

The Case of Claud Cardew's Violin: Race, Anxiety, and the British Empire Mail

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Abstract In the summer of 1894, Claud Cardew, then at British Central Africa, asked his brother in England to send him a violin. In tracing the violin's trajectory from metropole to colony, this article combines two inquiries. It probes, firstly, the emotional vocabulary surrounding Claud's request, and secondly, the technology underpinning the British Empire mail. Closely reading the Cardew family letters alongside postal documents, the author argues that for Claud, the violin's delayed arrival triggered a tangled nexus of anxieties, stemming from both the colonial racial hierarchy and the changing expectations surrounding modern technology. Much like the cultural connotations carried by the violin itself, efficient mail delivery denoted racial superiority. Furthermore, the empire mail gained significance in the minds of British users for its racially loaded function as potentially mitigating colonizers' anxiety in the face of outnumbering locals. Yet the violin's failure to arrive when expected led to mounting anxiety, as claims for colonizers' dominance cracked in the face of unstable postal communications. The story of Claud Cardew's violin thus offers a framework that may be used to unravel similar emotional entanglements surrounding Western technologies set to work within empire.

On 29 April 1894, at Fort Lister, Mlanji, in the protectorate of British Central Africa (today Malawi),¹ Claud Cardew composed an unusually meticulous letter to his brother Fred in England. Written in black and red ink, with frequent underlining, lettered headings, and traces of his own corrections in pencil, it was the only letter in the Cardew collection registered in the British mail to ensure its reception. The request it made was unusual as well: “My dear Fred, I am going to ask you to do me a great service, a service which I have no doubt will give you a great deal of trouble and temporally only (for I will refund you all expenses at the earliest opportunity) some expense.

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¹ Mlanji is today Mulanje; British Central Africa was called Nyasaland from 1907 but was renamed Malawi following independence in 1964. For further details see John McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859–1966* (Oxford, 2012), 57; Ezekiel Kalipeni, s.v. “Malawi,” *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century African History*, ed. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and Dickson Eyoh (London, 2003), 343–45, at 343. In this article, place names follow the British conventions of the nineteenth century.

I want a violin and a good one & England is the only place where I can get a good one without paying fabulous prices for one.”²

The letter provides instructions on how to select a violin that was loud but mellow, sound in body but affordable. More importantly, its mode of dispatch was minutely detailed, revealing not only thorough knowledge of the workings of the empire mail but also the writer’s precise expectations as to how, when, and where a parcel sent by post from England should reach him. Yet Claud’s authoritative knowledge of the empire mail is belied by his unusual choice of language, which stands out within the rest of the Cardew family archive. Typically reserved, Claud was impassioned with regard to the violin. His communications surrounding its arrival began with boastful confidence in the postal system’s abilities—and culminated in a high-strung, atypical anxiety in face of its delayed arrival. Why was Claud so uncharacteristically anxious?

An inquiry into the changes in the nineteenth-century British Empire mail, beginning with the introduction of steam and the restructuring of post office systems from 1840 onward, only amplifies the question. Although many empire locations experienced swifter and surer communications as the century progressed, new empire stations such as British Central Africa often did not. As one of the first administrators to arrive at British Central Africa, Claud witnessed the scrambled effort of constructing a colony, mail routes included. As clarified below, he was an experienced official, with firsthand participation in postal delivery in colonial outposts. His own experience proved that communications lines to a recently established peripheral station could conceivably falter. Why then did he hang such high hopes on his violin and suffer crushing disappointment when it was delayed?

By reading the case of Claud Cardew’s violin closely, I offer a deeper understanding of the interrelation between technologies and emotions. Straightforward studies of technology and empire tend to divorce the chronology of innovations from the lived experience of using them. Whether histories of communication networks such as the Royal Mail³ or histories of technology’s part in national or imperial rule,⁴ these studies mostly chronicle technology’s evolution from the point of view

² Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Mlanji, East Africa [to England], 29 April 1894, GB 0162 MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 550, Bodleian Library, Oxford. All other Cardew family letters cited in this article are also located in this file. The collection contains eighty-six letters sent over three generations between twelve empire family correspondents, beginning with Claud’s grandparents in India in 1842 and ending with Claud’s letters from Africa during the First World War. This study focuses on the letters sent between Claud, his father, and his brothers.

³ For example, see Howard Robinson, *Britain’s Post Office: A History of Development from the Beginnings to the Present Day* (London, 1953); Howard Robinson, *Carrying British Mails Overseas* (London, 1964); M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office since 1840* (London, 1985); Duncan Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post: The Authorised History of the Royal Mail* (London, 2012); Mark R. Frost, “Pandora’s Post Box: Empire and Information in India, 1854–1914,” *English Historical Review* 131, no. 552 (2016): 1043–73; Léonard Laborie, “Global Commerce in Small Boxes: Parcel Post, 1878–1913,” *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 2 (2015): 235–58.

⁴ For example, Harold Adams Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Lanham, 2007); Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981); Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860–1930* (Durham, 2007); Robert Kubicek, “British Expansion, Empire, and Technological Change,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3, *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford,

of innovators and implementers.⁵ They tend to focus on social and political consequences at the expense of quotidian, individual negotiations.

Conversely, family histories direct attention to individuals, with a considerable contribution centering on the mutual constitution of families and imperial endeavors.⁶ Some of these scholars rightfully claim written correspondence as the medium of empire.⁷ Yet changes in communication or transport technology, though facilitating much of the empire family phenomenon, are largely absent from empire family scholarship.

Bringing the two together, this study joins a body of scholarship concerned with the lived reactions to and repercussions of technology. From post to sail to telegraph, scholars delineate the effects of the changing transport and communication technology on individual lives.⁸ When examining individual lives, some scholars consider emotional consequences, such as shifting expectations among those traveling from Europe to empire⁹ or across the Atlantic.¹⁰ Yet despite this attention to affect, most scholarly work on technology in empire does not bring emotional impacts to the fore.

In contrast, studies of imperial sovereignty and culture increasingly recognize, as Joanna Lewis points out, that “empire generated highly emotional experiences for those living in it.”¹¹ Whether describing individual colonial encounters or collective

1999), 247–69; Amelia Bonea, “Telegraphy and Journalism in Colonial India, c. 1830s to 1900s,” *History Compass* 12, no. 5 (2014): 387–97.

⁵ See Simone M. Müller, *Wiring the World: The Social and Cultural Creation of Global Telegraph Networks* (New York, 2016).

⁶ For example, see Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, 2011); Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (Oxford, 2008); Elizabeth Elbourne, “The Bannisters and Their Colonial World: Family Networks and Colonialism in the Early Nineteenth Century,” in *Within and without the Nation: Canadian History as Transnational History*, ed. Karen Dubinsky, Adele Perry, and Henry Yu (Toronto, 2016), 49–75; Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004).

⁷ For example, see Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2008); Laura Ishiguro, “‘How I Wish I Might Be Near’: Distance and the Epistolary Family in Late Nineteenth-Century Condolence Letters,” in Dubinsky, Perry, and Yu, *Within and without the Nation*, 212–27; Laura Mitsuyo Ishiguro, *Relative Distances: Family and Empire between Britain, British Columbia and India, 1858–1901* (London, 2011); Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680–1820* (Cambridge, 2005); Erika Rappaport, “‘The Bombay Debt’: Letter Writing, Domestic Economies and Family Conflict in Colonial India,” *Gender and History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 233–60, at 235.

⁸ For example, see Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660–1800* (Oxford, 2009); Tamson Pietsch, “Bodies at Sea: Travelling to Australia in the Age of Sail,” *Journal of Global History* 11, no. 2 (2016): 209–28; Roland Wenzlhuemer, “The Telegraph and the Control of Material Movements: A Micro-study about the Detachment of Communication from Transport,” *Technology and Culture* 58, no. 3 (2017): 625–49.

⁹ For example, see On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, 2013); Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914* (Cambridge, 2015).

¹⁰ For example, see Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York, 2009); Anyaa Anim-Addo, “‘The Great Event of the Fortnight’: Steamship Rhythms and Colonial Communication,” *Mobilities* 9, no. 3 (2014): 369–83; David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, 2008); Lindsay O’Neill, *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World* (Philadelphia, 2014).

