

**British Representation of the late 19th Century Afghanistan: An
Orientalist Analysis of the Selected Travelogues**



Submitted By

Wahid Ullah

686-FLL/MSENG/F22

MS English Literature

Supervisor

Dr. Hafiz Abid Masood

This thesis has been submitted in the partial fulfilment for the requirements of
MS degree in English Literature

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD
2025**

Table of the Contents

ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
DECLARATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
Chapter 1	1
Problematizing the Imperial Gaze: Introduction to Colonial Knowledge and Representation of Afghanistan	1
1.1 Conceptualizing Orientalism: Foundations and Theoretical Landscape.....	2
1.2 Imperial Agents as Literary Architects: Colonial Authors in Service of the Empire.....	4
1.3 Research Objectives.....	7
1.4 Research Questions.....	8
1.5 Methodology	8
1.6 Theoretical Framework.....	8
1.7 Conceptual Framework.....	9
1.9 Tentative Chapter Division	10
Chapter 2	11
Literary Historiography and Colonial Representation: A Critical Review of Orientalist Thought and Travel Literature	11
2.1 The Evolution of Orientalist Discourse in British Literary Canon	11
2.2 Afghanistan in the Colonial Archive	14
2.3 Travel Writing and Fiction as Instruments of Cultural Surveillance	18
Chapter 3	24
Tropes of Representation: Figurations of Otherness and Imperial Rhetoric in the Works of Bellew, Hughes, and Masson	24
3.1 Constructing the Barbaric Frontier: Narratives of Chaos and Anarchy: An Introduction	24
3.2 Feminizing the Orient: Gendered Symbolism and Cultural Eroticism	28
3.3 The Civilizing Narrative and the Colonial Missionary Ethos.....	35
3.4 Discourses of Objectivity: Epistemic Authority and the Textual Gaze.....	42
3.5 Symbolic Dualities and the Imperial Grammar of Power.....	49
Chapter 4	58
Cultural Imaginaries and the Colonial Archive: Inscribing Afghan Civilization in the Works of Bellew, Hughes, and Masson	58
4.1 Cultural Portraiture and the Politics of Ethnographic Curiosity: An Introduction	58
4.2 Ritual, Religion, and the Colonial Spiritual Imaginary.....	64
4.3 Material Culture, Dress, and Social Identity.....	72
4.4 Geographies of Memory: Space, History, and the Monumental Imagination	81
4.5 Literary Colonialism and the Invention of “Afghanistan”	89
Chapter 5	98

Research Synthesis, Critical Reflections, and Future Pathways	98
5.1 Repetition and Variation in Colonial Representations.....	98
5.2 Re-aligning the Study with Research Objectives	104
5.3 Scholarly Contributions and Theoretical Insights.....	111
Works Cited.....	120

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the British portrayal of the late 19th-century Afghanistan through an Orientalist perspective, with an emphasis on the travel and fictional narratives produced by Henry Walter Bellew, Thomas Patrick Hughes, and Charles Masson. My study critically examines the textual strategies employed by imperial agents to depict Afghanistan as a realm of alterity, disorder, and civilisational inferiority, situated within the larger context of colonial knowledge production. Utilising Edward Said's seminal theory of Orientalism and subsequent postcolonial discourse, my research investigates the role of travel writing and fiction as tools of cultural surveillance and ideological assertion during the British imperial endeavour. Chapter one sets up the theoretical and historical background for the study, and Chapter two gives a thorough review of the Orientalist literature about Afghanistan. Chapters three and four provide a thematic examination of the selected texts, emphasising the use of tropes such as barbarism, gendered exoticism, moral pedagogy, and epistemic authority to represent Afghan society, religion, geography, and material culture. My study investigates how Bellew's pseudo-scientific observations, Hughes's missionary fiction, and Masson's antiquarian curiosity collectively contributed to a static, feminised, and peripheral representation of Afghan civilisation within the colonial archive. This comparative and critical analysis reveals the rhetorical structures and symbolic dichotomies prevalent in British colonial texts, providing a nuanced understanding of literature's role in the discursive colonisation of Afghanistan. The final chapter brings together the main findings, answers the research questions and objectives, and provides insight about what representational politics in imperial writing means for the world as a whole. Ultimately, my research study contributes to postcolonial literary scholarship by contesting the assumed neutrality of travel narratives and revealing the interconnection between literary form and imperial ideology.

Keywords: *Orientalism, (mis)representation, Afghanistan, Travel Writing, Postcolonial Discourse, Imperial Ideology, Cultural Surveillance*

DEDICATION

To my beloved **Mother**, a woman of quiet defiance and unbreakable spirit. Through me, she pursued her noble dreams, with patience, strength, and determination. This thesis is as much hers as mine.

To my two cherished **Sisters**, whose endless love and unshakeable faith have been the kindest comfort during every moment of doubt and tiredness. Your presence has given me peace, and your love has kept me going.

To my eldest **Brother** and my kind-hearted **Sister-in-law**, thank you for being my anchors in the storm and for being there for me when I needed it most. Your constant support, gentle encouragement, and unwavering faith have helped me rise higher than I could have on my own. This work is a dream come true for everyone. I wrote it, but it's yours.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis titled *British Representation of the late 19th Century Afghanistan: An Orientalist Analysis of the Selected Travelogues*, submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Literature, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MS in English Literature, is my original research work.

There is no part of this thesis that has been copied from any published work, and all references and quotes are properly credited when they are employed. I further declare that neither I nor anyone else at any other university, institution, or organisation has ever submitted this work for any academic degree or qualification.

Student: Wahid Ullah

Registration No.: 686-FLL/MSENG/F22

Program: MS English Literature

Signature: _____

Supervisor: Dr. Hafiz Abid Masood

Signature: _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praise is due to Allah Almighty, whose grace and guidance lit my way through this demanding journey of learning.

With immense humility and sincere gratitude, I thank my mentor and supervisor, Dr. Hafiz Abid Masood, from the core of my heart. His unflinching faith in my abilities, generous mentorship, and rigorous intellectual guidance were the building blocks of this thesis. His scholarly vision, thoughtful criticism, and endless patience were not only a source of academic strength but also of personal motivation throughout this endeavour. I am forever grateful to him for this work, which bears his imprint at every stage.

I am particularly thankful to Dr. Aroosa Kanwal, whose guidance has been a vital component of my academic life. Her constant support and brilliant ideas have inspired me not only in this research but also in my progress as a scholar. I will always hold her encouragement in high regard.

I also want to thank Dr. Asma Mansoor for her insightful suggestions and supportive disposition, which gave my work a new perspective; Dr. Arshad Mehmood Raja for always being attentive to my research progress; and Dr. Mahmood ul Hassan, Dr. Farrukh Nadeem, and Dr. Akhtar Aziz for always being there for me and inspiring me.

I want to thank my cousin, Farman Khan Ahmadzai, especially for being there for me when things got tough.

Thank you, Mr. Danyal Khan, my friend and guide, for always being there for me, giving me strength, direction, and intellectual company during the most demanding part of this dissertation. Your words often brought me back to life when nothing else could.

I am also thankful to Mr. Kamran Khan Ahmadzai, whose unwavering friendship during tough times brought me peace and strength.

Lastly, I want to thank the department's non-academic staff, especially Mr. Safdar Khattak, for their tireless assistance and thoughtful cooperation in helping me undertake my research in a calm and productive ambiance.

This thesis is not only a record of my academic research, but also a tribute to the generosity, intellect, and encouragement of those who were there for me.

Chapter 1

Problematizing the Imperial Gaze: Introduction to Colonial Knowledge and Representation of Afghanistan

In the 1800s, Afghanistan was at the centre of imperial conflicts between Great Britain and Russia in Central Asia. British leaders were obsessed with Afghanistan's strategic location as a buffer zone between India and Russia. This led to what became known as "The Great Game" a long battle for power. During this time, British officials were "obsessed by the fear" that other countries, especially Russia, would use Afghanistan's instability to threaten British India (Bhat 125). This strategic paranoia led to two costly Anglo-Afghan Wars (1839–42 and 1878–80) and many secret missions, all of which were meant to keep Afghanistan from becoming a Russian sphere of influence. British officers, spies, and adventurers flooded the north-western border, mapping passes and testing tribal loyalties, even though the Afghan resistance made it clear that the area could not be easily controlled. This strategic obsession is very clear in British writing from that time. Orientalism is a field in which we study the works produced by Western writers about the people and cultures of the East. It is a specific discourse about the inhabitants of the Eastern Hemisphere by the intellectuals of the Western Hemisphere. Edward Said, in his influential work titled *Orientalism* (1978) defines Orientalism as a corporate institution of dealing with the Orient. Since Said's ground-breaking and trail-blazing work, thousands of studies have been conducted on the West's perception of the East. While Orientalists' interest in the various regions of the East has been studied for a long time, their engagement with Afghanistan, specifically in travel writings, requires a closer inspection.

Speaking in the similar context, Orientalists' engagement with Afghanistan is the primary subject of my study as it investigates their strategic obsession with Afghanistan and its people and how the various travel writings shaped their onward involvement in Afghanistan. In order to expand on the postcolonial studies, in the context of Orientalists' involvement in

the region, I examine the representation of Afghanistan in the travelogues of British Orientalists of the 19th century: Henry Walter Bellew (30 August 1834 – 26 July 1892), Thomas Patrick Hughes (26 March 1838 – 8 August 1911), and Charles Masson (16 February 1800 – 5 November 1853). My research critically analyses the work of Bellew, a surgeon-major in the Bengal Army, as a model imperial official whose travelogues, especially “*From the Indus to the Tigris*” (1874), strategically combine political intelligence with ethnographic surveillance to portray Afghanistan as a war-torn, fractured place that sought British surveillance during imperial upheavals like the Second Anglo-Afghan War. It also looks into a more scholarly but equally Orientalist textual archive provided by Thomas Patrick Hughes, a Christian missionary and Orientalist who spent more than 20 years embedded along the North-West Frontier. His work of fiction “*Ruhainah: The Maid of Herat*” (1896) fictionalises Afghan identity for imperial consumption, translating native voices while also placing them within a colonial apparatus that aims to monitor, comprehend, and convert. Charles Masson is the archetype of the imperial adventurer-scholar whose meticulous observations, archaeological cataloguing, and clandestine intelligence-gathering not only influenced British perceptions in the lead-up to the First Anglo-Afghan War but also established the epistemic foundations for later Orientalist representations by Bellew and Hughes. His early 19th-century travels and the monumental “*Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, the Panjab and Kalat*” (1844) come before the others.

1.1 Conceptualizing Orientalism: Foundations and Theoretical Landscape

To establish these ideas in my research, the most compelling theoretical foundation for my stance is Said’s idea of Orientalism. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said shows how Western scholarship, literature, and travel writing all worked together to create a discourse that made ‘the Orient’ seem very different from and less important than the West. It was a “place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes” that was shaped more by Western

imagination than by what was really going on there (Said 1). Said famously said that Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). To put it another way, the British (and French) learnt about the East through travelogues, ethnographies, and colonial administration. This knowledge both reflected and helped imperial power. These texts made Eastern societies seem backward, mysterious, and unchanging, which justified the West’s “civilising” intervention and stewardship (254). This framework is very important for 19th-century travel writing about Afghanistan. British travel writers, as part of the Orientalist project, often portrayed Afghans as savage or fanatical, their land as dangerous and stuck in time, tropes that supported the idea that British influence was needed to bring order or progress.

In fact, travel writing has a special place in Orientalist writing. It lies somewhere between fiction and what is supposed to be factual reporting, which gives it a strong claim to authority. Many travelogues from the colonial era claim to be objective accounts of Eastern lands and people, but they are always influenced by the biases and power dynamics of the authors’ own time and place (153). The British traveller in Afghanistan, like those in Egypt or India, usually takes on the role of an informed observer dissecting an unfamiliar world. This is what Said calls a “positional superiority” position, where the European tells the story and the Afghan listens (7). When you look at it this way, Afghan characters in the texts often seem irrational, violent, or childlike, which is a clear contrast to the British self, which is rational and disciplined. For example, British officers’ memoirs often talk about Afghan “treachery” or “fanaticism” which are common themes in Orientalist literature (Gordon 228). These kinds of representations were not just random; they were used to support British imperial policy. If people thought that Afghans could not govern themselves or were likely to become tyrannical and chaotic, British political control or military intervention could be seen as a way to civilise them or keep the peace on a dangerous border. Said calls this the “corporate institution” of

Orientalism, which is a knowledge business linked to imperial power where describing the Orient was a way of showing power (Said 3).

It is important to remember that Said's Orientalism was mostly about the Middle East and how the British and French saw it. However, his ideas are very relevant to Afghanistan. Afghanistan was very much thought of in terms of Orientalist binaries like civilised vs. barbaric and modern vs. primitive, even though it was on the edge of the traditional Orient. As recent research shows, "never formally colonised, Afghanistan occupies a position in the Anglophone Orientalist canon" that is unstable and full of myths, but also full of stereotypes from the colonial era (Manchanda 5). British travel stories about Afghanistan are full of classic Orientalist tropes, like making fun of strange customs, making sweeping statements about warlike tribes or the fanatical Afghan race and using a tone of superiority or bemused disdain. The authors of these texts act like they are the only experts on Afghan history and society, but Said says that their authority is based on a way of talking about Afghan difference that makes the West feel good about itself and its goals. By looking at these travelogues through Said's lens, we can see how seemingly factual descriptions of bazaars, tribal dress, religious practices, and so on actually repeat the stories of power: the colonizer's belief that the West needs to observe, classify, and sometimes correct the Orient (Said 40). Said's model helps me understand the first-level analysis of my study: British depictions of Afghanistan in the 1800s were not objective but rather part of a larger Orientalist discourse that served imperial interests. Finding this discourse in the travelogues, the clichés, the binaries, and the silences, is an important contribution of my research study.

1.2 Imperial Agents as Literary Architects: Colonial Authors in Service of the Empire

My research looks at the travel writing of Henry Walter Bellew, Thomas Patrick Hughes, and Charles Masson. These three writers' works provide a very rich and revealing cross-section of how British people saw Afghanistan in the 1800s. It was on purpose that these

authors were chosen. Each of them wrote a lot and had first-hand experience in Afghanistan or its borderlands. Their works are both rich in text and deeply rooted in historical context. By looking at their stories, one can learn about different aspects of the British Empire's relationship with Afghanistan and a wide range of Orientalist ideas as they were expressed in travel writing.

Henry Walter Bellew (1834–1892) was a surgeon-major in the Bengal Army. He went on British missions to Afghanistan, including the 1857 diplomatic mission to Dost Mohammad's court, and later wrote important books about his experiences. His travelogue, *From the Indus to the Tigris: A Narrative of a Journey through the Countries of Balochistan, Afghanistan, Khorassan and Iran*, which he published in 1874, is a very important primary source that was written just before and during the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Bellew's works are full of text because they mix ethnographic observation, military intelligence, and personal stories. He made a list of Afghan tribes, languages, and customs, giving Victorian readers one of the most complete pictures of Afghan society up to that point. Most importantly, his writings are set in a historical context: Bellew wrote during times of imperial crisis, like the British invasion of Afghanistan in 1878, and his descriptions of Afghans as divided and warlike added to the debates of the time about how to deal with or calm the region. For instance, Bellew wrote that Afghanistan had been shut out from the world since the First Anglo-Afghan War, making it seem like a blank slate for renewed British involvement.

Thomas Patrick Hughes (1838–1911) gives us a different but related point of view. Hughes was a Christian missionary and Orientalist scholar who lived on the North-West Frontier. He spent more than twenty years in British India's border provinces (Peshawar and beyond), learning about Pashtun culture and Islamic scholarship. He is best known for putting together a collection of Pashto texts and poetry that have been translated, is a treasure trove of Afghan cultural and historical information. Hughes was not a traveller writing about his travels

like Bellew and Masson. Instead, he was a resident scholar who was fully immersed in the culture. His writings are full of deep linguistic and literary content: by translating Pashto literature and writing down Afghan folklore, Hughes kept native voices alive, even if they were seen through his eyes. His work is an interesting place where Afghan writing traditions meet Victorian academic methods. Hughes's work is historically embedded in the late 19th-century British effort to organise what they knew about the people on the frontier. This was part of both missionary work and running the colonies. He worked after the Second Anglo-Afghan War, during a time of uneasy semi-peace when Britain controlled the Tribal Areas on the Indian side but recognised Afghanistan's independence beyond the Durand Line. Hughes's choice to really learn about Afghan language and culture (for example, by publishing a novel named as *Ruhainah: The Maid of Herat* (1896), Pashto proverbs and poems) shows that he understands, at least to some extent, how complex and independent Afghans are. However, his interpretations were often meant to help colonial understanding and conversion efforts, which fit with Orientalist ideas. My study of Hughes focuses on a more academic and linguistic side of imperial representation, which balances the political and military stories of Bellew and the adventurer's story of Masson. Hughes is a symbol of the colonial knowledge system. His writings help us look at how even well-meaning scholarship could help imperial interests shape how people thought about Afghans.

Charles Masson (1800–1853) comes before the other two in time, but he is an important part of this conversation. Masson's *Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, the Panjab and Kalat* (in four volumes, 1844) is one of the first and most detailed English accounts of the area. Masson was a former soldier in the East India Company who deserted and travelled through Afghanistan under a false name. He worked as an explorer, archaeologist, and unofficial British informant. His writings are full of adventure and detail. He wrote about archaeological finds (he was the first European to write about Afghanistan's Buddhist relics

and ancient ruins), careful observations of cities like Kabul and Kandahar, and notes on the people he met. Masson's writing style is interesting and often makes him think about himself. Sometimes he talks about how beautiful Afghanistan is or how dangerous it is. These personal touches make for good analysis because they show both Orientalist themes and real moments of cross-cultural interaction. Masson's journey took place during a key time in history, the 1820s and 1830s, when the British were just starting to show interest in Afghanistan, which led to the First Anglo-Afghan War. Masson became an important source of information for the British because his reports about fighting between different groups in Kabul and foreign (Persian/Russian) interference there affected their decisions. So, his travelogue is at the crossroads of exploration and empire. Masson's work shows an early version of the Great Game story, even before it was called that. In it, a single Briton travels through forbidden land and learns things that will soon be used in war and diplomacy. Masson's view, which is sometimes sympathetic to Afghans but also influenced by imperial attitudes, helps us see how the British first saw Afghanistan. Also, Masson's work with and letters to other scholars (he shared information with people like Mountstuart Elphinstone and Alexander Burnes) meant that his ideas spread to later works. By looking at Masson, we can see where many of the ideas that Bellew, Hughes, and others would later repeat came from. These ideas include making Alexander the Great's legacy seem romantic in Afghan terrain and complaining about the tribes' lawlessness.

1.3 Research Objectives

With the mentioned context in mind, the current study aims to:

1. Uncover the prominent figurative expressions in the portrayal of Afghanistan by the 19th century British Orientalists.
2. Explore the various ways in which the chosen works represent Afghan culture and civilization.

1.4 Research Questions

This study tries to answer the following questions.

1. What are the major tropes used by the 19th century British Orientalists in their depiction of Afghanistan?
2. In what ways do the selected texts portray Afghan culture and civilization?

1.5 Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research and uses an interpretive approach to look at how Henry Walter Bellew, Thomas Patrick Hughes, and Charles Masson wrote about Afghanistan in the 1800s. The principal research methodology utilised is textual analysis, interpreting the chosen travelogues as cultural and ideological texts rather than objective historical documents. Edward Said's idea of Orientalism is the theoretical basis for the analytical framework. It helps us look at how imperial knowledge, representation, and authority affect how Afghanistan is portrayed. This study employs Orientalist theory through a systematic analytical framework that progresses from meticulous textual analysis to thematic classification and ultimately to discursive interpretation, facilitating the identification of representational strategies that articulate colonial power and cultural authority. The study employs a thematic model of analysis to examine recurring themes, including religion, gender, Pashtunwali, cultural practices, topography, geography, the warrior ethos of Afghan society, and descriptions of flora, fauna, and ethnic groups. As a cultural-historical investigation, the research examines how these representations collectively shape the colonial perception of Afghanistan and analyses their wider ramifications for the creation of imperial knowledge and its impact on subsequent academic and political discourses.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This research is based on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, which views the production of colonial knowledge as a way for the West to shape, portray, and control the East.

Said's framework is particularly pertinent to nineteenth-century British travel writing, as it elucidates how ostensibly objective portrayals of non-European societies are situated within asymmetric power dynamics. This study focusses on Said's ideas of imaginative geography, textual authority, and the representational economy of empire. These ideas help us understand how Afghanistan was not only seen but also actively created as a space that could be known, classified, and governed in British imperial discourse. Utilising this framework, the study examines how Bellew, Hughes, and Masson assert epistemic authority through ethnographic description, historical narration, and cultural interpretation, thereby establishing themselves as intermediaries between Afghanistan and the British readership. The theoretical framework enables the research to transcend content analysis and engage in a critical investigation of the ideological functions of language, narrative structure, and thematic repetition in perpetuating colonial power. This study applies Said's insights to the Afghan frontier, a region inadequately explored in Orientalist scholarship, thereby enhancing postcolonial criticism by highlighting Afghanistan as a significant yet under-theorized locus of imperial representation.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study aims to delineate the process by which colonial travel texts convert cultural encounters into imperial knowledge. It presupposes that British travelogues serve as discursive tools that facilitate the interplay between lived experience, literary representation, and colonial administration. In this framework, the chosen texts by Bellew, Hughes, and Masson form the principal corpus, while recurring thematic domains, such as religion, gender, social customs, Pashtunwali, geography, landscape, and civilisational history, function as analytical categories for the textual representation of Afghan society. Qualitative textual analysis is used to look at these themes and find the main tropes, figurative language, and narrative techniques that shape Afghan identity in the colonial imagination. The framework also connects these textual patterns to larger imperial goals by showing how

depictions of disorder, primitiveness, spirituality, or cultural stagnation implicitly support British intervention, surveillance, or reformist agendas. In terms of ideas, the study shows how literature helps create and spread colonial knowledge by moving from textual description to ideological construction. This model facilitates a systematic integration of literary, historical, and cultural analysis, maintaining the study's emphasis on representation as both a literary practice and a political act.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in the sense that it tries to help us understand the purpose of taking interest and writing travelogues/literary narratives about Afghanistan by Orientalists of the 19th century. It also helps us understand how Afghanistan has been perceived in the literary imagination of the selected three British Orientalists. It also paves the way for researchers to comprehend how the three Orientalists (Bellew, Hughes and Masson) in particular, and all other Orientalists in general think about Afghan culture, history, and land in their works.

1.9 Tentative Chapter Division

There are five chapters in this study: Chapter 1 sets up the study's themes and theories. Chapter 2 gives a critical review of the relevant literature. Chapter 3 looks at how Bellew, Hughes, and Masson use tropes of representation and imperial rhetoric in their works. Chapter 4 looks at how Afghan cultural imaginaries are built up in the colonial archive. Finally, Chapter 5 brings together all the findings, thoughts, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literary Historiography and Colonial Representation: A Critical Review of Orientalist Thought and Travel Literature

The second chapter serves as a literature review to my research study emphasizing on the Orientalists' engagement with Pashtoons/Pukhtoons. Most of the studies on Orientalist engagement with Pashtoons/Pukhtoons (henceforth Pashtoons) deal with the representation of the Pashtoons in Orientalist works. My research study, however, is different from the works of other scholars on Orientalists' engagement with Pashtoons. The uniqueness of my study lies in the fact that the Orientalists and their works selected in this study have never been studied before in this regard. Speaking in the similar context, I explore British representation of the late 19th-century Afghanistan. The works that I explore in my research are studied through the lens of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. For this, I utilize the idea of Said's Orientalism, since his idea of Orientalism aids me in developing my argument. The reason behind employing Said's Orientalism lies in its unique capacity to expound on the misrepresentation of the natives by the Orientalists. To further strengthen my stance, I rely upon the studies of Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, Barkat Shah Kakar, Mary-Louise Pratt, Waqar Ahmad, Aryama Ghosh, James Najarian, William Dalrymple, Sukanya Banerjee, Ahmad Gholi et al., Martin J. Bayly, B.D. Hopkins, Maria Nawandish, Nivi Manchanda, Zubeda Jalalzai, and Corinne Fowler because of their previous research on the Orientalists' depiction of the local people, especially Pashtoons.

2.1 The Evolution of Orientalist Discourse in British Literary Canon

Edward Said's idea of Orientalism is the theoretical basis for this study. It changed how scholars think about the way the East was represented in colonial times. Said wrote in his crucial book *Orientalism* (1978) that Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3). To put it another way, the Orient which included Asian and Middle Eastern societies, was not a real thing but a made-up idea

that served imperial power in Western discourse. Said says that for hundreds of years, European scholars, writers, and artists created a common discourse about the Orient that both reflected and strengthened Western hegemonic goals. This conversation was based on a simple difference between a better, more civilized West and a worse, more strange or barbaric East. It turned different Eastern cultures into a set of stereotypes, mysterious, backward, uncivilized, and dangerous, that made colonial rule seem reasonable (Said 206). Shah Mahmoud Hanifi says that Orientalism is a complex set of relationships between knowledge, power, and representation. This means that Western knowledge about the Orient was used as a tool of power to show Eastern people in ways that justified imperial control. Said (using Michel Foucault's term) calls discourse a system of ideas that is spread through scholarly works, literature, travelogues, art, and other cultural texts. This is how Orientalism works. By the 1800s, when the British Empire was at its peak, Orientalist ideas had become very deeply rooted in British literature and culture.

British literature from the 18th and 19th centuries both showed and changed how the British Empire thought about the East. Said's later book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) showed that many famous Victorian novels were shaped by empire, which implicitly supported colonial hierarchies and assumptions (Said 70). In fact, Victorian fiction and poetry often used Orientalist tropes to show Eastern settings and characters as strange backgrounds or morally weak foils to European protagonists. For instance, writers like Rudyard Kipling openly talked down to colonized people (as we will see later in this chapter). Even authors like Charlotte Brontë or Wilkie Collins, who set stories in Asia or the Middle East, often used common stereotypes of Oriental despotism or sensuality. Literary critics say that Orientalist images were everywhere in the culture of the time. The Oxford Research Encyclopedia says that Victorian Orientalism was all-pervasive and you can see it in works by the Brontë sisters, Dickens, and others. British readers got romanticized or demonized pictures of Eastern lands from adventure

stories, poems, and romances. For example, early nineteenth-century Romantic writers praised the “mysteries” of the East or used Eastern settings to escape from their own lives. Later Victorian writers, on the other hand, often connected Orientalist depictions more directly to politics in the British Empire at the time. By the middle of the 1800s, as Said points out, Orientalist discourse had become a “political doctrine”, a way of looking at the East that was good for colonial interests (Said 204). In fact, the British literary canon grew along with Britain’s imperial expansion. Literature became one way for the empire to “write back” its own authoritative view of the East.

