

THE GRIEVABILITY OF THE CHILD SOLDIER
IN THE BATTLE PAINTINGS OF
ELIZABETH THOMPSON BUTLER (1846-1933)

by

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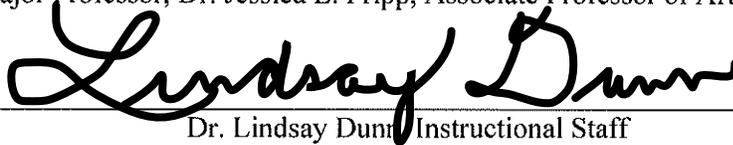
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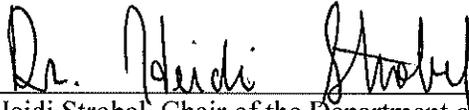
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Introduction

Lady Elizabeth Thompson Butler (1846-1933) garnered great renown as a British military painter by instigating a significant stylistic shift in battle painting when she exhibited *Calling the Roll after an Engagement, Crimea*, better known as *The Roll Call* (fig. 1), at the Royal Academy in 1874 to massive critical and popular acclaim. Butler eschewed subject matter typical of military paintings in the preceding decades: topographic battle scenes, images of the revered officer class, or sanitized domestic pictures of soldiers and their families. In *The Roll Call*, a group of soldiers, exhausted from a recent battle, stretches horizontally across the canvas in a snowy landscape. An anonymous mounted officer to the far left appears larger than the other figures in the composition, but Butler does not emphasize him as the primary subject. The officer's face turns away from the viewer and down toward the line of men as he observes them quietly. Butler treats all of the men as visual equals, giving them individualized faces and personalities as they contend with the horror of battle physically and mentally. Corpses of horse and man alike litter a hill in the distance.

The Roll Call is typical of Butler's battle paintings in its emphasis on the individual heroism and sacrifice of the common foot-soldier. In this work and her subsequent paintings, Butler highlighted the gruesome reality of injury or death as the inherent price of warfare. Butler portrayed the dire cost of war not only for the older and battle-weary soldier but also for younger recruits and the youthful members of the military band, figures that battle painters did not usually emphasize. In this thesis, I argue that Elizabeth Thompson Butler utilized the vulnerable child soldier figure in her paintings as a vehicle of emotive force and narrative drama. Butler's paintings of injured and deceased youths engaged with a sentimental mode of storytelling that evoked emotion within the viewer. Butler's incorporation of youth and children within her body of work enhanced the pathos of her scenes through bodily compassion, dramatic narrative

devices, and the manipulation of contemporary racial anxieties. These strategies were effective because contemporary discourses surrounding the value of children's lives increased the grievability of their deaths.

Art historians pay little scholarly attention to Butler except for a few key studies.¹ These scholars point out the youth of her soldiers but none have fully explored the significance of the child soldier in her oeuvre. The leading source on Butler's work is Paul Usherwood and Jenny Spencer-Smith's monograph *Lady Butler: Battle Artist, 1846-1933*, published in conjunction with the first large-scale exhibition of Butler's paintings at the National Army Museum in London in 1987. More recently, English literature scholar Catherine Wynne published a biography on Butler, *Lady Butler, War Artist and Traveller, 1846-1933*. By focusing on Butler's representations of the child soldier, I contribute original readings of Butler's paintings, placing them in conversation with discourses of childhood, bodily sympathy, motherhood, and empire. I also add to discussions of late-Victorian battle painting more generally, investigating the role that emotional response and sentiment played in the public's praise of Butler's battle paintings and what their response suggests about the contemporary political climate.

Although Butler achieved great artistic success, if feminist art historians mention Butler at all in their discussions of women artists, they dismiss her career. Their disinterest may be due

¹ Paul Usherwood and Jenny Spencer-Smith, *Lady Butler, Battle Artist, 1846-1933* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1987); Catherine Wynne, *Lady Butler: War Artist and Traveller, 1846-1933* (Chicago: Four Courts Press, 2019); Matthew Paul Lalumia, *Realism and Politics in Victorian Art of the Crimean War* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984); J.W.M. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Paul Usherwood, "Lady Butler's Irish Pictures," *Irish Arts Review (1984-1987)* 4, no. 4 (1987): 47-49; Paul Usherwood, "Elizabeth Thompson Butler: The Consequences of Marriage," *Woman's Art Journal* 9, no. 1 (1988): 30-34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358360>; Paul Usherwood, "Elizabeth Thompson Butler: A Case of Tokenism," *Woman's Art Journal* 11, no. 2 (1991): 14-18.

to Butler's ambivalence towards forging an outwardly feminist legacy for herself, as she often conformed to expectations for Victorian women in her personal life and did not engage publicly in feminist causes. Art historian Patrizia Di Bello attributes feminist scholars' disinterest in Butler to her relative success in sanctioned artistic spaces and her uneasy location in the history of modern art.² As a painter of battle scenes, Butler pursued a historically masculine genre of painting that has not received much attention. She also produced art that appealed to sentiment, a genre that art historians tend to dismiss. I situate Butler's career within feminist methodologies that privilege emotional responses as a legitimate form of historical inquiry.³

According to art historian Rebecca Bedell, sentimental art intends to elicit emotions from the viewer such as "tenderness, affection, pity, compassion, patriotism, and nostalgia" but also sadness and grief.⁴ The discipline of art history has been highly antagonistic towards sentimental art and art that prospered in popular culture. Although the distrust of sentimentalism in art originated in mid-nineteenth-century France, Clement Greenberg codified it in the twentieth century.⁵ Greenberg's theorization privileged art of the avant-garde, and he conflated sentimentalism in subject matter with "kitsch." The sentimental was thus "indecorous emotional

² Patrizia Di Bello, "Elizabeth Thompson and 'Patsy' Cornwallis West as Carte-de-Visite Celebrities," *History of Photography* 35, no. 3 (2011): 242, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2011.592406>.

³ For instance, see Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴ Rebecca Bedell, *Moved to Tears: Rethinking Art of the Sentimental in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 6.

⁵ Bedell, 3; Katie Hornstein, *Picturing War in France, 1792-1856* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 172.

pandering, seducing gullible viewers with an appeal to their softer emotions.”⁶ Scholars then used the denigration of sentimentalism and mass culture as an excuse to disregard the cultural production and consumption of women, who were often drawn to emotional subject matter and domestic themes. However, an investigation into the critical and popular response to Butler’s early paintings reveals that contemporary viewers valued the emotional reaction that her works produced. Butler’s paintings, as images that found wide appeal in popular culture, grant us insight into “the real spirit of [the] age, the collective *mentalité*,” in the words of cultural historian Jeffrey Richards.⁷

Butler became a celebrity when she exhibited *The Roll Call* in 1874.⁸ Her distinctive approach captured the heart of the British public as her paintings went on tour around the country and the reproductive rights were sold for small fortunes.⁹ Collectors, art dealers, and even the Prince of Wales begged the commissioner of the painting, Charles Galloway, an industrialist from Manchester, to sell the painting to them. However, he only agreed to sell it to Queen Victoria when she requested the honor.¹⁰ In the coming years, the national attitude shifted towards jingoism at the end of the century, defined by extreme patriotism and imperialistic

⁶ Bedell, *Moved to Tears*, 3.

⁷ Asa Briggs et al., “What Is the History of Popular Culture?,” in *What Is History Today ... ?*, ed. Juliet Gardiner (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1988), 120–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19161-1_11.

⁸ For an in-depth look at Butler’s engagement with her own celebrity in the form of *carte-de-visite* photographs, see Di Bello, “Elizabeth Thompson and ‘Patsy’ Cornwallis West as Carte-de-Visite Celebrities.”

⁹ Charles Galloway sold the copyright for *The Roll Call* at £1,200 and for *Quatre Bras* at £2,000. See Di Bello, 246.

¹⁰ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, *Lady Butler, Battle Artist*, 29.

foreign policy, and the public no longer preferred Butler's intimate examinations of the human cost of war.¹¹ Her works received some critical attention in the 1880s and 1890s, but she never reached the level of fame she experienced in the few years following *The Roll Call*.

Nevertheless, she rarely strayed from her original intention to paint not for the "glory of war, but to portray its pathos and heroism."¹² She consistently placed pictorial emphasis on the rank-and-file soldier, believing that these men and boys were worthy of depiction that rivaled battle paintings of the past. Furthermore, if they died in service to the country, Butler believed their deaths should spawn feelings of loss and grief, especially if they were young men.

Philosopher Dr. Judith Butler posits that some lives are considered grievable while others are not.¹³ Dr. Butler further argues that "war is framed in certain ways to control and heighten affect in relation to the differential grievability of lives."¹⁴ For Dr. Butler, our lives are precarious in that they can end at any time. Because all lives are precarious, those with power will exploit the precarity of people with less power, deemed ungrievable, to protect the lives of those who they believe matter.¹⁵ A life that matters is grievable, as it presupposes a life that will have been lived. To illustrate this point, Dr. Butler uses the example of an infant. People celebrate the birth of an infant, a reaction that implies people will grieve the infant's life if the

¹¹ Usherwood, "Elizabeth Thompson Butler," 31; Wynne, *Lady Butler*, 113.

¹² *The Times*, October 4, 1933.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), xiv.; I will henceforth refer to Judith Butler as Dr. Butler when necessary, so as to avoid confusion between the artist Elizabeth Thompson Butler and the philosopher.

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 26.

¹⁵ Butler, 31.

infant dies.¹⁶ Battle painters who focused only on elite officers or the British army as a whole rendered the common foot soldier as un-grievable by stripping them of their individuality. In contrast, when Butler painted the members of the rank-and-file, she placed value upon them as individuals worthy of grief.

Dr. Butler's conception of grievable and un-grievable lives can help us better understand how differential grief and the mourning of young lives manifested in Butler's battle paintings. Butler situates these young soldiers as individuals who matter and thus deserve her audience's grief. Their deaths were tragic because their lives had only just begun. However, Butler also utilized a differential conception of grievability by contrasting a deceased white youth with the Black Zulu army during the Anglo-Zulu War (January – July 1879) in her 1880 painting *The Defence of Rorke's Drift*. As we will see, although Butler exhibited sympathy toward some non-white victims of British imperialist policy, she also manipulated contemporary racial anxieties for narrative drama. Nevertheless, in her body of work, Butler expanded who was worthy of grief to include common foot soldiers and, in particular, the youngest members of the army. Before Butler, artists typically placed pictorial value only on the larger forces of war and high-ranking officials. Butler's new approach to the visual depiction of war warrants further examination.

A New Kind of Battle Painting

British battle painting was an ambiguous category throughout the nineteenth century. The country imagined itself as a non-militaristic nation against its historical rival France, which the British populace saw as bloodthirsty and prone to violent outbreaks of revolution.¹⁷ Although

¹⁶ Butler, 15.

¹⁷ Hichberger, *Images of the Army*, 69.

Britain engaged in continental and imperial warfare throughout the century, the government and the public did not see war as characteristic of their people or their culture. Rather, the country's perceived purpose of conflict around their empire was to better the world. Despite its proclaimed altruistic intentions, Britain's actions were imperialistic and racialized, reflected in the public's belief that they bore the "white man's burden" to save their imperial subjects.¹⁸ The attitude toward battle painting reflected the public perception of the country as one that engaged in military engagement reluctantly. Before the Crimean War (1853-1856), British battle painting barely constituted its own category, especially in state-sponsored institutions such as the Royal Academy. Even after the war began and the British public demanded documentary images, battle painting failed to develop a significant market as a result of its associations with militaristic societies and biases towards the genre.¹⁹ Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British military paintings focused on the accomplishments or heroic death of an aristocratic individual as exemplified by Benjamin West's famous 1770 painting *The Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 2) and Arthur William Devis' 1807 painting *The Death of Nelson, 21 October 1805* (fig. 3).

Butler also did not incorporate her representation of the individual soldier's heroism into that of the whole British army. For example, the topographical battle paintings of Royal Academician Sir William Allan (1782-1850) provide a bird's-eye view of the battlefield. In Allan's 1843 painting *The Battle of Waterloo* (fig. 4), masses of soldiers populate the vast landscape. Aside from a few mounted officers on the hill in the foreground, no visible faces appear. Allan intended to depict the battle itself rather than the individualized reactions of the common foot soldier. In contrast, Butler highlighted the mental and physical sacrifice of the

¹⁸ Hichberger, 2.

¹⁹ Hichberger, 63.

rank-and-file soldier by honing in on their individual responses to the horrors of war. She captured the psychological state of each man as they process the violence of battle, as evidenced by an extant oil sketch of a weary soldier, likely a study for *The Roll Call* (fig. 5). In the sketch, an older man's head is wrapped in a white bandage. His eyebrows draw upwards and his bright blue eyes shine, an expression suggestive of sorrow. As demonstrated by this sketch, Butler did not avoid the emotional impact that battle paintings could have on audiences but rather conjured emotion in her work through difficult subject matter and expressive portraits.