¹¹ Joanna Lewis, *Empire of Sentiment: The Death of Livingstone and the Myth of Victorian Imperialism* (Cambridge, 2018), 3.

sociocultural structures of feeling,¹² some historians of empire argue, along with Lewis, that to fully understand the British Empire, “it is necessary to bring in a history of emotion.”¹³ Others more specifically track anxieties over the corrupting effects of empire or anxieties for imperial rule.¹⁴ Within the realm of psychological research, Erik Linstrum points to the ways accumulated knowledge led to colonizers’ mounting anxiety over the impact of imperial domination.¹⁵ Ann Laura Stoler argues that such anxieties have taken part in shaping the imperial venture by spurring the implementation of colonial policies on the ground.¹⁶ This kind of enquiry reminds us of the empire’s dependence on the physical presence of individual men and women whose mental landscapes bear consideration.

Whether in empire settings or elsewhere, histories of emotions call for unique attention to emotional terms and their context. Building on the work of Peter and Carol Stearns, Barbara Rosenwein, Rob Boddice, William Reddy,¹⁷ and other historians of emotion,¹⁸ I consider emotions to be highly influenced by time, place, and social setting and, therefore, subject to historical change. Formed by conventions and cognitive reflexes, emotions are both individually experienced and socially performed. They are often on display in the communal context of family correspondence. The act of expressing an emotion may also serve to strengthen its hold on the performer, rendering the emotional terms not merely professed but profoundly felt and thus a significant trace of emotional experience.¹⁹

The methods and questions raised by the historians of emotions form an especially relevant analytical framework for understanding not only imperial ventures but also

¹² For example, see Jane Haggis and Margaret Allen, “Imperial Emotions: Affective Communities of Mission in British Protestant Women’s Missionary Publications, c. 1880–1920,” *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 3 (2008): 691–716; Andrew Rotter, “Empires of the Senses: How Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching Shaped Imperial Encounters,” *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 1 (2011): 3–19; Julia Wells, “The ‘Terrible Loneliness’: Loneliness and Worry in Settler Women’s Memoirs from East and South-Central Africa, 1890–1939,” *African Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (2017): 47–64.

¹³ Lewis, *Empire of Sentiment*, 2 (see also page 17).

¹⁴ For example, see Anthony Pagden, “Comment: Empire and Its Anxieties,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012): 141–48; Kenton Storey, *Settler Anxiety at the Outposts of Empire: Colonial Relations, Humanitarian Discourses, and the Imperial Press* (Vancouver, 2018); Michael Brown, “Cold Steel, Weak Flesh: Mechanism, Masculinity and the Anxieties of Late Victorian Empire,” *Cultural and Social History* 14, no. 2 (2017): 155–81.

¹⁵ Erik Linstrum, *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 2.

¹⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009), 1, 4, 18–20, 24.

¹⁷ Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,” *American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813–36; Stearns, *American Fear: The Causes and Consequences of High Anxiety* (New York, 2006); Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 821–45; Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2006); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 1600–1700* (Cambridge, 2015); Rob Boddice, *A History of Feelings* (London, 2019); William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York, 2001).

¹⁸ For example, see Jonas Liliequist, *A History of Emotions, 1200–1800* (London, 2015); Esther Cohen, “The Animated Pain of the Body,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 36–68; Jan E. Stets and Jonathan H. Turner, *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions* (Dordrecht, 2014); Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge, 2003).

¹⁹ Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 59, 103–4.

the personal and interpersonal repercussions of technological shifts for past users. Tracing intense emotional expressions surrounding mail in archived letter collections reveals ways in which mail technology may have shaped or changed the emotional relations of the correspondents.²⁰ As my focus here is on correspondents spanning the nineteenth-century British Empire, these methods may also provide fresh insight into questions raised by historians of empire.²¹ In a shift from political and economic formations to technological infrastructure, these approaches attend to the material substructure that brings particular emotions to the fore. In illuminating the emotional field of anxieties and expectations surrounding the uneven diffusion of mail communication technologies in the British Empire, these methods highlight both the lived experience of empire for the British families partaking in it and the emotional ramifications for those living in an age of rapid technological change.

The case of Claud's violin illustrates one such impact that technologies have had on emotional sensibilities. It likewise suggests the crucial importance of the scene in which this impact operates: empire and its emotional repercussions, focusing on the side of the colonizers. The letter to Claud's brother, together with subsequent correspondence, paints a double picture of anxiety: technological, caused by the delayed dispatch of the violin via the empire mail, and colonial, compounded by his position as a lone official in a barely existent colony.

Close reading of the case serves to explain other atypically intense emotions surrounding Western technologies set in empire locations. The case demonstrates the ways that the mail's failure to arrive when due highlighted colonizer correspondents' precarious position while shaking their firm belief in their racial and cultural superiority. Such destabilizing moments coalesced imperial and familial insecurities, as the mail's failure to arrive superimposed imperial insecurities onto a fragile sense of familial connections. In focusing on a single story, I offer a framework that may be used to unravel similar emotional entanglements surrounding Western technologies set to work within empire.

²⁰ This point is expanded upon in a larger project in which I am investigating the impact of technology on emotional relations by examining the changing technology underlying the nineteenth-century British Empire mail and its emotional effects on its users. In this larger project, I focus on the archives of four empire families: the Terrys (1840–1850s, Egypt, Malta, India, and Britain; British Library), the Hilliers (1850s, China, Singapore, Dutch Java, and Britain; School of Oriental and African Studies archive, London), the Wonnacotts (1860–1870s, Malta, India, Aden, and Britain; British Library), and the Cardews (1880–1890s, China, Sierra Leone, South and Central Africa, and Britain; Bodleian Library). Within these parameters, my work centers on one term that stands out in the correspondents' emotional lexicon—*anxiety*—and explains both why this term appears primarily with regard to the mail and its usages and why mail-related anxiety constitutes an empire-related phenomenon.

²¹ I am particularly indebted to the following: Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 2009); Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (Harlow, 2007); David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, (Oxford, 2002); James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford, 2011); John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, 1992); Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago, 2007); Giordano Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire* (Manchester, 2012); Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870–1950* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (Cambridge, 2001); E. M. Collingham, *The Hungry Empire* (London, 2017).

THE CARDEW CORRESPONDENCE

Although only twenty-four years old in the spring of 1894, Claud Ambrose Cardew already had vast experience of cross-empire communication with the members of his nuclear family. He hailed from a line of men serving in empire positions, beginning with his paternal grandfather Frederic, who was a civil and sessions judge in West Bengal. Claud's father, Sir Frederic Cardew, began his military career in India with a short stretch in Hong Kong, but spent most of it in Africa, becoming the new governor of Sierra Leone by the spring of 1894.²² Claud's eldest brother, another Fred, went west to join the Canadian Mounted Police before moving on to cattle ranching in Texas and Arizona.²³ By the time he received Claud's letter, though, he was already aiming for a different vocation, returning to be ordained in England and setting his sights on a missionary position in Australia. Cyril, the third brother, headed east toward Malaya as a second-class inspector of the Perak Sikhs.²⁴ By April 1894, Claud, the youngest, had been in Africa for four years, beginning with a cadetship in the British South Africa Company in 1889 and moving on to the two-year-old protectorate of British Central Africa in the summer of 1893.²⁵ He had evidently set out with a violin in hand, but his first instrument fell apart not six months after his departure,²⁶ and he turned to Fred for a replacement.

"The specific dynamics of families stubbornly frustrate generalization," Deborah Cohen notes,²⁷ yet the Cardews' experiences were shared with others of their time.²⁸ In particular, they were typical of what Elizabeth Buettner terms "empire families": British families who "became defined by long term patterns of work in residence overseas that alternated with time spent in Britain for schooling, on periodic furloughs, and ultimately in retirement," at times carrying these patterns over generations.²⁹ Though differing in temperament as well as in social, geographical, or temporal settings, families of middle- and upper-class Britons in the empire shared a series of distinct practices, among them patterns of mobility causing familial separation bridged by letters.³⁰ In this family, as in other contemporary empire families, mail was the way to keep in touch.

Sir Frederic's letters to his sons began in the fall of 1881, when their mother lay on her deathbed. Shortly thereafter, Sir Frederic was sent to Hong Kong, leaving

²² Papers of the Cardew Family: Administrative/Biographical History (n.d.), Bodleian GB 0162 MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 550.

²³ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Davenport, England [to Canada], 28 May 1884; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Davenport, England [to Canada], 10 June 1884; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Rorkes Drift, Natal, to Las Vegas, 20 September 1885; Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, England to USA, 22 July 1889.

²⁴ Papers of the Cardew Family: Administrative/Biographical History.

