



China in a Book: Victorian Representations of the 'Celestial Kingdom' in William Dalton's *The Wolf Boy of China*

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Abstract

Despite the wealth of material related to China in Victorian and Edwardian children's literature, relatively few scholarly works have been published on the subject. Critics who have discussed the topic have tended to emphasize the negative discourse and stereotypical images of the Chinese in late nineteenth-century children's literature. I use the case of William Dalton's *The Wolf Boy of China* (1857), one of the earliest full-length Victorian children's novels set in China, to complicate previous generalizations about negative representations of China and the Chinese and to highlight the unpredictable nature of child readers' reactions to a text. First, in order to trace the complicated process of how information about the country was disseminated, edited, framed, and translated before reaching Victorian and Edwardian readers, I analyse how Dalton wove fragments from his reading of a large archive of texts on China into his novel. Although Dalton may have preserved and transmitted some 'factual' information about China from his sources, he also transformed material that he read in innovative ways. These are reflected in the more subversive and radical parts of the novel, which are discussed in the second part of the essay. In the final section, I provide examples of historical readers of *The Wolf Boy of China* to challenge the notion that children passively accept the imperialist messages in books of empire.

In a *Mansfield Park* scene that draws attention to the connection between place and texts, eighteen-year-old Fanny Price, while reading a book about Lord Macartney's embassy to China (1792-1794), is interrupted by her cousin and mentor Edmund Bertram. He commends her choice of text, suggesting that by reading the 'great book', Fanny 'will be taking a trip into China' (Austen [1814] 1990, pp.140-141). Edmund Bertram's idea that reading a book about China could replicate the experience of travelling there is echoed at the end of Rowe Lingstone's *John Chinaman* (1891), an illustrated book of verse for children:

*Now don't you long to go, like me,
The wonders of this land to see?
Well, on the voyage you might be drowned,
And must spend many and many a pound.
Don't go: but scan this book with care,
Each line and letter:
It's just as good as going there.
Perhaps it's better.*

(Lingstone 1891, n.p.)

The sentiments expressed by Edmund and the narrator of *John Chinaman* reflect a belief in the primacy of the text in Orientalist discourse, which, according to Edward Said, reveals an attitude that ‘people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book ... the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes’ (Said 1978, p.93). Furthermore, Said continues, ‘such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe’ (p.94, emphasis in original). Said’s influential concept of Orientalism, which argues that the West, because of a dominating desire to govern the Orient, tame its hostility, and claim authority over it, constructed it as uniform, backward, inferior, fixed, and unchanging, has been used to examine children’s texts and their relation to imperialism and Empire. Summarizing what historians of children’s literature have said about the topic, Peter Hunt and Karen Sands state that ‘virtually all (English-language) histories of children’s literature agree that children’s books ... were the witting or unwitting agents of empire-builders. This was true of *all* writing, not merely the stories designed for the boys who were to be the empire-builders ... None of this is in dispute ...’ (Hunt & Sands 2000, p.40, emphasis in original). M. Daphne Kutzer argues in *Empire’s Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children’s Books* that writers of ‘classic British children’s books ... pass on... [an] essentially conservative and imperial ideology ...[to] child readers’ (Kutzer 2000, p.138). Similarly, Kathryn Castle asserts in *Britannia’s Children: Reading Colonialism through Children’s Books and Magazines* that Victorian children read material that secured ‘the youth into the imperial ethos’ through ‘both positive identification with Britishness and distancing from the undesirable “other”’ (Castle 1996, p.8). She claims that the ‘logic of racial and national superiority’ was ‘pervasive and controlling’ (p.9). Further, she states that it is ‘unlikely’ that the young readers who were ‘being ill-served by a denial of balanced history and the distortions of race in their leisure reading’ ‘recognised it’ (p.181).

The statements from Hunt and Sands, Castle, and Kutzer reflect the idea proposed in Jacqueline Rose’s oft-cited *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* that ‘[c]hildren’s fiction draws in the child, it secures, places and frames the child’ (Rose 1984, p.2). Yet, while the adults who wrote the texts discussed by these critics may have exhibited a desire to colonize children and control them, this does not mean that children who read the stories were shaped as subjects in this way. Furthermore, as Clare Bradford (2001) has pointed out, there are problems with Rose’s analogy that children’s literature is like the colonizer and child readers are the colonized. First, the relationship between adult writers of children’s texts and their child readers is not the same as the one between colonizers and colonized because the authors were children themselves once. Therefore, ‘the children for whom they write are not wholly Other’ (p.12). Second, some children’s texts feature young colonizers. In these stories, the children are portrayed as ‘us’ rather than ‘them’ (p.12). Recently Kimberley Reynolds (2007) has also questioned Rose’s argument, stating that it is ‘based on what has been said about children’s literature rather more than on the evidence of the texts themselves’ (p.8). Reynolds argues for a closer attention to the complexity evident in children’s texts, which often reflect ambivalent or radical ideas. Reynolds’s *Radical Children’s Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*, Julia L. Mickenberg’s *Learning from the Left: Children’s Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*, and Marah Gubar’s *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of*

Children's Literature provide ample evidence of subversive and radical children's texts that challenge notions of children's literature as a conservative genre invariably parroting the dominant ideologies of the time. Reynolds posits that 'children's literature provides a curious and paradoxical cultural space: a space that is simultaneously highly regulated and overlooked, orthodox and radical, didactic and subversive' (p.3).