Only when battle artists embraced a style that commemorated accomplishments from the middle and lower classes did military painting gain traction. The focus on the heroism of individual soldiers began with Louis William Desanges' fifty paintings of Victoria Cross (VC) recipients in the events that earned them the medal, a new honor given to members of the army who performed an act of valor or devotion to their country.²⁰ His series of heroic portraits spanned the years 1856 to 1862 and was hugely popular among the bourgeoisie, speaking to their preference for heroic images of their own social group, as most of the depicted officers were from the upper-middle class. Although Desanges also depicted common foot-soldiers in addition to the officer corps, out of the fifty portraits, only six depicted private soldiers.²¹ Butler's images of the common foot-soldier differed greatly from the images of Desanges' VC recipients. With her paintings, Butler did not valorize her subjects through traditional modes of heroic representation. Unlike hero portraits that focus on a single individual, her soldiers in *The Roll Call* stand on the same level; no one man is singled out from the rest. Rather than attempting to

²⁰ Trevor Royle, *Crimea: The Great Crimean War 1854-1856* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 159.

²¹ Hichberger, *Images of the Army*, 65–66.

pay tribute to the sacrifice of the private soldier by adopting the visual language of past images of the officer class, she instead developed an equalizing artistic style for most of her major paintings in the last quarter of the century, influenced by the contemporary political atmosphere.

Many authors have placed Butler's work in conversation with the Cardwell Reforms and have identified them as a significant influence on Butler's unflinching portrayal of war and her compassionate treatment of the common soldier.²² Following the election of William Gladstone as Prime Minister in 1868, war minister Edward Cardwell and Liberal reformers aimed to transform the army into a more egalitarian system.²³ The Crimean War exposed the corruption of the purchase system, which allowed aristocrats and the socially elite to purchase officer positions and promotions without previous experience in the military. Reformers argued that the system was not only corrupt but dangerous.²⁴ The public blamed the blunders of the Crimean War on the inexperience of the officer class.²⁵ The Cardwell Reforms abolished the purchase system in November 1871 and required training for officers, thereby increasing the professionalism of the army.²⁶ Cardwell aimed to make the army attractive to the lower classes, which supplied the bulk of potential recruits, and Liberal reformers marketed the army as a desirable and patriotic career

²² Matthew Lalumia, "Lady Elizabeth Thompson Butler in the 1870s," *Woman's Art Journal* 4, no. 1 (1983): 11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1358095>; Hichberger, *Images of the Army*, 72; Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, *Lady Butler, Battle Artist*, 33.

²³ Lalumia, *Realism and Politics in Victorian Art of the Crimean War*, 130.

²⁴ Arvel B. Erickson, "Abolition of Purchase in the British Army," *Military Affairs* 23, no. 2 (1959): 67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1985503>.

²⁵ "A Timely and Friendly Warning.," *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 1, no. 23 (April 5, 1856): 446–47.

²⁶ Douglas W. Allen, "Compatible Incentives and the Purchase of Military Commissions," *The Journal of Legal Studies* 27, no. 1 (1998): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1086/468013>.

path by extending benefits for the rank and file.²⁷ Butler's career, and those of her emulators soon after, emerged alongside these political developments, representative of the shift in perception toward the rank and file that the Cardwell Reforms initiated.²⁸

Butler's career benefitted from the new attitude toward the army as she could capitalize on a public more sympathetic to the plight of soldiers. Butler produced and reified this compassion in her body of work to craft sentimental narratives of the British military. Charles Landor, writing for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, makes note of this compassion in a review of Butler's 1875 painting *The 28th Regiment at Quatre Bras* (fig. 6): "One thing is noticeable about death as this artist depicts it: it is always touching, - poor, pitiful humanity yielding to the destroyer; her soldiers who are dead or dying are not indistinguishable or characterless relics of mortality, - they are figures which suggest love, grief, and loss, even in the humblest homes."²⁹ Landor's statement is typical of the critical response to Butler's early paintings. Reviewers of the 1870s and 1880s recognized the profound humanity of her soldiers – a response that the Cardwell Reforms made possible.

The Young Body in Pain

The Cardwell Reforms and Butler's paintings also coincided with a revolution in public schooling in late nineteenth-century Britain. Between 1870 and 1893, Parliament passed several Acts that extended access to schooling for the country's children. In 1870, Parliament established

²⁷ Hichberger, *Images of the Army*, 72; Lalumia, *Realism and Politics in Victorian Art of the Crimean War*, 130.

²⁸ For a discussion of how Butler influenced a generation of battle painters, see Dorothy Nott, "Reframing War: British Military Painting 1854 to 1918" (PhD diss., The University of York, 2015), <https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1827521326/6AC1F687CDEA4727PQ/1>.

²⁹ Charles Landor, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 6, 1877, 3.

school boards to build schools in areas that lacked them. After 1880, attendance was mandatory in England even if enforcement proved difficult. In 1891, the fees for elementary schooling were either subsidized or outlawed.³⁰ Butler's career thus overlapped with two major periods of progressive reform. Her paintings expose the intersection of the heightened concern for children's intellectual and physical well-being with their paradoxical involvement in war. She used this contradiction to make her work more emotionally impactful for her audiences. The contemporary re-conceptualization of childhood as a protected status aided her in this effort.

Sociologists emphasize that childhood is socially constructed. Biological immaturity is a constant for all humans, yet far from universal, the significance associated with that age group differs between cultures and time periods. The value placed on the early years of a person's life varies even in a single culture depending on class, gender, race, and other sociological factors.³¹ In nineteenth-century Britain, the status of the child was shifting.³² The labor demands of industrialization initially necessitated a conceptualization of childhood that positioned wage labor as an effective means of teaching practical skills and moral principles to youth.³³ However, by the 1850s reformers successfully began to re-constitute the Romantic image of the 'innocent' child that deserves love and guidance through the moral direction of the Evangelical family unit.

³⁰ Ginger S. Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Westport: Praeger, 2009), 37–38.

³¹ Allison James and Alan Prout, eds., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 6–7.

³² Frost, *Victorian Childhoods*, 10.

³³ Harry Hendrick, "Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the Present," in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, ed. Allison James and Alan Prout (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 33.

A childhood defined by innocence necessitated helplessness and thus a dependence on adult figures. State-sponsored schooling, which began with the Education Acts, also came to institute a significant guiding force in the lives of children in the last quarter of the century, bringing them to a state of universal ignorance that then could be influenced by education. Child development as a field of study gained ground in the late 1870s and continued into the 1890s, further delineating childhood as a separate category from adulthood in that it required separate and intense scientific investigation to understand and mold.³⁴

In nineteenth-century Britain, the age at which children transitioned to adulthood varied widely based on a child's gender and class. School provided a location for boys to separate themselves from the domestic sphere and to begin to integrate themselves within the masculine external world.³⁵ Working-class boys, which made up the majority of military recruits, stayed in school until about the age of fourteen when they went to work to provide for their families.³⁶ Many lower-class boys and orphan boys saw the army, and especially the military band, as a chance for steady wages, regular food, and consistent shelter.³⁷ Many of the teenagers that joined the military came from highly regimented institutional schools, some of which provided musical training to prepare them to join the military band.³⁸ Admission into the military or the military

³⁴ Hendrick, 37–40.

³⁵ Frost, *Victorian Childhoods*, 28.

³⁶ Frost, 49, 73.

³⁷ Trevor Herbert and Helen Barlow, *Music & the British Military in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

³⁸ Nicola Sheldon, "The Musical Careers of the Poor: The Role of Music as a Vocational Training for Boys in British Care Institutions 1870-1918," *History of Education* 38, no. 6 (2009): 750–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00467600903305590>.

band provided boys with shelter and food but also opportunities to develop skills and long-term vocational training.³⁹ In contrast, by the end of the nineteenth century, an upper-middle or upper-class boy would stay in school until he was about twenty-one, at which point he would enter the workforce and his “childhood” would officially end. Therefore, middle- and upper-class children remained dependents for longer, as they remained in school until a later age.

Butler belonged to a social class that had little need for additional income and her children likely stayed at home for longer and received education into their twenties.⁴⁰ Her grandfather had private money from sugar plantations in the West Indies. Butler’s great-grandfather included Butler’s father, Thomas James Thompson, in his will on the condition that he sought no profession. He thus received an education at Cambridge and spent the remainder of his time seeking public office as a Liberal, reading, and traveling.⁴¹ Thomas imparted the value of education to his two daughters, who studied such varied subjects as art, poetry, history, and languages as their family traveled around Europe.⁴² Butler achieved financial success from her painting career in the 1870s and married the career soldier William Butler (1838-1910) in 1877. Their comfortable financial situation allowed them to raise their children in an upper-middle-class family similar to her own upbringing. Because Butler and her family spent much of the 1880s and 1890s following William to his postings, her children’s education likely occurred within the domestic sphere with either herself or a private tutor providing instruction in their

³⁹ Sheldon, 758–59.

⁴⁰ Her sons served in the British Army during World War I as a soldier and a chaplain; however, at that point, they were in their early to mid-thirties, well past the age many lower-class boys joined the ranks.

⁴¹ Viola Meynell, *Alice Meynell: A Memoir* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929), 7.

⁴² Elizabeth Butler, *An Autobiography* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1922), 1–2.

early years. Butler likely valued education in the same way as her father, as his insistence on education features so prominently in her autobiography and later memoirs of her and her sister's lives.⁴³

Butler's class position certainly influenced whether she believed boys and teenagers belonged on the battlefield; her battle paintings also reflect her position. Butler's paintings of the late nineteenth century emerged from a recently developed cultural milieu that constructed childhood as separate from adulthood, especially for the upper classes, therefore necessitating different requirements and psychological conceptualizations. Butler's growing awareness of war's effect on children and youth was a natural extension of her interest in its effects on the common soldier, as seen in *The Roll Call*, her first blockbuster painting. Butler places no particular emphasis on the young soldiers among the lineup, a result of the equalizing layout. However, *The Times* noted that men of all ages were present, from the "battle-hardened soldier" to the "boy recruit." The author also remarked that "a raw, young soldier is overcome by the shock of [his comrade's] sudden fall, and leans his face on his musket, all but fainting."⁴⁴

The author identified the man as young without seeing his face, as his arms almost completely hide it as he reacts to the death of his fellow soldier or the general shock of the battle. *The Times* author likely identified him as a youth from a number of indicators: his emotional response indicative of inexperience with death, his smaller stature compared to the nearby soldiers, and his apparent lack of facial hair, suggested by his hair-free jaw. The young soldier toward the middle provides a parallel as he is likely another "boy recruit" who stands stiffly

⁴³ Butler, 1–2; Eileen Gormanston, *A Little I Kept* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953), 44–45; Meynell, *Alice Meynell*, 26–27.

⁴⁴ "Exhibition of the Royal Academy," *The Times*, May 2, 1874.

upright for the calling of the roll, hoping to demonstrate his discipline even as he struggles to keep his expression neutral. His is the only other clean-shaven face among the bearded men.

Facial hair was an important marker for manhood in Victorian Britain. Beards and mustaches gained popularity around the 1850s and soon they were synonymous with virile masculinity and the superiority of masculinity over femininity in women and other men. Many men defined the beard as the mark of a “civilized warrior- a man who retains the nature of essential manhood, yet remains within the bounds of Christian civility.”⁴⁵ Beginning with the Crimean War (1853-1856), the military embraced facial hair and its new connotations of ideal manliness. An illustration from the 1851 article “Proposed Alterations in our Military Dress, Arms, and Equipments” by Colonel Edward Napier includes an image that illustrates the contemporary state of the British soldiery in opposition to how the British soldier should ideally look (fig. 7). The soldier of the “present-day” is young, small of stature, and lacking in facial hair whereas the soldier as he “ought to be” is tall, masculine, older, and sporting a beard. Napier’s view gained traction, and the military permitted beards and mustaches during the Crimean War.⁴⁶ Then, in 1860, Command No. 1695 of the King’s Regulations forbade the shaving of the upper lip, thus requiring mustaches for members of the military.⁴⁷ The beard and mustache, or lack thereof, served as easy markers for biological immaturity or virile, mature masculinity. The

⁴⁵ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, “The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain,” *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2005): 8, 26. For discourses on masculinity and Christianity, see Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴⁶ Oldstone-Moore, “The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain,” 11–12.

⁴⁷ “Big British Army Problem. Officers and Men Want Order Compelling Mustaches Rescinded,” *The New York Times*, July 20, 1913, 24.

biological phenomenon of growing body hair was thus one way that Victorians perceived the switch from boy to man from the early 1850s to around World War I (1914-1918).⁴⁸

Butler particularly relied on facial hair to aid the perceived historical veracity of her paintings. Consistent attention to accuracy defined her oeuvre. While Butler prepared for *Quatre Bras* in 1875, an officer named Colonel Browne granted her access to three hundred Royal Engineers in full dress since he took interest in her work in progress. The Royal Engineers acted out her proposed composition, even firing their guns until they ran out of ammunition so she could see how smoke obscured the battlefield. Out of the three hundred men, she picked out eight as models, noting that she was looking specifically for men without beards.⁴⁹ Butler devoured sources such as Captain W. Siborne's *History of the War in France and Belgium in 1815* to aid in truthful representation.⁵⁰ Since beards were not popular in the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) and were not standard regulation for soldiers, Butler sought out beardless men for models. However, for her Crimean War paintings, Butler had very different norms to work with as a result of the mustache mandate of 1860. No longer are her soldiers consistently without facial hair. For the most part, they sport full beards, large muttonchops, or merely the required hairy upper lip. Therefore, the figures without facial hair are conspicuous. Their lack of mustaches, despite the requirement, suggests their inability to grow facial hair, a marker for biological and societal immaturity. A number of these youthful figures appear in Butler's

⁴⁸ Oldstone-Moore, "The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain," 12.

