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Allegory and the Imperial Imaginary:
Narratives of Racial, Sexual and National Becoming in the Fin-de-Siècle

by

Brinda Roy

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ABSTRACT

Allegory and the Imperial Imaginary:
Narratives of Racial, Sexual and National Becoming in the Fin-de-Siècle

Brinda Roy

I draw upon theories of postcoloniality, narratology, and the new historicism to read turn-of-the-century British literary and cultural texts. I situate these texts in their particular moments of historical production in order to comment upon the elaborate fabrication of an “allegorical” narrative of nationhood, imperial identity and empire-building in fin-de-siècle Britain. As the British colonial theater at the turn-of-the-century is a vast one, my study for the most part concerns the allegorical legacies of fin-de-siècle British metropolitan and imperial strategies of power and control in India. I argue that while the making of empire was more often than not bloody and violent, involving as it did military conquest and economic exploitation, the Janus-faced narrative of empire-building also required the enactment of idealistic “humanistic” schemes of cultural domination, such as ideas about the upliftment of “barbaric,” “savage” people through conversion to Christianity and introduction to civil society. The rhetoric of social missioning served to putatively recode the violent, economic narrative of colonialism as a redemptive allegory of empire.

I explore both the intrinsically complicated nature of the allegorical and the myriad forms of imperial allegory: the national, the military, the sexual, and the domestic/familial. I bring to my understanding of the national allegory of Empire a postcolonial distrust of predetermined, symbolic narratives. Any attempt to understand imperial allegories has to take into account allegory’s “other” nature – the persistent irony, endless deferral, permanent parabasis, that marks its utterances when it “speaks otherwise.” By viewing the performance of turn-of-the-century British imperialism through an “allegorical” lens, and mining especially allegory’s disruptive potential to “speak otherwise,” I am able to pose anew questions about the status of the “other” in colonialist and nationalist discourses, the relation between narrative, history and historiography, and finally, and most crucially, the implications of political and
geographical territorialization for an ethical, postcolonial aesthetics of (re)reading and (re)writing. This study will prove to be not so much a definitive view of allegory, but rather a highly selective, creative, and varied engagement with both hegemonic and anti-hegemonic, oppositional, and resistant allegories of nationalism, imperialism, militarism, sexuality, and domesticity in the fin-de-siècle.
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I owe my parents an immeasurable debt of gratitude. I dedicate this to Ma whose patient understanding that doctoral dissertations take an inordinately long time to write has finally paid off, and Baba whose own story of courage and determination first
aroused in me an interest in stories, histories, and narratives. Together they have taught me the value of texts and the cultural contexts in which texts are produced.

And finally this dissertation is for my husband whose support and constancy, especially in the final months of this project, considerably soothed my frayed nerves and eased the writing of this thesis. I hope a reading of this dissertation will explain some of those complex theoretical terms that he brandishes with such enthusiasm!
For Ramakrishnan, Ma and Baba.
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THE IMPERIAL INSTITUTE

AN ILLUSTRATED RECORD OF THE

Opening Ceremony by Her Majesty the Queen

"The story of our race is symbolized here at this East End celebration. High on her throne, the Empress of a thousand years - Queen Victoria."

THE NATION'S TRIBUTE TO QUEEN VICTORIA

Queen Victoria Opens the Imperial Institute, by G. Durand. Illustrated London News, 1893.

The Canvas of Empire: Visualizing the Allegorical Imaginary
Chapter I

Introduction: Allegorical Beginnings

"Why is it that the furthest reaching truths about ourselves and the world have to be stated in such a lopsided, referentially indirect mode? Or, to be more specific, why is it that texts that attempt the articulation of epistemology with persuasion turn out to be inconclusive about their own intelligibility in the same manner and for the same reasons that produce allegory?"

Paul de Man, "Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion."

al·le·go·ry
Function: noun.
Inflected Form(s): plural -ries.
Etymology: Middle English allegorie, from Latin allegoria, from Greek allEgoria, from allEgorein to speak figuratively, from allos other + - Egorein to speak publicly, from agora assembly.
Date: 14th century.
1: the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence; also: an instance (as in a story or painting) of such expression.
2: a symbolic representation: emblem.1

On June 21, 1897, the Daily Mail commemorated the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s reign as Regina and Imperatrix, with bold headlines in gold ink that called it a testament to the "GREATNESS OF THE BRITISH RACE." This noteworthy if somewhat tawdry sentiment found its theatrical counterpart in the lavish spectacle of Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee Procession which took place in London on that same day in June. Victoria’s royal procession of gilt carriages and ornately decorated equipages was accompanied by carriages containing sundry foreign dignitaries (which included among others, Indian, African and Hawaiian royalty) and ranks of soldiers ranging from Canadian hussars, to North Borneon camel troops, Jamaican and Guianan police, and cavalry from Natal. The procession began in Buckingham Palace and concluded at Westminster Abbey. Its route was lined with an "imitation oriental rug in the form of a

1 http://www.stas.net/poems/allegory.
carefully contrived allegory of Empire.”¹ Nothing could have been more conducive to the pedagogical and performative spirit of fin-de-siècle British nationalism/imperialism than this majestic and consummately staged allegory of a domesticated and masterfully controlled British Empire. One could read this moment of June 21, 1897, as a prefect symbolic exemplar of what Thomas Babington Macaulay allegorically envisioned as an “imperishable empire.” A powerful image of an immutable Empire is evoked for the moral cause of imperialism in Macaulay’s speech on the Government of India delivered some fifty odd years prior to the occasion of Victoria’s spectacular Jubilees. “To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition,” Macaulay says, “to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory ... [this is] the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.”²

Macaulay’s evocation of “our morals” and “our laws” (as opposed to “their” immorality and lawlessness) created an allegorical frame of reference which became crucial to the nationalist project of British colonialism insofar as this project was the unequivocal representation of Reality, i.e. the verity and inevitability of British imperial rule. Allegory in this instance may be understood as “the expression by means of symbolic ... figures of truths or generalizations about human existence.”³ Macaulay’s gesture toward stability, and triumphant humanism is a proleptic one: it anticipates the performance of imperial allegory vis-à-vis Jubilees, Durbars and Imperial Assemblages in the latter years of Victoria’s rule, which were also of course, the declining years of the British Empire. The “imperishable empire” of Macaulay’s vision becomes quite literally the subject of late-nineteenth century pageantry and imperial myth-making. I read this moment in 1897 as a realization of Macaulay’s vision because such a pompous display of royalty would have been impossible to imagine in Macaulay’s own time.

In the first three-quarters of the nineteenth-century, till about the 1870s, the scope for representing royalty in ceremonies and rituals like Jubilees was limited by several factors. The most crucial of these were the very real, effective political power of the

³ http://www.stas.net/poems/allegory.
British monarch, the unsuitability of London as a stage for showcasing royalty, the
general mid-Victorian attitude of parsimony which disdained ceremony of any kind, and
finally the relative lack of concern about foreign affairs which bred a certain sense of
confidence in the perpetuity of Empire. By the late 1870s, however, things had begun to
look very different. The mid-nineteenth century belief that there was really no need to
show off when imperial power was assured yielded to the late-nineteenth century sense of
a beleaguered Empire and a Nation in crisis. In a period of change and conflict it was
absolutely imperative to give the impression of stability and continuity and the allegorical
reimagining of royal ceremony provided the means for affirming permanence in the face
of change. Moreover the monarch’s gradual retirement from political life, and the
curtailment of her actual political power, meant that she could be invested with a
picturesque, symbolic grandeur that would not have been possible earlier. Thus
Macaulay’s rhetoric of entitlement and imperial order finds its visual equivalent some
fifty years after its initial articulation, during Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee
celebrations in 1897, in the orderly parade of exotic regiments and colonial royalty under
British military command. The allegory of an “imperishable empire” is revitalized by its
literalization in the Jubilee procession. In Chapter two I examine this connection further
in archival and popular texts of allegorical pageantry, to see how at a time when the real
power of Empire was already on the decline, a continuous, repetitive, symbolic narrative
– allegory, in fact – was strategically (but not unproblematically) deployed to
performatively and pedagogically represent British monarchical and imperial power as a
way of sanctioning empire. In this instance allegory becomes a mode of crisis
management.

I begin my dissertation by retrieving from history these two disparate, but perhaps
not entirely unconnected, moments in order to foreground the methodological,
theoretical, and discursive reaches and limitations of this study. I begin with the gold
headlines of the Daily Mail, the pomp of Jubilee pageantry, and retroactively, the
imperishability of Macaulay’s empire of “our arts, morals, literature and laws,” because I
see at work in them a dominant theme of this dissertation: the performative and

4 David Cannadine outlines all of these factors in greater detail in “The Context, Performance and Meaning
of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, c. 1820-1977” (The Invention of
pedagogic possibilities of allegory. The allegorical performative may best be described as a principle of motion, mutability, and change; it is the “prodigious living principle of the people,” it animates and transforms national subjects. The allegorical pedagogic is a redemptive, expository principle; it constructs national subjects and national histories as meaningful subjects and histories, with meaningful origins and ends (the significance of origins and ends will become clearer later on in this chapter). Victoria’s Jubilee procession is a good example of how these two codes come together. Since it is a staged production the Jubilee is a performance in the most obvious sense of the term. It is an “official” performance of imperial charisma. But the Jubilee also represents the allegorical performative in that it is possible to see in it the ever-mutating, creative principle that transforms national subjects, subjects like the Queen, the hussars, the colonial infantry, and the metropolitan audience, from indifferent participants in the national process (in the early part of the century) to active, avid players of the game (in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century). The performative energy generated in this scene comes into conflict with the pedagogical authority of allegory, what I term the allegorical pedagogic. The spirit of allegorical pedagogy is what produces this scene in the first place – the desire to authorize and via authorization pedagogically illustrate, the might of the British Empire. So what happens when the allegorical performative comes up against the allegorical pedagogic? Are the two mutually contestable or is one displaced by the other? In a sense this dissertation is an attempt to analyze the continually shifting, dislocating idioms of allegorical performance and pedagogy.

The allegorical performative allows me to locate and read for those places of disruption or fracture in narratives of allegorical pedagogy. I will argue that it is precisely in those moments of disruption that the allegorical performative makes itself felt. There are many such moments in the texts I discuss: when Luckworth Crewe and Nancy Lord in Gissing’s novel In the Year of Jubilee, resist Jubilee pedagogy in favor of Jubilee modernity; when Kim and Harry Feversham, from Kipling’s Kim and Mason’s The Four Feathers, resist white sartorialism in favor of oriental drag; when Indian prostitutes in the British-Indian army escape official and medical surveillance in an effort to reclaim their

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5 Homi Bhabha, “DisemmiNation,” in Nation and Narration, ed. Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 297. I have recast Bhabha’s original terms to suit my own allegorical needs.
colonized sexualities; and finally, when the dirty native servants of white “memsahibs” revel in their abjection, thereby resisting assimilation into the universal Family of Man. Without conflating the complex histories and subject positionings of these different “characters” I wish to read their texts of interruption and intervention as instances of the allegorical performative. Their varied strategies of interrupting the dominant will of allegorical pedagogy will allow me to stage my own allegorical performative, that of the postcolonial critic reading against the grain and interrupting the production of hegemonic allegories of empire. What I am performing then, through the practice of persistent interruption, is mining that aspect of allegorical discourse that Paul de Man famously associates with “irony” and “parabasis.” In fact, the two principles I identify in Victoria’s Jubilee procession, the allegorical performative and pedagogic, derive from the original definition of allegory. A reiteration of what allegory means is thus required before I can conceptualize the link between parabasis and the allegorical performative.

Defining Allegory

Allegory comes from the Greek word *allegorein*, a combination of *allos* which might be roughly translated to mean “other,” and *agoreuin* which approximates the English “to speak in public.” At its very conception then allegory is inflected with multiple, perhaps even contrary significations. Allegory is both public speech and “other” speech or the act of “speaking otherwise.” I believe that these two contradictory impulses in allegory, its emphatic will to public speech, to public performance in fact, and its equally emphatic if more covert need to “speak otherwise,” are responsible for many of the problems encountered in formulating a suitably handy definition of the term. Although I am indebted to these earlier formulations and shall have recourse to them throughout this study, my primary aim here will be to try and postulate a formula of my own, a definition (or definitions) that refer to earlier ones but also reconceptualize and expand the existing parameters of allegorical knowledge. As such I begin by first clarifying my position on those so-called “contradictory impulses” that beset allegory.

The first of these impulses, i.e. the public face of allegory, may be related to notions of transparency and invention. I would like to link several things here: allegory as
transparent public medium, allegory as public performance i.e. allegory as the idea of performing to and for an audience, and finally allegory as open, direct, unequivocal and unmediated discourse. The two anecdotes from British imperial history with which I began, exemplify the transparent, unmediated nature of public allegory. Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee pageant, verging on kitsch though it may be, and Macaulay’s bombastic rhetoric masquerading as moral sententia, illustrate the Hegelian precept that allegory is enigmatic and absolutely transparent as far as its exegesis is concerned. The “meaning” to be conveyed through both these very public performances has to do with the rightness, appropriateness, and moral strength of the British Empire. But how valid is this tableau? How really transparent is its representational mode? What would happen to this happy scenario if I was to complicate it by introducing another aspect of allegorical public speech: its performative, theatrical, inventive façade?

If allegory means to speak in public and if public speech sometimes carries connotations of performance, theater, and spectacle (something that is false or invented perhaps) even as it purports to be quite transparent, then isn’t there already another impulse at work within allegory, one that threatens to falsify if not actually subvert, allegory’s public agenda? The very theatricality of the public message, the spectacle that accompanies it, as in the case of the Hussars, camel troops, and gilded carriages that comprised Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee procession, suggest that there is something both excessive and empty or false about public allegories. I propose that this excess, in fact, marks a desire to insinuate allegorical meaning where there is probably no meaning to be recovered. The Diamond Jubilee gala after all comes at a time in the late-nineteenth century when the very institution it celebrates, the mighty British Empire, is already

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6 According to Hegel allegory aims “for the most complete clarity, so that the external means it uses must be as transparent as possible with regard to the meaning it is to make apparent” (quoted in Paul de Man, “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion,” in Stephen Greenblatt ed. Allegory and Representation, Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1981). The translation is de Man’s. Hegel’s notion of transparency, so at odds with the overarching definition of allegory offered in this dissertation (allegory as secretive, profoundly enigmatic), has to be thought of in the context of Classical-Romantic usage of the term. Hegel, as do Goethe and Coleridge, privileges symbolic language over allegorical meaning. Allegory is an empty, purely mechanical figure for Hegel. He condemns allegory’s easy, transparent allusion to its object, unlike symbol’s complex progression and ascension to meaning. Although I owe much to post-structuralist revisionary readings of Romantic allegory, I find that imperial allegories at the turn-of-the-century may be profitably read in the Hegelian sense as transparent, unmediated representations of reality. The allegory of the Jubilee procession depends on the notion of transparency - the fact that its meaning is apparent to everyone, that it doesn’t need to be explained.
entering into its death throes. The Hussars, camel troops and exotic colonial royalty become in effect empty vehicles of a larger allegorical story that they anchor but in which they play only bit parts. The excessive spectacle that is Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee is allegory at its flamboyant, public best; it is allegory speaking in, for and to a public. But it is important to note here that imperial allegory’s flamboyant, public speech is born of its structural desire to falsely invent and in the process continually revivify its story about meaningful origins and endlessly deferred endings. This becomes a way to displace anxieties about the end of Empire, by implying that the end will never come, at a time when the end seems not only inevitable but imminent. As such public allegories like the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee may even be regarded as a species of what Eric Hobsbawm famously described as “invented traditions.”

A comprehension of the empty, even false nature of allegorical public-speak offers a nice segue into that second impulse that characterizes allegory, its “otherness.” This “other” aspect of allegory is also what I would like to associate with the allegorical performative, that ever mobile principle of change and transformation. An interesting example of allegorical otherness running amok and literally wreaking havoc on imperial allegory’s public performance, is the infamous incident that took place during the Imperial Assemblage held in Delhi in 1877. Elaborately decorated elephants that had been brought in as part of the colonial pageant scene suddenly stampeded during the royal artillery salute, bringing down tents, Durbar regalia, and even trampling to death some of the onlookers, much to the horror and consternation of the assembled British.

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7 According to Fineman the desire for origins is built into the very structure of allegory insofar as allegory can be defined as an extended metaphor. Fineman write, “Every metaphor is always a little metonymic because in order to have a metaphor there must be a structure, and where there is a structure there is already piety and nostalgia for the lost origin through which the structure is thought” (“Structure of Allegorical Desire,” 44). To Fineman’s notion of lost origins I add the caveat that allegories constantly look forward to but always, inevitably defer their endings. I explore this idea of allegory’s desire for origins and deferral of endings in greater detail in Chapter two.


9 I wish to make explicit a distinction that has been implicit so far: the distinction between the allegorical performative and the official performative. The first, as I have already identified, is a popular, living principle, an expression of the will of the people so to speak. The second, is an official, ideological principle, one that allows the organizers of the Jubilee to represent empire in and through the bodies of the monarch and the procession. It is the first code, the allegorical performative, that I believe is synonymous with the parabasis as notion of “speaking otherwise.”
This rampant and rampaging otherness transforms the public spectacle of empire into a veritable tableau of oriental misrule and confusion. Brought in as splendid exotic props for what was undoubtedly envisaged as a magnificent allegorical staging of British benevolence and imperial grandeur, the hapless elephants become instead purveyors of another kind of allegorical desire. However unwittingly, they provide me with the means to read in this primal scene of imperial chaos, allegory’s insatiable desire to “speak otherwise,” to say/enact something other than what is already given to be said/enacted.

**“Other” Speech: Parabasis and Irony**

It is perhaps clear from my discussion in the preceding sections that my use of the term “allegory” is myriad, creative and idiosyncratic. Given the enormous variety of the term, it would be unnatural to offer a specific definition. Instead what I offer are several definitions (allegory as symbolic, public, secretive, “other,” discontinuous, pedagogic, performative, etc.), all of which just go to prove that the term is contingent, provisional, polysemic, and entirely open-ended. So far I have attempted to define allegory by going back to its etymological roots, the Greek *allo* and *agoreu*in, and then taking the English translations as the grounds for a creative digression into performance, theater, falsity, and invention. Later in this chapter I will outline in a very preliminary way, the importance of the term to historical and historiographical work by invoking a disciplinary historian’s formulations on the subject. And all this for the purpose of depicting two oppositional impulses that pull and push apart the allegorical fabric: allegory as open, public speech (the allegorical pedagogic) and as secretive, other speech (the allegorical performative). In this section I would like to address that second aspect of allegory, its “otherness”, in an effort to understand how allegory’s ability to “speak otherwise” precludes the kind of totalizing summary about “truths” and “origins” that I see at work in Victoria’s Jubilee procession.

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10 The Imperial Assemblage was held in Delhi in 1877 to commemorate Benjamin Disraeli’s bestowal upon Queen Victoria the title *Kaiser-i-Hind* or “Queen Empress of India.” For more on the Assemblage and the incident about the stampeding elephants see Chapter One, the section entitled “Absence as Presence: A Deconstructive Motif?”.
In Paul de Man’s view allegory is utterly “enigmatic and inescapable,” a “unique and plural touchstone by which all readings and all literary and philosophical corpuses are measured.” Allegory’s enigma owes something to de Man’s deconstructive definition of allegory which mines the activism of allos, of “speaking otherwise,” in order to persistently interrupt agoreuin’s totalitarian authority. Rather than attempt a complete account of de Man’s theory of allegory, what I would like to do at this point is refer specifically to the concepts of parabasis and irony since it is in accordance with these terms that I refigure the allegorical performative as the “other” of allegorien’s “otherwise.”

In the final chapter of his Allegories of Reading, after concluding his reading of Rousseau’s Confessions, de Man borrows from Schlegel to reconceptualize allegory as parabasis and irony. This is de Man: “the disruption of the figural chain ... becomes the permanent parabasis of an allegory (of figure), that is to say, irony. Irony is no longer a trope but the undoing of the deconstructive allegory of all tropological cognitions, the systematic undoing, in other words, of understanding. As such, far from closing off the tropological system, irony enforces the repetition of its aberration.” Parabasis may be literally translated to mean “stepping-aside,” and given its interventionist nature I would reinterpret “stepping-aside” to mean “stepping-into” as in interrupting, the main action of a play for instance. Parabasis is the act of intervention by the chorus in Greek drama, and the intervention of the author in German theater of Schlegel’s time. Parabasis is then a theatrical trope of intervention; it is a figure that interrupts, steps into, and otherwise disrupts theatrical performance. It mitigates against the assumption of a role or a persona. The stampeding elephants who disrupt the very public, almost sacred, performance of British imperial might during the Indian Assemblage of 1877, may be regarded in rhetorical terms as parabasis, an interruption of the most destructive kind.

To speak allegorically is to speak ironically; it is to perform parabasis, to interrupt, intervene, disrupt, and otherwise fracture continuity. To “speak otherwise,” to inevitably say something “other” than what is given, is also to speak in the allegorical

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performative. The dissonant figure of parabasis, its transgressive energy, is what generates and constitutes the allegorical performative. The stampeding elephants are only the most obvious instance of this. To locate parabasis in Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee procession of 1887, a much more subtle and circuitous endeavor, it is necessary to situate the procession within the broader historical narrative of change and instability at the turn-of-the-century.

**Establishing the Historical Scene**

For Britain the last years of the nineteenth-century were anxious, unstable years in which the project of empire-building came to acquire simultaneously a mythical and an apocalyptic flavor. The British Empire assumed mythical status primarily by virtue of its iconization of Queen Victoria as benevolent Regina, Imperatrix, and Mother Empress. Victoria’s reign, especially toward the end of it, came to be nostalgically remembered, and in the process underwent a sort of mythification, as the “Golden Age” of the British Empire. To Lord Salisbury, Victoria’s last Prime Minister, her rule emblematized the transition from an “English past to an Imperial present.”

It is worth quoting at some length an excerpt from Salisbury’s funeral address, delivered to the House of Lords after Victoria’s death in 1901:

“above all things, I think, we owe her gratitude for this, that by a happy dispensation her reign has coincided with that great change which has come over the political structure of this country and the political instincts of its people. She has bridged over that great interval which separates old England from new England ... I think that future historians will look to the Queen’s reign as the boundary that separates the two states of England ... and recognise that we have undergone the change with constant increase of public prosperity, without any friction to endanger the peace or stability of our civil life, and at the same time with a constant expansion of Empire which every year grows more and more powerful. We owe all these blessings to the tact, the wisdom, the passionate patriotism, and the incomparable judgment of the Sovereign whom we deplore.”

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12 Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press. 1979), 300-301. Hereafter cited as AR. I undertake a more thorough critique of the de Manian allegorical model in the first chapter. See the section entitled “Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin: Deconstructing Allegory?”.


In the House of Commons, Arthur Balfour echoed the popular sentiments of a nation in mourning when he said, “grief affects us not merely because we have lost a great personality, but because we feel that the end of a great epoch has come upon us” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{15}

The myth of the Imperial Golden Age, one that I argue in the following chapters directly resulted in the fabrication of an elaborate allegorical narrative of nationhood and empire-building, found its sanctioning force in the figure of the Mother Queen. The apotheosis of Queen Victoria was complete at the time of her death when her passing came to be mourned as the passing of a “great epoch” in English history. But the myth of a Golden Empire was also tempered by, and perhaps gained symbolic ascendancy as a result of, specifically fin-de-siècle fears over the future of the British Empire and the health of the British Nation. The closing decades of the nineteenth-century witnessed relentless social crises both at home in England and in the English colonies.

The final years of the 1870s saw England caught in the middle of a severe social depression which was to maintain its stranglehold on the economy and the popular English imaginary throughout the last years of the nineteenth-century and the early years of the twentieth-century. The domestic social crisis appears to have been precipitated by several factors: the seemingly overwhelming problem of urban poverty and resultant concerns over housing, city slums, overcrowding, air-pollution, unemployment, the “poor,” and so on; the socialist and feminist insurgencies caused by a growing demand for unionization amongst workers (like coal and steel miners) and suffrage for women; and finally, the inadequate state of the British Army which came to be universally acknowledged as something that was of paramount concern for maintaining the strength and longevity of the British Empire itself. Internal domestic crises was compounded by external crisis in the international arena where England faced stiff competition for her imperial economic resources from such rival emergent industrialized nations as Germany and the United States, and the growth of indigenous anti-colonial resistance and independence movements in the colonies.

Middle-class fears over loss of jobs, and poor housing and sanitary conditions, official fears over military inadequacies, and masculinist fears over unwonted feminist

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. cols. 19-20.
activism, all of these concerns came to be articulated around a particular figure/trope: that of degeneration. Social theorists drew extensively on Darwinism and ideas of natural selection and degeneration to figure the crisis in late-Victorian society. The trope of degeneration received its most extensive treatment in sociological discussions about the condition of London’s urban poor, the English army, and the sexuality of England’s national and colonial subjects (especially practices of concubinage and prostitution). I would like to turn now to a brief consideration of each of these “problems” in order to prepare the ground for my own intervention into debates about poverty, sexuality, and the military in the fin-de-siècle British-Indian context.

To such mid-Victorian studies of urban poverty as Henry Mayhew’s _London Labour and the London Poor_ (1851) were added Charles Booth’s compendious seventeen volume _Life and Labour of the People of London_ (four volumes of which were devoted to the subject of poverty), which was started in 1889 and completed in 1903, and Seebohm Rowntree’s 1901 study of the slums of York, _Poverty: A Study of Town Life._\(^{16}\) All of these accounts of urban poverty and the living conditions of the poor and often unemployed working-classes testified to the steady physical deterioration of a good portion of the English population. A committee report on “Physical Deterioration,” filed in 1904, stated that while the urban population in England had increased from fifty to seventy percent of the entire population between 1850 and 1900, there was “no corresponding increase in public attention to urban problems, and that consequently the English poor had been worse off than they had ever been.”\(^{17}\) To the upper- and middle-classes of nineteenth-century English society, unsanitary living conditions, overcrowding, and pollution transformed urban slums into infected, malignant, festering sores on the otherwise healthy body of the nation. Social images of disease and contagion soon became _moral_ images of decadence and degeneration. It was natural for Victorian social

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\(^{16}\) See Henry Mayhew’s _London Labour and the London Poor_ (London: C. Griffin and Co., 1861), Charles Booth’s _Life and Labour of the People of London_ (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891), and Seebohm Rowntree’s _Poverty: a Study of Town Life_ (London: Macmillan, 1901). To these were added in later years Will Reason’s _Poverty_ (1909), Beatrice Webb’s _Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission_ (1909), and Phillip Snowden’s _The Living Wage_ (1912).

\(^{17}\) Hynes, 23. See “Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration,” _Reports from Commissioners_ (1904), vol.32, p.103.
scientists like Thomas Plint and Carlyle to describe the urban poor as the “dangerous criminal class,” “moral poison,” “pestiferous canker,” and malignant ulcers.\textsuperscript{18}

To national fears over a morally and physically degenerate population were added imperial concerns about the health of the military body. In an article in the \textit{Contemporary Review} in January 1902, Sir Frederick Maurice, a General in the English Army, pronounced that sixty percent of Englishmen were unfit for military service.\textsuperscript{19} The popular consensus seemed to be that “the whole laborious population of the land are at present living under conditions which make it impossible that they should rear the next generation to be sufficiently virile to supply more than two out of five men effective for the [purpose] … of war.”\textsuperscript{20} The British army’s dismal performance in the Indian Afghan wars, the second of which was fought from 1878 to 1880, and the Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902), during which many working-class recruits had to be sent back to England because of bad health, only concretized these fears about the health and strength of the Empire.

The trope of degeneration also came to be powerfully figured in debates about the sexuality and sexual health of the English nation and the British Empire.\textsuperscript{21} The mediation of sexual identities and the management of sexuality in general were associated with the need to maintain a strict vigil over potentially undisciplined sexual bodies and permeable sexual boundaries. The fear that these bodies and boundaries might be easily breached, especially in the face of feminist activism, and “illegitimate” sexual practices like prostitution, colonial concubinage, homosexuality, and masturbation, found expression in the degenerative metaphorics of disease, contagion, and contamination. The turn-of-the-century sexual purity movement at home which led to the prolific condemnation of prostitution, abortion, homosexuality, and allied practices of sexual “aberration,” and the simultaneous valorization of motherhood and sanitary breeding regimens for the purpose of raising a healthy race of future empire-builders, found its global counterpart in Britain’s attempts to clean up its sexual practices in the colonies. Anxieties over racial

\textsuperscript{18} McClintock, 46.
\textsuperscript{20} Quoted in Hynes, 22.
contamination as a result of inter-racial sexual intercourse, and attendant fears over the implications of racial/cultural contamination for the future of white male imperial economics and politics, led to the increasingly stringent policing and surveilling of such “contagious subjects” as native prostitutes and working-class British recruits in the colonial army. Degenerative subjects, those classes and races most prone to disease and pathologically perverse sexualities, provided the grounds for instituting a rationale of sexual sanitation, control, surveillance, and regimentation both at home in England and abroad in the colonies.

The historical mise-en-scène outlined above has been by way of an attempt to provide, in the broadest sense possible, not just the context of my project but the context for reading that ceremonial moment in 1897 against the grain. The Jubilee spectacle is predicated on an act of symbolic looking that translates domestic fears and images of imperial otherness into a splendid, comprehensive vision of mounted horsemen, gilded carriages, a charismatic monarch, and obeisant colonial royalty. Like Victoria’s Golden Jubilee of 1887, this too is a masterfully orchestrated, state-sanctioned moment. The organizers of the Jubilee – London municipal authorities and other Victorian bureaucracies of government, commerce, and education – must have been filled with a sense of their own accomplishment when the pageant proved to be such a success (recall the gold headlines from the *Illustrated London News*). They had produced what, together with the lavish Golden Jubilee of 1887, might be considered the ultimate text of allegorical pedagogy. So is it at all possible to read this stable, consensual allegory, parabasistically? I believe it is, and in the second chapter I locate parabasis in those places where the allegorical performative emerges, places where the pedagogical authority of Jubilee ceremonials is challenged by the allegorical performatives of modernity, commodity advertising, and anti-imperial sentiment. My approach in the second chapter is illustrative of my methodology in this study as a whole. Throughout this dissertation the allegorical performative and its attendant rhetoric of parabasis are the necessary corollaries for the retelling of fin-de-siècle metropolitan and colonial stories.

Allegorical Contexts

As the British colonial theater at the turn-of-the-century is a vast one, my study deals almost exclusively with the British-Indian encounter in the last years of the nineteenth-, and the early years of the twentieth-century. With the exception of a brief foray into the British Sudan in the third chapter, a result of an engagement with A.E.W. Mason’s adventure novel The Four Feathers, and a comprehensive account of late-nineteenth century evolutionist reconfigurations of the Family of Man allegory in the fifth chapter, my study is largely concerned with the allegorical legacies of fin-de-siècle British metropolitan and imperial strategies of power and control in India.

I am interested in exploring not just the intrinsically complicated nature of the allegorical but also the myriad forms of imperial allegory: the national, the military, the sexual, and the domestic/familial. I bring to my understanding of the national allegory of Empire a natural, postcolonial distrust of predetermined, symbolic narratives. I argue that any attempt to understand imperial allegories will have to take into account allegory’s “other” nature – the persistent irony, endless deferral, permanent parabasis, that marks its utterances when it “speaks otherwise.” Following Jacques Derrida’s prescription that allegory is that possibility that “permits language to say the other and to speak of itself while speaking of something else; the possibility of always saying something other than what it gives to be read, including the scene of reading itself.”22 I argue that colonial appropriation, obfuscation, and violation, are the obverse, the “other,” of imperial allegory’s various staged performances of redemption and humanism.

Each chapter in my dissertation brings to the allegorical reading of empire a double-edged, profoundly contestatory sense of what “allegory” says and what it leaves unsaid, or says “otherwise.” Chapter two charts out much of the theoretical and historical terrain of fin-de-siècle imperial allegory. In the first section of this chapter I examine historicist and post-structuralist models of reading allegory in order to unpack the theoretical complexity of the term. Post-structuralism’s compelling critique of historicist notions of allegory yields a valuable insight into postcolonial revisionings of allegory such as the kind I am undertaking in this dissertation. The second section of this chapter

explores the relevance of allegory to the late-nineteenth century British domestic and
British-Indian popular cultural and visual scene. In it I argue that while the centricity and
historicity of a representational structure like imperial allegory can order the world a
certain way, in terms of Christianity, humanism, the Enlightenment project, social
missioning, etc., to meet its own polemical agenda, yet there is always already at work
within these hegemonic allegorical versions of “reality,” an anti-structuralist, anti-
historicist principle that undoes or deconstructs “meaning” as it were. Although
appearing stable, and completely transparent, imperial Jubilee allegories are slippery,
evasive things, for even at the very instant they seem to have found their anchor, in
the figure of the Mother Empress for instance, the “antinomies of the allegorical”23
disturb the relationship between allegorical exegesis and meaning, until it seems that the
“truth” about allegory is irrecoverable.

Chapter three examines the crisis of sexuality in the “sexual archives” of the
British India Office, and popular debates over prostitution, military cantonnement and lock-
hospital regulations in the British Indian army, against the masculinist, heterosexual
allegory of British nationalism/imperialism. Specifically, I examine how allegories of
nation and empire are sexualized and spatialized in the ordering and reimagining of
spaces and resistant sexual subjects in the British Indian Army. In the process I explore
several intersecting themes and problems: the “figure” of the recalcitrant native
prostitute, the archival foreclosure of homosexuality, the reinvention of space (military,
medical, and sexual) and labor (colonized female sexual labor and white, male, military
labor), the overdetermination of discourses about sexually transmitted diseases, hygiene,
and health, and the relationship between history, the “sexual archives,” and historical
agents. Ultimately, this chapter is a meditation on the implications of a militarized
colonial masculinity and its severe laws of sexual control, for a disenfranchised,
sexualized, female work-force.

The fourth chapter reads disguise as an allegorical trope in literary and archival
narratives about white imperial agents who infiltrate the ranks of the “other,” in the guise
of the “other,” in order to consolidate the all-knowing imperial “self.” Selections from

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Rudyard Kipling’s short story collection *Plain Tales from the Hills*, his novel *Kim*, and A.E.W. Mason’s popular adventure tale *The Four Feathers*, provide the textual grounds for a foray into the secret life of double agents disguised variously as Indian sweepers, stablehands, “faquirs” and “Dervishes.” I consider the question of what happens to that richly subversive, invariably ironic aspect of allegory, when its double nature (its ability to “speak otherwise”) is deployed for official reasons to produce knowledge about the Other.

Chapter five explores the consequences for women and colonized subjects, of the uneven gendering and racializing of the allegory of the Family of Man. Sara Jeanette Duncan’s imperialist novel *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib*, and Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner’s self-help domestic manual *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, situate the performance of colonial domesticity in British India within the late-nineteenth century British discourses of separate spheres, domestic imperialism, feminist mythmaking, and the creed of the “memsahib.” Belief in these putatively naturalized and universalized concepts appears in a way to stabilize and redeem the English woman’s domestic project in the colony. But Duncan and Steel’s narratives reveal that the white mistress’s position as domestic arbiter and Victorian “angel of the house,” is an unstable, contradictory one since it involves the negotiation of perilously shifting, ever fluid familial boundaries. The allegory of the Family ostensibly legitimates what it threatens at every moment to destabilize: the white woman’s assumption of agency vis-à-vis her domestic burden in the colony.

Following the new historicist prescription that literary texts are inseparable from, and circulate in the same space as non-literary ones, my readings situate the literary text within specific historical, cultural, political and social contexts. I believe that in order to understand the tremendously complex discursive formations, like the legal, sexual, racial, and social, that constituted the British Indian colonial/imperial moment at the turn-of-the-century, an engagement with these phenomena, an analysis of their mutually constitutive,
intersecting nature, is crucial. Subsequently, the genres I discuss are varied: domestic self-help manuals like Flora Annie Steel's *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, colonial domestic fiction like Sara Jeanette Duncan's *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib*, colonial espionage narratives like Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, adventure novels like Alfred Mason’s *The Four Feathers*, popular cultural and performance texts like the Delhi Imperial Assemblage of 1877 and Queen Victoria’s Jubilees of 1887 and 1897, metropolitan and vernacular newspapers, and finally the colonial archives of the British India Office.

The individual chapters in my dissertation situate allegory within a literary as well as a historical, cultural and theoretical milieu. As a system of representation allegory has to be understood within and read across other systems of representation like the historical, cultural and theoretical. Allegories of reading, to borrow Paul de Man’s phrase, are also after all allegories of reading history, culture and theory. In the final analysis, this study will prove to be not so much a definitive view of allegory, but rather a highly selective, creative, and varied engagement with both hegemonic and anti-hegemonic, oppositional, and resistant allegories of nationalism, imperialism, militarism, sexuality, and domesticity at the end of the nineteenth-, and the beginning of the twentieth-centuries.

**Allegories of History: Situating Allegory in Colonialist Historiographies**

Although allegory is seldom if ever simple, it may be possible to view this figure in its simplest sense as a symbolic mode of representation, one that depends for its exegesis upon a complex of metaphorical and metonymical codes. As Frederic Jameson has pointed out, our traditional notion of allegory, like that for example which is based on the stereotypes of John Bunyan, “is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences.”25 This rather one-dimensional system of symbolic correspondences is made more complex if we choose to “entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and

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transformation at each perpetual present of the text. It is clear from this definition that allegory can be both facile and complex, homogenous and polysemic, singular and various, and, in Jamesonian terms, both symbol and dream.

It is perhaps an acknowledgment of my own historically and literally imperfect method that I should invoke, proleptically in the case of Hayden White, both a disciplinary historian (White) and a literary critic (Jameson) in order to initialize my foray into the allegorical. A historian’s description of the method of privileging the figurative over the factual, the allegorical over the actual, offers a valuable opportunity to interrogate history and historiography’s collusion with literary (and hence perhaps fictional) modes of narration. On the other hand, a literary critic’s pronouncement on the inherently unstable, discontinuous aspect of allegorical discourse provides a way of reading against the grain the literary narrative of empire at the turn-of-the-century. Between Jameson’s polysemic discontinuities and White’s figurative histories, allegory’s reach seems both immense and limiting.

Macaulay and Victoria, hussars and royals, the imperishability of empire and the pageantry of the Jubilee processional, these are all allegorical “texts.” These “texts” along with various others of a similar nature – newspapers and periodicals, domestic self-help manuals, the sexual archives of the British India Office, adventure novels, and colonial spy fiction, for example – will provide the grounds for an exploration into the troubling nature of allegorical discourse and its tenacious affiliation with historical processes and modes of historiography. What, in fact, is the relationship between allegory and history? And why are the theoretical and cultural ramifications of this relationship so important to an understanding of how imperial histories make and unmake apparently meaningful, epistemologically coherent texts and subjects?

Hayden White claims that all histories are allegories of one sort or another. According to White, the irrefutably allegorical nature of historical discourse is a function

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26 Ibid.
of the interpretative processes that allow the historian (whoever that might be) to record and order "history" (whatever that might be). In order to situate the allegorical in the historical White harkens to the primal distinction between the literal and the figurative, the connotative and the denotative. There is nothing figurative about a literal "verbal proposition" like "The cat is on the mat" because the information supplied by this formula can be either confirmed or fabricated by observation, visual or otherwise. But how do we verify or disclaim verbal propositions whose sole referents can only be found in the historical past? A verbal proposition about something that exists in the absolute past can only refer to "an entity which we know only through another verbal proposition" that also probably exists in this past.\footnote{Hayden White, \textit{TH}, 7.} This creates a seemingly never-ending chain of referents for, as White says,

"The interpretative or assessmental problem cannot be solved by perception, for when we go to the documents to check the proposition, we are confronted by other – and usually a host of other – verbal propositions which must themselves be interpreted or assessed as to their truth value before the comparison can be made. This is why all historical discourse, although presented in the form of a series of literal statements, can be shown on analysis to be a set of figurative statements. Those historical propositions which are offered as mere descriptions of events, personalities, structures, and processes in the past are always interpretations of those events, personalities, and so forth..."\"  

\textit{Theories of History}, emphasis in original, 7.

Does this sliding chain of significations, which makes it impossible to determine "truth value," since in order to make sense of one historical "fact" one must refer to a multitude of other historical "facts" which must themselves be checked against a whole host of other referents, not point to the ultimate irrecoverability of all historical meaning? Setting aside for the time being the validity of this question about the (im)possible recovery of historical truth, I return to the power of the figurative in history. I believe that an understanding of the figurative nature of historical work, the fact that history is an amalgamation or chain of tropological rather than literal processes, structures etc., is Hayden White's most valuable contribution to the study of historiography and historical processes. I borrow from White this notion that the symbolic modality of figuration that constitutes and interprets events, processes, structures, and personalities in history is in
fact allegory. As White says, “insofar as the historical narrative endows sets of real events with the kinds of meanings found otherwise only in myth and literature, we are justified in regarding it as a product of allegoresis.” White’s analysis of the historical narrative as an allegorical narrative is significant for the opportunity it opens up for reading colonialist histories as allegories of civilization and universal progress. But how is the allegorization of colonialist histories and historiographies accomplished? What causes colonialist histories to become allegories, allegories which moreover depend upon the teleological, originary plotting of world histories? James Mill’s *History of British India*, published in 1817 in three volumes, may serve as a good point of entry into the question of how colonialist histories become progressivist allegories. A reading of Mill’s *History* will also enable me to formulate my idea of “allegorical historicism,” the model I attempt to dismantle via a post-structuralist re-reading of the allegorical imperative.

Mill’s *History of British India* was considered for more than a century after its publication as the authoritative model for writing about Indian history. Although it predates the historical purview of this study, Mill’s study is nonetheless invaluable precisely because of its “timeless” pedagogical authority. Mill draws fairly extensively on existent histories of India produced by such worthwhile Orientalists as William Jones, founder of the Asiatic Society, Nathaniel Halhead, Henry Colebrooke, and Charles Wilkins, either to refute or validate their claims about Indians and India. Mill relies on his “knowledge” of Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, to plot a historical narrative that is genetic and teleological, a narrative that searches for (presumably meaningful) origins and works towards (presumably meaningful) endings. The teleological and genetic narrative of Mill’s History validates a hierarchical vision of civilizational progress or development. Ascertain the “true state of the Hindus in the scale of civilization,” Mill declares, is the first step in determining the historical and cultural value of India and Indians. Ascertain historical and cultural value is also a matter of some “practical importance” for the British government of India, since to view the Hindus as a people who have attained the highest level of civilization when “they have in reality made but a

29 White, *CF*, 45.
few of the earliest steps in the progress to civilization,” would be erroneous.\textsuperscript{31} Mill then sets out to invalidate Orientalist claims about a prior Golden Age of “high civilization” in India, by positing, in the first instance, that Indians never had a history to begin with, and in the second case, that the present state of the Hindus approximates the primitive state of highly developed, civilized societies like Britain.\textsuperscript{32}

Statements about the child-like, immature, barbaric, rude, and wild nature of Hindus abound in Mill’s text. Mill declares that the Hindu religion is immoral and depraved, their institutions, laws and customs have remained stagnant and unchanged for centuries, under their “glosing” (sic) exteriors lie “a general disposition to deceit and perfidy,” and finally their “slavish and dastardly spirit” make them inferior even to “our ancestors.”\textsuperscript{33} The Hindu’s abject ahistoricity is the direct result of and is justified by his dastardly, pusillanimous, effeminate nature. The picture of the Hindu that emerges from Mill’s History is not an entirely novel one. It echoes nineteenth-century Orientalist narratives about Indian law, philosophy, history and literature/art. Historians, colonial administrators and social ethnographers like William Jones, Thomas Babington Macaulay, and William Ward, to name just a few, produced through their many writings on India and Indians, so-called authoritative versions of the “true nature” of Hindu institutions, laws, customs, and rituals. To a more or less exact degree these studies formulate the same thesis: that Hindus are pathologically corrupt, impure, incapable of education or self-improvement, historically inept, effeminate and weak. The ineluctable Hindu nature is a function of India’s pre-historical status. Orientalist historiographies about India thus legitimize a model of history that positions Europe as the very pinnacle of civilization, the fulfillment of the promise of Hegel’s Historical Consciousness,\textsuperscript{34} and


\textsuperscript{32} See HBI, 225-250.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 246-247.

