

Spring 2000

Serving the Foreign Office

Tobias Seamon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Seamon, Tobias (2000) "Serving the Foreign Office," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 53 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss53/15>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

SERVING THE FOREIGN OFFICE

I am the son of Jack the Ripper.
His name is Charles and the rumors
are true. He is upper-class, belongs
to the Royal Geographic Society, and served
with distinction in the Foreign Office. He has joked
with Burton, Speke, and Livingstone, and comes home
through the stables to shed his blood slicked
oil-skin amid the aprons of the butchers.

My mother, an idiot of Anglo-Irish gentility
sings his praises through turnip lips,
never saying boo about his absences
to Afghanistan and the Dark Continent. He has seen the Night
of the Long Knives, traveled a plateau of burning stones,
and murders whores with surgical abandon
in the sawdust gutters of Whitechapel.

He reads the papers assiduously and leans
across a plate of fried tomatoes and herring,
uttering, how horrible.

My father has ordered sub-alterns towards the Crimean
guns, speaks of Nightingale with pride, had a finger amputated
after Khartoum, and keeps a Dutch mistress in Paris.
He is skilled at espionage and the wives of ambassadors
return his glances. He enjoys the company of Americans
and ashes his cigars in a mummified monkey's head,
presented to him by the ruler of Lahore, with whom he shared the brains.

He is a cartographer and has mapped the Mountains of the Moon.
Among his charts of the Silk Road and the Blue Nile, there is a sketch
of the East End, red stars drawn like engagements

in anonymous alleyways. There has been no change
to his behavior, before the deaths or after, and he takes
his meals regularly to fulfill the needs of his slight paunch.
He tells stories of surviving without water, love, or ammunition,
laughing loudly and equally at Punch, Twain, and the Nun's Priest.

In a box that opens with the smell of musk,
I found a broken knife, a pressed orchid,
a locket portrait of my mother,
a tuft of ebon hair entwined
in a cheap green ribbon, and a severed
brown finger. I cannot tell the reason
or origin of any of these objects.
He spies me at the box and smiles,
remarking he did the same thing at my age.
The deaths have stopped, and the killer is no longer
sought. The murders remain a mystery to all the world.