

## 5. Toothy Tales: Dentures in the Writings of H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling

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In his 1965 work *Rabelais and His World*, literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin contends that the mouth plays a central role in the aesthetics of one of the most enduring modern artistic modes, the grotesque:

[T]he most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss (p. 317).

For Bakhtin, the image of the gaping mouth is all-consuming, a metaphor for the abyss that all other bodily features merely frame. The mouth is vital according to Bakhtin as it is within this space that ‘the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome’ (1965, p. 317). Given the importance Bakhtin places on the mouth, it is surprising that this topic remains under-researched in literary studies. In the few papers that address this topic in nineteenth-century literature, teeth tend to be analysed for their metaphorical meaning in broader arguments that connect imagery with other social themes. For example, regarding the ‘feline’-toothed villain James Carker from Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* (1846–48, p. 198), Robert Clark declares that his teeth signify ‘both a sexual and an economic rapacity’ (1984, p. 79); James E. Marlow considers them as an apt symbol for ‘cannibalistic England’ (1994, p. 93); and Gail Turley Houston contends that Carker’s mouth represents ‘unrestrained acquisition – hostile takeovers as well as corporate and corporal raids’ (1994, p. 98; Carlyle Tarr, 2017, p. 135 n. 85). Though fascinating, these readings do not tell us much about how teeth were viewed socially in Victorian Britain. More recently, a select number of studies address this issue, considering imaginaries of teeth metonymically. Clayton Carlyle Tarr reads

nineteenth-century portrayals of long, white, uniform teeth (including Carker's) in context with the professionalisation of dentistry, ultimately arguing that teeth of this kind 'signalled the threat of degeneration' (2017, p. 113). Adopting a similar approach, Andrea Goulet's 2017 article 'Tooth Decay: Edgar Allan Poe and the Neuro-déca“dent” isme of Villiers and Huysmans' argues that 'tooth- rot ... becomes revalued as part of a modern aesthetic sensibility, a refined reaction against the effects of American consumerism and base materiality' (2017, p. 198). In her analysis, imaginaries of teeth rot are read contiguously alongside transnational discourses of dentistry, neuropathology, consumerism, and aesthetics. The following draws from Carlyle Tarr and Goulet's approaches but considers how teeth, specifically false ones (which have seen even less scholarly attention), can be read as metonym, metaphor, *and* comic prop. Unlike previous studies, I show that teeth perform multiple affective roles in particular late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century imperial writings.

Specifically, this chapter investigates the rich use of false teeth users in the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works of H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. By re-examining depictions that have until now been read in ways that have overlooked key dental, biographical, and cultural contexts, this essay provides a new approach to reading teeth in literature. It argues that Haggard's and Kipling's works provided metonymic commentaries on the fit and functionality of false teeth while utilising their symbolic flexibility as devices to perform a variety of roles, stimulating comedy, personal reflection, and grotesque intrigue. An important role concerns how false teeth were deployed as metaphors to interrogate anxieties about the perceived ailing condition of Britain's colonial forces.

Imaginaries of false teeth have been neglected in studies of the long nineteenth century for three key reasons. First, as Guy Woodforde (one of few historians to write about the history of false teeth) explains, 'laboured attempts at a natural appearance' alongside post-Regency sentimentalities meant that though false teeth were common among the middle classes in

nineteenth-century Britain, propriety forbade any mention of them (1968, p. 2–3). As a result, dentures appeared infrequently in Victorian fiction—though Carlyle Tarr’s article and my 2017 essay “‘Get the best article in the market’: Prostheses for Women in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Commerce’ reveal some notable exceptions (Sweet 2017). Second, false teeth (as one might expect) were often imagined in comical ways and, as Bob Nicholson points out, even the best work in the field is often underpinned by assumptions about the oppressive seriousness of the Victorians (2012, p. 35). As a result, Victorian humour remains an under-researched area. Third, and related to the previous point, the mouth has been viewed as a relatively insignificant topic, mirroring the extent to which oral health has been neglected socially on a global scale (Watt et al, 2019). The focus of literary studies is, after all, often a reflection of what society views as important. The following analysis shows that representations of artificial teeth are worth our attention: they reveal attitudes to health, aesthetic standards, technology, social institutions, and nationhood; they also expose the power of the mouth as a symbol of cultural conformity/difference, physical fitness, and selfhood. Like David Scott’s contribution to this collection (Chapter 6), this essay gives overdue attention to the language and metaphors of the mouth, specifically those related to dentures.

