast, are subject to technologies of the self which mirror those imposed upon gentlemen: the drama of imperialism as government of both self and colony is thus acted out upon the racialised body of the Malay man.

**The Chinese Trader**

In 1902, when Clifford was convalescing in England, the *Straits Chinese Magazine* carried a review of his short story collection *In a Corner of Asia.*20 “The interest of the book is greatly marred,” the reviewer noted, “by his description of the Chinese, which at once betrays his narrow-mindedness and total ignorance of the life of the Chinese as a whole.”21 The review further noted that “Mr. Clifford is an official in one of the small Native States and the Chinese with whom he comes in contact are mostly of the coolie class. It is evident, from what he said with regard to the Chinese, that the author knows little or nothing about this people, beyond his little Malay village. No man who has the slightest knowledge of the Chinese would agree with his view that the Chinese in the Straits are the lowest in the human stock. In this he certainly reveals his utter ignorance of ethnology, and his sad lack of scientific knowledge.”22 Such writing, the reviewer noted in conclusion, was likely to “engender bitter prejudice” against Chinese men and women in the Straits Settlements.

We can see in the review an attempt to create a respectable, compradore-class Chinese identity in opposition to the “coolie class,” but the criticism is
nonetheless telling. Clifford's stories abject and Other Chinese men in a more overtly racist manner than that in which they manage Malay ethnicity. The invisibility of Chinese men and women in Clifford's stories is in itself remarkable. The Chinese population of Pahang in the late 1880s and 1890s was small, but played a key part in the state's economy. When Clifford made his expedition to Pahang in 1887, he encountered Chinese miners. The state capital, Pekan, was divided into two areas, Pekan Lama and Pekan Baru: the latter was also known as Kampong China because of its large Chinese population.

Chinese invisibility in Clifford's stories is, of course, ideological. He was one of a group of officers whom Victor Purcell categorised as "pro-Malays," who believed "that the Malays . . . were the people to whom the country belonged and that the others . . . were aliens and were in the country only on sufferance." "I have said that these States are, and must for ever remain essentially and primarily Malay States," he remarked in his first address to the Federal Council of the Federated Malay States upon his return to Malaya in 1927, adding that "the welfare and well-being of the indigenous inhabitants must always be the first care of the Federal and the State Governments." Chinese men and women are thus outside the circle of government occupied by Malay and English men: their repeated expulsion from this circle is, nonetheless, essential to Clifford's discourse of colonial governmentality and a marked feature of his fictional texts.

Chinese men and women have a key function for Clifford in justifying the imposition of the residential system, of a government in which each subject has nominal equality before the law. Many of Clifford's short stories that do feature Chinese characters recount an incident in which they are threatened by Malay prejudice and are released from the threat by British justice. "The Wages of Sin" is typical in this respect. It is based upon a real court case which Clifford reviewed in 1898. Clifford gives a general, and pessimistic account of Chinese-Malay relations, followed by an illustration from a village in Pahang, Bukit S'Gumpal. A Malay woman, Lunet, is the concubine of the Chinese shopkeeper, Ah Si. She is killed one day, and a passing Chinese man, Lim Chong, is accused by the whole population of murdering her. The narrator, whom we are encouraged to identify with Clifford himself, has some doubts about the case, and a Malay detective sent to the village to investigate further is confronted by a wall of silence. After the whole village is summoned to court, it is discovered that the crime has been committed by Bakar, a Malay villager. The village penghulu, Panglima Raja Akob, approves of the deed, and so he has persuaded all the Malay community to agree to a concocted story. Bakar is sentenced to death, and dies pleading for mercy, which the narrator finds both unmanly and un-Malay. Turning to the two Chinese men, the narrator expresses amazement that Ah Si has not helped out his friend by testifying that the charges laid against him were false.

British governmentality in "The Wages of Sin" is imagined in opposition to both Malay racism and Chinese commercial rapacity and carelessness for life.
The narrator exhibits no real sympathy for or understanding of the situation of Chinese immigrants to Malaya, and in fact seems to agree with Malay judgements: the immigrants, he notes, have “no scruples, no heart, no mercy, no morality, commercial or private.” The power of the Chinese man to attract Malay women, he observes, lies in snaring them in debt or making them “love and long for opium.” Liaisons between Chinese men and Malay women, in the narrator’s eyes, are naturally condemned by the Malay community, who are as incensed as would be “Europeans who saw their sisters mated with negroes.”

Addiction and natural emotions, however, must submit to the governing legislative rationality. Governmentality is acted out upon the bodies of Chinese and Malay men, who must be subjected to the discipline of the law.

Chinese equality before the law is thus for Clifford a fundamental principle of the new residential governmental order, but it represents a management of deeper contradictions. Chinese men often represent commercial rapacity objected from the British colonial order. It is the Chinese man who offers the opium, who offers the temptations of addiction, of surrender to the body and to the appetite. It was the British, however, who sold the opium importation monopolies to Chinese merchants. A convincing case has been made that the status of the Straits Settlements as free ports was only maintained in the nineteenth century through the fact that the government derived the money necessary for expenditure from opium “farms.” Chinese men are the site in Clifford’s work to which commercial rapacity is attached, the means by which the desire for profit is separated from an imperial mission based upon racial regeneration and disinterested governance.