⁴⁹ Butler states that the sergeant brought in five of the original eight men that she indicated as she had chosen some of "bad character" and thus they could not be sent to her. She does not specify what exactly the officers took issue with in the three refused men.; Butler, *An Autobiography*, 120–22.

⁵⁰ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, *Lady Butler, Battle Artist*, 61.

paintings of late-nineteenth-century military engagements and serve as evidence of her interest in depicting the suffering experienced by the various ages that made up the rank-and-file.

Butler portrayed bodily suffering in hopes of conveying the moral imperative that is the end of suffering through abstract political action, a characteristic of Thomas Laqueur's definition of the humanitarian narrative. Laqueur investigates the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British phenomena of the realistic novel, the autopsy, the clinical report, and the social inquiry as examples of what he calls a "humanitarian narrative." This narrative takes the form of a report, fictive or not, that details the body in pain, intending to engender compassion in readers, connecting the organic body of the sufferer with the body of the reader, who can potentially ameliorate their suffering. Laqueur identifies the main characteristic of a humanitarian narrative as a devotion to excessive detail, which lends authority to an account.⁵¹ Laqueur's theory provides a useful framework to explore how Butler utilized visual representations of the young body in pain to incite compassion in viewers, a sentimental form of narrative storytelling contemporary reviewers gendered as feminine but also constituted a unique form of political action for Butler as a woman artist.

Butler's evocative style and her devotion to historical accuracy in costume, weaponry, facial hair, and emotional response led some contemporary viewers to question her assertion that she had never seen an active battlefield. Some viewers even invented the myth that she was a nurse in the war. They believed she must have experienced battles in person due to the accuracy

⁵¹ Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt, Studies on the History of Society and Culture (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 177.

of her representations.⁵² The writer for *The Huddersfield Chronicler and West Yorkshire Advertiser*, when discussing Butler's paintings, detailed how painting is the best medium for conveying the reality of war since it appeals to the "physical" eye rather than the "mental" eye. He goes on to philosophize that because readers' imaginations differ, writers struggle to truly represent war and suffering. He wrote, however, praising Butler: "It is only when the task is undertaken by an accomplished painter, when the scene is vividly transferred to canvas, that the reality of war, its glory and its anguish, is forced home on the mind of the observer."⁵³ Therefore, for contemporary viewers, the realistic and detailed way in which Butler rendered the scenes granted narrative authority and heightened emotional effectiveness.

As a result of her affective pictorial style, much of the contemporary critical response to her 1876 painting *Balaclava* (fig. 8) ruminates on the bodily mutilation of the survivors after the failed charge of the Brigade of Light Cavalry during the Siege of Sevastopol in 1854. A botched order led the Light Brigade to rush the Russian batteries needlessly, resulting in massive unnecessary losses. This event and its resulting casualties would come to symbolize the failure of the Crimean invasion.⁵⁴ Butler depicts the few disorganized remnants of the Light Brigade as they retreated from combat. A dismounted hussar stands in the center, clearly in shock. The rest of the men are in complete disarray as they struggle with their wounds or their terrified mounts. Among the chaos of the scene are three identifiable youths. One is the deceased bugler in the arms of the mounted officer, to the right of the central figure, which I will discuss below. The

⁵² Joanna Devereux, "'On the Line' at the Royal Academy: Elizabeth Butler and Motion," in *The Making of Women Artists in Victorian England: The Education and Careers of Six Professionals* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016), 99.

⁵³ *The Huddersfield Chronicler and West Yorkshire Advertiser*, September 25, 1879, 3.

⁵⁴ Lalumia, *Realism and Politics in Victorian Art of the Crimean War*, 45.

next most obvious youth is the seated figure to the left, who holds a wrapping to his profusely bleeding hand (fig. 9). The *Nottinghamshire Guardian* described this figure as “a youthful soldier sulkily contemplating his mutilated hand.”⁵⁵ The youthful figure clutching an injured hand was a motif Butler would use again in her next painting *The Return from Inkerman* (1877) (fig. 10), reflecting her ongoing concern for the bodily pain of youth in wartime. The last youth in *Balaclava* crests the hill on the right, leaning sideways off his horse, mouth agape and eyes unfocused (fig. 11). His yellow-tinted pallor and his imminent fall indicate that he is likely dying or already dead.

These boys’ sacrifice is not heroic. Indeed, the horror of *Balaclava* was almost too much for some viewers. A critic writing for *The Times of India* thought some members of the public might object to the painting’s subject matter, as it “abounds in the painful and the repellent; on all sides are death and suffering and bloodshed; horses and soldiers alike are bleeding. It must be confessed that there is something rather nauseating about this unrelieved spectacle of carnage.”⁵⁶ *The Times* turned “with relief from the bloody page of *Balaklava* [sic]” to the picturesque glow of Alfred Hunt’s paintings of Whitby Harbor, as both artists were exhibiting at the Fine Arts Society.⁵⁷ Butler achieved her goal of inducing emotion perhaps a little too well. She noted in her autobiography that the husband of composer Virginia Gabriel had to lead his wife out of the room in tears after seeing the painting in 1876. She also records the comment by a veteran that “he would never have come if he had known how like the real thing it was.”⁵⁸ That Butler

⁵⁵ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, April 28, 1876.

⁵⁶ *The Times of India, Mumbai*, May 25, 1876, 4A.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, May 17, 1876, 6.

⁵⁸ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 152.

recalled these instances in her autobiography, written forty-six years after the painting's initial exhibition, attests to the impact the viewers' reactions had on her and the gratification she derived from their emotional responses. Her inclusion of this anecdote in the primary account of her life suggests that Butler hoped future readers would appreciate her ability to evoke strong emotions with her paintings after she was gone.

The onlookers' responses also attest to Butler's skill in wielding pathos to produce emotion and feeling, a skill that contemporary commentators gendered feminine. Critical responses to Butler's work often referenced her gender. The critics seem surprised that a young woman, only in her twenties, could find such a strong place for herself in the masculine world of battle painting. Yet, it also seems that, for contemporary critics, her feminine sentiment is exactly what made her so adept at representing the sufferings of men. The author for the *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, when analyzing *Balaclava*, described the piece as being "replete with a quiet undercurrent of true womanly feeling; and the spectator can fancy that, even as the artist has plied her pencil, her heart has been full of grief and compassion for the misery of which she has also been the pictorial chronicler."⁵⁹ A year later, Mary Heaton for *The Portfolio: An Artistic Periodical*, observed that *The Return from Inkerman* was painted "with the sympathy of a woman and the perception of an artist."⁶⁰ In 1900, the *Isle of Wight Observer* wrote similarly that Butler had united "keen feminine sensitivities to artistic genius."⁶¹

Wynne, writing on Butler's painting *The Remnants of an Army, Jellalabad, January 13, 1842* (fig. 12), briefly posits that Butler could express emotion more freely as a woman artist in

⁵⁹ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, April 28, 1876.

⁶⁰ Mary M. Heaton, *The Portfolio: An Artistic Periodical* 8 (January 1877): 100.

⁶¹ "About Men and Women," *The Isle of Wight Observer*, September 22, 1900, 3.

Victorian Britain. Wynne believes that Butler used emotion to “open a debate on war” and goes on to suggest that “the power then to generate feeling becomes a political act.”⁶² Many authors question the extent of Butler’s political engagement through anti-war sentiment, often concluding that she did not like war and its consequences but believed that war was inevitable and could yield heroism in dark times.⁶³ Nonetheless, Butler used the avenue available to her as a woman artist to explore the strong emotions associated with war and the sacrifice of the common soldier. Society expected Victorian men to control their emotions, as people associated excessive emotions with irrationality and weakness, among other unfavorable characteristics.⁶⁴ Women had more freedom to display feeling, an ability that some harnessed for political commentary.

Butler’s paintings, as examples of the humanitarian narrative, expose and critique the role that human agency plays in bodily suffering to encourage action. Contemporary commentators often remark upon the youths in her paintings. As figures particularly vulnerable to bodily harm, the boys are poignant accompaniments to the horror and brutality of war. Butler engaged in political expression familiar to the public through other examples of humanitarian narratives but detailed the suffering of bodies visually rather than rhetorically. She identified the physical pain and death of young boy-soldiers in *Balaclava* as the fault of the incompetent officer corps whose actions led to unnecessary suffering, engaging with the popular narrative of the Crimean War.

⁶² Wynne, *Lady Butler*, 109.

⁶³ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 47.

⁶⁴ Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain, 1760–1900: Bodies, Emotion, and Material Culture*, Studies in Design and Material Culture (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvxcrxwg>; Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man’s World*, Reading Popular Fiction (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991), 36.

Butler's inclusion of youth as a prominent class of victims reveals an interest that no artists were engaging with at the time: the bodily well-being of children and teenagers in the military.

The Sound of Silence

Butler's representations of injured youths in battle successfully produced pathos for contemporary viewers but the majority of children that appear across her body of work are boys serving not as active combatants but as members of the military band. In her 1897 painting *Steady the Drums and Fifes! the 57th (Die Hards), drawn up under fire on the ridge of Albuera* (fig. 13), Butler takes the drummer boys from the 57th Regiment at the Battle of Albuera as her subject matter. During the Peninsular War (1807-1814), the allied forces of Britain, Spain, and Portugal vied for control of the Iberian Peninsula against France under Napoleon and met at the Battle of Albuera on May 16, 1811. Although the engagement was devastating for both sides, the outcome was ultimately indecisive in the grand scheme of the war, which only ended with Napoleon's abdication in 1814. The painting depicts the band of the 57th West Middlesex Regiment of Foot in the heat of battle. They silence their instruments as they await, under heavy fire, the order to sound the advance. The boys stand in a loose grouping in the foreground. They exhibit varying responses to their imminent danger, ranging from stoic indifference in the older boys to wide-eyed fear in the youngest. A small boy, separated from the group, sits alone on the ground next to a broken wagon wheel. His back faces the viewer and his head falls forlornly to the right (fig. 14). One of the group's yellow-clad comrades has been shot and falls to the ground, clutching the leg of a nearby drummer, fife still grasped in hand.

Steady the Drums and Fifes! features the most apparent children and adolescents of Butler's oeuvre. All of the figures are visibly young, the only suggestion of facial hair is the occasional patchy mustache consistent with new growth. Butler writes in her autobiography that

she “had the vision of those drummer-boys for many years before my mind’s eye.”⁶⁵ Butler utilized “well-drilled lads” from the Gordon Boys’ Home in Dover as the models for the band members. Founded in 1885, the Gordon Boys’ Home took in boys as young as eight and kept them housed until they could earn a steady wage for themselves.⁶⁶ Butler also conscripted her own two young sons to model for the piece (fig. 15). Her older son Patrick, sixteen or seventeen, posed for the drummer boy who holds back his comrade by the shoulder with his left hand. Her younger son, Martin, aged nine or ten, posed for the drummer boy being restrained.⁶⁷ However, she wrote in her autobiography that “for obvious reasons, I could not include their dear faces in so painful a scene.”⁶⁸ This comment suggests that Butler’s role as a mother impacted how she responded emotionally to this historical event and thus how she represented it pictorially.

Butler’s focus on the youngest members of the military culminated in this 1897 painting; incidentally, or perhaps consequently, right as her sons were approaching the age that many of the military boys and young men never moved beyond. Butler’s autobiography and her sketchbooks make apparent that her artistic production and her personal life were inseparable from one another. Her autobiography moves seamlessly between reflections on her career and sequenced recollections of her daily life, frequently framed by the location of her family based on William’s assignments. Often, the discussion of her extraordinary career borders on brevity in

⁶⁵ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 261.

⁶⁶ Peter Higginbotham, *Children’s Homes: A History of Institutional Care for Britain’s Young* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword History, 2017), 150; Peter Higginbotham, “Gordon Boys’ Orphanage and Home, Dover, Kent,” accessed February 20, 2022, <http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/DoverGordon/>.

⁶⁷ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, *Lady Butler, Battle Artist*, 96–97.

⁶⁸ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 261.

comparison to the meticulous recording of her family's activities. Her sketchbooks also reflect the blended nature of her career and life. In them, itineraries and diary entries often occupy the same page as sketches (fig. 16), evidence of her inability to separate the two parts of her life. Therefore, her comment about being unable to place the likenesses of her own sons in *Steady the Drums and Fifes!* attests to the profound emotional connection she had with her paintings, a connection she had to protect herself from in this case.

I would like to emphasize here that I do not intend to essentialize Butler by casting maternity as the basis of her identity as a woman or an artist. Motherhood, as Andrea O'Reilly has argued, is "specifically and fundamentally a cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors" and thus "its meaning varies with time and place."⁶⁹ My reading of Butler's concern for children and youth is historically grounded in the expectations placed upon Victorian women and accounts of her life written by herself and her immediate family. The Victorian domestic ideal positioned fathers as the authoritative head of the household and mothers as the emotional support. Ideal mothers would sacrifice their own needs and comforts for their families and form close relationships with their children to maintain a harmonious home life.⁷⁰ William and Elizabeth's youngest daughter Eileen wrote in her 1953 autobiography *A Little I Kept* that her father was an autocratic presence at home and "No one there ever dared dispute my father's will – least of all my mother, in whom loyalty was an outstanding quality, who detested rows, and who, fortunately for herself, had her studio into

⁶⁹ Andrea O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice* (Ontario: Demeter Press, 2016), 56.