### **Grotesque Humour**

Haggard’s Captain Good from *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) is arguably the most famous and visible denture user in Victorian literature. While Woodforde asserts that ‘one might read a whole library of Victorian novels without learning that anyone’s teeth were artificial’ (1968, 3), Haggard’s work is an exception. Indeed, Good’s immaculate artificial teeth are prominent aesthetically and in terms of Haggard’s plot. One could, in fact, consider them an early example of unrealistically perfect teeth—representations of which in contemporary media are the focus of Rizwana Lala’s analysis in Chapter 3. Good, a former Royal Navy officer, who ‘had been turned out of her Majesty’s employ with the barren honour of a commander’s rank, because it

was impossible that he should be promoted', is revealed as a user of 'two beautiful sets' of false teeth (Haggard, 1885, p. 13). Throughout the imperial adventure novel, which sees Good, the narrator-protagonist Allan Quatermain, and the aristocrat Sir Henry Curtis travel to Southern Africa to find the latter's estranged brother, Good's teeth are recognised for appearing in 'perfect order' (p. 44). Their appearances matches the former Navy lieutenant's stereotypically pristine toilette: Quatermain remarks that Good 'looked the neatest man I ever had to do with in the wilderness' (p. 44). Good's teeth go on to hold a significant (albeit comic) role in the story as his nervous tick of 'dragging the top set down and allowing them to fly back to his jaw with a snap' bewilders a group of Kukuani warriors holding Good and his comrades hostage, leading them to believe that the Western men are 'wizards' (pp. 85, 88). The confusion and misplaced awe generated by this encounter saves the adventurers' lives. This infamous scene has been read by contemporary literary critics as an example of ethnocentrism (Patteson 1978, p. 113; Kestner 2010, p. 67)—revealing of a Western arrogance that mocks non-Westerners for having unenlightened approaches to technology—but such a reading only tells part of story regarding the aesthetic and contextual significance of Good's teeth. In his 2007 introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *King Solomon's Mines*, Robert Hampson provides a helpful but somewhat limiting reading of Good:

Good is 'of a susceptible nature' ..., but this becomes the sentimental counterpart to the comic presentation of his character. Otherwise, his character is little more than a neatness of dress, a fixed eyeglass and a set of false teeth, and it is dramatized through his being positioned as the butt of various humiliations[.] (p. xxviii)

Hampson is correct that Good's artificial teeth are character-defining and that he is a figure of fun, but this representation also encodes both a slapstick mockery of English Navy Officers and a comic exploitation of the potential offered by particular prosthetic technologies. Good is by no means a complex and highly developed character but his depiction is significant as it

exposes nineteenth-century attitudes to both Navy officers and spring-fixed upper- and lower-plate dentures.

Another work of British imperial fiction that draws from the humorous capacity of false teeth—albeit in a much darker and more symbolic way—is Kipling’s 1904 short story ‘Mrs. Bathurst’. This mysterious and dense literary work contains within a frame narrative (of four men gossiping and drinking beer at Simon’s Town, South Africa) a story about a false-teeth-using warrant rank officer of the Royal Navy, called Vickery, who falls in love with the keeper of ‘a little hotel at Hauraki—near Auckland’ (Kipling, 1904, p. 389). While moored in Cape Town one Christmas, eighteen months before his pension is due, Vickery becomes obsessed with a travelling circus’s cinematograph film of ‘the Plymouth Express arrivin’ at Paddin’ton’ as he believes it shows his beloved looking for him (p. 395). Vickery’s obsession leads him to watch the film six consecutive nights before he is granted leave to travel to Bloemfontein ‘to take over some Navy ammunition left in the fort’ (p. 387). Vickery uses this opportunity to travel to Worcester, the circus’s next destination, so that he can see the film a further time. During this trip, he goes AWOL. He is later found charred along with another man after being struck by lightning in a teak forest. He is ultimately identified by his false teeth, which remain intact following his death: ‘That’s what they really were, you see—charcoal. They fell to bits when we tried to shift ’em. The man who was standin’ up had the false teeth. I saw ’em shinin’ against the black’ (p. 407). Again exemplifying the affective richness of false teeth, Kipling’s short story uses grotesque humour and literary allusion to provide a contextual commentary on partial denture plates while exploiting false teeth as a character-defining synecdoche and a metaphor for human-machine integration. Together *King Solomon’s Mines* and ‘Mrs. Bathurst’ show the potent roles that teeth play in the literary imagination.