Such displacement is most clearly shown in the re-narration of the founding myth of the establishment of the full residential system in Pahang. Frank Swettenham, Clifford and others would retrospectively present justify the enforcement of a full residential system upon Ahmad in 1888 through the story of Goh Hui, a Chinese man who claimed the status of a British subject. A typical re-narration is the intentionally “thin” fictionalisation which Clifford presents in “At the Court of Pelesu,” in which he transforms himself into Jack Norris and names the Chinese man Ah Ku. Norris is visited one night by Ah Ku, who tells the British agent that the King desires his wife, but he refuses to hand her over despite various stratagems. Since he and his wife are born in Hong Kong, he claims they are British subjects and seeks protection. Norris advises flight to Singapore but the Chinese man refuses, because he will be unable to wrap up his business before the onset of the monsoon.

While attempting mediation through visiting the King’s balai, Norris hears a woman’s cry. Making his excuses and leaving, he discovers that Che’ Ah Ku has been set upon by assailants and left for dead. Norris nurses him back to health and learns that he has been set on by the King’s Youths. He wants to keep him alive during the monsoon so that he can be transported to Singapore to tes-
tify before the colonial authorities and thus provide a pretext for intervention. While waiting, Jack exhibits bravado, going to the King’s *balai* and openly speaking of the crime. When the first boat after the monsoon arrives, Norris begins to plan to get Ah Ku down to it. He has an audience with the King and explains his position: his small group of followers prepares for a fight the next day which will result in their certain deaths. Overnight, however, Che’ Ah Ku dies, saving Norris and his companions, but still providing the British with an adequate pretext to install a resident, Norris having previously summoned a gunboat.

In the absence of other accounts, it is difficult to contradict Clifford’s fictional re-narration of the incident, which, with a few dramatic embellishments, is very much that accepted by colonial officials and pre-independence historians. It is possible, however, to read the discursive contours of the story. The initial difficulty is brought by Malay rapacity: Ahmad’s unrestrained sexuality, his lack of self-governance, is paralleled to the lawlessness of the state. The situation is exacerbated by Goh Hui’s obsession with money—his refusal to give up his business, even when his wife is at risk. Such a situation can only be solved, the narrator suggests, by the imposition of a new system of government, one which will encourage the government of the self. It may be regrettable that this system must be imposed by force, or the threat of force, but such force is ultimately necessary. “Our experience in Asia,” he wrote in “Bush-whacking,” “has taught us that it is impossible to avoid making a little war of our own before we can hope to teach an unimaginative people the full blessings of peace.”

British intentions in establishing rule in Pahang were, however, not as idealistic or disinterested as Clifford narrated them to be. The primary motivation for the formalisation of Clifford’s position at Ahmad’s court was the protection of British commercial interests: Goh was a figure chosen to mask a wider instrumentality. Clifford’s focus upon Chinese men as influenced by commercial rapacity can thus be seen as a disavowal of the fact that the flag followed trade. The disavowal goes further: for Clifford, there is always the suspicion that trade is motivated by primordial, even Darwinian instincts. What is governed by technologies of the self may not be a primal male energy, but something much more frightening. In “His Little Bill” a Chinese man obsessively pursues his former employer for unpaid wages: continually frustrated by the man’s refusal to hand over the money, he eventually kills him. Clifford describes the murder luridly: “Presently Ah Sun’s feeble struggles grew fainter, and the ceased, and now the animal part of Lim Teng Wah broke through what there was of humanity in his composition. He let his *páran* fall from his grip, and began literally to bathe in the blood of the murdered man. With cries of horrible satisfaction, he rubbed the blood, which still ran warm from the gaping wounds that the *páran* had made, over his face and chest; he scooped up a double handful in his reddened palms and drank of it.”
Such nightmares of atavistic reversion are common in Clifford’s texts—in a sense, they parallel similar fears in other late-Victorian and Edwardian texts. Marion Shaw notes a horror of a “perverse Darwinist sublime” which “lies beyond the rational and civilized”36 in novels such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Island of Dr Moreau*. Yet for Clifford, these horrors are connected to another: the commercial rapacity that may lie beneath the benevolence of imperialism, the demand for the “little bill” which forms the title of the story. Chinese men serve as a constantly appearing sign of the management of this ambivalence: they appear often at the margins of the text, labourers “like strings of ants”37 observed from a bicycle, servants whispering in corners. Rarely focused on, they hint at the limits of the colonial text, the areas that are threadbare, where government of the self cannot quite be mapped onto government of the colony.

**The Malay Dandy**

If the Chinese man represents the abjection of sullying notions of trade from the gentlemanly order, Malay men are more central to the operation of colonial governmentality for Clifford, providing the bodies upon which discipline is seen to be enacted. One peculiarly unstable figure which repeatedly appears in his work is that of the Malay dandy. Alternately representing hypermasculinity and effeminacy, capitalism and feudalism, degeneration and regeneration, Clifford’s Malay dandy illuminates the instabilities of Clifford’s gentlemanly governance and the identifications and disavowals upon which the system is based.

