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An Exemplary Life Posthumously on Show: Frederick Courteney Selous, Imperial Masculinity, and the Nascent Preservation Movement

Jeffrey Schauer

Anthropology and History

Jeffrey Schauer's project began as a research effort aimed at narrowing his academic interests, but evolved into much more. Thanks to the enthusiastic support of Professor Mitchell, Jeffrey was able to experience a focused project, requiring primary and secondary research, that combined the solitude of sifting through archives thousands of miles from UCI, and travelling the length and breadth of Britain, with collaborative discussions in a classroom with a UCI professor and students a year later. He particularly enjoyed the almost endless fascination of sifting through nearly illegible letters in the library of the Natural History Museum in London. Jeffrey is pursuing a graduate degree in history at UC Berkeley.

Abstract

The death and subsequent commemoration of Frederick Courteney Selous, an explorer, hunter, and preservationist in the British Empire, weave together several strands of history that shed light on the character of the preservation movement in the early twentieth century. Exemplarity, conduct, and the Great War together created two moments that highlight the roles of race, class and gender in shaping notions of masculinity, which in turn becomes a tool for understanding the inherent contradictions in an early wildlife preservation society. Both Selous' person and memory become politicized spaces, used to reconcile a movement to the values of a time and a class. By examining images of the dedication of his memorial and investigating accounts of Selous' death and exchanges of letters between some of the key players in this drama, I was able to generate a new interpretation of a war-time death in East Africa and the hagiographic ceremony in London that followed. This interpretation suggests that early proponents of wildlife preservation were acutely conscious of the contradictions that their movement embodied, and sought to wield one exemplary life to fashion a narrative that linked preservation to other admirable attributes of imperialism. The effect of the choreographed ceremony was to reaffirm the difficulties faced in reconciling preservation with the commemoration of men like Selous.

Faculty Mentor



As a double major in history and anthropology, Jeff Schauer employed a wide range of analytical tools to assess the multiple cultural perspectives embedded in questions of wildlife conservation in the British Empire. Jeff's research is genuinely on the cutting edge. This paper simultaneously engages with three key points of current historical scholarship: the florescence of environmental history within mainstream debates; emerging investigations of the cultural, political, and economic contexts of environmental conservation; and the re-framing of national and imperial histories as mutually constitutive. Jeff productively used primary research conducted during his junior year in London, demonstrating long-range planning and real commitment to his topic. This paper lays the foundation for an exciting doctoral research program in Africa and Britain.

Laura J. Mitchell

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Key Terms

- ♦ Exemplary Life
- ♦ Great Man
- ♦ Preservation
- ♦ Selous, Frederick Courteney
- ♦ Society for the Preservation of the (Wild) Fauna of the Empire

Performing Last Rites

The tenth of June, 1920, was noted for a “remarkable variety in the duration of sunshine,” but in London there was a sporadic rain, which failed to cast a cloud over the ceremony taking place indoors at the Natural History department of the British Museum in South Kensington (“The weather” 20). The museum’s grand, Romanesque façade leads into a cavernous hall, which shares the exterior’s terracotta tiling. This tiling is known for its resistance to London’s inclement weather, which might have afflicted attendees at the unveiling of a memorial to Frederick Courteney Selous that summer day. The ceremony took place around a newly-commissioned memorial to Selous on the western side of the Grand Staircase, presided over by that enigmatic and controversial paragon of nineteenth century British science, Charles Darwin, and overlooked by the heads of two massive African elephants. On the stairs and landing, below these more imposing and august presences, were mortal men of flesh and flowing blood, the good and the great of a nation, a movement, and an Empire, who had come to praise, as well as bury beneath the awesome weight of history, one of their own (Figure 1). Selous’ memorial represents a life that was extraordinary to those who assembled in London that day not only for its great variety, but for its endurance through “sunshine and storm,” and for what his contemporaries imagined as its almost holy adherence to moral and physical probity, while managing to serve nation and the seemingly contradictory conception of preservation.



Figure 1
The Selous Memorial Ceremony. Natural History Museum. DH173/2157. Photograph used by courtesy of the Natural History Museum Archives; © The Natural History Museum, London.

Selous (born 1851) was a British explorer, hunter, colonizer, naturalist, preservationist, and soldier, who began his African career as a hapless wanderer in the Cape Colony. He became a renowned big game hunter, served the British South African Company in its expansion, and was an early advocate of the preservation of wildlife. He met his death in action at the age of 65 in East Africa during the Great War. Selous, as imagined by his contemporaries, was a fusion of a highly idealized and stylized imperial masculinity and the underpinnings of a burgeoning wildlife preservation movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Moreover, Selous traversed and mapped a variety of imperial terrain and met an evocative death. Finally, there was his embodiment of a particular type of masculinity, very reassuring in its bluff sensibility, rationalising some of the problematic and contradictory notions embedded in the developing preservation movement, rooted as it was in both Britain and Empire. These contradictions reside in Selous’ reputation as a big game hunter who was simultaneously at the forefront of a movement to preserve the fauna of the Empire. Examination of his status as an “exemplary life,” in particular through his embodiment of an “imperial masculinity,” sheds light on how the preservation movement became respectable in the early twentieth century, while also illustrating some of its unresolved tensions, of which its early members were acutely conscious.

