



Eastern Figures

Orient and Empire in British Writing

Douglas Kerr

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Eastern Figures

Hong Kong University Press thanks Xu Bing for writing the Press's name in his Square Word Calligraphy for the covers of its books. For further information, see p. iv.

In memory of my parents

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Orient and Empire in British Writing

Douglas Kerr



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— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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Introduction

This is a book of literary history which examines the relationship between British writing and Asian people and places in the colonial period and later, by considering a number of tropes in texts which form part of an attempt to represent and understand the East. The scope of my study embraces Lord Macaulay and Redmond O'Hanlon, but it draws its examples chiefly from work by British writers of the late nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, a period when the British empire reached its fullest extent, and when writing about the East was extremely rich, varied, and contentious.

Each of the texts discussed here has as one of its topics the relation between East and West. In much of the Earl of Cromer's *Modern Egypt*, or in Hugh Clifford's memoir of the 'heart-breaking little war' in the Pahang region of Malaya, or in Flora Annie Steel's *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, this topic is foregrounded and obvious enough. Each of these works ponders diegetically the question of East and West. But what about a fictional work — a work like Rudyard Kipling's short tale 'The Story of Muhammad Din', for example, in which an English narrator tells of his fondness for an Indian child, the son of one of his household servants, who falls ill and dies.¹ It is a slight tale. No portentous consequences hang upon the death or survival of this child, and the characters are not dressed in any rhetorical panoply signalling that they stand for something grand or abstract beyond themselves. And yet we can feel sure that this is not just a sentimental anecdote about a particular Indian infant, but that the story told is also Kipling's way of telling his readers something that matters about how he sees this relation between East and West, India and Britain (or Anglo-India). It can also be assumed that all of Kipling's readers — Indians, English, or anyone

1. Rudyard Kipling, 'The Story of Muhammad Din', *Plain Tales from the Hills* [1888], ed. H. R. Woudhuysen with an introduction and notes by David Trotter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 250–53. The story first appeared in the *Lahore Civil and Military Gazette*, 8 September 1886.

else, then and now — will have recognized this dimension of the tale. This is a way of saying that a tale like ‘The Story of Muhammad Din’, while going about its particular mimetic business as every story does, also participates in the British discourse about the East, even though the represented world in the story is confined to a single house and garden. If all Western writing (and painting, photography, music, film) about Eastern places and people is understood, and read, at one level as being about the relation between East and West, then every representation has potentially a quasi-allegorical dimension, as a trope in that Western discourse of the East. These tropes may be seen to have a figural as well as a literal meaning. I will be using the word *figure* to indicate an important and recurrent trope of representation, which can be shown to function not only as an element in the text in which it occurs, but also symbolically in the discourse, pointing beyond itself not to the East, but to a way of understanding the relation between East and West.

The essential parameters of the writings examined here are an Eastern object of representation, and a Western modality or point of view. The child Muhammad Din is a character, a human image in a story, the representation of an Indian person. He is also figurative, in that we construe his friendship with the English narrator in the story as in some way representative of a way that relations between India and the ruling British can be imagined and understood, or were imagined and understood by Kipling at least. He is also an instance of a trope of infantilization which is fairly common in the British imperial imagination, by which subject peoples are thought of as immature and incomplete, and therefore in need of protection and control by a more historically adult people, which is how the British thought of and represented themselves. And this is the point about Muhammad Din, that the image of the Indian child, or of India as a child, elicits or evokes a cluster of related images. These include the environment he lives in (a household in India belonging to an Englishman), the benign English adult who patronizes him, and also his own Indian father, his natural parent, who lacks the knowledge and resources that might perhaps have saved the boy’s life if applied in time. We can find traces of these same figural *dramatis personae*, though with a different and redemptive narrative and a provisionally happy ending this time, almost a century later in James Fenton’s poem ‘Children in Exile’ (1983), about refugee Cambodian children, fleeing from their lethal patrimony under the Pol Pot regime, and forming tentative surrogate parent-child relations in the West. The child, then, is an ‘Eastern figure’ in my sense.

As a matter of fact, there is not a chapter here on the figure of the child (though there might have been). But there is one about the Eastern crowd, and this can furnish another example of what this book is looking for. Asia is often first and most vividly experienced by the outsider, whether intrepid trailblazer or belated tourist, in the form of a crowd. The crowd is a figure of the East which

comes into focus through difference: to see the East as a crowd means, for the Western observer, to think of himself or herself as outnumbered; surrounded by a sea of indistinguishable foreign faces, the interloper is made acutely aware of his or her singularity by contrast, a heroic or beleaguered individuality. Or perhaps foreigners, arriving in the East with a sense of their own singularity sharpened by their travels, see the people they have come among as both legion and uniform, the overwhelming fact of these people's difference from himself or herself blinding the traveller, at least at first, to any difference or particularity among them. It hardly matters, and may not be possible to say, which comes first, the image of the singular West or the collective East, because they adduce each other and neither means much without the other. But the figure of the Eastern crowd is already halfway to becoming a *story* about East and West; one of the chapters that follow will trace that story through a number of examples.

Each figure considered here then contains a relationship of difference, yet never a static and rarely simply a conflictual or polar one, but always in some sense a mutual constitution, in which each is disclosed, precipitated and modified by its other or others. If the East occurs in the figure of a jungle, this is reinforced by, and brings into focus by contrast, memories and feelings about Western instances of both natural scenes and a modern urban habitat. The relationship is constitutively dialogic but not simply binary. The figure of the missionary, for another example, relates by difference to a number of figural partners or interlocutors — the convert, the unconvertible, and the apostate, the rival priest of a local religion or another church, the secular educator or official with whom missionaries often had an uneasy relationship, even the natural scene which must be converted to grace.

'Rule', the subject of a chapter here, is a figure that is not confined to concrete images like the policeman or the governor or the courthouse, but is dispersed in various institutions and ideas under whose aegis the Europeans — but particularly the British — in the East were pleased to think of theirs as a culture of law, and their imperial activity as guaranteeing and bequeathing the rule of law to Asia. It is a figure which encouraged them to imagine and represent the East as, by contrast, essentially lawless, or subject to rival corrupt, decayed, or barbaric customs and jurisdictions. (The implications of this figure still reverberate perilously today.) I want to show how the operation of these figures in the Western imagination of the East generates narratives about and dialogue between these figural partners — literally so in many cases, such as in the chapter on figures of rule, which ends with three face-to-face conversations between rulers and ruled. Each of these figures has its own history, and while this book will examine each in texts which embody it in what seem to me to be particularly interesting ways, it will also suggest something of the figure's fortunes in other earlier or later representations.

I do not propose to make any particular distinction between representations that purport to be portrayals of actual people and places and events, and those that are frankly imaginary. This is not to suggest there is no difference between fact and fiction. But my interest is in the way these representations are constructed; there is as much to learn from the ‘character’ of Christopher Isherwood, who was certainly a real person, as we see it in his China travel diary of 1938, as from the ‘character’ of Muhammad Din, who, as far as I know, never existed outside Kipling’s imagination. It is representations that are examined here, and I am interested in the rhetoric and textuality of these representations, rather than in how accurately they might be said to correspond to an authentic original, wherever this might be found. In this way my project takes up the invitation of Edward Said, who in his examination of discourse about the Orient recommended attention first to its tropology. ‘The things to look at,’ he says, ‘are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original.’² (Though I do not take issue with *Orientalism* until my final chapter, and though in dealing chiefly with the Arab world its Orient has a very different compass from my own, *Orientalism* is important to this book, which would not have been written without it. While the theoretical provocation of Said’s book, published in 1978, continues to generate a huge literature, its methodological challenge has not been nearly so comprehensively met.)

I have found it useful to think in terms of *tropes*, not just as the figures of speech of classical rhetoric but in the wider application given to the term in the work of Hayden White.

Tropology centers attention on the turns in a discourse: turns from one level of generalization to another, from one phase of a sequence to another, from a description to an analysis or the reverse, from a figure to a ground or from an event to its context, from the conventions of one genre to those of another within a single discourse, and so on.³

In this wide sense these moves or ‘turns’ can include images and ideas, and structures such as emplotments. This study foregrounds the representational tropes which are my chosen figures, because they have seemed to me particularly powerful and interesting. But the field of this book is the totality of all kinds of tropes that form the basic grammar and vocabulary of the British discourse on the East. And I have been mindful that this book, in its turn, is a part of that discourse; I have no modality outside it.

2. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* [1978] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 21.

3. Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 10–11. See also Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 1–25.

The term *modality* is also used here in a fairly commodious sense. Modality is point of view.⁴ It is concerned with speakers' or writers' or narrators' attitudes and perspectives towards the propositions they express or the things they represent. In grammar, modality is expressed in modal verbs such as *will*, *may*, or *should*, carrying the speaker's judgement of things like necessity, possibility, certainty and uncertainty, permission and obligation; crucially, modality is also imbricated in the question of the authority with which things are spoken of. Modality is present in a sentence in the marks of who is (or is supposed to be) speaking and to whom, where, and when, and in judgements carried in diegetic comments like 'of course', 'unfortunately' or 'at last'. There is no representation without modality, the point of view or attitude — spatial and ideological — from which something is brought into vision and becomes an object. This book deals with a Western modality on the East. We know of Muhammad Din through the eyes, judgements and feelings of the English narrator, and behind him (for modalities can be multiple, and embedded) those of Kipling. We cannot know how Muhammad Din's story might have appeared to his father, and still less of course to the child himself, except that it would certainly have been different. Much of the business of postcolonial discourse has been a struggle over modalities, the effort of the colonized and formerly colonized to represent themselves and get their point of view across.

One way this book tries to navigate its daunting theme is by anchoring frequently in specific instances and the close reading of particular texts. Close reading, as Edward Said argued eloquently in a late essay, is fundamental to humanist enquiry, a procedure for doing justice to the specific and the general and moving between them, that 'will gradually locate the text in its time as part of a whole network of relationships whose outlines and influences play an informing role *in the text*';⁵ in the process, if it works, the text and the network bring each other further into the light.

My aim has been to build up a gallery of figures, each telling a story that glosses the grander narrative of the interaction between East and West that is likely to continue to be the most important theme of our modern history. The scope is broad, but not nearly as broad as the subject. My 'East' is a wide one, in geography and experience. It stretches from the Egypt of Lord Cromer to the Pacific of Robert Louis Stevenson, though its centre of gravity is in the Indian subcontinent, as it always was for the British. It might be argued that this is an

4. There is a useful description in Katie Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (London: Longman, 1990), 302–03. See also the use of the term in Michael Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 64–79.

5. Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 62. Challengingly, Said also enjoins 'taking final comradely responsibility for one's reading' (66).

absurdly heterogeneous and unmanageable category. The British, however, were in the habit of speaking of 'the East' — or being or going 'out East' — as of a self-evident location, though it might prove in practice to be Cairo or Colombo; the word, like 'Orient' itself, suggests an intuition that in the imagination at least it was its own place. In political and commercial terms too, 'the East' was a vague but serviceable category, and a man (like Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations*) working for an Eastern house of business might be in Smyrna or Batavia, while colonial civil servants, especially senior ones, were posted around Asia and expected to know how to cope, experience in Malaya being convertible into seniority in Ceylon, and so on. If the objection is still made that 'the East' is a homogenizing and artificial concept, a verbal gesture hopelessly inadequate to categorize or contain the experience of alterity supposed to constitute it, I can only say I agree: this is one of the principal strands of my argument.

The texts I choose to discuss all recommend themselves, in my opinion, for literary *and* historical interest, but of course they are a tiny fragment of the available literature; I cannot deny that good writers and texts have been left out, and those chosen for discussion reflect my personal feeling for the field. The figures selected are themselves diverse, but certainly not comprehensive; indeed there is an arbitrary quality to the choice, which indicates how my own reading has fallen into place, but also flags a resistance to the more familiar and rather formulaic patterns sometimes imposed on this kind of material. The sequence of the following chapters moves from relatively straightforward figures of imagery, like the Hinterland and the crowd, to more abstract figures which are kinds of story or storytelling; in the figure of rule, in a late chapter, my subject is not just forms of authority but something like the master trope of representation itself. But in truth to think about even an apparently simple figure, like the space of Hinterland, in this context is already to be involved in thinking about narrative structures, modes and genres — in this case the structure of mystery and revelation, the modes of realism and romance, the genres of topography, adventure, the psychological and supernatural tale.

These chapters are essays, attempts; they are inter-related but each can also be free-standing, and together they represent an incomplete methodological project. Plenty of other tropes could be summoned and examined, other texts adduced, and a far wider range of experience sampled. My examples have an overwhelmingly masculine modality, for one thing (there are historical reasons for this, though I admit that the arrival of Maud Diver, in Chapter 6, is a welcome change). I have nothing to say about Japan, for another (Japan appears simply too *sui generis* to sit comfortably in a British-oriented account of the East with its centre of gravity in India; it seems to require a book of its own).⁶ These and

6. Such as Ian Littlewood has written in *The Idea of Japan: Western Images, Western Myths* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1996).

other absences seem rather scandalous even to me, but a book twice this length would still be far from comprehensive; and I suppose that at least these omissions are an egregious proof of the difficulty (I would add, the undesirability) of trying to grasp such a fiction as 'the East' as a whole. There are enough examples, examined in this book, of the grim consequences of claiming a total and inclusive authority over the Orient.

In the pages that follow there is a cumulative if sometimes underground argument that counsels against a too monumental and unfissured idea of knowledge of the Orient. I have described these chapters as essays, but their sequence is not random. It begins with an account of the broaching of Hinterland, the step into the Eastern unknown. It ends with figures of ignorance, the recognition that the Hinterland always has its own Hinterland, and the East is a horizon that can never be reached. You trudge, lift your eyes, and it still lies ahead of you. The writing of this book has been rather like that too. It seemed fitting to end with the image of the young Kipling narrator in 'The City of Dreadful Night', poised atop one of the minarets of the Mosque of Wazir Khan in Lahore, contemplating the unknown life of the city before him and ready, just as the story ends, to begin his enquiries.

Earlier versions of parts of this book have appeared in the *Conradian*, *Contemporary Literature*, *English Studies*, *Essays in Criticism*, *The New Zealand Journal of Oriental Studies*, and in *W. H. Auden: A Legacy*.⁷ I am grateful to the editors for permission to re-present this work here in revised form. My thanks to the staff of the Hong Kong University Library and the British Library for always courteous and efficient service, and to the Hong Kong University Committee for Research and Conference Grants for support. This book has benefited immensely from the help and criticism of Julia Kuehn, and of Elaine Ho as ever. I would also like to thank my Hong Kong colleagues, especially Christopher Hutton and Tong Qingsheng, for their support, encouragement and patience.

7. *W. H. Auden: A Legacy*, ed. David Garrett Izzo (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 2002).

Hunter in the grass: A Kipling story

How should we enter the Hinterland? Step by step, circumspectly, if at all.

An unsigned story entitled 'Bubbling Well Road', just 1500 words long, appeared in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, an English-language newspaper published in Lahore in British India, on 18 January 1888. It begins with a geographical orientation. 'Look out on a large scale map the place where the Chenab river falls into the Indus fifteen miles or so above the hamlet of Chachuran.'¹ The tale that follows is a first-person narrative about an unpleasant experience that befalls an Englishman when he enters a patch of tall jungle-grass, at a place called Arti-Goth, with the intention of shooting some wild pig for sport. We will follow this man, step by step. The story-teller does not give his name. Although we know that the author of this story was the *Gazette's* precocious assistant editor, the twenty-two-year-old Rudyard Kipling, it would be reckless as well as confusing to name the narrator Kipling. But he must have a name, so I shall call him Hunter.

'Five miles west of Chachuran lies Bubbling Well Road', Hunter continues, establishing his story's credentials by embedding it in a verifiable geography and in the normal tense for non-fictional description or topography.² Realism often establishes a shared epistemological regime with the map, the almanac and the calendar. 'Five miles west of Chachuran,' he repeats, 'is a patch of the plumed jungle grass, that turns over in silver when the wind blows, from ten to twenty feet high and from three to four miles square' (266). Hunter has the naturalist's

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1. Rudyard Kipling, *Life's Handicap* [1891], ed. A. O. J. Cockshutt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 266. Page references in the text are to this edition.
 2. Kipling's Arti-Goth road is not to be confused with (but may be named after) the more famous Bubbling Well Road which ran through the International Settlement in Shanghai.

eye, he pays attention too to the aesthetics of the patch of tall grass, but he also takes note of its dimensions, much as a surveyor might appraise a piece of land. Pausing to explain that a *gosain* or priest lives in the middle of the patch, a sinister one-eyed figure of great age and feral habits, Hunter recounts how one day he decided to enter the grass with his gun and his dog, because local villagers told him that a sounder or herd of wild pig had been seen to go in there.

'To enter jungle-grass is always an unwise proceeding, but I went, partly because I knew nothing of pig-hunting, and partly because the villagers said that the big boar of the sounder owned foot long tushes [tusks]. Therefore I wished to shoot him, in order to produce the tushes in after years, and say that I had ridden him down in fair chase' (266). He enters the tall grass, in other words, because he is inexperienced, ignorant, vain and dishonest, in a quest for a sporting trophy which he wants to pass off in later years as the product of his bravery and skill; for killing a wild pig with a double-barrelled rifle is less risky and glamorous than pursuing it on horseback and spearing it — the sport of pig-sticking, particularly enjoyed by military sportsmen in British India. Hunter as narrator casts himself then in the role of the aspiring *miles gloriosus*, the boastful soldier who is really a coward, and prepares readers to see him humiliated and punished for this unsportsmanlike action. (Horseback sports are for the equestrian classes, which probably makes Hunter a class imposter too.) It seems we are in for a comedy of self-deprecation.

Hunter takes his gun and enters into the hot, close patch, accompanied only by his dog, who is called Mr Wardle after the sporting gentleman in *The Pickwick Papers*. But once man and dog are in the interior, things start to go wrong, in a manner familiar from more heroic explorer narratives. The dog can negotiate the thick grass tolerably easily, 'but I had to force my way,' says Hunter, 'and in twenty minutes was as completely lost as though I had been in the heart of Central Africa' (266).

Readers of this story in the *Gazette* would have been aware, like everybody else, that the last African expedition of the celebrity explorer Henry Morton Stanley (1887–89) was forcing its way through the heart of Central Africa even as they read, and had indeed been lost to the outside world for many months. The journey was to be memorialized in Stanley's book *In Darkest Africa*, published in 1890, the year of his triumphant return, but it also raised a scandal, with allegations of Stanley's ruthlessness and cruelty, his association with notorious slavers, and of the complicity of some of his officers in cannibalism.³ This was

3. Stanley was under orders from King Leopold of the Belgians. He traversed the continent from west to east, reaching Bagamoyo after an appalling journey of two years and ten months. See Iain R. Smith, *The Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, 1886–1890* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972). See also Tony Gould, *In Limbo: The Story of Stanley's Rear Column*

the last great Victorian foray into the unmapped interior in the heart of Africa; it provides the heroic and haunting antiphon to Hunter's antiheroic adventure in the grass, his armed incursion into the Arti-Goth patch. And Central Africa is where Hunter might as well be, for if you are lost and far from home, one place is much the same as another. The place where he is, or the non-place (since we are off the map now), can be named with a word that was to enter the English language, from the diplomatic idiom of Bismarckian Germany, a year or so after this story was published: Hinterland.

The word is almost a history in itself of late nineteenth-century European exploration, encroachment and land-grab. Its first citation in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from the *Spectator*, 19 July 1890: 'The delimitation of the Hinterland behind Tunis and Algiers.' Its second citation, from the *Daily News* of 12 June 1891, reports Lord Salisbury's recognition of 'the very modern doctrine of the Hinterland, which he expounds as meaning that "those who possess the coast also possess the plain which is watered by the rivers that run to the coast"'. To describe a place as Hinterland might already be to make a territorial claim on it. By 1902, J. A. Hobson, the great critic of imperialism, could denounce 'a whole sliding scale of terms from "hinterland" and "sphere of interest" to "effective occupation" and "annexation"' as illustrations of a diplomatic phraseology 'devised for purposes of concealment and encroachment'.⁴ Hinterland is the 'back country' or interior, that uncertain territory that recedes away from the known and possessed. Hinterland extends 'our' sphere of property and knowledge and security, but extends beyond it, and is always to some extent disputed. We may assert our right over it, it may contain what we desire or fear, but it is an area of darkness — perhaps its heart, if it has a heart. Hinterland is a figure in the discourse of the late nineteenth-century European empires.

Two problems confront the hapless Hunter as he blunders deeper into the Arti-Goth patch. It is difficult to move, and it is difficult to see. 'There was nothing but grass everywhere, and it was impossible to see two yards in any direction' (267). Hunter's powers of mobility, survey, and control are being foreshortened; and dignity, the fourth pillar of colonial authority, collapses too. What seemed a paradigmatic colonial invasion starts to sound like an exemplary lesson in the limits of power and knowledge, but it is too late to go back. He has to sidle along a track which is barely in the realm of culture at all, for he describes it as a compromise between a native foot-path and a pig-run. Though obliged to walk a path trodden by beings of a lower order, he still takes its measure — it is barely

(London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979). Stanley's role as one of the models for Kurtz in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' is discussed by Robert Hampson in the Introduction to his edition of Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1995), xvi–xxvii.

4. J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: James Nisbet, 1902), 219.

six inches wide — perhaps in recognition that he is now in danger, as Kipling's English often are, of becoming engulfed in Oriental formlessness and incommensurability.

'Nonetheless it was a path, and valuable because it might lead to a place' (267). He struggles for agency and teleology: the path may lead to a place, and going anywhere is better than being nowhere. Encumbered by his rifle, which makes it difficult to shove aside the tussocks of grass before his face, he is obliged to progress backwards, to his own embarrassment. It is at this point, and just as he is preparing to back into an unusually stiff tussock, that he realizes that he seems to have lost the dog. He calls the dog three times — and receives a shock, for his words are repeated by a deep voice almost underneath his feet. He calls again, and, he reports, 'the underground echo assisted me'. The verb suggests that the echo is not just an acoustic repetition, but some kind of illocution. 'At that I ceased calling and listened very attentively, because I thought I heard a man laughing in a peculiarly offensive manner' (267).

Two things have happened to Hunter. First, his words have been returned to him in a different voice. Second, he has been laughed at. Here we find our first interlocution between West and East, and it is a peculiar one. The situation is quite complex. The unseen voice alarms Hunter, but in almost immediately identifying it correctly as an underground echo, he has acquired a piece of information that may well have saved his life; he is on the edge of a hidden precipice, and the echo has indeed assisted him, for without its warning he might have walked backwards over the edge. But if the echo warns him, the sound of laughter belittles him. This is no congenial merriment but a mockery, with its peculiarly offensive manner, and in the context the echo and the laughter are linked together, like text and commentary. The place is allowing him to listen to his own words, only to hear how ridiculous they sound.

Hunter is greatly disconcerted, his body experiences the laughter as a kind of illness, and his narrative makes a confused protest against it. 'The heat made me sweat, but the laughter made me shake. There is no earthly need for laughter in high grass. It is indecent, as well as impolite' (267). He locates the echo somewhere behind the tussock into which he was preparing to back, and drives his rifle 'up to the triggers between the grass-stems in a downward and forward direction', answering this 'indecent' challenge and travesty with his own aggressive masculine porrection (267). The story is rich in psychoanalytical resonances, both for Freudians and Jungians, but at this point it also comes close to indecent farce. 'Every time that I grunted with the exertion of driving a heavy rifle through the thick grass, the grunt was faithfully repeated from below, and when I stopped to wipe my face the sound of low laughter was distinct beyond doubting' (267–8). But it strikes a very specific historical chord too. The British in India were haunted by the memory of the uprising of 1857, and this adventure of an armed

man, with a not entirely reliable lieutenant, in an unexpectedly hostile Indian space with a well in the middle, can be read as a coded 'Indian Mutiny' story.⁵

The echo in the grass has now taken up not Hunter's words of command, but the sounds of his indignity. The history of his incursion is being repeated to him as farce. It is not just that Hunter is now reduced to the acoustic level of the pigs he was hunting. The faithfulness of the echo — 'the grunt was faithfully repeated' — is also an issue, because his natural subaltern (running dog, indeed), Mr Wardle, has faithlessly deserted him, and it is the place itself that is left to keep faith with him. But the echo is at the same time a faithful repetition of his own voice and an affront, a contradiction. The more the echo mimics Hunter, with a sound that both is and is not himself, the more it confuses and unsettles him, performing just the functions Homi Bhabha has described as belonging to colonial mimicry.⁶ His authority is not challenged (he would have ways of dealing with that), but it is disconcerted and confounded, by the way his voice is returned to him.

Hunter entered the Arti-Goth patch as explorer and surveyor: he wanted it to yield up its secrets. The discursive equivalent of his incursion is interrogation, in the service of what Bhabha calls 'that nineteenth-century strategy of surveillance, the *confession*'.⁷ But as we shall see throughout this book, the dialogue between West and East was never simply between authority on one hand and submission on the other. Hunter certainly behaves like an interrogator, sticking his rifle into the grass and 'waggl[ing] it to and fro' (267). But his incalculable interlocutor is not going to confess, but answers him with a blank, an acoustic mirror that gives back a version of his own voice, while mocking him with the sound of hidden laughter. The 'resistance of the grass' (268) turns out not to be the real problem, for once he has overcome that, the panoply of modernity that protects him — his weapon — is redundant in what proves to be the interior of the interior. He waggles his rifle in thin air: 'it did not seem to touch ground on the far side of the tussock as it should have done' (267). Instead of the resistance he was prepared for, it presents him with something worse. It presents him with nothing. 'When I had overcome the resistance of the grass I found that I was looking straight across a black gap in the ground' (268). The Hinterland is empty. All it contains is the echo and the laughter.

5. See the chapter entitled 'The Well at Cawnpore: Literary Representations of the Indian Mutiny', Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 199–226. Brantlinger shows that the massacre of civilians at the well in Cawnpore became the focus of the British public's horror at the Mutiny.

6. See Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 85–92.

7. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Sly Civility', *The Location of Culture*, 93–101; 99.

Hunter has come, in a sense, to the end of the world, the uttermost margin of the knowable, which is also an interior containing a mocking image of himself.⁸ He lies on his chest in an attitude of extreme subjection or supplication before something that is not there. By degrees, certain things start to become clear to him.

There were things in the water, — black things — and the water was as black as pitch with blue scum atop. The laughing sound came from the noise of a little spring, spouting half-way down one side of the well. Sometimes as the black things circled round, the trickle from the spring fell upon their tightly-stretched skins, and then the laughter changed into a sputter of mirth. One thing turned over on its back, as I watched, and drifted round and round the circle of the mossy brickwork with a hand and half an arm held clear of the water in a stiff and horrible flourish, as though it were a very wearied guide paid to exhibit the beauties of the place.

Hunter's effortful western progress through the grass is mocked by this effortless Oriental circulation of the things, the natives of the interior.⁹ Yet very little agency is attributed to them, and very little identity either. They exist rather than act; their existence is both a mockery and a trap to the sweaty interloper. He is interpellated with a horrible flourish which is also a *memento mori*, the dead hand, a metonym of agency lost, which gestures to 'the beauties of the place' like a weary guide. The interior, which Hunter took to be an emporium of trophies to be bagged by the intrepid individualist, now presents itself as a spectacle of tourism — indeed, a 'tourist trap', in which the consumer is to be consumed — as the deictic hand indicates plainly that the hunter is in danger of becoming the spoil. This is the dark epiphany to which Bubbling Well Road has brought him, and at the bottom of the well, where truth is sometimes supposed to reside, what interpellates the invading Hunter is his own death. There for a while we will leave him, with a promise to return to his adventure later.

Something in a cave : *A Passage to India*

Like the map of early twentieth-century India, irregularly punctuated by nominally independent princely states, the imaginary India of E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924) is a patchwork of reserved spaces. Reservation is

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8. The dark revelation awaiting Hunter on Bubbling Well Road is related to 'At the End of the Passage', another gothic tale in *Life's Handicap* (138–58), in which the feverish Hummil hallucinates his own double and dreams of 'a place down there' before his death.
 9. For Oriental circulation and Western lines, see Douglas Kerr, 'Conrad's Magic Circles', *Essays in Criticism* 53:4 (October 2003), 345–65.

a principle of the novel's design as well as a feature of its texture. 'Except for the Marabar Caves — and they are twenty miles off — the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary' (29).¹⁰ Already the guidebook-style opening sentence sets aside the caves, which will be at the centre of the novel, in a mental reservation that brackets them off from the first piece of information in the story, excluding them from general knowledge.

Having set aside the 'extraordinary' caves, the novel's opening proceeds to the realist agenda of representing the ordinary, and in the first chapter Forster sets the scene in realism, just as Hunter had done, putting his imaginary place on the real map and listing its topographical and aesthetic features. In other words he begins with a survey, a measure that reproduces in his English textualization of the Indian scene the discourse of a colonialism in which the production of information in survey and census was a part of the exercise of authority (as in the fictional Ethnographic Survey of India, in Kipling's novel *Kim*, which is a front for the British Secret Service, and in the actual cartographical survey of India described by Matthew H. Edney in *Mapping an Empire*).¹¹ The exception of the Marabar Caves is the first exclusion in what will prove to be a landscape paranoiacally territorialized into closed interiors of possession jealously guarded, and broached at peril for the most part. The landscape surveyed in the opening chapter is the material ground for a social topography even more measured out and hierarchized, in terms not just of differentiation but of exclusion. Chandrapore is ethnically zoned. There is a Eurasian quarter set apart. The Civil Station in turn, where the Europeans live, with its Club and grocer's and cemetery and its tidy right-angled streets, is its own place, sharing nothing with the city but the overarching sky.

It is not, of course, just a matter of differences between Europeans and Eurasians and Indians. For the most class-conscious bourgeoisie in Europe, one of the fascinations of India was the distinctions and divisions within Indian society itself.¹² It is often observed that the British, who found a divided subcontinent easier to rule, did at least not discourage the internal divisions of India. That

10. E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* [1924], ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 29. Subsequent page references in the text are to this edition.

11. Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765–1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). See also Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), and C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), as well as Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978). See also Chapter 9 below.

12. 'In social terms, the British colonies of settlement were about the export of hierarchy; India, by contrast, was much more about the analogues of hierarchy.' David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Penguin, 2001), 41.

there were a 'hundred Indias' (35, 195) was an English truism,¹³ frequently reaffirmed in Forster's novel, and confirmed by the topography, both entrenched and improvised, of its social life. Thus, in the second chapter, we see Dr Aziz dining with his friends and discussing whether or not it is possible to be friends with an Englishman, in the house of Hamidullah, which has its own sequestered Hinterland where the women of the household have their existence behind the purdah. Caste and religion fence off their own territories in the Indian community, as does class. Looming rather indistinctly in the background is the nationalism whose utopian project was to conjure or perhaps recover a sense of unity among Indians, but the task seems hopeless, until the Marabar incident has the effect of bringing the Indians of Chandrapore together upon the common ground of grievance and protest. The British in Chandrapore, who in this respect have the advantage of being a small and somewhat insecure minority constituted by the natural selection of a single class, are more united, though terrifically hierarchical. But their unity is thoroughly exclusive, kept in place by a determination to preserve their privileged spaces from local incursion.

This social system is scrupulously measured by Forster with rhetorical instruments sharpened over a century in English fiction's observation of knowable communities.¹⁴ It must be added that it is a social system that works reasonably well, if success is to be measured by equilibrium, for it secures property, propriety and identity for the various groups. But the disequilibrium which gives birth to narrative is provided by a series of attempts to cancel or transgress these boundaries in one way or another. Some of these efforts are of little account in the story, though it would have been pleasant to know more about the activities of Chandrapore's English missionaries 'who lived out beyond the slaughter-houses, always travelled third on the railways, and never came up to the Club'; to their heaven the incompatible multitudes of mankind will all be welcome, and perhaps the higher animals too, like the monkeys, and possibly the jackals; but even they must draw the theological line at lower forms of existence — oranges, cactus, crystal, and mud — for 'We must exclude something from our gathering, or we shall be left with nothing' (52–53). This rather Anglican joke does point to the dependence of identity on difference and exclusion, and provides some excuse for the way the social landscape of Chandrapore bristles with defended spaces. But it is this exclusiveness that provokes the chief motive of the plot, when the visiting English ladies, elderly Mrs Moore and young Miss Quested, express the desire to see 'the real India'. 'It was wonderful when we landed, but that superficial

13. 'India is as multitudinous as the sands of the sea,' concluded Flora Annie Steel, looking back like Forster's Mrs Moore about to sail from Bombay. Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity* (London: Macmillan, 1929), 191.

14. The phrase originates in Chapter 16, 'Knowable Communities', of Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* [1973] (London: Hogarth Press, 1993), 165–81.

glamour soon goes,' the earnest Adela Quested explains (45). British India cannot be the real India, and the apparent glamour of Indian India has only created an appetite in her for the real thing, a penetration beneath the surface into the interior. The Collector of Chandrapore, the senior British civilian, offers to set up a Bridge Party at which the visitors will have the opportunity to meet some real Indians.

Mrs Moore, characteristically, has already met one. Slipping out of a dismal production of *Cousin Kate* at the Club, she has wandered into a mosque in the moonlight, where Aziz finds her. Aziz has been having a trying evening, and has lost three points in a row in the game of Chandrapore territoriality; his meal in the domestic sanctuary of Hamidullah's house invaded by a summons from his English boss Major Callendar, his tonga seized without permission or thanks by two English women, he has been made to wait on Major Callendar's verandah like a servant without being invited into the house. Now he is furious that the sanctuary of his religion has been violated by an intruder, and he challenges her roughly. But then, upon recognizing her respect for the place (for she has removed her shoes, though the mosque was deserted) he proceeds to form an instant and warm friendship with her. With great courtesy he escorts her back to the gates of the Club (which Indians, of course, are not allowed to enter).

The Bridge Party is not a success, because although Indians have been invited into the normally closed Hinterland of English social life, they are not made welcome, and exclusive clumps of sex and ethnicity congeal on the lawns of the Club; Adela Quested's effort to break into the company of the Indian ladies is doomed, for 'she strove in vain against the echoing walls of their civility' (57). History is against her. The British empire in India was institutionally racist in that it was predicated on the right of one people to govern another by virtue of who they were — a fact that did not prevent, but was not altered by, many initiatives to cross that divide, in both directions, or to deny and transcend it. More successful as a bridge is the smaller tea party to which Fielding, the principal of the government college, later invites the two visitors to meet his Hindu colleague Professor Godbole and Dr Aziz. Aziz and Fielding have not met before, and the doctor is thrilled to be given immediate access by the Englishman into his private life, the interior of his house, and almost the intimacy of his dressing room. Warming to this free-trade sociability, Aziz rashly invites the women to his home. Horrified to hear them accept this invitation to enter an Indian interior, he immediately changes the offer; he will instead take them on an expedition to the famous Marabar Caves.

The caves then are a doubly inward space, not only the Hinterland of Chandrapore, but also a kind of displacement of the domestic and inner life of the Indian Aziz, the object of epistemological desire for Adela Quested, with her queer insistence on getting inside the real India. It can be noted that Ronnie

Heaslop, the City Magistrate and the man Adela has come to India to marry, has always disapproved of her eccentric ambition to meet Indians. He rudely interrupts the tea party, and is scornful of the proposed Marabar picnic; it is bound to fail, he is sure, for he has no confidence in other people's knowledge of their own ground, and you can't just "meet" in the caves as if they were the clock at Charing Cross, when they're miles from a station and each other' (89). No, he has not been to the caves, he admits, but he knows all about them. In the quarrel that follows, in which he complains of his mother's and his fiancée's morbid sensitivity, he makes it clear that the British have more important things to do in India than try to get to know Indians. 'We're not out here for the purpose of behaving pleasantly!', he blurts, for he has no interest in Indian interiors. 'We're out here to do justice and keep the peace . . . India isn't a drawing-room' (62).

Ronnie is the opposite of the liberal Fielding, who has the researcher's interest in interiors, and who first invites Aziz into his own living room, and later visits him when the doctor is sick in bed at home. On this occasion, after an awkward beginning when Aziz is embarrassed at the squalor of his house ('Now I suppose you want to be off, having seen an oriental interior' [118]), Fielding is rewarded with access to his friend's intimate life when Aziz shows him a photograph of his dead wife, secreted in a drawer in his bedroom, and gives him full rights of access to his personal Hinterland — 'I showed her to you because I have nothing else to show,' he says. 'You may look round the whole of my bungalow now, and empty everything. I have no other secrets . . .' (118). Ronnie Heaslop no doubt would regard this sort of interaction as 'drawing-room' behaviour, evidence of morbid sensitivity, and probably unmanly.

'India isn't a drawing-room.' Ronnie is a man in a public position, and sees himself as a character in the masculine national epic of empire and administration, not the feminine domestic novel of interiority and sensibility. For him, the 'real India' is to be found and dealt with in public spaces, such as his courtroom. The inner world, psychological or domestic, is a distraction, a place of private life, with its own rules, insulated from what Bakhtin (discussing the chronotope of the drawing-room) calls 'historical or socio-public events'.¹⁵ Ronnie himself has no ambition to extend his scope to the interior. Indian interiority is none of his business, and he is content to exercise his jurisdiction where he needs it, to keep the peace. He has no desire and no time to go poking around in caves.

The Marabar expedition is a disaster exceeding his misgivings. Mrs Moore suffers a panic attack in the first cave, from which she emerges confused and ill, and subject to an insidious demoralization that eats away at her liberal faith in

15. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 247.

Christian love and secular decency, and even her will to live. Miss Quested stumbles out of another cave saying she has been subjected to a sexual assault in the dark, and her accusation of Aziz, and his arrest and trial, will plunge Chandrapore into a crisis that divides the British and Indians yet further. Rather than pursuing this, the main theme of the novel, I will spend a bit more time looking at the incursion itself, mindful that we have left Hunter in the grass and still have to return and get him out.

The Marabar Caves are geologically very ancient, but featureless, for they contain nothing but emptiness. 'A tunnel eight feet long, five feet high, three feet wide, leads to a circular chamber about twenty feet in diameter. This arrangement occurs again and again throughout the group of hills, and this is all, this is a Marabar cave . . . Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation — for they have one — does not depend upon human speech' (126). The darkness, the hollow at the centre, the ineffability, and of course the echo, hark back in interesting ways to Bubbling Well Road; so does the way the description begins with measurements, but the Hinterland then slides off into proliferation and incommensurability, a challenge to realism and its ability to survey the unknown and transform it into the known.¹⁶ Legend has it, the novel reports, that elsewhere deeper in the granite there are other Marabar caves, chambers that have no entrances, and that in these too there is nothing. This is the interior vouchsafed to the liberal curiosity of the ladies who wish to see the real India.

Darkness, and an echo 'entirely devoid of distinction', swallow everything in the cave in a reductive mockery, for the Marabar echo is a great leveller of the meaning that depends on difference. 'Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies . . . Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce "boum"' (144). The echo reduces everything to one identical dimension of banality. 'Pathos, piety, courage — they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value' (146). This is the touristic trophy or souvenir that Mrs Moore is awarded in the cave and she struggles out, 'hitting and gasping like a fanatic' (144), into a world which will henceforth seem banal and indifferent, where even 'poor little talkative Christianity' (146) has no solace to offer. God is dead, everything is pointless. As for Adela Quested, she will press on to another cave, where something horrible happens. But the narrative does not follow her into this cave; the something remains unnamed. Perhaps Aziz did assault her. Perhaps it was the guide, or an animal in the dark, or perhaps it was a ghost or a hallucination. Fielding believes Aziz innocent, and he bravely declares this in

16. David Medalie develops an argument that the caves offer a reproach to 'the voice of realist fiction', with its assumptions of commonality and shared perspectives, the predominance of mundane life and the claim to a vantage point of superior insight. David Medalie, *E. M. Forster's Modernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 95.

the Club, much to the rage of the other English. Emerging from the Club building, the first object that he sees is the Marabar Hills.

At this distance and hour they leapt into beauty; they were Monsalvat, Valhalla, the towers of a cathedral, peopled with saints and heroes, and covered with flowers. What miscreant lurked in them, presently to be detected by the activities of the law? Who was the guide, and had he been found yet? What was the 'echo' of which the girl complained? He did not know, but presently he would know. Great is information, and she shall prevail. (179)

Fielding, triangulating these Indian hills with reference points of European culture, is still at this point positivistically sure that the protocols of realism and 'the activities of the law' will detect the crime and name the perpetrator. But they never do. No dramatic disclosure is in preparation, and *A Passage to India* is famously inconclusive.

Hunter, meanwhile, is putting a brave face on things, and has managed to skirt the deadly well and find the path again, carrying Mr Wardle in his arms. He reaches the hut of the *gosain* in the centre of a clearing in the grass, and after a rest there he forces the terrified priest at gunpoint to lead him out of the Arti-Goth patch. This is his exit strategy. Once when he hears the laughter of the well again, he is sorely tempted to fire both barrels into the priest's back. He learns from the villagers that others have entered the haunted patch and never emerged, having fallen victim, it seems, to the priest's witchcraft.

Adela Quested too seems to have been touched by something baleful, and is haunted by the echo of the Marabar cave. She asks Mrs Moore what the echo means.

'If you don't know, you don't know. I can't tell you.'
 'I think you're rather unkind not to say.'
 'Say, say, say,' said the old lady bitterly. 'As if anything can be said! I have spent my life in saying or in listening to sayings; I have listened too much. It is time I was left in peace.' (167)

There is one other enquirer to account for. In August 1912, E. M. Forster, thirty-three years old and the author of four novels (all of which contain drawing-rooms), was struggling to get on with a fifth, which was to be called *Arctic Summer*. On 25 August he wrote to his publisher Edward Arnold.

I am just off to India, which will either kill or cure it — if it doesn't kill me! I expect to have an interesting time and penetrate into queerish places. I don't suppose you want a book about India, nor do I know how to write one yet. Still, if you have any ideas on the subject, let me know. (9)

Clearly before his first Indian journey Forster was thinking in terms of the broaching of an Oriental interior, and at least the possibility of an experiential trophy in the form of a book bearing his name. He began work on an Indian novel in 1913, probably in July, but laid it aside; he was working on it again intermittently the following year, but it did not go well. 'I was clear about the chief characters and the racial tension,' he remembered later, 'had visualized the scenery and had foreseen that something crucial would happen in the Marabar Caves. But I hadn't seen far enough' (11). His vision into queerish places was not penetrative enough; he was unable to master the Hinterland of the story he was trying to tell: he seems to have abandoned the work a second time, and at the end of 1914 was writing in his notebook that he would never complete another novel.¹⁷

He made his second passage to India in 1921, and spent several months as the private secretary of the Maharajah of the princely state of Dewas Senior, an experience that he described as 'the great opportunity of my life'.¹⁸ The Indian novel was taken up again upon his return to England, though with the utmost difficulty and often with feelings of dejection and failure — many of the surviving manuscripts of rejected draft material relate to Chapters 14–16, the Marabar incident.¹⁹ Eventually, as everyone knows, Forster solved the problem of the opacity of the interior by leaving it blank. The crisis of the story is not narrated, no claim to its Hinterland is staked; the narrative does not enter the cave with Adela Quested. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson was one of the readers who asked to be given access to the secret hidden in the interior of *A Passage to India*. What had really happened in the cave? Forster obliged.

In the cave it is *either* a man, *or* the supernatural, *or* an illusion. If I say, it becomes whatever the answer a different book. And even if I know! My writing mind therefore is a blur here — i.e. I will it to remain a blur, and to be uncertain, as I am of many facts in daily life. This isn't a philosophy of aesthetics. It's a particular trick I felt justified in trying because my theme was India.²⁰

17. The surviving pre-war drafts do not get beyond Chapter 14, the arrival of the party at the Marabar Caves, although Oliver Stallybrass is 'strongly inclined to believe' that Forster got further into the caves episode than appears. See *The Manuscripts of A Passage to India*, correlated with Forster's final version by Oliver Stallybrass (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), xiii.

18. E. M. Forster, *The Hill of Devi* [1953], ed. Elizabeth Heine (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 3.

19. *The Manuscripts of A Passage to India*, 192–280. The editor points out (xvii) that in one manuscript alone, the drafts of these chapters represent 55 rectos out of 101.

20. P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life. Vol. 2: Polycrates' Ring 1914–1970* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978), 124–25.

In order to accomplish the novel, Forster set a limit on the scope of his realism and what it could know, measure, assimilate and possess. He turned aside at the edge of the darkness, and allowed himself not to enter the Hinterland of his own imagined India. The result is a story with a hole in the middle, a map which leaves a blank space at its heart.

Those more venturesome and less canny than Forster, who penetrated the unknown interior, might be led on to fabulous rewards or to terrible consequences, for themselves or others. Hunter, as we have seen, struggles out empty-handed, but his humiliating exit strategy leaves him bent on reprisals, and he ends by declaring with relish that he is going to return in dry weather with a file of old newspapers and a box of matches, and burn the grass patch to the ground, presumably with the *gosain* inside it. The colonial and later history of central Africa testifies to the fact that Henry Morton Stanley's incursion into the Hinterland of the Congo was yet more apocalyptic in effect. Hunter forcefully closes his narrative with the promise of an act of destruction, indeed holocaust, but it is also a research proposal, promising the disclosure of a secret 'which will make clear the mystery of Bubbling Well Road' (269). At this stage it is not certain whether it seems to him necessary to destroy the patch in order to know it, or to know it in order to destroy it.

Conversions and Reversions

Kipling and the missionaries

A famous man responds to an invitation to send a message of support to a conference on foreign missions. The date is 16 October 1895.

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your very courteous favour of the 11th: inst:

To tell the honest truth, no letter that I could write would in any way assist your cause for my views on foreign missions are not such as would be accepted by any conference.

It is my fortune to have been born and to a large extent brought up among those whom white men call 'heathen'; and while I recognize the paramount duty of every white man to follow the teachings of his creed and conscience as 'a debtor to do the whole law,' it seems to me cruel that white men, whose governments are armed with the most murderous weapons known to science, should amaze and confound their fellow creatures with a doctrine of salvation imperfectly understood by themselves and a code of ethics foreign to the climate and instincts of those races whose most cherished customs they outrage and whose gods they insult.

This is a matter that has been very near to my heart and I thank you for having afforded me an opportunity to testify.

Very sincerely yours
Rudyard Kipling¹

Why did Kipling dislike missionaries? One kind of answer to this question is provided by David Gilmour: Kipling's attitudes to religious missionaries were

1. Written from Naulakha, Vermont. Gillespie was secretary to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. Rudyard Kipling, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Macmillan, 1990) I: 205–06.

inherited from his father Lockwood Kipling, who ‘used to scoff at “warm evangelical gush” and “the pernicious nonsense purveyed by the ecclesiastical wind-baggeries”’.² But if we investigate further the figure of the missionary in Kipling’s writing, we will be led inevitably to consider also that other figure, the convert, for they constitute each other; missionaries make converts, but the idea or hope of a convert brought the missionary into being, and into the field, in the first place. A debate and drama about mission and conversion is one of the keys to the whole project of the European empires in the East, as well as a crucial and ever-present theme in Kipling’s writing, from the earliest Indian fiction to the stories about St Paul in his last collection of tales, ‘The Manner of Men’ and ‘The Church that was at Antioch’ in *Limits and Renewals* (1932). The convert is different from the missionary, not in an opposite way, but as an interlocutor, though not an equal one. And as the Western missionary speaks to and about actual and potential converts, he or she is involved in another conversation too, sometimes a fractious one, with a different kind of Westerner, one who, like Kipling himself, is skeptical about conversion or hostile to it. The *dramatis personae* of conversion and reversion include the missionary, the pagan, the convert, the anti-missionary, and the apostate.

The story, or the first part of the story, begins at the beginning of *Plain Tales from the Hills*, Kipling’s first book of stories. He opened that volume with ‘Lispeth’, a tale that had first appeared in the *Civil and Military Gazette* in November 1886. The story takes place in the Kotgarh Valley at the foot of the Himalayas, and tells of a Hill-girl who is brought up in the household of the English missionary chaplain, is disappointed in her love for a handsome English globetrotter, and returns in the end to her own people and religion. The pattern of conversion and reversion, the boundary that is crossed and recrossed, was one that interested Kipling extremely throughout his career. It provides the structure for many of his narratives, with particularly intricate variations in his Indian novel *Kim*, a story in which Lispeth the Hill-girl, later in life, puts in an appearance as the Woman of Shamlegh, who has no love for Sahibs.

When Lispeth’s parents die in a cholera epidemic, the child is taken into the Mission household and grows up as ‘half servant, half companion’ to the Chaplain’s wife. The ‘child of nature’, in the missionary formula, has become by baptism a ‘child of grace’. Hybrid in status, she is unsettling in appearance, and is described in terms specifically Western and classical. She is a striking beauty with ‘a Greek face’, and is ‘of a pale, ivory colour, and, for her race, extremely tall’.³ Her own

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2. David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London: John Murray, 2002), 81.
 3. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen with an introduction and notes by David Trotter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 33. Page references in the text are to this edition.

people grumble that she has become a white woman (34). She speaks English, professes Christianity, and reads all the books in the house. Everything points to a cultural as well as religious conversion, but it is this that the story intends to prove impossible.

Lispeth plays with the Chaplain's children, and takes classes in the Sunday School. She grows up: what should become of her? Obviously she cannot return to her own people, and besides, they hate her. The Chaplain's wife says Lispeth should take service in Simla as a nurse or something 'genteel'. This is a familiar career path for a young Eurasian woman of respectability, but Lispeth has no European blood, in spite of looking like 'the original Diana of the Romans' (33). In any case, she is quite happy where she is.

When she is seventeen she returns from a walk with the young Englishman in her arms, having found him unconscious from a fall in the hills, and announces that he must be nursed back to health and then she intends to marry him. A quotation will give the tone of all this.

She explained to the Chaplain that this was the man she meant to marry, and the Chaplain and his wife lectured her severely on the impropriety of her conduct. Lispeth listened quietly, and repeated her first proposition. It takes a great deal of Christianity to wipe out uncivilized Eastern instincts, such as falling in love at first sight. Lispeth, having found the man she worshipped, did not see why she should keep silent as to her choice. She had no intention of being sent away, either. She was going to nurse that Englishman until he was well enough to marry her. That was her programme. (35)

The narrating voice treats Lispeth herself with a mixture of detachment, respect, and amusement. She is beautiful but at the same time grotesque, 'a stately goddess, five feet ten in her shoes' (34), her twenty- and thirty-mile 'little constitutionals' (34) being both formidable and ridiculous when compared to the genteel exercise of English ladies. The respect and amusement apply too to her emotional life, and the unladylike suddenness and frankness of her love for the stranger. But while the narrative is quite ready to have sport with the Hill-girl, its main target is the missionaries, and it skewers them by mimicking their outrage ('uncivilized Eastern instincts'), setting up an ambush for it ('It takes a great deal of Christianity to wipe out uncivilized Eastern instincts'), and then detonating it ('It takes a great deal of Christianity to wipe out uncivilized Eastern instincts, such as falling in love at first sight').

In the sentence, Christianity, at least of the missionary kind, is trapped into exposing itself as the enemy, and opposite, of love. (Perhaps of relevance here are Kipling's extremely strong feelings of hurt and betrayal about his treatment as a child in an unloving Evangelical household in Southsea, described in the

short story 'Baa Baa, Black Sheep' [1888] and the memoir *Something of Myself*.)⁴ Christianity speaks as a discourse of repression and hypocrisy. The narrative puts imaginary comic quotation marks round 'uncivilized Eastern instincts', ridiculing the missionaries' espousal of this judgement which the narrator elsewhere has no trouble in endorsing. Lispeth does not conceal her love for the Englishman she has rescued. 'Being a savage by birth, she took no trouble to hide her feelings, and the Englishman was amused' (35). This sentence says Lispeth was born a savage, and so still behaves like a savage. Does the narrator endorse this view, or is he just reporting what the Englishman thinks?

In a sense, it does not matter how we answer this instance of the question of who speaks in the narrative text. The view that someone like Lispeth is and always will be a savage is one that can comfortably be held by the Englishman, and by the narrator, and presumably by most readers of the *Civil and Military Gazette*; in any case this observation, about not hiding one's feelings, at least suggests that the ways of the savage are not unequivocally inferior to the ways of the civilized. The people who *cannot* without contradiction espouse such views about the irredeemably uncivilized nature of Lispeth are, of course, those people who have a belief, a faith, and a professional investment, in the idea that someone like Lispeth can be turned, converted, into a being of a different nature.

The convalescent stranger is not above flirting with this strange girl, but anything more permanent is out of the question, and besides he has a fiancée at home. To avoid a scene when the time comes for him to depart, the Chaplain's wife advises him to tell the girl that he intends to come back and marry her. He departs, and forgets her. 'He wrote a book on the East afterwards. Lispeth's name did not appear there' (36). It is more than three months later that the Chaplain's wife judges it 'a profitable time' to let her know 'the real state of affairs — that the Englishman had only promised his love to keep her quiet — that he had never meant anything, and that it was wrong and improper of Lispeth to think of marriage with an Englishman, who was of a superior clay, besides being promised in marriage to a girl of his own people' (36–37).

Plain Tales from the Hills is very interested in the scandal of inter-racial liaisons. Kipling never writes about a white woman dallying with an Oriental man, an idea so disturbing that he may have been unwilling to bring himself even to imagine it, but several of the tales deal with an Englishman consorting with an Indian or Eurasian woman, and without exception these liaisons are broken up,

4. Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, ed. Louis L. Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 170–97; *Something of Myself* [1937], ed. Robert Hampson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 35–42. All Kipling's biographers agree that, in Gilmour's words, 'the experience [of Southsea] marked Kipling forever'. David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional*, 9.

punished, or at the least deplored.⁵ My point is that there is every reason to believe that Kipling would endorse the Chaplain's wife's view that it would be wrong and improper for a Hill-girl to think of marriage to an Englishman; and its corollary, that Englishmen were of a superior clay, is an opinion comfortably widespread throughout Kipling's writings, though he would not have expressed it in those terms without a genial irony. In the mouth of the Chaplain's wife and in the circumstances, however, these views are both cruel and hypocritical. The Hill-girl gets the point — 'You have killed Lispeth,' she tells the Chaplain's wife (37) — and wastes little time changing (or changing back) her name, her costume, her family allegiance and her religion. She quits the mission and never comes back. The convert has reverted, the trope of transformation is troped in its turn. 'There is no law whereby you can account for the vagaries of the heathen,' says the Chaplain's wife, 'and I believe that Lispeth was always at heart an infidel' (37).

The particular glee with which this story is told comes from its satisfaction in reporting not that the Chaplain's wife is wrong, but that she is right. For the facts of the case do seem to support the idea that Lispeth was always at heart an infidel. Her conversion was incongruous, always slightly comical, temporary, and skin-deep. She returns to 'her own unclean people' (37) as if to her element, resuming the cultural habits attributed to her ethnicity, such as being dirty, getting drunk and being beaten by her husband. The joke here, from the narrator's point of view, is that beliefs about the girl's natural difference — encoded in essentializing formulae such as 'uncivilized Eastern instincts', 'a savage by birth', 'at heart a heathen', and 'always at heart an infidel' — apparently borne out by Lispeth's reversion at the end of the story, run counter to the fundamental tenets of missionary Christianity at least in the nineteenth century. For if the savage is always going to be at heart a savage, then Christian grace, however liberally applied, can only ever effect a temporary, superficial, and inauthentic conversion.

Conservatives have always believed that it is vain to hope to convert the basic article, the thing itself; this is just the conservative doctrine applied to the facts of ethnicity and culture. But liberals may not allow themselves to believe in the essential unchangeability, or the unchangeable essence, of human subjects, for this renders futile the liberal programme of progress through education, as it renders futile the missionary programme of conversion. The story is in rather obvious ways a satire, even a critique, of English dishonesty and hypocrisy

5. Apart from 'Lispeth', this theme appears in *Plain Tales* in 'Kidnapped', 'Beyond the Pale' and 'To Be Filed for Reference'. Another fascinating example is 'Without Benefit of Clergy', in *Life's Handicap*. For the sexual life of the Raj, see Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990). See also Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

practised on vulnerable Oriental credulity. But what is most interesting here is the way it catches out the Chaplain's wife in a denial of a fundamental liberal shibboleth, the primacy of nurture over nature. It is a faith which a conservative does not share, but it has to underwrite the liberal belief in the possibility of development, education, transformation — the trope of betterment, and the grand narrative of progress that it enables. The Chaplain's wife is obliged to blaspheme, and perhaps even to disprove, the fundamental beliefs of the missionary project. She is, let us say, a professed liberal who ends up speaking like a conservative.

The two great modalities — liberal and conservative — of British domestic political life, in the Victorian era and into the early decades of the twentieth century, also shaped British ideas and policies about India and the colonies. Liberal and Conservative are the names of the two great political parties of Victorian Britain. But though these rival modalities correspond fairly closely to the attitudes and policies towards empire of the two parties, they are not identical with or confined to them. Liberal views and tendencies may sometimes be found in a Conservative voter or government, for example. I will use the terms liberal and conservative (lower-case) as the names of different ways of looking at and behaving towards the East in the colonial period. These ways of looking are opposed, but not in the sense that one is imperialist and the other anti-imperialist. They are both modalities of empire. Though their posture may be antagonistic, they serve the same national project, like the lion and unicorn of heraldry.

The colonialist conservative contemplating the East believes that nature has made the Oriental Oriental, and the Englishman English, and that any attempt to interfere with this natural disposition of things is asking for trouble. It is the business of empire, in the conservative view, to maintain order and to see to the material well-being of the subject people and then leave them to their own cultural devices. The colonialist liberal is more inclined to speak of justice than of order. His view, and hers, is that empire carries an obligation to minister to the mind and spirit and not just to the body, and that authority must justify itself by a determination to improve the East by bringing to it the manifest benefits of Western civilization. In secular terms this means education and in spiritual terms it means salvation, and the overlapping of missionary and educational work can be observed in every corner of the empire (and indeed also in the home country).⁶ The voice of the liberal is likely to be raised in schools and churches, while that of the conservative is more often to be heard in the administration and the security services. In *A Passage to India*, the magistrate Ronnie Heaslop can usually be

6. See Susan Thorne, "The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable": Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain', *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 238–62.

relied on to put the conservative point of view, and the teacher Cyril Fielding the liberal one.

These modalities are not to be understood as attributes of an individual, like right-handedness or left-handedness, but as inclinations in the discourse itself, usually in contention, and not be found often or for long in a pure form unmixed with the other. The Indian career of Lord Curzon, both a conservative and a reformer and the most splendid of the viceroys of India, is a good illustration of the coexistence of liberal and conservative beneath the same helmet.⁷ Kipling was almost unremittingly a conservative, though he could mimic the liberal voice when it suited him. That is to say, he was skeptical — to say the least — about the likelihood of India ever changing its ways enough to attain the real (rather than the mimic) maturity of a European country or culture, but he felt that the British were obliged to provide the material and technological support, and the political apparatus, to maintain stability and a degree of prosperity in the empire. It is a position spelt out in the narrative, and borne out by the story, of the tale 'On the City Wall' (1888).

Year by year England sends out fresh drafts for the first fighting-line, which is officially called the Indian Civil Service. These die, or kill themselves by overwork, or are worried to death, or broken in health and hope in order that the land may be protected from death and sickness, famine and war, and may eventually become capable of standing alone. It will never stand alone, but the idea is a pretty one, and men are willing to die for it, and yearly the work of pushing and coaxing and scolding and petting the country into good living goes forward. If an advance be made all credit is given to the native, while the Englishmen stand back and wipe their foreheads. If a failure occurs the Englishmen step forward and take the blame. Overmuch tenderness of this kind has bred a strong belief among many natives that the native is capable of administering the country, and many devout Englishmen believe this also, because the theory is stated in beautiful English with all the latest political colours.⁸

It is the conservative's opinion that faith in non-Europeans' capacity for grown-up modernity and 'standing alone' is a delusion, shared by 'many natives' and 'many devout Englishmen', but one that does not take in those engaged in the real work of empire.

'The Judgement of Dungara' (also 1888) is a tale that dramatizes yet more clearly the two visions of empire, conservative and liberal, that I have attributed

7. See the relevant chapters of David Gilmour, *Curzon: Imperial Statesman* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), especially 149–81.

8. Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, ed. Louis L. Cornell (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 223.

to Kipling and the missionaries. Though the motive and moral of the tale is that mission work is against nature, and nature is against missionaries, the story begins by expressing some sympathy for those who follow their vocation to the heathen. 'Do you know what life at a Mission outpost means?'⁹ Inviting the reader to step for a moment into the role of missionary, the tale goes on to catalogue the discomforts, indignities, dangers and frustrations that await 'you' in the field — the loneliness, the lack of resources, the constant testing of the spirit. Kipling wants to show that he understands the vision and the problems, and can speak the language, of his adversary, the missionary.

The idiom anticipates the mission statement of the poem 'The White Man's Burden 1899: The United States and the Philippine Islands', especially when it turns to dealings with the indigenous peoples whom the poem was to evoke as 'half-savage and half-child'. 'You must be infinitely kind and patient, and, above all, clear-sighted, for you deal with the simplicity of childhood, the experience of man, and the subtlety of the savage' (123). As a matter of fact, 'The White Man's Burden' is quite frankly missionary — interestingly, and of course strategically, considering its addressee, the missionary-inclined and manifestly-destined people of the United States, whom the poem urges to accept the responsibilities of an imperial nation. The poem characterizes the imperialist as a kind of Moses, giving his life to the mission of leading a sullen and possibly undeserving people out of bondage and ignorance. This is a role that would appeal to Justus Krenk, the German missionary in 'The Judgement of Dungara', but the tale warns of the sacrifices the unsung heroes of far-flung missions must be prepared to face. 'The reports are silent here, because heroism, failure, doubt, despair, and self-abnegation on the part of a mere cultured white man are things of no weight as compared to the saving of one half-human soul from a fantastic faith in wood-spirits, goblins of the rock, and river-fiends' (124).

But having thus paid his respects to missionaries, the narrating voice of 'The Judgement of Dungara' goes on to a gleeful representation of the missionary Justus as pompous, naïve, ridiculously idealistic, and of course German — he says things like 'We will these Heathen now by idolatrous practices so darkened better make' (122). Justus heads upcountry into the remote Hinterland with his wife Lotte, to build a mission outpost and spread the word of God in the heart of the country of the Buria Kol — 'the naked, good-tempered, timid, shameless, lazy Buria Kol' (122). Naked, without shame, and disinclined to labour; there are already suggestions here, consonant with both conservative and radical views, that these simple people are already living in something like paradise and do not need a missionary to point the way for them. Conservative imperialists and radical anti-imperialists are both prone to sentimentalize local ways of life as 'unspoilt'

9. *Ibid.*, 122. Page references in the text that follow are to this edition.

and 'authentic', but liberal imperialists, like their heirs the enthusiasts of globalization, usually want to improve and modernize them. To the missionary, the Buria Kol are both undeveloped and pagan, and represent a challenge: they must be converted.

Justus and Lotte set zealously to work. 'We will with the little children begin,' declares Justus. 'After the children the mothers; and then the men' (125). This is the classic pattern. By degrees they build up a congregation of the faithful among the Buria Kol, and with Christian conversion come some of the other manifest benefits of Westernization, including clothing, the beginnings of education, better conditions for women, the rudiments of agriculture, medical and child care, and even a cottage textile industry. The tale reports 'how Lotte lightened the Curse of Eve among the women, and how Justus did his best to introduce the Curse of Adam' (126). In other words, though the Krenks are primarily interested in the salvation of souls, their missionary intervention also entails a whole set of revolutions — technological, economic, cultural, institutional — which effect a major change on the Buria Kol and their way of life. This is the liberal way: the naked feet of these erstwhile hunter-gatherers have been set upon the royal road, or sacred way, to progress and Westernization. Not surprisingly, though, the missionary project soon meets resistance from those with an investment in the traditions of the threatened indigenous culture, in particular from old Athon Dazé, high priest of the local cult of Dungara. Ominously, the tale refers to Justus as the Priest of the God of Things as They Should Be, and to Athon Dazé as the Priest of the God of Things as They Are. When such a contest is joined in conservative discourse, we should know where to place our bets.

The narrative centre of the tale is the rivalry between the god Dungara and the Christians, and it ends with Athon Dazé playing a trick on Justus, getting him to clothe his flock in robes made from a local stinging nettle so that they think Dungara is punishing them for their apostasy with the torments of hell. Justus is humiliated before the visiting Collector, his congregation desert him, the mission is abandoned and reverts to nature, and Justus goes home to Heidelberg to take up botany. Kipling had a weakness for farce and he often punishes characters he dislikes by arranging for them to be the object of public derision (laughter seems to have been something of which he was very much afraid, as we saw in 'Bubbling Well Road'). The missionaries, then, are humiliated and defeated in Buria Kol, and the incorrigible old pagan is left to lord it over the restored status quo.

But although the priest of Dungara is the antagonist of the Krenks in this story, there is another character who stands in apposition to the missionaries, and this is the Englishman Gallio, the Assistant Collector or district officer and Agent in Charge of the Buria Kol. Gallio serves to protect the Buria Kol but unlike Justus he has no desire to change them. Like all of Kipling's heroes he is skilled, versatile, and tireless.

Gallio departed to risk his life in mending the rotten bamboo bridges of his people, in killing a too persistent tiger here or there, in sleeping out in the reeking jungle, or in tracking the Suria Kol raiders who had taken a few heads from their brethren of the Buria clan. He was a knock-kneed, shambling young man, naturally devoid of creed or reverence, with a longing for absolute power which his undesirable District gratified. (125)

Here we have a fully-fledged version of the young Kipling hero, unglamorous, wedded to his work, entirely practical and with a philistine uninterest in ideas, seeking no reward, cynical in his opinions but completely dedicated to service in his actions. Gallio embodies a conservative fantasy about the work of empire, the boyish paternalist controlling the simple policies of his vast district single-handed with the co-operation of the local authorities — ‘I’m monarch of all I survey,’ he tells Krenk, ‘and Athon Dazé is my viceroy’ (125). Crucially, Gallio is hands-off or minimalist in government, and never interferes with the established cultural practices of the Buria Kol, finding it necessary at most to talk to old Athon Dazé ‘like a father’ when a crisis needs to be defused. All in all, Buria Kol is a version of colonial pastoral, and it is not surprising to hear that ‘the Buria Kol loved [Gallio] and brought him offerings of speared fish, orchids from the dim moist heart of the forest, and as much game as he could eat’ (124).¹⁰

Gallio is one of these apparently unideological and untheoretical imperialists, explaining to Justus that he feels one creed is as good as another. ‘I’ll give you all the assistance in my power, of course, but don’t hurt my Buria Kol . . . I have their bodies and the District to see to, but you can try what you can do for their souls’ (124). Gallio’s business is with the body, and with things as they are. He does not mind (or care) about Justus’ designs on the souls of the Buria Kol, because the soul is a Hinterland over which he himself makes no claim. Flitting about the district like some benign tutelary spirit of the forest, Gallio is thoroughly naturalized within the scene. We are told about the missionary’s provenance, his arrival, his stipend, his struggles. But Gallio has no past, no history, and no problems. It is as if he has always been there, and always been accepted, and always will be. Justus makes an eruption into the history of Buria Kol, or rather through his intervention history enters the timeless and raffish idyll of the forest. But Gallio was there before the beginning of the story, and will be there after the end: he seems a phenomenon not of history, but of natural history. He guarantees

10. His life sounds rather like that of William Henry Horsley, a ‘jungle wallah’ whose story is told by David Gilmour and who described his existence as ‘a kind of prolonged solitary picnic with a certain amount of official correspondence to fill up the hot midday hours’. David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (London: John Murray, 2005), 121.

changelessness, and is thus the conservative ideal, the imperialist who preserves and protects but does not seek to convert or improve his charges. No wonder they bring him offerings, as if he were a god himself.

Liberal and conservative ideas in British India

Although Kipling liked to give the impression that British India was the creation and monument of men and boys like Gallio, in fact the history of British activity in India was almost from the beginning a rich and sometimes volatile mixture of trade, military, bureaucratic and missionary (religious and cultural) imperialism, and throughout that history can be heard a running dialogue, in all these fields of activity, between liberal and conservative views. What to do or not to do about Indian cultural practices and beliefs was a constant theme of East India Company and imperial policy in British India. Sometimes cultural *laissez-faire* could be as profitable as its economic cousin. For example, far from subverting Hinduism, the East India Company, quick to see profit, went into the business of protecting Indian religious festivals, and levied a pilgrim tax on visitors to Hindu shrines.¹¹ But while some saw foreign adventure simply in terms of markets and merchandise and profits, many in Britain held the view that the enlightenment and salvation of the heathen was the great opportunity and obligation — some said the only justification — of empire for a Christian nation. The figure of conversion helped many British people to understand their country's relation with India, and with the rest of the empire, in terms of duties and opportunities, or (as the anti-missionaries felt) of misapprehension and wrong-headedness. And as we shall see, the figure was readily adaptable outside the field of religion too, and many British and Anglo-Indians who were not concerned with Christianizing the heathen were motivated by the belief that the East could be converted to the various, and overlapping, benefits of civilization, modernity, and Western ways.

Though, as Eric Hobsbawm says, it would be wrong to describe missionary effort as an agency of imperialist politics,¹² on the whole missionaries in Asia and Africa tended to support imperial expansion for philanthropic reasons, and the missionary urge to conversion, to improve people as well as to govern them, supported a programme of cultural and religious activism whose intentions were well-meaning while its effects could be dubious. 'In India,' says Christine Bolt, 'the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accommodation of the British to their

11. William Golant, *The Long Afternoon: British India 1601–1947* (New York: St Martins Press, 1975), 38.

12. 'Often it was opposed to the colonial authorities; pretty well always it put the interests of its converts first.' Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London: Cardinal, 1989), 71.

subjects is acknowledged to have been halted by the desire of Evangelical and Utilitarian reformers to refashion major aspects of Oriental society in the Western image, in order to improve Britain's administration of the continent.¹³ An increasing interference in people's lives could lead to estrangement and bitter resentment, of the kind that fuelled the rebellion in India in 1857. Late in the nineteenth century, in the Pacific islands, Robert Louis Stevenson was frank about the effects of Western interference on indigenous populations. 'Upon the whole, the problem seems to me to stand thus: Where there have been fewest changes, important or unimportant, salutary or hurtful, there the race survives. Where there have been most, important or unimportant, salutary or hurtful, there it perishes.' (This was not a figure of speech: the unintended effects of such catalysis could be genocidal.) There too, the principal agent of change was the missionary. 'It is easy to blame the missionary. But it is his business to make changes.'¹⁴

Missionaries needed not only converts but also native recruits to help run the church abroad. These needs, and the properly egalitarian Christian doctrine of the soul, made missionaries tireless workers in education — an enterprise in which, incidentally, both men and women instructed, and both girls and boys were taught.¹⁵ In this the missionaries were supported, especially in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, by a widely disseminated Utilitarianism and by the vigorous efforts of reforming administrators strongly influenced by the Evangelical movement. In India these men and women, in the confidence of their religious belief and their faith in a manifestly progressive modernity, set themselves to what Thomas Babington Macaulay described as 'the reconstruction of a decomposed society'.¹⁶

This interventionist tradition was carried through into the latter part of the century by what Gerald Studdert-Kennedy calls the Broad Church idea of the British state, presided over by the figure of Gladstone, which brought to the empire a distinctive liberalism in 'a confused medley of generous intentions, anxious convictions and profound misapprehensions'.¹⁷ What might be called the ideology of native improvement lies at the heart of the liberal empire, embodied in the figure of conversion — not just to the truths of religion, but to eventual

13. Christine Bolt, 'Race and the Victorians', *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C. C. Eldridge (London: Macmillan, 1984), 145.

14. Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Depopulation', *In the South Seas* (1896), ed. Neil Rennie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 33, 34.

15. For an account of the work of Western missionary women in education and women's welfare, see Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Colonial Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 21–62.

16. Quoted in Humphrey Trevelyan, *The India We Left: Charles Trevelyan 1826–65, Humphrey Trevelyan 1929–47* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 14.

17. Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, *Providence and the Raj: Imperial Mission and Missionary Imperialism* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 31.

modernity, equality, and independence, at least in theory. While in practice the mission to change beliefs and ways of life may have led to distrust and hostility, in theory at least it brought colonizing and colonized peoples closer together, in terms of rights and opportunities. In 1833, Parliament decreed that nobody could be excluded from any employment in the East India Company on grounds of religion, colour, or place of birth. A career in the administration to the highest level was now in theory open to Indian people (at least to Indian men).

The year 1833 was also important for an exemplary figure of the liberal Raj, Charles Edward Trevelyan. Charles Trevelyan became assistant to Sir Edward Colebrook, the British Resident in Delhi, and soon signalled his earnestness by charging his chief with corruption, a charge which was eventually upheld. Trevelyan went on to become a high flier in the administration, and was at the forefront of the drive to adopt English education in India. It was in 1833 that he was appointed Secretary of the General Committee of Public Instruction, and joined battle with the 'Orientalists' who favoured Sanskrit and Arabic instruction in colleges for Indians.¹⁸ In the same year, Macaulay arrived in Calcutta as a member of the Supreme Council. The two were soon allies and friends; Macaulay was to become Trevelyan's brother-in-law. In the extraordinarily important decision to promote education in the English language in India, Macaulay's famous 'Minute on Indian Education' of January 1835 is recognized as the decisive text. Trevelyan, however, had been paving the way for some years, and has a claim to be seen as the architect of the policy. In 1838 he published an essay *On the Education of the People of India*, giving his thoughts on the long-term consequences of that decision, which he saw unambiguously as shaping an eventual Indian independence.

Macaulay's Minute is best remembered for his disparaging of Oriental learning and literature, including the notorious sentence endorsing the opinion that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia'.¹⁹ The corollary to this was Macaulay's persuasion that English would be the medium through which Indians could gain access to modern scientific learning and advanced ideas. Trevelyan in his essay dismisses the argument that, in giving Indians full access rights to modern knowledge and the means to possess it, the British were harming their own national interest. His view was that the existing connection between two such distant countries as England and India could not be permanent: no effort of policy could prevent

18. The 'Orientalist' position was not against the use of English, but against the exclusive use of English. Their view was that the British government should continue to foster instruction in Sanskrit and Arabic as well as in English for students in institutions of higher learning sponsored by the committee.

19. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Minute on Indian Education', *Selected Writings*, ed. John Clive and Thomas Pinney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 241.

Indians from ultimately regaining their independence. The only question was whether this would come through revolution or through reform. ‘The only means at our disposal for preventing the one and securing the other class of results is, to set the natives on a process of European improvement, to which they are already sufficiently inclined.’²⁰

Rather than struggle to maintain a precarious power, Trevelyan argued, the British should act as a trustee, preparing Indians to assume management of their own affairs; and English education was the main instrument of this preparation. The nineteenth-century idea that the Anglo-Saxon race stood in a relation of trusteeship to the less developed peoples of the earth — a doctrine with strong naturalizing and legitimizing undertones — was most influentially argued by the liberal imperialist Charles Wentworth Dilke. ‘The only justification for our presence in India,’ Dilke maintained, echoing Trevelyan, ‘is the education for freedom of the Indian races.’²¹ Such a paternalistic policy was manifestly virtuous. It was also in the British interest, Trevelyan held, its benevolence possibly prolonging British rule and certainly creating a goodwill that would lay the groundwork for a lasting commercial intercourse and political partnership, long after the garrison had gone home. He found a historical parallel in the policy of Julius Agricola to educate the sons of the leading men among the Britons in the literature and science of Rome. History showed that from being obstinate enemies, the Britons soon became attached to the Romans, and made more strenuous efforts to retain them than their own ancestors had to resist the Roman invasion. ‘The Indians will, I hope, soon stand in the same position towards us in which we once stood towards the Romans.’²²

The plans of Trevelyan and Macaulay for public education in India were an ambitious piece of social engineering, dedicated to a thorough modernization and transformation of Indian society. The seminaries to be set up would hasten the demise of the caste system, Trevelyan hoped, by admitting boys from any background on merit alone; they would have the added effect of breaking the stranglehold of the priesthood on education. Government sponsored colleges teaching in English would be the workshops of the conversion of India into a modern technological society. But the conversion envisaged by Trevelyan would

20. Charles E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1838), 192, 193. The case for reform as the alternative to revolution had been argued exhaustively in the domain of domestic politics, in the decade that saw the passing of the first Reform Bill (1832).

21. Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English Speaking Countries*, 8th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1869), 547.

22. Charles E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India*, 196. The Roman imperial precedent was a common trope, taken up in later works as diverse as Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’ and Kipling’s *Puck of Pook’s Hill*. I discuss it further in Chapter 9.

be a secular one. Religious instruction was to form no part of the object of the government seminaries, and he was unenthusiastic about the quality of education already being offered by many Christian missionary establishments. Nevertheless, his educational programme was geared to conversion, being explicitly designed to reform the Indian character by freeing it from what were considered the pernicious effects of Hinduism (and, to a lesser extent, of Islam). There would be no proselytizing, but Christian ideals would be inculcated indirectly through the study of English literature, which was imbued with the ideas and spirit of Christianity.²³ Though determinedly secular in its idiom, it was a thoroughly missionary project, whose goal was a kind of globalizing conversion, through a spreading of the word. The word was English, and the salvation it offered those to whom it was given was modernity and eventually equality and partnership with the English people, so that in the end, 'from violent opponents, or sullen conformists, they are converted into zealous and intelligent co-operators with us'.²⁴

In 1972 Charles Edward's great-nephew Humphrey Trevelyan published a history of his family's adventures in India over more than a century; its title, *The India We Left*, announces a legacy as well as a departure. He declares stoutly that there could be no doubt that 'the education policy of 1835, which gave educated Indians access to English liberal political thought, was largely responsible for the way in which the Indian independence movement developed'.²⁵ He also maintains that those who formulated the policy knew very well that it was an instrument for independence. 'Only in their expectation of concurrent social reform and the decline of Hinduism were the reformers wide of the mark'²⁶ — for with the spread of wholesome Western influence they expected Christianity to triumph in India within a generation.

Charles Trevelyan was also to take a prominent part in introducing a competitive examination for the Indian Civil Service — thus the 'competition wallahs' were born.²⁷ While in full moral support of the missionaries, Charles Trevelyan was firmly of the view that the government of India should observe complete religious neutrality. 'Christianity would prevail, but it would suffer if it were officially patronized by a conquering government. The missionaries would get on better on their own.'²⁸ Perhaps so; but a determination to change India for

23. For a discussion of the ideological aspects of this education policy see Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (London: Faber, 1990).

24. Charles E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India*, 90.

25. Humphrey Trevelyan, *The India We Left*, 51.

26. *Ibid.*, 52.

27. *The Competition Wallah* (1864), one of the most engaging books about British India, was written by Charles's son George Otto Trevelyan, who served for a while as his father's secretary in India.

28. Humphrey Trevelyan, *The India We Left*, 62.

its own good was gathering momentum not only among Christian clergy and teachers, but also in the East India Company administration and army. 'India in the 1840s and 1850s was slowly filling with pious British Evangelicals who wanted not just to rule and administer India, but also to redeem and improve it. [...] Nor was it any longer just the missionaries who dreamt of converting India.'²⁹ After the catastrophe of 1857, Queen Victoria issued a proclamation to her Indian subjects disclaiming 'alike the right and the desire to impose Our convictions on any of Our subjects'.³⁰ As for Charles Trevelyan, after twenty-one years back in England, he returned to India after the Mutiny as Governor of Madras, but was recalled after a quarrel with central government over finances. He returned for a last appointment as finance minister from 1863–65. Humphrey reports that Charles was concerned with what he saw as the deterioration of relations since 1857. 'He recalled that when he was a young man in Calcutta, all the top people were engaged in education and other work for the benefit of Indians.'³¹ The Mutiny was widely seen by the British as discrediting liberal attitudes towards Indians, and in its aftermath the atmosphere certainly hardened; in the last four decades of the century, the voice of conservative empire was heard through the land, with its stern reminders of the need for vigilance and control. Kipling was to be its greatest spokesman, with his admonition to 'Forget not order and the real'.

The liberal voice did persist to the end of British India, however, and its fortunes can be followed in two exemplary instances. Edward Thompson was the son of Wesleyan missionaries, and taught at the Wesleyan College in Bankura, Bengal. He knew Tagore, Nehru, and Gandhi. Thompson returned to England in 1923 and resigned the ministry, devoting himself to a career as historian (most ambitiously in *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* [1934]), essayist, novelist and dramatist. In Thompson and others like him we can see liberal pieties about eventual Indian independence finally coming to term.

Much injustice has been done to India, Thompson acknowledges, both in action and representation. He writes a history of 1857 called *The Other Side of the Medal* (published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press), and a history of suttee, a practice which 'was barbarous; but when we blame a system we must remember that the men and women who suffer by living in a system

29. William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 61. Dalrymple argues from local sources that anger at suspected British plans for the conversion of India to Christianity was a crucial factor in the Mutiny and the risings in cities like Delhi.

30. See Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 162. Even so, 'after 1858 the activities of Christian missionaries gradually increased, with the covert approval of the Government and the advantage of a period of unusual peace and progress'. *Ibid.*, 163.

31. Humphrey Trevelyan, *The India We Left*, 98.

have only a limited responsibility for its existence'.³² The British prohibition of suttee under Lord Bentinck in 1829, which ushered in a great liberal-Evangelical phase of reforms including the campaigns against 'female infanticide, thuggee, human sacrifice, slavery and all forms of indigenous barbarity,' earns Thompson's unqualified approval. But he also argues that 'such things as suttee kept back Indian political progress by many years', since 'even a beginning in self-government was impossible' so long as they continued. And he points out that suttee had a deplorable effect on the British too, for a conviction that Indians were barbarous made their British rulers brutal and complacent, and encouraged in them a 'beneficial ruthlessness' and 'a self-satisfaction and an isolation from the people of India'.³³

Thompson became increasingly committed to Indian self-determination and worked hard for it, but he was not willing to repudiate the Raj.

I know that the heroisms of this Empire are innumerable, and that they throw about its daily traffic a splendour brighter by far than any which imagination flings about the thought of Caesar's outposts on the Rhine or in Libya. These things will be seen and acknowledged one day, and no honest and competent mind will judge our rule hardly when its day has passed.³⁴

This awkward liberal even-handedness often made Thompson unpopular with both his Indian and his English friends, but he would not compromise it. His writing is a fine example of the liberal modality in the last generation of British rule in India. In particular, Thompson's three novels about the missionaries Robin Alden and John Findlay — *An Indian Day* (1927), *A Farewell to India* (1931), and *An End of the Hours* (1938) — represent an important record of the liberal conscience of colonialism in the East. And in the wartime *Enlist India for Freedom!* (1940), his vision of an India mature enough for self-government, and closely bound to its former rulers in mutual goodwill, is remarkably similar to that of Charles Trevelyan a century earlier.

There is no limit to the gracious and imaginative co-operation which the post-war world can see between India and Britain. No one need worry that a self-governing India will want to leave the Empire. Why should she? She likes our people whenever we give Indians a chance to like us, and it is not possible not to like and admire Indians if you know them. And we are a good people to have as comrades.³⁵

32. Edward Thompson, *Suttee: A Historical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow-Burning* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928), 53.

33. *Ibid.*, 82, 131, 137.

34. Edward Thompson, *The Other Side of the Medal* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), 19.

35. Edward Thompson, *Enlist India for Freedom!* (London: Gollancz, 1940), 94. For another part of the campaign to enlist India's support for Britain in wartime, see Douglas Kerr, 'Orwell, India, and the BBC', *Literature and History* 3rd series, 13:1 (Spring 2004), 43–57.

A second instance of the persistence of the liberal voice was in a specifically Trevelyan tradition in India. George Otto Trevelyan's *The Competition Wallah* criticizes the intransigence of British 'planters' (landowners and businessmen) and makes the case for sympathy and English justice for Indians. Humphrey Trevelyan joined the Indian Civil Service in 1929. He was to become a sub-collector in the Madura district, then to enter the political service, and he ended his career in the East working with the Nehru government after independence. With due humility, his memoir casts this outcome, and his own career, as in some ways the culmination of the process set in motion by his grand-uncle in the 1830s.

Indian independence was not won solely by a fight against the foreign occupier. The British, who had acquired their Indian empire as a practical requirement for successful trading, were never wholehearted imperialists in India. The vision of the generation of Charles Trevelyan's youth, pursuing policies which they knew would lead to independence, was blurred in later years, but never wholly lost, and the increasingly insistent demands of the Congress party, being based on the liberal principles inculcated by the British masters, received the sympathy and sometimes even the active support of sections of British public opinion.³⁶

Humphrey's whiggish historiography is able to draw a fairly straight line from Charles Edward's advocacy of English education for Indians in the 1830s to his own loyal service to the government of postcolonial India. 'In spite of all the years of political struggle, Charles Trevelyan's forecast of the way in which independence would come about was in the main fulfilled.'³⁷ Humphrey is witness to the fulfilment of his ancestor's prophecy. He draws on family letters to give an account not only of Charles Trevelyan's work, but also of the inwardness and sincerity of his Indian vocation — returning to Madras in 1859, for example, Charles wrote to his wife 'that he had committed himself to God, believing that he had been prepared and called for what was before him'³⁸ — and although this kind of piety does not extend to Humphrey's generation, what does remain is a secular faith in betterment, and a modest pride in the flowering of the liberal ethos in a successful modern independent Indian nation. This is the liberal gospel of India. Its central dogma is that of the education and improvement of Indians, and a sure test of liberalism or conservatism is the attitude adopted towards English-language-educated Indians.

36. Humphrey Trevelyan, *The India We Left*, 115.

37. *Ibid.*, 246.

38. *Ibid.*, 71.

Missionaries, of whatever stripe in terms of domestic British politics, were expected to speak up for the interests of their local parishioners — Indian, Chinese, Africans or whatever — and were more likely to be sympathetic to their political aspirations. A Christian belief in the equal value of human souls, a disposition to charity, and a professional involvement in welfare and education might be expected to ensure this, but often also ensured that they were patronized or ridiculed by fellow-countrymen like the Kiplings, father and son. Missionaries were also open to criticism and dislike on the grounds of either doing more harm than good, or not practising what they preached; Stevenson mounted both kinds of attack. Somerset Maugham casts a cool eye on missionaries on his travels in China. In 'Fear', he portrays a missionary obliged to pay lip service to the fine qualities of the Chinese while secretly consumed by a racist loathing of them. In 'The Stranger', a doctor teases a missionary by imagining Christ turning up in the town and being told that all the missionaries were away in the hills between May and September.³⁹ Missionary earnestness and missionary hypocrisy were easy targets. Converts too were often regarded with mockery or suspicion, and the cultural convert, the English-language-educated Indian or African or Malay, cultivated by the progressive educational programme of Macaulay's liberal vision, was a figure apt to arouse alarm, scorn and even hatred in the eyes of conservative imperialists. By the turn of the nineteenth century, most grandees of empire were of the view that the Trevelyan-Macaulay policy had done more harm than good, and had created a class of articulate malcontents all too ready to turn their knowledge and skills against their masters. Writing in 1908, Hugh Clifford blamed anti-British 'unrest' in India on the Macaulay-inspired English education of Orientals, and likened the policy to the monster-creating Frankenstein.⁴⁰

Kipling, we have seen, was thoroughly suspicious. His *babus* are invariably ridiculous and almost always untrustworthy (Hurree Babu in *Kim* is trustworthy, but clownish), for Kipling believed in an essential Indianness that could never be converted into something else by the acquisition of another's language or culture or faith.⁴¹ In contrast, Lord Ripon, Viceroy in the early 1880s, was

39. W. Somerset Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen* [1922] (London: Mandarin, 1997), 24–30, 82–86. Maugham gives a more sympathetic portrait of missionaries in 'The Servants of God', 16–19.

40. Hugh Clifford, *Saleh: A Sequel* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1908), ix.

41. The Bengali term *babu* meant something like gentleman, but the British used it to designate English-educated Indians. The Anglo-Indian dictionary *Hobson-Jobson* (1886) glosses the word as follows: 'In Bengal and elsewhere, among Anglo-Indians, it is often used with a slight savour of disparagement, as characterizing a superficially cultivated, but too often effeminate, Bengali. And from the extensive employment of the class, to which the term was applied as a title, in the capacity of clerks in English offices, the word has come often to signify "a native clerk who writes English".'

enthusiastic about that class of government-educated Indians brought into being by Macaulay's policy. 'We have made them,' declared Ripon with Utilitarian zeal, 'let us use them for their good and our own.'⁴²

Lord Curzon, another reforming Viceroy, stated the missionary ideal of empire in grand terms. 'Since men do not know why they exist or whither they go, the only purpose of life must be to do good. Where could that better be accomplished than in India?'⁴³ In this metaphysical formulation, however, the mission statement has been secularized. Indeed, in Curzon's experience an over-zealous Christianity could get in the way of the imperial mission to do good. In 1901 Curzon was obliged to dismiss his Old Etonian schoolfriend Bishop J. E. C. Welldon as Metropolitan of Calcutta. Welldon had antagonized too many people by his efforts to try to force on India a policy of the Bible in education and of vigorous proselytizing in religion. Curzon wrote to explain to Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India.

The fact is that Welldon's creed of Imperial Christianity has got so far as I can see, no advocates at all in this country. We are all of us Christians and Imperialists, but we have no desire to fuse the two characters. Imperialism will only win its way in this country if it wears a secular and not an ecclesiastical garb.⁴⁴

Meanwhile in his policy of preserving and refurbishing Hindu and Muslim monuments Curzon was consistent, as Golant remarks, with 'the conservative view, that an English administration must respect the culture of the country it rules'.⁴⁵

In a speech to the Royal Colonial Institute in 1897 by Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, the missionary idiom is still there but the liberal teleology is very faintly imprinted.

We feel now that our rule over these territories can only be justified if we can show that it adds to the happiness and prosperity of the people — (cheers) — and I maintain that our rule does, and has, brought security and peace and comparative prosperity to countries that never knew their blessings before. (Cheers.) In carrying out this work of civilization we are fulfilling what I believe to be our national mission . . .⁴⁶

42. Ripon, letter to Kimberley, 10 July 1883, quoted in Sarvepalli Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon 1880–1884* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 84.

43. Quoted in Humphrey Trevelyan, *The India We Left*, 18.

44. Quoted in Studdert-Kennedy, *Providence and the Raj*, 88.

45. Golant, *The Long Afternoon*, 38.

46. Joseph Chamberlain, *Foreign and Colonial Speeches* (London: George Routledge, 1897), 244.

Kipling might have found this pompous but he would not have disagreed with its substance. In its slippage from 'happiness and prosperity' to 'security and peace and . . . prosperity', I feel we may glimpse the conservative realist behind the mask of liberal ideals. For the conservative, the mission of the civilized was not to make other people civilized too, but to rule their territory and make it safe.

It is a principle of colonial discourse analysis that there are continuities between literary and official colonial texts. To locate Kipling properly in this dialogue within colonial discourse, I have to turn back now to its crisis in the controversial administration of Lord Ripon, mentioned above, the Viceroy of India from 1880 to 1884. (Rudyard Kipling left school and returned to India late in 1882, shortly before his seventeenth birthday, to work as assistant editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore.) Ripon had been sent to replace Lord Lytton, who was a Disraeli appointment of muscular conservative views, with his hawkish attitude to the Russian threat on the frontier and his hostility to nationalist sentiment. The Liberal victory in the 1880 general election had given Gladstone a mandate to change imperial policy. 'The new Viceroy would therefore be not merely the deputy of the Queen and the delegate of the Home Government but the personal representative of Gladstone sent out to give expression and effect in India to the temper and energy of English Liberalism.'⁴⁷

Ripon himself had been a lifelong Liberal statesman, and was a former cabinet minister and the son of a prime minister. He was a political heavyweight, though Kipling was to describe him uncharitably, fifty years later, as 'a circular and bewildered recluse of religious tendencies'.⁴⁸ He was determined to be a reforming Viceroy, repealing the Vernacular Press Act, and bringing in a Factory Act to outlaw the employment of children under seven, and improve working hours and workplace safety for others. He did his best to improve education too, especially at elementary level. But his main ambition was to bring educated Indians more into the process of government in view of the necessity, as he saw it, 'of making the educated natives the friends, instead of the enemies, of our rule'.⁴⁹ The motive here was to secure assent to British rule, but when he introduced a Resolution of the Government of India in May 1882, the idea of increased participation in local government was put forward not primarily with a view to improving the administration but as an instrument of political and popular education, in what we may recognize as the classic liberal, Gladstonian style. These reforms were not warmly received, and were for the most part watered down in the implementation in different provinces.

47. Sarvepalli Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon*, 2.

48. Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*, 62.

49. Sarvepalli Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon*, 84.

The crisis came elsewhere. In spite of the reverses of Indian-British relations which had followed 1857, there were local officers in the Indian Civil Service. Numbers of these would soon reach the seniority of district magistrates and sessions judges and would need to be granted jurisdiction over European British subjects, and this would require a change in the law. In February 1883, the Legal Member of Council, Sir Courteney Ilbert, introduced a Bill to alter the Criminal Procedure Code so as to remove all distinctions based on the race of the judge, and thus to remove the bar on native magistrates being invested with power over British subjects. Put differently, the Ilbert Bill proposed to make a radical change in the basis of the unequal dialogue between Indian and British people in India.

There were in fact only two Indian Civilians at that time who held the relevant senior posts of responsibility. But the Ilbert Bill caused consternation among British non-officials. What many of them took it to mean was ‘that native judges would not only be given jurisdiction over white planters in outlying districts, but — far more controversially — would be empowered to try white women’.⁵⁰ A generation after 1857, with its terrifying memories and myths, this was too much for many of the British in India, and a furious opposition was mounted to the Bill. The Kipling family joined in the general hysteria. ‘Even Lockwood, usually the most phlegmatic of men, regarded Ripon as a “terrible calamity” and claimed that his replacement the following year prevented “poor Anglo-India” from going “crazy with vexation and apprehension”’.⁵¹ For in the Ilbert Bill, the figure of conversion was writ very large. It proposed nothing less than to change the nature of Indians in the empire from subordinates to potential equals. For many Anglo-Indians, this was beyond toleration.

Ripon hung on grimly, correctly seeing that the Bill had implications for the status of Indians in the Civil Service in general, and indeed for the principles of British rule in India. If the measure was defeated, Indian judges could not be appointed to places where there were numbers of Europeans, because they would have no jurisdiction over them. The authority of Indian officials everywhere would be seen as inferior to that of their white colleagues. The campaign against the Bill expressed itself in often virulently racist terms, the attack on Ilbert modulating without effort into an attack on Indians in general. There appeared a European and Anglo-Indian Defence Association. ‘After a little hesitation most English-owned newspapers supported them and attacked Indians as a people.’⁵²

50. Harry Ricketts, *The Unforgiving Minute: A Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999), 57. Gopal (*The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon* 141) points out that Indian magistrates had been trying civil cases involving Europeans for more than forty years, and further, that in Hong Kong there had been Chinese magistrates who exercised criminal jurisdiction.

51. David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional*, 23.

52. Sarvepalli Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon*, 146.

There was opposition too at home, some of it in the India Office itself, and the *London Times* also came out against the Bill. Support for the Viceroy's initiative was often highly reluctant on the part of his own British officials. Ripon was obliged to retreat, the Bill was reconsidered, and eventually it passed in January 1884 in an amended and very weakened form, which allowed Europeans to demand a jury at least fifty per cent white, and in some circumstances to request a transfer to another court.

In effect the Ilbert Bill was defeated by the Anglo-Indians, in particular the non-government British in India referred to by the generic collective of 'planters', who rallied to the conservative banners of authority, hierarchy, and stability, and the conviction that Indians must be kept in their place. Relations between Indians and British were at their worst since the rebellion of 1857 (recall that this was in the first year of Kipling's return to India). The Viceroy had lost the battle, but had not changed his mind. 'In the present condition of this country,' he wrote gamely to Gladstone in June 1884, 'a truly and broadly liberal policy is essential not only to the discharge of our duty as a nation, but to the security of our power as a government.'⁵³

Perhaps he was right: the successful challenge to the government over the Ilbert Bill was also a lesson to the Indians themselves. At the end of 1883 as the Anglo-Indian planters in Calcutta celebrated their victory over their Viceroy, the first National Conference was convened in the city. It was the precursor to the Indian National Congress. For Indians, Thompson and Garratt were to comment sardonically, 'it was an entirely new experience to see a Government, and especially the aloof and powerful British Government, deflected from its purpose by newspaper abuse and an exhibition of bad manners. In later days Indian nationalism was to acquire some of its technique from the suffrage movement in England, and more from Irish Home Rulers, but it was the successful agitation against the Ilbert Bill which decided the general lines upon which the Indian politician was to run his campaigns.'⁵⁴ If this is the case, then ironically the Indian independence movement owed as much to conservative activism as to liberal education.

The Viceroy's liberal policies had raised issues of the education of Indians, of their participation in government and the administration of the laws, as well as the spectre of Indians on an equal footing with Englishmen and even exercising authority over white men and women. All of these issues return in 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes', a farcical and fantastic story written by Kipling and first published in *Quartette* in Lahore at the end of 1885. There, an English

53. *Ibid.*, 223.

54. Edward Thompson and G. T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* (London: Macmillan, 1934), 498.

engineer falls into a pit in the desert and finds himself trapped in a society of Indian outcasts who alarmingly see no need to defer to his racial authority. His swaggering is in vain: the racial tables are turned and his life or death now rest in the hands of a Hindu whom he has bossed — and beaten — in the past, who addresses him as an equal, steals and eats his horse, and justifies his actions by quoting Utilitarian slogans about the greatest happiness of the greatest number (presumably learned in a government college). Here the ruffraff of Indian cities has been metamorphosed into a post-imperial republic established on the basis of Western political principles, and the English sahib is dispensable and ridiculous, converted from master to clown. It is an Ilbert Bill nightmare, the history of India in a parallel universe, from which the dismayed conservative Morrowbie Jukes is only too anxious to awake.

Kipling's creed

We have now found our way back to Kipling in India in the 1880s, returning to his native land at 'sixteen years and nine months'⁵⁵ to start work as a journalist in Lahore, and soon caught up in the controversy over the Viceroy's liberal policies. The importance of the Ilbert Bill affair for the young Kipling has long been recognized, and he discusses it in his autobiography, *Something of Myself*. His newspaper the *Civil and Military Gazette* at first opposed the Bill. But the proprietors of the *Pioneer* (who owned the CMG) could not afford to antagonize the government, and the CMG published a pro-Ilbert leader, which caused the seventeen-year-old Kipling to be publicly hissed that evening in the Punjab Club. The Club was the focus of the British community in Lahore, its membership consisting of 'none except picked men at their definite work — Civilians, Army, Education, Canals, Forestry, Irrigation, Railways, Doctors, and Lawyers', and Kipling described it as 'the whole of my outside world': 'It is not pleasant to sit still when one is twenty [actually he was seventeen] while all your universe hisses you.'⁵⁶ Cruelly and decisively, it was borne in upon the humiliated upstart which side he wanted to be on. It was one of those life-shaping moments, as Louis Cornell describes it.

As far as we know, Kipling had been virtually without political views before his arrival in India. Less than a year later, the Punjab Club had become the centre of his world; the view from that centre had become his view, and it was to remain his for the rest of his life.⁵⁷

55. Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*, 56.

56. *Ibid.*, 58, 63. There were seventy members in 1883.

57. Louis L. Cornell, *Kipling in India* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 60–61.

There we might well leave it, with Kipling, in the context of a major political crisis, fully inducted at the age of seventeen into the ideological discourse of conservative imperialism. However, although he may well have occupied and entrenched this position at the age of seventeen, it finds its most complete exposition in correspondence written two years later, in two very long letters sent to his cousin Margaret Burne-Jones in England, one from late September 1885 and the second begun on 28 November 1885 and finished on 11 January of the new year.⁵⁸ A number of factors helped to put Kipling in the frame of mind for what may be seen as a statement of creed. On the penultimate day of 1885 he entered his twenty-first year. In the same month *Quartette* was published, as a Christmas supplement to the *CMG*, with contributions from all four Kiplings including three stories and five poems of his own. He had started to write a novel, *Mother Maturin*. The first book made entirely of his own work would appear the following year. His literary career was beginning. But doubtless any moment in a life can be made to seem an epochal turning-point. What is certain is that a crucial factor in Kipling's self-fashioning in these letters was their addressee, his cousin Margaret.

One theme of the September letter is an apologia for his work as a journalist. Kipling is anxious to show his cousin that his journalism can actually play a part in doing some good at a local level, by taking up individual causes, researching problems and remedies and publicizing them so that eventually the authorities take notice, and something is done. There is no point, he says, in waiting for educated Indians to set things to rights on their own, for 'our progressive Aryan brother, the Oxford B.A.' is paralyzed by custom and his own privilege (I: 92). Kipling mentions making propaganda for irrigation schemes in a drought-stricken district, the improvement of drains and water supply, and attention to the conditions for horses and passengers in the mail cart service from Simla. Journalism was not just ephemeral or empty words: it could be a form of activism. In these practical local matters, a well-informed reporter could make a difference, and this must certainly have been a consoling thought for the young member of the Punjab Club, consorting every evening with those admired 'picked men at their definite work', who were to remain Kipling's idea of aristocracy. He too was a member of the team.

You see, if you once set the ball a rolling you can generally get two or three men infinitely better than yourself with twenty years' experience to help it along. [...] There's no finer feeling in life than the knowledge that a year's work has really done some living good, besides amusing

58. *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, I: 88–96, I: 96–112. His nickname for his cousin was 'the Wop of Europe'; he was 'the Wop of Asia'. Pages references in the text hereafter are to this edition.

and interesting people, for a province that you are genuinely interested in and love. Then again there's nothing more sobering than the knowledge of the enormous mass of work that remains to be done and the utter hopelessness of doing one tithe of it. (I: 93)⁵⁹

Such local initiatives did far more good, he boasted, than all the 'Associations for advancement' of 'National Progress' in the Empire (I: 92). We can hear the voice of young Gallio here in the paternalistic work ethic, the devotion to a locality, and the suspicion of ideas and ideals.⁶⁰ Kipling was, as Louis Cornell suggests, remarkably consistent in his conservative views. These included a lifelong distrust and skepticism about assimilation and other forms of conversion,⁶¹ a hostility to cultural imperialism, a dislike of the 'heresy' of Free Trade which he understood as capitalist self-interest masquerading as a vehicle of globalizing modernization and democratization,⁶² a commitment to respect for the integrity of other cultures, practical activism on a local level, and the politics of difference. It is an ideological agenda that gives Kipling some unexpected affinities today.⁶³

Margaret Burne-Jones seems in her reply to have made some enquiry about 'natives', and this triggered the next letter from Kipling, much of which is an extended apologia for the British in India, his fullest exposition of his view of empire and the world — for once again, it is in dialogue that difference finds and identifies itself, and Kipling's tone in his letters to Margaret is very much that of experienced Tory masculinity in the field addressing naïve bleeding-heart femininity at home. 'When you write "native", who do you mean?', he asks, and gives a long list of some of the ethnic, religious and cultural groupings in India.

Which one of all the thousand conflicting tongues, races, nationalities and peoples between the Khaiber Pass and Ceylon do you mean? There is no such thing as the natives of India, any more than there is the 'People of India' as our friends the Indian delegates

59. In view of Kipling's fetishization of work it is interesting to note that in April of the following year he was defending himself in a letter to his chief, Kay Robinson, against the charge that he was not pulling his weight on routine work at the CMG (I: 125–26).

60. For a discussion of the ideology of work in Kipling, see David Bivona, *British Imperial Literature, 1870–1940: Writing and the Administration of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71.

61. Here a distinction is needed between home and abroad. Kipling's Britain, in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, is itself the product of a process of assimilation, but assimilation is always resisted or deplored in his British India. It appears that in the latter case the unbridgeable gulf was simply race.

62. For Kipling's views on Free Trade, see David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional*, 180–86.

63. The very complex question of Kipling's relationship to postcolonialism is canvassed in Bart Moore-Gilbert, "I am going to rewrite Kipling's Kim": Kipling and Postcolonialism', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 37:2 (June 2002), 39–58.

would have you believe. You may rest assured Wop that if we didn't hold the land in six months it would be one big cock pit of conflicting princelets. (I: 98)

If there is no such thing as the People of India, there can be no authentic Indian nationalism; in this conservative-imperialist trope, Kipling obscures the wood with the trees. Empire, he believes, is the opposite of anarchy, which would be the natural unsupervised state of self-divided India. The English, he goes on to explain, work and die for the welfare of these multitudes, 'to keep the people alive in the first place and healthy in the second'. He speaks of disease control, famine relief, law and order. (As ever, he shows no interest in the primary reason the British were in India, the exploitation of the country's resources.) Once more, the conservative blueprint of empire embraces policing and welfare, but allows for no illusions about brotherhood or intimacy. Kipling is quite unambiguous about this. There is an 'immeasurable gulf that lies between the two races in all things', he says, and consequently 'the Englishman is prone to despise the natives' and, 'except in the matter of trade, to have little or nothing in common' with Indians. But when such an attitude is adopted, then 'goodbye to his chances of attempting to understand the people of this land' (I: 99).

Kipling's idea of the 'natives' is predicated on various levels of extreme difference, among themselves, and from the West. The desirable attitude of the Briton, which we may take to be a version of what he thought his own position to be, involves an expert understanding of these differences, and of them *as* difference. It entails a respect for their immutability — they will never be ironed out or dressed up to be replaced by some universalizing levelling — and a realistic grasp of the limitation of one's own powers to have any effect on them or indeed to know them well. Empire can effect no conversion *deep down*. It can barely ripple the surface of Indian life, for the same reason that Lispeth's conversion was inauthentic — she was always 'at heart' a heathen, as even the missionary's wife was forced to admit. Once this is understood, and the master conservative metaphor of changeable surface and immutable depth accepted as a fact of life, the worldly and unillusioned hero Kipling believed himself to be is ready for the privilege of knowing India.

Underneath our excellent administrative system; under the piles of reports and statistics; the thousands of troops; the doctors; and the civilian runs wholly untouched and unaffected the life of the peoples of the land — a life as full of impossibilities and wonders as the Arabian Nights. I don't want to gush over it but I do want you to understand Wop dear that, immediately outside of our own English life, is the dark and crooked and fantastic, and wicked, and awe inspiring life of the 'native'. Our rule, so long as no one steals too flagrantly or murders

too openly, affects it in no way whatever — only fences it round and prevents it from being disturbed. (I: 99)

Here it is almost as if the justification of conservative imperialism is the conservation of cultural variety, though this is also the point at which Orientalism in Said's sense delivers its aesthetic dividend. As if in exchange for this protection, the life of the 'native' becomes productive as a resource for stories, he goes on. 'I have done my little best to penetrate into it and have put the little I have learnt into the pages of "Mother Maturin"' (I: 99). This, it seems, is the secret of the success of Gallio and the failure of the missionary Justus in Buria Kol; the Orient can be known, enjoyed and loved only by those who set a limit on their knowledge of it and renounce the desire to convert it into something else.

The lecture continues. Instead of 'centralizing and centralizing', the government of India should allow district officers — 'the little kings of the counties' — to run things on their own, guaranteed by their expert local knowledge. These are the men who get things done. When 'educated gentlemen of colour (who by the way are much less in sympathy with the natives than we) tell you of the enormous progress made by India of late years,' Rudyard counsels his cousin, she should be aware that 'every step of such progress' is boosted by Englishmen, who rarely get the credit for it but always take the blame if anything goes wrong (I: 104). This is a familiar theme: progress, when not illusory, is not allowed to derive from Indian resources, but must be the product of English work. Kipling then delivers a vicious attack on one particular educated Indian, a 'Bengali Babu' and 'native B.A.' in charge of the accounts for *Quartette*, and 'as fair a sample of the results of English educational top-dressing on the native subsoil as you could get' (I: 107). This latter-day beneficiary of the Macaulay-Trevelyan policy, it seems, had been inefficient and dishonest in a way Kipling triumphantly took to be typical.

In an evil hour for himself did Laljee Mull say that he was a B.A. He has a wife and three kids and is at least twenty one. What hope is there of a man or boy rather of that stamp — the representative of a class ten thousand strong. — Broken down — used up — played out before they are men and through the very weakness of their physical nature morally rotten and untrustworthy. A-a-a-Men. I'm becoming a regular preacher in my old age. (I: 107)

This is personal. To the sexually repressed nineteen-year-old who had not been to university, the Indian is not only spoilt by his useless learning but also exhausted by his precocious sexuality. The hapless Laljee Mull, graduate and father of three, is a grotesque mimic who has usurped the role of the knowledgeable and potent man Kipling feels that he himself is entitled by his race to perform. But Kipling's ire is also ideological. To him, the English-educated Laljee Mull is a profoundly

unnatural person, forced into a premature and corrupting intellectual and sexual activity, which leaves him enervated, disgusting, and useless. Conversion to modernity has not improved this Indian subject, it has ruined him. And the narrative of conversion, expected by Macaulay to lead to the redemption of a decayed culture, has in Kipling's eyes only secured its degeneracy.

This may seem an unexpected point to make in a letter to a young unmarried English girl. But this is very much the point. If these letters to Margaret Burne-Jones lay out in such detail the case for conservative empire, this is because in a sense, as his partner in dialogue, she asked for it. The point is well made by the biographer Harry Ricketts.

Consciously or otherwise, he offered [in these letters] a portrait of a stern-minded, duty-following, intensely practical Anglo-Indian in the making. The implied contrast was with Margaret herself, set up by her cousin to represent the English, liberal values that he was now renouncing.⁶⁴

Margaret Burne-Jones did indeed represent the liberal, artistic, even bohemian aspect of the home culture, to which Kipling was connected through his mother's family.⁶⁵ The fact that she was both a woman, and a representative of the maternal side of the Kipling identity, only brings into focus the gendered terms of this exchange, and of the broader debate of which it is an instance.⁶⁶ For when Rudyard attacks — and patronizes — Margaret's position as sentimental and idealistic (in the sense of impractical) he is using weapons with which men of the world have traditionally belaboured women at home. Well-meaning, no doubt, but she was both too soft and too ignorant: the world, after all, was not a drawing-room. Margaret was later to marry the classical scholar J. W. Mackail; both of them would anger Kipling by their opposition to the South African war. But whatever her actual views or character, as the interlocutor of the letters she is constructed through a process of dialogic othering as a sort of benign 'Pagett M.P.', with her fatuous enquiries as to whether the natives have affection for the British, and whether they are well-treated, and her general ignorance of India.⁶⁷ Indeed, if we take these letters as the conservative gospel, we can develop, as it were from

64. Harry Ricketts, *The Unforgiving Minute*, 76.

65. See Judith Flanders, *A Circle of Sisters: Alice Kipling, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Agnes Poynter, and Louisa Baldwin* (London: Viking, 2001).

66. The further fact that we have to reconstruct Margaret's part in this dialogue from letters that have not survived might also be considered relevant to the gender politics of the exchange.

67. 'Pagett, M.P.', in *Departmental Ditties* (1886), is about a smug liberal know-all who comes to India on a four-month visit 'to study the East', in complete ignorance of local conditions. See Rudyard Kipling, *The Definitive Edition of Rudyard Kipling's Verse* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), 26–27.

their negative, a fairly complete picture of the opposite position, as Kipling saw it, his dialogic Other (no conservative without a liberal).

The liberal, in Kipling's view, speaks in a discourse that is feminine and feminizing, and metropolitan, and therefore doubly ignorant of real men's work in the empire. It is naïve, idealistic, abstract, impractical, and prone to meddling. It is disposed to mistake India — which realists know to be the beneficiary of a self-denying British workforce shouldering the white man's burden — for a site of appropriation and oppression, and to concern itself with the spiritual and perhaps political welfare of the natives rather than with their primary physical needs for health, food, and safety. Liberals think global. They generalize and universalize, and this makes them incapable of seeing the differences among Orientals, and between Orientals and Europeans. Believing all men to have equal potential, liberals are in favour of an enlightened literary Western education for everyone, not realizing that this is a useless asset for non-English people. Conservatives know from long experience on the ground that you can only make a temporary, superficial mimic Westerner out of an Easterner, who will and should always remain essentially Oriental. It must be explained to the liberal that English-educated colonial subjects — their education going against their nature — make nothing but trouble, whereas uneducated ones can recognize naturally the authority of an Englishman.

Liberals (the Kipling view continues) hold to a sentimental teleology, convinced of the possibility of a historical progress in lands under British government, which would mean seeing local people become through education increasingly like the English. They have a romantic faith in modernization, which in practice would mean Westernization. They do not understand that such a conversion is impossible for India, and would in any case be undesirable. The liberal belief in liberty does not extend to other people's cultural practices and beliefs. Lacking the respect that the conservative has for the cultures of subject peoples in all their splendid difference, the liberal would end up destroying those cultures and replacing them with a replica Western one, by a process of misguided conversion. A liberal who wants Orientals to be different will not be able to see that Orientals are different already, and can therefore never understand them, nor reap the benefits of that understanding in terms of access to the intellectual and aesthetic riches of Oriental life.

The dialogue between conservative and liberal in colonial discourse was not the sort of debate that either party ever wins. In a postcolonial world, where war has been declared on terror and peoples induced to embrace democracy, their voices echo strangely.

Outnumbering: Western individuals and Eastern crowds

One thing everyone knows about the East is that many people live in it. The Western imagination of the Orient has always been characterized, and tested, by large numbers — the fabulous treasures of the East, its vast distances, its epical disasters, above all its enormous populations. Many of the most vivid or mythic moments of modern Asian history conjure images of great numbers of people — Hiroshima, the partition of India, the Cultural Revolution. But this embodiment of Asia in formidable numbers is at least as old as the Persian expeditionary force under Xerxes which crossed the Hellespont into Europe in 480 BC, and was estimated by Herodotus to number two million six hundred and forty-one thousand six hundred and ten. The great Eurasian migrations have been from east to west. The experience of the European colonialist, meanwhile, since Columbus set out for the Indies with one hundred and twenty men, has been an experience of being outnumbered, and Asia is in a sense doubly outnumbering for the colonialist encountering and seeking to master an almost unimaginably peopled continent.

This chapter looks at ways in which the East has been imagined in the figure of the crowd, by Western observers whose own difference literally singles them out, in an individuality produced and sharpened by the teeming numbers around them. In the middle — and in the sight — of this jostling company is the dazzling figure of Conrad's Lord Jim, who stands, we shall see, as the rather compromised avatar of that heroic individualism which was one of the ways in which Western men were visible to themselves in the age of empire. I place *Lord Jim* at the centre because it offers both an example and a radical critique of the figure of the Western individualist and the Eastern crowd defined in relation to each other. But other examples abound. I start with two quotations, to give the note.

The first quotation, a familiar one, is from Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822), from the preamble to his account of his opium dreams with their astonishing Oriental imagery.

I know not whether others share in my feelings on this point; but I have often thought that, if I were compelled to forego England, and to live in China, among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep, and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. [. . .] It contributes much to these feelings that South-Eastern Asia is, and has been for thousands of years, the part of the earth most swarming with human life, the great *officina gentium*. Man is a weed in those regions. The vast empires, also, into which the enormous population of Asia has always been cast, give a further sublimity to the feelings associated with all oriental names or images. In China, over and above what it has in common with the rest of Southern Asia, I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, by the barrier of utter abhorrence placed between myself and *them*, by counter-sympathies deeper than I can analyze. I could sooner live with lunatics, with vermin, with crocodiles or snakes.¹

The second, short quotation comes from Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900), from the equally fevered imagination of the alcoholic first engineer of the Patna who, with Jim and the other Europeans, deserted the shipload of pilgrims when they thought their vessel was about to sink. 'I saw her go down,' he tells the narrator Marlow. 'She was full of reptiles.'²

The dismaying multitudinousness of the East was a topic that was inevitably raised in any discussion of how its people should be dealt with, governed and managed. A fascinating and well-explored example is that of Edmund Burke, who was closely involved in the national political debate about the East India Bill in 1783 and the long process of the impeachment of Warren Hastings which began in 1786.³ To the author of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), India itself, in its vastness and remoteness, was a prime example of sublimity. (Burke's theory of the sublime seems to anticipate his active involvement in the politics of India, but Luke Gibbons has argued that it is nonetheless a 'colonial sublime' in that it is to be seen not only as a philosophical enquiry but also as 'a fraught, highly mediated response to the turbulent colonial landscape of eighteenth-century Ireland, experienced in his [Burke's] formative years'.)⁴ India's geographical scope was

1. Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater, The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, 14 vols. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1889–90), vol. 3, 441–42.
2. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (1900), Norton Critical Edition, 2nd edition, ed. Thomas C. Moser (Norton: New York and London, 1996), 35.
3. See Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 25–48.
4. Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 23.

astonishing ('The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment');⁵ its cultures and histories too seemed so diverse and obscure as to make Indian people virtually beyond management, or comprehension, or even representation.

All this vast mass, composed of so many orders and classes of men, is again infinitely diversified by manners, by religion, by hereditary employment, through all their possible combinations. This renders the handling of India a matter in a high degree critical and delicate. But oh! It has been handled rudely indeed!⁶

'In place of the popular vision of an exotic India excessively available to traversal and description,' says Sara Suleri, 'Burke offers an alternative reading in which the subject of India breaks each attempt to put it to an inventory.'⁷ The East was unaccountable.

Asia was sublime for De Quincey too, at least by Burke's definition which had identified the experience of sublimity with the idea of pain, danger, and the fearful stimulation of the instinct of self-preservation in the subject, and consequently of powerful passions that 'fill the mind with strong emotions of horror'.⁸ (De Quincey, however, had not managed to accomplish the second part of Burke's narrative of the sublime, in which the potentially threatening experience can become a source of delight.) De Quincey was especially worried about China, with its notoriously swollen population — three hundred and thirty-three million inhabitants were claimed for the Chinese empire, though De Quincey bravely declared that he did not believe it could have more than a hundred million.⁹ But his anxiety is pan-Asian — an example of the problematic tendency of 'the East' to spread outward from the geographical centre of attention when under a British gaze, a tendency that may itself be related to the habit of thinking of the East as a proliferating crowd. De Quincey's Orient, personified in the *Confessions* by a Malay, also has elements of 'Hindostan', the Euphrates and Egypt. Like most Europeans, as John Barrell points out, De Quincey conceived of Asia beyond the Tigris as 'a place where people seemed to run into each other, to replicate each

5. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 101.

6. Edmund Burke, 'Speech on Mr. Fox's East-India Bill', *The Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 2 (London: Dent, 1911), 182–83. See Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 27.

7. Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 26.

8. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 86.

9. Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 228. By the time De Quincey died in 1859, the Chinese population had risen to between 400 and 450 million. See Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 3–4.

other, to compose one mass without divisions or features'.¹⁰ Wildly Gothic in its horrifying pullulation, his Orient nonetheless springs from the imagination of an industrializing age. To think of South-East Asia as a 'great *officina gentium*', a people factory, is to imagine its residents as mass-produced, lacking individual character, a part of that sinister process that Romantics were starting to deplore as dehumanized, if not actually satanic. To think of people in very large numbers seems to be an important step towards not thinking of them as people at all, as John Carey has argued in relation to totalitarian thought.¹¹ 'Man is a weed in those regions.' The East to De Quincey's anxious imagination was not a place so much as a populace, undifferentiated, fluid and teeming. It was a crowd.

The Asian crowd is an essential part of the first human impressions of all travellers, from the earliest explorers to the latest tourist, who have set out to see the East and find their gaze returned. 'And then,' remembers one, 'I saw the men of the East — they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the colour of an Eastern crowd. All of these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement'.¹² This is Charlie Marlow in the tale 'Youth', his first venture as a Conrad narrator, recounting his first voyage to Asian shores, which ended in landfall in a lifeboat after the sinking of his ship. The crowd that here confronts him seems uncannily silent and immobile, but it belongs to an East which he immediately intuits as being 'full of danger and promise'. And indeed for the West the great Eastern populations were and are seen as both a gigantic resource to be harnessed, as labour or market, and a gigantic danger to be reckoned with, in forms that range from competition and immigration to war and invasion. The Oriental crowd was the focus of the most urgent anxiety of colonialism, an anxiety present in extreme form in De Quincey, but visible everywhere in colonialist writing, and not least in those adventure stories for boys in which some plucky hero faces down, outwits or in some cases converts a hostile — often 'fanatical' — crowd. (*Lord Jim* itself is an intertextual changeling to this genre.)¹³

10. John Barrell, *The Infections of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

11. 'The phenomenon of Hitlerism was a product of multitudinousness and cannot be imagined without that precondition.' John Carey, *The Intellectual and the Masses* (London: Faber, 1992), 202. Though he traces the phenomenon back through the nineteenth century, Carey does not specifically link it to the increased awareness of Oriental numbers that was one of the fruits of European colonial and trading ventures in that period.