Clifford’s Malayan short stories are full of dandies. Sometimes they emerge as protagonists in their own right in stories which are tragic in structure, if not in tone. In one story, Leh, a Malay actor-manager from the then independent state of Kelantan, returns home after romantic and financial successes in neighbouring Pahang, “lavishly clad from the waist downward in a profusion of gaudy silk sarongs and sashes,”38 only to meet death at the hands of jealous husbands whose wives he has seduced. Returning an agnostic from a series of voyages to his native village in the state of Pahang, Abdul Rahman indulges in similarly ostentatious behaviour outside a mosque: “clad in gorgeous silks such as are dear to the heart of the Malayan dandy” he swaggers “past the holy building cocking an insolent eye at the pious crowd.”39 Such pride, inevitably, comes before a fall. Yet the dandy is often less thematically central but continually asserting his presence, insinuating himself into the corners of the narrator’s gaze, especially at Clifford’s most medievalist moments. In “Ramazan,” the narrator’s eye roams over Malays waiting to break their fast at sunset, moving inexorably from “the gorgeous plaid of a silk sarong, or waist-cloth” to “the green of a young dandy’s trousers” which “serve to give colour and life to the scene.”40

Clifford did not invent the Malay dandy himself. The trope is common in nineteenth-century British fiction and travel writings set in Malaya. The dandy is
often the sultan himself, or a member of the ruler's family. Emily Innes, who lived as a colonial official's wife in Perak and Selangor in the late nineteenth century, gave the following description of Tunku Dia Udin, "the Viceroy of Selangor." "The Tunku," Ines noted, "himself was not at all disgusting in his habits or appearance; on the contrary, he was a great dandy. I used to catch glimpses of him going to the bathroom in a most gorgeous toilette of pale blue quilted silk, perfectly fresh; he looked like some brilliant tropical bird. His silk caps, embroidered with gold, were innumerable, and when his bedding was carried, Malay fashion, publicly down to his boat, I noticed that the pillows were of mauve satin, the round ends being almost entirely of pure gold."41 Innes here is not entirely disapproving, but her imagery is clearly Orientalist. The pillows suggest lethargy with hints of the harem, the emphasis upon "toilette" a narcissistic concern with personal appearance. The image of the bird again stresses decoration above work or use, the total effect of the description marking a sharp contrast with Victorian masculinist ideologies of self-restraint and immersion within work.

The description of the dandy in such texts does, of course, indicate an incommensurability between nineteenth-century British and Malay perceptions of masculine selfhood. The emphasis upon ceremony in the Malay states was paralleled by intricate sumptuary codes. While colonial governments themselves often indulged in extravagant ceremonial theatre, middle-class men's clothing styles became increasingly monochromatic in the nineteenth century.42 Malay clothing conventions, while clearly gendered, allowed both sexes to wear bright colours. It is more difficult to reconstruct Malay understandings of manliness,43 but clearly they were not based as nineteenth-century British ones were upon governance and restraint. Clothing and gender were habitually linked by European observers, who were especially curious why Malay men employed in "manly" occupations, such as warriors or sailors, should wear such polychromatic and therefore effeminate clothes.44

Clifford's representation of the Malay dandy, however, signifies more than mere incommensurability. Power, as the Orientalist language might indicate, is clearly involved. The dandy is spectacular, open to inspection by a gaze which is panoptic, predicated upon colonial mastery of not only space but also knowledge. He is, as Innes's simile suggests, aestheticized, made part of a colonial landscape which is instantly available to the observer to be judged and appreciated.45 He is also, in Johannes Fabian's terms, subject to "allochronic discourse," placed in "another Time" from that of the narrator and the observer and so more easily subject to analysis. Dandyism is thus associated with the medievalist discourse with which, as we have already noted, the British described Malay society in which the Malay's "proper place" was "amidst the conditions of the Thirteenth Century."47 The dandy's ostentation parallels the pageantry of a medieval monarch: in one early descriptive piece, a "crowd of Raja, Chiefs and commoners are assembled in their gaily coloured garments"48 for the spectacle of bull fighting.
Even when the dandy is not the sultan himself, he is associated with medieval or Elizabethan England. Clifford implicitly compares the wanderings of the dandified “strolling player,” Leh, to the peregrinations of pre-Shakespearean travelling players. This wandering has an additional dimension. One effect of the introduction of the residential system was to stabilise previously mobile populations. The British actively discouraged shifting cultivation, called “dry padi” or ladang (clearing) and encouraged continuous cultivation and more elaborate systems of irrigation, since this led to a more concentrated, less mobile, and more easily administered population. The dandy’s loitering, his random but constant mobility, is thus very much part of the pre-colonial order.