Two moments, Selous’ death in East Africa and his subsequent commemoration in the Natural History Museum, provide the focus for analyzing the intersections that lie at the heart of the narratives surrounding Selous’ life and death. This analysis in turn generates a critique of the developing preservation movement and helps us to understand why Selous’ life was worthy of such attention, when many other individuals with seemingly similar profiles died comparatively anonymous and uncelebrated deaths. It was the fusion of the ideals of preservation and masculinity and the combination of spheres in which Selous operated that made him such an appropriate subject for commemoration. His compatriots gave his memory as a gift to the nation and the Empire in the hopes that his person could be a rallying point for those concerned with the preservation of imperial fauna and fortitude. This memory glossed over the uncertainties that seethed below the placidly patriotic surface. The interpretations of Selous’ death and commemoration demonstrate that his life was as contested as the terrain that he died fighting over in East Africa.

This paper provides background on the preservation movement in the form of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire (SPWFE), explaining its link to

Selous and the importance of its composition and ethos. It then uses a discussion of Selous' masculinity, manliness and exemplarity to link the dramatic narrative of his death to his involvement in the preservation movement. This highlights the contradictions that Selous embodied, representative of the institutions and ideas he was meant to symbolize. After locating Selous' death in the context of the Great War, I briefly describe the subsequent uses of his name and portrayals of his person. This paper argues that Selous is particularly significant because of his embodiment of the virtues associated with the wildlife preservation movement, although he also embodies the movement's weak points and contradictions. However, Selous' death, coming as it did at the end of a life long associated with Africa and the continent's wildlife, allows us to view the emerging preservation movement at a crucial historical moment and to describe the competing forces at work within that movement

Fighting for Fauna

Scarcely more than a month after Selous was killed in action in German East Africa, a number of his admirers, including E.N. Buxton of the SPWFE, met in the Natural History Museum to discuss the creation of a memorial to honour Selous and his achievements. Other members of the nascent committee included C.E. Fagan, Sir Harry Johnston, and Theodore Roosevelt ("Memorial to Captain Selous" 5). Fagan was the Secretary of the Natural History Museum, and after the British Museum's trustees approved the memorial in 1918, and as the date of the ceremony approached, he engaged in an enlightening correspondence to ensure that the various facets of Selous' life and career were well represented at the Museum ("Memorial to Capt. Selous" 9). Robert Baden-Powell wrote from the Boy Scouts Association's Imperial Headquarters that he would "gladly arrange for a Guard of Honour of Boy Scouts for the unveiling of the Memorial." There was a snag, however, when a representative of the Legion of Frontiersmen (with whom Selous had served in the Great War) wrote to complain of being upstaged, asking whether the scouts might be moved to "the gallery at the end of the memorial," so as not to interfere with the "definite arrangements as to placing of frontiersmen, including the sounding of the Last Post as the memorial is unveiled" (NHM DF1004/CP/665). In the end, participants assembled before an adulatory crowd to hear praise heaped on Selous by Lord Grey, E.C. Stuart Baker (former-Inspector-General in the Assam Police), E.N. Buxton (eminent preservationist, founder of the SPWFE), and H. Wilson Fox (director of the British South African Company) beneath the high vaulted ceiling, from which

hung the skins of 14 lions, which must have served as a further reminder of whom (and what) was being celebrated.

Selous was a man who had moved across many spheres in Britain, her Empire, and the wider world, wearing many metaphorical hats. Most of the tributes to Selous written between January 1917 and June 1920 pay homage to his personal qualities. Others also take account of what was considered his skill as a naturalist. Yet there is strangely little mention of his role in the preservation movement. Selous had been an active proponent of game reserves, although he had doubts about the practicality of policing them, and wrote on multiple occasions (and spoke before Parliament) about the controversy surrounding the tse-tse fly (*Journal SPWFE* 1903 13). The void around this sphere of Selous' activities can be understood by examining the nature of the early preservationists.