²⁵ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, RMS *Grantly Castle* to Africa [to unknown], 25 May 1890; Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, BCA, East Africa [to England], 21 June 1893.

²⁶ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, BCA, East Africa [to England], 14 January 1894.

²⁷ Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: The Things We Tried to Hide* (Oxford, 2013), 8.

²⁸ For a similar approach, see Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660–1720* (Oxford, 2007), 11–12; Dagmar Freist, "A Global Microhistory of the Early Modern Period: Social Sites and the Interconnectedness of Human Lives," *Quaderni Storici* 52, no. 155 (2017): 537–56, at 545–47.

²⁹ Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004), 2.

³⁰ Buettner, *Empire Families*, 5.

sixteen-year-old Fred, fifteen-year-old Cyril, and twelve-year-old Claud in schools in England. Father Frederic's surviving letters to his sons and the sons' correspondence with each other numbered sixty-four letters sent between Britain, East Asia, North America, Australia, and Africa over the next eighteen years.³¹ Fred, the eldest, was the most regular correspondent,³² and the most organized recipient. Nearly all the collected letters, whether from father or siblings, were directed to him, yet as none of his letters were saved, his own voice was rendered silent. At the opposite pole stood Cyril, a notoriously bad correspondent with only five surviving letters. He seldom acknowledged receiving letters from his siblings, as Claud noted in a letter to Fred.³³ Claud himself seemed to have been a fair correspondent, urging Fred to "mind you write whenever you can spare the time & I will do the same."³⁴ Yet, apart from the neglectful Cyril, the Cardew men veered between periods of intense and intermittent correspondence.³⁵ The content of their letters suggests that the occasional longer intervals between letters reflect a slower pace of exchange and not necessarily missing letters.³⁶

The Cardews were a family of men, their letters sent primarily between father and brothers. Father Frederic undertook the duties of corresponding upon the death of the boys' mother, his first letters plainly indicating that the recent widower was unused to writing to children.³⁷ By the 1890s, however, two women were added to the family: young Fred's wife, Norah,³⁸ and Katherine Jones, father Frederic's new wife. Upon Frederic's remarriage, the letters from him trickled to a halt as the correspondence was taken up by Katherine.³⁹ The father may have opted to unburden himself from the duties of letter writing when a woman was at hand to take over the obligation. As in other contemporary empire families, among the Cardews the duties of corresponding with kin, and especially distant children, fell primarily to women.⁴⁰

³¹ The number of Cardew letters quoted here is based on the letters in the collection sent by the second and third generation of Cardew correspondents from 1881 to 1898, excluding Frederic's single letter to his illegitimate son, Frederic Jamison.

³² Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Rorkes Drift, Natal [to Canada], 30 August 1885.

³³ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Nyasaland, East Africa to Australia, 12 October 1895.

³⁴ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Maclontsie Camp, South Africa [to unknown], 17 November 1890.

³⁵ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, SS *Australia* to Ceylon [to England], 13 March 1882; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Penang, Malesia, [to England], 29 May 1882.

³⁶ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Sierra Leone [to England], 23 March 1895; Sir Frederic Cardew to Norah Cardew, Sierra Leone [to Australia], 21 April 1895; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Sierra Leone [to Australia], 23 March 1896; Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Fort Buchuanaland, South Africa [to unknown], 7 August 1891.

³⁷ For example, see Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Kent, England [to England], 8 September 1881; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Suez [to England], 27 February 1882.

³⁸ Sir Frederic Cardew to Norah Cardew, 21 April 1895; Claud Cardew to Norah Cardew, Nyasaland, East Africa [to Australia], 15 February 1895; Claud Cardew to Norah Cardew, Nyasaland, East Africa, to Australia, 18 October 1895; Claud Cardew to Norah Cardew, BCA, East Africa [to Australia], 11 September 1898.

³⁹ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 23 March 1895; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 23 March 1896.

⁴⁰ This claim is sustained by many scholars, including Barbara Caine, *Bombay to Bloomsbury: A Biography of the Strachey Family* (Oxford, 2006), 213–14; Rothschild, *Inner Life of Empires*, 19–20; Buettner, *Empire Families*, 132; Caroline Brettel, "Migration," in *The History of the European Family*, vol. 2, *Family Life in Long Nineteenth Century, 1789–1913*, ed. David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli (New Haven, 2002),

Claud's detailed request for a violin stands out within the Cardew correspondence. The late-century Cardew men rarely sent each other parcels, whether by post or by other means. Of the sixty-four Cardew letters I examined for this study, thirteen discuss nine parcels, most of which contained trivial gifts. The Cardew sons received Chinese trinkets from their father when they were young, yet they seldom requested anything.⁴¹ The one exception was Claud, who on a single occasion asked for "foreign note paper & envelopes" from his stepmother Katherine, ending his request with a vague threat that ties the essential supplies to future letters.⁴² Given the common practice of charging women with sending and receiving cross-empire parcels,⁴³ gender norms may explain the Cardew men's disinterest in parcels, making Claud's supplication to Fred for "a great service, a service which I have no doubt will give you a great deal of trouble,"⁴⁴ even more remarkable.

EMOTIONS

One further aspect marked Claud's request as unique within the Cardew family correspondence. Alongside the letter's meticulous formulation and singular content, Claud's request stands out for its unusual emotional expression. On 25 June 1894, two months after his initial petition, he wrote, "I haven't seen colour of that violin you were talking about in your last letter. I have spent many a week of hair-turning anxiety expecting to hear of its arrival at Chiromo, our port of entry, by every mail but have had no news of it. However I daresay you have sent me a violin of some kind by this time."⁴⁵ Only two months had passed since his letter requesting a violin, and yet Claud was consumed with anxious anticipation. In the sequence of letters concerning the violin, he used stronger emotional terms than was his or his family's wont.

Letters are far from straightforward productions, not least because they are calculated for an acknowledged audience.⁴⁶ Yet singular formulations within an extended exchange, such as Claud's atypical emotional exclamations, call for closer inspection.

229–47, at 246; Ishiguro, "Relative Distances," 74. In a nonimperial setting, a similar assertion is made by Amanda Vickery in "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (1993): 383–414, at 409; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago, 2019), 272–320; Amy Harris, *Siblinghood and Social Relations in Georgian England: Share and Share Alike* (Manchester, 2016), 116.

⁴¹ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, SS *Gwalier* to Dover, England, 13 May 1882; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Hong Kong to Dover, England, 6 October 1882; Cyril Cardew to Fred Cardew, Perak [to Australia], 16 November 1898.

⁴² Claud Cardew to Katherine Cardew, Nyasaland, East Africa [to unknown], 25 December 1894.

⁴³ Consumption calculated to enhance social positions was and often remains women's work, as noted by current social scientists. For example, see Marianne Conroy, "Discount Dreams: Factory Outlet Malls, Consumption, and the Performance of Middle-Class Identity," *Social Text*, no. 54 (1998): 63–83, at 76. Parcels sent between family members dispersed throughout the nineteenth-century British Empire included articles both mundane and unique.

⁴⁴ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 29 April 1894.

⁴⁵ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Mlanji, East Africa [to England], 25 June 1894.

⁴⁶ For example, see Whyman, *Sociability and Power*, 11–12; David A. Gerber, "Epistolary Ethics: Personal Correspondence and the Culture of Emigration in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 19, no. 4 (2000): 3–23, at 9, 12; Henkin, *Postal Age*, 112; Buettner, *Empire Families*, 130.

Focusing attention on the letters surrounding Claud's request for a violin and closely reading his emotional exclamations in the context of his own affective vocabulary alongside his family's, points to the distinctiveness of the terms in which Claud describes waiting for a violin dispatched by the empire mail.

The Cardew men's lexicon indicates that they preferred stoic, polite, and noncommittal terms, such as *hope*, *afraid*, and *glad*, to ones with specific and intense emotional tones. Father and sons frequently *feared* that events might not go as planned, in a typically British polite usage, and were *glad* mostly in polite response to letters received or to the news within them. In other cases, a stronger sentiment seems to lurk behind the mild terms, as when father Frederic had not heard from his son "for two mails but I trust all is well with you."⁴⁷ Whereas another parent might have used stronger terms to convey worry or anxiety, the pious Frederic trusted and hoped.⁴⁸ Though he clearly cared deeply for his children, he repeatedly chose guarded terms to describe his own emotions, as did his sons. Moreover, even when using terms that describe actual felt emotional states, the Cardews tended to do so impersonally. For example, father Frederic often used the terms "cheerful" and "rejoice" to prescribe proper Christian sentiment,⁴⁹ and the word "relief" was mostly relegated to replacing battalions.⁵⁰ Leaning toward emotional portrayals best described as distant, the Cardews often resorted to muted emotive expressions, using bland, polite professions of feeling.