⁷⁰ Frost, *Victorian Childhoods*, 11; Ann Sumner Holmes and Claudia Nelson, "Introduction," in *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925*, ed. Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), 3–5.

which to retreat and there find tranquility.”⁷¹ As an upper-middle-class wife and mother, Butler seemingly conformed to the expectations of Victorian society, and the concern she had for her children manifested in her paintings.

Butler placed *Steady the Drums and Fifes!* “amongst those of my works with which I was least dissatisfied.”⁷² The critical response to the piece was mixed, reflecting Butler’s considerable decline in fame in the 1890s. Some critics, such as Marion Harry Spielmann for *The Magazine of Art*, felt the painting did not deserve the favorable hanging position at the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1897 that it received.⁷³ Most, however, thought the piece was a worthy successor to her blockbuster hits of the 1870s even if, as one critic put it, “the fashion of popularity in this particular kind of work seems to have died out.”⁷⁴ This statement reflects the paucity of extended analysis of the piece at the time. The succinct criticism of the 1890s was a far cry from the poetic musings inspired by the paintings of the 1870s, which reflected on the nature of war and its bloody cost. Although Butler’s intention to paint the common soldier had not changed, viewers and critics seem uninterested in such reflections at this point.

Far from contemplating the pathos of the image and the implications of the presence of youth on the battlefield, some critics saw a bristling excitement in the boys. The *Westminster Budget Newspaper* thought the band was “deprived of the excitement of answering bullet with

⁷¹ Gormanston, *A Little I Kept*, 33.; Additionally, Butler’s autobiography makes her feelings for her children clear throughout. Her dedication page reads: “To My Children.”

⁷² Butler, *An Autobiography*, 261.

⁷³ Marion Harry Spielmann, “The Exhibition of the Royal Academy,” *The Magazine of Art*, January 1897, 157.

⁷⁴ “The Art of the Day,” *The Sketch* 18, no. 225 (May 19, 1897): 138.

bullet,” despite their status as bandmembers and their lack of weapons.⁷⁵ The writer for *London Man of the World*, discussing the youngest figure to the left, writes the boy’s eyes are “wide with the suppressed excitement of the moment” and the author delights in this expression.⁷⁶ The author likely misread the expression on the boy’s face and its intended effect on the scene, as Butler would likely agree since she later characterized the scene as “painful.” Albuera was a harrowing event and the 57th Regiment suffered overwhelming casualties. According to popular myth, Colonel William Inglis imparted the nickname of “the Die Hards” upon his regiment after he was struck by a canister shot and shouted “Die hard the 57th, die hard!” as he lay injured with a near-fatal wound, refusing to leave his men.⁷⁷ The sacrifices made at Albuera, and particularly those of the 57th, inspired intense national pride for Britain.⁷⁸

Butler crafted a complex narrative that drew on both the heroics of the regiment and the sadness of their situation. *The Irish Times* agreed, noting that Butler showed “mastery over the expression of the various emotions of fear and bravery, and of the complexities – the gradations, one passing into the other – of the two.”⁷⁹ Like her previous paintings, Butler ensured that she relied on first-hand and well-researched accounts of the battle to portray it accurately. Four years before the completion of Butler’s painting, Henry Herriott Woollright released his book *History*

⁷⁵ *Westminster Budget Newspaper*, April 23, 1897, 5.

⁷⁶ *London Man of the World*, May 5, 1897, 6.

⁷⁷ Guy Dempsey, *Albuera 1811: The Bloodiest Battle of the Peninsular War* (London: Frontline Books, 2008), 291–99.

⁷⁸ Dempsey, 257–58.

⁷⁹ “The Royal Academy: First Notice,” *The Irish Times*, May 4, 1897, 5.

of the *Fifty-Seventh (West Middlesex Regiment of Foot 1755-1881)*.⁸⁰ Although she does not cite her direct influence, Butler likely read Woollright's history around the time of its publication and it eventually inspired her to take up the subject in paint, as she did note that she had the boys in her "mind's eye" for many years. Butler also wrote of the "unexpected treat" of being able to paint the uniforms yellow instead of the typical red.⁸¹ This particular fact about the uniforms of the 57th Regiment drummers also comes from Woollright, who notes early on in his history that the "drummers of the 57th wore yellow coats faced with red..."⁸² Therefore, Butler most likely drew on his account for *Steady the Drums and Fifes!*.

However, Woollright only mentions the average age of the whole regiment, which included forty-one sergeants, twenty-one drummers, and 722 members of the rank and file. The average age of the 784 men was twenty-six when they arrived in Lisbon in 1809.⁸³ If Butler relied on Woollright's account, she did not have information on the specific ages of the drummer boys, only knowing the average age of the regiment two years before the Battle of Albuera. Therefore, by depicting the bandmembers as younger than they likely were, Butler altered the narrative of the event, heightening the painting's emotional impact by making the boys closer to children than men. Butler's brother-in-law Wilfrid Meynell wrote in his 1898 biography of the artist that the painting was "at once a picture of war and a picture... of childhood" and that by painting the event as she did, Butler showed the boys "confronting their youth with death, their

⁸⁰ Henry Herriott Woollright, *History of the Fifty-Seventh (West Middlesex) Regiment of Foot 1755-1881* (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1893), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008592724>.

⁸¹ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 261.

⁸² Woollright, *History of the Fifty-Seventh (West Middlesex) Regiment of Foot 1755-1881*, 28.

⁸³ Woollright, 148.

impulse with discipline.”⁸⁴ Meynell and his wife, famed poet and suffragist Alice Meynell, were liberal Catholics and anti-imperialists.⁸⁵ As a progressive, he likely read more tragedy in the painting than the typical Royal Academy reviewer.

Meynell goes on to say that Butler does not shrink from the “too great pathos” of the child figure standing second from the left, who Meynell believed is about nine or ten. The boy is “shaken by the fear of death and yet proud of his disciplined attitude.”⁸⁶ Butler likely fictionalized the boy, deciding to portray a young child for emotional impact. Wynne identifies the boy as a real person named Henry Holloway, who served as a drummer in the 57th Regiment during the Battle of Albuera at eleven years old.⁸⁷ However, Butler does not mention Holloway in any of her published writings. Meynell, who likely would have corresponded with the artist about the painting as her brother-in-law and biographer, also does not mention him. Additionally, the boy in the painting is a fifer, not a drummer, further problematizing the identification of him as Holloway. If the boy is not Holloway, then Butler invented the boy herself, intent on punctuating the drama of the scene with the presence of a fictionalized young child. If the bandmembers were older than Butler depicted them and the youngest boy was a narrative invention, then the painting is not a completely factual depiction of the historical event. Instead, Butler made the painting and the boys contained within metaphorical symbols of vulnerability, intending to elicit an emotional reaction from the viewer.

⁸⁴ Wilfrid Meynell, *The Life and Work of Lady Butler (Miss Elizabeth Thompson)* (London: The Art journal office, 1898), 17, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008919915>.

⁸⁵ Julia Kuehn, *A Female Poetics of Empire: From Eliot to Woolf* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 142.

⁸⁶ Meynell, *The Life and Work of Lady Butler (Miss Elizabeth Thompson)*, 17.

⁸⁷ Wynne, *Lady Butler*, 178.

Butler was not the only late-Victorian figure that used children serving in the military as vehicles for ideological messages. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a trend appeared in British popular culture that romanticized the drummer boy as a symbol of nationalistic pride. The drummer boy and his burgeoning manhood served as a battleground of ideological construction that reflected contemporary political and ideological developments. Politics of the “New Imperialism” inspired by the conservative politician and two-time Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli overtook the liberalism of William Gladstone that characterized the 1870s. Disraeli first took office after Gladstone in 1874. As opposed to Gladstone’s civilizing philosophy for colonization and imperialism, characterized by its moralistic purpose and minimal interference, Disraeli saw the possession of colonies as a goal in its own right to assert the supremacy of England on the world stage.⁸⁸ Disraeli’s aggressive foreign policy came to define late Victorian conceptions of nationhood accompanied by the shared values of masculine competitiveness and militaristic discipline.⁸⁹ The national fascination with the drummer boy emerged from this political context and generated numerous artifacts of popular culture, including popular prints (fig. 17), ceramic mantelpieces, and literature.⁹⁰

An example of the literature engaging with the drummer boy fad is Rudyard Kipling’s short story “Drums at the Fore and Aft,” which first appeared in 1889 and was subsequently reprinted in collections of his stories throughout the 1890s and beyond.⁹¹ The story follows two

⁸⁸ Bradley Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 11–13.

⁸⁹ Deane, 7.

⁹⁰ Trevor Herbert, “Trumpets, Drums and the Sources for Their Symbolic Authority in Britain,” *Music in Art* 41, no. 1–2 (2016): 73.

⁹¹ Infamous for his 1899 poem titled “The White Man’s Burden,” Kipling wrote positively on England’s empire and what he believed was the country’s moral imperative to civilize the people

troublemaking drummer boys of about fourteen years of age, Jakin and Lew, in a fictional regiment nicknamed the “Fore and Aft.” When the regiment was to go to the Front, the boys begged the colonel, who eventually acceded, to take them along.⁹² However, once they arrived at the battlefield, the inexperience of the regiment became apparent. The demoralized soldiers began to retreat when faced with their enemy’s firepower. Jakin and Lew, left behind by their comrades, took cover behind an outcropping. Bolstered by rum, the boys take up their musical instruments and march out toward the line of enemies in a show of courage. The field is briefly silent before the Afghans fire upon the boys, killing them. Shamed by their cowardice, the Fore and Aft regiment charges forward, hoping to get revenge for the boys. They succeed in pushing the Afghans back but ultimately “the battle was won by Jakin and Lew.”⁹³

Artists depicted the short story in illustrations (fig. 18) and paintings. In 1895, two years before Butler completed *Steady the Drums and Fifes!*, Edward Matthew Hale exhibited a painting inspired by Kipling’s story, also titled *Drums of the Fore and Aft* (fig. 19). Jakin and Lew appear while playing their doomed song, marching alone in a rocky landscape. Hale’s painting is somewhat sterile; the only suggestion of the violence that has just and is about to occur is the faint splattering of blood on the dusty ground. The boys exhibit neither fear nor

living in the colonies. Invariably linked by scholars to the jingoism and racism that defined late-nineteenth-century England, Kipling wrote often of the army. There are a number of sources on the author and imperialism, but for his relationship with the military, see “Kipling’s Militarism” in John Peck’s book *War, the Army, and Victorian Literature* (1998).

⁹² The colonel then walks home and tells his wife the story of the two boys who begged to be sent to the Front. She cries when he tells her. Although Kipling does not elaborate on why exactly she responds in this way, it remains an interesting example of the gendered response to the presence of young boys on a battlefield.

⁹³ Rudyard Kipling, “Drums of the Fore and Aft,” in *Soldiers Three: A Collection of Stories*, 5th ed. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, Limited, 1890), 96.

excitement. Hale does not explore the complex array of emotions that marching toward enemy fire with only musical instruments would inspire. Hale's painting and Kipling's original story are largely unsentimental. The boys' bravery inspires feelings of pride in the retaliating soldiers as well as in the late Victorian reader. Kipling was not critiquing the systems that allowed the participation of two young boys on the battlefield but rather how the actions of the boys rectified the cowardice of the fictional regiment.

Butler's *Steady the Drums and Fifes!* and Hale's *Drums of the Fore and Aft* are unique for focusing solely on members of the military band. Most battle paintings, including many of Butler's, contain only a figure or two within the larger battle scene, if they appear at all. An example of this tendency is Charles Edwin Fripp's 1885 painting *The Battle of Isandlwana, 22 January 1879* (fig. 20). The work depicts a bloody engagement between the British army and warriors of the Zulu Kingdom during the Anglo-Zulu War. Sir Bartle Frere, the British High Commissioner, believing the Zulus to be the primary obstacle to white rule in South Africa, acted against the government's wishes by issuing an ultimatum to Cetshwayo kaMpende, the king of Zululand. Keeping London in the dark, Frere demanded, among other things, that Cetshwayo dissolve the Zulu military system and that the king bow to British rule, an outrageous demand that was sure to be denied. War was declared when the ultimatum expired on January 11, 1879.⁹⁴ Lord Chelmsford invaded Zululand and engaged in the first full-scale battle of the war at Isandlwana. The Zulus successfully beat the British at Isandlwana and repelled the first British invasion of Zululand, but lost the war at the Battle of Ulundi in July 1879.

⁹⁴ John Laband, *Zulu Warriors: The Battle for the South African Frontier* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 198–200.