The preservation movement with which Selous was intimately involved developed in the early twentieth century. Among its first formal incarnations was the SPWFE, of which Selous was a member, which was founded in 1903 as a reaction against the threat to a reserve in the Sudan (Neumann "Postwar conservation boom" 24). Uneasy at "the destruction of wild animals throughout the British Empire," the SPWFE conceived of itself as a "small Association" which sought to "[collect] information as to the number of wild animals killed each year, the gradual disappearance of species [...] and to take steps so far as possible to check this destruction" through the formation of "a sound public opinion on the subject at home and in our Dependencies" and of "game reserves and sanctuaries" (*Journal SPWFE* 1907 5). The SPWFE's membership demonstrates the priorities of its founders, and the limited scope within which they regarded "public opinion." This campaign was not seeking to put thousands of people on the streets of London to call for game reserves. It did not rely on a series of well-timed broadsides in daily broadsheets to make policy concerns known. It depended on a close-knit network of individuals with specialized knowledge, some of which was faunal and imperial: Selous and many other men with experience of African fauna were crucial sources of knowledge about population, characteristics and habits (although this knowledge was often second-hand, gleaned through native African scouts and hunters).

The other category of knowledge was social: a whisper in the ear of the Colonial Secretary, or a deputation from a number of well-connected members could work magic. A SPWFE list of members reads like a combination of Who's Who and Burke's Peerage. The aristocratic composition of

the SPWFE meant that it was composed of individuals who would have been broadly suspicious of a mass movement. Concerns similar to those that fashioned Selous' exemplarity (discussed below) included: in 1922, a "slump in faunal preservation" was "attributed to the general slackening of the fibres of civilisation" (*Journal SPWFE* 1922 38). What is most striking about the early SPWFE is how top-heavy it was, which meant that it had the ear of officialdom, but did not have to make its case to a broader audience. It is significant that the Society drew its members from the upper and titled classes, as well as from the services, which promoted imperial ties and social masculinity.

The preservation movement was one primarily for elites, but within this social category, it crossed international borders. In the inaugural issue of the Society's *Journal*, the list of members included Theodore Roosevelt (U.S.A.), Count Hoyos (Austria), Prince Henry (Liechtenstein), and Baron Gravenitz (Russia) (*Journal SPWFE* 1903 List of Members). The character of the movement was exclusive and exclusionary. The international meetings, which occurred to regulate hunting in Africa and draw up universal guidelines for preservation, differed little from the conferences of an earlier age that carved up the territory of Africa. No Africans were present, and those Britons, Europeans and Americans who were scarcely represented their respective populations. What they did represent were those with a vested interest in regulating use of colonial territory and its inhabitants, both human and faunal. The elites who carved up Africa's "empty spaces" had a long history of involvement in hunting and preservation (MacKenzie, *Empire of nature* 1988). The question then, is how this history could be reconciled with the growing preservation movement. Part of the answer lies in the physicality and exemplarity that Selous embodied.

A central tenet of my argument is Selous' status as an "exemplary life," and it is worth lingering over this concept briefly. Some historians distinguish between different types of heroic individuals in history. The Great Man tends to be a mover of history and a maker of events, whereas the Exemplary Life (perhaps analogous to the heroic myth) stands for particular sets of values, embodying them in life as well as death (Cubitt and Warren, 2000; MacKenzie *Popular imperialism* 112). Selous seems to fit into the latter category. Exemplary though Selous was perceived to be in his personal characteristics, it was his association with the larger-than-life Cecil Rhodes that positioned him near the center of politics in Southern Africa. There were many men with the same career profile as Selous, but his association with Rhodes, his connections to the preservation move-

ment, and his literary endeavours (which brought him into contact with Roosevelt) gave him special standing. His life checked all of the requisite biographical boxes, making him an appealing figure to a cross-section of imperial Britons.

Being a Man

Selous was the pride of his company, and said to be the oldest man serving in the British army. It was not so many years since elite Britons had fumed about the degeneracy of British manhood, and so a specimen of Selous' "beautiful proportions" caused journalists, fellow hunters, and other adulators to wax uncontrollably lyrical ("Captain F C Selous" 6). Perhaps they had in mind his undoubtedly splendid physical exertions such as the occasion on which, after wounding a giraffe, he leapt onto the animal's back and rode it. Bodily, rather than moral exercise seems to have been Selous' forte, and he himself remarks on the "thoughtless cruelty" demonstrated by this act of derring-do (Selous *Nature notes* 215–16). When Britain went to war with Germany in the summer of 1914, Selous' instinct was to apply for service in Western Europe. Despite his enthusiasm, recruiters had doubts about his age. Selous was nevertheless able to return to service on the continent where he had spent much of his life. His peace-time experience in Africa served him well, and he seemed to suffer less than his compatriots. He won a Distinguished Service Order (DSO), and was leading his battalion on 4 January 1917 when he stumbled upon an enemy force, receiving two wounds, one fatal. According to a tribute in the *Journal of the Royal African Society*, "he died leading a charge, though already wounded. He would have desired no other death; and he rests in the land he loved" (Pycraft 200). All who witnessed his death were much affected, including "his boy, Ramizani, who had been with him some considerable years," and who "stood upright on the top of the ridge in face of terrible German machine-gun fire and brought out of a tree the black sniper who wounded Captain Selous" (Davis 11). Thus was created a heroic moment, worthy of the tableaux of Wolfe, Cook and Nelson, and in a setting no less exotic. Perhaps Selous' admirers hoped that the hills beside Beho-Beho would enter into the historical lexicon to resonate with an imperial-minded public along with the Plains of Abraham, Kealakekua Bay, and Cape Trafalgar.

