Modern Subjects/Colonial Texts

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The preceding chapters have shown the persistent centrality of women to Clifford’s technologies of governance. The shared secret of a woman’s affection brings two men together in both “In the Heart of Kalamantan” and “Greater Love”: deeds of empire are imagined as chivalric service performed for women. In “Cast,” the narrator notes of the now-invalided imperial hero Simon Strange that there was “a girl for whose sake, perhaps, much of his best work had been secretly done.” Such discoveries are made in confidence between men: they could be seen as constituting a “traffic in women” in Gayle Rubin’s reworking of Levi-Strauss, in which the exchange of women solidifies a patriarchal social structure. In Clifford’s works, women are often placed in a triangular relationship with two men; these relationships seem amicable, often making use of women as “symbolic . . . property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” rather than illustrating panic or rivalry. Yet if the presence of women in Clifford’s works is necessary for their performance of governmentality, such presence, like that of Chinese and Malay men, also introduces discontinuities into the processes of the government of the text, colony, and self.

Women were an important part of Clifford’s life and of his process of self-constitution. His mother, Josephine, he noted in a letter to Eve Hall, was perhaps his most important formative influence, a “very strong woman” “inculcated a tremendous sense of discipline” in him which had served him well in later life. His first wife, Minna, succeeded his mother in occupying a central place in his life. Upon her death in Trinidad in January 1907, he wrote to his friend Edward Clodd that he felt completely at a loss—“[s]he was all my life to me—the object of all my hopes & my ambitions, the star around wh. all my world revolved.” Clifford’s second wife, Elizabeth de la Pasture, remained with him throughout the latter part of his career, concealing his growing ill-health: her illness, not his, provided the pretext for Clifford’s departure from his position as Governor of the Straits Settlements.

Central to Clifford’s relationship with each of these women was the Victorian and Edwardian notion of the separation of the spheres of masculinity and femininity. This doctrine was most famously given expression by John Ruskin in his essay “Of Queens’ Gardens.” Different roles, Ruskin argued, arose from different powers innate to each sex:
The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. . . . By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in the world, must encounter all peril and trial.  

Women's genius here is domestic, man's part of the external world. The division of the spheres "underwrote an entire system of institutional practices and conventions at mid century, ranging from a sexual division of labour to a sexual division of economic and political rights." For Clifford it was natural that his mother would cut short a budding career as a short story writer to marry his father, just as Elizabeth de la Pasture would cease to be a writer when she became Lady Clifford. Women would find expression through the careers of their husbands, which would then be redefined as a form of chivalric service. "[H]onourable life," Ruskin wrote, "assumes the subjection of the young knight to the command—should it even be the command in caprice—of his lady." There were, however, other women in Clifford's life, ones for whom he could not so unproblematically provide chivalric service. The common Victorian virgin/whore dichotomy, Mary Poovey notes, was based upon a conflict "between the image of the woman as a sexual creature that flourished in the seventeenth century and the domestic, idealized woman that gradually repressed this image in the eighteenth century." If women were responsible for ordering and arrangement, for contributions towards the government of the male self, they were also capable of abdicating such responsibility, of removing the technologies of the self that enabled discipline. Clifford had a reputation as a "lady's man." It seems likely from the evidence of his 1893 diary that he had at least one Malay mistress while in Pahang. On March 31, Clifford notes that "Meriam spent the day with me." On April 4, Meriam "spent the night here." Clifford stayed up late, "Meriam staying with me." After April 5, Meriam drops out of the narrative, although Clifford's February accounts, at the back of the diary, make reference to payments for "Meriam's clothes." A plausible explanation for Meriam's place in the narrative would be that Clifford was making efforts to end their relationship, given his impending marriage and the growing European population of Pekan, which would have resulted in greater social pressure for moral conformity. 

The relationship Clifford had with Eve Hall while Governor of Nigeria is more easy to substantiate factually: a number of letters he wrote survive in the library of Rhodes House, Oxford. In Clifford's words, "Lagos was humming with scandal; . . . I was regarded as senile Priapus—a sex-mad creature—who was being flattered, coaxed, and cajoled [sic]." Clifford himself expresses doubts about
the relationship in his letters to Hall, noting that "my extravagant devotion to You" is "rather a feather in your cap,"14 but wondering whether his feelings are reciprocated. What is most curious in Clifford's letters to Hall are his protestations of chivalric service—epitomized by his capitalising "You"—matched by equally powerful criticisms of his lack of self-control and apparently insouciant references to her indifference. The government of the self and the separation of the spheres of masculine and feminine power clearly require considerable rhetorical energy.

**Gender and the Colonial Community**

Recent feminist scholarship has noted the extent to which the ideology of the separate spheres was imbricated with other areas of social life. Lynda Nead notes that gender was a key component in the formation of the nineteenth-century bourgeois subject, and that "class coherence was established through the formation of shared notions of morality and respectability—domestic ideology and the production of clearly demarcated gender roles were central features in this process of class definition."15 Rather than seeing the Victorian Angel of the house as a victim, Elizabeth Langland argues, we should perhaps see her as playing an active role in class formation. Women presided over the various aspects of domestic etiquette that separated the middle class from their social inferiors, manipulating a series of "social signs."16 In particular, they supervised the erasure of work from the domestic sphere, creating "a haven, a private domain opposed to the public sphere of commerce" while simultaneously serving "as a significant adjunct to a man's business endeavors."17 The work of gender thus laid the ground for the construction of the financially disinterested gentleman.