\textsuperscript{34} According to Hegel history is the coming to consciousness of Spirit. Non-western cultures like those of Africa and Asia, are excluded from History because they are inadequately, if at all, prepared for the advent of the historical Spirit, of historical Consciousness. Hegel plots the genetic movement of History as something that never touches Africa, begins inchoately Asia, and reaches its teleological apotheosis in Europe. Hegel’s conception of history, which may be viewed as the traditional model of historicism, is outlined in his The Philosophy of History.
relegates India to a stage of historical *pre-* or un-consciousness. This model, of course, serves to validate and secure British colonial domination of India.

Mill’s *History* and the colonialist historiographies of knowledge formation of which it is an example, may be read in the context of “allegorical historicism.” I have coined this term to designate the transformative poetics of certain historicist models like that of James Mill’s. The traditional model of historicism employs a certain view of historical analysis which presupposes that history “can become completely accessible to the modern historian, without mediation, and the contradictory and heterogeneous aspects of histories,” including I would think the histories of the colonized, “are irreconcilable with or reducible to historicist methods.” As a critical reader of colonialist discourses I am naturally distrustful of an interpretation of history in which history becomes a linear, progressive, evolutionary narrative – the march of Time, Reason and Progress – which creates and unfolds itself “through the dialectical incorporation of otherness.” James Mill’s historicism which depends upon the figurative plotting of histories and civilizations, transforms his text into an allegory of universal progress. Mill’s *History* is allegorical in the sense that allegories are the figurative expressions, by means of “symbolic fictional figures or actions,” of “truths” about human existence. Mill’s “Hindu,” an obvious fiction, anchors his “truthful” account of the history of civilization. The power of Mill’s allegorical historicism is that it can evoke such fictions for the service of an appropriative colonial economy. Mill’s *History*, moreover, deploys the principle of allegorical pedagogy in that its allegorical authority is primarily a pedagogical one. The *History* was adopted as “the official textbook in the company’s colleges” thereby influencing generations of British administrators in India. Under the circumstances it seems imperative to stage a deconstructive, parabasistic, postcolonial re-reading of historicist allegories. The question of why a postcolonial reinscription of allegory is pertinent to the critique of allegorical historicism will take up the final movement of this chapter.

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36 Ibid.
37 William Thomas, Introduction, *HBI*, xii. And as Tejaswini Niranjana reminds us, Mill’s writings “are still used in Indian history classes, often with the barest mention of his racism, and with sad approval of the wisdom of his characterizations” (*Siting Translation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 21).
Situating the Allegorical in the Postcolonial

Defining the "postcolonial" is almost as difficult and vexatious as defining the allegorical. As my dissertation is not concerned with providing for a complete, authoritative account of the term, I shall limit myself to a preliminary definition here and, as and when the need arises in the following chapters, I shall supplement this with the other definitions or uses to which the term might yield itself. To attempt an initial description of the postcolonial I must first recapitulate some of the facts of colonialism. Since at least the end of the seventeenth century and up to about the 1940s, what we now consider the major imperial European powers of Britain, France, and to lesser degrees, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Italy, and Holland, ruled over four-fifths of the entire surface of the earth. The process of decolonization or counter-colonial resistance did not begin until after World War I, and one might argue is still continuing today since the complex ruptured histories of formerly colonized countries make it seem reductive to talk about swift transitions and clean breaks from colonial domination and former colonizers.

I should emphasize at this point that I do not wish to conflate the two terms "imperialism" and "colonialism." While colonialism might be thought of as the direct conquest, rule, and control of other people's territories, and is a specific phase in the history of imperialism, imperialism itself has now come to be understood as "the globalisation (sic) of the capitalist mode of production, its penetration of previously non-capitalist regions of the world, and destruction of pre- or non-capitalist forms of social organisation." According to the Marxist narrative of imperialism, the colonial phase represents modern imperialism's strong economic need for new markets and new sources of raw materials, and its equally strong desire to compete for and deny these to other emergent capitalist nations. The rapid acquisition of new territories in the nineteenth-century, like the infamous European "Scramble for Africa," is illustrative of this stage of imperial history.

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38 See Edward Said's Orientalism (London: Routledge, 1978) for more about the nature and ambitions of the great European imperial powers.
39 Chrisman and Williams, CDPT, 2.
Any invocation of the term “postcolonialism” must take into account its multiplicity, political resonance, and historicity. I propose to use the term in its unhyphenated form in order to de-emphasize its temporal aspect and stress instead its political valence for articulating a new theory of allegory. But why, in fact, is it important to rethink allegory in a postcolonial context? I believe that the task of rethinking allegory is absolutely crucial in a context where it has been used at least since the time James Mill produced his authoritative allegory of Indian history and peoples, to reinforce modes of thinking about and subjectifying non-Western “others,” especially colonized peoples. Mill’s allegorical historicism, Macaulay’s “imperishable empire” of “our” arts, morals, laws and literatures, the ceremonial headlines in gold ink in a metropolitan newspaper proudly proclaiming the “GREATNESS OF THE BRITISH RACE,” I read in these varied texts the working of an insidious process of subjectification, not just a simple case of “othering” but rather a technology of representation that violates and completely obscures the agency of the colonized subject.

Reconceptualizing the allegorical then becomes a matter of some importance and urgency for a postcolonial theory that would attempt to rework, undo, dismantle, and in fact deconstruct such strategies and modes of representation. By deconstructing allegorical historicism via post-structuralist critiques of historicism, I seek to reclaim allegory’s subversive potential thereby reinscribing allegory as a viable and valid model of resistance not just in the colony but also in the metropolis. By viewing the performance of turn-of-the-century British imperialism through an “allegorical” lens, and mining especially allegory’s disruptive potential to “speak otherwise,” I hope to be able to pose anew questions about the status of the “other” in colonialist and nationalist discourses, the relation between narrative, history and historiography, and finally, and most crucially, the implications of political and geographical territorialization for an ethical, postcolonial aesthetics of (re)reading and (re)writing. The “truth” about that ceremonial moment that began this chapter might in the process be revealed as something that has to be recovered not in the metropolitan space of Jubilee London but in the colonized spaces of India’s provinces and towns.
Chapter II

Staging Empire: History, Narrative and the Spectacle of ‘Allegoresis’ in the Colonial (Con)Text

"The historical narrative does not, as narrative, dispel false beliefs about the past, human life, the nature of the community, and so on; what it does is test the capacity of a culture’s fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning that literature displays to consciousness through its fashioning of patterns of ‘imaginary’ events. Precisely insofar as the historical narrative endows sets of real events with the kinds of meaning found otherwise only in myth and literature, we are justified in regarding it as a product of allegoresis. Therefore, rather than regard every historical narrative as mythic or ideological in nature, we should regard it as allegorical, that is, as saying one thing and meaning another."

– Hayden White, The Content of the Form.

"His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet ... [a storm] irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress."

– Walter Benjamin, Illuminations.

Hayden White’s extensive writings on the relationship between narratology and that complex expression of figurative language, allegory, and Walter Benjamin’s theories of allegory as one of the functions of historical materialism, seem to me to be good theoretical points of intervention into the contemporary debate over allegory’s place in narrative and history. The interest in allegory as a term of critical inquiry is apparent in the plethora of writings on the subject by such diverse figures as Paul de Man, Frederic Jameson, Paul Ricoeur, and of course, Walter Benjamin and Hayden White. Because each of these theorists associates narrative with allegory, either by superimposing one upon the other whereby neither can exist alone (White, Jameson), or by violently substituting one for the other (De Man), it may be possible to view the revival of interest in allegory in twentieth century critical thinking as a symptom of our poststructuralist preoccupations about the stories, fictional and otherwise, that we tell ourselves and the plots of which these comprise. It is precisely the powerful resonance of this – allegory as
a mode of storytelling – that I wish to evoke in the story that I tell below. I refer to the story of narrative becoming that Britain, in the closing years of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, told and retold in an effort to achieve a coherent, stable, unified version of history, a history that was almost simultaneously being over/re-written by fractious citizens at home and abroad. As the British colonial theater is a vast one, more than half the globe by the turn-of-the-century, and quite beyond the limited scope of my project, I shall focus on the cross-trafficking in symbols, rhetorics, images, between two supplementary discursive spaces, fin-de-siècle England and India. I will examine the spectacularly visual medium of Imperial Assemblages, Durbars, Jubilees and advertisements, through which history was staged and allegorized at the turn-of-the-century.

As the allegorists I will be reading make clear, allegory is a slippery, evasive thing, deeply stabilizing for some, radically disruptive for others. This contrariness comes through in the very definition of allegory Derived from the Greek words allos and agoreuein which mean “to speak otherwise,” allegory operates not only as a synchronous, metaphorical relationship between two signs but also as a metonymical relation of signs to other signs.¹ But “it is always the structure of metaphor that is projected onto the sequence of metonymy ... which is why allegory is always a hierarchizing mode, indicative of timeless order, however subversively intended its contents might be. This is why allegory is an inherently political trope ... because in deferring to structure it insinuates the power of structure.”² The ideological and political agenda of Britain’s imperial project, its desire to hierarchically order the world in terms of a dominant ideology (Christianity, social missioning, Enlightenment), seems particularly amenable to an “allegorical” reading.

The traditional allegorical schema that fixes subjects and allegorical agents into single symbolic hierarchies³ is, however, complicated in the context of colonialism where hierarchies of power and relations of domination and subordination are implicated in a

¹ Jenny Sharpe, Allegories of Empire (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1993), 140. Hereafter cited as AE.
regularized discourse of race, racist, extremely violent colonialist practices, on the one hand, and in grand civilizing visions of “raising the native into humanity,” on the other. Allegories of empire, then, can only be understood if the violent discontinuity and incommensurability of the entire imperialist project of self-consolidation is taken into account. Vicious territorialization, racist acts of violence and appropriation are the obverse, the “other,” of imperial allegory’s staged performance of redemption and humanism.

**Allegory and Historical Representation**

The scandal of allegory is that it is inextricably caught up in the politics of mimetic representation. If allegory is a system of symbols or emblems then it is not antithetical to the spirit of non-fictive modes of narration like history/historiography which depend upon realism, empiricism, rationalism? The relation between allegorical and historical representation is invariably implicated in questions about fictional and non-fictional modes of representation. What in fact is the difference between realistic and imaginary narratives? In his essay “Historical Discourse,” Roland Barthes asks if there is “any linguistic feature by which we may distinguish on the one hand the mode appropriate to the relation of historical events ... [which are traditionally] judged only by the criteria of conformity to ‘what really happened’ and by the principles of ‘rational’ exposition – and on the other hand the mode appropriate to the epic, novel or drama? Allegory is not such a “linguistic feature” since it would appear to further blur the lines of distinction between the historical and the imaginary.

Those traits of historical discourse, i.e. rationality, “reality” and factuality (“what really happened”), that Roland Barthes appeals to and distinguishes from “literary,” and hence perhaps fictional, qualities associated with the novel, epic, or drama, are further

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3 For more on this see Angus Fletcher’s *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 59-69.

4 See the excellent collection of essays, *Allegory and Representation: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979-80*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), on the subject of allegory and mimesis. It includes Paul de Man’s influential “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion” and Joel Fineman’s “The Structure of Allegorical Desire” both of which enabled my own trajectory as an allegorical reader.
blurred in Hayden White’s analysis of the historical and the literary. White would respond to Barthes’ query about distinguishing “linguistic features,” with the idea of historical discourse as something that is inextricably tied to a distinctly literary (and therefore fictional?) mode – allegorical discourse.

Metahistory one of Hayden White’s earliest theorizings on the subject of historical representation describes the structure of the historical consciousness, and the status of the “historical work” in the following way: “[it is] a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them” (emphasis in original).⁵ Allegory although a shadowy figure still, is history’s chosen mode of narrative becoming. White’s recent and more ambitious study on narratology The Content of the Form explicitly reinscribes allegory, naively identified with a symbolic mode of signification, in historiography. White distinguishes between “real” and “imaginary” events, marking history as the “discourse of the real” as opposed to the “discourse of desire/the imaginary” which is presumably the purview of literature. Historical discourse takes as its proper content “real” events.⁷ But, White goes on to argue, “real” historical events acquire a certain symbolic significance when they are arranged in a connected narrative sequence. The truth of historical mimetic representation entails a causal plotting of events anterior to and subsequently successive of each other. History is then a chronologically ordered, sequential narrative expressive of the historian’s (or the subject who is recording the history) desire to narrate: “Thus envisaged, the narrative figurates the body of events that serves as its primary referent and transforms the events into intimations of patterns of meaning” (emphasis added).⁸

What becomes clearer in Hayden White’s engagement with the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s ideas on narrative, plot and historiography, is this sense of the historical narrative as a symbolic, figurative account of events and temporalities, where parts are related to wholes, beginnings to endings. In Volume 1 of Time and Narrative Ricoeur notes that plot in narrative serves an integrative function that “grasps” together

⁷ White, Content of the Form (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1987), 20. Hereafter cited as CF.
multiple and scattered events and knits them into a "whole and complete story ... thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole."\(^9\) Memories of past events, Ricoeur notes in the third volume of *Narrative and Time*, which survive in personal testimonies of witnesses as well as in public documents and archival records, constitute a "chain" of events; if we "proceed along this chain ... history tends to become a we-relationship, extending in a continuous fashion from the first days of humanity to the present."\(^10\) Reading Ricoeur through White reading Ricoeur, we get: "The plot ... places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity: to be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening. It receives its definition from its contribution to the development of a plot."\(^11\) The historical narrative is redefined by Ricoeur as an "allegory of temporality,"\(^12\) and it is as an allegorical or symbolic discursive mode that history most closely resembles literature.\(^13\) Although history and literature differ from one another in terms of their "immediate referents" ("real" events in the case of history and imaginary ones in that of literature), insofar as they narrate emplotted stories they share an "ultimate referent" which is the aporetic "human experience of time" or the "structures of temporality,"\(^14\) and it is this "ultimate referent" that makes any narrative, historical or literary, allegorical.

As must be apparent the White-Ricoeur coupling comes naturally, and seems natural, to me. Through their mutual citationality, each referring to the other as enabler, both theorists achieve a complicitous understanding of historical narrative as a meaningful process of emplotment. To this they give the name "allegory." All histories, all narratives are allegories of one sort or the other: "A narrative account is always a

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\(^8\) Ibid., 45.


\(^12\) Ibid., 71.

\(^13\) The crucial distinction between allegory and symbol, which will be addressed in my discussion on Paul de Man, is effaced in Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White's theories of allegory as a historical mode. White substitutes allegory for symbol as in this passage which, ironically enough, is a comment on Ricoeur's own tactics of elision: "A historical narrative ... can be said to be an allegorization of the experience of 'withintime-ness' ... It is a means of symbolizing events without which their historicality cannot be indicated" (*CF*, 53). Symbol is allegory and allegory, symbol.

\(^14\) White, *CF*, 175.
figurative account, an allegory.”15 The telos of allegory is what gives meaning to history; it makes history symbolic, causal, even moral. This is what enables Ricoeur’s “first-order entities,” by which he means “peoples, nations, civilizations,” to participate in the historical process as agents of causality.16 These “first-order entities” are the relayers of historical “truth” who mediate between the historian and the event structure – between narrative and praxis – and in doing so reveal the meaning immanent in their actions. The Ricoeurian historian becomes allegorist as he then proceeds to ravel together these disparate threads to construct an intentional narrative of origins. Meaningful, moral, symbolic, causal, originary, intentional: for White and Ricoeur the historical narrative as allegory is all of these things in the final analysis.

While Ricoeur and White’s writings on the irreducibly tropological nature of all historical work (to borrow Gayatri Spivak’s phrase),17 of history in fact, has proved tremendously useful to my own project of reading and unpacking historical narratives like that of imperialism, their understanding of allegory in/as history is a deeply problematic one. The problem lies in their unvarying, unstinting reconstruction of all histories as holistic, temporally continuous allegories which in turn seems to belong to a rather historicist view of the passage of time as progressive and discrete events as parts of a totality.18 To put it very simply, I believe that Ricoeur and White repress those aspects of allegory, its contentiousness, its fractured double-speak, its overwhelming “otherness,” that make it possible and even necessary to rewrite history from a post-colonial perspective. The hero of the White-Ricoeurian historical narrative is the sovereign subject of humanism, purveyor of a certain methodology I have chosen to term “allegorical historicism.” Any attempt to dislodge subject of allegorical historicism would have to take into account allegory’s “other” nature – the persistent irony, endless deferral, “permanent parabasis,” that marks its utterances when it “speaks otherwise.” I turn now to two critics Paul de Man, the American deconstructionist and Walter Benjamin, the German analytic thinker and historical materialist whose early writings on allegory’s

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15 Ibid., 48.
17 She uses this phrase in the chapter on history in her recent book Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 203.
18 For a definition of “historicism” and the Hegelian paradigm of historicism see my Introduction.
status in history has proved immensely productive for (post)colonial discourse analysis, to see if there might be a way out of this double bind.

Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin: Deconstructing Allegory?

Allegory appears to be a curiously deconstructive/deconstructed figure. As Jacques Derrida famously noted all texts carry within themselves the condition of deconstruction. Even as it constructs itself, its system of meanings and symbols, there is always already at work in a text a principle that threatens to deconstruct it. Is allegory’s double-speak the deconstructive principle that threatens to destabilize its totalitarian agenda? Derrida’s Memoires addresses this issue. Given as a series of lectures between January and February of 1984 following the death of Paul de Man, Memoires is Derrida’s memorial to his colleague whom he acclaims as one of the most important thinkers of the time. Derrida engages specifically with de Man’s theory of reading which is also his theory of allegory since for de Man every reading is an allegory of reading itself, “a process of reading in which rhetoric is a disruptive intertwining of trope and persuasion … of cognitive and performative language.”19 Derrida points out that for de Man allegory is that possibility that “permits language to say the other and to speak of itself while speaking of something else; the possibility of always saying something other than what it gives to be read, including the scene of reading itself.”20

De Man’s concept of allegory seems to differ rather radically from that of Hayden White or Paul Ricoeur. Where they postulate continuity he see parabasis; the lineaments of chronology, anteriority, sequentiality in them is replaced in de Man by a sense of the impossibility of all of these. The conclusion of de Man’s “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion” is emphatic in its denunciation of sequentiality: “The (ironic) pseudo-knowledge of this impossibility [of homogenous ‘geometrical’ structures], which pretends to order sequentially, in a narrative, what is actually the destruction of all sequence, is what we call allegory” (23).21 Robert L. Caserio argues in his essay ““A

19 Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), ix. Hereafter cited as AR.
Pathos of Uncertain Agency*: Paul de Man and Narrative,” that what de Man calls allegory is a “narrative-destroying inevitability” since sequence is identified with narrative and in the de Manian scheme allegory destroys sequence.\textsuperscript{22} Caserio finds it perverse that a deconstructionist should set up his debate in terms of such stark antithetical binarisms: narrative vs. allegory. In contrast to Derrida’s “affirmative” deconstructionism which simultaneously solicits and subverts oppositional pairs like the constative (referential) and the performative (figural), de Man solicits binarisms “in order precisely to fix – and to fixate upon – their oppositional differences” (198). But is de Man really fixated on the antithetical nature of narrative and allegory? And how “real” is de Man’s denunciation of allegory as the destroyer of narrative sequence, upon which is based Caserio’s own critique of de Man’s “false” as opposed to Derrida’s “true” deconstructive practice?

“The Rhetoric of Temporality” written prior to “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion” is also devoted to allegory and the problem it presents for representation/representability. De Man distinguishes between symbol and allegory when he sets out to critique Romanticism’s privileging of the former over the latter. The symbol, he says, appealed to the Romantics because it carries suggestions of a universal, total, single meaning:

“This appeal to the infinity of a totality constitutes the main attraction of the symbol as opposed to allegory, a sign that refers to one specific meaning and thus exhausts its suggestive potentialities once it has been deciphered … Allegory appears as dryly rational and dogmatic in its reference to a meaning that it does not itself constitute, whereas the symbol is founded on an intimate unity between the image that rises up before the senses and the suspensionary totality that the image suggests.”

“Rhetoric of Temporality,” 174.

In his reading of the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, de Man posits that their choice of symbol over allegory is a “defensive strategy” that allows them to hide from knowledge of the self in its “authentically temporal predicament” which is the allegorical experience.\textsuperscript{23} In fact, wherever allegory surfaces in the work of the Romantics’ as in Wordsworth’s geographical allegories or Rousseau’s ethical conflict in \textit{La Nouvelle}

\textsuperscript{22} Robert L. Caserio, “*A Pathos of Uncertain Agency*: Paul de Man and Narrative” (\textit{The Journal of Narrative Technique} #2, Spring 1990: 195-209), 197.

Héloise, it always “corresponds to the unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny.”

Allegory seems to be identified here with the experience of temporality and as such it seems closely allied with the Ricoeurian historical narrative which is an “allegory of temporality.”

De Man concludes his discussion of the dissimulating Romantic strategy of substituting symbol for allegory, by restoring sequence (and hence narrative since sequence is narrative) to allegory: “it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it … it is of the essence of the previous sign to be pure anteriority” (emphasis added). How is this to be reconciled with the anti-narrative bent of allegory in “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion”? Despite the radicalism of de Man’s thesis, his violent subversion of narrative in allegory, I propose that there is something comfortably structural in de Man’s treatment of allegory as a sequential chain of significations. What he achieves is not so much an undermining but a reinscribing of narrative in allegory. The hegemonic control allegory exercises vis-à-vis the narrative mode, a crucial point in my own analysis of colonialist discourses, is nowhere more apparent than in the work of a critic whose eschewal of narrative is expressed in the most violent of terms. Allegory is the deconstructive figure par excellence: it defers meaning elsewhere (“speaks otherwise”) even as it asserts the centrality of a meaningful structure.

De Man’s allegorical consciousness is a strangely transhistorical one. Allegory is a purely linguistic thing to him, a property of the figure(s), the sign(s). As Tejaswini Niranjana says, “[while] de Man’s notion of allegory performs a valuable critique of

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24 Ibid., 190.
25 White, CF, 71.
27 Many critics have noted that de Man’s theory of language hinges on the purely arbitrary and forceful nature of any performance of meaning. This stems from de Man’s belief that Western philosophy has repressed the “aporia” which he describes as the co-existence of “two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view” (AR, 131), between constative and performative language. Tejaswini Niranjana (Siting Translation, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Werner Hamacher (Reading de Man Reading, eds. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) and Robert L. Caserio, among others, have commented on how language is itself an arbitrary, violent “figure” for de Man. His views on allegory derive from his sense of all linguistic acts as violently staged oppositionalities – the battle between language as meaning and language as performance.
representation, it does not have any conception of history or historicity.”

There is no sense of how allegory might be effected by the pressures and desires of history. Walter Benjamin’s clearing of an allegorical space in the work of historical materialism is all the more significant precisely because it restores a historical consciousness to the deconstructive project of allegory without at the same time reducing allegory to historicist methods via White-Ricoeur.

Benjamin’s allegory has to be understood in the context of his notion of historical materialism. Rather than the universalistic and Eurocentric notion of history as this grand narrative of social advancement and progress which moves through “homogenous empty time,” that emerges from a Ricoeurian reading of historical narratives, what we get in Benjamin is the notion of a past that is unfixed, contingent and dependent upon the present:

“The historical materialist must sacrifice the epic dimension of history. The past for him becomes the subject of a construction, whose locus is not empty time, but the particular epoch, the particular life, the particular work. He breaks the work away from its reified historical continuity … The task of historical materialism is to work an engagement with history original to every new present. It has recourse to a consciousness of the present that shatters the continuum of history.”

“Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian,” emphasis in original, 352.

A historicist understanding of the past, such as is available from the writings of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur, presents it as a single, uninterrupted narrative of events; a historical materialist engagement with the past, on the other hand, requires a remaking and a remapping of past events from the point of view of a particular present. So, instead of “an eternal image of the past” what we get in historical materialism is “a specific and unique engagement with it.”

Compelled by his own pronouncement to “brush history against the grain” Benjamin sets out to cull from the figurative emblems, personifications and props of German tragic drama or the trauerspiel a vision of history that emphasizes discontinuity and disintegration. Benjamin’s clearest views on allegory are developed in his book The

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Origin of German Tragic Drama where he distinguishes the baroque allegorical form of the trauerspiel from earlier Christian chronicles, medieval passion and miracle plays which tell a story of human redemption. Ruins and destruction in the place of monuments, fragments where there should be continuums, these signify in the trauerspiel a historical process that is not so much progressive as it is retrogressive. Ruins and fragments signify a retrogressive historical movement or moment, one that is important for Benjamin because of the value it poses for the writing of an anti-historicist, anti-totalitarian, materialist historiography. The passage of time is displayed in the ruins as disintegration; this works against the impulse to see the past as a totality. Benjamin’s idea of history as ruins is linked to his idea of history as allegory. He writes, “In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay … Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.”

What Benjamin means by this is that the decay of objects and processes lies at the very “heart of the allegorical way of seeing.” Like ruins which transform the natural scene into a “petrified, primordial landscape,” the allegorical image too is transformative – it transforms history into the very scene of transitoriness and decay. Like the ruin allegory is also fragmented; it destroys the “false appearance of totality.”

De Man probably appreciated Benjamin’s Angel of History, a figure Benjamin borrows from Paul Klee’s painting “Angelus Novus” to express his vision of history in his 1940 essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” The figural violence of the image might have appealed to de Man whose own lurid figures convey the endlessly disjunctive, discontinuous nature of allegory. As Benjamin’s Angel flies from the past with his back toward the future, it sees before (or behind) him the cumulative debris that the storm of history, called “progress,” leaves in its wake. The Angel is an ironic allegorical figure: he embodies the “future perfect tense,” for the future he is fleeing toward is always already the past he is fleeing from. The future is past but the past is never really past since the Angel is really facing it. Benjamin uses the Angel image, an allegory of the work of

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31 Ibid., 166.
32 Ibid., 176.
33 Tejaswini Niranjana, ST, 159.
historical materialism, to ironicize the modernist myth of historical progress. History is not a document of progress but one of wreckage; it is not about continuums but about discontinuums. Niranjana usefully reads the Benjaminian notion of history as disruption, as a critique of what Jacques Derrida would term the metaphysical concept of history, “associated with a linear scheme of the unfolding of presence, where the line relates the final presence to the originary presence according to the straight line or the circle.”

The White- Ricoeurian epistemology of allegorical narrative that constructs history as an intricately linked causal chain of events, symbolically leading up to the present, is obviously disrupted and brought into crisis by Benjamin’s iconoclastic treatment of time in allegory and de Man’s disjunctive reading of allegory as anti-narrative. If the future is always past and the past never really past, how does the historian reconstruct events and more crucially still, represent them? What is the implication of this for my own project since in my attempt to remake/remap the past am I not partaking of the historian’s task as well?

I have found it useful to juxtapose these four theorists, White, Ricoeur, de Man and Benjamin, in order to problematize my reading of historical representations as allegories. All four critics implicate allegory in questions of history, historiography, narrative, as a way of engaging with the larger problem of representation. Ricoeur and White’s accounts of allegory point to the tremendous representative power of history-as-allegory. De Man and, even more radically, Benjamin provide a counter-critique of allegory as a totalizing representative historical narrative by deconstructing allegory’s potential to “speak otherwise.” As a “postcolonial” reader I think it is important for me

34 Ibid.
35 De Man’s treatment of allegory, as I pointed out earlier, is an ambivalent one. His destruction of sequence in allegory in “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion” is undermined by his reinstating of anteriority in allegory in “The Rhetoric of Temporality.” As such he is closer to the structural politics of White and Ricoeur than he is to Walter Benjamin.
36 I use the term “postcolonial” under advisement to signify a way of critically reading dominant discourses, like colonialism, and texts, like imperial pageantry. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to unpack all the theoretical, political complexities of the term “postcolonial.” Any recent work on the subject, like Leela Gandhi’s Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), Elleke Boehmer’s Colonial and Postcolonial Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) or Aijaz Ahmad’s “Postcolonialism: What’s in a Name?” (in Michael Sprinker et al. eds. Late Imperial Culture, London: Verso, 1995), which usefully differentiate between “postcolonial” and “post-colonial,” will do the needful. I am concerned primarily with using “postcolonial” as a tool for the analysis of such
to account for the power of representation (hence White and Ricoeur) even as I launch my critique of representation (via de Man and Benjamin). This double realization – of the power and centricity of a representational structure and its powerlessness, decentricity – is what makes all imperial allegories both complete and incomplete, whole and factious, continuous and fragmented, wonderfully sententious and perversely dissident, at one moment moralizing and at the very next irreverent. The subject of allegory is always decentered but it endlessly centers itself in order to notice its de-centrality. This is the lesson to be learnt from refracting the White-Ricoeurian allegory through the de Man-Benjaminian one: that all allegories are openly wayward, unalterably “other” even to themselves, and endlessly provocative. I hope that some of this richness is conveyed through my own allegory of reading the narratives of empire.

Reading the Imperial Mission as Allegory

Frederic Jameson has noted that master narratives are allegories in that their “political unconscious” manifests a strong desire for hegemonic control. Allegory as a mode of hegemonic control seems particularly apposite to colonialism’s project of domination. While the making of empire was more often than not bloody and violent, involving as it did military conquest for the purpose of rapacious economic exploitation, the Janus-faced narrative of empire-building also required the enactment of idealistic “humanistic” schemes of cultural domination, what Gayatri Spivak refers to as “the imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social mission.” Ideas about the

37 This is how Gayatri Spivak describes the whole project of deconstruction. The deconstructed subject (or deconstructionism’s subject) is always decentered: “Deconstruction persistently notices – unavoidably centering itself in order to notice – that this ‘centering’ is an ‘effect-structure’ entailing indeterminate boundaries that can only be deciphered as determining” (Critique of Postcolonial Reason, 323).
39 While I do not wish to conflate the two Gramscian notions of “domination” and “hegemony,” I see the workings of both in the British Indian colonial context: “domination” because the colonial apparatus is clearly a coercive, controlling one, and “hegemony” because colonialism also depends upon class consensus, which is achieved through what Niranjan terms the “filtration effect” i.e. “the gradual pervading by different forms of colonial rule of all sections of the colonized” (ST, 33).
40 Gayatri Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (Critical Inquiry 12, Autumn 1985), 244. Spivak is describing what is at stake for the feminist individual as she tries to make/interpellate herself as individual and individualist in imperialism. She writes, interpellation of the individual(ist) female
moral upliftment of “barbaric” “savage” people through conversion to Christianity and introduction to civil society served in a way to legitimize Britain’s ruthless territorialization of the globe.

The fin-de-siècle years seem especially interesting to me in this regard because these were uncertain years in which the consolidation of British rule was accompanied by violent British militaristic strategies for containing native insurgency in the colonies, and by the rigorous enactment of laws that laid out the behavioral codes according to which British colonial agents were to manage their private and public lives. The imperial urge to allegorize, to produce a seamless, linear narrative of “timeless” order, was never more intensely felt than at the very moment when the imperial ideal was being imperiled and unmade both at home where domestic resistance to colonial policies was slowly gaining ground, and abroad in the colonies where the emergence of indigenous nationalist movements, like the Indian National Congress (founded in 1885) and the All-India Muslim League (1906) threatened the demise of Empire. The deployment of allegory as a stabilizing historical signifier seems all the more crucial at a time of general colonial unease. As Joel Fineman notes, “allegory seems regularly to surface in critical or polemical atmospheres, when for political or metaphysical reasons there is something that cannot be said.” Allegory becomes an “other” way of speaking about something, an ideal, which was slowly being whittled away.

The crisis in British colonial authority made it both possible and necessary to produce allegories of empire – symbolic narratives of timelessness and continuity that could testify to the permanent, immutable nature of the British Empire at a time when real imperial power was already on the wane. In Walter Benjamin’s words: “An appreciation of the transience of things and a concern to rescue them for eternity is one of the strongest impulses in allegory.” Allegories of empire, I believe, work precisely in this manner, to rescue for and from history the idea of an eternal empire, an empire upon

subject in imperialism takes place on two registers: “domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction” and social missioning. I shall have recourse to both these conceptual categories in Chapter IV where I talk about the Family of Man allegory in relation to the consolidation of male and female imperialist subjects in colonial narratives of domesticity.

41 Chapter II examines some of these laws as they pertain to the management of sexuality in the colonies. Allegories of empire become sexualized in the colonial contest over bodies – male, female, white, brown – and spaces – cantonments, hospitals, towns, etc.

which “the sun [would] never set.” This is what I term allegory’s “centripetal” or “structuralist” impulse. At the same time, however, the basic ambivalence of allegory’s other speech undermines its recuperative efforts by self-consciously referencing, even parodying, its own narrative mode, and this is what I term allegory’s “centrifugal” or “anti-structuralist” principle.

I would like to turn now to a consideration of how both these tendencies work in certain exemplary allegorical moments like Queen Victoria’s Jubilee celebrations of 1887, Edward VII’s Coronation Durbar of 1903, when the staging of the putative power of the British monarchy via Durbars, ceremonial processions, Jubilees, affectively put on display for the benefit of metropolitan and colonial audiences the largely dissembling power of the British Empire. With its reference to occult beginnings, divine ordinance, historical traditions, these performative texts fully realized the centric force of allegory, but the representation of these events in popular media like advertisements and novels, effectively reworked allegory’s centralizing principle. In fact, I will show how the images employed to convey the significance of the imperial allegorical endeavor, like the image of the commodity as advertised object, and that of the Queen, were themselves the contaminated, imperfect, anti-structuralist vehicles of allegorical thought. As such, they threaten the very legitimacy and authority of the official imperial allegorical project.

**Jubilees and Durbars: Allegorical Pageantry**

The formality of empire, its dependence upon ritualistic, ceremonial, public spectacle reached its representational apogee in the closing years of the nineteenth century. From the 1870’s to about the beginning of the first World War, the public image of the British monarchy changed; it became more flamboyant, extravagant, showy. David Cannadine usefully argues that the rapid industrialization of Britain and the attenuation of actual monarchical power were among the factors that led to the visually splendid, public and popular character of British monarchical ritual. The tremendous changes taking place within English society with the mobilization of an industrialized urban population – unionization of workers, feminist activism, the Irish Question etc. – and outside England

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43 Benjamin, *Origin*, 57.
where competition from Germany and the U.S. posed a severe threat to the future of British economic expansionism abroad, meant that the “deliberate, ceremonial presentation of an impotent but venerated monarch as a unifying symbol of permanence and national community became both possible and necessary.” The staging of royal power is, then, inextricably linked to the anxious performance of nationalism in the fin-de-siècle.

I would like to suggest that the allegory of the royal Durbar, ceremonial procession, Imperial Assemblage, depends upon and derives its suggestive power from the dual aspects of nationalism as pedagogic and performative. Homi Bhabha uses the two terms in his critique of nationalism in “DisemmiNation.” According to Bhabha, a “split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative,” produces the narrative of the nation. The nation-space is a “contested cultural territory” in which people are thought of in double-time, in relation to both originary and reproductive time. National subjects are “the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy ... that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event.” But they are also “‘subjects’ of a process of signification that ... [demonstrates] the prodigious living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process.” Nationalist pedagogy claims for the nation a continuous, symbolic history and remote past, but the interpellation of the nation subjects takes place

44 David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, c. 1820-1977” in The Invention of Tradition, eds. E.J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 122. Cannadine traces four distinct phases in the development of the ceremonial image of British monarchy. The first is that of the “ineptly managed,” localized, provincial, pre-industrial British monarchy, which lasts up to about the mid-nineteenth century (the “starting point” of Cannadine’s narrative remains unclear). The second phase is from 1877, the year Queen Victoria is crowned Empress of India, to the beginning of World War I. This is the great imperial age when old ceremonial is staged with an expertise and appeal that they lacked before, and new rituals are “self-consciously invented to accentuate their development” (108). The third and fourth phases, from 1918-1943 and 1953-1977, witness a gradual (in the third phase) and then more rapid (in the fourth) decline of British imperial power, the advent of mass media, and the de-glamorizing of royalty. I think it might be interesting to carry Cannadine’s study further into the late-twentieth century to see how the proliferation of royal images in tabloids, on television, in “tell-all” bestsellers, might further change the “meaning” of royal ceremonies. The orgiastic celebration of Diana after her death, her mythification in the popular imaginary, for instance, completely transformed the ceremony of the royal funeral procession.


46 Ibid., 297.

47 Ibid.
through the repeated, recursive narrative performance of "nationality" and "nationalism." National double-time may be related to allegorical double-speak in the sense that the performative will of the people, what Bhabha calls the "prodigious living principle," is the obverse, the "other" of the pedagogical will of the nation. How the former responds to, challenges, and otherwise transforms the latter is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Imperial national identity was both performed as well as produced through the authoritative discourse of nationalist pedagogy, in the various very public displays of royal pomp and splendor that accompanied the British colonial mission in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1877 Benjamin Disraeli bestowed upon Queen Victoria the title "Queen Empress of India." An elaborate Imperial Assemblage at which native princes and subjects gathered to pay homage to the Queen, was organized in Delhi. Her crown was hailed as "the emblem of the British race, to encourage its expansion over the face of the globe." In his commemorative account of the events The History of the Imperial Assemblage at Delhi J. Talbot Wheeler praises the Durbar as "one of the oldest institutions in India" going back to Mughal times. Referring to the unpleasant events of 1857, the year of the Sepoy Mutiny which was arguably one of the earliest expressions of Indian nationalism, he writes: "[That] tale of panic and revolt may well be forgotten in the story of the Imperial Assemblage at Delhi." Not only does Wheeler's narrative imply a continuous tradition of coronation ritual from the time of the Mughals to the present, it also erases the possibility of other historical narratives like that of the Mutiny. Its sensibility is an essentially allegorical one if, like Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur, we understand by allegory any continuous, symbolic, teleological, originary narrative.

A similar allegorical impulse is seen at work when eleven years later, in 1887, Queen Victoria's first Jubilee was celebrated in England and all across India with great fanfare and an absolute outpouring of nationalist-imperialist sentiment. The Illustrated London News described it as "the grandest state ceremony of this generation; one, indeed, practically unique in the annals of modern England" (June 25, 1887). In a way the 1887

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49 Quoted in Sharpe, AE, 150.
Jubilee celebrations surpassed the earlier Imperial Assemblage due to the magnitude of the scale on which it was celebrated both at home as well as in the colony. In London royalty was put on spectacular display: the chief royal carriage procession was preceded by carriages containing sundry Indian princes, Victoria’s European relatives, and other foreign dignitaries, and it was followed by the First Life Guards in full regalia. The royal procession itself consisted of eleven carriages drawn by six bay and black horses “in gold-mounted harness” while Victoria’s carriage was drawn by six cream colored ponies ([*The Times*, June 18, 1887, 676]). The entire procession started at Buckingham palace and concluded with a Thanksgiving service at Westminster Abbey. This visually lavish spectacle although unrivaled by any one show that the colony put on, was nonetheless supplemented by the sheer number of smaller ceremonies that were held throughout India to celebrate the occasion. Not only were ceremonies held in the major centers of colonial administration, Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, but Jubilee functions were organized in the innumerable smaller towns and provinces of India. What was lost in grandeur in the colony was more than compensated for in sheer number.

One of the central paradoxes of the Jubilee allegory of 1887 was that while it did serve to spectacularly display the monarchy it did so in a way that modified its meaning to signify both modernity and tradition. Jubilee ceremonials had to signify modernity because the burgeoning commodity culture of fin-de-siècle England implicated all exchanges within a consumptive, modern market economy; but the Jubilee also had to signify tradition because English nationalist discourses operated by evoking a past and implying that the present was in symbolic continuity with the past.

**Evoking the Past**

In the spirit of nationalist pedagogy [*The Illustrated London News* on June 18, 1887, commemorated the Jubilee in its editorial on the subject of the history of royal pageantry as witnessed in that “venerable edifice” Westminster Abbey. Its originary narrative begins with the coronation of William the Conqueror and concludes with the investiture of the present Regent at the Abbey in 1837. Throughout the editorial a language suffused with metaphysical, mystical signifiers is used to describe royal
entitlement. As Victoria kneels to have the crown placed on her head, a "ray of sunshine [falls] on her face; the day had been dull, but the sunlight on the diamonds made a kind of halo around her head," investing her with divine grace (676). Her divinity, however, seems to partake as much of the materiality of the diamonds as it does of the immateriality of the "ray of sunshine," presumably a sign of godly sanction. It is this conflict between material goods, objects that could be bought, sold, consumed, advertised, and immaterial ideas or ideals that seemingly transcended the material world, that pushes and pulls apart the allegory of the Queen's Jubilee of 1887. The next section ("Advertising the Present") deals with this in greater detail.

The Illustrated London News article transforms the Jubilee into an image of past glory and present pomp by inserting it into a nationalist narrative of historical pageantry that stretches unbroken from the time of William the Conqueror to the present. The Anglo-Indian press\(^{50}\) similarly constructs a past for the Jubilee text but one, that validates its imperial authority. The Bombay Gazette, for instance, takes the Jubilee "of a reign which forms an epoch in history" as a convenient vantage point from which to review the distance traversed since Victoria was crowned "Queen Empress of India":

"The Jubilee of the Queen Empress will today be celebrated ... throughout India with a universality of rejoicing which can find no parallel in the history of the country, even under its most illustrious Emperors. The shades of Akbar and of Aurangzebe [sic] must applaud the power and beneficence of their successor. The crown that they wore, has been invested with a new luster on the head of Victoria Kaiser-I-Hind. The title by which it is held is made as sacred as it is inviolable, by the willing obedience of a contented and grateful population enjoying in peace and security, the fruits of a renewed civilization."

Bombay Gazette, Feb. 16,1887, p. 4.

A moral rhetoric of providential sanction for monarchical rule in the Illustrated London News editorial is supplemented here by a gliding rhetoric of universal, natural kingship that assumes a continuous genealogy of rule from the Mughal Emperors to the English Empress. Such representations abound in the Anglo-Indian press, creating their own systems of self-validating signs that required no outside exegetical source to prove their

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\(^{50}\) I use the term "Anglo-Indian" to refer to the expatriate British community living in colonial India.
truth-claims. The telos of this symbolic narrative presents Victoria as natural successor to the Mughal Emperors for the Indian throne (note how her power succeeds but also exceeds theirs).

Another frequent trope in newspaper accounts that took the Jubilee ceremonies as sufficient grounds on which to mount a retrospective of Victoria’s reign, was the recapitulation of colonial achievements in India. The Times, for instance, spoke for the nation when it praised the introduction of civil law and industrial technology in India:

“The vast body of varied and conflicting laws under which the country was [once] administered has been reduced to simple and admirable codes ... [India] has been traversed by vast railway systems, and a Public Works Department has wrought enormous changes in the system of irrigation ... sanitary reforms [have been effected], trade has increased, education has spread widely.”