12. Joseph Conrad, *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether* (London: Dent, 1946), 40.

13. See Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London: Routledge, 1991). Adventure tales as a genre are discussed and classified in Martin Green, *Seven Types of Adventure Tale: An Etiology of a Major Genre* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

The human space of colonial Asia was the theatre of a grotesque disproportion — sometimes gratifying, certainly alarming — between the subject peoples and their colonial masters. The anxiety of outnumbering is not hard to understand in the imperial circumstances. Around 1800, for example, the population of India was about one hundred and fifty million; a century later it was some three hundred million, governed by a Civil Service with about a thousand administrative officers.¹⁴ The British of course commanded large and capable military forces, of Indian and British and (as Kipling reminds us) Irish troops. But from day to day colonial authority across the East, in the face of such gross disproportion of numbers, was not sustained by the use or threat of military force, but by its own confidence, and that confidence of colonialism — the antidote to colonial anxiety, and prophylactic against colonial panic — was to be one of the features which most engaged Conrad in the story of *Lord Jim*.

A necessary confidence is also a leading theme in Kipling — it is related, causally, to his often deplored vulgarity — and it is worth looking at the representations of Asian numbers in Kipling's fiction. In *Kim*, the Grand Trunk Road which is Kipling's epitome of India, and his version of pastoral, is described as 'a wonderful spectacle', a bustling crowd half a continent long, 'such a river of life as nowhere else exists in the world'.¹⁵ It is a crowd going about its business, but at the same time a companionable and even festive company, whose traffic and livelihood are supervised and guaranteed by a benign imperial police. It remains one of the most impressive of all modern imaginings of a well-ordered and natural community, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, funny, exciting, voluble and various, the crowd as utopia. No wonder Kipling dwells lovingly on this attractive and deeply reassuring image of colonial society as it should be, with a satisfaction not far removed from that of *Lord Jim*, whom we shall soon see showing Marlow how the people of Patusan flourish under his just and kindly lordship.

If the Grand Trunk Road is Kipling's dream crowd, its nightmare obverse is the lawless and rioting mob, what Elias Canetti in *Crowds and Power* calls the reversal crowd. Reversal presupposes a stratified society and a hierarchy of command; every command leaves behind 'a painful sting', says Canetti, and 'a revolutionary situation can be defined as this state of reversal, and a crowd whose discharge consists mainly in its deliverance from the stings of command should be called a *reversal crowd*'.¹⁶ Kipling often reassures himself that hostile Asian

14. In 1901 the entire British population of India was 154,691, of whom about half were army personnel and their dependents. David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (London: John Murray, 2005), 10–11.

15. Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* [1901], ed. Edward W. Said (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 105.

16. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* trans. Carol Stewart (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 67.

crowds are none too formidable, whether in the shape of the 'over-many Paythans' gleefully massacred by the soldiers of the Black Tyrone at close quarters in the story 'With the Main Guard', or the hysterical religious rioters in 'On the City Wall', efficiently contained by the police and city garrison, who are pleased at the prospect of having 'a little fun' with them.¹⁷ Asian numbers here provide the West with the opportunity for sport, as gentlemen in evening dress stroll out of the Club to lend a hand in breaking up the shouting masses with stirrup-leathers, whips and staves. Here too we can hear empire telling itself a story (contradicted, though, elsewhere in the tale) about its own powers of control.¹⁸ If India was a crowd, it was also easy to push around.

But such a belief in imperial omnipotence could not always be sustained, even in fiction. Kipling's narrative self-contradictions are a good instance of what Nigel Leask has described as the doubleness of colonial anxiety, which expresses the fears to which the imperial project is exposed, but also solicits resolution, so that anxiety blocks and empowers at the same time the imperial will.¹⁹ In 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes' (which I discussed above in relation to the Ilbert Bill), the English sahib tumbles into a great pit in the desert, peopled by Indian outcasts. Unhorsed and reduced literally to the level of the Indians he despises, he suffers the colonial nightmare of finding his difference both denied and derided by the ragged crew: 'on approaching the crowd [I] naturally expected that there would be some recognition of my presence,' he says, but to his mortification 'they cackled, yelled, whistled, and howled as I walked into their midst'.²⁰ A man who claims authority should stay above and not enter a crowd, for in doing so he risks becoming at best merely another face in the crowd and at worst its victim. His powers of control depend on keeping a certain distance, and being literally above the people. The humiliation of Morrowbie Jukes is a warning of what would happen if Indians were allowed to deal with their colonial masters on an equal footing. As far as Kipling was concerned, the alternative to the Raj was simply mob rule, the triumph of the crowd.

The same reversal anxiety is dramatized more fully in 'The Man Who Would Be King'. There the adventurers Dravot and Carnehan establish themselves as kings in Kafiristan on the strength of little more than a swashbuckling self-confidence, though they are outnumbered, at their own computation, one million to one. They have modern rifles of course, but the reasons for their success are not primarily military but discursive and histrionic. They subdue Kafiristan by

17. Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 134, 238.

18. In 'On the City Wall', the riot is used as a cover for the escape of an anti-British political prisoner from jail.

19. Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, 6–7.

20. Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, 7.

putting on a performance of kingship, reinforced by the rituals of the Army and freemasonry. Their success, and their continuing safety, depend on their ability to dazzle the people into believing in them. They lose the kingdom, as they won it, theatrically, when a performance turns into a disaster and their bluff is called. Dravot stages a royal wedding for himself, but as he kisses the unwilling bride she bites him, and his bleeding face shows the assembled spectators that he is not after all magically different from other people. Neither god nor king, he is just a man no different from other men. Instantly the crowd becomes a vengeful mob, and the kingdom is lost.

'This business is our "Fifty-Seven"', Carnehan tells Dravot as they try to make their escape from the valley 'full of shouting, howling people',²¹ and indeed it is. For the great myth of colonial crowd-anxiety was the uprising of 1857 which the British called the Indian Mutiny (the word suggests that what should be an obedient group has become a disobedient crowd),²² and in which it seemed for a while that they would be overwhelmed and destroyed. The year 1857 showed the fragility of a power that rested so largely on confidence, and with it part of that confidence was lost for ever. 'Most Victorian accounts insistently mystify the causes of the Mutiny,' says Patrick Brantlinger, 'treating the motives of the rebels as wholly irrational, at once childish and diabolic.'²³ The rebels were merely a rabble, and the well-known irrationality of crowd behaviour was already for most of the British public enough to explain and condemn what had happened.

Thereafter, the spectre of 1857 haunted Europeans in Asia just as frighteningly as that other horror story of crowd behaviour, the revolutionary Terror in Paris, continued to haunt them in Europe. For a century to come, the memory of 1857 was there to remind the British of the perils of being outnumbered, and that their colonial venture in the East itself was a difficult exercise in crowd control on a continental scale. Asian populations were huge, and expanding, and indeed the European powers could argue that their own successes in bringing the gifts of modernity ('Fill full the mouth of famine, and bid the sickness cease' is an item on the agenda of 'The White Man's Burden') had played a part in that population explosion. Whatever the causes, the population of Asia doubled, from one thousand one hundred and fifty million to two thousand three hundred million, between 1925 and 1975; but even a century before, the ratios of Asians to Europeans in Asia were stupendous. For the colonial powers, force mattered, and the weaponry and communications to threaten and deliver it; but there would

21. *Ibid.*, 53.

22. The events of 1857 began with a mutiny, when East India Company soldiers turned on their British officers, but this was followed in many places by a widespread popular insurrection.

23. Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 222.

never be enough force to control a continent permanently, so the colonialist had to fashion and maintain an authority which Asia's numbers must be persuaded to believe in. 'But,' as the loathsome Cornelius says of Lord Jim, 'if something happened that they did not believe him any more, where would he be?'²⁴ The Patna's toad-haunted chief engineer knows the answer. "Hurry up," he yelled suddenly, and went on in a steady scream: "They are all awake — millions of them. They are trampling on me . . ."²⁵

The panic of the outnumbered is not confined to such extreme cases. In mild form it is probably familiar to anyone who has ever been caught up unwillingly in a crowd, and particularly a crowd of strangers in an unfamiliar place. The fictional experiences of Morrowbie Jukes in the pit, or Dravot in his kingdom of Kafiristan, are not in the everyday run of things. But in Kipling's journalism there is a strange and disturbing moment that arises from an experience commonplace in the memory of anyone who has been a tourist.

In 1889 Kipling journeyed from India to Europe by way of Japan and the United States and in early April he arrived in the British crown colony of Hong Kong. It was a bustling, modern and purposeful port, as he described it in one of a series of articles sent back to his newspaper, the Allahabad *Pioneer* (and later published as *From Sea to Sea*). His first impression of the streets included 'a few thousand Chinese all carrying something'.²⁶ First impressions, as this brilliant vignette suggests, were positive. He settled down to appraise Chinese manufacture in tropes of inspection and inventory, noting with approval that the baskets of the coolies were in good shape and the rattan fastenings that clenched them to the polished bamboo yoke were whipped down, so that there were no loose ends. Not many tourists in Hong Kong in 1889 noted for report that you could slide in and out the drawers in the slung chests of the man who sold dinners to the rickshaw coolies, or that the pistons of the little hand-pumps in the shops worked accurately in their sockets. Showing-off aside, these are the observations

24. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 236.

25. *Ibid.*, 36. In *Crowds and Power* (414–27), Elias Canetti says that the hallucinations of alcoholics provide us with an opportunity to study crowds as they appear in the minds of individuals. The characteristic 'Lilliput effect' of the delirium — the sensation and sight (or fear) of a crowd of small animals attacking the skin — probably harks back to the experience of vermin infestation, which may have been what 'brought man to *think* in terms of great crowds'. Mankind's dangerous self-conception as a lordly and isolated being, detached from innumerable lesser creatures, was partly formed by vermin, and later the discovery of the bacillus. 'On the one hand was himself, greater and more isolated than before, and on the other a crowd, larger than any he had previously imagined, of infinitesimal creatures.' Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 420.

26. Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea, The Writings in Prose and Verse of Rudyard Kipling*, vol. 15 (New York: Scribners, 1906), 300. Subsequent page references in the text are to this volume.

of a man who has not been so overwhelmed by the size of a new experience as to blind him to the individual detail of people's ordinary lives. In his first dispatch he teases his Anglo-Indian readers with his inability to deliver the kind of journalistic generalization they may expect of him — 'It grieves me that I cannot account for the ideas of a few hundred million men in a few hours' (305–06) — but he admires the workmanship and beauty of Chinese things, and the industriousness and good order of Hong Kong, and concludes jocularly that the British have conquered the wrong country. 'Let us annex China!' (307)

This may have seemed not a bad joke. Kipling was in a crown colony, writing for an Anglo-Indian readership; though well-travelled, and apart from a schoolboy trip to Paris with his father, he had in fact never set foot outside British possessions; and he was now reporting from the contact point between the two largest Asian empires, the British and the Chinese. He was also sending a dispatch to the second most populous country in the world, from the edge of the only nation that outnumbered it. The Chinese impressed him, but in Hong Kong those 'few thousand Chinese all carrying something' that he saw busy in the streets and workshops were a manageable sample of the huge numbers of their kind. There were fewer than four hundred thousand inhabitants of Hong Kong in 1889, and they had been under British jurisdiction for close on fifty years. These Chinese were subjects of the British crown, and lived in a stable and prosperous colony where many places and names and customs reminded the visitor strongly of India (and some even of Scotland). In Hong Kong, the British visitor himself was identifiably and unambiguously as much one of the *sahiblog* as he was in India. Though a visitor on holiday, his ethnicity was a visible badge that gave him honorary membership of Hong Kong's governing class, so that the Chinese in the crowd he passed among were in this sense his people.

The serene confidence of his first dispatch from Hong Kong was somewhat shaken in his second, which reports on the city's night life. Kipling was upset to find white girls working as prostitutes in Hong Kong, and since he was not squeamish about prostitution in general it can be surmised that what angered him was the idea that they might be servicing Chinese clients; their lapse was unforgivable, not as an instance of what Victorian men called 'ruin', but because it was politically compromising, jeopardizing the ethnic hierarchy that kept the colony functioning and the crowd in its place.²⁷ The real crisis, however, came not in Hong Kong but upriver in the Chinese city of Canton (Guangzhou).

27. The Hong Kong government had been licensing brothels since 1846. Prostitutes working in early brothels in and around Lyndhurst Terrace were mainly Westerners. In 1930 the government prohibited prostitution, first banning Western prostitutes in 1931. Cheng Po Hung, *Early Hong Kong Brothels* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Museum and Art Gallery, 2003), 9.

The third and last dispatch is about a trip Kipling made there, accompanied by his travelling companion the Professor, and a local guide called Ah Cum.²⁸ The cheeriness of the first dispatch from Hong Kong is quite gone, and the moment Kipling sets foot on Chinese soil he sounds peevisish and hostile, as if he has found himself not just beyond the scope of European authority, but beyond the human world entirely. 'Every other shop was a restaurant, and the space between them crammed with humanity. Do you know those horrible sponges full of worms that grow in warm seas? You break off a piece of it and the worms break too. Canton was that sponge.' (338) The abundance of people convinces him, paradoxically enough, that he has come to an inhuman place, for it seems the Chinese set no value on human life. 'I hated the Chinaman before; I hated him doubly as I choked for breath in his seething streets where nothing short of the pestilence could clear a way.' It is ominous that the oppression of the crowd immediately triggers the thought of how to get rid of them. Yet he admits there was 'no sign of incivility' from the people, 'but the mere mob was terrifying' (338).

The obliging Ah Cum takes them into a curio shop, drawing them inside the big door and bolting it, but this is not enough. Kipling cannot shut the Eastern crowd out of his mind. 'I thought more of the crowd than of the jewellery. The city was so dark and the people were so very many and so unhuman' (339). The tourist is provoked into an ethnic panic, the curio shop becomes an unlikely stockade, and the shoppers in the streets, without themselves doing anything other than being there, are transformed into a fearsome reversal crowd. The metamorphic turn is double, dramatic, producing the passers-by as a threatening mob and producing the tourist as embattled and nightmare-ridden.

The March of the Mongol is a pretty thing to write about in magazines. Hear it once in the gloom of an ancient curio shop, where nameless devils of the Chinese creed make mouths at you from back-shelves, where brazen dragons, revelations of uncleanness, all catch your feet as you stumble across the floor — hear the tramp of the feet on the granite blocks of the road and the breaking wave of human speech, that is not human! Watch the yellow faces that glare at you between the bars, and you will be afraid, as I was afraid! (339)

His travelling companion the Professor does not seem in the least to share in this burst of fear and loathing, and certainly a part of this strange and repulsive performance is comedy, as it always is when a Kipling narrator (like Hunter)

28. Kipling was travelling with his Anglo-Indian friends Alec and Edmonia Hill. Mrs Hill makes no appearance in Kipling's travel articles for the *Pioneer*. Her husband, who taught at Muir College in Allahabad, may have been the model for the Professor but the latter is not much more than an interlocutory convenience, a travel writer's comic trope.

accuses himself of being afraid. Some of it is a playing-up to the Anglo-Indian readers of the *Pioneer*. Now he changes his tune from the earlier mischievous suggestion that Britain should annex China. 'It would be quite right to wipe the city of Canton off the face of the earth, and to exterminate all the people who ran away from the shelling' (339–40). The whole city is now described in this intensely phobic light. They are taken next to see a Buddhist temple, decorated by statues representing most of the races of Asia and including one European, allegedly Marco Polo, hopelessly outnumbered. Next they visit Potter's Field, where executions take place, and an executioner, who happens most improbably to be wandering about, is urged to keep up the good work of limiting the population. Even the cemeteries are alarming, for the dead are more than the myriads living (343). With great relief they come finally to the British concession, an enclave described as 'an Indian station with Europe shops and Parsee shops and everything else to match' (344), guarded by a Hong Kong policeman, though Kipling feels that it would be better defended by a Gatling gun.²⁹

What, we might again ask, had the Chinese in Canton done to deserve any of this? The environment in the city has become overwhelmingly threatening, eliciting a would-be genocidal response. Yet all the people in the city had done is to exist, in numbers, beyond the authority of the observer who moves among them. The difference lies not in the crowd, but in the way it is looked at: not in the figure, but in the modality. The things that arouse horror in Canton existed in Hong Kong too, including the crowded and busy streets, but in Hong Kong the work rate of the Chinese was admired, whereas in Canton it seems part of a conspiracy to overwhelm the white races. Even Chinese craftsmanship, so admired in the colony, expresses itself in the Canton curio shop in the form of the malevolent furniture of a Gothic tale, including the brazen dragons that 'catch your feet as you stumble across the floor', spitefully intent on bringing about a European fall.

The Chinese crowd under the bountiful shadow of colonial security can be confidently seen as both a utility and an adornment to the British empire, adding value to its economic life and increasing its cultural tribute, like the exhibits of colonial products that furnished the Great Exhibition and its successors. But once that same Chinese crowd is viewed outside the colonial scope — the border was open, so it could have been the very same people — it is being viewed not from the elevated vantage of a member of the master people, the *sahiblog*, but laterally by a tourist, a citizen of a small island whose prestige is not convertible

29. The six-barrel Gatling gun was patented in 1862, and a ten-barrel model was purchased by the United States Army in 1865. Most European armies soon followed suit. The British used the Gatling to great effect in the Sudan. By 1882 it had been so improved as to fire 12,000 rounds per minute, the ideal weapon for use against massed infantry, or a crowd.

currency here. The Chinese are unlike any people he has ever met before, Kipling tells the Professor. ‘Look at their faces. They despise us. You can see it, and they aren’t a bit afraid of us either’ (340). But it is not the faces of the Chinese that have spooked him, but their numbers, and the conviction that if the Chinese have numbers on their side, they have time on their side too. Confidence may keep the colony shipshape and orderly for the time being, but in the long run numbers will tell.³⁰ The extraordinary virulence of Kipling’s report on Canton is his tribute to this demographic truth.

The Chinese crowd had to be interpreted, because its voice could not be understood, or even heard. When Sir Frederick Lugard arrived in Hong Kong to assume the governorship in 1907, his wife was disconcerted by the Oriental stillness of the crowd that came to observe them: unlike the usually boisterous crowds at home, these Hong Kong people simply stood in silence to watch the procession go by. The silent Oriental crowd seemed odd, even unnatural, to Lady Lugard, as it had to Marlow making his own Asian landfall in ‘Youth’. The Hong Kong Chinese might have learned to use a Kodak camera, but they had not yet learned to cheer as an English crowd might be expected to do. But Lady Lugard was ready to fill this silence with her own interpretation. ‘Though the crowd did not cheer they looked profoundly interested. There was not an indifferent countenance in all those that we saw and the crowd as a corporate body had a curious intense way of conveying it was pleased.’³¹

The following year Sir Frederick Lugard, the governor of Hong Kong on an official visit to Canton, was being carried in a chair through the same crowded and filthy streets that Kipling had visited twenty years earlier. ‘The thing that strikes one in the jostling crowd,’ he reported in a letter to his brother, ‘is the *intelligence* of their faces, their diversity within a common type, and the absence of wrangling and quarrelling. Generally speaking, you see a vast number of industrious folk, each in his own cell or pigeon hole, working hard, sallow and intelligent.’³² Lugard’s Canton crowd sounds a bit like Kipling’s Hong Kong crowd, disciplined, industrious and capable. Yet Lugard was well aware that he was in a city in a Chinese empire on its very last legs. Nonetheless his experience of the

30. Even when settled in the most secure of discursive environments, in the middle of a boastful catalogue of Victoria’s global possessions in ‘The Song of the English (1893)’, Kipling’s Hong Kong comes with a warning about a constant threat from landward, from mainland China.

31. Flora Shaw Lugard, letter to Edward Lugard, 29 July 1907. MSS. Brit. Emp.s.66: Lugard Papers 37. The Lugards’ travels are discussed by Elaine Yee Lin Ho in ‘China Upriver: Three Colonial Journeys between Hong Kong and Canton’, in *A Century of Travels in China*, eds. Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 119–32.

32. Frederick Lugard, letter to Edward Lugard, 10 January 1908. Margery Perham, *Lugard: The Years of Authority* (London: Collins, 1960), 372.

Chinese, in the colony and its neighbouring province, convinced him that in the long run their prospects were good. 'Truly I often wonder whether the dream of the Yellow Peril is not likely to come true some day, and the Chinaman by sheer ability and industry will dominate the commerce of the world.'³³

Perhaps this prospect was the occasion for some melancholy to a servant of the British empire, but Lugard did not repine, for he was sufficiently imbued with the liberal faith that progress was indivisible, and the free-trade dogma that the prosperity of one people enhanced the prosperity of all. As for the appropriate British reaction to future competition from the 'sheer ability and industry' he had seen embodied in the Chinese crowd, 'The usual answer,' he opined to the Foreign Secretary, 'is I suppose that it is immoral to endeavour to arrest the development of a people and even not to assist in every way'.³⁴ This attitude enabled the Governor of Hong Kong to move through the crowded streets of Canton with more equanimity than the globetrotting Kipling twenty years before.

Lugard's brief was to co-operate with the Chinese as far as was compatible with Britain's interests, a co-operation symbolized by the building of a railway linking the colony to Canton. When the Viceroy of Canton made a visit to Hong Kong in 1909, the two potentates made a demonstration of their authority and partnership for the edification of the crowds. 'It was an object lesson to the swarms of Chinese,' or so Lugard thought, 'to see the Viceroy and myself going side by side in the train and laughing and chatting familiarly, and they craned their necks and obviously appreciated the significance of the sight'.³⁵ Even here, though he feels unthreatened by the crowd, Lugard has to project onto them the reactions he feels they should be experiencing, just as his wife had done earlier. The Governor gives himself a good notice for his performance, a recognition of the theatricality of authority; a crowd may be quelled by force but its leadership is acquired and reinforced by demonstration. This theme of performance is, I will now suggest, at the heart of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, and it is time to allow the hero of that great novel to emerge from the crowd and seek the spotlight where he thinks he belongs.

Playing to the crowd: *Lord Jim*, performance and hypnotism

From the start, we are invited to visualize Lord Jim alone, standing apart from others in singular apostasy. But in fact *Lord Jim* is a densely populated novel. In the first part of the story, Jim is first mate on the Patna, where five white officers and their Malay crew have charge of some eight hundred Asian passengers,

33. Frederick Lugard, letter to Flora Shaw Lugard, 9 July 1909. *Ibid.*, 372.

34. Frederick Lugard, letter to Sir Edward Grey, undated [1909]. *Ibid.*, 373.

35. Frederick Lugard, letter to Flora Shaw Lugard, 30 July 1909. *Ibid.*, 306.

pilgrims bound for Mecca. Accused of cowardice, Jim gives his evidence before a crowded court of enquiry. Later, in professional disgrace, he works in a number of bustling seaports, and he ends up in Patusan, where, apart from Rajah Allang's people and Sherif Ali's men, the local chieftain Doramin in his town presides over sixty families with two hundred warriors, and there are countless more in the surrounding district. When the piratical Gentleman Brown arrives in Patusan where Jim has taken sanctuary, he finds it, to his surprise, 'an immense place'; it seems to swarm with thousands of angry men, and he and his thirteen desperadoes are outnumbered 'two hundred to one'.³⁶ In the culture and climate of Patusan almost all business is transacted in public. Jim arrives in Patusan, establishes his authority, and eventually dies, surrounded by people. In the novel's scenes of action (as opposed to its scenes of narration) there is always an Asian crowd not far off.³⁷

Jim wields two kinds of authority. First, on the *Patna*, he is a ship's officer, with professional and legal standing, backed by the ethnic prestige of a European. After his disgrace, he builds up in Patusan a less official but actually more powerful status in the court of the chief Doramin. He becomes one of those white adjuncts close to Eastern power, joining the mixed company of Western mercenaries, political agents, tutors and governesses, journalists, military and spiritual advisors, secretaries, spies, management consultants, foreign experts and mountebanks who have colourfully punctuated modern Asian political history. Jim is not only the trusted advisor of the chief, and friend of his son and heir Dain Waris. He is also an object of awe to the people of Patusan, and everywhere he goes they crowd round him as admirers, supplicants, almost worshippers. Jim plays up. For the always outnumbered stranger in authority, especially when there are impediments to written and even spoken communication, that authority can best be maintained by a display of difference and superiority, a performance of cultural sovereignty that both mystifies and naturalizes Western leadership, to which the Eastern crowd then consents, with any luck.

Jim seems born to the performance of leadership, with his powerful build, his loud voice, and not least the immaculate white in which he always dresses, even in Patusan. As Marlow, who will tell his story, never quite says, Jim 'looks the part'. The *Patna*, both a symbol and a kind of theatre of colonialism, is his first stage. The other officers on board may perform wretchedly, like 'knockabout clowns in a farce' (65–66), but Jim seems the real thing, and with instinctive

36. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 214, 220–21. Page numbers in the subsequent text refer to the cited edition.

37. Jim is pretty successful at drawing attention exclusively to himself, however. The chapter on *Lord Jim* in Benita Parry's *Conrad and Imperialism*, for example, only once even mentions Asian people.

stagecraft he habitually distances himself from the other players, to stand out in a shining visibility, like a true star. 'Contemplating his own superiority' (18), he paces the bridge of the Patna, which is elevated like a stage and lit up at night. Below and in front of him he can dimly see the passengers, silent, packed together, in the dark. The Patna at first seems to offer as comfortable an image of colonialism as does *Kim*, with Eastern spirituality (the pilgrims) secure in the capable hands of Western skill (the officers),³⁸ and Eastern numbers overseen by a singular white man.

Nineteenth-century crowd theory had developed the idea of the group mind, which could be collectively surrendered to a leader more completely than any individual submission. The keynote in Conrad's sumptuous descriptions of the pilgrims on the Patna is faith, and belief — this is the religious belief that has sent them on pilgrimage, of course, but a number of deliberate ambiguities show that what is also at stake is their faith in the white officer and his faultless performance of trustworthiness as he paces above them, his soul intoxicated 'with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself' (17). They give him *their* confidence, and invest their faith in him, because his performance convinces them that he is what he impersonates. They give themselves up to him, just as an audience — in becoming an audience — suspends and surrenders its own power to act, its agency. To them the ship, its officers, and everything on board constitute a spectacle 'strange alike, and as trustworthy as it would for ever remain incomprehensible' (55).

It happens that they are wrong to put their faith in Jim and the others, but of course they are only doing what passengers on a ship (or a bus or an aeroplane) have to do. What is interesting is that just the same pattern is repeated in Patusan. Arriving alone and with an empty revolver, Jim establishes his authority there through trust, and maintains it by performance, including the ritual shows of courage at his audiences with the poisonous Rajah among what Marlow calls the 'awestruck riot' of his dependents (150). Jim achieves 'the conquest of honour, love, men's confidence' (136) on credit, through what Marlow calls his 'racial prestige' (214). In Patusan Lord Jim's statecraft is a kind of stagecraft, under the eyes of the people who throng Doramin's town and seem always to cluster to Jim in the open, as supplicants or just spectators — as in Marlow's last sight of him on the darkening shore of Patusan, or Gentleman Brown's first sight of him, where on both occasions Jim stands out, a white figure among 'a group of vivid

38. The formula is strikingly similar in *Kim* (1900), an exact contemporary of *Lord Jim*, where the spiritual and temporal life of the hero, and of India, are guaranteed by the Tibetan lama and the English spymaster. Each respects the other's sphere of authority. On the Patna, the Europeans run the show. We should not forget, however, that the owner of the ship is Chinese.

colours and dark faces' (225). He is always intensely visible, a cynosure — 'in the midst of these dark-faced men, his stalwart figure in white apparel (138).³⁹ 'We Princes, I tell you,' said Queen Elizabeth I, 'are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed.'⁴⁰ Jim's hold over Patusan might also remind us of Foucault's imagination of a time in European history when, he says, power worked more effectively through theatrical display than through language and especially writing;⁴¹ though what Jim displays is not force so much as a metaphysical or magical truth of which he seems to be the natural embodiment.

As Cornelius says, Jim succeeds by making people believe him. Like Kipling's Dravot, he is every inch a make-believe king, incorrigibly theatrical. There are two ways to avoid being engulfed by a crowd of strangers: you can hide from them, like Kipling in the curio shop, or you can make an exhibition of yourself before them in a display or performance of your own difference. Even in disaster, Jim is only fleetingly tempted by the former course. He has fortified his house, and after the death of Dain Waris he starts to scribble a note, perhaps for Stein or Marlow, heading it 'The Fort, Patusan' (202). But this access of stockade mentality is short-lived. The note is unfinished and he leaves his sanctuary to meet his fate in the crowd. In Patusan he had lived on display, and in the end he dies on display, entering Doramin's court unarmed to take responsibility for the tragedy of the chief's son's death at the hands of Brown and his crew. Jim's story ends in the figure of colonial anxiety, in an Asian crowd that rushes 'tumultuously' forward to engulf him (246). But even his death makes a personal dramatic triumph out of Patusan's political disaster. The East is his theatre, the crowd his audience, and the critical Marlow gives his death scene a good notice, calling it 'an extraordinary success' (246).

What about the teeming East before whom this performance is produced? Most of the time the Asian people in *Lord Jim* can best be described as dormant or (to use Elias Canetti's term) stagnant crowds.⁴² The pilgrims on the Patna are as good as gold, but they are still a potential mob and after the collision Jim can easily imagine 'all the horrors of panic, the trampling rush, the pitiful screams, boats swamped' (56).⁴³ In Patusan too, a fragile membrane of confidence separates

39. The spectating face is a recurrent motif in this novel of echoes. See for example the Inquiry, where 'from below many eyes were looking at him out of dark faces, out of white faces, out of red faces, out of faces attentive and spellbound' (21). Jim's most discerning spectator is Marlow himself, who is forever describing his appearance.

40. Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 42.

41. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 32–69.

42. See Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 38–44.

43. Mob violence worried Conrad. In *Typhoon* the ship in the storm 'was like a living creature thrown to the rage of a mob: hustled terribly, struck at, borne up, flung down, leaped upon'. Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon and Other Stories* [1903] (London: Dent, 1950), 47.

'the social fabric of orderly peaceful life', raised and sustained by Jim's leadership, from 'a ruin reeking with blood' (221), in which Western sovereignty and presence would be engulfed. The hold exercised over large numbers of Asian people by the representative of a distant European-owned trading company, in a district of a native-ruled state 'not judged ripe for interference' (140), raises a question about the crowd control of colonialism that may be illuminated by late nineteenth-century crowd theory.

Gustave Le Bon's *La Psychologie des Foules* (1895) was much the best-known of such studies. It went through twenty-six printings in French between 1895 and 1920, and the English version, published as *The Crowd*, was printed sixteen times between 1896 and 1926. The elitist conservatism of Le Bon's theory of crowds also provides a manual of crowd control. Since the French Revolution, 1848, and the Paris Commune, the crowd has become the real maker of modern history, and the present age is 'the ERA OF CROWDS';⁴⁴ the elite had better understand the psychology of the crowd if they do not want to be governed by it. Le Bon said he had discovered 'the law of the mental unity of crowds'. Each crowd acquired a collective mind, dominated by considerations of which it was unconscious. Its members became like the cells of a single body, shedding individual inhibitions, subject to the contagion with which every sentiment and act spreads in a crowd, and enormously suggestible. 'Moreover, by the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization.' 'It will be remarked that among the special characteristics of crowds there are several . . . which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution — in women, savages, and children, for instance.' Crowds were thought to be impulsive, credulous, incapable of reason, exaggerated in sentiment, and 'everywhere distinguished by feminine characteristics'. 'A crowd only thinks in images', and has no morality to speak of, though it can be urged to heights or depths of self-sacrifice. 'The crowd is a servile flock that is incapable of doing without a master.'⁴⁵

It will be clear, then, that Le Bon's crowd theory fits like a glove over the discourses of colonialism.⁴⁶ Essentialized, primitive, feminized, incapable of

44. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 14. The first English translation appeared in 1895, a year after *La Psychologie des Foules* was first published.

45. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 32, 35–36, 39, 41, 118.

46. The year before *La Psychologie des Foules* was published, Le Bon had produced *Les Lois Psychologiques de l'Evolution des Peuples*. Le Bon's contribution to the nexus of anthropological, psychological, historical and linguistic ideas that underlay French colonialism at the end of the nineteenth century is discussed in John E. Joseph, 'The Colonial Linguistics of Léopold de Saussure', *History of Linguistics 1996: Papers from the Seventh International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences (ICHoLS VII) Oxford, 12–17 September 1996*, ed. David Cram, Andrew Linn and Elke Nowak, vol. 1: Traditions in Linguistics Worldwide (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999), 127–37.

reason, fetishistic, and in need of a leader, Le Bon's crowd is 'Oriental', and an actual Oriental crowd would be a sort of tautology.⁴⁷ J. S. McClelland points out that Le Bon makes the crowd as frightening as he can, so as to promote his claim to understand it, for what science can understand it can also control.⁴⁸ Crowds, Le Bon promised, could be led 'by seeking what produces an impression on them, and what seduces them'.⁴⁹ The way to the crowd's heart was through its eyes, so it must be given something visible to admire.

Crowds being only capable of thinking in images are only to be impressed by images. [...] For this reason theatrical representations, in which the image is shown in its most clearly visible shape, always have an enormous influence on crowds.

Here was an opportunity for any visibly superior being, for the crowd 'demands a god before everything else'.⁵⁰ A crowd cannot be defeated, except by another crowd, but it is not hard to persuade, and the fundamental element of persuasion is what Le Bon calls *prestige*.

Prestige in reality is a sort of domination exercised on our mind by an individual, a work, or an idea. This domination entirely paralyses our critical faculty, and fills our soul with astonishment and respect.⁵¹

Prestige is also the word which, as it happens, Marlow uses to explain Jim's authority over Patusan. As we have already seen, he speaks of Jim's 'racial prestige' (214). The source of that prestige, and the theme of all Jim's displays of himself, is his colour. A leader has to make an exhibition of himself, and on the Patna and in Patusan Jim performs white, immaculately.

Le Bon may also provide a clue to the authoritative effect — the success — of Jim's performances. Just what kind of show does Jim put on, before his Eastern spectators? An individual in a crowd, according to Le Bon, is 'in a special state, which much resembles the state of fascination in which the hypnotized individual finds himself in the hands of the hypnotiser'.⁵² Hypnotism and suggestion, whose

47. Le Bon's theory of crowd leadership was to have an influence on the doctrines and training of the French army in the Great War. See Robert A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage, 1975), Chapter 6. He felt that his crowd psychology 'could be especially useful with colonial troops who, being blacks, had practically no mind at all, so the orders of their officers could pass almost directly into their unconsciousness'. J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 214.

48. J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob*, 196.

49. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 20.

50. *Ibid.*, 68.

51. *Ibid.*, 130.

52. *Ibid.*, 31.

study was institutionalized in the medical schools of France (most famously under Charcot at the Salpêtrière, where Freud came to learn about them), provided a model for the unconscious behaviour of crowds. It would be good to know whether or to what extent Conrad had direct knowledge of Le Bon's writing, but in any case Le Bon helped to make the link with hypnotism a cliché in the popular understanding of crowd psychology by the turn of the century.⁵³ 'The theory of hypnotism, such as it was,' says McClelland, 'really put a stop to any further enquiry into the mechanisms of leadership technique because it was so universally persuasive.'⁵⁴

The intellectually under-developed — a class assumed to include women, children, and savages (and animals) — were generally thought to be the most susceptible to hypnotic fascination, though there was a good deal of debate about this.⁵⁵ It is interesting to go back to *Lord Jim* in the light of these contemporary ideas of the crowd as collective primitive, its behaviour essentially unconscious, in a state of fascination akin to that of hypnosis. There is an eerie beauty to the description of the Muslim pilgrims streaming into the Patna, 'coming from north and south and from the outskirts of the east' (14), a pan-Asian vision like De Quincey's (but a safe one), as if the whole history and demography of the Orient had liquefied into a single element. Water has no will of its own, and this silent flowing crowd of 'unconscious pilgrims' is indeed in a state of fascination, enthralled by their faith in an idea of salvation, a faith which for the duration of the journey is entrusted to the bright particular figure on the bridge of the ship. When Conrad shows us the view from that bridge, what we see is a crowd heaped like treasure on the decks, utterly lacking in consciousness or will, as helpless and trusting of authority as Le Bon promised, in its attitudes of surrender and even death.

A draught of air, fanned from forward by the speed of the ship, passed steadily through the long gloom between the high bulwarks, swept over the rows of prone bodies; a few dim flames in globe-lamps were hung short here and there under the ridge-poles, and in the blurred circles of light thrown down and trembling slightly to the unceasing vibration of the ship appeared a chin upturned, two closed eyelids, a dark hand with silver rings, a meager limb draped in a torn covering, a head bent back, a naked foot, a throat bared and stretched as if

53. Zdzislaw Najder suggests that Conrad was reading Taine and Le Bon in the eighteen-eighties. Zdzislaw Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 88. Ian Watt notes a similarity between Le Bon's ideas and Conrad's treatment of the psychology of the crew in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), 115.

54. J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob*, 239–40.

55. See for example J. Milne Bramwell, *Hypnotism* (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 61–70.

offering itself to the knife. The well-to-do had made for their families shelters with heavy boxes and dusty mats; the poor reposed side by side with all they had on earth tied up in a rag under their heads; the lone old men slept, with drawn-up legs, upon their prayer-carpets, with their hands over their ears and one elbow on each side of the face; a father, his shoulders up and his knees under his forehead, dozed dejectedly by a boy who slept on his back with tousled hair and one arm commandingly extended; a woman covered from head to foot, like a corpse, with a piece of white sheeting, had a naked child in the hollow of each arm . . . (16)

This beautiful and sinister vision is seen through the medium of Jim's gaze, in his modality.⁵⁶ (The two Malay steersmen, standing silent and almost motionless at the wheel, are also under the hypnotic spell but the invisible stokers in the depths are not, by the sound of it.)

'Hypnosis is not a good object for comparison with a group formation,' wrote Freud in 1921, 'because it is truer to say that it is identical with it.'⁵⁷ The suggestibility of hypnotic subjects could turn them into irrationally obedient automata, subject to a paralysis of the will and sapping of initiative. Freud was to explain this by saying that the hypnotist has stepped into the place of the subject's ego-ideal, and this was also the explanation for the crowd's idealization of its leader; the leader is the ego-ideal of the crowd. The docility of the Patna pilgrims beneath Jim's gaze might partake of their religious devotion, but the later submission of the population of Patusan to his fascinating authority is more personal, though no less complete. Here too Jim can savour his hypnotic, narcotic power.

The houses crowding along the wide shining sweep without ripple or glitter, stepping into the water in a line of jostling, vague, grey, silvery forms mingled with black masses of shadow, were like a spectral herd of shapeless creatures pressing forward to drink in a spectral and lifeless stream. Here and there a red gleam twinkled within the bamboo walls, warm, like a living spark, significant of human affections, of shelter, of repose.

56. The treasure spread before Jim also looks like the aftermath of a battle. It makes me think of Canetti's words: 'To be the last man to remain alive is the deepest urge of every seeker after power'. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 443.

57. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), *Civilization, Society and Religion*, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 12 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 145. Freud calls the hypnotic relation 'a group formation with two members'. Two, not three, is a crowd. 'Group' is used by Freud's translator as the equivalent of the German 'Masse', which Freud used 'to render both McDougall's "group" and also Le Bon's "foule", which would more naturally be translated "crowd" in English'. *Ibid.*, 95 note 1.

He confessed to me that he often watched these tiny warm gleams go out one by one, that he loved to see people go to sleep under his eyes, confident in the security of tomorrow. (148–49)

This suggests that one way to understand colonial authority is to see it as depending on cultural sovereignty induced by a form of hypnosis. Meanwhile, it also provides part of an explanation of the Patusan tragedy. Jim is away from Patusan, in the Hinterland, when the boatload of pirates invades the river. Though they have the means, the numbers (of course), and in Dain Waris a leader of their own to take decisive action, the Patusan people are incapable of acting on their own initiative to meet this threat. Helpless and inert as the hypnotized, believing themselves to be without a leader, they are suspended in political paralysis, waiting for Jim to return and tell them what to do. They are in effect enslaved, literally enthralled, and dependent on Jim to make their history for them. Having invested all their belief in Jim, they have none in themselves.

Their confidence is fatally misplaced, and not just when Jim makes the error of judgement that will lead to the death of Dain Waris. Jim draws on his membership of the group to convince the council of war in Doramin's court, reminding them 'that their welfare was his welfare, their losses his losses, their mourning his mourning' (232). But after all this is not true. Jim is never part of the crowd in Patusan, always standing (and living) apart from and above the people. He is their Lord Jim, but it is a title conferred by virtue of his being different from them. Never till the very last moment is he absorbed into the crowd. He scrupulously declines to go native, and thus neither risks the annihilation feared by De Quincey as a consequence of living among 'them', nor aspires to the extinction of difference that might follow a merging of his identity into theirs. His own sense of community is already pledged to another crowd, the one represented by Marlow, the white crowd, the marching ranks of the colonial powers. These people — who have already and forever turned their backs on him — are Jim's crowd, the ones for whose non-existent approbation he puts on a good show in Patusan. For, as Kipling had explained in the last stanza of 'The White Man's Burden', the East was a theatre in which the performance of white men was played out for 'the judgement of [their] peers', under the critical eye of people like themselves.

The use of hypnosis as a therapeutic agent, where its chief value was as an aid to the resurrection of memories, was in decline towards the end of the century.⁵⁸ But in any case to the lay public it was most familiar as a theatrical phenomenon. The stage version of George Du Maurier's *Trilby*, with Beerbohm Tree as the hypnotic and sinister Svengali, was the hit of 1895. The practice had

58. H. B. Gibson, *Hypnosis: Its Nature and Effects* (London: Peter Owen, 1977), 48.

a dubious reputation, which was not improved by the popularity of hypnotists as music-hall entertainers, and its association with table-turning mediums, and other charlatans — such as Dr Walford Bodie, ‘The Most Remarkable Man on Earth, The Great Healer, The Modern Miracle Worker, Demonstrating Nightly Hypnotism, Bodie Force and the Wonders of Bloodless Surgery,’ who began as a stage ventriloquist and had a forty-year career of ‘electric wizardry’.⁵⁹ Hypnosis was often part of a stage conjuror’s act, performed as a kind of magic, and frequently trapped out in Oriental costumes and flummery. (Svengali’s Jewishness had seemed to confirm his diabolical mystique.) Hypnotism was ‘the lineal descendant of many ancient beliefs’, and was ‘known to the earliest races of Asia’, wrote one authority, while complaining that the practice, ‘which is now the subject of much intelligent and well-directed modern research . . . is also, unfortunately, the plaything of a class of wandering stage performers’.⁶⁰

It seems reasonable to say that when Conrad was writing of how Jim loved to see people go to sleep under his eyes, and exercised a fascinating power over his subjects that deprived them of an agency of their own, he was depicting him as a kind of hypnotist, and that this was not a flattering depiction, for the status of the hypnotist in the eyes of the educated lay public was that of a conjuror. Hypnotists were performers who played a trick on the crowd. From a certain angle, the performance of white confidence in *Lord Jim* is indistinguishable from a confidence trick. And here the abyss really does open, because what is at stake is not only the question of whether Jim really is fit to command, but the much wider question of whether the authority and prestige of white people across the world is warranted by anything more than display, a fancy uniform, a gesture of command, and a mouthful of empty words. Much of Conrad’s work, from *Almayer’s Folly* onwards, presents his disconcerting answers to this question.

Seen in this light, the outrage of Captain Brierly at the enquiry — so appalled is the famous captain at Jim’s dereliction of duty on the *Patna* that he takes his own life — would be like that of the guild members of the Magic Circle when one of their number unforgivably gives the game away, betraying (Marlow’s words) at once the ‘glamour’ and the ‘solidarity of the craft’ (81), on which their livelihood depends. It is a species of fraud that guarantees the authority of white men over Asian populations in the East in *Lord Jim*; this is the understanding that Conrad contributes to the figure of the Asian crowd. Confidence — lost, restored, shared, abused — is one of the profoundly serious themes of the novel. What links Jim to Kipling’s Dravot, and perhaps to Governor Lugard in precarious Hong Kong, is that they amass enough confidence to pull off an enormous confidence trick — up to a point, and for a time.

59. Graham Noun, *When the World Was Young* (London: Ward Lock, 1986), 62–63.

60. Ernest Hart, *Hypnotism, Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft*, new edition (London: Smith, Elder, 1896), 2.

For the theatrical (as opposed to the therapeutic) hypnotist, his subject is a tool or a stooge, his purpose a demonstration of his own powers so as to impress an offstage and un hypnotized audience. Freud acknowledged casually in 1921 that hypnosis was ‘only a game’ really, and he admitted just as cynically that leadership was a fraud, since ‘the members of a group/crowd [Masse] stand in need of the illusion that they are equally and justly loved by their leader, but the leader himself need love no one else, he may be of a masterful nature, absolutely narcissistic, self-confident and independent’.⁶¹

On board the Patna and especially in Patusan, Conrad notoriously piles on, to the point of cliché, a romantic language of spellbinding mystery, enchantment, and the spectacle of illusion. Many people have felt there is something stagey, something culpably gaudy in all this.⁶² My argument is that this glamorous atmosphere is quite the appropriate lighting for Jim’s fascinating performance of lordship over the people of the East.

The hypnotist dominates the hypnotized, but there could be no hypnotist without a subject, and no performer without an audience to bring him or her into being. They interpellate each other and both parties are in a sense subject to the conditions of the performance itself; here Homi Bhabha’s work on the processes of subjectification in colonial discourse can help us see the way in which both the lordly Jim and the ‘subjects’ under his command are creatures of the same process. If Jim perpetrates a kind of hypnosis over the Eastern crowd, he seems to be its victim too. Fascinated by the gorgeous virility of his dreams of far-flung heroism, he relaxes, perhaps disastrously, on his watch on the Patna, feeling sleepy and ‘full of a pleasurable languor running through every limb’ (17). Later, he actually arrives asleep in Patusan, awakening to perform a series of actions that are, by his own account, instinctive, unconscious.

Is the hypnotist himself hypnotized? Is the leader, as well as his crowd, in thrall to a force that controls his actions? I am thinking ahead here to George Orwell’s story ‘Shooting an Elephant’, in which the colonial official — in this case a police officer — stands before an immense crowd of local people, feeling ‘like a conjuror about to perform a trick’, and realizes that he has no freedom to change or escape what he is acting out. Unthreatening in itself, this is another spectating ‘stagnant’ Asian crowd with expectations of its cynosure. ‘It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked

61. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology*, 160, 156. Freud’s attitudes to crowds and leaders in 1921 were not simple. McClelland (267) believes that fear of the anti-Semitic mob in Vienna was one of the triggers of Freud’s book. On the other hand, Freud was a leader himself.

62. See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), 206–80.

the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes — faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot.⁶³ The show must go on. Imperialism is the name Orwell gives to the invisible Svengali that pulls the strings of helpless policeman and powerless spectators alike, and in this as in so many other cases, has brought the crowd and the stranger together in the first place.

For power can be as unwelcome as powerlessness. In the chapter of *Tristes Tropiques* entitled 'Crowds', Claude Lévi-Strauss remembered how the supplication of beggars in Calcutta conferred on him a godlike role, an interpellation that filled him with horror. 'Yet how can one harden one's heart, when — and this is the insuperable point — all these forms of behaviour are modalities of prayer? And it is because the fundamental attitude towards you is one of prayer, even when you are being robbed, that the situation is so completely and absolutely intolerable, and that, in spite of being ashamed at the confusion, I cannot help likening the refugees . . . to the black, grey-hooded crows cawing ceaselessly in the trees of Karachi.'⁶⁴

There is a dwindling number of places in the world where the arrival of a stranger still constitutes a spectacle that can draw a crowd, and fewer still where that strangeness might be converted into any kind of authority. Asia is more teeming than ever, but although mass events such as certain festivals or pageants or some sports (or even 'vibrant' nightlife or the teeming local market or bazaar) may still feature as attractions in tourist brochures, modern travellers are more likely to be seeking out less crowded places — and making them more crowded, to be sure. Even so, modern visitors know what it feels like to be — even voluntarily — not only in a crowd, but a stranger in it. There is a particularly striking visual image of this in Peter Weir's film of C. J. Koch's 1978 novel *The Year of Living Dangerously*, when two foreign journalists go to report a political demonstration in Jakarta, and find their car engulfed in a sea of excited protestors (this extraordinary scene was filmed in the Philippines). Here the stockade has modernized itself into a Mercedes, but the journalists also want to observe authoritatively and record the event, and so at one point they decide to leave the relative safety of the car, for the danger — but professional advantage — of clambering in among the demonstrators and filming them at close quarters. But you cannot be in the crowd and protected from it at the same time.

63. George Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison, vol. 10 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), 503–04.

64. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), trans. John and Doreen Weightman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 172–73.

The figure of the crowd tends always to be negatively conceived by those who feel that it is a potential threat to the power established in a class or race: hence Le Bon's mixture of fear and contempt for the crowd, and Kipling's jocular panic. Lord Jim looks down on the Eastern crowd, from his elevated position as the officer or lord who has taken them under his protection, with paternalistic benignity, certainly not as an equal; he only goes down among them when he goes to his death. This chapter has emphasized the way the articulation of this figure is based on the *difference* between the crowd and its other. An actual merging of Eastern crowd and Western individual has seemed an outcome to be avoided, and instances of it are rare and usually signal a disaster — like the death of Lord Jim, swallowed up in the reversal crowd at Doramin's court, or the racial catastrophe fantasized by Kipling's or De Quincey's fears about the Yellow Peril. Before the Asian crowd moves off, however, we can record an unusual glimpse of a voluntary and indeed utopian immersion, by an unusual Western individual. A scene in Edward Thompson's *A Farewell to India* (1931) describes how his English characters witness the Lekteswar 'Mela', a religious festival with a procession centred on a black meteorite, an image of Shiva. There is much authentic-sounding ethnographic detail, and the English missionaries, who can speak the language and are well-versed in local customs, explain the goings-on to their lady compatriots. 'It was joy in widest commonality spread, a bliss democratic and shared by every man, woman and child, whatever their rank or age.'⁶⁵ This is a narrative of the Asian crowd that we do not often see, but for an educational missionary and liberal like Thompson's central character Robin Alden, religious passion is the same everywhere, and this crowd is not an image of difference and alienation but an instance of an inclusive, ecumenical, and universal experience, albeit in a local language.

Here, as in Burke's conception of the sublime, the potentially threatening spectacle becomes an enrapturing one through the excitement of sympathy.⁶⁶ Still, though he enjoys the spectacle, Alden is not a part of it. It is different for his friend and fellow-missionary John Findlay. Findlay has mystical tendencies, fewer ties than Alden to the West since his wife and child are both dead, and a strong affinity with the Indian jungle in which he prefers to live. It is he who has some kind of epiphany at this festival of Shiva, and — rather to the consternation of his English friends — he suddenly embraces and enters the Asian crowd.

He *loved* this crowd, as he had loved his wife and child; all were children of the one Love . . . In that moment, Findlay felt that his

65. Edward Thompson, *A Farewell to India* (London: Ernest Benn, 1931), 252.

66. 'Sympathy, in fact, plays a key role in Burke's conception of the sublime, extending its remit from self-preservation in the face of danger to include wider social sentiments and the well-being of others.' Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, 4.

heart would break with unbearable happiness, if in some way, in any way, it might be given to him to die to bring some good to that multitude.⁶⁷

He joins the worshippers and wanders off with them for a week. He has recognized the crowd for the utopia it is — integrative, benign, binding, happy, and anarchic (this last quality makes it significantly different from the crowd on the Grand Trunk Road in *Kim*, whose harmlessness was guaranteed by a police presence under English command). Findlay approaches the Indian crowd with the Western tourists, but he slips into it willingly, exultantly, and effortlessly, to become another of its anonymous members, not so much a dialogic as a choric partner. He speaks its language and is offering it his life. It takes a very unusual stranger, with a very different kind of confidence, to join the Asian crowd under these terms and submerge his difference in it.

67. Edward Thompson, *A Farewell to India*, 254.

Nature and Some Naturalists

In the wilderness: Leonard Woolf and others

This chapter is about natural history, and figures of nature in Western writing about the East. In the first part I examine representations of the wilderness, how it is seen by those who enter it and how it returns their gaze, helping to constitute them as various kinds of subject — as explorers, writers, sportsmen, and naturalists, on missions of subjugation, or scientific expeditions, or in search of a paradise. The second part examines the single and instructive case of the uses of nature, and in particular the role of animals, in George Orwell's representation and understanding of the Orient which he had known as a policeman of the empire. In a coda, I look at a naturalist in the postcolonial jungle.

When W. Somerset Maugham, 'in a far island away down in the South East of the Malay Archipelago', encountered a great cockatoo which stared at him, his first instinct was to look about for the cage from which it must have escaped.¹ In the jungle, he says, he never quite got over his surprise at seeing at liberty birds and beasts whose natural habitation seemed to him a Zoological Garden. It is a characteristic drollery, but for some of the people in Maugham's stories the jungle is not always so amusing, and one of the disconcerting things about it is that, while it may provide plenty for the traveller to see, admire, hunt, or describe, it is not to be prevented from sizing him up in turn for purposes of its own. The thought ensures a sleepless night for the hero of Maugham's tale 'Neil MacAdam'.

The darkness was profound. The noise was deafening of innumerable insects, but like the roar of traffic in a great city it was so constant that in a little while it was like an impenetrable silence, and when on a sudden he heard the shriek of a monkey seized by a snake or the scream of a night-bird he nearly jumped out of his skin. He had a

1. W. Somerset Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour: A Record of a Journey from Rangoon to Haiphong* (London: Heinemann, 1930), 83.

mysterious sensation that all around creatures were watching him. Over there, beyond the camp fires, savage warfare was waged and they three on their bed of branches were defenceless and alone in face of the horror of nature.²

The natural world and its contents have been very much linked with the enterprise of literature, and above all English literature, especially since the Romantic revolution of the late eighteenth century had undertaken to restore the integration, or deplore the alienation, between humans and their habitat. The tales of returning travellers were expected to include descriptions of foreign places and the things that grew and lived there, particularly when these were dramatically or picturesquely different from what was to be seen at home. But we have become very used to the idea that representations of nature constitute a kind of knowledge that is never ‘innocent’ in the sense of being detachable from the political context that made and continues to make it possible.³ It is in the domain of Orientalism that this truth has been most comprehensively asserted in the past quarter-century — so much so that there is now more danger of our falling into the opposite error, a reductive insistence that such knowledges are nothing but the expression of a political will to power.

The case of Colonel Francis Younghusband is one that would seem to make most simply the point about a collusion between appreciating nature and dominating territory — between acquiring knowledge of a locale and acquiring power over it. Younghusband’s book *India and Tibet* (1910) contains celebrated descriptions of mountain scenery in the high Himalayas, for which he felt a frankly mystical affinity. ‘I was born in the Himalayas,’ he explains, ‘within sight of the Kashmir Mountains; and some inexplicable attraction has drawn me back to them time after time. Now that I was called upon to pierce through the Himalayas to the far country on the hither side, I was to make my start from that spot, from which of all others the most perfect view is to be obtained.’⁴ We do not need the clue in Younghusband’s fondness for the language of penetration into the interior to remind us that his enjoyment of mountains is to be understood in the context of the history of imperialism. The full title of his book is *India and Tibet: A History of the Relations which have Subsisted Between the Two Countries from the Time of Warren Hastings to 1910, with a Particular Account of the Mission*

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2. W. Somerset Maugham, *Ah King and Other Stories* [1933] (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), 311. When the tale was first published in *Nash’s Pall Mall Magazine* in April 1932, its title was ‘The Temptation of Neil MacAdam’.
 3. The most influential statement of the case in this context is in Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).
 4. Francis Younghusband, *India and Tibet* [1910] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1985), 100.

to Lhasa of 1904, and the mission to Lhasa of 1904 was an invasion, sponsored by the Viceroy of India, to force a treaty on the Dalai Lama and open Tibet to Western trade. Younghusband was no Wordsworthian solitary. Indeed he was in a position to share his Romantic enthusiasm for the mountain wilderness on the way to Lhasa with an army of eight thousand sepoy and a file of ration-carrying coolies.⁵

For Europeans (and Americans) in the age of empire, geographical knowledge and the imperial business went hand in hand. Younghusband like other explorers is very far from making a secret of this. Indeed it was such an obvious and agreed truth that, in an address to the Royal Geographical Society whose president he was in 1920, Younghusband sounds apologetic as he puts forward an argument that geographers should take a less material and more spiritual view of the earth. Science, he maintains, has shown the earth to be a complex network, a system of interrelated activity tending to excellence, and 'the characteristic of the face and features of the Earth most worth learning about, knowing and understanding is their beauty'.⁶ Natural resources may be exhausted, and the strategic value of a region may change from year to year. But natural beauty is the most valuable asset of a place, for it is a universal quality, something which everyone can admire and enjoy. Younghusband told his audience that for some time he had not realized 'that a knowledge of the beauties of Tibet was not only one geographical result of the Mission [of 1904], but the chief geographical result,' and in reporting on the expedition he ought to have paid not less but more attention to it.

When the new tradition is established, and travellers become aware that we regard knowledge of natural beauty as within the scope of our activities, the error into which I fell will be avoided. We shall think travellers barbaric if they continue to concern themselves with all else about the face of the Earth except its beauty. We shall no longer tolerate a geographer who will learn everything about the utility of a region for military, political, and commercial purposes, but who will take no trouble to see the beauty it contains.⁷

Here the invader of Tibet seems to have turned into a Romantic universalist, or at least a League of Nations ecologist. In the end, strategic knowledge of a region's utility is less valuable than knowledge of its beauty, and the geographer's motive of survey for national military, political and commercial purposes should

5. Peter Fleming retold the story in his spirited *Bayonets to Lhasa* [1961], intro. Brian Shaw (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1984).

6. Francis Younghusband, 'Natural Beauty and Geographical Science', *Geographical Journal* 56:1 (July 1920), 3.

7. *Ibid.*, 8.

be demoted, he argues, in favour of a higher purpose which is aesthetic and universal. And yet, in a pattern which we shall see again in this chapter, an identification with nature does not entirely or for long blot out an identification with nation. As Younghusband tries to drain geography of national politics, it keeps leaking back in. He is of the view that natural beauty can only be appreciated comparatively, and some people are better equipped for this than others. He recalls that the inhabitants of the Gilgit frontier who had never left the Himalayas were altogether ignorant of the special grandeur of their beauty, because they thought all the world was just the same. It requires a stranger to see the natural beauty of the wilderness for the wonder it is, and bring it to the attention of others. ‘Englishmen are born lovers of natural beauty and born travellers.’⁸ This, it seems, is a job for the Royal Geographical Society after all. The Himalayas need the foreign geographer, not to survey their strategic importance, but to confer beauty on them, or to make real the beauty potential in them, by seeing and publishing it. They need to be looked at in the right way. Without an English modality in which they can be admired, the Himalayas are just mountains.

A different kind of observation of the Oriental scene of nature may illustrate a related point. The naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace spent eight years in the Malay Archipelago (1854–62), where he amassed more than 125,000 specimens, hundreds of which were new to science. A random example of his scientific observations of the natural history of the region is his statement that there are sixty-three known species of bird on the island of Lombok, eighty-six on Flores, and one hundred and eighteen on Timor.⁹ The birds that inhabited the Timor Group were real enough, but this item of knowledge about them only came into existence when Wallace arrived and applied to the scene his zoological taxonomies, his methods of observation, and in due course his access to outlets for the dissemination of knowledge — all predicated on the sense that the number of kinds of birds in a place was worth finding out. Of course Wallace made no claim to have *discovered* the birds of the Timor island group, but it was he and his assistants who observed, classified, counted, and reported them. It is he therefore who created the knowledge (scientifically falsifiable by any later observer) that there were one hundred and eighteen kinds of bird on Timor. In just the same sense, his greatest scientific discovery, ‘Wallace’s Line’, the boundary that separates the fauna of Australia from that of Asia, had no existence until Wallace drew it on the map.¹⁰ Here again an appreciative account (and accounting)

8. *Ibid.*

9. Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-Utang and the Bird of Paradise, a Narrative of Travel with Studies of Man and Nature* [1869] (London: GBR ElecBook, 2001), 195.