Selous' vigorous and exemplary life required a correspondingly dramatic and exemplary death. Davis' interpretation suggests that Selous was "leading a charge" when he died. The almost certainly much more prosaic truth is that Selous was trying to get his bearings in the difficult terrain, in order to move forward, when he was shot (Taylor 289–90).

What was a tragically routine wartime encounter became a highly-charged heroic moment, in which Selous was killed by an identifiable enemy, and dramatically avenged. The elevated terms that Davis uses, “the charge,” correspond with Paul Fussell’s description of “raised” or “high diction” (Fussell 21–2). Such language had a crucial role to play in formulating a positive, idealistic, and heroic image of war. The description of Ramizani’s avenging of Selous also seems problematic. If the exchange of fire at Beho-Beho was as chaotic as accounts seem to suggest, and did indeed take the British and Germans by surprise, it seems improbable that both Davis and Ramizani (who, unremarked upon elsewhere in accounts of Selous’ exploits, makes a dramatic entrance here) were able to identify the individual sniper. Still more remarkable was that Ramizani was able to then kill the marked enemy, and that he was willing to expose himself to the withering fire laid down by the Germans. He was clearly a good sort, and a commendably (if suicidally) plucky fellow. Ramizani fits into Michael West’s description of the “Good Native,” who was as “equally idealized [...] as his sinister opposite number [the Dangerous Native]” and who was “‘properly’ trained and respectful of authority” (West 14). The racialized portrayal of Selous’ servant corresponds with broader colonial conceptions of native peoples, including in the sphere of preservation. So long as native Africans accepted *Pax Britannica*, and acted out its lessons, they were acceptable, and might find their way into heroic narratives as a footnote, or *deus ex machina*. This miraculous set of coincidences is only eclipsed in its conspicuousness by the parallels with the deaths of other imperial military heroes.

Viscount Horatio Nelson was killed at Trafalgar by a sniper, and in subsequent (inaccurate) imagery, lay a while on deck (and was kissed by Hardy) before expiring. Selous “was not killed instantaneously”: Davis “immediately went over to him and stayed with him for fully ten minutes” (Davis 11). On the Plains of Abraham, General James Wolfe was wounded by a sniper before being killed by an artillery shard, and one of the characters kneeling by his side in Benjamin West’s fanciful painting is a pensive Native American. In the (imagined) cases of Nelson and Wolfe, popularized by West’s work, the hero does not die immediately, but lingers, surrounded by a crowd, and only expires once victory is assured. The wound that Selous received from the sniper may not have been the immediate cause of his death: according to Davis, it was rather “a splinter” from an earlier action (Davis 11). In his account of the campaign, however, Byron Farwell contradicts multiple aspects of Davis’ own description of the moment, writing that “in a brief firefight [Selous] was shot through the mouth and died directly”

(Farwell 318). This symbolic silencing of the hero denies him his moment of glory and due reverence. The details of the moments surrounding Selous’ death are contested, and significant, for the ways in which they stand for the virtues admired in him by his compatriots.

A second point to note in Davis’ description is the stress on “the land he loved.” This is not a remote, foreign place, but one where Selous was at home. In describing Selous’ participation and demise in the Great War, Taylor notes that “in Europe, too, there was a sense that amid the toll of the trenches, his was a death which amounted to more than just another futile sacrifice” (Taylor 291). The war in East Africa was also characterized as a “gentleman’s war,” and the commanders there were often romanticized (Koenig 14). The apparent gentlemanly nature of this conflict may have contributed to the probable myth-making surrounding Selous’ death. Perhaps ascribing his killing to an African sniper let the Germans themselves off the hook. The idea that Europeans killing Europeans really wasn’t cricket may have died a slower death in Africa than in Europe, where the guns of August annihilated such provincial sensibilities. When particular values and ideals become rooted in a geographic space, and heroic individuals can be linked to that space, legends flourish. Selous’ participation in the Great War was one component of his exemplarity, the product of historical circumstance, and helps to define the nature of his status as a symbol of all that was good about the Empire.