The Times, Feb. 16, 1887.

A humanist rhetoric of modernity or modern capital, the symbolic lodestones of which are the railway, the telegraph, the spread of education, trade, and irrigation, is at work here to lend legitimacy to the colonialist project of economic exploitation and land appropriation both of which actually depend upon the imperial command of commodity capital and the exploitation of a colonized work force. The decisively aggressive task of colonialism, its episteme of violence, masquerades as a rationalist endeavor for the enlightenment and civilizing of a “lesser” people. Even Karl Marx in his (in)famous linking of the emergence and universalization of capitalist production with colonialism’s will to power, defends British colonialism’s progressivist rhetoric: “England has to fulfill a double role in India: one destructive, the other regenerative — the annihilation of the Asiatic society and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia.”

For Marx, as critics have pointed out, the “progressive role of capital” is an indubitable function of the “progressive role of colonialism.”

51 From Surveys from Exile, ed. David Fernbach (London: Pelican, 1973), 320. Marx’s position is a fairly well-known one. Marx believes that the precondition for universal social revolution is the spread of European capital. As such, European colonialism and its destruction of “primitive” or pre-capitalist forms of production, are necessary historical stages in the globalization of the capitalist mode of production. The triumphant march of European capital is thus tied to the triumphalist logic of colonialism. For a critique of the Marxian position see Edward Said’s Orientalism.

Such metropolitan and Anglo-Indian newspaper accounts of the Jubilee celebrations can be read as temporal allegories in that they are concerned with temporal continuities. Joel Fineman believes that allegories can be sign relations that are perpendicular or horizontal or both at the same time. These newspaper allegories are primarily horizontal, which is not to say that they are not vertical too, but rather that they can be visualized in *primarily* horizontal terms. They unfold linearly and metonymically, where metonymy means a principle of diachronic connections through which structure is “actualized in time in speech,” a Saussurean *parole.*

Each sign in the allegory of the Jubilee periodical text, diachronically refers to a previous sign – Victoria’s crown to William the Conqueror’s, the British empire to the Mughal empire, the modernity of British India to the pre-modernity of Mughal India – and so on in an infinite series of images that stabilize meaning in history. The Jubilee periodical text is an allegory in the White-Ricoeurian rather than the de Man-Benjaminian sense of the term since its narrative entails a symbolic, causal, moral ordering of history and historical events. But its emphasis on the “recuperative originology” of royal, and royal-cathedted-as-imperial power means that any reading of the Jubilee press allegory has to take into account its flagrantly polemical message. The historical narrative as allegory is obviously working towards ideological and polemical ends here, disputing Hayden White’s claim that while the historical text can be allegorical it cannot at the same time be ideological. Imperial allegories might be imperfect histories but they are always inevitably, invariably ideological in nature.

Jubilee articles historicize Victoria’s reign in a curiously trans-historical way by referencing a past that is significant only in relation to Victoria’s Jubilee. This serves to not only decontextualize events like the Mughal rule of India, but even more drastically, to de-historicize the Indian past so that it seems impossible to historically imagine a pre-Victorian India. As a mode of writing history, then, the textual representation of the Jubilee in these periodicals presents an imperfect allegory of origins that justifies imperial rule in India on a couple of symbolic registers like the divine/genealogical right to kingship of the English monarch, and the enlightenment project of modernity and

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54 Ibid., 29.
55 See especially Hayden White’s *The Content of the Form.*
progress that promised to improve the state of the ignorant, pre-modern Indian. It is an imperfect allegory because it is contingent upon a narrative of “invented traditions,” to paraphrase Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Invented traditions are a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules, of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”

The perverse allegorical historicity of the periodical press image of the Jubilee yields a paradox in that it entails both the invention of a historical tradition, and therefore reference to a specific past, as well as the expulsion of “other” histories and thus an irreferentiality to any past; it both fixes meaning in the past and unfixes the meaning of other pasts. As such it is an endlessly transforming and transformative canvass that can make of anything – any image, any history – absolutely anything else, thus fulfilling Walter Benjamin’s dictum that in the allegory “any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else.”

Advertising the Present

If evocations of a glorious past in periodical press accounts of the Jubilee ceremonials serve to validate the allegory of English royal power as well as English imperial power, representations of a rapidly changing present in advertisements mobilize a counter-current of modernity that modifies and significantly changes the meaning of the official Jubilee allegory. The pedantic Samuel Barmby, a caricature of the foppishly learned, progressive, “new” man, sees in the spectacle of Jubilee a celebration of the completion of fifty years of “Progress”: “National Progress, without precedent in the history of mankind ... the Progress of the Human Race! ... Compare England now, compare the world, with what it was in 1837. It takes away one’s breath!”

Like almost all the characters in George Gissing’s 1894 novel In the Year of Jubilee, Barmby is made to embody some version of late-nineteenth century English modernity. Although Barmby’s bombastic rhetoric of Progress is a parody of pedantic modernist narratives of

57 Benjamin, Origin, 175.
58 George Gissing, In the Year of Jubilee (London: Lawrence and Bulen, 1894), 100. Hereafter cited as IYJ.
advancement, and it is recognized as such by the other characters in the book, yet his vision of a modern England trading in printed images (in Barmby's view the national presence of a print media, of newspapers, is what helps one "grasp the difference between civilization and barbarism") is borne out by the overall novelistic investment in the commodification and selling of printed images via the technology of advertising.

In his study of the commercial consumption of images, commodities, bodies, through the relatively new capitalist medium of advertising in Victorian culture, Thomas Richards points out how during the Jubilee of 1887 there was a proliferation of commodities all associated with the "figure" of the Jubilee. These ranged from perfumes, cosmetics, beverages to medicines and lotions. Luckworth Crewe, an advertising agent in Gissing's novel, enviously describes the activities of Jubilee entrepreneurs who exploit the readily available, ever expanding market for Jubilee products by investing in such things as a "Jubilee perfume" and a "Jubilee drink." Although critical of royalty, "expensive humbugs" as he calls them, he is extremely appreciative of the current commercial climate in which the advertisement becomes a universal, democratic, benign vehicle of modernity, progress and enlightenment. For Crewe advertising is the equivalent of civilizational progress. "How could we have become what we are without the modern science and art of advertising?" he asks. "Till advertising sprang up, the world was barbarous. Do you suppose people kept themselves clean before they were reminded at every corner of the benefits of soap? Do you suppose they were healthy before every wall and hoarding told them what medicine to take for their ailments?" Samuel Barmby's printed word is equivalent with Luckworth Crewe's printed, advertised image. Both these media are coterminous in their equating of modernity, which to Crewe and Barmby means the triumphant progress of commodity capital via newspapers and advertisements, with the spectacle of imperial expansion.

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50 Ibid., 102.
52 Gissing, Jij, 112.
53 Ibid., 130.
Critics like Thomas Richards and Anne McClintock have effectively shown the ideological ends to which advertising works in the imperial economy.\textsuperscript{63} Commodities like soap, tobacco and tea become, through the imperial advertising process, carriers of a political ideology; they become charged with a symbolism that seems to transcend their status as material goods. They became signifiers of an immaterial ideal, the ideal of imperial goodness and wealth. As symbols of the dominant imperial ideal the advertised commodity-image traverses the length and breadth of the British Empire, from Africa to India, in its endeavor to "whitewash" the world, remake it in the image of England. The advertised commodity represents the "bulwark of Empire"; its semiotic medium displays wherever it goes the "superiority and surplus productivity of English industry."\textsuperscript{64} Allegories depend upon such agents of materiality as commodities, texts, images, in order to convey what lies at their other extreme, the "transcendental idea to which these agents putatively refer."\textsuperscript{65} As such the symbolic, clearly ideological charge of the advertised commodity-image means that it can be seamlessly embedded in the greater nationalist allegory of late-Victorian imperialism which, as I pointed out earlier, employs a progressivist rhetoric of modernity to propel its narrative of dominance.\textsuperscript{66}

By harnessing the advertised commodity to the ideological and political project of colonial domination, the imperial allegory imputed to that hyphenated abstraction, the commodity-image,\textsuperscript{67} a stable value and meaning. Pears’ soap could thus be used to not only clean black/brown bodies but also inculcate in those bodies an ideology of purity and cleanliness that stems from but ultimately transcends the materiality of the clean

\textsuperscript{63} See Richards’ \textit{The Commodity Culture of Victorian England} and Anne McClintock’s \textit{Imperial Leather} (New York: Routledge, 1995).

\textsuperscript{64} Richards, CCVE, 142.

\textsuperscript{65} Theresa M. Kelley, \textit{Reinventing Allegory} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5.

\textsuperscript{66} A paradox should be noted here: while the embedding of commodities within imperial allegory can be a seamless and necessary task for the production of nationalist and imperialist truth-values, the burden of the commodity, its connotations of materiality and unpaid, poorly-paid or colonized labor, can fracture the very same allegory that it purportedly supports. I recall here the narrative of the Queen’s investiture in a June 18, 1887 \textit{Illustrated London News} editorial, a text I explored earlier in this chapter. The materiality of the diamonds in the Queen’s crown (and how can one escape associating diamonds with economic exploitation and colonized labor in South Africa?) seems to almost overwhelm the immateriality of this scene of divine sanction and godly providence.

\textsuperscript{67} I use the hyphenated term "commodity-image" because I believe that this expresses the conflictual character of the allegory of the late-Victorian advertisement. While the representation of objects in these advertisements stresses their imagistic and therefore iconographic nature, there is no getting away from the status of advertised objects as material commodities. I want to suggest that the conflict between the material and the immaterial is what enables the advertisement to function as an allegory.
body. The value of such advertising for imperial social, Christian missioning is obvious. What is less obvious but crucially important to my perception of allegory as “other” speech, is the radically destabilizing power of the advertised commodity-image at home, in the metropolitan space of English advertising, i.e. in ads directed specifically toward the English consumer. Thomas Richard’s compelling work on the spectacularization of Victorian advertising vis-à-vis a rapidly expanding market for consumer goods has shown how the late-Victorian body became a controversial site over which advertisers and the government fought a continuous battle to assert supremacy of control.68 The human body, including all of its bodily functions, “when healthy or sick, perfumed or medicated, stretched or compressed,”69 became the focus of advertising. I would like to suggest that the sheer materiality of the human body, coupled with advertising’s will to modernity, are the two contact points at which the historicist Jubilee allegory of origins, of seemingly immutable ideals, starts coming apart.

At home the English advertisement retains as much of its modernizing, progressivist fervor as it does abroad. Luckworth Crewe seems to be aware of how the advertised commodity’s circulation in an economy of desire and consumption – the barbaric people who can attain to proper hygiene and good health only after their insertion as desiring subjects into a consumer market economy of advertised products – enables the production of modernity. Advertising is a specifically modern science, Crewe states emphatically. Advertising ushers in the age of modernity. The “modern” functions in Gissing’s text as a progressive sign and among other things the progression it signals is that of class and gender equality. I would like to move the discussion now into the literary terrain of George Gissing’s novel In the Year of Jubilee in order to explore the emergence and constitution of the modern female consumer. An analysis of the consequences of modernity for Gissing’s heroine Nancy Lord will in turn offer me a way to enter into the vexed relationship between another modern female consumer, Queen Victoria, and commodity advertising. I will demonstrate, through a close reading of

68 See especially Richards’ chapter on the “Patent Medicine System” in The Commodity Culture of Victorian England. He depicts the history of this conflict as it was played out between the English Parliament, which through its legislation on medicine advertising all through the early 1900s tried to put a check on fraudulent advertising practices, and the advertisers who became more flagrantly extravagant in their peddling of dubious “medicines” – lotions, pills, ointments and such – to a growing body of consumers (168-204).
Nancy’s encounter with the modern, that female citizenship and female participation in nationalist allegories are staged around the pleasurable consumption of commodities.

The modern space is one in which upper-middle class, emancipated, proto-feminists like Nancy can rub shoulders with a democratic crowd of Jubilee celebrators, despite the fact that by doing so Nancy is clearly transgressing certain codes of behavior, those pertaining to proper social, class and gender conduct. A closer consideration of the Jubilee celebrations episode, in which Nancy’s proto-feminist drama of emancipation is linked to and enacted against a backdrop of commodity advertising, might serve to foreground the curious ways in which the advertisement comes to signify modernity in Gissing’s novel. More generally, I will show what is at stake for the Jubilee allegory when the modern economy of commodity advertising starts asserting its narrative presence everywhere.

*In the Year of Jubilee: Female Pleasure and Commodity Spectacle*

Like many turn-of-the-century novels, Gissing’s *In the Year of Jubilee* is about the tremendous anxieties that accompany a newly emergent consumer society’s negotiation with class and gender hierarchies. The struggle to articulate new gender and class positions at a time when rampant consumerism, which posited a Universal Consumer, appeared to be obscuring differences within and between classes and genders, is staged in Gissing’s novel through the female protagonist’s attempts to constitute her own identity, as upper-middle class, educated woman, vis-à-vis a “modern” space. For most of the characters in Gissing’s story, as I noted earlier, “modernity” is coterminous with an idiom of liberalism and progress. For Nancy Lord, Gissing’s heroine, it is also inevitably caught up in the vexed question of female or feminist independence. In her progress toward a feminist individualist sensibility, Nancy transgresses gender and class boundaries but in a way which reinscribes and reinstates class and gender prejudices.

In accordance with the thematics of modernity in Gissing’s novel, the Queen’s Jubilee celebrations provide a discursive space in which Nancy’s performance of modernity can take place. From the very outset, Nancy’s desire to participate in the

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Jubilee gala is coded as a transgressive desire because it defies the Law of the Father. Nancy’s father, Stephen Lord, is in many ways, not least of all in his refusal to allow his daughter to attend the Jubilee functions, outside of and even against modernity. His refusal stems from his belief that the Jubilee space is one in which class differences get dangerously blurred so that it becomes impossible to tell from the crowd attending the Jubilee what the difference is between an “educated young lady” and a “servant girl.”

Nancy’s desire, on the other hand, is a purely “modern” one: she sees the Jubilee celebrations as an opportunity for women to “walk about all night” in streets cramped with people and blazing with lights, with the freedom to go to “public-houses” just as men do. Although she admits its importance as a “historical event,” something which in the year 3000 will be “set in an examination paper, and poor wretches will get plucked because they don’t know the date,” her principle motive in wanting to witness the Jubilee celebrations owes nothing to its significance as history. In fact, she does not even catch a glimpse of the Jubilee procession (and isn’t greatly bothered by the fact either). She becomes, on the other hand part of another kind of procession, one that the narrator believes is more significant than the earlier royal one. Separated from her companions, she becomes part of a teeming, “trampling populace” of Jubilee celebrators, and is granted among them a kind of classless anonymity that frees her from the constraints of her own social position.

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70 There are instances of Stephen Lord’s “pre/anti-modernity” throughout the novel. An early example is his resistance to the “modern reforms,” by way of architectural changes, that his daughter proposes for their house (43). Again, his savage dismissal of his son Horace’s fiancée, Fanny French, as one of those “worthless ... trashy, flashy girls” whose “lady-like” pretensions are in his opinion an imperfect, grotesque mining of upper-class refinement, is an indictment of an insidious modernity that blurs class boundaries and fosters a kind of inter-class social miscegenation (77). As a final, and what is perceived by Nancy as the most damning expression of his anti-modernity is Stephen Lord’s will in which he bequeaths half of his sizable assets to his daughter but on the condition that she remain unmarried, and that she continue living in her father’s home with the housekeeper as guardian, subsisting on a slender yearly allowance, till the age of twenty-six. The will functions in Gissing’s novel as the legal patronymic that circumscribes and circumvents Nancy Lord’s modern narrative of feminist becoming. The rest of the novel describes Nancy’s struggle to negotiate with the terms of her father’s will, her rapidly dwindling financial status, and her secret disastrous marriage to a man who has abandoned her to pursue his fortune in the Bahamas.

71 Gissing, *RT*, 63.

72 Ibid., 39.

73 I think it significant that Nancy first experiences modernity in such an unabashedly public space as the Jubilee crowd. As Janet Wolff points out in her essay “The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity” (in The Problems of Modernity, ed. Andrew Benjamin, London: Routledge, 1989), the experience of modernity in the nineteenth century is for the most part associated with experience in the public sphere. Wolff describes two trends in particular, the fleeting, anonymous encounter in the city and purposeless strolling, as peculiarly constitutive of the “modern” experience especially in the mid-late
When Nancy first sets out, accompanied by Samuel Barmby and then later by Luckworth Crewe that erstwhile representative of the new commodity culture, she is equivocal in her enjoyment of the moment. She only “half” enjoys being jostled along by a “profane public” but decides nonetheless to “amuse herself in vulgar ways” for a while.\textsuperscript{74} After she is separated from Crewe, however, her enjoyment at being part of a crowd grows until it seems to consume her entire body in a faintly sexual, purely pleasurable way:

“Nancy forgot her identity, lost sight of herself as an individual. Her blood was heated by close air and physical contact. She did not think, and her emotions differed little from those of any shop-girl let loose. The ‘culture’, to which she laid claim, evanesced in this atmosphere of exhalations. Could she have seen her face, its look of vulgar abandonment would have horrified her.”

\textit{In the Year of Jubilee}, 120.

Nancy’s body is breached in innumerable ways when for instance someone treads “violently” on her foot, for in the crowd she is just another body amongst a multitude of other bodies. In fact there is even a dangerously destabilizing moment when a slightly inebriated man puts his arm around Nancy’s waist and drunkenly propositions her, having mistaken her for a prostitute. Stephen Lord’s reservations appear to have been justified: an “educated” upper-class woman may be taken for a loosely licentious “shop-girl” in the Jubilee crowd. Although the unmarked, homogenized bodies in the crowd can bear any number of signifiers, as far as the woman is concerned the crowd’s chief function seems to be the vulgarization of the female body. There is no narrative irony in the observation that Nancy’s enjoyment is vulgar; it is antithetical to any claims of “culture” that her education might make. So even as Nancy liberates herself from the fixity of her class position, and this is undoubtedly an emancipatory classless moment for her, the very rhetoric that is used to code her liberation is deeply invested in class prejudice. The narrative’s very disavowal of class difference serves to reinforce it in the strongest possible terms.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 106.
Nancy’s adventure in the crowd is quite literally framed by the spectacle of commodity advertising. All along the road are rows of advertisements for “somebody’s ‘Blue’; somebody’s soap; somebody’s ‘High-class Jams’; and … inserted between the Soap and the Jam – ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoso believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.’”\textsuperscript{75} The hoarding is an indiscriminately democratic space in its visual juxtapositioning of the clearly commercial/material and the putatively spiritual. Following Thomas Richards’ injunction to read Jubilee advertising as a form of commodity kitsch rather than \textit{bricolage}, I prefer to see in this clamorous, disruptive scene an instance of spectacular kitsch intruding upon and fracturing the solemn allegory of the Jubilee.

According to Richards, Claude Levi-Strauss’s notion of \textit{bricolage} might appropriately describe the mid-Victorian advertisement. \textit{Bricolage} is the end product of the \textit{bricoleur}’s attempts to fashion something new out of whatever material is available to him. The \textit{bricoleur} works with “whatever is at hand” so he is skilled at adapting old tools to new materials. The \textit{bricolage} economy is one of long-duration. Kitsch, on the other hand, is a sloppily put together object that is “improvised to meet an immediate, short-term demand.” As such it is more suited to the task of Jubilee advertising since it belongs supremely to “one moment and one moment only.”\textsuperscript{76} The Jubilee occasioned a veritable outpouring of commodity kitsch. The market was flooded with all kinds of Jubilee souvenirs and advertisers found it expedient to cash in on the current fashion by marketing anything and everything from Jubilee perfumes to games to cutlery.\textsuperscript{77} Everything was fair game for the Jubilee advertiser: the sacred and the profane, the material and the immaterial, the public and the private. And the hoarding with its impartial representation of all objects, all commodities, from medicines to furniture, from prayer-meeting announcements to the Queen’s dress, was the ultimate modern, democratic space in which everything is reducible to the one – the commodity – while, paradoxically, the commodity itself remains irreducibly other, and seems to transcend its representative mode.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{76} Richards, \textit{CCVE}, 90.
\textsuperscript{77} For a more detailed account of Jubilee kitsch and its impact on late-nineteenth century Victorian commodity culture see Thomas Richards’ \textit{Commodity Culture of Victorian England}. 
By using a modern visual like the hoarding to frame another modern visual, the socially unmarked Jubilee crowd, and by presenting both as the enabling signifiers for Nancy’s narrative of modern becoming, I believe that Gissing’s novel undoes the sententious allegory of origins and traditions that periodical press accounts of the Jubilee ceremonials mobilized. In fact, Gissing is only remotely concerned with the royal Jubilee procession. He is only interested in its impact upon his own narrative concerns which have to do with his characters’ investment in and attainment of modernity vis-à-vis the newly developed economy of commodity advertising. In Nancy Lord’s case modernity, synonymous with the growth of a feminist individualist, classless sensibility, is achieved via the new technology of advertisement. Later in the novel Nancy gains a measure of financial independence when, in response to an advertisement, she successfully applies for a job in a ladies’ dress shop. Coming at a still relatively early stage in her development, the Jubilee episode serves to imbricate her moment of independence in the pleasurable spectacle of the advertised commodity rather than the official Jubilee spectacle of monarchy. The undoing of the press allegory, then, takes place in Gissing’s novel through the elevation of the advertised commodity-image and the modern consumer and the simultaneous devaluation of the image of royalty. The next section concerns itself with this process of devaluation; in it I will engage with a particular image of royalty, that of the monarch, in order to see how the allegory of empire unravels even further when it takes the royal body as its central “figure” of authority.

Images of Royalty at Home and Abroad: Victoria’s Body

“At the head of the Durbar was a raised dais on which stood the Queen’s colour belonging to the Prince of Wales’ Own Grenadiers, and on an easel a large print of Her Majesty presented by herself with her signature to the Regiment.”

78 The importance of class in Nancy’s development as feminist/modern woman cannot be over-emphasized. I have already commented on how Nancy’s pleasure depends upon the complex process of disavowing class differences by reinscribing them, in the Jubilee crowd scene. Her ambivalence towards class is apparent throughout the novel. She prides herself on her education, a mark of upper-middle class status, and is openly contemptuous of the “trashy,” lower-class Fanny Fench, and the ridiculous social mimic Jessica Morgan. When she finally accepts work in the ladies’ dress shop, a move antithetical to her upper-middle class code of leisure, it is clearly the accession to class that is needed to propel her toward modernity.

79 India Office Records, L/P&J/6/211, #47, Aug. 6, 1887.
"A mounted figure of Her Majesty drawn specially for the occasion ... was put up at the entrance into the shamiana with the motto ‘Justice, Mercy, and Love Personified’."\textsuperscript{80}

"The portrait of Her Majesty the Empress was carried on a palanquin profusely ornamented with flowers ... Copies of the portrait ... were distributed freely among the people."\textsuperscript{81}

The above excerpts, taken from the Political and Judicial files of the India Office,\textsuperscript{82} provide meticulous accounts of the action taken in connection with the celebration of the Queen’s 1887 Jubilee in the various districts and provinces throughout India. These “Jubilee files” as I dub them follow a more or less similar trajectory: they begin with a description of the ceremony, its architectural design (shamiana, Durbar etc.), the number of people in attendance, and they conclude with an account of the official speech usually delivered by the highest ranking administrative officer present such as the Collector of the District or, in the case of the Presidencies, the Governor. Almost all of these archival renditions of the Jubilee ceremonies center on the representative figure of the Queen. While Victoria was never present at any of the ceremonies that marked her 1887 Jubilee in India or even earlier at the Imperial Assemblage of 1877 that was held in Delhi to celebrate her royal title of \textit{Kaiser-i-Hind}, her image, aesthetically bodied forth in portraits, paintings, busts, was everywhere present in India from the smallest towns to the largest centers of colonial rule.

If the Jubilee archives are a testament to anything at all, they are a testament to the repeatedly staged performance of imperial monarchical power as an absent presence. While Victoria herself never came to India, her likeness proliferated throughout the country during that year of the Jubilee in the form of paintings that evoked her “absent presence” like so many scattered, imperfect, refracted mirror-images. Because they were not the “real” thing, because they were only simulacra that produced a semblance of the real, I want to suggest that these paintings, duplicated, re-duplicated, dispersed, and

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} The India Office was established after the Queen’s Proclamation of November 1, 1858 led to the disbanding of the East India Company and the transference of its powers to the British Crown.
circulated as they were by the hundreds, became the grounds for an allegorical reimagining of imperial authority. Victoria’s image, the way her body itself came to be represented, manipulated and disseminated not only pictorially but also rhetorically, was the means through which the allegory of empire gained its sanctioning force.

An instance of how Victoria’s image stabilizes and redeems the allegory of empire is available in the speech that the Governor of Bombay, Lord Reay, delivered on the occasion of the Jubilee celebrations in Bombay on February 16, 1887:

“In the Queen Empress we venerate not an abstract and unknown exalted personage, but the living representative of all that is best in English public, domestic, and social life – the example given in public life of unceasing toil, of steadfast devotion to the highest interests of an ever-growing Empire ... in domestic life first the centre of the happiest home in England, and after the crushing bereavement giving to the subjects the noblest illustration of the fulfillment of maternal responsibilities ... That such a home should have been with the sanction of the Queen Empress erected in our midst is a cause of much gratification.”

The public world of civic duty combines with the private world of domesticity to transform Victoria into the very pattern of a responsible, benign Empress. She is at one and the same time grieving widow, noble mother and devoted ruler of an ever-expanding empire; by a perverse mixing of the public-private metaphors, her empire becomes in fact her home. But it was not always the case that Victoria’s image could thus be invoked to suggest both a publicly and privately constituted responsible king- (or queen)-ship. In order to fully understand how a rhetorical text like this one, has the potential to transform the figure of the Queen into an allegorical agent, one that could legitimize the originary historicist allegory of empire, I return to England to see how the English public’s perception of the Queen’s image changed in 1887 and how this change affected colonial India’s Jubilee representations of Victoria as Queen Empress.

In Lord Reay’s speech the public and the private, those heavily debated realms of activity in nineteenth century popular and philosophical thought, meet in the body of a monarch who until that spectacular moment in 1887 had been a virtual recluse in Windsor. After Albert’s death in 1861 Victoria made very few public appearances and those occasions on which she did appear were marked by a general air of shabbiness and

83 India Office Records, L/P&I/6/211, #47, Aug. 6, 1887.
the lack of any kind of show whatsoever. When the Prince of Wales was married in 1863 what was acerbically noted was “the poor taste of the decorations, the absence of outriders, and the extraordinary shabbiness of the royal equipages.” Victoria was dismissively dubbed the “Widow of Windsor” due to her reluctance to take part in any public ceremony that did not reflect her own melancholic state of mind. In 1871 Walter Bagehot probably echoed an entire nation’s sentiments when he wrote “there has never been a moment when what we may call the showy parts of the Constitution have been in less general favour than they are now.” Coming when it did at a time of general public dissatisfaction with the image of the monarch, the lavishly staged Jubilee pageant of 1887 became a centrally transformative, very public moment in the nationalist and, I will suggest, imperialist narrative of royalist myth-making.

Although, as Thomas Richards has argued, the uninspired, slightly dowdy, matronly body of the Queen might seem utterly resistant to mythification of any sort, while her royal body with its associations of immaterial transcendence would appear to be more eminently suited to the task of sacralizing, it was really the material Queen who came to embody the principle of transcendence. Richards draws on Ernst Kantorowicz’s classic The King’s Two Bodies which posits that the monarch’s two bodies, the one moribund and material, the other deathless and immaterial, are “an important heuristic fiction which served … to bring into agreement the personal with the more impersonal concepts of government.” Richards believes that while the actual, physical, material body of Queen Victoria lacks charm, her immaterial body, the one she possesses by virtue of her royal status, is what lends her an “intrinsic charisma.” Yet, in the popular Jubilee imaginary which appropriates and consumes Victoria’s image in the form of commodified kitsch like icons, souvenirs, insignias and so on, it is always the Queen’s material body that comes to stand in for or signify that which is immaterial. It comes to embody, to use Richards’ phrase, a “transcendent materiality.”

Thomas Richards presents a convincing case for the national revival of interest in and the consequent specularization of the Queen’s image during the time of the

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85 Thomas Richards. CCVE, 77-78.
86 Ibid., 77.
87 Ibid., 82.
Jubilee. He does not, however, consider how representations of the Queen’s image in colonial Jubilee ceremonials might alter its significance or receptivity. What happens to the Queen’s image when it is exported to the colonies? How is it represented and read in this other space? As the excerpts (from Lord Reay’s speech and the Jubilee archives) quoted above make clear the Queen’s material body provides the discursive grounds for the visualizing, in rhetorical and iconic terms, of the gendered royal subject as authoritative immaterial, imperial allegorical agent. As bereaved spouse, caring mother, and dutiful monarch she is the very personification of “Justice, Mercy, and Love.” The motto on the banner which hangs over her figure and reads “Justice, Mercy, and Love Personified,” the garlanded portraits offered up for the consumption of a (hopefully) adoring colonial audience, the adulatory speeches that evoke her public and private roles as queen, mother, and spouse, all of these different texts use the image of Victoria in a representative allegorical fashion to convey ideals of imperial power and knowledge.

Angus Fletcher has shown how a particular tradition in medieval allegorical paintings used such figures as that of the monarch in a representative fashion to embody certain ideals or ideas like imperial power, and in this process transformed them into allegorical agents.\(^8\) Although I am in no way suggesting that Jubilee representations of the Queen continued an anterior tradition in allegorical representations that began in the middle ages, I nevertheless believe that the codes of interpretation the older mimetic mode depends upon does survive vestigially in the newer one. Late-nineteenth century imperialism could not have chosen a better medium – paintings, statues, official speeches that use common tropes like that of the queen-as-mother – to convey the explicitly allegorical significance of a figure like that of the Queen’s. The paintings and speeches work allegorically to fix the meaning of the imperial narrative in the image of the Queen. She comes to signify the benevolent humanism of the imperial mission, its “good work,” its morality, its superiority. She is the very personification of a beneficent Empire. The image of the Queen then functions as a kind of mediator between allegorical meaning and interpretation; in other words, she mediates the relationship between extrinsic

\(^8\) Ibid.

conventions of reading, crucial to allegory’s exegetical purpose, and the system of allegorical iconography that operates intrinsically within the text.

In Jubilee England Victoria’s image is used to sell everything from perfumes to soap. It circulates as commodity kitsch and because it becomes part of a mass-market consumer economy, the meaning it comes to embody partakes of the materiality of the very commodities it is selling. In Jubilee India Victoria’s image is reincarnated. It literally assumes center-stage in Jubilee celebrations that use the image to produce a monumental allegorical vision of empire. Colonial Jubilee ceremonials thus appear to restore to the image of the Queen a significance that transcends the material. Metropolitan Jubilee ceremonials embed the Queen firmly in a modern commodity culture; colonial Jubilee ceremonials on the other hand fix her as the definitive allegorical icon, one that is not so much anti-modernity as much as outside it. The overwhelming materiality of the Queen’s body, present everywhere in the metropolitan Jubilee text, is subsumed by the immaterial allegorical vision of the British Raj in colonial India.

Absence as Presence: A Deconstructive Motif?

But how effective in fact is the strategy of using the figure of the monarch to center and legitimize imperialism’s allegory of goodwill and beneficence? According to Paul de Man allegory is always ironic, it is marked by “permanent parabasis.” In “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion” de Man writes, “allegory (as sequential narration) is the trope of irony.” Following de Man I would like to suggest that if allegory is inevitably ironic, then this irony can in turn capsize the ideological project of allegory; it can undo, disrupt, fracture, defer allegorical meaning endlessly. The irony of the imperial allegory of Jubilee and Durbar ceremonials, what ultimately causes it to come undone is its endless, futile centering of itself in the figure of the absent monarch, the Regent who is never ever present. As has been noted earlier, Victoria never came to India. When Edward VII was crowned Emperor of India after his mother’s death, and an elaborate Coronation Durbar was held in Delhi to celebrate the occasion, he was not present either. The irony of the absent figure of the Empress/Emperor is that while her/his

90 Paul de Man, “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion,” 12.
presence is invoked through the repeated staging of royal power in paintings, icons, portraits, official speeches, there is no getting away from the fact that presence is in fact absence. Lord Curzon who was Governor General of India at the time of Edward VII’s accession to the throne, seems however unconsciously aware of the fact that the monarch’s non-presence signifies lack. Speaking before the Imperial Legislative Council in Simla on September 5, 1902, he notes almost apologetically that although the Coronation Durbar would be more “historic” and “solemn” if Edward were himself to be present at the event, “duties of the state” would keep Edward away. Coming at the end of a speech which invokes the symbolic but very real power of the monarch to unify in his person an entire race/nation of people, the disavowal seems all the more shocking.\textsuperscript{91}

The utterly ludicrous effect of this eternal, ironic reversal of presence and absence whereby presence signifies absence and vice versa, comes through in Val C. Prinsep’s account of the scene he had been commissioned to paint at the Imperial Assemblage which was held in Delhi in 1877 to commemorate Victoria’s Indian title. A motley crowd of sundry Indian princes and colonial subjects gathered on that occasion to pay obeisance to the (absent) Empress. A wooden platform was constructed under a gaudily decorated scarlet canopy, and as the Indians climbed up to the dais to pay their tributes what looked down upon them was not the Queen herself but her framed portrait. This is how Prinsep records the moment:

“Oh Horror! What have I to paint? ... On the central erection they have heaped enormity on enormity – the Ossa of bad taste on the Pelion of shrieking colour ... Of necessity my picture must be a picture commemorative of the Assemblage rather than a faithful reproduction of the scene ... Pictorially, as I have already said, this thing cannot be rendered. I must try and put something into it which it had not – more dignity and distinction.”\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{91} “Lord Curzon’s Justification of the Delhi Durbar,” from \textit{Lord Curzon in India}, H. Caldwell Lispett (London: R.A. Everett and Co., 1903), 119-123. Of the king’s power to unify Curzon says: “The life and vigour of a nation are summed up before the world in the person of its Sovereign. He it is who symbolises its unity and speaks for it in the gate. Here in India it is for the first time under the British Crown that this unity has been attained and that the entire Continent has acknowledged a single ruler. The political force and the moral grandeur of the nation are indisputably increased by this form of cohesion, and both are raised in the estimation of the world by a demonstration of its reality.” This demonstration has to ostensibly take place through the person of the sovereign, in the reality of his presence. How can it then take place when the sovereign is absent?

The indignity, the absolute unrenderability of the scene derives perhaps not so much from the tasteless decorations as it does from the comically grotesque effect of having a reproduction of the Queen's image stand in for the real. As official painter Prinsep is charged with nothing less than commemorating a historical event, preserving it for history. But he recognizes the impossibility of the task of reproducing for history the memory of an event which centers itself on the representative presence of an absent Queen. Thus the painting he finally produces and the ceremony he records for posterity in his journal, restores to the event the materiality of the Queen's body. His painting The Jewel in Her Crown and his narrative Imperial India: An Artist's Journal both make it seem as though Victoria was present at the Imperial Assemblage.

In the painting Victoria is depicted seated on a canopied throne under an open sky surrounded by a representative crowd of her loyal Indian subjects which include princes, sepoys, traders, mothers, children and even beggars. To one side of her stands Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli with a map of India held up in his hands while approaching her is an Indian prince who holds before him a velvet cushion with a jewel upon it. The title of the painting refers to the jewel which in turn stands for India. The painting may be read allegorically as India's yielding of all her wealth and people to Britain. It allegorizes the very real material consumption of India by the British Empire. The painting's disingenuous allegorical mode consolidates British imperialism's ideological agenda in that it erases from its canvas the very real, material violence of imperialism in order to present a stable, idealized, "happy" image of colonial India. The rather grisly circumstances surrounding the actual event contribute even further to the catechistic way the painting works to create a schizoid reality. Prinsep's narrative account makes no mention of the fact that during the royal gun salute, elephants ran amok, stampeding and trampling to death some of the Indians in the audience.93

By inserting into the imperfect Assemblage text the definitive presence of the Queen, Prinsep adds something of "dignity and distinction" to the overall picture of royal

93 Jenny Sharpe, 150. Sharpe describes the less-than-auspicious nature of the Assemblage in her chapter on Paul Scott's novel The Jewel in the Crown. She argues that in his own allegorical retelling of colonial history Scott uses the Prinsep painting to both sanction as well as critique the violent narrative of British colonialism in India. He uses the Prinsep painting to produce his own normative allegorical reading of a particularly turbulent and violent period in British colonial history — the years immediately preceding India's independence in 1947. See Sharpe, 137-161 for more on this.
ceremony. Her image, however artificially improvised, redeems the ideal of empire by anchoring it to the allegory of her Presence. Without the Queen then, there is a very real possibility that the imperial allegory might come undone. So at the Jubilee ceremonials eleven years later in 1887, her image has to be frantically, almost obsessively produced and re-produced, copied and circulated, in paintings, portraits, speeches, in order to evoke the (im)materiality of her presence in the face of her overwhelming material absence.

The Last Days of Empire

With its colorful parade of Indian princes and foreign dignitaries the January 1, 1903 Delhi Coronation Durbar of Edward VII was almost as showy as his mother’s 1887 Jubilee celebrations had been. Yet for all its grandeur it lacked the symbolic constituency of the previous spectacle. Missing from the scene is Edward but perhaps more importantly, his mother. Victoria’s image even in its absent-presence, or perhaps because of it, had an overwhelming symbolic currency that Edward VII could not duplicate. The Imperial Assemblage of 1877, the Golden Jubilee of 1887, and finally the Diamond Jubilee of 1897 had transformed Queen Victoria into a transnational, transcendental emblem of Empire, a symbol of what the Daily Mail proclaimed in gold headlines on June 21, 1897, was the “GREATNESS OF THE BRITISH RACE.” Victoria’s death signals the gradual collapse of imperial allegory. Her image, already fading from historical memory cannot be used any longer to sanction and center the moral allegory of empire. What seems an authoritative image, anchoring the permanent and immutable allegory of empire on the previous ceremonial occasions, is by the early part of the twentieth century, perceived as provisional and fleeting.

This national and imperial sense of melancholic transitoriness is not only associated with Victoria’s death but also with the demise of a century, an “epoch.” Arthur Balfour speaking in the House of Commons notes, “grief affects us not merely because we have lost a great personality, but because we feel that the end of a great epoch has
come upon us." \(^{94}\) Victoria’s funeral procession is emblematic of this epochal death. In Elinor Glyn’s words:

“It was impossible not to sense, in that stately procession the passing of an epoch, and a great one; a period in which England ... had attained to the height of her material wealth and power ... I felt that I was witnessing the funeral procession of England’s greatness and glory.” \(^{95}\)

Events in the colonies like the disastrous Boer war in South Africa and the growth of anti-colonial sentiment in India were further signs of a national/imperial decline. While the Boer war raised serious concerns about the health of the national body politic, a rising, increasingly militant Indian nationalist movement threatened the very existence of empire.

By the time of the Coronation Durbar of 1903, the Indian National Congress had already been established (in 1885) and the founding of the All India Muslim League was a scant three years away. Even in 1887 despite the unashamedly adulatory periodical press accounts of Victoria’s Jubilee, editorials in vernacular papers like *Amrita Bazaar Patrika, The Liberal, and The Bengalee* gave voice to the popular nationalist demand for self-rule and the conceding to Indians of administrative, legislative and judicial rights. In most of these accounts there is a general sense of unease with the pomp and show of imperial pageantry. *The Liberal* of February 20, 1887, argues that the Jubilee would have been more honored and honorable if rather than the extravagant display of lights and fireworks, it had been marked by the spontaneous concession of some political rights to Indians:

“The fireworks and the illuminations, and any permanent commemoration of the event ... will, when the present enthusiasm over the event has cooled down, probably bring back painful regrets when [it is realized] that although the Queen Empress’ Indian subjects have poured out their hearts in demonstration of loyalty, Her Majesty’s Government of India has been unable to recognise such a display [except] by a Viceregal speech which ... is of no more than its conventional value. Well may we say — ‘All is vanity and vexation of spirit.’”

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\(^{95}\) Ibid., 17.
In its critique of Jubilee rhetoric (the fireworks, official speeches etc.) and its advocating of political rights for Indians the *Liberal* editorial compels a revisionary reading of metropolitan press constructions of the Jubilee ceremonials as sacred, ineffable history, as allegory.

What was the reason for the decline and ultimate death of the seemingly ineluctable allegory of empire? Why does it start falling apart after Victoria’s death? Is there something about this allegory in particular, and official, state-codified allegories in general, that causes them to fail at the very moment when they are needed the most? The answer perhaps lies in the figure of the moribund Queen. As I have shown throughout this chapter Victoria’s image was central to the construction and representation of British authority both in the metropolis and in the colony. Nineteenth-century allegorical paintings and lithographs of Victoria served to transmogrify a “real” person into a one-dimensional allegorical agent who could then be used to produce, authorize, and sanction British national and imperial power. In a way, then, the “reality” of Victoria was subsumed, replaced, and finally overtaken by the imagistic “unreality” of her allegorical persona. Imperial allegory’s success depended upon the longevity of this “unreal” persona and perhaps its failure may be attributed to the death of the “real” person. Victoria’s paradigmatic image grounded the allegory of empire; the permanence or synchronic atemporality of this image may have ensured imperial allegory’s success. But Victoria was after all a real person and therefore subject to the diachronic eventualities of impermanence and temporal death. Ultimately it is the reference to reality, to a real person, and the knowledge of her absolute unsubstitutability that leads to the demise of imperial allegory. “Victoria” the death-less allegorical agent has to finally succumb to Victoria, the real person. In a way Victoria’s death and the subsequent death of imperial allegory is representative of the definitional collapse of allegory itself. Allegories work because they readily lay themselves out “on the grid constructed out of the hypothesised intersection of paradigmatic synchrony and syntagmatic diachrony.”96 The death of the real Victoria collapses this carefully laid out grid so that the axis of syntagmatic diachrony no longer intersects but in fact merges with the axis of paradigmatic synchrony. The structure of imperial allegory falls in on itself.

96 Fineman, “SAD,” 32.
The growth of Indian nationalism, the death of Queen Victoria, the demands of an expanding modern consumer market economy at home, all of these constitute "pressure points" at which the allegory of empire starts to unravel. The confidence with which the organizers of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, held on June 21, 1897 in London, could roll out miles of red carpet in the form of a "carefully contrived allegory of Empire,"97 for the royal procession, is no longer possible after 1903 because imperial allegory as a medium of signification is being simultaneously devalued and modified so it can now carry other kinds of meanings. I have argued that the spectacle of royal ceremonies like Jubilees and Durbars and their manner of representation in the English and Anglo-Indian periodical press created originary, symbolic historical narratives or what Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur would term allegories, of empire. But at the start of a new century these seem defunct, out-of-step with the changing times. Counter-allegories or counter-crossings within the same allegory, of commodity kitsch, advertising, and nationalism, which owe more to the de Man-Benjaminan sense of allegory as "other speech," are now being fashioned at home and in the colony in an attempt to find a new vocabulary more suited to the demands of modernity. Nancy Lord, Gissing's modern heroine, finds little or no value in the official Jubilee ceremony, while The Liberal sees in it the workings of an empty, showy ceremonial rhetoric. Without conflating the two subject positions of English woman and Indian nationalist, I would like to point out that the obvious ends to which hegemonic allegories of empire work is toward the exclusion of these figures.