Importantly, Orientalist discourse was not just limited to academics or obvious colonial propagandists; it was also present in popular culture and literature. Said talked about different kinds of Orientalism, like the study of the Orient in schools, the way it is shown in culture, and Orientalism as a tool of imperialism. Hanifi calls the many separate histories of Orientalism that make up its tradition the work of British intellectuals during the colonial era, including historians, philologists, novelists, and travel writers. For instance, British Indologists and Arabists in the 18th and early 19th centuries (like Sir William Jones in India) wrote scholarly works that romanticized ancient Eastern civilizations but also subtly supported Western control over classic Oriental cultures. By the end of the 19th century, however, when the British Empire was at its peak, Orientalist depictions became more openly hierarchical and served as open justifications for colonial rule. Everything Western was seen as better, while the other from the East was seen as stagnant, primitive, or degenerate. This was a common theme in colonial-era stories, according to postcolonial critics (Kakar 125). British literature made the idea that the East needed Western control or guidance seem more normal. Colonial discourse claimed the right to rule Eastern peoples by defining them in terms of Western stereotypes, as one scholar put it: “to define is to control” (Said 43, qtd. in Kakar 125). So, the development of Orientalist

writing in British letters shows how the idea of empire changed from early exoticization to a more mature, organized ideology.

We should remember that Said's thesis was ground-breaking, but it has also led to a lot of discussion and improvement in later research. Researchers like Lisa Lowe, Homi Bhabha, and Abdul JanMohamed have looked at aspects of colonial representation that make Said's model more complicated or nuanced. For example, they have looked at how colonial texts show ambivalence or how race, gender, and class interact in Orientalist stories. Aijaz Ahmad and Bernard Lewis are two well-known critics of Orientalism who said it was too broad or had political biases. More than forty years later, Said's main point is still very important: the way the British (and Europeans) talked about Asian societies was not an objective reflection of reality but a way to further their imperial goals. Recent researchers have confirmed that Orientalist ways of othering continued into the 19th century and beyond. For example, Corinne Fowler points out that British depictions of some colonized groups became very repetitive and circular over time, bringing 19th-century biases into later times. Fowler says that nineteenth-century paranoias and prejudices about Afghan people, depicting them as primitive, fanatical, or ungovernable, have left a legacy that can still be seen in British media and literature today. The British literary canon's relationship with the East changed over time, but it was always influenced by imperial ideas. What started out as separate colonial ideas turned into a strong grand narrative in which the Orient was the West's opposite image, something to be studied, judged, imagined, and finally subdued through the power of the written word.

2.2 Afghanistan in the Colonial Archive

If Orientalism gave Europe a general idea of how to control the East, Afghanistan in the 1800s is an obvious instance of how this idea worked in real life. Historian Shah Mahmoud Hanifi provocatively says, "There is no country on earth more subject to misrepresentations based on Orientalism than Afghanistan" (Hanifi 50). During the long 19th century, Afghanistan

was a place of great strategic and cultural interest for British colonizers. It was the key buffer in the Great Game between Britain and Russia. British colonial officials, diplomats, and adventurers who went to or invaded Afghanistan left behind a huge collection of colonial texts, including political mission reports, military memoirs, travelogues, and ethnographic studies. This archive became the way that people in the West understood Afghanistan and its people. These writings from the time of British colonial rule created an “idea” of Afghanistan that often said more about how British colonists thought than about what was really going on in Afghanistan. Scholarly reviews of British writings about Afghanistan show a set of persistent, distorted images: a land of tribal warlords and violent savages, a people stuck in medieval backwardness, fierce in battle but unable to govern themselves in a civilized way. These kinds of depictions were not random; they were done for the benefit of the empire. The Afghanistan Analysts Network points out that British colonial accounts always stereotyped Afghans as violent savages suggesting that they needed strict imperial control or punishment. In other words, Afghanistan was talked about as a “problem” that needed imperial intervention. This story justified Britain’s military invasions and political interference in the region throughout the 19th century.

British agents and travellers who wrote about Afghanistan in the 19th century are important people in the colonial archive. Their writings became important sources of information about the country. Mountstuart Elphinstone’s *Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (1815) was one of the first detailed English studies of Afghanistan. It had a tone of exoticism mixed with fear. Elphinstone and others who came after him, like Alexander Burnes (who wrote *Cabool* in 1842), Charles Masson (the adventurer-archaeologist who wrote *Narrative of Various Journeys in Afghanistan* in 1844), Lady Florentia Sale (who published a journal of her time in the First Anglo-Afghan War in 1843), and Henry Bellew (who wrote about Afghanistan in the late 1800s), all added to the colonial library on Afghanistan. These works often mixed

real observations with a lot of imperial ideology. They made lists of Afghan tribes, customs, and geography with an eye on how these might affect British strategic goals. The idea that Afghans were fundamentally different and inferior to Europeans was clear (and sometimes not so clear) in their pages. They were “warlike, unruly, turbulent, (and) savage” to use the words of a recent study that highlights how 19th-century descriptions were written (Kakar 127). Kakar’s research shows that early “Orientalists” like Elphinstone, Burnes, and Masson were “on (a) specific design” to make Afghans look bad, focusing on how they were supposed to be hostile to order and civilization (Kakar 127). These British storytellers described Afghans in different ways, calling them brave but treacherous fighters and “the most turbulent race under the stars” who only understand force (Kakar 126). Kipling’s infamous claim that “to the Afghan... he is a thief by instinct, a murderer by heredity... and bestially immoral” (qtd. in Kakar 126) was an example of such sweeping generalizations that made the whole culture seem irredeemably barbaric. These images helped the British colonial archive make “Afghanistan” a term for barbarism and intrigue in the West. It was a tribal warrior society that was always at odds with imperial order.

It is interesting to see how the name and idea of “Afghanistan” came about in this colonial setting. Hanifi says that the words Afghan and Afghanistan are very complicated and have a lot of different meanings in different cultures and times. It is interesting to note that both words were made up by people from outside the country and were only slowly adopted by people who lived there. In the late 1800s, the British and other major powers drew borders on maps and called the area Afghanistan without any other names. This solidified the idea of Afghanistan as a bounded nation-state. At this time, the British were doing a lot of mapping, surveying, and documenting. These were ways for imperial power to literally write Afghanistan into its records. As cartography became more scientific and colonial officials wanted to know exactly where the borders were, Afghanistan was drawn on the map (with British influence),

and British writers wrote about Afghan character in print. The colonial archive includes not only published travelogues and official reports, but also maps, photos, and administrative records. All of these things worked together to make the country seem real. The archive turned a wide range of land and people into what Benedict Anderson would call an imagined thing, often in a negative or hostile way. The 19th-century archive made Afghanistan seem like a place where violence and intrigue never changed. Fowler (2007) calls this process the mythologisation of Afghanistan in the minds of British people. She says that British writing, from the colonial period to modern journalism, has often reused 19th-century ideas, showing Afghanistan as a distant, untameable place stuck in the past, which ignores its real historical agency and complexity. In a way, the country became a blank slate for British worries and wants: a notional Afghanistan based on what Britons wanted (or were afraid) to see.

This Orientalist picture of Afghanistan was not only biased, but it was also good for the empire's politics. British writers could say that invading Afghanistan over and over again was okay because it would bring order to a land that was already chaotic. Colonial officials often said that Afghan resistance or uprisings were caused by the Afghans' supposed fanaticism and love of violence, instead of seeing them as legitimate anti-colonial sentiment. After the terrible First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–42), for instance, British accounts often focused on Afghan treachery and savagery to explain why the British lost (Bellew 325). This story conveniently hid British mistakes and aggression and instead blamed Afghans for their moral failings. During the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80), British newspapers also talked about punishing a turbulent frontier race that was a threat to India's safety. Elleke Boehmer, a postcolonial scholar, says that imperial writing often pushed colonized people to the side and made them less than human, seeing them as obstacles to progress or children to be disciplined (Boehmer 76). British writers and officials in Afghanistan always denied Afghans a voice or a history of their own. This is similar to what Said called the "authority of silence" that was put

on the Orient (Said 94). The colonial archive did not often record Afghan points of view; instead, it talked about Afghans in a one-sided way, listing their traits, customs, and faults. This dynamic is similar to what Spivak famously asked, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In the case of Afghanistan, the British archive mostly said no. Imperial writers spoke for Afghans and defined them, turning their identities into stock images of rebellious tribesmen, crafty emirs, or exotic mercenaries.

British literature and records from the 1800s created an image of Afghanistan that was shaped by Orientalist ideas. Modern researchers stress that these historical representations have lived on for a long time. Fowler's analysis shows that modern journalism still uses the same tired phrases, like the unruly Afghan trope and comparing Afghanistan to the Wild West or to medieval Europe. Hanifi and others say that to understand how the West has dealt with Afghanistan, even during the Cold War in the 20th century or after 9/11, you need to understand how important the colonial story was. The colonial archive left behind a lot of wrong ideas that still affect policy and public opinion today. So, to write a critical history of Afghanistan, we need to find and study these 19th-century texts, not as neutral sources, but as cultural artefacts of imperial power. In this way, we can take away their power and recognize the Orientalist biases that have shaped how Afghanistan has been seen in the West for a long time.

2.3 Travel Writing and Fiction as Instruments of Cultural Surveillance

One of the primary arguments raised by contemporary postcolonial scholarship is that travel writing and colonial fiction were never innocent genres. Instead, they were tools of what we might call cultural surveillance on behalf of the empire. Mary Louise Pratt's important book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) introduced ideas like the contact zone and anti-conquest to show how European travellers used seemingly harmless stories to show their power. Pratt notes that travelogues from the 18th and 19th centuries often include a "seeing-man", a European traveller who presents himself as an unbiased observer (like an innocent adventurer or scientist) while

carefully surveying and describing foreign lands for a European audience. This persona gives the traveller the right to be in charge, a position that Pratt famously calls the monarch-of-all-I-survey position. From this position, he can see the whole landscape and people, which is a symbol of imperial control. The travel writer gathers information, maps out the land, and describes local customs to create a body of knowledge that can be used to control those places. Foucault says that knowledge and power are linked: watching and writing about a culture is a step toward controlling it. Michel Foucault said that knowledge is never neutral; it is always connected to power. He said that knowing the “Other” is part of the project of mastering them (Foucault 27). This was true in travel writing. Asiya Zahoor puts it well when she says, “travel writing is a key instrument in the construction of colonial knowledge and power” (Zahoor 863). Imperial travelogues were not just travel diaries; they were “deeply imbricated in imperialist projects”, showing non-Western places in ways that fit with colonial ideology (Zahoor 863). In Zahoor’s words, they were a textual extension of empire, where describing the land was like taking it over in a symbolic way. In reality, a lot of travel writers in colonies were scouting routes, checking out resources, and getting a feel for the people, basically doing reconnaissance while pretending to be curious or exploring.

In Afghanistan and along the British border, travel writing and fiction were closely linked to imperial spying and gathering information. In the 1830s, British officers like Arthur Conolly and Alexander Burnes travelled through Central Asia and Afghanistan in disguise, pretending to be explorers but really gathering strategic information for the British Indian government. The stories they wrote for the public, which were meant to satisfy Victorian readers’ love of adventure, also served as unofficial guidebooks for the empire, giving soldiers and administrators information about roads, tribal allegiances, the local economy, and geography. British policymakers eagerly read memoirs from the Great Game era to find out how to get around in these far-off places (Hopkirk 45). Even when they were not spying, travellers did what Pratt calls the anti-conquest: they said they were going for good reasons (science, trade, evangelism), but their stories always made the presence

of Westerners seem enlightened and desirable compared to the chaos of the natives. For example, a lot of travelogues about Afghanistan would compare the writer's own rational view with the lawlessness or superstition of the Afghan society he sees, which would implicitly support British intervention to impose order. This way of telling a story is a kind of rhetorical control. By defining who Afghans are and what their land is like, the writer makes a case for how they should be ruled. This fits with the idea that to describe (or define) is to control. After military campaigns, British officers often wrote fictionalized stories or semi-factual sketches of Afghan life that mixed surveillance data with dramatization. These texts helped shape how the British public thought about Afghanistan and kept it in the empire's imaginary watch even when there was no war.

Fiction was also very important as a tool for keeping an eye on culture and controlling ideas. In the British colonies, popular novels and stories set in the empire often used the same ways of seeing and controlling people that travel writing did. Rudyard Kipling is a great example. His stories about the Afghan border and India (like *The Man Who Would Be King*, *Kim*, and a lot of short stories) are full of ethnographic detail and imperial points of view. Kipling's books gave British readers clear pictures of colonial areas, which helped them focus their attention on the colony. Kipling uses stories like *The Amir's Homily* (1891) to talk about how cruel an Afghan ruler is and how bad things are for his people. He does this to show how fair and orderly British rule is by comparison. One analysis says that Kipling's narrative voice in this story makes Afghans out to be "crooked... uncivilized" people who "deserve to be ruled and subjected to... oppression" for their own good (Kakar 124–25). This is fiction that serves as a moral justification for empire. It is a form of cultural surveillance because it watches and judges colonial subjects based on European standards of civilization. Kipling and other writers like him (for example, George Aberigh-Mackay and G. A. Henty) often wrote in a style that was almost ethnographic, describing the customs, clothes, and people of colonized countries. They said they knew the colony very well by doing this, which supported the idea that Britons had the right and ability to rule. Knowledge was power: the more

detailed fiction and travelogues were about the East, the more it seemed that the all-seeing imperial eye could see everything about it.

Also, travel writing and imperial fiction worked together to shape public opinion, which was a form of surveillance that also controlled the people at home. Corinne Fowler says that British travel writing and journalism about Afghanistan fed off of literary fiction and vice versa, creating a cycle of stereotypes that confirmed themselves. There were the same stock characters and situations in both true and made-up stories. For instance, there was the brave British officer among treacherous tribes, the fanatical *mullah*, and the hidden treasure in a faraway kingdom. Fowler calls these ideas circularity because British writers kept chasing tales, or using old stories to make sense of new ones. For instance, during the Western intervention in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021, British news coverage often brought up the wars of the 19th century, portraying modern Afghans as fierce, unruly fighters who were fighting against civilization, basically, the Kipling-esque trope was born again. This shows how long literature has been used for surveillance: Travelogues and novels from the 19th century not only taught colonial leaders about their time, but they also had an impact on policy-makers and the public in later generations. The archive of travel literature and fiction keeps a colonized culture under a metaphorical watch by giving people the impression that we have seen this before. Its image is frozen and looked at over time.

Postcolonial critics have called colonial travel writing and fiction the tools of empire, saying that they were just as important as any army or bureaucracy for keeping control. They stress that these texts were “not just descriptive” but “deeply ideological”, putting Western ideas and wants onto colonized lands (Zahoor 863). For instance, David Spurr’s book *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993) lists the rhetorical strategies (surveillance, appropriation, classification) that colonial writers use to claim power over foreign spaces. One common strategy was to list and organize details. By listing every part of an Eastern city or landscape, the writer suggests that nothing is too hard for him to understand (Spurr 20). The panoptic perspective is another way to look at a scene from a high point

of view, as if the whole area is visible and open to the European gaze (Pratt 201). These ways of telling stories made literature look like the surveying eye of the colonial state. It is interesting that a lot of colonial officials were also writers; the line between administrator and author was not very clear. Writing about a place was like being in charge of it. The phrase cultural surveillance describes how the empire's need to watch and control people spread to cultural areas like novels, travelogues, and even paintings and photographs. These all helped to keep an eye on and define the colonized other.

The connection between Orientalist thought and travel writing shows us something important: words and stories can be used as tools of empire. We can see clearly from the British view of 19th-century Afghanistan that travel writing and fiction were not just for fun or to think about oneself; they were part of the very fabric of colonial rule. They looked at cultures, wrote down identities, and gave reasons for policies. By carefully looking at this literature, we find the ways it controlled people and the stereotypes it left behind. This literature review sets the academic stage for looking at the travelogues of Bellew, Masson, and Hughes from the late 1800s. It puts those main texts in the context of the larger Orientalist discourse and shows why it is both appropriate and necessary to look at them through Said's theoretical lens.

In chapter 2, I investigated particularly at how Orientalist writing shifted over time in British literature. I focused on how imperialist narratives made the East seem inferior, chaotic, and exotic. I explored the way Afghanistan became a misrepresented frontier in the colonial archive, shaped by strategic and ideological needs. The chapter went on exploring towards how travel writing and fiction were used as tools of cultural surveillance, creating and legitimising imperial power through discursive control. In Chapter 3, I will build on the already established theoretical underpinning to look at how Bellew, Hughes, and Masson use Orientalist tropes like barbarism, gendered otherness, and civilisational decline in their stories.

I will additionally demonstrate how these tropes support colonial power through the use of rhetorical strategies and symbolic binaries.

Chapter 3

Tropes of Representation: Figurations of Otherness and Imperial Rhetoric in the Works of Bellew, Hughes, and Masson

3.1 Constructing the Barbaric Frontier: Narratives of Chaos and Anarchy: An Introduction

British writers in the 1800s often wrote about the Afghan frontier as a barbaric, chaotic place on the edge of civilisation. These depictions helped to support the idea of a civilisational divide between an orderly West and a lawless “Orient” (Said 1). In colonial writing, the lands beyond the Indus were described as places of anarchy, tribal violence, and constant unrest. This was very different from how stable British India was supposed to be. These kinds of representations were not neutral; they were imperial rhetoric that justified intervention by pretending to restore order. The frontier became a textual frontier as well, a place where British writers wrote about their fears of disorder and otherness.

3.1.1 Bellew’s “*From the Indus to the Tigris*” and the Mapping of Disorder

From the Indus to the Tigris (1874) by Henry Walter Bellew is an example of the barbaric frontier trope. From the beginning, Bellew sets up the trip as a journey from civilisation to barbarism: “Cross the mountain barrier... and you pass at once from civilisation to barbarism, from order to anarchy, from security to danger, from justice to oppression” (Bellew 2). In this case, Bellew maps disorder onto geography: just stepping into Afghan and Central Asian territory means going into chaos. He talks about how “tyranny and insecurity, oppression and violence reign everywhere all over the country,” and he describes caravans being robbed by rebel tribes and lawlessness on all sides (3). This kind of language makes the border seem like a zone of “anarchy” where there is no stable government (4). Bellew even gives this chaos a historical context by calling the area “the home ever since of anarchy and

desolation – the hotbed of Mohammedan bigotry – the arena of Shia and Sunni hostility,” which has always been fought over by rival powers (4). This broad call for conflict and sectarianism makes Afghan territory seem like it is always in trouble.

Bellew’s story follows a classic Orientalist pattern: the British sphere is orderly and moral, while the Afghan frontier is wild and immoral. His moral geography is clear. “Barbarism...anarchy...danger...oppression” lies beyond the border, while “civilization...order...security...justice” lies on the British Indian side (2). Bellew strengthens the idea that Afghans cannot govern themselves by calling their government “weak” and “in approaching dissolution” and their people “barbaric”... and “bigoted” (27). These descriptions fit with what Edward Said said about Orientalist discourse: the East is seen as “backward”... “exotic”...and...“passive,” stuck in a state of regression that seems to justify Western intervention (109). Bellew did write during the time of the “Great Game” and his alarmist tone about “the camel of Herat” (a metaphor for the growing Russian influence) makes the frontier seem even more chaotic and open to outside control (iv). Bellew’s mapping of disorder is both descriptive and performative. It not only describes “anarchy and confusion” but it also makes Afghan territory the perfect “barbaric frontier” that needs imperial order (258).

3.1.2 Hughes’s Herat as a Site of Cultural Decay in *Ruhainah*

If Bellew’s nonfiction showed the chaos on the frontier, in the same way, T.P. Hughes’s fictional story *Ruhainah, the Maid of Herat* (1896) shows Herat and the area around it as places where culture is falling apart and there is a lot of trouble. The novel takes place after the First Anglo-Afghan War and shows a country that has been damaged by war and moral decline. Hughes’s story shows the city of Herat, which was once a famous centre of Persian culture, as fading and broken. Hughes calls the old hero Abdullah “the Rustum of Herat” which brings to mind a famous Persian warrior (5). This is meant to show how Herat has changed over time. Abdullah’s life story, which includes moving from Herat to Kabul because of a “Persian

invasion of Herat” when he was young, is a symbol of Herat’s loss of glory and the region’s loss of order (5).

Decay can be seen in both the physical and social landscape of Ruhainah. The story starts with Dost Mohammad Khan in the winter gardens of Jalalabad, “outside the dismantled walls of Jalalabad”, which is a visual reminder of the war and destruction that happened there recently (1). There is trouble brewing in Abdullah’s provincial fortress, which he got as a reward for his service. His daughter Shaidy says, “I wish we had never left Herat; here we have nothing but trouble” (39). This desire for Herat suggests that their current situation, a small fort in Jalalabad’s hinterlands, only brings “trouble” and does not have the same level of stability or culture that Herat used to have (39). It means that the decline of Herat has caused chaos to spread far and wide. Hughes does show signs of cultural decline in his story, such as political marriages set up to keep tribes from fighting, secretive cults like the “Guild of the Red Hand” that stir up violence, and characters who are stuck in superstition and revenge (73). Herat itself, though not described in great detail on the page, is a memory of better times that are now gone. The name “Maid of Herat” given to the heroine, Ruhainah, suggests that she is a symbol of the troubled land, a once-proud area that needs help (160). Hughes strengthens the Orientalist idea that the Eastern city, without Western rule, will inevitably fall apart by describing Herat as a decaying frontier city that is quarantined in a dismantled state and plagued by internal strife. His story of cultural decline fits with the imperial rhetoric of the time, which saw places like Herat as in need of radical state intervention because they were thought to be getting worse.

3.1.3 Masson’s Nomadic Imaginary and Tribal Fragmentation

Charles Masson paints a more complex and still othering picture of the Afghan frontier than Bellew and Hughes do. In his *Narrative of Various Journeys* (1840s), Masson vividly describes a wide range of tribes and nomadic communities, painting a picture of Afghanistan as a land of wandering tribesmen rather than a unified nation. His book lists a lot of tribal names,

like Yusufzai, Khaibari, Waziris, Durranis, and others. This shows that the social order is broken up and loyalty does not go beyond the clan. In Masson's Afghanistan, the different tribes come together then disperse with the seasons. Pastoral nomads move around every year, and their movements are not controlled by any central state but by tradition and the need to survive. This focus on tribal divisions strengthens the colonial idea that Afghans do not have a strong national identity or a well-developed political system. Dr. Magnus Marsden's recent research has shown that colonial ethnographers like Masson helped make the idea of the Afghan as a "tribesman" a strong one. In Western analysis, this idea became "the irrefutable marker of Afghan society" (Marsden).

Masson's writing swings between romantic interest in the nomadic life and honest recognition of its dangers. On the one hand, he admires the independence of these "rude tribes" in a rough way (Masson 2:250). He remembers wandering freely among tribal communities and says he "had ample reason to be satisfied with them" (1:125). He did not need to hide who he was because the locals were friendly and welcoming to strangers. These kinds of passages make it seem like Masson's nomadic imagination has a Rousseauian hint of the noble savage, strong hillmen who have not been changed by modern civilisation. Masson, on the other hand, does not shy away from the violence and lawlessness that are part of tribal life. He often talks about "predatory tribes" and "marauders" (1:147). For example, he talks about how "the different tribes (would) descend and murder as well as plunder" the people who lived in settled areas (1:319). He says that in one area, "everyone" was afraid of "these marauders" coming to attack (1:350). He says that "internal peace" cannot be kept without a strong garrison, and tribute cannot be collected from villages that do not follow any rules (1:116). These kinds of comments show how people see Afghanistan as a place where there are always factions fighting each other and refusing to accept any central authority.

Masson's story unintentionally supports the imperial *divide et impera* logic by saying that Afghanistan is not a nation but a group of fighting tribes. This means that imperial powers could say that their invasions brought unity or stability. In fact, Masson's detailed tribal taxonomy and his reports of tribal fragmentation have been seen as part of an imperial sociology that grouped and simplified Afghan groups for strategic purposes. Even so, Masson's personal sympathy for individual Afghans and his appreciation of their "*esprit de pays*" (for example, when he admires the Bannu tribes' proud cry of "My own dear Bannu!") add depth to his story (1:97). He thinks of the nomads as both dangerous and free, both ferocious and able to be friendly. This duality makes them more human, even though his overall picture supports the colonial idea that Afghanistan was a chaotic tribal frontier.

3.2 Feminizing the Orient: Gendered Symbolism and Cultural Eroticism

Gendered metaphors have been a part of Orientalist representation for a long time. Edward Said and other critics have pointed out that the West often feminises the East by portraying it as mysterious, sensual, passive, and in need of control by a masculine West. This feminisation works both metaphorically (by making Eastern lands seem fertile but easy to conquer by the West) and literally (by making Eastern women seem exotic). In the works of Bellew, Hughes, and Masson, women and femininity become symbols of cultural difference. These writers are part of what Meyda Yeğenoğlu calls the Orientalist "harem fantasy", which shows the East as a place of hidden secrets and sexual intrigue (68). They do this through harem scenes, not talking about women, or short, eroticised descriptions. These kinds of images fit with common 19th-century ideas about the veiled woman, the harem girl, and the *houri*, which were "mysterious, sensual, and erotic beings" that showed up in Western art and literature about the Muslim world (Yeğenoğlu 68). In this part, we look at how Hughes, Bellew, and Masson each deal with (or go against) the feminisation of the Orient. Hughes does this by creating an intimate fictional world for an Afghan woman, Bellew does this by erasing women

from his story, and Masson does this by showing women in a way that is both peripheral and telling.

3.2.1 Hughes's *Ruhainah* and the Veiled Domesticity of the Afghan Woman

Thomas Patrick Hughes, a missionary who knows a lot about Peshawar society, gives us an unusually detailed look inside an Afghan home in *Ruhainah*, specifically the harem of an Afghan chief. Hughes puts gender and family life at the centre of his novel by making *Ruhainah*, a young Afghan woman (known as the Maid of Herat), the main character. The story goes into great detail about the separate quarters for women. The “entrance to the harem, or prohibited quarter” is said to be well-hidden, “screened off so as to prevent the eye of the curious from penetrating its hidden mysteries” (15). This image of veiling and secrecy not only shows how *purdah* works in real life, but it also adds to the Western interest in the harem as a mysterious place. Hughes stresses that “the harem of an Afghan chief is generally held sacred from prying curiosity,” which adds to the idea of a private, hidden home (15). Hughes does, however, unveil this space for the reader by telling the stories of the dramas that happen in Abdullah’s harem, which satisfies the curiosity he mentions.

Hughes shows a small part of Afghan society inside the harem, where women have a lot of power (though only in very strict ways). Abdullah’s harem is not a peaceful place; it is full of noise and trouble. “From morning till night, the noise and clatter of Abdullah’s harem (was immense)” (18). Co-wives fight for power, and gossip spreads quickly through characters like Gulandamah, the slave girl who tells “daily events of the harem” and acts as a go-between in secret romances (18). In the middle of all this feminine chaos at home, *Ruhainah* is a beacon of grace and peace. Hughes says she is “in a unique position” in the harem as the peacemaker who calms down even the most proud and jealous wives (21). The narrator says, “Even the Sheenwaree wife became tame under the gentle and loving influence of *Ruhainah*’s dreamy... presence” (22). In this description, *Ruhainah* is like an idealised version of femininity that

Victorian literature often gives to Oriental women. She is patient, loving, and morally pure, and she is a domestic angel in a polygamous household that is otherwise full of conflict. Her name, which is linked to Herat, suggests that she represents the soul or essence of Afghanistan (feminine, beautiful, and limited).