In colonial communities, gender was essential not only to the maintenance of middle-class respectability, but also of a racial identity. Poovey's seventeenth-century stereotype of a sexualised woman, lacking in self-control, was often applied to non-European women; the application of control to these bodies thus became a metaphor for colonialism. European dilemmas concerning sexuality and its control"18 Sander Gilman notes, were "transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female."18 There were profound "structural connections between the treatment of women and of non-Europeans in the language, experience and imaginations of western men"19 in the nineteenth century: both groups were characterised as child-like, dependent, and in need of active male guidance. Edward Said notes that "Orientalism is a praxis of the same sort ... as male gender dominance, or patriarchy, in metropolitan societies"20 and that "Orientals, like Victorian housewives, were confined to silence and unlimited enriching production."21

The work of gender within colonial communities, however, is more complex than a congruence of binomial oppositions. The constitution of colonial
communities was in itself founded upon class, and women played roles in class formation which paralleled those played by middle-class women in Victorian England. "[T]he Colonial Service," wrote C. Jeffries, "is the only profession in which one can live the life of a country gentleman on the salary of a civil servant."22 Questions of class became imbricated with those of race, and women's role in the maintenance of the gentlemanly order became even more urgent than it was in England. In her investigation of colonial culture in the Dutch East Indies, Ann Laura Stoler notices "proliferating discourses around pedagogy, parenting, children's sexuality, servants, and tropical hygiene"23 which are similar to the series of social signs which Langland identifies as markers of bourgeois respectability in Victorian England. Through the manipulation of these semiotic sites, Stoler suggests, "racial membership [was] subject to gendered appraisals and ... "character," "good breeding," and proper rearing were implicitly raced. These discourses do more than prescribe suitable behaviour; they locate how fundamentally bourgeois identity was tied to notions of being 'European' and being 'white.'"24 This identity might then be exported: Antoinette Burton notices how much the "vocabulary of Victorian social reform and philanthropy at home was ... steeped in racial metaphors and civilizing tropes,"25 clearly the construction of bourgeois identity in the colonies was a complex, negotiated process, not merely a cognitive mapping of one binomial opposition onto another.

Much feminist scholarship on colonialism has concentrated upon Victorian women travellers such as Mary Kingsley and Alexandra David-Neel rather than upon women residents of colonial communities. Initially, this scholarship had a restorative quality, evincing an "interest in famous, 'heroic,' white women in colonial settings"26 without incorporating a critique of colonialism itself. Recent work on European women's travel writing has demonstrated how it is implicated in the "production of specifically imperialist knowledges,"27 but its potential to offer deconstructive levers to open up the fissures of colonial discourse continues to attract interest. Feminists, Sara Mills have noted, have tended to avoid the most obviously racist Victorian women writers and to celebrate women adventurers for whom race is not so immediately important for the construction of self. There is a need, she argues, for "a reorientation of our views of imperialism, so that we resist the projection of imperial expansion as adventure, and concentrate more on the lived experience of all those involved in colonial life."28

An example of the difference between a traveller, who observes a colonial landscape from the position of a secure subjectivity and a member of a colonial community, who defines selfhood through a series of intra-communal transactions, can be seen in a comparison of the writings of Isabella Bird and Emily Innes. Bird's *The Golden Chersonese* was based upon letters she sent home during a five-week visit to Singapore, Malacca, Sungei Ujong, Perak, Selangor and Penang in 1879. Her view of the Peninsula is certainly Orientalist. She views Islam as a
false religion, Malay bigotry supplying the reason why they "have successfully resisted all attempts to convert them to Christianity," and she subscribes to common wisdom that Malay culture is degenerate, perhaps terminally so. Bird admires Hugh Low, however, for having "not a vestige of contempt for a dark skin," and describes her travels in the Peninsula as a gorgeous spectacle. She is a professional writer, mapping the contours of a colonial landscape with a practiced eye for the consumption of a domestic audience.

Emily Innes's *The Chersonese with the Gilding Off* is a much less easily categorised text than Bird's. As its title implies, it interrogates some of the assumptions in Bird's book: it is not a travelogue, but an account of a colonial official's wife's residence in the "native states" of Perak and Selangor. "[S]he and I," wrote Innes of Bird, "saw the Malayan country under totally different circumstances." In many ways, Innes's text seems more feminist than Bird's. Its author complains about social conventions which allow an "English man" to bathe while on a long boat voyage, while restraining English women from doing likewise. When her husband recounts an incident in which he told the Sultan of Selangor "that anything given to his wife was given to him, and belonged to him," Innes notes that "I was inclined to demur; however, the Married Women's Property Act had not yet been passed." Such an assertive expression of women's rights, however, is enabled through a self-fashioning which is based upon racial division. The European community is differentiated from Malay society by its enlightened treatment of women. Malays, Innes remarks, "like all savages, jealously exclude their women, wherever they can, from all concerns of life, except the purely domestic." Her authority over her servants, so crucial to her position as a memsahib, was profoundly dependent upon this process of differentiation. "I never succeeded in imbuing my servants with the proper respect for me," she wrote, "until I had had them for some time. None of them had been accustomed to English mistresses; they all had the true Oriental contempt for women at the bottom of their hearts."

Innes's criticism of Hugh Low for his tolerance of "slavery" is also very much part of the manufacture of a British female selfhood. Opposition to slavery was a key aspect of British national identity in the early and mid nineteenth-century, when, despite the country's history as the most active international slave trader, "emancipation allowed the British to congratulate themselves on their moral superiority in having ended slavery." Innes combines this sense of Britishness with a feminist consciousness to refute Low: to his comment that "all married women are slaves" she replies that this fact is "precisely why I can sympathize with other slaves." Such identification, however, does not lead for a call for Malay independence: rather, Innes recommends that the Colonial Office formally assert control over the Malay States as a means of eradicating such feudal traditions. For Innes, the construction of a feminine, and at times potentially
feminist, subjectivity follows, if at times obliquely, the contours of power of colonial governance.

**European Women in Colonial Malaya**

What, then, was the position of European women in colonial Malaya? The imperial frontier was a masculine space, and most women who did come to Malaya from Europe would have arrived as the wives or fiancées of colonial officials or unofficials. The population of Singapore contained European women in the 1850s, and by the time Emily Innes was in Selangor and Perak in the 1870s, a community of European wives was present in the Malay States. A severe gender imbalance persisted, however, in the European community early in British colonial rule in Malaya. Many younger men could not afford to marry on the salaries they earned, particularly since there was a wide consensus that children would need to be educated in Britain to escape the deleterious effects of a tropical climate. By the early 1900s, European women were coming to Malaya independently, particularly as nurses and as teachers for girls’ schools: they played a more active part in society, and many made connections with Malay, Chinese and Indian women outside the European community. Later in the colonial period, more socially prestigious professions were open to women: several served as doctors.