In Haggard’s novel, the neatness, whiteness, and artificiality of Good’s dentures aptly represent his character and, by extension, caricature the typical late-Victorian Navy officer. Good’s teeth

are described as 'beautiful', 'in perfect order', and 'lovely' (pp. 13, 44, 86). Quatermain, who reveals himself as a false teeth user as well, laments that Good's teeth have often caused him to break the tenth commandment: 'Thou shalt not covet ... anything that is thy neighbour's' (Exodus 20:17). To appreciate the imaginary of Good's teeth contextually, one must note that Royal Navy officers' uniforms, which were standardised in the 1880s and 1890s, communicated 'upper-middle-class masculine qualities of patriotism, leadership ability and self-discipline' (Colville 2003, p. 115). Good's attentiveness to personal hygiene and maintaining a neat appearance, which is represented by his 'perfect' dentures, certainly matches the qualities of self-discipline and patriotism promoted by real-life officers' uniforms. But Haggard makes a mockery of these ideals when Good ironically becomes heralded for appearing superhuman by the people of Kukuanaaland. It is initially Good's nervous pulling down of his top set that arrests his captors' attention, but they are ultimately convinced of his magic after Quatermain instructs Good to remove and replace his dentures entirely:

'Open your mouth,' I said to Good, who promptly curled up his lips and grinned at the old gentleman like an angry dog, revealing to his astonished gaze two thin red lines of gum as utterly innocent of ivories as a new-born elephant. The audience gasped.

'Where are his teeth?' they shouted; 'with our eyes we saw them.'

Turning his head slowly and with a gesture of ineffable contempt, Good swept his hand across his mouth. Then he grinned again, and lo, there were two rows of lovely teeth.

Now the young man who had flung the knife threw himself down on the grass and gave vent to a prolonged howl of terror; and as for the old gentleman, his knees knocked together with fear.

'I see that ye are spirits,' he said falteringly[.]' (p. 86)

The surprising and extreme reaction of the Kukuanaland people, who, according to the novel's condescending and derogatory ethnocentric logic, are 'as utterly innocent of ivories as a new-born elephant' (p. 86), creates part of the comedy of this scene. But this extreme reaction works in tandem with the slapstick grotesqueness and social impropriety of a former Royal Navy officer exposing his bare gums. The problematic animal simile used to describe the Kukuanaland gentleman is paired with an also degrading animalistic comparison of Good as he exposes his gums—he 'curled up his lips and grinned at the old gentleman like an angry dog'—though note how the Westerner is compared to a domesticated nonhuman associated with 'faithfulness, sagacity, and self-sacrifice' in the Victorian imagination (Esmail, 2014, p. 19), while the man from Kukuanaland is compared to not only a wild and exotic animal but a new-born one at that.

The demeaning comparison of Good is nonetheless significant as it emphasises just how uncouth it was to remove one's false teeth publicly in such a manner, a move made even more shocking as it is performed by an individual tied to the presentational standards of the Royal Navy. As Woodforde notes, 'in ordinary polite society, propriety forbade any mention of false teeth' (1968, p. 2). He explains, 'By about 1840 laboured attempts at a natural appearance had brought false teeth into the category of the modern male toupee: however blatantly artificial, and loose, they had to be passed off as the work of Nature; however inconvenient for eating, they stayed in at meals' (1968, p. 1). Regarding the expected appearance of navy officers, Colville observes that 'Pride in the self, and pride in the navy and its traditions, were treated as interchangeable concepts' (2003, p. 124). Furthermore, we must also note that cleanliness was instilled into navy men as a matter of the utmost importance in the nineteenth century (Smith, 2018). Though no longer officially serving with the navy, given how closely Good's character is tied to the institution, the vulgarity and uncleanliness of removing one's teeth in public appears doubly shocking (and thus incongruously humorous) when we consider the extent to