The first component of Selous’ exemplarity was physical. At a time when elite Britons obsessed over how Britain measured up to rising powers, fears of “physical deterioration” plagued imperialists (Darwin, 1986; Soloway, 1982). In nearly every tribute to Selous, his physical exemplarity features as a prominent and inevitably positive attribute. This exemplarity is associated with his imperial exploits. The Empire, itself a “massive assertion of masculine energies,” was “widely depicted as a strenuous open-air life, requiring energy, resilience and physical adaptability” (Tosh 6–7, 185). Selous’ life of out-of-door vigour meant that he was eminently suited for the lifestyle in the Empire which simultaneously created and reaffirmed masculinity. The cumulative and unintentional effects of the idealisation of Selous were to create a small-scale hero who could stand for values and ideas, and to create a moment of commemoration that exemplified the contradictions, ideals and ambitions of the preservation movement.

It was Selous’ fitness that allowed him to venture where few white men had, to conquer Africa’s fauna, and to

facilitate the transfer of the ultimate mammalian prize to a British museum. It mattered little to Dr. Albert Charles Lewis Gotthilf Günther (Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum) that Selous failed in his initial attempt. The armchair naturalist wrote with more than a little awe to Selous, remarking, “if you had not a constitution as tough as a rhinoceros skin, you would probably have never seen Matabeleland again” (NHM DF201/12). In none of the spheres in which he operated (as a hunter, collector, agent of expansion, author), was Selous indispensable. In its individual facets, one could have described any number of men, who fought and died in the War, who penned engaging narratives of their hunting exploits in Africa, who joined the SPWFE, or who represented a particular physical ideal. It was through the fusion of these spheres, augmented by his reputation and association with a number of powerful individuals, that Selous attained his exemplary status, which made him the subject of the elaborate ceremony after his death.

It was not only Selous’ embodiment of the physical ideal of masculinity, but his apparent moral probity that made him so exemplary an individual. He always “told the absolute truth,” and was “entirely free from egotism”; these things made him a “great hunter and a still greater gentleman” (“A mighty hunter” 13). There was, perhaps, no greater tribute that Selous’ compatriots could have paid to him than this last. In the age of the amateur preservationist, prior to the appropriation of the movement by the more scientifically-minded, Selous partook in two admirable pursuits (Neumann “The postwar conservation boom”). Not only was he an avid and successful hunter, but a collector who was “in the very front rank of field naturalists of his time” (Heawood, Fox and Fagan). In many tributes, Selous’ feats as a rambunctious lad at Rugby, and his more violent exploits in Germany as a young student, become the stuff of legend, or at least *Boys’ Own*, and are linked to his love of not only a vigorous life, but of collecting specimens. Selous’ compatriots created a myth that possessed all of the requisite ingredients for a hero, but not a tawdry, flamboyant hero; rather, Selous was a relatively modest hero, whose actions spoke louder than any words he pronounced. Like all constructions, this one required maintenance.

Gifts to the Nation

Some years after the ceremony to unveil Selous’ memorial, it was noticed that the incorrect year had been given for Selous’ birth. Aghast, admirers quickly altered the form of the lettering, and corrected the date. Their concern stemmed not from any obsession with the truth, but rather

from a fear of the adverse effect that the misinformation would have on Selous’ reputation. Making him more youthful “detracted from the credit due to him,” and this fault “appeared to be too important to leave unrectified” (NHM DF1004/CP/665). Another tribute to Selous is the sheer mass of dead faunal matter throughout the museum, on display and in storage. The Selous Collection in the Natural History Museum numbers 10,000 specimens. Over 7,000 of these are bird eggs, but among the species represented in the 550 heads given by the hunter are lion (19), buffalo (6), giraffe (3), waterbuck (14), eland (11), impala (18), hartebeest (30), gemsbock (18), sable (16), roan antelope (11), and Grant’s gazelle (16) (NHM DF1004/CP/665). That “sportsmen in particular” were sure to be “gratified” by these “gifts” to the nation does not seem to have troubled the members of the SPWFE who were not only present in some numbers at the ceremony, but instrumental in bringing it about (“Big game trophies for the nation”). Selous’ manly and patriotic collision with the Empire produced a body count of the sort that ran contrary to preservationists’ goals, which decried the “indiscriminate slaughter” that threatened “the preservation throughout [British] possessions in Africa...the various forms of animal life” (*Journal SPWFE 1903* “Convention”). Here, at least, the impact was fatal. But if Selous was indeed an unrepentant butcher, his patriotism, thoughtfulness in the gifting of his kills, clean-living, and long service to the appendages of Empire, more than excused him.