In their emotional reticence, the Cardews conformed to cultural norms. The second half of the century saw a marked shift in the idea of manliness from a homosocial model in which feelings were habitually displayed, to a stricter definition centering on physical prowess.⁵¹ Middle-class men were schooled to suppress their emotions and exercise self-control.⁵² These notions were especially prominent in empire settings, John Tosh argues, where definitions of manliness thrived on the dichotomies of race within empire; the colonizers were seen as the polar opposite of the excessively emotional colonized peoples.⁵³ This racialized belief held sway in the popular imagination, though it often faltered in the face of actual experience, as Philippa Levine notes.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, gendered and racial convictions conspired to curb emotional expressions.⁵⁵ As George Orwell famously observed, strict

⁴⁷ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Rorkes Drift, Natal [to USA], 4 October 1885.

⁴⁸ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 4 October 1885.

⁴⁹ For example, see Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Hong Kong [to England], 20 February 1883; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 20 September 1885.

⁵⁰ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 20 September 1885; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Rorkes Drift [to USA], 1 November 1885; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Rorkes Drift [to USA], 8 November 1885.

⁵¹ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester, 1990), 72.

⁵² John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1999), 111; Mary Jo Maynes, "Class Cultures and Images of Proper Family Life," in Kertzer and Barbagli, *History of the European Family*, 2:195–226, at 198; Loftur Guttormsson, "Parent Child Relations," in Kertzer and Barbagli, *History of the European Family*, 2:360–63, at 361.

⁵³ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 111. See also John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (London, 2004), chap. 9.

⁵⁴ Philippa Levine, "Venereal Disease, Prostitution, and the Politics of Empire: The Case of British India," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, no. 4 (1994): 579–602.

⁵⁵ For thoughts on the prominence of structured intersectionality at the age of colonialism, see Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, vol. 1, *Memories of Empire* (Oxford, 2013), 21, 114–15, 171; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993).

assignments of colonial roles forced the British into emotional reticence not only in performance but also in a deep disavowal of distinct emotions.⁵⁶ In evincing guarded and noncommittal emotional expressions, then, Claud Cardew conformed to contemporary colonial cultural expectations of manhood.

In the relevant letters, Claud used the polite interjections “afraid” and “hope,”⁵⁷ conforming to cultural and familial norms of masculine reticence. For example, in a subsequent letter to his father, he “hopes” the violin “will arrive here before long,” yet to this commonplace he added a telltale sign of insecurity, trusting and hoping in the same breath: “and I trust it will not have suffered any harm from its tough journey.”⁵⁸ Claud feared, hoped, and trusted, as other Cardew family members often did, but he did so with an undertone of uncertainty.

Considering his guarded expressive descriptions, Claud’s request for a violin is unusually emotionally laden, as indicated in the use of urgent and intense language seldom found in the Cardew letters. He describes his “delight” in playing an instrument,⁵⁹ and mentions the “pleasure” the violin gave him.⁶⁰ The only two times in which he is “grateful” in his letters are with regard to the violin.⁶¹ Moreover, the letters requesting a violin include the only one in which he uses the word “joy,”⁶² exclaiming, “You can’t imagine what a joy a violin would be to me in my present life.”⁶³

The violin as a source of amusement was imbued with high emotional value due to Claud’s underlying emotional state. As he explained in a letter to Fred in the summer of 1894, “I shall be alone now for about a month. The officer in charge of the forces in this district whose headquarters are here is going round to inspect the numerous outposts & will not return for nearly a month. If only your violin turns up I shall be able to pass the evenings pretty well.”⁶⁴ With six district officers appointed in 1891 before their number increased to twenty-seven in 1897, Claud was one of a handful of British administrators augmented by local clerks, policemen, and government staff.⁶⁵ Distressed at the prospect of a lonely month ahead, Claud longed for musical distraction. Six months later, he similarly declared himself uncommonly grateful for the rare joy and amusement a violin would afford, seeing as he would “have to eat my Xmas dinner in solitude.”⁶⁶ His underlying loneliness may account for an even more extreme emotional state: despair. The only times that

⁵⁶ “A white man mustn’t be frightened in front of ‘natives’; and so, in general, he isn’t frightened.” George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant,” in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York, 1968), 235–42, at 239.

⁵⁷ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 29 April 1894.

⁵⁸ Claud Cardew to Sir Frederic Cardew, Nyasaland, East Africa [to Sierra Leone], 22 September 1894.

⁵⁹ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 14 January 1894.

⁶⁰ Claud Cardew to Norah Cardew, Nyasaland, East Africa [to Australia], 15 February 1895.

⁶¹ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 1 May 1894; Claud Cardew to Sir Frederic Cardew, 22 September 1894. The two other times that “grateful” is used are by father Frederic.

⁶² The four other times that the term *joy* is employed, Frederic is the one using it, and in three of these instances, he uses it in the context of religious subjects.

⁶³ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Mlanji, East Africa [to England], 1 May 1894.

⁶⁴ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 25 June 1894.

⁶⁵ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 71. Nyasaland had a considerably smaller percentage of white colonists than did its neighbors, amounting to 766 among 960,000 Africans in 1911. For early twentieth-century population figures, see Christopher J. Lee, *Unreasonable Histories* (Durham, 2015), 36.

⁶⁶ Claud Cardew to Katherine Cardew, 25 December 1894.

term is deployed anywhere in the archived Cardew correspondence are those when Claud wishes for a violin: "If I don't get it I shall be in despair," Claud tells Fred, adding that he has not despaired of Fred's finding a passable instrument quite yet.⁶⁷ As loneliness transformed into deeper solitude, so eagerness was colored by desperation.

These undercurrents of loneliness and despair set the stage for Claud's "hair-turning anxiety" while waiting for his violin,⁶⁸ a unique turn of phrase that appears nowhere else in the archived letters. Though the terms "anxious" or "anxiety" appear eight times in the correspondence, seven iterations are by father Frederic, whereas the one and only time that Claud refers to anxiety of any kind is in June 1894, while he awaits his violin. As an emotional term that may change in connotation over time, "anxiety" is difficult to define. The *Oxford English Dictionary* points to its use in English from the late fifteenth century, chiefly defined as "worry over the future or about something with an uncertain outcome; uneasy concern about a person, situation, etc.; a troubled state of mind arising from such worry or concern."⁶⁹ This definition aligns with the most prevalent use of the term by the Cardews and their contemporary correspondents. Although unfamiliar with present-day pathologizing definitions of anxiety as worry that is more intense than the situation warrants, they may have identified with the uncertainty, helplessness, and doubt encompassed in the twenty-first century definition.⁷⁰ As the sequence of letters beginning in early 1894 suggests, Claud viewed the violin as a way to escape from loneliness and despair and anticipated its arrival with unusual anxiety.

TECHNOLOGY

Claud relied on an extensive technological infrastructure to convey his anxiously awaited parcel: the technology underlying the British Empire's mail. At the bottom of the second folio page of his April 1894 letter, right after detailed instructions regarding the three layers of casings in which to pack his violin, Claud formed a new title in red ink: "Mode of dispatch." He proceeded to mark the first words with a double black and red line: "If you possibly can, send the box to me by Parcel Post, as it will be better taken care of that way & will reach me more quickly." Above the term "Parcel Post," capitalized and underlined in red, Claud added a note: "Parcel Post is 1/9 [one shilling and nine pence] a pound from England to here. Expensive but a very sure way of sending it."⁷¹ These words indicate that Claud was confident that the parcel post was reliable, although costly. Much like other contemporary letter writers, the late-century Cardew correspondents held the Royal Mail to strict standards of regularity.⁷²

⁶⁷ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 14 January 1894.

⁶⁸ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 25 June 1894.

⁶⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "anxiety."

⁷⁰ Cherlene Pedrick and Bruce M. Hyman, *Anxiety Disorders* (Minneapolis, 2012), 4, 11, 100. See also the National Institute of Mental Health, *Anxiety Disorders* (Bethesda, 2009), 1–22.

⁷¹ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 29 April 1894.

⁷² See unsigned review of William Lewins's *Her Majesty's Mails* in the *Manchester Guardian*, 24 May 1864; see also *The First Report of the Postmaster General, on the Post Office* (London, 1855), 49 (the report is for the year 1854).