which navy men's attention to their appearance was seen to represent their attachment to the institution and pride in good sanitation—both to maintain appearances and to protect their comrades from contagious diseases. As Elise Juzda Smith writes, at the time Haggard was writing, 'personal presentation now appeared as a visible symbol of enhanced naval discipline' (2018, p. 190). Good's act certainly represents a breach of self-discipline, but it is one with unexpected and amusing consequences, which endure: the humorous results of the scene are extended as Good is forced to maintain the half-dressed appearance that he exhibits when ambushed by the Kukuanaaland men—with half of his face shaven and no trousers—to stay in character as a '[Son] of the Stars' (p. 97). Alongside the incongruous humour caused by this scene is a satirical jab at the navy as an institution. As I will return to later, there is a suggestion that appearances were being favoured over substance.

Complicating Haggard's depiction, Good's false teeth, though comically rendered, are represented as useful—and not just because of the impression that they give to the people of Kukuanaaland. Earlier, they are shown to be functional in a more regular sense. On the white men's treacherous journey to Kukuanaaland, which requires them to cross the forty leagues of desert between Kalukawe River and the mountain range Sheba's Breasts, they are saved from dehydration after stumbling across a patch of wild melons. Upon finding these, Good appears to have no trouble devouring 'about six' using his dentures. As Quatermain reports, within seconds of discovering the fruit, Good 'had his false teeth fixed in one' (p. 70). Later in their journey, in another act of famished desperation, Good makes short work of raw meat from an alpine antelope known locally as an 'Inco' (pp. 78–79). In both scenes, there is an irony and dark humour to the white men's (and especially Good's) savage eating habits. Contextually, the comedy is heightened by the knowledge that false teeth often failed at mealtimes. As Woodforde observes, 'actual teeth were often so ill-arranged that even a close-fitting denture was at once dislodged on chewing' (1968, p. 74). He also explains that 'Victorian false teeth,



more than anything else, lay behind the Victorian custom of eating in bedrooms just before dinner. It was a custom which insured against disaster at the table' (1968, p. 4). Though contextual knowledge of false teeth's usual deficiencies may have added to these scenes, building comic tension about a dental mishap likely to occur, Good's teeth hold up well. Haggard thus exploits false teeth's comic potential without diminishing their functionality, mirroring his personal experiences with dentures, which I will return to towards the end of this essay.

Contrasting Haggard's rather jovial depiction of Good, in Kipling's short story there is an uneasiness regarding the permanency of Vickery's teeth, which not only remain intact but 'shinin'' after this violent death. This mood resonates with several earlier representations of prosthetic body parts, which figure as enduring mementos following the death of their users. For example, in Robert Williams Buchanan's 'Lady Letitia's Lilliput Hand' (1862), the eponymous protagonist is memorialised following her death by her 'Lilliput Hand', a dainty and perfectly formed prosthetic. Furthermore, H. G. Wells's *The Food of the Gods and How It Came to Earth*, which was published just a few months before 'Mrs. Bathurst' in May 1904, features a glass eye, which is the only remnant of an elderly farmer named Mr Skinner after he is eaten by a giant rat. In each of these imaginaries, there is an unsettling permanency to the prosthetic body part, which stands uncomfortably alongside the comparative fragility of the human condition. Metonymically, the prostheses stand as exemplars of a trade that has developed hugely over the course of a century. Metaphorically, the prostheses represent how mankind's obsessive attention to its creations can lead to them outlasting or even replacing human beings. In the case of Vickery, the grotesque image of his charred corpse contrasting his white dentures focalises the mouth in line with Bakhtin's observations about the prominence of this feature in relation to the grotesque. Indeed, the freakishness of Vickery as a character becomes synecdochally represented by this final image of his prominent teeth.