The centricity and power of a representational structure like allegory, as White and Ricoeur have argued, can order the world a certain way to meet its own polemical agenda. Yet, as Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin remind us all structures carry within themselves a deconstructive principle which means that in order to center itself allegory has to constantly de-center its meaning. The antinomies of the allegorical, according to Walter Benjamin, imply that there is a dialectical tension within allegory, a contradictory impulse to preserve/restore and to destroy, to recover (a meaning) and to subvert.98 Not only does allegory depend upon preexisting codes of meaning for its exegesis, but it also demands an explanation that goes beyond what the codes can explain. The "antinomies of

97 Richards, 116.
98 Benjamin, Origin, 174-175.
the allegorical” oscillate between convention and expression, between a “fixed image” and an “unfixing interpretation.” Imperial allegories are thus ever in motion; even at the very moment when they seem to have found a still center (like the Queen) the movement between meaning and interpretation (how is one to read the Queen’s presence in Prinsep’s painting The Jewel in Her Crown?) disturbs them until it appears that meaning is ultimately unrecoverable.

99 Sharpe, AE, 144.
Chapter III

Fearful Sexualities and the Crisis of Allegory: Desire, Disease and Contagion in Fin-de-Siècle British India

"I want this narrative to come together, to produce knowledge and pleasure ... as the end become the perfect joinder and alibi for the analysis I am constructing. But alas, it can never be ... the whole story [like sex] always escapes its end even as the end always seems to define the story’s direction, scope [and] aim. The various means by which orgasm and its analogies become the end of the story in narrative and psychoanalytical theories reveal the nature of the ideological connection of narrative and sexuality.”
— Judith Roof, Come As You Are.

"Distanced at the beginning from its source, allegory will set out on an increasingly futile search for a signifier with which to recuperate the fracture of and at its source, and with each successive signifier the fracture and the search begin again: a structure of continual yearning, the insatiable desire of allegory.”
— Joel Fineman, “The Structure of Allegorical Desire.”

Allegorical narrative desire, its endless deferment, displacement and constraintment is the subject of this chapter’s discursive foray into the fin-de-siècle British Indian scene. Specifically, this chapter examines how allegorical desire informs, motivates, sustains, and re/de-generates sexual desire. Through the historical, critical and theoretical analysis of the sexual archives of British imperial governance, I will attempt to plot the connection between allegory and sexuality. How does an understanding of allegory in its definitional capacity as symbolic metaphoric narrative, enable an understanding of colonial sexuality in its myriad, complex and complicated forms as official (and/or archival), heterosexual, homosexual, commodified, scandalously public and covertly private? Or, to ask even more fundamentally, how can I clear a space for the sexual within the allegorical? What in fact is the relationship between sexuality, sexual desire and the allegorical narrative?
In the previous chapter I argued that as historical narrative allegory’s exegetical purpose is invariably ideological; although imperial allegories might be flawed histories, they are always unfailingly ideological in nature. In this chapter I will add to this assertion that the ideological end towards which the imperial allegory works is explicitly and provocatively sexual. Taking my cue from Judith Roof’s profoundly compelling work on the intimate cultural linking of narrative, ideology and sexuality,¹ I argue that the overweeningly nationalist allegory of British imperial chauvinism at the turn-of-the-century causally and disingenuously joined sexual concerns to the overall obsessive fear of colonial loss masquerading as imperial decline.² After a careful and eclectic reading of among others Freud, Barthes, Butler, Wittig and Theresa de Lauretis, Roof concludes that as “organizing epistememes and as expressions of a figuratively heterosexual reproductive ideology” in contemporary Western culture, the pairing of narrative and sexuality goes beyond such shared formalistic terms as “climax”; their imbrication is in fact “a symptom of their common progenesis in a specific, already heterosexual ideology that presents a critical difficulty in even thinking about them outside of that same set of ideologies.”³ So under the metaphorical reproductive heteroideology (Roof’s term) of narrative’s aegis the thinking of such aberrant, non-reproductive sexualities as homosexuality can only take place metonymically as negative, non-productive, non-valuable categories, a point that will prove crucial to my own study of deviant, non-productive sexualities like that of the prostitute’s or the (perhaps) homosexual soldier’s.

In my enthusiasm for Roof I have tried to push her argument further by transposing its terms to the historical, cultural and textual milieu of late-nineteenth/early-

¹ See Judith Roof, Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Roof meticulously analyzes the persistent coupling of narrative and sexuality in psychoanalytic and structualist theories of narrative, in popular media like films and television, and finally in novels and short stories. I shall refer to Roof’s study throughout this chapter as it has proved to be instrumental to my own exploration of the connection of sexual desire and sexuality to allegory.
² I am conflating two ideas here: colonial loss and imperial decline. The first is more a political effect while the latter could perhaps best be described as a cultural affect. For England, the turn-of-the-century signaled the onset of colonial loss, i.e. the gradual eroding of English colonial power vis-à-vis the emergence and consolidation of indigenous anti-colonial movements. But fears over loss of colonial power remained inarticulable, and were indeed displaced on to general anxieties over the decline of the (male) imperial body. The almost-all-pervasive sense of imperial decline manifested itself in the late-nineteenth century discourse of degeneration, through cultural narratives about (potentially) degenerate bodies, spaces, and racialities. For a fuller account of the domestic discourse of degeneration and its impact on imperialism see Chapter IV.
³ Roof, Come As You Are, xxvii. Hereafter cited as CAYA.
twentieth century British India. In other words, I have tried to see how the stubborn, almost obsessive partnering of sexuality and narrative in the popular, official and archival imperial imaginary both reflects and disrupts the heterosexural, heterosexist, masculinist allegory of British nationalism—imperialism. The pairing of sexuality and narrative disrupts colonial heteroideology because the heteroideology of the colonial archives centers itself on two particularly troubling figures, that of the native female prostitute and the working-class English recruit serving in the British Indian army. The prostitute’s disruptive performance of colonized sexuality and the recruit’s equally fraught performance of heterosexual militarism significantly alters the heteroideological authority of the colonial archives.

Throughout this chapter I will use “allegory” in its simplest although not necessarily its most simplistic sense of a symbolic, progressive narrative that lends itself to and derives legitimacy from the, however false or delusive, knowledge of an underlying structure. By introducing allegory as the other theoretical term in Roof’s argument, by using it as another species of narrative, and by reading its desire for order as an explicitly sexual desire, I propose to reengage Roof’s problematic of narrative heteroideology.

My task will be to study the specific narrative sites that produce colonial heteroideologies of sexual control. Ultimately, what I will develop from such a study is a strategy for reading and writing about the limitations, inadequacies and redundancies of an imperial allegorical schema of sexual management and prescription in the colonies. Thus when Judith Roof’s argument about the interrelated nature of narrative and sexuality in twentieth-century Western culture travels back both temporally and spatially to the historical mise-en-scène of turn-of-the-century British India and its performance of sexual control vis-à-vis the Law, narrative’s (hetero)sexual ideology is imbricated in a racialized, gendered colonial discourse of subordination and domination in a way that might expand the original terms of Roof’s study. I would like to turn now to the late-nineteenth century when imperial anxiety over declining colonial power was translating rapidly into increasingly stringent sexual legislative measures. Allegory, narrative and sexual ideology, as I shall demonstrate, never met at a more auspicious time.
The Beginning of the End: National, Sexual and Imperial Decline

"... when we see regiment after regiment ... of soldiers laid up and useless from one of the most dreadful of human diseases what is this but a distinct depletion of military power. Men thus diseased [cannot] fight ... their morale is lowered, and they become dispirited in the face of the grave malady that is eating out their very lives and disfiguring their persons."\(^4\)

"[Sexually transmitted diseases assume] horrible, loathsome and often fatal form[s] ... the sufferer finds his hair falling off, his skin and the flesh of his body rot, and are eaten away by slow, cantankerous and stinking ulcerations; his nose first falls in at the bridge and then rots off and falls off; his sight gradually fails, and he eventually becomes blind ... his throat is eaten away by foetid ulcerations which cause his breath to stink."\(^5\)

It is by now a commonplace in late-nineteenth century English studies\(^6\) to link the workings of fin-de-siècle English nationalism to the politics of sexuality and sexual legislation in particular. Among others, Kenneth Ballhatchet, Christopher Lane, Ann Laura Stoler, Jeffrey Weeks, and Phillipa Levine have commented on turn-of-the-century British nationalism’s uneasy but relentless insistence upon sexual self-mastery and restraint as prerequisites for imperial dominance. At a time when the idea of a “British Empire” was being beleaguered from all sides, internally by a more militant women’s movement, a growing anti-colonial stand, and the Irish Question, as well as from outside by fears over economic competition from such newly industrialized nations as the U.S. and Germany, and the emergence of indigenous nationalist movements in the colonies, anxiety over the nation’s development and defense led to the elaborate fabrication of a heroic and masculinist narrative of nationhood, imperial identity and empire-building.\(^7\)

George Mosse in *Nationalism and Sexuality* argues that by the end of the nineteenth century a certain robust notion of manliness and masculine (hetero)sexuality came to be firmly associated with the nationalist ideal: virility, a restrained and controlled sexuality, even “the sublimation of sexuality into leadership of society and the nation,”


\(^6\) By “English studies” I do not simply mean the study of English cultural and literary texts but the study of English colonial texts as well.

\(^7\) For more on this see my “Chapter I: Staging Empire: History, Narrative and the Spectacle of ‘Allegoresis’ in the Colonial (Con)Text.”
became national and imperial ideals. The very performance of nationness, or nationness-cathedected-as-imperialness, came to depend upon a masculinist, hyper-virile, heterosexist idiom of sexual control. The attitude at the end of the nineteenth century was that "if the normally constituted civilized being was not capable of mastering his sexual urges as soon as they came into conflict with the demands of society, then family and state, the foundations of the legal and moral order, would cease to exist." This attitude was to effect colonial policies and legislation regarding the exercise of sexual control in those "far-flung outposts" of Britain's empire. The appeal to "family" and "state" as custodians of the nation's morality and legality established an allegorical frame of references according to which empire was to be defended and vindicated.

The late-nineteenth century "cult of masculinity," as Ronald Hyam describes it, which redefined masculinity in terms of sexual restraint and "cleanliness," became a powerful and pervasive moral code. Cultural constructions of masculinity tied it to ideas of purity and empire. The Alliance of Honour, an exclusive male organization that was formed in 1904 by, among others, Sir Robert Baden-Powell who later went on to found the Boy Scouts, declared in its 14 point program that its objective was to promote "True Patriotism; Clean Citizenship; Public Moral Health and Public Physical Health." The Alliance recruited young men who were exhorted to "develop self-control and avoid masturbation in order to construct a strong empire and state."

The Alliance of Honour's preoccupation with questions of public health and patriotism are symptomatic of larger national concerns for Britain's imperial strength. The Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902) raised the specter of physical deterioration when many working-class recruits to the army had to be sent back from South Africa because it was discovered that they had puny physiques and bad teeth. The Boer war exacerbated fears over the military and political prowess of the male imperial body. Echoing popular Darwinian sentiments the Earl of Rosebery declared in 1900: "An empire such as ours

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requires as its first condition an Imperial Race—a race vigorous and industrious ... Health of mind and body exalt a nation in the competition of the universe. The survival of the fittest is an absolute truth in the conditions of the modern world.”¹³ It was assumed that the “abandonment of sexual restraint” in the colonies “would precipitate colonial insurrection” and cause Britain to forfeit her empire. As Christopher Lane relevantly notes: “This threat helped to endorse the belief that sexual havoc was an immediate precursor to moral and political degeneration.”¹⁴

Relations of domination and subordination, rules of exclusion and hierarchy, and other differential discursive social practices are underpinned and reinforced in the colonial context by certain racial, economic, and psychological or psychosexual factors that link racial and sexual differences to ideas of moral contamination, physical degeneration, and climatic incompatibility. Ann Laura Stoler has pointed out that colonial scientific reports and the popular press in English metropoles at the turn of the century, were “laced with statements and queries varying on a common theme: ‘native women bear contagions’, ‘white women become sterile in the tropics’, ‘colonial men are susceptible to physical, mental and moral degeneration when they remain in their colonial posts too long’.”¹⁵ Sexuality is the mediating factor in all of these discussions about the nation’s health and the state of empire, which is also the state of imperial masculinity.

It is not surprising then that concerns over the health of the national/imperial body politic (obviously a masculine body), especially in the wake of such disastrous colonial encounters as the Anglo-Boer war and the Afghan wars in India, came to revolve around the highly complex, invariably frustrating task of managing the bodies, sexualities and sexualized bodies of diverse colonial subjects. And it is even less surprising, given the historical paranoia over race and sexual degeneration, that the management of sexuality in the “porno” tropics, whether it was the white man’s sexual desire for the native, the British soldier’s incipient homosexuality, or the native woman’s predatory sexuality (itself a colonialist construction?), is inevitably caught up in fears over sexual contagion, issues of race and class, the politics of gender, hygiene, health and disease.

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¹³ Quoted in Hyam, “Concubinage and the Colonial Service,” 74.
At the turn-of-the-century the imperial allegory of British national unity and racial purity became inextricably linked to the valuing and policing of sexual identities. These identities were seen to consist of such reified binary categories as heterosexual and homosexual, white male and brown female, prostitute and soldier, native/Indian and British. Imperial allegory's heteroideological narrative impetus is reflected in its desire to expel or erase from its force field anything that does not conform to what Judith Roof describes as narrative's "reproductive logic." According to Roof narrative's reproductive logic operates in the sense that "there are really only two sexualities: reproductive sexuality, which is associated with difference and becomes metaphorically heterosexual, and non-reproductive sexuality associated with sameness, which becomes metaphorically homosexual."16 The latter because it is a non-(re)productive non-value comes to synecdochally denote an entire field of negative, abnormal or perverse object and behavioral choices.

I would like to suggest, through my reading of the colonial sexual archives of the British India Office, that narrative's heteroideological reproductive logic performs a much more complicated maneuver when it encounters the (perhaps) non-reproductive commodity sexual capital that circulates in the form of the Indian female prostitute. In this case imperial allegory's heteroideological narrative cannot simply negate, as Roof would have us believe, that which has no value. Mid-nineteenth century colonial sexual legislation hinged on the putative worth of regimental brothels. The hetero-ideologic behind the regimentation of prostitution in the British Indian army was that prostitution was a necessary evil. But colonial heteroideologists find themselves in a double bind when they try to claim that prostitution is both necessary and evil. As safeguards to the expression of other, more "abnormal" (homo)sexualities, the heterosexual services of prostitutes are invaluable; but the very scene of inter-racial sexual labor invariably raises the specters of disease, contagion, "dirty" economics, and, of course, non-productive sexuality. So colonial heteroideology has to do something far more complicated than merely negate that which is not valuable. It has to, in fact, perform a contortionist's trick whereby sexual value is affirmed and reaffirmed in the face of obsessive disaffirmations and disruptions of any kind of sexual value. What this means for the actual establishment

16 Roof, CAYA, xxix.
of sexual value is that those in favor of regulating and licensing prostitution in the British Indian army, face off against those who view this practice as ethically repugnant and institutionally indecorous. And resisting every attempt to either establish or dispute sexual worth is the figure of the Indian female prostitute. In the following sections I shall explore some of the ways in which the sexual archives – collective “voice” of sundry sexual legislators, hospital administrators, military commanders, regulation and anti-regulation activists, police officials etc. – negotiate the native prostitute’s recalcitrant, profoundly indeterminate sexual (non)value.

**Methodology and the Use of the Archive**

It is not my aim in this chapter to attempt an authoritative, complete account of the general historical situation as regards colonial sexual legislation in turn-of-the-century British India. Although I do present a general overview of the case, my engagement with history vis-à-vis the colonial archive, is idiosyncratic at best, fragmentary at worst. Rather than a systematic reading of history I undertake what Srinivas Aravamudan has described in another context as the anti-originary act of “retroactive reading,” as I chart the itineraries of sexual desire, disavowal and difference in various colonial archival texts. But even as I privilege my claim of an eccentric engagement with history vis-à-vis the colonial archive over any “systematic” reading of History, I am very aware of the problematic nature of all such avowals (or disavowals). Although the discursive reach of this chapter precludes and limits a fuller exploration of the relation of history to the archive, I would like to describe very briefly my own use of archival sources.

Dominick LaCapra’s famous indictment of “archivism” or the uncritically naïve use of the archives is worth rearticulating at this point:

“The archive as fetish is a literal substitute for the ‘reality’ of the past which is ‘always already’ lost for the historian. When it is fetishized, the archive is more than the repository of traces of the past which may be used in its inferential reconstruction. It is a stand-in for the past that brings the mystified experience of the thing itself – an experience that is always open to question when one deals with writing or other inscriptions.”

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Despite its fetishistic, substitutive disposition whereby its very existence both reconstructs as well as stands in for a kind of dubious historical “truth,” for the critical reader of colonial history the imperial archives have to serve as her primary albeit problematic field text. The intersection of history, context and ideology in the imperial archives make it both a necessary and compelling narrative document for the understanding of the ideological fractures, anxieties and contradictions that accompany the colonial mission. Reading the imperial archive then becomes an exercise in reading for but also against historical truth; it means accounting for and understanding that the gaps and elisions of the imperial archival text are part of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has conceptualized as the “epistemic violence” of the imperial project, “the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other ... [or] the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity.”¹⁹ As the official self-consolidating record of the “Other,” the sexual archives of empire, my concern in this chapter, must inevitably perform a species of epistemic violence.

My selective but not perhaps injudicious reading of pieces of the historical past, or in Hayden White’s terms fragments of “the unprocessed historical record,”²⁰ inscribed for posterity in dispatches, letters, memorandums, lock-hospital regulations, medical reports, and activist pamphlets, all of which comprise the “imperial archive,” is not an attempt at re-membering or nostalgically reconstructing a colonial past. The process of returning to the archive, on the contrary, reveals the impossibility of all such historical recuperative efforts. The past as LaCapra reminds us is always already lost to the historian. But what should not or cannot be lost is the perception of how the ideological imperatives of the imperial archive, its representational strategies, produce a master- or ur-narrative as the pleasurable, motiveless, miraculous hegemonic mechanism that orders and produces historical reality. So, even as I am aware that the sexual archives of

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imperialism can be perversely alluring, and even as I enjoy this allure, what informs my methodology is a sense of how sexualized and racialized ideologies intersect with nationalist desires and discursive relations of power and domination to sustain this very same pleasurable archival text.

The Sexual Archives: The Case of the Pathological Prostitute

As I wander through the interstitial archival text I find that I am interested in tracing the emergence of one figure in particular: that of the overdetermined and delusive native female prostitute. For the purpose of my argument in this chapter I shall refer to her in certain strategic places as the native-woman-as-prostitute or the woman-prostitute. The narrative subject position she occupies is a hyphenated one; it is inflected with all sorts of conflicting, overdetermined heteroideological and class conventions. The story of the woman-prostitute that emerges from the sexual archives is an infelicitous one.\textsuperscript{21} As far as I have been able to determine, for the most part women who are designated as prostitutes in the archives belong to the lowest social class: they are coolie women, the wives of grasscutters, sweepers, and syces, women who accompanied the troops wherever they went, constituting a kind of peripheral, migrant labor force the management of which was crucial to the smooth daily running of the regiment. Later in this chapter, I will demonstrate that the socially marked, utterly abject bodies of these women, regardless of whether they were really prostitutes, became the targets of an obsessive surveillance by colonial officials, doctors and military commanders.

What happens more often than not, in situations where the sexual archives cannot determine the sexual or sexualized status of certain women, they err on the side of plenitude and assume that these women are prostitutes, and that by extension all lower class women are prostitutes. It is not simply that the archives blur the two categories

\textsuperscript{20} Hayden White, \textit{Metahistory} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 5.

\textsuperscript{21} I am aware that by using the term “story” I am imputing all sorts of structuralist values like causality and linearity to what are essentially disparate and scattered archival instances chosen at will to serve an eccentric purpose. But despite my rather post-structuralist impulse to read fragmentarily and disruptively I find that using the unfashionable structuralist term “story” is valuable for the insight it provides into how different terms and sets of characters, plots and actions function and relate to each other within a specific narrative. Rather than following \textit{a} particular plot or pattern, what interests me is the dynamic interrelation of disparate sets of these.
"woman" and "prostitute," but rather that they perform a chiastic reversal whereby all lower-class women are prostitutes and all prostitutes are low-class women. For instance a report from the Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur to the Inspector General of Hospitals in 1889, aggrievedly remarks on the large number of "lower class" women from surrounding villages who "flock in [to the cantonments] as they please" and along with the "ordinary prostitute population ... aid in reducing the military strength of empire." An earlier report from 1888 complains about the "absence of [a] definition of the term "common prostitute" and the consequent difficulty of obtaining a conviction" for unmarked women. It goes on, "many women ... who are really promiscuous and should be brought under the operation of the Act shelter themselves as wives or concubines." The official anxiety in trying to distinguish between prostitutes and women who are merely "promiscuous" is felt in this letter to the Prime Minister that tries to separate "irregular" women from sex workers: "The subject is one of difficulty and complication, and requires the very careful treatment, as any system must [that is] worked by subordinate officers who are liable to be corrupted, and may abuse their power in the case of women who lead irregular lives, but are not in the ordinary sense of the word, prostitutes" (emphasis added). An Army Sanitary Commission report of 1892 detailing the spread of venereal disease among British troops stationed in India makes the connection between unlicensed, unregulated prostitution and lower class women even more explicit: "[these women] are under no surveillance whatsoever. In every Indian cantonment after dusk the vicinity of the European lines is haunted by women of the lowest and poorest class who, though not prostitutes by profession, are willing to

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22 Phillipa Levine in her essay "Venereal Disease, Prostitution and the Politics of Empire: The Case of British India," touches upon this point, about the indeterminate, vague nature of archival definitions of "prostitute" and what constituted "prostitution." I believe however that it is vastly more important than she gives it credit for, precisely because I think it ties in, firstly, with the whole debate about licensed vs. unlicensed prostitution that was raging at the time, and secondly, with my own project of exploring how these unmarked women become both the objects as well as the elusive metaphorical figures of an official policy of surveillance and control. Levine's essay can be found in the Journal of the History of Sexuality, Vol. 4, #4, 1994.
23 IOR, L/MIL/7/13906, Jan. 22, 1889.
24 IOR, L/MIL/7/13815, #6, 1888. The Act referred to here is the Act of 1868, an offshoot of the Indian Contagious Diseases Act of 1865 that called for the compulsory examination and registration of prostitutes in military cantonments, cities and towns across India.
25 Ibid. Extract from a letter to the Prime Minister from H.T. Holland.
prostitute themselves for even a smaller sum than is claimed by the regular courtezan (sic)” (emphasis added).²⁶

The politics of identification or rather the failure to identify – who is the prostitute? who is the wife? who is the concubine and/or courtesan? are they all the same? – unfixes, destabilizes, and threatens to collapse, that very logic of regulation and surveillance upon which colonial rule premises its systemic sexual cleaning-up operation. With its phobically pathologic gaze fixed on the figure of the native woman, these archival pronouncements as to the “true” sexual status of women, who are always already wives, concubines, or prostitutes, are instantiations of the singularly misogynistic, ethically unsavory politics of sexual control in fin-de-siècle British India. Class anxiety and indeterminate sexual energies (recall the fear evoked by the promiscuous woman) are not so much blurred as they are symptoms of a reified, incoherent ideo-logic of imperial sexual rule. Because these women-prostitutes belong to the lowest social stratum and are therefore completely disenfranchised, because they are not even a part of the general regulated and regulatable prostitute population, they are pathologically transformed into poor, disease-ridden, promiscuous, stealthy and unhealthy purveyors of sex. The narrative of the prostitute, as critics have pointed out, constitutes an apotheosis of the link between commodity and sexuality and more covertly, points to the analogous relation of production, reproduction and power.²⁷ Prostitution is commodified sexuality and sexual commodity; prostitute bodies are involved in relations of exchange and sale, marked by the market rules of a productive consumer economy.

Imperial Britain’s regulation of prostitution in India during the mid-late nineteenth century was motivated by a self-perpetuating desire to rope the sexual labor of a native female population into the service of the colonial army. The official attitude that prevailed at least through a good portion of the nineteenth century, was that prostitution was a necessary evil, something that through proper regulation could come to benefit the colonial military state by channeling the British soldier’s hopefully heterosexual desires, a point I shall have recourse to elaborate upon in the next section. But the tremendous anxiety evoked by and associated with the presence of illicit, lower-class, unregulated,

²⁶ IOR, P/5016, #1778, Dec. 11, 1893.
²⁷ Judith Roof, CAYA, 34.
unlicensed sexual bodies belonging to those women-prostitutes whose sexual status was indeterminate at best, produces a duplicitous narrative moral lesson: that when inscribed on poor, low-class female bodies sexuality is not only non-valuable but also diseased, unhealthy, unsanitary and finally unintelligible. The ideological drive to expel these negative sexualities is thus felt in archival narrative after narrative that grapple incoherently and irresolutely with the problem of the low-class, unlicensed, unregulated woman-prostitute.

**The Proper Place of Sex: A Historical Detour**

In order to engage more fully with that troubled subject/object of archival representation the woman-hyphen-prostitute, in order to account for the terrible tropes of disease and degenerescence that are associated with and indeed become emblematic of her, I must make a brief historical detour via the sexual disposition of British nationalist discourse at the turn of the century. What emerges from a retroactive reading of the colonial archives and the broader historical narrative of fin-de-siècle British nationalism is this sense of the existence of two mutually contestatory notions of sexual abstinence, for fear of sexual contamination, on the one hand, and the incitement to sexual activity on the other. The desperate, almost hysterical denunciation of “aberrant” or immoral sexual practices like homosexuality, miscegenation and prostitution characterizes the first, whereas the fear that sexual repression might lead to sexual excess or abnormality dominates the second.

As Judith Roof has pointed out the narrative of sexuality is swiftly appended to the service of the family which must delimit sexuality to a non-threatening non-incestuous heterosexuality. To this I will add a perhaps logical corollary: the narrative of sexuality is also yoked to a national and nationalist agenda. Roof believes that sexuality’s licit or illicit character is dependent upon the reproductive use to which it is put. I believe it is worth quoting her at some length since her observations on this score are both useful and can be effectively mined for my own discursive engagements:

“while healthy heterosexuality produces the proper reproductive narrative ... perversions produce the wrong story: decrease, degenerescence, death. This perception is supported by the narrative logic of production, a logic
of combination and increase, and both are susceptible to a deplorable short
circuiting through pleasure (bad investment) and the seductive but
unprofitable delay of perverse 'détours'. The bourgeois need for the
correct narrative, one affected by proper heterosexual, reproductive
sexuality and good timing positions sexuality as itself causal: perverted
sexuality is the cause of the bad narrative, familial dysfunction, low
production; and good, reproductive sexuality is the cause of profit,
continuity, and increase.” 28

The implications of a positive reproductive heterosexuality, for the production of a
“good” national narrative are clear. In late-Victorian Britain where hysterical concerns
over deviant, contagious sexualities and the nation’s health led to the obsessive, relentless
policing of class and sexual boundaries between the so-called “productive” and “non-
productive” members of society, the management of female reproductive sexuality which
could only be exercised in its proper familial sphere, assumed an all-pervasive
importance in the national consciousness. The heteroideological narrative of late-
Victorian nationalism directed its moral ire towards prostitutes, working class women,
poor mothers, spinsters, unmarried women, homosexuals, and the indigent and
unemployed in general, all of whom it classified as sexually non-(re)productive. It
valorized, on the other hand, maternity and healthy, state sanctioned
reproductive/breeding practices some of which included the spread of state-sponsored
domestic education, the weighing and measuring of babies and the systematic
regimentation of domesticity. 29

Dating from the sexual purity movements of the 1880s and 1890s, the prolific
condemnation of prostitution, abortion, masturbation and homosexuality in turn-of-the-
century British national discourse also spills over into concerns about the sexual integrity
and morality of the colonial project abroad. A threat at home, sexual hence racial
degenerescence is even more of a problem abroad in the colony where inter-racial sexual

28 Ibid., 35.
29 Various critics have commented on the connection between race degeneracy, state intervention and
national sexual hysteria. Anne McClintock, for instance, writes, “by the turn of the century, sexual purity
emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic and political power. In the metropolis ... 
population was power and societies for the promotion of public hygiene burgeoned, while childrearing and
improving the racial stock became a national [duty]” (47). For more on this see McClintock’s Imperial
Leather, Ann Laura Stoler’s “Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in
Central Asia” (in Gender and the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern
practices like *metissage* raises its ugly head. In India the high rate of hospital admissions for British soldiers in the Indian army – a report from 1893 put the figure at 28000 (out of a total of 68,000 British soldiers)\(^{30}\) – who were believed to have contracted venereal disease from diseased prostitutes appeared to lend credence to apocalyptic fears over the dreadful effects of inter-racial sexual activity. Wild statements regarding hordes of infected, diseased soldiers returning to England only to “marry and transmit the disease to their children”\(^{31}\) thus contaminating future generations and causing the physical, moral and spiritual decline of England, abounded in the popular imaginary. A writer for the Anglo-Indian periodical *The Sentinel*, for instance, remarks in a tone of absolute moral outrage that, “the British Army in India is rotting away, and the British soldier is being made into a half-brute and a half-devil … At the expiration of their term in India, multitudes of [these soldiers] bearing in their bodies the marks of their vices, return to England to infect the population with the ideas and habits of which they have been here indoctrinated by Authority.”\(^{32}\)

Behind the more metaphorical concerns over the health of the nation and the perpetuity of its citizens, was the very pragmatic material anxiety that arose from the knowledge of the deleterious economic aspects of a disease that was laying waste to a very valuable commodity resource. Citing the heavy losses incurred by the British army in India because of the high rate of affliction among British soldiers, a socio-economic report from 1888 concludes:

> “The cost of every European soldier put down in an Indian cantonment is reckoned at £145, and his annual upkeep involves a very high expenditure; he is an expensive machine; he is in fact one of the costly British products of which … the English have to make use for the administration of the country. It becomes accordingly a financial question of great importance to enquire how far this costly article is economically used; and attention is

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\(^{30}\) IOR, L/MIL/7/13845, Nov. 8, 1893. I offer these statistics with a great degree of caution because the method of tabulating data regarding the incidence of venereal and other kinds of sexually transmitted diseases was problematic and quite possibly inaccurate. This was due to a number of reasons: the general scientific difficulty in actually defining what did or did not constitute venereal disease (as opposed to syphilis or gonorrhea), the ever-vexing problem of human error which sometimes led to the same individual being counted more than a single time, and finally the official tendency to exaggerate the admission figures. It is clear however that, even accounting for exaggeration and hyperbole, the rate of hospital admissions for venereal disease among British soldiers in India at the end of the nineteenth century was rather formidable.

\(^{31}\) IOR, L/MIL/7/13843.

\(^{32}\) IOR, P/3248, #1825.
especially drawn to the unnecessary waste of health and strength involved in the amount of venereal disease which is at present allowed to exist in the army."  

Imperial expenditure and resources are deemed wasteful when they are directed toward the upkeep of a diseased and depleted military force. Three aligned terms come together in this narrative of waste: economic non-production, diseased sexuality, and failed capital. All three terms are causally and effectually related to each other – sexual disease causes the economic (also sexual) non-productivity of the British soldier and both are the improper, injudicious effects of the improvident allocation of state resources and capital for controlling the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among British troops in the Indian army. In this way the nationalist-imperialist heteroideological narrative contains and concretizes the symbolic fear over racial and sexual decline by embedding it in a capitalist production narrative of economic failure. In other words, while the health of the imperial army can become a metaphor for the health of the entire race, its robustness testifying to the strength of the nation as a whole, the soldier’s sexuality, and more relevantly his diseased sexuality, is both a metaphor of racial degenerescence as well as a synecdoche for unfulfilled imperial capital. If he contracts venereal disease the soldier, as a vital part of an “expensive fighting machine,” impedes the full expansion of colonial commerce, adversely effecting the flow of imperial capital and economic production.

It was in response to anxieties over race degeneration resulting from inter-racial sexual activity, and the very real economic panic that accompanied this, that the Crewe Circular was ultimately passed in 1909. On January 11, 1909, the Secy. of State for the Colonies, Lord Crewe issued a confidential circular that came to be variously known as “the morals despatch,” “the immoral relations memo” or simply “the Crewe Circular.” The Circular warned that “concubinage with girls or women belonging to the native population ... [would be considered an] instance ... of misconduct ... which would result in scandal and grave discredit to the public service.” New recruits to the colonial service were told that “such practices [lower themselves] in the eyes of the natives, and diminish [their] authority to an extent which will seriously impair [their] capacity for useful work.

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33 IOR, L/MIL/7/13815, #6.
in the Service.” It further warned of the “disgrace and official ruin which [would] certainly follow from any dereliction of duty in this respect.”

But the Crewe Circular did not come into effect until 1909. At this point in the history of colonial sexual legislation it was officially assumed that the only way to prevent contagion was to practice sexual abstinence, and sublimate sexual energy in athleticism or militarism: “The [sexual] passions … must be repressed by force of will aided by severe physical exertion, abstemious habits, and the high moral capacity arising from culture.” The fear of sexual contagion was countered by the strong but seldom articulated belief that without easily available women, soldiers would be tempted to either resort to sexual violence against women or, even more unfortunately, turn to each other for sexual gratification. A curious mix of sententious moralism, quasi-medical knowledge masquerading as scientific rationalism, and military zealouslyness inform official debates concerning the need to provide for (hetero)sexual services for British troops. A memo dated October 1886, from the Surgeon-General of Hospitals argues that since men, especially the class of men serving in the army, are innately, irrevocably and physiologically immoral their sexual “passions must be satisfied some way or the other … For a young man who cannot marry and who cannot attain to the high moral standard required for the repression of physiological natural instincts, there are only two ways of satisfaction, viz. masturbation and mercenary love.” He goes on to argue that though “the former … leads to disorders of both body and mind [and] the latter to the fearful dangers of venereal,” yet the second is still preferable to the first. Prostitution is then a “necessary evil,” a safeguard against soldiers performing unsanitary sexual acts on their own persons or running amok raping women or, worst of all, indulging in sexual intercourse with other soldiers. Although I found no archival evidence that homosexuality was ever a part of the official discourse on sexual regulation in the colony (which is not to say that there is no evidence, but rather that I did not unearth anything in the course of my research), nevertheless the threat of same-sex male desire haunts these discussions, its spectral

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34 Ronald Hyam, “Concupiscence and the Colonial Service: The Crewe Circular (1909)” (The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History. Vol. 14, May 1986 #3: 170-186), 183-184. Christopher Lane erroneously claims that the Crewe Circular was “one of Britain’s earliest legislative interventions into its colonies sexual practice” (The Ruling Passion, 158). As my paper amply demonstrates Britain’s legislative intervention into the sexual lives of its colonial subjects began long before the Crewe Circular was thought into existence.

35 IOR, L/MIL/7/13815, #6, 1888.
presence undercutting the overdetermined heterosexual nature of debates over the management of colonial sexuality.

One view on colonial sexual relations, then, advocates sexual abstemiousness or at best, the displacement of sexual energy on to other kinds of healthful activities like athletics; the other, and this is obviously what until the early 1900’s at least, dictated colonial policy, advocates the use of a regulated, licensed, militarily and medically surveilled female sexual labor force as a preemptive measure against the expression of “other” sexual desires. The first provides a pretext for anti-regulation activists to mount their attack on the Indian Contagious Diseases Act and subsequent cantonment and lockhospital acts while the second, of course, becomes Law. Both positions, the legal and activist, are overtly contestatory. But in their use of such familiar tropes as the female prostitute as carrier of disease, death, racial degenerescence etc., each position mimics the rhetorical discursivity of the other. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this complicitous performance where each mimetically tracks the other’s “figure” and can then in turn be performed by it, takes as its emblem the body of the putatively diseased prostitute.\(^{31}\) I would like to consider two archival instances which amply demonstrate the workings of this complicitous rhetorical strategy. The first is from the official records and the second from an anti-regulation activist pamphlet entitled “Our Army in India.”

**A Return to the Archives: The Woman-Prostitute as Sexual Predator**

The first is an excerpt from a memorandum on the Indian Contagious Diseases Act filed by the Surgeon General W.J. Moore and is dated October 1886. In it the Surgeon General describes the onset of syphilis in the female prostitute and warns of the dangers that syphilitic prostitutes pose to the health of the British Indian army. He writes,

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\(^{31}\) I have borrowed this description of the disingenuous rhetorical strategy employed by anti-regulation activists to mount their attack on government regulatory policies, from Mark Sanders’ review of Gayatri Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Sanders is describing Spivak’s tracking of the figure of the Native Informant through various discourses, philosophical, literary, historical and cultural. This is how he describes it: “Finding that the Native Informant reveals, in its trail, a dispropriable ‘position’, a borrowed one not strictly anyone’s own, the tracker [or reader] herself performs the figure, and is, in turn, performed by it. Giving shape to the tracker, this mimetic tracking engages the trace of the other which sends this book on its way.” Sander’s essay “Postcolonial Reading” is included in the electronic journal *Postmodern Culture*, Vol. 10, #1, September
“the slight irritation caused in the female by the early stage of venereal rather excites than dulls the sexual appetite. As would naturally be expected from so many women with excited sexual appetites being suddenly allowed to disseminate disease, there was a large increase of syphilis among the men [over the past five years].” The diseased woman-prostitute is characterized by “haggard shanks, shrunk eyes, pallid countenance, peculiar gait, sallow colour and loose integument.” This is an instance of metastasis and there are several such rhetorical moments in the archives when the woman-prostitute is transformed into a devouring, cannibalistic, hyper-excited sexual monster, the very personification of venereal disease. Her infected, sexually diseased body even transforms the male military body into a sore-infested, ulcerated, rotting organism, hardly recognizable as a human body (note the two quotes with which I began the section, “The Beginning of the End: National, Sexual and Imperial Decline”).

My second example drawn from anti-regulation activist literature appropriates however unconsciously the tropological construction of the prostitute as unclean sexual siren even as it launches its critique of the official practice of regulating and licensing prostitution in the army. The author, Violet Tempest, writes: “What we are fighting against is the fact that the Government in India does ‘help Tommy Atkins’ to look upon vice as a ‘trial and temptation’! Can you imagine the brown body, and the black hair plastered down and reeking of rancid cocoanut (sic) oil – with a few pungent scented flowers – notably the jasmine – sucked into its heavy, greasy coils, while everywhere you turn in the hovel there are cobwebs and dust? Truly ‘Tommy’ doesn’t want much to ‘tempt’ him poor fellow.” Violet Tempest’s indictment of government policy concludes with an exhortation to the divine: “How long, O Lord, how long will this turmoil, this injustice, this cowardliness go on … [while] girls and women live on in submission and ignorance.” But by focusing on the body of the prostitute rather than her subjection/abjection Tempest’s critique collapses the two narratives of government exploitation and activist intervention into a phobic miming of positional appropriability. In other words it appropriates the official “figure,” the sexually carnivorous woman-

36 IOR, L/MIL/7/13815, #6, 1888.
37 IOR, 8285CC52 IOC.
prostitute, for its own interventionist agenda but in doing so fails at its own avowedly political project of humanizing prostitution, of showing us how "girls and women live on in submission and ignorance." Anti-regulation activism then reprises misogynistic stereotypes about the prostitute as libidinal procurress, foreclosing the possibility of a critical engagement with the woman as subjective entity or the government as sexual enabler.

In another instance of positional appropriability, one of the arguments that both advocates of regulation and those who wanted to abolish the system used was that native prostitutes were born into the profession. Both sides made the rather dubious culturally relativist claim that prostitution was a hereditary caste-based trade in Hindu society just like any other caste trade, and so somehow sanctioned by Hindu social law as well. Between activism's fatalistic, "these women are born into the trade, not made," and pro-regulation's self-serving justification of the use of Indian women for sexual labor, the fate of the Indian woman-prostitute was sealed. This official report from 1889 which advocates the division of Indian prostitutes into two classes, codified as law under the Indian Contagious Diseases Act of 1868, one of which was to be reserved for the exclusive use of British soldiers, sums up the morally dubious, self-gratuitous tone that surrounds the entire debate both in official as well as activist circles.

"From time immemorial in Indian cities persons living by the same trade have resided together, and thus congregated, following the calling from generation to generation. The trade of prostitution is no exception to this custom, and it is also hereditary. Prostitutes are not looked upon by the natives of India with the contempt which attaches to them in other countries. They are accepted as safeguards to society, and are not themselves ashamed of their calling. As a class they are rich ..."38

The kinds of gross assumptions made here, about the woman-prostitute's economic, cultural and social status, reveal not just the limits of an imperial system of representation and knowledge but serve also as a convenient gloss for the actual material and economic conditions of her labor.

As the subject of a discourse in which she is proffered as an example of bad morality, both individual and social, the prostitute is both a narrative necessity as well as a narrative cipher. She is necessary because her perversions are crucial to the inciting of
moral as well as sexual consumptive desires. She exists to sway the British soldier from other kinds of potentially perverse desires, to incite and sustain official, medical and scientific discourses, and finally to legitimize anti-regulation activist interest in her “fallen” moral state. But she is also narrative cipher because, perhaps unsurprisingly, none of these texts summon her perspective. In the case of the activist text she does appear but only to confirm, through the unethical process of foreclosure, her immorality. The psychoanalytic concept of foreclosure is useful in this regard since it aptly demonstrates the (im)possibility of rendering the woman-prostitute’s perspective. By bracketing the (im) I am erasing “impossibility” without canceling it. The activist narrative’s engagement with the prostitute as both an object of investigation as well as a subject of representation is an (im)possible one since it forecloses the possibility of other narrative perspectives. I would like to offer an example from the activist archive as an instantiation of this moment of foreclosure.

The author of the editorial entitled “The Government vs. the Gospel in India” appears to have toured rather extensively the districts and provinces of India in which the “densest heathen darkness” of sexual depravity prevails.\(^{39}\) He writes about his experience in one of these. In the district of Sitapur he visits one of the bazaars of “Government certified harlots”: “It was a veritable market of lust. Soldiers were going in and out of the [establishments], without any appearance of shame, where the licensed women reside ... and little children were playing near the entrances to this vestibule of hell.”\(^{40}\) It is under these circumstances, in an atmosphere already weighed down with religious metaphors of sin and lust that he describes his encounter with two prostitutes:

> “While we were talking to the soldiers on patrol duty, two licensed harlots came boldly out and joined the group. Mr. Lowson (the American Methodist minister in this district) addressed the most forward of the two on the sinfulness of her life, and earnestly pointed her to Him who is able

\(^{38}\) JOR, L/MIL/7/13843.

\(^{39}\) JOR, P/3248, #1825, *The Sentinel*, Mar. 1888. This and all other quotes in this section, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Sentinel* editorial.

\(^{40}\) One of the measures taken to regimentalize prostitution was the establishment of *lav bazaars* (literally red markets). These can be best described as red-light or brothel areas that were exclusively reserved for the service of British soldiers (as opposed to native ones). Kenneth Ballhatchet has noted that as was the case more often than not, the existence of these bazaars was never formally, officially recognized by the Government. They existed outside the official realm of sexual policy-makers and legislators, but the fact that they flourished is indicative of official approval if not knowledge, a connection that is obviously noted by *The Sentinel* writer.
to save to the uttermost. She saucily asked if there were two Gods. The Hindus have a popular but hideous god named Mahadeo, which is the personification of sensuality."