A necessary context to understanding Claud's declared trust in the post lies in the changes in late-nineteenth century communications technology. The 1800s witnessed two converging shifts that shook the bedrock of cross-distance communications. The first was rooted in technological changes, most prominently the rise of steam engines. Though ships powered solely by steam had sailed the oceans since the 1830s, their engines increased in efficiency, while iron hulls increased their size throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷³ The second shift was a radical reorganization of the ways that letters were shaped, shipped, priced, and paid for. Government-chartered contracts proposed payments for private companies that competed to take on foreign and colonial mails in various routes since 1838. These subsidies allowed the winning companies to invest in steamships, coaling stations, and other expenses, in both westbound and eastbound directions.⁷⁴ These paid subsidies, together with the technical ability supplied by steam, may have accounted for a rising promise of postal regularity.

Toward the close of the nineteenth century, then, empire mail was faster than it had been when Claud first experienced it upon his father's embarkation to Hong Kong in the early 1880s. New methods of securing delivery, such as registration, insurance, and compensation, combined to form a "very sure way of sending."⁷⁵ This was borne out in the mail routes used by Claud from the early 1880s to the mid-1890s—when writing to his father in Hong Kong, Natal, or Sierra Leone, or when receiving letters in British Central Africa. In 1881, as his father set out to China, a letter sent from London to Hong Kong should have taken thirty-seven days to arrive. By 1896, two years after Claud's current request, a letter sent along the same route was expected to arrive in thirty-two days. Transit times similarly shrank in other routes used by the Cardews; for example, shipping a letter from London to Natal in South Africa was supposed to take twenty-six days in 1881, whereas by 1896 it should have taken only twenty-two. Published transport times from London to Sierra Leone decreased from twenty-eight days in 1881 to a mere fourteen in 1896.⁷⁶

Alongside steadily shrinking transportation times, late nineteenth-century mail offered two methods to increase confidence in deliveries: registration and insurance. In his letter of April 1894, Claud asked Fred to send the letters informing of the violin's embarkation using a special postal service that tracked letters en route and guaranteed their safe arrival.⁷⁷ In 1856, the British postal guide explained that registering a letter would "make its transmission more secure by rendering it practicable to trace it" from receipt to delivery.⁷⁸ As the postmaster general boasted in his

⁷³ Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1981), 131–32, 135–38, 142–44, 165–67; James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford, 2011), 106–8.

⁷⁴ M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office since 1840* (London, 1985) 154–56; Howard Robinson, *Carrying British Mails Overseas* (London, 1964), 110–11.

⁷⁵ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 29 April 1894.

⁷⁶ *British Post Office Guide*, no. 102, October 1881 (London, 1881), 228–29; *British Post Office Guide*, no. 162, October 1896 (London, 1896), 401. (These guides were published quarterly.) According to *Bradshaw's Overland Guide to India, Egypt, Turkey, Persia, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Cape, and across America* (London, 1884), 314, the voyage to Natal lasted twenty-seven days.

⁷⁷ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 29 April 1894.

⁷⁸ *British Postal Guide* [. . .] *1st May 1856* (London, 1856), 10. The same definition was also used later in the century; see, for example, *British Postal Guide 1881*, 9.

eighteenth report to both Houses of Parliament in 1872, "The security from registration consists in the arrangement by which packets can be traced from hand to hand from the moment afforded by of posting to that of delivery; and how great this security is may be inferred from the fact that last year it was only as regards one registered letter out of about 1,400 that any complaint or even inquiry was made; while in nearly all such exceptional cases the result of the application was successful."⁷⁹

Within the empire, letters could be registered to select locations from the 1850s.⁸⁰ By 1881, correspondents could register letters sent to nearly two hundred global locations⁸¹ for two pence. An additional two and a half pence allowed the sender to receive assurance of the letter's arrival, assuming it had been sent from locations included in the Postal Union agreements of 1874.⁸² Not only did the registration service enable tracking the letter and receiving acknowledgment of its arrival but the postal administration also promised to pay 50 francs (*sic*) upon proof that a registered letter was lost while under mail custody.⁸³

Furthermore, though foreign and colonial parcels could not be registered,⁸⁴ they could be insured when shipped to select colonial locations. A parcel valued up to £50 could be insured for one shilling and three pence. Moreover, even uninsured parcels sent to British possessions, among them Hong Kong and Sierra Leone, could be eligible for compensation if damaged or lost while handled by the empire mail.⁸⁵ Encompassing well over 290 destinations worldwide,⁸⁶ this all-embracing promise attested to the Post Office's confidence in guaranteeing delivery of both letters and parcels.

Claud's experience communicating across empire to family members may have contributed to his growing faith in the postal system. Available information could also boost his confidence, since by 1894 the estimated sending times for both letters and parcels were published. By the mid-1890s, Post Office guides were publishing "approximate times occupied in the transmission of parcels from London to certain places abroad." Parcels took longer to arrive than did letters; for instance, in 1896 a parcel sent to Hong Kong was estimated to take forty-three days, to Natal twenty-seven days, and to Sierra Leone seventeen days.⁸⁷ Thus, Claud's confidence that the violin would arrive both quickly and reliably was apparently grounded in fact.

However, Claud's declared trust in the post made little sense considering his contemporary circumstances. At the time of this correspondence, he was based in the landlocked territory of British Central Africa, whose exports and imports passed

⁷⁹ Eighteenth Report of the Postmaster General, on the Post Office, 1872, C. 645, at 9. (The report is for the year 1871).

⁸⁰ For registered letters and parcels in British India from 1854 onward, see D. S. Virk, *Indian Postal History, 1873–1923* (New Delhi, 1991).

⁸¹ By 1881, more than 196 global locations were listed as possible for registered letters. *British Postal Guide, 1881*, 208–36.

⁸² *British Postal Guide, 1881*, 202, 215, 223; *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 219, 380.

⁸³ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 381.

⁸⁴ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 402.

⁸⁵ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 405–7.

⁸⁶ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 208–26.

⁸⁷ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 424.

through German or Portuguese controlled territory.⁸⁸ One of the first officials to arrive in the summer of 1893, he witnessed the earliest development of colonial infrastructure, mail routes included. As he explained exultingly to Fred, “I came up here purely ‘on spec’ hearing that the country of B.C. Africa . . . was in a state of ‘being opened up’ & likely to turn out trumps . . . The government are sure, I fancy, in course of time to take over B. C. Africa entirely in which case the ‘administration’ will be on a par with other Services & with of course a pension in view. Now don’t you think I have improved my position considerably by the change [*sic*].”⁸⁹

Not only did Claud arrive on the scene as one of the first jobseekers but he was also “fortunate enough to get an appointment in the ‘administration’ of B. C. Africa,” as he further explained to Fred.⁹⁰ His duties changed continuously. In the disarray of constructing a colony, he filled several positions, among them postmaster: “My work consists of superintending the various Improvements that are being effected on the Br[itish] Concession and sorting what little mail matter arrives for the British residents of Chinde.”⁹¹ Though only few letters were sent to the handful of colonialists in the new outpost, Claud could see the inner workings of the empire post from his duties,⁹² and the sight was not always pleasing.

As he had personally experienced in another remote Africa station, delays in delivery were a matter of course.⁹³ Two years previously, for example, in the winter of 1891, a letter from Fred arrived nearly three months late, owing to the negligence of two postmasters: “Many thanks for your letter of Nov 5th which I received only today owing to its having gone on to Tuli (a place 75 miles from here) through the gross carelessness of the postmaster here & having lain for a month at Tuli owing to the even grosser carelessness of the postmaster at that place. I may well mention that the postmaster here was hardly accountable for his actions during a fortnight at Christmas-time owing to the fact that he was in a state of drunken muddleheadedness during the period.”⁹⁴

Postmasters were few and far between in Maclontsie in the British protectorate of Bechuanaland (today Botswana), and Claud describes them as inept, their negligence and drinking suggesting dispirited dissatisfaction with their colonial positions. The phrase “gross carelessness,” repeated twice in outraged indignation, appears nowhere else in the Cardew letters. Waiting for Fred’s letter, Claud learned firsthand that postal promises of efficiency were not strictly upheld in inland Africa.

⁸⁸ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 75.

⁸⁹ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 21 June 1893.

⁹⁰ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 21 June 1893. Claud’s use of quotation marks around the word *administration* suggests that he was questioning something about the term’s legitimacy.