10. It was while observing birds on Lombok that Wallace began to notice the faunal discontinuity which he was to map as Wallace’s Line, and which became the basis for his own elaboration

adds value by realizing the potential of the local scene, and, in doing so, takes a kind of possession of it.

But Wallace's case is exemplary for another reason too, for in a number of ways the place answers him back. For the object of his observations was at the same time observing and reacting to him. Amassing specimens and writing natural history, he turned the archipelago into a sort of laboratory for one of the heroic undertakings of Victorian science, and his findings led him to become with Darwin one of the proponents of natural selection. But while the data he collected in Borneo and Timor was used to confirm his scientific theories, his own presence in such places was confirming for others a quite different way of understanding nature. 'One of the most disagreeable features of travelling or residing in this country,' he noted in his journal, 'is the excessive terror I invariably excite. Wherever I go dogs bark, children scream, women run & men stare with astonishment as though I were some strange and terrible cannibal monster.' Wallace, a most amiable character, was rather hurt by this, for he was a man who had 'never been accustomed to consider himself an ogre or any other monster.'¹¹ It was, however, a lesson in reciprocity. The wilderness had a life, and point of view, of its own. From the jungles of Borneo Wallace constructed the grand narrative of a theory of the evolution of species, but the jungle was capable of producing stories just as pertinent to understanding the place of a modern European man in nature. He figured it, and it figured him.

Another more intimate lesson in reciprocity and contradiction was offered him by an infant Mias or orang-utan he adopted, after he had shot and killed its mother. Orang-utans, so obviously close to humans, were of extraordinary interest to evolutionary enquiry, and Wallace killed, skinned, beheaded and shipped back to England many excellent specimens. His treatment of the rescued infant, however, was tender and loving. He fed her rice-water from a bottle, built her a cradle, made her a ladder to play on, and used to bath and dry her and brush her hair. At first the terrified animal had clung desperately to the whiskers and beard of her mother's murderer, but the two soon became friends, and Wallace reported the infant 'enjoyed the wiping and rubbing dry amazingly, and when I brushed its hair seemed to be perfectly happy, lying quite still with its arms and legs stretched out while I thoroughly brushed the long hair of its back and arms'.¹²

of a theory of the evolution of species. See John Langdon Brooks, *Just Before the Origin: Alfred Russel Wallace's Theory of Evolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 136–39.

11. Michael Shermer, *In Darwin's Shadow: The Life and Science of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 124.

12. Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 51. Wallace does not give the sex of the animal but an illustration shows her to have been a female. See also Martin Fichman, *An Elusive Victorian: The Evolution of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 39.

This account of the scientist's maternal ministrations to this jungle creature he had orphaned, a small story glossing the very grand narrative of evolutionary theory, is made doubly moving by the fact that his scientific work at the time bore on the great Victorian project to understand the relation between humans and the natural world.¹³ The animal's brief life as Wallace recounts it (she survived some three months) was, perhaps, the wilderness's own tragic answer to that great question.¹⁴

The West has no jungle. To Western observers of Asia, the jungle is the Other habitat *par excellence*, the location and symbol of everything most foreign about the foreign parts penetrated by the European empires and later their vast shambling international rearguard of tourists. With its fascinations and dangers and its extreme difference from home, the wilderness of the jungle was as much a challenge to colonial and travel writers as it had been to the explorers clearing a trail through it. Leonard Woolf will be a good guide through this other world, not only because he was an acute observer, but also because, in his diaries and letters and memoirs and fiction about Ceylon (Sri Lanka) where he served as administrator of a jungle district, he offers a number of different and even contradictory ways of seeing and understanding what the jungle can mean.

Our path in the rest of this section leads to various ways in which the trope of the jungle is figured. Here is a sketch-map. The jungle is seen as the place of nature; a war between nature and culture, nature and history, is most clearly inscribed in the image of ruins in the jungle. The writing of colonial officials like Woolf and Clifford shows they were always conscious of a duty of care, for the conservation of the jungle habitat and the improvement of the lives of the inhabitants, but this often involved a contradiction, for to bring progress to the wilderness inevitably meant despoiling it. The trope involved Woolf in a further contradiction as a writer of increasingly anti-colonial convictions, seeking to give a sympathetic portrait and a voice to the dwellers in the jungle, who could not represent themselves; for to embody them as autonomous in his fiction was, of course, to bring them most fully into the regimes of Western representation.

Leonard Woolf worked as a colonial officer in Ceylon from 1904 to 1911.¹⁵ He was clever, a ferociously hard worker and a gifted administrator, and rising

13. See Ted Benton, 'Where to draw the line: Alfred Russel Wallace in Borneo', *Studies in Travel Writing* 1 (Spring 1997), 96–116. A more depressing gloss on this question is given in Clifford's tall story, 'The Strange Elopement of Chaling the Dyak', about a man abducted by an amorous female orang-utan, who eventually escapes by cutting her throat. Hugh Clifford, *Studies in Brown Humanity* (London: Grant Richards, 1898), 243–60.

14. Wallace was very upset at the loss of his 'orphan baby', a sentiment not impugned by the fact that after its death he sold its skin and bones to the British Museum for £6. See Peter Raby, *Alfred Russell Wallace: A Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001), 108.

15. See Victoria Glendinning, *Leonard Woolf: A Life* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 73–124, and Christopher Ondaatje, *Woolf in Ceylon* (Toronto, ONT: Harper Collins, 2005).

rapidly in the hierarchy he was appointed (by Sir Hugh Clifford, Colonial Secretary and Acting Governor) Assistant Government Agent or district officer in the Hambantota district in 1908, staying there until his return to England in 1911. It was an instance of the extraordinary opportunities and responsibilities with which colonial service sometimes confronted a young man. At the age of twenty-seven Woolf controlled a district of a thousand square miles and a hundred thousand inhabitants: its principal town, Hambantota, however, had a police force which only consisted of one sergeant. Most of the district was jungle.

Even before his posting to Hambantota, Woolf had looked on his correspondence as a lifeline to the civilization and culture he had left behind. The colonial personnel he worked and socialized with in Ceylon filled him with scorn. They were 'like people in rotten novels'.¹⁶ He could not make up his mind whether Kipling had depicted such people accurately, or whether such people modelled themselves on Kipling's characters.¹⁷ In any case, the posting to Hambantota district was something of a relief — there was no 'society' there, and travelling on circuit round the district Woolf could be quite out of touch with Europeans for days or weeks. The disadvantage, to be sure, was an extreme isolation, and a looming sense of oppression by the unrelieved and uncivilized surroundings in which he worked.

We have seen Maugham write about 'the horror of nature'. In much of Woolf's writing too there is this sense of the stubborn malignancy of the natural scene and its denial of anything that might define humanity as more than an animal state like any other. To read about the jungle is to be struck by a recurrent figure of ingestion, an anxiety (which was present on Bubbling Well Road) about being swallowed up by the scene of nature, never to reappear. The jungle may be a refuge, for the savage or the outlaw or the holidaymaker, but it can also engulf people who cross its threshold. When two adventurers enter the jungle in one of Hugh Clifford's stories, '[t]heir little expedition slipped into the forest, and the wilderness swallowed it' — they enter as agential subjects, but are immediately transformed, in the grammar of the sentence, into objects of the place's incorporation.¹⁸ When Leonard Woolf came to Hambantota district in August 1908 he too felt as if he had disappeared into some dark ahistorical otherworld. 'I have no connection with yesterday,' he writes to Lytton Strachey in October; 'I do not recognize it nor myself in it.'¹⁹ He felt he had lost his place in the story; he was, to use the exact word, bewildered.

16. Letter to Lytton Strachey, 26 February 1904 [1905]. *Letters of Leonard Woolf*, ed. Frederic Spotts (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1990), 81.

17. Leonard Woolf, *Growing: An Autobiography of the Years 1904–1911* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 46.

18. Hugh Clifford, 'The Quest of the Golden Fleece', *Malayan Monochromes* (London: John Murray, 1913), 197.

19. Letter to Lytton Strachey, 2 October 1908. *Letters of Leonard Woolf*, 137.

The forest was not just the absence of civilization but its opposite. Woolf was drawn to its beauty, particularly the beauty of its wild animals. 'But the jungle and jungle life are also horribly ugly and cruel.'²⁰ It is often in his letters to friends in England that this ugliness is expressed most vividly, and this is of interest because these young men (later to coalesce into 'Bloomsbury') saw their friendships as an epitome of civilization; they liked to reassure each other of their superiority, like that of the Athenians of the Periclean Age, or as if they were 'the mysterious priests of a new and amazing civilization'.²¹ When Woolf reports back to this acropolitian centre from the savage frontier he is not inclined to sentimentalize the scene of nature or to mitigate what jungle life means for others, the many human beings who live it. Here is a passage in a letter to Saxon Sydney-Turner.

I am 41 miles from Hambantota . . . Some of the inhabitants of this place are scarcely human. Every male between the ages of 18 & 55 in Ceylon is liable to a road tax of rs 1.50; if he does not pay by March 31st he is liable to a fine of rs 10 or in default a month's imprisonment. At every place I stop, crowds of these defaulters are brought up to me by the headman for trial & sentence. They bring down to me wild savages from the hills, spectacles incredible to anyone who has not seen them. Naked except for a foul rag round their loins, limbs which are mere bones, stomachs distended with enormously enlarged spleens, their features eaten away by & and their skin covered with sores from one of the most loathsome of existing diseases called parangi, or else wild apelike creatures with masses of tangled hair falling over their shoulders their black bodies covered with white scales of parangi scab hobbling along on legs enormous from elephantitis.²²

This is the Orient as the spectacle of abjection, with Woolf as its appalled spectator.²³ For although he was acting in this and similar scenes in his capacity as magistrate, this judicial part of the process — the 'trial and sentence' — is barely textualized, and not at all narrativized, and the observing subject lives in this account only as the audience is present in but separated from a scene of drama, as these 'scarcely human' exhibits are 'brought up to me' or 'down to me' in a grotesque display. These people live in the place of nature as Thomas Hobbes might have imagined it, cruel and ignoble and unredeemed. They are prehistoric, for the jungle also has no history. They are virtually prehuman.

20. Leonard Woolf, *Growing*, 212.

21. Lytton Strachey to Leonard Woolf, 9 September 1904. *Letters of Leonard Woolf*, 43.

22. Letter to Saxon Sydney-Turner, 28 October 1908. *Letters of Leonard Woolf*, 141.

23. For a discussion of the idea of abjection in imperial discourse, see David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 76–91.

'The more you are in jungle, particularly if you are alone, the more one tends to feel it personified, something or someone hostile, dangerous,' Woolf remembered. 'I twice lost myself in jungle, a terrifying experience, and each time it was due to carelessness, to forgetting for an instant to be on one's guard against the treachery of the jungle.'²⁴ The disorientation of the familiar lost-in-the-jungle anecdote brings a kind of relapse, for not only is the destination — the home direction — lost, but the traveller is condemned to a futile and endless circulation, a story that is a travesty of narrative because it has no shape, no beginning or end. Getting lost in the jungle is already the end of the story. In Maugham's 'Neil MacAdam', Angus Munro describes how he lost his way in thick jungle, realizing (this is another familiar motif of the genre) that he has been walking in circles; after a few hours of frantic wandering, he says, he would have blown his brains out if only he had had a revolver. But he survives, of course, to tell the tale. Later in the story, his wife Darya is abandoned in the jungle and never seen again, and we can only imagine what happened, how long she will survive and how she will die. She simply disappears off the map of the narrative; she has lapsed from history into nature, rejoining the life of the beasts.²⁵ There is a similar moment at the end of Leonard Woolf's novel *The Village in the Jungle* (1913). Various tragedies have overtaken the family of Silindu and the village where they lived. The village is forgotten and disappears into the jungle from which it had sprung, and the last survivor, Punchi Menika, who has been living on roots and leaves, lies dying of fever and starvation, alone in the remains of her hut. 'When the end was close upon her a great black shadow glided into the doorway.'²⁶ Whether it is a wild boar, a hallucination, or a devil, she recognizes that the jungle has come for her, and in this moment the narrative ends as the jungle folds over it: there can be no more story. What will happen next is abject and unspeakable, but it is not a spectacle, for there can be no human being to witness and recount it, there is only the darkness.

If the jungle was the state of nature in this Enlightenment sense, malignant and hostile and constantly at war with human efforts to subdue, cultivate and civilize it, then there can be no more potent image of this struggle than ruins in the jungle. In Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, the monkey people, the Bandar-log, kidnap Mowgli and try to recruit him to their travesty of human civilization in the ruins of an abandoned city.²⁷ In 'The King's Ankus' in *The Second Jungle*

24. Leonard Woolf, *Growing*, 212.

25. W. Somerset Maugham, *Ah King and Other Stories*, 269–339.

26. Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle* [1913], Revised and Annotated in Accordance with the Original Manuscript, ed. Yasmine Gooneratne (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 246.

27. Rudyard Kipling, 'Kaa's Hunting', *The Jungle Book* [1894], ed. W. W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 22–47.

Book, Mowgli returns there, for an adventure involving an ancient cobra who still guards the king's treasure in a vault beneath the overgrown ruins. Mowgli steals a jewelled elephant goad, with tragic results, and then returns it, having learned his lesson that the emblems of human history (and property) do not belong in the pastoral scene: 'I will never again bring into the Jungle strange things'.²⁸ This little episode of 'imperial Gothic' reminds us of an important fact: ruins in the jungle are invariably uncanny and usually haunted.²⁹ It teaches Mowgli a lesson about the incompatibility of the natural world and human civilization, a lesson that will be more cruelly driven home when he himself is expelled from the jungle upon becoming an adult human.

Whether they are the relic of an indigenous civilization or an earlier foreign invader, ruins in the jungle are an important trope of colonial writing. In Hugh Clifford's story 'The Skulls in the Forest', Martin Halliday thinks he has found a specifically ahistorical spot, a place of unfallen nature — 'The place where he was standing had never suffered profanation: it had no past, no history; it was straight from the hand of its Maker'³⁰ — only to discover under the brushwood the earthworks of an ancient fort of European design. His attempt to settle the place ends in disaster and many deaths, for what seemed like a jungle idyll is in fact haunted by a terrible history. The unappeased spirits of the earlier settlement (apparently Portuguese of the fifteenth century) exact a wholesale vengeance on the new arrivals, and the place is left at the end of the tale, as it was at the beginning, uninhabited by a living soul. Purged of human activity, it reverts to empty Hinterland, and to its natural function of simply being there.

Ruins, especially if they are overrun by an encroaching nature, encourage thoughts about the mortality of civilizations, as they inspired Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, or Shelley's 'Ozymandias'. Asia, like Latin America, has several sites where the jungle has laid waste the works of a great civilization, and none more spectacular than the Khmer temples at Angkor. Somerset Maugham wanted never to leave the place. Hugh Clifford wrote a novel about it. André Malraux, notoriously, stole from it. Maugham said he had never seen 'anything in the world more beautiful' than the temples at Angkor; the desolation was a strong part of the beauty, and the overgrown city presented itself irresistibly as a *paysage moralisé*. 'For centuries nature has waged its battle with the handiwork of man; it has covered, disfigured and transformed it, and now all these buildings that a multitude of slaves built with so much labour lie a confused tangle among the

28. Rudyard Kipling, 'The King's Ankus', *The Second Jungle Book* [1895], ed. W. W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 104.

29. The phrase 'imperial Gothic' was coined by Patrick Brantlinger in *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 227–54.

30. Hugh Clifford, *Malayan Monochromes*, 233.

trees.³¹ Clifford's *The Downfall of the Gods* (1911) is a scholarly historical novel — though the title is Wagnerian, the model may be Flaubert's *Salammbô* — which imagines how the great mediaeval empire at Angkor came to grief, through revolution, anarchy and invasion.³²

Clifford's fascination with the lost story of Angkor must have been similar to that of his fictional Halliday pondering the ruined fort in 'The Skulls in the Forest'. 'How often I stand looking at those huge, silent trees, and long for them to have voices wherewith to speak, that they might tell me of the sights which they have seen — the tragedy of that abandoned fort, of this deserted fairyland.'³³ For Clifford as for Halliday, the ruins in the jungle become an obsession because they are the signs of a history that has been struck dumb. There is no written record of the collapse of Angkor, and it becomes the function of the traveller to give the place the gift of history, and supply it with the story that has evaporated from its ruins. Clifford's novel then is an aetiological myth, a work of not archaeological but of narrative restoration.³⁴

At the end of *The Downfall of the Gods*, Thai invaders overrun and sack the city, the people of Angkor revert to being a 'race of jungle-dwellers,' and the principal surviving characters are reduced to living in a forest hut. 'Already the trees of the forest begin to invade the sanctuaries, and the wild fig vines thrust their tendrils between stone and stone.'³⁵ With the return of the jungle, *The Downfall of the Gods* ends with the same trope as *The Village in the Jungle*, or indeed as Kipling's 'The Judgement of Dungara', in which the jungle has swallowed up the mission house of Justus Krenk. Kipling, Clifford, Woolf and Maugham all seem to have taken a melancholy satisfaction in the spectacle of the defeat of the handiwork of man by the irresistible might of nature. The jungle in this aspect may be said to be an important manifestation of the Oriental sublime. Like the

31. W. Somerset Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, 209, 213–14.

32. Clifford had already speculated, in *Further India* (1905), on this question, suggesting that earthquakes may have caused the inhabitants to abandon Angkor. 'As regards the encroachment of the forest, that, I think, need occasion no surprise. I have myself seen a ploughed field in tropical Asia covered in the space of fifteen months with dense undergrowth twelve feet in height, through which a man could pass only with the greatest difficulty, with the aid of a stout wood-knife.' Hugh Clifford, *Further India: Being the Story of Exploration from the Earliest Times in Burma, Malaya, Siam, and Indo-China* (London: Alston Rivers, 1905), 161–62. For the history of Angkor, see Ian Mabbett and David Chandler, *The Khmers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), and Charles Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

33. Hugh Clifford, *Malayan Monochromes*, 245–46.

34. There is an analogy with the speculative and controversial restoration by Arthur Evans of the Minoan palace at Knossos, over several decades beginning in 1900. Evans too was reconstructing a lost story.

35. Hugh Clifford, *The Downfall of the Gods* (London: John Murray, 1911), 336, 335.

Orient as crowd, it creates an awareness of the potential annihilation of the self. It is one of those sublime natural phenomena which, according to Kant, challenge the subject's attempts to appropriate and contain them, and demand from us 'courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature'.³⁶ Sometimes, so omnipotent is nature that not even ruins are left to testify to a defeated human effort. Sailing upriver towards the decayed town of Brunei in Borneo, Hugh Clifford felt that the resumption of sovereignty by 'the spirits of the jungle' was even merciful in its completeness. 'Those hillsides, we knew, were filled with the memory of ancient tragedies, records of wrong and oppression, or murder and ruthless robbery; and Nature was even now slowly covering from sight the scenes of so much wickedness.'³⁷

But if the jungle was the state of nature red in tooth and claw, there were several ways in which its dark places might be measured, brought to account, and made subject at least to the government of narrative. It could be explored and catalogued, by people like Wallace. Its resources, especially timber, could be exploited on a scale beyond the means of its indigenous inhabitants. Or it could profitably be turned into a playground, by people like Hunter in the Kipling story who entered the grass patch in search of a trophy and a sporting anecdote. The Hambantota district of Ceylon contained a Game Sanctuary and was famous as a sportsman's paradise, with its leopard, bear, elephant, buffalo, sambhur deer, spotted deer, and pig. It was part of the Assistant Government Agent's job to look after the foreign visitors who came to hunt for sport. But although Leonard Woolf himself spent as much time as he could afford in the jungle, observing the animals and sitting up at night over water holes, he soon lost his taste for hunting and gave up shooting except for food. In any case, for him the jungle was not a leisure environment but a workplace. First as a colonial officer and last with half a century's retrospect in his autobiography, Woolf's portrayal of the jungle, with his complicated and changing feelings for it, becomes a figure of the east in his writing.

It is in his diaries that we can read in detail the story of Woolf's work in Hambantota. The British colonial government in Ceylon, and elsewhere in the empire, required its district officers to keep a diary, recording their day-to-day work and making a full report of events and conditions in their district. These diaries were transmitted regularly to the colonial capital at Colombo, where they were read by the Colonial Secretary (Clifford). So Woolf's diaries have the form of a journal, but the function of a subaltern correspondence. The writer whose sketchy self-portrait emerges from the diaries is quite different from the fastidious

36. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. with Analytical Indexes by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 111.

37. Hugh Clifford, 'A Dying Kingdom', *Macmillan's Magazine* 86 (May/October 1902), 108.

and rather academic observer who wrote letters to Strachey and the rest.³⁸ A different genre and reader produces a different writing subject, who in turn represents the jungle in a different way. This is Leonard Woolf in his impersonal professional capacity, writing himself into the jungle as agent (and as Assistant Government Agent), keeping a record of his tireless travels across his far-flung district — one, two, three hundred miles each month, much of it on foot, the distances scrupulously recorded in the official diary. His circulating presence — like the progress of some mediaeval monarch — is his authority, as if he is constantly tracing across the landscape of the jungle the signature of the empire he embodies, and his own signature as author of the account of the district assigned to him. His regime is scopic, and his jungle district is controlled by being inspected and overseen. The story the diaries tell is an account (in both senses) of what can be seen and measured in Hambantota, its people and animals, its distances, its occasional crimes, its areas of cultivation and its seasonal yield of paddy and salt. Its themes are transport, irrigation, welfare, agriculture, and health. Matters of life and death in the story are the maintenance of irrigation tanks, the coming of rain or drought, the formation and collection of salt.

The diaries report on these matters, and on Leonard Woolf's constant efforts to improve the lot of his poverty-stricken district by introducing a more efficient administration, disease control, and new agricultural methods. The jungle had its swarming vegetation, its lethal animals, its capricious climate, its chthonic fears. Woolf went into battle against these things with his own armoury: technology, communication, law, survey and census, progress. He was intensely proud of the 'extraordinary wide and intense knowledge of the country and the people' which he developed in Hambantota.³⁹ If the predominant mood of his letters is frustration, and their tendency is to turn Ceylon into a troubling spectacle, the diaries (which he was writing at the same time but, so to speak, in office hours) in contrast relish their ability to process Ceylon into an object of knowledge and an area of development — an 'Enlightenment project' indeed.

The jungle, in the diaries, is not only an object of Woolf's knowledge but also of his actions, his agency. He writes casually of 'the dam I had constructed', and 'the place where I had blocked the modara'.⁴⁰ Perhaps this is just a manner of speaking — he really means 'the dam I had had constructed' and so on — but it is interesting that the executive pronoun rises to the challenge of its surroundings by assuming what sounds like an epic potency. 'Inspected gravel

38. See Douglas Kerr, 'Stories of the East: Leonard Woolf and the Genres of Colonial Discourse', *English Literature in Transition* 41: 3 (1998), 261–79.

39. Leonard Woolf, *Growing*, 232.

40. Leonard Woolf, *Diaries in Ceylon, and Stories from the East* (London: Hogarth Press, 1963), 23. A modara is a channel.

road which I am making,' 'I am building a footbridge,' 'I have . . . stopped chenas in these villages,' 'I am putting up a new building here,' 'I am now growing Abassi [cotton] on the high ground,' and so on.⁴¹ If the first two chapters of *Genesis* were autobiographical they might consist of statements like these. They are a reminder that the implacable spirit of nature is not the only godlike presence in the jungle. It has a worthy antagonist in the person of a determined young man with a modern empire at his back, like Leonard Woolf, or Kipling's Gallio, 'a knock-kneed, shambling young man, naturally devoid of creed or reverence, with a longing for absolute power which his undesirable District gratified'.⁴²

Gallio, however, seems to have been dedicated to maintaining the idyllic status quo undisturbed in Buria Kol, whereas Leonard Woolf, at this stage a faithful missionary of modernity, was determined to make life better for people in his backward district. He took vigorous measures to control the scourge of rinderpest in cattle. He introduced English ploughs, yoked local bulls to them, taught himself to plough, and passed the skill on to the local rice farmers. He revolutionized the salt industry (a government monopoly), made the administration more efficient, started irrigation and road works, opened schools, completed a census in record time. He developed a reputation for strictness, even ruthlessness, for he saw himself as an agent of development, bringing improvement to an economy that had changed little in a thousand years. Like it or not, he was moving his sluggish district out into the stream of history. Hambantota was to be converted into an outpost of progress.

The trouble was, of course, that standing in the path of this course of modernization were the very things that Woolf came to prize most in Hambantota — the jungle itself, its superb wild animals, and the way of life of its inhabitants, whose simplicity, courage and stoicism the Assistant Government Agent greatly admired. The implementation of government policy on chenas is an example of a wider dilemma. In this primitive form of agriculture, the cultivator burns down a portion of jungle, roughly clears it, and then sows a crop. No care of the plants is taken, but the return is good as the soil is virgin soil; however, after a few crops the soil is impoverished, the plot is abandoned and another one cleared. The authorities disliked this inefficient and destructive form of cultivation, but were unwilling to outlaw it. Their attempt to control it (licensing chenas by payment in advance) drove the very poor into ruinous debt, and threatened to depopulate the jungle villages. Woolf used his diaries to point out the problem to his superiors, and often found himself interceding on behalf of the jungle villagers whose

41. Leonard Woolf, *Diaries in Ceylon*, 123, 173, 178, 179, 236. Chenas were plots of land used by jungle-dwelling villagers for slash-and-burn clearing and crop-planting.

42. Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would be King and Other Stories*, ed. Louis L. Cornell (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 125.

livelihood depended on being helped to continue the degradation of their habitat.⁴³ He was facing a version of a classic liberal dilemma still familiar to governments and NGOs.

In July 1910, he was sent to superintend the famous Kataragama Pilgrimage. Kataragama was a tiny village, not much more than a large clearing with two temples, in dense jungle in the Uva province, neighbouring Hambantota district. It had no roads and almost no buildings, but every three or four years it filled with about four thousand pilgrims from all over Ceylon and South India, many of them sick and in search of a miraculous cure. When the pilgrimage was over, Woolf wrote a report for the Government Agent, and recommended that the authorities should provide some accommodation for the pilgrims, and a road and drains. On a visit fifty years later, he returned to the spot.

My recommendation had certainly been carried out, but the Kataragama that I knew had disappeared. There was now a large car park by the side of the river and a bridge over the river; there was now shelter for the pilgrims. There were many things connected with the Kataragama of 1910 which were evil and which to me were repellent. I dislike superstition wherever I find it, whether among primitive and simple people or sophisticated ninnyes. But at least there was something fundamentally genuine, primitively real there in the jungle. The people believed what they believed simply and purely. The beliefs were deplorable, no doubt, but the purity, simplicity, and their motives for taking the terrible journey to the temple I respected. Even the temple authorities, though they were, like most Church authorities, greedy and disingenuous, seemed to have some faint belief in what they preached or professed. The pilgrimage was an authentic, spontaneous explosion of the hopes and aspirations of ordinary men and women who lived hard and bewildered lives. The Kataragama of 1960 is the exact opposite. Like Lisieux and other famous European places of Christian pilgrimage its whole atmosphere is that of the commercialized exploitation of credulity.⁴⁴

Modernization always precipitates a crisis of difference. Modernity, in the shape of British colonialism, brought Woolf to Kataragama, to marvel at what he saw as its genuineness. But it also brought him to begin unwittingly the destruction of its difference, a process that, as he saw it, would convert it into something as meretricious and false as its European counterpart. Claude Lévi-Strauss makes the same point about the industrialization of culture itself.

43. Leonard Woolf, *Diaries in Ceylon*, 86–87, 117, 216–17. These are the material conditions that determine the plot in *The Village in the Jungle*.

44. Leonard Woolf, *Growing*, 231–32.

There is nothing to be done about it now; civilization has ceased to be that delicate flower which was preserved and painstakingly cultivated in one or two sheltered areas of a soil rich in wild species which may have seemed menacing because of the vigour of their growth, but which nevertheless made it possible to vary and revitalize the cultivated stock. Mankind has opted for monoculture: it is in the process of creating a mass civilization, as beetroot is grown in the mass.⁴⁵

In the same year Leonard Woolf was supervising the Kataragama pilgrimage, his boss the Colonial Secretary, Hugh Clifford, published in the *Cornhill Magazine* a story called 'How Bondage Came to the Jungle' (1910). Clifford was gloomily struck by the contrast between what he remembered of the untouched jungles of Malaya, from which he had been posted, and the commercialization going on in Ceylon. His story describes a Ceylonese jungle town, Kraaltown, full of ugly buildings, temporary hotels, and a large heterogeneous crowd of tourists who have come to enjoy the local attraction, the capture of wild elephants. This vulgar initiative of 'The Civilization' to turn a working practice into a tourist spectacle is a violation of 'every tradition of the elephant-folk' and 'every observance sacred to the jungle gods', as well as a defiance of common sense, for in the confusion three men are killed, three others wounded, and only sixteen elephants are captured.⁴⁶ In disgust, the beaters all leave, and the elephants that have been captured break loose and tramp back to the jungle and freedom. In this case, nature wins a battle against modernity; but there is no doubt about the outcome of the war.

David Gilmour reports the case of one Irish official in the Indian Civil Service who was so solicitous of jungle nature that, while making a road, 'he would either divert it to save a tree or, if this were not possible, leave the tree standing in the middle of the road'.⁴⁷ Not everyone could afford to be so scrupulous. In August 1899 Clifford had published a Malayan story in *Blackwoods* entitled 'In Chains'.⁴⁸ In it he describes how he was the first European to visit the remote

45. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), trans. John and Doreen Weightman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 44.

46. Hugh Clifford, 'How Bondage Came to the Jungle', *Bush-Whacking and Other Asiatic Tales and Memories* (London: Heinemann, 1929), 305.

47. David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (London: John Murray, 2005). A similar solicitude is shown in a short story by Flora Annie Steel, 'In the Permanent Way', about a Hindu holy man who sits in meditation in the path of a railway line across the desert; every time a train approaches, the English train driver gets out and lifts him off the track. Flora Annie Steel, *In the Permanent Way and Other Stories* (London: William Heinemann, 1898), 27–42.

48. Earlier that year *Blackwoods* had published another jungle story, Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness', which appeared in three instalments in February, March and April 1899.

headwaters of the Sempan river in Pahang province, and gives a loving description of the river and forest, its great trees draped with creepers, ferns and orchids in this untouched *terra incognita*. 'It was with a feeling akin to shame that I gave the word which was to disturb the profound peace and to set man's defacing thumb mark upon all this inviolate beauty.'⁴⁹ In the beginning was the disturbing word that brings change into the hitherto timeless paradise of the forest wilderness. If the jungle is the place of innocence, it reveals the interloper to be other than innocent, whatever his intentions — or, to put it another way, Clifford is Adam in this paradise, but he also introduces to it the serpent that will bring it to grief. He has set the clock of history ticking in the jungle. Nine years later, when Pahang has become a part of the British Protectorate, he has occasion to visit the place again, and sees — roads, bungalows, a concrete dam, and a power station with a corrugated iron roof, providing light for the gold mines at Raub, seven miles away. The next day he rides home by a road marked all along its way by new plantations and the signs of commercial progress and material development.

And then, though all the changes around me had been things for which I had worked and striven with all my heart and soul, somehow it seemed to me for the moment that it was not only the river that had lost its vitality and freedom. Together we had shared the wild life which we had known and loved in the past; together in the present we went soberly, working in chains.⁵⁰

Leonard Woolf would probably not have succumbed to the sentimentalism that colours Clifford's vision, linking the spoliation of the jungle to the loss of his own youthful freedom. But Woolf was quite capable of representing the jungle as a sanctuary, in which the demands of modern life might be escaped. His own enjoyment of the nights spent observing animals by the water-holes is heightened by the work obsession, and the responsibilities of office, that governed his days. He escapes from history into the other world of natural history. In stories and memoirs and travellers' tales there are many examples of the representation of the jungle as pastoral, and they are all pretty similar, in their celebration of the simple, timeless, beautiful, but cruel life of the wilderness in contrast to a modern human society which is felt to be irksome, cosseted and inauthentic.

Kipling's *Jungle Books* are rather a special case, with their didactic insistence on the supremacy of the Law over all inhabitants of the jungle (except the monkeys), and on the emerging supremacy of the human child over the other animals, which has to be read as an allegory of the 'natural' authority of the country-born British in India. But like other jungle idylls, these books are

49. Hugh Clifford, 'In Chains', *The Further Side of Silence* (London: Curtis Brown, 1916), 371.

50. Hugh Clifford, *The Further Side of Silence*, 387–88.

motivated by what we might call a prehistoric or anti-historic urge. The first two Mowgli stories to be written were 'In the Rukh' (1893) and 'Mowgli's Brothers' (first published in 1894, but completed in November 1892). In 'In the Rukh', Mowgli is already an adult, and he becomes a husband and father and works for white men in the Department of Woods and Forests.⁵¹ All the other Mowgli stories turn the clock back to before that overdetermined loss of innocence. 'Mowgli's Brothers' begins with the man-cub's adoption by wolves, and moves forward to the moment of his expulsion by the wolf-pack, and his return to the world of men; this is the first story in the first *Jungle Book* and subsequent tales have to rewind again, back past this lapsarian moment, to chronicle the boy's wonderful adventures with the forest animals.

So long as Mowgli's jungle is prelapsarian and prehistoric, it can be represented as a felicitous space (in Gaston Bachelard's phrase), and is another of Kipling's versions of pastoral — until history, in the shape of the white man, changes its orientation.⁵² Adventures happen in *The Jungle Book* but they are without lasting consequences for Mowgli and after each adventure he returns, as it were, to the beginning. The only serious thing that could happen to him would be expulsion from paradise, which would be the beginning of a different kind of story. From this consequence the child as swain is protected so long as he remains within the pastoral frame.⁵³ But in the last story in *The Second Jungle Book*, when he is nearly seventeen years old, Mowgli's supremacy has grown so much (in this story, he is addressed as Master of the Jungle, and his wolf brother and his two teachers Baloo the bear and Bagheera the panther all lick his feet), and his ties to the human world so manifest, that he can no longer live as one of the animals.⁵⁴ The Man-Cub has become the Master of the Jungle, but in assuming its mastery, he no longer belongs in it. The jungle for him has become replete with problem and tragedy. He has fallen into the Rousseauesque trap; to master nature is to exile ourselves from it for ever.

51. W. W. Robson follows editorial precedent by printing 'In the Rukh' as an appendix to his edition of *The Second Jungle Book*, 178–201.

52. See John McBratney, 'Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space in Kipling's *Jungle Book*', *Victorian Studies* 35:3 (Spring 1992), 277–93.

53. William Empson in 1935 explored 'a shift onto the child . . . of the obscure tradition of pastoral', but without reference to Kipling, its most notable living practitioner. William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral: A Study of the Pastoral Form in Literature* [1935] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 203. The natural world is much more securely and simply a pastoral 'felicitous space' in Kipling's *Just So Stories* [1902] (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1987).

54. Rudyard Kipling, 'The Spring Running', *The Second Jungle Book*, 155–77. The story was originally entitled 'Mowgli Leaves the Jungle for Ever'. See Norman Page, *A Kipling Companion* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 47–49. It may be of interest that Mowgli has to

Leonard Woolf too, in very different circumstances, came to regret that the price of mastery of the jungle was alienation. He thought that perhaps the first 'twinge of doubt' in his 'imperialist soul' was registered in Jaffna, when he was, he says, unfairly accused of striking a Tamil with his riding-whip.⁵⁵ In his years in Hambantota, he had to admit that the villagers saw him as 'part of the white man's machine, which they did not understand', although his attitude to them was 'entirely benevolent and altruistic'; he began to acknowledge 'the absurdity of a people of one civilization and mode of life trying to impose its rule upon an entirely different civilization and mode of life'.⁵⁶ His every authoritative intervention in local life seemed to emphasize his difference from it, reflecting back to him an image not of his goodwill but of his unwelcome intrusion. A growing conviction of the impertinence of colonial mastery was one of the reasons why Woolf decided not to return to Ceylon in 1912, and it became the basis of his growing anti-imperialist convictions and his career as an internationalist and critic of empire.⁵⁷ The most striking evidence of this change of heart, as Woolf acknowledged, was his jungle novel.

The jungle and the people who lived in the Sinhalese villages fascinated, almost obsessed me in Ceylon. They continued to obsess me in London, in Putney or Bloomsbury, and in Cambridge. *The Village in the Jungle* was a novel in which I tried somehow or other vicariously to live their lives. It was also, in some curious way, the symbol of the anti-imperialism which had been growing upon me more and more in my last years in Ceylon.⁵⁸

The writing of the novel (it was written in England) was, as Yasmin Gooneratne says, 'one of the means by which he worked his way towards his decision to resign from his post, and exchange a career of certain and brilliant success in Britain's colonial service for the very different satisfactions and frequent insecurities of a literary and political life in London'.⁵⁹

leave the jungle at the same age (nearly seventeen) at which Rudyard Kipling entered the world of work. The story of *Kim* stops when the hero is about the same age; it is hard to imagine an older Kim being such an attractive and unproblematic figure.

55. Leonard Woolf, *Growing*, 113.

56. *Ibid.*, 191, 193.

57. See for example Leonard Woolf, *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (London: Labour Research Department and George Allen and Unwin, 1920), *Economic Imperialism* (London: Swarthmore Press, 1920) and *Imperialism and Civilization* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928). See also Duncan Wilson, *Leonard Woolf: A Political Biography* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1978), 92–118, 159–77.

58. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911–1918* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 212.

59. 'Introduction' to Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle*, 17.

The setting of *The Village in the Jungle* is recognizably the Hambantota district of colonial Ceylon described in Woolf's diaries, letters and later autobiography. But he has twisted the usual topography of colonial fiction, which places white experience in the centre of the picture while the local scene provides a colourful background or adventurous test. Woolf tropes this generic pattern, turning it inside out so that the novel becomes heterocentric and is in this respect postcolonial. Located in the deep jungle and in the lives of people who could hardly be more remote from European experience, it is actuated by a very different idea of centre and margin. As if to underline this polemical centring of otherness, Woolf placed extreme alterity at the heart of the novel in the shape of the story of a young woman who adopts a wild fawn and nurses it with her own child. After she is assaulted and the deer is tortured and killed in front of her by a gang of her neighbours who think it is a devil bringing misfortune on the village, she is taken home where she dies of a broken heart. This could hardly be more scandalously different from the kind of home life portrayed by the English novel, even in Bloomsbury.⁶⁰ *The Village in the Jungle* — uniquely in the history of English fiction, it seems unnecessary to say — focuses on the life of Sinhalese cultivators and hunters. Though the principal characters are the hunter Silindu and his daughters and son-in-law, the village itself is the main theme as the title accurately announces. All around the village lies the jungle, and beyond that, in the towns that are the periphery of the novel's vision, lies the apparatus of colonial government — its law courts and jails, places of incomprehensible rituals and an alien language — and the equally bewildering operations of literacy and a money economy. The only consequential European character, a magistrate, is firmly decentred in the story, and has never been to Beddagama, the village in the jungle, before he is called there to conduct a murder investigation.

Silindu and his family are jungle-dwellers but they have little time to spare for the beauties of nature while they are locked in a lifelong struggle for survival, in and against their habitat. Silindu is a hunter but not a sportsman. His jungle is dangerous and unforgiving, but at the same time a familiar, quotidian environment, both terrifying and commonplace. The narrative concurs with Silindu's view of the jungle as a place of evil, and yet this metaphysical discourse is hardly borne out by the action of the book, for if there are evils in this story they are the human evils of greed, ignorance and cruelty. The jungle is formidable enough as the vigorous natural force which every day confronts the village with the entirely real and material danger of erasure.

60. The relation of this novel to the culture of English modernism is one of the topics of a wide-ranging essay by Mark A. Wollaeger, 'The Woolfs in the Jungle: Intertextuality, Sexuality, and the Emergence of Female Modernism in *The Voyage Out*, *The Village in the Jungle*, and *Heart of Darkness*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 64:1 (March 2003), 33–69.

The jungle surrounded it, overhung it, continually pressed in upon it. It stood at the door of the houses, always ready to press in upon the compounds and open spaces, to break through the mud huts, and to choke up the tracks and paths. It was only by yearly clearing with axe and katty that it could be kept out. It was a living wall about the village, a wall which, if the axe were spared, would creep in and smother and blot out the village itself.⁶¹

The village in the jungle is also the village against the jungle.⁶² Whether the natural environment is really transitive and malevolent, as Silindu feels and this opening passage suggests, or is just an extraordinarily harsh ecology with a precarious margin for survival, the struggle enacted here is essentially a tragic one, a war between culture and nature which will end, as we have seen, with the last human survivor reduced to a feral solitude as the forest reclaims and obliterates the village. Here the relationship between human beings and their natural surroundings is neither pastoral nor therapeutic, but a matter of brutal economics, glossed by the animistic beliefs and the fatalism of people like Silindu and his family.

The jungle does not belong to Silindu — to him it would be meaningless to call it a possession, his property or anyone else's — but he belongs to it, naturally (that is, as a native), and in spite of their appalling hardships and misfortunes he and his family cannot imagine living anywhere else. Life in the village may be thankless but, as Babun says, 'Surely it is a more bitter thing to die in a strange place'.⁶³ Villagers who migrate to the towns are lost and miserable, or corrupted. When Babun is sent to prison for six months he simply dies. The villagers are completely bound in to their forest habitat, in an environmental integration that any alienated post-Romantic might envy, at a distance. Silindu can find his way as if by instinct through the trackless forest, and can hear the animals speak to him. His daughter takes a deer for her child. Though the natural world is every day a matter of life and death to them, it is never a problem.

So the jungle in Woolf's novel is a habitat viewed from the inside by the people who live in it, for the narrative mediates, most of the time, a native point of view, one condition of which is the marginality of colonial discourses and institutions to this way of life. When they are brought before him, the colonial

61. Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle*, 39.

62. In an article that makes mention of his own observations of the temples at Angkor and the uninhabited forest in Pahang, Hugh Clifford congratulated Woolf on his discovery of a 'profound truth' in his Ceylon novel. 'That truth is that, in all the long history of man in the tropics, the Jungle has always in the end triumphed over mankind.' Hugh Clifford, 'Mankind and the Jungle', *Living Age* 278 (July/September 1913), 162.

63. Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle*, 143.

magistrate interprets the speech of the jungle-dwellers — their complaints, their evidence, Silindu's confession to murder — as conscientiously as he can, but he knows he will never discover the real story (which has already been entered into the narrative record which he cannot read, being a part of it). In the powerful courtroom scene, the magistrate never quite pieces together, from the incoherent and perjured evidence brought before him, the story of the feud between Silindu and Babun and their enemies which the reader has already watched unfold in earlier chapters. In consequence, a fatal injustice is done which will lead to the destruction of the family. As symbolically indicated by the way the great open doors of the courthouse disclose a view across the town and the bay to the indistinct and interminable jungle beyond, the magistrate's vision of this jungle tragedy is blurred and imperfect. But the narrative knows exactly what happened. This dramatic irony makes a formal point not only about the limits of the official colonial vision, but about the special claims of *this* representation, which is privileged to see into the life of the jungle and its inhabitants *when there is no colonial presence to observe them*. In other words, Woolf imagines a life for the jungle independent of the scopic regimes that he himself represented.

The novel has chosen as its main subject just those aspects of jungle life which were impenetrable to the colonial gaze, and which Leonard Woolf the Assistant Government Agent in Hambantota district had found most frustrating to his magisterial enquiries — the unfathomable family feuds and alliances, the complicated disputes over property and women and debts, the magic and superstition, and the impenetrable inner lives of people who were too afraid or too clever or too inarticulate or just too different to reveal them to him. In showing the inadequacy of the colonial authorities to understand, the impertinence of their attempt to intervene in these things, and the part played by an imported modernity in making these people's sufferings worse, *The Village in the Jungle* dissociates itself from the colonial project, and becomes the symbol of the anti-imperialism which had been growing upon its author more and more in his last years in Ceylon. It marks another transition too. 'My seven years in the Ceylon Civil Service,' Woolf was to recall, 'turned me from an aesthetic into a political animal.'⁶⁴ The novel is a gesture of decolonization, a project of giving autonomy to the modality and experience of people who belong to it. In most representations, the jungle had seemed to need its Western observer — Wallace to draw a line through it, Clifford to read its ruins, and others to transform its animals into game or specimens, to be reported in sporting anecdotes or travellers' tales or

64. Leonard Woolf, *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939 to 1969* (London: Hogarth Press, 1969), 153.

scientific exhibits, or to dress it as a stage where the adventure of a hero can be performed. Woolf's book seeks to emancipate the jungle into its own story.

The ironies attendant on this generous ambition are clear enough.⁶⁵ Can the colonial writer make himself postcolonial? Woolf can hardly have been blind to the anomaly of undertaking this heterocentric project in English, and indeed in writing. He may emancipate the place by decentering the white presence and limiting its vision, but in doing so he reinscribes foreign authority in a narrative omniscience. Its participation in colonial discourse is what enables the anti-colonial gesture in the first place. Woolf's knowledge of Ceylon was that of a colonial officer and was not separable from the power of his office over its inhabitants. In the novel, he is able 'vicariously to live their lives' through his command of discourses that could mean nothing to them — including the English language, comparative ethnography, statistics, and perhaps above all the protocols of the realist novel and the convention of an impersonal omniscient narration, and the particular precedent of the rural fiction of Thomas Hardy.⁶⁶

With this equipment, the novel can see through the eyes of Silindu and the others, but it can see further. It can also share at will the magistrate's view, but free itself from the limits of his vision. In this stereoscopic ability to transcend the bounds of both indigenous and colonial cognition, Woolf's narrative becomes something like a supercolonial discourse on the jungle, able to permeate any alterity as the invisible but all-seeing embodiment of a completely naturalized authority. The more we are given of the voice of indigenous interiority, the greater the authority of the narration which can mediate and contain it. That narration is the expression of a consciousness whose boundaries are nowhere and whose centre is everywhere, like that other benevolent despot, God. To set the jungle free, Woolf takes it completely into his possession. What else could he do?

65. Some of them are canvassed in Elleke Boehmer, "Immeasurable Strangeness" in *Imperial Times: Leonard Woolf and W. B. Yeats*, in *Modernism and Empire*, ed. Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 93–111. The novel is still an issue of debate in Sri Lanka itself. Regi Siriwardena calls it 'a work which should be known by every person in Ceylon who is seriously interested in literature', and describes its translation as 'virtually a classic of contemporary Sinhala literature'. *Selected Writings of Regi Siriwardena* (Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2005–06) 1: 408, 2: 475.

66. Hardy was one of the literary heroes of Woolf and his generation, and as an anti-Victorian 'definitely upon our side'. Leonard Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880–1904* (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), 166. 'Lastly, when you get to know them, you find beneath the surface in almost everyone [in Jaffna and Hambantota district] a profound melancholy and fatalism which I find beautiful and sympathetic – just as something like it permeates the scenery and characters of a Hardy novel.' Leonard Woolf, *Growing*, 54.

George Orwell and the natural history of Burma

George Orwell's most popular book tells a story about animals, and there are animals in all his novels. The upbringing of boys of his social class encouraged a close and sometimes proprietorial and predatory interest in the natural world, for the 'lower-upper-middle class' had assumed some of the gentry's absorption in matters of land and livestock, though their ownership of these things might amount to no more than a suburban garden and a cat.⁶⁷ Orwell's was in many ways a withdrawn and isolated childhood, with not much scope for emotionally enriching experience. 'Most of the good memories of my childhood,' he was to recall, 'and up to the age of about twenty, are in some way connected with animals.'⁶⁸ My argument here will be that in his writing too, and particularly in the Burmese material, the world of natural history, of animals and growing things, moves in to fill a gap, to supply a want, and becomes a way of seeing and talking about what it is hard to see and talk about in simply human terms.

What happens is that nature, and animal life in particular, becomes a sort of code — like a joke — in which matters can be made articulate to both characters and to a narrator. Above all, the natural world is a way for those to see the Orient who are not able, for the time being and for one reason or another, to see the Orientals. Orwell gave one telling instance in his essay 'Marrakech', written early in 1939 while he was spending half a year in French Morocco for his health. For several weeks, he did not notice the file of ancient women who passed his house every day, bent double under loads of firewood. 'In a tropical landscape, one's eye takes in everything except the human beings,' he noted. 'People with brown skins are next to invisible.'⁶⁹ But he saw the donkeys. In fact he had not been five minutes on Moroccan soil, he said, before he noticed the overloading of the donkeys. It made him very angry. In the essay, his indignation at the suffering of the animals renders ironic the fact that for a long time the suffering of the women was invisible to him — in other words, his memory of the animals brings the women into the light of his memory and his narrative after all.

Orwell's novel *Burmese Days* (1934) has as its central character an Englishman, John Flory, who works for a timber company. As glumly as Leonard Woolf a generation earlier, Flory acknowledges himself a part of that machinery that was converting Asia to modernity, and he can cynically imagine some future triumph of empire in which all local variety — the jungle, its villages, monasteries and pagodas — will have been replaced by an orderly reproduction suburbia,

67. Orwell described his background as 'lower-upper-middle class' in *The Road to Wigan Pier* [1937], *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, 20 vols., ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986–98) 5: 113.

68. George Orwell, 'Such, Such Were the Joys' [1956], *Complete Works* 19: 368.

69. Orwell, 'Marrakech' [1939], *Complete Works* 11: 418, 420.

measured out with 'pink villas fifty yards apart'.⁷⁰ His own job involves converting the trees into commodity, an industrial process of chopping and replanting timber. But at other times he can see Burmese nature with different eyes, and can imagine a relationship with it which is not one of violence and spoliation, but rather of integration, kinship and pleasure. How Flory sees and behaves towards the natural world is figurative of his painful, contradictory, and eventually tragic relation with Burma and the Burmese.

He too turns to the natural world as a sanctuary, as we see when, in the fourth chapter, he sets out with his dog on a solitary walk, seeking escape from the awfulness of the little town where he lives, full of self-disgust after an encounter with his Burmese mistress Ma Hla May and unable to face the only social alternative, an evening's boozing at the European club. The edge of the jungle is ugly and unwelcoming, dried-up and lifeless, with its stunted bushes, turpentiney fruits and poisonous smells. But as he moves alone into the interior, the nature of the place seems to change. Coming to a clear pool where the roots of a peepul tree make a natural cavern, he strips and steps into the water, accompanied by the dog. Unarmed, unclothed, helpless as an unborn child in its amniotic element, he sits in the cool water as shoals of tiny curious fish come nibbling at his body. He hears birds in the great tree above him.

A flock of green pigeons were up there, eating the berries. Flory gazed up into the great green dome of the tree, trying to distinguish the birds; they were invisible, they matched the leaves so perfectly, and yet the whole tree was alive with them, shimmering, as though the ghosts of birds were shaking it. Flo rested herself against the roots and growled up at the invisible creatures. (57)

This is another jungle pastoral, with a recognizably Wordsworthian sylvan cathedral, and here an epiphany (or Pentecost) is vouchsafed to Flory only after and because he has laid aside the panoply of agency and even identity, confronting the jungle as a naked animal, a creature not of the colonial history the British were making in Burma, but of natural history. He and the jungle surrender to each other and he sees into its green heart. Time stops, and for once in his clumsy life it is natural for Flory to be where he is, as integral a part of a scene of nature as the birds whose colour matches the leaves. He seems for this moment of stillness to be as perfectly adapted as they are to the environment of which tree, water,

70. George Orwell, *Burmese Days* [1934] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 40. Page references in the text refer to this edition. The text and pagination of the Penguin edition follow those of Volume 2 of the *Complete Works*. Flory's vision of the triumph of modernity anticipates Lévi-Strauss complaining, some twenty years later, that 'the whole of Asia is beginning to look like a dingy suburb'. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 43.

birds and man together are the constituents.⁷¹ If this moment is as Romantic as Tintern Abbey, its aftermath is as Romantic as the Ancient Mariner. For time resumes, history slips back into gear, and Flory is jolted back into chronic alienation and insufficiency. 'Alone, alone, the bitterness of being alone!' The loveliness of the scene only brings a self-pitying awareness that he has no one to share it with, and even his pleasure at having seen it reminds him of how different his experience has been from more normal encounters between Western men and Burmese birds.

One does not often see green pigeons so closely when they are alive. They are high-flying birds, living in the treetops, and they do not come to the ground, or only to drink. When one shoots them, if they are not killed outright, they cling to the branch until they die, and drop long after one has given up waiting and gone away. (57)

Later in the novel Flory will be seen slaughtering green pigeons with his gun, and indeed coaching Elizabeth Lackersteen as she unsportingly shoots one on the branch of 'a great peepul tree' that looks familiar (171–72).

The tripartite pattern of this encounter — alienation, then integration and epiphany, then a reaffirming of alienation — is almost immediately repeated in human terms. Flory and the dog, returning home, get lost in the jungle as darkness falls. A Burmese with a bullock-cart takes them to his village, a tumbledown enclave in which there seems to be a compact between people and the natural world and its animals. The first thing Flory sees is a woman chasing a dog round a hut, not aggressively but in play, laughing, 'and the dog was also laughing in its fashion' (59). The stranger with the dog is welcomed into the village, courteous conversation is exchanged, he is given refreshment and a conventional blessing. It seems another timeless place, untouched by history and indifferent to the business of the outside world. (Somerset Maugham had described such a village a few years before, and had allowed himself to marvel at and briefly envy the changelessness of its inhabitants' lives. 'But for them the days unchanging added their long line to one another without haste and without surprise; they followed their appointed round and led the lives their fathers had led before them. The pattern was traced and all they had to do was to follow it. Was that not wisdom and in their constancy was there not beauty?')⁷²

71. The environmentalist writer David Ehrenfeld wrote an interesting essay about Orwell's admiration for 'environments where people and nature interact in a positive way'. David Ehrenfeld, *Beginning Again: People and Nature in the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 18.

72. W. Somerset Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, 84. It does not occur to Maugham, as it might have occurred to Clifford and Woolf and even Flory, that his own incursion could itself be a threat to this idyllic changelessness.

Flory takes pleasure in this idyllic interlude, which offers him the one social contact in the novel that is not problematic for him; the village in the jungle is a place he need neither fear nor control. But he cannot stay, and so he returns to his own world, the European-centred space more than ever repugnant to him, to his Burmese servant who 'hated to see his master behaving differently from other white men' (60), to his Burmese mistress who has gone gambling with the money he paid her for sexual services, and to a communal life which consists of getting drunk every night with horrible people who dislike him, in the club where Burmese people are excluded, spoken of as vermin, and regarded as racial enemies.

The pattern — rehearsed with the green pigeons, and repeated in the jungle village — recurs in Orwell's writing and is one of the keys to his understanding of the relation between the human and the natural world, and (in so far as it operates figurally) between West and East in the colonial age, and between other asymmetrical relations, most importantly of class.⁷³ In the first phase of the pattern, what is Burmese is seen as grotesque, ugly and alienating. Then, a Romantic epiphany reveals a kinship between the observing subject and the object of observation, seeming to offer a romantic integration into a kindly and unalienated natural life. But to glimpse this possibility is also to see that it is impossible to sustain, for the constraints of ideology — the roles provided for the observer by his place in the imperial project, by his race, his gender, his class, his profession — drive him back into postures of antagonism, and perhaps even acts of violence. The antagonism and the violence re-affirm his earlier alienation, this time not only from the natural scene but from himself, for his betrayal of the glimpsed relationship is also a betrayal of himself, of (as we say) his better nature. This tropic pattern, with its turning and turning back, can help us to frame, in the particular instance of Orwell's treatment of Burmese nature, a more general argument about the representation of Asia in the colonial period. The more closely the colonial observer is drawn, emotionally, to the object of observation, the more unbridgeable seems the estranging gulf between them, a gulf opened up by the very conditions that enabled his observation in the first place — who he is and what he is doing there.

Flory has conventionally romantic feelings for his surroundings, but this is unusual among the English at Kyauktada. More typical, it seems, is Elizabeth, the girl he falls in love with. To her, Burmese nature seems Hobbesian, monstrous and chaotic, and she has brought to the East a quasi-paranoid theory of natural history, and of colonial history, so that she assumes humankind and nature to be forever at war, just as she assumes the relationship between the West and the Orient to be always one of antagonism. To her a harmless buffalo looks like a

73. See Douglas Kerr, 'Orwell, Animals and the East', *Essays in Criticism* 49: 3 (July 1999), 234–55.

killer, the shape of the Burmese skull indicates (according to something she thinks she has read in a magazine) criminal tendencies, and although she feels some kinship with the Burmese women, she dismisses them as 'so *coarse*-looking; like some kind of animal' (122). She treats Burma like a dangerous beast, and is only roused to enthusiasm by the prospect of a hunting expedition in the jungle; this encourages Flory, the harmless wanderer of the earlier chapter, to assume for her benefit the impressive role of white hunter, and he wins her heart by killing a leopard. When he puts a freshly killed pigeon limp and warm into her hands, it is clear that this is the jungle, and he is the man, of her dreams (172).

Her delight over the dead bird stands in emblematic contrast to Flory's delight over the living birds at the forest pool. These two moments belong to different orders of nature. The natural world excites Elizabeth precisely because she is not part of it: she defines herself by her conquest of it. Here, her understanding of Burma is exactly congruent with her understanding of wild nature, the former figured in the latter. Both are dangerous, potentially overwhelming; but in their grotesque and barbaric difference, they are there to be triumphed over and controlled. While Flory is inclined to see Burma as 'kindly', to Elizabeth it is 'beastly' (283, 137). In the end Flory's weak liberal insights into the possibility of Burmese life as an environment that could be belonged to, rather than dominated, wither in the harsh atmosphere of colonialism understood as exploitation by force. The discourse of empire drowns out that of natural history, and Flory the would-be Romantic excursionist has to accept the role of reluctant imperialist, his relation with the natural world being one of enmity, estrangement and violence. For him it cannot be an option to immerse himself quietly in Burmese nature, or to leave it alone and intact.

In Orwell's two famous stories about Burma, 'A Hanging' (1931) and 'Shooting an Elephant' (1936), the pattern of integration and estrangement recurs, and both times the pattern is activated by an animal. 'A Hanging' is an early piece apparently based in Orwell's experience of Burma.⁷⁴ It describes the execution of a Hindu, in a Burmese prison yard. The narrator is a member of the party who escort the condemned man to the scaffold, listen as he calls upon his god, see him die, and go off together, in a mood of jocular relief, to have a drink afterwards.⁷⁵ But what interests me most at this point is the strange case of the dog.

74. 'I watched a man hanged once; it seemed to me worse than a thousand murders.' *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), *Complete Works* 5: 136–37. Even so, there are striking similarities between 'A Hanging' and 'The Vice-Consul', an episode in Somerset Maugham's 1922 book, *On a Chinese Screen*, 143–47. See Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), 88–89.

75. George Orwell, 'A Hanging' (1931), *Complete Works* 10: 207–10. Page references in the text hereafter refer to vol. 10 of the *Complete Works*.

In the prison yard a disagreeable job is to be done — part of what Orwell called ‘the dirty work of Empire’.⁷⁶ There is a careful choreography in the ritual of the execution, with the Indian warders crowding close to the prisoner, while the less precisely seen group of ‘the rest of us, magistrates and the like’, keep their distance as the man is bound, process to the gallows behind him, and stand ‘five yards away’ to see him die (208). Differences, as well as rituals, are being observed here. A measure is also taken of cultural distances, for although the Europeans present are not identified as such until the last paragraph, all the Asians are ethnically designated — the Hindu prisoner, Indian warders, Eurasian jailer, Burmese magistrate, and Dravidian head jailer. Asians are also distanced from a European norm by the deviances of their quaint and pompous speech from the style of the narrative discourse. The description of the condemned man himself is further estranged by the derealizing detail of his moustache, which makes him resemble ‘a comic man on the films’ (207).

Smoothly, if nervously, the rituals of imperial justice are performed on this alien material, until a ‘dreadful thing’ happens, and the procession to the gallows is interrupted, by a dog.