Clifford’s Othering of the dandy in order to create a division between pre-colonial sovereignty and colonial governmentality can also be tied to the Victorian fascination with the figure. We have seen Clifford’s investment in the notions of the gentleman and of Carlyle’s heroic man of letters. For Carlyle in Sartor Resartus, the dandy is the Other of this kind of hero. He is feminized, gazed at rather than gazing, lacking in the energy and absorption in work which Carlyle’s model of masculinity requires: “[y]our silver or your gold . . . he solicits not; simply the glance of your eyes.” Indeed, as James Eli Adams argues, the dandy, through Carlyle’s construction of him, becomes an important element of Victorian masculine self-fashioning, “the grotesque icon of an outworn aristocratic order, a figure of self-absorbed, parasitic existence, against which Carlyle evokes a heroism founded on superbly self-forgetful devotion to productive labour.”

Yet the dandy is not merely othered in Clifford’s texts—rather, he repeatedly crosses the self/other binarism. Leh, for example, is effeminate in his dress. Yet he is also intensely attractive to women and sees himself as providing services to them in a curious parody of the chivalric service for the beloved which Clifford saw as the hidden motive for the gentlemanly order of imperialism. Clifford’s stories do not merely gaze at the dandy, but also discipline him textually. Abdul Rahman departs to Mecca at the end of “The Nature of an Oath,” his elaborate costume changed for the white, anonymous robes of pilgrimage which no longer draw the eye. In “A Malayan Actor Manager,” Clifford’s narrative disciplines Leh’s sartorial and spatial vagrancy: the player’s peregrinations in Pahang initially generate money which enables a dandified, sartorial, extravagance of “gaudy silk,” his hat twisted into a “fantastic peak” and his dagger set in gold. The narrative finishes, however, with his return to Kelantan, where Leh is murdered by men who are jealous of the attraction he exerts upon their wives and daughters: discipline here is only possible in death.

The dandy in Clifford’s texts is, in fact, very much like the gentleman hero in comparison to whom he is Othered. The dandy might in some ways—through his vagrant tastes, his lack or restraint and decorum—seem to stand in contrast to the refinement of the gentleman. Yet it may be useful here to remember Baudelaire’s construction of the dandy “as a sort of Derridean supplement to the gentle-
man." Seen through this lens, then, the Malay dandy is a mark of the tensions of a discourse which is undergoing rapid change. Baudelaire's dandyism "appears above all in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to totter and fall." For Adams, the dandy and the gentleman are hauntingly similar: "Both figures are defined in resistance to degrading involvement in economic competition, or (more broadly) to economic schemes of value...; both ideals at least in principle repudiate self-interest, claiming instead devotion to a rigorous and impersonal code of duty (hence the ascetic pretensions of dandyism that Baudelaire celebrates and Carlyle mocks)." The dandy, as supplementary gentleman, becomes a figure onto whom the trials of gentlemanliness, the need for self-discipline, can be displaced. The Malay dandy can be subject to technologies appropriate to his own separate development, can be textually disciplined encouraged to develop towards a regenerated Malayness. Yet the separation between Malay dandy and English gentleman is never secure in Clifford's texts: each category is essential to the other. The figure of the Malay dandy may eventually be seen as "questioning substratum and... surface," occupying "a place within... discourse which is also outside it."

An illustration of this process can perhaps be best achieved by returning to a close reading of one particular story. Published as part of Clifford's short story collection *Malayan Monochromes*, "The Nature of an Oath" has the Malay dandy as its thematic centre. Its protagonist, Abdul Rahman, after travelling to many countries as a sailor, and in the process entertaining doubts about the truth of Islam, returns to his home village in Pahang. He is initially welcomed for the wealth that he brings, but the villagers soon come to censure his lack of religious observance. He finally is humiliated by being thrown into a buffalo-wallow by several youths at the instigation of Imam Teh, the headman. Vowing revenge, he concocts an accusation that Imam Teh has stolen his cattle and prepares for the law suit by bribing and priming witnesses. The District Officer (a self-portrait of Clifford) arrives on his houseboat to judge the case. The Imam, when questioned, replies that if Rahman is willing to swear in the mosque on the holy book, and he remains unpunished for thirty days, he will accept the case against him and give his accuser the cattle. The District Officer, perhaps surprisingly, accepts this proposal. Ostracized by the community, and tormented by superstitious belief, Rahman repents his accusations within the month and begs mercy of the Imam. Chastened by his experiences, he departs on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

"The Nature of an Oath" is predicated upon a textual governance of the self, the transformation of the dandy into the gentleman. Rahman's masculinity is initially unchecked, without a "sole restraining influence," attracting each "fickle female heart" with "a keen eye for colour."

In contrast the Imam and the District Officer, the latter especially, are monochromatic, androgynous figures. Islam, and religion in general, seems to have the ability to petrify masculinity, to
fix it and codify it within a structure. Thus in the course of his wanderings Rah­
man’s eyes dwell upon the “Phallic monuments of Bankok,” minarets, and other “religious erections.” In contrast to many European travellers, most British col­
onial administrator/writers in Malaya, such as Clifford, Swettenham and Winstedt, were not completely hostile to Islam. Islam, trained through the Ma­
lay monarchy, was seen as a possible route for Malay racial regeneration. In “The Nature of an Oath,” Islam emerges as a culture-specific technology of the self in Clifford’s story—it sits “lightly enough upon these simple Malayan villagers,” and promotes “laxness” but it provides an antecedent for the self-government which the District Officer promotes. The District Officer, the Imam comments, leaves well alone in religious matters. Islam here is seen not as an antithesis of the enlightenment values of colonial governmentality but as their precursor: it can be framed and put to a self-improving use through the doctrine of indirect rule.