Drawing upon the assertions of Reynolds, I use the case of William Dalton's critically neglected *The Wolf Boy of China; or Incidents and Adventures in the Life of Lyu-Payo* (1857) as an example of a children's text that occupies 'a curious and paradoxical cultural space'. My reading takes up Reynolds' challenge to reconsider interpretations of Victorian children's texts that read them as always only reinforcing the dominant ideologies of Empire. *The Wolf Boy of China* is one of the earliest full-length Victorian children's novels set in the 'Celestial Kingdom', and it significantly explores the fluidity of mixed-race identity and reflects the complexity of racial tensions between the Han Chinese and other ethnic minorities such as the Miao, Si-fan [Xifan] and Tartars in the nineteenth century.¹

The story is set during the years after the first Opium War (1839-1842), possibly during the Miao rebellion (1854-1873), which was a series of serious revolts that raged for almost twenty years in the province of Guizhou. It features a mixed-race hero named Herbert Richardson, better known as Lyu Payo. His father, Captain Richardson, is an English officer-turned-merchant, and his mother, Sang, is a Miao princess. Lyu is known as the 'wolf-boy' because his mother's family is 'a brave race, who live among the mountains, in the province of Kwei-chou [Guizhou], and are called by themselves the Miao-tse, but by the rest of the Chinese people, wolf-men and women' (Dalton [1857] 1884, p.15).² Richardson and his family live in Canton, where he runs a business with a Chinese Christian named Tchin, who had been saved by the Captain during the war. One day Tartar child-stealers attempt to kidnap Lyu.³ While Captain Richardson and Tchin try to rescue the boy, one of the thieves stabs the Captain. He falls into the river and disappears. After searching futilely for Richardson, Tchin assumes that his business partner is dead and offers to adopt Lyu and Sang as his children. He takes them to Peking to live with his brother Hieul and sister-in-law Chang, who secretly plot to get rid of the newcomers. Hieul's hopes for monetary gain are realized during the Feast of Lanterns, when he seizes the opportunity to take Lyu out alone after Tchin falls ill. Hieul sells the boy to a bonze (Buddhist priest) who takes him to Kounbom [Kumbum, in historic Tibet, near Xining]. Lyu manages to escape from the city and searches for his mother. Along the way, he is miraculously reunited with his father, who had not drowned in the river but had been held captive by pirates since his disappearance. During the course of the novel, the main characters travel through many parts of China, a plot device that Dalton uses to provide readers with a great deal of information on various Chinese customs, cities, landscapes, and landmarks.

Although William Dalton (1821-1875) never travelled to China, he was commended by contemporary reviewers for his 'wide and accurate knowledge of foreign lands', suggesting that Victorians believed that having textual knowledge was enough to qualify one as an 'expert' on China ('Reviews' 1858, p.33). By selective copying of 'facts' about China and the Chinese that he read into the novel, Dalton

was one of many Victorian writers who participated in the production of Orientalist discourse. His sources, which sometimes replicated second-hand, or even third-hand, information, may have been outdated by the mid-nineteenth century, mistranslated, or simply made-up. In one sense, Dalton can be categorized as an imperialist writer in terms of his confidence in the notion that one can know a country by simply reading about it. However, *The Wolf Boy of China* should not be dismissed as a typical Victorian text filled with messages that would influence children to accept imperialist ideology because a close reading reveals that it contains distinctive ideas about race, miscegenation, and mixed-race children.

The Wolf Boy of China complicates previous generalizations about negative representations of China and the Chinese in Victorian children's literature and highlights the unpredictable nature of child readers' reactions to a text. In this essay, I first analyze how Dalton wove fragments from his reading of a large archive of texts on China into his novel to trace the complicated process of how information about the country was disseminated, edited, framed, and translated before reaching Victorian and Edwardian readers. Although Dalton may have preserved and transmitted some 'factual' information about China from his sources, he also transformed material that he read in innovative ways. These transformations are reflected in the more subversive and radical parts of the novel. The second part of this essay discusses two of them: Lyu's role as a mixed-race hero and the novel's questioning of British confidence in the sustaining power of their empire. In the final section, I challenge the idea that children passively accept the imperialist messages in books of empire by examining the experiences of some historical readers of *The Wolf Boy of China*.

William Dalton and Knowledge of China

William Dalton wrote children's fiction set in places such as China, Japan, Africa, Ceylon, and the Indian Archipelago. Little is known about his life, except that financial difficulties compelled him to apply three times to the Royal Literary Fund for assistance. The application information he sent to the Fund, which includes letters of endorsement and personal statements, reveals that he was a journalist and sometime editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and sub-editor of the *Morning Advertiser*. According to *Men of the Time: A Dictionary of Contemporaries, Containing Biographical Notices of Eminent Characters of Both Sexes* (Cooper 1872), Dalton belonged to 'an old Yorkshire family', was one of the founders of the Savage Club, served as editor of a monthly magazine, and was 'honorary secretary of several literary institutions' (p.277).⁴ In a letter to the Royal Literary Fund dated 6 May 1862, Dalton writes that he 'drifted into a purely literary career by the success of [his] first work *The Wolf Boy of China* at a time when [he] had no other occupation'.