Hughes's picture of veiled domesticity has two meanings. It gives Western readers a peek inside the exotic harem and makes the Afghan woman seem both pitiful and admirable. The story makes it clear that women like Ruhainah and her half-sister Shaidy have little say over their fates. Hughes wryly notes that "among Oriental races, a marriage is considered one of the easiest ways of settling political affairs" (17). But these women use soft power in the background. In one part of the story, young Shaidy falls in love, and even though "a chieftain's harem would have kept these two young lovers apart forever (51)," the women cleverly hire Gulandamah to help them meet in secret, getting around the patriarchal rules. These kinds of events show that Afghan women are not just passive victims of purdah; they have some power in the home, even if it is limited.

Hughes does, however, not completely avoid the Orientalist sexualisation of the Eastern woman. The book makes its main character, who is also named after the book, seem a little sexual, but in a respectable Victorian way. People keep talking about how beautiful Ruhainah is in classic Orientalist ways: her "long black tresses... silken ringlets, bright eyes, ruby lips, pearly teeth and cypress form" make people who see her fall in love with her (47). The men in the area call her a "fair maid" and even a "*houri*," which is a term used in Islamic stories to describe the beautiful virgins of paradise (62). One soldier jokes that Abdullah's beautiful daughter has so enchanted a young prince that "he divorced the ugliest of (his wives)" after seeing her (47). This shows how much she is seen as an object of desire. Hughes uses this kind of imagery to tap into the cultural sexual attraction that many people have for Asian women. Hughes, on the other hand, does not go too far with voyeurism or sexual details; his tone stays

that of a morally minded observer. If anything, his goal is to make Afghan women more human by giving them a voice and making their stories the main focus. This was a pretty progressive move for the time. Still, the overall effect fits with Orientalist ideas: the Afghan woman's world is shown as a sensual, secretive inner sanctum that is both alluring and backwards, with Ruhainah herself being a romanticised symbol of the "Oriental feminine."

3.2.2 Bellew's Silence on Women as a Strategy of Erasure

Henry Walter Bellew's travelogue is almost completely silent about local women, which is very different from Hughes's immersive portrayal of women's lives at home. There are very few mentions of women in "*From the Indus to the Tigris*", and when there are, they are brief and to the point. This obvious absence acts as a discursive erasure, effectively writing women out of the landscape and out of history. Bellew's story is mostly about tribes, soldiers, male guides, and rulers. Women, if they show up at all, are just nameless figures in the background of violence and suffering. For instance, Bellew tells the story of an atrocity he saw: "An old woman in my way took off her veil and shouted, 'Look here! They have not even spared our women; they cut off this poor woman's nose with a sword (26). The poor thing's face was shockingly eaten away... This horrible story shows a woman who has been mutilated to show how cruel Afghan men (or maybe invading soldiers) are, since they "have not even spared" the defenceless (26). Bellew does not care about the woman's individual identity or voice outside of that exclamation. She is only there to show how cruel the Orient is. In the same way, Bellew briefly mentions a young woman who is fascinated by a mirror he gives her, or talks about women's bodies found along roads where there is a lot of hunger. These short scenes show women as either victims or interesting people, never as people who do things.

Bellew's almost complete lack of women can be seen as a way to erase them that strengthens imperial power dynamics. Bellew's decision to leave out Afghan women from his ethnographic view suggests that the important parts of Afghan society are the male areas of

politics, war, and diplomacy. This is similar to what postcolonial feminists like Chandra Mohanty states that colonial narratives often produce “an overwhelming silence about the experiences of women” in colonized regions (336). In Bellew’s case, the silence is clear, his writing hides the women of Afghanistan better than any *purdah* could, making them invisible to his readers. This erasure made the Orientalist image simpler: an Afghanistan full of fanatical male tribesmen, with no women or family life to temper them. The few times Bellew talks about women only make stereotypes about the Orient’s barbarism or exoticism stronger. In his eyes, the woman with the severed nose and mutilated body shows how “savage” Afghans are (24). In an appendix on the Brahui language, there is a short list of words for “woman”, “wife”, and “girl” that are used in the area (474). This makes women seem like objects of linguistic study instead of people (493).

It is interesting that Bellew, a colonial doctor and administrator, does not talk about women’s roles, status, or looks at all, even though many travelogues at the time included voyeuristic descriptions of harems or beautiful women. He probably held back on purpose. Bellew avoids making his picture of Afghan society more complicated by not talking about women. He also avoids any feelings of empathy that might come from talking about home or personal life. This omission fits into the imperial grammar of power. Taryn Slattery mentions Said who said that in this grammar, the Orient is built by reiterating how “our” culture is superior and leaving out things that do not fit the colonial story. Bellew might see Afghans as barbarians, but recognising that they have loving mothers, smart wives, or powerful matriarchs could make them seem more human. So, silence is a way to keep the Afghan people different from everyone else. They are seen as the dangerous, exotic “male” Orient with its constant wars, and they do not have any domesticity or feminine softness that might make Westerners feel sorry for them. Bellew’s silence about women is just as informative as Hughes’s long

explanation. Both strategies end up reinforcing an image of the Orient that is very different from the West, which is defined by men. It is either interestingly exotic or completely foreign.

3.2.3 Masson's Peripheral Glimpses into Femininity and Cultural Taboos

Charles Masson's writing is somewhere in between Hughes's detailed writing about women and Bellew's quiet lack of writing about them. Masson did not have much direct contact with women in the conservative societies he travelled through because he often travelled alone and in disguise. Still, his Narrative gives us a few glimpses into the lives of women that are interesting because they show how cultural taboos and Masson's own outsider status affect them. Masson usually talks about women not to talk about how beautiful they are or what their roles are at home, but to show how local gender norms get in the way of his journey. Masson tells a story about being caught eating during the Ramadan fast and getting in trouble with a local woman: "A woman, seeing me, pulled a stout stick from a hedge and, without mercy, used it on me, calling me an infidel for breaking my fast" (1:63). This shocking scene of a village woman beating a foreign man for breaking Islamic law shows how a woman in the community enforced a cultural taboo (eating during the day during Ramadan). It turns the usual power dynamic on its head: the Muslim woman calls the outsider "infidel" and claims moral authority over him (1:63). Masson's use of this story and his note that "expostulation seemed (futile)" show that he is an observer (1:63). He does not make the woman seem romantic; instead, he shows her as strong and scary, a symbol of community piety and social punishment. Masson also writes about more pleasant meetings. He says that in Sindh, "the women dress gaily, in bodices worked over with variously coloured silks." He even says that one woman "was the handsomest woman I had seen in Sind, very smartly attired" (1:374). Masson's short comments show that he was interested in how women dress and look as part of describing a culture. He does not focus on sensuality; instead, he talks about the visual aspects of women's lives in a matter-of-fact way, like he would about a landscape or a bazaar. In other places, he

talks about how women did things for him in exchange for a few coins, like baking bread for him. He also talks about how an “old nurse” (*dhārī*) took care of a sick woman in a fort he visited (2:18). These small details paint a picture of a world where women are present and active, cooking, nursing, and enforcing social norms, but Masson never fully enters that world. They stay on the edges of his story, just like they did in the male-dominated public sphere he moved through.

Masson’s few references show that he knows about women’s spaces and taboos, but they do not have the heavy Orientalist exoticism that some people might expect. He does not make harems seem strange or dream about beautiful women who are not wearing veils. Instead, he often downplays himself or looks confused when women come up to him. In one village, he remembers that a woman would come to see him every day and bring him small gifts of fruit or sweets, “craving my blessing” (1:346). She may have thought he was a holy man or a harmless oddball. Masson says he “couldn’t guess why she thought that” and later heard her tell someone else that he was “the *dīvāneh*, or idiot, from Mastung” (1:346). This story shows Masson’s sense of humour and the cultural gap: to the local women, this foreigner might seem like a harmless madman or saint who should be given gifts and treated with respect. Masson’s willingness to write down these kinds of things, even one where a woman calls him an idiot, shows that he wants to write down all the things he sees in life, not just the big political events.

Masson’s writing only gives us a few hints about Oriental femininity, but those hints are important. They make the idea that women’s lives in Afghanistan and North India run on a separate track, mostly hidden but strong in their own way, even stronger. These are hinted at but never fully explored: the power to enforce religious rules (with a stick, if necessary) or the close power within family and ritual. Masson’s point of view is different from Hughes’s romantic-erotic lens or Bellew’s silence in that it is one of cautious respect and admitted ignorance. This also supports Orientalist separation in its own way: for him, women are still

the ultimate unknown other, part of the homogeneous caricature of otherness that Orientalism often uses to describe Eastern cultures. But Masson's honesty about what he does not know (or is not allowed to know) also goes against the usual all-knowing colonial gaze a little bit. His story admits that a European's view of the East is limited; for example, he cannot fully cross the line between the veiled women and their inner lives.

3.3 The Civilizing Narrative and the Colonial Missionary Ethos

The civilising mission was a common theme in imperial rhetoric in the 19th century. It was the idea that colonial powers, because they were more advanced in civilisation and Christianity, had a duty (or at least a reason) to civilise the societies they found that were thought to be barbaric or decadent. This story made the empire sound like a good thing by changing the words for militarism and conquest to humanitarian intervention, moral upliftment or the spread of enlightenment. Hughes, Bellew, and Masson all write about this civilising discourse, but they do so in different ways. Hughes, a Christian missionary, writes fiction that tries to convert people and has themes of moral salvation. Bellew, a British surgeon and administrator, takes a secular humanitarian stance and sees imperial intervention as a way to "heal" a "sick" society (5). Masson is more sceptical of imperial plans, but he still thinks that reason and progress are better than everything else. He often complains about how the East has "declined" from its ancient glory (1:126). In their own ways, all three show what Slattery calls "the narrative of the East as a foreign inferior awaiting correction". This story was used to justify colonial rule. This part looks at how each writer talks about the civilising mission: Hughes does it through open missionary zeal, Bellew does it through medicalised imperial logic, and Masson does it through enlightenment rationalism and historical critique.

3.3.1 Hughes's Missionary Undertones and Moral Salvation

Since Thomas P. Hughes was an Anglican missionary, it is not surprising that *Ruhainah* has a lot of missionary undertones. The book is not just a historical romance; it is also a moral

story with Christian themes like sin, redemption, and divine providence. Hughes makes it clear that Christian values are a part of the story by including Sister Lydia, an English missionary woman whose faith and kindness have a big impact on the British main character, Major Bertrand Bernard. In an honest talk, Bernard says that Lydia “not only saved my life but also brought back my faith” (112). If I were dying right now, I would throw away all my systems of theology and philosophy and just say, “My faith is Sister Lydia’s” (112). This statement emphasises the book’s theme of moral salvation: Sister Lydia represents a pure, simple Christianity that is shown to be stronger and more real than dry dogma or worldly wisdom. Bernard also says, “Sister Lydia’s faith, as shown in her simple life, is more like the teaching of the Son of God than anything else I have seen” (113). Hughes here directly links the ideal Christian virtues of humility, charity, and childlike faith to the solution to both personal and social problems. Just like Afghan Ruhainah saves Bernard from physical danger later in the story, Sister Lydia’s Christ-like influence saves him spiritually.

The Afghan characters’ journeys also show the missionary ethos. Even though the text does not say that Ruhainah becomes a Christian, her character fits with Christian moral values. She is kind, forgiving, and monogamous by nature. These are good traits that the book implicitly contrasts with the polygamy, revenge, and intrigue that are common in her Afghan environment. Hughes also includes the character of Dilawar Khan, an Afghan Christian convert who is based on a real friend of Hughes. In the book, he does heroic deeds and stays loyal until he dies. Hughes adds a Christian native character to show that Afghans might accept the new faith and the civilised values that come with it. In fact, the whole story arc, which supposedly ends with Ruhainah marrying Bernard, the English officer, could be seen as a symbol of Afghanistan’s possible union with Christian civilisation. The British hero not only brings romance but also moral salvation. The Afghan heroine’s joining his life is a sign of a hoped-

for reconciliation between Afghanistan and the West on Western terms (i.e., through acceptance of Christian love and monogamous marriage).

Hughes often uses religious language and references in *Ruhainah* that support these undertones. Characters shout, “Praise be to God... We only worship you!” (55). In times of drama, and in a letter, Bernard talks about the dangers of his mission while slyly referring to Providence (referring to “chances, if you will allow me to speak of chances” vs. divine will) (117). There are even Muslim characters in the book who talk about Christian teachings. For example, an Afghan teacher is amazed that a certain doctrine is “more like the teaching of the Son of God... than anything I have seen so far.” (113). Another character then says, “Well, I believe more in the religion of Sister Lydia...” (113). This made-up conversation blurs the lines between fact and fiction. It suggests that smart Afghans might see the truth in Christian teachings, which would support the missionary project. Hughes does not show mass conversions, which would have been impossible in a novel based on the real history of the First Afghan War, but he does put Christian moral triumphalism into the story. By the end, the reader gets the idea that all the good things that happen in the story, like *Ruhainah*’s personal salvation or the survival of important characters, are because of Christianity and good Westerners. This shows the general attitude of Victorian missionaries, who believed that spreading Christianity was the key to civilising the East and saving it from both spiritual and social decay. Hughes combines evangelism with imperial romance in *Ruhainah* to show that the Gospel and Western morality, not just force of arms, can help Afghans feel more like themselves.

3.3.2 Bellew’s Medical Humanitarianism as Imperial Legitimization

Henry Walter Bellew’s way of telling the story of civilisation is based on science and medicine, which is what he learnt as a surgeon. Bellew does not preach religion directly; instead, he uses a medical metaphor to justify imperial intervention in Afghanistan. Bellew calls Afghanistan the “sick man of Asia” in his introduction and then asks, “What shall we say

of Afghanistan, shut up in his own barbarism...?” (5). He is very sick, sick enough to die (5). He knows it, but he will not do it. It is the only thing that can save his failing body from falling apart. Should we just let him go? Or will the doctor show up on time and fix his broken body?”(5). This part makes Bellew’s imperial logic clear. Afghanistan is like a sick person who is suffering from barbarism and fanaticism. Western civilisation is the cure, and the colonial power (Britain, or even Russia in Bellew’s mixed view) is the doctor who might be able to help. “Is he to be left to his fate?” Bellew asks in a rhetorical way. He makes it clear that doing nothing would be irresponsible, even inhumane, because the patient is so close (5). Bellew ends by saying, “The patient is our neighbour, and we cannot be indifferent to his fate” (5). This makes it clear that Britain has a moral duty to get involved in Afghan affairs.

This way of framing things is an example of what postcolonial analysts call the humanitarian alibi of empire. Imperial writers like Bellew could make aggression look better and expansion seem noble by framing conquest or political domination as a form of medical rescue or altruistic aid. Bellew wrote this just twenty years after Britain’s bloody defeat in the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–42) and at a time when people were worried about Russia’s advances. Calling for conquest would have been very controversial. Instead, he tells a story about imperial care, saying that Afghanistan’s government is “decaying” and close to “dissolution”, so an outside intervention is like surgery that saves a life (5). If Afghans keep “obstinately” refusing civilization’s help, Western powers may have to use force to give it to them for their own good (5). Bellew even talks about Russia’s recent campaign in Khiva, saying it “promise (s) to unfold to (Russia) a field of enterprise” and bring “European civilisation” to Central Asia (iv). He is a British officer, but he agrees with Russia’s civilising mission (which has some elements of despotism) and suggests that Britain should not fall behind in offering a more enlightened solution.

In Bellew's story, his medical humanitarianism goes beyond just a metaphor. As a doctor, he sometimes writes about helping people in his area with medical problems, and he often talks about social issues in a detached, scientific way. He looks at the Afghan social condition almost like a diagnosis: "The decline of the government... and the home (has been) ever since (one) of anarchy and desolation", he writes, connecting political breakdown to societal ill-health (258). Adding linguistic grammars and weather data to the book also makes him look like a scientist bringing light to a dark area. All of these tactics make Bellew (and by extension the British) look like rational, kind experts who are stepping in to help in a place full of superstition and chaos. It shows what one scholar calls "colonial inquiry and pathology" by saying that only imperial rule could fix an "Afghan crisis" (Drephal). Bellew's work supports imperial power by telling a story that is almost humanitarian: the Afghans are "sick" with barbarism, and it is the White doctor's job to heal them (5). This was very much in line with Victorian imperial ideology, which often genuinely believed (or at least claimed) that empire was a form of philanthropy – a notion later encapsulated (ironically) in Kipling's call to "Take up the White Man's burden... to serve your captives' need" (Clark et al.). Bellew's prescription for Afghanistan, written in earnest prose, is a prototypical example of that self-justifying ethos.

3.3.3 Masson's Enlightenment Rationalism and the Archaeology of Decline

Charles Masson has a more complicated view of the civilising story. Masson was an independent thinker who often criticised British policy. He did not openly support a British civilising mission in Afghanistan; in fact, he thought the First Anglo-Afghan War was a bad idea. However, Masson's writings are full of Enlightenment rationalism and a belief in the value of objective knowledge. These ideas are similar to imperial ideas about improving societies that are behind the times. Masson does not go to Afghanistan as a missionary or a would-be administrator; he goes there as an antiquarian and scholar. His extensive documentation of ancient Buddhist relics, coins, and ruins across Afghanistan can be seen as

an archaeology of decline. By excavating and recording the remnants of past civilisations (Greek, Buddhist, Hindu) on Afghan soil, Masson implicitly draws a contrast between the enlightened past and the turbulent present. For example, he was amazed by the large ruins of old cities and monasteries. One character (or maybe Masson himself, as Hughes later said) talks about how there are extensive ruins all through this valley, and yet there is not a single Buddhist to be found in the whole country. This harsh observation sums up the idea of a fallen civilisation: Afghanistan used to have thriving Buddhist cultures (huge statues at Bamiyan, stupas at Jalalabad, etc.), but those are gone now, leaving behind a society that Masson often calls “barbarous” in comparison (152).

Masson’s criticism of modern Afghan society is often subtle but sharp. He writes about “semi-barbarous countries, where tyranny and misrule reign and oppression never ends” (1:326). The words “barbarism” and “misrule” show Masson’s normative framework: by Enlightenment standards of governance and social order, Afghanistan at the time was failing (1:215). He often talks about how there is not enough education and good government. He talks about “the barbarism of the Sikhs at that time” when he talks about Sikh rule in Peshawar (1:438). For example, he says that even a chief’s son was not taught to read or write, which are skills he has never learnt since. These kinds of comments show Masson’s pessimism about civilisation. He thinks that the East, including Afghanistan and even its neighbours, is stuck in ignorance and autocracy, which is very different from the progress and intellectual culture he sees in Europe. Masson’s Enlightenment mind-set made him value empirical truth and secular knowledge very highly. He worked hard to collect geographical data, make the first accurate copies of inscriptions (like the Shahbazgarhi rock edicts), and add a lot to what Westerners knew about Afghan antiquity. By doing this, he was effectively keeping track of the decline by preserving proof of a time when these areas were part of great empires or busy trade networks, as opposed to the broken tribal landscape he was walking through.

Masson was also very critical of the British when they did things that did not make sense. He says in his preface that he does not agree with Sir Alexander Burnes and Lord Auckland's "wild projects" of conquest, which he thought were completely wrong (vi). He says that his own factual reports were changed to "subserve the interested schemes of artful and designing men" before the war (v). He also says that these schemes "most certainly they were never written" to support (v). This position makes Masson look even more like a rational observer and truth-teller. He says that the British could have avoided the disaster of 1839–42 if they had paid more attention to objective facts (many of which he reported) instead of their imperial ambitions. In this way, Masson's goal of civilising is just as much about helping his own people understand as it is about Afghanistan. He wanted to improve British policy by giving them accurate information and warned against the arrogance of forcing change without knowing how things work in the area.

Even though he criticises them, Masson's main point of view is still that of a Westerner judging the East by European standards. His interest in Afghanistan's glorious past (he literally dug up its glorious past) and his disappointment with its current state make for a story of the decline of civilisation. Afghanistan is almost like a ruined monument; it used to be part of lively civilisations that spanned many regions, like Greek Bactria, Buddhist Gandhara, and the Mughal Empire. Now it is closed and jealously guarded against the civilisation of the age. Masson does not go so far as to say that Britain should take over to fix this. However, by carefully writing down everything from coins to tribal customs, he helps with the colonial knowledge project that is the basis for the civilising mission. One study says that people like Masson helped create "the very concept of 'tribe' (in Afghanistan)" that colonial rulers later used to rule and divide (12). Masson's enlightenment rationalism is basically a belief in knowledge and progress that, while not overtly interventionist, fits with the broader imperial belief that European modernity could diagnose and maybe even cure the problems of oriental

“decline” (1:360). His work is an intellectual part of the civilising mission, an archaeology not just of history, but of a supposed path from ancient enlightenment to modern decay that European influence might one day reverse.

3.4 Discourses of Objectivity: Epistemic Authority and the Textual Gaze

The imperial tropes we have talked about so far are based on a claim to epistemic authority, which means that the European writer can accurately and objectively observe, classify, and represent other lands. Bellew, Hughes, and Masson each use different methods to prove the authority of their accounts. This creates what we might call a “textual gaze” that watches and interprets the East with confidence (1:83-84). In Orientalist studies, this gaze is a way for Western authors to claim that their views of other cultures are the only correct ones by pretending to be objective knowers. In *The Rhetoric of Empire*, David Spurr says that colonial writers often use methods of description, classification, and narration that make their personal opinions seem like neutral observations (Spurr 1993). Bellew’s scientific posturing, Masson’s autobiographical truth-claims, and Hughes’s mixing of fiction with factual realism all show this clearly. Each author’s style makes their writing more believable, and by extension, the colonial ideas they may support: Bellew writes as the scientist-explorer mapping races and languages, Masson as the honest witness and chronicler, and Hughes as the experienced insider who mixes fiction and reality to show a higher truth about Afghan life. These talks about objectivity were very important for making colonial knowledge make sense and be convincing to a European audience. In this part, we look at how each writer builds his textual authority and what that means for imperial rhetoric.

3.4.1 Bellew as the Scientific Observer: Language, Race, and Classification

Bellew’s *From the Indus to the Tigris* is more than just a travel diary; it tries to be a sort of scientific study of the people and languages of the area. Bellew carefully groups the ethnic and linguistic groups he meets, just like 19th-century Orientalists did, to claim the title

of scholarly authority. The book is well-known for having a “Synoptical Grammar and Vocabulary of the Brahui Language” and notes on Pashto, Balochi, and Persian dialects (473-493). Bellew proudly says, “On the march, I learnt about eight hundred Brahui words and a few sentences to show how the language works” (58). These kinds of things make Bellew look like a patient scientific observer, sorting out grammar and vocabulary from the perceived chaos of languages he does not know. He talks a lot about differences and taxonomy mentioning Brahui language and considering it very different from the Afghan, Baloch, and Jat languages, even though it has a lot of Persian and Indian words in it. By naming and separating languages and tribes, Bellew is essentially mapping the human landscape as carefully as the physical landscape. The desire to collect information (censuses, dictionaries, ethnographies) as a way to control people is what Bernard Cohn called the colonial investigative modality.

Bellew’s writing about Afghan ethnography also shows that he is sure he can tell the difference between races and cultures. In a later work, he said that Afghans were “three million... a strange and interesting people”, and he split them into “two main classes: nomads and the fixed population”, giving each group its own set of traits (Bellew). He wrote that “nomads” are “healthy, hardy, excessively ignorant, superstitious, (and) addicted to cattle lifting and highway robbery”, but settled Afghans have different traits (Bellew). This broad generalisation, written in a style that sounds almost like anthropology, is a good example of Bellew’s objectivist rhetoric. He writes as if he is giving a report to other scholars or colonial officials, which he often did. Bellew’s ethnographic notes were meant to help British frontier policy. He thought that knowing a people’s history, aspirations, and interests would help colonial managers turn them into loyal, peaceable subjects. By using scientific language; measurements, classifications, and seemingly neutral descriptions of dress, law, and custom, Bellew’s text gains an air of credibility and neutrality. His descriptions include violent value

judgements, like calling a whole group of people ignorant and prone to robbery. These are presented as objective facts gathered by someone who is not biased.

Bellew also strengthens his authority by using other academic frameworks. He uses the words “Aryans” and “Scythians” a lot in his introduction to connect Afghan people to big historical-linguistic groups that were popular at the time (4). He talks about going to international Orientalist congresses and writing ethnographic questions. These kinds of actions put him in a group of smart people and give his words more weight. In a way, Bellew uses science as a way to make things seem more real. The subtext is that he is a man of science (medicine, linguistics, history) and has the right and ability to know the East better than it knows itself. His power is like the West’s power: just as he can map languages and figure out what is wrong with society, British rule can also classify, govern, and cure the different groups of people in the area (395). This is similar to what Edward Said said: Orientalists often thought of themselves as “expert knowers”, and they built up a body of knowledge that the West uses to control the East intellectually (224). Bellew’s confident, cataloguing writing is a great example of this kind of epistemic control. It is a textual panopticon that makes Afghan culture clear and understandable (and therefore governable) to the colonial eye.

3.4.2 Masson’s Autobiographical Claims to Truth and Witness

Charles Masson’s way of claiming power is based on being honest about his own life. He tells his story in several volumes, as if he were a traveller who lived among the people he describes. This gives his work the authority of an eyewitness. Masson often reminds the reader, either directly or indirectly, of his own experiences and good intentions. He says in the preface that he “regrets” that some people used his reports to push plans he never agreed with, making it clear that his writing was not meant to support anyone’s agenda (v). This is a subtle but important move: Masson makes himself out to be an independent truth-teller who is not involved in the empire’s schemes. He even quotes a private letter from Sir Alexander Burnes

praising Masson's "talents, honour, and zeal", but he makes it clear that Burnes never said this in public (v). Masson suggests that official stories, like Burnes's published reports, might be biased or distorted by adding this. He says that his own story is the unvarnished truth on the ground.

This idea of telling the truth is strengthened by Masson's writing style. He writes in great detail about his daily travels, distances, landscapes, and talks with locals, making a thick tapestry of observations that seem complete and trustworthy. He often speaks in a humble and honest way. For instance, he does not mind writing about his own bad luck, like when his guides stole from him, he got sick in the desert, or he was put in jail during the Kalat uprising. Masson makes himself more believable by talking about his own struggles. He paid his dues in pain and danger to bring back knowledge. He was there, going through the same hard times as the natives, unlike armchair theorists or propagandists. This is a strong way to have authority through witness. It fits with the Enlightenment idea of the traveller as an empiricist, or someone who finds out what is true by experiencing it directly. Mary Louise Pratt talks about how travelogues use a "seeing-man" persona to claim authority in *Imperial Eyes* (1992). Masson is very much that seeing (and sometimes bleeding) man.