Earlier in the short story, Vickery's teeth exacerbate his oddness as a character. For a start, unlike Captain Good's dentures, Vickery's are noticeable for the wrong reasons: they are loose, meaning that they cause a repetitive clicking sound. This noise is so prominent that Vickery is known by the nickname 'Click'. In Nicholas Daly's analysis of 'Mrs. Bathurst', he claims that the clicking noise is 'evidently meant to remind the reader of that made by a projector' (2004, p. 74), thereby sonically linking Vickery to the novel technology fuelling his obsession. However, we can also read this depiction as a literal critique of partial denture plates, which were, at the time Kipling was writing, 'inclined to be so loose and uncomfortable that most people refused to wear them' (Woodforde 1968, p. 79). Like many contemporary real-life users of partial plates, his is certainly not closely fitting, hence the infamous sound it produces. Unlike Haggard's complementary presentation of spring-fixed dentures in *King Solomon's Mines*, metonymically the depiction of Vickery's false teeth provides a subtle critique of partial plates. His dentures not only fail to enable him to pass as someone with a full set of teeth but draw attention to his prosthesis use to the extent that his name and identity are reduced to the very noise that they produce: 'Click'. Metaphorically, the loose-fitting prosthesis transmogrifies a navy officer into a grotesque human-machine hybrid.

As well as critiquing partial plates and forewarning the spectre of human-machine integration—aspects that contrast Haggard's imaginary of dentures—Vickery's artificial teeth add to his unsettling nature. For instance, Pyecroft, the man who tells the story of 'Click's' obsessive visits to the travelling circus, describes the first time he watched 'the Western Mail came in to Paddin'ton' (p. 419) with Vickery by focussing on the grotesque image of his mouth: 'Vickery touched me on the knee again. He was clickin' his four false teeth with his jaw down like an enteric at the last kick' (p. 398). Here, Vickery's clicking makes audible his excited and nervous state while his mouth appears like an enteric (typhoid or paratyphoid) fever patient on the cusp of death. This morbid image foreshadows 'Click's' grisly death, which comes as an

unlikely consequence of his fixated pursuit of the cinematograph projection. Pyecroft is so disturbed by Vickery that he notes his relief upon realising his death: ‘Well, I don’t know how you feel about it, ... but ’avin’ seen ’is face for five consecutive nights on end, I’m inclined to finish what’s left of the beer an’ thank Gawd he’s dead!’ (p. 408).

The prosthesis user’s obsessive quest in pursuit of an infamous but almost mythical being, which ultimately leads to his undoing, links him intertextually with Herman Melville’s Captain Ahab (1851). However, *Moby-Dick* is not the only novel that his depiction recalls. His disturbing persona also links him to earlier predatory male characters known for their prominent teeth, including Sir Francis Varney from James Malcolm Rymer’s *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood* (1845–1847), Carker from Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*, and the eponymous anti-hero of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Of course, predominantly these representations feature the Gothic trope of the vampiric fang, though John Sutherland has speculated that Carker’s gnashers are likely artificial: ‘Carker’s ‘glistening’ teeth, in the mouth of a 40-year-old man, and their astonishing ‘regularity and whiteness’, are surely too good to be true. They must be porcelain, we suspect’ (1999, p. 84). In the case of Vickery, it is not so much the shape or whiteness of his teeth that make him appear disconcerting. Rather, it is the chattering sound that they produce that underscores his unsettling depiction. His clicking teeth speak for him in a ghoulish way, expressing his angst and overstimulated nervous excitement.

### **Imperial Concerns**

While there are clear differences in the way that false teeth are imagined in Haggard’s and Kipling’s writings, ingrained in both is an anxiety regarding the dwindling condition of Britain’s imperial forces. Infamously, Britain’s failings in the Boer War stimulated fears of national decline, which were ratified by the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration’s damning report. This was published in July 1904, just a couple of months before ‘Mrs. Bathurst’ first appeared in *Windsor Magazine* in England and the *Metropolitan*