At this point his narrative abruptly switches to another consideration: the manner in which the figuration of vice is spatially literalized in the arrangement of the brothel tents. The arrangement of the tents, the writer says disapprovingly, "is an illustration and sample of how lust is forced upon the British soldier ... While the Temperance tent is in a comparatively obscure corner, the tent of the government harlots confront the troops from morning to night." No buildings or trees conceal the brothel tents and, even more morally egregious, "the encampment of the Government harlots ... is in full view of the native Christian church" which doubles as a school for children.

The indictment of a corrupt government sanctioned practice of sexually trafficking in female bodies is embedded in a complex cultural allegory that blends the sacred with the secular, the interior with the exterior, the religious with the geographical. The couching of the problem in these terms shifts the narrative focus from the really critical issues of rehabilitation and colonial collusion in the systemic exploitation of a female sexual labor force, to the theological questions of a) prostitute morality and b) religious conversion. The entire debate is, of course, framed by anti-regulation activism's fascination with the brazenly sexual woman-prostitute whose presence it evokes to authenticate its own voyeuristic interest, masquerading as religio-moral outrage, in the sexual mise-en-scène. This is what I meant when I said earlier that the figure of the woman-prostitute is a narrative necessity. Without her "bold," sensual appearance – itself a textual affect – the rhetoric of activist moral intervention flounders. And yet the subversive potential inherent in the women's questioning of Christian theology is negated by the abrupt narrative disengagement with the prostitute as problematic object of activist discourse and the transition to a more general exploration of the actual scene of vice (in which the prostitute again figures metonymically as sexual instigator and corrupter). This textual figuration and consequent shift is what enables the activist writer and the American minister to produce an allegory of righteousness. The ideo-logic of this narrative produces the woman-prostitute as the indubitable sexual and moral "other," without letting itself become caught up in such messy ethical issues as sexual exploitation
and colonial moral culpability. It thus, in effect, absolves the male reformer of all responsibility even as it assumes the mantle of “activism.”

**Sexual Legislation: A Brief Note**

In the mid-late 1800’s almost all of Britain’s colonies were subject to sexual legislation in some form or the other, either directly through actual laws or obliquely through official circulars and memoranda. These regulations were primarily concerned with the behavior of the female prostitute as a means of checking the high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases like venereal disease and syphilis among British soldiers. In the Indian case a series of Cantonment Acts, the first of which was passed in 1864, together with that definitive piece of sexual legislation the Indian Contagious Diseases Act, effective from 1868 onward, regulated the sexual traffic of female bodies in military cantonments, towns and cities throughout India. From proposing that all prostitutes submit to compulsory periodic medical examinations, to dividing prostitutes into two classes, those who exclusively serviced British soldiers and those who serviced native men, to licensing “clean,” uncontaminated prostitutes, to finally assigning prostitutes special living quarters that sometimes entailed staking out entire villages as “prostitute villages,” these acts laid out in excruciating detail the “proper” conditions under which sexual trade might be plied with the full legal sanction of the British government.

In the wake of anti-regulation activism and the moral outrage both in India as well as in England over what was frequently described in abolitionist discourse as a government sanctioned system of vice and immorality, the cantonment acts were substantially amended and the Indian Contagious Diseases Act was ultimately repealed on June 5, 1888. Yet cantonment legislation in the late 1890’s retained in practice at least the spirit of extreme coercion and restriction that characterized the earlier acts. Although theoretically the new laws “forbade any coercion on the part of the Indian authorities in enticing women to examination,” women who refused to submit to medical inspections, women who were caught in the act of soliciting soldiers “after dark” and in undesignated areas, and unlicensed prostitutes could be subject to summary expulsion from the

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41 Levine, “Venereal Disease, Prostitution and the Politics of Empire: The Case of British India,” 590.
cantonment. Previously under the Indian Contagious Diseases Act a woman’s failure to register herself would have resulted in fines, arrests, even imprisonments. Under the new laws, however, expulsion from the cantonment was as effective a tool of coercion as were the earlier more explicit methods of compulsion; both mechanisms could deprive the woman of what was often her only means of livelihood.

It is not enough to see in these infamous legislative endeavors the workings of a patriarchal, racist, sexist, classist imagination because while they are all of these things, a retroactive re-reading of them will show how they also provide the grounds for a fertile albeit problematic fashioning of textual agency. I use the phrase “textual agency” because it would be impossible to ask empirically of these women: what is at stake for them? what are the implications of their sexual victimage? is it even possible to think of them as anything other than commodity objects in a ruthless sexual economy of exchange and transaction? Is it possible, in other words, to read beyond positivistic representations of the “woman-as-prostitute” who is either, in official terms an appetitive, all-consuming, diseased whore, or in the rhetoric of anti-regulation, a caste-bound victim of her circumstances, or sometimes both. My question is: are “immoral whore” and “fatalistic victim” the only subject positions available to the woman-prostitute? Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s admonition to always read the text of sexed subalternity as cautiously, scrupulously and ethically as possible in order not to turn the entire process of reading into some naïve and potentially dangerous form of information retrieval, I turn now to plot those moments of textual fracture when it appears, if only for a moment or two, that the marginalized, disenfranchised woman-prostitute resists sexual regulation.

A Foucauldian Intervention

“The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. The power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting.”

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 45.

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In order to read the text of subaltern female resistance it is essential to first theorize the connection between sexuality, power, discourse, resistance and the law. Evoking Michel Foucault at this point is a strategic necessity. Although unacknowledged so far, Foucault has been a shadowy presence in my text from the very beginning. My analysis of the discursive production of colonial allegories of sexuality is indebted in no small part to Foucault’s writings on discourse, power-knowledge relations and sexualized subjectivities. In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault defines the elaborate regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that enables the production, and the “put[ting] into discourse,” of human sexuality in the West from the eighteenth century onward.\(^4^3\) Foucault gathers under the rubric of the term “discourse” diverse cultural categories and formations, including technologies and institutions of power and knowledge, historical practices, social modalities and mechanisms. A multiplicity of distinct discourses which take form in “demography, biology, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, ethics, pedagogy, and political criticism,” produce sexuality and sexualized subjects within a network of power-knowledge relationships.\(^4^4\) Foucault’s history of sexuality is, then, a history of how power/knowledge was mapped onto institutionalized spaces like the prison, the asylum, the psychiatrist’s office, and the family, spaces which were charged with regulating, surveilling and producing normalized sexualities.

Central to Foucault’s discussion of sexuality and its emergence as an epistemic, cultural and historical category in the West, is the sustained exploration of sexuality’s contradictory and problematic relation to power. According to Foucault power is everywhere present in society, a decentralized, relational, free-floating (but not aimless), productive thing. It cannot be located in any one institution or mechanism; it is rather produced strategically from one moment to another, through a moving, transformative series of unequal force relations like that which exist between family and state, subject and law, bourgeois and proletarian:

“Power, insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests upon each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement ... power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a


\(^{4^4}\) Ibid., 33.
certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."

Relations of power are not exterior to but are immanent in other kinds of relationships like economic, familial, epistemic and, of course, sexual. Sexuality is inextricably linked to the exercise, logic and history of power: "Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden." What follows this pronouncement is crucial to my own understanding of the complex interrelation of sexuality, power and the law. "Power prescribes an ‘order’ for sex," Foucault writes, "that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility: sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law … power acts by laying down the rule: power’s hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates … a rule of law … The pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator; and its mode of action with regard to sex is of a juridico-discursive character." In this way Foucault makes explicit the connection between the powerful discourse of law and the function of sexuality.

Through the rule of law, though the discourse of legality, power sustains and retains its reign over sexuality. There is pleasure in the exercise of this power, a pleasure derived from exercising the power of the Law. And there is also pleasure in evading, resisting, fleeing from, parodying, and otherwise transgressing the boundaries prescribed by this lawful power. Although Foucault specifically eschews the term "boundary" when he remarks that these "circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but perpetual spirals of power and pleasure," I find that for the purpose of my argument, the resistances to and evasions of a colonial rule of law by transgressive subaltern female subjects can relevantly be read as a breaching of boundaries. As I shall illustrate below the reaches and limits of a colonial legal discourse of sexual prohibition can and must be read as a rhetorical as well as a very real material breaching of borders.

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45 Ibid., 93.
46 Ibid., 83.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 45.
While the value of a Foucauldian analysis of power, resistance, discourse and sexuality cannot be under-emphasized, yet I think it is important to address at this point what are at least from a postcolonial historical perspective certain limitations or "blind spots" in the Foucauldian text. While Foucault is a brilliant theorist of "power-in-spacing" and peripheral sexualities, his writings are not informed by, to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, "the awareness of the topographical inscription of imperialism."\(^4^9\) Spivak's critique is very pertinent here. Quoting a passage from Foucault that points to his politics of elision, Spivak argues that Foucault remains consistently impervious to the "geographical discontinuity" wrought by territorial imperial expansion and economic exploitation. Foucault writes: "In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ... we have the production of an important phenomenon, the emergence, or rather the invention, of a new mechanism of power possessed of highly specific procedural techniques ... This new mechanism of power is more dependent upon bodies and what they do than the Earth and its products."\(^5^0\) What is omitted in this account is the fact that the "new mechanism(s) of power" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the West was actually an effect of territorial imperialism, the extraction of its products from the Earth, in "other" parts of the globe. Spivak concludes that the very brilliance of Foucault's analysis,

"produces a miniature version of that heterogeneous phenomenon: management of space – but by doctors; development of administrations – but in asylums; considerations of the periphery – but in terms of the insane, prisoners and children. The clinic, the asylum, the prison, the university – all seem to be screen-allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism."\(^5^1\)

It is not surprising, then, given that his vision/version of Western history ignores its "production by the imperialist project," that Foucault's "history of sexuality," in particular, and his theorizings on power, in general, do not take into account the fact that the discourse of sexuality in Europe at least from the middle of the nineteenth century onward was produced in large part externally, through colonial policies and legislation regarding and regulating the sexual behavior of Europeans in the colonies, as much as it was produced internally, within Europe, through techniques of surveillance and control.

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\(^4^9\) Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," 85.
\(^5^0\) Quoted in Spivak, ibid.
\(^5^1\) Ibid., 86.
British imperialism’s appropriative sexual desire, manifested in its stentorian pronouncements of colonial Law, is as much a feature of the narrative of British sexual history as is the national dialectic of sexual control and prohibition. This is not to say that I am privileging the former over the latter, but rather that I believe that the two should be read dynamically as counterpoints/parts of a dual-handed historical narrative structure. A contrapuntal reading of the British Contagious Diseases Act and the Indian Contagious Diseases Act, for instance, might contribute to our perception of how a certain historical narrative, a “narrative of reality” to use Spivak’s words, could be ideologically produced as the normative one while the other putatively subordinate narrative has to be excavated and reinstalled as a form that celebrates “subjugated knowledges.” In a sense my entire effort in this chapter has been by way of illustrating this point, that the imperialist project and its attendant “planned epistemic violence” is crucial to an understanding of the process of normative subject-formation in the West. The colony and its sexual interests are not as peripheral to the metropolis and its sexual preoccupations as some might think it to be. I would like to turn now once again, and for the final time, to the sexual archives. This time I consider the slippery question of agency through a Foucauldian lens, as I track the figure of the woman-prostitute as she attempts to evade, elude and delude the Law of her imperialist masters.

**Defying the Law: Pleasurable Transgressions in the Foucauldian Mold**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, according to the various cantonment acts the authorities had absolute control as far as the administration and management of prostitute labor was concerned. This control was theirs often by virtue of the Law, and sometimes, as in the case of the installation of *lal bazaars*, by virtue of an unacknowledged but not completely unofficial rule of thumb. The colonial authorities, which comprised of lawmakers, and hospital and military personnel in the main, could determine where

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52 Ibid., 76.

53 Foucault describes subjugated knowledge as “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (*Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, trans. C. Gordon et. al., New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, 82).

prostitutes were to live, the facilities they were to use, when, where and with whom they could conduct their business, the frequency with which they had to submit to medical examinations and so on. The regularity and intensity of legislative and official intervention was directly proportionate to the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among British soldiers. The higher the rate of disease, the more blinding the observation of the agent of disease. And as the abject agent of sexual disease it is the prostitute who becomes the target and suspicious object of official investigation.

One of the more popular techniques of surveillance involved an elaborate numbering system whereby brothels frequently visited by British soldiers were “to be numbered outside, or in some conspicuous spot inside,” so that when a soldier reported sick he would not be required to “personally point out the woman from whom he contracted the disease, merely to give the number of her house.”\(^55\) In another proposal it was suggested that inexpensive village-type establishments, not to be confused with lal bazaars, be set aside for prostitutes so that these “women could be well managed and easily found for examination, and that the soldiers [would] know where to go to (sic) as soon as they arrive at the station.” Strenuous disavowals accompany this proposition: “Perhaps it is a mistake to ... call [these villages] brothels. The registered women’s village would be a better name, and the more it approaches to village character, of separate tenement, tree shade, and water supply, the better. And in this village the women should be encouraged to settle, as comfortably as may be, with their animals and other necessary appurtenances of a home.”\(^56\)

The sexual marketplace of prostitute labor is remade into a hygienic domestic space where the (appropriately domesticated) woman-prostitute lives with the accouterments of her newly sanitized labor, the animals, the shady trees, the clean but inexpensive mud huts. While it seems to be clear that a) the extent to which these proposals were adopted as official colonial policy cannot accurately be ascertained, and b) the physical conditions under which these women actually plied their trade in the lal bazaars would be far removed from the sanitary domestic conditions outlined above, what is interesting about this description is its deliberate attempts to not just sanitize but also make respectable the murky sphere of paid sexual female labor. In fact, any signs

\(^{55}\) IOR, P/3248, #1829.
that these women constitute a very real economic labor force, and provide an economic service, are erased in the face of their overwhelming domesticity. Making the whole imperialist project of regulating, via the process of domesticating, prostitution, seem like a respectable alternative to other forms of sexual coercion, the official extract quoted above also serves to render invisible the very visible, spectacular politics of colonial sexual surveillance. It does so by implying that the policing of prostitutes is a natural, inevitable, and invisible consequence of domesticating the trade.

More generally, there is evidence to believe that the degree of surveillance was vigorous, even brutal, with soldiers frequently apprehending and imprisoning or expelling women who were in seeming violation of the rules. And yet despite the potential loss of livelihood that imprisonment and/or expulsion signified for the women, the archives record innumerable instances of transgression; moments that register the woman-prostitute’s inability or unwillingness to stay within prescribed borders. There are several instances of lock-hospital breakouts signifying perhaps the woman-prostitute’s reluctance to be inserted into a pre/over-determined medicalized, scientific discourse about her diseased sexuality. Her typical narrative trajectory takes her from an indefinite period of incarceration in a lock-hospital, ostensibly for the medical purpose of determining whether she is diseased, to a dubious kind of freedom when she, often successfully, escapes from the hospital. In this report from 1887, regarding the renovation of an old lock-hospital building, the medical administrator notes that the outer building wall has to be raised even farther, and the “doors at the entrance completely boarded up,” because several women had escaped from the hospital in the past.

The unregulatable woman-prostitute frequently breaches, crosses, disregards the boundaries painstakingly set up by the authorities. Not only does she “lurk around after dark,” “waylaying soldiers in ravines in and about the cantonments,” she also, on a number of occasions, “disguises herself in men’s clothing and sneaks into the barracks”

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56 Ibid.
57 Kenneth Ballhatchet describes the historical emergence of the term “lock hospital” in his chapter on “Lock Hospitals and Lal Bazaars” in Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj. He writes that the term goes back to eighteenth century London where lock hospitals, as the name suggests, were literally prisons-cum-hospitals in which lepers were forcibly confined. In the nineteenth century it was accepted that patients suffering from venereal disease would be locked up until they were cured, “and it was invariably understood that these patients would be women prostitutes” (11).
58 IOR, L/MIL/7/13906.
to ply her trade.\textsuperscript{59} Most of these women are “unlicensed prostitutes” practicing what is described in official reports as “illicit/clandestine” prostitution. From an official point of view, however, it was often impossible to determine if a woman was a registered prostitute, especially after registration became voluntary after 1890. As one official puts it: “... these women who came in with the Duke of Wellington’s Regiment suffer severely [from venereal disease], although according to their ... report book they had been frequently and recently inspected. My opinion is that some substitution and impersonation must have been resorted to” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{60} Most of these reports end on a typical note of official frustration like this one from 1889: “A number of women ... practice their calling with impunity ... and refuse to attend hospital. [They] cohabit with soldiers and are well-known to be diseased [and] I can do nothing [about it].”\textsuperscript{61}

I would like to conclude this section with a rather singular example of overt female resistance. This is an excerpt from an Annual Report on the workings of a lock-hospital, dated 1887:

“some women were apprehended by the police, brought up for inspection, found diseased, but as they would not register their names, were turned out of Cantonment limits where they actually lived ... This action [of the police] was made the subject of a report by the women in question to the Commissioner at Simla who ... ruled that it was illegal, that [the police] had no authority to apprehend women on suspicion ... From this it will be seen how ambiguous the authority is regarding the control of prostitution by unlicensed women ... how difficult the duty is that [the police] are expected to perform and ... the risk they would incur in arresting a woman within the ruling of the law.”\textsuperscript{62}

This was the only example, and therefore worth quoting at some length, that I found of actual voiced resistance, if I can even call it that, where the women concerned applied for colonial legal sanction of their act of transgression. It seems all the more surprising because of its status as a written complaint, suggesting a degree of literacy on the part of these women (or the person applying on their behalf).

\textsuperscript{59} IOR, L/MIL/7/13823.
\textsuperscript{60} IOR, L/MIL/7/13906.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
Who Do I Speak For?: Some Thoughts on Agency

I do not wish to presume or by presuming, valorize a voice of resistance on the part of the woman-prostitute. I am well aware of the dangers of attempting to "speak for" an/other. I recognize that a politics of advocacy is finally a limited and limiting one. Advocacy can be transformed into a facile process of information-retrieval where the object of investigation becomes a reified ventriloquist's version of the investigator's will to "truth." And it becomes all the more problematic when the object of our discourse is the Indian female prostitute in turn-of-the-century British India for she is, to use Gayatri Spivak's phrase, a "sexed subaltern."

The Subaltern Studies collective, a group of historians in India, Britain and Australia, borrow from the political writings of Antonio Gramsci his notion of the subaltern to define their own anti-elitist historical project of writing Indian history "from below." They employ the term subaltern to designate various forms of subordination that have to do with race, caste, ethnicity, class, gender, and so on. They oppose their own writing to a form of Indian historiography that might present a colonialist or nationalist perspective. Their counter-historical project is to "rethink Indian colonial historiography from the perspective of the discontinuous chain of peasant insurgencies during the colonial occupation." Members of the collective read historical accounts against the grain in order to recuperate from and for history a subaltern, usually peasant consciousness. Gayatri Spivak very famously described their practice of restoring agency to the lost or elided subjects of history as a "strategic use of positive essentialism."

Although Spivak expresses considerable sympathy for the Subaltern Studies project, she questions their construction of the subaltern as merely another unproblematic field of knowing. In "Can the Subaltern Speak" she draws a distinction between two kinds of representation: "representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy." These two senses of

63 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," 79.
64 See Ranjit Guha, ed. Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society, vols. 1-6 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982-89).
65 Spivak, In Other Worlds (New York: Methuen, 1987), 205.
66 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," 70.
representation, as political and tropological, are “related but irreducibly discontinuous” she says, which means that any political articulation of subaltern agency is always an act of reading. Through her own act of reading subaltern agency she produces a critique of the Subaltern Studies project that works on, at least, two registers. Spivak argues that the Subaltern Studies group which seeks to derive a subaltern voice or will from the text of peasant rebellion, and more generally, retrieve the effaced trace of the subaltern subject, offers a male dominant model of agency that cannot accommodate the woman, the sexed subaltern. Secondly, and even more radically, she questions the very presumption of making the subaltern the subject/object of her own history: can the subaltern, in fact, speak?

Spivak’s study raises all kinds of questions about the ethico-political aspects of a politics of “speaking for” she who cannot speak, the putative sexed subaltern. It is beyond the scope of my chapter to examine the ramifications, both moral and philosophical, of her analysis. As one critic has suggested, Spivak’s work on sexed subalternity can be deconstructively read, and was perhaps intended to be read, as a species of Socratic irony: a persistent questioning that provokes the law to speak, “ruling that of course the subaltern can speak and in the same breath contradicting its statement with vivid acts of foreclosure.” If this disruptive reading does not suit, then Spivak’s prescription would be to locate the point of fracture in the value system and intervene, through careful reading, there.

In this chapter I have attempted, through the very act of reading itself, to make available the differing mechanisms of resistance, to show how through various means like substitution, disguise, and even in one instance legal protest, the woman-prostitute could manipulate even if she could not actually overcome the ideological circumstances of her situation. It would be impossible to determine how effective a means of resistance or circumvention such acts are, since one can always argue that some of these subversive performers are simply perpetuating the cycle of sexual oppression set in motion by the great colonial legal machinery. For what it is worth, I choose to read resistance with the assumption that my reading will open up, maybe just a little bit, the foreclosed archival text of female resistance. In the face of a dehumanizing, exploitative, economistic and

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67 Mark Sanders, “Postcolonial Reading.”
unethical colonial politics of sexual control, such a reading is not only necessary but also ultimately inevitable.

**Conclusions: National and Sexual Allegories**

I would like to end as I began by evoking once again the allegory of the British nation at the turn-of-the-century. One of the definitions of allegory offered in an earlier chapter of this dissertation describes allegory as a symbolic narrative that is expressive of some truth or generalization about the human condition. Allegory is "the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions, of truths or generalizations about human existence." It is precisely in this sense that fin-de-siècle British nationalism becomes allegory. British nationalism becomes allegory when, in order to establish the epistemological and ethical parameters of its own "truth"ful project, it expresses itself by means of such symbolic sexual themes, figures, and tropes like those of the "pornotropics," pathologically contagious sexualities, diseased native women, at-risk soldiers, hyper-virile and hyper-militarized masculinities. All of these themes, figures, and tropes are "fictions" in the sense in which the "fictional" is not so much a product of falsity or falsehood as much as it is a function of cultural inventiveness, a culture's ability to imaginatively invent and tell itself convincing stories. It is thus by means of these symbolic fictions that the allegory of British nationalism (and national-imperialism) self-consciously expresses those cultural "truths" and generalizations which validate and stabilize its own ideological existence.

In this chapter, then, I have tried to show how the idiom of British nationalism necessarily involves a complicitous allegorization of racial, sexual, and gender identities. From the vast archival array of late-nineteenth century historical narratives about this complicity I have chosen to read an exemplary handful, and from these in turn I have selected to explore only the fraught narrative of one historical performance, that of the Indian female prostitute’s. What I would like to suggest now, as I come to the end of my narrative about prostitute performers and their vexed archival narrators, is that the claims to masculine preeminence and pedagogical authority offered by British national and

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imperial allegories are thrown into disarray by the Indian prostitute’s counter-allegorical performance of resistance and disruption. When she refuses to remain imprisoned in lock-hospitals, when she repeatedly escapes medical and military surveillance, when she refuses to testify against other “diseased” prostitutes and will not allow her body to be appropriated for the sake of spiritual or medical absolution, the woman-prostitute herself becomes the agent of an ironic, parabasistic allegory of otherness.70 Her refusal to remain contained within or be explained away by a self-righteous, highly indecorous sexual colonial structure denotes the native woman’s unwillingness to be assimilated into any kind of a symbolic allegory of empire or nation-hood. Instead, her disruptive performances signify her accession to another kind of allegorical power: allegory as ironic parabasis.

Throughout this chapter there are at work two implicit allegorical codes. The first is that of the symbolic, even “fictional,” allegory of the British nation and empire. This allegory actualizes itself through the deliberate and repetitive evocation of healthy, not-so-healthy, or downright unhealthy sexualities. Its epistemological and ethical burden involves the harnessing of varied sexual energies for the sake of a national and imperial technology of power. I have already noted the paradox inherent in this allegory. The paradox of the native female prostitute as “necessary evil” is that while she signifies the expenditure of proper sexual energy, i.e. heterosexual energy, her bodily demeanor suggests improper, non-productive, diseased sexuality. Now, the second allegorical code derives directly from the female prostitute’s parabasistic performance of sexual resistance and disaffection. Her allegory of sexual dystopia and parabasis clashes with the earlier imperial allegorical code of sexual production. What this clash yields is not so much the triumph and subsequent defeat of one code by the other but rather the inability of one code to contain the other or stave off its covert (and not so covert) performances of “otherness.” Implicit in the clash of the two codes is perhaps the hidden knowledge of colonial guilt, itself attributable to the abjection of the colonized.

69 http://www.stas.net/poems/allegory.
70 See my Introduction for a definition of allegory as “parabasis” and “irony.”
"[All] discourse is improvisation, both an entry into and a deflection of existing strategies of representation. The improviser never encounters the theoretical origins of signification, whether they lie in pure presence or absence. All artists enter into representation that are already under way and make a place for themselves in relation to these representations which are, we might add, never fully coordinated ... This task is shaped by the fact that the improviser is himself in part the product of these prior representations. But only in part, for were there a perfect fit, there would no longer be that craving for reality that forever generates ironic submission and disguised revolt."


This chapter is all about improvisers and impersonators and how impersonators become improvisers, of meanings, actions, and realities. I am especially interested in those strategies of deflection, accommodation, and subversion that imperial improvisers adopt when they enter into a discourse of disguised otherness. Such entries are marked by the simultaneous desire for and the disavowal of difference. Throughout this chapter I consciously link the two terms "improviser" and "impersonator," and their respective performances — improvisation and impersonation — in an effort to understand the connection between improvised realities and the impersonated subjects and agents of these realities. And what is the relation between improvisers, impersonators and allegory? Insofar as the idea of representation or mimesis is central to allegory, if allegory is understood to mean the presentation of Reality, then acts of improvisation and impersonation are allegorical in as much as they have to do with the mimetic project of representing realities. In other words, mimesis or the representation of reality is the very foundation for comprehending the link between allegory, impersonation and improvisation.

Most of this chapter, then, is concerned with the allegorization of practices of impersonation and improvisation in the context of colonial detective spy fiction. It should, however, be noted at this point that the final direction in which this chapter
moves questions the notion of reality itself, and therefore the viability of allegorical improvisations and impersonations. From my preceding discussions of allegory in this dissertation it should be clear that allegory's relation to reality is a vexed one. Allegory's attempts to represent meaningful Reality inevitably reveal the failure, even the impossibility of ever recovering meaning or Reality. As my second chapter illustrated, for instance, official Jubilee allegories constitute and deploy a pedagogical authority for representing the power of the British Empire. But the attempt to anchor this narrative in commodities, the Queen, and commodified royalty, causes the official allegory of empire to come undone. The very attempt to construct a meaningful structure reveals the failure of structure itself. It is this conception of allegory and representation, in general, and allegorical improvisations and impersonations in particular, as structures that are built upon their own undoing (to paraphrase Stephen Greenblatt) that I wish to investigate in this chapter.

In the previous chapters I use a certain notion of "allegory" (derived from my reading of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur) as symbolic narrative to frame my discussion of British colonial and nationalist discourses of race, sexuality and gender in the fin-de-siècle. I describe in those chapters the production of predetermined allegorical codes of meaning, such as the code of royal ceremony and pageantry that evoked the symbolic power of the British monarchy, and the nationalist/imperialist codes of masculinity, virility and heterosexuality, which dictated the governance of empire. In this chapter I will argue that, within the normative allegory of turn-of-the-century public performances of imperial identity, the figure of the disguised, perpetually wandering, colonial agent in contemporary spy narratives is a particularly troubling one. At a time when the idea of Empire had come to increasingly depend upon certain predetermined, very publicly performed codes of meaning, the colonial agent's secretive, not-so-public forays into "nativeness" in espionage narratives of the time complicated and at the same time threatened to expose the allegorical fiction of colonial stability and unmediated power.¹ I

¹ The "codes of meaning" I refer to here are the ones I mentioned earlier: codes of royal ceremony and pageantry which aggressively literalized the power of the British Empire as the (putative) power of the British monarchy, and nationalist/imperialist codes of masculinity, hyper-virility, militancy, and heterosexuality. Toward the end of the nineteenth-century these codes supplied sundry statesmen, myth-makers and narrators of Empire with a handy vocabulary to talk about a whole slew of subjects ranging from imperial magnanimity, and the traditional authority of Victoria, to the desirability (or undesirability as
believe that the male imperial body in disguise performs that other, more ambiguous allegorical function: it speaks otherwise (or "other"wise); as an/other body it problematizes the authority of the regulated, heterosexual, official colonial subject. The disguised colonial agent becomes allegorical improviser vis-à-vis his impersonation of otherness. His script of collapsible identities and doubled bodies gives rise to interests, desires, and strategies that conflict with and yet prove curiously useful for, official colonial structures of power.

Kipling and Mason in Context

The narratives I consider here, Rudyard Kipling's short stories "Miss Youghal's Sais" and "The Bronckhorst Divorce-Case," his novel Kim, and A.E.W. Mason's romantic adventure novel The Four Feathers, were all published between 1888 and 1902. The two Kipling short stories appeared in the 1888 collection entitled Plain Tales From the Hills. Some of the stories in this collection had been published earlier in the Lahore-based, Anglo-Indian newspaper, the Civil and Military Gazette where Kipling himself worked for a while as assistant editor. Early reviews of Plain Tales both in the Anglo-Indian press as well as in metropolitan newspapers back home, lauded Kipling's "instinctive knowledge" of native life and his ability to "lift the veil from a state of society so different from ours" (The Times, March 25th, 1890). The famous reviewer Andrew Lang acclaimed Kipling as a master "Indian story-teller" who wrote with a "freshness, wit, and knowledge of things little known – the dreams of opium smokers ... the passions of Pathans and wild Border tribes, the magic which is yet a living force in India." 2 With the publication of Kim towards the end of 1901, Kipling's canonization as

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the case may be) of healthy, heterosexual national and colonial subjects. By the turn-of-the-century, the whole enterprise of Empire came to depend upon these publicly performed codes of meaning as a way of sustaining the illusion of a grand institution that was already entering into its death throes. See David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977" (in The Invention of Tradition, eds. E.J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Christopher Lane, The Ruling Passion (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), and Bernard Cohn, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) for more on this. Also see Chapters II and III of this dissertation for my own analysis of these codes and their imbrication in, and transformation into, British imperial and national allegories.

the authoritative teller of Indian tales was complete.

What is striking about Kipling’s engagement with India and its encoding in the popular media of the time, is the way in which he arrogantly assumes the mantle of “otherness,” choosing to speak for and about the “other” from the place of “otherness,” without the slightest degree of ambivalence or discomfort. The self-other difference remains unmediated in Kipling’s colonial fiction; it becomes a function of a facile process of information retrieval about the native “other” whereby the “other” simply becomes a version of the “self.” I do not wish to rehearse the principal tenets of recent Kipling criticism, which have for the most part centered around his violating, violent, ahistorical vision of empire, and his vulgar celebration of all things imperial (his jingoism, in other words). What I do wish to do is explore the narrative internalization of “otherness” which transforms the Kipling texts I discuss in this chapter into allegories of counterfeit performance. The media’s valorization of Kipling’s ability to speak for and about the other, their celebration of his heady power of ventriloquism, is sanctioned by those fictional performers of otherness who proliferate in his short stories and novels. My concern in this chapter is with two of these performers in particular, Inspector Strickland of the British Indian police and Kim, an invaluable player of the Great Game. To these two I will add a third, Harry Feversham from A. E. W. Mason’s novel The Four Feathers.

Alfred Mason’s The Four Feathers resembles Kipling’s narratives in that it, too, employs the conventions of the romance/adventure novel and spy-thriller to tell the story of a young man’s attempts to redeem himself of the charge of military cowardice. The Four Feathers first appeared as a short story, “The Coward,” in the Illustrated London News before being serialized in the Cornhill Magazine from January to November of 1901. As Roger Green has pointed out in his almost hagiographic account of Mason’s life and work, the almost immediate success of the story led to its publication in volume form in 1902: “Its reception surpassed that of any of the earlier books, and it was at once realized that Mason had produced a classic.”³ Apparently, of all the tributes paid his book the one Mason cherished the most was the famous explorer Roald Amundsen’s declaration that “it was his Bible and that he wouldn’t be without it anywhere!”

Amundsen carried the book with him on both his Arctic and Antarctic expeditions.\(^4\) Again, *The Four Feathers* sold nearly a million copies in England in the first score years after its publication, and three films based on the book were made during Mason’s lifetime, testifying to the novel’s enduring appeal amongst its Edwardian readers.

Although the contexts in which they were writing were very different – Kipling wrote in colonial India, for a primarily Anglo-Indian readership, while Mason’s books enjoyed wide circulation in the home country and were written for a metropolitan audience who were fed a steady diet of African romances by authors like Henry Rider Haggard – Mason and Kipling’s writings describe and appeal to a common imaginative “geography of adventure.”\(^5\) Perhaps the reason for the tremendous success of Kipling and Mason’s adventure narratives is their authoritative construction of “other” realities, of “other” spaces, geographies, and bodies. The power of these constructions relies on realistic authorial descriptions of “other” spaces, geographies, and bodies as well as realistic fictitious performances of otherness.

Kipling, as I have already mentioned, was lauded for his realistic portrayal of India and Indians. Mason’s description of the Sudan, particularly the prison of Omdurman where the central action of *The Four Feathers* takes place, were so vivid that the novel’s readers were impressed by the author’s ability to recapture every aspect of his own experience in the Sudan “and turn them into word-pictures which call up living scenes even to those who have never seen the original.”\(^6\) What I find interesting about these scenes of realistic representation is that they derive much of their power from and are actually conveyed through a series of improvisory, impersonated acts of otherness, acts which I will shortly reveal to be utterly specious and, in fact, fictitious. The “reality” of Kipling and Mason’s fiction, never doubted or constructed as fictitious by their

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\(^4\) Ibid., 91.

\(^5\) The phrase is Richard Phillips’. According to Phillips the “geography of adventure” may be described as “a cultural space opened up by European encounters with the non-European world and by European narratives of encounter with the non-European world” (13). See Phillips’ *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (London: Routledge, 1997) for more on this.

\(^6\) Roger Green, *A. E. W. Mason*, 89. In early 1901 Mason traveled to Egypt in the early part of 1901. He visited Alexandria, Cairo, and Khartoum where he was a guest of the Governor of the Sudan, Sir Reginald Wingate. It was from Khartoum that he visited Omdurman, the “Sacred City of the Dervishes (sic).” The city was in ruins as a result of the defeat of the Khalifa’s army at the hands of the British during the Battle of Omdurman (1898). Omdurman and the Khalifa’s infamous prison the House of Stone provide the backdrop for Harry Feversham’s tale of redemption and deception in *The Four Feathers*. 
metropolitan and, in the case of Kipling, Anglo-Indian readers, is very much a product of the improvised and impersonated stories that Kipling and Mason’s heroes tell. Their realities are in fact unrealities but nonetheless powerfully suggestive for that. I will argue that while Kim, Strickland, and Harry Feversham are adept improvisers and impersonators of a certain kind of reality, the very dubiety of their actions reveals the always already altered and fictional nature of these realities.

**Allegory and Disguise**

Angus Fletcher, among other theorists of allegory, has pointed out that the nature of allegory is always “to speak otherwise”: it “says one thing and means another.” This is etymologically sound since Fletcher is, of course, drawing upon the resonance of allegory’s Greek root *allos* which means “other.” As I have argued elsewhere allegory’s power is precisely this doubleness. In this chapter I am interested in exploring the doubling of the allegorical text through the performative trope of disguise and the fantasy of cross-cultural dressing which itself involve the doubling of several texts. In Kipling and Mason’s writings disguise is a prominent trope which brings together notions of performance, mimicry and power. The performance of authenticity, the improvisation and impersonation of authenticity – which is, after all, what disguise is all about – whereby Kipling and Mason’s imperialist white heroes assume native disguise and “pass over” to the “other” side, raise some important questions. These have to do with the relations of power and knowledge that govern colonial society, the surveillance and manipulation of racial and geographical borders, identities, and bodies, and the semiotics of disguise itself. Very simply then I will ask of each of these texts, what sort of disguises are these? Is there a desire for disguise operating in these texts? And finally, why is the political project of information retrieval inextricably tied to and expressed through the idiom of disguise, an idiom which is itself torn between deflecting and accommodating all sorts of desires (desire for disguise, desire for the other, desire for information, and so on)?

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Important to my analysis of how the allegory of masking consolidates and at the same time renders unstable notions of colonial subjectivity, power and authority, is the richly diverse theoretical field that attempts to integrate performativity and historicism. My own work situates performativity within a particular literary, historical, and cultural context, namely the fascination with “oriental” costume and disguise in late nineteenth/early twentieth century England, and more obviously, in colonial narratives of espionage and spying from the turn-of-the-century.

Homi Bhabha’s work on the production of difference and the performance of colonial identities through the processes of “mimicry” will enable me to interrogate performativity as a function of specifically race- and culture-related anxieties. Bhabha draws upon Foucauldian theories of power and knowledge, as well as certain psychoanalytic theoretical paradigms like Frantz Fanon’s notion of the irrevocably, always-already, split subject of colonialism, to frame his discussion of colonial mimicry. Also, Gail Ching Liang-Low and Parama Roy’s very recent (and incredibly savvy) work on cross-cultural exchanges between India and Britain in the late nineteenth century, also imbricates literary, theoretical, and historical discourses in ways that prove invaluable for the application of theories of performance and performativity to literature. I situate my chapter, both in its methodological sway and discursive reach, alongside these essays that seek to open up and extend the uses of performance theory in the context of particular historical and social formations. I also attempt to reengage the central terms of some of these theoretical debates by reading allegorically, and therefore disruptively or parabasistically, the myriad textual performance of colonial reality.

“Performance” and “Performativity”: Some Definitions

As this chapter is concerned with the politics of performance and performativity, I begin by defining my use of the terms “performance” and “performativity.” Performance, at the simplest level, is an act that actually (as opposed to potentially) carries out a purpose. The performative it appears is a much more complex thing. It spans the theatrical and the philosophical; it underscores the “obliquities among meaning, being,
and doing" (emphasis in original). The language philosopher J. L. Austin distinguishes between two kinds of utterances, the constative and the performative – the former being statements that merely describe without "doing," while the latter enact in the very moment of speaking, the action being described (like "I promise" or "I dare"). The performative can be understood and is only intelligible within social and semiotic matrices. Judith Butler implicitly reorientates these linguistic codes to gender in her examination of the conjunction of performance with performativity.

In Bodies That Matter Judith Butler seems intent on separating the performative from the performance. She argues against the reduction of performativity to the level of performance:

"In no sense can it be concluded that that part of gender that is performed is therefore the 'truth' of gender; performance as bounded; 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'; further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performance to performativity would be a mistake." (234)

Performativity is tied to the "reiteration" or "citationality" of certain social norms, what Butler elsewhere refers to as "culturally intelligible grids" like that of an "idealized or compulsory heterosexuality." Gender identity is produced through heterosexual and heterosexist grids, intersecting matrices of power and discourse that "effectively produce and regulate the intelligibility of those concepts ['person,' 'sex,' or a 'sexuality']." The construction of seemingly coherent sexualities conceals the gaps, discontinuities, and general incoherencies that "run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender." Butler sees in the performative a principle of effective subversion, inversion, or displacement, within the overdetermined terms of constructed identity. The performative can be a parodic device

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9 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990), 135. Hereafter cited as GT.
11 Judith Butler, GT, 135-136.
as when the statement “I now pronounce you man and wife” (to borrow an example of the performative that J. L. Austin uses) is directed toward a pair of women lovers. The social context here changes our understanding and reading of an already-constructed heterosexual convention. The performative “I now pronounce you man and wife” thus destabilizes dominant notions of gender and social identities: what does it mean to be married, female, male?

My use of the two terms “performance” and “performativity” owes something to, but also departs from, Butler’s theories of gender and performance. Butler’s ground-breaking work on performance and the troubled idea of gender as materially performative, and the varied responses to it, have enabled a powerful interrogation of the way identities and behaviors are performed “iteratively through complex citational processes.”

12 According to Butler, gender identity is not a stable, unified, coherent thing; it is rather “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (emphasis in original). 13 In a follow-up essay to Gender Trouble Butler makes explicit this connection between performance, the performative, and gender identity. Gender, she says, is a “constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode of belief ... [gender] is real only to the extent that it is performed.”

14 As critics have pointed out, the point Butler is trying to make is not that gender is just an act, but that gender is materially performative: “it is real only to the extent that it is performed.”

15 Pushing even further, Butler goes on to argue that gender identity, and by extension I would assume other kinds of identities as well, like racial, sexual and classed identities, are not only performative but also ontologically insecure, even fictive. There is nothing interior, no interior truth, to the performing “I.”

My purpose in this chapter is not to undo the vexing binary of interior-exterior which perhaps cannot be undone at all but has to be constantly deferred; rather, my aim will be to contextualize performance within a specific set of material and historical

12 Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds. Performance and Performativity, 2.
13 Judith Butler, GT, 140.
relations. A Butlerian performance of gender while immensely provocative, remains ambiguous about, what Elin Diamond refers to in a different context as, “the materiality and historical density of performance.” Butler does address the idea of materiality. In Bodies That Matter she revisits the category of sex and the problem of materiality in order to interrogate the process whereby sex itself becomes the norm. She says, “I [want] to work out how a norm actually materialises a body, how we might understand the materiality of the body to be not only invested with a norm, but in some sense animated by a norm, or contoured by a norm.” All of Butler’s varied engagements with the sexed body, the queer body, the body in drag, the body in theatrical performance, may be read as her attempts to contextualize the body in materiality. Yet the relation between materiality and any kind of historicality remains unclear or inarticulated in Butler’s many discussions about the body. Is the material body a historical body as well? While there is no doubt that the body is material, I think it valuable to ask how a reading of this materiality might be inflected or altered by an understanding of a specific body’s specific historicality. The body’s performance at different historical moments and within different historical contexts yields insights into how historical situatedness plays a large part in determining materiality.

To pose an intervention into Butlerian performance theories of bodily materiality, I will ask: how does the very real, racialized material body of the disguised colonial agent, riddled with historical ambiguity, anxiety, desire, complicate our understanding of the body in performance as a purely material body? Performance in this case cannot be reduced to the merely material. The colonial impersonator’s body is also a specifically historical one. Its performance has to be understood in a historical context, as it intersects with late-nineteenth century histories of national myth-making, racialized subjectivities, bodies, and classes, and the historical creation of a form of “sartorial orientalism” in the fin-de-siècle. By way of providing a point of departure from Butlerian performance politics, I now turn to Homi Bhabha’s observations on mimicry as a strategy of performance in colonialist discourse. By using Bhabha as my point of departure I will,

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16 Ibid., 5.
17 Extracted from “Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler,” interview by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, London, 1993. Extracts from the interview may be found at http://www.theory.org.uk/but-intl.htm. For the full text see Radical Philosophy 67 (summer 1994).
first of all, be able to investigate the very conditions (historical, theoretical, cultural) that produce performance, and second, that which gets anxiously displaced, subsumed or sanctioned, in the myriad processes of performing "other" identities.

**Bhabha’s Performative: Introducing the Mimic Man**

One of Bhabha’s earlier essays, “Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” (1983), theorizes power in psychoanalytic terms: “The construction of colonial discourse is ... a complex articulation of the tropes of fetishism – metaphor and metonymy – and the forms of narcissistic and aggressive identification available to the Imaginary ... One has then a repertoire of conflictual positions that constitute the subject in colonial discourse. The taking up of any one position, within a specific discursive form, in a particular historical conjuncture, is then always problematic – the site of both fixity and fantasy.”