It came bounding among us with a loud volley of barks, and leapt round us wagging its whole body, wild with glee at finding so many human beings together. It was a large woolly dog, half Airedale, half pariah. For a moment it pranced round us, and then, before anyone could stop it, it had made a dash for the prisoner, and jumping up tried to lick his face. Everyone stood aghast, too taken aback even to grab at the dog. (208)

Blundering in among the principals of this drama, the dog seems not to know its proper place in the background. It is noisy, promiscuous, alarming and gleeful. It is of no particular breed itself, being half Airedale and half pariah, and it demolishes in a moment the carefully constructed barriers and categories that had distinguished Dravidian and Eurasian, people in front and people behind, the breaker and the enforcers of the law. ‘[W]agging its whole body’, for a while it succeeds in turning this *marche funèbre* into a carnival procession, subverting authority’s rituals with its barking, bounding, leaping, prancing, dancing and gambolling, ‘taking everything as part of the game’, and confounding distance and measurement by keeping just out of reach of its pursuers and dodging the stones that they throw. The unruly life of the body sprawls untidily into the hierarchical performances of politics.

76. George Orwell, ‘Shooting an Elephant’ (1936), *Complete Works* 10: 501. The same phrase occurs in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Complete Works* 5: 136.

By the time nature is subdued by culture, and the dog secured by the narrator's handkerchief through its collar, history and the procession can resume. But its interruption by natural history and its modality means that political history is now seen differently by the narrator, as he paces behind the prisoner. The animal makes the human visible, as the narrator's English eye, trained from an early age to pay attention to what animals do, but not always so ready to take note of natives, now finds its attention drawn back to the native as human, by the deictic precedent of the dog. Abundantly alive in its physical senses, but politically illiterate, the dog had looked at the procession and seen, simply, 'many human beings together'. But to the narrator, the occasion can only be justified, and coherent, if predicated on an extreme distance, a categorical difference, between himself and the condemned man, certainly, but also between himself and the Asian functionaries — jailer and warders — from whom he keeps his fastidious literal distance. But when he looks now at the prisoner, as he steps slightly aside to avoid a puddle, the narrator sees as it were through the skin, the ethnic difference, to a man like himself, one of 'many human beings together'. No longer a barely human, 'puny wisp of a man', with vague eyes and an absurd moustache, the prisoner is now solidly embodied and inescapably aware, 'a healthy, conscious man'.

This man was not dying, he was alive just as we were alive. All the organs of his body were working — bowels digesting food, skin renewing itself, nails growing, tissues forming — all toiling away in solemn foolery. His nails would still be growing when he stood on the drop, when he was falling through the air with a tenth of a second to live. His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned — reasoned even about puddles. He and we were a party of men walking together, seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world; and in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone — one mind less, one world less. (208–09)

Here is a different way of looking at the native as animal, for this glimpse into the animal life of the prisoner is not a trope of alienation but an admission of kinship. The secret physiological workings of the prisoner's body now also appear as the tokens of the human interiority, the faculties of perception and consciousness and the private life, that bind him into the same community as the narrator, who now actually paraphrases the dog's perception of that community as 'a party of men walking together'. Narrator and condemned man are nonetheless, of course, the same animal. For the dog, whose intervention seemed a distraction from the business in hand, has in fact enabled it to be seen or seen through in the most uncompromising (and 'humanist' way), in a truly natural modality.

It is an essential part of the meaning of this imperial epiphany that it has no effect on what happens. The execution proceeds. With the noose round his neck, the man begins to call on his god with a steady, rhythmical cry. With the reiteration of this single sound, the prisoner into whose heart the narrator seemed to see for a moment has now at the last become opaque again, estranged, a 'lashed, hooded man on the drop', making an 'abominable noise' which evades interpretation, except that it sounds neither like a prayer nor a cry for help. It is the noise of the ungraspably, invincibly foreign, and at last the superintendent — 'perhaps he was counting the cries' — brings it to an end. 'There was a clanking noise, and then dead silence. The prisoner had vanished, and the rope was twisting on itself' (209). The superintendent reaches out with his stick and pokes the bare body — to satisfy himself that the man is not only still but dead (nothing going on inside him), of course, but also as if to deny the momentary permeability of that body, which had allowed the narrator his awkward insight. The rest of the narrative performs a sort of cover-up, a betrayal of that insight. It is all over, and the servants of empire can get on with things with a sense of relief. But the society, the civility that has been secured by the annihilation of the deviant ('the prisoner had vanished') reveals itself to be a dreadful travesty of community. Now the narrator turns in relief to watch what seems to him 'a homely, jolly scene after the hanging', the breakfast of the other prisoners, where the men eat squatting in long rows, served rice out of a bucket under the eye of warders armed with lathis (210).

It is a miserable set of values that finds comfort in such a scene. The last paragraphs of the narrative give a really dismaying picture of bad community, built on violence, repression, anxiety and segregation, even when in the aftermath of the execution there is among the officials a relieved and even festive atmosphere of something like celebration, laughter, relaxation, and friendship across the divides of race and rank. (The dog, now knowing better, retreats timorously from these people and slips away.) The narrator himself, burdened by the insight which he has immediately had to smother, is now (like Flory in *Burmese Days*) subject to the corruption of those who have 'to live [their] real life in secret'.⁷⁷ He is estranged from himself — 'Several people laughed — at what, nobody seemed certain . . . I found that I was laughing quite loudly' — as the price of denying both his doubts about the 'machinery of despotism' and his own agency in it (210).⁷⁸ At the superintendent's invitation, the white men and their good

77. George Orwell, *Burmese Days*, 70.

78. See John Coombes, 'A New Dissection of Orwell's Elephant', *Practices of Literature and Politics*, ed. Francis Barker et al. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1979), 245–57. The phrase 'machinery of despotism' is from George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier, Complete Works* 5: 136.

native subordinates go off to drink whisky together, the scene itself being a nasty imperial utopia that parodies Kipling's dreams of an empire of co-operation between faithful natives and authoritative white men with the common touch. Their hysterical bonhomie and conspiratorial closeness are the clues to a secret sharing in what Sara Suleri has described as the 'economy of complicity and guilt' of Anglo-Indian discourse.⁷⁹

'A Hanging' stands as a kind of allegory of the empire which disgusted Orwell because he came to see it as not only unjust but also untrue. Its injustice robbed the native and its untruth corrupted the imperialist, who must either deny or conceal recognition of its indefensible (even when benevolent) tyranny. The 'secret vein of dirt'⁸⁰ (to use one of Orwell's recurrent figures) had to be purged, and anyone can see that his various passages through the labyrinths of powerlessness, poverty and distress — the filthy sculleries of Paris hotels, the mines of the north, the Spanish trenches — are part of his own attempts at a personal catharsis. There was an appropriately animal phrase for men who abandoned or lost their imperial caste, as he tells himself with some satisfaction in *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

You have talked so often of going to the dogs and — well, here are the dogs, and you have reached them, and you can stand it. It takes off a lot of anxiety.⁸¹

'Shooting an Elephant' was written for John Lehmann's *New Writing* in 1936, two years after the publication of *Burmese Days*. It is a first-person account of the shooting of a working elephant which has gone 'must' and killed a coolie.⁸² Another animal encounter, presented as offering a 'glimpse . . . of the real nature of imperialism' (502), the story provides a remarkably inclusive recapitulation, and development, of earlier themes of natural history and the colonial enterprise.

'In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people' (501). The Burmese in the story feature as an undifferentiated and hostile crowd, in a town where anti-European feeling was very bitter; but though the thrust of the story is anti-imperial, it is far from unambiguously pro-Burmese. The local people are shown as hopelessly incapable of mounting a real resistance to their masters, or of doing anything with their *ressentiment*, except standing around and jeering at the Europeans. Local people are without agency and transitivity,

79. Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3.

80. George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *Complete Works* 1: 80.

81. *Ibid.*, 1: 17.

82. The story appears to be based on the experience of a Major E. C. Kenny, reported in the *Rangoon Gazette*, 22 March 1926, under the heading 'Rogue Elephant Shot'. See *Complete Works of George Orwell*, supplementary volume, ed. Peter Davison (privately printed, 2003), 39.

they do not make things happen, they can only watch: Burmese history is colonial history, and the British are the people who do things, to and for the Burmese — this is the grammar of empire. When an elephant goes out of control, a British police officer is sent for, for the local population are not allowed weapons and are quite helpless against it; their only function is as spectators of a show of masterly force. Their inability to take an active part in the story is the condition of the imperialism which the narrator explicitly repudiates, but at the same time it earns them his contempt for it makes them appear an ineffectual herd — the Oriental crowd, made to seem less than fully human, and parasitic on the work of Europeans for both their security and their entertainment. This ambivalence expresses itself, characteristically, in an uncertainty as to whether the Burmese have anything *inside them*. ‘No one had the guts to raise a riot’ (501); on the other hand, ‘I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest’s guts’ (502).

The narrator himself is ‘all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British’ (501), of whom he is one. The oppressions visited on the Burmese are physical, and include the discomforts and violence of imprisonment and flogging, whereas the narrator himself is ‘oppressed’ intellectually, with an ‘intolerable sense of guilt’ (501). The dirty work of empire has worked to dehumanize the Burmese, and this demands sympathy, but it is hard to be fully sympathetic with what is less than fully human. And hence the confusion. ‘All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred for the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible’ (501–02). It is in this confused state of mind that he is summoned to ‘do something’ about a rampaging elephant. Confusion is said to be endemic in the East, where a story always sounds clear enough at a distance but ‘the nearer you get to the scene of events, the vaguer it becomes’ (502).⁸³ But what we are promised here is a different kind of story, a Western one, that moves in the opposite direction, through confusion to a point of clarity, offering at last a glimpse into the ‘real nature’ of imperialism and despotism. At the heart of this animal story, we can expect a revelation.

By the time the elephant is located, its attack of ‘must’ is over and it is no longer dangerous. The policeman narrator knows that it ought not to be shot. But it is at this moment that it is borne in upon him that his own judgements, opinions and feelings are of no consequence here. He thinks he should not shoot the elephant: he happens to think the British Raj is a tyranny; these thoughts, kept to himself, count equally for nothing. For he is in thrall to the story that he and the crowd are enacting. Like Flory hunting the leopard in the jungle, or like

83. Clifford too complained about the inability of Orientals to tell a story in a proper, orderly and reliable way. Hugh Clifford, *Studies in Brown Humanity*, 243.

Lord Jim assailing the mountaintop, Orwell's policeman has become entangled in a cliché of colonial adventure. Marching fearlessly down the hill to meet the mighty beast his antagonist, a lone white man with a rifle over his shoulder at the head of an Asian crowd which it is his duty to protect, the imperial policeman is part of an imperial myth of such momentum that he is not a free agent. The procession is as much of a rite as the hanging party was, and the outcome is just as determined. All the policeman's fragile prestige is invested in the promise of violence which will confirm his rank in nature's order. There must be a display of superiority, over both the now harmless elephant, and the unarmed native crowd, who would mock him if, by not shooting, he proved himself as innocuous as themselves. The elephant has to die. This is the revelation we were asked to wait for. 'I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys' (504).

Here we have another variation on the pattern of the Orwellian epiphany. First heard of in confusing and unreliable reports, the elephant's frightening natural force is an affront to the law and order the policeman serves. A tame animal that has reverted to destructive wildness, it is a menacing counter-attack of nature against civilization, embodying the wilderness just like the wild boar that brings the story of *The Village in the Jungle* to an end. (The beast's condition of 'must' also makes it a specifically masculine challenge that he poses.) The narrator, the police officer, approaches it in the extreme of estrangement: it is a killer, and he carries a murderous weapon. But once in sight, the animal offers no danger, standing harmless and dignified in a field, peacefully eating, and paying no attention to the excited crowd. 'I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him' (503). The turn of the pronoun — the moment it comes into sight, the animal is no longer 'it' but 'he' — is a trope corresponding to the humanizing moment of intimacy on the execution ground in 'A Hanging', when the criminal mutely claimed kin with the man who was going to help to kill him. But in both cases the awkward epiphany is not powerful enough to stop the process.

The sight of the peaceful elephant brings a realization of an essential innocent oneness between the human and the natural world. Appropriate enough in a Buddhist country like Burma, for Orwell and his English readers it is also an idea that has a whole tradition of Romantic writing, and feeling, behind it. But this natural piety is turned aside by a stronger imperative, that of the discourse of empire and the policeman's part in it; once again, he has to remind himself why he is there. Racial prestige is at stake. The flash of Romantic kinship between the human observer and the animal world is quenched, even as it is expressed in ethical terms. 'It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him' (504). That human pronoun is now reinforced by a further trope, the scandalous naming of the act as murder, a figure of speech which assumes a human perpetrator and victim. But the man has been brought here not as a Romantic naturalist but as a

policeman with a gun in his hand, and he is now obliged to use it to assert imperial prestige, by inscribing it with violence on the body of Burmese nature, the elephant. 'A sahib has got to act like a sahib' (504). All animals are natural, but some animals are more natural than others.

Imperial policeman and colonized crowd are here complicit in the shooting, which is in effect a political murder. And once again as the curtain is pulled down on the brief epiphany, the observer in betraying his own Romantic insight is left alienated from himself — for he has acted, we might again say, against his better nature — and given over to self-pity and guilty isolation. 'In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away' (506). A sahib has got to act like a sahib, and not acting — in the sense both of drama and agency — is not an option open to a policeman of the empire; the consequence in this case is the self-pitying insensitivity of the insight that 'when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys,' which Orwell places at the heart of his story. But there is another heart to the story, and for this we have to look to what is said about the body of the elephant itself.

After the frightening rumours about his destructive progress through the streets, the elephant on first actual sight does not look like an apocalyptic beast, but seems almost comically anti-climactic in his ordinariness, a familiar and even banal sight, a tame animal in a field, eating grass. Yet at the moment of triumph over the natural world by violence — the moment of the shot — the great beast seems to undergo a metamorphosis into something tragic and unknowable.

In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. (505)

'One could have imagined him thousands of years old' (505). The moment the bullet penetrates the animal's body, the moment of a literal and violent entry into his interiority, is also the moment when he is realized to be untouchable, out of range, and possessed of an unfathomable history of his own, which puts him beyond the policeman's instruments of measurement and control, even as he is framed in the precision sights of the rifle and the shot goes home. In just such a way the condemned man on the scaffold had called out so incomprehensibly on his god, from some point beyond the reach of his executioners.

The stricken animal falls, and his killer comes close and literally looks into him, into his gaping mouth and 'far down into caverns of pale pink throat' (505). But even in his abjection the animal in some sense escapes the man, for the

elephant is dying in his own time, 'in some world remote from me,' and shot after shot 'poured . . . into his heart and down his throat' is unable to find where his life is, and end it. There is always a further Hinterland that frustrates the invader. As the beast's life is possessed by the policeman's power, it baffles and defeats his knowledge to the end, and will only yield up the secrets of its body, after its killer has left the scene, to the Burmese crowd who will take possession of it and strip it almost to the bones. The policeman meanwhile returns to bad community, to the company of the Europeans who are his own kind, to 'endless discussions' about the propriety of what he has done, and to share again in their brutal language as he cynically professes himself glad that the elephant had killed a coolie because 'it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant' (506).

The point could hardly be driven home more succinctly that, as Orwell tells it, colonial discourse speaks the unnatural history of Burma. And it speaks it through a series of self-defeating gestures of violent possession and control, gestures which serve to alienate their performers both from Burmese nature and from themselves.

The Borneo rhinoceros: Redmond O'Hanlon's belated travels

An afterword to this chapter is the appropriate place to talk about belatedness. *Into the Heart of Borneo* would be a fine title for the memoirs of an intrepid Victorian explorer. On the cover of a book published in 1984, it bears the faint imprint of self-mocking quotation marks. The Indonesian republic was proclaimed in 1945 and the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. What would a Western book about the jungles of postcolonial Borneo be like, more than a century after Alfred Russel Wallace?

Redmond O'Hanlon and James Fenton were Oxford friends. Their plan was to travel up the Rajang and Baleh rivers in Sarawak, to climb Mount Batu Tiban, and to rediscover the Borneo rhinoceros; later they returned to Kapit and ascended the Rajang and Balui to visit the Ukit people at Rumah Ukit. O'Hanlon's account, complete with maps and photographs, is in many ways quite conventional, describing preparations for the expedition, the engaging of local guides, the sometimes perilous journey to the interior, and the partial achievement of the goal, all the time giving plenty of zoological, ornithological, geographical and ethnographic information. It is also a very funny book, much of the humour deriving from the contrast between the heroic genre of the exploration adventure and the unheroic comedy of these startlingly incongruous Englishmen in the jungle — and much more from the contrast between the fit and agile locals and their dishevelled and plonking visitors. The heart of Borneo is not the heart of darkness, but there is some point here in invoking Marx's joke about the self-

repetition of history, first as tragedy and then a second time as farce. But the farce of O'Hanlon's jungle journey is in an odd way redemptive.

The journey is belated in that it takes place in the shadow of earlier expeditions and their texts. *Into the Heart of Borneo* is very bookish. O'Hanlon (himself a naturalist) takes with him an improbable collection of reference books — including Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago* — and frequently refers to them to check or elucidate his observations. One of their research techniques is to show local people illustrations from a book, such as Smythies' *The Birds of Borneo*, and see what they recognize. This is belated travel indeed, its main agenda item appropriately enough being to establish whether the Borneo rhinoceros is extinct from a habitat where it was earlier observed. (This quest ends when they meet a wizened old Ukit hunter who tells them casually that he killed seven of them on Mount Tiban when he was a young man.) O'Hanlon portrays himself as an enthusiastic amateur when compared to the naturalist giants like Wallace, whom he often quotes. For example, he gives a paragraph of Wallace's meticulous and beautiful description of the butterfly he named Rajah Brooke's Birdwing. O'Hanlon's own adjacent description of butterflies is in a different style.

Sucking our clothes and skin with their thread-like proboscides at one end, the butterflies exuded a white goo over us from their anal vents at the other. Getting up, brushing them off as gently as possible, I walked away from my companion the mandatory few yards and took a pee myself. Whilst my patch of urine was still steaming slightly on the muddy sand, the males of Rajah Brooke's Birdwing (the females, fully employed laying eggs in the jungle trees, are seldom seen) flew over and crowded down on it, elbowing each other with the joints on their legs, pushing and shoving to get at the liquid, the brilliant green feather-shaped marks on their black wings trembling slightly as they fed. I began, prematurely, to feel a part of things.⁸⁴

The idiom is that of an amateur, the theme of excretion signals rudely from the repertoire of farce, but there is a scientific romanticism in this passage which is not foreign to Wallace, whose more learned description follows. Inserting himself thus into the food-chain of the jungle fauna, O'Hanlon integrates himself with nature by a method unmentioned by Wordsworth. Recording his naïve pleasure at this feeling, he also frames it ironically with knowledge of what is to come; 'prematurely' is a belated gloss on this Romantic text.

O'Hanlon and Fenton make their way upriver with three Iban guides from Kapit — the chief Dana, of whom they are all rather in awe, and two younger men, Leon and Inghai. Much of the narrative concerns itself with the interaction

84. Redmond O'Hanlon, *Into the Heart of Borneo: An Account of a Journey Made in 1983 to the Mountains of Batu Tiban with James Fenton* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 35.

and friendship between the two English travellers and these skilful, intrepid and humorous people. In the interior they are given hospitality by people whose culture is extremely stable, indeed has not changed much in millennia — O'Hanlon notes that the large mother-of-pearl fastenings on the ceremonial belts of Dana's daughters in the longhouse at Kapit are exactly the same as those worn by their ancestors thousands of years ago. Though modernity certainly encroaches, in the form of motorized river transport, logging and mining and 'the government', but also in the form of medicines, education, and opportunities for some, in the further jungle there is still a natural and human life going on as it always has in the Hinterland. At their furthest point of navigation, after the ascent of Mount Batu Tiban, the expedition wades across the river and prepares for the return journey.

Reaching the other side, we hoisted our packs, scabbled up the wet bank, and then turned and said goodbye to the most beautiful retreat on earth, the home of the gibbon and the Great argus pheasant, the Borneo deer and the wild boar, the hornbills and — rarest of all — James's friends, the Black-naped orioles. In a month or two the vegetation would cover the Iban shelter, the crossed poles of our basha frame, the Ukit message sticks and shredded ferns on the mountainside, and, rightly, not a trace of us would remain.⁸⁵

Though the robust face of the narrative has kept it underground until now, here the trope of the jungle paradise becomes explicit, as we saw it intermittently in earlier Western jungle books. But — and this is the point — it is precisely the face of the narrative that protects this tropical paradise from becoming sad. 'The first thing we see as we travel round the world,' Lévi-Strauss wrote furiously in *Tristes Tropiques*, 'is our own filth, thrown in the face of mankind.'⁸⁶ But the jungle in O'Hanlon's narrative is not a tragically despoiled Garden of Eden, but something more like the green world of comedy. The intrusion of good-natured clowns into the heart of Borneo has been an innocent invasion, taking no trophies but a story to tell, and leaving nothing behind. And the ability of the jungle to overgrow and quickly obliterate any traces of human presence, which we have seen adduced earlier as a trope of tragedy, is here welcomed as part of the regenerative power of nature, which will keep the jungle a place of innocence, at least for now.

85. *Ibid.*, 145.

86. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 43. Clifford Geertz gives a specifically lapsarian account of Lévi-Strauss's narrative. 'He was sailing toward a spoiled world . . . Nothing was left of the terrestrial Garden but remnants.' Clifford Geertz, 'The Cerebral Savage: On the Work of Claude Lévi-Strauss', *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 348.

Contacts and Transgressions

On the beach: Denationalization and Stevenson in the Pacific

This chapter will consider some cases of the transformations that result from contact between Western people and Eastern places, and in particular the theme of transgression in the Orient, in the figure of stepping across from one world to another; cases of what seems to be a surrender, voluntary or not, to possession by the spirit of a foreign place. We shall see that tropes of contact, involving as they do a potentially perilous crossing from one world to another, seem often to involve a modal contention between realism and romance, and their respective regimes of representation.

In February 1903 Hugh Clifford published *A Free Lance of Today*, his adventure story about ‘a masterful son of the dominant race’ whom ‘circumstance and inclination had combined well-nigh to denationalize’.¹ We will return to this novel. But the theme of denationalization was very much on Clifford’s mind in an essay on ‘The Art of Mr. Joseph Conrad’, published the previous month in *The Living Age*, reviewing Conrad’s volume of three tales, ‘Youth’, ‘Heart of Darkness’, and ‘The End of the Tether’. The climax of Clifford’s essay is his generous praise for the centerpiece of this triptych, ‘Heart of Darkness’ — ‘this wonderful, this magnificent, this terrible study’ of ‘[t]he denationalization of the European, the “going Fantee” of civilized man’.²

It is worth looking closely at Clifford’s portrait of Conrad the artist in this review essay.

Description unquestionably is his forte, and the most remarkable of his gifts is the power which his strength in this direction gives him for the absolute creation of atmosphere. He is a realist in that he writes of a real world which he has seen for himself with his own eyes; but he

1. Hugh Clifford, *A Free Lance of Today* [1903], 2nd edition (London: Methuen, 1928) 8.

2. Hugh Clifford, ‘The Art of Mr. Joseph Conrad’, *Living Age* 236 (January 1903), 122.

risers superior to the trammels of ordinary realism because he has not only looked long and thoughtfully upon land and sea, so that he can write of them with the truth and certainty born of sure knowledge, but because also he has caught the very spirit of them, and has the art so to breathe it into his pages that his readers become imbued with it too.³

This suggests that for an author like Conrad, writing is above all a matter of the relation between subject and place, though for Conrad as for Clifford the places are remote — the East, the high seas, central Africa. To speak of the power to capture the spirit of a place is a cliché of book-reviewing, no doubt. What makes it interesting in Clifford's essay is that he is dealing with a Conrad story, 'Heart of Darkness', which is about the opposite — the power of a place to capture the spirit of a person, 'the power of the wilderness, of contact with barbarism and elemental men and facts, to effect the demoralization of the white man'.

The barbaric and elemental is a zone of risk, of high profits and commensurate dangers. Contact sets in motion a drama of possession, in the economic but also the spiritual sense; you may seek to master the dark places, like Conrad, but they may end up mastering you, as happened to Mr Kurtz. Conrad, says Clifford, has the power to tell the truth about alien places; but in 'Heart of Darkness' it is the wilderness that tells the truth about Kurtz, whispering to him things about himself that he did not know, so that, as Clifford puts it, 'it comes to pass that when at last he [Kurtz] is met with, the reader finds that he is utterly in accord with his surroundings,' the denationalized European now a naturalized citizen of the darkness.⁴ What balance is struck or lost, what mastery exercised, between the person and the place alien to each other? The drama played out to one conclusion in 'Heart of Darkness' is played out to another in *A Free Lance of Today*, and again and again in stories about the East.

Not only Western incursions in the East, but history itself, told a story of contact between individuals, nations and races which left no party unaffected. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Comte de Gobineau, who understood history as the story of the spread and mixing of blood, had already developed this idea into a tragic narrative: successful races were bound to spread themselves geographically, but in doing so they were also prone to mix their blood, so that the blood of the conquering minority was adulterated, as he saw it, by the blood of the conquered majority, and degeneration ensued.⁵ Gobineau's ideas had an important effect on European thinking about race and empire, and are often

3. *Ibid.*, 121.

4. *Ibid.*, 122.

5. Gobineau believed that racial mixing was always at the expense of the 'highest' stock, the white race, from whom he managed to believe all civilization derived. Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* [1854], trans. Adrian Collins (London: Heinemann, 1915), 210.

found linked to ideas deriving from an application of Darwinian theory to human experience both biological and social, the struggle for existence projected on a racial scale, the perils of unfitness to environment, and the associated danger of a weakening of loyalty and cultural identity among those far from home and drawn to the fascination of the local. (The story of Mr Kurtz is in one sense a very familiar one, of a European who goes mad in the tropics.) The Victorians developed a whole lexical spectrum to talk about the disturbing consequences of too close a contact between Western people and Eastern places: going native, going Fantee, going bush, going wrong; deterritorialization, demoralization, denationalization, degeneracy. These are very murky waters, but it may help to distinguish between the biological, medical, cultural and moral dimensions of dangerous contact.

In general, Western narratives about the Orient were imbricated with Western tropes about women: the East was very often figured as a female, frequently a desirable one.⁶ One very important model shaping the way people thought about relations between East and West was sexual contact, with its issue of scandalous hybridity, and Robert J. C. Young has shown how theories of race in the nineteenth century, 'by settling on the possibility or impossibility of hybridity, focussed explicitly on the issue of sexuality and the issue of sexual unions between whites and blacks'.⁷ How different were the human races? Biological science seemed to suggest that if there was a profound natural difference between, say, Europeans and Africans, they would not be able to interbreed, or their issue would be or become infertile in a generation or two. Kipling's representation of Eurasians, so much more fleeing than his portrayal of any other ethnicity in India, testifies to the affront that hybridity could seem to pose; his scorn for Western-educated Indians shows this anger extending to cultural as well as to biological hybridity. But horror at miscegenation in India was a Victorian phenomenon. Ronald Hyam estimates that ninety per cent of the British in India in the mid-eighteenth century made marriages with local women.⁸ Missionary disapproval, the professionalizing of the service, and increasing racial anxiety brought about a change in attitude. Hyam says 'the double advent of the Mutiny and the Memsahib' drove the Indian mistress out of the colonial house by the 1860s.⁹ William Dalrymple's research, however, suggests this important change was well under way before 1857, and

6. See Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 156. There is no lack of examples in Western literature of the Orient.

7. Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 9.

8. The story of one spectacular and romantic liaison is told in William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: Harper Collins, 2002).

9. Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 118.

he attributes it largely to a growing Evangelical intolerance among the British in India.¹⁰ When these liaisons continued, under the Raj, they did so in the dark.

The medical consequences of residence in foreign climes were well known. West Africa was the 'white man's grave', but disease and climate took a severe toll on Europeans everywhere in the tropics, especially before the widespread use of quinine against malaria, and Darwin was thought to have supplied a theoretical basis for the idea that Europeans were adapted to their own latitudes and risked not surviving in others, even if their vulnerability was seen as a function of their superiority. George Orwell remembered being assured in Burma that white men risked death if they neglected to wear a *sola topi* under the tropical sun, an amenity not required by local people who were supposed to have evolved the protection of a thicker skull. 'The thin skull was the mark of racial superiority, and the pith topi was a sort of emblem of imperialism.'¹¹ Hugh Clifford (who was also impressively bald) was famous for his eccentric unwillingness to wear head-cover, and was reputedly the inspiration for Noel Coward's song 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen'.

Hygiene was frequently a problem, there were fast-moving epidemics of infectious and contagious diseases, and for soldiers and others there was also the risk of venereal diseases caught from prostitutes and casual encounters.¹² Flora Annie Steel thought that soldiers should be punished for catching sexually transmitted diseases just as they were for drunkenness.¹³ In general, tropical climate was thought to have a deleterious and cumulative effect on whites, and most English people envisaged retirement, once their work out East was over, to the home country, to some melancholy healthful sanctuary on the south coast or in Cheltenham or North Oxford, where the nostalgic smell of curry was said to hang in the evening air. Robert Louis Stevenson, on the other hand, did not expect to return from the tropics, unless it was to die. 'I was never fond of towns, houses, society, or (it seems) civilization,' he told Henry James. 'The sea, islands, the islanders, the island life and climate, make and keep me truly happier.'¹⁴ A

10. William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 73.

11. George Orwell, 'As I Please', *Tribune*, 20 October 1944, *Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), 16:436.

12. The traffic in disease was of course not one-way, as the famous opening of Stevenson's 'The Ebb-Tide' can remind us. 'Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease.' Robert Louis Stevenson, *South Sea Tales*, ed. Roslyn Jolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 123. But the most devastating effects of the transmission of European diseases to tropical peoples were felt in the Caribbean and the Americas.

13. Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity* (London: Macmillan, 1929), 129–30.

14. Robert Louis Stevenson, Letter to Henry James, August 1890. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 5 vols, ed. Sidney Colvin (London: Heinemann, 1924), iii, 307.

health report on Conrad's characters in the tropical East would include the cases of Almayer, irritable and never well in his Sambir backwater, the ship's crew in the Gulf of Siam in *The Shadow-Line* for whom a lack of quinine is almost disastrous, but also Axel Heyst in *Victory*, contented and in good health in his island sanctuary.

Cultural and social contacts brought their own perils and excitements. Here is a rich and problematic area of experience, stretching from the minimal commerce of the most insulated tourist or aloof *memsahib* who 'could use her verbs only in the imperative mood',¹⁵ to a case like McIntosh Jellaludin in Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills*, who chooses another religion, culture, language, name, wife and household, and pays for these (inevitably, as Kipling sees it), in dirt, disease, and early death.¹⁶ The usual asymmetry of relations and the special position of the Westerner in the East, dictated by political and economic realities, often and inevitably raised ethical and moral issues. Contact was hardly ever made on a basis of equality. But contact there must be, since it was not possible to trade or work with people, learn about them, or govern them, without it, and since some level of mutual curiosity is not to be denied. But the British and other Europeans in the East walked a rope strung between contradictory needs, the need for contact at close quarters, and the need for a separation and distance on which matters like identity and authority and even survival were felt to depend.

Many places, and just as many states of mind, were topographically organized to keep different people apart, like the cities of British India (such as Forster's Chandrapore), with their civil lines, their military cantonments, and 'native quarter'. One of the things that most appealed to Robert Louis Stevenson about the Pacific islands was that they seemed to lack many of the structures and institutions that classified and segregated people in more established colonial jurisdictions — or indeed in Victorian London or Edinburgh. A character like Wiltshire (in 'The Beach at Falesá') would be unlikely to be found married to a Polynesian woman if he lived and died in an English market town, but it is just as improbable that the gentlemanly Herrick would associate in the home country on an equal footing with Huish, 'a vulgar and bad-hearted cockney clerk' in 'The Ebb-Tide'.¹⁷ Stevenson discovered in the islands a great thesaurus of stories because they made possible so many unexpected and unpoliced conjunctions and anomalies, of lives, conduct, and values; 'never was so generous a farrago,' he told his friend Sidney Colvin.

15. John Masters, *Nightrunners of Bengal* [1951] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 12. The description is of Joanna, wife of Rodney Savage. The joke about the imperative mood, presumably an Anglo-India staple, also occurs in *A Passage to India*.

16. Rudyard Kipling, 'To be Filed for Reference', *Plain Tales from the Hills* [1888] ed. H. R. Woudhuysen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 274–77.

17. Robert Louis Stevenson, *South Sea Tales*, 127.

I am going down now to get the story of a shipwrecked family, who were fifteen months on an island with a murderer: there is a specimen. The Pacific is a strange place; the nineteenth century only exists there in spots; all round, it is a no man's land of the ages, a stir-about of epochs and races, barbarisms and civilisations, virtues and crimes.¹⁸

The spirit of the place in this account sounds like a carnival, generating an appetizing 'stir-about', farrago, mixing, transgression. But although it may have only existed there 'in spots', for the whites in the islands the nineteenth century was not to be forgotten, for it was the place they had come from, their original version of the real world, that reminded them from time to time who they were supposed to be.

Wiltshire, the narrator of 'The Beach at Falesá', can be the first example of a transgressor in the East, and he is chosen largely because he is very unlike the supremely transgressive Kurtz in 'Heart of Darkness', with his visionary ideas and his epic crimes. Wiltshire does undergo a change of loyalty on Falesá. It would not be inaccurate to say he surrenders to the spirit of the place, though without the fatal consequences of Kurtz's surrender to the wilderness. But nor can Wiltshire be taken as a model of cultural sensitivity and respectful dialogic adaptation to alterity. What interests Stevenson in his case is the confusion that his predicament visits on a man neither particularly good nor bad, and he explores this confusion through assigning Wiltshire the telling of his own story.

Wiltshire's story begins with a variation on a generic scene of Eastern landfall, his first sight of the island of Falesá from the sea, in moonlight, neither night nor morning, with the land breeze blowing in his face. 'Here was a fresh experience: even the tongue would be quite strange to me; and the look of these woods and mountains, and the rare smell of them, renewed my blood'.¹⁹ We can recognize this as an entry into a world of romance, with its possibilities of new life, its opportunities and perils. Stevenson acknowledged the aura of romance that adhered to the Pacific islands as a subject, but he was to claim 'The Beach at Falesá' as the first realistic South Sea story.

Everybody else who has tried, that I have seen, got carried away by the romance, and ended in a kind of sugar candy sham epic, and the whole effect was lost — there was no etching, no human grin, consequently no conviction. Now I have got the smell and look of the thing a good deal. You will know more about the South Seas after you have read my little tale than if you had read a library.²⁰

18. Robert Louis Stevenson, Letter to Sidney Colvin, June 1889. *Letters*, iii, 261.

19. Stevenson, *South Sea Tales*, 3. Page references in the text are to this edition.

20. Stevenson, Letter to Sidney Colvin, 28 September 1891, *Letters*, iv, 101.

The writer too had a tricky landfall to make, and to master the place and tell the truth, not a 'sham epic', about it, required what Conrad's Marlow would call restraint. The trick was not to deny the romance, but not to surrender and be carried away by it. The rest of the tale pays homage to romance, while over it hovers the 'human grin' of the grotesque.

Wiltshire learns that one of his predecessors in the trading station fled the place at half an hour's notice, and another went mad and died. Undeterred, he comes ashore, and is soon fraternizing with the beachcombers Case and Black Jack and the decayed trader, Captain Randall. Wiltshire's instinct, like theirs, is for appropriation and fraud. One of his first acts is to pick out an island girl, Uma, for himself. Case assists him to procure her services, drawing up a marriage certificate which declares, in words she cannot read, that she is illegally married to Wiltshire who is entitled to send her packing whenever he wants. So here is the first configuration on Falesá, with Wiltshire allied to the other whites, using their economic power and cultural equipment (in this case the magic of literacy and law) to dominate and exploit the local people. Wiltshire possesses Uma by contract, and he expects that his trading in copra will be equally to his advantage. It all seems too easy.

But this familiar 'Orientalist' pattern — the powerful, masculine and modern exploiting the helpless, feminine and backward — is soon to be unsettled. For one thing, Wiltshire will be disabused of the idea that the whites are a homogenous group; in fact, though the traders may share an ambition to extract all they can from the island and its resources, they are also, being traders, in competition, and their rivalry moves the plot to a dénouement that will leave Case dead, Black Jack and Randall ruined, and Wiltshire in monopolistic control of Falesá. The other factor that undermines that early configuration of exploited islanders and rapacious 'beach' (the word for the white settlement and its population) is Wiltshire's growing feeling for Uma, his hapless bride. As so often, at the intimate centre of the figure of contact is a sexual relationship.

He has selected her on Case's recommendation and without bothering to speak with her, in the businesslike spirit of 'one of those most opposed to any nonsense about native women' (12). Stevenson's understanding of the odd ambivalences of transgression means that every time Wiltshire makes an important move towards closer contact, as here, he accompanies it with a reassertion of his entrenched beliefs in the essential difference and the need for separation between the races. It is at the moment she speaks to him for the first time, on their wedding night, that he is obliged to relate to Uma as a human adult (rather than as something like a cat, a baby, a statue, a child, a kind dog, or a kitten, which is how he has seen her before). They converse haltingly in the pidgin of the Pacific islands, also called Beach-la-Mar or Beach de Mar, a contact language which, as Roslyn Jolly says in her Introduction to *South Sea Tales*, is 'a form of English

which includes as many speakers as possible and erases distinctions between them' (xxiii).

Their first language exchange, the fetishized false marriage contract Wiltshire gives his bride, was grotesquely asymmetrical. But in their exchange of pidgin dialogue Wiltshire and Uma move into the contact zone between them, a common ground: it is still very far from a dialogue of equals, but it marks Uma's emergence from silence while for Wiltshire it is the first hint of a willingness to revise his loyalties, accompanied by a characteristic doubt and muddle. 'To speak to her kindly was about more than I was fit for; I had made my vow I would never let on to weakness with a native, and I had nothing for it but to stop' (13). He will discover that Uma is both loyal and resourceful, and later he expunges his original language crime when he goes through a proper marriage ceremony with her, conducted in deference to her in her own language (36). She becomes his chief ally in the struggle against Case. Wiltshire is on the road towards denationalization.

The unsettling of Wiltshire's racial loyalty, and his move from the 'beach' to the island community, had begun, however, with his revulsion from the senior European trader, whom he describes in these terms.

In the back room was old Captain Randall, squatting on the floor native fashion, fat and pale, naked to the waist, grey as a badger, and his eyes set with drink. His body was covered with grey hair and crawled over by flies; one was in the corner of his eye — he never heeded; and the mosquitoes hummed about the man like bees. Any clean-minded man would have had the creature out at once and buried him; and to see him, and think he was seventy, and remember he had once commanded a ship, and come ashore in his smart togs, and talked big in bars and consulates, and sat in club verandahs, turned me sick and sober. (8)

This is one of the most powerful of all representations of the man gone wrong. Island life in its easiness has taken its revenge on the Captain, possessing and imprisoning him in his own sloth and degradation. He seems to be in the process of melting into his torrid environment, so as to become, as Hugh Clifford said of Mr Kurtz, utterly in accord with his surroundings.

But unlike Kurtz, Randall is a transgressor by inaction, the victim of a lot-eating passivity for which he has traded his energy and self-respect, to become a figure of abjection. Randall, appropriately, plays no active part in the story, and Wiltshire recognizes him for what he is, a model and a warning. The sight of the old man immediately conjures for Wiltshire an image of the other Randall, the smart sea captain he once was and has now forgotten; presumably he too arrived in Falesá with the same excitement and pleasure as Wiltshire, to the same promise of a transformation whose nature he could not have foreseen. Randall has forgotten

himself: he has abandoned the institutional life — the career, the clubs and consulates — that once underwrote his identity, and with that identity he has lost his moral bearings too. These things were understood to go together, as John W. Griffith points out. ‘The concatenation of “denationalization” (losing one’s national loyalty) and “degeneration” (losing one’s moral centre) is a common feature of writing on the colonial experience.’²¹ Topping all through the day, subject to occasional fits of violence, Randall is sunk in the gross life of the body, and he smells like something that ought to be buried. It is the island, innocent in itself, that has done this to him, and Wiltshire takes the point. “My friend,” I was telling myself all day, “you must not come to be an old gentleman like this” (9). That night, he pours away all his gin.

Randall is a fallen man, a degenerate. In a seductive environment far from the restraints of England, home and duty, sloth and addiction have caused him to lose his grip and relapse into a beastly life, governed by mere appetite, like the stereotype of the tropical savage. In the year this story was published, 1892, Nordau’s *Entartung* (translated as *Degeneration* in 1895) had warned that ungovernable desires associated with primitive peoples were threatening to engulf Europe, and must be checked through a return to strict moral limits. Eugene Talbot, a few years later, sounded a similar warning: degeneration was a reverse of evolution, ‘a gradual change of structure by which the organism becomes adapted to less varied and less complex conditions of life,’ which was characterized intellectually by a reversion to ‘the brute brain within the man’s’, and behaviourally by parasitism and crime.²² For Europeans overseas, a demoralizing climate, a pampered lifestyle, the distance from the restraints of institutions and opinion at home, and the proximity of primitive peoples all conspired to increase the risk of relapse.

Stevenson, who was not an unqualified admirer of Western civilization, concurred in the late-nineteenth century belief that it was a fragile commodity. Behind this anxiety about relapse lay two powerful cultural narratives. One was the Christian story of Original Sin, underwriting a theory of culture as a system of artificial restraints imposed by necessity upon the unruly desires we inherit with our fallen nature.²³ Another was a story adapted from Darwin and Spencer about the ever-present possibility, in the arduous evolutionary process of alternating progress and regression, of an atavistic turn or backsliding in the life

21. John W. Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma: ‘Bewildered Traveller’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 148.

22. Eugene S. Talbot, *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs, and Results* (London: Walter Scott, 1898), 14–15, 18.

23. See Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

of species or individual, especially in unfamiliar and unsuited surroundings. Whether you believed man's ethical sense and moral self-respect were the highest development of evolution, or saw them as at odds with the instincts of the struggle for survival, it was recognized that under pressure they were liable to collapse into self-betraying transgression.²⁴

The blubbery Captain Randall is sunk beyond redemption. The same must probably be said for Case, for whom the islands provide an irresistible theatre for the performance of resourceful villainy. Case strikes Wiltshire at first sight as a good sort, and he never quite ceases to admire him, even when Case is revealed as a hypocrite, bully, cheat, and multiple murderer, ruthlessly intent on monopolizing the copra market in Falesá. Rapacious and cynical, Case is much the sort of person Wiltshire would like to be, before his association with Uma, and throughout Wiltshire's story there persists a half-acknowledged affinity between them. Case represents, as Randall did, a model of a certain kind of European response to the unpoliced temptations of the islands.²⁵ A kind of theatricality clings to him, most obviously in the elaborate fraud he perpetrates to convince the islanders he has magical powers, when, as Vanessa Smith puts it, he 'successfully manipulates the myth of Western technological supremacy, managing a personal cargo cult as theatre'.²⁶ Case is not entering into local cultural practices, but exploiting them; his transgressions are a pretence, a conjuring trick.

A third model of contact and adaptation to the alien place, different from both Randall and Case, is embodied in the missionary Tarleton, who lives and works with his local flock of converts. Missionaries were everywhere in the islands; Stevenson himself on his travels often relied on their hospitality, help and knowledge, though (as we have seen) he had very mixed feelings about them.²⁷ Wiltshire is at first very hostile, suspicious of missionaries as both class enemies and culture traitors: 'they look down upon us,' he says, 'and, besides, they're partly Kanakaized, and suck up with natives instead of with other white men like themselves' (34). He appears to have forgotten that he himself is hardly a

24. For key texts in the debate see *Herbert Spencer on Social Evolution: Selected Writings*, ed. J. D. Y. Peel (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972) and T. H. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (New York: Appleton, 1911). See also David Wiltshire, *The Social and Political Thought of Herbert Spencer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Brian W. Shaffer, *The Blinding Torch: Modern British Fiction and the Discourse of Civilization* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

25. An affinity with Case is inscribed in Wiltshire's name. He tells the missionary that 'on the beach' it is usually pronounced 'Welsher' (35), which is a slang term for a swindler.

26. Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-Century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 176.

27. See Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas* [1896], ed. Neil Rennie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998). See also Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific*, 135–42.

model of white solidarity, considering that he has just beaten up Case, and that he is about to seek Tarleton's help to regularize his own marriage to Uma (34). They form an alliance, for Case with his magic has turned local people against the missionary, just as with his crafty plotting he has caused them to *tabu* Wiltshire and refuse to trade with him.

Tarleton is a European who has transferred his loyalty to the islands while retaining his Western beliefs and values. Wiltshire is redeemed by his love for Uma from his first inclination to cheat and plunder. We might feel at this point — if this were a Hollywood film, for example — that the stage is set for the deserved triumph of positive over negative transgression, the benign and culturally sensitive adoptors of (or adaptors to) island culture over the avaricious and despoiling triumvirate of Randall, Black Jack and Case, and the inauguration of an era of shared wealth, social justice, and racial harmony on Falesá. But while this is more or less what happens, it is not the story Wiltshire tells. To put it another way, the trope of transgression may be redeemed in Wiltshire's story, but the modality of his storytelling remains pretty unregenerate.

Even as he moves towards the showdown in which he will kill Case, Wiltshire is inclined to grumble and bluster about racial prestige and solidarity, and to make casually racist remarks about 'Kanakas' (and Black Jack). He never really revises his view that he and his kind belong in a separate and privileged category; the local people 'haven't any real government or any real law . . . and even if they had, it would be a good joke if it was to apply to a white man' (24). Even as the political configuration of the island is shifting around him, Wiltshire persists in seeing himself as different in nature and prestige from the locals, as a white and a colonial — demanding to be treated by the chiefs 'as a white man and a British subject', and boasting to Uma about his intimacy with Queen Victoria (24, 48).²⁸

There is ironic comedy — perhaps this is what Stevenson meant by the 'human grin' — throughout the story but especially in the muddled state of mind in which Wiltshire finishes his narrative. When after Case's death the missionary gives his pledge to the local people that Wiltshire will deal fairly with them, Wiltshire honours his word, but rather grudgingly, and is half glad when his company transfers him to another island where there are no such obligations to cramp his style. He has not gone wrong; but in the end he is not spectacularly right either. His contact with the island effects after all no magical transformation, the complacent parameters of his identity (in ethnicity, nation, and gender) remain undeconstructed as far as he is concerned, and he is still substantially as he described himself to Tarleton: 'I'm no Kanaka, nor favourer of Kanakas — I'm

28. An association that was useful to Stevenson too, when in the Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati), he was introduced to the king as 'Queen Victoria's friend (who was soon to be promoted to be her son)'. Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, 181.

just a trader; I'm just a common, low, God-damned white man and British subject, the sort you would like to wipe your boots on' (35).²⁹ He does remain married and devoted to Uma, now grown stout like Tolstoy's once romantic Natasha, but poignantly the issue of the marriage is not the redemptive children of romance, but a problematic of hybridity carried over to another generation. Wiltshire feels he is stuck in the islands because there is, of course, no future for his and Uma's children 'in a white man's country', though he has sent his eldest boy to be schooled in Auckland.

But what bothers me is the girls. They're only half-castes, of course; I know that as well as you do, and there's nobody thinks less of half-castes than I do; but they're mine, and about all I've got. I can't reconcile my mind to their taking up with Kanakas, and I'd like to know where I'm to find the whites? (71)

Stevenson was drawn to the Pacific as a place of romance, but he had seen enough there to write of the place as a realist — with 'the truth and certainty born of sure knowledge', as Clifford said of Conrad. In his travel book *In the South Seas*, he tells the story of an Austrian, shipwrecked on the island of Hiva-oo, who decided to remain where he landed.

Now, with such a man, falling and taking root among islanders, the processes described may be compared to a gardener's graft. He passes bodily into the native stock; ceases wholly to be alien; has entered the commune of the blood, shares the prosperity and consideration of his new family, and is expected to impart with the same generosity the fruits of his European skill and knowledge. It is this implied engagement that so frequently offends the ingrafted white.³⁰

The denationalization of this European is described as a fall, but it seems a felicitous fall, a landfall which also brings reracination and redemption into new life — the renewal of the blood anticipated by Wiltshire. A successful hybrid has been created, for the Austrian as for the Wiltshire family. But this is not how things end. There are problems to come, problems of adjustment and asymmetry, the possibility of resentment on both sides at what has been surrendered, mutual exploitation, the continuing negotiation of identities, the question of the future. Only in romance is marriage the end of the story.

29. Traders, as Vanessa Smith points out, played a somewhat uncertain part in the colonial story. They represented Western commercial interests in the outposts of capitalist enterprise, but were not 'simply colluders'; 'their role retained a certain ambivalence, falling in the unreliable territory between colonial representative and maverick entrepreneur'. Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific*, 167.

30. Stevenson, *In The South Seas*, 99.

In the bush: Clifford and going native

Stevenson's writing is, of course, itself a site and transmitter of inter-cultural contact. In Samoa and on his Pacific travels, he was as prolific a correspondent as ever, and he sent home for publication many hundreds of thousands of words about the Pacific and its inhabitants, for the edification and enjoyment of his readers in Europe and America. He collected a store of local anecdotes and legends, wrote polemically about injustice where he found it, composed stories in the local manner, some, like 'The Bottle Imp', intended to be translated into the Samoan language, and told stories to his neighbours. But though Stevenson never lost his sense of the romance of the South Seas, his report on inter-cultural contact in the islands is unillusioned. Contact was more often than not deleterious and corrupting, and might result in forms of denationalization harmful to both local communities and incoming individuals, disturbing local cultural practices and economic patterns, and confronting foreigners with temptations of pleasure, wealth and power which could cause them to forget themselves. Where some successful accommodation seemed to be reached, as in the case of Wiltshire and his family at the end of 'The Beach at Falesá' and perhaps of Stevenson and his at Vailima, that success had to be acknowledged to be provisional, partial, unequal and unsecured.

If Stevenson's South Seas romance is muddled over with prosaic actuality and irony, Hugh Clifford's tale of contact, *A Free Lance of Today*, has the bright colours of a much less ambiguous adventure tale. Unlike the scruffy and half-educated Wiltshire, or the decayed and weak-willed Herrick in Stevenson's 'The Ebb-Tide', the blond sportsmanlike hero of *A Free Lance* might pass muster in a G. A. Henty novel, 'a thorough Anglo-Saxon, clean bred, and a good specimen of his race'.³¹ Maurice Curzon looks like an exemplary hero, and his story is an exemplary story, about what befalls a young Englishman who turns from his own kind, to 'herd with natives' (8). *A Free Lance of Today* is not only an important novel about denationalization, it is also a stage for the dialogue between the modes of realism and romance that seems an inseparable part of the trope.

Though he is bizarrely given the surname of the lordly Viceroy of India, Maurice Curzon is not on the career path of a British official in the East. He has come out to Singapore as a clerk in a banking-house, but the East awakes 'a gypsy spirit' in him, and in turn he surrenders to the spirit of the place. 'The magic and the mystery of Asia possessed him' (10). He has spent a couple of years in an upcountry Malay state as interpreter to a prospecting expedition, and then wandered through the archipelago enlarging his experience of native life.

31. Hugh Clifford, *A Free Lance of Today* [1903], 2nd edition (London: Methuen, 1928), 8. Page references in the text are to this edition.

With his whetted taste for adventure, and his love of freedom and of Malaya and its people, he is ready for anything, the generic chapter-one hero waiting for opportunity to knock.

Maurice Curzon's restlessness comes in equal measure from a romantic attraction to Malay life, and a contempt for his colonial countrymen, whom he has learned to look upon with the modality of the Oriental, to whom many of their ways appear at once vulgar and repulsive. In this perspective, colonial Singapore seems brash, materialistic, ignorant and boring. What irks him, in effect, is modern bourgeois life, and Clifford's romantic Orientalism gives Maurice a dream of the East which is the opposite of all this — a 'blended discord and harmony of strange tongues', 'a thousand scents, half fragrant, half repulsive, wholly enervating and voluptuous', and the excitement of 'an unknown life underlying it all' (10). Maurice Curzon's Eastern imaginary is a compendium of delights, sometimes the enervating sink of Captain Randall's island, sometimes the promise of boyish action and adventure, but also the raffish business opportunity of Wiltshire and the others, for Maurice agrees to join a gun-running venture to Sumatra with his Malay friend Rāja Tuākal, shipping arms to Aceh for use against the Dutch.

Maurice is not much troubled, at this point, at the prospect of taking arms against Europeans; the Dutch are after all rivals of the British in Asia, and besides they are bourgeois imperialists, their empire 'primarily a money-getting machine erected for the advantage of Holland' (97). ('In spite of his affection for the term "white race", says Kathryn Tidrick, 'he [Clifford] was not, when it came down to it, a race patriot but a British patriot who enjoyed crowing a little over his country's rivals.')32 In this respect the Dutch differed from the British whose empire in the East, Clifford wrote soon after in *Further India*, had entered 'an age of philanthropy and humanitarianism'.³³ Clifford's experience of Malaya was mostly highly localized, and a large part of his remit as a colonial official was a responsibility for the welfare of the people in his charge: in this Clifford has perhaps more excuse for his blindness to empire as an economic system than Kipling, another romantic imperialist.

It is a version of romanticism, coupled with that empathetic imagination that gives him the gift of being able to see through the eyes of an Oriental, that draws Maurice Curzon to the glamour of the East. But if the character inherits this faculty from Hugh Clifford, the young adventurer and explorer of Pahang, a

32. Kathryn Tidrick, 'Hugh Clifford, Administrator', *Empire and the English Character* (London: Taurus, 1992), 88–129; 110.

33. Hugh Clifford, *Further India: Being the Story of Exploration from the Earliest Times in Burma, Malaya, Siam, and Indo-China* (London: Alston Rivers, 1905), 346. It was a view of contemporary colonialism harder to apply to Trinidad, where Clifford had been sent in 1903.

more sober aspect of Clifford is present too in the narrative voice, noting that in his enthusiasm for Asia, Maurice has become 'well-nigh denationalized'. 'This, be it said, is not a wholesome attitude of mind for any European, but it is curiously common among such white men as chance has thrown for long periods of time into close contact with Oriental races, and whom Nature has endowed with imaginations sufficiently keen to enable them to live into the life of the strange folk around them' (8). The figure of contact, which is the central motif in all Clifford's writing about Asia, always has two sides, one light and the other dark. The narrative sounds a warning here; but the voice of experience, racial loyalty and common sense soon withdraws from the story, to reappear at a later stage when Maurice has learned some lessons the hard way. Meanwhile, to be sure, the more enthusiastic Maurice waxes about Oriental people, the more he entrenches categorical differences between the races.

At this point we can see that the old paradox of contact is already in play. Clifford the colonial administrator never tired of asserting that the effectiveness and authority of Europeans in the East depended on their ability, like Maurice Curzon, to 'live into the life of the strange folk around them', not just in a good knowledge of their ways and language, but actually in love for them, a love which, Clifford was not embarrassed to say, is still there when the white man finds himself ranged in war against them.³⁴ But Clifford also owned to a powerful fear that this imaginative empathy, good in itself, could also lead to disaster, when 'close contact with Oriental races' led a man to forget himself, with consequences ranging from inefficiency and torpor to degeneracy, madness, savagery, and death. From the point of view of the 'Oriental races' themselves, contact with the West was equally hazardous and subject to equally strong anxieties. It could bring the benefits of modernization, in public health and works, education, technology, and economic opportunity. But it might also destroy habitats and communities, traditionally sustaining cultural and economic practices, and identities. It might be noted that this problematic is still very much alive, both in countries like Malaysia and in the multiracial cities of the West, in its more recent terms of globalization and locality, multiculturalism and integration, and the politics of identity.

To begin with, though, the Malay world is simply enticing and irresistible to Maurice Curzon, a youthful Quixote in love with its romantic possibilities. The East is embodied for him not in the person of a beautiful and mysterious woman,

34. In 'Recollections of the Pahang Disturbances of December 1890 – September 1891', Clifford writes of the white man who 'loves the folk against whom he is warring — loves them, has served them in the past, will labour to redeem them in the future'. Hugh Clifford, *Bush-Whacking and Other Asiatic Tales and Memories* (London: Heinemann, 1929), 50. Clifford is quite frank about the painful contradictions and evasions entailed by this state of mind.

but in the debonair warrior chief Rāja Tuākal, whom Maurice befriends after intervening to stop him beating up a Singapore policeman, who objected to his carrying a weapon in the streets. Rāja Tuākal like Maurice himself is a man of action and of freebooting instincts, who bridles at the orderliness of colonial life. He invites Maurice to join him in the gun-running venture, but what he is really offering is escape to a romance world of martial adventure, of aristocratic courtesy, a code of honour, and brotherhood in arms.³⁵ He is inclined to say things like ‘it is over long since I bathed me in the smoke of the gun-medicine’ (4); Clifford followed the fashion set, as we have seen, by Kipling, of having his characters speak fustian to indicate that they were using an Asian language, but as it happens the shade of Walter Scott looming over this dialogue does quite accurately indicate the kind of world Rāja Tuākal inhabits, a quite specifically medieval romance utopia which is a refuge from an artificial and inauthentic modernity.

Maurice is quite aware of this when he tells his friend of his own desire to ‘get hence’ as fast as possible. ‘It matters not whither so only it be somewhere very far from this place, where the world is wide, where the land and the folk are still as Allah intended that lands and folk should be, not things wrought by hand at the will of the Law and the Government!’ (2) (The recoil from manufacture is interesting.) The adventure will be a flight from irksome colonial law and order, into a highly-coloured past which is a heady mix of prelapsarian innocence and enjoyable masculine violence. It is Etta Burnside, the attractive young widow who fascinates him in Penang, who spells it out for him. She calls him ‘a free lance of today’ (32). ‘You are a knight-errant,’ she tells Maurice. ‘You don’t belong to this ugly age of ours’ (45).

We have seen other examples of Clifford’s uneasiness about the modernity that European presence and government were conferring on the East, and Philip Holden has written of his corresponding inclination ‘to inscribe Malaya nostalgically as a medieval society’.³⁶ Maurice Curzon, ‘born out of due time’ (20), embraces his opportunity to display the swashbuckling qualities and roving spirit that drove white men in the first place to explore and conquer the earth — and to found those empires which, ironically as the novel shows, have now evolved into bureaucratic systems supporting money-grubbing settlements like Singapore.

35. Rāja Tuākal belongs to the caste of soldier aristocrats, descended from the fiction of Walter Scott, who dominate and define one of the two strands of imperial adventure fiction, in Martin Green’s useful taxonomy (a merchant caste dominates the other). Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 15–20.

36. Philip Holden, *Oriental Masculinity, Orienting Nation: W. Somerset Maugham’s Exotic Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 96. See for example Clifford’s description of the Pahang sultanate, which, when he entered it in 1887, ‘presented an almost exact counterpart to the feudal kingdoms of medieval Europe’. Hugh Clifford, *The Further Side of Silence* (London: Curtis Brown, 1916), ix.

With Râja Tuâkal and the guns, Maurice sets sail for Sumatra, arriving after an enjoyable storm and pursuit by a Dutch naval boat, and marches through the virgin jungle to the city of the king of Aceh. It is in his thoughts on this Hinterland journey that a rather different strand of Romanticism emerges.

Maurice recalls that the people of the tiny state of Aceh alone resisted the incursions of the earlier European invaders. Its people are now involved in a long guerilla war against the Dutch settled on the Sumatra coast, and it is this anti-colonial war effort that he has come to assist as an arms dealer. Gradually the thought of the money, the ostensible object of his enterprise, ceases to be important to him, as he becomes enthralled by the spirit of the Achehese resistance against the foreign and modern world. Here, it seems, is not only a site of romance, but a political paradise as yet unlost.