Colonial discourse in both Malaya and the British empire as a whole reflected a profound ambivalence concerning the presence of European women. There was considerable nostalgia for a time before the “arrival of the womenfolk,” which was retrospectively celebrated as a time of intimate contact between British men and the local culture, without the interfering demands of colonial bureaucracy and European community. It is from this nostalgia that the stereotype of the memsahib developed, women who were “narrowly intolerant, more prejudiced and vindictive towards the colonized than their men, abusive to servants, usually bored, [and] prone to extramarital affairs destructive to peaceful social relations.” At the same time, European women were celebrated as the moral guardians of colonial social order, keeping their menfolk up to the mark morally and supporting their work. In turn, colonial officials considered that one of the primary measures of colonialism’s success was its ability to carve out a space suitable for European women to safely inhabit. Women were here represented according to Victorian stereotypes: they were associated with domesticity and with ordering and governance within the confines of the European community. It was widely believed that the tropical climate had a worse effect upon women than men. In the 1920s and 1930s, many American movies were banned from being shown in the Straits Settlements because they showed images of sexually assertive European women who contradicted the vision of the angel of the house and, more importantly, circulated these images beyond the confines of the European community. Hill stations in the Cameron Highlands in Pahang, small
English enclaves with mock-Tudor buildings, had their roads named after the wives of colonial officials: they were feminized spaces, domesticated and Anglicized, removed from the local population and the larger requirements of colonial governance.

Individual women responded to this social role in a variety of ways. Helen Callaway has noted that women played a greater variety of roles in colonial societies than has hitherto been acknowledged, and that in West Africa women were admitted to the Administrative Service in the 1950s. Janice Brownfoot has demonstrated that the participation of European women in Malaya in voluntary work reached out across community boundaries: some such work, through supporting nascent Malay nationalism, may have been anti-colonial in effect, if not in intention. Kumari Jayarwardena has also explored the many roles which Western women who lived in South Asia during colonial rule took on, roles which moved beyond that of the “the colonial wife, living in a sort of doubly refined bondage—isolated in the home as a woman and alienated in the colony as a foreigner,” to other social positions which actively supported South Asian women in the struggle for self-rule. The position of European women in the late colonial period is clearly a complex one: one might, however, wonder at Brownfoot’s uncritical endorsement of European women’s participation in the “regeneration and progress of Asian races” to enable “Asian women . . . to exert greater influence in the family and in public affairs”; clearly such “improvement” was itself part of colonial rhetoric of development.

In exploring Clifford’s writing, we are looking at an earlier social reality, one in which a European woman would to a large extent have been encouraged to submerge her own identity in that of her husband. Flora Shaw, Callaway notes, had to undergo a substantial change to become Lady Lugard, which she marked “symbolically by discarding the black clothes she had worn for her professional career to wear white dresses in her new identity as the wife of a leading colonial administrator in Africa.” Elizabeth de la Pasture, the popular novelist who was hailed as a successor to Mrs. Oliphant, similarly took on a new identity as Lady Clifford and largely stopped writing. Women’s identity was expressed as a wife of the colonial official; the word “mem” was only used by servants to address married women while an unmarried woman of any age would be called “missie.” Women were responsible for the organisation of the household and for the observance of etiquette which preserved the gentlemanly order, often through customs that were anachronistic in Britain but gave a renewed sense of British identity within the colonial context. Denied language training and thus unable to speak fluent Malay, most colonial officials’ wives before the First World War would have had less contact than their husbands with other communities. Ordering the home, they became the centre of a semiotic system which brought together both class and race, the gentlemanly chivalry of the husband preserving the “uncontaminated whiteness” of the wife.
Writing Gender, Writing Race:

White Women and Chivalric Service

For Clifford, then, European women are important to the government of the self. Service to women is a regulative force, channelling male energy in a positive direction. Women also represent an enclave of imagined Englishness, separated from the colonial territory. Through mutual concern for women, men can enter a space of intimacy which both acknowledges and manages Clifford's own need for but uneasiness about homosociality. Finally, service to women justifies imperialism: the secret of service as a form of chivalric altruism both reinforces the identity of the gentlemanly administrator and simultaneously expels consideration of economic motivations.

Two stories which illustrate the functions of women within the semiotic system of colonial governmentality are "Alfred Huxley's Ride" and "A Tale of Old Labuan." Both portray European women as invalids who die in the course of the story; in each case, it is unquestioning service to women which justifies colonial activity and which divides the European community from those it governs. "Alfred Huxley's Ride" is a rather unsuccessful, overly melodramatic piece of writing. Huxley, a district doctor in a west-coast Federated Malay State which must be Pahang, receives a telegram from another official, Archer, who informs him that his wife is dying in "Kuala Bram," eighty miles away, and needs an unspecified operation to save her life. Huxley sets off on his bicycle and crosses over the central mountain range, covering the eighty miles in eight hours. During the ride he thinks back over the past, and it emerges that he was once in love with Mrs. Archer, then "Mary Chalmers, the only daughter of a high official" but that she has chosen Archer instead of him, "mistaking, perhaps, roughness for strength, and selfishness for manly independence." Arriving in Kuala Bram, and given no time to rest by Archer, Huxley bungles the operation, and it is clear the wife has not long to live. Archer grabs hold of Huxley in his anger, but discovers that the doctor is already dead of a heart attack.