In Fripp's painting, the outnumbered British soldiers have formed a protective circle in the center of the canvas, fighting the surrounding Zulus but to no avail. A small drummer boy points alarmedly outwards in the center of the formation, perhaps toward an unseen enemy. Fripp likely portrayed the drummer boy as much younger than the actual drummers at the battle, as adult men usually filled the position.⁹⁵ This narrative choice is similar to the one Butler will make in 1897 with *Steady the Drums and Fifes!*. However, unlike Butler, Fripp placed his drummer boy within the safety of older soldiers. The man on the boy's left, despite a bleeding head wound, holds his arm out protectively in front of the boy. Another man sporting a thick beard tinged with gray stands behind the boy, looking fiercely over his shoulder. Armed and older men actively protect the youth from injury. The boys in *Steady the Drums and Fifes!* lack that reassuring presence. They are exposed on the field, susceptible to immediate bodily harm, as the falling boy makes clear.

Kipling's "Drums at the Fore and Aft" highlights the brave act of Jakin and Lew undertaken when the rest of their regiment fled. Similarly, Butler commended the will of the drummer boys when she utilized a quote from Cardinal Manning's essay on courage to accompany the painting in the catalog: "The highest courage in a soldier is said to be standing still under fire... It is the self-command of duty in obedience to authority. In a forlorn hope there is the excitement of action and the forgetfulness of self which comes with it. But to stand under fire, still and motionless, is a supreme act of will."⁹⁶ Butler reminds the viewer that the boys in *Steady the Drums and Fifes!* are under the orders of an authority figure. They are dependents of

⁹⁵ Ian Knight, *Zulu Rising: The Epic Story of ISandlwana and Rorke's Drift* (Basingstoke.: Macmillan, 2010), 471.

⁹⁶ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, *Lady Butler, Battle Artist*, 108.

the military, an unforgiving and unfeeling guardian. In Kipling's story, Jakin and Lew are the instigators of their fate. They mimic the masculinity modeled by the adult men in the regiment. They drink, smoke, and curse just like men do. They beg their commander to let them accompany the men to the front and decide to march back onto the field rather than retreat. Kipling removes the blame for the boys' deaths from the authority figure because he characterizes them as boys who act like men and thus can make their own decisions.

But boys are not men, a theme Butler returned to many times. In Butler's most famous painting *Scotland for Ever!* (1881) (fig. 21), depicting the charge of the Scots Grey at Waterloo, a bullet hits a young trumpeter, causing the charge to descend into chaos. The brochure that accompanied the painting emphasized the central role of the trumpeter in the scene. The trumpeter, on the Squadron Leader's left, has just finished sounding the order to charge when he is shot, leading his horse to panic, creating a "pressure of horses" to the viewer's right.⁹⁷ Almost two decades later, Butler exhibited an oil painting titled *On the Morrow of Talavera* that showed two young soldiers carrying the body of a dead bugler on a litter (fig. 22).⁹⁸ In the background, the commander salutes the bugler's body.

Butler included deceased band boys in many of her paintings, but the most emotionally effective use of this figure was in her 1876 painting *Balaclava*. Behind and to the right of the central figure, a mounted officer carries the slackened body of a deceased bugler close to his body (fig. 23). Wynne points out the size of the officer's hands compared to the torso of the boy, which emphasizes his small body.⁹⁹ The officer's eyes are glistening and ringed in red as the boy

⁹⁷ The brochure is located in a private collection but is quoted in Wynne, *Lady Butler*, 120.

⁹⁸ Butler reproduced the painting in 1923, which is this version.

⁹⁹ Wynne, *Lady Butler*, 88.

has likely just died in his arms. The boy's bugle hangs off his shoulder, prominently displayed by Butler to indicate him as a member of the band rather than an active soldier. To the left of the central figure, a man reaches out pleadingly toward the boy as a fellow soldier staunches a bleeding wound in his friend's chest. This dramatic and emotional vignette was frequently remarked upon by critics. For the *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, the episode is "a drama of infinite pathos" as the man "recognises a friend or kinsman" in the "dying or dead" trumpeter.¹⁰⁰ *The British Architect* suggests the boy is the brother of the man, who cries out in "anguish" and "stretches feebly forward his arms to reach him."¹⁰¹

The grief of the man as a friend or brother to the fallen bugler reflects our grief as viewers observing the tragic scene. As William Meynell puts it in the conclusion to his biography of Butler: "...she has given to the victim of war the single personality that has its appeal to all other of the human family. It is no longer a marionette that is 'put to the sword,' but a brother who has been done to death."¹⁰² Butler emphasizes the grievability of the boy through the man. The bugler's young life has only just begun and thus is to be grieved once ended. Butler will not explore tragedy so expertly after 1900 as she did in the previous twenty-five years. Her style shifts significantly, eventually resembling the kind of topographical battle painting that she moved away from in 1874. For example, her painting *The Dorset Yeomen at Agagia*, completed in 1916, provides an overview of a skirmish between the British and the Senussi during the first World War (fig. 24). The two forces clash in the middle. The painting does not linger on the reactions of the men involved or the imminent loss of life on either side of the battle. The nature

¹⁰⁰ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, April 28, 1876.

¹⁰¹ *British Architect* 5, no. 122 (Apr 28, 1876).

¹⁰² Meynell, *The Life and Work of Lady Butler (Miss Elizabeth Thompson)*, 31.

of war was quickly changing but Butler never developed a new visual language that successfully reflected these changes. Her compositions formulated during the days of the red-clad soldier were no longer relevant to the new military climate.

In her few large-scale paintings completed after 1900, Butler pulls the viewer back from the action, giving an overview of the field rather than focusing on individual soldiers and their intimate dramas. She increasingly worked on a smaller scale, executing watercolors rather than full-scale oil paintings. Butler worked in watercolor often in these early years, especially for sketches and studies of her travels throughout the British empire for William's military assignments. In these studies, people of color feature prominently as she observed the lands and the people around her. For instance, she represents a bustling Cairo bazaar scene in her published book of letters and illustrations *From Sketch-book and Diary* (fig. 25). However, only one large painting from her pre-1900 work includes people of color. *The Defence of Rorke's Drift* (1880) allows us to consider how discourses surrounding race and imperialism in late Victorian Britain influenced Butler's work, impacting who was able to be grieved and who was not.

The Grievability Gap

Queen Victoria sent the Keeper of the Privy Purse, Sir Henry Ponsonby, to Butler's studio in Kent to commission a painting in 1879, five years after convincing Mr. Galloway to let her purchase *The Roll Call*. The queen requested that this painting would take as its subject "a war of her own reign."¹⁰³ Hesitant to paint a recent conflict, but conscious of the status of her patron, Butler suggested a depiction of British soldiers retrieving the body of Louis-Napoléon, the twenty-three-year-old Prince Imperial of France. He was under the protection of British

¹⁰³ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 186–87.

forces during the Anglo-Zulu War when the army sent him on a presumably safe scouting mission and he was killed by Zulus in June 1879. The queen approved but soon sent word that she changed her mind. In need of a new subject for her painting, Butler turned to the topical military heroics at Rorke's Drift, apparently urged by her friends, for her painting titled *The Defence of Rorke's Drift*, finished in 1880 (fig. 26).¹⁰⁴

After the humiliating defeat at Isandlwana, the victory at Rorke's Drift reassured the public of the superiority of the British army. Lieutenant John Chard quickly received news of the British army's loss at Isandlwana as well as the Zulu plan to attack the mission station of Rorke's Drift, which lay only six miles away. The British garrison prepared defenses to repel an attack, using anything available to form a protective barrier.¹⁰⁵ The British force of about 150 men successfully defended Rorke's Drift against approximately 3,000 Zulu warriors through twelve hours of fighting. The defense of Rorke's Drift by ordinary soldiers, none of them a higher rank than lieutenant, struck a chord with the British public, who, as historian Ian Knight pointed out, "discerned something they hoped lay deep in themselves, that, despite all the faults of the Victorian era, at their heart, too, they were just as courageous and proud and would always do their duty."¹⁰⁶ The queen thus honored the heroes of the defense with eleven Victoria Crosses, the highest number for any single engagement.¹⁰⁷ The battle spawned several objects of popular culture, including Butler's painting.

¹⁰⁴ Butler, 187.

¹⁰⁵ Knight, *Zulu Rising*, 484–88.

¹⁰⁶ Knight, 560.

¹⁰⁷ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, *Lady Butler, Battle Artist*, 78.

Butler focuses on the heroics of the 24th Regiment of Foot in her monumental work. She included portraits of all the VC winners, whom she visited at Portsmouth, where they quartered upon their return to the country. The winners spoke to her about the fighting and even reenacted the battle for her in the uniforms they were wearing that night. Their input was invaluable to her, as their participation allowed her to depict the event “as nearly to life as possible, but from the soldier’s point of view.”¹⁰⁸ For the painting, she chose a moment in the heat of battle, yet centered the composition almost wholly on the British defenders. On the left, red-clad soldiers fire their guns at the Zulu force and stab at them with bayonets from behind a line of mealie bags. In the back, black smoke trails out of the burning hospital building as more defenders move around the courtyard. Art historian J.W.M. Hichberger reads *The Defence of Rorke’s Drift* as “a source of conflict between her anti-violence principles and her patron’s expectations of a battle painting.”¹⁰⁹ Butler wrote that she wrestled with her moral compass, as it “was against my principles to paint a conflict.”¹¹⁰ Her solution to this dilemma was to confine the other participants in the bloody conflict to the extreme edge of the painting.

Butler relegated the Zulu warriors to the far side of the canvas and shrouded them in shadow. Their dark bodies coalesce into a single form that barely reads as a group of humans. Rather than painting them individually, Butler recalled how she placed them “in the composition in dark masses, rather swallowed up in the shade.”¹¹¹ The British soldiers, in contrast, are bathed in light, their faces and bodies perfectly distinguishable and individual. The men fight heroically,

¹⁰⁸ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 188.

¹⁰⁹ Hichberger, *Images of the Army*, 82.

¹¹⁰ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 187.

¹¹¹ Butler, 188.

yet maintain generally calm expressions, a common visual trope used by artists at the time to distinguish between the controlled emotions expected of “civilized” white men and the uncontrolled emotions typical of effeminacy and “uncivilized” peoples.¹¹² Butler painted only one corpse in the frenzied scene. On the far right, a youthful soldier, face free of facial hair, lies propped up on three mealie bags, hand draped over his torso as if he tried to futilely staunch a wound in his side. His deathly pallor and unseeing gaze mark him as deceased. This white youth served as a visual foil to the Black Zulu warriors, located on the opposite edge of the canvas. These two elements, the dead youth and the attacking enemy, bracket the scene.

The painting’s reference to a contemporary imperial war and the expectations of her patron required Butler to navigate the discourses surrounding race and masculinity that the Zulu warriors and the British soldiers then embodied in *The Defence of Rorke’s Drift*. Around 1875, the Victorians began to conceptualize race as a fixed category that carried inherent biological and personal characteristics.¹¹³ They utilized “scientific” methods of categorization that claimed to map out these characteristics to justify their imperial actions and global hegemony based on racial hierarchies.¹¹⁴ The loss at Isandlwana prompted a crisis of masculine imperial identity; the British had to quickly re-evaluate their supposed superiority over an “inferior” race with archaic

¹¹² Catherine Anderson, “Red Coats and Black Shields: Race and Masculinity in British Representations of the Anglo-Zulu War,” *Critical Survey* 20, no. 3 (2008): 19; Catherine Anderson, “Embodiments of Empire: Figuring Race in Late Victorian Painting” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2008), 14, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304692602/abstract/752F43015A0F4286PQ/1?accountid=7090>.

¹¹³ Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 7.

¹¹⁴ Streets, 8.

military technology.¹¹⁵ Some wrote approvingly of the Zulu army and its king because they represented an ideal masculinity based on military discipline that Britain increasingly embraced in the last quarter of the century.¹¹⁶ Yet, the Zulu victory at Isandlwana also generated anxiety about the vulnerability of Britain's imperial forces against a ferocious African enemy. Butler drew on these racial anxieties to promote an emotional response from the Victorian public to the deceased white youth and, through him, to the painting as a whole.

Butler's relationship with race was complex. Her marriage to Sir William Butler, who acquired the title of Lieutenant General before his death in 1910, intimately entangled her life and professional career with Britain's wars of empire. She and their six young children often accompanied him to the distant countries his postings required. I must acknowledge her positionality in the British imperial project, yet her personal beliefs on these issues are not so straightforward. She and her circle of family and friends often problematized British imperial expansion. William, an Irish Catholic born into an impoverished family, often drew the ire of his superiors for writing vociferously against what he perceived as Britain overstepping the rights of people abroad.¹¹⁷ William's 1880 book *Far Out: Rovings Retold* addressed what he understood as the unjust war waged on the indigenous inhabitants of colonial regions, including those in

¹¹⁵ Leslie Allin, *Penetrating Critiques: Emasculated Empire and Victorian Identity in Africa* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 29.

¹¹⁶ Streets, *Martial Races*, 10; Anderson, "Red Coats and Black Shields," 21.

¹¹⁷ Usherwood and Spencer-Smith, *Lady Butler, Battle Artist*, 69.; Lacking explicit indications of strong political beliefs in her publicized writings, many authors have read William's politics as the primary source of influence in Butler's paintings. However, Butler's paintings before her marriage were not politically neutral, as we have seen. I would suggest that the couple likely mutually reinforced each other's pre-existing political convictions. If William Butler provides a useful source for reading his wife's paintings, it is through a lens that acknowledges their shared moral foundations in place of overt references by Butler herself.