In the text, then, Islam operates not as Other, but as prototype to the Western technologies of the self and of power. It is a medieval, chivalric system of self-discipline, built upon the governance and restraint of the self. Just as the concept of the gentleman is based upon a feudal model, but one transformed in an age of industrial capital, so the technologies of the self represented by a nominally feudal Islam may be employed in the service of the modern colonial state. British rule in Malaya was carried out, as we have seen, through a fiction of Residents and Advisers in the Federated and Unfederated Malay States, in which the nominal sovereignty of the Sultans was preserved but the real power lay elsewhere. The performance of Malay feudalism was seen by Clifford and others as vital to the maintenance of British rule. Commenting upon the reception of Malay traditional rulers by the Duke of York in Singapore in 1901, Clifford depicts “a pro­
cession of phantoms—phantoms of a blood-stained tyranny that is dead—reviving for an hour the ancient state of their kinship, and bowing their heads, in the name of the past of war and rapine which they represent, to the heir of a monarchy which stands in the present as the embodiment of the freest of all rules.” Despotism here bows itself in submission to freedom.

Clifford’s promotion of Islam as an appropriate technology of the self that enables a separate development for Malays is contrasted in his story with an undesir­able alternative: acculturation, becoming European. Rahman’s return from abroad and his rejection of Islam, Clifford’s narrator comments, makes the man untrustworthy, since “white men are always suspicious of men of Abdul Rah­
man’s type, who are apt to be more sophisticated and experienced than reli­
able.” Such acculturation, Clifford commented in another essay, resulted in “unfortunates,” “Malays who have been educated out of . . . self-respecting reserve, and have become almost as offensive and familiar as low-caste Europeans.” Progress may only come through appropriately Malay technologies’of the self, ones that refurbish, but do not discard, Malay gentlemanliness.
Just as in the case of the Chinese trader, however, Clifford's management of the contradictions of gentlemanly governmentality through the "separate development" of the Malay dandy is ambivalent. The dandy is too like the gentleman for comfort, and the racial energy which his submission to Islamic technologies of the self is seen to regulate is indistinguishable from the masculine energy essential to the gentleman's self-governance. Like the Chinese trader's pursuit of wealth, Rahman's actions suggest that the search for profit, not male energy may actually be the natural force that needs regulation. At the centre of Rahman's dandyism is a surrender to a force whose victory seems inevitable if the technologies of self-discipline are abandoned—"Mammon made a strong appeal to him; Allah seemed very far away."68 It is under the influence of money that Rahman sheds "all vestiges of an ethical code"69 and his silk clothes are an emblem of his newly found wealth. Underneath the techniques of self-management, commerce as an atavistic, Darwinian force returns.

The parallel between the dandy and the gentleman leads to other ambivalences in Clifford's texts. Clifford, we have noted, clearly accepted a world view that both stressed a sympathetic similarity between Malay and British culture and a fundamental difference in their worth. British rule, he avowed, enabled Malays to become themselves, to experience a cultural and racial regeneration through submission to a benevolent British rule, devoid of the motive of profit:

[In Malaya] the Malays are in the enjoyment of complete individual liberty; . . . they are not compelled to undertake work of a nature which in their eyes is at once uncongenial and humiliating; . . . the rule of an alien race has had the curious effect of enabling the Malays to lead their own lives after a fashion which most completely commends itself to them without let or hindrance to an extent previously unknown among them. This is the very privilege which has been most denied to their compatriots in the Dutch Colonies, where the white rulers hold the opinion that an indolent brown population must be made diligent by law.70

Such a schema, however, involved an uneasy management of position for the gentleman administrator. In one sense, he had to stand outside Malay society, to use ways of knowing that differentiated him from it. In another, he had to be so much part of it that he could comprehend it intimately. In Clifford's first novel, Since the Beginning, Frank Austin, a young officer with an enthusiasm for Malay culture is cautioned against excess by an older man:

You must remember that it takes a pretty strong man to study native life thoroughly, as you are bent upon doing, without getting his own ethics and morality a trifle jumbled. You see, to learn anything at all about natives you are obliged in the beginning to cultivate a large-hearted tolerance, which can regard, without any outward sign of disapproval or disgust, many things at the sight of which all decent souls must rise in revolt. Just as one who would watch the ways of timid animals in the jungles must remain very still, so must a white man, who takes up the study of natives, repress his
own feelings upon all occasions. He must devote his energies to examining the
thoughts and motives of those around him, without startling the natives with useless
protests, and without, for the time, attempting to demonstrate to them the evil of their
ways. Later on, when you have painfully acquired a really deep knowledge of the peo­
ple, you may be able to influence them for good, by means of the power which a com­
plete understanding of their point of view must always give you.71

Lightness, then, is all: the imposition of colonial governmentality comes from a
colonial official’s immersion in a native culture, his own sense of self-discipline,
but also from his framing this knowledge within a larger perspective and a train­
ing of the colonized culture so that it leads to self-improvement: litigation, for in­
stance, replaces duelling in “The Nature of an Oath.” Yet the performance of
gentlemanly governance is always on a knife-edge, always threatened by one’s
“ethics and morality” being jumbled by a parallel ethics and morality which imi­
tates, and supplements it.