Huxley's entire ride is premised upon a series of divisions between secrecy and gossip, altruism and selfishness, modernity and tradition. The telegram Huxley receives from Archer is "very short," as his reply: this terseness is placed in contrast to the "incorrigible gossip" of the "little Tamil telegraph peon" who observes his plight with "unfettered coarseness." Huxley is bound by invisible fetters which animate him as if "by some unseen hand." His motion in his ride contrasts with the stillness of the landscape, in which the races are precisely placed. Not far from his station, Huxley passes "a dirty cluster of thatched coolie-lines, inhabited by grease and dung-smeared Tamils, naked save for their foul loin-clouts." In the foothills of the central mountain range, he notes "a gang of Chinese miners, their blue-clad figures swarming up and down the notched tree-trunks that served them as ladders, like strings of ants running to
and fro.” A Malay constable at the last police station on the western slope is indolent, lacking “energy.” The traffic Huxley meets consists largely of “clumsy bullock carts,” in opposition to the mobility of the bicycle. The series of oppositions in Clifford’s short story are linked together by its narrative structure. The narrative begins in a confined but untidy space: Huxley’s room, which in his haste he reduces to “an absolute wreck.” It moves to the expansiveness of a landscape ordered by the intervention of colonialism, and then back to another confined space, Mary’s sick-room, filled with “dainty dresses” and “knick-knacks.” Huxley’s actions in the world outside the confines of the two residencies are expressions of almost maniacal energy, primitive “Red Indian” passions harnessed to propel a modern bicycle forward. Such energy is both inspired and regulated by his service to Mary, which is expressed in Catholic devotional terms. Mary’s own name is surely not accidental, and while Huxley is climbing over the central mountain range he urges himself on with half-remembered lines from Christina Rossetti’s “Up-Hill,” metaphorising his ride into a spiritual journey. Mary’s room is referred to as the “inner sanctum,” and Huxley kneels at the bed. Through Clifford’s use of religious metaphor, service to God, Empire, and woman become one: the commercial activity which marks the landscape through which Huxley passes is external, inessential: the true motive of the journey is not economic, but chivalric, an expression of service which is devotional in its intensity.

Even “Alfred Huxley’s Ride,” however, is marked by uneasiness surrounding the question of masculinity and service to woman as service to empire. Huxley’s motives are secret, known only to himself, and they die with him. Masculinity inheres in the performance of the ride itself but appears spectral, vanishing if exposed too long to the open air. Huxley scarcely communicates with Archer, nor does he receive recognition from Mary, the object of his devotion. His self-regulation here, which the narrative attempts to present as a triumph of disinterested affection, seems suspiciously self-consuming: colonial masculinity here is bound so tightly by the iron bands of government that it implodes.

“A Tale of Old Labuan” is a more complex and ideologically suggestive story. As in “Alfred Huxley’s Ride,” its representation of women is bound up with the governance of a colonial landscape variously imagined as panoptically available and chthonic, the expansiveness of a panorama contrasting with the confinement of the grave. The story begins with a panoptic, master-of-all-I-survey view of the colony Labuan, and narrows to a dinner on board a British man-o’-war anchored in the harbour. After the dinner, during which casually proleptic mention is made of the poor state of the local cemetery, the anonymous Governor and Walter Tracy, his recently-arrived assistant bid farewell to the captain and first lieutenant of the ship, and return to land.
No sooner has the man-o'-war departed than Tracy and the Governor go directly to the graveyard, where they discover that Murut tribesmen, "possessed by a passion for owning other folks' skulls and bones," have dug up the body of Faber, the most recently interred of the graveyard's inhabitants. Tracy's thoughts go to his wife, who is dying of a fever, and he becomes obsessed with the thought that, should she die, her grave might also be desecrated. Much of the latter part of the story is a deathbed scene, in which Tracy attends to his dying wife in a sickroom remarkably similar to that in "Alfred Huxley's Ride." Upon her eventual death, Tracy goes out into the night and digs fifteen graves, each at the foot of a tree in the orchard behind his house. He puts his wife in one of them, and fills up each so that they will be indistinguishable to the Muruts. He carries the secret of which grave his wife is in until his own death, after a distinguished career in the colonial service.

Clifford's story is adapted from Hugh Low's account of his burial of his wife in similar circumstances "some time in the 1850s." The changes that Clifford made, however, indicate a sharpening of the ideological work of gender in the story. Low had lived in Labuan for many years upon his wife's death, while Tracy in the story is newly arrived. The "young Mrs. Hugh Low" upon whose death the story is based was in fact the daughter of William Napier, the Lieutenant Governor of Labuan. In "A Tale of Old Labuan," Tracy is consumed by guilt at having brought his bride from England to a certain death in an unhealthy outpost of Empire; Low met his wife on Labuan. Descriptions of the sick-room in Clifford's story repeatedly return to a moral purity which is expressed in a racial metaphor of uncontaminated whiteness, but Kate Napier was Eurasian, occupying a troubling space on the border of a tiny European community.

Like "Alfred Huxley's Ride," "A Tale of Old Labuan" empties out women's agency. The dying invalid is perhaps the ultimate expression of woman reduced to the status of symbol or a transferable sign that may be circulated in the economy of colonial governance. Tracy's wife is given a name—Pearl—which, like Mary Archer's, is fraught with Catholic symbolic meaning. She does not speak until just before her death, and even then her speech is not represented in Clifford's text, an intrusive narrator noting that what "each said to each as they lay there . . . , in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, is not for alien ears to hearken to." Rather, she is a symbol of the work still to be done to make Labuan a successful colony; on the ship, talk of progress and of possible draining of swamps moves seamlessly to polite inquiries regarding Mrs. Tracy's health. White women here become a measure colonial progress, their "death-rate," the Governor noting with some sarcasm, never yet approaching "the magnificent figures of the West Coast [of Africa]." The sickroom at Tracy's bungalow attempts to mark itself off from the "hard, pitiless" climate outside, but is invaded by "a breathless, airless, quivering darkness," and an "appalling heat." Tracy is "tortured by the knowledge" that the sickroom lacks "everything which in Europe
tends to relieve the intensity of discomfort”; it is a marker of the as yet tenuous hold that colonial governance has upon the landscape.

Despite the text’s insistence on an effort to separate the sickroom off as an uncontaminated European space, however, a persistent series of parallels are drawn between the body of the woman invalid and the landscape of the island itself. “It must be a truly awful thing,” the captain of the ship thinks of Tracy, “to be chained for years to the corpse of this lifeless colony”: Tracy will, it emerges, be chained to the memory of the location of his wife’s body. Before Pearl’s death, Tracy is aware that her brief return to consciousness is “but the preface to the long sleep which would have no ending in this life,” a phrase which recalls the Governor’s description of the island of Labuan: “You have only to look at the island to see that its aeon-long rest should never have been broken, that it has now fallen fast asleep again, and that it is never going to wake up for a second time.”

Such meditations merge with a more conventional coding of the landscape a feminine, a feature which Edward Said, Mary Louise Pratt and Annette Kolodny have noted is a feature of colonialist texts. An “elbow of blue water” is “thrust by the sea into the waist of the island,” while through the trees red soil can be seen like “naked flesh.” Even these images, however, return to the scene of the sickroom. The masculine-coded elbow thrust into a feminine waist foreshadows Tracy lying on the bed next to his dying wife, while the glimpses of flesh hint at Tracy’s fixation upon the “little slender arms” of his wife.