It seemed to him that this land, which alone of all the brown men's kingdoms in Southern Asia had maintained its integrity and freedom, was the one place left upon the face of the earth in which he might find a Malayan race unspoiled by European progress and vulgarity, untainted by the degeneracy which civilization seems fated to bring with it. Here, if anywhere, he might fairly hope to see the native in his natural state, and to learn much that must be hidden from all to whom so unique an opportunity had been denied. (81)

This ambition to see 'the native in his natural state' is ethnographic, but it is above all a version of a political and philosophical desire whose direct ancestor is Rousseau's understanding of social modernity as a fall, and of the noble savage as the free and unspoiled darling of a benevolent nature. It is 'freedom', constructed in Curzon's meditation here very clearly as the opposite of 'progress' and 'civilization', which may be discovered in the Eastern Hinterland, grimly holding out against the West, just as Rousseau had magnificently imagined it a century and a half before.

When I see multitudes of naked savages despise European pleasures, and brave hunger, fire and sword, and death itself, to preserve their independency; I feel that it belongs not to slaves to argue concerning liberty.³⁷

The clash of freedom with modernity is Romantic and passionate. The people of Aceh are fanatically moved by 'an Idea — the divine right of the brown races to possess the homes of their fathers' (95), and they are persistently and hyperbolically represented as possessed by a savage bloodlust, a frantic eagerness to kill, a craving for vengeance, acolytes of 'a tremendous idol glutted with bloody

37. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* [1754] (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), 42.

immolations' (96). This may be suitable for a Homeric conflict, as Maurice imagines it, but it is also strongly marked as primitive. The warlike Rāja Tuākal, though himself a Malay from the peninsula, is excited to a pitch of inarticulate raving by this obsessive Achehnese passion, while Maurice finds it alarming. However, riding at last into the City of the King surrounded by jungle, he feels he is riding over 'the only fragment of the brown man's empire concerning which he had dared to cry to the European races, "Ye shall not steal!" and had been thereafter able to keep the proud word unbroken' (108).³⁸

Fired by his sympathy for the sufferings and bravery of the Achehnese, he 'had taught himself to picture a kind of Utopia flourishing here' (108), with the noble and the peasant bound by a common danger, a state in which strength and power exist only for the protection of the weak.³⁹ A free lance of today, he offers his chivalrous services in battle to the king. The fact that he will be fighting against the Dutch conceals, at least from him, the other fact that he has now equated the empires of the European races with theft, enslavement and murder, and their modern civilizations with degeneracy. He is now a transgressor, who has passed over to the other side.

It is only when he has reached the City of the King that Maurice begins to see that actual conditions there are rather different from the vision of the East to which he has pledged his service. The monarch himself is disappointing, for one thing. This romantic Orient had seemed more authentic than the colonial one in that it seemed more masculine, as the swaggering Rāja Tuākal was more of a man than the puny Singapore policeman. But Maurice soon learns that the king of Acheh is a poor specimen, indeed a degenerate — his handshake is limp and flabby, his face scarred with self-indulgence and precocious dissipation. Far from being the virile Muslim warrior prince of tradition, he is a 'pitiful, worn-out boy, obviously bored by the duty which detained him for a few moments from returning to the petting and the caresses of his women' (107). He does not accompany his army when they go to war against the Dutch. That army, with the weapons supplied by Maurice and Rāja Tuākal, does set off with enthusiasm, but it too falls short of Maurice's ideal which is, inevitably, that of a highly trained and disciplined army under European command. The Achehnese have almost no

38. The words of the novelist were of course painfully at odds with the actions of the imperialist. 'Thus at a preposterously early age I was the principal instrument in adding 15,000 square miles of territory to the British dependencies in the East; and this fact forces me to the conclusion that my share in the business stands in need of some explanation, if readers who are not themselves Britishers are to be persuaded that I am not merely a thief upon a rather large scale.' Hugh Clifford, *The Further Side of Silence*, x.

39. Of course there is no bourgeoisie in this pre-modern Utopia. An indication of what Clifford thought trade and commerce could do to Orientals may be found in his virulent description of the Jews from whom Maurice buys his guns (49).

discipline; this is, of course, the corollary of that natural freedom Maurice had admired. They are maddeningly inefficient (sentries always fall asleep), and when offered battle in conditions not of their own choosing, most of them run away. When they have the upper hand, they are puzzled when the chivalrous Maurice tries to get them to stop shooting at wounded and retreating troops.

Above all they are poorly led, in war and in peace, and Maurice soon develops a contempt for the governing class — ‘Chiefs ignoble, selfish, and incredibly inept, who cared for naught save their own power, their own lusts and passions’ (159) — which he shares with Clifford, who saw the misrule of the Malayan rajas as ‘one of the most absolute and cynical autocracies that the mind of man has conceived’, and the chief justification for British interventions in the region.⁴⁰ Maurice begins to revise his narrative of contact, and reconsider his own transgressive decision ‘to exchange his European birthright for the Asiatic’s unsavoury mess of pottage’ (159). He will pass from one extreme to another, from whole-hearted identification to horrified revulsion, in a way that has much to tell us about the violent contradictions of Clifford’s own feelings, though Conrad was probably right to complain to the author of ‘a certain immaturity or rather superficialness in Maurice’s character’; he had been made ‘too savage and too squeamish’.⁴¹

The trope of Maurice Curzon’s denationalization, his turn to the Orient, is now itself troped by a return to his senses, his identity, and in due course his own people. The process is dramatized by two incidents in particular, or rather by two sights. In the jungle, the soldiers of Acheh ambush and rout a party of Dutch. Maurice comes upon the naked corpse of a white man — first one, then others — which causes a violent reaction in him. There is a long physical description of the dead soldier, followed by a long physical description of Maurice as he takes in the sight. The soldier has hairy, blotchy skin, a contorted face, gashed chest and almost severed arm; but it is not these things that disgust Maurice, and cause him to sweat, tremble, stagger, set his teeth and clench his hands, as the blood rushes through his veins and floods his brain.

‘The whiteness of that awful corpse made the dead man akin to him — it was as though this vile outrage had been perpetrated upon the body of one dear like a lifelong friend. A fierce hatred of the brown men who had done this thing, a passionate indignation, surged up in his heart’ (194). It is the sexual mutilation of the corpse, an action Clifford cannot quite name, that is *answered* (here we have a kind of bodily dialogue) by Maurice’s spasms, his rushing blood and

40. Hugh Clifford, *The Further Side of Silence*, xi.

41. Letter to Hugh Clifford, 26 February 1903. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21.

drumming heartbeat and struggle for breath.⁴² The white corpse claims kin with him, and he is aroused, apparently sadomasochistically, to respond. It tells him who he is. His adventure of penetration into the East culminates here with something like a primal scene of the uncovering of the white body defiled.⁴³ The mutilation is such a powerful image that it crowds out every other way Maurice has thought about Aceh; for him now the place means nothing but outrage, and he has forgotten that it remains no less, for example, the site of resistance to invasion.

There has been an earlier but just as emblematic encounter, serving notice on Maurice Curzon's ethnic apostasy, and it too involved a claim of kin and a degraded white body as the object of the gaze. On his first night in the city of the king, he receives a visitor, an uncouth and filthy figure dressed in Achinese costume, with a sickly yellow face, 'discoloured by blotches like those seen upon the mildewed calf-binding of a book, and it was overgrown by hair, wiry and sparse like that of an *ōrang-ūtan*' (112). Maurice is immediately seized with an irrational desire to do violence to this apelike figure, who seems to him like an unclean monster, or a creature maddened by drink and degraded by bestial passion, or a lunatic. Here are the classic symptoms of degeneracy, of reversion to a more primitive evolutionary stage, and shortly the figure will confirm the diagnosis by proving to be both a parasite and a criminal. He is, of course, despite appearances, a denationalized white man, and he has sought Maurice out in an appeal to racial solidarity; above all, he tells him, he needs a white man to talk to and tell his story. Maurice's first reaction, on realizing this, is to hide him. Possessed by the European's instinct to cover up 'the shame of the fallen ones of the dominant breed', and apparently forgetting his own desire to identify with the Malays, he steps hastily to the door and closes it (118).

This man — we never learn his European name — is called Pāwang Ūteh, the White Medicine Man. In a long narrative full of self-pity, he tells Maurice he is a fallen gentleman, who served in the ranks in the Dutch army, was captured and enslaved in Aceh, and learned magic from the medicine man who bought him. Here is denationalization in person. Like Lord Jim appealed to by Gentleman Brown, Maurice is appalled, but cannot quite disown this thing of darkness. Meanwhile in telling his own story, the Pāwang is unwittingly holding a mirror up to Maurice. 'Put yourself in my place,' he urges (124), playing for Maurice's

42. The mutilation is gratuitous, a supplement to the killing of the soldier. As with other acts of violent terrorism, the disproportion of the outrage creates an immediate shock that flings the survivor back upon a feeling of irreconcilable difference from the perpetrators.

43. Philip Holden reads this scene in terms of a wider argument about Clifford's anxieties about race and masculinity. Philip Holden, *Modern Subjects / Colonial Texts: Hugh Clifford and the Discipline of English Literature in the Straits Settlements and Malaya 1895–1907* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2000), 108–09.

sympathy. 'Did God Almighty mean the white to serve the brown?' (124) But in offering Maurice a horrible lesson in the consequences of going wrong, it is not so much a transgression of metaphysical laws that he embodies, as a degradation of the physical life, in dirt, disease, bestiality and bondage. The Pāwang's fall into abjection began with his betrayal of his Dutch comrades to the Achehnese. His interlocutor, of course, is about to go to war on the side of the Achehnese against the Dutch. That same gift of empathy which allowed Maurice to 'live into the life' of the Malays will return to him as he scans the faces of the Dutch soldiers, making him 'enter, almost against his will, into the sufferings which he witnessed and had helped to cause' (193). But the sight of the Pāwang has already warned him that his own transgression compromises his humanity, as the sight of the castrated corpse warns that it compromises his manhood.

There is always, as Dante showed, someone who has fallen further. Maurice Curzon's transgression is venial compared with the Pāwang Ūteh's, who has gone native to the extent of being almost indistinguishable from an Achehnese, but even he has not sunk without trace; in this sense, there is no such thing as 'going native', or rather, 'going native' comprehensively would entail disappearance from the radar of Western discourse altogether. There are always degrees of going wrong. Wiltshire measures and pits himself against Case. On the beach, Stevenson's Herrick is sunk, but fails to drown; he is redeemable, and redeemed. The old soak Captain Randall has forfeited his dignity but still clings to his religious prejudices, like a last unsold heirloom. Even Kipling's apostate McIntosh Jellaludin is still attached to the English world he has left behind, by a taste for English tobacco and learned conversation. Maurice Curzon confronts in his dialogue with the decayed but dangerous white medicine man an image of himself, of what he might become, and this helps him to draw back from irreversible transgression. Faced with the appalling implications of denationalization, he begins the process of change that will mortify his Orientalist romanticism and transform him from a transgressor into the opposite of transgression.

Denationalization is a process of erasure of difference, but its representation is always a differential process; the subject defines itself in relation to others. The drama of the European man who is seen to go wrong in the East sets him up with a number of possible dialogue partners, what might be called significant others, elicited or conjured into his narrative. The man who has crossed the line has often done so to consort with an alien partner — Wiltshire's Uma, for example, or Fielding's friend Aziz — and in most cases this is a sexual partner, though in the case of Maurice Curzon it is his brother-in-arms, Rāja Tuākal, who will later give his life for Maurice in battle. He may also encounter, and be warned by, another of his own kind who has sunk further, as Wiltshire encounters Randall. An interesting relationship is that between the transgressively semi-Orientalized European and the transgressively semi-Westernized Oriental — in Kipling's story

'On the City Wall', both these figures revert to their 'real' ethnic loyalties in a crisis. And a strong dramatic and dialogic potential inheres in the relationship between the transgressive and the lawman, the one who abandons the protocols and norms and hierarchies of his own culture and the other who remains true to them.⁴⁴

The mutuality between Kurtz and Marlow in 'Heart of Darkness' is the classic example of this paradigm (the lawman is often the one who survives to tell the tale). In *A Free Lance of Today*, Maurice Curzon begins the tale as a romantic renegade. He is possessed of a strong sense of the Eastern Other as the vessel for everything lacking or unsatisfactory in actual Western modernity, and at the same time a romantic yearning to immerse and identify himself in it. But when the closest contact is actually made, he is vouchsafed, in the distorting mirror of the Pāwang, a vision of the Other actualized in the Western self. There follows a revulsion, and a flight back to the stockade protecting self from Other. The renegade becomes a lawman, and Maurice ends the story like a conventional hero of imperial romance, stoutly defending a party of English against treacherous Achehese. But just as the law-abiding Marlow remains locked in haunted kinship with the renegade Kurtz, it is not easy for Maurice Curzon to shake off the scandalous white medicine man. When he leaves the king's army, he takes the Pāwang with him. The ostensible reason is to remove him from the scene of his disgrace for the sake of white prestige, but it is also an acknowledgement that they are bound together, the revolting and treacherous Pāwang a figure of himself gone wrong.

Denationalization, which had presented itself in the exotic colours of romance and chivalry, turns out to be a dirty deed in practice, and Maurice, who saw Acheh as a vision of freedom, now cannot wait to escape from it. The language too is rescued from lurid Romantic excess, with realistic descriptions of the demoralizing and unheroic warfare of 'bush-whacking', where the enemy is often invisible and even victory is 'like killing rats in a hole' (193). These descriptions, some of the most powerful passages in the novel, are underwritten by Clifford's memory of his own campaigning in Pahang, enabling him to write, as he said Conrad did, 'of a real world which he ha[d] seen for himself with his own eyes'. Maurice's quixotic unillusioning is, however, not as straightforward as we might expect.

Maurice does not quite return to colonial Malaya and its symbolic order; in fact, he will end the novel in a ship at sea. After his resolve to leave Acheh and the king's army, he makes his way, with the Pāwang, to the coast of Sumatra, fortuitously in time to rescue Etta Burnside, her sister Mabel, and their father,

44. See Douglas Kerr, 'Three Ways of Going Wrong: Kipling, Conrad, Coetzee', *Modern Language Review* 95:1 (January 2000), 1–10.

from shipwreck. When a local warlord, Tûku Ampun Dâya, holds them to ransom, and the incorrigible Pâwang steals Maurice's money with the idea of using it to buy Etta from the Tûku as his sex slave, Maurice rescues the girls again, and takes them to a refuge in a cave (where the Pâwang finally meets his end) until the British navy arrives to take them to safety. This fairly preposterous *dénouement* indicates, I think, an interesting swerve in the story of the man gone wrong and (as the Evangelicals say) getting right.

The story started with the contrast between two ways of life — roughly, poetic Orientalism and prosaic colonialism — and their contrasted styles, a highly coloured hyperbolic youthful exoticism on one hand, and the sober, realistic voice of experience on the other. Maurice Curzon rejected that modern, materialistic, Western-governed world (Singapore), denouncing it as inauthentic, vulgar and degenerate, and denationalizing himself instead in the passionate, medieval — or dehistoricized — and free Oriental world (Acheh). The latter proved a hopeless illusion, its Romantic language quite inappropriate to a squalid reality. Yet Clifford does not send Maurice Curzon back to the colonial world, and its realism. Politically, he is left in a kind of limbo, diplomatically invisible (because of his activities against the Dutch), but nonetheless invited to make himself quite at home, on a British naval ship, which will not arrive in Penang before the novel ends. All the surviving European characters end the story on board the ship, a floating enclave which becomes Maurice's 'paradise' (the last word of the novel) after the failed Utopia of Acheh. In this non-place or in-between place, Clifford consigns him to a different order of romance, a domestic love story, in which we watch as Etta Burnside, the attractive flirt who captivated him earlier, steps back to allow a truer love to blossom between Maurice and her quiet but worthy sister Mabel.

Maurice's adventures with the Achehese had been sexless, and thus lacking one of the favourite motifs of the Oriental romance, the exotic liaison.⁴⁵ The Acheh adventure had been full of gender themes, with its masculine bonding, effeminate king, and castrating army. But it is as if the erotic parameter of the story had split off, to reappear in the safer surroundings of the all-white subplot of Maurice's relations with Etta and Mabel. It would not be quite right to call this turn to the genre of courtship story a trope of evasion — after all, in failing to supply Maurice with a dusky maiden Clifford is eschewing an Orientalist

45. Lord Jim's love for the beautiful Jewel honours this standard motif of imperial romance, though Jewel is not strictly speaking a local or an Oriental. Clifford may have felt that he had dealt sufficiently with the theme in his first novel, *Since the Beginning* (1898), a story in which a white man's passionate Malayan mistress murders her former lover's saintly English wife. Robert Hampson discusses the novel in his examination of the question of gender in Clifford's fiction, including *A Free Lance*. Robert Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction* (London: Palgrave, 2000), 81–98.

stereotype, if only to replace it with a domestic one — but it is fair to say that the love story is useful to the structure of the tale, since it provides Maurice, cured of his grand illusion, with somewhere to end up, which is not quite a return to the colonial world he had rejected. The love of the saintly Mabel by itself appears to redeem Maurice of his past mistakes. In this way the critique of colonial ‘realism’ is not erased; it remains live. The price of this move is that Clifford purges Maurice of one kind of romance, and its language, only to plunge him into another. ‘Without more words he drew her to him and kissed her passionately, his eyes dancing with joy as they looked down into the dear face upturned to him’ (310), and so on.

Maurice with his English bride-to-be is no longer denationalized, but he is certainly depoliticized, as the curtain of impending marriage comes down on his refigured romance. But, though his surrender to possession by the magic and mystery of Acheh came to worse than nothing, there is still the possibility of a move in the opposite direction. Maurice in the excitement may have forgotten, but in his pocket he carries a letter from Tūku Ampun Dāya, addressed to the Governor of the Straits Settlements. In it, that amiable warlord invites the English to oust the Dutch, and to possess themselves of Acheh (225).

The paradoxes of contact remained deeply and painfully inscribed in Clifford’s own career. He had worked in Malaya, and established his reputation, under the Resident system, in which British control was exercised not by a bureaucratic structure but through an isolated white agent embedded in a local community, in a drama of contact sardonically described by Clifford’s senior colleague Frank Swettenham.

There was an idea and that was all. The idea was that a British officer, or two, should be sent into a country where white men were unknown; where everything that could be wrong was wrong; where almost every man was a law unto himself; where there was hardly any trade, no development of any kind, no roads, no police, or other means of maintaining order; and where two or three individuals claimed to be supreme. It was apparently supposed that, under these circumstances, the single white man would reduce everything to order by the exercise of tactful advice.⁴⁶

In these circumstances Clifford had exercised the imaginative empathy, and developed the knowledge, of which he was proud, and on which almost all of his writing draws. But in 1903, the year of *A Free Lance of Today*, the Colonial Office was to transfer him across the world to Trinidad; he would not be re-assigned to Malaya for more than twenty years. At the same time as he was removed from

46. Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya* (London: John Lane, 1907), 213–14.

Malaya, some officials at the Colonial Office expressed concern about his writing, fearing that it would detract from his official duties; Clifford was obliged to reassure his employers that he intended to lay this writing completely aside.⁴⁷ It is perhaps only a coincidence that he was discouraged from writing about Malaya at the same time as he was posted to the other side of the world, though J. de V. Allen is tempted to see a link between his transfer and Colonial Office disapproval of the tone of some of his more recent books. 'It would no doubt not be the first time that fear that one of their bright young men was "going native" had prompted the white men in Whitehall to arrange for promotion to another colony.'⁴⁸

If Clifford's employers felt his contact with Malaya had become too close, *A Free Lance of Today* might possibly have reassured them. Further proof of his belief in the danger of divided loyalties, and of denationalization, was to be had in *Sally: A Study* (1904) and *Saleh: A Sequel* (1908), republished as a single book, *A Prince of Malaya*, in 1926. Here Clifford tells the story of a Malay prince, sent to England for his education, who finds that he can never be accepted by the British as one of them, nor by his own people as a Malay. 'He saw himself as a waif of all the world — of the white men's world, but not in it; in the Malayan world, but not of it — an outcast of the nations!'⁴⁹ Clifford's foreword to *Saleh: A Sequel*, as we have already seen, specifically blames the policy of English education, instituted by Macaulay, for creating this tragic and unviable monster — 'There was once a man called Frankenstein'.⁵⁰ Torn by his love and hate for British and Malays, Saleh becomes the figurehead of a hopeless rebellion against British rule. The rebellion is put down by his old friend Jack Norris, a British official, and Saleh is eventually shot dead when he runs amok in an agony of despair. In this story, which is in many ways the didactic companion piece to *A Free Lance*, Saleh's most significant dialogic partnership is with the Clifford-like Norris, who likes Saleh and brings a deep sympathy and profound understanding to his work with Malays, and 'had absorbed unconsciously more than a little of the Oriental'; 'yet though the temptation may at times have been felt by him, never had he become denationalized, never had his robust faith in the ideals of his race in Asia faltered or failed' (118).

47. Harry A. Gailey, *Clifford: Imperial Proconsul* (London: Rex Collings, 1982), 41. Clifford did not keep this promise.

48. J. de V. Allen, 'Two Imperialists: A Study of Sir Frank Swettenham and Sir Hugh Clifford', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 37:1 (1964) 65. See also Kathryn Tidrick, 'Hugh Clifford, Administrator', 106.

49. Hugh Clifford, *Saleh: A Prince of Malaya*, Introduction by J. M. Gullick (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 111.

50. Hugh Clifford, *Saleh: A Sequel* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1908) ix. The attack on the Macaulay policy is not included in the amalgamated *A Prince of Malaya*, which has a Foreword reaffirming Clifford's belief in the necessity for the British intervention in Malaya.

This was, perhaps, the best Clifford could do with his insoluble problem. He had come to Malaya as a young man when race barriers were relatively low and he could develop an intimate experience of Malay life. When he returned as Governor in 1927, he saw around him unrest, separation, racism, and increasing restrictions on the liberty of the colonized. Intimate contact was closed to him, and meanwhile modernization had the country in its grip. In reply to his welcome from the Federal Council, Allen reports, Clifford spoke “in strange accents for a British colonial governor . . . of the threat of “absorption and denationalization” and the “tremendous ordeal” to which the Malays had been subjected by their progress, by the “disturbing and disintegrating effect of close association with alien races,” and by the “tremendous experience of the clashings of more than one civilization” in their midst.⁵¹ Clifford’s own disintegration awaited him in the form of the cyclical insanity to which he succumbed not long after, and he left Malaya for the last time in 1929.

In touch: Gender and regeneration in Maud Diver’s romances

With good reason, the incursion of Westerners in Asia in the colonial period is usually thought of as an overwhelmingly masculine affair, and the discourse on the Orient as largely the product of masculine voices. There were, of course, women of all Western nations in the East, and, particularly in the latter part of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, important women writers who helped to shape Eastern figures for a Western readership. The way women writers approach the figure of contact is especially interesting since that contact has been so often represented in gender terms, with a Western party with characteristics considered masculine (rational, enterprising, assertive and so on) and an Eastern one endowed with properties (passion, intuition, receptivity) attributed to women in traditional gender thinking. What about a subject who is Western, but female?

‘Despite colonialism,’ as Elleke Boehmer has put the question, ‘despite what might be called an imperious “maternalism”, an often convinced identification with colonial rhetoric, did women see the colonized differently, in more nuanced ways . . . ?’⁵² Was their vision complicated by a sense of sharing common experiences — of marginality for example — with colonized women and indeed with colonized men? How did Western women experience the East? In selecting two novels by Maud Diver for attention here, I want to show how a woman writer’s modality need not necessarily challenge that paradigmatic gendering of

51. J. de V. Allen, ‘Two Imperialists’, 70.

52. Elleke Boehmer, ‘Introduction’, *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870–1918*, ed. Elleke Boehmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxvii–xxviii.

East-West contact, but can certainly envisage it in different lights. In one novel we will see how contact with India precipitates a crisis and eventually a regeneration of both masculinity and femininity for the British. In another, a different kind of generativity is envisaged.

The way Clifford's *A Freelance of Today* turned into a domestic love story — what we might call a white romance — in its last chapters was a swerve that helped Clifford to ward off the intractable problems of the novel's principal political theme. Maurice Curzon was revolted with what the colonial presence was doing to Asia, but his contact with the indigenous and anti-colonial insurgency in Aceh brought only disillusion and self-disgust. The traditionally apolitical and feminine genre of the romance love-story provided Clifford with a refuge which simply deferred the issues of loyalty raised by his hero's adventures; at the conclusion of the novel the only loyalty that matters is the love between Maurice and Mabel, their shipboard romance insulated from the grounds of politics, and trapped in the amber of the story's end.

The colonial domestic romance — the story of love, marriage and family in a colonial setting — was a field of literary production arguably just as important as the colonial adventure romance. Adventure tales were usually written by men for a readership of men and boys, while most of the writers of the domestic novel were women writing for a putatively female reader, though both genres were undoubtedly read by people of both sexes. The domestic romance in a British and usually provincial setting, which was and still is a very significant genre in popular culture, usually required its readers to pay little attention to political themes or public issues in its manifest content.⁵³ But the colonial domestic romance was different. Whether white romance or — much more unusually — the story of interethnic relationships, it was bound by its setting to raise questions about the sort of people who had contact with other races, the sort of lives they lived and should live, and how this contact was best managed.

The colonial domestic novel was often employed by its usually female authors to dramatize and work through problems of the colonial subject, as well as to educate people at home about what life was like in the outposts of the empire, especially for women. To be an Englishwoman overseas was in itself a career — a predicament, a challenge, sometimes a vocation. The two most prolific Anglo-Indian women novelists, Flora Annie Steel and Maud Diver, both wrote handbooks about the life of the Englishwoman in India. Flora Annie Steel's *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (co-authored by Grace Gardiner) is an immensely

53. See for example Jean Radford, ed. *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Culture* (London: Verso, 1984), and Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

informative practical handbook, while Maud Diver's *The Englishwoman in India* is more in the nature of a plea for understanding of the *memsahib*, too often suspected by other Englishwomen of being 'idle, frivolous, and luxury-loving'.⁵⁴

The Anglo-Indian marriage was not just a private affair, and in the Anglo-Indian domestic novel, as Alison Sainsbury argues, 'we find a new conception of the domestic woman, one who is governed not by familial structures but by imperial service,' and the genre 're-entangles the language of sexual relations with the language of politics in response to the public nature of the colonial domestic space'.⁵⁵ In this setting the choice of a wife or husband, that classic novelistic theme, may be crucial to the good order and the future of the empire. Here I will look at the question of contact between British people and India in two novels about marriage by Maud Diver, which produce two quite different answers to the question of what it means to be Anglo-Indian.

Maud Diver was an imperialist and a conservative. She is described by Benita Parry as one of those women writers of romantic novels about India who 'hold up Anglo-India for approbation as a society incorporating the highest attainments of the British people, indeed of the human race', and, Parry continues, 'the tenor of her writings — her emphasis on the master-race qualities of the British, and conversely on the ineptitude, which she calls the feminine nature, of the Indians — is to vindicate Anglo-Indian isolation from India'.⁵⁶ This hostile characterization does highlight two important parameters of Diver's work — the question of gender, and the problem of contact. These matters are interconnected in Diver in important ways.

Among her prolific output of fiction Diver produced four 'Desmond family' and four 'Sinclair family' novels. I will consider one book from each sequence: *The Great Amulet* (1909), second of the Desmond novels, and *Lilamani* (1911), first of the Sinclair novels.⁵⁷ Diver's work usually concentrates on the domestic side of the Anglo-Indian experience, but this does not at all mean it is sealed off from political and public affairs. The familial is the political.

In this era of hotels, clubs, and motors, of days spent in sowing hurry and reaping shattered nerves, the type is growing rarer, and it will be an ill day for England's husbands and sons, nay, for her supremacy

54. Maud Diver, *The Englishwoman in India* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1909), 5.

55. Alison Sainsbury, 'Married to the Empire: The Anglo-Indian Domestic Novel', *Writing India 1757–1990*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 163–87; 168, 169.

56. Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: India in the British Imagination 1880–1930* (London: Verso, 1998), 95, 99.

57. *The Great Amulet* is dedicated to Diver's friend Mrs Trix Fleming, Rudyard Kipling's sister. The title is taken from a phrase, 'to love is the great amulet that makes the world a garden', in Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey*.

among nations, if it should ever become extinct. For it is no overstatement, but simple fact, that the women who follow, soon or late, in the track of her victorious arms, women of Honor Desmond's calibre — home-loving, home-making, skilled in the lore of heart and spirit — have done fully as much to establish, strengthen, and settle her scattered Empire as shot, or steel, or the doubtful machinations of diplomacy.⁵⁸

It is the burden of all Diver's novels on Indian themes that Englishwomen and Englishmen had to find a proper relation with India, and with each other, for this benevolent stability to be secured. Importantly, she reminds her readers that the empire depended on a partnership of men and women. *The Great Amulet* is a love story that exemplifies what is at stake. Its chief characters triumph in the end over their problems in a way that ensures their domestic happiness and, by implication, the consolidation of Anglo-India. *Lilamani*, with its action set entirely in Europe, deals with similar themes in a more visionary way. It is subtitled 'A Study in Possibilities', and what it adumbrates is a possible Anglo-Indian future.

The wedding of the hero and heroine happens at the beginning, not the end, of the romance of *The Great Amulet*. In Switzerland, Quita Maurice, a bohemian painter, marries Eldred Lenox, a captain of artillery on leave from India. But learning that she has had a recent romantic entanglement, he rejects her on their wedding day, and returns to his work in India where he has a reputation of being 'an anchorite and woman-hater' (55). Five years later, they meet again by chance in India, and the rest of the story recounts the process of their eventual reconciliation, which only becomes complete when Lenox has become a certain kind of man and Quita a certain kind of woman.

One issue central to the question of masculinity is Lenox's enslavement to opium, which he smokes mixed with tobacco. He has turned his back on Europe and Quita: the embrace of India, symbolized in this notoriously Oriental addiction, is his refuge from or alternative to both his cultural affiliations in the home country and the love of women, but at the same time it drains his virility, leaving him listless and unable to work efficiently. Like his East India Company grandfather before him, who went to the bad 'through eating too much opium, like some of the natives do out there' (91), he risks being orientalized, losing his masculine will-power and ultimately his agency, and succumbing to 'fatalism — the moral microbe of the East' (96).⁵⁹ This microbial contagion has left him demoralized, and his friend the heroic Captain Theo Desmond VC urges him to

58. Maud Diver, *The Great Amulet* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1909), 57. Page references in the text are to this edition.

59. The idea of the 'moral microbe' of Indian fatalism is mentioned in *The Englishwoman in India* (6) where it is attributed to the novelist Henry Seton Merriman.

buck up, with advice that would have done for Kipling's Hunter. 'No man worth his salt goes to meet failure half-way. I grant you're on the edge of an ugly pit, and if you insist on peering into it, your chance is gone' (96).

Addiction to drugs or alcohol was a serious social problem among Westerners in the tropics, and was one of the principal ways of going wrong in the East. Flora Annie Steel recalled that once when her Indian Civil Service husband was posted to a new station in the Punjab, they discovered on arrival that they were the only sober Europeans there: she soon found herself nursing a young English lady through *delirium tremens*.⁶⁰ Maud Diver is remarkably frank about Lenox's opium addiction, which he himself understands, in the idiom of the time, as a moral failure and an impurity of the blood: he feels that it would be wrong to resume sexual relations with Quita until he has broken his opium habit and ensured he will not pass this fatal legacy down to a future generation. The 'moral microbe of the East' has compromised his masculinity, and with it those moral qualities that depend on it, the manly attributes of heart and spirit which warrant British rule over the empire — 'the vital force, the pluck, endurance, and irrepressible spirit of enterprise, which — it has been aptly said — make him [the British officer], at his best, the most romantic figure of our modern time' (212).

Addiction is one conduit of this demoralizing contact. Disease is another. These two endemic perils make India a succubus, draining vital spirits from the body and the morale and infecting the victim with a listless pessimism specifically Oriental. When an epidemic of cholera strikes (cholera and famine were the great epics of British India), British energy is mobilized to counter it.

For on the Frontier work means work: and when cholera hovers over the station like a bird of prey, it is carried on with redoubled vigour. Only by constant occupation can fear and fatalism be held at arm's-length. Only the infectious mettle of the British officer can infuse into all ranks that cheerful alertness which, at a time of epidemic, is the finest safeguard in the world. (210)

Cholera is the debilitating infection endemic to India, but it meets its prophylactic, as we shall soon see it doing in Masters' *Nightrunners of Bengal*, in the resilient 'mettle' which is the benign infection brought by the British. Not only the troops but the civilian population too are nursed and chivvied through the outbreak. Lenox contracts and recovers from cholera (Honor Desmond also survives a bout) and is restored to Quita, but the opium given him in his illness has made his addiction worse. Again, Diver is frank about the addiction, as she is about

60. Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity* (London: Macmillan, 1929), 141.

Quita's sexual frustration: only when Lenox feels he has purged himself of his Oriental contagion, he explains to her, can their marriage be properly resumed.

Eldred Lenox has to return to the right sort of masculinity, as he does not only by self-detoxification but also by proving his courage and endurance as a soldier and explorer in some of the usual ordeals of the adventure genre, before he can enter into his happiness. This is straightforward enough: contact with a testing environment in the end makes (or remakes) a man of our hero; it is the scenario that Marlow and Stein arranged for Lord Jim. But interestingly Quita too has some changes to make before she can become the Englishwoman in India that the narrative requires. India in the novel becomes a kind of laboratory in which improved strains of national gender are developed and reproduced. Possibly — though this theme is not developed in *The Great Amulet* — Anglo-Indian models of gender could in turn regenerate a home country confused about masculinity and femininity by phenomena of modernity like feminism and urban living.

Anglo-Indian womanhood, on the model of Honor Desmond, is, as we have seen, deemed as essential to England's national supremacy as its masculine partner. Quita's Indian experience — in the dangers and responsibilities she faces — chastens her and makes her more serious, less egotistical. Her bohemian past and her unconventional continental ways, her mild flirtatiousness with the womanizing Major Garth and later with her husband's friends, her insistence on pleasing herself and even perhaps her career as a painter — these things have to be mortified in the demanding moral climate of Anglo-Indian domestic duty. In the end she proves her self-abnegation by consenting to her husband's accepting a posting to an inhospitable frontier region where they will be separated for most of the year. The interests of British India must be allowed precedence over her desires as well as over his.

In this case, then, contact with India incubates a metamorphosis of both masculinity and femininity. Drawing back from temptations to transgress — his drugs, her unconventionality — Lenox and Quita are recalled to responsibility and the reality principle. They emerge from their long ordeal much closer to the Anglo-Indian ideal embodied in their friends Theo and Honor Desmond. The various crises of the transformation are felt above all in adventures of bodily contact, in the physical discomforts and dangers they undergo, the cravings of addiction and unsatisfied desire, illnesses, wounds, and finally pregnancy and childbirth. The propagation of an Anglo-Indian child is both the evidence and the reward of this successful transformation. The Western man in the East overcomes the danger of infection and debilitation of the will, while the Western woman must vanquish her own shortcomings and selfishness in order to assume her destiny of supporting and inspiring her husband in his work of service. He becomes more of a man through being more assertive, she becomes more of a

woman through being more submissive, and they end the story worthy servants of India and the empire.

The continuity of the Indian empire is secured, it might be said, on terms that include the willing subordination of English women to men. For of course another important context of *The Great Amulet* and *Lilamani* is the debate about the New Woman, women's rights and specifically women's suffrage. A year after *The Great Amulet* and *The Englishwoman in India* were published, the National League Opposing Women's Suffrage was founded in London (1910). Its first two presidents were none other than the great imperialists, Lord Cromer and Lord Curzon, the latter giving it as his belief that admitting women to the political process might lead 'to the disruption and even to the ruin of the Empire'.⁶¹ Maud Diver too felt that empire depended on masculine supremacy; women were essential but not equal partners in the great national enterprise.

Put differently, Quita in effect relinquishes some of her modernity in accepting the role of *memsahib*. When Lenox first met her she was a free-spirited and cosmopolitan artist, roaming Europe with her slightly louche brother, but her contact with India has purged her of much of her independent-mindedness, her wilfulness, indeed her New Womanhood. She has learned some of that feminine submissiveness which Maud Diver believed was under threat in England, but fortunately still 'the chief charm of the cultured Eastern woman'.

For of a truth, in these days of independence, of pushing and striving among all ranks and sexes, the gracious old-world flower of gentleness runs risk of being trampled out of feminine character: the more so, because it is a common fallacy to confound gentleness with weakness; whereas true gentleness is the handmaid of strength though not of self-assertion.⁶²

It is certainly curious that in the end Lenox, cured of his addiction, has become less like the English idea of an Indian while his wife, purged of her egotism, has become more like one. Her latest painting is a self-portrait in which she represents herself turning away from her easel. The turn from the easel is also a turn from her right to independence, a trope acknowledging that there is a higher claim than art and career upon her, and a different kind of creative vocation. In the final words of the novel, when she refers to 'my masterpiece — our masterpiece' (406), she is speaking to her husband not about an artwork but about their infant India-born daughter. There are few important Indian characters in the

61. David Gilmour, Curzon: *Imperial Statesman* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 401–02.

62. Maud Diver, *The Englishwoman in India*, 166, 167. Notably, Diver devotes almost half of the book to celebrating the achievements of 'pioneer women of India'.

story, and it is fitting that this should be the last exchange in a novel in which the constitutive dialogic partner of the Englishman is the Englishwoman in India.

Lilamani is principally different — and very unusual though not unique — in being the story of the romantic courtship and ultimately successful marriage of an Indian woman and an Englishman. *Lilamani* is the daughter of a high-caste Rajput Hindu, Sir Lakshman Singh. Travelling to Europe with her father and in the company of a feminist doctor, Audrey Hammond, at Antibes she meets an aristocratic English painter, Nevil Sinclair. They marry, and when his father dies they return to England where he must assume his responsibilities as baronet and head of the family: *Lilamani* becomes Lady Sinclair. The rest of the story deals with the various obstacles they must overcome, mostly in the form of English tradition and race prejudice embodied in Sinclair's sister Lady Roscoe but also in Sinclair himself. There is a happy ending, and three more Sinclair novels will continue the family's story. While this romantic resolution is purchased at some considerable price, as we shall see, its positive treatment of the old trope of miscegenation, at a time when tragic or cynical representations were still very much the norm, deserves to be saluted. Notably, the successful marriage of English and Indian partners here flourishes not in some sequestered enclave of British India but in the heartland of the English governing class.

In many ways, a grotesque idealization and essentialization is the price of Diver's sympathetic portrait of the young Indian aristocrat abroad.

And at seventeen a child of the fulgent East is already a woman; which complicates matters not a little, in more ways than one. So it was with *Lilamani*, a creature saturate with the poetic symbolism, the passion and religious fervour of her race, reared on age-old tradition and ideals not to be eradicated by a change of continents and a few years at college.⁶³

This is a gender ideal of a specifically reactionary kind, as we see when *Lilamani* rejects the scientific training and vocation, and the model of womanhood, offered by her friend the feminist and doctor Audrey Hammond. Audrey is a missionary of modernity and is disappointed that *Lilamani* will not become a doctor and bring her medical skills home to improve the lot of Indian women. Nevil Sinclair, in the conservative pattern, likes her just as she is. 'I wouldn't change one iota of her unique, delicately-poised personality,' he exclaims. 'Her pretty poetic fancies and her quaint turns of phrase are as much a part of her as the scent and colour are of a flower' (127). So far, so unpromising. *Lilamani* is portrayed as an outstandingly feminine woman, that femininity essentialized and warranted by

63. Maud Diver, *Lilamani: A Study in Possibilities* [1911], ed. Ralph Crane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19. Subsequent page references in the text are to this edition.

her orientality. The idea of the essential femininity of the East is endorsed by her father Sir Lakshman, an enthusiastic Anglophile imperialist — ‘If modern India produced more of his type,’ says Audrey, ‘we should hear little or nothing of political unrest’ (37) — who is keen to support the marriage if it will promote yet greater sympathy between Britain and India. ‘From an idealist standpoint,’ he explains, ‘it seems as if such combination ought to produce a fine result: if only because soul of the West is masculine and soul of the East, feminine’ (118).

Yet the novel shows intelligence and sensitivity in its portrayal of the fears and miseries of a very inexperienced Hindu girl finding her way in an alien culture, even among people who are fond of her. In stories like ‘Lakshmi’ and ‘The Escape’, Diver explores the predicament of the sequestered Hindu woman, relatively powerless and ignorant in ‘her restricted world of the Inside’.⁶⁴ In *Lilamani*, the young girl exposed to modern European ways feels that the sanctity of her own reserved female space has been transgressed, and she is lost and scared ‘without her private shrine dear to Hindu womanhood’ (50), until she gets the contents of her own room shipped from India; with these materials she is able to reconstitute an enclave of her own ‘world of the Inside’ within Nevil Sinclair’s English ancestral home, in an early example of multicultural space. This sanctuary of refuge and identity is particularly necessary as she encounters the active hostility, as well as the casual unthinking racism, of many of the English she meets, and especially of Nevil’s sister Jane who thoroughly disapproves of her brother’s bride. Clearly for her, miscegenation would cast an even greater Oriental shadow on the bloodline than the hereditary addiction feared by Eldred Lenox. But Jane’s acquaintance with race theory does make her concede that her brother’s union with an Aryan is not quite as bad as if he had married a Hottentot or an American Negro (‘I may be prejudiced,’ she says stoutly; ‘I’m not ignorant’, 211).

Diver makes it clear that racial prejudice is the norm among the English, both those who have lived in India and those who have never been there. Interestingly Nevil Sinclair himself, despite the courage he has shown in marrying an Indian, struggles obscurely with his own half-admitted misgivings. It is Lilamani who makes all the adjustments (she becomes Lady Sinclair but it is unthinkable that he should become Mr Singh) and who is always on foreign soil. Nevil will not countenance a visit to India; even Egypt, which they visit for Lilamani’s health, is just too Oriental for him. ‘There were moments of unreasoning, yet invincible revulsion, when he could scarcely endure the sight of those other Eastern women who, in a dozen trifling ways, so subtly reminded him of his wife; robbing her, thus, of the unique quality that was for him an

64. Maud Diver, *Siege Perilous and Other Stories* (London: John Murray, 1924), 33–53, 207–30; 33.

essential part of her charm' (225). Those 'other Eastern women' look too like his wife for comfort: the affiliation reveals what he has been trying to forget about her.

There are pungent suggestions of sexual problems with the marriage, with Nevil for a while apparently unwilling or unable to love her — this most intimate form of contact being out of the question because, as he confesses later, he dreaded having a son 'handicapped by the stigma of mixed blood' (335).⁶⁵ This is, after all, a dynastic matter involving the future of the baronetcy and the family estate (a daughter similarly stigmatized would be all right, it is suggested), metonymic of a patrilineal English social order. The frustrations and unhappiness of her predicament drive Lilamani close to suicide. This frank and painful treatment of the theme of miscegenation has to be balanced against the more fluffy and sentimental material about Lilamani's 'poetic fancies and quaint turns of phrase' and so on.

Interestingly, especially in the light of the part played by Quita's painting in *The Great Amulet*, it is in the realm of art that the problems of the marriage, and the novel, are more or less resolved. Nevil is not much more than a dilettante at the start of the story, living as an artist in order to escape the role of politician and landed proprietor for which his birth seems to have destined him. It is only when Lilamani becomes his muse and collaborator that his talent blossoms and is recognized. During their honeymoon, it is decided 'that he should make his name as a painter of Eastern subjects, having become enamoured of half a hemisphere in the person of one small woman' (155). Lilamani, in other words, adds value to Nevil's talent. She is the embodiment of an essentially lyrical Oriental culture, as we have seen, but she also has access to its epic resources, and she instructs Nevil in the narrative of the Ramayana which becomes the theme of his own painting — or rather of *their* painting, for it is she, Nevil tells her, that is the true artist (159). This is not Indian art but Western technique and training at the service of a Hindu theme, its subject-matter related by Lilamani in oral form and later in written translation in 'her own quaintly characteristic English' (301), critically approved by their international artist friends, and exhibited and sold in a smart London gallery. This cultural fusion is both symbol and product of miscegenation.

Contact between East and West here finds its expression in a creativity that depends — equally, as Nevil insists — on both partners in the dialogue. A new kind of art is generated by intellectual congress just as a new life is conceived

65. In Flora Annie Steel's Mutiny novel *On the Face of the Waters*, the child of Jim Douglas and his Indian mistress is born dead, rather to the relief of his father because of 'the vague repulsion which the thought of a child had always brought with it'. Flora Annie Steel, *On the Face of the Waters* (London: Heinemann, 1897), 35.

from a resumed sexuality. It seems unlikely that Sir Nevil Sinclair is a modernist (I am afraid he sounds more like Alma-Tadema), but it is worth noting that his work, inspired and refreshed by Oriental themes, coincides with the modernists' reinvention of a European pictorial and plastic art given impetus by non-European models — from Africa and the South Seas for example — often made available in museums and galleries and books in the form of colonial trophies.⁶⁶ Perhaps more modestly, Western technique and Indian subject matter come together in fiction like Maud Diver's own, including the Sinclair sequence of which this is the first volume.

And the collaboration between these marriage partners effects another regeneration too. The Sinclair family seat at Bramleigh Beeches was in a parlous state at the start of the story, with Nevil evading his responsibilities as elder son while his father squandered the remains of the family capital in reckless speculation. With Lilamani's support the house is saved and becomes hospitable, the family is more or less reconciled, and Nevil settles to his squirely duties, a masculine task softened by his own artistic-Oriental strain, for 'in all true artists, there lurks some hidden touch of the woman' (155). As in *The Great Amulet*, the East has a contribution to make to renewing traditional English ways. By this means an essential English way of life is secured, albeit by a somewhat androgynous agency and even though it will be inherited by a son who is half Indian.

At whatever level we read it, whether as a social 'problem' novel, a romantic love story, or an equally romantic allegory of its own procedure, the novel is notably able to imagine contact between East and West as an ultimately benign, productive process, albeit as one that needs to be worked for and earned. Furthermore, it is a process whose results may be felt in the home culture as significantly as in the colonized one. What is more, it is a process oriented to the future. Lilamani's story, for all its tribulations and however idealized its principal character, is generative. The child who issues from it will be Roy Sinclair, hero of the sequel *Far to Seek* (1921), the heir to his father's responsibilities and title and the beneficiary of an unorthodox multicultural education from his mother, who, 'with her Eastern mother genius, had forged between herself and her first-born a link woven of the tenderest, most subtle fibres of heart and spirit'.⁶⁷ Undoubtedly the idealization of romance is at work here too, and furthermore in the ensuing

66. A good guide to this large subject is in Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25–70. *Lilamani* was published in the year between the London exhibitions 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' (1910, when 'human character changed' according to Virginia Woolf) and the 'Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition' (1912). Leonard Woolf, back from Ceylon, was the secretary of the latter.

67. Maud Diver, *Far to Seek: A Romance of England and India* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), 31. Lila and Nevil go on to have four healthy children.

story of Roy Sinclair, matters of race are not treated with a sensitivity that would satisfy a modern taste. Nevertheless the story of contact told in *Lilamani*, which will issue in a racially mixed English person with a double cultural inheritance, seems to have more to say to our contemporary experience than other Maud Diver novels in which 'Anglo-Indian' refers simply to the white governing class in the Raj.

Contact and contagion: *Nightrunners of Bengal*

In the course of a long day I listed thirty-five areas of conflict about which I felt I could write novels. They covered the whole period from 1600 to 1947. Taken as a whole they would present a large canvas of the British period in India. The British would be in the foreground, as they had been in actuality; yet I thought the canvas would show how they were controlled by their environment — India — even while they were ostensibly directing it.⁶⁸

Thus John Masters, recently retired from the army, planned the campaign of writing that would produce nine novels with an Indian setting, besides three volumes of autobiography. His subject was the British in India, and his books would range in time from 1627 to 1947. His theme was contact and its dramatic form, conflict. It was immediately obvious to him where he should begin. For British and Indians, the uprising called the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was the explosive and tragic crisis of a relationship two and a half centuries old; its repercussions were to extend beyond the independence India and Pakistan achieved a century later. John Masters' first Indian novel, *Nightrunners of Bengal* (1951), tells a story of 1857 focussed through an East India Company army officer, Rodney Savage. His other novels centre on the experience of Savage's forebears, and descendants, in a family he saw as possessing 'dominant, recognizable characteristics, which in turn should resemble the characteristics of the British as they showed themselves in India'.⁶⁹

There is much in *Nightrunners* for the student of contact and transgression to ponder, and many of the themes of this chapter return within its adventure-story form, including the perilous romance of contact and the shocking reality of violence, the test of gender roles and ethnic identity, denationalization, and a debate about location and belonging, the proper relation between the Anglo-Indian individual — or couple — and the Eastern place. I will centre my discussion on the lawman-and-outlaw relationship between the central character of

68. John Masters, *Pilgrim Son: A Personal Odyssey* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), 145–46.

69. *Ibid.* Masters himself belonged to the fifth generation of his family to have served in India.

Nightrunners, Rodney Savage, and his enemy the Silver Guru. But I need to frame this with consideration of other relationships, between Savage and three women — his wife Joanna, the Rani Sumitra of Kishanpur, and another Englishwoman, Caroline Langford — and between Savage and the jungle-dwelling peasants he comes into contact with later in the story. The choreography of these characters plays a belated variation on the drama of contact — belated, of course, in relation to the historical context of the story, but also in relation to the Raj itself, since the novel was written after the British withdrawal from India, though it has been persuasively argued that all Masters' Indian fiction is an imaginative repossession of the country, a way of 'staying on'.⁷⁰

Rodney Savage, born in India into a family with generations of service to the East India Company, is a captain in the Bengal Native Infantry, commanding Indian troops. At least half Indian in his loyalties, he is a man who has dreamed of romantic adventure like Maurice Curzon, but who experiences India as a problem. 'He found it a strange thing to hate his exile, and yet to love the country which was its place'.⁷¹ His wife — she of the imperative verbs — has been in the country six years and enjoys the prestige and intrigue of regimental society. She has as little contact as possible with local people, whom she refers to as blacks. (This was common enough among the less sensitive British. Queen Victoria had made Lord Salisbury apologize for referring to Indians as 'black men'.)⁷² Caroline Langford is a visitor, the cousin of the wife of an officer in Rodney's regiment at Bhowani; but she has taken the trouble to learn Hindustani and takes a stubborn interest in Indian life. The Rani is regent of a neighbouring small princely state and enlists Rodney's help as a soldier, later recruiting him as her lover, but all the while she has been playing a leading part in plotting the insurrection to drive the British from India. And the Silver Guru, a holy man who is a leper, sits under a peepul tree in Bhowani, making gnostic pronouncements and exhibiting what seem to be supernatural powers; he too, it turns out, is involved in the plot. When the sepoy mutiny and most of the English in Bhowani, including Joanna, are killed, Rodney escapes with his infant son and Caroline Langford, with the help of Indians loyal to the British. They make their way after a perilous journey to the British garrison town at Gondwara, bringing information which enables Company troops to defeat the rebel forces in a battle which prefigures the failure of the uprising. Here the story ends.

70. See Peter Morey, *Fictions of India* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 80–108.

71. John Masters, *Nightrunners of Bengal* [1951] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 22. Page references in the text are to this edition.

72. David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (London: John Murray, 2005), 5.

The sepoy mutiny which includes soldiers of his own regiment takes Rodney Savage completely by surprise, leaving him traumatized and temporarily mad. But indeed he has been wrong about everyone around him, with the possible exception of his wife. His education by experience can be charted across his relations with the three women; first with his small-minded and provincial English wife, with her complete lack of engagement with her Indian environment; then with the Rani, the dangerous seductress who tricks him but also loves him, who wants him to leave the Company's service and command her army; and finally with Miss Langford, earnest and liberal, whom he instinctively disliked at first, but who emerges in the end as not only his destined partner but also the bearer of the solution, in a sense, to his Indian problem.

These women represent, obviously enough, possible modalities open to Rodney, and to his family's association with the East, ranging from a commanding aloofness, through a seductive immersion which as usual entails an engulfing loss of identity, to a dedication to service in the recognition of difference which is what Savage rescues from the disaster of the rebellion, with Caroline Langford's help and example. This summary, with its Goldilocks options (not too distant, not too close, but just right!) makes the novel seem more schematic than it is, but not distortingly so. The focus on Rodney Savage, and the British problem of how to live in India, central to all Masters' fiction, precipitates this triangulation of partners which is as much ideological as sexual. 'Come, Miss Langford,' Joanna says teasingly to Caroline in an early chapter, 'we will begin to think you have quite gone native' (26). She has not, but her feelings of sympathy and responsibility towards Indians will enable her to survive as Joanna will not. Rodney Savage does not go native either. He does not risk denationalization: the problem is that his nation is Anglo-India.

Caroline Langford complains that the British hold themselves aloof — 'India is your palace, but you live shut up with yourselves in little rooms' — and Rodney glumly concedes the point, but says it is inevitable. 'But to feel India in the way you say your Kishanpur friends do, you must become Indian, gain one set of qualities and lose another. As a race we don't do it — we can't' (27). Later he restates this dilemma as a problem of government and jurisdiction, arguing that the British rule India according to muddled and contradictory principles. 'We must not, as we do now, permit untouchability and forbid suttee, abolish tyranny in one state and leave it in another, have our right hand Eastern and our left hand Western. It is not that India is wicked; she has her own ways. If we rule we must rule as Indians — or we must make the Indians English' (176). In a sense, what he is drawing attention to is the presence of contradictory liberal and conservative modalities in the ideology of British India. Ought British India to be a more British or a more Indian place? The dilemma is reflected in Rodney Savage's own life, for he is drawn as much to India as to an England he knows

little about, and the crisis of the mutiny will test this double loyalty to destruction, and turn him for a while rabidly against all Indians. The East drives him mad, but it is not a denationalizing madness so much as a retrenchment of his ethnic and imperial identity, and a revulsion from mixing with Indians. In consorting with the Rani he was willing to betray his wife. Now he feels betrayed by the men under his command, and by India.

It is here that the most interesting pairing of the novel emerges as that between Rodney Savage and the Silver Guru of Bhowani. In plot terms, there is some justice in Ralph Crane's complaint that the story of the guru is 'unnecessary and somewhat ridiculous,' but the balance and interchange between the guru and the English officer is central to the theme of contact and transgression in the novel.⁷³ The guru is physically a ruin but spiritually powerful, and has his own authority with the people of Bhowani and Kishanpur. He is, Rodney discovers to his astonishment, not Indian at all, but a deserter from a British infantry regiment thirty years before. (Rodney is thirty: he and the Silver Guru are to this extent twins.) He has been possessed by India through the most intimate of all contact. 'India had touched him and turned his white to silver. Selecting him, she branded him and drew him ashamed out of the English room into the darkness and the glare' (161). Interestingly, the leprous guru tells Rodney his story when the latter is not in his army uniform, but in disguise as an Indian, his clothes dishevelled and splashed in coloured powder: he is already, like Maurice Curzon, cross-dressed, his Englishness travestied. Like Maurice with the Pāwang, Rodney confronts in the Silver Guru the embodiment of the transgression to which he too has been tempted. This kinship between them seems to give the holy man a knowledge of the Englishman and insight into his desires and needs. 'Captain Savage, I know you. [. . .] I know that you dream of romantic adventure . . . Your blood drives you. Don't you think I might be the same sort of person?' (160).

The guru's transgression has come at a physical price but with a metaphysical bonus. His disloyalty, as it seems, to his own people has been rewarded with supernatural powers, like the hypnotic and metamorphic powers of the Pāwang, or the magical powers attributed, though falsely, to Case as *tiapolo* or devil (or Kurtz's transformation into a cult object in 'Heart of Darkness'). Rodney Savage confronts in the guru an example of a radical and transfigurative transgression beyond his own dreams of romantic adventure. For a moment the whole story seems poised on the point of this recognition scene between outlaw and lawman. But only for a moment. The guru does not long demoralize the officer. There was never a serious possibility that the renegade's path could be Rodney Savage's,

73. Ralph J. Crane, *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 22.

and this specular encounter, like Maurice Curzon's with the Pāwang, only serves to remind the white hero where his inalienable ethnic loyalty lies.

As a matter of fact, Rodney learns later that in this exchange the guru was lying and playing for time, to prevent Rodney from discovering the projected mutiny of his own troops. The pattern is oddly repeated in the next interview between the two, when Rodney keeps the guru talking to give the loyal servant Piroo time to come up behind and strangle him. There seems to be a wider pattern in these doubling interlocutions between the relatively law-abiding and the lawless who embody their temptation to transgress, for Wiltshire kills Case, Curzon kills the Pāwang, Savage has the Silver Guru killed.⁷⁴ In this last encounter, it emerges that the guru is not in fact English, but an Irishman, a revelation that causes Rodney to gasp with relief, for it means the guru is not after all a traitor, only an enemy: his part in the rebellion is not problematic. The guru, who now admits that the rebellion is fuelled by hate and destined to fail, tells Rodney that the British in India have wanted nothing but power, where they should have given love. His last words quote St Paul's admonition to lowliness, meekness and charity.

This is a position Rodney has come to share, and the last words of the guru are in harmony with the thematic direction the novel has taken. With the help and example of Caroline Langford and the earthy Mrs Hatch (who has escaped with them), Rodney is cured of his desire for revenge against India, and in the jungle village of Chalisgon where they have been given refuge, the English refugees work unselfishly to help during an epidemic of cholera. These are circumstances when contact can very easily mean contagion, and they are risking a fate worse than the guru's leprosy. A gospel of love and self-denying effort, spelled out in the dialogue between the former Catholic Irishman and the Protestant Englishman, underwrites a dedication to self-sacrifice and service which becomes the novel's solution to the problem of how the English should live in India. The cholera, to be sure, being no respecter of persons, is a naturalizing figure: everyone is equally subject to its dangers. It serves as a reminder of universal kinship at a time when the rebellion has made people deadly enemies. Natural kinship tropes political division.⁷⁵ At the same time, the novel makes its own swerve to white romance as Rodney and Caroline discover their love for each other, entrusting India's future, as it was in *The Great Amulet*, to a mature Anglo-Indian couple dedicated to unselfish service.

74. Marlow does not kill Kurtz, but he does threaten to, and later watches him die.

75. A further form of kinship is created at the very end of the novel, when in the aftermath of battle Rodney Savage agrees to raise the defeated Rani's son. This latest example of the surrogate parent-and-child group constitutes what Ralph Crane calls 'a rather optimistic conclusion' in the circumstances. Ralph J. Crane, *Inventing India*, 22.

The epidemic, and everyone's (Indian and English) heroic efforts to battle it, suggest that in the end there is no important difference between people, and here in the village in the jungle Rodney's problems with India seem to be solved, and the place becomes for a while the Utopia he wanted, a place of both integration and difference. In Chalisgon after the crisis of the epidemic has passed, ethnicity has dissolved, to be replaced simply by class, which is easier to live with. 'The people he passed greeted him with their unfailing courtesy. They bowed low and joined their hands, because he was of a ruling class; but this time they smiled with their eyes, too, because he had proved himself their equal' (295). He feels he belongs here, accepted not for what he is but for what he has done.

It is a glimpse of Hugh Clifford's ideal of an empire of philanthropy and humanitarianism, a redeeming dedication to works — the good works of evangelically-inspired liberal imperialism, or the public works celebrated by the conservative Kipling with his hymns to drains and famine relief. It anticipates, in several ways, the postcolonial modalities of charities and NGOs in the third world. For Rodney Savage and Caroline Langford and Mrs Hatch, risking their lives to help nurse the sick in Chalisgon, the loss of identity which had haunted Europeans making common cause with the East is troped, not as transgression but as a willing self-abnegation. A different aspect of romance makes its startling late appearance as the village in the jungle is transformed into the redemptive green world, where lessons are learned from nature about how people can live together in harmony. This is, it hardly needs saying, a suspension rather than a real solution of Rodney Savage's India problem, let alone of the rebellion still raging outside the pastoral refuge, to which he and the others have to return, or of what was yet in the future as the story ends — the rebellion's defeat, the terrible reprisals that followed, and the conflicts and divisions to come.

China 1938: Auden and Isherwood

As he went through the passport check at Heathrow airport, in the summer of 1973, at the beginning of a journey that would take him to the war in Vietnam and Cambodia, James Fenton glanced at the Sunday newspapers and saw that the poet W. H. Auden had died.¹ The conjunction of the beginning of his journey, and the end of Auden's, seemed significant in some obscure but important way. The young Fenton had recently dreamed of his own death. Auden was the poet he most admired. Fenton in the summer of 1973 was setting out on a journey to see and write about a war in Asia. In the new year of 1938 Auden had embarked on his own journey to an Asian war.