Contemporary reviewers of *The Wolf Boy of China* revealed in their assessments of the novel a confidence in the authority of the written word and the idea that China could be contained in a book. For example, a reviewer in *The Observer* claimed, 'A more interesting and more complete collection, *in petto*, of all that has been known of China and the Chinese does not exist in the English language' (quoted in 'A "Wonder Book" on China' 1858, p.9). In labelling the work as a 'complete' collection of 'all' that has been known of China, the reviewer is assessing the book based on standards set during the nineteenth-century 'knowledge explosion'. This explosion of knowledge can be attributed

to expanded sources of information and greater demand for knowledge from a society with higher income and more educational opportunities. A passion for cataloguing and classifying was reflected in the many scientific trends that swept through nineteenth-century Britain, including botany, geology, entomology, archaeology, and palaeontology. Amateurs, many of them women, enthusiastically gathered ferns, collected rocks, and searched for insects, carefully documenting everything they found.⁵ Alan Rauch has characterized this ‘encyclopaedic spirit’ as being grounded in

some common ideas: first, that it is indeed possible to classify the world, at least in discrete parts; second, that an adequate re-creation of that world can be contained within a book or a series of books; and, third, that it is possible to present all facets of the world in a way that is accessible to the public. And, while these criteria cannot be taken as absolutes, they reflect the sense of orderliness that remains an implicit justification for the organized accumulation of knowledge into texts.

(Rauch 2001, p.34)

Because most Victorians believed that it was possible for foreign countries to be accurately represented via the written word, contemporary reviewers claimed that ‘the odd customs of the Celestial people are represented with rigid truthfulness’ in *The Wolf Boy of China* (‘Reviews’ 1858, p.33). Dalton was critically acclaimed not only because Victorians were particularly interested in China at the time, but also because they were confident that the world could be classified, contained, and accessed through the written word (see Richards 1993, p.7).

According to Thomas Richards (1993), the Victorians placed great emphasis on archiving and organizing knowledge because they believed that ‘the control of Empire hinged on a British monopoly over knowledge’ (p.7). The Great Exhibition of 1851 showcased British efforts to classify materials sent in from different parts of the Empire. As one critic observes, the Great Exhibition ‘inspired and compelled the production of numerous narrative and cataloguing texts’ that ‘ordered the event’ and ‘gave meanings to its displays ...’ (Kriegel 2001, pp.147-149). Considering that *The Wolf Boy of China* was published in 1857, Dalton may have been inspired by the Great Exhibition and American collector Nathan Dunn’s ‘Ten Thousand Chinese Things’ exhibition at Hyde Park to create his own ‘exhibition catalogue’ of China. In fact, some of the information included about China in the novel came from William B. Langdon’s *Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Collection*, suggesting that Dalton probably visited the Hyde Park exhibition (Langdon 1842).

Dalton’s novel thus served as a vehicle for ‘displaying’ an exotic China: festivals such as the moon festival, Feast of Flowers, and Feast of Lanterns are described in detail; as well as activities that range from cricket baiting to coal burning. It is clear that readers were expected to learn something from *The Wolf Boy of China*, because when they opened the 1884 edition of the book, they would have noticed this quotation on its title page: “‘Something is learned every time a book is opened.’ *Chinese Proverb*’.⁶ In addition to this maxim, each of the chapter titles is adorned with an English translation of a Chinese adage and many others are interspersed throughout the text. All of these aphorisms can be found in John Francis Davis’s (1836; 1841) *The Chinese* and *Sketches of China*, suggesting that Dalton most likely consulted these two critically acclaimed works (see Davis 1836,

vol. 2, pp.158-163 and Davis 1841, vol. 2, pp.94-100).⁷ In incorporating vast amounts of information into his novel, Dalton presents himself as an expert on China who is able to lead children on a comprehensive tour of the country.

For Victorians experiencing the ‘knowledge explosion’ for the first time, quick access became a central concern for those seeking information. In 1830, W. W. Wood commented that although many multi-volumed works on China had already been published, these works were not likely to be perused by the average reader because in order to gain information on ‘the leading features of the country and its inhabitants’, one must ‘wade through such a mass of comparatively uninteresting matter, and tediousness of detail’ (p.vii). Therefore, ‘few choose to purchase their knowledge of China at the price of so much patient research’ (p.vii). Wood’s statement makes texts such as *The Wolf Boy of China* more significant because they reveal how adults like Dalton, who did not have personal experience of the country, mediated the ‘ponderous volumes’ of books on China for non-specialist readers (p.vii). Contemporary readers appreciated Dalton’s patience in researching China: according to a *Court Circular* reviewer, Dalton ‘collect[ed] all the information available for his subject’. The reviewer thanked him for ‘hints upon many things not generally known, though very generally talked about’ (‘The Wolf Boy of China’ 1857, p.8).

Dalton and the French Sinologists

What sources did Dalton consult in his research on China? Although there was already a considerable amount of knowledge about China published in the mid-nineteenth century, available sources for information on the interior provinces of China were more limited because Dalton was preparing his novel before the Treaties of Tianjin (which allowed foreigners to traverse beyond the thirty-mile boundary surrounding the treaty ports) were signed in 1858. Therefore, many of his sources were translations of works by French sinologists published in the eighteenth-century.⁸

Dalton’s main unacknowledged source of information on China was the four-volume *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l’Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (1735) by French historian Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (1674-1743). Considered the most authoritative source on China until well into the nineteenth century, this work was translated into English not long after its publication. British writers could consult two English translations of Du Halde’s work, *The General History of China* (Du Halde 1736b, translated by Richard Brookes) and *A Description of the Empire of China* (Du Halde 1738; 1741, translated by Green and Guthrie).