⁹¹ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Chinde, Zambasia [to England], 15 September 1893. Located on mouth of the Zambesi River, the enclave of Chinde was conceded to the British in 1891, with exports and imports passing through Portuguese-controlled territory. See McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 56, 173.

⁹² It might be that Claud held similar postal duties when stationed previously in Maclontsie. See Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 7 August 1891. For estimations of postal activity, revenue, and expenditure in British Central Africa in the mid-1890s, see C. A. Baker, “The Postal Services in Malawi before 1900,” *Society of Malawi Journal* 24, no. 2 (1971): 14–51, at 40–42.

⁹³ For example, see Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Rorkes Drift, Natal [to USA], 21 November 1885; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 23 March 1895; Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 12 October 1895.

⁹⁴ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Maclontsie Camp, South Africa [to unknown], 29 January 1891.

A review of British Central Africa in guides published by the Post Office and Bradshaw in the late nineteenth century suggests that while the broad brushwork paints a picture of overall advancement, the smaller strokes reveal that not all empire locations were included. Born of missionary and speculator pressure and with little strategic or economic value in British eyes,⁹⁵ the British Central Africa protectorate was constantly omitted from relevant Bradshaw listings, among them the thirty-seven colonial locations listed in 1898,⁹⁶ and the list of average length of voyages from England to colonial locations of 1903.⁹⁷ British Central Africa was again omitted from the destinations of “all the civilized world” included in the General Postal Union,⁹⁸ emphasizing not only its remoteness but also its moral and cultural standing in British eyes among other, well-established colonies.

Official Post Office guides reflect in other ways British Central Africa's slighted position in terms of service. Compared to other colonial locations, the options of sending letters there seem sparse. Outgoing mail was limited to four times a month, in contrast to China, where outgoing letters could be sent more often than twice a week, or to Natal, which received letters from London on a weekly basis.⁹⁹ The British postal guide for 1986 fails to list British Central Africa when giving approximated sending times for letters or parcels sent from London to other colonial locations including Hong Kong and Sierra Leone.¹⁰⁰ Both the colony's absence from the Bradshaw guides and the infrequent sending options described in the postal guide point to lower demand for communicating with British Central Africa.

Likewise, shipping to British Central Africa was considerably more expensive, at one shilling and six pence from London¹⁰¹ as opposed to ten pence from London to Hong Kong,¹⁰² nine pence to Sierra Leone,¹⁰³ and one shilling to Natal for the equivalent weight.¹⁰⁴ The 1903 *Bradshaw's Through Routes to the Capitals* makes clear that getting to British Central Africa was an expensive business not only for parcels but also for travelers, with the leg of the journey from South Africa alone adding between six to forty-five pounds sterling.¹⁰⁵ Since people and post traveled the same routes, these prices may further explain why shipping a parcel from London to British Central Africa cost one and a half times more than to Natal and nearly twice as much as to Hong Kong, yet both of the latter are more than 1,500 kilometers further distant.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁵ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 55, 56; Robin Hallett, *Africa to 1875: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, 1974), 496.

⁹⁶ *Bradshaw's Through Routes Overland Guide to India and the Asiatic and Australian Colonies; A Manual for Travellers in Egypt, Turkey, Persia, India, China, and Japan; Australia and New Zealand; Via the Suez Canal, Panama, and the American and Canadian Pacific Railways* [. . .] (London, 1898), lxxi–lxxiii.

⁹⁷ *Bradshaw's Through Routes to the Capitals of the World and Overland Guide to India, Persia, and the Far East: A Handbook of Indian, Colonial and Foreign Travel* (London, 1903), xl.

⁹⁸ *Bradshaw's Through Routes Overland Guide, 1898*, lviii.

⁹⁹ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 383–84.

¹⁰⁰ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 401, 424.

¹⁰¹ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 411.

¹⁰² *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 416.

¹⁰³ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 423.

¹⁰⁴ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 419.

¹⁰⁵ *Bradshaw's Through Routes to the Capitals, 1903*, 395; McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 75.

¹⁰⁶ The aerial distance from London to present-day Malawi is 7984.95 kilometers; from London to Natal in South Africa 9445.22 kilometers; and from London to Hong Kong 9626.00 kilometers. Natal and Hong Kong are both approximately 800 nautical miles further from London than is present-day

Though government contracts forced the Post Office to carry mail to all colonies,¹⁰⁷ varying prices reflected the uneven terrain within the empire. Some locations were either easier to reach and cheaper to ship to or harder to reach but with higher demand. In 1894, it was indeed difficult to get to British Central Africa,¹⁰⁸ yet a greater strategic importance could have induced the government to invest in roads and rail. London treasury officials refused to invest in transport routes that would pass through foreign territories, more so as the Protectorate administration was far from supporting itself by locally drawn revenue.¹⁰⁹ Fewer sending options and higher prices further indicate that the Post Office received less funding for forming mail routes to the new outpost and compensated for its costs by charging more.¹¹⁰

Sending a registered letter to British Central Africa did not necessarily promise peace of mind, as no acknowledgment of receipt was offered for that route,¹¹¹ and there was no compensation for a lost registered letter.¹¹² The Post Office warned that to some countries, “an article can be registered only to the port of arrival; it being left, in those cases, to the Postal authorities of the country to which that port belongs to continue the Registration or not as they may think proper.”¹¹³ Thus, although Claud asked Fred to register the letters regarding the violin despite the additional expense, he could not be assured of their arrival or count on compensation. Moreover, he must have realized that other complications habitually occurred en route, such as detainment in customs¹¹⁴ or redirection when colonial officials changed addresses.¹¹⁵ Despite his declared expectations of a sure arrival, his violin might not have been “better taken care of” by post.

The British postal guides thus suggest that communicating with British Central Africa was a precarious business. Parcels sent there via Cape Town and Chinde, as Claud requested, did indeed leave from London every Saturday morning, yet they traveled to their destination only once a month.¹¹⁶ Where steamship routes ended, local men carried postal loads as runners through often difficult terrain.¹¹⁷ With no guarantee and habitual setbacks en route, it was hard to assess with accuracy if

Malawi. See United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Physical Map of the World, January 2015* (Washington, DC, 2015), <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3201c.ct005758/>.

¹⁰⁷ *First Report of the Postmaster General*, 31. See also Daunton, *Royal Mail*, 147, 157, 161, 170.

¹⁰⁸ For Nyasaland’s notoriously expensive and inefficient transport system, see McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 75; Hallett, *Africa to 1875*, 494.

¹⁰⁹ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 76.

¹¹⁰ For fewer sending options, see *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 383–84. For prices of letters and parcels, compare *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 270, 370, 371, 411, 416, 419, 423; and *Bradshaw’s Through Routes to the Capitals, 1903*, 155, 395.

¹¹¹ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 371, 380.

¹¹² *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 381.

¹¹³ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 380.

¹¹⁴ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 402–3.

¹¹⁵ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 381. Claud’s violin was indeed redirected to his updated new location several months after his initial request. See his change of address between June and September 1894 from “Fort Lister Mlanji Nyasaland via Chinde” to “Fort Johnston Nyasaland”: Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 25 June 1894; Claud Cardew to Sir Frederic Cardew, 22 September 1894.

¹¹⁶ *British Postal Guide, 1896*, 411.

¹¹⁷ Baker, “The Postal Services in Malawi,” 31, 37, 40.

a parcel or letter sent to British Central Africa would arrive as quickly and surely as it would if shipped to other colonies.

By late June 1894, Claud's unusually emotional description of his "hair-turning anxiety" as he awaited his parcel showed that uncertainty was beginning to eat away at his assurance.¹¹⁸ His expectations of the arrival of his violin weeks earlier had been dashed. How could he expect so much of mail delivery to British Central Africa? After nearly two years in the protectorate, witnessing firsthand how postal practices could turn inefficient in such remote locations, he should have been prepared for setbacks. Examining the nexus of anxieties in which mail met race met empire explains why Claud hung such high hopes on his violin's timely arrival.

RACE, ANXIETY, AND THE EMPIRE MAIL

In the winter of 1894, upon first raising the notion of a new instrument, Claud's choice of words disclosed both his uncharacteristically high-strung emotional state and the underlying value he attributed to the violin. "If I don't get it I shall be in despair," he stated, "for I can't of course get anything so civilized up here."¹¹⁹ The strong and atypical emotional term, despair, is distinctly directed at the violin's perceived cultural value as a "civilized" object, one possible to obtain only in England. In aiming for it, Claud positioned himself in stark contrast to his immediate surroundings, his words betraying his perception of cultural and racial hierarchy. Thus, Claud viewed the instrument, due to arrive from metropole to colony, through an ideology of racial binaries.