A final element that disturbs the relationship between the dandy and the
gentleman is the association of the dandy with the homosexual. Much descrip­
tion in both “The Nature of an Oath” and other stories (“The Lone-Hand Raid of
Kulop Sumbing” and “Mat Arif the Elemental”) celebrates a Malay knight-errant
masculinity, an often homoerotically72 aestheticised physical prowess—“He was
a big, sturdy fellow for a Malay, his beautifully built frame denoting both
strength and activity.”73 In writing of the Malay dandy at the turn of the century,
Clifford would no doubt have borne Oscar Wilde in mind. If dandyism had not
been associated with homosexuality in the middle of the nineteenth century, it
certainly had that association by the century’s end. Following the passage of
Henry Labouchere’s Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 criminalising male
homosexuality, the “Cleveland Street Affair” of 1889,74 and the 1895 Wilde trials,
which were covered in every major British and American newspaper, the neces­
sity of self-management seemed even more apparent. Homosexuality, while visi­
ble as dandaical effeminacy, was paradoxically conceived of as arising from
ungovernable and unruly desires within the male body, which called out for re­
newed application of transmuting technologies of the self, for vigilance and self­
appraisal.75

The effect of these anxieties upon “The Nature of Oath” is to incite a new
imposition of restraints and regulations. It is in the regulation of the text that this
government is completed: Clifford’s narratives march on. The dandy dies, or
goes to temporary exile in Mecca: the gentlemanly order continues undisturbed.
Yet the various technologies which make up gentlemanly governmentality re­
main haunted by the raw material they seek to but can never quite process and by
its similarity to the final, manufactured product. Examined closely, certainties
dissolve: identity is only possible through abjection. “Eternal superiority of the
Dandy,” Baudelaire writes confidently in his *Intimate Journals*, and then, questioningly, “What is the Dandy?”

**The White Hero—Teddy’s Story**

On one of his many tours of the Malay States after his appointment as High Commissioner in 1927, Hugh Clifford visited the small town of Kuala Tembering in Pahang. His return there was more of a pilgrimage than a mere casual visit, its primary purpose being to set up a monument, at personal expense, to his junior colleague, Edward Wise, who had been killed nearby at the stockade at Jeram Ampai during the Pahang “disturbances” of 1894. Wise, Clifford remarked in a speech, was a public school product “of a very exceptional calibre both physically and in character.” In a speech at the site of the grave Clifford noted the importance of their relationship: “To me he was dearer than a brother, and during all the three and thirty years that have come and gone since I was deprived of his companionship, never once has the date of his death, June 29th, come round without that loss being once mourned by me.”

Wise is referred to in many of Clifford’s short stories, sometimes appearing as “Tommy Burton”, at others sliding anonymously into the text. Other stories return obsessively to Wise’s burial-place, to the sandbank where the Pahang river meets the Tembering. Wise becomes for Clifford “my alter ego and first disciple,” the prototype of the colonial hero, sacrificing himself for the cause of Empire in a foreign land, dying young without the chance of being reunited with his family. He was a companion, sharing “fearsome experiences”, later Clifford would magnify his exploits to almost mythic proportions.

Clifford was not alone in contributing to Wise’s apotheosis. Lord Sudeley, who was in Pahang on business when the “disturbances” occurred, also remembered the young man in glowing terms. In response to a talk given by Frank Swettenham in London, Sudeley praised the bravery of such servants of empire: Of this I am quite certain, that these gentlemen who serve the Settlements in their various positions, often in lonely places far removed from civilised districts, have no equal in any part of the world. Many times these officers carry their lives in their hands; and they show on all occasions the greatest heroism and bravery. It was my melancholy fate to know one poor officer—Mr. Wise, which I mention as one incident among many. I saw him the day before he was killed, and when afterwards I asked how this sad event occurred, I was told that he thought it his duty as a Civil officer of the Government to go forward with an attacking party. So he met his death bravely doing his duty. These are the sort of acts and deeds which make us proud of being Englishmen.

Wise’s death here becomes an emblem of nationhood, an expression of the gentlemanly officer’s ultimate devotion to a higher cause.