Femininity in “A Tale of Labuan,” then, emerges as not so much the other of masculinity as a vital component of Tracy’s masculine self-fashioning. Femininity’s doubleness, Poovey’s dichotomy of sexual dissolution and moral propriety, re-emerges in the story through Clifford’s manipulation of Gothic tropes: darkness, sublime landscapes, cemeteries and opened graves. Clifford’s period of writing is contemporaneous with that of practitioners of what Patrick Brantlinger has named the “Imperial Gothic” which for Brantlinger “combines the seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult.” Within the Imperial Gothic, Empire becomes an inscription of order which attempts to control Gothic excess: the technologies of government become “a temporary means of preventing Britain itself from relapsing into barbarism.” Following Brantlinger’s lead, one reading of the story would be a disciplinary one: through a rejection of excess, a choice of service to domesticated femininity rather than an indulgence in colonial “flesh,” Tracy sets out upon a successful colonial career.

Such a reading, however, flattens out the ambiguity of Clifford’s story. The graveyard is certainly intended as a metaphor for imperial governance: “the rank, crudely-coloured grasses grow with a horrible luxuriance that defies all attempts at decency and neatness,” paralleling the moral intractability of the Muruts. The horror itself, however, is not merely at the spectacle of exotic depravity. On arriving at the desecrated burial-ground, the Governor’s pony
shies at "some white object in the grass by the wayside" which is subsequently identified as "the thigh-bone of a man." The sight of this, and of the open grave, make Tracy "quite unmanned." He sits down, overcome by a feeling of nausea, on a neighbouring grave. The intrusive narrator, however, comments that the "desecration of one's own race by people of an inferior breed is ever a terrible thing to behold, and it has the power to stir up strange tumults of passion in a white man's heart." It is unclear whether being "unmanned" involves a depletion of or a surrender to atavistic passion and energy.

The thigh-bone reappears, suggestively, in the sick-room. After Pearl's death Tracy feels the burden of a memory of "something that remained to be done," something "painful, horrible, yet necessary."

He turned from the window, and groped his way through the darkness towards the bedside. A white figure standing by the door suddenly made itself seen, and, with all his nerves a-quiver, Tracy jumped aside, his heart beating like a drum. A second later he had recognised the apparition as the white dressing-gown which Pearl had been wont to wear, that now hung on a hook against the door, but the shock which it had given him had set his dulled brain working, had fired a train of thought. He had shied like a horse at the sight of that white object, just as the Governor's pony had shied at—at what? Ah, now he knew!

The thigh-bone thus reinserts itself within the private, domestic space of imperialism, a space in which Tracy's mind has already "broken away from all control. . . and refused obey his will." Confronted by the impotence of the colony's only doctor, Jenkins, to do anything to relieve his wife's suffering, Tracy is driven "wild with rage against all the world, fierce as a trapped beast, hating himself, and filed with a savage fury against fate." His frenzied night of digging to disguise the location of his wife's grave is similarly inspired by a primordial energy, "a sustained physical effort" which wakes him from "stupor" and, paradoxically, returns him to "reason."

The complex play of energy and regulation through Gothic tropes in "A Tale of Old Labuan" is perhaps best thought of in terms of the original meaning of the Gothic. When the Gothic came to the fore as a literary form in the late eighteenth century, it was associated with a racial history, with the barbaric energy of Teutonic tribes which tended naturally towards liberty and freedom. The energy that inspires the Muruts is not so very different from the racial energy that Clifford saw as necessary to colonialism. In a sense, colonialism in "A Tale of Old Labuan" is the desecration of graves: it too requires the forcible resuscitation of the body of a colony which has lapsed into a more than normal sleep. For Tracy to succeed in a colonial career, he must transmute such energy into service through the mediation of a woman. Again, management of the energy seems fraught with difficulty. Like the activities of the Muruts, the technologies of manly self-restraint are also "unspeakable." All that marks out Englishness as
different, all that justifies the extent of colonial rule, is hidden through these tech­
nologies of self in the silence of the grave, and there is the suspicion that, when ex­
cavated, the tomb may prove empty.

**Pretexts for Colonialism: Malay Women**

European women provide, we have seen, opportunities for service and self­
government in Clifford’s stories. Malay Women provide similar, although dif­
ferently enacted, incitements. The rescue of Malay women from the oppression
of the feudal harem is, for Clifford, a marker of the success of the residential sys­
tem: progress and racial “regeneration” can be measured by the extent to which
women are protected through monogamous marriage and the doctrine of the
separate spheres. At the same time, however, Malay women’s “venality” be­
comes a test for the regulation of the masculine self. Many of Clifford’s early sto­
ries share a common structure: the jejune colonial administrator listens while a
old Malay man tells stories of feudal exploits of an epic scale which occurred be­
fore the intervention of the British, stories in which women are invariably ob­
jects of exchange between men. The frame narrative of the listening
administrator contains these stories and contextualises them, but does not full
negate them. Tales of a prior traffic in women, to Clifford and to his implied
reader, represent a reinvigoration of masculine essence, one which fortifies the
common-sense ideology of the narrative against the contemporary threats of the
woman question, while simultaneously preserving a rule of colonial difference
which separates modern administrator from feudal storyteller.

A simple illustration of the role of Malay women as objects of exchange is
Clifford’s story “The Weeding of the Tares,” which appears as “Droit du Seig­
nieur” in some later collections. It is the story of Mat Drus, a Malay “peasant,” and
his daughter Minah, who is newly married to the sturdy young yeoman Daman.
Their effete Chief sees Minah working in the fields, and she takes his fancy. Da­
man refuses his command to hand her over to his harem and, after some stout re­
sistance, is killed by the King’s retainers. Minah herself also resists but is carried
off. While Daman is overcome by the Chief’s feudal rapacity, Clifford clearly en­
codes his defence of his wife as the first shoots of an incipient Malay modernity.
His father in law, Mat Drus, shows the “eyes of a driven peasant, the cattle of
mankind”: Daman, in contrast, stands “erect” when confronting the chief, “an
equal facing an equal, a man defending his women-folk from one who sought to
put shame upon them.” This manly self-reliance, Clifford suggests, fails before
the introduction of the rule of law, but it will be encouraged after the introd¬
tion of the residential system. The independent yeoman is the very subject inter­
pellated by colonial governmentality, and a significant impulse in his
self-assertion as an individual, not as a subject, is the defence of a naturalised mo­
nogamy. Women thus become objects of traffic here: their movement from the
confines of the harem to the sphere of the home represents the transition from feudalism to enlightened modernity.