*Magazine* in America. The report revealed ‘widespread physical weakness among the working class’ (Gilbert, 1965, p. 144). More specific to oral health, the Army Medical Department Report for the Year 1903 revealed that of 69,553 men inspected 4,400 were not accepted due to ‘loss or decay of many teeth’ (Medical Division, War Office, 1905, p. 43). As Helen Franklin notes in Chapter 9 of this collection, this issue remained prevalent during World War One. While Good and Vickery are depicted as navy officers of the middle class, rather than soldiers of the working classes, for both characters false teeth are insignias of unfitness. Good, for instance, lacks preparedness for battle due to the complexity of his toilette—which he only gets away with due to the unfamiliarity of his foes to the wonders of modern technology. On the other hand, Vickery’s troubled nature and frailty as a character are aptly captured by the continual chattering of his dentures. The vanity of both men, as represented by their false teeth use, is also opened to critique as they each fall in love with women who, at the time of publication, would have been considered unsuitable: Good falls in love with a Kukuanaaland servant, who cares for him after he is badly injured in battle (another scene that underscores his weakness as an imperial warrior); Vickery, of course, becomes obsessively attached to not merely a woman of low social status on the other side of the world, but, more specifically, the image of that woman as represented by the cinematograph (highlighting his fragile mental state and anticipating a kind of techno-sexual dystopia). Reading these works as critiques of Britain’s military and national fitness aligns with the authors’ publicly stated concerns about maintaining colonial control. As Andrew Rutherford notes in his introduction to the Oxford World Classics collection *War Stories and Poems* (1990), Kipling’s stories about the Boer War presented dismay at the inefficiency shown at many levels throughout the Army while his works between this conflict and the First World War warned of Britain’s need to prepare itself for Armageddon (pp. xii, ix–xx). In Haggard’s *Diary of an African Journey*, on the other hand, which he wrote during his return to South Africa as a diplomat in 1914, he noted a conversation

with a Royal Navy captain in which they discussed ‘the falling off in the quality of the young Englishmen of all classes who take to the sea nowadays and especially of the officers’ (2000, p. 277). This conversation brings into focus how Haggard’s depiction of Good almost thirty years earlier anticipated later anxieties about the military in decline. In both *King Solomon’s Mines* and ‘Mrs. Bathurst’ we can read false teeth as a metaphor of an empire that presented itself as well formed and intact but behind the veneer was weakened and unhealthy.

### **Personal Experience**

Other personal factors affecting Haggard’s and Kipling’s representations of false teeth concern their real-life experiences with dentures and dental problems. We learn from their letters and autobiographical writings that both Haggard and Kipling were false teeth users: Kipling from at least 1897 (when he was in his early thirties) and Haggard from at least 1914 (when he was in his late fifties), though one suspects the latter lost his teeth earlier than this—archaeological studies of nineteenth-century London reveal very high levels of tooth decay in middle- and upper-class population groups across all ages (Whittaker, 1993; Hendersen et al, 2013). Indeed, one wonders whether the following comments about Good’s dentures in *King Solomon’s Mines* come from the fictional narrator or the author himself: ‘he had two beautiful sets that have often, my own being none the best caused me to break the tenth commandment. But I am anticipating’ (p. 13). This metafictional moment, read in context with the contemporary prevalence of dental carries and Haggard’s later open writing about false teeth use, suggests that his imaginary of Good’s highly finished dentures may have stood in contrast with his own, or at least the ones he anticipated wearing. We know for sure that Haggard was acquainted with dentures from an early age. In the first volume of his autobiography *The Days of My Life* (published posthumously in 1926), he recounted a comical scene from a childhood family trip up the Rhine that involved his mother’s maid racing to retrieve his father’s false teeth from ‘a mile or more away’ just as their steamer was about to depart (1926, ch. 1). This early exposure

to the practical realities and comical potentiality of false teeth use may well have contributed to Haggard's depiction of Good's denture use.

Kipling, on the other hand, was a false teeth user several years before the publication of 'Mrs. Bathurst'. His letters reveal that he suffered terribly from toothache in the winter of 1896–1897, leading him to spend extensive periods 'in the embraces of the local dentist' (1896, p. 273). Kipling wrote openly with characteristic imagination and dark humour about his dental woes. For instance, in a letter to writer and editor Ripley Hitchcock on 17 January 1897, Kipling remarked, 'my constant occupation is going to the dentist: for my teeth miss the dry air of Vermont and like cherubim and seraphim "continually do cry"' (1897b, p. 282). Having recently moved to England from Vermont, here Kipling rationalised his toothache while providing a combination of simile, personification, and allusion to the hymn '*Te Deum Laudamus*' to emphasise hyperbolically how strongly his teeth were communicating their ill state—in the context of the hymn, cry means exclaim rather than weep (Church of England, 1662, p. 51). By June 1897 Kipling used false teeth. In another light-hearted letter to his doctor, James M. Conland, Kipling provided an account of attending a navy steam trial of a 30-knot torpedo boat in which he recounted, 'I felt my false teeth shaking in my head!' (1897a, p. 300). The vibrations of this experience were long-lived: Kipling noted that it took two days to get the 'jumps' out of his legs (1897a, p. 301). Such an experience provided a precedent for Kipling's depiction of Vickery's rattling false teeth, which can be read in this context to represent not only a nervous disposition but a body reeling from the shocks of steam-powered sailing.