In reality, however, Wise’s death was meaningless, or at best an event to which it is difficult to ascribe significance. It occurred after Malay resistance to
British rule in Pahang revived, spurred by a raid by Mat Kilau and Bahaman, local leaders who had been expelled from the state by the British and who had sought refuge in neighbouring Trengganu. After initial successes, the raid lost momentum, and the British assembled a force of Malays and Indian troops from Perak and Selangor. On June 29, this force attacked the stockade at Jeram Ampai, which the raiders had fortified. It was quickly overrun, but in the process Wise was fatally shot. The investigation into Wise's death concentrated upon three apparent anomalies. First, as a Civil Officer, Wise should not have been anywhere near the fighting. Second, it was quickly apparent that he was shot not by the raiders, but from the rear by members of the Selangor Sikhs. Third, the cause of Wise's death was bleeding from a severed artery in the leg. The absence of medical orderlies meant that a tourniquet was not applied; he bled to death.

What emerges from Colonial Office correspondence on the assault on the stockade is incompetence and mutual recrimination rather than heroism. Clifford, absent at the time on a visit to the Cocos-Keeling Islands, laid the blame on Lieutenant-Colonel R. S. F. Walker, who commanded the force. Walker in turn laid the blame upon the "indiscipline" of the Selangor Sikhs and, implicitly, upon their commander, Captain F. Lyons. He also hinted that Wise's actions in joining in the fighting had been imprudent, noting that "Wise's orderly informs me that he tried to hold his master back in the attack but he said he 'did not care.'" The clearest and probably least self-interested account was given by Captain H. C. Talbot while convalescing in Singapore General Hospital, who was also injured in the attack. He remembered that as he and the other members of the force approached the stockade the Selangor Sikhs were "firing from the hip into the air and anywhere." They also did not "get on fast enough" and so were overtaken by himself, Wise and others. Talbot then waited for his men to come up. When they did so, he advanced again:

I found Wise sitting down at the proper right front corner of the stockade and about 10 to 15 yards from it—with a Malay supporting him—under hot fire from the stockade... Directly I came up, I saw Wise had been wounded, and he told me he had been hit from behind by one of the Selangor Sikhs. He had been hit in the knee—the right knee, I think... I heard a Malay shouting out "Jaga sahya punia tuan" (take care of my master)—It was Wise's boy—he seemed then to have pulled Wise further back from the stockade. I think Wise must have been hit again then.

When Talbot was injured he lay on the ground next to Wise, but he did not realise Wise was seriously wounded until someone said he was dying; by this time, it was too late to do anything.

Talbot's account would also seem to lay some of the responsibility on Lyons. Lyons himself, however, offered his own justifications. In the attack on the stockade at Jeram Ampai, Lyons noted, he and the detachment of Selangor Sikhs emerged from the jungle and immediately came under fire. He moved right and
urged his men to follow him. Eight did, but fourteen remained behind. The stockade was taken, and Lyons then met up with Walker:

I then met Colonel Walker . . . who said "some of your men behaved disgracefully; they were firing from behind me, and have shot Wise and very nearly shot me."

I said, "I am sorry to hear it, they would not follow me, although I stopped and called and waved to them, but some of your men were just as bad behind me" and he said "I know they were."

... I then went to see Wise, who said "some Pathans have shot me"—that was all he said, and I saw nothing could be done for him. He died from shock, I think."86

In concluding his report, Lyons attempted a peculiar mixture of an admission of guilt, a plea for mitigating circumstances, and an attempt to implicate others:

Colonel Walker told me he had reported adversely on my men, and I quite agreed with him that they behaved very badly in not following me, and that I had always considered them wanting in discipline. On reflection, however, I think there was some excuse for them, as the affair was sudden and the fire hot they had no time to see what they were about.

Of course, the sad accident to poor Wise aggravated matters.

But, after all, the odium only applies to about 14 men, of whom two were killed, and it is hardly fair to blame the whole force for that.

I am far from wishing to incriminate others to defend them, but there were certainly some of the Perak force who behaved in much the same way although happily no accident is attributed to them.87

Lyons’s report reads very differently from accounts of military action in imperial fiction, lapsing into an incoherent series of unconnected paragraphs, each defending potential assault from a different direction.

In the accounts of the attack on the stockade at Jeram Ampai, there is little significance in Wise’s death: it is a troubling accident, a symptom, perhaps, of wider incompetencies which must be explained away. Many of the elements of the colonial adventure story are deconstructed: Sikh and Pathan martiality88 is shown to be more a function of training than of supposedly “innate” racial qualities, leadership seems to involve the evasion rather than the taking of responsibility. Above all, Wise’s death is meaningless: it can in no way be seen as a sacrifice, since it itself has achieved nothing.

Clifford’s fictional re-narrations of Wise’s death aim to manufacture this significance, to promote the event as an exemplification of racialised masculinity, an expression of the English gentlemanly order. The most tortuous of these re-inscriptions is the short story “Greater Love,” in which a party of British troops are ambushed by “dakatis.” Tommy Burton, the political officer accompanying the party, notes to his horror that Walter Fairleigh, the commanding officer of the
expedition who has a reputation for bravery, is terrified and cowering behind a boulder. His new subaltern, Oliver Salmon, is hit by a bullet in the leg. In the absence of any other leadership, Tommy summons up courage and leads a charge to the hilltop that disperses the attackers. Salmon is stretchered back from the front, and Fairleigh and Burton carry on with the expedition. Their intimacy is disturbed, however, by the incident. Back in their camp, Burton receives a letter from the District Officer in the station Salmon has been sent to. He informs Burton that Salmon has been making allegations about Fairleigh's lack of courage and asks Burton to refute them. This action forces Burton to finally confront Fairleigh, who confesses to his "funk," but indicates a resolve to face a formal inquiry. In order not to have to lie to the investigating Court of Inquiry, Burton writes an ambiguous letter which makes it seem as though the cowardice has been his. During the next campaign, he exposes himself recklessly in the firing line and is killed by a dakait bullet.