The most direct evidence of Dalton having read both translations lies in the names Lyu Payo, Hieul, and Tchín, which appear in a Chinese story entitled ‘The Practice of Virtue Renders a Family Illustrious’ that is included in volume 3 of *The General History of China* and in Volume 2 of *A Description of the Empire of China*. There are slight differences in the romanization of some of the characters’ names in the two translations. For example, Dalton’s Tchín and Hieul are rendered ‘Tchin’ and ‘Hieul’ (but later as ‘Hi eul’ [sic]) in Brookes’s translation while they are ‘Chín’ and ‘Hi eul’ [sic] in Green and Guthrie’s edition. Lyu Payo is probably a combination of Green and Guthrie’s ‘Lyu pau’ (‘Lyu, the Treasure’) and Brookes’s ‘Liu pao’ (‘Liu the Treasure’) because

Dalton explains it means ‘*Lyu the Treasurer*’, for Sang ‘had resolved that her boy should be the treasurer of all her happiness’ (Dalton 1884, p.16).⁹ Dalton also borrows from the plot line, making Tchín a kind merchant like the Tchín in the Chinese story, while basing Hieul’s wicked behaviour on Lyu pau/Liu pao’s dubious conduct (see Du Halde 1736b, vol. 3, pp.114-134 and Du Halde 1741, vol. 2, pp.147-167). However, instead of passively copying the entire plot of ‘The Practice of Virtue Renders a Family Illustrious’, Dalton transforms it into his own by making Lyu a young half-Miao, half-British hero who undergoes many trials and adventures throughout various parts of China.

Like Dalton, Du Halde, who lived in Paris all his life, did not have first-hand experience of China and relied on various sources for information on the country. He gathered information mostly from corresponding with Jesuit missionaries in China, reading their memoirs, conversing with them when they returned, or editing their reports for *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* (34 volumes, 1702-1776). For example, Du Halde notes that he derived ‘The Practice of Virtue Renders a Family Illustrious’ from the work of Jesuit Père D’Entrecolles (1664-1741), who travelled to China as a missionary in the late 1600s (Du Halde 1736b, vol. 3, p.113). Du Halde also consulted the works of Père Le Comte (1655-1728) in describing a ‘young brisk Bonze’, which Dalton used in his narrative of Lyu’s first meeting with the bonze during the Feast of Lanterns (Du Halde 1736b, vol. 3, p.44). Jesuit mathematician Louis Le Comte, who arrived in China in the 1680s and worked in Shanxi and Shaanxi, probably could not have anticipated that his observations on China would eventually be transmitted to readers centuries later in the form of a children’s novel.

Considering that Dalton also quotes extensively from *The Travels of Marco Polo*, a book attributed to the Venetian who some scholars believe never travelled to China, his sources could potentially be traced back to the thirteenth century.¹⁰ These examples illustrate how complicated the process of information dissemination was, for each step of the process involved selecting, interpreting, translating, and editing. For example, elements in the plotline of *The Wolf Boy of China* initially originated in Père D’Entrecolles reading a Chinese text and translating it into French, Du Halde reading it and incorporating it into his French text, Richard Brookes and Green and Guthrie translating it into English, and Dalton reading the English translations and choosing to modify them to suit his purposes. In tracing how Dalton used the materials provided in several books in his novel, we can see how information that would have only been purchased by historians, missionaries, or others with a special interest in China potentially reached a wider audience.

The Mixed-Race Hero

Although Dalton may have played a role in perpetuating certain stereotypes about the Chinese by passively accepting and repeating the works of previous writers, this does not mean that he simply wrote a story to encourage children to become empire builders, as previous critics of Victorian children’s literature have often implied about all writing of this period. The few critics who have written on the representation of the Chinese in nineteenth-century children’s literature, such as Cécile Parrish (1977) and Louis James (1973-74), have tended to emphasize the negative discourse and stereotypical images of the Chinese, concentrating on the portrayal of Chinese villains and the

establishment of an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality. In creating Lyu Payo, the half-Miao, half-British hero of *The Wolf Boy of China* as a boy who spends the majority of his time passing off as a Han Chinese but is very proud of his Miao heritage, Dalton presents a complex character who is not the undesirable ‘other’ that often appears in other nineteenth-century texts.

The topic of interracial marriage and Eurasian children in China became more noticeable only in the latter part of the nineteenth century. For example, Susan Thurin points out that in *A Marriage in China* (1896), Alicia Little tackles the subject of Eurasian children in China, which increasingly became a public concern after 1867, when the *China Punch* printed a cartoon about a man who fears being mistaken as the father of a Chinese child. Thurin also mentions that people believed that half-European children ‘have a blood or race claim upon every foreigner’ and thus deserve to be saved from the ‘constant contact with the degrading vices of the Chinese’, as one writer argues in an 1871 article in the Anglo-Chinese journal *Cycle* (quoted in Thurin 1999, p.169). Although Lyu is the hero of *The Wolf Boy of China*, he differs dramatically from the typical Caucasian adventure-story hero. Instead of being regarded with disgust for being a mixed-race child, Lyu navigates between the Miao, Si-fan, and Han communities with ease. Perhaps one reason Dalton chooses to make Lyu half-Miao instead of half-Chinese (Han) is due to the fact that his audience knew relatively little about the Miao, but may have already had negative stereotypical ideas of the Han Chinese entrenched in their minds. Lyu’s Miao background also heightens his marginal status as well as the ‘romantic’ or ‘exotic’ nature of *The Wolf Boy of China*. In addition, because the Miao were enemies of not only the ruling Manchu government, but also of the Han Chinese and Si-fan, the element of danger and excitement is increased.