Central to the value of the faunal specimens at the Natural History Museum was the personal hand that Selous had in killing each and every one of them. His person is therein linked (positively) to the destruction of fauna. The transportation of the specimens to a British museum was also key. But this raises some important questions about the ownership of the specimens that Selous is able to claim by virtue of having killed them. In his own writing, Selous occasionally gives credit to those who helped him find his footing as a hunter. Among those individuals whom he cites are several Africans, who served as mentors, because of their long experience of the terrain and geography, and their intimate knowledge of flora and fauna. However, these are not the only native Africans who played a role in the making of Selous’ reputation. It seems clear from his correspondence with Günther that Selous did not personally shoot all of the animals he sent to Britain (NHM DF200/23/213). It is unclear whether in compiling the Selous Collection the Museum differentiated between those animals which Selous was known to have personally shot, and those that were killed for him by others, but sent back to Britain by him. In all of this, the Africans who frequently travelled with him,

and may well have been responsible for some of Selous' "gifts" to the nation, are often anonymous. In the Zambesi Valley in search of the elusive White Rhino, Selous wrote, "two of my kafirs and I got a back [sic] attack of fever" (NHM DF200/23/380). The possessive "my" opens up space for a conversation about the role Africans played in the making of Selous' reputation. Those who travelled with him do so not as individuals, but as annexes of his person. What to do with these silent people would dog the preservation movement, the ethos of which put it squarely at odds with many Africans. Although culling "vermin" that killed livestock or visited "intolerable ravages among the natives' crops" shows that there were some shared concerns between colonial officials and native peoples, preservationists' conceptions of reserves as isolated spaces, to be kept "apart" from people, played havoc with the economies of many African cultures (National Archives FO881/7395-G 2).

Steinhart describes how Europeans failed to understand the role that hunting played in many African economies, and the damaging effects of the restrictions on movement that reserves and parks placed on Africans. These misunderstandings and manipulations had the effect of converting African hunters in to poachers (Steinhart, 2006). Selous himself held somewhat contradictory attitudes towards the autochthonous people among whom he moved. In many ways condescending and racist, Selous also held some Africans in relative esteem. As Mrinalini Sinha suggests, "the colonial preference for 'martial' over 'non-martial'" peoples clearly shows the link between the British Empire and masculinity in nineteenth century Britain (8). Selous describes "Bushmen" as "very intelligent companions, full of knowledge concerning the country in which they lived" and "undoubtedly the best of all the natives of South Africa to have with one when in pursuit of game, as they are such wonderful trackers, and so very intimately acquainted with the habits of every type of wild animal" (Selous *African nature notes* 345). One can sense that mere horticulturalists would have held little appeal for this imperial action-man. Selous' emotionally sympathetic but ideologically exploitative views are summed up by his closing in *African Nature Notes*, where he describes Bushmen as "beings whose human hearts can be touched and whose sympathies can be aroused by the kindness of another human being, however widely separated the latter may be from themselves in race and degree of culture" (348).

Networking for Nature

Early in February of 1905, members of the nascent preservation movement arrived at the Colonial Office. The SPWFE deputation's passage through the panelled doors, impenetrable to native peoples, was facilitated by the social connections of the organization's leadership. Physical doors were not the only ones to which a shared class experience with government elites proved to be the key. The minds of the men who ran the Empire were opened, and internal inspection revealed a deep sympathy to the SPWFE's themes. However, the fractured manner in which the representatives made their case revealed internal disagreements. After raising some technical matters in framing lists of protected animals, Buxton stood down, and Colonel Delme Radcliffe launched into a diatribe against Buxton's soft approach to African hunting, castigating the "natives" who killed "everything that walked [...] with poisoned arrows" (Journal SPWFE 1905 17). Clearly, A Bad Thing, Which apparently made them different to the Europeans who killed everything that walked, but using firearms. On the balance, A Good Thing.

Selous' own place in the preservation movement magnifies the double-standards and contradictions embodied in this meeting at the CO. The lion skins hanging from the ceiling and the two elephant heads overlooking the stairs presented the eulogizers with a conceptual dilemma. These contradictions did not go unnoticed early in the SPWFE's existence (Fitter and Scott 8). In the Society's own *Journal*, Sir Henry Seton-Karr took on the critics headlong:

Those who are specially interested, from knowledge and experience, in this question have been called 'penitent butchers'. We are—shall I say wrongly and ignorantly?—thought to be men who, having in earlier days taken their fill of big-game slaughter and the delights of the chase in wild, outlying parts of the earth, now, being smitten with remorse, and having reached a less strenuous term of life, think to condone our earlier bloodthirstiness by advocating the preservation of what we formerly chased and killed [...] Your true sportsman is always a real lover of nature. He kills, it is true, but only in sweet reasonableness and moderation, for food if necessary, but mainly for trophies. (Journal SPWFE 1908 26).