The Lacanian idea of the Imaginary and the Freudian myth of fetishism are evoked in the above passage to explain and problematize the discursive production of the colonial subject. The colonial subject becomes “the site of both fixity and fantasy,” who is at “once other and knowable,” within the interactional political field of asymmetrical and differential relations that constitute colonial discourse. Native resistance in this account is limited to the passive act of returning the colonizer's disciplining gaze, his “look of surveillance.” A later essay of Bhabha’s, “Of Mimicry and Man” (1984), extends the grounds of the earlier discussion by locating in the idea of “mimicry” and the “mimic man,” the site of ambivalence that can radically disrupt, or at least has the potential to destabilize, the entire enterprise of colonialism.

The mimic man, the “subject in process,” does not simply capitulate to the colonizer’s narcissistic desire to identify and reproduce himself in the colonized, but rather menaces or challenges colonial authority by insidiously rewriting the original normative script, through repetition and difference, to produce an imperfect double, a parody of what the colonizer originally desired. Colonial mimicry, Bhabha tells us, “is

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18 Homi Bhabha, “Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” (reprinted in The Location of Culture. New York: Routledge, 1994), 204..
the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as the subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite (emphasis in original)." The discourse of mimicry is thus "constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference ... mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal." Colonial mimicry performs a two-fold process of displacement: it is both "a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power," as well as the native's "inappropriate" and parodic imitations of this discourse which have the effect of undermining the "'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" of colonialism. The colonized "other," instead of simply serving as a refractory foil to the colonizer's narcissistic, self-consolidating desire, repudiates through the strategy of mimicry, the dominant colonialist script even as he appears to adhere to and obey colonial authority.

Bhabha's theory of mimicry is important to my reading of Kipling and Mason's narratives of displacement and "othering" because it will enable me to foreground the racial and cultural anxieties related to colonial identity that circulate in these texts, in the form of the defining trope of native impersonation and disguise. What interests me in Bhabha's theory is not so much the construction of the colonial subject (the colonized subject) through the process of mimicry, but the anxieties and preoccupations that accompany the colonizer's will to disguise, the need that he -- and I am deliberately using the masculine pronoun here, for this trope is almost relentlessly gendered masculine in these texts -- feels to impersonate the native. The fear of going native is, of course, a dominant thematic in colonial discourse; then why is there this almost paradoxical emphasis on the necessity for native impersonation?

My consideration of the trope of native impersonation in Kipling and Mason's fiction will shift the focus from Bhabha's hybridized colonial subject, the mimic man who is "not quite/not white," to the colonial observer who puts on native disguise to infiltrate the ranks of the "other," thereby assuming the "posture of authenticity" and performing the role of native informant. In her compelling essay on Richard Burton's performing or miming of nativeness in the late-nineteenth century, Parama Roy has

19 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 86.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
pointed out that the paradigm shift from native mimic men subverting the imperial endeavor, to “knowing” colonial agents miming nativeness for the purpose of containing and countering such subversion, opens up the “Bhabha” text to a set of different possibilities. This, she argues, enables the reformulation of such notions as mimicry, colonial subjectivity, exchange, and power/knowledge relations. I agree with Roy’s convincingly argued conclusion that an engagement with these issues serve to enlarge the original scope of Bhabha’s argument by showing how equally fraught with anxieties is the colonizer's strategy of mimicry as is the native subject’s, thus demonstrating the powerful discursive reach of a concept like “mimicry” in the contestatory field of colonial discourse.\textsuperscript{22} I would, however, like to complicate Roy’s engagement with Bhabha by suggesting that the problem of the disguised body in colonial spy narratives can most properly be understood in explicitly performative terms: how can one body or one, apparently unified, self simultaneously display two “other” distinct bodies or selves? And how is this doubling of the one self/body as two or more selves dependent upon, but also a repudiation of, an already established normative, masculine, compulsorily heterosexual, singular body?\textsuperscript{23}

This “two-body” paradox finds its historical referent in that anxious fin de siècle moment when masculinity, especially imperial masculinity, came to be defined as an acting out of a series of attributes, like Englishness, whiteness, virility, heterosexuality, and militancy. Historically, the closing years of the nineteenth-century were uncertain years in which the consolidation of British rule was accompanied by, on the one hand, increasingly violent British militaristic strategies for containing native insurgency, and on the other, by the vigorous enactment of laws that laid out the codes of behavior according to which British colonial agents were to manage their public and private lives. Debates

\textsuperscript{22} For more on this see Parama Roy’s “Oriental Exhibits: Englishmen and Natives in Burton’s Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah & Meccah” (boundary 2 22:1 1995, 185-210). Hereafter cited as “OE.”

\textsuperscript{23} My reading of the doubled body owes something to Peggy Phelan’s performative analysis, in a very different context, of the archaeological and homphobic cultural politics surrounding the excavation of the Rose Theatre on London’s South Bank. Phelan argues that the discovery of the physical remains of the Rose unearthed not only the ghosts of Oscar Wilde, and Christopher Marlowe, but also that of gay men dying of AIDS. She reads the ruins of the Rose Theatre as an always already doubled architectural body, “a mutating, mobile, and ‘theatrical’ body” that refuses to die, but keeps coming back as the repressed memories of other dead bodies: Wilde’s, Marlowe’s, the countless gay men who will die of AIDS. See Peggy Phelan, “Playing Dead in Stone, Or, When is a Rose Not a Rose?” (in Performance and Cultural Politics, ed. Elin Diamond, 1996).
about Britain’s imperial health and defense came to increasingly center around the issue of masculinity; the state, in other words, of the *male imperial body*. The Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902) raised concerns over the evidence of physical deterioration amongst working-class male recruits, most of whom had to be sent back from South Africa because. A series of domestic and colonial “sex” scandals, like the Oscar Wilde trials, and the case of Hubert Silberrad in Kenya, raised the specter of homosexuality and miscegenation, and exacerbated fears over the nation’s sexual health.\(^{24}\) The urge to both regulate the male body, to prevent it from deteriorating or escaping into sexual and physical deviancy, and to rigorously enact its desirable attributes, was never more intensely felt than at the very moment when the imperial ideal of masculinity was being imperiled and unmade at home and abroad.

At such a time then when the teleological narrative of Empire could only sustain its mythic drive via the surveillance and regulation of its masculine subject, the surreptitiously covered, masked white body of the double agent is especially challenging because it seems to be a *re-action* against that other unmasked normative body. Rather than availing of and enacting this easily recuperable script of normative identity, the figure of the masked imperial mimic man chose to reimagine his body as and in nativeness. Moreover, the very public theatrical space of empire depended upon the spectacular display of powerful male bodies, in combat, in governance, in control; to what extent then is the mimic man’s secretive private forays into the other’s body, an equally spectacular display of power, based as it is upon an aggressive disavowal of difference?

**Inspector Strickland, The Consummate Performer**

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\(^{24}\) The specific circumstance which led to the issuance of the Circular was the case of Hubert Silberrad, an Englishman in Kenya, who refused to pay the customary bride money for a twelve- or thirteen-year old Kenyan girl with whom he had had sexual relations. Scandalized by his behavior his neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Routledge, reported him to the local governor. The British colonial office in London decided that this would be a propitious moment to intervene in the private and sexual lives of their colonial agents. The Crewe Circular was issued in 1909 as a direct result of the Silberrad controversy. The Circular prohibited inter-racial sexual contact between colonial officials (this included soldiers) and the native population. It warned that such contact “would result in scandal and grave discredit in the public service” (Hyam, 183-84). For the full Circular text see Ronald Hyam, “Concubinage and the Colonial Service: the Crewe Circular (1909)”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol 14, May 1986, #3: 170-86. For more on the Hubert Silberrad case see Christopher Lane, *The Ruling Passion* (1995).
“Miss Youghal’s Sais” and “The Bronckhorst Divorce Case” both published in the 1899 collection of Kipling short stories entitled *Plain Tales From the Hills*, center around the singular adventures of Strickland, an Inspector in the British Indian police department who has a penchant for native impersonation. In addition to these two stories Strickland appears in a couple of other stories and also makes a cameo appearance in *Kim*. His unorthodox methods and intimate knowledge of the native underclasses, place him in a position of liminality in relation to the colonial elite. Yet story after story “sanctions his familiarity with native life for the rewards it reaps in the task of law-enforcement,” as Gail Ching-Liang Low notes.\(^{25}\)

The first of the two stories “Miss Youghal’s Sais” introduces Strickland as an expert manipulator of racial and cultural signifiers. We are given a veritable list of native activities and identities that Strickland has mastered and consummately enacted over the years: “He was instituted into the Sat Bhai at Allahabad once ... he knew the Lizard Song of the Sansis ... [he] had mastered the thieves’ patter of the changars ... His crowning achievement was spending eleven days as a faquir or priest in the gardens of Baba Atal at Amritsar”, all of which prove that he has gone “deeper than the skin.”\(^{26}\) The faquir disguise even helps him solve a murder case – the power of disguise is here correlated to the exercise of imperial knowledge.

Knowledge of the native subject, “to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves” serves as Strickland’s raison-d’être,\(^{27}\) is an important constituent of the colonial impulse to power. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* describes how the nexus of power and knowledge operates in Orientalist discourse, generally, and in the colonial context, particularly: “... knowledge of subject races ... is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control.”\(^{28}\) The assumption of native disguise by Strickland brings into play notions of power and knowledge, as it generates information about the native that can then be used


\(^{27}\) Ibid., 25.

to control him. “Natives hated Strickland; but they were afraid of him. He knew too much” (emphasis added).  

In terms of its plot construction and narrative design “Miss Youghal’s Sais” is not immediately concerned with the production of such knowledge on Strickland’s part. While episodic accounts of Strickland’s various disguises abound in the text – all attesting to his skill as manipulator of identities – the story itself revolves around Strickland’s clandestine courtship of Miss Youghal in the face of family disapproval. Assuming the disguise of a “sais,” or native groom, Strickland sets about wooing Miss Youghal. The story ends rather conventionally, when Miss Youghal’s parents, won over by Strickland’s devotion and impressed by the lengths to which he will go in order to court their daughter, give their consent to the marriage. The trope of disguise is thus benignly deployed for the explication and resolution of a romance/marriage plot. “The Bronckhorst Divorce Case,” on the other hand, uses this trope in a quasi-detective plot setting to discredit native witnesses testifying in an English divorce case.

Bronckhorst, a rather “ill-mannered,” coarse, “nasty”  

Englishman, falsely charges another Englishman, Biel, with having an adulterous affair with his wife, and files a criminal case against him. The evidence against Biel “would be entirely circumstantial and native,” provided by Bronckhorst’s native servants. Because natives are naturally given to lying and cheating, these servants, the narrator knowingly tells us, would not hesitate to perjure themselves on the stand for their master. Disguising himself first as a faqir and then as a sweep, Strickland infiltrates Bronckhorst’s household of servants, to uncover the truth. The power of disguise is underlined in the courtroom scene when Strickland reveals himself to the servants who, rendered terrified and fearful by the prospect of what “the Sahib” knows about them, recant their testimony. It is also interesting to note how Kipling represents Strickland’s power in this scene – it resides in language, in his grasp of and command over the native vernacular: “Strickland

29 Kipling, Plain Tales, 27.
30 Ibid., 241.
31 Ibid., 243.
32 Note how the stereotype of the subservient lying native servant is strategically deployed here, along with that other socially-motivated stereotype of the lower-class, sexually licentious, recalcitrant English subject (a problematic national subject at best). The subversive potential implied in the articulation of both these subject positions is contained by the counter-deployment of the disguised colonial agent as normative performer.
whispered a rather coarse vernacular proverb” into one of the servant’s ears, “to the effect that he was abreast of all that was going on.” The white man’s knowledge and his linguistic power, closely related to his powers of disguise, effectively silence the native, and establish the imperial agent as sole arbiter of justice and truth.

**On Translation, Allegory and Performance**

But how real is a linguistic performance of nativeness? How real, in fact, is Strickland’s linguistic power? A short foray into Kipling’s narrative technique might prove useful at this point. Kipling’s use of the native vernacular is hugely problematic. While his novels and short stories are liberally interspersed with Hindusthani words, his use of them is invariably incorrect. When the English characters in his books use Hindusthani words, they remain untranslated, their untranslatability asserting to their status as truth-value. On the other hand, when Indian characters, who are usually servants, speak Hindusthani, their words are laboriously but carelessly translated into a form of “archaic and awkward” pidgin English. This textual practice performs a type of “translation-as-violation” as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes it. The use of pidgin is a horrible violation of the native subject’s consciousness.

If the protean Inspector Strickland’s body can be read as a translated body, or a body in translation, then it may be argued that the “reality” of his power depends upon a series of specious acts of translation – first a sais, then a faqir, subsequently a sweeper, and finally and most spectacularly a white man in native disguise. These performative acts are specious because Strickland’s narrative of triumphant performance is instrumental to the ideology of translation-as-violation. Debates about translation at such high theoretical moments as Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” and Paul de Man’s “Conclusions” (a response to the Benjamin essay), have centered around the idea that the original language, the language that is translated from, is the authoritative language while the translation itself, “instead of resembling the meaning of the original,

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33 Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 246.
35 Spivak says, “Let us call this ensemble of moves – in effect a mark of perceiving a language as subordinate – translation-as-violation.” See her “Imperialism and Sexual Difference” for more on this.
must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language."³⁶ But how can one read "love" in the violent narrative/linguistic encounter between, on the one hand, an imperial tongue, and on the other, the subject-language and the subjects themselves that it appropriates?

Tejaswini Niranjana has pointed out that etymologically the very term "translation" carries with it suggestions of rupture, disruption, and displacement.³⁷ She reads the history of this disruption in the context of British colonialism in India. Niranjana argues that at least from the late-eighteenth century onward translation could be considered a part of colonial and colonialist discourses of Orientalism by virtue of the efforts on the part of the British to gather as much information as they could about their subjects in India (under the indirect rule, at this point, of the East India Company). The prodigious translations of colonial administrators like Sir William Jones, missionaries like William Carey and William Ward, and "historians" like James Mill, were instrumental in authorizing and legitimizing versions of the "Hindu" and/or the "Oriental" for Western audiences. The self-adequate nature of these versions meant that they soon "came to acquire the status of 'truths' even in the countries in which the originals were produced."³⁸ These versions, which constitute a formidable system of representation, participate in colonial practices of subjectification, violating, even erasing, native histories, bodies, and texts.

The connection between allegory and translation should be clear from the above discussion. Translation relies upon notions of representation and reality in the same way that allegory does. But, like allegory, translation also carries with it suggestions of disruption and violence. Translation may be usefully associated with allegory, as indeed it is in Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man's writings. Translators are allegorists and allegorists are translators in that they are both involved in improvising meanings and

³⁷ Tejaswini Niranjana, _Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 8. Hereafter cited as _ST_. Niranjana's study of translation addresses "(a) the problematic of translation that authorizes and is authorized by certain classical notions of representation and reality; and (b) the problematic opened up by the post-structuralist critique of the earlier one, and that makes translation always the "more," or the _supplement_, in Derrida's sense" (8).
³⁸ Tejaswini, Niranjana, _ST_, 33.
constructing realities. Strickland’s body may be read as a body “in translation” and as a body “in allegory.”

Given the inherently complicitous relation between translation, allegory and violating colonial practices, it is not surprising that at the very moment of the encounter between English and Hindi in Kipling’s narratives, the colonial double agent’s translated allegorical performances can only be understood in the context of, perhaps even as a function of imperial violence. Translation is a “species of violation” here, making it impossible to view the original and the translation in Benjaminian terms as “fragments of a greater language.” And Strickland’s performance as translator/allegorist is all the more violating because it appears to be predicated on a series of strangely liminal, disenfranchised subject-positions: sais (groom), sweeper, and faquir (which may be roughly translated to mean “wandering holy man”). I shall return to the specific problem posed by the liminal native subject, who is reappropriated in both Kipling and Mason’s narratives as the hegemonic imperial subject, later in this chapter when I consider Mason’s depiction of the “Darwaysh” in The Four Feathers against Kipling’s portrayal of sundry Indian liminals (the sais, faquir, sweeper) in Kim and the Strickland short stories.

**Kim, the Fledgling Performer**

The rather dubious power of language intersects with the much more concerted power of disguise in Kim through Kim’s various performances of identity. Identity, in fact, becomes very much a matter of negotiation and performance in this novel, thus tying it to the notion of mimicry. As a young, street-wise orphan, Kim keeps company with natives of the lowest kind. He lives “hand in glove with men who led lives stranger than anything Haroun al Raschid dreamed of; and he lived in a life wild as that of the Arabian Nights.”\(^{39}\) The association of Kim’s lifestyle with the Arabian Nights opens up a colonialisst fantasy which, as Benita Parry has pointed out, “transfigures India as the provider of libidinal excitation.”\(^{40}\)

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Kim’s mimicking of nativeness allows him to cross cultural and racial boundaries fluidly although this in no way effects his own authoritative identity as a “sahib.” Kim can talk like a native, swearing and cursing fluently in the vernacular, he can “[squat] as only the natives can,” but the “whiteness” of his blood and the superiority of his racial heritage are continually asserted and reaffirmed in the face of all these instances of multiple mimicry. Although he was “burned black” and spoke English only as a second language, though he “consorted on terms of perfect equality” with his native peers, “Kim was white.” Throughout the narrative the color white functions as a “residual truth,” to use Gail Low’s phrase, which cannot be erased despite Kim’s appearance and behavior. When Kim’s ancestry is revealed upon the production of his baptismal and birth certificates that confirm his status as a white man, color is invoked by Father Victor as the reality behind his appearance.

This almost fetishistic insistence on Kim’s whiteness, betrays a certain anxiety about Kim’s ability to don masks and native costumes. The crisis of identity which purportedly lies at the heart of the novel, is staged around the idea of Kim’s “true” color which is in turn linked to his disguised costumed body. Costumes and clothes are signifiers of racial and cultural differences in the text. Father Bennet thinks that Kim is a native because of his Indian clothes and treats him like a native boy. Father Victor, we are told, is a better reader of signs. He unmask Kim by taking off his outer garments to reveal the whiteness under the native costume. (I will return to the idea of the costume a little later on.) Affirmations of whiteness exist alongside Kim’s cross-cultural performances in order, I believe, to secure for the colonial reader a pleasurable text of fantasy and racial/cultural passing, a narrative that on the one hand celebrates masquerade and disguise but on the other hand, anxiously disavows the racial differences upon which such disguises are predicated. Despite his “negative capability,” and his excursions to the “other” side, Kim is never allowed to forget that he is a “Sahib,” and that “some day, when the examinations are passed, [he] will command natives.”

A crucial distinction is also drawn between Kim’s mimicked performances of native identity and the native’s own imitation of the white man. The character of Babu

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42 Gail Low, *WSBM*, 213.
43 Kipling, *Kim*, 177.
Hurree Chunder functions in the narrative as a stereotype of the effeminate, anglicized Bengali gentleman whose bombastic mimicking of the Englishman turns him into a grotesque caricature of the original. This stereotype is a familiar one in British colonial discourse and was created, I believe, to counter the possibility of native resistance and insurgency that the Babu’s anticolonial and nationalist sentiments constituted. In her book *Colonial Masculinity* Mrinalini Sinha discusses the processes and politics of colonial masculinity through which were constituted two conceptual groups, the “manly Englishman” and the “effeminate Bengali,” in late-nineteenth century India. Sinha traces the historical ordering of colonial masculinity vis-à-vis four distinct colonial controversies: the “white mutiny” against the Ilbert Bill in 1883, the official government response to the Native Volunteer Movement in 1885, the recommendations of the Public Service Commission of 1886, and finally the Indian opposition to the Age of Consent Bill in 1891. Sinha outlines the impact of each of these moments on the construction of reified colonial masculinities whereby a class of “politically self-conscious Indian intellectuals” came to represent a form of “perverted” or “unnatural” masculinity, the antithesis of the “manly Englishman.” The most significant referent for that “odious category designated as ‘effeminate babus’” was the middle-class English-educated, Bengali Hindu male.\(^{44}\)

Kipling’s grotesque depiction of Babu Hurree Chunder corroborates late-nineteenth century stereotypes about the effete Bengali male. The potential disloyalty of this figure, his (perhaps) nationalist, anti-British aspirations, are contained within and displaced as native comicality and caricature. Kipling’s account of the Babu’s very “English” education, which isn’t a “real” education at all but a flawed performance or miming of it, is a study in colonial identity-formation. It is worth quoting this section at some length since it exemplifies the cultural formation of the Babu’s masculinity.

“[He], an M.A. of Calcutta University, would explain the advantages of education [to Kim]. There were marks to be gained by due attention to Latin and Wordsworth’s *Excursion* ... a man might go far, as he himself had done, by strict attention to plays called *Lear* and *Julius Ceaser* ... Still more important than Wordsworth, or the eminent authors Burke and Hare,

\(^{44}\) Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2. I am indebted to Sinha’s account of the formation of British and Indian colonial masculinities at the end of the nineteenth century for my own “against the grain” reading of Babu Hurree Chunder’s character. For more on the complicated, multi-layeredness of the whole discourse of effeminacy and the Bengali male intellectual, see Sinha’s introductory chapter in *Colonial Masculinity*. 
was the art and science of mensuration ... A boy who has passed the examination in these branches ... could, by merely marching over a country with a compass and a level and a straight eye, carry away a picture of that country which might be sold for large sums in coined silver ... To keep count of thousands of paces, Hurree Chunder's experience had shown him nothing more valuable than a rosary of eighty-one or a hundred and eight beads, for 'it was divisible and sub-divisible into many multiples and sub-multiples.'” (163).

What is interesting about this passage is how the Babu, although a flawed performer of Englishness, is also meant to serve as Kim's teacher. Kim has often been read as an "allegory of imperial education in the subcontinent." Most notable among Kim's many educators are Colonel Creighton, Lurgan Sahib, Mahbub Ali, Babu Hurree Chunder and, of course, the lama. To greater or lesser extents these men are responsible for Kim's instruction, his institutional and "real" education. They induct him into the Great Game. But how serviceable a teacher is the Babu? His pedagogical authority is always in doubt, given Kipling's satirical view of his English education. Unlike Creighton, Lurgan, or the lama, whose pedagogical authorities remain indisputable, the Babu is clearly circumscribed by his overdetermined cultural value. We can never take him seriously as a pedagogue because his abilities as a teacher depend upon and are rendered fallible by what we already know about his own impersonated education.

Kipling would have his readers believe that there is something inherently false about the Babu's education, about his very understanding of English texts. His instructive "tip" to Kim about Lear having fewer "historical allusions" than Julius Ceaser (163), is obviously an oversimplified reading, or mis-reading, of English canonical "literary" texts. It is a reductive, adolescent reading, and Kipling's narrative implicitly leads us to conclude that Kim outgrows such readings upon his accession to colonial knowledge at the end of the novel. Although the Babu's narrative and thematic roles are that of instructor, I would argue that Kipling's fictional representation of a cultural/historical formation, that of the weak, effeminate, English-educated Bengali male, transmogrifies the Babu from effective teacher to parodic caricature.

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45 The phrase is Sara Suleri's. See her Rhetoric of English India (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 128. Hereafter cited as REI.
As much as Kim’s success relies upon his performance of disguised Indianness, upon his consummate impersonation and improvisation of “Indian” meanings and realities, the Babú’s failure is a product of his disguised Englishness, his inability as English impersonator and improviser. Babu Hurree Chunder’s imitation of the white man may in fact be read as a function of his desire for the white man’s identity; Kim’s play-acting on the other hand, is described in terms of a game, a pleasurable, delightful game. Pleasure in disguise is, moreover, produced as the white man’s natural prerogative and racial privilege as in this scene in which Kim, along with a native boy, enact a variety of disguises for Lurgan: “The Hindu child played [the] game clumsily. That little mind ... could not temper itself to enter another’s soul; but the demon in Kim woke up and sang with joy as he put on the changing dresses and changed speech and gesture therewith.”

The colonizer can perform nativeness better than the native himself.

Both Kim and my next novel Mason’s The Four Feathers are, among other things, about the political and administrative problems of controlling vast areas of land. The colonial anxiety associated with the exercise of power, and the maintenance and surveillance of geographical borders as well as potentially insurgent native subjects, is staged in Kim in the organization of the Secret Service and the elaborate Great Game. Critics have noted how it is through the collecting and collating of information about India’s roads, rivers, natives and customs, that the Ethnological Survey makes available to the colonial government that intelligence which is essential to the proper exercise of British power. And it is the “little sahib” Kim, that consummate performer and mimic of nativeness, who can cross racial and geographical borders, and fluidly pass himself as any of India’s many peoples, thus gaining access to India’s secrets and putting them “at the disposal of a benevolent Raj.” Harry Feversham’s espionage activities in Mason’s novel The Four Feathers, are more explicitly related to Britain’s militaristic desire for territorial control of the Sudan. Feversham travels through Egypt in the guise of a Darwaysh (dervish), gathering information about the anti-colonial resistance movement. Although within the confines of the novel’s immediate plot and action, the question as to

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46 Kipling, Kim, 159.
47 See Gail Low’s White Skins/Black Masks and Benita Parry’s “The Contents and Discontents of Kipling’s Imperialism” for more on this.
48 Parry, “The Contents and Discontents of Kipling’s Imperialism,” 54.
whether Feversham's information will be made directly available to the British
Intelligence Office remains unaddressed (even unimportant), the conclusion leaves us in
no doubt as to the institutional value and pertinency of this information. At the end of the
novel General Feversham, Harry's father, reveals that his son is engaged in writing an
authoritative history of the Anglo-Egyptian war of 1882. Harry, we are told, will do a
superb job because "he knows the ground ... he was in the bazaars, he saw the under side
of it" (398). This is of course a reference to Feversham's disguised adventures in the
Sudan. Harry was not only present at the war but he "understands" it as noone else can,
because of his intimate acquaintance with the "underside" of it, and so his writings will
constitute an invaluable resource of for colonial knowledge.

A Short Aside on Liminality

The narrative of Harry Feversham's adventures powerfully and sub-textually
invoke Sir Richard Burton, the famous English adventurer and cross-cultural
impersonator whose journeys are recorded in a two-volume travel book, the *Personal
Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (1855). Feversham's assumption
of the Darwaysh disguise might have been modeled on Burton's description of the
Darwaysh as a suitably eccentric and unregulated/transgressive figure in the Islamic
world: "No character in the Moslem world is so proper for disguise as that of the
Darwaysh ... [he is] the chartered vagabond ... In the hour of imminent danger, he has
only to become a maniac, and he is safe; a madman in the East, like a notably eccentric
character in the West, is allowed to say or do whatever the spirit directs." This
description is in keeping with the representation of the "dervish" in the novel as a darkly
fanatical, strangely liminal people. The literal-figural space of Darwaysh identity allows
Feversham to reinvent and rework his own identity as both voyeur-spy and native
Muslim subject, just as his noteworthy predecessors Inspector Strickland and Kim
reimagined subject-liminality in their own white bodies.

It is significant, I think, that Strickland, Kim, and Harry Feversham can only

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49 Richard Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (New York: Dover
reimagine themselves in positions of native liminality. In the context of India, there were
certain groups of people in colonial India, like sanyasis, faqirs, dacoits, entertainers,
herders, who seemed to defy the prescribed social order by constantly wandering beyond
the boundaries imposed by colonial law. Bernard Cohn’s *Colonialism and Its Forms of
Knowledge* offers a reading of “liminals” and the particular problem they posed for the
colonial administration in India. Cohn argues that these liminal figures constituted a very
real epistemological problem for the British. Special instrumentalities of
power/knowledge such as the use of native informants, the creation of special
commissions (the Thagi and Dacoity Department was formed as early as 1835 to gather
and collate information about thugs, a category of robbers accused of a form of ritual
murder of travelers), were constructed to “provide the criteria by which whole groups
could be stigmatized as criminal” and could therefore be *known* if not controlled.\(^50\) A
form of criminal ethnography that categorized and identified various liminal groups as
criminal “types” took gradual shape over the course of the nineteenth-century. These
were groups of people who defied social categorization and thus resisted classification
under colonial instrumentalities of control and knowledge.

The figure of the Darwaysh, the disguise Feversham favors in *The Four Feathers*,
presents a similar problem for colonial epistemology. The attractiveness of this figure, at
least for a social outcast like Feversham,\(^51\) derives perhaps from its curiously mobile,
transformative, unregulatable cultural identity. Richard Burton recognized this aspect of
Darwaysh identity in his wanderings through Egypt. According to Burton, the mutability
of Darwaysh identity allows it to be “assumed by all ranks, ages, and creeds.” The
Darwaysh is “allowed to ignore ceremony and politeness, as one who ceases to appear
upon the stage of life; he may pray or not, marry or remain single as he pleases, be
respectable in cloth of frieze as in cloth of gold, and no one asks him … Why he comes
here? Or Wherefore he goes there?”\(^52\)

Burton’s understanding of Darwaysh identity as ever fluid and unregulatable, and


\(^{51}\) An explanation of Feversham’s social marginalization follows in the next section. Suffice it to say at this
point that Feversham’s marginality, the social ostracism he is subjected to as a result of his pacifism, is
central to an understanding of why he chooses the Darwaysh disguise.

therefore eminently approvable, owes something to the cultural construction of the Darwaysh as eccentric Sufi mystics. The Darwaysh were followers of the famous thirteenth-century Sufi mystic Jalal-ad Din Rumi. That popular Western cultural construction the "whirling dervish" is not an entirely erroneous one, since it owes its basis to the fact that practices of ecstatic singing and dancing, and in fact the idea of music itself as ecstasy, is an integral part of the Darwaysh spiritual regimen. Their peculiarly liminal positioning in Islamic culture, where their unorthodoxy makes them the privileged objects of scholarly inquiry, attention, and curiosity, means that the Darwaysh can become the easy (though not unproblematic) subjects of an imperial discourse of disguised liminality and "otherness."\textsuperscript{53} What I mean by this is that white subjects like Harry Feversham (and perhaps Richard Burton) who are at best liminal and at worst redundant in their own social habitations, can successfully make themselves over as Dervishes because of the predetermined cultural script of indeterminacy, mutability, and fluidity that this Islamic liminal enacts. And by performing this mobile, indeterminate script they can, to a certain extent, recover from their own social liminalities.

Imperial white appropriations and remappings of native liminal subjectivities are central to both the Kipling and Mason tropology of disguise. Inspector Strickland and Kim's disguises seem to embody British colonial anxiety over "liminals" even as they attempt to harness this anxiety for the task of law-enforcement. I think it is interesting to note here that as far as Kim is concerned native liminality is inscribed on a body that is already inscribed with another kind of racialized liminality: Irishness. Yet in the text itself Kim's Irish liminality is less important than his white non-liminality, for it is his whiteness that is corroborated and celebrated in the face of his multiply disguised Indianness. Feversham's Darwaysh disguise, unlike Kim or Strickland's disguises, is I think a much more destabilizing performance of native liminality. Despite their apparent dexterity and mobility, a feature of the liminal identities they perform, Kim and Strickland are very much a part of the colonial system. Kim's participation in the Great Game and Strickland's position as Inspector in the British-Indian police force, mean that they do not stand outside the system of institutionalized colonial knowledges and powers. They inhabit this system in a way that poor Harry Feversham never does, or at least not

until the very end of the novel. I would argue then that liminality in Kipling becomes a causality of an already available imperial structure of power and knowledge. Feversham’s loss of military face, and hence masculine pride, on the other hand, forces him to substitute one kind of liminality (social and gender) for another (racial) in the hope that an assiduous performance of the latter will allow him to recover from the former. And although Darwaysh liminality is a necessary stage in his narrative of recovery, there is always the fear that Feversham will remain a perpetual liminal no matter what, that he will never receive social absolution. Feversham’s liminality is not collapsible in the way that Kim and Strickland’s are. His liminality incorporates the real terrors of liminal subjectivity into a text of adventure and spying. The fact that liminality signifies a state of in-betweeness, a state from which it might be impossible to recover, is more powerfully present in Feversham’s narrative than it is in either Kim or Strickland’s.

**Harry, the Uncertain Performer**

Feversham’s performance of native identity is perhaps the most furtive and secretive of all the performances (Kim’s and Inspector Strickland’s) that we have seen so far. While Kim and Strickland perform in the reified space of Kipling’s India, with the security of a colonial apparatus of power already in place, Feversham’s impersonation takes place in the uncodified, uninscribed desert spaces of Egypt in 1882, against a backdrop of colonial uncertainty and vulnerability, and native rebellion. The British, in their attempt to gain a foothold in Egypt, were at this time involved in prolonged military skirmishes with the Turks and the Arabs. Without attempting to present all the facts about the historical situation at this time, it is enough to say at this point that during the nineteenth-century British political and economic interest in Egypt had steadily increased until events in the early 1880’s forced a military showdown between the deposed Egyptian Khedive’s army and England. The Anglo-Egyptian war broke out in July

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54 The deposition of Khedive Ismail by the English and increasing English interference in Egyptian matters of state fueled Egyptian nationalist, anti-British sentiments. The formation of the Egyptian National Popular Party led by Egyptian general Ahmad Urabi alarmed the British who were especially concerned about retaining control of the Suez Canal. The Canal, an important trade sea-route to India, was a lifeline for British colonial interests. Control of the Suez Canal, completed in 1869, was crucial for the administration and management of British colonial properties in other parts of the globe.
1882. The Egyptian troops were defeated on September 13, 1882, at the battle of Tall al Kabir, and Egypt returned to the nominal sovereignty of the (British-appointed) Khedive. Although the Khedive remained on the throne there was never really any doubt that the British retained absolute political control of the region.\(^5\)

Played out as it is against the backdrop of Egyptian insurgency and colonial uncertainty, Harry Feversham’s performance of disguised nativeness is fraught with the fear of discovery and with a sense of keen anxiety about personal safety. Unlike the disguises that Kim or Strickland assume, Harry Feversham’s impersonation of the Darwaysh has the ability to destabilize and jeopardize the enterprise of British colonialism in Egypt. So, the authoritative discourse of imperial disguise is undermined in Feversham’s case by a sense of insecurity and uncertainty over the actual outcome of his surreptitious espionage activities. Strickland’s transparent (everybody, including the natives, know that he is a master disguise artist) and exultant mastery of the medium, Kim’s skillful, and again very visible, performances are, in this instance substituted for secrecy, stealth, and invisibility. Even though Harry is allowed to permeate the Darwaysh he is never allowed to relax his guard for fear of discovery. And when he is, in fact, discovered, the scene of recognition must be read not so much as a function of native perspicacity, i.e. the native’s ability to discern and penetrate the white performer’s secret/secretive body, but rather as Harry’s own desire to be discovered (penetrated even?). Here is the exchange between Feversham and Captain Trench:

``I was captured in the desert, on the Arabian road,’ said Feversham slowly.
‘Yes, masquerading as a lunatic musician who had wandered out of Wadi Halfa with a zither. I know. But you were captured by your own deliberate wish. You came to join me in Omdurman. I know.’” (emphasis added, 329)

In order to understand and appreciate the deliberateness of Harry’s action in unmasking himself, and thereby subjecting himself to the horrible rigors of the infamous House of

\(^5\) Egypt became a British protectorate in 1914, and was finally able to gain independence in 1922. Most of the information provided here was garnered from Timothy Mitchell’s Colonising Egypt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and the following websites:
Stone prison in Omdurman, it is necessary to understand the novel’s overall thematic investment in Harry’s tale of recuperable cowardice. What I hope to achieve through this circuitous reading of deliberate unmasking and military woe, is a questioning of disguise itself as an over-valued masculine trope.

The central conflict in Mason’s novel, Harry Feversham’s *raison-d’être* in the Sudanese desert, arises from the collision of two distinct desires: Harry’s pacifism versus society’s heterosexual militarism. When Harry decides against fighting in the Sudan and surrenders his commission in the army on the eve of the war with Egypt, his pacifism is read as a sign of cowardice, of failed masculinity. As a mark of cowardice Harry is presented with four feathers by his military friends Durrance, Trench, and Willoughby, and his ex-fiancée Ethne. The feathers symbolize military cowardice, effete masculinity, social disapprobation, and stressed heterosexuality. Throughout the novel, in fact, Harry’s pacifism is equated with socially unacceptable qualities and the desires these give rise to. So pacifism becomes a sign of imperfect masculinity, which comes to stand for effeminacy, which in turn becomes a sign of Harry’s threatened sexuality. Harry’s journey to Egypt, his assumption of the Darwaysh mask, are by virtue of his efforts to recoup not just his masculinity but his heterosexuality as well. And the unmasking that

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56 The city of Omdurman, situated across the Nile from Khartoum, is one of the cultural and commercial centers of Sudan. During the 1880s, the historical period covered in Mason’s novel, Omdurman was ruled by Khalifa Addallah. One of the most infamous associations with Omdurman is the Khalifa’s prison, the House of Stone. Mason draws upon his own visit to the House of Stone in 1901, and the stories he hears about it, to describe Feversham’s harrowing experience during his imprisonment there. The House of Stone resembled that other powerful place of colonial terror and abjection, the Black Hole of Calcutta, and it exercised that same kind of fascinated horror on the colonial imagination as did the latter. The House of Stone in the ancient Darwaysh city of Omdurman served as a prison “in which the Khalifa’s captives, black, brown, or white, it mattered not, [were] herded like sheep in a pen, night after night through the long suffocation of the tropics” (Green, *A. E. W. Mason*, 87).

57 The opening scene of the novel, where a group of colonial officers meet at Harry’s father, General Feversham’s house for dinner, proleptically foregrounds the later confluence of these themes. As the young boy Harry sits listening to these former colonial officers reminiscing about their military exploits, his pain and distress are made vividly clear: “The curttest, least graphic description of the biting days and night in the trenches set the lad shivering. Even his face grew pinched, as though the iron frost of that winter was actually eating into his bones” (5). The boy’s overly sensitive reaction to the scenes of military violence being described here, become apparent to one of the officers, Lieutenant Sutch, who, almost as a matter of free association, notes the boy’s overwhelming resemblance to his dead mother. “Harry Feversham wore his father’s name, but he had his mother’s dark and haunted eyes … [her] delicacy of profile [and her] imagination” (11). As Christopher Lane notes, the Lieutenant’s unhappy realization of the young Harry’s effeminacy anticipates the adult Harry’s troubling relation to virility. The rest of the novel represents, in a sense, Harry’s attempts to erase the taint of the maternal, the taint of effeminacy, and re-establish a species of military, virile masculinity via the name of the Father. See Lane’s chapter on Mason and colonial homophilia in his book *The Ruling Passion*, for more on this.
takes place, that *must* take place, is central to his drama of salvageable masculinity. As a result of his unmasking Harry is imprisoned in the House of Stone where he meets and engineers the escape of one of his recent accusers, Captain Trench, and thereby retrieves his masculine honor and military pride. What Trench learns and the reader already knows, of course, is that Harry’s unmasking is voluntary, meaningful, and pre-meditated. A happy result of Harry’s voluntary unveiling is his social and sexual rehabilitation and reinstatement. Society commends his bravery and Ethne, whose earlier rejection of him jeopardized his heterosexual identity, accepts his second offer of marriage and with it his reconstituted (hetero)sexuality. The point I am trying to make here, through this lengthy detour into Harry Feversham’s vexed relationship with masculinity, is that the very idea of disguise in Mason’s novel is deeply invested in an overdetermined masculine code of military prowess, virility, and heroic aggression.

**Acting Out and Oriental Theatricality**

Harry Feversham’s assumption of the Darwaysh disguise, Kim and Strickland’s exultant excursions to the “other” side, all of these cross-cultural performative texts might be read within the wider cultural fascination with the theater of Empire in the nineteenth century. A wealth of material, from encyclopedias to the illustrated press, was produced on the subject of native costumes during the late nineteenth century. Albert Racinet’s *History of Costume* published between 1876 and 1888, and F.M. Coleman’s *Typical Pictures of Native Indians* published in 1897, carefully catalogue Indian costumes according to caste and status – detailing, for instance, the sartorial differences between a Rajput warrior’s costume and a Mohammedan trader’s – and vividly reproduce photographs of native castes to help readers realize the “charm” of the “gorgeous East.” “Where the physiognomy of racial difference,” Sara Suleri observes, “can evoke only a colonial fear of the greater cultural alternatives it symbolically represents, costume provides ... a sartorial aesthetic that somehow suggests that the colonized can be completely known.” In addition to costume books, the “sartorial aesthetic” was also evoked in elaborate plays about such “glorious and sentimental episodes in history” as

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58 Sara Suleri, *REI*, 108.
“The Indian Mutiny,” “The Storming of Delhi,” and “The War in Zululand” (actual titles). These plays quite literally staged the drama of empire as a lavishly costumed pantomime. Costume, then, played an integral part in recreating for nineteenth century metropolitan and colonial audiences the luxury of the Oriental spectacle.

But orientalist costume also raises the specter of an aberrant, if not explicitly queer at least non-normative, sexuality. In her essay “Acting Out Orientalism,” Emily Apter reads the staging of lesbianism and orientalist decadence in turn-of-the-century Parisian salons as a form of “outing.” In these fin de siècle theatrical productions she argues, orientalism is used as an “erotic cipher, a genre of theatricality in which acting ‘oriental’ becomes a form of outing, and outing is revealed to be thoroughly consonant with putting on an act (each flips into the other unpredictably).” What is particularly interesting about Apter’s argument is the idea of theatrical passing in European orientalist stage productions as outing/acting. There is enormous potential here for the queering of performative desire (both desire for performance and desire for the subject whose identity has been appropriated for the sake of performance), something that could transform the Orient into a “living tableau of queerness” to use Edward Said’s famous phrase. There appears to be something innately queer about the trope of performance. But is it possible to clear a space for the queer performer or the queer performative principle in the kinds of texts that I have been discussing? Kipling and Mason’s cross-cultural performance fantasies are determinedly heterosexual in nature. The articulation of queer desire is not so much disavowed as it is foreclosed in their texts. The psychoanalytic concept of foreclosure is useful here because it describes a process of disavowal, but one in which the very object of disavowal is not recognized. Is it possible to read the disavowal of a queer performative text of desire in those places in Kipling and Mason’s fiction where performance is anxiously subsumed by an overdetermined discourse of heterosexuality?

It would be productive at this point to bring Judith Butler back into the argument. In Gender Trouble Butler argues that the parodic performance of “aberrant”, non-

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60 Said, Orientalism, 103. The figure who springs to mind here is, of course, T.E. Lawrence whose miming of Arabness involved a kind of self-reflexive masochism as well as (de)sublimated homosexuality. Kaja Silverman notes that Lawrence’s cross-cultural performative fantasy was erotically and masochistically invested in a notion of Arab masculinity. See Kaja Silverman’s Male Subjectivities at the Margins (New York: Routledge, 1992).
normative gender identities via drag and cross-dressing subverts and mocks expressive, essentialist models of gender identity. In subsequent essays and interviews Butler critiques the naïve appropriation and premature celebration of drag as the paradigm of subversive performativity by readers of Gender Trouble.\textsuperscript{61} Despite Butler's reservations about the "true" subversiveness of drag, I believe that for strategic reasons it is useful to my argument to use drag's apparent subversiveness in order to interrogate (hetero)sexual identity construction in Kipling and Mason's texts. Butler is mainly interested in sexual drag, i.e. transvestitism, cross-dressing, assumption of butch/femme identities. She says that drag parodies normalized gender identities because, "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency" (emphasis in original).\textsuperscript{62} So gender itself is up for grabs when it is all dragged out through the performance of phantasmatic disguised bodies (bodies in drag are bodies in disguise, after all). What this means is that the "normal" heterosexual parameters of gender identity are breached and destabilized by the "abnormal," potentially queer performance of dragged bodies. Now my question is: what happens if I transpose the terms of Butler's argument to consider not sexual drag, not men dressing as women or women dressing as men dressing as women, but rather cross-cultural, racial drag, white men dressing as brown men, or white racialities masquerading as brown racialities? What happens to gender and especially the idea of the queer drag performer when race intrudes?