Kipling, Conrad, and Clifford, Maud Diver and Flora Annie Steel, Paul Scott, John Masters and Graham Greene all wrote about war in the East. War is a particularly potent figure in the representation of the Orient as a place that must often seem to an outside observer 'replete with problem and tragedy' (in Auerbach's haunting phrase).² In this chapter I will juxtapose the literary record of two journeys to observe war in Asia. The first is that of Auden and Christopher Isherwood, travelling to report on the Sino-Japanese war in 1938, and the second is that of James Fenton in Indochina in the early 1970s. Both journeys produced a body of prose reportage and poetry by writers of strong political convictions, which can speak to each other in revealing ways. Auden, Isherwood and Fenton at the time of their travels had no stake in the colonial East. They were left-wing and anti-imperialist, and solidarity with the Asian victims of aggression was a part of the luggage of mixed motives for both journeys. They were tied to no

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1. James Fenton, *All the Wrong Places: Adrift in the Politics of Asia* [1988] (London: Penguin, 1990), 6.
 2. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Task (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 41.

imperial, commercial or missionary enterprise, and so were free, it seemed, to observe with disinterested sympathy. But how possible was it for the Western observer and outsider to make common cause with Eastern suffering, or triumph? And were the pitfalls of modality in 1938 different from those of 1973? Is it in any case decent to make literary copy out of someone else's war, when the reporter may share some of its dangers but always has the option of going home and leaving it behind? The abjection of the Orient (in Fenton, of the Third World) was dramatized in the tragedy of war, but how, and by what right, could a Westerner, with a colonial history on his back, record its story? And how should the traveller represent himself in his account? The journey to war might be a figure of solidarity — fellow-travelling, indeed — but the journey could also be construed as an ego trip, the traveller a holiday-maker, a privileged thrill-seeker, even a voyeur. Of the figures considered so far, the journey to war involves the highest degree of self-consciousness — ironically enough, since the reporter of a war is supposed to be an ancillary character in someone else's drama.

In his 'Second Thoughts' prefacing the reissue of *Journey to a War* in 1973, Isherwood saw the risk of his narrative being mockingly entitled 'Little Me in China'.³ Fenton was to be accused, by Benedict Anderson, of 'political tourism'.⁴ Auden omitted his own figure, and the pronoun *I*, from his China poems; but he omitted China from many of them too. How does the travel writer relate to his or her counterpart, the 'travelee' or people travelled to — especially in the case of war reporting when the travelee is more than likely to be a soldier, victim of war or refugee — as well as to other writers, other travellers?⁵ And what image of Eastern people and places emerges from the war report?

In the summer of 1937, Faber and Faber and Random House had offered a contract to the poet W. H. Auden and the novelist Christopher Isherwood to collaborate on a travel book, a genre which had been enjoying a vogue since the Great War.⁶ The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war that August determined them to go to China. For left-wing intellectuals, solidarity with China's resistance to invasion was an obligation similar to support for the Republican cause in the

3. W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* [1939], rev. ed. (London: Faber, 1973), 8.

4. Benedict Anderson, 'James Fenton's Slideshow', *New Left Review* 158 (1986), 81–90.

5. See the very useful discussion of these questions in Hugh Haughton, 'Journeys to War: W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and William Empson in China', *A Century of Travels in China*, eds. Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 147–62.

6. See Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Philip Dodd, 'The Views of Travellers: Travel Writing in the 1930s', *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing*, ed. Philip Dodd (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 127–38; and Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 341–418.

Spanish civil war. By the time he came to write up his part of the book, in the dangerous summer of 1938, Isherwood was in a mood to grumble about the political pressures or expectations under which he wrote, but not to challenge them. 'Besides, the "line" I have to take — united front, resistance to the Japanese, etc., etc., — has lost whatever meaning it ever had for me. These are only slogans now.'⁷ But the journey to the Chinese war had been an exciting prospect a year earlier. Many young European and American writers had flocked to Spain — Auden had made his own brief excursion there in the spring of 1937, although not to the front — but China by contrast was not already 'crowded with star literary observers' and this made it professionally attractive: 'We'll have a war all of our very own,' Auden promised Isherwood.⁸

Auden was by this time the acknowledged leader of his poetic generation. Isherwood had made a name for himself as a novelist, and especially with his Berlin stories. They were old friends and occasional sex partners. They left England in January 1938, returning at the end of July. Their book *Journey to a War* was published in March 1939.⁹ Auden and Isherwood's China book, like Auden and MacNeice's *Letters from Iceland* (1937), is eccentrically shaped. It starts, after a dedicatory sonnet to E. M. Forster, with six poems by Auden on themes arising from the journey from London to Hong Kong. Then comes the 'Travel-Diary', a substantial prose narrative by Isherwood relating their China journey from its beginning at Hong Kong to its end in Shanghai. This is followed by the 'Picture Commentary' — thirty-two pages of photographs, mostly taken by Auden — and finally by Auden's 'In Time of War', consisting of a sequence of twenty-seven sonnets (twenty in the revised version) and a thirteen-page 'Verse Commentary'. At the back of the book there is a map of China. *Journey to a War* is one of Auden's collaborations that is not just structural, but textural: Isherwood drew on Auden's notes as well as on his own for the Travel-Diary, and there seems to be plenty of Isherwood's brand of observation in Auden's verse. It would be a futile exercise to try to disentangle their dialogic and intratextual embrace within

7. Christopher Isherwood, *Down There on a Visit* [1962] (London: Methuen, 1985), 133. The words quoted occur in a diary entry for 31 August 1938, reproduced in an autobiographical narrative of 1962. It is as well to enter the usual caution about the fictionality of Isherwood's autobiographical writings. The first volume of Isherwood's published diaries begins in 1939.

8. Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1976), 289.

9. When the book was to be re-issued in 1973, the year of Auden's death (and Fenton's journey), Auden thought his work very careless and made some substantial alterations, dropping a passage of the verse commentary and several of the sonnets, and revising the wording and the order of others. Auden's revisions create difficulties for the scholar. To be consistent, I quote the original versions of the poems I discuss here, even in cases where I feel the revisions are an improvement. Isherwood made no revisions.

the pages of their book, and in fact the relation between them is an important generator of its meanings. Still, simply in structural terms Isherwood's travels come enclosed in Auden's journey, and one of the questions this raises is whether the travelling companions were at one about where they were going, and, later, where they thought they had been.

Auden and Isherwood left England in January 1938 and arrived in Hong Kong in late February. 'The Ship', Auden's sonnet describing their sea voyage, ends on an apprehensive note.

It is our culture that with such calm progresses
Over the barren plains of a sea; somewhere ahead
The septic East, a war, new flowers and new dresses.
Somewhere a strange and shrewd To-morrow goes to bed
Planning the test for men from Europe; no one guesses
Who will be most ashamed, who richer, and who dead.¹⁰

The generalization, whereby the ship becomes a metonym for all Western culture, immediately raises the stakes for this particular journey. The generalization is typical, and so is the anxiety. In the 1930s Auden was disposed to regard almost any experience as a 'test', with its several implications of ordeal, examination, and authentication. The nature of the test in store for these men from Europe was certainly multiple. For the ocean-going voyagers it was their destination, the comprehensively alien culture of Asia: what would they make of it? For Auden and his fellow-traveller Isherwood, it was also the war they were going to witness, which would be for both their first experience of such things: how would they react, and what might it reveal of their true nature? For the test for men from Europe was also a test for men. The East is figured here as a stage on which this European action will play out. Further, it was clear to Auden and Isherwood as to many Europeans early in 1938 that tomorrow, or the next day, would confront them with a war much closer to home, a European war. This anxiety too informs the poem, as it informed most of Auden's work (and Isherwood's), in a way that would cause Philip Larkin to declare that 'Europe and the fear of war' were Auden's 'key subject and emotion'.¹¹ Any voyage in 1938 was a stage in a journey to a war.

They had travelled to a country under attack: Japanese troops were in China. A united-front sympathy with the Chinese made it important to Auden and Isherwood that they should produce an account of the country that would be

10. W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (New York: Random House, 1939), 20. Page references in the text are to this edition.

11. Philip Larkin, 'What's Become of Wystan?', *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955–1982* (London: Faber, 1983), 123–28; 125. Larkin argues that Auden lost his 'key subject and emotion' when he moved to America.

neither exploitative nor coercive, and should be exempt as far as possible from the collusion with overbearing Western actions and attitudes that had characterized most modern European writing about Asia. They also wanted, and needed, to avoid the pompous tone of unchallengeable expertise which was too often the voice, and vice, of traditional travel writing. They had been asked to go to China and write the book, after all, not because they were experts on China — very far from it — but because they were well-known writers. At the same time, their remit was factual and informative; people who read their book would expect to be told what things were really like in China at war, and what that war meant. These circumstances pitched the travellers into a crisis of authority, even before they disembarked in Hong Kong.

A travel writer is supposed to write about his or her travels — the place is predicate to the writerly subject — and the first task for the travel writer as for the traveller is to find one's bearings. Dennis Porter sets out the implications of this in *Haunted Journeys*.

From the beginning, writers of travel have more or less unconsciously made it their purpose to take a fix on and thereby fix the world in which they found themselves; they are engaged in a form of cultural cartography that is impelled by an anxiety to map the globe, centre it on a certain point, produce explanatory narratives, and assign fixed identities to regions and the races that inhabit them. Such representations are always concerned with the question of place and of placing, of situating oneself once and for all vis-à-vis an Other or others.¹²

This finding and situating oneself, and of others in relation to oneself, is a process of orientation, a word which usefully can also mean finding the East, or simply travelling eastward. The orientations of *Journey to a War* are very interesting indeed, and partly because they are oddly contradictory, the plural orientations of the book being one important way in which it manages to avoid (or, if you will, fails to achieve) that monocular vision that would take possession of the object of its gaze, China.

Their journey to a war took Auden and Isherwood first by sea from England to Hong Kong, from the metropolis of empire to its extreme edge in the 'Far' East. Hong Kong was doubly marginal, of course, being peripheral both to the West and to China, and Isherwood's narrative starts with the travellers' impatience to get away from this outpost and penetrate the real China. The word 'real' chimes increasingly forlornly through Isherwood's prose, and is also much invoked in

12. Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 20.

Auden's verse in the book. It occurs, with its relatives 'really' and 'unreal', six times in 'The Voyage', the opening five-stanza poem. But though the tone of that first poem is gloomy and anxious, and though the perpetual hurry of their few days in Hong Kong was a distraction, the beginning of the 'real' journey — the journey in China — was an exciting prospect. "Well," Auden said, "here we are. Now it's going to start" (28).

The real East was what they were after, and they had come properly equipped with the instrument of realism, a camera, to capture it — perhaps the same camera Auden had taken to Iceland on his travels with Louis MacNeice a couple of years before, declaring photography 'the democratic art', purely content-oriented and rendering the question of the practitioner's skill and modality irrelevant, for 'artistic quality depends only on the choice of subject'.¹³ It seemed to be a form of expression that rendered the observing artist redundant. It was Isherwood who famously likened himself to a camera, on the first page of *Goodbye to Berlin*. 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.'¹⁴ But on the China journey, Auden was the one who played the camera-man, occasionally to irritating effect. Years later, Isherwood remembered sometimes 'really hating him — hating his pedantic insistence on "objectivity"'.¹⁵ Isherwood, the slightly older man, was less confident of his own abilities to capture in a snap or a phrase the subject they had chosen, or to be sure it was really there, even once they had passed over from colonial Hong Kong into real China.

Already the reality of Asia was starting to seem elusive. Was their journey really real, for one thing — and were they real travellers? The literary travellers of the 1930s were always aware of a ghostly *Doppelgänger*, the tourist, breathing down their neck.¹⁶ 'I question whether the reactions of the tourist are of much value,' Auden had written blithely in *Letters from Iceland*. 'At the best he only observes what the inhabitants know already; at the worst he is guilty of glib generalizations based on inadequate and often incorrect data.'¹⁷ This startling candour is a characteristic Auden gambit. But to anticipate such criticism was not really to answer it: after all, something more was expected of the travel writer by his publisher and public.

13. W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland* (London: Faber, 1937), 137.

14. Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), 1.

15. Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind*, 304.

16. See Helen Carr, 'Modernism and Travel (1880–1940)', *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, eds. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 70–86.

17. *Letters from Iceland*, 209.

Meanwhile, the circumstances of the sea journey itself — its artificial sociabilities, its seeming suspension of the passage of time — had induced a sense of unreality in the travellers. Shipboard life had been like a monotonous dream. ‘At Hongkong, we had said to each other, we shall wake up, everything will come true’ (28), but it hadn’t. Now, travelling upriver from coast to Hinterland (and thus recapitulating the history of imperial travel writing),¹⁸ things somehow fail to get much better. Isherwood feels adrift: no anchor, no orientation; he is *in* but disconcertingly not *inside* China. In Canton (Guangzhou), during a tea party, he experiences his first air raid, while incongruously surrounded by the imagery and rituals of English expatriate civility and culture.

My eyes moved over this charming room, taking in the tea-cups, the dish of scones, the book-case with Chesterton’s essays and Kipling’s poems, the framed photograph of an Oxford college. My brain tried to relate these images to the sounds outside; the whine of the power-diving bomber, the distant thump of the explosions. Understand, I told myself, that those noises, these objects are part of a single, integrated scene. Wake up. It’s all quite real. And, at that moment, I really did wake up. At that moment, suddenly, I arrived in China. (32)

Isherwood’s sense of arrival — his ability to comprehend his surroundings and his place in them, to link English subject and Eastern predicate, in other words his orientation — depends on his ability to make the link between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the known and the unknown, and to apprehend them as ‘a single, integrated scene’. He negotiates this cognitive frontier; he arrives. But the integration, and the arrival, are temporary. He has to keep trying to arrive; and meanwhile his narrative is haunted by a trope of disintegration. China continues to baffle him impenetrably, and the further the travellers move inland, towards where they hope the action is, the more any centre or real China seems to recede and elude Isherwood. He travels towards a series of destinations of discovery, only to find once again his fingers close on thin air. He is unable — or is it that he is unwilling? — to seize hold of his subject, and so in Isherwood’s part of the book there is a failure (a conscious, if not a deliberate failure) to write a travel book. It is a failure of arrival, comprehension, integration, and closure. He cannot domesticate or appropriate China to his own system of manners and meanings, as his hosts in Canton had done, in their charming room with its reassuringly recognizable English amenities. He fails, in other words, to put China into English to his own satisfaction.

18. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 15–37.

Traditional forms of travel writing are acts of observation and explanation: they possess, conjure, and translate. It is a genre in which, as Dennis Porter puts it, 'there is typically an indecent rush to assign meaning to the manifold phenomena of alien cultures'.¹⁹ The gradient of China travel writing slopes down invitingly towards authoritative generic pronouncements about China and the Chinese, but Isherwood, although one of the most acute literary observers of his generation, does not find himself carried towards such confident or easy discourse. He finds too much resistance in the surface of his China experience, and falls back again and again on doubts of his own authority. He is just a 'tripper', not a real reporter, and still less a war correspondent; in fact — he confesses — he is a coward, and he does not much enjoy travel for that matter, and what is more he can't really make much sense of the country he travels through. He can see things happen, but he is unable to see quite why they happen. The real is now invoked — 'really'! — in exasperation.

Really, the proceedings of the Chinese are so mysterious as to fill one, ultimately, with a kind of despair. During the morning Auden heard an explosion and ran out into the road to see what had happened. All he could see was an officer haranguing his men, and a group of peasants who were burning an old book. Then a woman rushed up and prostrated herself before the officer, wailing and sobbing. The officer raised her to her feet and, immediately, the two of them began talking quite naturally, as though nothing whatever had occurred. (91–92)

Clearly these are real Chinese people: not the obliging or obstructive English-speaking middlemen and servants and press officers and diplomats and expatriates and journalists that the travellers have spent most of their time with, but the genuine Other. But how on earth to communicate or make common cause with them? They are doing something: but what? Here is action but no plot, a story without a syntax. It is bad narrative, lacking, in Hayden White's words, 'the capacity to envision a set of events as belonging to the same order of meaning' which integrates a heap of occurrences into a story.²⁰ Its happenings seem to be controlled by, or translatable into, no grammar of causality, but merely to occur and be reported — perhaps like those Chinese meals which, to Isherwood's observation, were 'served in no recognizable order of progression' (30).²¹ From some angle (a Chinese angle doubtless) these elements would add up to what

19. Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys*, 289.

20. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 16.

21. Roland Barthes was to find a similar apparent lack of order in Japanese eating, with its 'decentred' food and deictic chopsticks, much to his ideological taste. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 15–22.

Isherwood was groping for in the air raid, 'a single, integrated scene'. They must presumably make sense to the participants, the woman and the officer and the peasants, but they make none to the disoriented and estranged narrator. Kipling, whose entire career was an exhibition of expertise, would have found this simply intolerable, and would have provided a knowing teleology for the incident, and done the voices too. But for Isherwood the only sure meaning of the event is his own ignorance.

The role of interpreter of the foreign scene, supplier of explanatory narratives, is a generic obligation of the travel writer. 'What an anonymous country this is!' thinks Isherwood, watching, from his train window, peasants labouring in the fields (74). Yet the peasants certainly had names. It is not that the country is anonymous, but that to Isherwood it is illegible. His China is no Baedeker's. And the traditional expectations of the travel writer are made more burdensome in Isherwood's case since his is a journey to a war. There are many kinds of war reporting, but the first test of a war reporter is that he should find the war, and then report it. This is more easily said than done.²² Hardly have the travellers left Hong Kong, than they meet an American reporter who warns them gloomily that there is no 'real story' in China (30), and he turns out to be right. Just as Isherwood was not able to find the story in the incident of the burning book, so on a wider scale they travel through a country at war, without ever quite finding the war. Neither the country nor the war has a centre. Maps turn out to be unreliable.²³ Haunted like the rest of their generation by the European Great War of their childhood, Auden and his friends had learned from Wilfred Owen and the others that it was a writer's duty to tell the truth about war, and furthermore that the truth was only to be found at 'the front', where the trenches are. But when their Chinese hosts reluctantly take them to 'the front', this moment of destination — the narrative climax and centre of the travel-book form, with its parabola of preparation, ordeal, discovery and return — this arrival is an anti-climax which Isherwood cannot disguise.

Our own route was the same as yesterday evening. There were the same semi-farcical precautions: the advance in single file across the fields and some dramatic dodging along communication trenches, only to emerge from them right on the crest of the sky-line as brilliantly

22. *Journey to a War* can instructively be read alongside Evelyn Waugh's farcical novel about war reporting, *Scoop* (1938), a product of Waugh's own spell as a war correspondent in Africa, and published in the year Auden and Isherwood went to China. Waugh's journey to a war is recounted in non-fictional form in *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936).

23. Significantly, maps are unreliable in prose but reliable in poetry. Auden's Sonnet XVI ends with the words 'And maps can really point to places / Where life is evil now: / Nanking; Dachau' (274). The disorientation of the prose in *Journey to a War* is balanced by the orientation of the verse, as we shall see.

illuminated targets. Finally we reached the canal bank itself. But this part of the front — as one of the officers, who spoke a little English, had to admit — was only occupied by the Japanese at night, when almost all the real fighting and raiding takes place. During the daytime the Japs retired into Han Chwang village. (113)

Theirs was a journey *to* a war, but the scene of their arrival is not powerfully textualized, as such scenes of penetration usually are in traditional travel narrative, or traditional war and other adventure stories, which typically move towards and through the climax of a baptism of fire. There is no centre to Isherwood's journey; or the centre must be sought elsewhere. Here, the 'real fighting' takes place only at night. Once again they have arrived at the wrong place, or the wrong time, for their encounter with the real object of their journey. At the front, rituals of solidarity (or is it tourism?) are performed, they pose for group-photographs and exchange visiting-cards with the Chinese commander. 'Your families,' he tells them, 'will be very pleased to know that you have been so brave' (114). There is some noisy but distant shelling, an enemy plane passes harmlessly overhead, and the visitors are ushered back to a village behind the lines in time for lunch. Isherwood has come to this place in search of self-testing sensation and journalistic copy. His account of this non-event — in its dry manner one of the drollest parts of his story — scrupulously reveals the 'front' to be drab, confusing, and not even particularly dangerous. It is undramatic and epistemologically thin. There is no story here.

But a story was taking place somewhere else. For while Auden, as a character in the *Travel-Diary*, shared the bewilderments and boredoms and disorientations that Isherwood records, his sonnet sequence 'In Time of War' was to place the Sino-Japanese war confidently within the frame of a story — a *grand récit*, indeed, with a grand narrativity — as big as human history itself. The first twelve poems (reduced to ten in the revised version) tell the story of humankind's continuing struggle, a history of the world in a handful of sonnets, largely through a series of paradigm or parable careers: the farmer, the tyrant, the poet, the money-man. (It is an exclusively male history.) The rest of the poems settle on the subject of the present Chinese war, and its implications in that world history.

This sonnet sequence is one of Auden's most impressive productions, as John Fuller has argued: "In Time of War" represents a new scope of historical understanding and new powers of generalization and condensation in Auden's work. [...] In its discussion of evil, of human nature and society, [it] is Auden's *Essay on Man*, a seriously secular theodicy.²⁴ Auden's management of the sonnet form, and a generally very simple syntax and vocabulary, for narrative is extraordinary. The story moves from the beginnings of life to the evolution of

24. John Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber, 1998), 234, 235.

our own species, the 'childish creature' who stumbles out of a natural paradise into freedom and grief, and the invention of language, agriculture, cities, political organization, and science. But what is this series of historical paradigms doing in a sequence that follows a narrative of travels in China in 1938?

One answer is that it is part of an orientation. *Journey to a War* is a book about history, and to find out where he is, Auden needs to remind himself where he has been. Very likely he had in mind the brilliant catalogues of imagery — attached to Yesterday, Tomorrow and Today — of his poem of the previous year, 'Spain 1937'.²⁵ What 'In Time of War' offers is a global human history, of the development of spiritual, economic, social and cultural life. In this story, with its traces of both Marxist and Christian teleologies, there are no names or nations since no people is any different from any other, but every human is assumed to participate as an equal partner. Thus after the great transitional sonnet XIII, 'Certainly praise: let the song mount again and again', the sequence moves smoothly into the present, coming literally down to earth in the here and now, and this is where it becomes specific, and Chinese; the Chinese war is the here and now of all our history.

Here, now, are sonnets on an air raid, a military hospital, headquarters — and this, sonnet XVIII (276).

Far from the heart of culture he was used:
Abandoned by his general and his lice,
Under a padded quilt he closed his eyes
And vanished. He will not be introduced

When this campaign is tidied into books:
No vital knowledge perished in that skull;
His jokes were stale; like wartime, he was dull;
His name is lost for ever like his looks.

He neither knew nor chose the Good, but taught us,
And added meaning like a comma, when
He turned to dust in China that our daughters

Be fit to love the earth, and not again
Disgraced before the dogs; that, where are waters,
Mountains and houses, may be also men.

This faceless soldier is a marginal figure, his life expended far from the heart of things, yet in him Auden is claiming to have found, as it were, the dead centre of the war. His passivity and his mute ordinariness have been learned from the

25. W. H. Auden, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927–1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1977), 210–12.

war poems of Owen and Sassoon, but this sonnet restores some of the public meaning or meaningfulness that Owen had drained from the death of soldiers in such poems as 'Futility'.²⁶ For while the octave denies this man discourse — he is unnamed, unoriginal, uninteresting and unremembered — the sestet restores him to signification. His death helps you to read what this war means, as the humblest punctuation point may determine the meaning of a sentence. Lacking agency and moral self-consciousness himself, the soldier confers a meaning which you will never find in the official histories or epics; indeed he is the most important person in the war, which makes him, given the scheme of the sequence, the most important person in the world here and now. For in the lowest depths, the ground zero of the ironic mode, the unknown soldier is rescued into epic, the making of history.

And this moment of discovery is also a moment of triumphant orientation, where Auden 'arrives' so conclusively as to arrogate to himself the right to speak *as a Chinese* ('our' daughters) — an identification all the more extraordinary when you consider the cultural context of the utterance. For the disgrace 'before the dogs' which the penultimate line was bound to evoke was the legendary notice erected by the *British* colonial authorities in a public garden in the treaty-port of Shanghai, reading: 'No dogs or Chinese'.²⁷ Does that pronoun 'our' (in 'our daughters') represent a generous gesture of united-front sympathy, or a breathtaking colonialist appropriation and incorporation?²⁸ It is easy to see how 'your daughters', though discursively the more obvious option, may have seemed politically infelicitous in drawing attention to the distance between poetic voice and political subject. It would just look patronizing. With the bold choice of 'our daughters', the pronoun becomes the 'single, integrated scene' where poetic voice and political subject are the same thing. The British poet belongs to China, and

26. Hugh Haughton notes that the sonnet sequence follows Auden's last photo of 'The Unknown Soldier', thus 'relating Auden's sequence to two of the major legacies of the First World War, the war poem and the tomb of the unknown soldier'. Hugh Haughton, 'Journeys to War', 156.

27. The notorious notice is an ineradicable part of Chinese knowledge about British colonialism. 'Whilst it is not true that there was ever a sign bearing that bald prohibition — municipal councils in China were as long-winded as anywhere else — the hundreds of rules and regulations governing these tiny scraps of park did indeed exclude most Chinese people and all dogs, ball games, the riding of bicycles and the picking of flowers.' Frances Wood, *No Dogs and Not Many Chinese: Treaty Port Life in China 1843–1943* (London: John Murray, 1998), 2. See also Robert A. Bickers and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, 'Shanghai's "Dogs and Chinese Not Admitted" Sign: Legend, History and Contemporary Symbol', *China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995), 444–66.

28. The poem was well received in China, and immediately translated into Chinese and published in the Chinese press, though Isherwood reports that the translator amended the line 'Abandoned by his general and his lice' to the more morale-boosting 'The rich and the poor are combining to fight' (161).

China to the British poet. In the phrase 'our daughters' — with its subjective, plural, possessive pronoun and its substantive of kinship — difference is abolished, distance cancelled. Surrounded by problem and tragedy, the phrase is a Utopia of its own.

In Auden's 'In Time of War' the Japanese attack on China is placed and understood as the latest catastrophe in the long struggle of the species to fulfil its human potential and become what it might be. History itself was, of course, the big game stalked by so much serious European writing of the 1930s. Isherwood was after it too. He had got close to it in Berlin earlier in the decade. Now in Hangkow — 'the real capital of wartime China' (50) — he felt he was hot on its trail again. But what seemed to disclose itself so clearly to the poet's Olympian gaze, ranging across the global dimensions of history and geography, was not so visible to the grounded Isherwood, perusing the Chinese city with the scrupulous eyes of the novelist.

If Auden sees China from above, 'as the hawk sees it, or the helmeted airman' (as in the poem 'Consider'), Isherwood is that other 1930s myth, the baffled detective. 'Hidden here are all the clues which would enable an expert, if he could only find them, to predict the events of the next fifty years' (50). *Journey to a War* does not score very highly for prediction — for one thing, it seriously underestimates Mao and the Communists — and the real problem, it seemed, was indeed expertise. Hangkow was full of experts — the Nationalist military and political authorities, foreign diplomats and missionaries, old China hands and veteran journalists; it sometimes seems Auden and Isherwood are the only amateurs in the place. And Isherwood was distinctly more of an amateur even than Auden, who had already made and reported on a journey to a war (in Spain, though he didn't go to the front), and had already published a travel book (on Iceland, with MacNeice). Isherwood offers a droll portrait of himself decked out in 'beret, turtleneck sweater, and oversized riding-boots that gave him blisters,' but he was really only 'in masquerade as a war correspondent'.²⁹ Just as he is dwarfed by his subject (and how could anyone write a book big enough to be about China?) he stands in a relation of ironic belatedness to people he sees as real travellers in and writers about the East.

Two such in particular cross their path, each in a way a reproachful image of what Auden and Isherwood themselves might have been, obliging them to own up to being unreal travellers (or not real travellers). The American radical journalist Agnes Smedley — unkindly described by Isherwood as 'not unlike Bismarck' in appearance (60) — is a model of the politically committed writer. Her *China's Red Army Marches* had appeared in 1934, and in that year, 1938, her *China Fights Back: An American Woman with the Eighth Route Army* was to be

29. Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind*, 224.

published in London. She is portrayed as full of single-minded zeal, passionately devoted to the revolution and particularly to the Red Army, among whom she had lived for several months. “When I was with them,” she told us, “for the first time I felt at one with the universe” (166). No problems of orientation for her, it seems; her China is rendered ‘a single, integrated scene’ by the revolution in which she is a partner. But although Auden and Isherwood may have felt overawed by Agnes Smedley’s integration, her achieved inwardness to the experience of the Chinese war, in *China Fights Back* she was to express her own frustration at nonetheless remaining still an outsider.

I, who had had food this day, realized that I can never know fully the meaning, the essence of the Chinese struggle for liberation which lies embedded in the hearts of these workers and peasants. I am still an onlooker and my position is privileged. [...] And I hungered for the spark of vision that would enable me to see into their minds and hearts and picture their convictions about the great struggle for which they give more than their lives.³⁰

As ever, there is yet further to go, and an unexplorable psychic Hinterland still yawned before her. To Auden and Isherwood she may have seemed an enviable insider, but not to herself.

Equally at home, as Isherwood tells it, though in a quite different way, is the seasoned English explorer and war correspondent Peter Fleming, a real professional and already author of two travel books about China, *One’s Company* (1934) and *News from Tartary* (1936), as well as of *Brazilian Adventure* (1933) with which he had made his name at the age of twenty-four. *One’s Company* — its very title seeming like a well-bred proleptic snub to the dual-authored *Journey to a War*, which Evelyn Waugh, reviewing it for the *Spectator*, was to liken to the hind and front legs of a pantomime horse³¹ — begins with a canny disclaimer of authority, a ‘Warning to the Reader’:

The recorded history of Chinese civilization covers a period of four thousand years. The population of China is estimated at 450 millions. China is larger than Europe.

The author of this book is twenty-six years old. He has spent, altogether, about seven months in China. He does not speak Chinese.³²

30. Agnes Smedley, *China Fights Back: An American Woman with the Eighth Route Army*, Left Book Club edition (London: Gollancz, 1938), 123. *Journey to a War* was commissioned by the aesthetically progressive Faber and Faber, but Gollancz was the house publisher of the United Front.

31. *The Essays, Articles, and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallaher (London: Methuen, 1983), 251.

32. Peter Fleming, *One’s Company: A Journey to China* (London: Cape, 1934), i.

Valentine Cunningham expresses impatience with the 'boastful naivety' of the Fleming tradition of travel writing.³³ And indeed amateur status for Fleming is a gambit. He may say he is an ignoramus but he certainly does not want to be taken at his word, and the narrative of *One's Company* shows him a gentleman adventurer, modest but resourceful and well-informed, and full of the traveller's *savoir-faire* that Isherwood portrays himself as lacking. Fleming always knows exactly where he is, in relation both to his material and to his readers. He had travelled longer and further in China, including at least two visits to Peking. He was an Etonian and well-connected. Auden and Isherwood make much of an interview they secured with Mme Chiang Kai-shek (Soong May-ling), who rather overawed them — 'certainly a great heroic figure' (59). But Fleming had interviewed the Generalissimo himself, and the former emperor Pu Yi, on his first journey to China, in which he had also made the first visit by a foreigner to the anti-communist front: at the end of the journey he and his companion Gerald Yorke were de-briefed by the British authorities in Hong Kong and, later, in Shanghai. 'We had become — or at any rate we had no difficulty in passing ourselves off as — the Greatest Living Authorities on a subject.'³⁴ And in the journey from Peking to Kashmir, for all the self-deprecation with which it is described in *News from Tartary*, Fleming had undergone hardships beyond the dreams of riding-booted Isherwood and carpet-slipped Auden. Here was a real traveller, with an authority he had earned for himself. (The metaphor of the real traveller's *earned* authority is not a casual one. Being a tourist, by contrast, was something to feel rather ashamed of, like having an unearned income; Auden says that the tourist always looks with the eye of a *rentier*.)³⁵

So when their paths cross for a few days in *Journey to a War*, Isherwood and Auden defer to Fleming's travel expertise, and half-mockingly entitle him the Chief. Their initial reaction of 'anti-Etonianism and professional jealousy' quickly gives way to admiration. As a traveller, Fleming is tried and tested. They recognize him as a strong precursor; they would follow him anywhere.³⁶ 'Laughing and perspiring we scrambled uphill; the Fleming Legend accompanying us like a distorted shadow' (214). They amuse themselves by improvising passages from an imaginary travel book called *With Fleming to the Front* (204). But in casting Fleming as a hero in the G. A. Henty mould (Henty's titles include *With Wolfe in Canada*, *With Kitchener in the Soudan*, and *With the Allies to Peking*), they were also suggesting that his intrepid travels belonged more to the age of Speke or Younghusband than their own antiheroic, would-be postcolonial journey.

33. Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, 391.

34. Peter Fleming, *One's Company*, 301.

35. W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*, 209.

36. Hugh Haughton writes of 'the sense of impersonation they feel in the presence of the "real traveler" [Fleming]'. Hugh Haughton, 158.

For Auden and Isherwood, belated travellers, it was a different story. Isherwood's narrative, like the journey itself, wanders about, unsure of direction, its report characterized by the sort of odd discontinuities which we can recognize as the faultlines which the experience of foreignness and dislocation scored into the landscape of literary modernism. At its best, Isherwood's diary resembles a series of brilliant snapshots.

A pause. Then, far off, the hollow, approaching roar of the bombers, boring their way invisibly through the dark. The dull, punching thud of bombs falling, near the airfield, out in the suburbs. The searchlights criss-crossed, plotting points, like dividers; and suddenly there they were, six of them, flying close together and high up. It was as if a microscope had brought dramatically into focus the bacilli of a fatal disease. They passed, bright, tiny, and deadly, infecting the night. (70–71)

This is an unforgettable image, but it is the work of a highly subjective and uncertain vision, far from the simple and objective photographic record that Auden had spoken for in his Iceland book.

Auden's photographs in *Journey to a War* comprise a narrative of their own. There are sixty-three of them, the great majority being portraits, most of them head-and-shoulders, almost all of men. Three women are portrayed — a doctor, a beggar, and the photogenic Mme Chiang. The sequence begins with 'United Front', six portraits of leaders including Chiang Kai-shek and Chou En-lai.³⁷ These people are identified by name, but the rest of the portraits gloss their subjects by rank, function (like missionaries, or doctors) or type, such as 'Railway Engineer', 'Press Bureau', 'Shanghai Businessman'; when names are given it is seemingly as an afterthought, as with 'Intellectual (C. C. Yeh)' and even 'Special Correspondent (Peter Fleming)'. This pattern continues with the photographs from the 'War Zone', which include pictures of the wounded and the dead, allegorized as 'The Innocent' and 'The Guilty', and even 'Train Parasites' (a beggar woman at the carriage window). Even in this most particular and naturalistic of media, Auden seems to be drawn towards generalization, allegory and myth.

The images are not unmoving, but they are subject to an eerie depersonalization. A photograph of cheery children, perhaps refugees, is given the title of Malraux's Shanghai novel *La Condition Humaine*: its subjects are made to stand for something beyond themselves, troped as universal. Towards the end of the sequence (its actual end is a portrait of a young Chinese in uniform, perhaps inevitably entitled 'Unknown Soldier'), as if finally surrendering any ambition to

37. Chiang's Nationalist government and the Communists had agreed to join forces against the Japanese in early 1937.

render actual particular experience, Auden prints two stills from *Fight to the Last*, a Nationalist propaganda film made at the Hangkow Film Studios. The meaning of propaganda images is public and, if anything, overdetermined. These pictures are at the far end of the epistemological scale from Isherwood's inability to process the story of the officer and the burning book (his inability to 'get the picture').

The photographs themselves serve Auden's urge to generalization and the global view. In contrast to Isherwood, not once does Auden speak in the first-person singular in this book. The generalized vision that enables him to survey from the beginning of evolution to the end of history, and from China to Peru and beyond, also enables and indeed obliges him to see the Orient and Oriental people as generic, representative, exemplary. For Auden, Chinese experience always stands for something else, as it must as he lifts further and further away from particularity.

Night falls on China; and the great arc of travelling shadow
 Moves over land and ocean, altering life:
 Thibet already silent, the packed Indias cooling . . . (299)

Thrilling as this is, it is a view of the Orient available only from space.³⁸ And it is not surprising that, from that Olympian vantage, all Auden can hear arising from Shanghai in the last verses in the book is a generic human cry, 'the voice of Man', or that what it has to say is a series of airy generalized banalities.

It's better to be sane than mad, or liked than dreaded;
 It's better to sit down to nice meals than to nasty;
 It's better to sleep two than single; it's better to be happy. (300)

Auden's drive to commonality beaches him eventually in the commonplace, but the experiment was an interesting and even an honourable one, an address to the problem of East and West that simply denies these polarities (and those of nation and ethnicity), and seeks in the Chinese war the features of a universal human history, part of the necessary ordeal of the species, 'Till they construct at last a human justice, The contribution of our star' (301). Auden here starts his rehearsal for the role of global village poet.

Isherwood drew on Auden's travel notes as well as his own, and Auden for his part was famously ready to incorporate his friends' ideas and even phrases into his verse. So the personal distinctions between Auden's and Isherwood's contributions to *Journey to a War* can sometimes become blurred. But the distinction of medium, the prose parts and the verse parts, remains sharp. Auden

38. See Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, Ch. 6, for a full discussion of the tropes of looking up and looking down in the writing of the period.

as a character in Isherwood's narrative is slightly clownish, but the verse parts of the book are always poised and assured. The prose part in contrast often seems uneasy, provisional, self-doubting, ready to admit interruption and qualification by voices that are native or more expert or authentic-sounding or mocking. We might evoke here the distinction Bakhtin makes between literary prose, which always avails itself of the internal dialogism of discourse, and poetry, which tends to behave — as language — as if it were single-minded and single-voiced. 'The world of poetry,' says Bakhtin, 'no matter how many contradictions and insoluble conflicts the poet develops within it, is always illumined by one unitary and indisputable discourse. Contradictions, conflicts and doubts remain in the object, in thoughts, in living experiences — in short, in the subject-matter — but they do not enter into the language itself. In poetry, even discourse about doubts must be cast in a discourse which cannot be doubted.'³⁹ Auden's poetic imagination integrates recalcitrant experience into a single style and story. Isherwood in contrast cannot process alterity into an integrated coherent vision; his narrative is choppy ('cut', as Foucault might have it), arrhythmic, striated with contradictory speech and anecdote, under-authoritative and inconclusive. The contrast is a complementarity, as the verse, however monologic and mandarin, is always in dialogue with the self-mocking, hesitant, bourgeois prose.

As Auden, from his hesitant beginnings, becomes more authoritatively vatic and long-sighted as the book progresses, Isherwood is floundering ever deeper in the viscous particularity of China. It is in this sense that the two voices of the book move in different directions. In 'The Ship', Auden had imagined the East preparing a test for men from Europe. China certainly seems to offer a challenge to European literary modes, and it was one which Isherwood's descriptive realism was finding very testing, since China did not seem to confirm even the minimal assumptions on which the mode was based. Realism grows out of science, and its currency includes the inference of general laws from the empirical observation of reality. Though his observation is sharp, Isherwood found it hard to see through a baffling Chinese particularity to the typical, or beyond it to the universal, the stratum where Auden's writing is at home. In the *Travel-Diary*, China continues not to surrender to Western explanations and categories, and Isherwood staggers from one empirical pratfall to another.

39. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 286. In practice, the idea of a monologic language of poetry 'illumined by one unitary . . . discourse' was hard to sustain, but Bakhtin clung on to the idea of poetry as monologic in tendency. The domain of the 'poetic' in this sense shrunk in his later work, as the domain of the 'novelistic' expanded beyond the novel itself.

The journey was uneventful. T.Y. Liu, in wonderful spirits, told us: 'I am never sorry.' He spoke too soon, for presently he was sick. We stopped to get petrol near a restaurant where they were cooking bamboo in all its forms — including the strips used for making chairs. That, I thought, is so typical of this country. Nothing is specifically either eatable or uneatable. You could begin munching a hat, or bite a mouthful out of a wall; equally, you could build a hut with the food provided at lunch. Everything is everything. (230–31)

China will not give itself up to even the primary tools of anthropological description (such as food: not-food), or exhibit the basic stable differences that make language itself possible. 'Everything is everything' — this rueful admission of defeat is related to the insight of another traveller who undertook a quest for the real Orient, Forster's Mrs Moore in the Marabar Caves: 'Everything exists, nothing has value'.⁴⁰ Is Isherwood to be applauded for having the courage to defer indefinitely what Dennis Porter called the travel writer's 'indecent rush to assign meaning', and to refuse to try to cram China into some procrustean framework of orientation; or is he just suffering from travel fatigue? When at the end of the journey they board a river-boat that will take them to Shanghai and the European jurisdiction of the International Settlement, Isherwood looks out through the port-hole, back to where they have been. The view looks like a typical picture of an Oriental scene. 'A cabin port-hole is a picture-frame. No sooner had we arrived on board than the brass-encircled view became romantic and false' (234). He is afraid that 'this simple theatrical picture', rather than 'all the subtle and chaotic impressions of the past months', is how he will remember China. But it was not.

Indochina 1973–75: James Fenton

James Fenton's journey to a war took him first to Cambodia. In 1982, he published *The Memory of War*.⁴¹

'Cambodia'

One man shall smile one day and say goodbye.
Two shall be left, two shall be left to die.
One man shall give his best advice.
Three men shall pay the price.

40. E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* [1924], ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 146.

41. The collection was expanded and republished the following year. Poems quoted in this section are from James Fenton, *The Memory of War and Children in Exile: Poems 1968–1983* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

One man shall live, live to regret.
Four men shall meet the debt.

One man shall wake from terror to his bed.
Five men shall be dead.

One man to five. A million men to one.
And still they die. And still the war goes on.

This poem is simple, using nothing but ordinary words, deployed in a childish prosodic form. It sounds like a playground counting chant: one two three four five — then a million. The poem's title at the beginning promised geography, but what is delivered in the end is history, a war. The place turns into an event. As John Pilger wrote of Cambodia's neighbour, 'Vietnam was a war, not a country'.⁴² The imagery of Fenton's 'Cambodia' is simple, but also simply undescriptive. It gives some bare facts and bare figures, but withholds its orientation. Who is the 'one man' who keeps appearing, what is his relation to Cambodia, and (if it is the same man throughout) how and why does he escape while a million and more do not? Or does he escape? Might he be a soldier, in the first stanza, going off to war? Is he a refugee who gets away, leaving his family to die? What is the relation between his well-meaning advice and the payment exacted from others? Could he be a so-called foreign advisor? Is it the poet himself? Why does he have nightmares? Why for that matter is almost all the poem, the first in a collection whose subject is supposed to be memory, couched in the future tense of prophecy rather than the past tense of history? There is an underdetermined modality here — that is, the mechanism that orientates the theme of an utterance in relation to person, place, time, and attitude, seems to be on the blink, giving these verbally plain statements the ambiguous and haunting quality of a dream. Our reading has landed us in Cambodia, or 'Cambodia'; but is the guide lost?

James Fenton — a poet, English, middle class, white, in his twenties — travelled to Indochina in the summer of 1973 hoping to witness the end of a chapter in imperial history. American combat troops had been withdrawn from Vietnam, and the collapse of the South Vietnamese regime they had shored up was only a matter of time. Fenton was to travel in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, and was present in Saigon during and after the fall of the city to the North Vietnamese army in 1975.⁴³ 'I wanted to see a war, and I wanted to see a communist victory, which I presumed to be inevitable' (4). He belonged to a generation that defined itself in its opposition to the involvement of the United States in Vietnam, seen as the most egregious of Western imperial interventions

42. John Pilger, *Heroes*, revised ed. (London: Pan, 1989), 174.

43. His Asian travel writing is collected in James Fenton, *All the Wrong Places: Adrift in the Politics of Asia* [1988] (London: Granta, 2005). Page references in the text are to this edition.

in the third world, which in Indochina stretched back to the middle of the nineteenth century.

A resistance to Western hegemony, a counter-discourse from oppressed margins to domineering centre, may be the hallmark of the postcolonial, but what happens when that resistance is articulated in a Western voice? Like the united-front leftists of the Auden generation, Fenton and his friends tried to take an internationalist view of nationalism.

I wanted to see a communist victory because, as did many people, I believed that the Americans had not the slightest justification for their interference in Indochina. I admired the Vietcong, and, by extension, the Khmer Rouge, but I subscribed to a philosophy that prided itself on taking a cool, critical look at the liberation movements of the Third World. We supported them against the ambitions of American foreign policy. We supported them as nationalist movements. We did not support their political character, which we perceived as Stalinist in the case of the Vietnamese, and in the case of the Cambodians . . . I don't know. The theory was, and is, that where a genuine movement of national liberation was fighting against imperialism, it received our unconditional support. When such a movement had won, it might then take its place among the governments we execrated — those who ruled by sophisticated tyranny in the name of socialism. (4)

He was going as a witness to the struggle, but not an unbiased or objectively oriented one. A 'genuine movement of national liberation' was afoot in Indochina, whose resistance to imperialism deserved 'unconditional support'.

The unconditionality of that support was to be one kind of hostage to fortune. A more immediate difficulty, and a sometimes though never completely comic one, lay in the fact that Fenton, unconditional support or no, simply *looked* American (or French, or British) and was treated accordingly by local people.⁴⁴ He describes being snarled at in Vientiane — 'I mean really snarling, like a tiger' (10) — by a Pathet Lao soldier standing behind a bush. He finds himself constantly assimilated to a strong discourse of Americanism, identified as the imperialist other by the very people with whom he wants to make common cause, and this means that he tends to be treated either as an enemy to be snarled at, or else, more commonly, as a naive tourist with more money than sense.

The streets of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City now) were the theatre for some tragic absurdities involving this latter figure. There was, for example, the implacable shoeshine boy, his interpellations impossible to ignore — 'You! You give me no money, you want I eat shit!' (12). This is far from the kind of dialogue

44. Agnes Smedley had been exasperated to find, as she moved among Chinese Red Army troops who had never seen a foreigner, that she was often taken to be Japanese.

with Vietnam the traveller had envisaged, but there is no escape; negotiations begin, the boy is eventually employed, overpaid, haggled with, finally paid more. 'The next day, at the same time, he came into the bar; his eyes were rolling back in their sockets and he staggered helplessly around the tables and chairs; I do not know what drug he had taken, but I know how he had bought it.' (12)

In another grotesque Saigon story, Fenton sets off on another act of intended charity, taking a beggar woman's apparently dying baby to the hospital, 'on an errand of Western mercy' (14), but is given such a runaround as to leave him (though the baby survives) disoriented to the point of first-world paranoia. The bewildered traveller cannot figure out if he has saved a life, or been made a fool of: his good intentions are being translated into a language he cannot understand or verify, and this makes him both anxious and angry. It is another bad narrative: like Auden and the incident of the burning book, Fenton has witnessed events, participated in them, reported them, but he does not know what has really happened. 'Suppose the old woman, the taxi driver, the man whose van stalled, the engine driver — suppose they were all now dividing the proceeds and having a good laugh at my expense, congratulating the child on the way it had played its role?' The beneficiaries of 'unconditional support' have their own perceptions of, and way of dealing with, the Western bearer of this commodity.

I was disgusted, not just at what I saw around me, but at what I saw in myself. I saw how perilously thin was the line between the charitable and the murderous impulse, how strong the force of righteous indignation. [. . .] It was impossible in Saigon to be the passive observer. Saigon cast you, inevitably, into the role of the American. (17)

It is not just that the would-be reporter finds, like Wallace in the jungle, that the Eastern place is telling a story about *him*, in which he is cast as an American, but also that — in the frustration of his good intentions, the suspicion that he has been manipulated, his uncertainty as to just what has happened, his inability to feel good about the effort he has made — he is forced into fellow-feeling with the very people he condemns (General Westmoreland, for example).

In some cases the would-be internationalist is saddled not only with a national identity, but with a covert function, which is the opposite of his intention. He spent time in Kampuchea Krom, an area of Vietnam populated by ethnic Cambodians. This is genuine Hinterland, it seems, where the learned categories of nationality and loyalty are hopelessly inadequate. Here the old men had fought for the French, their sons had fought for the Americans, and their grandsons were fighting for the Vietnamese: they treated the Vietnamese with distrust yet felt they were no longer Cambodian either. 'And if they were not Cambodians, and not Vietnamese, what the hell were they?' (39). In this national no man's

land — it is in the war zone, the Vietcong control villages only a couple of miles away — Fenton spends some days in a monastery of friendly and eccentric Khmer monks. As he is leaving, one of the monks asks him if he is from the CIA.

I laughed. 'If I was from the CIA, I would be afraid to stay here. Besides, I'm not American.' 'That's what you say. But how do we know? This is an interesting area for you. You want to get information about the Vietcong.' 'I'm a journalist,' I said, 'and I hate the CIA.' 'But of course you'd say you hated the CIA.' He was quite serious, and what he said destroyed, at a stroke, all the pleasure of the last days. Of course that's what they'd think. Why else would a foreigner come and spend such a time with them? What was worst of all was they didn't *mind*. They seemed almost to be used to it. I was an American spy doing my job; they were Cambodian monks, doing theirs. (42)

The visiting international socialist is trapped in a narrative ('I was an American spy') produced by Cambodian people out of an understanding of the world learned from their own history, in which he is a CIA agent and the embodiment of militant anti-socialism; and of course the more he denies it, the more he is behaving as such an agent would. Coming to offer his support, he is identified as someone else, the opposite of the person he sees himself to be. He is not able to make his journey to war mean what he would like it to mean: the traveller finds himself a figure that keeps slipping out of his control under the gaze of the 'travelees', the people he has come among. His anti-American socialism does not translate, in these circumstances and to these people. If he is not one of us, he must be one of them: this is how the monk orients himself to his visitor, and he is right. So the traveller's attempt to rotate, as it were, the axis of East and West, so that he and his hosts occupy the same latitude, cannot really bring them together. Whether hostility or dependence, it must still be a relation of us and them: they (the Cambodians and Vietnamese) and we (the foreigners).

Saigon was an addicted city, and we — the foreigners — were the drug. The corruption of children, the mutilation of young men, the prostitution of women, the humiliation of the old, the division of the family, the division of the country — it had all been done in our name. People looked back to the French Saigon with a sentimental warmth, as if the problem had begun with the Americans. But the French city, the 'Saigon of the piastre' as Lucien Bodard called it, had represented the opium stage of the addiction. With the Americans had begun the heroin phase, and what I was seeing now were the first symptoms of withdrawal. (11)

This was one difficulty — being vested with the privilege and touched with the contagion of the system he had come to bury. Being identified with Western

depredations was one thing. But being identified with the North Vietnamese was another. Fenton was a member, in England, of the International Socialist party, 'a revolutionary socialist, of the kind who believe in no Fatherland of the Revolution; who have no cult hero' (6). This political philosophy was what brought him to Vietnam, to bear witness in one of the most important battlegrounds of the revolution, and to see a communist victory. But it also brought him into an inescapable and deepening paradox, for his internationalist convictions led him to align himself with a thoroughly nationalist liberation movement in Vietnam. The triumph of that nationalism, which he did witness, was to leave Saigon monologically bludgeoned — in countless banners and endless, maddening broadcasts over the PA system — by the slogans of the cult hero Ho Chi Minh. The grip of colonialism and neo-imperialism was replaced by the grip of Stalinism, with its institutional lies and its mockery of political justice. This fact had somehow to be put alongside a continuing belief in the right of Vietnam to unity and independence.

If the fate of Vietnam after 1975 was not one that an international socialist could unequivocally applaud, the fate of Cambodia in and after that Year Zero was, as everyone knows, quite another matter. Cambodia was to be given over for several years to the most paranoid form of nationalism in the history of the world, under a regime that was to destroy a large minority of its own population, a number in seven figures. Some of these were victims of lunatic economic mismanagement, but many were killed for nationalistic reasons, for the crime of *not being Cambodian enough*. From the date of the fall of Phnom Penh, says John Pilger, 'anybody who had owned cars and such "luxuries", anybody who had lived in a city or town, anybody with more than a basic education or who had acquired a modern skill, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, tradespeople and students, anybody who knew or worked for foreigners, such as travel agents, clerks, journalists and artists, was in danger; some were under sentence of death.'⁴⁵ The Khmer Rouge policy was not random. They were rooting out two things that were perceived as one: anything that was modern, anything that was foreign — an identification that runs right through the modern history of contact between East and West. It was the most extreme form of anti-internationalism ever put in place.

Any foreigner who had worked or travelled in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge victory would inevitably have formed friendships there. Now, any international contacts — on the part, for example, of locals employed by the foreign press corps — were seen as a contamination and a crime. The more contacts outsiders had made, the more they were integrated into local networks of friendship and work, the more lives they had put in danger, although this was

45. John Pilger, *Heroes*, 386.

not immediately understood. Fenton himself remembered ‘discourag[ing] one [Cambodian] friend from leaving, in the belief that he could expect no decent future in a foreign country. [. . .] Some people indeed foresaw utter disaster, but a large body of opinion held that the end of the war would be a relief. For one reason or another, many of us mourn friends whom we could well have saved.’⁴⁶ The terrible dramatic irony of the truth about the Khmer Rouge, a truth only realized too late, hangs over the poems in *The Memory of War*. One man may smile one day and say goodbye.

Discursive hazards, then, as well as (sometimes) physical ones, littered the path of the international socialist journalist-poet in Indochina, and some of them were too deeply concealed to be avoided before the damage was done. That these problems were as next to nothing, compared to what the inhabitants were undergoing, was itself a problem if something, rather than nothing, was to be said about these places. The problem, as usual, amounted to a question of modality or point of view — of where to stand, and in what relation to the people around. Fenton’s first gambit seems to have been to cast himself, as far as possible, as singular, even eccentric, more the poet than the journalist. He travels alone and light for preference, unencumbered by the obligations of official discourse, such as political orthodoxy, and professional deadlines. (Not, however, without letters of commission and introduction. A history might be written of travellers according to what letters they carried: Peter Fleming’s were among the most impressive. Fenton was advised by the journalist Nicholas Tomalin to carry a supply of headed notepaper on which to forge letters from his editor to suit the occasion.) Not so much is expected, as Auden and Isherwood had found, of the amateur, or the tourist. ‘The journey,’ Fenton had promised himself at the outset, ‘was to be utterly selfish’; and if this sounds a bit disingenuous, it is the condition for what follows: ‘Everything was negotiable’ (6). He is talking here about political views, but in a wider sense what is constantly being negotiated in these writings is an orientation in and towards Indochina which is always provisional, a point of view that shifts like the needle of an unsteady compass. But it was not quite true that everything was negotiable. He could not, for example, negotiate his way out of looking like an American. ‘Where does the journey look?’ Auden asked at the start of *Journey to a War*. ‘What does the traveller look like to others?’ was just as important a problem, and in cases like Fenton’s and Isherwood’s (though not for the invisible Auden) the writer himself is the figure in question.

Here a distinction might be drawn between the poems and the prose reporting, interesting in the light of the difference between the verse and prose

46. James Fenton, ‘Introduction’, *Cambodian Witness: The Autobiography of Someth May* (London: Faber, 1986), 11–16; 12. Someth May’s extraordinary narrative, written in English, documents his survival of the Khmer Rouge regime.

parts of *Journey to a War*. It would not be right to describe Fenton's war poems as impersonal; nevertheless, there is something distinctly elusive about the poet whose memory of war produces these poems. It is quite different from the mandarin discourse of Auden in 'In Time of War', for many of Fenton's poems are anecdotal, even reportorial. But he tends to be found, if at all, somewhere near the edge of his composition, a detached or at least reserved onlooker: his only action is observation. As a matter of fact there is much more of James Fenton in the foreground of the journalistic writing than in that of *The Memory of War*. He refuses the conventional self-effacement of the reporter, which is actually a claim to the authority of an objective truth. 'I suppose that people like the story of a historical event told from a personal point of view,' and this entails sharing your ignorance with the reader as well as your experience.⁴⁷ So we see a lot of James Fenton as the often bewildered hero and *eirón* of the reportage, in the roles of tourist, dandy, adventurer, journalist and fool.

But the 'personal point of view' is harder to identify in the poems. In 'Lines for Translation into Any Language', the first-person pronoun opens the poem with an observation — 'I. I saw that the shanty town had grown over the graves and that the crowd lived among the memorials' — but then goes underground, disappearing into the unexpected mode of the narrative, which is given in the form of a schoolroom exercise — numbered sentences for translation — with its own conventions (that the sentences are self-contained without narrative or logical connection, that they are apparently authorless and without context, that their purpose is to test the understanding of the reader).

5. That night the city was attacked with rockets.
6. The firebrigade bided its time.

And so on. In such exercises, the ability to translate would be proof of understanding. But here the problem of modality is devolved onto the reader. The experience of the Vietnamese is already only available to us in the language and through the point of view of the Western observer. Into which language is the reader of English supposed to translate these lines, as the title instructs? Into Vietnamese?

Point of view, orientation, is an issue in these writings, especially when it shifts in retrospect. It is in retrospect that the struggle against imperialism is understood to have carried the seeds of the Stalinist terror of the Khmer Rouge regime (which does not mean that the struggle against imperialism was wrong). It is in retrospect that love for Cambodia, which Fenton says he greatly preferred

47. James Fenton, 'Journey without Maps: An Interview with James Fenton', by Mark Wormald. *Oxford Poetry* 6:1 (1991), 9–16; 13–14. The question is also discussed in the Introduction to *All the Wrong Places*, xix–xxiii.

to Vietnam, is seen to mean an endangering of the object of love, and contact itself turns out to have been in some cases a fatal contagion. It is the poems that confront some of the pain of getting it wrong (not that it was really possible to get it right) in this way; and among them, 'In a Notebook' is a formal enactment of the way retrospect requires a reorientation.

The poem is in two parts, typographically distinct, and the first, italicized part, evokes the life of a jungle village.

*There was a river overhung with trees
With wooden houses built along its shallows
From which the morning sun drew up a haze
And the gyrations of the early swallows
Paid no attention to the gentle breeze
Which spoke discreetly from the weeping willows.
There was a jetty by the forest clearing
Where a small boat was tugging at its mooring.*

*And night still lingered underneath the eaves.
In the dark houseboats families were stirring
And Chinese soup was cooked on charcoal stoves.
Then one by one there came into the clearing
Mothers and daughters bowed beneath their sheaves.
The silent children gathered round me staring
And the shy soldiers setting out for battle
Asked for a cigarette and laughed a little.*

*From low canoes old men laid out their nets
While on the bank young boys with lines were fishing.
The wicker traps were drawn up by their floats.
The girls stood waist-deep in the river washing
Or tossed the day's rice on enamel plates
And I sat drinking bitter coffee wishing
The tide would turn to bring me to my senses
After the pleasant war and the evasive answers.*

This is a version of pastoral idyll (and of the jungle-village motif we have met before), a naturalized human scene, and realized without an orientaling glamour. The rhyme scheme is that of a relaxed, dozy *ottava rima*, which keeps settling down to rest on substantives, or on those lulling participle forms which are not quite timeless (idyll's ideal) but suggest that history can have no very urgent business with this village. The poet himself is foreign here, an object of curiosity, yet accepted or tolerated as part of the peaceful communal life — fully arrived, in Isherwood's sense, in a single, integrated scene, and perhaps idly sketching his impressions in the notebook.

The second part of the poem is like a playback of this memory, but now the idyll gets rewritten as tragedy. Here many of the images and even lines from the first part are repeated, but seen now from a different vantage point, further away in space and time — the same images, but troped into difference. Something terrible has intervened.

There was a river overhung with trees.
 The girls stood waist-deep in the river washing,
 And night still lingered underneath the eaves
 While on the bank young boys with lines were fishing.
 Mothers and daughters bowed beneath their sheaves
 While I sat drinking bitter coffee wishing —
 And the tide turned and brought me to my senses.
 The pleasant war brought the unpleasant answers.

The villages are burnt, the cities void;
 The morning light has left the river view;
 The distant followers have been dismayed;
 And I'm afraid, reading this passage now,
 That everything I knew has been destroyed
 But those whom I admired but never knew;
 The laughing soldiers fought to their defeat
 And I'm afraid most of my friends are dead.