His answer does not satisfy. The language of progress appropriated by the defensive SPWFE members tallies neither with the exclusivity of the organization nor its pri-

orities. Equating “sweet reasonableness” with “trophies” also seems problematic. The 14 lion skins that hung from the ceiling of the Natural History Museum demonstrate importance of numbers.

What is certain is that Selous did have a change of heart during his lifetime. But these shifts are probably less dramatic than the progressive narrative that the SPWFE provides suggests, and more subtle. Writing to Günther of the interminable quest for the White Rhino, Selous bemoaned the difficulty of his task: “I very much fear that I shall never be able to get you one, and it will be a very great pity if this animal disappears from the face of the earth, without any specimen being preserved in our own national museum” (NHM DF200/25/340). At this point, Selous has no difficulty reconciling the unfortunate occurrence that the extinction of the rhinoceros would be with his complicity in that extinction. He is not so much concerned with the extinction of the rhino as with the possibility that he might fail to kill the last individual. Selous’ writings do not make clear what converted him to the preservation movement later in life. Once integrated into SPWFE, he wrote in the Society’s *Journal*, explicitly linking the problem of maintaining the integrity of game reserves to the intrusion of prospectors into them, implicitly coming down on the side, within the SPWFE’s internal debate, of those who believed that it was Europeans, and not Africans, who were the greatest problem for game preservation (1907 13). Yet Selous was deeply sympathetic to Afrikaans-speaking settlers. The debate in question highlights the intensely racialized aspects of the preservation movement, and the strong undercurrent of social class, which informed the arguments that the Society made. Edward Buxton, the moving spirit behind the SPWFE, declared that “you cannot interfere with [Africans] ancestral methods,” and believed that “traditional” methods of hunting were not destructive. Later, he would implore MPs “not [to] part with lands to settlers or others within the reserve” (*Journal SPWFE* 12). Others among the SPWFE’s members were critical of Buxton’s approach, as Delme Radcliffe’s passionate intervention demonstrated.

Neither of the views articulated by the aristocratic members of the SPWFE show any great understanding of the issues that would have been important to Africans: culture and subsistence. Buxton’s view is condescending, and portrays Africans as outside the realm of social and cultural change. Delme Radcliffe recognizes the impact of the British and other Europeans, but the language in which his observations are couched is paternalistic, and rooted in the belief that Britain’s presence in Africa brought civilisation and modernity to the continent. The third Baron Hindlip, him-

self a settler in British East Africa argued that blameless settlers should be allowed to keep hunting rights, and that only a few among their number had an adverse impact on game (*Journal SPWFE* 1907 17). And soaring above these petty mortal voices were the exalted tones of Lord Curzon, who urged members of the SPWFE not to speak of wildlife preservation in terms of hunter versus naturalist, or of finances. Rather, the humble man implored, they should consider that they “owe the preservation of these interesting and valuable [...] types of animal life as a duty to nature and to the world [...] We are the owners of the greatest Empire in the universe” and a part of the responsibility implied therein is the position of “trustees for posterity of the natural contents of the Empire” (*Journal SPWFE* 1907 “The Year” 21). The language that was used to describe the ethos of the early wildlife preservation movement offers some clues to the silences on the subject of Selous’ own involvement.

Selous himself has relatively little to say about his clear involvement in the preservation movement. For those seeking to elevate Selous after his death at Beho-Beho, to confirm yet again his “manliness,” the omission is telling. They sought to refrain from overly emphasizing any single facet of Selous’ life, or sphere of his involvement. The combination of particular anecdotes with sweeping narratives suits the generalized portrait of Selous as the renaissance imperialist, who spent a rambunctious youth in Britain, had little taste for the Continent, and cut his teeth on the harsh and uncivilized imperial frontier, before establishing himself through connections with African potentates and powerful Britons. He was engaged in political and economic expansion. His wartime service, together with his collection for museums, amateur naturalist activities, and commitment to preservation in the Empire, brought together a number of distinct strands, which were more powerful when woven into a single narrative. Moreover, because of the contradictions in the preservation movement, its leaders probably found it easier to make an appeal based on Selous’ broad “authority” (stemming from his first-hand knowledge of fauna, exploring and soldiering), to which his exemplarity was inextricably linked.