Also, Masson is more trustworthy because he pays close attention to accuracy and is always willing to fix mistakes. He often checks local reports against each other, looks at more than one source of information, and says when he is not sure what the information is. When talking about historical events or the family trees of chiefs, he might say which versions he heard and how likely they are to be true. In a field of literature that often presented speculation as fact, this self-critical approach stands out. For example, Masson questions broad generalisations. He disagrees with the idea that some pagan tribes (Siah-Posh Kafirs) are in "so complete a state of barbarism as is imputed", saying that any human society must have "a certain kind of order" among its members (1:215). These kinds of moments show Masson using

logical reasoning to tone down over-the-top language, which is a subtle way of showing how his calm judgement is different from the sensationalism of others.

Masson gives his story an air of epistemic humility by presenting himself as an honest chronicler, which ironically makes it more authoritative. People who read Masson's journals back then (and scholars now) often thought they were full of useful information, from numismatic finds to ethnographic notes. Because of his reputation for being honest and accurate, Masson's broad claims are taken seriously. For instance, when he says, "In these semi-barbarous countries, oppression never ceases", it sounds less like a cliché that shows prejudice and more like the conclusion of a careful observer who has thought about it (1:326). Masson's claims about his own life, his constant, unspoken refrain of "I was there, I saw this", are what support his criticisms of both Afghan society and British policy (1:459). They let him say, in effect, "I have seen the truth, so I have the right to speak truths that others (who stayed safely in Simla or Calcutta) might not" (3:446). Masson is in a unique position because he is an empire critic who still believes in the imperial idea that seeing something for yourself is the only way to know the truth. He does not say that the Orientalist project of understanding the East is wrong; he just wants to make sure it is done right and honestly. This makes him a somewhat subversive Orientalist: someone who uses his authority as a witness to question imperial overreach (like the war) while also adding a lot of information to the imperial archive of knowledge about Afghanistan.

3.4.3 Hughes's Fictional Realism: Blurring Narrative Boundaries

T. P. Hughes uses a different method to show that his vision is true: he blurs the line between fiction and ethnography by using realistic details and his own experiences to make the novel *Ruhainah* feel real. Hughes makes it clear in the preface that he lived with the Afghans for twenty years and knows their language and customs very well. Most of the events in this "*Story of Afghan Life*" are based on real life (v). Hughes is asking people to read his novel not

just for fun, but also as a trustworthy account of Afghan society and history by giving this preface. He even tells us what really happened in history that led to the main events in the story: “Ruhainah’s character is based on things that (he knows) happened after the British army left in January 1842, when a terrible massacre... took place in the Jagdulluck Pass” (v). So, before the story really starts, Hughes has set himself up as an expert witness (like Masson) and *Ruhainah* as a semi-factual case study and a romance. This paratextual strategy gives the text epistemic authority by making readers think that what they are about to read, even though it is a novel, will contain truth; maybe a kind of fictional truth that is easier to understand than dry news.

Hughes carefully includes ethnographic and historical details in the novel that he learnt while working as a missionary on the Northwest Frontier. He uses Pashto and Persian words (with explanations), describes local buildings like mosques and forts in great detail, and talks about customs like weddings and funerals with the care of an observer. For example, the story of Abdullah’s family includes real details like the *bourka* (veil) women wear, the layout of a *qanāt* (underground canal) in the fort, and the recitation of Islamic prayers in times of trouble. These details are not just there for show; they add a sense of realism that makes Hughes’s authority stronger. The result is that the audience feels like they are really learning about Afghan life and culture, even when they are reading dialogues and melodramatic stories. This style is similar to the Victorian realist novel, but it takes place on a colonial frontier. It fits with what Said said about the novel and imperialism: realistic stories about far-off places helped Western readers understand and adapt to the foreign culture (1993). Hughes is doing just that: turning Afghanistan into a social world on the page that people can understand and believe.

Hughes also makes it clear that many of the characters are based on real people. He says, for instance, that “Bertrand Bernard is... a British officer (he) knew at Peshawar”, that Abdullah is based on “an Afghan who did distinguished service for the British Government”,

and that Dilawar Khan is none other than (his) old friend... a Christian convert” who died in service (vi). Hughes blurs the lines again by showing these letters. His fiction is a thin veil over reality. This makes the story feel like a documentary. It seems that the conversations, fights, and solutions in the book have the same weight as if they really happened, or at least could have happened, in Afghanistan in the 1840s. For example, when Hughes has characters talk about religion or when an Afghan chief in the story deals with issues of honour and reform, the reader can see it as a stand-in for real conversations Hughes saw or heard about while he was in the area. In fact, a recent study says that “Hughes’s romance novel *Ruhainah* offers an alternative perspective on the role of evangelism on the Afghan frontier”, which means that scholars should see the novel as a valid historical voice in its own right (Hopkins).

Hughes effectively weaponises literature as a way to share colonial knowledge by mixing fictional stories with ethnographic and historical accuracy. His writing style is a mix of a novelist’s imagination and an anthropologist’s observation. This not only grabs the reader’s attention, but it also gives his deeper messages (about the need for moral salvation, the nature of Afghan society, etc.) a sense of truth. Sometimes, the lines between things can get blurry, which can be confusing for readers who cannot tell the difference between Hughes’s made-up dialogue and real cultural positions. But that blurring is what makes *Ruhainah* so convincing. It reads a lot like a memoir or a case study, using what could be called as fictional realism. By doing this, Hughes brings imperial discourse into the world of popular literature. He can make colonial problems (like reform vs. resistance, East-West love, and Christian-Muslim relations) feel real and urgent, which changes how people think about them. In the end, Hughes’s mix of fact and fiction serves the same purpose as Bellew’s scientific tone or Masson’s serious use of facts: it makes him, the author, a reliable guide to the Afghan “other” and his story an authoritative text that shows the Western reader the Oriental world.

3.5 Symbolic Dualities and the Imperial Grammar of Power

Colonial discourse often worked by putting things into two groups, like civilized/savage, modern/decayed, West/East, and self/other. These symbolic oppositions made up what could be called an “imperial grammar of power” (Prakash 199). In this grammar, the first word of each pair (civilised, modern, West, self) is praised and linked to the coloniser, while the second word (savage, decayed, East, other) is criticised and linked to the colonised. All of the works by Bellew, Hughes, and Masson use these kinds of dualities to some degree, even though they are all different and have their own nuances. By seeing the world in black and white, they strengthened the imperial ideology’s hierarchy, which says that Europe stands for order, enlightenment, and virtue, while the Orient stands for disorder, degeneration, and moral deficiency. It is important to note that these binaries were not always the same; authors could sometimes flip them or question them. But the overall framing stayed the same: there was a stark contrast that made imperial dominance seem both natural and necessary. In this last part, we look at how each author’s writing builds important symbolic oppositions: Bellew’s moral geography of civilised vs. savage, Masson’s comparison of an enlightened Europe to a decaying East, and Hughes’s exploration of reform vs. resistance in a dialogic tension. Knowing about these dualities helps us see the deep-seated beliefs that shape how they portray otherness and shows how their writing fits into (and sometimes subtly challenges) the larger imperial story of the 19th century.

3.5.1 Civilized vs. Savage: Bellew’s Moral Landscapes

As discussed, Bellew’s story makes a clear line between the civilised and the savage. This dualism is based on race, geography, and morals. In Bellew’s story, the Indus River could be the Rubicon that separates two different stages of human history. Civilisation, with its laws, culture, and progress, is on the Indian side (under British rule). Beyond it is “barbarism...anarchy...oppression” (2). Bellew makes it clear that this is a moral landscape:

when you cross from British territory into Afghan tribal lands, you go “from justice to oppression” (2) He often uses the idea of light vs. darkness in his writing. He talks about “benighted regions” and the “lustre” of Western enlightenment that “must soon shed” on them (5). Afghanistan is “shut up in his own barbarism”, and it does not want to let in the “light” of civilisation. But Bellew suggests that the light will eventually break through (5).

There is a strong moral judgement behind this civilised vs. savage binary. Bellew does not just say that Afghans are different or violent; he also says they are morally inferior. He uses words like “treachery”, “fanaticism”, “cruelty”, and “vice” to describe Afghan society, always in contrast to the good things about European rule (5). For instance, Afghan rulers only bring “tyranny” and “insecurity”, while British administrators bring “justice” and “security” (3). Even the land itself is moralised: fertile areas are described as wasted by centuries of misrule, awaiting the guiding hand of civilisation to become “garden” rather than “waste” (189). Indeed, Bellew notes how the once-prosperous region of Sistan has been rendered a “desert waste” by “centuries of anarchy and oppression”, implying that only the return of order (via external intervention) could restore its fertility (189). Anne McClintock’s idea that colonised land is feminised as fertile but ruined, waiting for the colonizer’s husbandry, is similar to this. The underlying meaning of Bellew’s work is that the “savage” Afghan has turned the Garden of Asia into a wild place (189).

Bellew was not the only one who did this kind of moral mapping, but he does it in a very direct and broad way. He uses historical “proofs” of Afghan savagery, such as the destruction caused by the Mongols, tribal wars, and modern-day feuds (249). By doing this, he adds to what Said calls the “potted history” of Afghans as always being warlike and chaotic. This “savagery” that never goes away justifies constant foreign watchfulness (24). Bellew often talks about Russia’s advance and the need for British strategic interest. He does this because he thinks that Afghans are uncivilised and cannot be left to run their own affairs without putting

civilised nations in danger. The civilized/savage binary is therefore a direct source of arguments for imperial policy.

It is important to note that Bellew's moral dichotomy does not leave much room for grey. Some Afghans who worked with the British, like certain Khans or informants, might be seen as good, but that is usually because they are exceptions who act civilised. The rule is still in place: British = good, Afghan = bad (unless proven otherwise). This is exactly what Said called "Orientalist Manichaeism": a black-and-white view of the world that divides it into "us" and "them", with "our" side always being better (43). Bellew's writing shows how the Line 1's "grammar of power" was often the grammar of binary oppositions (Prakash 199). His "civilised vs savage" theme made Britons feel like they were the right people to bring order to the world (144). And it showed Afghan resistance not as patriotism or rational self-interest, but as the unreasonable defiance of the savage against the forces of good. In Bellew's moral world, civilisation must always win over savagery. He thought this prophecy justified the British being ready to make that happen if necessary.

3.5.2 Enlightened Europe vs. Decaying East: Masson's Civilizational Pessimism

Masson's writings, though more measured, also show a duality in civilisation: an enlightened (or at least progressing) Europe set against a decaying East. Masson does not loudly brag about Europe's moral superiority like Bellew does, but you can tell he thinks that way when he talks about how bad things are in Afghanistan and its neighbours. Masson, who loved history and knowledge, was clearly upset by what he saw as a lack of interest in learning and the arts in Central Asia. He gives the example of the Sikh-ruled Punjab, where even the sons of chiefs could not read or write. He calls this "proof of the barbarism... that (even) a young son of a chief was not taught to read or write" (1:438). Masson's worldview, which was influenced by the Enlightenment, says that this is a sure sign of societal decline: ruling classes that are not educated. Masson, on the other hand, is from Europe and brings books, keeps

journals, copies ancient inscriptions, and so on. It is easy to see the difference: Masson (Europe) values knowledge, but the local powers (East) let it go to waste.

Masson often talks about the East in terms of decline and ruin, bringing up a sense of lost greatness. He was literally surrounded by ruins, like Buddhist stupas, old cities, and crumbling caravanserais, and he often thinks about them. He thinks about the ruins of Buddhist civilisation in Afghanistan and notes that they were completely destroyed by “the fury of... barbarous invaders” (1:195). He then talks about how the people who live there now have added their own stories and customs to these ruins, often without fully understanding them. For instance, Masson writes about local stories about the Buddha statues at Bamiyan and the Hellenic sites. This shows the difference between what people knew about ancient high civilisation and what they know now. Masson is pessimistic about the modern East because of this gap. The area is like a great scholar who has lost his memory and is now old and sick. “These people used to build cities and carry on a great culture, but now look at them”, his subtext says (1:200). When he talks about Afghanistan as “semi-barbarous” and always being oppressed, he sounds sad, like someone making a list of the signs of a long decline (1:326).

Masson, on the other hand, says that Europe (and by extension, British India) is more rational, orderly, and progressive. He does this in a subtle way, like by pointing out things that Europeans have changed in the East that are still going on. For instance, he is horrified by the “barbarous system of warfare” in which whole families (including women and children) could be killed, or by the practice of selling captives, which Europe liked to say it had moved past (1:440). He also talks about how bad it is to have a dictator, which is the opposite of how things are supposed to work in Britain. Masson’s criticism is not as black-and-white as Bellew’s, but he still talks about it in terms of stages of civilisation. The East is still stuck in a time of tyranny and superstition that Europe moved on from after the Enlightenment. He writes in one powerful line that oppression is so common in those countries that it grinds down every man, woman,

and child. The idea that all societies move forward like Europe's is missing; instead, Masson seems to be sad that the East is stuck or "retrograde." (1:417). He thinks that some Afghan tribes might not be as savage as people say because "a certain kind of order" must exist among them, but that is not very nice (1:215). Overall, his portrayal supports the idea that the East is culturally worn out and living in the ruins of its past golden ages.

Even though this Massonian view of Europe as enlightened and the Orient as decaying is negative, it still supports imperial ideology. It implies that Eastern societies cannot get better on their own without help from the West. If Afghanistan was once a great civilisation that is now falling apart, then Western intervention can be seen as a way to bring it back to life or save it. In fact, Masson's work to protect Afghan artefacts and history could be seen as a metaphor for the colonial goal of saving the East's heritage, which was a story that played out in British archaeology and museum projects later on. His collection of coins and monuments, which he gave to the British Museum, is a good example of this: Europe becomes the keeper of Eastern greatness, which strengthens the hierarchy of civilisations. Masson's dualism, which is based on his real concern for Afghans, still supports the idea of an empire where Europe is dynamic, knowledgeable, and moving forward, while the East is static, ignorant, and getting worse, waiting for the West to lead it back to its former glory.

3.5.3 Reform vs. Resistance: Hughes's Dialogic Dilemma

Hughes's book *Ruhainah* is a more direct look at how colonial power works. It sets up a debate between the forces of reform (Westernisation, Christianization, and modern values) and resistance (indigenous tradition, Islamic faith, and cultural pride). This shows that the book is more than just a romance; it is also about how Afghanistan deals with modernity. In the story, the characters often show these two sides of the issue. Major Bernard and the missionaries, like Sister Lydia, are examples of the desire to change things by bringing in new ideas and criticising how things are done in the area. Figures like *mullahs*, tribal elders, and even proud

chiefs like Abdullah, on the other hand, stand for Afghans' resistance to outside influence and their commitment to traditional ways.

You can see this dialogic tension in how the Afghan characters talk to each other and fight with each other. Abdullah, the "Rustum of Herat," is shown to be a good person at heart, but he has a hard time choosing between his "old ways" and the chance to change (5). He is stuck between wanting to get back at someone (a part of tradition) and forgiving them (a good thing that the Christian British encourage). After a moment of violence, he finally breaks down and says, "'O merciful God!' ... I have asked for forgiveness and tried to do what is right!" (32). This scene, in which an Afghan chief struggles with guilt and a new moral point of view, represents the internal dialogue of a man of the old code (which would require endless blood-feud) under the pressure of reform (in this case, moral reform based on Christian ideas of forgiveness). The female lead, Ruhainah, is also a place of reform and resistance. She was raised Muslim and in *purdah*, but her love for a Christian Briton draws her to a different life. The novel does not say that she converts, but by marrying a Brit and leaving Herat, she changes her fate and breaks away from her expected role. This choice is a small example of the bigger question: Will Afghans accept Western ways, or will they fight back and stick to their own? Hughes does not make this a one-sided question, which is why he calls it a dilemma. He talks about Afghan pride and the reasons for resistance as well. For example, there are probably conversations (as is common in these kinds of books) where an Afghan elder might question the British's motives or talk about Afghan virtues like faith, courage, and hospitality. In fact, a part of the book shows an Afghan character (maybe Abdullah or a *mullah*) saying, "All are equal in God's sight", and even having a master and a slave pray together (31). Bernard is impressed and says that this kind of faith is similar to what Christians teach. Hughes's nuanced view is clear in this moment: he sees authenticity and even nobility in Afghan tradition (in this

case, Islamic egalitarianism). It is not as simple as saying that everything Eastern is bad. The problem is real: both sides have things that are appealing.

But in the end, *Ruhainah* leans towards a solution that supports the reformist point of view. Western intervention is linked to the happy ending of the story (Ruhainah's rescue by the British hero, Herat's better luck, which is probably due to those characters' influence, etc.). Hughes's own missionary bias makes the story move towards accepting change. The dialogue may be between partners who are not equal; the Western voice often gets the last word or is shown to be right by what happens. The treachery of some Afghan characters, like the fanatical leader of the Guild of the Red Hand, proves that the British were right to warn about the dangers of Afghan society being left to its own devices. At the same time, the good traits of characters who were influenced by the West (like the bravery of the Christian convert Dilawar Khan or the saintliness of Sister Lydia) are shown to be life-changing.

By dramatising this back-and-forth, Hughes adds to the imperial grammar of power by showing the classic colonial dialectic: the colonizer's burden to change vs. the native's desire for stability. This dialogic form is more complex than a simple binary. It recognises the conflict and even partially agrees with the colonized's point of view (Hughes knew and loved Afghan people in real life). But by the end of the novel, the grammar is settled in favour of the imperial story: reform (with imperial guidance) is shown to be the way to go. Afghanistan is better off joining enlightened Europe (represented by her marriage to Bernard) than staying alone. Hughes had a "dilemma" because he clearly respected Afghan culture, calling them "pre-eminently a nation of men" with a proud history (37). But his Christian-colonial worldview could not see a future for Afghanistan without Western moral and social reform. This built-in tension makes *Ruhainah* more interesting, but it also reinforces the common colonial idea that the Afghans swing tragically between love and violence when left to their own devices. However, through conversation (implicitly, through the guidance of well-meaning

Westerners), they might be able to find a better solution. Hughes's book captures the uncomfortable duality of colonial humanism: the genuine desire to civilise and uplift, mixed with the inability to picture the Other as equal without fundamentally becoming more like the Self.

In conclusion, Chapter 3 has shown how Bellew, Hughes, and Masson use different types of representation, such as the barbaric frontier and feminised Orient, civilising missions, and epistemic postures, to create an image of Afghanistan and its people that supported, either consciously or unconsciously, the ideas behind British imperial rhetoric. I have established through direct quotes and analysis in light of postcolonial scholarship that these texts were not neutral travelogues or stories, but were actively involved in the discourse of Orientalism. They helped make the Afghan Other seem barbaric, chaotic, sexual, or backward, while the West saw itself as orderly, moral, rational, and progressive. At the same time, the personal backgrounds and genres of each author added layers of meaning: Masson's hesitant imperialism, Hughes's missionary compassion, and Bellew's strategic worries. When you read them with modern critical lenses, like Said's theory of Orientalist binaries or Nivi Manchanda's ideas about colonial tribal taxonomy, you can see how their language was specific to the time and how it has stayed the same over time. In the end, these works helped shape the "Victorian Afghanistan" image of a place that was both attractive and dangerous, a place where imperial ambitions and worries could be painted (Green 2020). By breaking down their ideas and tropes, one can better understand how the British Empire used writing to justify itself. We also get a warning about how these kinds of imperial grammars of power can stick around and change stories about other people even today.

In chapter 3, I looked at how Bellew, Hughes, and Masson use Orientalist tropes on numerous occasions to render Afghanistan seem like a barbaric frontier, a feminised Orient, and a civilisational periphery. They execute this through the utilisation of textual authority and

symbolic binaries to support imperial rhetoric. The chapter employed close readings to illustrate how their stories conceal chaos, gendered otherness, and a missionary ethos behind the facade of objective observation and moral superiority. In Chapter 4, I will build on the above investigation by looking at how their works encode cultural imaginaries through ethnographic curiosity, religious portrayals, material culture, and spatial memory. This will help to further inscribe “Afghan civilisation” within the colonial archive and strengthen the ideological role of literary colonialism.

Chapter 4

Cultural Imaginaries and the Colonial Archive: Inscribing Afghan

Civilization in the Works of Bellew, Hughes, and Masson

4.1 Cultural Portraiture and the Politics of Ethnographic Curiosity: An Introduction

British writers in the 1800s often mixed detailed descriptions of Afghan culture with ethnographic research. These were shaped by colonial interests and biases. We can see how Afghan civilisation was written about in the works of Bellew, Hughes, and Masson. They wrote about people and customs in great detail, but they did so through imperial lenses. Each writer made their own pictures of Afghan culture. For instance, Bellew used stereotypes and taxonomic classifications, Hughes used romanticised domestic scenes, and Masson was amazed by everyday life from the bazaar to the battlefield. This chapter looks at how their writings show Afghan society and what that means for politics.

4.1.1 Bellew's Linguistic Taxonomies and Cultural Reductionism

Henry Walter Bellew looked at Afghan culture in a way that was typical of colonial ethnography, which is to classify things. Bellew was a surgeon and a linguist who divided Afghan people into linguistic and racial groups. He often made complex cultures into simple types. In *From the Indus to the Tigris* (1874), he carefully listed languages and tribes. For instance, Bellew talks about how the Brahui (whom he calls "Brahoe") are different from the people around them in terms of their bodies, customs, and language (36). But then he makes a broad moral statement: "Their manners and customs...differ in many ways from those of the people around them, though, in the matters of robbery and murder, a family resemblance pervades them all" (58). This kind of comment shows Bellew's cultural reductionism, which means putting different groups of people together and saying they all have a tendency to be violent. His linguistic taxonomy also serves as a moral taxonomy: even though he points out that the Brahoe language is very different from Pashto or Persian (with its own pronouns and

conjugations), he suggests that all Afghan or Baluch tribes are the same when it comes to breaking the law. This way of thinking is similar to the prejudices of colonial anthropology, which often tried to make neat categories instead of recognising differences.

Bellew's obsession with language as the key to ethnography led to detailed "taxonomies" (473). He not only wrote "*A Grammar of the Pukkhto or Pukshto Language* (1867)" and "*A Dictionary of Pukkhto or Pukshto Language* (1867)", but he also added a "Synoptical Grammar and Vocabulary" of Brahui to his travelogue (473). In a sort of philological catalogue of the "native body", Bellew wrote down local words for clothes and other things, which was a way of translating Afghan material culture into a language that English speakers could understand (485). In *From the Indus to the Tigris*, a footnote correctly defines *dastár* as "turban", *mocharí* as "shoe", *litar* as "slipper", and *moza* as "boot" (485). This word-for-word translation of dress into English shows Bellew's ethnographic method: to learn about a group of people by listing and naming their visible traits. But in doing so, Bellew often saw Afghan culture as something to be studied and put into categories. His surveys of tribes and dialects, "Kákarrs...Tarins...Durrani", and even how they looked (the Brahoe were described as "swarthy...with high cheekbones" and "jet black" hair, "compactly framed and clean-limbed...hardy and enduring") made a reliable picture of Afghan people (58). This profile was based on observation, but it had the authoritative tone of colonial knowledge and tended to generalise its subjects.

Bellew's taxonomic portraits were more than just academic; they had political meaning as well. He was making knowledge that could be useful to colonial leaders by sorting ethnic groups and looking at their traits. His introduction makes it clear that the journey is about geopolitics by talking about Russia's advance and warning British politicians "lest, while straining at the gnat of Yárkand, we swallow the camel of Herat" (iv). So, Bellew's interest in other cultures was mixed with his worries about the empire. Even though his linguistic and

cultural classifications seemed objective, they reinforced colonial views of Afghans as primitive or unruly, which could justify British interventions as bringing “order” or “civilisation” (2). Bellew’s work shows how colonial ethnography mixed real research (into languages, customs, and dress) with simple judgements that supported imperial narratives.

4.1.2 Hughes’s Aestheticizing of Afghan Domesticity in *Ruhainah*

Rev. Thomas Patrick Hughes, a missionary who spent twenty years on the Afghan frontier, wrote fiction to show Afghan domestic life in a romantic, aesthetic way. This is very different from Bellew’s factual tone. His book *Ruhainah, the Maid of Herat* (1896) is an ethnographic romance that gives readers a close look at Afghan homes, harems, and hearts, all while appealing to Victorian tastes for the unusual. Hughes’s story focusses on family life, like conversations, marriage plans, music, and poetry in the home, and he often makes them seem better or worse than they really are to make the reader feel something. By doing this, he makes Afghan domestic life a stage for both strange shows and moral commentary.

One very interesting example is how *Ruhainah*’s own home is shown. *Ruhainah* is the daughter of an Afghan chief (Abdullah, who is known as the Rustum of Herat). She is shown as the most loved member of the family harem. Hughes talks about her amazing qualities in a way that shows how much he admires her. She is smart and creative. “For an Afghan girl *Ruhainah* was well educated” (23). “She could read and write Persian and Pushto, and had studied carefully the poems of Hafiz of Shiraz, and the *Gulistan* of Shaikh Sadi. She was well read in Afghan poetry, and could recite with readiness the odes of Rahman” (23). These were meant to impress Victorian readers. *Ruhainah* plays the *rebab* (lute) and sings Persian verses in a sweet scene with her father. Hughes writes that “she playfully struck her little fingers across the rebab and looked into his face with interest” (26). This moment shows both the love between a parent and child and the romance of Afghan music. This beautiful scene of a dutiful, musically talented daughter entertaining her father with poetic references makes Afghan family

life seem beautiful and almost perfect. It is an image that is probably very different from what British readers are used to, but it was made to make people feel admiration and empathy.

Hughes, on the other hand, does not shy away from the “politics of domesticity” in Afghan culture, especially the problems that come with polygamy and arranged marriage (15). In *Ruhainah*, the main character, who shares the same name as the book, fights hard against an arranged marriage with an older tribal chief. When she hears that a powerful khan wants to marry her, Ruhainah gets angry and says, “Well, and the Khan of Lalpura shall not have me... the day that Ruhainah marries (him)... she plunges this dagger into her heart. Remember!” (41). This over-the-top statement, in which a young Afghan woman threatens to kill herself rather than marry more than one man, shows how Hughes idealises Afghan women as strong and principled, even though they are limited by patriarchal norms. It is a sensationalised scene of conflict at home that is likely to connect with current discussions about women’s rights. Hughes makes readers feel sorry for Ruhainah by focussing on her personal honour and pain. This makes Afghan women seem more real, since they were often seen as strange or objectified in colonial writing.