For all his use of Malay women as symbols of the degree of racial regeneration, however, Clifford also deploys Malay society in a sharply contrasting way, as a "natural order" which implicitly criticises Victorian women's struggles for social equality. Clifford's story "The Battle of the Women" is prefaced by a quotation from Lockseley Hall that clearly emphasises the separation of the spheres: "Woman is the lesser man,/ And all her passions matched with mine,/ Are as moonlight to sunlight,/ And as water unto wine." The story which the Clifford-narrator tells is, he comments, "garnished with a moral; and one, moreover, which the Women's Rights Committees would do well to note. I should dearly like to print it as a tract, for distribution to these excellent and loud-talking institutions." In the story, the Sultan departs up-river in the hot season, and his son, Tunku Indut, elopes with four of the palace's dancing girls. His half-sister, Tungku Aminah, is so incensed—partly, the narrator implies, through jealousy, since she is not yet married—that she leads an army of women to Tungku Indut's compound, and bangs loudly on the door with her sword. After beating on the door for a time, Tungku Aminah pauses. Tungku Indut is heard calling for his sword, at which point the women run away in panic.

The narrative is given additional authority by the position of the narrator, whose voice the reader is encouraged to identify with that of Clifford himself. The narrator watches events from the safety of his compound across the street from Tunku Indut's: he observes, sometimes with anxiety, but he does not intervene. Events unfold almost as a scientific experiment, one which, following natural laws can, Clifford suggests, lead to only one outcome. Many other tales that portray Malay women reflect a similar management of nature and the individual. Clifford rarely portrays a woman's story in its own right: most often Malay women provide the impetus for a commoner or a member of the Sultan's household to resist arbitrary authority in the name of monogamous conjugality. At the same time, nominally traditional relations between Malay men and women are coded as natural, implicitly criticising the degenerate state of sexual relations in late Victorian England.

Clifford's texts, however, do not succeed in consistently managing Malay women as part of a system of government or in completely denying them agency. A persistent concern in the stories and novels is Malay women's sexuality—"according to the vernacular proverb," one of his narrators notes, "the desires of Malay women are as disproportionate as those of the sandfly." Another remarks, with a certain wistfulness, that "there are no Florence Nightingales among the women of Pahang." In Poovey's dichotomy, Malay women represent the earlier construction of femininity as lack of restraint, as opposed to the virtues of Victorian womanhood which white women embody. Their desire is present, half-concealed, at Clifford's most vividly indulgent descriptions of racial degen-
eration. The narrator of “A Dying Kingdom” diagnoses the “foolish goggle eyes, restless and leering . . . mouthing blubber lips” of the son of the Sultan of Brunei as “the fruit, over-ripe with decay, of the self-indulgence and the vile ill-doing of generation after generation of men who had recognised no law of God or man save that of unchained inclination.”88 Behind the man, he notes the object of such indulgence, “the glint of women’s eyes surmounting a suggestion of bright silks and gaudy jewelry, the eyes of Malay women, the most venal of their sex.”89 As ever, however, Clifford is haunted by the paradox that such desire is necessary for regeneration and the work of colonial governance. If Malay women must be moved out from the “inner apartment” this movement will also bring to light the desire which has been displaced onto them. The territory, the imperial administrator notes, “shall be forced to yield its secrets to you” and they will “be laid bare to your probe.”90 “Until you have yourself experienced these desires, you cannot conceive the measure of their potency.”91

The ambivalence introduced by inter-racial desire centred upon a woman into Clifford’s narratives is perhaps best illustrated by his short story “The Further Side of Silence.” In a strategic displacement of an European/Malay inter-racial relationship which enables explicit eroticism, Clifford tells the story of the tragic love of a Malay man, Kria, for an orang asli (“Sakai”) woman. The opening passage of the story, in which Kria journeys upriver from the Malay-populated seaboard to the “fringe of the Sakai country”92 in the mountains, reflects a popular theme of Clifford’s: a hierarchy of races through which one descends as one moves from the metropolis to “benighted lands.”93 The story thus represents another example of Clifford’s complex identification with Malay masculinity: Englishman here is to Malay as Malay is to “Sakai.” Thus, of the small house which Kria constructs for himself, the narrator remarks that it is “a rude enough affair . . . but compared with the primitive and lopsided architecture of the Sakai it was palatial.”94 Kria’s love for Pi-Noi is coded as a desire for the primitive which marks a return to male and female essences: she is “what the first woman was to the first man.”95 A noble savage, Pi-Noi exhibits a “a divine unconsciousness” of her nakedness.96 Following her into the forest, Kria finds himself understanding for the first time “something of the exaltation and exhilaration of spirit that had been hers as she entered once more into her birthright of forest freedom”97 which is also, if more distantly, his own birthright.

Desire for the primitive, the narrative suggests, can never fully know its object: it must remain always as desire. Pi-Noi enjoys “playing at being a Malay housewife” but is “only mimicking Malayan ways for her own distraction and amusement” rather than “seriously attempting to adapt herself to her husband’s conception of femininity.”98 At times, she vanishes into the forest for a period of days or even weeks: Kria does not know where she goes and is powerless to prevent her. Much of the narrative is concerned with Kria’s tortured efforts to know what occurs in the forest, and it climaxes in his hiring of tracker to follow her.
The tracker discovers her with a Sakai man, and kills the couple—it is not until Kria arrives on the scene that he realises the dead man is Pi-Noi’s brother.