In 1854, scientist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) stated that ‘nobody can deny that the offspring of different races is always a half-breed, as between animals of a different species, and not a child like either its mother or its father’ (quoted in Young 2000, p.157). ‘Half-breeds’ were believed to be sterile and degenerate. Therefore, Victorians who were anxious about the survival of the superior ‘race’ felt strongly about maintaining racial purity. In discussing the representation of Eurasians in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British Indian literature, Loretta M. Mijares (2004) comments that as a standard trope, the half-caste is ‘granted a strange agency’ where he has the power ‘to choose the inherent qualities of his own make-up’ and ‘is generally perverse enough to pick the worst qualities of the two races’ (p.120). Mijares posits that ‘[t]his convoluted rhetoric of relocated agency and blame enables a disavowal not only of responsibility to the entity fathered by the colonizer but also of similitude between father and bastard child’ (p.120).

Dalton’s presentation of a mixed-race character does not reinforce the widely held stereotypes about ‘worst qualities’ and instead emphasizes positive qualities and strengths. Not only is Captain Richardson a responsible father who loves his son, there is also a striking similarity between the two. Instead of possessing the worst qualities of the Miao race and the British race, Lyu seems to have inherited the positive traits of both—courage, compassion, filial piety, intelligence, nobility, physical strength, and Christian morality. In 1854, physician Josiah C. Nott (1804-1874) expressed the view that ‘[t]he infusion of even a minute proportion of the blood of one race into another,

produces a decided modification of moral and physical character' (quoted in Young 2000, p.157). Most Victorians believed that this 'modification' resulted in weakened offspring, but in the case of Lyu, the modification that occurs is a positive one, for he is strong, intelligent, and loyal.

In choosing to refer to his hero as 'Lyu' rather than 'Herbert', Dalton seems to focus on Lyu's 'Miaoness' more than his 'Britishness'. After Lyu finds his maternal grandfather, the Miao king, he demonstrates his 'Miao bravery' by passing the 'ordeal of valor', proving that he is 'worthy to be a leader of his race' (Dalton 1884, p.260; p.263). Lyu continues to demonstrate his bravery by fighting with the black Si-fan and saving a pirate chief from being assassinated by a Tartar woman.¹¹ After the first incident, the black Si-fan chief concludes that 'he [Lyu] is no dog of a Chinese; the blood of the wolf or tiger is in him' (p.227). Similarly, the pirate chief calls him the boy with 'the heart of a tiger' (p.293).

Dalton describes Lyu's personality traits in much more detail than his physical appearance. In fact, not much is known about Lyu's physical features except that he wears a queue and has a fair complexion. With the exception of the bonze, nobody else in the novel seems to recognize him as a Eurasian child. Unlike half-castes in colonial fiction, Lyu does not pose a 'threat' because he never attempts to 'pass' as British and does not possess the 'dangerous invisibility' that colonial writers were often anxious about (Mijares 2004, p.115). In choosing not to emphasize physical features, Dalton is implying that 'knowledge' of a culture is possibly more important for survival. For example, it is not enough for Captain Richardson to go undetected disguised as a boatman while searching for Lyu. In order to obtain vital information about where his kidnapped son might be held, he must utilize his knowledge of Chinese customs. When he spots a sympathetic-looking Chinese man, Richardson laments that he had lost his only son and 'would have no child behind him to perform the customary ceremonies at his funeral or sweep his tomb', knowing that the Chinese man would consider this a serious misfortune and offer to help (p.21).

In addition to knowledge of culture, mastery of language is also crucial for survival. Lyu's knowledge of both the Miao language and the language spoken by the government envoy saves him because he could act as the interpreter for the official who was heading for Guizhou to deliver a message from the Emperor to the Miao leader. Knowledge of attitudes towards race is also a powerful thing to have. For example, when Lyu is discovered by Chinese soldiers he merely tells them that he is the son of a merchant and they treat him kindly. When the black Si-fan people ask him about his history, he is not afraid to tell them 'the name of his father's race' because he knows they probably would not object to that (p.231). Because he is not sure about their attitude towards the Miao, however, he merely informs them that his mother is from the mountains without specifying the name of her tribe. However, he is too proud of his Miao identity to pretend that he has Si-fan blood in him even though claiming Si-fan ancestry would have gained him acceptance among their tribe.