As I mentioned earlier Kipling and Mason's spy-drag narratives are overwhelmingly heterosexual. Yet drag generates, if not the actual energy of same-sex male desire, then the fear that these desires could be unleashed at any time by the male dragged body. It is this second kind of desire that I would like to refer to as "queer" desire. "Queer" in this instance is not so much a signifier of homosexual desires, but rather a designation for those incoherent desires that resist containment within chromosomal or biological models of sexual desire. My questioning of these incoherent desires will center around the adventures of Strickland and Feversham in particular. The fear of queer desire is never expressed overtly but always subterraneously in Strickland and Feversham's tales of disguise. Strickland limits his disguised activities after his

\textsuperscript{61} http://www.theory.org.uk/but-int1.htm.

\textsuperscript{62} Judith Butler, \textit{GT}, 137.
marriage to Miss Youghal. There is a very definite sense in his narrative that native drag represents and unleashes all kinds of libidinal desires, desires that are deemed “unsavoury,” not respectable or “normal” by official colonial standards. His marriage and subsequent assimilation into a heterosexual familial structure, closes off forever the possibility that he might desire other, perhaps abnormal places, people, races or identities. So we are told that Strickland marries on the understanding that he “should drop his old ways.” And although Strickland promises to not break his word “it [is] a sore trial to him; for the streets and bazaars, and the sounds in them, [are] full of meaning to Strickland, and these called to him to come back and take up his wandering and his discoveries.”

The heterosexual marriage also denotes closure for Harry Feversham. His heterosexual masculinity which is rendered fallible by his non-/anti-military desire has to be reconstituted in the Sudanese desert via the dragging of Darwaysh identity. Harry’s “queerness” has to be read as a function of his doubly displaced body. Harry’s body is doubly queered, first in England when he is accused of military cowardice and ends up forfeiting his heterosexuality (when his fiancée breaks off their engagement), and then in the Sudan when he impersonates a lunatic Darwaysh musician. So in other words, there is something queer about Harry’s decision to not fight in the war, and something queerer still about his assumption of drag, which is in Butlerian terms, itself a queer trope. The all-encompassing irony about Harry’s drag is, of course, that it is undertaken in the belief that it will restore his masculinity and heterosexuality. The novel’s ending, with its vision of restored heterosexuality, seems to bear this out. Like Strickland, Feversham’s reinstatement in the heterosexual family signals the death of drag and its concomitant, queer desire. But the fact that Harry has to even claim Darwaysh identity, the fact that his body has borne Darwaysh drag, always remains as a residual reminder/remainder of queerness.

So, how does the abortion or deflection of queer desire in stories about white agents in native drag complicate Butler’s theories of subversive drag performance? In the first place, how subversive are these performances? Insofar as drag is subversive these performances are subversive too. But all the activist potential of subversion is negated when drag performers like Feversham and Strickland end up consolidating normative

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63 Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 31-32.
structures and discourses like heterosexuality, militarism, and colonialism. So in this context cross-cultural drag isn’t subversive at all. The realization that cross-cultural colonial drag is a co-optation rather than a subversion of normalized knowledges reveals the limitations of Butler’s claims about the universal subversiveness of all drag. This is obviously not to say that drag is not subversive but that not all drag is always subversive all the time. Drag has to be thoroughly contextualized, historicized, and understood in relation to race as well as gender.

My point about contextualizing drag in gender and race re-engages not just Judith Butler but Homi Bhabha as well. White bodies in brown drag bear a complicated relation to race, as most of this chapter demonstrates. Reversing Bhabha’s problematic of performative mimicry proves useful in this regard. White impersonators in native drag challenge the model of “sly civility” posited by Bhabha to describe the resistance of colonized subjects. The sly civility of figures like Kim, Strickland, and Feversham, neutralizes the sly civility of the native. And when Kim performs Indianes better than do the Babu or the inadequate Hindu child, the white man’s sly civility transforms the Indian into an object of ridiculous caricature. This compels a rethinking of Bhabha’s mimetic colonial subject as someone whose text of successful resistance is foreclosed by the white agent’s duplicitous impersonation of him.

Allegories of Serious Espionage

For the type of fictional and non-fictional colonial spy narratives that I consider in this chapter, the orientalist fascination with costume and disguise is harnessed to the more serious discipline of espionage. Lurgan sahib in Kim anchors the extravagance of theatrical spectacle to the soberer task of undercover work. The master narrative in this instance is, of course, Richard Burton’s spy memoir A Pilgrimage to Al Madinah and Meccah which records Burton’s adventures in India as a disguised Muslim pilgrim from Afghanistan. Burton’s cross-cultural transformations are marked by the “same attention

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64 Homi Bhabha, “Sly Civility,” in Location of Culture, 93-101.
to Oriental detail, the same playful appreciation of costume and a kindred libidinal excitement which comes with theatrical illusion."65

Like Kim, who assumes different disguises in different contexts, Burton’s ability to take on the role of an Afghan is part of his protean ability to switch identities at will. The early chapters of his Pilgrimage see him variously disguised as a “hakim” or Indian doctor, a “Pathan,” and a “wandering Darwaysh.” The pleasurable effects of disguise, of absorbing the office of the native informant into his own European “self,” are felt in the following passage: “there was something infinitely seducing in the character of a magician, doctor and fakir ... even respectable natives ... opined that the stranger was a holy man, gifted with supernatural powers, and knowing everything. One old person sent to offer me his daughter in marriage; he said nothing about the dowry, – but I thought proper to decline the honor.”66

The seductiveness of disguise, however, is consistently linked to the exercise of colonial power and knowledge in Burton’s text. His impersonation of natives and his sojourns in India, and later Sind, were undertaken on a fairly regular basis in the service of the colonial state. At a textual level this appears in his travel accounts as footnotes addressed to a European audience, in which he provides anthropological and geographical information about the “state of the native/Oriental.”67 The allegory of cross-cultural dressing in Kipling and Mason, which is indebted in no small part to Burton’s adventures, centers on a similar association of knowledge/power and disguise.

There exists a central paradox in the allegory of disguise – while its objective is to render invisible the colonizer, whose “disguised” task it is to observe native ways and secrets, it actually makes visible his power and authority over the native subject. The Four Feathers complicates this visible-invisible dynamic even further by figuring the disguised colonial agent, the I/eye that looks outward, as both scrutinizer and (possibly) scrutinized. Disguise, as a result, is a paradoxical, perilous thing in these narratives, its ambiguity constantly threatening to undermine its authority.

All of these anxiety-ridden transactions across different racialities, borders, cultures, and economies, are predicated on a certain notion of the native subject as

65 Gail Low, WSBM, 209.
67 See Parama Roy’s essay on Burton for more on this.
entirely scrutinizable, knowable and transparent "other," while the imperial impersonator, although assuming multiple disguises and identities, remains indivisible and unknowable. This, of course, marks another site of ambivalence in the colonial discourse of native impersonation: if the native is always already known, then why is there a need for surveillance via impersonation? Colonial anxiety over loss of power enforced upon the colonizer a need to maintain constant vigilance in order to guard against the possibility of native insurrection. This might explain the recurrence of disguise as a favorite trope in colonial narratives of espionage and spying. But something like an "erotics of performance" – effects of pleasure at performing identities are unmistakable in these texts – also emerges alongside the anxiety, which leads me to believe that the performative principle in colonial espionage texts also functions as a pleurally transgressive force. And colonial masqueraders however liminal or marginal their status might be in relation to colonial civil society, seem to be essential for the functioning of this society for their knowledge of the native subject promises to be accessible and useful for the governance of the imperial state. But how real is this knowledge? How legitimate or even valid is it? Let me return to allegories of impersonation and improvisation by way of an answer to these questions.

I began this chapter by invoking impersonators and improvisers. Strickland, Kim, and Feversham are all consummate impersonators and improvisers. Their disguised entries into already existing structures of representation—Darwaysh, fakir, etc.—mark their attempts to understand, and in their turn represent other identities, bodies, and peoples. The fact that they triumph in their missions to gather information, and that they are able to return to their former positions, in society, nation, and family, with their own identities and bodies secure (or resecured in Feversham's case), seem to mean that their efforts at representation are successful. So, if allegory's ultimate aim is the successful representation of Reality then, Strickland, Kim, and Feversham's narratives are successful allegories of Reality. But allegory's attempt to represent reality is also marked by the inescapable failure to represent (recall De Man and Derrida's theorizings on the subject). If this is so, then all of these magnificent impersonations of reality I have been studying in this chapter could be regarded as magnificent counterfeitings of reality, not reality at all but allegorical fictions of reality, stability, and unmediated power. The
triumph of meaningful improvisation thus yields to the contingency of meaningless provisionality. Allegories of disguise and masking can never be anything other than allegories of disguised, masked, and therefore, counterfeit, realities.
Chapter V

Retrieving the Family of (Wo)Man: Allegories of Creation, Evolution, and Colonial Domesticity

“The adult who retains the more numerous fetal, infantile or simian traits, is unquestionably inferior to him whose development has progressed beyond that … Measured by these criteria, the European or white race stands at the head of the list, the African or negro at its foot … All parts of the body have been minutely scanned, measured and weighed, in order to erect a science of the comparative anatomy of the races.”

— D. G. Brinton, Races and Peoples, 1890.

“The adults of inferior groups must be like children of superior groups, for the child represents a primitive adult ancestor. If adult blacks and women are like white male children, then they are living representatives of an ancestral stage in the evolution of white males. An anatomical theory for ranking races – based on entire bodies, not only on heads – had been found.”


Daniel Brinton’s unequivocal celebration of the science of measurement as a viable means of determining Man’s developmental worth, is representative of nineteenth-century evolutionist thought in general, and the rigorous scientific profession of the concept of anatomical classification in particular. Brinton was an anthropologist whose work on anatomical evolution and ancestral recapitulation sums up the logic of nineteenth-century biological determinism. Brinton’s belief in ancestral recapitulation allied him with other social, evolutionary, and racial scientists of his time: people like Francis Galton, who pioneered modern statistics and first coined the term “eugenics” in 1883, Paul Broca, craniometrist extraodinaire and founder of the Anthropological Society of Paris (1859), Ernst Haeckel, the German zoologist whose treatment of the “family tree” metaphor proved to be the most extensive and elaborate of all nineteenth-century accounts of the human family, Cesare Lombroso, the Italian physician and criminologist, and finally social Darwinists like Thomas Huxley and Charles Lyell.

1 Stephen Jay Gould defines biological determinism as the claim that holds that “shared behavioral norms, and the social and economic differences between human groups – primarily races, classes, and sexes – arises from inherited, inborn distinctions and that society, in this sense, is an accurate reflection of biology”
Charles Darwin’s enormously influential treatise on evolution *On the Origin of the Species*, published in 1859, was of course the *Ur*-text that revolutionized mid-nineteenth century scientific practices of and theories about the evolution of man.

I would like to acknowledge at the outset my indebtedness to Anne McClintock for her compelling account of the Family of Man trope in nineteenth-century European social, scientific and cultural contexts. In *Imperial Leather* McClintock argues that the extended metaphor of the Family of Man provided nineteenth-century evolutionist theory with the necessary means to hierarchize racial and gender differences, and contain the spectacle of rampant racial and gendered otherness within a universal familial structure. My understanding of this image, as the metaphoric figuration of human genesis, evolution and progress within the frame of universal family relations, derives from McClintock’s formulation that the “family” constitutes the “organizing trope for marshaling a bewildering array of cultures into a single global narrative ordered and managed by Europeans.”

One of the overriding paradoxes of this image was that, although the Family of Man postulated that all of the world’s peoples belonged to the same Family, the universal Family of Man, their positions in this Family really depended upon their positions in the evolutionary scale of being which was in turn determined by complex codes of racist and sexist exclusions. An analysis of these codes and the paradoxes they engender are the subject of this chapter’s investigation of the allegorical Family.

My reading of the Family of Man image departs from McClintock’s in several crucial ways. In the first place, and most importantly, I reconfigure the Family of Man as a specifically allegorical Family. Allegory is a useful tool in reading both with and against the grain of history and culture. An allegorical frame will thus allow me to, a) interrogate the assumptions and imperatives that motivate, trouble and otherwise disturb the dominant cultural/historical text of Man’s Family, and b) sketch the uneasy allegorical morphing of the Family of Man into the colonial Family of Woman. I will argue that the allegory of the Family of Man becomes the allegory of the white male who is repeatedly invoked as the head of the Family, the apotheosis of civilization. His

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apotheosis is accomplished at the expense of denigrating other members of Man’s Family, women, colonized subjects, and “other” racialities like the “Negro,” “Hottentot” etc. The generic, universal Family of Man becomes in effect the gendered, exclusive Family of the White Man.

I explore the allegorization of the Family of Man in theories of biological and cultural evolution, and then use my findings about the unevenly gendered and racialized Family of Man to plot the connection between the Imperial Family of Man and the Colonial Family of Woman. I argue that in order to validate her specifically familial and feminine concerns, the English woman in late-nineteenth century British India has to appropriate the Family of Man allegory, remake herself as the sovereign subject of this allegory, and in the process displace the white male from his position as the head of this Family. The displacement of the white male subject is a necessary stage in the white woman’s narrative of colonial domesticity. It is the only way she can assume the mantle of authority necessary for the successful performance of domesticity in the colonial space. The performative paradigm in this instance is the allegory of Queen Victoria as benevolent Mother Empress of the world. As the favored subject of imperial allegorical myth-making at the end of the nineteenth-century, Victoria is repeatedly figured as the Mother Queen. She becomes the head of the universal Family, and it is through an associative act of reading that I posit Victoria’s text as the sanctioning text in feminine remappings of the colonial Family. When Victoria deposes the white male as sovereign allegorical subject of the universal Family, her assumption of power and reappropriative energy allows for a parabasistic rereading of the Family of Man allegory. I use Victoria, and her however unconsciously constituted legacy of the reordered Family to white women trying to reorder their own families in the colony, as a way of reengaging the original terms of McClintock’s argument. Such a reengagement is necessary if I am to recast McClintock’s view of the largely white, male-(en)gendered Family in terms of the English “memsahib’s” derivation of agency via the establishment of Woman’s Family in the colony.

I argue, moreover, that for women like Sara Jeannette Duncan, Flora Annie Steele, and Grace Gardiner, the tropological ordering, or reordering, of colonial domesticity along familial lines in fin-de-siècle British India is seen as a natural and
seamless act of incorporating “otherness.” But the paradox of this trope is that while it enacts a seemingly “natural” and “seamless” act of incorporation, it is also marked by overwhelming anxieties and fears over what such incorporation might imply for the white woman and her white family. The questions I pose in this chapter have as much to do with the problematic reordering of white families as they do with the reinvention or reimagining of brown families. What are the implications of an unscrupulous, unmediated policy of incorporation for the white woman’s “other” family? What happens to the unhappily incorporated “other,” who in the case of Steel and Duncan is often the abject native servant, when she/he is appropriated for the task of allegorical self-actualization? Does she simply appear as (re)appropriated prop in the seamlessly reordered space of white colonial domesticity, or does she perform a much more insidious script of resistance, one of dirty, unwholesome, unkempt abjection?

While I do not aim to reproduce in their entirety, theories of biological determinism that dictated and codified not just scientific, but social, moral, and familial relationships in England from the 1850’s onward, I would like to recapitulate some of the central terms and tropes of this debate especially as they pertain to my own argument about colonial domesticity and the revisionary allegory of the Family of Woman. I believe that in order to fully understand the ambiguous and often contradictory feminine project of making families and reordering households in the colonies, it is necessary to first comprehend the scientific instrumentalities that shape these feminine projects, and mark them as at best philanthropic, “womanly” occupations, and at worst opportunistic, self-aggrandizing ambivalent affairs. The first few sections of this chapter thus involve a reading of nineteenth-century figurations of the allegorical Family of Man while the second-half of this chapter links the male Family of Man to the female Family of Woman in texts which apparently produce the woman (instead of the Man) as the head of the “other” allegorical Family. The allegorical Family of Woman in Sara Jeannette Duncan’s novel The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib, Flora Annie Steele and Grace Gardiner’s The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook, emerges in those places in the text where the white woman’s duties in the colony is viewed specifically as the management of colonial families. To these women-gendered narratives I add a third text or textual “moment,” a lithograph of Victoria from Richard Whiteing’s novel No. 5 John Street.
Whiteing's description of the lithograph offers the pretext for substantiating Victoria's counter-claims to the Family of (Wo)Man.

My reading of these different texts will demonstrate how the scientific vision of racial and gender differences contained within hierarchies of valuation in the Family of Man is replaced by a vision of racialized bodies contained within a meticulously hierarchized domestic structure in the Family of Woman. The method of classifying and attributing value (moral, social, cultural) via classification is central to how both these Families represent racial difference. I would like to turn now to an overview of nineteenth-century biological determinism in order to see how the method of classification is central to the subsumation of difference in the Family of Man allegory.

About Creation and Evolution: A View of Nineteenth-Century Biological Determinism

The allegory of the "Family of Man," sanctioned as it was by science, gathered around it the myriad discourses of race, gender, sexuality, economics, and class. The mid-nineteenth century science of Family, of measuring, classifying, and "objectively" recording and graphing the evolution and development of the human race, harnessed the metaphors of progression and gradualism to the tasks of gender and race management. Anthropologists and racial scientists used the Family of Man image in their calculations of "gradations among races and subcategories of gender to determine a mathematics of European sovereignty, in which God and Nature appeared to countenance [the] exploitation" of women, Africans, and colonized subjects. According to the imperialist, patriarchal logic of evolutionary progress, women, blacks, and those classes and races of people who were otherwise denoted as "inferior" (like the Irish, Jews, the urban poor, and so on) were frozen in a state of perpetual infantilism, emotionalism, and non-development. The paleontologist E. D. Cope, for instance, isolated four groups of so-

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4 The broad historical claims I make here will be substantiated by my reading of a handful of "exemplary" evolutionist narratives in the following sections. As this chapter is concerned with racial allegory and I am interested in evolutionary theories only insofar as they impinge upon my own textual concerns, an in-depth reading of nineteenth-century evolutionism is necessarily constrained by my localized reading of the Family of Man allegory. Among those leading proponents of recapitulation whose writings I do not discuss here were Francis Galton, Cesare Lombroso, Louis Agassiz, Donald Brinton, James Sully, G. Stanley Hall,
called "inferior" or lower human forms: non-white races, all women, southern European whites (as opposed to northern European whites), and lower classes within superior races (like the Irish). The tropological overtones of nineteenth-century genesis narratives like Cope's transform them into allegories of progress, of human and humanistic development, and above all, of moral genealogy.

Cope's hierarchical classification of "inferior" races elucidates the theory of recapitulation that became, after the 1850's, the all-important criterion for measuring and ranking human groups and races for those social scientists, eugenicists, biologists, anthropologists, and physicians who were interested in extending the terms of scientific inquiry into the field of morality and ethics. With the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859, the two most intensely contested theories of creationism, monogenism and polygenesis, were overthrown in favor of the evolutionary theory of the descent of man. As Stephen Gould has pointed out in his study of the history of biological determinism in the nineteenth-century, while evolutionism supplanted creationism as the theory *du jour*, it continued to serve, and indeed reinforced, the rationale of racism that the earlier creationist theories had deployed to explain the origin


Before the 1850's, before Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* popularized evolutionism, there existed two models for determining racial rank and class. The first of these views, and by far the most prevalent one, was called monogenism. Proponents of monogenism held that all creation originated from a single center, Adam, and that the degeneration of the species as a whole was a result of the Fall from Edenic innocence. Different races degenerated at different rates because climatic conditions were largely responsible for racial decline. Thus, the argument went that white races declined at a slower rate than did black races because of the intemperance of "black" climate zones. The second view about the genesis of the human race, called polygenesis, proposed that "human races were separate biological species, the descendants of different Adams" (Gould, *MM*, 39). While monogenists believed that humans originated from a single source, polygenists claimed that different races developed in different regions and originated from different sources. According to the logic of this strand of creationism, certain races like the blacks were from their very inception inevitably inferior to and more degenerate than the whites. For more on the polygenist point of view see Samuel G. Morton, "Value and the World Species in Zoology," *American Journal of Science and Arts* 11 (May 1851), and for a critique of this view see Nancy Stepan's "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science" (*Isis* 77, June 1986: 261-277). Stepan writes that even geographical migration was not a guarantor of racial regeneration for black races. For instance, slaves who had been freed were cast in the popular and scientific imaginations as "doomed" degenerates, for even if they "moved northward into white, temperate territory, and as they moved socially and politically into freedom," they would still be subject to racial degeneration (Stepan, 100).
of man and justify the hierarchical division of the races. Even as it revoked creationism, Darwinian evolutionism supplied the proponents of creationism with the necessary tools to reify racial differences and institutionalize racism. "The monogenists continued to construct linear hierarchies of races according to mental and moral worth; the polygenists now admitted a common ancestry in the prehistoric mists, but affirmed that races had been separate long enough to evolve major inherited differences in talent and intelligence."

To the abounding interest in Darwinian evolutionism was added the mid-nineteenth century fascination for numbers, measurements, and the growing interest in the new science of statistics. These methods of quantifying data when combined with evolutionary theories about human origin led to the first powerful theoretical articulation of what has now come to be termed "scientific racism," "the most authoritative attempt to place social ranking and social disability on a biological and 'scientific' footing." Paul Broca, clinical surgeon and foremost authority on craniometry in the latter half of the nineteenth-century equated racial intelligence, and hence racial worth, with physiognomies. Broca’s belief in the absolute validity, legitimacy, and "respectability" of empirical evidence, of "facts," led him to the indisputable conclusion that, "A prognathous face, more or less black color of the skin, woolly hair and intellectual and social inferiority are often associated, while more or less white skin, straight hair and an orthognathous face are the ordinary equipment of the highest groups in the human series ... [Thus a] group with black skin, woolly hair and a prognathous face has never been able to raise itself spontaneously to civilization" (emphasis added).

The seemingly objective, empirical, factual method of ascertaining racial value, the scientific criterion for imputing racial and sexual worth established by people like Broca and Francis Galton, became the means for not just classifying but morally identifying and isolating those so-called degenerate races and classes: Irish, Jews, Africans, prostitutes, criminals, the deranged, the colonized, the poor and unemployed. Mapping the body became in effect an exercise in mapping the hitherto concealed and secret places of racial(ized) and sexual(ized) psyches. The atavistic body, like that which

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7 Stephen Gould, MM, 73.
8 McClintock, IL, 49.
9 Quoted in Gould, MM, 84.
belonged to the prostitute or the black “heathen,” became the site of degeneracy while measuring the body’s geometry became the grounds for establishing and scientifically sanctioning degeneracy. The science of anthropometry could then insert these unruly, degenerate, atavistic bodies into the broader progressivist allegory of racial origin and human descent, and make them the grounds for underwriting a racist theory of white domination and power.

**Serial Allegories: Charting the Family Tree of Man**

The singular trope that propels and sustains this allegory is that of the “human series.” The overarching theme of Paul Broca’s ethnological endeavors was “to determine the relative position of races in the human series.” As such, a linear, hierarchical scale of racial, and hence mental and moral worth was established, and although this did not prove to be a fool-proof method for imputing racial meaning and value, the importance of such a scheme was never in doubt. For, as Broca himself put it, “if the volume of the brain does not play a decisive role in the intellectual ranking of races, it nevertheless has a very real importance.” These series ranked, in an ascending order of importance (from lowest to highest), different racialities according to body measurements and physiognomies. One of the most influential and resilient of these serial graphings was that of the Family Tree of Man. Paolo Mantegazza and Ernst Haeckel provided what would perhaps prove to be the most definitive visual and theoretical paradigms for this graphing. I wish to argue in this section that Mantegazza’s drawings of the “Morphological” and “Aesthetic” Trees of the Human Races, included in his elaborate and meticulously illustrated study *Physiognomy and Expression*, and Haeckel’s

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11 Some of the criterion for judging racial superiority and its obverse, racial inferiority, were slippery at best. When Broca tried to determine the “apishness” of certain races by measuring the ratio of the radius bone to the humerus, reasoning that the higher ratio (the longer forearm) would ascertain apishness (since apes have long forearms), Eskimo and Australian aborigine skeletons scored lower ratios than did whites. Broca had similar problems when comparing the brain sizes of Eskimos and Malays to those of “civilized” Europeans. Malays, it turned out, had bigger brains than did whites! This less than perfect anthropometrism threatened to throw into complete disarray theories about the inevitability, irreversibility, and naturalness of white racial superiority. The only way it could be rescued was by admitting that measuring brain size and forearms were merely two in an infinite series of (hopelessly) watertight tests for determining racial worth. For more on this see Gould’s chapter on Broca and craniometry in *The Mismeasure of Man*.
diagrammatic representations of phylogenetic trees from 1866 onward, provided the illustrative framework necessary for the allegorical reinvention of the Family of Man. Of crucial importance to me is the paradoxical refiguration of time, space, race, and gender that takes places, however unwittingly, in these visual and theoretical articulations of the phylogenetic Family Tree of Man.

Mantegazza visualizes the Family of Man in arboreal terms as a tree whose many upward-growing branches represent unevolved, still-evolving, or perfectly evolved hominid species. Anne McClintock notes that the tree as an image that denotes and emblematizes the story of human descent, is not an entirely new or even novel one. Johannes Fabian also points out, "The tree has always been one of the simplest forms of constructing classificatory schemes based on subsumption and hierarchy." While genealogical family trees may be traced all the way back to 1100 A.D. Rome and were primarily mappings of affiliation amongst different family members, the biological or phylogenetic tree did not appear in Europe until the eighteenth-century. The phylogenetic tree was not so much concerned with graphing the genealogy of individual families, as it was with the entirely more onerous task of mapping the origin, development, evolution, and extinction of the entire species of man. And Mantegazza and Haeckel's family trees mark a new, specifically racialized and racist poetics of phylogenetic mappings in the nineteenth-century.

Mantegazza and Haeckel's trees authorize a view of evolutionary history that is almost Hegelian in nature. They diagrammatically visualize human history as an originary, teleological, continuous narrative that subsumes differences and hierarchizes racialities. Ernst Haeckel revitalized an older theory of creationist biology in order to read the evolutionary tree in the light of his embryological model of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny. What Haeckel means by his famous phrase "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" is that an individual's growth may be read off the series of stages of a child's growth. Adult ancestral lineage and progress, in other words, mimics the miniature stages

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14 *Johannes Fabian, Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983), 15. Hereafter cited as *TO.*
in a child’s developmental history and growth. In Gould’s words, an individual “climbs its own family tree.”\textsuperscript{16} The value of a theory of recapitulation for “scientific” practices of ranking along race, class, and gender lines, is obvious. If all “inferior” races, sexes, and classes, could be fruitfully compared to white male children, and could moreover be seen as primitive, emotionalist reversions to white adult ancestors, then racial, sexual, and economic inferiority could be justified on evolutionary grounds. According to the logic of recapitulative evolutionism all “inferior” groups must be regressed, infantalized versions of white adult males, and must therefore also be the natural and rational subjects of white adult male domination. As a rationalization of imperialism, to name just one discourse that appropriated the theory of recapitulation, the child-like atavistic savage served an invaluable function. Benjamin Kidd, for instance, argued that colonial expansion in Africa was justified on the grounds that in Africa “we are dealing with peoples who represent the same stage in the history of the development of the race that the child does in the history of the development of the individual. The tropics, will not, therefore, be developed by the natives themselves.”\textsuperscript{17}

Ancestral recapitulation’s presentation of the human family found its visual counterpart in Paolo Mantegazza’s diagrams of the Tree of the Human Races. The lowermost branches in Mantegazza’s “Aesthetic” and “Morphological” human trees, those closest to the base and hence in a state of inchoate or non-evolution, represent the Hottentots, Papuans, Negroes, Fuegans, and Australian aborigines, while the highest, hence most developed or evolved, branch represents the Aryan race. Elsewhere, evolutionary progress is represented in linear, progressivist terms vis-à-vis the arrangement of anatomical types as in the “Family Group of Katarrhinen.” I do not wish to reproduce here McClintock’s already astute analysis of this evolutionary image, whereby the chronology of human development as captured by the image of a series of linearly unfolding evolutionary types, from the apish/Negroid face to the most aesthetically pleasing and least black-identified features, becomes a spectacular, visible

\textsuperscript{12} See the introductory chapter of McCown and Kennedy’s Climbing Man’s Family Tree for more on the origins, histories, and differences between genealogical and phylogenetic trees.
\textsuperscript{17} Benjamin Kidd, \textit{The Control of the Tropics} (New York: Macmillan, 1898), 51.
expression of natural progress. What I find interesting in Mantegazza’s visual-aesthetic representation, and Haeckel’s recapitulative family tree, in particular, and mid- to late-nineteenth century cultural evolutionist theories in general, are their allegorical reconfigurations of historical time and space. A brief engagement with Johannes Fabian’s thoughts on time and space will prove useful to an understanding of Mantegazza and Haeckel’s tropological ordering of temporalities and spatialities.

**Temporal and Spatial Allegories**

Temporal figurations in both the Judeo-Christian and secular naturalist traditions transform evolutionary narratives of human history into allegories of progress. There are certain allegories, like visual representations of the allegory of Fortune’s Wheel or the Great Chain of Being, and even literary allegorical narratives like Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender*, that are primarily vertical, concerned as they are with spatial extensions rather than temporal extensions. And there are allegories such as picaresque or quest narratives, which are more horizontal than they are perpendicular, since they unfold in time and make only the most casual reference to figurative structures. Then there are those allegories that combine the two axes, the vertical and horizontal, in equal proportions. An example of this type of allegory would be Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* where each tale moves the action of the entire story forward in time and space. Whatever the case may be though, it is in the very nature of allegorical structures to organize themselves along temporal and spatial matrices, or to put it in the terms developed by Roman Jakobson, allegories unfold synchronically (in time) and diachronically (in history) in order to establish a connection between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic linguistic poles of meaning.

Johannes Fabian’s discussion of sacred and secular time opens up the possibility for allegorizing time. In his important study on the temporal construction of

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anthropology’s object of study, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Fabian demonstrates how the Judeo-Christian or Biblical conception of sacred time – time as a chronicled, apocalyptic sequence of events – yielded to the social evolutionist idea of secular time – time as a naturalized, *spatialized* chronology of events – in the nineteenth-century. Biblical chronicle time gave way to chronological secular, social time: “Unlike old sacred Time, or even its secularized form in the ‘myth-history of reason,’ the new naturalized Time . . . was a way to order an essentially discontinuous and fragmentary geological and paleontological record.”

Social evolutionists plotted their stories about human history under the firm conviction that time “accomplished” or brought about things in the course of evolution.” Their reconstruction of time stemmed from their preoccupation with civilizational stages where each stage was “as meaningful as a sentence leading toward the conclusion of a story.”

The allegorical impulse to create meaningful symbolic structures, to tell meaningful stories, characterizes social evolutionist notions of time.

I believe that the allegorical refiguration of time and space in social evolutionism, enable the transmogrification of evolutionary narratives into allegories. These allegories unfold linearly and temporally but also vertically and spatially. Nineteenth-century social evolutionists found themselves preoccupied with questions about the evolutionary history of the human race, the developmental stages “leading toward civilization,” rather than with the sacred history of mankind.”

One of the reasons for the expansion and redefinition of the notion of time was perhaps the transformation of the narrative of religious travel into the narrative of *geographical* or global travel. Spatial relations, movements across the globe from the famous intellectual and political centers of Europe to the “unmapped” corners of the earth, were temporalized. The nineteenth-century traveler, sailing to the metaphoric “ends of the earth,” was perceived as traveling back in time: “he is exploring the past; every step he makes is the passage of an age.”

This *forward* movement into those hitherto unexplored, unknown spaces is accompanied by a

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21 Johannes Fabian, *TO*, 14.
22 Ibid., 15.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 7.
concomitant move *backward* into the past, a temporal dimension as yet unmeasured. With the advent of social Darwinism this radically spatialized allegorical vision of time could be applied to racial, evolutionary history.

The problem, however, with nineteenth-century evolutionist allegories that plot mankind’s progress through synchronic time and diachronic space is that they figure futurity and progress in the past tense. I believe that these evolutionist allegories are, in other words, allegories of paradoxical temporalities and spatialities. In order to chart progress, social and biological evolutionists like Paolo Mantegazza and Ernst Haeckel had to hark back to a regressive, atavistic, primitive stage in human development. To use the metaphorical terms of travel: the journey across the globe into uncharted, “savage” territories becomes both a movement *forward* in space and time (in the sense that voyages of discovery, which is what these movements were putatively about, denote a forward, progressive movement) and also a movement *backward* into atavistic/past space(s) and time(s). The point I am trying to make here is that the structure of evolutionist allegories, which is apparently one of racial progression leading ultimately to the apotheosis of white (male) Europeanness, becomes immanent as regression, for these allegories obsessively *devalorize* those very images of atavism, primitivism, and backwardness that make their conceptual representations of white progress and sovereignty possible in the first place. The one, the perfectly evolved white man, is not possible or epistemologically realizable without the other, the imperfectly evolved and decadent primitive man.

Like the strain of atavistic, degenerate otherness that lies at the heart of and threatens to contaminate Friedrich Engel’s familial vision of industrial England,\(^{25}\) the

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\(^{25}\) See Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (London: Swan Sonneschien & Co., 1892). The “family” image recurs in Engel’s book as an indictment of the misguided and deleterious employment practices of the English working-class in the wake of the first great crisis of industrialism. As he wanders through the mines, mills, and factories of Manchester, Liverpool, and London, it seems to Engels as though everywhere he looks he finds only dissolute, disarrayed, unnatural, decadent working-class families. A paradox lies at the heart of Engel’s desire to marry degeneracy theories to evolutionism, a paradox that also characterizes the allegory of the Family. While Engels ascribed to the racial theory of evolution, to the belief that the “common Negro” is a degenerate type of a higher, more developed form of man, he simultaneously refigured degeneracy in socioeconomic terms, as a natural function of social progress (and not just evolutionary progress). Engel’s image of the degenerate working-class English family contains a paradox in that it utilizes both an evolutionary *global* trope, that of racial degeneration, and an internal *domestic* trope, that of the family. Domestic space and the domestic family are racialized. English slums are transformed into places of veritable wildness while the families that live
image of backward spatialities and temporalities threatens to destabilize the epistemological foundations of cultural, social and biological evolutionism. There is an almost schizophrenic split in the desire to plot a forward movement, universal progress in other words, but only in terms of and against the “objective” matrix of a movement back, a primitive regression into pre-historic (or pre-Historic) times and spaces. Allegories of progress and progression are thus transformed into allegories of regress and reversion. An instance of how this works is available in Mantegazza’s “Morphological” and “Aesthetic” Trees of the Human Races and Haeckel’s theory of ancestral recapitulation and the family of man, both of which are illustrative of mid-nineteenth century theories of human evolution.

To state the case allegorically: Mantegazza’s tree is a perpendicular or (mostly) metaphorical representation of human types, where we might understand metaphor to mean a “synchronic system of differences.”26 Mantegazza’s is for the most part a vertical or spatial allegory. Haeckel’s graphing of the family, on the other hand, may be read as a horizontal, linear, metonymical representation of human development, where metonymy is understood as the “diachronic principle of combination and connection by means of which structure is actualized in time.”27 Haeckel’s is a lateral or temporal allegory. His diagrams of phylogenetic trees are uniserial representations of the various human racialities. Because he doesn’t believe in the common language theory, which posited that all the world’s languages originated from a common mother tongue, his tree reflects his belief in multiple points of evolution from multiple linguistic sources, rather than a single point of origin for all mankind. The main point of distinction between Haeckel and Mantegazza’s trees is that the former plots different evolutionary lines for different linguistic groups while the latter traces a single evolutionary line for the entire Family of Man.

It might be politic to admit at this point that both Haeckel and Mantegazza’s allegories do achieve a combination of the two axes, the spatial and the temporal, in that their stories of human evolution are literalized over time and in space. Whatever the

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predominant orientation of either allegory, however, whether they are vertically
developed through structural/spatial declensions or horizontally developed through
narrative temporalities, the two matrices of time and space must be authentically and
meaningfully related to each other in order for the allegory to succeed. Spatial projections
must logically unfold in time while narrative time must “persuasively [uphold] the
distinctions and equivalences”28 described by the spatial structure.

It would appear, then, at least on the surface of it, that Haeckel and Mantegazza’s
allegories are quite successful in that they are able to establish a viable relationship
between the two coordinating poles of the temporal and the spatial. Racial differences are
not just subsumed but sanctioned by the hierarchical ordering over time and in space, of
the various species of man. But how efficacious or even ultimately successful is this
temporal and spatial ordering of different racialities and species? I would like to question
the very manner in which the criterion of time and space are utilized by Haeckel,
Mantegazza, and evolutionary allegorists in general, to successfully broadcast and
validate “scientific” truth claims.

A certain incoherence lies at the heart of the entire discourse of evolutionary
progress. What causes this incoherence is the paradoxical ordering of time and space
whereby the apotheosis of European white masculinity, and its correlative European
present-time, is performed at the expense of repeated evocations or invocations of an
other and an elsewhere, of an/other past-time and an/other past-space. A simultaneous
recognition and disaffirmation of backward temporalities and spatialities makes possible
the double acknowledgment or inscription of evolutionary history as a universal,
homogenous history (the history of ALL mankind) and of the present as an inevitable,
necessary moment in the universal narrative of development and progress. The
progressive move to establish a universal evolutionary history, a history which is a
component of and serves to validate the European/Western subject, is constantly marked
by a series of retrogressive or regressive shifts into the past, into not just previous times
and spaces but irretrievably different times and spaces.

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
These irretrievably different times and spaces were what Mantegazza, Haeckel, and the host of other social evolutionists whose work I have been discussing in this chapter, sought to capture and recoup for the sake of writing a teleological, uniformly same, universal history of the Family of Man. But the domestication of difference, of heterogeneous time and space, which was undertaken in the name of authorizing sameness, of ratifying homogenous, universal time and space, only succeeded in reproducing and reifying difference. Paolo Mantegazza’s Morphological Tree of the Human Races seems to almost topple under the weight of the lower-most branches which represent those racially, temporally, and spatially different “others,” the Hottentots, Fuegans, Australian aborigines, etc. This bottom-heaviness, something that appears in Haeckel’s diagrams of ancestral recapitulation as well, may be read as a sign of that difference which cannot be contained and indeed seems to overrun the canvas of the universal Family of Man. It sums up my point about the simultaneous disavowal and affirmation that accompanies the depiction of temporal, spatial, and racial differences.29

**Contextualizing Woman’s Family**

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the Family of Man allegory then sought to narrate the entire chronological history of human development as a story of progress and racial and gender hierarchy. The Family Tree of Man codified and sanctioned race and gender differences, placing these within a hierarchically ordered text of evolutionary progress at the head of which marched the sovereign white male subject. The advent of social Darwinism after 1859 and biological and medical discourses in the 1870s and 1880s, all sanctioned the use of the “Family of Man” image as determining trope for the global genesis narrative of evolution and human development. The rest of this chapter is directly concerned with the consequences for women and colonized subjects, of the

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29 I am conflating the racial with the temporal and spatial at this point because the racial “other” is also, of course, the spatial and temporal “other.” The Hottentot’s radical otherness is not just a feature of racial difference, i.e. it is not just a product of her specifically racial features, but it is also a matter of her temporal and spatial differences, the fact that she is seen as inhabiting a different, pre-historic, pre-evolutionary time and space from that of the white man. The racialization of time and space is another characteristic of nineteenth-century social evolutionism.
uneven gendering and racializing of the allegorical narrative of the Family and the reinventing of Man's Family as Woman's Family.

Sara Jeannette Duncan, Grace Gardiner and Flora Annie Steel situate their performances of colonial domesticity in British India within the late-nineteenth century British discourses of separate spheres, domestic imperialism, feminist mythmaking, and the creed of the “memsahib.” Belief in these putatively naturalized and universalized concepts appears in a way to stabilize and redeem the English woman’s domestic project in the colony. But the depiction of these relations vis-à-vis the allegorical image of the Family of Woman actually serves to destabilize and sabotage the white woman’s domestic mission. If the English woman’s avowed mission in the colony is the fashioning of some kind of feminine (rather than feminist) agency, then this is premised on the forging and affirming of “familial” ties, ties that include not just the white woman’s husband and the rest of the Anglo-Indian community, but also her native servants. I use the term “familial” in this and the following instances to denote the putative codes of kinship and loyalty which underpin colonial relations. The “familial” in other words signifies relationships of alliance across racial and gender lines — the native servant’s alliance with the white master/mistress, the white woman’s alliance with Anglo-Indian society, and so on.

But the Family image is not as capacious as it would appear to be. It is beset with all kinds of problems not the least of which have to do with the English woman’s vexed relationship with a colonized, racialized work-force. The Family as an all-inclusive metaphor cannot be unproblematically deployed to frame the white mistress’s domestic dealings with her native servants in the colony. Duncan and Steel’s narratives reveal that the mistress’s position as domestic arbiter and Victorian “angel of the house,” is an unstable, contradictory one for it involves the negotiation of perilously shifting, ever fluid familial boundaries. Always lurking in the background is the risk posed by the deviant servant, the idle, lying, cheating, sniveling, dirty cook or houseboy who, despite the mistress’s best efforts, inevitably resists domestication and thus familial validation. In this regard the dirty Indian servant is as much a threat to the integrity of the colonial Family as is the domestic wage-earner to the metropolitan household. The incursion of the servant in middle/upper-class Victorian households heralds the entry of labor and
capital into a private, domestic, pre-capital space.  But what is significant about the white woman’s encounter with colonial domestic labor, as opposed to metropolitan domestic labor, is that the former raises the specter of not just class but racial difference as well. The figure of the native servant is doubly undervalued given her marginal class and racial status. It isn’t just that she brings with her the “whiff of the marketplace,” but that she carries in her body the marks of an ineradicable, irreducible “dirty” raciality, something that perhaps cannot be erased despite the mistress’ best efforts.

My reading of Sara Jeanette Duncan’s imperialist novel The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib (1893), and Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner’s domestic instructional manual The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook (1898) will focus on each woman’s engagement with domesticity, specifically colonial domesticity, as a familial concern. In the process I will investigate some of the ways in which the sovereign white male subject is displaced when the white woman redefines her position as head of the colonial Family. I believe that the refiguration of the Family of Man as the Family of Woman was possible and necessary in the colony because of the popular perception that women were symbolically charged with establishing and administering households in the colony. Colonial housewives were doing in a small, domestic way what their husbands and sons were doing on a larger, political scale: seeing that the Empire was managed efficiently. So, colonial housekeeping carries with it a symbolic valency that housekeeping in the metropole does not. By exploring the terms and conditions under which colonial housekeeping takes place I will interrogate the actual value or even legitimacy of such allegorical reimaginings of the universal Family of (Wo)Man.