As teeth took on a comical and curious role in Haggard's earlier fiction, in his 1914 *Diary of an African Journey* they became symbols of deep reflection and lament. After passing Cape Gardafui, a headland in Somalia, Haggard recounted a sorrowful dental incident: 'I had two teeth taken out by the doctor this morning. They have been my companions for half a century

but the best of friends must part! They looked very lonely lying there upon the table' (2000, p. 274). It is notable that Haggard took time to describe dental details such as this in a work otherwise focussed on African affairs and the author's often regretful reflection on his personal achievements. Haggard exposes here a vulnerability similar to the experiences of those 'having work done' in Barry Gibson, Jennifer Kettle, and Lorna Warren's essay (Chapter 11). The loneliness projected onto Haggard's personified, extracted teeth resonates with the regret he expressed as he said farewell to Africa and considered the broader impact of his life's work:

It is impossible for me to avoid contrasting the feelings with which I leave [South Africa] now that I have grown old, with those with which I bade goodbye to its shores in 1881 while I was young. Then life was before me and I had hopes and ambitions. Now life is practically behind me with its many failures and its few successes. Now I have, I think, no ambitions left and my only hope is that I may end my days in peace and remain of some slight services to my country and others till the last. (2000, p. 241)

Despite this very different tone and treatment of teeth, Haggard recorded with some of his usual slapstick humour two incidents involving his dentures. First, the top plate of his recently fitted false teeth was crushed by the iron lid of a washbasin, requiring him to use an 'old temporary set', which 'the dentist wanted to destroy' (2000, p. 76). Second, one morning Haggard awoke to find his servant, Mazooku, who he had been reunited with after nearly forty years, 'in the act of consigning [his] wretched false teeth to everlasting oblivion' (2000, p. 180). Haggard noted that Mazooku 'did not know the use of or recognise' his false teeth (2000, p. 180), recalling the confusion caused by Good's dentures in *King Solomon's Mines*. That Haggard included these incidents in his diary, which he intended for publication, shows how false teeth remained humorous and symbolically rich devices in his imagination as well as an aspect of his identity that he did not wish to hide from public scrutiny.

## Conclusion

Building on the work of Carlyle Tarr and Goulet, this chapter has shown that in literary studies as in medicine, you learn a lot by turning attention to the mouth. For Haggard and Kipling, dentures served multiple purposes, operating as metaphor, metonym, and comic prop. In their writings, false teeth are symbols of technological sophistication (in the case of Good's performance in front of the hostile soldiers of Kukuanaland), human-machine hybridity (in the case of Vickery's clicking and lightning-proof teeth), and dwindling imperial might (as in *King Solomon's Mines* and 'Mrs. Bathurst'). Metonymically, these imaginaries function as commentaries on dental prostheses that were surprisingly useful (as with Good), poorly fitted (as with Vickery's partial plates), or representative of unpleasant yet also at times sentimental personal experiences (as evident in *King Solomon's Mines* and 'Mrs. Bathurst' when these works are read in context with Haggard's and Kipling's personal writings). For both writers, artificial teeth were potent comic props: for Haggard as a hilarious focal point of slipstick mishaps and social misfortunes; for Kipling as a grotesque synecdoche for an odd and curious character. As this chapter has shown, in literary writings false teeth are rich and pliable devices that reveal much about issues of communication (not just verbal), social expectations, and anxieties regarding health (physical and mental) at various scales: individual, institutional, and national. This conclusion begs the question: to what extent are these observations true for earlier and more modern imaginaries of dentures—in literature, film, and other cultural artifacts? I urge scholars working in cognate fields to find the answers.

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