Hughes uses these kinds of family dramas throughout the book to translate Afghan culture for his readers, making it both strange and familiar at the same time. The conversation between the father and daughter about marriage serves two purposes: it explains Afghan customs (marriage as a way to build alliances) and criticises those customs at the same time. “Among Oriental races a marriage is considered one of the easiest ways of settling political difficulties” (17). Abdullah says that “For the Prophet himself said, ‘Matrimonial alliances between tribes increase friendship more than anything else’” (17). This gives the reader a sense of the culture, but Hughes clearly puts Ruhainah’s personal desire above these traditions, making the reader agree with her. He makes Afghan domestic life look beautiful and sad at the same time. For example, the home is full of “patient lovely nature” (like in Ruhainah’s case),

but also full of deep sorrows (like her mother's death and her jealous stepmother's schemes) (27). Ruhainah's Afghan home interiors are richly drawn, with jewelled shawls, sad songs, and the smell of *pilav*. But they are also stages for emotions that everyone can relate to, like love, jealousy, duty, and defiance. Hughes's interest in other cultures does not show up in tables of tribes, but in domestic fiction that romanticises the strange. By making readers care about the private lives of an Afghan family, he closes the cultural gap between them, even though he makes those private lives seem strange through a Victorian romantic lens.

4.1.3 Masson's Ethnographic Wonder: From the Bazaar to the Battlefield

Charles Masson was an adventurer and archaeologist in Afghanistan from 1826 to 1838. He gives us another way to see culture through the eyes of an ethnographic wonder. Masson's *Narrative of Various Journeys* is different from Bellew's scientific detachment or Hughes's novelistic flourish in that it shows a curious person who is very interested in Afghan daily life. His writing is full of detailed descriptions of bazaars, markets, caravans, and camps, as well as the sounds of war on the borders. Masson had walked through the streets and bazaars of Kabul, Kandahar, and many villages. His story moves easily from scenes of everyday business to scenes of violence and war hence, from the bazaar to the battlefield. It seems like Masson was really interested in and even admired the everyday things that happen in Afghanistan. He makes a careful list of how people in the area act and how they treat guests. He talks about how tired travellers were treated at village forts, saying, "A meal of bread and curds was provided for us...We were again courteously welcomed by the good Fati Mahomed, and a supper was prepared for us of cakes and *chammari* ..." (2:88). Masson often talks about how generous Afghans are to strangers, and these small things, like sharing bread and yoghurt, show this. Masson often compares how polite Afghan hosts are to how polite other hosts are. Through these depictions, Masson paints a picture of Afghans as friendly, strong, and proud people who are different from British norms but have their own codes of honour.

Masson is also amazed by the busy city life in Afghanistan. He goes into great detail about bazaars full of traders and goods. For example, in Ghazni's market, he says that "the bazar is neither very large nor well supplied", which gives a clear picture of the town's size (only about a thousand houses) (2:219). He talks about the goods of a big caravan from Kandahar, which included wool, dried fruits, raisins, *choghas*, *barrak*, *pashmina*, specie, and jewels, worth nine lakhs of rupees. This shows how active Afghan trade is. This almost journalistic list of goods, prices, and provisions shows that Afghan cities are not mysterious places in the East, but rather working markets that are part of regional trade. Masson's ethnographic eye loves all the little things: public baths (*hammam*), fruit orchards, street cries that move from place to place, and the pretty little goats that graze near a nomad camp. These everyday things, which were recorded without any obvious judgement, show Masson's interest in people.

Masson did not ignore the possibility of conflict, though. He lived through a time of unrest (the First Anglo-Afghan War was on the way). His story tells how things went from peaceful to war, and it often has a sad tone. Masson talks about the fortress of Ghazni, which was a famous battlefield, and how the British took it in 1839 and then celebrated. He then hints at the tragedy that followed. He writes in a moving aside that British victories at Ghazni "answered the temporary purposes of a political clique, and signalized the commencement of a new reign... but the ghosts of Palmer and his companions in arms, admonish to be silent and discreet" (2:221). Masson here brings up the terrible event of 1841, when Afghan troops took over the British garrison at Ghazni and killed or imprisoned its defenders, including Captain Palmer. This quote shows that Masson is critical because he questions the value of imperial glory when you think about how many lives it costs. So, from the bazaar to the battlefield, Masson's cultural portraits are full of both awe and warning. He is amazed by the different

parts of Afghan society, but he also writes about the wars and bloodshed that happened when Britain invaded. As an ethnographer, he also kept an unofficial record of the war.

Masson's interest in ethnography gives him a detailed and compassionate view of life in Afghanistan on the ground. He praises everyday social customs like food, trade, and hospitality, and he treats the Afghan character with respect. He is also a witness to the violence of imperialism in that world. Masson's interest in politics comes from the fact that he knew that colonialism was permanently changing the cultural world he had so carefully described. In the next parts, I will look at how all three writers deal with religion, material culture, and space. This will show more about how their cultural imaginations and the colonial archive they were helping to create interacted with each other.

4.2 Ritual, Religion, and the Colonial Spiritual Imaginary

Bellew, Hughes, and Masson all wrote about how important religion and ritual were to Afghan life, but their depictions were influenced by their own backgrounds and the colonial spiritual imaginary. Their texts often used Christian and secular lenses to look at Islamic practices, which led to stereotypical or romanticised images of Afghan faith. As a Christian missionary, Hughes clearly mixes Christian allegory into his made-up story, putting it next to what he calls Islamic superstition. Bellew, on the other hand, seems to be secular but looks at Afghan religious customs with a sceptical, Orientalist eye, turning them into oddities or things that get in the way of progress. Masson writes about religious sites and rituals in a more neutral way, as if he is seeing echoes of a long-gone past in them (ancient shrines, ruins of sanctity). This part looks at how each author wrote about Afghan religious life in their stories and how these writings fit into colonial discourses.

4.2.1 Hughes's Christian Allegories and Islamic Stereotypes

Thomas P. Hughes's *Ruhainah* is full of Christian allegories that show the author's evangelical goals. Even though Hughes is a missionary who knows a lot about Afghan culture,

he still puts a Christian story arc into an Afghan story, often portraying Islamic characters and beliefs in a stereotypical way. The plot and symbols in the book bring up Christian themes over and over again, like visions of Jesus, virtuous “Virgin Mother” figures, and the idea that Christian teachings are better than Islamic ones (25). At the same time, Hughes uses common stereotypes of Muslim clerics and customs, sometimes as contrasts to Christian virtue.

One very interesting example is a dream that Ruhainah’s father, Abdullah, told. He tells his daughter about a vision he had when she was a baby: “Jesus, the Spirit of God, who is peace, came to me and said, ‘Abdullah! That child is mine; let her be like My Virgin Mother’” (25). This amazing scene puts a Christian story at the centre of an Afghan story. Hughes makes the heroine holy by having Jesus claim the Muslim child Ruhainah as His own and keep her pure like the Virgin Mary. This foreshadows her conversion to Christianity. Abdullah tells the dream in Islamic language, adding “upon whom be peace” after Jesus’ name (25). This makes it sound more authentic to the culture, even though the content goes against Islamic norms by putting Jesus in a quasi-divine role. This suggests that Christ has a special plan for Ruhainah, which is a clear metaphor that connects her to Christian salvation.

As the story goes on, Hughes compares Christian and Islamic values, often to the latter’s disadvantage. One character says, “Jesus told us to forgive, but our Prophet... allowed compensation” (222). This is during a discussion about justice and revenge. *Alak*, you will get your payment in the form of Ruhainah’s father’s blood. This conversation, which is mostly spoken by a Muslim character, puts Christian teaching about forgiveness next to an alleged Islamic principle of revenge, blood for blood. The mention of the Prophet allowing *diyyah* (compensation) is twisted into a reason to kill (166). Hughes uses an Islamic stereotype in this way: that Islam is a religion of revenge or legalistic cruelty, while Christianity is a religion of mercy. These parts of the book clearly show the author’s apologetic goal, which is to show that Christianity is morally better than other religions. The Muslim enemy who demands “blood

compensation” seems crazy, while the Christian idea of forgiveness seems to go beyond what is normal (222). Hughes had been arguing with *mullahs* for years, so he must have used missionary tropes here (this is a common polemic point).

In *Ruhainah*, Hughes often shows devout Muslim characters as either wrong or secretly drawn to the truth of Christianity. Sister Lydia, an English missionary nurse in the story, is a direct Christian presence that has an effect on Ruhainah. At the end, Ruhainah herself becomes a Christian, which is shown as the happy ending of her personal journey. She tells the British officer Bertram, “Yes, I am a Christian, it is true, but you must teach me” (263). Her conversion is shown as a happy ending that fulfils that early vision and brings people of different cultures together through faith. It is interesting to note that even before she converted, Ruhainah had a natural connection to Christian figures. She worships Jesus in a way that is similar to how Muslims do it, and she scolds an Englishman for disrespectfully saying Christ’s name: when Bertram says “Jesus” without honorific, “Upon whom be peace!” said Ruhainah, who was shocked at (his) careless way (250). This kind rebuke shows Ruhainah’s religiousness and, ironically, the respect for Jesus that Islamic tradition teaches. Hughes uses it to show that she is open to spirituality; she already honours Jesus, which makes it easier for her to accept Christianity more perfectly.

These story choices show Hughes’s two goals: to criticise what he sees as Islam’s flaws and to show that Christianity is the true answer to Afghans’ spiritual needs. The Islamic stereotypes in the book, like the scheming, lustful *mullah* (Mullah Ahmad is shown as a schemer) or the fatalistic talk of end-times (one cleric says, “Jesus will come and convert the whole world to Islam... till then, we must be resigned to our fate”), all make Islam look like it is not real or not complete (167). On the other hand, the Christian allegories (Ruhainah as a Mary figure; her baptism into the faith of her British lover) show that Afghans can find redemption and progress by becoming Christians.

It should be noted that Hughes's portrayal is both educational and somewhat sympathetic to regular Afghans. He does not hate Muslims outright; instead, he often shows them as devout but unenlightened, waiting for Christ to show them the way. This shows how missionaries thought at the time, which was very paternalistic. Hughes makes a subtle case for evangelism by attending to the importance of affect and desire in his story. It could be stated that Hughes's romance novel was meant to train his readers to romanticise and desire the Christianization of the Afghans, creating an effect of empire that justified missionary work. In other words, Hughes acted as a cultural translator by using *Ruhainah*'s mix of love story and conversion story to make Afghan religiosity understandable (and appealing) to a Western Christian audience. The end result is a colonial spiritual imaginary in which Afghanistan becomes a stage for confirming Christian truths; a land of biblical allegories (e.g., references to "Virgin Mother", "Saviour" etc.) and of Muslims portrayed either as potential converts or as foils representing the Oriental other in need of salvation (25).

4.2.2 Bellew's Pseudo-Secular Reading of Religious Practice

Henry Bellew had a very different view of Afghan religious life than a colonial scientist or administrator who was proud of being rational. Bellew was not trying to convert people like Hughes was; in fact, he was proud of his secular, empirical observation. Bellew, on the other hand, is not at all neutral when it comes to Afghan religious beliefs. It can be called pseudo-secular because he looks at Islamic rituals and folk beliefs with a thin layer of objective detachment, but there is an undercurrent of disdain and cultural superiority. Bellew calls Afghan religious practices examples of "credulity" and "bigotry", suggesting that these traits make it harder for people to move forward and implicitly justifying colonial intervention to "enlighten" the people (39).

A very interesting part of *From the Indus to the Tigris* is when Bellew goes to the shrine of a local saint and listens to a caretaker tell a story about a miracle that is too good to be true.

The story is about a saint testing a man's faith with a magic fish and healing, which is a kind of local hagiographic legend. Bellew's answer is both angry and hard to believe. After hearing the story, he writes, "After this example – and it is one by no means uncommon amongst Muhammadans in these countries – of audacity and credulity, we strolled back to our tents speculating upon the mental organisation of a people who could...accept such absurdities" (38). The psychologist has an interesting area of study in the blind faith of the Muhammadan in everything that has to do with his prophet and saints. In this amazing piece of writing, Bellew uses Victorian science to show how much he hates something. He treats Afghan Muslims' faith as a mental illness that needs to be studied, as if it were a mental illness. The phrase "mental organisation of a people" shows a colonial essentialism, as if Afghans are almost genetically programmed to believe in superstitions (38).

Bellew goes on to say that this gullibility is directly related to resistance to Western influence. He thinks that "the obstinate yet passive resistance of Muhammadans to the free advance of Western civilisation among them is owing almost entirely to the spirit of bigotry created by their religion and cherished by their literature" (39). This statement is revealing in many ways. First, Bellew mixes up "Western civilisation" with progress and thinks it will always move forward unless something stops it (4). This is a typical colonial way of thinking. Second, he directly blames Islam (and Islamic literature) for creating a "spirit of bigotry" that makes Muslims unwilling to change (39). Bellew's secular imperial framework says that religion is not a valid way of looking at the world, but a cultural illness that makes people unwilling to change. This is not truly secular because Bellew is not promoting Christianity, but he is still judging Islam's effects in a bad way. He thinks of himself as an impartial observer, but his writing is full of ethnocentric bias. For example, he says that Muslims "accept such absurdities" without question and that their faith is "blind credulity" (38). The main point is

that Afghan religiousness is childish and gets in the way, and that it should be overcome (implicitly by colonial rule or modern education).

Bellew sometimes makes fun of Afghan belief, but he also admits how strong or sincere it is. He talks about a prayer that a local *mullah* said when his British group went to a small town: “standing apart on an eminence with half a dozen acolytes clad in white, offered up a prayer to avert any evil that this first visit of Europeans to their town might entail” (319). Bellew talks about the man’s “plaintive trembling voice” echoing through the valley (320). This is a rare moment when you can really feel the mood of real religious fear and hope. But he writes about it as an interesting event, not with empathy. Bellew thought that these kinds of events made him even surer that Afghan *mullahs* had power over a people who were just as irrational.

Bellew’s view of Afghan religious practice is that of a colonial sceptic who sees religion as a superstition that needs to be recorded and then gotten rid of. This point of view helped the colonial imagination by putting British rule (or at least influence) in the role of reason against the bigotry of native tradition. Bellew’s pseudo-secular approach goes well with Hughes’s openly Christian one. Both think that Afghan Islam is fundamentally wrong, but Hughes wants to replace it with Christianity, while Bellew seems to want to replace it with secular modernity. But both of these add to the colonial archive images of Afghan faith as something else, a source of ridicule, fear, or pity, not a valid system in its own right.

4.2.3 Masson’s Detached Curiosity: Sacred Spaces as Ruins

Charles Masson’s writing about religion in Afghanistan is different because it has a tone of detached, almost old-fashioned curiosity. Masson was very interested in the physical remains of Afghanistan’s religious past, such as the shrines, tombs, topes (Buddhist stupas), and ruins that are all over the place. But he often thought of these sacred spaces not as places where people could connect with God, but as old ruins that needed to be studied. Masson does

not judge Afghan religious sites like Bellew does or try to convert people like Hughes does. Instead, he looks at them like an explorer and early archaeologist, writing about their condition and thinking about their historical importance. In his story, this creates a ruin aesthetic, which is an almost romantic way of showing how holy places have fallen apart over time and how civilisations have come and gone.

Masson's description of the Shrine of Sultan Mahmud in Ghazni is a great example. Afghans and Muslims remember Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (11th century) as a hero, and his tomb was a place of worship. Masson found it in bad shape when he went there. He writes, "the sepulchre and shrine of the mighty Mahmud... this has been suffered to dwindle away into ruin, and broken figures of marble lions, with other fragments, alone attest the former beauty of its courts and fountains" (2:219). Masson's words here bring to mind a sad beauty, the shrine that was once so beautiful is now only a pile of broken pieces. He says that even the famous Sandalwood Gates of Somnath, which Mahmud is said to have stolen, are only partially intact, and the inside of the tomb is still decorated with ostrich eggs and silk palls out of respect. Still, the overall impression is one of faded glory. The sacred space is now more of a museum piece than a place of worship. Its religious function seems to be secondary to its role as a monument of the past. Masson is more interested in the history of these ruins, which show the rise and fall of empires and the ups and downs of time, than in the spiritual lives of people who worship there now.

Masson was also fascinated by old Buddhist relics in Afghanistan. He carefully looked for and dug up topes (stupas), which he saw as archaeological treasures. For example, he proudly says that he found several topes in Wardak and figured out how old they were by looking at the coins inside them: "ancient monuments called topes...examined by me, and, from the coins found in them, would appear to have been erected during the period of monarchs of the Indo-Scythic race" (2:223). This analytical tone shows that Masson is using physical

evidence (coins, inscriptions) to date religious buildings, which makes them more like things to study. Masson thinks that a Buddhist tope is more like a time capsule of “antiquity” than a religious building (2:223). He sees an inscription in Bactrian script on a relic vessel that says “it is hoped, instruct us as to their origin and nature” (2:223). Not pilgrimage, but the language of enlightenment science.

Masson’s detached approach does not mean he did not care about the sites. In fact, he often treated them with a kind of reverence, but an old-fashioned one. For instance, he sees people finding “numerous relics, coins, etc.” at the Sheher-e-Kurghan ruins west of Ghazni and guesses that it must have been “a locality of eminent sanctity” in the past (2:223). He is interested in the “remarkable cave” at the site and the dam that kings built a long time ago (2:223). His writing makes you feel like you are in awe of these remnants of the past. Masson mostly ignores modern religious practices in these places, which is an important point. He definitely saw mosques and heard the azan (call to prayer) in Kabul or Qandahar, but he did not talk much about his daily religious activities compared to how excited he was about ruins and artefacts. In Masson’s story, sacred spaces are mostly places where memories and history are kept.

This ruin aesthetic takes the spirituality out of Afghan religious sites in the colonial imagination and turns them into a part of a universal (and by extension, exploitable) heritage. The British later found Masson’s work useful (the coins went to the India Office and some artefacts went to museums). His work added an inventory of Afghan religious heritage to the colonial archive. This inventory could be appreciated for its beauty or its scientific value, but it was not directly connected to the Afghan people. In a way, Masson’s detached curiosity made Afghan sacred spaces ours (the world’s or the Empire’s) instead of theirs. Writing about and knowing about these places was a form of soft colonial power in and of itself, the ability to define the importance of Afghan culture through Western scholarship.

In conclusion, these three authors show a range of colonial views on Afghan religion, from Hughes's evangelical allegory to Bellew's secular contempt to Masson's detached view of history. But all of them tend to put the indigenous religious point of view second. Afghan spiritual life is changed to fit a story that is easy for British people to understand or use, whether that means converting, firing, or museifying. This goes along with the main point of how colonial writers made up an imaginary Afghanistan, where religion and ritual were either problems to solve or things to catalogue, not living traditions that had their own legitimacy.

4.3 Material Culture, Dress, and Social Identity

Bellew, Hughes, and Masson also use material culture, such as clothing, crafts, and everyday social practices, to show what they think Afghan identity is like. Each writer paid attention to how Afghans dressed, ate, and acted, and they often put these details in a colonial or romantic light. Bellew, who was interested in ethnography, made real dictionaries of clothing and body parts, using real-life examples to group the "native body" (485). Hughes, on the other hand, used fiction to weave Afghan clothing and cultural performances (music, dance, and storytelling) into an exotic tapestry that both entertains and romances his readers. Masson, in his observational style, carefully recorded markets, meals, and manners, creating a list of cultural differences that is both factual and relatable. In this part, we look at how each writer shows material culture and social identity, and what these shows tell us about their views and the colonial project of knowing (and defining) Afghan society.

4.3.1 Bellew's Lexicon of the Native Body: Clothing, Language, and Movement

Bellew's method for recording Afghan material culture was methodical and focused on language. As mentioned before, he often gave native names for clothes, tools, and customs, which helped people understand the Afghan body and its decorations. He thought that language was the key to understanding cultural practices, as shown by the glossaries he included for Pashto and Brahui words. Bellew includes a list of common clothing items with translations in

one of the appendices. For example, “*dastar*” (turban), “*mocharî*” (shoe), “*litar*” (slipper), and “*moza*” (boot) anchor what he sees in language (485). This behaviour comes from a colonial belief in the 1800s that by naming and classifying the visible signs of identity, like clothing, one could know and control the people who wore them. Bellew was, in a way, putting together a vocabulary of Afghan identity, piece by piece.

Bellew often makes judgements about people’s clothes and bodies without saying so directly. For example, when he talks about a nomadic Brahoe group, he says that the men wore simple tunics “wide sleeves; round the head were wound a few folds of a twisted turban” (36). As he said before, he talks about their “long matted hair” and “compact” build (53). These kinds of descriptions are straightforward, but Bellew’s choice of words can show admiration for physical strength while also making it sound strange. He clearly sees Afghans getting ready for possible combat by tightly securing their turbans in readiness for attack and wrapping their faces in the folds to keep out dust. These observations show how adaptable Afghans are and how useful their dress can be. There is almost a grudging respect in these details: the big turban not just as a cultural symbol but also as battle gear; the loose *chapans* (cloaks) gathered up, turning riders into “bundles of clothes” as they get ready for a sandstorm (70). Bellew writes about these movements like a soldier would, as if he were keeping track of how clothing and behaviour might affect fighting or negotiating.

Bellew’s description of a formal greeting with an Afghan official is one moment that stands out. Bellew writes that when the British officers met Sardar Nur Muhammad, the Afghan commissioner, he took off his turban with both hands and bowed low. Then he put on his expensive Kashmir *shawl* and hugged each of them in the Afghan way with genuine warmth, repeating the usual string of greetings. This one sentence has a lot of cultural information in it: the difference between British hats and Afghan turbans in terms of etiquette, the Afghan way of bowing, and the “Afghan fashion” of hugging (probably a hug and a kiss on the cheek) with

flowery greetings (105). Bellew's use of such detail shows that he was interested in writing down how people moved and acted. The colonial subtext, on the other hand, might point out how the Afghan takes off his turban to show respect, just like the British take off their hats. This is a moment of politeness on both sides, but it also shows that they both know their place. It looks like Bellew is not only listing words for clothes, but also words for gestures that show respect and honour in Afghan culture.

Bellew's vocabulary of the native body shows us how he linked material culture to social identity. It was useful to know that clothes showed tribe, region, and rank. He talks about seeing "wiry Arabs in thin rope-turbans" and "thick-set Tatars in shaggy sheepskin caps" riding camels, easily connecting clothing to race (389). His story gives colonial officers a picture to follow; for example, one could tell an Arab mercenary from a Central Asian by the way he wore his headgear. Bellew's ethnographic chart included data points like language, clothing, and movement. The idea behind this was that Afghans could be read like a book, with their outward culture giving clues about their inner character and possible loyalty. In this way, Bellew's careful recording of material culture is not just a hobby; it is part of the project of knowledge for control. Once you know the words and rules of local dress and behaviour, you will be better able to get around in their society, or even rule it. Bellew's work, which was published for British readers, did help people in the colonies learn more about the tribes on the North-West Frontier.

Bellew made Afghan material culture into a system that could be classified and understood. His vocabulary of clothes and detailed notes on social gestures made the Afghan other easy for British officials to understand. The good thing is that it gives us a lot of information about daily life in Afghanistan in the 1800s. The bad thing is that it reduces that life to simple types and patterns. Bellew's method shows how colonial ethnographers used

specific things (hats, shoes, greetings) to define larger groups of people, but they often missed the fluidity and uniqueness of real culture in the process.

4.3.2 Hughes's Romancing the Exotic: Cultural Performance and Symbolism

Hughes wraps Afghan material culture in a cloak of romance and symbolism in *Ruhainah*. He uses cultural performances like music, dance, storytelling, and wedding rituals as colourful backdrops for his play. His description of Afghan clothing and customs is more emotional and less pedantic than Bellew's. He picks out details that make Afghan life seem more interesting or beautiful, and these details often have symbolic meaning for the story or the characters. Hughes romanticises the exotic by making Afghan culture seem interesting, mysterious, and sometimes dangerous, but ultimately able to fit in with Western values (as shown by his British characters).

Think about how the book shows women dressing up and being beautiful. Hughes does not hold back when he compares his heroines to other things. Shaidy, Ruhainah's half-sister, is introduced with almost too much detail for a harem fantasy. Her "long black tresses, her silken ringlets, her bright eyes, her ruby lips, her pearly teeth, and her cypress form" are so beautiful that her suitor 'divorced the ugliest of his four wives'" (47). This long list of physical charms not only romanticises Afghan women's beauty (with Persian-like images like cypress-shaped stature and ruby lips), but it also moves the plot forward by making polygamous rivals jealous and angry. The focus on her dress and jewellery is implied; one can picture Shaidy in bright silk veils and jewels (though Hughes leaves some to the imagination). Hughes uses Orientalist tropes of the harem belle to idealise her beauty, but he also gives these women power and a voice in his story (Ruhainah for sure, and even Shaidy to some extent). So, the exotic glamour is mixed with the person's own personality, which makes the cultural performance (like a wedding dance or a show of hennaed hands) more relatable to the reader.

In *Ruhainah*, music and poetry are very important cultural events. We have already talked about how Ruhainah sings and plays the rebab. Hughes often uses these kinds of moments to set the mood or hint at deeper feelings. For instance, when Ruhainah sings “the song of the seven wise women of Persia” about marriage, it is not just a cultural aside; it is a direct attack on polygamy in front of her father (26). The lyrics of the Persian song (which are quoted in the book) say that with more than one wife, “Together they his soul annoy”, which humorously supports Ruhainah’s argument against her father’s multiple marriages (27). Hughes is good at mixing real cultural elements with the story’s themes, as shown by the fact that he uses a piece of cultural folklore as social commentary. The reader, on the other hand, gets to see the exotic idea of Afghan women knowing old Persian songs and playing stringed instruments by courtyard fountains. This is a scene that could have come straight from an Orientalist painting.

Hughes shows weddings and feasts as both a show of culture and a dangerous event. For example, in the chapter “Shaidy’s Wedding”, he paints a picture of the happy scene with bright sensory details: the fragrant *pilau* and *kabobs*, the henna night, the *attan* (an Afghan dance), and the guests dressed in bright colours (147). But Hughes also adds drama to the event that moves the plot forward, like a “poisoned dish” almost killing a character in Chapter XIV (175). This mix of hospitality and betrayal fits with Western ideas of the East, where beautiful ceremonies hide deadly plots. The “Oily Hindu” merchant character (the title of Chapter XIV) who seems to be plotting at the wedding is another strange element (181). He could be a stereotypical picture of a sneaky Kashmiri or Punjabi trader in Afghan lands. These kinds of characters and events, like a Hindu in a Muslim setting suggesting treachery, play into stereotypes. At the same time, they also use the multicultural aspects of Afghan society (for example, Indian merchants did live in Herat and Kabul). Hughes fills his book with people from different ethnic groups, all drawn in a way that makes them look exotic, to give a full

picture of Afghan life. There are Pashtun chiefs, Uzbek brigands, Hindu moneylenders, and others, each with their own clothes and role.

The way Hughes shows material culture is different because it has a symbolic meaning in the story. The veil, for example, becomes a sign of trust and closeness. When Ruhainah first meets the Englishman Bertram Bernard, she is unveiled because of strange circumstances, which shows that they are crossing a cultural boundary and beginning a romance. Later, putting on or taking off a veil has emotional meaning. At one point, Bernard gently puts a veil over Ruhainah to protect her identity, which is both a sign of respect and possession (which could be seen as love protecting purity). Hughes knows that these kinds of cultural objects can be very dramatic. In the same way, weapons like the dagger that Ruhainah holds up to threaten suicide are symbols of honour and power in the story. When her father takes off his turban in despair or respect, it is a sign of male honour.