The connection between the violin, racial divides, and volatile emotions is carried on in subsequent letters. In the letter following his detailed instructions to Fred, Claude describes the unimaginable joy a violin would give him, and confesses, "[V]ery often I am the only white man here for weeks at a time and don't very often know what to do with myself during the long evenings."¹²⁰ The violin will bring him joy not only through its musical qualities but also as a companion during lonely hours. Nearly a year later, when the officer in charge leaves for a month, the violin is again presented as an antidote to loneliness.¹²¹ Although far from being the only person in the new outpost, Claud was often "the only white man," suggesting that in his perception the inanimate object is company while the innumerable people around him are not.¹²²

Claud's description of the local reactions to violin music again reiterates his ideological stance. "The natives don't seem to appreciate Raff's 'Concertina,' Gounod's 'Serenade' etc.," he complained to his brother's new wife; they also "draw unflattering comparisons" between the violin and "a miserable instrument made of a gourd and a stick & two pieces of bark-string on which they sound combinations of 3

¹¹⁸ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 25 June 1894.

¹¹⁹ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 14 January 1894.

¹²⁰ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 1 May 1894.

¹²¹ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 25 June 1894.

¹²² For example, see Claud Cardew to Katherine Cardew, 25 December 1894. As Levine suggests, the terms *white*, *European*, and *British* were often interchangeable for nineteenth-century users. Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York, 2003), 6.

consecutive notes.”¹²³ Though both have a wooden neck, a hollow body, and strings, Claud was affronted by the analogy of the Western and African instruments and the melodies they produced. His father and brothers shared his high-handed disregard of colonized peoples, generally looking down them as uncouth, amusing, and in need of the empire’s parental reprimand.¹²⁴ Concepts of British racial hierarchies consolidated by the late nineteenth century, particularly within white settler societies such as those in South and Central Africa.¹²⁵ Within this supremacist worldview, Claud’s notions of racial hierarchy were distinctly embodied in the longed-for violin, and he regarded the music it produced as a public performance of perceived Western preeminence.

Claud was not the only empire official to feel lonely in his outpost. “The isolation of rulers from the ruled was integral to the colonial experience,” Ranajit Guha asserts, a structural necessity of “an autocracy that ruled without consent.”¹²⁶ Minority domination was buttressed by harsher imperial attitudes as well as stricter racial divides.¹²⁷ While it was colonized peoples for whom racial segregation created the severest consequences, it also led to an “immense sense of difference and alien-ness experienced by Britons living abroad,” as Philippa Levine suggests.¹²⁸ Guha argues that for colonizers, a pervasive sense of isolation stemmed not only from curtailed contacts but also from the oppressive recognition that the imperial surroundings were both alien and immense.¹²⁹

In self-imposed segregation within an incomprehensible environment, colonizers equally misunderstood local peoples in what Homi Bhabha terms “an ongoing, vacillating process of translation.”¹³⁰ Attitudes such as the Cardews’ were underpinned by an ever-present apprehension that they might be confronted by inexplicable and, to them, irrational conduct.¹³¹ In *Along the Archival Grain*, Stoler uses the phrase “epistemic anxiety” to describe the uncertainty lurking behind imperial efforts to maintain order in colonial surroundings through regulation and

¹²³ Claud Cardew to Norah Cardew, 15 February 1895.

¹²⁴ Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Hong Kong [to England], 8 April 1882; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, Hong Kong [to England], 24 April 1882; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 13 May 1882; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 12 July 1882; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 31 August 1882; Claud Cardew to Norah Cardew, Nyasaland, East Africa to Australia, 18 October 1895; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 20 February 1883; Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, Maclontsie Camp, South Africa [to unknown], 17 August 1890; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 30 August 1885; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 23 March 1895; Sir Frederic Cardew to Norah Cardew, 21 April 1895; Sir Frederic Cardew to Fred Cardew, 23 March 1896; Claud Cardew to Sir Frederic Cardew, 22 September 1894; Claud Cardew to Katherine Cardew, 25 December 1894; Cyril Cardew to Fred Cardew, Taiping, to USA, 20 May 1889.

¹²⁵ Schwarz, *The White Man’s World*, 21–22. For racial prejudice in Nyasaland, see Lee, *Unreasonable Histories*, 36.

¹²⁶ Ranajit Guha, “Not at Home in Empire,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997): 482–93, at 484–85.

¹²⁷ Levine, *British Empire*, 107–8; Burroughs, “Imperial Institutions,” 171; Storey, *Settler Anxiety*, 8; Peter Burroughs, “Imperial Institutions and the Government of Empire,” in Porter, *Oxford History of the British Empire*, 3:182–83.

¹²⁸ Levine, *British Empire*, 107.

¹²⁹ Guha, “Not at Home in Empire,” 483, 487. See also Barry Hindess, “Not at Home in the Empire,” *Social Identities* 7, no. 3 (2001): 363–77, at 362.

¹³⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “Anxiety in the Midst of Difference,” *Legal Anthropology Review* 21, no. 1 (1998): 123–37, at 126–27.

¹³¹ Hindess, “Not at Home,” 373.

classification.¹³² Anxiety, according to Bhabha, was “a necessary social effect of the indeterminacy of the imperial everyday.”¹³³

For empire Britons, then, daily existence was fraught with anxiety. Though they outwardly displayed confidence,¹³⁴ the uneasy awareness of the threat of violence that lurked behind their thin veneer of rule could feed a gnawing anxiousness. Conceivably, as this anxiety originated partly due to their minority domination of locals, the smaller the colony, the more colonizers had to be anxious about. Those who were close enough to the precarious work of erecting a new outpost inevitably glimpsed colonialism's contingent nature. In its ability to evoke a comforting home culture, alongside its audible claim for cultural dominance, the violin was meant to mitigate that imperial anxiety.

Yet that is only one aspect of the imperial anxiety embodied in the instrument. Another aspect comes to the fore when the violin's story is compared to another remarkably similar one mentioned only once in Claud's letters. In January 1898, four years after his attempt to ship a violin to Central Africa, Claud reported the history of another conspicuously Western artifact in his remote outpost:

I wish I could send you photos of the station & my house. Unfortunately my camera (for which I paid the vast sum of £17/17/0 without any fittings) has gone wrong with the damp and won't work at all. Such disappointments are enough to drive one crazy. I have just built and fitted up a dark-room in the veranda of my house. With this dark-room I could have developed photos etc, etc any time during the day and have turned out much better photographs. I took a lot of trouble over the dark-room, fixed in a small window of red paper, made an absolutely light proof ceiling and door, and fixed up a bit of a sink with a tin case and an old gun barrel. Of course I had to do everything myself and put a lot of work into it. The dark-room is absolutely useless now. Photography was the only means of amusement that I had in this lonely hole.¹³⁵

This depiction is uncannily similar to that in the letters describing the violin. Claud was again positioned in an isolated outpost, this time Nkata in British Central Africa, where mentions of the violin are conspicuously absent from his letters.¹³⁶ Again, he was lonely. The Western artifact, his camera, must have likewise been shipped from Europe, and its high price suggests complicated shipping arrangements. Most importantly, here again we see the typically reticent Claud expressing extreme emotions. As in the case of the violin, though ostensibly only an object of “amusement,” the camera is laden with a heavy emotional charge.

Claud's camera sheds light on a further aspect of empire and anxiety. Alongside the considerable expense, it called for no less considerable effort—building and fitting a darkroom. Yet as Claud emphasizes, the hard work was rendered “absolutely useless” as high hopes came crashing down. To his mind, the culprit was Africa—the damp of this particular colonial location—the same offender that drove him toward the

¹³² Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 1, 3.

¹³³ Bhabha, “Anxiety in the Midst of Difference,” 128. See also Levine, *British Empire*, 107.

¹³⁴ For the elaborate ways the British displayed power in the empire, see, for example, David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford, 2002), 45–55, 122.

¹³⁵ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, BCA, East Africa [to Australia], 20 January 1898.

¹³⁶ The final mention of a violin in Claud's letters is in February 1895, three years before he describes the camera. See Claud Cardew to Norah Cardew, 15 February 1895.

venture to begin with. As indicated by the term *amusement*, used also to describe the violin,¹³⁷ Claud acquired the camera as a means of escaping his colonial surroundings. The darkroom further accentuates this function, as it is a concretely separate zone sealed tight to bar out anything in its vicinity. As with the violin, the camera is antidotal to Africa.