South Africa. Writing on Cetshwayo, for example, William called out the double standard placed upon the Zulu king: “While the black king’s dealings towards us are weighed and measured by the strictest code of civilised law and usage existing between modern states, our relations towards him are exempted from similar test rules...”¹¹⁸ Additionally, Butler’s sister Alice Meynell and her husband Wilfrid, as mentioned above, were anti-imperialists, evident in their periodical *Merrie England*, in which they often labeled the wars which sought to attain or retain colonies as unjust. Scholar Julia Kuehn suggests Butler’s “family’s idealism and censure of (some features of) the imperial project must have had an impact on [her].”¹¹⁹

Although Butler participated in these imperial systems of power as the wife of a British officer, she also sympathized with non-white victims of aggressive British foreign policy. A small undated oil painting titled *The Life Guards, an Incident of the suppression of Arabi Pasha's Rebellion* (fig. 27) depicts a brutal scene of the British Household Cavalry overpowering Egyptian rebels during the Arabi Revolution (1879-1882). In the front, a mounted British guard holds an Egyptian man against a stone wall by the neck and points a revolver directly in his face. The Egyptian holds his arm up in protection. He holds a gun in his other hand, but it points at the ground, a neutralized threat. In the background, another mounted British guard prepares to strike a cowering unarmed man with his sword. In this piece, Butler’s sympathies lie with the non-white rebels fighting against British intervention in the region. Although her husband departed with the British force sent to Egypt under the control of Lord Wolseley, Butler reaffirmed her sympathy for “poor old Arabi and his ‘rebels’” in her autobiography.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, despite her

¹¹⁸ William Butler, *Far Out: Rovings Retold* (London: Wm. Isbister, Limited, 1880), 177.

¹¹⁹ Kuehn, *A Female Poetics of Empire*, 142–43.

¹²⁰ Butler, *An Autobiography*, 193.

apparent sympathies, in searching for a visual vocabulary to explore drama in an imperial context, she resorted to racial difference to make *Defence of Rorke's Drift* emotionally potent.

The charged imperial political climate primed the public to react strongly to an image of a young boy killed by the Zulus. One of the most repeated narratives from the Anglo-Zulu War was the bodily mutilation and subsequent killing of a number of boys at the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. In March of 1879, newspapers reported the torture and execution of the "poor little drummer boys" at Isandlwana. The details of the torture varied. Soldiers' accounts related how the drummer boys of the 24th Regiment were "hung on butcher's hooks" by their chins and then disemboweled or "opened like sheep," all while still alive.¹²¹ The *Daily News* reported that the boys "were hurled living into the air, and caught on assegais [spears] as they fell."¹²² The *Colonies and India Newspaper* instead said that "drummer boys were found with their hands tied behind their backs and strung up on tiptoe."¹²³ Sergeant G. Smith of the 24th Regiment wrote to his wife that the Zulus stabbed "poor Drummer Haydon" sixteen times and cut off a part of his cheek in the hospital at Rorke's Drift.¹²⁴ The veracity of the tales concerning the mutilated drummer boys is not the point here.¹²⁵ Instead, what is important is the British people's

¹²¹ Knight, *Zulu Rising*, 470.

¹²² "The War at the Cape," *Daily News*, no. 10258 (March 6, 1879).

¹²³ "Imperial Parliament – House of Commons," *Colonies and India Newspaper*, March 31, 1879, 10.

¹²⁴ Norman Holme, *The Silver Wreath: Being the 24th Regiment at Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift, 1879* (London: Samson Books, 1979), 61.

¹²⁵ Ian Knight provides two primary source accounts from men at the battle who testified that no torture had taken place and that the stories circulated in the English press were untrue. He also presents convincing evidence that the "poor little drummer boys" at Isandlwana were likely not all that "little." Examining the rolls of the 24th Regiment reveals that most soldiers with the rank

willingness to believe these stories and to repeat them ad nauseam; indeed, the stories of the torture have become enshrined in the mythology of the battle. The public deemed the white drummer boys as grievable and their deaths thus warranted swift vengeance.

The press inflamed the public's wrath over the drummer boys with stories that called for vengeance. *The Graphic* recounts that when the British captured two Zulu prisoners suspected of conducting the torture on the boys, "the soldiers' breasts were filled with grief and indignation" and "it was a hard task for the sentries to prevent some of them from taking summary vengeance on the captives."¹²⁶ According to the *Daily News*, when the public learned of the massacre of the British troops and the "ruthless barbarity" shown to the drummer boys, "men's blood boiled, and loud and deep were the threats of vengeance uttered."¹²⁷ The national grief spawned by the deaths of the drummer boys became a rallying point for racialized justifications of imperial violence against apparently ungrievable foes. This phenomenon characterized by the call to violence over the death of protected populations is consistent with Dr. Judith Butler's theory of grievable versus ungrievable lives. According to Dr. Butler: "certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war."¹²⁸ Press accounts of the violence against and retaliation for children demonstrate they were a population that should be protected in times of war according to the Victorian public, a sentiment reflected in the art world.

of "Boy" were over the age of sixteen and the rank of drummer was reserved for adult men. See *Zulu Rising* 470-471.

¹²⁶"The Zulu War: On the Voyage Out," *The Graphic*, March 29, 1879.

¹²⁷ "The War at the Cape," *Daily News*, no. 10258 (March 6, 1879).

¹²⁸ Butler, *Precaious Life*, 32.

The magazine *The Queen* highlighted the contrast in human value between a Black Zulu man and a white British child in their coverage of the 1880 exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery.¹²⁹ The magazine placed reproductions of Carl Haag's *A Zulu* and S.M. Fisher's portrait of *Ethel, Daughter of W.H. Peake, Esq.* next to one another, thus juxtaposing "Barbarism and Civilisation, each in the highest types" (fig. 28).¹³⁰ By placing the images so close to one another, the magazine magnified the racial and age difference of the figures for the Victorian reader. The Zulu warrior is in profile on the left, facing the young white girl on the right. His *assegai* points at her chest, suggestive of imminent violence stopped only by the bounds of the image. Scientific and biological justifications for the articulation of racial difference hid an even more sinister purpose: the conscious and practical weaponization of race for imperial rule. Victorians were not unaware of the contradictions inherent in such articulations, but rather ignored them for their own purposes.¹³¹ The popular culture spawned by the Anglo-Zulu War and the following press coverage thus leveraged racial stereotypes and anxieties about the vulnerability of British youths to manipulate public opinion. In doing so, journalists assuaged the crisis of masculine imperial identity by projecting the vulnerability of the British soldier onto white children. Exhibiting her painting in 1881, a year later than intended, Butler engaged in a similar form of manipulation but found little critical success in her endeavor.

The public's response to *Defence of Rorke's Drift* was unfavorable when the painting appeared at the Royal Academy in 1881. Although some critics mentioned its "drama" and

¹²⁹ Anderson, "Red Coats and Black Shields," 6.

¹³⁰ *The Queen*, June 12, 1880, 546.

¹³¹ Streets, *Martial Races*, 8.

“tragic effect,” the overwhelming reaction was one of disappointment.¹³² After all, Butler’s fame was still at its peak in 1881; her breakthrough success with *The Roll Call* along with her subsequent popular paintings were still fresh in the minds of the art-viewing public. Voicing their disappointment, critics lambasted the painting’s composition, poor color choices, and shoddy drawing skills. However, the correspondent for the *New York Times* took a more sympathetic tone, writing that the painting was a “fine picture” executed with “care and thought” though perhaps a little hastily done. “Had Mrs. Butler exhibited her picture a year ago,” the author importantly points out, “when the memory of the dire tragedy in Zulu-land was still present to every one [sic], and when time had not robbed it of any of its horrors, there would have been less of cool criticism and more of sympathy in the tone of the various reviews.”¹³³ The Royal Academy exhibit occurred two years after the Anglo-Zulu War ended. The public had moved on to more topical subjects. The grief of the war had faded.

Another area in which critics found fault was the visual treatment of the Zulus. The writer for *The Era* complained that Butler portrayed the Zulus as “indistinct” and “just a few of the savages are huddled in a corner of the picture.”¹³⁴ However, objections to the Zulus’ indistinctness were not protesting their inhuman representation. Critics thought that the ambiguity of the enemy’s numbers lessened the heroics of the British soldiers. To this author and others, Butler tempered the militaristic might of the Zulu army by relegating them to the fringes of her painting. Despite the ultimate inefficacy of the painting to the critical establishment, who

¹³² “Tragedy at the Royal Academy,” *The Era*, no. 2224 (May 7, 1881).; “Notes on Current Events,” *British Architect* 13, no. 12 (March 19, 1880); 133.

¹³³ “Royal Academy Pictures: Subjects Treated by Famous Hands and How Treated,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1881, 2.

¹³⁴ “Tragedy at the Royal Academy,” *The Era*.

seemed to want more direct visual engagement with “Barbarism and Civilisation” as *The Queen* expressed, Butler framed the battle in a way that “heighten[ed] affect in relation to the differential grievability of lives” in an attempt to emphasize the drama of the work.¹³⁵

By representing the Zulu men as a single dark mass, the painter strips them of their individual humanity, thus deeming them ungrievable. Dr. Butler defines an ungrievable life as one “that cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone.”¹³⁶ Painting for a British audience, Butler felt no need to portray the Zulus individually, as they were already destroyed, positioned only as a faceless enemy. The Zulus are thus “implicitly framed as targets for destruction” by Butler.¹³⁷ They were merely the bodies that the British soldiers would eradicate to win their ultimate victory. War serves as the ideal time for the active differentiation between those who are ungrievable and grievable.¹³⁸ The focus of the painting is wholly on the British soldiers by design. Their lives mattered and would be grieved if lost. However, viewers could not grieve the adult soldiers because they did not die. They survived the battle and went on to receive awards for their heroics. Butler, therefore, placed the grief wholly on the single corpse in the image: the vulnerable youth, a population that should be protected and thus carries dramatic and emotional weight.

Butler identified the youth as an important narrative element of the composition by placing him upright, ensuring his youthful, yet slackened, face is clearly visible to the audience. In doing so, she drew on contemporary mourning practices to represent the youth’s death

¹³⁵ Butler, *Frames of War*, 26.

¹³⁶ Butler, xix.

¹³⁷ Butler, xvii.

¹³⁸ Butler, 26.

visually. Specifically, his upright posture despite his recent death resembles the Victorian practice of post-mortem photography. The invention and commercialization of photography in the late nineteenth century prefaced the emergence of a new kind of memorial portrait: the post-mortem photo, in which a family posed and photographed a deceased relative often as if sleeping. This practice was especially common for recently deceased children.¹³⁹ Whether the family placed the deceased in a bed or coffin, they tilted them upward for the camera to capture their likeness. The young soldier's pose imitates this common mortuary practice. He is also devoid of any apparent wounds, reflective of the wish to idealize the deceased and hide any physical damage on their body.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, Butler referred to a Victorian mortuary norm familiar to the public to accentuate the message that his life is to be grieved and memorialized.

The norms that governed Victorian society established the value of youth and the grief felt by familial networks and onlooking publics when children died. Their deaths were especially poignant in violent circumstances made more distressing by anxieties about racial difference. This young man's life, which has just violently ended, is grievable because his youth "presupposes that a life will have been lived."¹⁴¹ Calls for decisive vengeance against African bodies voided any calls to grievability for their bodily or cultural termination. According to Dr. Butler, "...there are norms, explicit or tacit, governing which human lives count as human and as living, and which do not..." Furthermore, these norms are reified by what frames do and do not reveal, "bringing an image into focus on condition that some portion of the visual field is ruled

¹³⁹ Jen Cadwallader, "Spirit Photography Victorian Culture of Mourning," *Modern Language Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008): 13.

¹⁴⁰ Audrey Linkman, "Taken from Life: Post-Mortem Portraiture in Britain 1860–1910," *History of Photography* 30, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 323.

¹⁴¹ Butler, *Frames of War*, 15.

out.”¹⁴² Butler includes only what is necessary of the Zulu army to suggest their overwhelming and threatening presence, thus “ruling out” lives she and the public deemed ungrievable in favor of ennobling the actions of the white British soldiers.

Conclusion

Butler portrayed injured or deceased youths across her body of work to elicit emotional responses from her viewers. Before 1900, she interrogated the human cost of war for the common foot soldiers in her battle paintings. The youthful recruits and members of the military band were particularly vulnerable to bodily harm due to their immature age and tactical inexperience. Their presence in her paintings highlighted the tragedy of war even in pieces that also celebrated the valor of the British soldiery. However, childhood held varied definitions dependent on gender and class in Victorian Britain. Many sons of lower-class families and orphans saw the army as a viable source of wage-earning and upward social mobility. In contrast, middle- and upper-class children stayed in school for longer, extending childhood to late teenage-hood or their early twenties. Butler’s youth spent in a family that valued education and her comfortable financial position in adulthood surely influenced her belief that children should stay at home pursuing education rather than fighting on a battlefield. The birth of her children intensified this conviction. Her published writings further indicate that her sons’ involvement in the military, either hypothetically in *Steady the Drums and Fifes!* or literally in the first World War, pained her.¹⁴³ Butler’s career as an artist was connected to her roles as wife and mother, made evident by her autobiography and extant sketchbooks.