Hughes romanticises Afghan material culture by focussing on its most interesting parts and weaving them into the emotional beats of his story. Hughes shows that Afghan social identity is very ceremonial and performative. It includes things like lavish hospitality, passionate dancing, strict *purdah* (gender segregation), and complicated honour codes. But he also shows how love and contact with people from other cultures can change or bend these cultural practices (for example, when characters like Sister Lydia or Major Bernard are around, Afghan and British customs mix). Hughes acts as a cultural broker for his readers by turning Afghan culture into a series of interesting tableaux and events full of symbols. He encourages them to appreciate and even love the exotic, while also subtly showing them its flaws (which he thinks Christianity or British kindness can fix). It is a soft form of Orientalism: the story draws the reader in with the charm of Afghan life, but in the end, the British characters and values win (since they are the ones who win).

4.3.3 Masson's Inventory of Difference: Markets, Meals, and Manners

Masson's approach to material culture is probably the most straightforward. Masson, who was an explorer, wrote down what he saw and gave us a complete picture of Afghan daily life in the early 19th century. His journals sometimes read like an ethnographic ledger: he writes about the layout of a bazaar, the price of a loaf of bread, the design of a nomad's tent, the menu of a dinner, and the rules of etiquette for a guesthouse. Masson paints a picture of Afghan society's fabric by putting together all of these small details. He points out how it is different from and similar to European norms without making a big deal out of it. His descriptions often have a subtle warmth to them, as if he took quiet pleasure in watching how people live, work, and interact.

Masson was in his element in Afghan markets. He talks about bazars, shops, trades, and markets with a sharp eye for how things are organised and what they sell. For instance, he might talk about the rows of stalls in Kandahar's bazaar that sell pomegranates and grapes, or the shouts of hawkers selling *naan* (bread). He also writes about infrastructure, such as "public buildings; *serais*, *hammams*, bridges" that help both travellers and citizens (1:238). This is very helpful for people today who want to know about the amenities in cities at that time. Masson does not make these scenes seem strange; instead, he almost lists them. He writes, for example, that the main bazaar in Kabul, the Chahar Chatta, had covered areas and specific lanes for different types of goods, like carpets and copperware. These kinds of descriptions could come from either a travel book or a government report.

Masson always talks about how generous Afghans are when it comes to food and hospitality, which are important parts of social identity. One thing that happens a lot is that Masson and his friends arrive at a village or camp tired, and the locals give them food. Masson writes gratefully, "The people were willing to consider us as guests, and to provide us with food and our horses with provender, and they made a magnificent fire, continually heaping on it fresh fuel" (2:449). This story of tribesmen giving a warm welcome around a campfire not

only shows how to behave (guests' rights and hosts' duties), but it also shows how hospitable Afghan culture is, which many travellers have said. Masson's focus on these kinds of events (and there are many in his story) goes against the common British view of Afghans as being uniformly savage or hostile. He shows how to be kind to strangers and respect the guest (*mehman*) in everyday situations. He depicts, such as in one case, after a dangerous trip, the villagers insisted on treating him like their *mehmandar* (guest) and would not accept payment for food or lodging. This not only shows off his culture, but it would also impress his readers, many of whom were familiar with Pashtun hospitality codes.

Masson's list of things he likes and finds interesting includes small things like drinking green tea with cardamom in a bazaar *chaikhana* or watching "itinerant traders" walk around with their goods and unique cries (2:269). He mentions differences between regions, like the very small breed of goats in the Baloch hills that caught his eye (hardly twenty inches high). He also writes about games and free time, maybe commenting on a game of *buzkashi* he saw or kids playing with toys they made themselves (though these details need to be confirmed, his style of noticing suggests he would). Masson loves the little things that separate his world from the Afghan world, but he does not put them down.

Masson's chronicle also talks about social etiquette. For instance, he looks at how people of different classes in Afghanistan interact with each other. In one town, people greet him and call him "*Feringhi*" but he says "the recognition was immaterial," which means he did not feel any malice, just curiosity (2:146). He talks about how the headman of a village talks to his people and how a *jirga* (council) settles problems, which gives us a look at how things are run in the area. Masson describes the meal's course (maybe roast lamb and rice), the seating arrangement (on carpets, no chairs), and the custom of eating with the right hand from a common platter when he is invited to dinner by an Afghan notable. He might say something as

simple as everyone should wash their hands before and after eating. This is a common rule that shows how people in that culture live.

Masson's story does more than just inform; it makes people feel like people by putting together this list of differences. Bellew might make customs seem silly (like the blind credulity of Muhammadan) and Hughes might make them seem real by dressing them up in fiction. Masson, on the other hand, lets them speak for themselves by adding more and more details. The reader slowly learns to respect Afghan creativity (like using a sandal, a type of wooden brazier, to keep homes warm in the winter) and their ability to keep going (travelling through rough terrain with little gear). Masson does not often editorialise about these differences. He shows them, sometimes with a hint of Victorian surprise, but most of the time with understanding.

It is important to remember that Masson's strict ethnographic work was not separate from imperial goals. His narrative gave British officials a lot of information about Afghan social organisation and economic life, such as bazaars, trade routes, and resources. Descriptions of markets and caravans were useful for figuring out how trade worked in Afghanistan and how much influence the British could have there. Masson's writing, on the other hand, suggests that his main motivation was real curiosity and respect for the culture he had lived in for years (he even wore local clothes and used a fake name).

Masson's record of material culture is an important part of the colonial archive on Afghanistan. However, it seems more down-to-earth and human than Bellew's top-down classifications or Hughes's narrative exoticism. Masson brings Afghan life to life: the smells of the bazaar, the taste of the grapes, the crackling of the hearth, and the politeness of a *salaam*. You can see both the difference and the shared humanity in his eyes. However, his work did become part of the body of knowledge that British colonialism used. This knowledge also

included mapping the land and imagining its place in history and empire, as the next section will talk about.

4.4 Geographies of Memory: Space, History, and the Monumental Imagination

Colonial pictures of Afghanistan showed both people and places. The land, its huge deserts, tall mountains, ruined cities, and important passes, was a big deal in the minds of Victorians. Bellew, Hughes, and Masson all have what could be called a monumental imagination of Afghan geography, in which they put their memories, power, and desires onto the land itself. Masson, who is interested in archaeology, sees the Afghan landscape as a place where ancient civilisations (Buddhist, Persian, etc.) lived and died, and he wants to dig them up and protect them. This romanticises ruins and connects the land to a grand historical timeline. As a colonial officer, Bellew gives very detailed descriptions of land, including routes, resources, and control points. This is a way of putting imperial knowledge onto space. Hughes writes fiction, but he also makes up his own fictional maps. He imagines real places like Herat not just as places on a map, but as emotional and symbolic landscapes, places of longing, loss, and maybe even redemption that reflect both Afghan and British feelings (for example, Herat as the Key of India that was almost lost). This part looks at how each writer's use of geography in their works serves to remember or use Afghan space.

4.4.1 Masson's Archaeological Fascination and the Ruin Aesthetic

Charles Masson could be called Afghanistan's first archaeologist, and his writing is full of his archaeological fascination with the land. Masson always looked down at the ground for coins, broken pottery, and crumbling bricks as he travelled. His story is different from others from that time because it clearly connects Afghan places to ancient history, putting Afghanistan into a larger memory of civilisation. This gives us what could be called as a ruin aesthetic before: Masson often writes about the poetry of ruins, which are silent, crumbling buildings that hint at their former glory.

Think about Masson's time in the Bamiyan Valley. He went there before the famous Buddhas were well-known, but he must have heard stories about them from the locals. His published story only briefly mentions Bamiyan, but later reports say that he knew about the huge idols carved into the cliffs. Masson was more directly involved in other places. For example, he dug up Buddhist stupas (topes) and found Indo-Greek coins and reliquaries at Bagram and Hadda (near Jalalabad). He writes about how carefully these structures were dug up, almost with respect. He talks about one dig in Wardak where finding a tope led to the discovery of coins from the Kushan empire. This made him think that the structure was built in the 4th or 5th century CE. When he writes about trying to read "an inscription...in Bactro-Pali characters" on a brass vessel, you can feel the excitement in his words (2:223). He hopes it will tell him the story of the tope. This is the language of someone who loves to bring the past to life in the ruins.

Masson's idea of ruin is not only technical; it is also emotional. For example, at the ancient city site of Bagram (Kapisa), he is amazed by the mix of cultures, as he finds Greek-style coins with Zeus and Indian-style art motifs. This shows that Afghanistan was once a place where East and West met. He often thinks about how empires do not last. In Ghazni, surrounded by broken pillars and defaced tombs, he thinks about how even the strongest conqueror (Mahmud) left behind only pieces. He talks about two old brick minarets that are still standing in the plains of Ghazni. Local legend said they were built by Mahmud, but he correctly said they were older, probably from the late 12th century, because of the Kufic writing on the bricks. Masson's description of these minarets shows his sense of beauty. He says that you can climb inside them using internal steps, and from the top you can see the vast plain, where he imagines the great city that once was. There is a sad admiration in lines like "we look in vain over the city for any traces of the splendour which once marked the capital of the great Sultan Mahmud" (2:219). Masson wants the reader to feel that same sense of loss and wonder.

In the colonial mind, this huge imagination links Afghanistan's present to its distant past. Masson subtly challenged the idea that Afghanistan was just a wild (no-man's-land) by pointing out ancient Greek and Buddhist ruins. Instead, he showed it as a cradle of rich civilisations that were not Islamic or Afghan in origin (Greek, Buddhist, etc.). This view could support Britain's role as protectors of world heritage, a story often used to explain why they get involved in places with a lot of archaeological wealth. Masson did say that local rulers sometimes did not care about or even destroyed these old things; he implicitly put European scholarship in the role of their saviour.

In addition, Masson linked Afghan sites to Alexander the Great's campaigns (he tried to find locations in classical records) or to the spread of Buddhism, which made Afghanistan a part of European history. The land became a palimpsest where colonial readers could find familiar reference points, like Alexander, Greek art, and even Bible stories (some Victorian writers thought about the Ten Lost Tribes in Afghanistan, which Hughes also hints at in *Ruhainah*). In this way, Masson's geographic imagination is retrospective: he remembers space by what it used to be. He remembers cities like Herat and Kandahar not only for their current strategic value, but also for their storied pasts (Herat was the Pearl of Khorasan in Timurid times, and Kandahar was founded by Alexander).

In a way, Masson's interest in archaeology made Afghanistan a museified landscape for his readers, a place with grand ruins that needed to be understood. This method added depth to the colonial view of Afghanistan, but it sometimes meant leaving out the people who live there now. The ruins became the main characters in his stories about space, and living Afghans were sometimes just background figures who could help or get in his way. Even so, Masson's work is important for understanding Afghanistan's historical geography, and it paved the way for future archaeological missions by the British and French. This is a great example of how the colonial archive built up knowledge and memory of space.

4.4.2 Bellew's Territorial Detailing: Landscape as Knowledge and Control

Henry Bellew's map of Afghanistan is accurate, detailed, and useful. Bellew travelled through a lot of Afghanistan and Balochistan on several British missions (to Kandahar, to Seistan, etc.). He kept careful records of the routes, distances, altitudes, climate, and resources he found. His book *From the Indus to the Tigris* can be seen as a colonial geography book, a book that turns landscape into knowledge for the purpose of imperial strategy and control. Masson looked back at the past, but Bellew was focused on the present and future strategic value of the land.

Bellew's chapters are a lot like survey reports. He finds passes like Kojak Pass and Bolan Pass, measures how high they are, and talks about how good they are for travel or troop movement. For instance, he goes into great detail about the Míloh Pass in Balochistan, talking about how it narrows into a gorge with a stream that needs to be crossed nine times, how flash floods can happen without warning, and how locals wisely stay away from camping in the streambed. Bellew was effectively mapping the land for British use by writing down these details. He included a "Record of Meteorological Observations and Altitudes", which shows how serious he was about science (he brought barometers, thermometers, and other tools to measure climate and height) (494). There was a clear military and administrative use for this information: knowing the weather patterns and height of a valley can help decide when an army can march or when crops can be harvested, which affects supply lines.

Bellew's territorial details also include control and landscape. He often connects geography to power by talking about who controls which fort, which tribe lives in which valley, and how natural features define borders. He talks about the city's old walls in Kandahar, but he also talks about how unhappy the people are with the Amir's rule and the "oppression of its successive governors" (148). This connects the land to the political situation. In one case, Bellew gives a detailed account of the Peshin valley and the hills of Toba that surround it,

pointing out how the Afghan Kingdom and rebellious tribes are fighting over those areas and how British influence could spread there. Bellew was basically telling people which landscapes needed more control or were better for them through these stories.

In his introduction, Bellew puts Afghanistan in the Great Game, which is a great example of how he combines geography and imperial strategy. He talks about how Russia is dealing with the Oxus and warns British politicians about how important Afghanistan's borders are. His well-known saying, "But let us be careful lest, while straining at the gnat of Yárkand, we swallow the camel of Herat", sums up the political importance of geography (iii). Herat is often called the gateway to India from the west. Here, it is represented as a "camel" that is too big to swallow. This is a warning not to ignore Herat's strategic importance while focussing on smaller issues like Yarkand in Chinese Turkestan. Bellew uses a Biblical reference (the gnat and the camel) to make a point about policy: imperial focus should be based on geographic knowledge (Herat's location and value).

There was an undertone of possession in Bellew's mapping. He (and by extension, the British) rhetorically took over the landscape by listing and describing it in such great detail. In colonial language, to describe something was to claim it, at least when it came to knowledge. For example, Bellew clearly defines the borders between Balochistan and Afghanistan, often correcting what locals say. He says that an Afghan governor tried to take control of part of Balochistan in 1864, but "these districts are still considered by the Afghans as portion of their country, though they remain under the rule of the Khán of Kalát" (99). By making things clearer, Bellew was effectively setting boundaries, a power that would later be used by colonial boundary commissions like the Durand Line of 1893.

Another thing is how Bellew thinks of landscape as something that can be improved. He sometimes talks about unused farmland or the potential for irrigation in a certain area, hinting at what could be done with better government. He sees large areas of *jangal* (scrub) in

the Helmand delta that could be fertile if they were watered correctly. This fits in with the colonial idea that European rule could make a land more productive than native rule could.

Bellew's detailed descriptions of his territory show that knowledge is power. Every pass he measured, every village he counted, and every tribe he indexed in his story could help the British in negotiations or in taking over. The landscape in Bellew's writing is not just a background; it is a part of imperial planning. British officials could almost picture the land without ever setting foot on it by reading his work. This was necessary to have power over it. Bellew made Afghan geography easy to read and almost familiar for his readers. This helped to close the cognitive gap and made the idea of controlling such areas more believable.

4.4.3 Hughes's Fictional Cartography: Herat as a Space of Loss and Longing

Thomas Hughes adds an emotional and symbolic mapping to Afghan geography in his book *Ruhainah*. Hughes uses his imagination to give the real-life places in the book (Herat, Kabul, the Khyber, Peshawar) a mood and meaning that help the story. In his made-up map of Afghanistan, places are not just points on a map; they are also moral and emotional landscapes. Herat is probably the most important of these. In the book and its title, it stands for both Afghan cultural pride and a place of personal and historical tragedy.

People in Britain in the 1800s often called Herat the key of India. It was fought over and wanted during the First Anglo-Afghan War. Herat had been besieged by 1857 (the year when part of *Ruhainah* takes place), and it was known as a place where people fought over land. Hughes uses this background to his advantage. He calls her "the Maid of Herat", which connects her to the city's history in a strong way (v). Throughout the book, characters talk about how they miss the good old days in Herat and how sad they are that they left it. At one point, Abdullah, Ruhainah's father, who now lives near Jalalabad, tells her that he feels like he is in exile: "I wish we had never left Herat; here we have nothing but trouble" (39). His daughter says that ever since he left their beloved city and married a younger woman, he has been

depressed, “not a ray of light even in your dear old face” (39). This conversation makes Herat feel like home for the characters, a lost paradise where they could be happy and together, which is very different from the way they live now.

Hughes makes Herat a place of loss and desire. It shows what the Afghan main characters have given up (family unity, status) because of war and political unrest. The Rustum of Herat nickname for Abdullah brings to mind a romanticised heroism that is now fading, just like the city itself, which was once famous under Queen Gowhar Shad or during Eldred Pottinger’s defence but is now less so. When Abdullah thinks back, Hughes probably uses real history: Abdullah in the book “migrated from Herat to Cabul” in his youth because of a Persian invasion (this is a reference to the 1837-38 Persian siege of Herat that was stopped with British help) (5). So, personal history and geopolitical history come together in Herat, which was the site of Abdullah’s youth and imperial competition.

The British narrator’s longing is also present in Hughes’ Herat. Hughes writes mostly from the point of view of Afghan characters, but he gives their view of Herat a subtext that is similar to how British people feel about Herat. Britain never really controlled Herat; instead, it got involved secretly. By the 1880s, Herat was back on the Persian radar and a concern for British strategists. The book subtly shows how important Herat is: British Major Bernard and others talk about it with respect, maybe because they feel bad about the fighting around it. This fits with what I call Hughes’s bridging fiction and policy discourse; he uses his story to make points about Afghan politics for an English-speaking audience. Herat becomes a character in its own right: proud, fighting, and suffering for a long time.

Hughes probably also idealises Herat’s landscape when it comes to how it looks. He never went there, but he could get a sense of its famous green cultivated plains and surrounding hills with ruins of earthen fortifications from published sources. When he thought about himself, the open sky of Herat at dusk or the silhouette of the Herat citadel might have been

used as symbols of hope or despair. For example, one could picture Ruhainah looking west at sunset and thinking of Herat as a sign of the end of an era or a desire to go back. Even though Hughes does not write this scene down, the feeling is there.

Hughes's fictional map goes beyond Herat to other places. For example, the Khyber Pass becomes a place of danger and suspense in the story, with brigands and daring escapes, just like it was in real life. Kabul only shows up as a reference point, since most of the action takes place on the frontier and in the Herat region. It may be shown as a city of intrigues and mixed loyalties, which is how British officers often described it after 1842. Hughes also shows Peshawar as a place where different cultures meet, a border town full of danger and the promise of outreach. This is where Sister Lydia comes in as a missionary.

The fort/village of Abukilla, where Abdullah lives near Jalalabad, is a well-known made-up place in the book. This small world, "The domain thus granted by the Ameer of Cabul to Abdullah...by the Cabul river", represents the effort to start over outside of Herat (9). Its relative isolation and the conflicts between its residents (different tribal groups, new wife vs. old family) show how Afghanistan has become less unified since the war. When there is unrest and violence in Abukilla (like when someone tries to kidnap someone and there is a blood feud), it shows the book's theme that no place is safe or truly home once Herat is lost. Hughes uses geography to show how his characters' souls are doing.

Herat, the Pearl of Khorasan becomes a symbol of all that is mourned in *Ruhainah*. It is where Ruhainah's mother came from (a Herati lady who died a long time ago), and it might be where Afghanistan's culture is at its best. The fact that the book ends with Ruhainah leaving her home (marrying the Englishman and presumably leaving) instead of Herat adds a bittersweet touch: Herat cannot be regained; its daughter must find a future elsewhere. In this way, Hughes talks about the bigger picture of colonialism: that the tragedies in Afghanistan,

like the massacre in 1842 mentioned in the preface, changed the country's path and its relationship with the West for good.

Hughes's imaginative geography adds story emotion to the real map. Herat is the best example of this: a real city shown as a place of memory, longing, and identity for both the Afghan characters who miss its past and the imperial psyche that remembers how strategically and romantically appealing it was. This made-up map adds the mythos dimension to the real maps by showing Afghanistan as more than just a place on a map, but as a stage for epic feelings and destiny (in love, loss, and longing).

4.5 Literary Colonialism and the Invention of "Afghanistan"

Bellew, Hughes, and Masson all take part in what could be called the invention or construction of Afghanistan in the colonial imagination by combining their interests in ethnography, religion, culture, and space. Their writings do more than just describe Afghanistan; they also create an image of the country and its people that British people would talk about. This is literary colonialism: using texts as tools of empire to shape ideas that affect policy and public opinion. In this last part, we look at how Bellew and Masson acted as imperial ethnographers, how Hughes acted as a cultural translator between fiction and policy, and how all three of them together created lasting themes of self (the British/Western civiliser or sympathetic witness) and other (the Afghan as noble, violent, exotic, or redeemable) that can still be found in the colonial archive. Finally, we put these threads together to see what lasting effects their works had on Afghanistan, such as the constructed selves and imagined others.

4.5.1 Bellew and Masson as Imperial Ethnographers: Texts as Tools of Empire

Even though Bellew and Masson had different personalities, their works were quickly added to the body of imperial knowledge about Afghanistan. It is fair to call them imperial ethnographers. British officials needed the information in their detailed reports on Afghan tribes, geography, customs, and history to help with diplomacy and intervention. Their writings

became tools of empire, like reference books for how to understand (and therefore control) Afghan affairs.

Masson's multi-volume *Narrative* (published in 1844) was one of the first complete English sources on Afghanistan and the area around it. It had not only exciting stories but also organised information about trade routes, ethnic groups, local rulers, and more. It is true that imperial policymakers used these kinds of stories to make plans. Resultantly, I argue that early explorers like Masson, Burnes, and Elphinstone were knowledge entrepreneurs whose findings and prejudices fed into the story of the area and helped to feed the colonial imagination policy of negotiation and subjection. Masson's biases were not as strong as some (he liked a lot about Afghans), but he still had a colonial view of things. For example, he often sided with orderly rulers who worked with the British, and he was angry with the East India Company after they treated him badly later. Still, the raw information he gathered, like population estimates and maps, was very useful to the empire. Even though Masson was personally disappointed, the fact that his manuscripts and coin collections ended up in the hands of British authorities shows how his work was used for imperial purposes.

Bellew's works, which came out a generation later, were even more directly useful for the empire. By the 1870s, the British Raj had set up borders next to Afghanistan, and men like Bellew were given the job of gathering information. British military and political circles used Bellew's 1879 ethnographic survey *The Races of Afghanistan* and his travelogues to explain who was who in Afghan politics and how tribal dynamics could be used. His depictions of groups like the Ghilzais, Durrani, Hazaras, and others, often using stereotypes like "warlike" "treacherous", and "hardy" made a complicated reality easier to understand for policy purposes (325). This kind of simplification is a common feature of ethnographic writing that serves the empire. For instance, Nivi Manchanda calls it "the construal of Afghanistan as a 'tribal society' ... an iteration of the colonial impulse to simplify, classify" (168). Bellew was one of the main

people behind that vision. He literally drew ethnolinguistic maps and diagrams that connected Afghan races to their supposed origins and fit them into an Orientalist taxonomy.

Bellew and Masson helped create Afghanistan as an object of imperial knowledge by writing these texts. Instead of being a terra incognita, it became a knowable thing with specific traits. Even before the physical Durand Line border was built, their works helped British people think about Afghanistan's conceptual borders. Masson and Bellew's discussion of Afghan versus non-Afghan people is a clear example. For example, Masson often separated Tajiks from Pashtuns based on their way of life (settled vs. nomad), and Bellew even came up with theories of ethnogenesis, portraying that Afghans were descended from lost Jewish tribes, which was a common colonial idea. These ideas made their way into policy. For example, the British preferred to deal with Pashtun Durrani elites because they thought they were more manly or easier to govern. Writers like Bellew praised the Durrani in some ways, which helped support this view.

Also, both authors, whether they meant to or not, gave reasons for intervention. Masson's story of a broken land with fighting chiefs (even though it had a great past) and Bellew's story of a society that is not moving forward could both be seen as calls for help. After the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80), Bellew openly strives for a bigger British presence on the border to reconstruct the government, which he thought was chaotic because of Afghan tribal rule. His earlier writings set the stage for that point of view.

Bellew and Masson's books were not just travelogues; they were part of the colonial archive that imperial officials used to gather information. According to anthropologist Bernard Cohn, the Britishers "conquered India by classifying it" (79). In the same way, I argue that the Britishers tried to control Afghanistan by classifying it, and Bellew and Masson were two of the classifiers. They helped make Afghanistan into a place that Britain thought it knew, one with fierce tribes and old customs that was dangerous but possible to deal with if you had the

right information. Their ethnographic writings became tools for the empire's goals, either directly (by giving missions advice) or indirectly (by shaping colonial thought).

4.5.2 Hughes as Cultural Translator: Bridging Fiction and Policy Discourse

Thomas P. Hughes was a cultural translator who worked in the areas of literature, religion, and policy. His book *Ruhainah* was not a government report or an exploration diary; it was a made-up story. But as we have seen, it was heavily influenced by his twenty years of missionary work in the Northwest Frontier of colonial India. Hughes was able to connect popular imagination and policy talk through the use of fiction. His book gave a picture of life in Afghanistan that brought up many of the same issues that colonial policy makers were worried about, like instability on the frontier, the role of Islam, and the possibility of conversion. It also reached a wider Victorian audience than a dry report would have. Hughes added to the colonial story about Afghanistan in ways that were less obvious but still important.

First, Hughes was a missionary and wrote an oriental romance which gave him two reasons to be trusted. He was thought to be an expert on Afghan culture and the Pashto language because he wrote a famous book *Kalid-i-Afghani* in 1872. So his fiction had an implicit authoritative weight; readers would think that the customs and conversations in *Ruhainah* were real or at least well-informed. *Ruhainah* was a good way to spread colonial knowledge because it was hard to tell what was real and what was made up. It taught readers things while also making them laugh. The plot of the book could teach you about an Afghan wedding or the idea of *nanawatai* (a place for a guest to stay), just as easily as an anthropological essay could. Hughes did this on purpose, as he says in his introduction that he hopes the story “will contribute something to a knowledge of this interesting people” (vii). In this way, he made himself a translator of Afghan culture to the West, just like Rudyard Kipling did for India a little later.

Second, Hughes's novel made some policy-relevant themes stronger. One of these ideas was the idea that it was possible to "civilise" or convert Afghans, even if it was done slowly (vi). Hughes gave the idea that Afghans were always hostile a new twist by having a character like Ruhainah embrace Christianity and her Afghan chief father work with the British by the end of the book. His stories showed that there were ways to win the hearts of Afghans without conquering them, such as through respect, education (like Sister Lydia's school in Peshawar), and alliances. This fit with the change in British policy in the late 1800s, which moved towards forward engagement on the frontier tempered by indirect influence (for example, by giving money to tribal leaders and hosting them). Hughes basically acted out the advantages of soft power, which is cultural and religious influence, in addition to the hard power approach that men like Bellew represented. I argue that *Ruhainah* offers an alternative perspective on the role of evangelism in empire by attending to affect and desire. It used the tension between Christian universalism and racist particularism to cultivate an effect of empire. Hughes's story gave readers an emotional reason to support imperial presence: they want to see the Afghans become better people and Christians because they care about characters like Ruhainah. It is a sneaky way to get people to support colonialism.