On the racial hierarchy, Dalton places the minority 'races' in China (Miao and Si-fan) high above the majority (Han). According to Dalton's description, the Miao are a 'simple people' (p.248), 'uniformly good-tempered, pleasing, and industrious' (p.247). Considering that he consulted the

works of Charles Gutzlaff (1838), who describes Guizhou as the ‘Switzerland of China’ (vol. 1, p.164), it is not surprising that Dalton (1884, p.246) informs readers that Lyu found ‘freedom and hospitality’ everywhere in Guizhou. Gutzlaff also compares the Miao to the Scottish Highlanders. Just as the Scottish people were categorized into the Lowlanders and Highlanders, the Miao people were divided into two categories by the Han Chinese: ‘raw’ [*sheng* Miao] or ‘cooked’ [*shu* Miao] (Jenks 1994, p.35). After saving his grandfather from a ferocious boar, Lyu arrives at the headquarters of the ‘SING’ Miao, which implies that his mother and grandfather are members of the ‘raw’ (unassimilated) group, who lived in remote areas and refused to adopt Han customs (p.255). The depiction of the Miao king’s refusal to acquiesce to the Emperor of China’s condition that he ‘throws aside his yellow robe and assumed title, and permits a garrison of imperial troops to occupy one fortress between every two divisions of the land of the Miao-tse’, would have resonated with contemporary readers who were aware of similar political tensions within the British Isles (pp.257-258).

In the novel, Dalton draws a parallel between the Miao and the Scottish when he compares Lyu’s perseverance to that of Scottish hero Robert the Bruce (1274-1329), ‘who, after many failures in his attempt to beat King Edward, happening to see a spider after many failures succeed in reaching its web, made another effort, beat Edward, and became king of Scotland’ (p.262). The story of Robert the Bruce and the spider was popularized by Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) in *Tales of a Grandfather* (1828-1830), a three-volume children’s history of Scotland. Like Scott, Dalton presents a nostalgic yearning for the romantic past as reflected in the Miao, whom he depicts as independent, brave, and proud. In creating a romantic adventure in the tradition of Scott, Dalton is encouraging readers to approach *The Wolf Boy of China* as they would a novel by the popular writer, providing them with a familiar framework to receive the book.

Dalton’s book can also be seen as Romantic in its sense of the vulnerability of empires. A description of the Tower of the Thundering Winds in *The Wolf Boy of China*, which ‘was built in the time of the philosopher Confucius, 2,500 years since’ and ‘now only partly in ruins’, causes the narrator to ask,

Where shall we all be in 2,500 years hence? Whole empires will have arisen, decayed, and become lost; nay, perhaps, the civilized inhabitants of some yet undiscovered country, may be sending out vessels of discovery to dig from the bowels of the earth monuments of that mighty England, that they will only know as we know Pompeii, Xanthus, and other cities—from books.

(p.200)

The narrator’s rumination on the rise and fall of empires reflects eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century ambivalences about the pursuit of empire. The image of ‘ruins’ in *The Wolf Boy of China* point to the English Romantic poets’ works and C. F. Volney’s (1789) *The Ruins, or Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires and the Law of Nature*, which highlights the transience of empire. While writing about China, Dalton is meditating on Britain: he is not confident that ‘mighty England’ will still reign supreme in 2,500 years. The disturbing fact is that England’s status

as a powerful empire would not be everlasting because empires inevitably decline. Ultimately the light emanating from Britain's glorious monuments will be extinguished. However, the narrator emphasizes that books containing knowledge about England will survive, just as texts about Xanthus and Pompeii did. This passage reinforces the idea espoused by Edward Said that in Orientalist discourse, great authority is placed on books for their capacity to preserve knowledge of a place for posterity.

Historical Readers of *The Wolf Boy of China*

As a writer, Dalton mediates a complex textual discourse on China that had been developing in Europe for hundreds of years, seeking to make these erudite texts more accessible for the child reader by combining 'instruction' with 'amusement' in his novel. His project reflects the Victorian expansion of knowledge and the passion for 'facts' as 'the dominating force in the children's book market' in the mid-nineteenth century (Carpenter & Prichard 1999, p.74). How successful was he in imparting this information to the common reader and contributing to their understanding of the Chinese? Although one contemporary reviewer noted that Dalton 'perfectly succeeded in the very difficult task of combining instruction with amusement', how did child readers respond to the text ('Reviews' 1858, p.33)?

In 'Reading as Poaching', Michel de Certeau argues that

The reader ... invents in texts something different from what they 'intended.' He detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings.

(de Certeau 2002, p.169)

As de Certeau suggests, the process of reading itself is a creative one that can lead to a variety of meanings. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton (1990) have also pointed out that readers of the early modern era 'did not passively receive but rather actively reinterpreted their texts' (p.30). The idea of readers as poachers can be seen in an example of a childhood experience of engaging with *The Wolf Boy of China* from the late American politician John E. McDonough's *Idyls of the Old South Ward* (1932).

McDonough's memoir about growing up in Chester, Pennsylvania calls into question simplistic assumptions about the child reader. Although the evidence of reading provided in McDonough's memoir may not represent a typical reader's experience, it elucidates how readers can assert their individualism and refuse to be controlled by a text. McDonough (c. 1874-1944) recalls that when he was a child, he often went to visit his eccentric friend Frederick J. Hinkson, Jr., a former active Republican who had retired from politics to sell shoe supplies. Before the Fourth of July celebrations of 1882, Hinkson had given the young McDonough money to buy books for his library. Given the freedom to choose books for Hinkson, eight-year-old McDonough purchased "The Phantom Wife," by Emma Garrison Jones; "Kit Carson's Revenge," by Beadle, and "The Wolf Boy in China" (McDonough 1932, p.95). An American edition of *The Wolf Boy of China* was published

under the title *John Chinaman; or, Adventures in Flowery Land* in Boston in 1858 and as *The Wolf Boy of China; or Incidents and Adventures in the Life of Lyu-Payo* in 1859. Because the title of McDonough's volume, 'The Wolf Boy in China' differs slightly from *The Wolf Boy of China* and the name of the author is not specified, it is possible that he had bought a pirated copy of Dalton's work. Furthermore, because it cost less than twenty cents, making it significantly cheaper than the five-shilling first British edition and the seventy-five-cent first American edition, we can see that the book was later marketed as popular literature along with Beadle's dime novels.