It is crucial to locate Selous’ death and exemplarity, and the ceremony that followed, in the broader context of the Great War. The Great War was a different type of war to those that preceded it in terms of technology and scale (Ashworth). The hagiographies that poured forth after Selous’ death stemmed in large measure from his particular sphere and manner of participation in the Great War, and specifically, from the kind of death that he died. The sort of war that

was fought in East Africa was markedly different from that which raged in Western Europe, and facilitated Selous' feats. War in Europe was "stagnant [...] steady, almost ritualistic," whereas in Africa "the campaigns were marked by extreme mobility" (Farwell 14). Although the mobility and openness that characterized the East African campaign can be overstated, compared to the claustrophobic hell of the trenches in France, the campaign was more familiar to a nation that had recently experienced small, colonial wars (Paice, 2007; Wrigley 44–5). It provided a panorama for the projection of a type of imperial adventure that fell victim, like so many British youths, to shells and machine gun fire in Europe.

As noted, Selous' age was a matter of prestige. In part, this stemmed from an abstract glorification of his superb fitness at an advanced age, and the lesson that held for Britons of a younger (and ostensibly more degenerate) generation. There were also practical considerations. According to some observers of the East African campaign, "the older men held up better than the younger to the hard marching, fatigue, loss of sleep, and reduced rations" (Farwell 304). Describing Selous' exploits in the context of the Great War contributes to our understanding of his exemplarity. However, the problematic portrayals of his death, together with the questions posed by his involvement in the preservation movement, have raised questions about the rationale of the movement and the ambitions of its founders, further muddying the moral waters artificially purified by the SPWFE.

Remembering

The uncertainty surrounding the moral purpose of the preservation movement would have resonated with the dignitaries who assembled on 10 June 1920, who were seeking, uncertainly, with much debate, to address these issues, and to provide a verdict. Searching among themselves they found a memory of one of their number who, by living much of his life in their Empire, and moving through one of its "virgin" corners, served a larger purpose. Dredging deeper, they found him to be an honourable man, who in his service to King and Country, Company and Commerce, embodied those virtues that were necessary to forge a movement dedicated to the preservation of the fauna of the British Empire, and to project a heartening ideal in the aftermath of war. Despite the confidence conferred on them by their stations, it was their uncertainty about the future of their movement and their class that generated the dramatic display in the Natural History Museum. This was a masculine enterprise. There are no women in the field captured in the photograph of the ceremony, and the *Boy*

Scouts and Legion of Frontiersmen preclude any significant participation on their part. To the children attendant at the ceremony, standing perfectly erect, eyes fixed on the Selous Memorial, this grave occasion was meant to be an object lesson in being a man, and the grown men of the Legion, together with the government officials and the faunal specimens all circumscribed the ideal space in which they were to operate. Perhaps a thrill of excitement ran through the assembled Boy Scouts as they took part in the creation of history and the uncomplicated commemoration of a great man whose life was eminently exemplary. And the thrill may have been no less for the Frontiersmen, the old soldiers, who were striving as best they could to maintain a myth about not only the type of man it took to win a war, but about the progressive purity of their movement.

Beho-Beho lies in the northern corner of the Selous Game Reserve in modern Tanzania. Following the Great War, the British, in altruistic fashion, valiantly took upon themselves the administration of former-German East Africa. A luxury safari camp rests in the hills three miles from where Selous was killed (Beho Beho). Interested visitors can "experience a safari in absolutely wild and unspoiled bush" ("Game-Reserves.com, Tanzania"). Unspoiled, apparently, by the war that had raged around it for over four years, longer than the fighting in France. Unspoiled too, it would seem, by the "poaching" that had so frustrated Selous and his contemporaries. It remains an "untouched gem," accessible to a privileged few, as the SPWFE would have desired (Tanzanian Tourist Board). The casual erasure of the contested history of the Reserve, and the ideas behind it in popular advertisement, and of the contested ideas, indicates the extent to which aspects of the hagiography of Selous were successful.

The associations of masculinity (and militarism) with colonial rule in Africa took on a different meaning in the context of Selous' name in Rhodesia in the period between UDI (1965) and Independence (1980), when a series of bombs went off at churches in Salisbury (now Harare). Blame was put on a Rhodesian Army Unit called the Selous Scouts. Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo, the two African leaders battling for control after the impending independence, condemned the bombs, and called upon the British Governor, Lord Soames, to disband the unit ("Mugabe calls to disband" 6; "Mr Nkomo accuses" 6). This Unit, often operating in the Bush, had little regard for the black Africans who were about to become full partners in the nation for the first time, and had taken as their name that belonging to a British explorer and preservationist, whose particular incarnation of masculinity was suited to a colonial context. The exam-

ples of the Selous Scouts and the Selous Game Reserve demonstrate that detached from colonialism and masculinity on the one hand, and from preservation on the other, Selous' legacy becomes much more complex, as it should be. His contemporaries found it more comfortable to use Selous' life to reinforce a meta-narrative about Empire, which commented on race, class and nature. Selous' grave at Beho-Beho gives his name, marks him out as a soldier of the Royal Fusiliers, and remarks that he was "Killed in Action." Reality was ever so much more complicated.

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