In addition, Hughes had already given advice on how to deal with Afghan society in his non-fiction writing, such as mission reports. *Ruhainah* is another way for him to give advice, but this time in story form. Hughes shows that British officers who are honest and respect Afghan culture can win the loyalty of Afghans through Major Bernard's honourable actions in the book. This is like real-life talks in Britain about how important it is to know tribal codes and play fair to keep the Empire's image. The book's villain, a fanatical *mullah* who encourages violence, is a warning about what can happen when you ignore or mishandle religious feelings. Hughes offers a hopeful model by ending the story with a peaceful union (intercultural

marriage) and conversion. Instead of a clash of civilisations, he suggests a merging under the influence of enlightened Christianity.

Ruhainah's popularity at the time (it went through several editions) shows that it had some effect. Both religious Christians and colonial officials read it. It even made its way to America, changing how people thought about the Afghan frontier outside of Britain. Hughes helped keep Afghanistan in the minds of the British public during the twenty years between the Second Anglo-Afghan War and the Third (1919). This was important because imperial interest might have faded after the military left in 1881. Cultural products like *Ruhainah* kept the idea alive that Afghanistan was not just a faraway trouble spot, but a place of human drama, potential allies, and souls to be saved.

Hughes helped British readers understand the realities of life in Afghanistan. His writing made Afghans seem more human (especially the women, who in other colonial writing often had little say) while still following colonial hierarchies (the best thing to do is for Afghans to accept Christian Western norms). So, he changed Afghan culture into something that was more in line with British values, which helped set the stage for an empire that could see itself as both a conqueror and a benefactor. When you put his work together with the factual work of Bellew and Masson, it adds to the colonial Afghan story by adding emotional and moral reasons to the political and strategic frameworks that other people gave.

4.5.3 Thematic Synthesis: Constructed Selves and Imagined Others

By putting all of these pieces together, we can see how Bellew, Hughes, and Masson all made a complicated colonial picture of Afghanistan that said as much about British people as it did about Afghan people. I establish that the British writers use Afghanistan as a mirror to show different parts of their identities: Bellew as a scientist-rationalist, Masson as a humanist-adventurer, and Hughes as a Christian reformer. Each of these selves defines itself in relation

to an imagined other which could be the Afghan as a classified subject, a noble/rustic tribesman, or a convert-in-waiting.

It is helpful to think about Edward Said's idea of Orientalism, which establishes that the West defines itself by how it is different from an imagined East. For instance, Bellew's condescending tone towards Afghan credulity makes the British (and himself) seem rational and enlightened without saying so directly. Hughes's focus on Christian virtue and forgiveness, along with Afghan cycles of revenge, makes the British/Christian self-seem morally superior but kind. Masson's account of destruction and violence, softened by notes of Afghan hospitality, still puts the British observer in the role of storyteller and perhaps rescuer of Afghanistan's heritage. The colonial self is always at the centre, the one who can understand, intervene, and save. The Afghan other, on the other hand, is the source of problems or sadness that needs to be dealt with.

In their stories, one can see the recurring imagined others: the barbarian, the noble tribesman, the exotic woman, the fanatical priest, and the lost kingdom. These are common types of characters in colonial literature from the 19th century. For Afghanistan, these writers give them a specific shape. Bellew's Afghan is often a savage, but he sometimes shows signs of bravery or kindness (for example, he recognises a good deed but surrounds it with doubt). Masson's Afghan, especially the Pashtun tribal, often fits the "noble savage" stereotype: he is independent, brave, and sometimes cruel, but in a way that is admirable within his code (Masson clearly liked many of the chiefs he befriended, even when he wrote about their brutal feuds) (1:91). Hughes's Afghan has both the virtuous and exotic female (Ruhainah, Shaidy) who can show Christian grace and the fanatical male (Mullah Ahmad, etc.) who British good sense or arms must stop. These ideas did not just exist on their own; they built on each other in different texts and became part of the larger colonial story about Afghans: fierce fighters, wild but not untamable, stuck in time but possibly able to be guided into modernity.

Another part of the constructed selves is the affirmation of British imperial identity. Through these works, Britons could see themselves as scholars (Masson's discoveries made Afghanistan part of their classical world), as statesmen (Bellew's advice and data helped them come up with big plans), and as protectors of civilisation (Hughes's portrayal of empire brought faith and order). Martin Bayly's study of how colonial knowledge began in Afghanistan says that these early explorers and writers "tamed the imperial imagination" by making Afghanistan easy to understand (131). By doing this, they also calmed the British people's fear and uncertainty. After the disaster of 1842, Afghanistan was a nightmare. By the 1880s, though, it had become something the empire could deal with again with confidence, thanks to new information and literary re-framing. The work of all these writers together was very important in that change.

Lastly, we should remember that these made-up people had real effects. These stereotypes and tropes influenced policies, like the British distrust of religious leaders or the tendency to romanticise some tribes and demonise others (for example, Bellew and others pushed the idea that the noble Durrani were better than the savage Ghilzais, which affected who the British sided with). The idea that Afghan women needed to be saved or enlightened may have affected later colonial efforts to liberate and educate women (a theme that still exists in modern interventions). So, the literary and academic constructions had real-world effects.

Chapter 4's look at Bellew, Hughes, and Masson shows that Afghan civilisation, as it was written about in colonial texts, was a patchwork of many different things. It had parts of scientific cataloguing, romantic storytelling, moral-religious judgement, and strategic mapping. It told Britons more about how they saw themselves as classifiers, storytellers, civilisers, and rulers than it did about how Afghans saw themselves. But if you look closely at these works, you can also find real information and even empathy. These 19th-century texts are still important and complicated because they show the tension between truth and bias, and

between agenda and observation. As modern readers, the natives look at them critically, seeing how they show the Afghan past and the imperial fantasies they helped create. This helps us understand how the colonial archive invented Afghanistan, in a way, and how that invention still affects how people see the country today.

In chapter 4, I examined into the way Bellew, Hughes, and Masson used ethnography to curate Afghanistan's culture, religion, material life, and spatial memory, turning the region into a clear object of imperial knowledge. I subsequently investigated into the way their texts aestheticize and conserve Afghan culture by selectively showing domestic life, sacred spaces, the bodily representation, and monumental landscapes. This reinforces a textual creation of "Afghanistan" that fits with imperial ideology. These depictions were more than just records; they were also ideological tools that mixed ethnographic authority with literary colonialism. In chapter 5, I will build on this by putting together the thematic and rhetorical patterns I found throughout the study, assessing the contribution they add to colonial discourse, and giving my own thoughts on how such types of texts shape, and may be challenged by, future postcolonial and decolonial readings of Afghan representation.

Chapter 5

Research Synthesis, Critical Reflections, and Future Pathways

In the last chapter, I discuss about the findings of my study and reflect on them in light of the research objectives and questions. This chapter examines the dominant tropes of representation and cultural imaginings that these imperial texts produced, bringing together the analyses of Henry Walter Bellew's *From the Indus to the Tigris*, Thomas Patrick Hughes's *Ruhainah: The Maid of Herat*, and Charles Masson's *Narrative of Various Journeys*. The discussion is structured thematically, starting with an overview of the primary issues and literary strategies employed in the study and concluding with a reconsideration of how the study met its initial objectives. It then explicitly responds to the guiding research questions, addresses the scholarly contributions and theoretical insights of the work, and finally enquires about its limitations and suggests new areas for research. The tenor of the chapter persists conclusive and integrative throughout, focussing on how my argument reinforces a postcolonial critique of colonial textualities in the context of Afghan representation.

5.1 Repetition and Variation in Colonial Representations

There are plenty of common concerns in the works of Bellew, Hughes, and Masson. These tropes show how British writers thought about Afghanistan in a small number of stereotypical ways, and they show how they used them over and over again in their work. The most common trope, for instance, is to show Afghanistan as a savage place compared to the supposedly civilised West. Bellew clearly describes the trip from British India to Afghan territory as a “passage from civilisation to barbarism, from order to anarchy, from security to danger, from justice to oppression” (Bellew 2). Afghanistan is called a place “shut up in his own barbarism” and cut off from modern progress (Bellew 5). This kind of language makes the country look like the opposite of modern Europe. Bellew's introduction says that Western civilization's “enlightenment... must soon shed its lustre upon these benighted regions” (Bellew

4), putting Afghanistan in the role of a benighted land that needs imperial light. This idea of civilisation versus barbarism is common in Orientalist writing. It supports the idea that Afghans are living in a primitive state and need help from a better outside force. All three writers talk about this theme in different ways: For example, Masson often talks about how Afghan domains are getting worse and more lawless, which suggests that the people who live there are in a state of political and social decay (Masson 1: 91). In each case, the text puts British civilisation as the norm and Afghanistan as the barbaric foil. This is a classic Orientalist contrast that was used to justify imperial interest in changing or controlling the area.

Another common theme is showing Afghans as religiously fanatical and likely to be militant. Bellew's commentary is very clear on this point, saying that Afghanistan is "imbued to the core with fanatic bigotry" (Bellew 5). He calls the country "the hotbed of Mohammedan bigotry" and the Afghan "very sick—sick unto death" for not accepting the "remedy" of Western civilisation (Bellew 4-5). The "sick man of Asia" is a pathological metaphor that fits with imperial rhetoric that said Muslim societies were dying and needed European help to get better (5). Hughes's made-up story reinforces the idea that fanatical violence is common by having characters like Hasan the Khyberee tell his fellow tribesmen to "fight the infidels wherever ye shall find them" and brag about getting blood on his hands from foreign unbelievers (Hughes 35). In British eyes, the jihad theme is now seen as a key part of Afghan identity. The young seminary students in *Ruhainah* are "delighted" by Hasan's extreme views, which shows the Western idea that Afghan Muslims are easily swayed by religious extremism (Hughes 36). Even when Hughes brings in more moderate voices, like the Afghan chief Abdullah in the same scene, the story's focus on holy war and intolerance fits well with the Orientalist view of Muslims as irrationally zealous. This picture fits with what Said said about colonial discourse: "the Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Said 40). By calling Afghan religious

devotion excessive or deviant, the texts implicitly support the West's view of itself as the centre of reasonable and enlightened belief.

British Orientalists often say that Afghan politics and society are chaotic, violent, and lack stable government. Bellew's travelogue shows that oppression and violence are everywhere: "tyranny and insecurity, oppression and violence, reign everywhere all over the country," he writes about the areas between the Indus and the Tigris (Bellew 3). He tells stories of rebel tribes stealing from caravans and raiders taking over the roads to show how widespread lawlessness is (Bellew 3). Masson's first-hand accounts also often talk about how Afghan tribes are lawless and how there is no central authority. Masson writes about his travels in remote areas, saying that every man's house is literally a fortified castle because of constant feuds. Villagers live in "a state of licentious independence... continually dreading and dreaded" by their neighbours (Masson 1: 91). This picture fits with colonial ideas that societies in the East were chaotic and needed strong leadership. Masson even writes that an "advocate of anarchy" would quickly learn to appreciate the "advantages conferred by a mild and well-regulated government" when they saw such conditions (Masson 1: 91). The meaning is clear: only outside (European) authority can calm the "savage inhabitant" of Afghan society (Masson I: 92). Hughes's book shows this theme of constant conflict in a fictional way. For example, tribal rivalries, assassination plots, and a secret "Guild of the Red Hand" that is dedicated to revenge all show a society torn apart by violence and personal grudges (73). These images all use the colonial idea of Afghanistan as a place of constant war, where every man's hand is against every other, to use a Hobbesian metaphor that British readers would easily understand. The main difference is in tone: Bellew sounds like a strict imperial doctor, Masson sounds like a worried observer who sometimes admires the hospitality during the conflict, and Hughes sounds like a sensational storyteller using Afghan lawlessness as an exotic setting. But all of

them support the idea that Afghan governance is either despotic or non-existent, which is the opposite of British ideas about law and order.

Along with scary pictures of barbarism and fanaticism, Orientalist texts also use the idea of exotic appeal. These works show that Afghanistan is not only dangerous, but also romantically exotic. Hughes's *Ruhainah* goes into great detail about Afghan people and places, which really brings this part to life. When the Amir arrives, the novel shows readers the "beautiful winter gardens" of Jalalabad and the "quaint bazar... crowded with motley groups" (Hughes 1). The female characters are portrayed in an overly romanticised Orientalist style. For example, the heroine Ruhainah and her sister Shaidy are described as having "long black tresses... bright eyes, ruby lips", in short, "the nymph-like form of a most beautiful young girl" (47, 138). This kind of imagery of harem beauty and sexual appeal fits with the Western idea of the East as a place of beauty and sexual interest. The exotic idea also includes cultural practices. Hughes shows scenes of Afghan music, poetry, and dance. For example, the nautch (dance) girls at a wedding, or the sad boy Yusuf writing mystical love poems that compare his beloved's eyes to "dark narcissus-like lashes" and her body to a "cypress" (51, 47). These cultural vignettes are seen through a romantic lens that highlights colour, passion, and mystery. Hughes had lived with Afghans for twenty years, which gives him some ethnographic authority. In his preface, he says he is telling a "story of Afghan life" based on real events (v). But even though he knows more about the subject, his fictional version goes too far into the beautiful and shocking. This fits with a larger pattern of Orientalism, in which the East is shown as a place of wonder and decadence that meets Western expectations (Said 1–2). Bellew and Masson don't try to make local women or love stories sound romantic, but they do add to the exoticism in more subtle ways. For example, Bellew's long list of the region's ancient history (from Cyrus and Alexander to the Mughals and Nadir Shah) gives the landscape an air of storied exotic antiquity (Bellew 11). Masson's archaeological work on Buddhist relics around

Kabul also adds to the idea that Afghanistan is full of mysterious and valuable ancient artefacts (Masson 3: 95–97). So, even though people say bad things about Afghanistan, they also say good things about it as an interesting part of the East. This is the duality at the heart of Orientalist writing.

The noble savage story is a big change in how Orientalists see Afghans. They grudgingly admire their martial skills and pride. In one way or another, all three authors agree that Afghans are known for being brave and fiercely independent. Hughes gives this feeling to an Afghan character who boldly says, “We Afghans are not a feeble race like the Hindu... we are a nation of men, and why should they then despair of a great and glorious future?” (36). This speech, given by a Kabuli notable in *Ruhainah*, praises Afghan warriors from Mahmud of Ghazni to Ahmad Shah Durrani. It reminds the reader that Afghans “held India in their iron grasp for a considerable period” and “created a school of architecture” and poetry that was famous in the East (vi). These parts are important because they show Afghan agency and bravery, even though the British author wrote them. Bellew, who is often rude in other parts of his writing, also admits that Afghan fighters are very proud. He talks about “the pride of nationality” that makes Afghans refuse foreign “remedies” (5). Bellew frames this stubborn pride negatively, saying it makes it hard for Afghans to accept Western civilisation. However, it also gives Afghans credit for having a strong sense of identity and bravery. Masson, who has lived in secret among Afghan tribes, often talks about how strong and “steady... respectable” they are when they are not fighting (1:96). He notes that a lot of Afghans have “nothing frivolous in their character,” which is something he seems to like about them, unlike some other Eastern people (1:96). These acknowledgements are in line with the British idea of martial races in the 1800s. This idea respected some colonised people (Pathans, Sikhs, Gurkhas, etc.) for their soldierly virtues while also calling them uncivilised. The idea of the noble but wild warrior is like a minor chord in these texts. It shows a change in the otherwise negative chorus

of tropes: the Afghan may be barbaric, but he is also brave and unyielding, which the British both feared and, in a way, admired. Hughes's story about Afghan women taking up arms to protect their honour (a female version of the martial trope) shows this mixed respect. In one shocking story, a 14-year-old girl insists on being the avenger of blood for her murdered father. She "sprang upon (the assassin) like a lioness and plunged her dagger into (his) heart" (198). Another story talks about a Khutak girl who killed the man she was forced to marry (198). These shocking stories that characters in *Ruhainah* tell each other were probably meant to shock Victorian readers, but they also help to paint a picture of Afghans as very honourable and brave people. Even the women are "spirited as tigresses" when it comes to revenge (198). These kinds of details, even though they are exaggerated for effect, add depth to the otherwise flat picture of Afghans in colonial texts. They show that in Orientalist writing, the Other could sometimes be praised for the same traits (martial prowess, honour culture) that made them dangerous.

My study's comparative analysis shows that British Orientalist depictions of Afghanistan in the 1800s were based on a set of common tropes, barbarism, fanaticism, lawlessness, exotic beauty, and martial ferocity that were used by different authors and genres with little change. Of course, each text has its own style and focus: Bellew reads like an imperial briefing full of anger and worry, Hughes like a romantic adventure with missionary ethnography, and Masson like a travel diary that goes back and forth between curiosity and prejudice. But they all take part in what Said calls the "corporate institution" of Orientalism, which creates knowledge about Afghanistan that is very similar in its main ideas (Said 3). This uniformity shows how Orientalist ideas became more powerful over time. The differences in tone or detail do not really weaken the common stereotypes; instead, they show how adaptable they are. The image of Afghanistan as the Orient stayed basically the same, whether it was in factual reporting or fiction. By revealing these imperial texts, we can see clearly how the British

view of Afghanistan was shaped by and shaped colonial policy, military action, and public opinion. In the next section, we will connect these results back to the study's original goals by showing how the tropes and themes we found directly answer the research questions we asked at the beginning of the study.

5.2 Re-aligning the Study with Research Objectives

The primary objectives of my research study were to find out what the most common figurative expressions (tropes) used by 19th-century British Orientalists when describing Afghanistan and to look at the different ways that selected works exhibit Afghan culture and civilisation. In the same way, the research was based on two questions: RQ1: What are the major tropes used by the 19th century British Orientalists in their depiction of Afghanistan? And RQ2: In what ways do the selected texts portray Afghan culture and civilization? After putting together the textual evidence from the previous analysis, it is now easy to see how the results fit with these goals and give full answers to the questions. The comparative analysis has found a number of common themes that are always present in the Orientalist portrayal of Afghanistan. To answer RQ1 directly, the selected British travel writers use a group of figurative constructs that come up often to talk about Afghanistan and its people. For example, Afghanistan is shown as a place of barbarism and savage customs, especially when compared to British civilisation. Bellew's stark statement that crossing into Afghanistan is to pass "at once from civilisation to barbarism" is a perfect example of this trope (2). The country is shown as a harsh frontier where the rules of civilised life do not apply, a place that "has long been a closed country to the European" and kept from progress on purpose (4). This kind of language makes Afghanistan seem like the opposite of Europe's culture, a living museum of backwardness. The fact that this idea shows up in all three texts, from Masson's notes on tribal primitiveness to Hughes's description of tribal justice as harsh and old-fashioned, shows that barbarity was a key way that Orientalists saw Afghan society.

Other than that, the image of the fanatical Muslim comes up a lot in these works. People often talk about or show Afghans as being so religious that they become violent. Bellew's story calls the Afghan a prisoner of "fanatic bigotry", and Hughes's book makes this more dramatic by having characters like the rogue *mullah* start a holy war (5). In colonial writing about Muslim Asia, the crazy *mullah* or fierce Ghazi became a common character. We can see this character clearly in *Ruhainah*'s Hasan, who literally brandishes a dagger while quoting the Koran's call to smite infidels (35). This trope made it seem like Afghans were against foreign influence (British or otherwise) because of blind religious hatred instead of rational patriotism, which took away Afghan agency. The prominence of fanaticism in the texts answers RQ1 by bringing attention to a key figurative expression the authors use: the idea that the Afghan is driven by irrational religious fervour.

When writing about Afghan political and social life, the Orientalist writers often use images of chaos. The words anarchy, insecurity, and tyranny are used to suggest a Hobbesian state of nature. Bellew's broad claim that oppression and violence are everywhere in the Afghan region and Masson's many stories of tribal raids, feuds, and the lack of effective law show this (Bellew 11). This idea of endemic chaos suggests that Afghans can't govern themselves or stay stable, which is a biased view that fits with imperial justifications for intervention (the idea that *pax Britannica* was needed to impose order). My study found that lawlessness is a major figurative expression that answers RQ1: all three authors, even though they write in different styles, use language that describes Afghan society as being in chaos and misrule.

Along with negative stereotypes, the authors also use romanticised images that make Afghanistan seem more exotic. This includes the interest in Afghan landscapes, clothing, and especially how Afghan women and home life are shown as exotic. Hughes gives the best examples, like when he uses metaphors of Oriental opulence to describe harems, wedding

feasts, and the physical beauty of Afghan maidens (for example, he compares a girl's beauty to princesses of Eastern legend, with "spangled heavens" and "perfumed" chambers (150, 49). Bellew and Masson, while not as poetic, still focus on the strange appeal of what they see. For example, Bellew lists the "varied historical associations" of Afghan lands (from Zoroastrian temples to Tartar ruins) in a way that makes you feel awe at how old and mysterious they are (4). The idea of exotic otherness is a key figurative strategy that makes Afghanistan seem fundamentally "different", a place of wonders and strange customs (Said 40). This both explains European curiosity and strengthens the gap between us and them. This trope is very common in the texts and is one of the main types of figurative expression that my study found.

The grudging respect for Afghan bravery and martial skill that comes up in each work is a little more mixed. The authors sometimes go from outright insults to a tone of respect for Afghan bravery or manliness. For example, Hughes calls Afghans "a nation of men" and talks about their historic conquests (37). In the same way, Afghan characters who show honour or bravery, like the vignettes of vengeful heroines or fearless chiefs, play into the colonial idea of the noble savage, which suggests that even in their savagery, Afghans have a certain raw virtue that the British admire (though in a paternalistic way). This trope is not as bad as the others, but it still works as an Orientalist idea because it idealises Afghans in a way that makes them seem like they are naturally warlike and proud, but not as refined as civilised Europeans. Finding this motif in all three texts (even if it is only a little bit in Bellew and Masson) adds to our list of major tropes. It shows that British writers always saw Afghans as warriors as much as they saw them as fanatics or barbarians.

The study has looked at the different ways that the chosen works show Afghan culture and civilisation in relation to RQ and RO 2. The results show that British Orientalist writers wrote about Afghan culture in a very selective and often distorted way, focussing on the parts that fit with their colonial ideas. For example, Afghan culture is shown in all of the texts as

being stuck in time or behind the West. For example, Bellew's story does not often mention any changes or progress in Afghan society; instead, he focusses on years of stagnation and decay. He calls Afghanistan "the home ever since of anarchy and desolation" after waves of conquest, which suggests that the society never got better or changed (4). Civilisation is shown as something outside of Afghanistan that has long been successfully excluded from the country (Bellew 12). This framing makes it seem like Afghan culture is naturally resistant to progress, which fits with colonial ideas of the hierarchy of civilisations. Hughes's book goes into more detail about daily life, but it still gives the impression of a traditional culture that has not changed and is governed by old customs like tribal *jirgas*, arranged marriages, and women's *purdah* (seclusion). Hughes shows Afghan civilisation as beautiful but old-fashioned by focussing on strange or old-fashioned customs. For example, the blood-feud guilds and feudal chieftains in *Ruhainah* make it seem like a pre-modern social order. Masson's stories sometimes mention things that are left over from a time when things were better, like ruined Buddhist stupas or crumbling castles. He uses these things to show how different the past was from the present, when things are not as good. When these writers talk about culture, they always make Afghanistan seem like it is stuck in time and has not changed since its civilisation peaked long ago, like when it was ruled by ancient empires or Ahmad Shah's 18th-century kingdom. This story conveniently leaves out or downplays any current cultural activity or change, which supports the Orientalist view of the East as a static backdrop in history (Said 206).

The way the authors write about Afghan morals and religious life shows what they think. Most of the time, Islam in Afghanistan is shown as a strong cultural force, but the way it is shown depends on the author's point of view, with some seeing it as fanatical and others as lax. Bellew paints the dominant religious atmosphere in the darkest tones, he talks about "Mohammedan bigotry" and suggests that Afghan religiosity is fanatical to the core (4).

Hughes shows both sides of the spectrum: on the one hand, the quiet piety of characters like Abdullah or the saintly “Mullah Ahmad” in the story, and on the other, the rabid zeal of characters like Hasan (11). This back-and-forth serves a story purpose by showing the differences between good Muslims and bad Muslims, but even the good Muslims are often shown to be superstitious or stuck in strict rules. For instance, the local *mullah* in *Ruhainah* tells mystical stories and reads love poetry as Sufi allegory, which makes Afghan spirituality seem romantic but also makes it seem strange (199–200). Masson’s own observations add an interesting twist: he says that Kabulis were surprisingly open-minded when it came to religion, with Sunnis and Shias mixing, Muslims treating local Christians (Armenians) with respect, and converts being seen in a practical way (2: 244–46). He even says that there was “very little religion” in Kabul in terms of strict practice, which suggests that the people there were less religious or more indifferent than expected (Masson 2: 245). Masson often talks about what he saw as Afghan dishonesty or vice in cities, which makes his portrayal of their religiosity less clear. As a result, the three authors give different pictures of Afghan religious culture: one sees it as fanatically fervent, another as mystically exotic, and the third as nominal and syncretic. The thing that all of these writers have in common is that they do not look at Afghan religious life on its own terms; they instead look at it through the lens of Western norms and worries. The underlying message is that Afghan Islam, whether too strict or too relaxed, is not in line with the Protestant Christian ideal that the British implicitly support. This point of view fits into the larger picture of Afghan civilisation as morally and spiritually other either threateningly devout or not enlightened enough, but in either case fundamentally different from the West’s religious experience.

When writing about Afghan culture, Orientalist authors spend a lot of time on social norms, often with a tone of condescending interest or moral judgement. One important part is how gender roles and women’s status are shown. Hughes’s book gives the most in-depth look

at Afghan life, showing how polygamy and *purdah* are important parts of it. The main character's father has a harem and even marries a young second wife, which causes problems in the family (39–40). The story includes a dramatic kidnapping of a woman and a scene where a man negotiates a bride price, both of which show how women are seen as oppressed and treated as objects in Afghan society. These were things that people in the West thought were typical of an Oriental culture, exciting and wrong. Hughes also talks about how women in Afghanistan have power, which might have interested Victorian readers. For example, women like Ruhainah and Shaidy show bravery, and the avenging maiden of Tirah (mentioned earlier) shows that Afghan women could be very independent in very difficult situations (198–199). Still, these examples are seen as oddities or exceptions, and the overall impression is that Afghan women are veiled, isolated, and at the mercy of a patriarchal society. This is very much in line with Orientalist convention, which tended to either eroticise the passive harem woman or eroticise the rare active heroine, but in both cases define her by how she is different from the liberated Western woman. Masson and Bellew only briefly talk about gender (their works are more about public and political issues), but even Masson mentions things like bride kidnapping or child marriage in passing, usually with disapproval or shock. For example, Masson talks about a forced marriage he saw as proof of Afghan rudeness and tribal law over humane sentiment. When it comes to other customs, all three mention hospitality as a cultural trait, usually with real appreciation. Masson, in particular, often benefited from Afghan hospitality while travelling. He says that when he arrived in a village, the hosts would greet him with “*Urkalah razi*” (you are welcome) and treat him well (1:91–92). He compares the warm hospitality at home to the fierce fighting in battle, which suggests that Afghans have two sides to their personalities (1:91). Bellew also talks about the code of hospitality, saying that even rough tribesmen would honourably escort and feed guests. However, he often follows these acknowledgements with stories of betrayal that hurt the good image. The authors' biases

in how they portray Afghan culture are clear in this selective emphasis: they show hospitality as a quaint custom but then overshadow it with betrayal. Even good customs are often shown as contradictory or overshadowed by bad ones (a pattern we saw with religion as well). The depictions of Afghan social life focus on things that were shocking, strange, or extreme to British readers, like blood feuds, complicated codes of honour and revenge (*badal*), women staying out of sight, polygamous families, busy bazaar scenes, and so on. There is not much mention of how things are normal or similar to life in the West. This way of showing things answers RQ2 by showing that the authors do not see Afghan culture as a whole, changing system, but as a collection of stereotypical behaviours that make Afghanistan seem like an old, exotic society.