It is worth noting that McDonough purchased books for Hinkson's library based on his 'whim and fancy' (McDonough 1932, p.95). Therefore, he may have chosen titles he thought would appeal to Hinkson or simply bought books based on his own personal preferences, which supports Jan Fergus's (2006) argument that children have agency—not only do they decide what they want to read, sometimes their tastes differ from people's expectations (p.245). For example, she discovered in the borrowing records of Rugby students that boys aged eight to fourteen read *Goody Two-Shoes*, traditionally considered a 'girl's book'. Similarly, McDonough made an unexpected choice in Emma Garrison Jones's *The Phantom Wife* because Jones was noted for writing women's romance fiction such as *Will She Win?* (1888), *Lady Ryhope's Lover* (1890), and *Wedded in an Hour* (1891).

Perhaps taking McDonough's interests into consideration, Hinkson discarded the other two books and started to read aloud 'The Wolf Boy in China', the story of 'a boy of a wolf clan who was journeying through the Celestial Kingdom, as it was then known'. In this 'interesting book for male juvenile readers', one of the most notable characters 'was a philosophic old soul who after the manner of Confucius expressed himself in cryptic parable, adage and proverb, one of which seemed to roll off his lips for all of the situations in the book' (McDonough 1932, p.95). Festivals seem to be the least likely of times for reading, but during the process of reading, readers such as McDonough seem to be able to enter a space where noises are temporarily blocked out, because he describes engaging with the text of 'The Wolf Boy in China' as a 'quiet dissipation', suggesting that he became oblivious to the 'incessant discharge of fireworks' outside (McDonough 1932, p.95). As de Certeau describes of reading, 'to read is to be elsewhere, where *they* are not, in another world' (de Certeau 2002, p.173, emphasis in original).

Instead of merely reading the book aloud, Hinkson translated the text into Latin and before the evening passed, a 'considerable' portion of the work had 'become clothed in Latin, in which translation the subtle humor of the old philosopher was developed in a delightfully amusing way' (McDonough 1932, p.95). A knock at the door interrupted the process of translation, forcing them to leave the 'merry sheets of the Latinized "Wolf Boy"' aside (McDonough 1932, p.96). The unexpected callers, a woman and her uncle, were descendents of the Salkelds, the original owners of the house, who had come seeking a memorandum of the family. On the eve of Independence Day celebrations, Hinkson shared some 'interesting gossip of pre-independence days' with his visitors and rummaged through his documents, producing a letter penned by a previous Salkeld (McDonough 1932, p.97). Because he was unwilling to part with the letter, the woman copied its

contents on the ‘back of a sheet of Latinized “Wolf Boy in China”’, making her yet another potential reader or user of the Hinkson version of Dalton’s story (McDonough 1932, p.99).

After the pair departed, Hinkson and McDonough returned to the story. McDonough’s experience with the text became even more interesting when Hinkson, finding Lyu’s ‘journey through the Gobi desert’ so ‘drab’, asked McDonough ‘to provide an appropriate melody’ to ‘cheer him on his perilous way’ (McDonough 1932, p.99). Before the fireworks ushered in the first minutes of the Fourth of July, McDonough, choosing the melody of the latest popular ballad ‘Oh Dem Golden Slippers’, pretended to be Lyu singing in the Gobi desert. Rather than regarding Lyu as the undesirable ‘other’ and wishing to distance himself from this mixed-race character, McDonough channels Lyu in his performance.

Considering that African-American Philadelphian James A. Bland’s song ‘Oh Dem Golden Slippers’ (1879) was itself a parody of the spiritual song ‘Golden Slippers’, McDonough’s ability to transform a ‘serious’ text such as *The Wolf Boy of China* into something light and comical becomes even more noteworthy. Reading this book and translating it into Latin during America’s celebration of Independence Day, Hinkson and McDonough asserted their own independence from any message the author may have been trying to convey. Instead of being manipulated by the text, they literally ‘poached’ (to borrow de Certeau’s term) it and invested it with new meaning in the act of translation and performance.

De Certeau, employing the image of readers as travellers, argues that they are ‘like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves’ (de Certeau 2002, p.174). Like Fanny Price, McDonough and his friend took ‘a trip into China’ along with Lyu, but instead of being submissive recipients of ‘knowledge’ of China transmitted from the thirteenth century onwards, they were active playful readers who worked collaboratively to find amusement in the text and creatively appropriated it for their own purposes. Regardless of the accuracy of the information presented about China in this novel, they enjoyed engaging with the text, interpreting it, and giving it new meaning.