"Greater Love" is a complex reinscription of Wise's death. The description of the ambush itself, and the circumstances proceeding from it, draw upon an incident some two years before the assault on the stockade at Jeram Ampai in 1892. The bullet in Salmon's thigh represents a displacement of the bullets which killed Wise. Wise's own ill-advised rush forward at the stockade is now given meaning: displaced to the scene of the ambush, it enables the Sikh troops to drive off their attackers. The pain and futility of Wise's death, in contrast, vanishes: it occurs off-stage, put forward as an exemplary Christian sacrifice, the final expression of gentlemanly brotherhood. Yet the effect of the story is to make British masculinity vanish: it becomes an absence, a silence, a shared secret that cannot be divulged.

In terms of racial typology, the most obvious strategy in the story is one of racial othering. The Malay men against whom the British and Sikh are fighting are reduced from freedom fighters to dakais, or bandits. Within the ranks of the British themselves, Clifford ties gentlemanliness to race. The young subaltern, Salmon, is "a cad, a bounder, and a Jew-boy," and later, in the District Officer's letter, a "bounder, . . . an outsider of the most outrageous breed." Race here excludes Salmon from the gentlemanly order. When he is treated at the hospital, Salmon is portrayed as "gassing to every soul he has seen," "gossiping with the women, 'gassing' to the native dressers" about Fairleigh's actions. Like the dandy, or the Bengali Babu, who "pours" in Frank Swettenham's words "a great stream of words . . . from the narrow channel of his mind," Salmon is marked by an ability to imitate gentlemanliness, but disqualified by his inability, like the inability of women and "natives," to exert self-control, to subject himself to discipline.

In contrast to Salmon's volubility, gentlemanly masculinity in "Greater Love" is put forward as silence. After Farleigh's "funk," neither he nor Burton dares articulate his reactions: Fairleigh does not know if Burton has seen him
show "the white feather" while Burton does not know if his friend in turn knows how much he has seen. Their friendship becomes "a mocking wraith of their former honest companionship" each avoiding discussion with the other, until the District Officer's letter forces Burton to speak. When confronted, Fairleigh notes that he has an innate propensity to cowardice which can only be tamed by iron discipline: "But even when a man is closest to you there is always the little hard ring of self-fencing you about; the impassable barrier which encircles each soul, walls in the appalling solitude of each individual identity, the barrier that nothing can win through. I have felt it, have brought up sheer against it, scores of times, even with you, Tommy." The only person granted admittance into this circle of the self is, Fairleigh notes, a woman, or perhaps, more properly, the imagined construction of a woman, his fiancée, Elsie Vardon. When in need of courage, he recalls, he remembers "Elsie and what she would have had me do"; when performing deeds of imperial bravado, he has imagined that "Elsie, in spirit, was at my elbow all the while, and I was playing to the gallery; the gallery of which she was the soul occupant."

Masculinity here becomes a private performance for an internal audience. Just as in "In the Heart of Kalamantan," so in "Greater Love" this audience is briefly expanded. The two friends become "closer than ever before" now that the "flood-gates of . . . reserve had been once flung wide." Such articulation of self is represented as confession; represented as an expression of an innate truth of self it is, in fact, a technology of "individualization by power," a technology for "producing truth." Masculinity is produced here as a process of Christian self-regulation, and the reader is also briefly made privy to its workings: Fairleigh becomes Walter, and intimacy is established.

As in "In the Heart Of Kalamantan," however, such intimacy can only end in death, in the "magnanimity of a splendid self-immolation." Walter does not know of the precise motives for Tommy's self-sacrifice, and the conclusion of the story represents the reconnecting of the iron band of masculinity, the reinsertment of the secret upon which gentlemanly governance is based. The quotation from John 15.13 that constitutes the title of the short story hints at the ultimate type for the gentleman: Christ. Like Christ, the gentleman is doomed to vanish from the narrative, to be a troubling figure encountered on a road elsewhere, or an uninvited guest at a gathering. "Greater Love" is a story which, through its ascription of significance to Wise's death, successfully purges the gentlemanly order of any motive of profit, and which cauterises any suggestion of abnormal intimacy or homoeroticism. What remains, however, is a figure that vanishes. The Chinese trader and the Malay dandy hint at disruptive, unexpectedly contrary forces, which technologies of the self must manage. The vanishing hero hints at another possibility, that such forces may be entirely absent, and what distinguishes the gentleman is merely management: his identity is nothing more than performance.