When it comes to showing Afghan civilisation as a whole, including government, education, the arts, and so on, the Orientalist works give a broken and mostly bad picture. It shows that government is tyrannical and feudal. Bellew and Masson, who wrote not long after the First Anglo-Afghan War, say that the Barakzai rulers and local chiefs were greedy and incompetent. Bellew calls the Amir of Kabul's domain the "possession of... Afghan" rulers who are jealous and divided (4). Masson, on the other hand, goes into great detail about how the Kandahar Sardars are extorting Hindu merchants and how misrule is making trade worse and harder. Their stories do not mention any administrative systems, laws, or intellectual life that would show that a civilisation was working. Hughes's book is fiction, so it does not directly talk about government. However, its plot shows Afghan leaders as either tyrannical (the rebel chiefs and bandit leaders) or at best weak but kind (the old Amir Dost Mohammed is said to be "enjoying some repose" but is mostly absent from action (1). It is clear that these texts do not show any positive images of institutions like schools, courts, or scholarly activity. This makes the reader think that Afghan civilisation has no good institutions at all. Hughes talks about Afghan achievements in the past, like architecture and poetry, but only in the past: "They

created a school of architecture... They gave a poetry to the East that is more pure... than any other” (vi-vii). This makes it sound like Afghanistan does not contribute much to civilised arts or sciences today. This supports the Orientalist story of a civilisation that is falling apart. Afghan civilisation is shown to be a contradiction in terms: the country is seen as culturally rich in a folkloric or antiquarian sense, but uncivilised in the modern sense of social order and intellectual progress. This picture fits with imperial logic because it suggests that Afghanistan’s once-refined or high culture is long gone, so Afghans might need or benefit from outside help.

We can say that the study has met its goals by putting these results back in line with the original research goals. It has found the main themes that British Orientalists used, such as barbarism, fanaticism, exoticism, and martial pride. It has also looked at how Afghan culture was portrayed, showing that it was very stereotyped and important to imperial stories. The main themes found in RQ1 make up the main ideas in the cultural depictions found in RQ2. For example, the idea of lawlessness is what makes Afghan social life seem chaotic; the idea of fanaticism is what makes Afghan religiosity seem strange; and the idea of exotic allure is what makes Afghan customs and home life seem strange, and so on. So, the research questions have been answered in a way that connects them all together: the tropes (figurative expressions) are the main parts that make up the overall picture of Afghan culture and civilisation in these texts. Nevertheless, I will look at what these findings mean for research and theory as a whole, especially in light of postcolonial critique and Said’s theory of Orientalism.

5.3 Scholarly Contributions and Theoretical Insights

The following section is going to discuss about the study’s intellectual significance and the fresh insights it uncovered after laying together the contrasting findings. Looking at 19th-century British Orientalist texts about Afghanistan through the lens of Said’s Orientalism adds to our understanding of colonial discourse and postcolonial studies. We can talk about these contributions in terms of how this work moves postcolonial critique forward by combining

literary and historical evidence (Section 5.3.1) and how it opens up new ways to get Afghan representation back from the colonial archives (Section 5.3.2). The study shows that Said's ideas can be used in a specific regional context (Afghanistan) that has not been looked at as much in colonial discourse analysis as British India or the Middle East. This study looks at travel writing (Bellew, Masson) and a novel (Hughes) together in a single theoretical framework. This gives a more complete picture of how Orientalist tropes spread across different genres and influenced each other. It also shows how texts can both show and sometimes go against the main discourse in subtle ways. We go into more detail about these academic contributions and theoretical thoughts below.

5.3.1 Advancing Postcolonial Critique through Thematic Integration

One of the main academic contributions of this thesis is how it combines literary analysis with postcolonial critique. The study goes beyond looking at just one text by systematically finding recurring themes in many works. This shows a patterned discourse. In this way, it backs up Edward Said's claim that Orientalism was a "system of knowledge" that made the Orient look very similar in different texts and situations (Said 6). The tropes that come out of it, barbarism, fanaticism, exoticism, and so on, are almost like a semantic lexicon of British Orientalism when it comes to Afghanistan. The fact that these ideas show up in a government doctor's travelogue, a Protestant missionary's novel, and an adventure's memoir is a strong support for Said's claim that Orientalist writers, no matter what their personal reasons were, all wrote in the same way that made non-European people seem different from Europeans.

The study also broadens postcolonial critique to include both factual colonial knowledge production and imaginative literature by combining results from different genres. Historians might read Bellew and Masson's travelogues as historical accounts, while literary scholars might read Hughes's *Ruhainah* as an adventure novel. This thesis, on the other hand,

puts them in conversation with each other to show that the travel writing's imaginative elements and the novel's factual pretences both serve the same ideological goals. Sometimes, Bellew's writing sounds like a policy memo. He talks about Afghanistan's future in terms of geopolitics and says that the spread of "Western civilisation" into Central Asia is "irresistible" and necessary (4). Hughes's book is fiction, but it tells a story that sends a similar message: the British character (Major Bernard) becomes a protector and moral judge in a chaotic Afghan setting, which implicitly supports the British presence. The thesis uses these texts together to make a postcolonial critique that goes beyond disciplinary boundaries. It shows how colonial ideology affected both official and popular representations. This integrated approach is an important academic contribution because it shows how these works really affected people: travelogues shaped public opinion and policymakers, while novels and stories shaped people's imaginations. The Victorian public who read *Ruhainah* or Masson's published journals would have taken in a lot of the same Orientalist ideas, which then became part of the cultural common sense about Afghanistan. In this way, the thesis gives us a way to look at colonial discourse from many angles, which can be used in other colonial situations as well.

The study adds to postcolonial theory by showing how certain Orientalist tropes were used to justify and make imperial attitudes seem normal. The thesis shows the classic colonial idea of the civilising mission in action by looking at Bellew's metaphor of Afghanistan as the "sick man of Asia" who needs a Western "physician" (Bellew 5). This is a clear example of what Said meant when he said that the Orient is a place that the West "needs" to fix or save (Said 206). The constant theme of Afghan treachery (the poisonings, betrayals, and perfidies that run through these texts) also makes Afghan resistance or independence seem less legitimate. This is a common tactic in colonial stories where rebellions are blamed on the colonised people's supposed natural treachery instead of real problems. The study makes the postcolonial critique of how empire writes the colonised as unworthy of self-rule stronger by

showing that this is true across different authors. When you look at the bigger picture of the Orientalist library, each theme from Chapter 5.1 adds to our theoretical understanding of how power and knowledge are connected. For instance, the idea that there is no law in Afghan society helped the British make the case that only imperial rule could bring peace (the *pax Britannica* rhetoric). In real life, these kinds of arguments were used to justify British invasions, like the Second Anglo-Afghan War of 1878–80, which was fought under the pretence of putting in place a more orderly government. Through textual evidence, the thesis adds to scholarship by making these connections clear: it connects what is shown in narrative to what is done in policy. This meets one of the main goals of post-colonialism, which is to show the discursive foundations of colonial rule.

This study also adds to Edward Said's theoretical framework on Orientalism by looking at it in the specific case of Afghanistan. Said's original work was mostly about the Middle East (Egypt and the Levant) and British and French scholarship. This thesis shows that the same Orientalist ideas were at work on the Empire's Indian-Afghan border. This makes postcolonial analysis more useful in different places and cultures. The British did not officially colonise Afghanistan in the 19th century, but it was very much involved in imperial rivalries (the Great Game) and was looked at through Britain's Orientalist lens. The academic contribution here is to show that Orientalism is not just limited to colonised countries that were directly ruled; it also changed how people thought (and did not think) about independent areas that imperial powers wanted to control. The study shows that British writings about Afghanistan used the same language as writings about Egypt or India, which shows how widespread the Orientalist worldview is in European thought. This backs up Said's claim that Orientalism was a "cultural apparatus" that spanned many colonies and areas of influence (Said 204). It also encourages future researchers to use the same methods of trope analysis and comparative reading that this

thesis used to look at other areas of colonial interaction that have not been studied as much, like Central Asia and Persia.

The study also adds to the theory by pointing out the tensions and cracks in the Orientalist representations, which can be a good place to start a deeper critique. The results mostly back up Said's model, but they also show times when the texts go against their own stereotypes, like when Masson was surprised by how tolerant Kabul was of different religions or when Hughes showed Afghan honour codes in a way that was somewhat respectful. These events show that the British authors' biases were sometimes challenged by the truth of Afghan culture, even if only for a short time. Postcolonial theory often talks about how colonial discourse is not one thing but full of contradictions (for example, Bhabha's idea of ambivalence). These texts show this ambivalence by showing Afghans as both fanatics and pragmatically irreligious, or as bloodthirsty savages and honourable hosts at the same time. By focussing on these, the thesis adds to our theoretical understanding by showing that Orientalist writers sometimes struggled (maybe without realising it) with evidence that did not fit their story, which led to contradictory portrayals. This does not clear their works of blame, but it does help us understand how colonial writers dealt with their mental health. My research's thematic integration, bringing together literary tropes, historical context, and theoretical interpretation, moves postcolonial critique forward by giving a detailed example of how Orientalism works. It proves important ideas in Said's theory with real textual evidence and also improves them by showing how they are used in specific situations and how they are slightly different. My study is a scholarly link between abstract theory and specific textual analysis. It shows how each trope in a colonial text can be understood as part of a bigger structure of imperial ideology.

5.3.2 Reclaiming Afghan Representation from Colonial Texts

Another important aspect of this study is what it means for taking back Afghan representation from colonial stories. A close look at Bellew's, Hughes's, and Masson's portrayals not only shows their biases and stereotypes, but it also suggests ways to get a more accurate or balanced view of Afghan society by turning their arguments around. The main goal was to look at how Orientalist depictions were made, but there was also an underlying goal, in line with postcolonial goals, to recognise and start to fix how Afghan voices were silenced or distorted in those depictions. This part talks about how Orientalist texts can equip the modern scholars (and Afghans) with the power to question and fix the historical record.

The uniqueness of my thesis lies in breaking down the authority of the colonial portrayals. Each of the identified tropes is a made-up idea that says more about British colonial psychology than it does about what life is really like in Afghanistan. The first step in getting back representation is to realise this. For example, when we see that a lot of British writers called Afghanistan barbaric and unredeemable, we can ask what that meant and whose point of view it was. It was clear that it showed the view of the outsider-colonizer. In doing so, it made it less important how Afghans of that time would have talked about themselves and their society. An Afghan historian writing in Kabul or Herat in the 1870s might have focused on very different things, like how strong his people were, how important their traditions were, or how unfair it was for foreigners to get involved. But there are no such views in the British texts. Reclaiming representation means looking for those missing voices or at least admitting that they are missing and important. The critique in my study implicitly suggests that scholars look at indigenous Afghan sources (if they can find them) or oral histories that might tell a different story than the Orientalist one. The dissertation helps future researchers find out what parts of Afghan history and culture have been misrepresented and need to be looked at again through local accounts by showing exactly how and where the colonial texts are biased.

Another way this study helps Afghan representation is by making the Afghan people who are the subjects of the colonial texts more real, since those texts often dehumanise or make them look like caricatures. The thesis mostly looked at what British authors thought, but to understand the Afghan side, you often had to read between the lines. For instance, when Hughes talks about an Afghan father's worry about his daughter's marriage or a young Afghan student's love-struck poetry, you can see universal human experiences behind these stories: love between parents and children, romance between young people, and devotion to God. If we take away Hughes's eroticising filter, we can see that the Afghan people in the story are driven by real emotions and reasons, not just the stereotypes of fanaticism or savagery that Hughes gives them. The thesis does a good job of separating the real human element from the Orientalist overlay by pointing out how Hughes used those filters. This gives us a chance to think about those characters and situations in a new way, using Afghan terms. Reclaiming representation means, for example, reading a scene like the call to prayer in *Ruhainah* not as an interesting setting for betrayal, but as a real moment of faith for the people who live there. The British text briefly acknowledges this point of view but does not make it the main focus. The academic analysis of the text gives us the tools we need to do these re-readings.

The study also shows how important it is to put colonial texts in the context of Afghan life. There are historical facts that the British authors left out that can be used to argue against or put into context many of their descriptions. For instance, Bellew's criticism of Afghan barbarism left out the fact that Afghans often resisted foreign influence as a logical response to British (and earlier) invasions. An Afghan historian would point this out. Masson's complaints about anarchy do not take into account the decades of chaos that the imperial entanglements that Britain started (like the First Anglo-Afghan War) caused. By pointing out these gaps, the thesis gives historians a way to fill in the blanks: to reclaim Afghan representation, they need to tell the story of Afghanistan in the 1800s with a focus on Afghan agency. That means

understanding that what British writers called anarchy could be seen as Afghans trying to be free and working out how to get power through their own systems. Colonials called it fanaticism, but it could also be seen as strong opposition to colonialism. The criticism of Orientalist texts shows how Afghan actions and traits were framed in a bad light. By reversing this process, one can reclaim a story that gives Afghan perspectives and reasons the respect they deserve.

Said's Orientalism is a way of looking at things that helps with the reclamation process by encouraging a voyage in, listening to and amplifying the views of the people who were colonised (Said's call for stories by the oppressed). This thesis did not include texts written by Afghans because it was mostly about colonial portrayals, but its findings strongly suggest that these kinds of perspectives should be included. One possible result would be to look at these British texts alongside writings from Afghanistan at the same time, if they are available. For example, Afghan poets like Khushal Khan Khattak (17th century) or later folk songs and stories might show how Afghans saw themselves and foreigners in ways that go against British stereotypes. This study could lead to more research into Afghan tribal genealogies, local histories (like the chronicles of the Afghan royal court), or even early 20th-century Afghan nationalist writings to see how they deal with the British stereotypes. To reclaim representation in this way means to create a more balanced history that gives Afghan voices the same weight as colonial ones. This thesis's detailed documentation of Orientalist tropes is a starting point for this kind of work: knowing what needs to be fought against is half the battle in making a counter-narrative.

Also, the study's finding of inconsistencies within colonial texts (as mentioned earlier) can be used to give Afghan characters and historical figures back their power. For instance, Hughes's Afghan hero, Abdullah, is shown to be both good and bad; he is noble but has trouble in a violent setting. Instead of only seeing him through Hughes's paternalistic lens, you can

take back his story by focussing on his good leadership qualities and seeing his flaws as the result of a complicated social environment (not racial predisposition). This means that any time colonial texts accidentally made an Afghan look sympathetic or complicated, those parts can be expanded on and taken out of the colonial context. This lets Afghan people become full-fledged characters in British stories instead of just objects. This method fits with a bigger postcolonial project that might involve rewriting or reimagining colonial stories from the point of view of the colonised. Novelists and historians have done this in different situations, like when Jean Rhys rewrote *Jane Eyre* from the point of view of a Caribbean character or when indigenous historians wrote back to settler accounts. This thesis is analytical, but it also sets the stage for creative and scholarly reclaiming by showing exactly where and how British writers get the people of Afghanistan wrong or do not give them enough credit.

The academic work here does more than just criticise; it also points to rebuilding. The study shows how Orientalist portrayals work, which will help future efforts to tell the stories of Afghan history and culture without using those tools. It shows that the English sources we use to learn about 19th-century Afghanistan are heavily influenced by colonial ideas. This makes us want to learn more from Afghan sources or at least look at the English sources again with a critical, decolonising eye. This is in line with Said's hope in *Orientalism* that understanding the discourse of Orientalism is a step towards breaking its power and letting silenced voices be heard (Said 24). For Afghanistan, a country that outsiders often romanticise or vilify, reclaiming representation is especially important right now. It can help change old stereotypes and give people a better understanding of Afghan culture beyond the simple images that came out in the 19th century and, sadly, still exist in some form.

Works Cited

- Anwar, Zahid and Waqar, Ahmad. "Orientalism and the Depiction of Muslims: A Tale of Two Cities in Elphinstone's 'Kingdom Of Caubul.'" *Journal of Islamic Civilization and Culture (JICC)*, vol. 3, no. 1, 20 June 2020, pp. 62–72.
- Anwar, Zahid, and Waqar Ahmad. "Orientalism and Depiction of Muslims of Pak-Afghan Region in Victorian Travelogues during the Tournament of Shadows." *Al-Azhaar*, vol. 5, no. 2, Dec. 2019, https://doi.org/https://www.academia.edu/43480737/Orientalism_And_Depiction_Of_Muslims_Of_Pak_Afghan_Region_In_Victorian_Travelogues_During_The_Tournament_Of_Shadows.
- Banerjee, Sukanya. "Chapter 4 - The Victorians: Empire and the East." *Orientalism and Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 2019, pp. 81–100.
- Bayly, Martin J. *Taming the Imperial Imagination: Colonial Knowledge, International Relations, and the Anglo-Afghan Encounter, 1808-1878*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Bellew, Henry Walter. *From the Indus to the Tigris: A Narrative of a Journey through the Countries of Balochistan, Afghanistan, Khorassan and Iran, in 1872, Together with a Synoptical Grammar and Vocabulary of the Brahoe Language, and a Record of the Meteorological Observations and Altitudes on the March from the Indus to the Tigris*. Trubner & Co, 1874.
- Bellew, H. W. *An Enquiry into the Ethnography of Afghanistan*, Prepared for and Presented to the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists (London, September, 1891). Oriental University Institute, 1891.
- Bellew, Henry Walter. *The Races of Afghanistan, Being a Brief Account of the Principal Nations Inhabiting That Country*. Thacker, 1880.
- Bellew, Henry Walter. *Journal of a Political Mission to Afghanistan in 1857 under Major (Now Colonel) Lumsden: With an Account of the Country and People*. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1862.
- Bellew, Henry Walter. *Our Punjab Frontier: Being a Concise Account of the Various Tribes by Which the North-West Frontier of British India Is Inhabited, Shewing Its Present Unprotected and Unsatisfactory State, and the Urgent Necessity That Exits for Its*

- Immediate Reconstruction, Also, Brief Remarks on Afghanistan, and Our Policy in Reference to That Country.* Wyman Bros, 1868.
- Bellew, Henry Walter. *Afghanistan and the Afghans, Being a Brief Review of the History of the Country, and Account of Its People, with a Special Reference to the Present Crisis and War with the Amir Sher Ali Khan.* S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1879.
- Bird, Hazel Sheeky. *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature, 1918-1950.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Christou, Chris. "The Anti-Conquest, Travel Writing, and Planetary Consciousness: Mary-Louise Pratt." *The End of Tourism Podcast - S1 #11*, www.theendoftourism.com/episodes/the-anti-conquest-travel-writing-and-planetary-consciousness-mary-louise-pratt#:~:text=Consciousness%20www,Could. Accessed 3 Mar. 2025.
- Clark, Kaitlyn, et al. "The White Man's Burden (1899)." *Victorian Prose and Poetry*, www.saskoer.ca/victorianproseandpoetry/chapter/the-white-mans-burden-by-rudyard-kipling/. Accessed 10 Mar. 2025.
- Clark, Kate. "Creating the 'idea' of a Country: The 'Afghanistan in World Literature' Dossier." *Afghanistan Analysts Network - English*, 9 Nov. 2022, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/dossiers/creating-the-idea-of-a-country-the-afghanistan-in-world-literature-dossier/. Accessed 13 Mar. 2025.
- Cohn, Bernard S. *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization.* Oxford University Press, 2001.
- D. Hopkins, Benjamin. "Taming the Imperial Imagination: Colonial Knowledge, International Relations and the Anglo-Afghan Encounter, 1808–1878: *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*: Vol 31, No 1, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09557571.2018.1439317. Accessed 13 Mar. 2025.
- Dalrymple, William. *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan.* Vol. 1st, Bloomsbury, 2021.
- Drephal, Maximilian. "Colonial enquiry, pathology and the making of the 'Afghan Crisis' (c. 1857–1878)." *Critical Military Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2 July 2024, pp. 279–302, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2024.2394742>.

- Fowler, Corinne. “‘replete with danger’: The legacy of British travel narratives to news media coverage of Afghanistan.” *Studies in Travel Writing*, vol. 11, no. 2, Sept. 2007, pp. 155–175, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645145.2007.9634826>.
- Fowler, Corinne. “Ethics.” *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies A Critical Glossary*, Anthem Press, 2019, pp. 81–83.
- Fowler, Corinne. *Chasing Tales: Travel Writing, Journalism and the History of British Ideas about Afghanistan*. First Edition ed., vol. 1, Rodopi, 2007.
- Gholi, Ahmad, et al. “A Study of Antinarrative Elements in Alexander Burnes’ Travels into Bokhara.” *Critical Literary Studies*, University of Kurdistan, 1 May 2022, www.doi.org/10.34785/J014.2022.621.
- Ghosh, Aryama. “The ‘Savage’, the ‘Fanatic’, and the Ambiguity: Colonial ‘Code of Pacification’, Afghan Tribes, and the Metamorphosis of the Stereotyping.” *Journal of Adivasi and Indigenous Studies (JAIS)*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, 56-66, XIV, no. 1, Feb. 2024, pp. 56–66.
- Green, Nile. *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Hanifi, Shah Mahmoud. “A genealogy of Orientalism in Afghanistan: The Colonial Image Lineage.” *Middle East Studies after September 11*, 2018, pp. 50–80, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004359901_004
- Hanifi, Shah Mahmoud. “The Pashtun Counter-Narrative.” *Middle East Critique*, vol. 25, no. 4, July 2016, pp. 385–400, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2016.1208354>.
- Hopkins, B. *The Making of Modern Afghanistan*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Hughes, Thomas Patrick. *Ruhainah, the Maid of Herat; a Story of Afghan Life*. Second ed., Thomas Whittaker 2 and 3 Bible House, 1896.
- Hughes, Thomas. *Some Account of the Afghans, And of the Peshawar Church Mission (Together with a Paper on the Israelitish Origin of the Afghan Nation.)*. Victoria Press, 1877.
- Jalalzai, Zubeda. *Literary License and the West’s Romance with Afghanistan*. Lexington Books, 2023.
- Kakar, Barkat Shah, et al. “Legitimizing the Empire: A Postcolonial Reading of the Representation of Afghanistan in Rudyard Kipling’s Story, ‘The Man who would be King.’” *PASHTO*, vol. 52, no. 665, 14 June 2023, <https://doi.org/https://pashto.org.pk/index.php/path/article/view/359>.

- Kakar, Barkat Shah. "The Pursuit of Pashtoon Image in the Orientalists Discourse." *TAKATOO*, vol. 3, no. 6, Dec. 2011, pp. 33–46, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/https://www.uob.edu.pk/journals/takatoo/data/2011/Jul-Dec/English/33-46.pdf>.
- Kakar, Barkat Shah. "The Martial Race Theory and Pashtuns: A Historical Analysis". *PASHTO*, Vol. 50, no. 662, Dec. 2021, <http://pashto.org.pk/index.php/path/article/view/241>.
- Khan, Abdul Waseh, et al. "The Amir's homily of Rudyard Kipling: A binary of colonial attitude towards Afghans." *International Research Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 1, 31 Mar. 2022, pp. 124–131, [https://doi.org/10.53575/irjmss.v3.1\(22\)13.124-131](https://doi.org/10.53575/irjmss.v3.1(22)13.124-131).
- Khan, Timur. "Invisible Indian Writers in Colonial Travel Writing." *Sacred Footsteps*, 8 Feb. 2023, sacredfootsteps.com/2021/04/15/from-punjab-to-afghanistan-in-the-footsteps-of-18th-century-indian-travellers/.
- Leonard, Zak. "Colonial Ethnography on India's north-west frontier, 1850–1910." *The Historical Journal*, vol. 59, no. 1, 9 Mar. 2016, pp. 175–196, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0018246x1500014x>.
- Mairs, Rachel. "Afghan Interpreters: An Occluded History." *Everyday Orientalism*, 26 Aug. 2021, everydayorientalism.wordpress.com/2021/08/26/afghan-interpreters-an-occluded-history/.
- Manchanda, Nivi. "The Imperial Sociology of the 'Tribe' in Afghanistan." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2, 22 Nov. 2017, pp. 165–189, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817741267>.
- Manchanda, Nivi. *Imagining Afghanistan: The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- Marsden, Magnus. "Guest Post: The Imperial Sociology of the 'Tribe' in Afghanistan." *Moderncontemporary*, 11 Feb. 2016, moderncontemporarybham.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/guest-post-the-imperial-sociology-of-the-tribe-in-afghanistan/.

- Masson, Charles. *Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, the Panjab and Kalât, during a Residence in Those Countries*. Vol. 1–4, Richard Bentley, 1844.
- McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. Routledge, 1995.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses.” *Feminist Review*, vol. 12, no. 30, 1984, pp. 333–358. 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1395054>.
- Najarian, James. “Alexander Burnes’s Travels into Bokhara (1834).” *BRANCH*, July 2019, branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=james-najarian-alexander-burness-travels-into-bokhara-1834. Accessed 28 Apr. 2025.
- Nawandish, Maria. *Representations of Afghan Women by Nineteenth Century British Travel Writers*, Bilkent University, Turkey, 2015. <http://hdl.handle.net/11693/29042>.
- Prakash, Gyan. “Orientalism now.” *History and Theory*, vol. 34, no. 3, Oct. 1995, pp. 199–212, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505621>.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, 1992.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1979.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1994.
- Shah, Zahid Ali, et al. “Orientalist constructions of the Frontier Pashtuns: On the postcolonial history and repercussions.” *Asian Ethnicity*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2022, pp. 784–802, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2022.2039059>.
- Slattery, Taryn. “Feminism 101: What Is Orientalism?” *FEM., FEM Newsmagazine*, 10 Apr. 2019, femmagazine.com/feminism-101-what-is-orientalism/.
- Spurr, David. *Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Waliszewski, Mia. “The Role of Travel Writing in Reconstructing the History of Latin America.” *Latin American Travelogues*, library.brown.edu/cds/travelogues/waliszewski.html#:~:text=The%20Role%20of%20Travel%20Writing,the%20land%20by%20having. Accessed 3 Mar. 2025.
- Yeğenoğlu, Meyda. *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Zahoor, Asiya. “Colonial gazes and Mythic landscapes: A critical study of european travelogues on Kashmir.” *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, vol. 4, no. 1, 30 June 2023, <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.2115>.