The inherent unpredictability and creativity of reading is demonstrated both in Dalton’s writing of *The Wolf Boy of China* and the reactions of child readers to the text. Dalton’s ‘Celestial Kingdom’ came into being through the process of reading and poaching, modifying and transforming, imagining and creating. Rather than merely writing a colonialist text set on securing the child reader into the imperial ethos, Dalton produced a cultural space from which a plurality of meanings could proliferate in unexpected ways. The novel illustrates children’s literature’s ‘paradoxical’ nature because it contains both didactic and subversive elements that simultaneously resist and reinforce orientaling tendencies and positions. On one hand, Dalton was continuing in the long tradition of writers who replicated textual knowledge in their confidence that the world could be recreated and contained in a book. On the other, he created a vision of China that was far from simplistic. In *The Wolf Boy of China*, Lyu journeys across a vast country characterized by tensions between different racial groups. These conflicts potentially reflected back on the problems within Britain itself.

As Lee Sterrenburg (2004) has pointed out, scholars tend to ‘acknowledge possible exceptions to hegemonic metropolitan discourse, only to discount those exceptions as infrequent or nonsignificant’ (p.275). However, he continues, these ‘exceptions can be diverse and significant. And they have been there in the archive all along’ (p.283). *The Wolf Boy of China* is just one of the many Victorian texts on China that challenges previous assumptions about the monolithic representation of the Chinese. Others, such as Anne Bowman’s *The Adventures of Rolando* (1853) and Bessie Marchant’s *Among Hostile Hordes* (1901), to name a few, demonstrate the diversity of images of China and a broad spectrum of views on the Chinese in Victorian children’s literature. These, and others that have thus far mostly received little critical discussion, are worth bringing out of the archive and examined in future projects.

Endnotes

¹According to Robert H. G. Lee (1979), ‘Si-fan is the name applied to the nomadic Tibetans who occupied the large expanse of grassland situated at the headwaters of the Yellow River, the Min River, and the Chin-ch’uan River (the present Apha Tibetan Autonomous Chou)’ (p.36).

²The first edition of *The Wolf Boy of China* was published in England by Binns and Goodwin in 1857. This essay uses an American edition of *The Wolf Boy* published in 1884.

³In Dalton’s time, the word Tartar referred to the Manchus, the rulers of the Chinese Empire.

⁴The Savage Club was founded in 1857 at the Crown Tavern, Vinegar Yard, Drury Lane, by a group of Bohemians (artists, journalists, and authors). Notable members of the Savage Club include G. A. Henty, George Augustus Sala, Wilkie Collins, Sir Henry Irving, Mark Twain, and others. Dalton was elected to the Committee at the first annual meeting which was held on 4 February 1858. See Watson (1907) for a history of the Savage Club.

⁵For more discussion about Victorian women and science, see Barbara T. Gates’s (1998) *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World*, Suzanne Le-May Sheffield’s (2001) *Revealing New Worlds: Three Victorian Women Naturalists* and Mary Ellen Bellanca’s (2007) *Daybooks of Discovery: Nature Diaries in Britain, 1770-1870*.

⁶This aphorism is a translation of the Chinese proverb *kaijuan youyi* which could also be more literally translated as ‘there are always advantages in opening a book’. Although Dalton does not specify his source, he most likely came across this saying in volume 2 of John Francis Davis’s *The Chinese* because it is number 58 on Davis’s list of Chinese ‘Aphorisms’ (see Davis 1836, p.161).

⁷Davis (1795-1890), a famous British diplomat and Sinologist, notes that he selected and translated the collection of sayings in *The Chinese* from ‘a dictionary of quotations’ entitled *Ming-sin paou-kien* [*Mingxin baojian*, compiled by Fan Liben in the Ming Dynasty] (Davis 1836, p.157). In *Sketches of China*, Davis does not specify his sources, merely noting that the maxims were ‘picked up in the course of Chinese reading’ (Davis 1841, p.94).

⁸Some of his other unacknowledged sources include George Staunton's (1797) *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*, as well as nineteenth-century books such as Charles Gutzlaff's (1834) *A Sketch of Chinese History*, John Francis Davis's (1836) *The Chinese: a General Description of the Empire of China and its Inhabitants* and articles in newspapers and journals such as *The Times* and the *Canton Miscellany*.

⁹Du Halde's French text uses the names 'Liu pao', 'Tchin' and 'Hi eul' [sic] (see Du Halde 1736a, pp. 362-366).

¹⁰For example, Frances Wood claims that Polo did not go to China because he fails to mention the Great Wall, foot-binding, and tea-drinking. In response to Wood, Peter Jackson (1998) argues that 'The book associated with Marco Polo's name is a description of the known world rather than the memoirs or itinerary of the traveller himself; and this, together with an extremely complex and obscure MS tradition, means that we need not attach too much significance to matters that are omitted' (p.101).

¹¹Dalton probably read Du Halde's comments on the Si-fan: 'The Chinese distinguish this Nation into two Sorts of People; they call one Sort the Black Si fan, He si fan; the other Hoang si fan, or the Yellow Si fan; not from any Difference in their Complexion, for they are generally pretty swarthy, but because one Sort live in Black, and the other in Yellow Tents' (Du Halde 1736b, vol. 1, p.34). Dalton may have cast his characters as the 'black Si-fan' because Du Halde notes that black Si-fan are 'very uncivilized' (Du Halde 1736b, vol. 1, p.34).

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