The story of Pi-Noi and Kria might be felt on one level to be an oblique acknowledgement of women’s power—the power to manage the home environment, to control a domestic symbolic system, as Langland puts it, and, in Pi-Noi’s case, the ability to illuminate the arbitrariness of the system. Although benevolent-seeming, Pi-Noi has some affinities to the demonic women Nina Auerbach identifies as symbols of the uneasiness of nineteenth-century patriarchy with women’s power. Kria thinks of his three years with her as “slavery,” and she symbolizes “for him the eternal triumph of her sex—the tyrannous, unsought power of woman.” Clifford’s embedding of her within the dichotomy of primitive and civilised, however, makes a further acknowledgement about the nature of desire itself. What disturbs Kria is the very silence of the story’s title: the fact that Pi-Noi is not transparent to rational inquiry. Pi-Noi’s capacity to know beyond language and logic disturbs him: in her moments of “silence and immobility,” he speculates that she is “holding intimate commune with animate nature in a language which had its beginning upon the further side of silence.” It is a silence which Kria can never penetrate, one which is preserved even in the culmination of his drive to know, Pi-Noi’s death.

Through its manipulation of gender centred on the figure of the “primitive woman,” then, “The Further Side of Silence” hints at the place of the primitive within Clifford’s notion of colonial governance. It is present as a necessary object of desire, and yet because desire must be prolonged, it can never be attained. The nation looks back into the past for re-infusion of a primordial vigour, but it is the desire resulting from this backward glance which, paradoxically, drives the nation forward into the modern world. Pi-noi’s death also hints at the larger violence of the changes unleashed by the imposition of the residential system; if it is unrepresentable, it nonetheless calls for an intermediary to record, to inscribe, to represent. “Professor Max Müller,” Clifford writes in one of his earliest published articles in which he analyses “Sakai” dialects, “tells of a traveller in South America who saw a parrot which was the only living creature that could speak some words of a forgotten tongue. A vocabulary which I compiled of this dialect will act the part of the parrot, and will shortly be the only record that such a dialect was ever spoken by man.”

**Race, Gender and Nation: Since the Beginning**

Representations of European and non-European women and their symbolic exchange in the creation of a British male subjectivity culminate in Clifford’s first novel, *Since the Beginning*. The novel is in two parts, the first centering upon a Malay and the second upon a European woman. In the first, a young British man, Frank Austin, arrives in Karu, the capital of the native state of Pelesu,
which no European has visited for fifty years. Welcomed by the Malay ruler, Austin begins a surreptitious relationship with Maimunah, a woman of the Sultan’s harem, and eventually elopes with her from Pelesu. The second part of the novel is set eight years later. Frank Austin has married Cecily Blandford on his last leave and has brought her out to the Senangan valley, where he is District Officer. In the course of the narrative, Frank recalls his relationship with Maimunah and his gradual disillusionment with her, leading to their divorce before his home leave. He is consumed with guilt over not having told Cecily of is past. Maimunah, however, arrives in the District and approaches Frank, asking to be a second wife. When Frank refuses, she poisons Cecily with arsenic and then confesses her actions to the Englishman, who promptly commits suicide.

Despite the autobiographical elements of Clifford’s novel, an interpretation which sees it reductively as primarily autobiographical, the expression of guilt at a premarital relationship with a Malay woman which returned to haunt Clifford’s marriage, is probably mistaken. The most obvious quality about Clifford’s portrayal of Maimunah is its intertextuality. At the time of the novel’s composition, Clifford had discovered Conrad’s novels and praised the novelist’s “power, the instinct, the genius, call it what you will, which alone enables a man to give articulate and artistic expression to his inner thoughts.” He first read Almayer’s Folly while returning from Malaya on leave in 1895, the period of leave on which he was to marry. Since the Beginning, however, bears less similarity to Conrad’s first novel than to his second, An Outcast of the Islands (1896). Maimunah is very close to Conrad’s Aïssa. Both Malay women fall uncontrollably in love with a European man, and yet both remain proudly self-assertive; in both texts, elaborate narrative convolutions are needed to establish that the Malay woman is in fact of Arabic descent, as if to thereby explain the desire they provoke in European protagonists and diminish the transgressive power of an interracial sexual union. Even the language Clifford uses recalls Conrad. When Frank is seduced by Maimunah Clifford’s description has a certain melodramatic force: “the glowing eyes of Maimunah burned into his own, and her clinging arms drew him down, down, down, impotent and unresisting, into a measureless oblivion, which obliterated all the memories of a lifetime.” The imagery of such a passage clearly recalls Conrad’s repeated comparison of Willems’s liaison with Aïssa to a fall “into a sombre hollow, into a deep black hole full of decay and of whitened bones.”

If Clifford’s portrayal of Maimunah is influenced by Conrad, the larger structure of the novel, with its opposition between feminine savagery on the colonial frontier and feminine self-governance in the metropolitan home, also responds to a literary and cultural environment. The most explicit expression of this opposition was yet to be written: Conrad’s presentation of two nameless women, the African woman and the Intended in Heart of Darkness, one signifying the atavistic liminality of colonial exploration, the other the stable domestic-
ity to maintain which such exploration was done. The opposition, however, does not start with Conrad: one might think of the narration of the Indian “Mutiny” as a violation of feminized domestic space in many Victoria accounts, or of the exclusion of domesticity and therefore femininity from the narrative of Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887). “I would have no woman lord it over me about the child,” remarks Ludwig Holly, Haggard’s narrator, of Leo Vincey, his young charge, “and steal his affections from me. The boy was old enough to do without female assistance.” Yet Clifford’s novel is unique in one respect: unlike most late Victorian adventure novels, it does not present a journey into a liminal zone, with a return to the metropolis as its conclusion. Rather, it seeks a transformation of the space of the colony itself from one of liminality to one of safe domesticity: in this respect it is a colonial, not an imperial adventure novel. Women thus become markers of the success of governance, of the systematic replacement of the perils of the romantic frontier with the order of the colony, of the domestication of colonial space. The eight years which pass between the first and second parts of the novel are the eight years Clifford from the institution of the residential system in Pahang in 1888 to Clifford’s return with his wife from England in 1896, eight years at the end of which Pahang was incorporated into the Federated Malay States, a period in which, Clifford noted, the “Pahang Malays” became less of a “turbulent people” and “each year . . . more civilised and more amenable to the law.”