¹⁴² Butler, 74.

¹⁴³ Butler, 261, 323-8.

Butler completed two known self-portraits in her career spanning six decades. The first is a small oil sketch completed in 1869 when she was about twenty-three (fig. 29). In the second, she plays a minor part in the larger composition of *To the Front: French Cavalry Leaving a Breton City on the Declaration of War* (fig. 30). In this work, painted circa 1888-9, a crowd has gathered to see off a regiment of French Dragoons during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). The mounted dragoons have just emerged from the crumbling Porte Saint-Malo in Dinan. Butler's self-portrait is on the left of the composition (fig. 31). She wears a tan dress with a black shawl that also covers the back of her head, reminiscent of a mourning shawl. She looks wistfully up at the departing dragoons and waves a white handkerchief as they ride away. Next to her, in a red dress, is a portrait of her daughter Coos. Further into the crowd, standing next to two Breton women, are two young boys in cream outfits, modeled after Butler's sons Richard and Patrick. Wynne suggests that Butler could have been "reminding her husband of the sacrifices of family to war, and of the primacy of family" after a cheating scandal involving William and socialite, author, and journalist Gertrude Blood, also known as Lady Colin Campbell.¹⁴⁴

While Wynne's reading certainly may be accurate, I propose that the painting is also a portentous vision that abbreviates the three stages of a boy's life if he were to enter the military. The painting reads from left to right, moving temporally through life. First, as children, boys idolize the soldier but are ultimately innocent of the horrors of war, as her sons are as they watch the dragoons depart. Second, young men sign up to be soldiers, youthful and enthusiastic, confident of their success as they ride off to war. Finally, moving along the painting to the right, one arrives at an old man propping himself up on a cane and a woman kneeling on the ground in a posture of supplication or grief. I read this man as a veteran of a past war, maimed both

¹⁴⁴ Wynne, *Lady Butler*, 150–51, 156.

physically and mentally from his experience. He looks not at the departing soldiers but forward, beyond the frame of the image; his expression is both contemplative and melancholy.

Artists and writers who advocated for veterans' rights portrayed them as "engaged in the act of recollection." For the public, the veteran served as a liminal figure who provided a connection between the past, present, and future. They were both victims of past violence and reservoirs of memory that would provide lessons for future generations of Englishmen. Advocates employed these arguments for better support on behalf of Crimean War veterans who were often dying in abject poverty, as Kipling despaired in his 1890 poem "The Last of the Light Brigade."¹⁴⁵ This figure's dirty and tattered clothes would thus likely mark him as a lower-class veteran to the Victorian public. Rising above the veteran's head is a stone cross, reminiscent of a gravestone. The close pictorial proximity of the disabled veteran and the cross suggests that the ultimate outcome of war is either bodily disablement or death. That Butler included her self-portrait and the portraits of her young children in this painting suggests that (influenced especially by her role as a soldier's wife) she was deeply aware of the potential outcomes of life in the military and considered them in the context of her own children, who serve as the starting point for this narrative. The inclusion of her likeness is also poignant as Butler was seemingly uneasy about her representation in photographs and her fame as a woman artist, preferring the focus to be on her paintings rather than her image.¹⁴⁶

Butler thus conceived of children in the military through the lens of her status as a mother of two young boys. The presence of youth in the battles she depicted was tragic and their injuries

¹⁴⁵ Lara Kriegel, "Living Links to History, or, Victorian Veterans in the Twentieth-Century World," *Victorian Studies* 58, no. 2 (Winter 2016): 297, 291.

¹⁴⁶ Di Bello, "Elizabeth Thompson and 'Patsy' Cornwallis West as Carte-de-Visite Celebrities," 242.

and deaths even more so. Butler employed this concern for children, with which viewers sympathized as a result of the contemporaneous culture's increasing interest in childhood, to emphasize her painting's emotional impact. Art historians have been quick to dismiss art that appealed to sentiment as kitsch or "low- or middlebrow, trite, shallow, formulaic, offering cheap emotional stimulation to those unable or unwilling to engage in serious intellectual response."¹⁴⁷ However, Butler wielded sentiment deftly in her work. In return, the masses showered her with praise, purchased prints of her reproduced paintings, and flocked to see her works in droves.

Butler used youthful soldiers and bandmembers as powerful narrative devices in her battle paintings. Contemporary sources reveal that the public valued Butler's work for its ability to elicit strong emotion. The grief produced by these images of injured and deceased soldiers, especially when youthful, created a space for the re-interrogation of war and its costs. Butler held firm to this formula even as public opinion further shifted toward the New Imperialism in the 1880s and 1890s, a transition that called for a celebratory take on Britain's military excursions. Therefore, Butler's paintings and their proliferation as materials of mass culture provide insight into the public's relationship with war during a crucial period of Victorian Liberalism. More importantly, Butler's paintings reflect the grievability of youth in the late nineteenth century. The white child proved to be a potent symbol of physical vulnerability that exposed unease about the cost of warfare for Butler and many critical commentators.

¹⁴⁷ Bedell, *Moved to Tears*, 3.

FIGURES



Figure 1. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *The Roll Call*, 1874, oil on canvas, 93.3 x 183.5 cm. Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 405915.



Figure 2. Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1770, oil on canvas, 152.6 x 214.5 cm. National Gallery of Canada, 8007.



Figure 3. Arthur William Devis, *The Death of Nelson, 21 October 1805*, 1807, oil on canvas, 195.6 x 261.6 cm. National Maritime Museum, London, BHC2894.



Figure 4. William Allan, *The Battle of Waterloo*, 1843, oil on panel, 118 x 310 cm. English Heritage, The Wellington Collection, Apsley House, WM.1539-1948.



Figure 5. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *Study of a wounded Guardsman, Crimea, 1854*, circa 1874, oil on board. National Army Museum, NAM. 1963-11-194-1.



Figure 6. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *The 28th Regiment at Quatre Bras*, 1875, oil on canvas, 97.2 x 216.2 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, p.309.9-1.

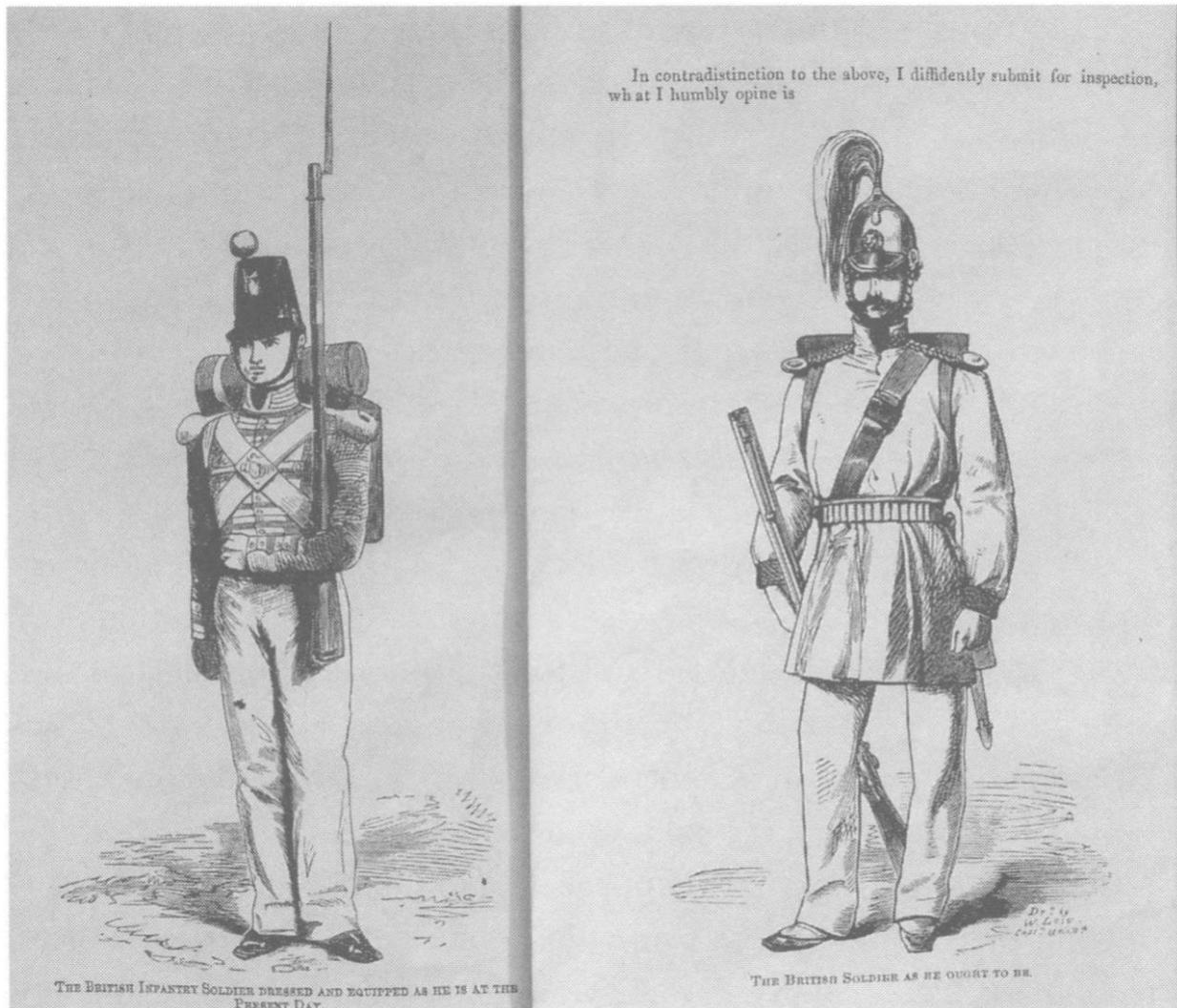


Figure 7. Edward Elers Napier, Illustration from “Proposed Alteration in our Military Dress, Arms, and Equipments” in *Colburn's United Service Magazine* (September 1851), pages 15-16.



Figure 8. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *Balaklava*, 1876, oil on canvas, 103.4 x 187.5 cm. Manchester Art Gallery, 1898.13.



Figure 9. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, detail of *Balaclava*, 1876, oil on canvas, 103.4 x 187.5 cm. Manchester Art Gallery, 1898.13.



Figure 10. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *Return from Inkerman*, 1877, oil on canvas, 86.7 x 104.5 cm. Ferens Art Gallery, KINCM:2005.4787. Bridgeman Images.



Figure 11. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, detail of *Balaclava*, 1876, oil on canvas, 103.4 x 187.5 cm. Manchester Art Gallery, 1898.13.



Figure 12. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *The Remnants of an Army*, 1879, oil on canvas, 132.1 x 233.7 cm. The Tate Collection, N01553.



Figure 13. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *Steady the Drums and Fifes! the 57th (Die Hards), drawn up under fire on the ridge of Albuera*, 1897, oil on canvas, 127 x 180.4 cm. The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment.

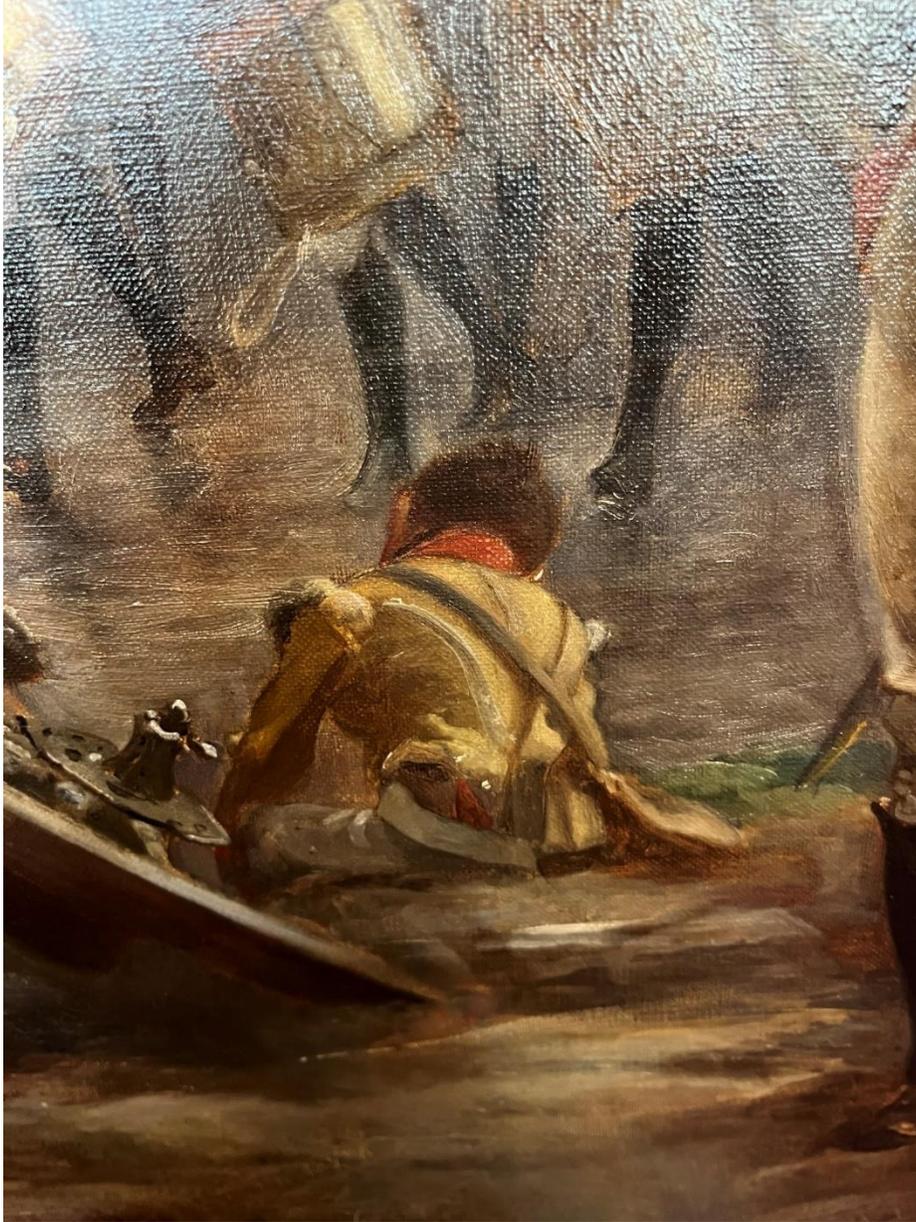


Figure 14. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, detail of *Steady the Drums and Fifes! the 57th (Die Hards)*, drawn up under fire on the ridge of Albuera, 1897, oil on canvas, 127 x 180.4 cm. The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment.