In the correspondence, the camera's chief attribute is its failure. It has failed to function as an artifact mitigating empire anxiety precisely because of its imperial surroundings. In that, it recalls Claud's former fiddle, the one he tried to replace in the winter of 1894: "I was tuning up my violin the other day *mirabilis dicere*, (punctuality of the silent newton !!!) [*sic*] my tuning up had no effect on the instrument but rather the tone got lower & lower—I soon discovered the cause for in a moment the belly of the instrument gradually came away from the back. The hot & moist weather of the last few weeks has been rather too much for the glue. It was but an inferior instrument."¹³⁸

As the camera evidences, not only inferior instruments collapsed under colonial circumstances. As Emma Rothschild says of another violin sent to another imperial location, the West Indies, nearly a century and a half previously, "the damp and the rainy season brought it all to pieces."¹³⁹ The failure of the camera and violin to function undercut any attempt to have them bolster a racial hierarchy. Instead of mitigating Claud's imperial anxiety, their collapse exacerbated it.

Leora Auslander argues that everyday objects are used as crucial means of emotional expression because they mirror two basic aspects of human existence. Like their users, they are embodied, and they can only occupy one place and time, and like their users, they are mortal.¹⁴⁰ Delicate or intricate instruments such as violins and cameras are fundamentally frail, whether located in metropole or colonial conditions. Nevertheless, Claud expected superior functioning out of both objects even when transported through rough terrain. Much like his aggrandizement of empire, itself a fallible mechanism, Claud was confounded when valued Western objects faltered.

Taken together with the story of his camera, the case of Claud Cardew's violin suggests a pattern. A distinctly Western cultural or technological artifact is overburdened with an atypical emotional vocabulary, due to its perceived capacity to mitigate a particular form of anxiety, one that has to do with being a lone white man in an outpost of empire. Yet when transported to colonial settings, these intricate artifacts often falter, undermining the beliefs they are supposed to sustain and exacerbating rather than mitigating anxiety. This pattern applies not only to the camera or to the violin but is the story of the British Empire mail in the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSIONS

In the nineteenth century, mail shipping lines conveyed goods and ideas, as well as people. For someone situated in a remote outpost, the mail was probably the primary connection to distant loved ones. Although mail-operated telegraph lines

¹³⁷ Claud Cardew to Sir Frederic Cardew, 22 September 1894.

¹³⁸ Claud Cardew to Fred Cardew, 14 January 1894.

¹³⁹ Rothschild, *Inner Life of Empires*, 107.

¹⁴⁰ Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *American Historical Review* 110, no. 4 (2005): 1015–45, specifically 1016–17, 1019, 1023.

existed, their presence was not as pervasive as lettered correspondence, and their price was a considerable barrier. The telegraph stations nearest to Claud were in Natal or Cape Colony, and messages were transmitted for five shillings and two pence a word, as opposed to two and a half pence for an entire letter.¹⁴¹

Like the camera and violin, nineteenth-century British mail relied on Western technology—be it steam engines, stamps, rails, or iron hulls—rendering the mail network a Western artifact. As a self-proclaimed “department of progress,”¹⁴² the British mail was metonymic of the empire at large, its technological advancement justifying the imperial mission.¹⁴³ Levine claims that for the British, their white identity was immidentally tied to colonial success.¹⁴⁴ Ventures of empire mail delivery could easily have been given the same significance, as a litmus test for the strength of empire and Britishness. An 1864 article in the *Manchester Guardian* asserted, for example, that all Britons “feel a proper national pride in its [the Post Offices’] superiority,” as it was an institution that “brought fresh honour and renown to the country of its birth,” especially so “now that its success is beyond all possibility of miscarriage.”¹⁴⁵

Posting a letter was open to all who could afford the price,¹⁴⁶ yet arguably the post’s elaborate system was primarily meant to serve the British public.¹⁴⁷ As Simone Müller reminds us regarding the telegraph, communication systems often served to connect some while disconnecting others, repeatedly reinforcing a racial barrier.¹⁴⁸ Despite attempts to engage more of the vast local populations as postal users, as in the Indian subcontinent in the 1850s, contemporary authorities viewed the British minority as the main target users.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the post was hailed by colonizers as a fundamental link to other white Britons, a panacea for imperial anxiety.

“The borderline affect of anxiety,” Bhabha explains, emerges from a “disjunctive relationship between the external and internal worlds, or material and psychic reality.”¹⁵⁰ Claud Cardew’s expectations of Western technology were at odds with his own experience. Disregarding his working knowledge of Western technology when relocated to remote colonial settings, he held fast to high hopes born of a

¹⁴¹ The prices quoted per word are for 1896; see *Postal Guide, 1896*, 485–86. See also Wenzlhuemer, “Telegraph and the Control of Material Movements,” 625–49, at 627.

¹⁴² *First Report of the Postmaster General*, 49.

¹⁴³ A similar comment about the parcel post is cited in Laborie, “Global Commerce in Small Boxes,” 240–41. For an influential discussion of the ways in which temporal concepts such as progress strengthened claims of colonial superiority and justified conquest, see Dipesh Chakrabarti, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?,” *Representations*, no. 37 (1992): 1–25.

¹⁴⁴ Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics*, 6.

¹⁴⁵ “The Post Office,” *Manchester Guardian*, 24 May 1864, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post*, 129–30; Robinson, *Carrying British Mails Overseas*, 15–18. See also *First Report of the Postmaster General*, 8.

¹⁴⁷ In its 1844 report, the Secret Committee on Law in Respect to Opening and Detaining Letters at General Post Office observed, “the crown undertook to be the letter carrier for its subjects.” See *Report from the Secret Committee on the Post Office; Together with the Appendix* (London, 1844), 1–2. See also Roland Hill’s testimony in *Report from the Select Committee on Postage; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index* (London, 1843), 4.

¹⁴⁸ Müller, *Wiring the World*, 239, 241, 243–44. A similar claim is made by Valeska Huber regarding the technology of the Suez Canal. See Huber, *Channelling Mobilities*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ For example, see the “Report of Committee on Postal Communication in India; Reports from Bengal Respecting Telegraphs; Despatches Sanctioning Establishment of Electric Telegraphs in India,” House of Commons Papers 76 (London, 1852), 23–24.

¹⁵⁰ Bhabha, “Anxiety in the Midst of Difference,” 127.

racialized ideology. In that, he “actively estranges the division and distance between ‘sense’ and ‘experience’ or enunciation and affect,”¹⁵¹ meeting Bhabha’s definition of anxiety.

Secluded and out of reach, Claud hoped the empire mail would reliably relieve his loneliness via the violin. The other side of anxiety, argues Bhabha, is hope.¹⁵² But hope, Ernst Bloch reminds us, is “unconditionally disappointable.”¹⁵³ Oriented to the future, it is always implicitly dissatisfied with the present. A setback in the violin’s arrival, then, could have caused Claud mounting anxiety and shaken his firm belief in white dominance in Black Africa.

Claud Cardew’s violin finally arrived a full ten months after his first request from April 1894, and “strange to say in perfectly good condition.”¹⁵⁴ Yet despite his expressed anxiety regarding his violin’s voyage, its arrival left little by way of lettered traces. By 1895, he had not inquired into the grounds for his violin’s detention by the empire mail. Yet his initial expectation and lingering disappointment tell a story that pertains, as we have seen, to more than the delayed delivery. The story is set within a nexus of anxieties born out of both the racial binaries central to imperial ideologies and the rising and ebbing expectations of modern technology. As such, it offers a key to unraveling other atypically anxious intersections around Western artifacts in empire locations, included the inflated anxious expectations of nineteenth-century British Empire mail. Both mail and violin were perceived as superior artifacts of Western civilization set against ostensibly incompetent colonial surroundings. Their failures shed light on the precarious position of colonizers, simultaneously shaking their firm belief in their own superiority—the same superiority that served to justify that precarious minority rule. A fragile imperialist worldview was fractured, allowing empire’s epistemic anxiety to seep through the cracks.

¹⁵¹ Bhabha, 127.

¹⁵² Bhabha, 127.

¹⁵³ Ernst Bloch, “Can Hope Be Disappointed?,” inaugural lecture at the University of Tübingen, quoted in Hirokazu Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge* (Stanford, 2006), 69.

¹⁵⁴ Claud Cardew to Norah Cardew, 15 February 1895.