Familial boundaries shift constantly in Duncan and Steel’s narratives; the axes of familial power keep shifting and realigning themselves, moving fluidly from white man to white woman, white woman to native servant, and even on occasion from white man to native servant. This constant shifting or back-and-forth movement reveals a pervasive, predominantly feminine, anxiety about the maintenance of familial boundaries. On the one hand, the image of the “family” serves to concretize and legitimize the white

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30 For more on this see McClintock and, for an astute analysis of servants as threats to the sexual ordering of Victorian families see Michel Foucault’s The History of Sexuality: Volume I (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).
31 McClintock, IL, 164.
woman's domestic burden because of the ideological charge that this image already bears—according to the claims of imperial ideology the colonies are part of an extended, global Family, managed and led by Britain. But the family is at the same time a disturbingly fluid, protean trope that has to be anxiously and vigilantly applied so that it becomes a guarantor of social and racial affiliation in the face of overwhelming social and racial difference. To state the case paradoxically, the family trope in these domestic texts has to signify filiation or kinship across family lines, when the vehement non-filiation, a non-desire for any kind of filiative relationship with the domestic “other,” seems to be the logical corollary of a colonial policy of racial exclusion and exploitation. This central contradiction comes through very powerfully in my first textual engagement, Sara Jeanette Duncan’s novel The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib.

The Memsahib’s Mission

“...we must not forget that women are, on the average, a little less intelligent than men, a difference which we should not exaggerate but which is, nonetheless, real. We are therefore permitted to suppose that the relatively small size of the female brain depends in part upon her physical inferiority and in part upon her intellectual inferiority.”
—Paul Broca, 1861.32

“The day when, misunderstanding the inferior occupations which nature has given her, women leave the home and take part in our battles; on this day a social revolution will begin, and everything that maintains the sacred ties of the family will disappear.”
—Gustave LeBon, 1879.33

Duncan’s heroine Helen Browne embarks on a noble journey to undertake the (re)ordering of a family in The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib, a novel about the domestic world of white women in late-nineteenth century British India. The core of the novel and its plot/narrative impetus comprise of Helen’s attempts to establish two modest households in Calcutta. It might be expedient at this point, before I enter into the question of Helen Browne’s fashioning of colonial femininity, for me to situate Helen’s tale of

32 Quoted in Gould, MM, 104.
33 Ibid., 105.
domestic (re)invention within the specific historical context of the emergence of the “memsahib” as a popular cultural and analytical category in the late-nineteenth century, as well as in the broader context of the woman question in late-Victorian England.

The plight of the English woman in India or the “memsahib,” as married English women were popularly referred to in India, has been well documented in colonial histories and literature. From Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster’s less than complimentary literary depictions of the memsahib, to Pat Barr’s 1976 study The Memsahibs and Geoffrey Moorhouse’s history India Britannica, the memsahib has figured prominently in the British-Indian colonial consciousness.34 The overwhelming consensus with regard to the memsahib is that her presence in India was at best a safeguard or a deterrent to the English man’s potentially unhealthy and excessive sexual appetites, and at worst, a hindrance to the proper running of empire. Misogynistic statements about the memsahib’s inability to cope with or even understand the complex colonial psyche were fairly commonplace in the popular cultural imaginary. The universal belief that the memsahibs “were very largely responsible for the break-up of relations between the British and Indians,” was supported by pseudo-scientific empirical observations about their pathologically unsuitable temperaments.35 Hence this dramatic conclusion reached by Charles Allen, a historian of the British Raj: “Most of them [start] out as perfectly reasonable, decent English girls, [but] many of them in the course of time [develop] into what I can only describe as the most awful harridans.”36 Geoffrey Moorhouse is less strenuous but equally incisive in his denunciation of the memsahib: “They were at first victims and then perpetrators of a vicious circle which reserved them for their husband’s pleasure alone, [and] left them ignorant and smug within a small superior coterie.”37

A great deal of critical evidence has emerged in the past few years to suggest that the white woman in the colonies was ambiguously, even tenuously positioned in relation to the white man and the colonized subject. Anne Laura Stoler, Helen Callaway, and

36 Ibid., i.
Vron Ware, among others, have theorized extensively on the subject of the white woman’s implication in imperialist processes. As professional women employed as nurses and teachers, domestic workers, missionaries, or the wives of colonial officers who were charged with the sacred task of producing and rearing future empire builders, colonial women, by virtue of race privilege on one hand and gender subordination on the other, were both subjected to and implicated in the task of colonialism. They were complicit both as “colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting.”

For the new memsahib, Helen Browne, negotiating the apparently murky domestic waters of colonial India is a tricky thing. Helen’s first encounter with her Indian cook reconfirms the shaky status of the memsahib in the colonial hierarchy:

“Helen found herself confronted with her little domestic corner of the great problem of India – the natives’ ‘way’. But she had not language with which to circumvent it or remonstrate with it. She could only decide that Kali Bagh was an eminently proper subject for discipline, and resolve to tell George about it, which was not much of an expedient. It is exactly what we all do in India, however, under the circumstances. We tell our superior officers, until at last the Queen Empress is told.” (86)

As Helen articulates herself in relationship to, or tries to derive agency from her domestic functions, the native subject is excluded from any share in her emerging narrative of female individualism. Racial prejudice informs Helen’s dealings with her servants and Indian neighbors. An unmistakable note of distaste and unease comes through in Helen’s musings on her maid’s meticulous knowledge of Helen’s personal possessions. She says about Chua (which literally means “rat”) that she “knew the exact contents of every box and drawer and wardrobe ... Helen used to feel ... as if the omniscient little woman had made an index of her mistress’ emotions and ideas as well, and could lay her small shiny brown fingers upon any one of them” (95). The native servants’ sinister, deceitful nature

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37 Ibid.
39 McClintock, IL, 6.
is a staple of orientalist colonial discourse, and is repeatedly used to establish the racial and moral superiority of the white woman over the native.

A more complex case is presented by the Brownes’ neighbors, the wealthy Bengali women whose class/social entitlement place them on a higher economic level than both the Brownes as well as Helen’s socially disempowered maid servant, Chua. Helen rarely sees these women but almost obsessively fantasizes about the secret, “different” lives they lead. She imagines them inhabiting a harem-like, oppressive space, shut up within an ugly, dirty yellow compound, behind “iron-barred” windows. When they do venture out, these women are veiled and hidden from view: “the ladies, the Mesdames Mitterjee, when they issued forth from the little silent yellow house, which they did but seldom, went most securely in charge and under cover, and Mrs. Browne might look in vain for any glimpse of their fascinations behind the purple curtains of their palanquins, as they passed her gate” (158-160). By their very absence or invisibility these “other” women come to signify Helen’s agency, her “unveiled,” emancipatory status as white woman.

As a white woman in the colonies Helen is both a signifier and an agent of racial and gender hierarchies. Her domestic mission is premised on a colonized domestic workforce while her will to feminist power is underwritten by the authoritative voice of Mr. Browne. Her identity as domestic mistress has to be obsessively produced, re-produced, performed and mediated by the master-, or in this case, mistress servant relation, and race privilege is an important constituent of her will to power in this instance. At the same time her status as the Master’s wife, and hence her gender restriction, means that her dominance is always-already on the verge of being challenged, questioned and/or subverted by her potentially recalcitrant servants whose putative loyalties lie with the Master. Helen’s agency has to be understood then in terms of the unequal gender power relations in colonial patriarchy. As wife of a colonial officer she serves “discreetly at the elbow of power.” 40 Unlike her husband, she is not involved in the direct military and economic running of empire. Race and gender, then, come together in very interesting and problematic ways in Duncan’s story of late-nineteenth century feminist self-fashioning.

40 Ibid.
In *The Simple Adventures of the Memsaarih* the allegorical Family of Man narrative which depends for its exegesis upon the hierarchizing of gender relations and the racializing of colonial relations, derives its suggestive power from another late-Victorian ideological narrative, that of the separates spheres of gendered activity. In order to tell Helen Browne’s story Duncan has to evoke, among other things, the notion of a private space derived from the separation of a “woman’s sphere” from a “man’s sphere”. Darwinian models of evolutionary development at the end of the nineteenth century contrasted a “striving restless masculinity” to “an organic, nondifferentiated femininity”, and used this contrast to sanction the idea of separate spheres.\(^{41}\) I want to suggest that although in Helen’s case the allegorical trajectory of Family derives its ideological momentum from the idea of separate spheres, sexualized as female/private and male/public, this discourse is undercut by the ambivalent performance of domesticity by Helen’s husband.

Although Helen’s performance of colonial domesticity has to be read within the late-nineteenth century British discourse of separate spheres, the two axes, the public (or male) and the private (or female) are constantly shifting and realigning themselves, so much so that there are moments in the novel when it seems as though traditional gender roles are reversed if not precisely subverted. In one of the novel’s most thorough explorations of the “family” trope, George Browne introduces his new wife to their Indian servants, dwelling extensively on their “exotic” native characters, their ranks and domestic duties. This is an extraordinary scene of benevolent colonial patriarchalism and indoctrination in which the white master elaborates for the benefit of his wife, the details of his social contract with his native servants.

The most interesting aspect about this scene is its unselfconscious feminization of the English man and its consequent blurring of male-female, public-private boundaries. George Browne appropriates his wife’s proper, private domestic role and performs it unabashedly before an Indian audience. His performance, which inhabits the border of the public and private, emphasizes the fragility of such historical divisions: male versus female, public versus private spheres of activity. The important point to keep in mind here is that although this is a scene of feminization it is not an emasculation. In

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other words, George Browne’s inverse performance of domesticity does not signal his abdication of his singularly male, imperial patriarchal power. He is still very much the “man of the house” and head of the “family.” His performance is less an attempt to vacate his position of gender power than it is an attempt to pose a strategic intervention into his wife’s yet-to-be articulated narrative of domestic power. So what this scene allows George Browne to do is vicariously experience colonial domesticity, without at the same time endangering his own colonial masculinity.

George Browne’s unthreatened male performance of colonial domesticity suggests the profound ideological ambivalence and instability of the memsahib’s project of making families in the colony. When she appropriates the white man’s place of primacy in the Family of Man allegory Helen runs into the danger of having her position reappropriated by the man. Her domestic sovereignty is always on the verge of being jeopardized, not just by disloyal native servants but also by her husband, the original head of the Family. I believe that her allegory of the Family of Woman may in fact be read as the failure of the Family of Woman allegory. The fact that Helen’s narrative does not allow for the serene passage of power from white man to white woman in the colonial domestic sphere marks an aporia in the Family of Woman allegory. The aporia arises from the realization that even as she remakes her colonial family, even as she establishes herself as the “mistress,” Helen’s will is underwritten by and has to be understood as the potent reminder of Mr. Browne’s ultimate authority in all things colonial. By co-opting her Family Mr. Browne in effect aborts the promise of familial endeavor as envisaged in the opening scene of the novel. I would like to turn now to a consideration of how this scene with its sub-textual invocation of a counter-model of female authority, Queen Victoria’s mistressing of the Imperial Family, marks another moment of aborted promise in Helen’s text.

**Helen and the Queen**

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42 I use “aporia” here in the sense in which Jacques Derrida uses it in his discussion of justice as the experience of aporia in his essay “Force of Law.” “It is impossible to have a full experience of aporia, that is, of something that does not allow passage,” Derrida writes. See his essay “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority,” in *Cardoza Law Review* 11:5-6 (July/Aug. 1990: 919-1046).
My theoretical point of intervention into Duncan’s avowedly feminist, incipiently racist representations of gender power in *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* is Gayatri Spivak’s work on the constitution and interpellation of the (female) subject in the age of imperialism. According to Spivak, imperial subjection takes place on two registers: “child bearing” and “soul making.” She describes the first as “domestic society through sexual reproduction catheted as ‘companionate love’,” and the second as “the imperialist project catheted as civil society through social mission.” It is in accordance with the Spivakian allegory of “child bearing” and “soul making” that the “white woman’s burden” and the whole ideological project of reinventing colonial families is envisaged in the opening chapters of Duncan’s novel.

A memorable opening scene in the novel has Helen’s mother Mrs. Preachey imagining her daughter “in her new field of labour” in India. Mrs. Preachey imagines Helen exercising influence and control over her native servant, and ultimately, realizing her maternal and imperial mission by producing “little empire-builders” of her own. More specifically she pictures Helen “seated under a bread-fruit tree in her Indian garden, dressed in a white muslin, teaching a circle of little ‘blacks’ to read the Scriptures” (12). This overdetermined imaginary scene of social misssioning, with its blatantly racist chromaticism, the white woman in white muslin surrounded by black children, and its equally racist rhetoric of enlightenment masquerading as Christian benevolence, can be read within a certain allegorical tradition of religious portraiture. Mrs. Preachey’s rhetorical portrait can be read in the historical context of late-Victorian allegorical paintings that depicted Queen Victoria herself as “the mother figure of Empire,” to borrow a phrase David Cannadine uses in another context.

One such allegorical painting is Val C. Prinsep’s rendition of the Imperial Assemblage of 1887 that was held in Delhi to commemorate Benjamin Disraeli’s bestowal upon Queen Victoria of the new title of Kaiser-i-Hind or Queen Empress of India. Prinsep’s painting is entitled *The Jewel in Her Crown*. In it Victoria is depicted seated on a canopied throne under an open sky surrounded by a representative crowd of

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43 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (*Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1985), 244.
her loyal Indian subjects which include princes, sepoys, traders, mothers, children and even beggars. To one side of her stands Prime Minister Disraeli with a map of India held up in his hands while approaching her is an Indian prince who holds before him a velvet cushion with a jewel upon it. The title of the painting refers to the jewel, which in turn stands for India. The painting may be read allegorically as India’s yielding of all her wealth and people to Britain. It allegorizes the very real material consumption of India by the British Empire.  

Prinsep’s painting uses the image of Victoria in a representative allegorical fashion to convey ideals of imperial power and knowledge. Angus Fletcher has shown how a particular tradition in medieval allegorical paintings used such figures as that of the monarch in a representative fashion to embody certain ideals or ideas like imperial power, and in this process transformed them into allegorical agents. Although I am not suggesting that Prinsep’s visual representation of the Queen continued a medieval allegorical tradition in iconographic representations, I nevertheless believe that the exegetical codes that the medieval mimetic mode employed does survive in Prinsep’s aesthetic rendition. I would even go so far as to suggest that the newer mimetic allegorical narrative, that of the universal, global Family of Man, could a) be usefully affiliated with the older form to suggest such imperialist ideas as have to do with the essential racial superiority of the English, the charity and goodwill of the colonial mission, the spiritual and material significance of a project of “enlightenment,” and so on, and b) provide a place for the representation of the gendered subject as allegorical arbiter of meaning.

Victoria’s family, her household, is an all-inclusive, global one. It contains within its admittedly racist purview, all of those “fortunate” subjugate races whom the British found themselves governing at the turn-of-the-century: those primitive, sub-evolved

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45 For an analysis of Prinsep’s painting in the context of allegorical pageantry and imperial myth-making see my Chapter I: Staging Empire: History, Narrative and the Spectacle of ‘Allegoresis’ in the Colonial (Con)Text, the section entitled “Absence as Presence: A Deconstructive Motif?” Also see Val C. Prinsep’s Imperial India: An Artist’s Journal (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870) for Prinsep’s own account of the Delhi Imperial Assemblage of 1877.

Papuans and Fuegans of Mantegazza’s Morphological Tree of the Human Races. But while Mantegazza’s Family of Man does not admit any women, as in fact do none of the nineteenth-century graphings of the family unless it is to situate women, alongside children and other so-called inferior groups, as pre-evolutionary subjects, allegorical depictions like Prinsep’s painting and Richard Whiteing’s lithograph (included in his novel No. 5 John Street) are structured around the formal and thematic topos of the universal, global family at the head of which stands the authoritative figure of the Mother Queen. I do not mean to suggest that this tradition in allegorical portraiture that places a Woman at the head of the Family of Man, offers a “feminist” alternative to the overweeningly masculinist and sexist text of social evolutionism. No assumption about feminist agency can be made given the historically reified, politically ineffectual nature of these jingoistic allegories and the political circumscription of the Queen herself. The Queen is merely an ornamental, decorative allegorical figurehead, unthreatening to male politicians like Disraeli and the Ministers in Windsor uniform who stand in front of her in positions of apparent obeisance; she is unthreatening because she has absolutely no political cachet.

The allegorical figure of the Queen performs, at a meta-historical and cultural level, what Helen Browne is strategically deployed to do in her mother’s noble vision of her daughter’s future: they are both the symbolic centers or apogees of a domestic allegory of Family, Nation and Empire. Denied any direct political power in the management and administration of the colonies, the women become charged in both these instances with an allegorical function — Helen Browne with moral missioning or “soul making” and sexual reproduction, and the Queen with guardianship of Empire, and the symbolic provision of a rallying point of stability for the British nation.

There are, however, some important distinctions in the way the Family of Man allegory functions in Helen Browne’s domestic narrative as opposed to that of the Queen’s. While the Queen’s allegorical role is that of the idealized, benevolent Mother

47 Late-Victorian jingo allegories “were given in as set texts for school examinations, presented to the queen on ceremonial occasions, posted as aids to recruitment, enshrined in public statues, and publicized by a flood of commodity kitsch” (Thomas Richards, The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, 135). While such jingoist allegories crowded almost every available space of English public and domestic life, from pubs, schools, and work-places, to private homes, their actual worth, beyond the propagandist, was severely limited.
Empress whose household encompasses most of the globe, Helen, the newly anointed memsahib, fulfills her allegorical function in the relatively circumscribed precincts of a middle-class Calcutta house. The Queen as she is represented in Prinsep’s painting and in the innumerable allegorical sketches, portraits, and lithographs that abounded in the late-nineteenth century, is not so much a person as much as she is an allegorical ideal. The allegorical scene depicted in the lithograph of Victoria in Richard Whiteing’s 1902 novel No. 5 John Street is a typical expression of this: “The chief kneels on a loin-cloth of ostrich plumes. Ministers in the Windsor uniform hover in the background.” ⁴⁸ All the bounty of the colonial household is offered up to Victoria, presumably as her reward for the proper management of her universal family and as a testament to the benevolence, goodwill, and charm with which she has carried out her domestic duties.

Victoria is a one-dimensional, idealized figure in these scenes of material consumption. She is depicted in much the same vein as mythical heroes like Aeneas, Hercules, and Odysseus were represented in medieval allegories: “no assumption was made that depth of significance implied human character, with all its variability.” ⁴⁹ The flamboyant style of these allegories lack any ironical perspective; they do not even allow for irony, for any kind of ironical reading of the scene. This is not to say, of course, that these allegories cannot be read ironically since I am obviously and ironically interrupting their pedagogic authority. My point here is that these lithographs were not in their original intents, meant to be read ironically. They were meant to be taken at their face-value as nothing more nor less than the figurative expression of British imperial benevolence. In their propagandist desire to convey the message of imperialism’s goodwill and divinely sanctioned mission, they are conventional, unsubtle and obvious although always, invariably serious. In Whiteing’s novel the characters who read the allegorical lithograph of the Queen take it very seriously indeed. The lithograph serves a pedagogical function in that it teaches the various characters to appreciate England’s “evangelizing mission;” it even leads them to surmise that since the Maker’s qualities of

⁴⁹ Angus Fletcher, ATSM, 34.
"justice and mercy" are "eminently British qualities," qualities that distinguish the British administrator, the Maker must be "at heart a Briton" (60-61).

The way Helen's mother envisions her daughter's social role in colonial India is consonant with these one-dimensional, single-minded, fixed allegories of Victoria. Mrs. Preachey's rhetorical portrait transforms Helen and indeed the entire scene of imperial transmission, pedagogy, and family-making (Helen is after all teaching little "blacks" how to read the Bible and thereby incorporating them into the universal Christian Family of Man) into an idealistic allegory of Christian beneficence and English philanthropy. In this it is similar to the exegetical mode that late-nineteenth century allegorical paintings and lithographs employed to signify the imperial imperative. Yet one of the unwitting ironies of Duncan's novel is that this initial allegorical vision of good female Christian endeavor remains unrealized and unrealizable in the context of Helen's life as she "really" lives it in India. Indeed, Helen herself feels not the slightest inclination to realize her mother's grandiose ambitions.

Once in Calcutta, and after she has outgrown the "special raptures" that accompany her first view of the "exotic" native scene (36), Helen finds herself caught up in the mundane details of setting up a modest, middle-class Anglo-Indian home. Mastering the intricate details of domestic life and charting a smooth course through the rather murky waters of Anglo-Indian society, serve to keep Helen occupied in the early days of her new life in India. The reality of Helen's situation is that domestic and social activities such as making sure the food is served hot, the furniture dusted, the bawarchi and khitmugar paid appropriate wages, and the proper hierarchical structure of Anglo-Indian society maintained, take precedence over everything else. And at the end of it all, after her period of apprenticeship has ended and she has successfully executed her domestic and social responsibilities, she is deemed a proper memsahib. The novel concludes on this rather melancholic, stagnant vision of Helen Browne, a vision that serves as an ironic counter-point to that earlier allegorical vision of bread-fruit trees and Bible lessons:

"Mrs. Browne has become a memsahib, graduated, qualified, sophisticated ... She has lost her pretty colour, that always goes first, and has gained a shadowy ring under each eye, that always comes afterwards. She is thinner ... and has acquired nerves and some petulance ... She is growing dull to
India too ... She sees no more the supple savagery of the Pathan in the market-place, the bowed reverence of the Mussalman praying in the sunset, the early morning mists lifting among the domes and palms of the city. She has acquired for the Aryan inhabitant a certain strong irritation, and she believes him to be nasty in all his ways ... She is a memsahib like another” (310).

Unlike Victoria and despite Mrs. Preachey’s vision, Helen Browne will forever remain detached and alienated from her “other” family. The Anglo-Indian memsahib is destined to fail at making families. And in the final analysis the memsahib’s failure is inextricably linked to and becomes a function of the all-pervasiveness of dirt in the Indian household.

Despite her efforts to the contrary the memsahib can never expel dirt from her family. The colonial Family of Woman is, unfortunately, an irredeemably dirty one. This is where it differs from Victoria’s immaculate Family. The allegorical canvas of Queen Victoria’s universal Family is an uncontaminated, clean one. All suggestions, even the tiniest hint of dirt, are erased from it. Even the beggars who sit at Victoria’s feet in Prinsep’s painting are a remarkably clean and tidy group. Victoria is pure, and her family is pure, in a way that Helen and Helen’s family can never be. Helen sees dirt everywhere she looks: the people, the house, the city are all irreducibly dirty. Dirt is omnipresent in the memsahib’s world and has to constantly be battled with, as it raises the specter of not just physical but moral uncleanness.

Women’s Labor: Managing Dirt, Managing Dirty Bodies

Dirt is very much a part of the memsahib’s physical and moral universe in India in The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook, the instructional manual-cum-cook book co-authored by Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner. Gardiner and Steel dedicate their book to “English girls to whom Fate may assign the task of being House Mothers in our Eastern Empire.” In their Preface they firmly state their belief that “housekeeping in India today has a political and social as well as a domestic side” (vii). The end and objective of housekeeping in India from the point of view of the English woman “is not merely personal comfort but the formation of a home – that unit of civilization where father and
children, master and servant, employer and employed can learn their several duties ... the proper administration of even a small household needs both brain and heart. A really clever woman always sees this, and like George Eliot, the greatest of modern women, prides herself on being an excellent housekeeper” (emphasis added, 7). The Preface reads almost like an apologia for housekeeping because of the authors’ anxious insistence on the worth and value of “women’s work.” They reiterate, “an Indian household can no more be governed peacefully and without dignity and prestige, than an Indian Empire” (7).

Although Steel and Gardiner do not elaborate on the political aspect of colonial housekeeping, it is clear from their discussion that the English woman as housekeeper has to undertake the socializing, economizing and domesticating of an entire, inalienably other civilization, a family of pathologically unhygienic, idle Indian servants. Gardiner and Steel announce their mission in radical terms as nothing less than a complete overhauling of the Indian household. They write, “amid the crowd of idle, unintelligible servants, there seems not one to carry on the usual routine of household work, which in England follows as a matter of course. The kitchen is a black hole, the pantry a sink. The only servant who will condescend to tidy up is a skulking savage with a red broom; while pervading all things is a stifling, enervating atmosphere of custom, against which energy beats itself unavailingly” (ix). It is this forbidding scene of domestic ineptitude and slovenliness that the Anglo-Indian pioneer housekeeper must face when she makes her first foray into colonial space. Steel and Gardiner’s self-help domestic manual carefully and conscientiously lays out the duties of the English mistress by tracking a circuitous route through the abject psyche and social condition of the native servant. The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook thus makes a cultural argument in order to constitute the English woman’s domestic power, and hence her agency, on the grounds of the domestic subordination and the potential domestic irredeemability of the native servant.

A dominant metaphor for native domestic irrecoverability in Steel and Gardiner’s text is that of dirt, or to be more specific, the general miasma of dirt and incipient disease that clings to the Indian servant. We are repeatedly informed that without proper

50 Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner, The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook (London: William Heinemann, 1898).
supervision and constant vigilance on the part of the mistress, the servants will fall into their old slovenly habits with all the “inherited conservatism of dirt” (1). The khimirag we are told, is as a rule “a quick, quiet waiter … but in the pantry and scullery his dirt and slovenliness are simply inconceivable to the new-comer in India” (73). Again, the cleanliness of the home depends upon the sweeper so “he should never be allowed to degenerate into … [a] dirty, unkempt drudge” (63). In addition to managing the waiter and sweeper, the most difficult task that faces the new housekeeper is to ensure the cleanliness of her cook. Steel and Gardiner warn the memsahib that she must “always be on her guard against the dirty habits which are ingrained in the native cook” (69).

The dirty servants are not just pathological, they are also contagious. Their contagious, dirty bodies might infect and contaminate the food as well. The careless housekeeper soon finds that puddings and pies are served with “dusty, half-dried smears of gravy clinging to the sides of the pie-dish” (47). Smeared on dishes and physiques, dirt becomes this all-pervasive, overdetermined moral category. In fact, after a point in the text it becomes a physically vacuous but morally loaded symbolic marker of racial difference and cultural abjection. Steel and Gardiner thus remind the English housekeeper that if dirty habits remain unchecked, the insidious dirt will “cling” to the lowest servant “long after he has risen to higher things” (73).

Anne McClintock, Mary Douglas and Leonore Davidoff have all linked dirt to social anxieties about the maintenance and policing of bodily, economic, and class boundaries. Mary Douglas writes:

“Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements … Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing … In short, our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications” (36).

Dirt is not dirty in and of itself; it is a relative thing. Dirt derives its symbolic power from its relation to society, to social mores, values, and norms. Dirt is both the excess and the

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disordered residuum. It is what we wish to eliminate at all costs because of the frightening possibilities (of disorder and chaos) it unleashes in our ordered universe. To quote Mary Douglas again, “dirt is essentially disorder ... Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment ... making it conform to an idea” (2).

To situate the narrative of dirt in the historical context of nineteenth-century England: the individual body’s relation to dirt in Victorian England, was an expression of the social body’s relation to labor. Anne McClintock writes that dirt was a scandal in Victorian culture because “it was the surplus evidence of manual work, the visible residue that stubbornly remained after the process of industrial rationality had done its work.” She argues that it was the great unmentionable because it tied the basic fact of commodity production to the bodies of the working class, women and colonized. The dialectic that underpins the Victorian obsession with dirt is the “fetishized undervaluation of human labor.”

While I find this argument convincing I am not entirely sure of its applicability to the Indian scene. The almost fetishistic insistence on cleaning up dirt – dirty dishes, dirty houses, dirty servants et al – in Steel and Gardiner’s manual and in Helen’s Browne’s personal narrative, reveal not so much an interest in concealing the visible signs of manual labor, but in exhibiting the very conditions of this labor. Ultimately both The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook and The Simple Adventures of a Mem Sahib offer up, for the consumption of an avid expatriate English female community, the spectacle of a colonized domestic labor force in all its shameful dirty glory. Dirt seems to be a necessary condition for the English woman’s assumption of domestic agency – toward what worthy goal would the memsahib direct her zealous spring-cleaning operations, upon which she premises her agency and power as white woman, if it were not for the slovenly habits of her dirty native servants? Rather than cover it up, the maker of colonial domesticity works to expose dirt, spectacularize and exhibit it, so that it become both a feature of the native landscape and the character of the native servant. The memsahib’s self-imposed domestic task is to remove, through sterilization, the dirt, to clean up the

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52 McClintock, IL, 153.
53 Ibid., 154.
house and by extension the family. It is not surprising then that Steel and Gardiner devote entire chapters of *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* to the arduous but crucial process of removing dirt and, metaphorically speaking, to the process of sanitizing the colonial family.

Dirt, of course, is an important image in the overall iconography of colonial social missioning. Imperial racism imputed a moral value to black/brown bodies. These bodies were racially marked as dirty, unhygienic, even diseased. Nineteenth-century rituals of cleaning, especially those represented in and by commodity advertisements (for products like Pears’ soap, Buttercup Metal Polish, Sunlight Detergent Soap etc.), directed their feverish energies toward the cleaning of dirty bodies, dirty families and dirty households. The final aim was not to simply remove physical or surface dirt, but to impress upon these bodies, families and households an ideology of purity and cleanliness, and thus ultimately transform them into, not just physically clean but morally pure bodies, families, and households.

**Families in Crisis**

There are certain obvious paradoxes or contradictions in the colonial narrative of domesticity and gender power. I have tried to show how these fissures surface despite or perhaps because of the allegory of the universal Family of Man. Helen Browne’s domestic will is circumscribed by her husband’s obvious socially and historically prescribed sense of maleness, something that is not in any way affected by his singular performance of domesticity. At the same time, Helen’s relation to labor is a conflicted, often agonized one. Her race entitlement is underscored by her gender restraint, and it turns out that neither are a guarantee of class privilege. Even Helen’s maid knows that she is but a “chota memsahib,” i.e. a memsahib of no particular social standing. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* completes this problematic picture of the memsahib in crisis. The “family” image, although repeatedly invoked to sanction and legitimize the English woman’s domestic project in the colony, cannot stabilize a household overrun with pathologically dirty, idle native servants. It is paradoxical but not altogether surprising, that even in the face of such overwhelming domestic resistance,
Duncan, Steel and Gardiner still resort to the Family allegory as a way of containing the unhappy spectacle of colonial labor.

What Steel and Gardiner, and Duncan to a lesser extent, are all concerned with is the constitution of families through the strict regimentation of housework. Leonore Davidoff believes that, “In the most basic sense, housework is concerned with creating and maintaining order in the immediate environment, making meaningful patterns of activities, people, and materials” (emphasis added). I would push Davidoff’s argument even further by suggesting that in the context of colonialism and colonial housework (something Davidoff does not consider in her essay), the only way in which the English woman can create and maintain order through the forging of “meaningful patterns of activities, people, and materials,” is by invoking another, more powerful, meaning-imputing narrative: the Family of Man. In a way, the imposition of meaning and the creation of patterns of meaning is what the nineteenth-century allegory of the Family attempted through its myriad plottings of family trees and ancestral graphs. For the white woman in the colony the task of ordering or re-ordering a family has to be undertaken, and indeed can only be undertaken, under the auspices of the allegorical Family of Man narrative.

When the memsahib appropriates the predominantly masculinist Family of Man allegory, however, curious things happen to it. As I have noted earlier nineteenth-century social evolutionism either banished women entirely from its conceptualization of man’s family, as Paolo Mantegazza does in his diagram of “The Family Group of the Katarrhinens,” or, as was more often the case, lumped them with children and “savages” in the evolutionary ladder. So what happens when the Anglo-Indian memsahib decides that the only way she can authorize her own allegory of progressive domesticity is by invoking the decidedly anti-feminist allegory of the Family of Man? Can her appropriation be read in feminist terms as an activist act of translation, rewriting or resistance? Is she, in fact, inserting herself back into the Family of Man allegory but this time as an agent, as an active indeed even authoritative player in the Family game?

I would argue against any kind of celebratorial reading of the Family of Woman, at least in the problematic case of the memsahib in her field of familial labor in fin-de-

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sécle British India. I have already adverted to the English woman’s race- and class-
engendered and endangered relationship to her abject, native work-force. Her familial
narrative is jeopardized from the very outset by these determinedly incorporatable
“others,” the always-dirty servants who refuse to become the servile subjects of an
allegorical discourse of family. The white woman’s vision of family appears to be one of
togetherness, of cohesion and unity. Helen Browne’s mother, Mrs. Preachey, sums it up
best in her portrait of Helen’s incorporated family at the beginning of *The Simple
Adventures of a Memsahib*. But as my reading of nineteenth-century allegories of the
Family of Man has demonstrated, the efficacy of the Family narrative depends not so
much on cohesiveness as it does on divisiveness, exclusion, and dis-unity. The Family of
Man is not after all the family of all men everywhere. Thus the Family of Woman
allegory, which has to utilize the symbolic cachet of the Family of Man allegory in order
to sanction its own domestic project, cannot necessarily be an all-inclusive one either.
Duncan, Steel and Gardiner’s texts are in the final analysis, failed allegories of womanly
families. Their failure has as much to do with the all-pervasiveness and ineradicability of
dirt (dirty dishes, dirty rooms, dirty servants, etc.) as it does with the always-already
exclusive nature of the Family of Man allegory.
Epilogue: Allegorical Endings

"In allegory the concern is always with process, with the way in which various elements of an imaginative or intellectual system interact, and with the effects of this system or structure on and within individuals. To express change and process allegorical action often takes the form of a journey, a quest, or a pursuit: this becomes the metaphor by which a process of learning for both protagonists and readers is expressed. In the course of their adventures the heroes of allegory discover which ideals are worth pursuing and what things are obstacles to that pursuit. The narrative action thus gradually establishes a hierarchy of value and dis-value. It also provides a means for expressing — via dramatic relationships and imagery, for example — a complex pattern of connections between various ideas and abstractions."

— Gay Clifford, The Transformations of Allegory.

Although Clifford's comments relate specifically to medieval allegorical modes of narration, I find that her description offers an appropriate gloss for the method of analysis I adopt in Allegory and the Imperial Imaginary. My reading of fin-de-siècle political, cultural, and literary texts is itself an allegory of reading the myriad processes of politics, culture, and literature, of plotting the connections (and dis-connections) between ideological abstractions and imagistic expressions. To a certain extent my journey over the course of this dissertation proximates that of the hero of medieval allegory whose allegorical quest, for truth, knowledge, or whatever ideal it is he seeks, becomes a metaphor for the process of learning for reader and protagonist alike. The purpose of embarking on allegorical journeys is to attain an ideal, while the successful attainment of the ideal(s) reveals the meaning immanent in allegory. Unlike the medieval allegorical hero's journey, however, my pursuit reveals the intractability and ultimate instability of those ideas of truth and knowledge which purportedly constitute allegorical meaning and lie at the end of all allegorical actions. This difficulty has as much to do with post-structuralism's legacy of disjunctive meanings and postponed endings as it does with my own findings about allegory's profoundly varied, subjective nature.

By juxtapositioning the previous five chapters with their respective accounts of parabasistic disruptions and pedagogical authorizations, I have attempted to grapple with allegorical structures, to fix and dismantle them, to contain and resist them, to account for
their hegemonic power and then undo the very power I seek. I have, in other words, converted the difficulty of pinning down allegory to a meaning into a valorization of its proliferating intractability. But what purpose does such a valorization serve? Is it simply a happy celebration of allegorical multiplicity? Or is it perhaps a much more radical acknowledgment of allegory’s resilience in the face of claims (mainly literary ones) that it is dead, that its moment is gone forever? What I would like to do then, to mark not the end of my own engagement with allegory but the beginning of new mappings of the allegorical, is gesture toward the possibilities opened up by a creative reading of allegorical resilience. I would like to invoke two instances of “allegorical resilience,” or at least the resilience of an allegorical mode of reading. The first is a complicated post-colonial, post-imperial moment, a disturbing legacy of Anglo-Australian history, and the second is an instance of radical remaking of allegory in and through the virtual reality of the “information superhighway.”

In order to unpack both these moments it is necessary to keep in mind that throughout this dissertation I have been less interested in exploring literary forms as allegories and more concerned with inserting or locating the allegorical in broader historical, political, scientific and social narratives. The advantage of such a reading is that it allows the reader to locate allegory in not just literary but cultural contexts as well. Allegory and the Imperial Imaginary amply demonstrates the validity of allegorizing cultural texts/contexts. And although the immediate context of this dissertation is nineteenth-century British and British-Indian history and culture, the implications of its allegorical interpretive frame are far more extensive; its allegorical sway exceeds its historical detail. Instead of making this the grounds for a flattened textual reading of all histories and all cultures as allegories, what this allows me to do is identify those moments of dislocation when it appears, as it does to us today, that older nationalist, imperialist allegories are collapsing or disarrayed and neo-nationalist, neo-imperialist, even “virtual” allegories are emerging to take their places.

My first example is from an editorial entitled “Centenary Writ Small” by Australian political scientist Robert Manne.¹ Manne’s article describes, in a tone loaded

with irony and cynicism, the July 2000 and January 2001 celebrations held in London and Sydney respectively to mark the centenary year of Sydney's foundation. Manne's cynicism derives from his perception of a clumsy, unsophisticated, anachronistic staging of an antiquated imperial ceremonial code in Sydney, and the retroactive miming of this in London. Manne's entire essay is infused with a very postcolonial sense of Australia's failure to produce a meaningful allegorical code of her own, a code that might express the country's relation to a troubled imperial and aboriginal past, its present predicament as a "multi-cultural" society with unassimilable elements (aborigines, Asian immigrants, etc.), and its future as an effective player in a global, multi/transnational economy.

Manne writes that in London, "Australian female troops in slouch hats guarded Buckingham Palace," while "600 eminences, in black tie and evening dress" met at the Guildhall to honor the Australian Prime Minister in a ceremony one of the on-lookers describe as "magnificent, very British." The London celebrations conclude with a service in Westminster Abbey (a familiar site of allegorical myth-making) where the highlight is an aboriginal musician's playing of a "didgeridoo." In Sydney, several months later, the pageant floats "trundled wearily along the steamy Sydney streets," a visual reminder of Australia's failed postcoloniality. London's attempt to revitalize a moribund allegorical code is as contrived and facile as is Sydney's re-staging of it. And surrounding both symbolic failures is the all-pervasive ironic recognition that in order to celebrate Sydney's hundredth birthday it is necessary to first "[dispatch] to Buckingham Palace a troop of Australian guards." Allegory's reach seems both immense and terribly limiting when I read these hopelessly retrogressive scenes of imperial pageantry.

If my first example illustrates the inadequacy and perpetuity of older allegorical codes, and the desire for newer, multivalent ones which are more attuned to our contestatatory twenty-first century histories, my next example drawn from the world of internet reality, shows the resilient mutability of the term. A preliminary search on the internet using the keyword "allegory" (which yielded more than 100,000 entries) results in a number of curious finds: Web design companies called Allegory Design Group (www.allegory.net) and Allegory, Inc. (www.allegory.com), and an Internet Relay Chat Network www.allegory.org (billed as the "first and largest" of its kind). This sudden encounter with the virtual, cyber-spatial proliferation of allegorical discourses leads me to
contemplate the definitional challenges that the term “allegory” poses in our present
culture of hyper-realities. How can we rethink allegory in this other space? What does it
mean when a virtual chat network which connects people from all over the world and
allows them to “talk” to each other “24 hours a day” in English, German, Finnish,
Japanese, and a host of other languages, uses the domain name “allegory?” And what
happens to the idea of allegory when it is harnessed to an entire E-Commerce economy?
Does it become just another “dot com” phenomenon, its fate tied to the vicissitudes of the
Dow Jones Industrial Average?

What I see happening in these however unconscious reinventions of the
allegorical in aether space, is the resurgence of a term whose demisc is prematurely
mourned every once in a while.² I would argue that in our post-modern, or post-
postmodern age in which the relationship between sign and signifier has never been
viewed with more suspicion, allegory is still very much alive. The resurgence of the term
in cyber-space speaks of allegory’s adaptive ability, and perhaps the advent of a new
phase of allegorical (re)imaginings. The Imperial Imagining of allegorical realities might
have to yield to the Cyber Imagining of allegorical (virtual) realities in the new world
order. But allegory’s survival isn’t simply tied to its remapping in aether space. As my
reading of Robert Manne’s essay shows, allegory also survives in that clumsy, failed
moment of Anglo-Australian myth-making. So even at the very moment of allegory’s
reinvention as/in virtually constituted spaces, its ideological legibility in non-virtual
arenas has to be constantly contested and resisted. And such acts of contestation and
resistance open up still newer ways to define allegory.

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Appendix A

Illustrations

Figure 1: Victoria's Jubilee Procession, *Illustrated London News*, June 25, 1887.
Figure 2: Consuming the Queen’s Image, Graphic, March 5, 1887.
Figure 3: The Dragging of White Male Bodies: Richard Burton as “The Pilgrim,” *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Mecca*, 1893.
MRS. PEACHET HAD PRIVATE CHASTENED VISIONS, CHIEFLY ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS, OF HELEN IN HER NEW FIELD OF LABOUR.

Figure 4: Imagining the Colonial Family of Woman, The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib, 1893.
Figure 5: Paolo Mantegazza’s Family Tree of Man, *Physiognomy and Expression*, 1890.
Figure 6: Mapping Racialities: Paolo Mantegazza, *Physiognomy and Expression*, 1890.

Figure 7: Ernst Haeckel's Graphing of the Family Tree of Man, 1868.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Human Species</th>
<th>A.</th>
<th>B.</th>
<th>C.</th>
<th>Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuft-haired</td>
<td>1. Papuan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Mn</td>
<td>New Guinea and Melanesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lophocomi</td>
<td>2. Hotin-tot</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Mn</td>
<td>Philippine Islands, Malacca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(about 2 millions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The extreme south of Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The Cape)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexy-haired</td>
<td>3. Kaffre</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>Mn</td>
<td>South Africa (between 30° S. Lat. and 5° N. Lat.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eriocomi</td>
<td>4. Negro</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>Pi</td>
<td>Central Africa (between the Equator and 30° N. Lat.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(about 150 millions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight-Haired</td>
<td>5. Australian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Mn</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthycomi</td>
<td>6. Malay</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Co</td>
<td>Mn</td>
<td>Malacca, Sundaness, Polynesia, and Madagascar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(about 600 millions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The greater part of Asia and northern Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(India)</td>
<td>7. Mongol</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>Mn?</td>
<td>The extreme north-east of Asia and the extreme north of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Indo-China)</td>
<td>8. Arctic</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Co</td>
<td>Pi?</td>
<td>The whole of America with the exception of the exception of the extreme north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(North China)</td>
<td>9. American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Mn?</td>
<td>South Asia (Hindostan and Ceylon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(North America)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Central Africa (Nubia and Fula-land)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curly-haired</td>
<td>10. Draupi-das</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Co</td>
<td>Mn</td>
<td>In all parts of the world, having migrated from South Asia to North Africa and South Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euplocomi</td>
<td>11. Nubian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Co</td>
<td>Mn?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(about 600 millions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>12. Medi-</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>Pi</td>
<td>In all parts of the world but predominating in America and Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>terranean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>13. Hybrid</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>Pi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the Species</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N. B.—Column A denotes the Average Number of the Population in millions. Column B shows the Degree of the Phyletic Development of the Species, thus Pr = Progressive Diffusion; Co = Comparative stability; Re = Retregression and Exteinction. Column C denotes the Character of the Primeval Language; Mn (Monoglottonic) signifies that the Species had one Simple Primeval Language; Pi (Polyglottonic) a Compound Primeval Language.

Figure 8: Family Genealogies: Ernst Haeckel, 1868.