Figure 15. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, detail of *Steady the Drums and Fifes! the 57th (Die Hards)*, drawn up under fire on the ridge of Albuera, 1897, oil on canvas, 127 x 180.4 cm. The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment.

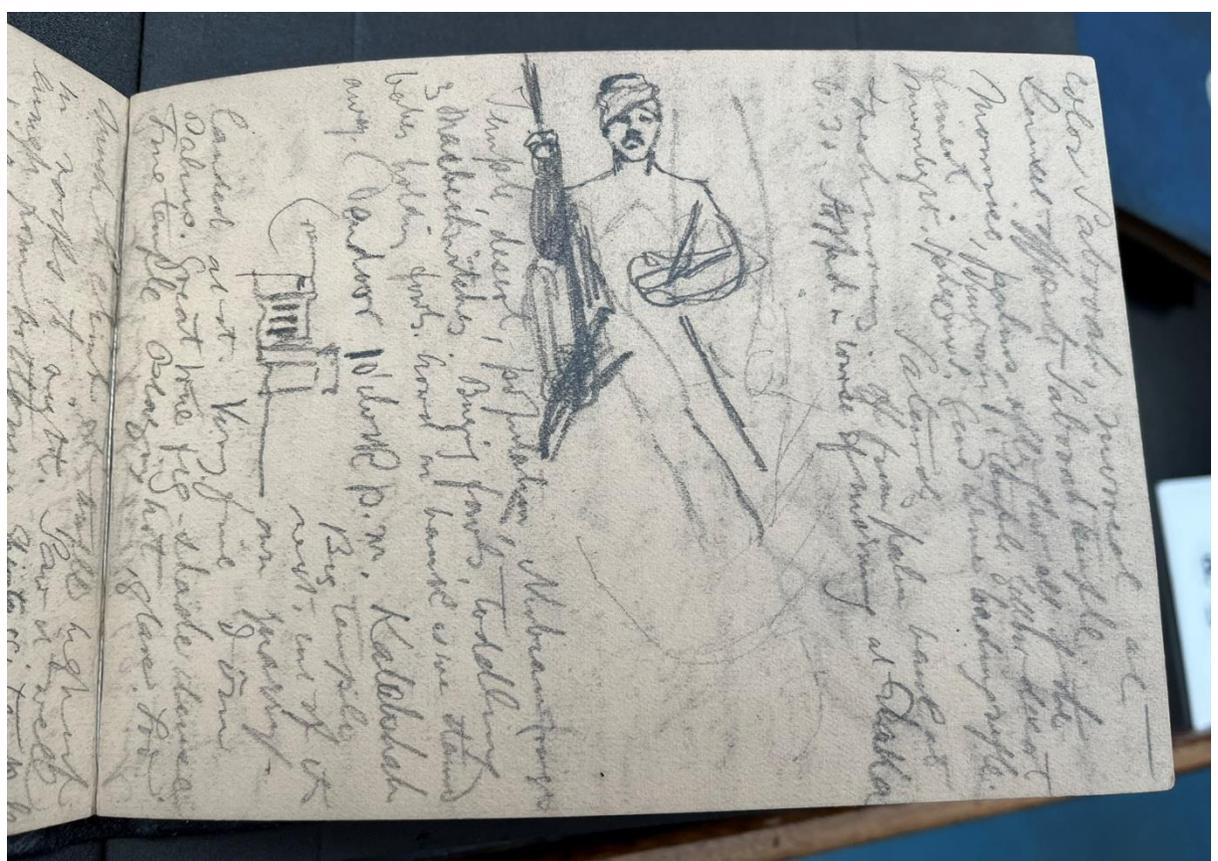


Figure 16. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, sketchbook, graphite on paper, 13.2 x 18 cm. The British Museum, 1966,0118.3.1-25.



Figure 17. Frederic James Shields, *The Drummer's Boy's Dream*, c. 1866, watercolor over graphite, 29.8 x 48.5 cm. The British Museum, 1970,1031.1.



The tune settled into full swing and the boys kept shoulder to shoulder. —p. 58.

Figure 18. Illustration from *Soldier Tales* depicting the story “Drums of the Fore and Aft”, 1896.



Figure 19. Edward Matthew Hale, *The Drums of the Fore and Aft*, 1895, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 198.1 cm. Leeds Art Gallery, LEEAG.PA.1896.0014.



Figure 20. Charles Edwin Fripp, *The Battle of Isandlwana*, 22 January 1879, 1885, oil on canvas, 142.2 x 223.2 cm. National Army Museum, NAM.1960-11-182-1.



Figure 21. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *Scotland for Ever!*, 1881, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 194.3 cm. Leeds Art Gallery, LEEAG.PA.1888.0002.



Figure 22. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *On the Morrow of Talavera*, 1923, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.8 cm. Private collection. Bridgeman Images.



Figure 23. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, detail of *Balaklava*, 1876, oil on canvas, 103.4 x 187.5 cm. Manchester Art Gallery, 1898.13.



Figure 24. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *The Dorset Yeomen at Agagia, 26 February 1916*, 1916, oil on canvas, 97 x 183.5 cm. Dorset County Council, DCC-01.



Figure 25. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, illustration from *From Sketch-book and Diary* captioned "In a Cairo Bazaar," 1909.



Figure 26. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *The Defence of Rorke's Drift*, 1880, oil on canvas, 120.2 x 214 cm. Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 405897.

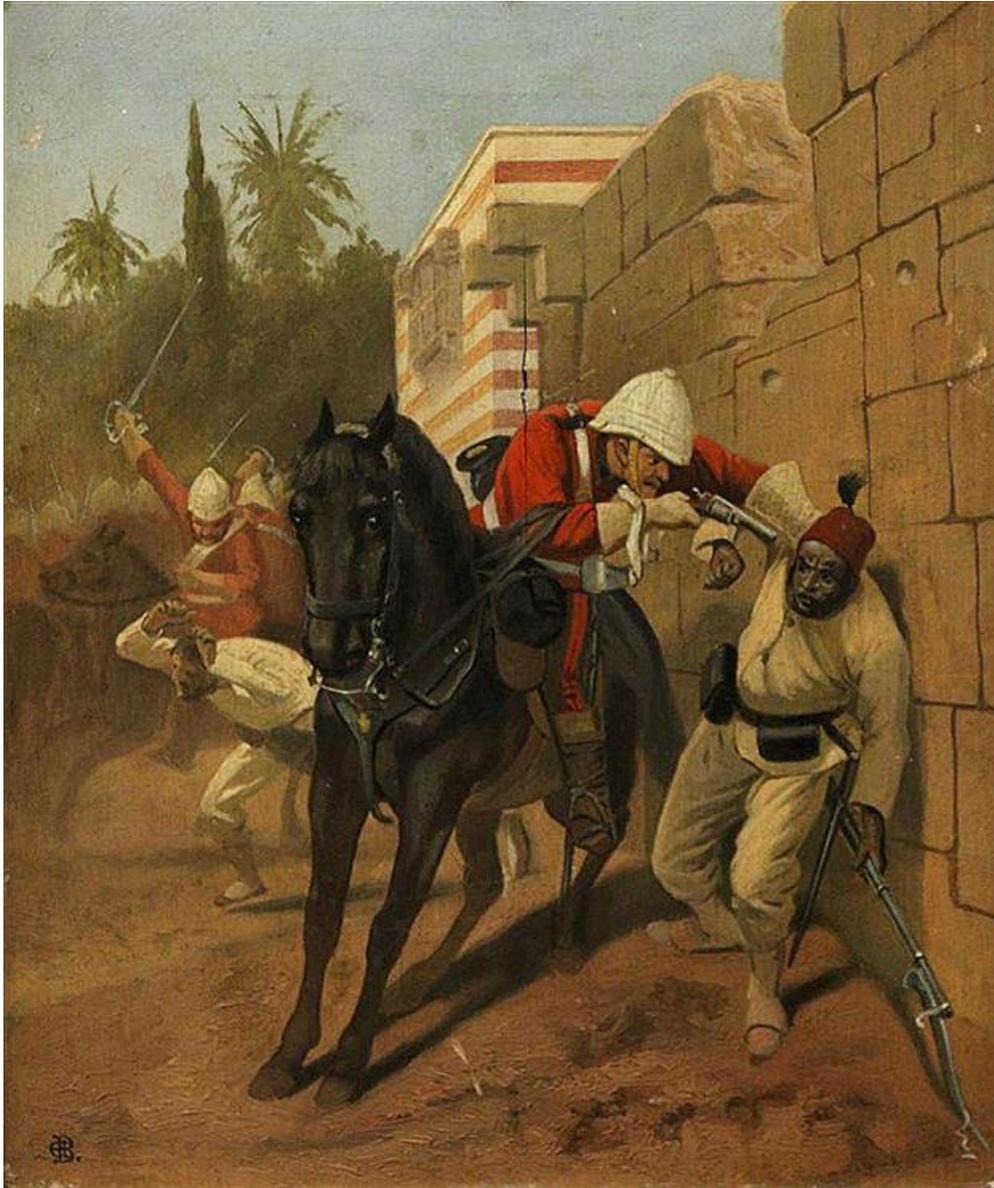


Figure 27. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *The Life Guards, an Incident of the Suppression of Arabi Pasha's Rebellion*, undated, oil on panel, 30.5 x 25 cm. Private collection.



(115) A Zulu. By Carl Haag.



(116) Ethel, daughter of W. H. Peale, Esq. By S. M. Fisher.

Figure 28. *A Zulu* by Carl Haag and *Ethel, daughter of W.H. Peale, Esq.* by S.M. Fisher, facing illustrations in *The Queen*, June 12, 1880, pg. 546-547. Image from Catherine Anderson, "Embodiments of Empire: Figuring Race in Late Victorian Painting" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2008), 208.



Figure 29. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *Self-portrait*, 1869, oil with traces of pencil on card, 21.9 x 18.1 cm. National Portrait Gallery, NPG 53.14.



Figure 30. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *To the Front: French Cavalry Leaving a Breton City on the Declaration of War*, 1888-89, oil on canvas, 112.2 x 165.9 cm. Private collection.



Figure 31. Elizabeth Thompson Butler, detail of *To the Front: French Cavalry Leaving a Breton City on the Declaration of War*, 1888-89, oil on canvas, 112.2 x 165.9 cm. Private collection.

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ABSTRACT

THE GRIEVABILITY OF THE CHILD SOLDIER
IN THE BATTLE PAINTINGS OF
ELIZABETH THOMPSON BUTLER (1846-1933)

by

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Bachelor of Arts, 2020

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Lady Elizabeth Thompson Butler (1846-1933) eschewed subject matter typical of British battle painting before the 1870s to portray the heroism and sacrifice of the common foot-soldier. She highlighted the dire cost of war not only for the older and battle-weary soldier but also for the youthful combatants and boys in the military band. In this thesis, I argue that Butler utilized the vulnerable child soldier figure in her paintings as a vehicle of emotive force and narrative drama. I analyze *Balaclava* (1876) and *Steady the Drums and Fifes!* (1897) to demonstrate how Butler employed injured or deceased youths to heighten the tragedy of her battle paintings. I also explore how Butler navigated a public that was becoming increasingly jingoistic to execute her painting *The Defence of Rorke's Drift* (1880), which drew on racial anxieties produced by the Anglo-Zulu War (1879) to promote an emotional response to a deceased white youth. Philosopher Judith Butler's differentiation between grievable and ungrivable lives helps us better understand how grief and the mourning of young lives manifested in Butler's battle paintings. She tapped into the contemporary consciousness that was increasingly distinguishing childhood as distinct from adulthood, utilizing the adolescent as a charged symbolic figure that allowed her to critique systems of war by influencing her audience's emotions.