The division in Clifford’s text can usefully be thought of as one between harem and home. Inderpal Grewal has noted that representations of the English landscape in the nineteenth century are marked by a fetishisation of readability “transparency.” Whatever is unknown, whatever is foreign, thus becomes coded as opaque. Nineteenth-century European travel narratives, Grewal notes, seek to “‘civilize’ ‘Eastern’ women . . . to make them less opaque, to strip them of their veils, and to remove them from harems where they lived lives hidden from the European male.” The harem is presented as “a space of nonfreedom, evil, and idleness, a degenerate space awaiting the regeneration of colonial rule. In Clifford’s text, the narrative begins with Maimunah recovering from torture in the King’s household for the crime of taking a lover: her movements are circumscribed, and she can only leave the household at night, or on a suitable pretext. The King’s household, like that in “A Dying Kingdom,” is clearly decadent, the monarch’s voice “soft and gentle as that of a woman.” Maimunah asks Frank to take her out of the darkness of the harem into the emancipatory light of modernity; at the end of part one he acquiesces.

In the second part of Clifford’s text, the emphasis is upon the domesticity of the home, a home externalised as the native state under British administration. The locus of action is not the Sultan’s Palace but the residency bungalow. Austin engages in elaborate formalities in the interest of preserving the nucleus of the British family: “It was one of Frank’s fads that evening dress was a necessity even
in the jungle when a lady was present, for this once semi-orientalised White Man, whose friends had been wont to lecture him upon his too great disregard for European civilisation, was now among the most punctilious observers of social conventionalities. Cecily’s charitable work extends the reach of the family out beyond the walls of the bungalow, transforming the district into a familial group, with herself and her husband at its head.

Clifford’s attempts to articulate home to harem, to provide a narrative of the systematic replacement of one by another, are indicated by the “once” of the above quotation. Susan Morgan’s account of the changing demands of colonial governance in British Malaya is useful here. “On the Malay Peninsula,” after the initial Forward Movement, Morgan argues, “heroic adventure needed to be metamorphosed into successful administration. One way to mark this ideological change in public policy is that the masculine needed to be transformed into the feminine.” The role of the Resident, Morgan notes, was different from the earlier, more masculine, adventurer’s role, and involved the use of what “in Victorian England were normatively considered the more feminine virtues, those used in raising a family and running a home: familiarity, understanding, kindness, and persuasion.” For Morgan, the domestic space of the home must thus expand out into the colony: what might have been coded as private is now made public.

Morgan’s account, however, neglects the way in which “masculinity” and “femininity” are part of a wider process of the formation of and governance of a racialised self in the late nineteenth century. Her insights can be modified by consideration of Ann Laura Stoler’s account of colonial subjectivity. Foucault, Stoler notes, argues in The History of Sexuality that a premodern power system based upon legal codes is in the nineteenth century subject to the superimposition of a “system of power that regulates through normalization rather than legal codes, that enlists the individual to monitor itself.” This is also, we might note, the change from sovereignty to governmentality, and, crucially, the family is the nexus of this new system. Relating Foucault’s schema to the situation of colonial governance, Stoler notes that earlier constructions of the possibility of “alliance” through interracial marriage were supplanted in the nineteenth century by stress upon racial integrity, in which governing practice made “the formalization of racial categories contingent on the management of sex.”

Clifford’s novel, then, attempts to display a transition from colonial sovereignty to colonial governmentality through the medium of its hero’s relationship with women. Frank’s relationship with Maimunah is subject to a considerable amount of textual retrospection and comment that places it in another time from that of his marriage with Cecily. Thus the text notes that “[t]he girl was strikingly handsome, altogether unlike any Malay woman whom Frank had been accustomed to see, for the Arabic type approximates more nearly to European standards than does that of any of the races of Southern Asia,” while
the narrator simultaneously speculates that Austin’s “standard of feminine beauty had, perhaps, become somewhat debased.” The story of Frank and Maimunah is structured as a Romance, in which Frank’s participation enables a return to the primitive: we discover through the medium of the narrative that “in common with most young Englishmen, Frank Austin had sufficient latent savagery in his composition to make the chances and the incidents of a fierce fight for life a keen delight.”

The story of Frank and Cecily, we have seen, is structured around control and self-regulation, with Frank now a “most punctilious observers of social conventionalities,” dedicated to the removal of “pollution” and threats of desecration from the “shrine” of the home as metonym for both colony and self. The difficulty for Clifford lies in articulating the two stories as a smooth, progressive narrative, in which one mode of government proceeds from another, cause giving rise to effect. From the perspective of the second narrative, the first can only be a perversion, a monstrosity which must be erased. In the second narrative, the first has been expunged, only to return again, through Maimunah’s renewed presence. Maimunah has no place in this second narrative, and so she disrupts its triumphalism. Unable to plot his novel according to the principle Hayden White has termed “explanation by formal argument,” unable to produce a colonial novel which proceeds by stages from cause to effect, Clifford is left with nothing but structures of narrative, with “explanation by emplotment.” The first half of *Since the Beginning* is Romance, the second half Tragedy, and they remain discrete, each competing with, rather than complementing, the other. Clifford’s efforts to place women serve only to suggest the frailty of the story of colonial governance he has made for himself, one which can only persist through continual re-narration which elides its lack of coherence.

In Clifford’s representation of women, thus, the work of gender in underwriting masculine governance is never quite done. In an early Pahang Annual Report Clifford gave an account of an abandoned scientific expedition to Gunung Tahan in the Central Highlands, and notes that Ahmad sent a party of his men instead. “Their accounts of their adventures,” Clifford wrote, “included such detailed descriptions of the unearthly beings whom they had encountered, that it was impossible to place much credence in any of their reports.” What did the Malay men report seeing in the mountains, and why does Clifford suppress the content of their reports? A later story, “In a Semang Camp,” gives clues. In it Clifford and three Malay companions visit a camp of aboriginal Semang people in the Upper Perak Valley and are told by an old man that “in the depths of the silent forest places, there lives a tribe of women, fair of face and form, taller than men, paler in colour, stronger, bolder.... These women know not men.” As in Haggard, so in Clifford, a white woman appears uncannily, unaccountably, here at the heart of the most primitive of spaces, at the very place from which the text’s oppositions of class, gender and race work so assiduously to exclude her.