The poet who wrote of the village in a notebook in the past is reading those same lines, but now they mean something different; that scene of peace has now gone forever, destroyed by the people he most *admired*. The meaning has changed in memory, or rather its true meaning has only now emerged. If we go back and read the first part again, it has become ironic, of course (irony is a double modality). There is a terrible discrepancy between the peacefulness of the scene and the war we now know is soon going to destroy it. The poet, now become his own reader, recollects not only the village but also himself, his own ignorance and self-deception, his willingness to believe that everything will be all right. The innocent words, and the innocent observer, come back, reaccentuated (Bakhtin would say) by intervening knowledge, seen from a more revealing, apocalyptic angle.

The perils of misreading account, perhaps, for the elusiveness of the first person in the poetry, which I have already mentioned, and which is quite different from the Olympian absence of first-personality in Auden's China poems. A certain reserve, and a perhaps English self-mockery, are erected to shield James Fenton's first-person speaker from a genuine self-reproach. Graham Greene's novel *The Quiet American* (1955), a story about an English reporter in Vietnam and about the difficulty of remaining merely an outsider in wartime, might have been a

warning that remorse, or at least mistakes, are not to be avoided by the gambit of aloofness. At this point the man whose journey was to be 'entirely selfish', who prided himself on 'taking a cool, critical look' at other people's struggles, turns out to have been looking in the wrong direction. Misprision indeed could be said to be the theme of all the Indochina poems in *The Memory of War*. His disorientation lays him open to the charge of being an Orientalist (in Said's sense) after all, viewing the East as a spectacle, misunderstanding the place he journeys to through preconceptions based on a Western political discourse (with its heroes and villains) which does not really apply. In any case, perception and point of view are themselves the issue. The poems of memory are about observing: as an observer, Fenton says, 'I had the illusion that I was honest, and in many ways I was' (106). He also admits, however, that he had intended to write a full prose account of his experiences in Cambodia. 'But I found it too painful, during the years of the Khmer Rouge regime, to touch that subject, and by now it is too late' (xiv).

Cambodia remained unfinished business. The later, longer poem 'Children in Exile' takes it up again. Here the subject is approached from the opposite direction, that of the backwash from so many European and American journeys to Indochina, in this case a family of Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees in Europe. Refugees, immigrants, settlers: it is in demographic and genetic events that the really lasting effects of Western adventures are inscribed. To these young children, over-educated in horror ('Each heart bears a diploma like a scar'), the peaceful plains of Italy at first seem terrible and wild. They are afflicted by the fearful foreignness of their new home as well as by their awful memories of Pol Pot's Cambodia, when 'they are called to report in dreams to their tormentors'. The worst of the old nightmares and new culture shocks over, however, the children set about learning the West, an education that has its own frustrations.

La Normandie est renommée par ses falaises et ses fromages.

What are Normandy, cliffs, cheeses and fame?

Too many words on the look-out for too many meanings.

Too many syllables for the tongue to frame.

It is a process of learning that is always untidy and clumsy and will always be incomplete — just as difficult, in fact, as the attempt by the 'Western observer' to figure out Cambodia or Vietnam. Meanwhile, untidily and incompletely, but with goodwill, a common ground is established in the household in Italy, a little international community with elements that are Italian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, American, and English. 'Love is accommodating. It makes space.' No imaginable melting pot, however, could vaporize the difference of these young exiles, the foreignness of their provenance or history.

I hear a child moan in the next room and I see
 The nightmare spread like rain across his face
 And his limbs twitch in some vestigial combat
 In some remembered place.

The sleeping, dreaming face is a figure for the irreducible otherness of a foreign experience, a gap which no amount of sympathy or imagination or will to solidarity can bridge. This alterity will remain untranslatable, its psychic Hinterland never to be penetrated.

But if we have to remain in some ways tragically blind to other people's experience, alterity can also provide unexpected insights if we learn to see, as it were, *through* it. Taken to visit the tourist sites at Pisa, the child who is a veteran of Pol Pot's Cambodia can bring an experienced eye to bear on all those martyrdoms and infernos depicted in Italian sacred art. '[A] connoisseur among the graves' in the Campo Santo, in this context he is a foreign expert. And it is not only his European cultural heritage that the poet can see afresh in the eyes of the children in exile who have journeyed from their own war. It is confusing, aggravating even, that these children now look forward to a future in America, a country with more than a measure of responsibility for their tragedy. But for the refugees, who have no choice, it is an orientation only to the future that matters now. 'For it is we, not they, who cannot forgive America.' A modest effort to see as the displaced children see can be placed alongside the last part of 'In Time of War', where Auden listens to 'the voice of Man' rising in prayer from Shanghai.

Do they know what they want? They know what they do not want.
 Better the owl before dawn than the devil by day.
 Better strange food than famine, hard speech than mad labour.
 Better this quietness than that dismay.

'Children in Exile' repeats a familiar trope from the battery of Orientalism: its Western characters (including the visiting poet) are adults, its Eastern characters are children. Often enough, this is a pattern that can be seen to imply that the Orient is weak, immature, and in need of protection by the West. Fenton's children in exile in Italy are indeed shown to be learning from their host culture, but the education is not all flowing in one direction.

A tiny philosopher climbs onto my knee
 And sinks his loving teeth into my arm.
 He has had a good dream. A friendly gun-toting Jesus
 Has spent the night protecting him from harm.

It is an odd, comic, and touching moment, when the grotesquely hybrid image — 'Whoever dreamt of Jesus with a gun?' — mingles with a new variation of the

figure of the Oriental sage.⁴⁸ For the 'tiny philosopher', already a veteran of disaster who has lost everything once in his life, goes on to talk about what he has learned about learning — that knowledge and skills, unlike property, are to be prized because they can neither be stolen nor inherited. This is the scene of pedagogy, all right — the child on the adult's knee — but it is not the Western speaker but the Eastern and childish voice that we hear, as we heard it at the opening of the poem.

'What I am is not important, whether I live or die —
 It is the same for me, the same for you.
 What we do is important. This is what I have learnt.
 It is not what we are but what we do,'
 Says a child in exile . . .

The travellers to war considered in this chapter had also been in search of a kind of language, a way of speaking in friendship with others, which would have to be also a way of listening. This fragment of conversation, for a moment uniting an Eastern self and a Western interlocutor in a single subject, an existential partnership, is one result.

48. The child veteran of suffering may also have his roots in Matthew Arnold's 'To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-shore'.

Anarchy in the East: Burgess and the Malayan trilogy

The figure of rule is different in kind from figures like the jungle and the crowd, both more abstract and more polymorphous, for it is not so much a trope itself as the ability to trope, to bring alien material within the ambit of representation, comprehension, control and use. Hayden White has shown that narrative representation itself must be predicated on some system of rule. 'But once we have been alerted to the intimate relationship that Hegel suggests exists between law, historicity and narrativity, we cannot but be struck by the frequency with which narrativity, whether of the fictional or the factual sort, presupposes the existence of a legal system against which or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate.'¹ Thus Sir William Jones's exposition of the structure of Sanskrit, and his work as a judge of the supreme court of judicature at Calcutta, were both projects in the figure of rule, but so was Kipling's deployment of the English language and the picaresque tradition to tell a story about India in *Kim*.

At least from the time of Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*, with its fascinated horror at the incursions of Asiatic abandon, the East has appeared to represent a particular challenge to what is understood in the West as order and system. Unfamiliar and partially understood in its ways, and resistant to Western frameworks of interpretation, it has very often seemed a place of reprehensible disorder, ever ready to tip over into ungovernable chaos. A contrast between Western order and peace, and endemic Eastern chaos and terror, is a trope that is powerfully present in twenty-first century perceptions of the globe. It is often found as an argument supporting the view that the East is inherently incomplete, unruly and immature, and in need of completion, correction or education by an

1. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 13.

experienced disciplinary hand. There is plenty of evidence to support this understanding of how figures of order and disorder usually work, and interventions in the East have often taken place or taken shape as a response or corrective to a perceived state or risk of forms of anarchy — under its many names of disorder, violence, corruption, emergency, crime, terror and so on. It was tempting to see a chaotic East as simply the dark negation of forms of order.² But it is not the whole story.

Anthony Burgess's Malayan Trilogy consists of the novels *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), and *Beds in the East* (1959), all written while the author was an education officer in the Colonial Service, stationed in Malaya during the 'Emergency' in the last years of British rule (he later taught in Brunei). Penguin published all three in a single volume as *The Malayan Trilogy*, but have also issued it under the title *The Long Day Wanes*, a phrase from Tennyson's 'Ulysses'. If a Tennysonian title was thought appropriate, the trilogy might as well have been called *The Old Order Changeth*.³

All three novels follow the fortunes of an Englishman, Victor Crabbe, in Malaya, chronicling his modest rise from House Master to Headmaster and then to State Education Officer, and the decline of his private life, the collapse of his marriage, and gradual dissolution of his belief in himself, a process culminating in his death by drowning in an upcountry backwater towards the end of the story. The rather colourless Crabbe is the unifying topic, but he is somewhat eclipsed by the disorderly throng of eccentrics and maniacs who make up most of the population of the books, and this is much to the point, for Malaya in the trilogy is a world always tending to anarchy. System, structure and regulation are present in various discourses and disciplines which are almost all Western in origin, but all are subject to dissolution — subversion, confusion, loss of identity — in an East which is felt to be intrinsically disorderly. All that is solid becomes unstable in these tropical conditions. There is torrential rainfall, and flooding; there is dysentery, and everyone sweats copiously: Victor Crabbe's end is appropriately sodden. A world with a natural tendency towards dissolution is one of the conditions of farce, which the trilogy certainly is. (It might be argued that all Anthony Burgess's fiction is in farcical mode, in which case it has to be added that this pattern was established in Malaya, in his first three published novels.)

The trilogy begins with a colonial policeman, Nabby Adams, who has served in India and is now seeing out his time in British Malaya. Shambling, lazy, dishonest and alcoholic, Nabby Adams bears very little resemblance to Kipling's

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2. See David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 92–108.
 3. See Chiu Man Yin, 'Written Orders: Authority and Crisis in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Hong Kong, 2003.

smart and tireless police officers. He is not even much concerned with law and order, since he is in the Transport Department, where he and his sidekick Corporal Alladad Khan spend most of their time selling cars and fiddling the petrol returns, when not consuming prodigious amounts of beer. This is the way colonial law and order is ending, in a decade where its days are numbered, for the trilogy takes place in the context of the communist insurgency which the British called the Emergency (1948–1960), and of the decolonizing and Malayanization process which led to Malayan independence in 1957, which takes place in the third novel. Nabby Adams departs at the end of *Time for a Tiger* — as if to insist on the arbitrariness of event in the novel, Burgess solves all Adams' problems with a lottery win — and in the anonymous Malay state where *Beds in the East* is set, there is only one white man left in the Police Department, and there is endless intrigue and squabbling between Jaffna Tamils and Malays on the force. Much of the comedy of Burgess's Malaya is generated by the multicultural rough-and-tumble of Malays, Sikhs, Tamils, Chinese, and Eurasians. The communist insurgents, in the background and in the jungle for the most part, are a threat to first the colonial and then the new postcolonial order, but they are never very clearly seen. They erupt violently into the narrative from time to time, but they are a force of disorder in the story, and are never taken seriously as an alternative system.

The Malayan Trilogy is a novel about history, and Victor Crabbe is a history teacher, who does try to teach his pupils an orderly account of the past, and to find coherence in the deliquescent Orient into which he is sinking. But his surroundings fail to inspissate into the kind of ground that would support the sort of narrative he is used to.

History? The State [of Dahaga] had no history. It had not changed in many centuries, not since the Chinese had stepped ashore and soon retreated, carrying its name back in three ideograms: DA HA GA. The British had hardly disturbed the timeless pattern. The rivers were still the main roads, though the railway train puffed in from the south once a week and an aeroplane came daily. There were cinemas and a few hotels, some British commercial firms in poky offices. But Dahaga regarded all these as a rash that might go, leaving the smooth timeless body unchanged. Or the British might be absorbed, as the Siamese had been in the days of the occupation, when the Japanese had moved west and south, leaving Dahaga to their jackal friends from Thailand. The future would be like the past — shadow-plays about mythical heroes, bull-fights and cock-fights, top-spinning and kite-flying, sympathetic magic, axeing, love-potions, coconuts, rice, the eternal rule of the Abang.⁴

4. Anthony Burgess, *The Malayan Trilogy* [1956, 1958, 1959] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 214. Page references in the text are to this edition.

It is not, then, that Dahaga has no history, even from Crabbe's point of view, but that the grammar of past, present and future fails to organize it, so that what he sees is a narrative of historical events which all melt into an unchanging jumble of cultural practices (or 'folklore'). Victor Crabbe's own efforts to make a difference in Malaya are subject to the same frustration, and here the story of the Mansor School, in the royal town of Kuala Hantu in Lanchap province, is so characteristic as to be almost allegorical.

The school gives an English education to Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians, all of 'good family'. Its teachers come from England and India and the Straits Settlements. Some headmasters rule as they had done in their schools back home, some succumb to the generic temptations of the Orient ('Only one headmaster was removed for pederasty and he with regret, for he was a superb cricketer' [37]), others seek some compromise with local ways. 'The problem of rule seemed insuperable. A sort of Malayan unity only appeared when the discipline was tyrannous; when a laxer humanity prevailed the Chinese warred with the Malays and both warred with the Indians and the Indians warred among themselves' (37). Boothby, the current headmaster, is a ferocious disciplinarian, who has no idea what his students are actually like, and is completely unaware of the covert revolutionary sympathies some of them harbour. Crabbe is liberal and sympathetic, but this does him no good. A communist student rather cleverly discredits him by sending an anonymous letter claiming Crabbe has communist sympathies. The fortunes of Boothby and Crabbe (another conservative-and-liberal dyad) seem to be emblematic of the British presence in the East — one to be driven out to go home disgruntled, the other to be slowly absorbed and disappear.

Crabbe is trying to learn Malay, but even the language seems anarchic, and his teacher tells him sadistically that each Malay word must be learned separately; there is no grammar whose structures can be grasped. 'De English look for rules all de time. But in de east dere are no rules. He he he' (87). This teacher, Inche Kamaruddin, is a Malay nationalist, and is not amused when Crabbe points out that Malaya has never been purely Malay; even *Merdeka*, the watchword of independence, is a Sanskrit word, a foreign importation (90). Later Crabbe observes ironically that Karl Marx's real name was Mordeca, and might well carry the same Arabic transliteration as the nationalist slogan (608). It is notable that Burgess, who was a professional language teacher and was later to write a good book on Joyce,⁵ revels in the variety and quirkiness of the languages of Malaya (including English) but also raises the possibility of identifying a web of hidden correspondences that might reveal the apparently arbitrary phenomena of language to be, at another level, coherent. The naming of characters and places

5. Anthony Burgess, *Here Comes Everybody* (London: Faber, 1965).

is another instance. Victor Crabbe's domestic and intellectual life may be hopelessly muddled, but his name tells a lucid story, as Burgess later recalled, 'suggesting the past imperial triumphs of the British and, at the same time, a backward scuttling into the sand of failure and eventual death'.⁶ Such telling nomenclature has been the stock-in-trade of English novelists since the days of Mr Thwackum and Mr Square. But Burgess also insinuates wordplay in Oriental languages into his names. For Muslims, Nabi Adam is the father of mankind, created by Allah. 'Dahaga' means thirst in Malay; Kenching, the name of its principal town, is a word for urinate. And so on.⁷ It may have given Burgess a private satisfaction that what looked semantically empty from a Western standpoint was nonetheless meaningful when seen from a different angle. Thus (as in Joyce) the mask of riotous carnival may disguise a compulsive structuralist.

For a Western reader, however, the carnival is the thing, and there is no unifying principle to bring the disorder of Malaya into shape. A Chinese of cosmopolitan manners, Lim Cheng Po, complains that the component races of the emerging nation do not get on together. 'There was, it's true, a sort of illusion of getting on when the British were in full control. But self-determination's a ridiculous idea in a mixed-up place like this. There's no nation. There's no common culture, language, literature, religion' (447). This is a variation on the Victorian commonplace, which we will see expressed by Dilke and others, that British order could conjure a nation from chaos, and the corollary that without the British, to chaos it may well return. (A habit of thinking in terms of Western order and Eastern chaos may well have made the departing British more susceptible to an '*après nous le déluge*' mentality, and in India to the abandonment of the idea that the country was a single nation in any sense other than as an imperial possession, and so to agreement to Partition.) It would be reckless to attribute these fictional sentiments to Burgess himself. But it is certainly true that the picture of Malaya that emerges from this narrative is highly polyphonic, fractious, and confused, and the anti-colonial and postcolonial voice of Malayan nationalism seems likely to find it as difficult as the British to make itself heard above the Babel of multicultural diversity.

Meanwhile the various disciplines imposed by the British — through what we might call its ideological and its repressive state apparatuses, from the educational system to the police force — were never very efficient or convincing in the first place, and now as the sun sets over the remains of empire, they are

6. Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God: Being the First Part of the Confessions of Anthony Burgess* (London: Heinemann, 1987), 400.

7. The names in the novel contain covert jokes in Arabic, Chinese and Malay. See Chiu, 133–35. Illegible to most English readers, they can certainly cause offence in others. See the very hostile reading in Zawiah Yahya, *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* (Perenbit, Malaysia: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994), 124–55.

melting into a turbulent fluidity whose future shape cannot be guessed. The pattern is not only British and secular. Father Laforgue (in *The Enemy in the Blanket*), after ten years of missionary work in China, is so absorbed into Chinese culture that his orthodoxy has been impaired. He is 'a soldier of Rome in a far outpost, cut off from orders' (264), and only precariously still a Christian priest at all. 'The big words were beginning to sound empty in his mouth' (266). The missionary lives at the end of a row of Chinese shops, with his name and his calling painted on a board in bold ideograms above the door, like any other tradesman of the Chinese quarter.

While Burgess is open to a charge of nostalgia for a European order in the East, it is by no means clear that he sees this levelling of distinction as deplorable. For one thing, it is certainly creative of the lively comedy that makes his Malaya enjoyable, and there is a messily democratic quality, not to be despised, to the grotesque juxtapositions and polyphonic noise of the story — as there is at the tropical Christmas party which ends *Time for a Tiger*, where history itself seems to have liquefied.

They drank, and the evening poured itself out in a long bubbling or frothing aromatic stream, and Alladad Khan sang a Punjabi hunting song and addressed the Crabbes seriously in Urdu, and the Crabbes addressed Nabby Adams in Malay, and it became Whitsun more than Christmas, for the Tower of Babel lay with the empty bottles. (202)

Anarchy may be endemic in the East as Burgess sees it, but the procession of order is not necessarily to be preferred to the carnival of chaos. In any case, once colonial rule is finally ended, towards the end of *Beds in the East*, there are early signs of a neo-colonial system, with a different sponsor, anxious to move in and replace it. 'The British are going. Nature abhors a vacuum' (544). The vanguard of a new order is Temple Haynes, an American academic representing one of 'various organizations' that are now descending on the region — 'There's work to be done in South-East Asia' — and armed with a whole Foucauldian battery of disciplines.

'I'm concerned, as you'll have guessed, with the linguistic angle. Then there's the angle of inter-racial relations. And there's method of teacher training, time-and-motion study in industry, behaviour-patterns, statistics, sociological surveys and, of course, demographic studies. A great deal to do. It'll cost a lot of money, of course, but it's the best possible investment. We can't afford to let the communists get away with it.' (548)

Unruly Asia is already testing a new order, whose disciplines will have to grapple in their turn with the old chaos.

Law and order: The British and the rule of law

The British empire too, arthritic and demoralized at the time Burgess wrote about its twilight in the 1950s, had once itself been a new order. Schoolboys of the new British *imperium* were taught a list of the achievements and lasting benefits of the Roman empire which was its strong precursor: the Romans preserved the work of the Greeks, built roads, and bequeathed a system of laws to the lands that had been under their rule. Sometimes, the Latin language was taken to be a more important legacy than the roads, but the pattern was the same — culture, communication, and law. The British could see themselves bringing similar gifts to their own dominions and colonies. Some would have named the Christian religion as the greatest benefit conferred by their imperial attentions. In the field of communications, the great railway and road and canal system of India could be pointed to as a gift of empire, as well as the English language, set on its globalizing path by Trevelyan and Macaulay in the 1830s. But the rule of law, and the order it guaranteed, was the achievement of which the imperialists themselves were most proud, and it also turned out to be, apparently, the most uncontroversial part of the legacy; as the tide of empire withdrew, efforts were everywhere made in former dependencies to preserve, in necessarily modified form, the system of law in whose name authority had been exercised. An intolerance of lawlessness and determination to suppress abuses had been and remains one motive for interference in the first place.

Empire imposed European form on Oriental content: European rule, as law and measure, was the great figure of empire. For the British as for the Romans before them, the law was of course not just a collection of rules, but embodied a set of decisions about the political and ethical nature of human beings — about property and conduct, rights and obligations — which had evolved in Europe. ‘Apart from hesitant social reform,’ says V. G. Kiernan, ‘the gift that Western rule prided itself on bestowing was order, that watchword of governors in the colonies as of Metternich and the Holy Alliance in Europe. It had more of an affirmative and novel quality in Asia because it implied a guarantee of private rights, seldom safe under any of the old regimes; above all, security of life and, almost as important to the European mind, property.’⁸ Modern Europe was inclined to view the rest of the world as the realm of stagnation and chaos, Kiernan continues, and the contrast helped to define Europe’s sense of itself as the fortunate home of law and order — or rather of order and law.

Hapsburg and Hohenzollern and the older ruling classes believed in
Order: the intelligentsia believed in a reign of Law, under which

8. V. G. Kiernan, *Imperialism and Its Contradictions*, ed. Harvey J. Kaye (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 106.

freedom of thought and enquiry, constitutional right, professional respectability could be enjoyed. None of these things seemed to exist in Afro-Asia: it was all the more incumbent on Europe to cherish them. In so doing it would naturally feel its kinship and its distinctness from all others.⁹

The law was an institution, but it was also a story about East and West. There were many ways to tell it. One way is to be found in Hugh Clifford's Malayan story, 'Two Little Slave Girls'.

This is a small and unregarded Clifford tale, simple, although not quite as simple as it looks. It tells of two Malay children, aged eleven and eight, who are forced to live as slaves with their master Che' Awang Uda, because a debt incurred by their parents, now both dead, gives him the right to claim them as property. The sisters escape down river to the white man's settlement at Pekan, because they have heard that the white folk do not allow slavery. When they reach their destination after a perilous journey, they are freed, and Awang Uda is handed over to the law. I want to use 'Two Little Slave Girls' to open up the question of how the British often saw themselves as the missionaries of law, but also to show how that pleasant self-conception could sometimes mask other motives and activities.

For much of the nineteenth century, in the peninsula and archipelago of South-east Asia the seaborne Europeans could control the coasts and principal ports, but their authority in the Hinterland was patchy or non-existent: this is the situation of Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*. Clifford's story first establishes a picture of the Malayan Hinterland as not just lawless before the white man came, but worse, a jurisdiction of institutionalized inhumanity and violence, sanctioned by a barbarous and cruel religion. Slavery is not just tolerated but protected under Islamic law, as set out in the *Kanun*, the traditional Civil and Criminal Code of the Malays, which the story cites in evidence (the narrator says he has a copy on the desk before him).¹⁰ So the local and miniature story about the Malay children is contained within a much grander narrative which will show the supersession of an old, primitive, and 'superstitious' order by modernity — one of the names of the West — and its enlightened laws. A tale about the pathos of children escaping from a despotic Islamic environment sounds ideally suited for a missionary theme, but Clifford (who was a devout Catholic) shows no interest in Christianity in the story, and the spiritual antagonist of cruel Islam is simply a paternalistic sentimentalism about children. The

9. *Ibid.*, 158.

10. For a fuller picture of the interaction of law, custom (*adat*) and religion in the peninsula, see A. C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1982).

countertext to the *Kanun* is an exceptionally soppy epigraph from a Swinburne poem about ‘children far above us’ and their ‘smile as sweet as flowers’.

The narrative part of the tale begins with the terrified little girls taking refuge from the bullying of their master in undergrowth at the edge of their village compound, and resolving to make their escape. Minah, the younger, declares she can no longer bear her life of slavery, but Iang, the elder, is pessimistic. ‘We be like unto fish caught in the stakes. We have no power, no stratagem; we can do nought but weep.’¹¹ Nonetheless, the girls do decide to make the dangerous journey to seek out the white men, and they steal a dugout canoe and set off downriver towards the sea they have never seen, and the jurisdiction of the foreigners who, they have heard, do not allow slavery. Clifford is interested in the fact that this short journey is an epic voyage for the children, whose world hitherto has extended for not much more than a mile in each direction beyond the compound. On their journey they have no adequate scale of distance by which to measure things, a curious instance of the unfathomable jungle becoming the place of sublime incommensurability to its own inhabitants; the narrator, however, knows exactly how far they have to travel to escape.

They set off, paddling the dugout by night and hiding by day, exhausted and scared of the darkness, the river, the jungle animals, and the prospect of capture and punishment, ‘their only hope of deliverance [lying] in the protection that might be afforded to them by the white strangers — a race of men as weird and awful to these little brown girls as the ogres of our own nursery tales’.¹² It is in some obvious respects an allegorical story — as so many colonial tales about Oriental children are — with its journey from a native place of restriction, darkness and cruelty towards a new world of freedom and opportunity under the protection of enlightened laws. (Fenton’s ‘Children in Exile’ was to retell this tale with a number of cautious qualifications.)

The journey, rather than the arrival, is foregrounded. Once they get to the riverside town, and after encountering there a bewildering series of townfolk (Chinese, Tamils and Sikhs as well as Malays, indicating the global scope of the jurisdiction they have reached), they are taken by a Malay policeman to tell their tale to the white man, after which the business is finished in a couple of paragraphs — arrangements made, the bullying Awang Uda sent for and handed over to the law, trustworthy relations found to look after the girls, and a report that they are now flourishing. It turns out that the white man who plays the role of the *deus ex machina* in this case is the narrator himself, and he describes how he took the little girls on his knee, and gave them barley sugar as he coaxed their story out of

11. Hugh Clifford, ‘Two Little Slave-Girls’, *Malayan Monochromes* (London: John Murray, 1913), 130.

12. *Ibid.*, 142.

them. The good foster-father drives out and succeeds the bad for these orphans, and, 'if it cannot resuscitate dead parents, the Government at any rate does its clumsy best to take their place'.¹³ And replacement is clearly better for the girls than even resuscitation could have been, for the whole story has been one of deliverance from an old and horrible way of life to a new and hopeful one.

The story shows the British government in Pekan, in the person of the narrator, as something like the redeeming destination of these juvenile pilgrims' progress, the guarantee of a salvation from bondage, offering new life. This story has nothing to say about why there was a British government presence in Pekan in the first place, but the answer to that question is of some importance to the history of colonialism in the Malayan peninsula, and to the career of Hugh Clifford, as well as to the context of this story. Clifford arrived in Malaya in 1883 just when a long-standing British policy against territorial acquisition was coming to an end. When other European powers, especially the French, began to be active in the region, the British felt the need to preserve their economic domination of the peninsula by bringing territories under their protection. This started with a campaign to 'pacify and civilize' Perak, but the British found that they could not stop there but had to continue until the entire peninsula had been brought under their control.¹⁴ Pekan was the seat of government of the state of Pahang, which was the scene of a small gold rush in the 1880s, and when the raja was felt to be handing out too many concessions to foreign prospectors, the young Hugh Clifford was sent there as agent of the colonial government to negotiate to secure a minimum of supervision over the state.

The raja was persuaded to allow a permanent British government agent to reside at Pekan (Clifford, as we have already seen, later claimed that he had been 'the principal instrument in adding 15,000 square miles of territory to the British dependencies in the East')¹⁵ and Clifford himself, aged twenty, became the first British consul in Pahang. Subsequent British interference, and attempts to force the chiefs to accept British administrative systems, led to a small war and the 'pacification' of Pahang. It would not be quite fair to say that this history is repressed in (or out of) 'Two Little Slave Girls', since fiction is under no obligation to tell the whole of any story; and as a matter of fact it is told in some detail in Clifford's 'Recollections of the Pahang Disturbances of December 1890 to September 1891', the first part of *Bush-Whacking*.¹⁶ But an awareness of the

13. *Ibid.*, 148.

14. Harry H. Gailey, 'Sir Hugh Clifford', *African Proconsuls: European Governors in Africa*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan (New York: Free Press, 1978), 267. See also A. C. Milner, *Kerajaan*, 29–52.

15. Hugh Clifford, *The Further Side of Silence* (London: Curtis Brown, 1916), x.

16. 'Our experience in Asia has taught us that it is impossible to avoid making a little war of our own before we can hope to teach an unimaginative people the full blessings of peace.

context can remind us that British rule could mean other things than the opposite of terror and enslavement.

In the story the law is embodied, and humanized, in the Malay policeman and the white official, but we scarcely see it at work — simply, ‘all was soon arranged’.¹⁷ It seems, as it must to the children, a magical dispensation. Yet the figure of Western law is inscribed all over the tale, and is what enables it to be told in the first place. The storyteller — Clifford, the district officer with his judicial powers — is only able to tell the tale by virtue of his command of the resources and authority of the law he represents, and the knowledge and power it deploys. He has the historical scope to understand the origins of different kinds of slavery (including debt slavery) in Malaya and their ideological justifications, and the geographical and ethnographical knowledge to piece the story together. He has the power to challenge and overturn the ancestral practice and divine sanction of the rival jurisdiction. He has something like a divine omniscience himself, as he appears to have been able to witness and reproduce verbatim the conversation between the girls before their escape, at which no one else was present. He commands the faculties of measurement and discrimination, marshalling and presenting evidence and eliciting and judging testimony, and he embodies ideas of justice that lead him to condemn the slave-owner and offer protection to the girls, not only in his decisions as a magistrate, but also in his narration of the tale itself. Here the figure of law is not merely something represented, in people and actions in the story, but is nothing less than the enabling principle of the representation itself. As for the child characters, in the story they have to grow up, to behave like adults (braving the darkness and the journey), in order to come into possession of their rights under the law of the British.

The figure of law was absolutely central to the British imperial self-conception; indeed, as in Clifford’s tale, it was what enabled the story of that empire to be told in the first place. If it seemed to come easily to the French to think of their overseas activities as a civilizing mission, the British were more inclined to narrate and justify their adventures in terms of a widening and universalizing of the rule of law. Ordering, systematizing, regulating, and enlightening, the law went to work on the formless chaos of nature in imitation of the original act of the Creator.

Ideally, the law was or should be the opposite of chaos. As we have seen, formlessness and illegibility were among the most frightening things about the jungles that covered the dark places of the earth, accounting for some of ‘the horror of nature’ that Maugham talked about, and no doubt some of the ‘horror’

[. . .] [S]o we inaugurate our rule of peace with a heart-breaking little war.’ Hugh Clifford, *Bush-Whacking and Other Asiatic Tales and Memories* (London: Heinemann, 1929), 5, 6.
17. Hugh Clifford, *Malayan Monochromes*, 147.

disclosed to Kurtz in 'Heart of Darkness'. Nature in Europe was tamed, domesticated and productive for the most part, but in the East it was unpredictable and never properly under control. Especially in tropical latitudes, and even when an effort was made to bring it to order, it had a tendency to run riot and become monstrous.

The heat throbbed down on one's head with a steady, rhythmic thumping like blows from an enormous bolster . . . In the borders beside the path swaths of English flowers — phlox and larkspur, hollyhock and petunia — not yet slain by the sun, rioted in vast size and richness. The petunias were huge, like trees almost. There was no lawn, but instead a shrubbery of native trees and bushes — gold mohur trees like vast umbrellas of blood-red bloom, frangipanis with creamy, stalkless flowers, purple bougainvilleas, scarlet hibiscus and the pink Chinese rose, bilious-green crotons, feathery fronds of tamarind. The clash of colours hurt one's eyes in the glare.¹⁸

This is the garden of the European club at Kyauktada in Orwell's *Burmese Days*, and the remarkable violence of the language here gives some sense of what is felt to be an innate and alarming indiscipline in Eastern nature. Kipling's outburst at the polyphiloprogenitive Laljee Mull (see Chapter 3) speaks to the same anxiety, specifically moralized — the Bengali's precocious sexual productivity is linked to his dishonest practices in Kipling's mind. 'He has a wife and three kids and is at least twenty one,' wrote the outraged young Kipling, his own sentences becoming disordered at the thought. 'What hope is there of a man or boy rather of that stamp — the representative of a class ten thousand strong. — Broken down — used up — played out before they are men and through the very weakness of their physical nature morally rotten and untrustworthy.'¹⁹ Law was the opposite of nature, and a teeming and uncontrolled Eastern nature stood in particular need of law and order.

Victorians were apt to think of nature in the wild as a place of unrestrained competition — 'red in tooth and claw', as Tennyson describes it in *In Memoriam* — but when Kipling imagined a jungle society in *The Jungle Books* he could not imagine it without a law. The poem 'The Law of the Jungle', in *The Second Jungle Book*, gives a set of prescriptions for the conduct of wolves among themselves, and wolves are the most social of jungle creatures, 'For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack'.²⁰ But the Law of the Jungle

18. George Orwell, *Burmese Days* [1934] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 15–16.

19. *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Macmillan, 1990) 1: 107.

20. Rudyard Kipling, *The Second Jungle Book* (1895), ed. W. W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 17.

seems to run for the other animals as well, although it is not always obeyed, and Daniel Bivona has described its descriptive and prescriptive functions as bringing it close to the classic meaning of 'ideology'.

Kipling's 'Law' is both an ethical code prescribing how people (or animals) ought to behave and an explanatory code accounting for how people (and animals) inevitably have behaved in organized societies (and nature). It blurs the line between the ethical notion of 'law' and the morally neutral or relativistic anthropological notion of 'culture', thus generating the fantasy of a rule-governed order which — luckily — is somehow found to be the order of the natural universe as well, a social order which is identical with or analogous to the order of nature.²¹

The Law makes the jungle a culture and a system, not just a bloody mess. Where Kipling gets into trouble is with the 'man-cub' Mowgli, and with the unresolvable paradox of his being both a wolf and a human child. Legally he is a wolf, for he has been brought by his wolf-parents to the Council Rock, as the Law requires, and accepted by the pack. But he is manifestly a human, with human abilities, such as being able to stare down any of the animals, and being unafraid of fire. As he matures, the Law of the Jungle ensures that he will have sovereignty over the other animals by virtue of his human nature, but it also makes it inevitable that he cannot stay with the wolves, although he is 'a brother spoken for and brought into the Pack according to the law of the Jungle'.²² Although Mowgli has always assented to the Law, in the end it will outlaw him as intolerable to the equilibrium it supports. Here Kipling's allegory about the naturally sovereign incomer collides with his allegory about the natural order of those native to a specific location — with worrying implications for the British in India, for the law that gives Mowgli power in the jungle also says he has no legitimate business there. This is why, as we have seen, Mowgli is driven out of the jungle at the end of the first tale in *The Jungle Book*, and then subsequent stories have to move back above the watershed of that lapsarian exile, to chronicle his further but earlier adventures.

A simpler and more common story, however, is the one that sees the law as an intervention into and against anarchy. In Kipling's last Indian story, 'The Man Who Would Be King', Dravot and Carnehan inaugurate their rule over the chronically warring villages of Kafiristan by scratching a line with a spear right

21. Daniel Bivona, *British Imperial Literature 1870–1940: Writing and the Administration of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 86–87.

22. Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* (1894), ed. W. W. Robson (Oxford University Press, 1987), 17.

down the middle of a valley, literally inscribing the new order in the land.²³ Law, like morality, begins with drawing the line somewhere, making a shape where there was no shape before. Law replaced anarchy and chaos. Though he viewed the British government of India as ‘a well-administered despotism’, Charles Dilke also saw it as creative. ‘The greatest of the many changes in progress in the East,’ he wrote, ‘is that India is being made — that a country is being created under that name where none has yet existed’; this was being done by British technology, communications, and a centralizing government.²⁴ And it was a government that was under the law, not the other way round.

Law had a part to play in nation-building. One of the greatest of all Utilitarian projects was the codification of the law of India, a task that began in 1833 and was not finished until the 1880s. This huge undertaking was to mark the passage of colonial India from sovereignty to governmentality, replacing the capricious and purely extractive force of the sovereign, under the East India Company, with a process of professionalization that brought all important branches of the law into a distinct, systematic, written form. ‘As a massive interpretive project,’ Nasser Hussain writes, ‘codification also provided an answer to the inevitable anxiety felt when the colonial gaze traversed India: a sense of confusion and overwhelming chaos. The qualities that government officers demanded of codification — consistency, predictability, and certainty — answered these needs and anxieties.’²⁵ As the task approached completion, it seemed to some that a system had been worked out for India that would actually be superior to the haphazard amalgam of English law. Fitzjames Stephen felt able to boast, in an article in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1872, that ‘to compare the Indian Penal Code with English criminal law is like comparing cosmos with chaos’ — in other words, English criminal law now looked chaotic in comparison with its Indian counterpart.²⁶ Stephen

23. Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, ed. Louis L. Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 262. Scratching a line in the earth is not a very realistic detail of cartographic ruling. When Gertrude Bell, ‘shaking her head at the blurred frontiers’ in the region, drew the lines of the borders of the new country of Iraq in 1918, she did so on a map in the Foreign Office. Janet Wallach, *Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1996), 214. See also Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765–1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

24. Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English Speaking Countries*, 8th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1869), 551. But Dilke was also worried that the over-rapidity of legislation in India, and its ‘unyielding adherence to English or Roman models’, made it unpopular with Indians, causing him to fear that ‘if we are swept from India, our laws will vanish with us’ (544).

25. Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2003), 41.

26. *Ibid.*

was here reversing the commonplace comparison between the 'cosmos' of an imposed Western jurisdiction and the 'chaos' which was supposed to have preceded it in the Orient. Like the divine *fiat*, law worked on chaos and troped it into system, coherence and narrative.

Two generations before, William Wilberforce had spoken of 'the vast superiority even of European laws and institutions, and far more of British laws and institutions, over those of Asia', as of a self-evident truth.²⁷ For Wilberforce the superiority of these laws over the 'dark and bloody superstitions' of the East derived from their warrant in Christian morality. But the discourse about British law spoke in many voices, and not only in the Christian accents of Wilberforce. A hundred years later, the great imperialist Lord Milner put it in secular terms, but with the same confidence. 'For the British race has become responsible for the peace and order and the just and humane government of three or four hundred millions of people, who, differing as widely as possible from one another in other respects, are all alike in this, that, from whatever causes, they do not possess the gift of maintaining peace and order for themselves.'²⁸

For this was the simple refrain, in all the long polyphonic imperial palaver on the subject, of which this section has offered a sample. The rule of law was a gift, fashioned out of Europe's own struggles (and America's) and now offered to a world that sorely needed it: Western law was also itself a modality, an angle of vision from which the rest of the world appeared in a certain way. The history of the unreconstructed East in particular told a story of confused alternations of despotism, corruption, violence, anarchy, and again despotism. The rule of law could break that cycle, and there was a plain moral duty to confer its blessings on those not fortunate enough to have evolved it for themselves. All those involved in the work of empire felt that duty. Conservatives who trumpeted order, and liberals who preached rights and liberty, could agree on this if on not much else. Beneath the choppy surface of the discourse on empire, this strong undertow bore on like a destiny. To doubt it was to cast the whole enterprise in question, for the rule of law was both means and end, not only the instrument of empire but also its historic justification. It was through their law that the British apprehended Eastern places and their people, and reinscribed them in a Western idiom. The work went on in the codification of the law of India, in the public arguments of men like Wilberforce and Milner, and the law-giving of Leonard Woolf in the Hambantota jungle. It was served too by Hugh Clifford, not only when he secured effective British rule over the state of Pahang, but also when he

27. In a speech to the House of Commons, 1 July 1813, quoted in *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Atlee 1774–1947*, ed. George Bennett (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1953), 101.

28. Alfred Milner, 'Introduction', *The Nation and the Empire, Being a Collection of Speeches and Addresses* [1913] (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1998), xxxiii.

took the two little slave girls onto his knee and transformed their confused and childish narrative into one of his stories, in his people's language.

Other orders: Contesting local jurisdictions and practices

At the end of Burgess's Malayan trilogy the burden of order has passed to a new generation and a new world power in the West, but one equally sure that there is such a burden, and that it is natural to assume it (for 'Nature abhors a vacuum'). Conservatives are inclined to take a Manichean view of an endless war between order and chaos and depravity; liberals prefer to emphasize the law as an instrument of progress, supplanting earlier and cruder jurisdictions, and primitive and savage ideas. Although it was possible to take different views of its teleology, there was from Enlightenment to modernism a strong if not unanimous orthodoxy about the order-giving mission of the West in the world, the basis of its right to rule.

Enlightenment historicism reassured Europeans and white Americans that they were the instruments as well as the beneficiaries of modernity. The particular moral self-confidence that filled the sails of the nineteenth-century discourse of the British about themselves — an unmistakable note in so many utterances, and in large part responsible for the self-righteousness that discredited the Victorians among the generations that followed — drew on a sense of national success derived from increasing affluence, but there were two other factors that encouraged the British to feel pleased with themselves. The first was the defeat of Napoleon, seen as a victory of sturdy British traditions of freedom over foreign tyranny. The second was the campaign that led to the abolition of slavery in the British empire. These two narratives were crucial to British identity, and they account for the otherwise unaccountable insistence in British public discourse that in spreading their empire they were spreading freedom: and freedom, like order, depended on the rule of law. 'We are free, we are civilized, to little purpose,' Macaulay told the House of Commons on 10 July 1833, 'if we grudge to any portion of the human race an equal measure of freedom and civilization.' He concluded this speech about India with a famous peroration. 'To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, 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 all our own.'²⁹

The gift of law, to a liberal like Macaulay, was the foundation upon which the independence, and equal trading partnership, of the colonized peoples would eventually be raised. But to those who would demur at the very notion of working

29. *The Life and Works of Lord Macaulay*, vol. 8 (London: Longmans, Green, 1908), 141, 142.

towards an equal measure of freedom for colonial subjects, the law was a weapon that could at least help to free them from primitive and cruel customs and practices, from irrationality, violence and injustice. Flora Annie Steel voiced a fairly typical conservative sentiment when she wrote, as late as 1929, that rule was the order of the day in India: self-rule could wait for some dateless tomorrow. 'In time India will govern herself, but only in time; so, in the interests of all, let us take it.'³⁰

Western law and order, then, defined and justified itself not only in distinction and opposition to an endemic Eastern chaos, but specifically against a raft of unruly and unmodern ('uncivilized') orders and practices. I want now to consider what some of these 'other orders' were, with which Western rule and its laws contended, and from which it purported to effect a turn or conversion. Many of them could easily carry the prefix 'Oriental': despotism, slavery, caste, superstition, fanaticism, and latterly terrorism or more simply terror (the 'war against terror'); more locally, the religious or social sanction of phenomena such as infanticide, suttee, *thuggee*, amok.³¹ Unruliness was the reason for more rule, disorder and abuse were the premises of order. The Indian legislation responding to the 'Thug scare' of the 1830s is a good example, as Javed Majeed points out. 'This legislation was part of a general drive by the [East India] Company to extend the scope and reach of criminal law in order to control as many sources of authority in Indian society as possible.'³²

European colonial law may be said to have been virtually brought into being as a counterforce to what Nasser Hussain has called 'the phantasm of oriental despotism', first conjured by Montesquieu in *L'Esprit des Lois* in 1752.³³ The institution of slavery was recognized as the bedrock of despotism. Though more often thought of in its African and Atlantic contexts, slavery was widespread in Asia too. The campaign against the slave trade was often the justification for the use of force and the annexation of territory (you could argue this is the hidden agenda of 'Two Little Slave-Girls'), as well as for missionary activity in the field and a great deal of pious fund-raising at home. There is no doubting the sincerity of this campaign to enlarge freedom, though it fed a certain self-righteousness

30. Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity* (London: Macmillan, 1929), 253.

31. For the latter, see Philip Holden, 'Love, Death and Nation: Representing Amok in British Malaya', *Literature and History*, 3rd series 6:1 (Spring 1997), 43–62.

32. Javed Majeed, 'Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug*: The Anglo-Indian Novel as a Genre in the Making', *Writing India 1757–1990*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 86–110; 87.

33. 'After all, in *The Spirit of the Laws*, we have a text widely considered foundational to Western legal ideas that proceeds by explicitly dividing the world into types of government and completes its more major arguments by referring to the figure of Eastern despotism.' Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency*, 44.

that tended to overlook the part played by others, including the enslaved themselves, in the fight against slavery.³⁴

It did not, however, always overlook the infamous part played by the British slave trade in an earlier phase of its imperial history, and some saw an extra moral obligation on the former slaveholding and piratical empire to provide just laws and good government for its charges as an atonement and redemption. This was how the Radical leader John Bright saw it, when in a speech in Manchester in 1877 he argued in favour of governing India justly, 'not only . . . for our own sakes and to satisfy our own conscience', but with a view to establishing the basis for its future independence. 'By doing this, I think we should be endeavouring to make amends for the original crime upon which much of our power in India is founded, and for the many mistakes which have been made by men whose intentions have been good.'³⁵ It has also been noted that anti-slavery humanitarians could be both abolitionists and racists, 'simultaneously believing that slavery was evil and that members of African and other non-white races were biologically inferior to Europeans'.³⁶

Caste seemed to many almost as iniquitous as slavery, and a specifically Oriental form of oppression. If the mission of British rule in India was to help improve the lot of 'a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition', as Macaulay (quoted above) had put it, one of the most dramatically obvious impediments to that people's resurrection from the depths was the caste system. To most British observers, India's Hindu population seemed to be imprisoned in an inflexible and priest-ridden hierarchy. Caste was a social institution generally deplored even by Europeans who understood it, for a people who advocated free trade in the economic sphere were not disposed to tolerate what seemed its opposite in family and social life, especially when in many cases they were themselves the beneficiaries of social mobility through their translation to India. Caste was understood to be not the same thing as social class, and was seen as indigenous and essential to Indian life, the defining feature of Indian social organization.³⁷

34. See the chapter 'Who really ended the British colonial slave trade?', in Marouf A. Hasian Jr, *Colonial Legacies in Postcolonial Contexts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 25–55.

35. *The Concept of Empire*, ed. George Bennett, 263.

36. Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 72.

37. David Cannadine argues that after 1857 the British regarded the established Indian social order, including the caste system, more favourably than they had done in the reforming period. Caste, 'as the analogue to their own carefully ranked domestic status hierarchy . . . seemed to make Indian society familiar'. David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London: Penguin, 2001), 42.

Leonard Woolf's comic story 'The Two Brahmans' can be taken as typical of British perceptions of caste.³⁸ In a town in the north of Ceylon, two Brahman neighbours both want a marriage between the son of one and the daughter of the other, but negotiations between the fathers break down into recriminations because the great-great-great-grandfather of one polluted his caste by going fishing, and the great-great-great-grandfather of the other once carried earth on his head. The absurd dead hand of caste, which forbids a Brahman to do anything that looks like work, stands like a comic villain in the way of young love in the story, and more generally immobilizes the Brahman community in centuries of useless boredom. Here the rule of caste, forbidding any change, is the opposite of history, for it condemns the privileged to paralytic inanity, just as surely as it condemns the lower castes to servitude. It is also the opposite of the satirical, worldly, modern, English-language story that reports it to be comical and sad.

It has been argued that the insistence on the inflexibility of the system, on the part of Orientalist ethnographers and the British administrators who learned from them, played a significant part in the making of a more caste-conscious social order; and further, that caste — if not a deliberate colonial artefact — was specifically the product of the historical encounter between India and Western colonial rule.³⁹ The rigidity and injustice of caste has been seen as an interpellation of Hindu social order by British policy, which both justified British intervention and kept Hindus divided among themselves: in other words, the British helped to create the wrong which they then said they were determined to right. Whatever the merits of these arguments, most observers thought of caste as simply and definitively Indian (or Oriental), and saw it as perpetuating inequality and injustice in a system they would not have tolerated in their own society.

Caste presented an image of the East not as alarming chaos but as a deplorable kind of order, a hierarchical sclerosis to which British rule, with its laws before which everyone stood equal,⁴⁰ could offer a contrast and perhaps a remedy. A colonial rule based on equality of treatment seemed the best way to weaken the grip of caste. 'Educate the people of India, govern them wisely, and gradually the

38. Leonard Woolf, *Diaries in Ceylon, and Stories from the East* (London: Hogarth Press, 1963), 280–86.

39. The first point is made in Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), the second in Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

40. Francis Carey, a character based on Cecil Rhodes in John Buchan's African novel *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, voices a widespread opinion about the colonial subject and the law. 'He must stand before it [the law] as an equal with the white man — not a social equal or a political equal, but a legal equal.' John Buchan, *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1906), 202.

distinctions of caste will disappear,' John Bright advised.⁴¹ Macaulay and liberals like him saw caste as a symptom of the degeneracy and the 'depths of slavery' from which Oriental society had to be rescued. The opening, *de jure*,⁴² of all grades of office in the Government of India to all Indians, regardless of colour, descent, or religion, was quite specifically intended to help undermine the caste system.

Other kinds of discourse were going about the same subversive task. In *The Expansion of England* the historian J. R. Seeley acknowledged that new ideas, 'introducing the science of the West into the midst of Brahminical traditions', could be as revolutionary as new laws.⁴³ Conservatives, less reform-minded, were usually more tolerant of caste, though almost never enthusiastic about it. (But Kipling's enthusiasm for the exclusive brotherhood and mystique of occupations has still to be fully investigated through the optic of caste.) Their sense of the stiff, hierarchical and conformist societies of the Orient — especially of India and China — helped British social theorists in the nineteenth century, like John Stuart Mill, to see, and argue, that a progressive society should above all foster the individual liberty of its citizens. 'The greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history, because the despotism of custom is complete,' wrote Mill in *On Liberty*. 'This is the case over the whole East.'⁴⁴ His argument about organic progressive Western societies leads him to trope the whole East as a morbid reactionary system.

Though it was a secular government and practised official religious tolerance like its Roman forebear, British colonial rule in Asia was designed to act as a check on the excesses of Oriental practices coded as 'superstition' — in other words, non-Christian. Islam in India and the East Indies was respected for its virility; Muslims were thought by the British to be a manly and martial people (so were the Sikhs), unlike the Hindus. But both Hinduism and Islam were considered often cruel and backward in their social practices, and most especially in the treatment of women. Though they were most apt to invoke and dream of the Orient as a female figure — veiled perhaps, and enticing — to most nineteenth-century European observers Oriental society had seemed an overwhelmingly masculinist order. Missionaries often saw a special responsibility, and opportunity, in women, whose sequestration in the home, and lack of social power outside it, seemed to make them particularly in need of help.

41. *The Concept of Empire*, ed. George Bennett, 173.

42. This provision was included in what Macaulay called 'that wise, that benevolent, that noble clause' in the Government of India Act (1833). See *The Life and Works of Lord Macaulay* 8:140.

43. J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* [1883], ed. John Gross (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 156.

44. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859), ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (London: Penguin, 1988), 136.

Maud Diver in 1909 wrote of the need for Englishwomen in India to lend a helping hand to 'their simple-hearted sisters' in the face of superstition and prejudice, 'for woman is the lever, whereby sunken nations are upraised'; this was vital work, because 'it is the *moral* culture of her women that is needed to lift India out of the rut of ages; for power is hers, weakling though she be, to make or mar mankind at her good pleasure'.⁴⁵ It is a sentiment to be set alongside Diver's firm views about the ancillary position of women in any society. Edward Thompson had more progressive views. 'Indian civilization has spoiled its men,' he declared roundly in 1928. 'If there is any "gulf" between East and West, it is where sex and the family are in question, and woman's function and her relation to man.'⁴⁶ This remains a problematic theme in perceptions of Asian societies. At the beginning of this century, the plight of women under Taliban rule could be held to justify the invasion of Afghanistan in the eyes of people who might otherwise have been expected to denounce it.⁴⁷

These contexts are all very different, but they are grouped here to make the argument, already advanced in different terms in Chapter 6, that the order of gender, and its consequences in social behaviour, has very often been experienced as a critical point of difference between the East and its Western observers, just as it remains a difficult issue in the politics of multiculturalism. A frequently prurient curiosity about Asian women could reside quite comfortably in the European breast alongside a sense of outrage at the way they were treated by their menfolk; if there seems a contradiction between these two stories, one about the exciting availability of Asian women and another about their demeaning subjection, it is not one confined to the nineteenth century, or the twentieth.

Sometimes the treatment of women was a matter for legislation. Under pressure from London, the Hong Kong government made efforts of varying sincerity, from 1917 onwards, to abolish in the colony the long-standing Chinese system of *mui tsai* or domestic female slavery, whereby girls were commonly bought and kept, often in the guise of adopted daughters, to perform household or sexual services. The government's interventions were much resented as an interference in traditional customs.⁴⁸ The same argument had been made in the more spectacular case of *suttee* (*sati*) or ritual widow-burning in India, which

45. Maud Diver, *The Englishwoman in India* (Edinburgh: Blackwoods, 1909), 81, 98.

46. Edward Thompson, *Suttee: A Historical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow-Burning* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928), 142, 144.

47. 'The defeat of Taliban terrorism against millions of Afghan women should be ample justification for the actions of the US and its allies.' Janet Williams, letter to the editor, *New Statesman*, 26 November 2001 (p. 36). The recovery of the word 'terrorism' in this context is much to the point.

48. See Maria Jaschok, *Concubines and Bondservants: A Social History* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988).

was for some time tolerated under the East India Company's policy of non-intervention in religious matters. But this attitude was eloquently countered in 1829 by Lord William Bentinck, when as Governor-General of India he outlawed the practice in the name of the universal enlightened principles of a higher order.

The first and primary object of my heart is the benefit of the Hindus. I know nothing so important to the improvement of their future condition as the establishment of a purer morality, whatever their belief, and a more just conception of the will of God. The first step to this better understanding will be dissociation of religious belief and practice from blood and murder. They will then, when no longer under this brutalizing excitement, view with more calmness acknowledged truths. They will see that there can be no inconsistency in the ways of Providence, that to the command received as divine by all races of men, 'No innocent blood shall be spilt', there can be no exception; and when they shall have been convinced of the error of this first and most criminal of their customs, may it not be hoped that others, which stand in the way of their improvement, may likewise pass away, and that, thus emancipated from those chains and shackles upon their minds and actions, they may no longer continue, as they have done, the slaves of every foreign conqueror, but that they may assume their first places among the great families of mankind? I disown in these remarks, or in this measure, any view whatever to conversion to our own faith. I write and feel as a legislator for the Hindus, and as I believe many enlightened Hindus think and feel.⁴⁹

Bentinck's is a mission, not of religious conversion, but of intellectual liberation, an Enlightenment contestation of benighted traditions. A time-honoured practice is to be (so to speak) ruled out, under the warrant of colonial law, but the law itself is the instrument of a higher order. Bentinck characterizes *suttee* as a symptom of an enslaving mental discipline, with its 'chains and shackles'; it is high time for it to be replaced by the jurisdiction of universal moral laws, which are in any case more truly intrinsic to Hindus since indeed they are 'received as divine by all races of men'; only then will Hindus be ready to join the order of modernity among the great families of mankind, and it is the

49. Minute on the suppression of *sati*, 8 November 1829, quoted in John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: The Making of a Liberal Imperialist 1774–1839* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 211. While Bentinck talks about 'the dissociation of religious belief and practice from blood and murder', and sees this as an issue about *order*, unlike Thompson a century later he does not appear to see it as being particularly about *women*. 'Bentinck's famous Minute on *sati* . . . makes not a single mention of the widow. The document focuses almost entirely on the safety of prohibition.' Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 76.

responsibility of 'a legislator for the Hindus' to help to bring this about. Here is another redaction of a familiar story, in which a backward, brutal and provincial practice is to be given up, in exchange for membership *inter pares* of a global community, here in the guise not of a free trade network, or a political federation, but of a moral order constituted by 'the great families of mankind'. This liberal Utopia may not have a place for all the races of the world, but it is more generously conceived than the later ethnically-defined global network of 'imperial brotherhood' desiderated by Cecil Rhodes and others at the end of the century.⁵⁰

A century later, Bentinck was to be one of the heroes of Edward Thompson's 1928 history of *suttee*, and Thompson notes approvingly that after the prohibition of *suttee* a new social conscience came to the Indian government, and the next thirty years saw them warring against female infanticide, *thuggee*, human sacrifice, and slavery. He recalls that the campaigns against these abuses were led by Indians, and sees the colonial law and its disciplinary orders, in this liberal phase in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, as enlisted to engage with as well as against forces in the indigenous culture. He has no time for the argument that a 'barbarous' practice like *suttee* indicated something about the Indian character, for 'when we blame a system we must remember that the men and women who suffer by living in a system have only a limited responsibility for its existence'; nevertheless it was a system that had done much political damage, Thompson considered, for it brutalized the British too, by giving them a reason to believe that Indians were barbarous and deserved to be ruled ruthlessly, so that 'such things as *suttee* kept back Indian political progress by many years'.⁵¹

Thompson characteristically sees the question in terms of systems that are not simply in contention, but in dialogue. The perception of a subject people as cruel precipitates in rulers an inclination to be harsh, scornful and remote. Thompson had found a similar effect, magnified, after 1857, when the Indian rebellion — felt by most British people to be a betrayal — prompted reprisal atrocities, perpetrated under martial law by some of the most heroic and pious of the British, which poisoned relations between colonial rulers and subjects for generations.⁵² Thompson envisaged rule not as something that some people imposed on others, but as a relationship modified, for better or worse, by people's

50. See Elleke Boehmer, 'Global and textual webs in an age of transnational capitalism; or, what isn't new about Empire', *Postcolonial Studies* 7:1 (2004), 11–26.

51. Edward Thompson, *Suttee: A Historical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow-Burning* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928), 131.

52. These atrocities, denounced at the time by William Russell, the war correspondent of the *Times*, did not appear in the British historical account and memory of the 'Mutiny'. Thompson's history, *The Other Side of the Medal* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925) is an attempt to correct the record. See also William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), which draws extensively on local archives.

understanding and misunderstanding of each other, and the colonial law should be something done in partnership with colonial subjects, not something done to them. He continued to believe almost to the end that a more responsible and benign rule would in turn be answered by the ruled in appreciation and co-operation.

Hard cases: Conversations between ruler and ruled in Scott, Coates, and Woolf

Rule is a relationship, and Bentinck seemed to show rule at its most benign, even Utopian. But his pronouncement about *suttee* is a speech-act he was able to make because he had at his disposal the power to execute his laws, ultimately if necessary by coercion. Any system rests on a warrant of authority, and the laws of any political system, even the most consensual, repose at some level upon enforcement. The figures of rule have many dimensions, ranging from violent acts of invasion and repression, extraordinary ritual displays of pomp and the invention of tradition like the Delhi Durbar stage-managed by Lord Curzon in 1903,⁵³ the data gathered and the mountains of paperwork generated and circulated by bureaucrats, the daily activity of the likes of customs officers, school mistresses, village headmen, and police cadets, the texts prescribed for classrooms, the rumours circulated in the market, the gossip in the club. But, except in cases of violence, rule is never entirely monologic. It involves an exchange, though never a symmetrical one. We can end the chapter by considering the relationship of rule in three moments of exchange — conversations, of a sort — where authority is the issue. One is from a fictional narrative, and two from memoirs. Rather than in an abstract theoretical formulation, the figure of rule can be observed in different dialogic enactments, where the contours of rule are defined and redefined in what people say to each other in given circumstances.

The first conversation is from *The Day of the Scorpion* (1968), the second novel of Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet*. I want to draw attention to a single moment here, however hard it is to separate it out from the dense, intricate, organic texture of the whole work. The conversation involves Hari Kumar, a young English-educated Indian, and Ronald Merrick, District Superintendent of Police in Mayapore, and it takes place in the evening of 9 August 1942. On that day the British interned the leaders of the All-India Congress in response to their ratification of Gandhi's Quit India Resolution, and a wave of civil unrest broke over the country. In the fictional town of Mayapore, Hari Kumar is brought in

53. David Gilmour, *Curzon: Imperial Statesman* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 238–46.

for questioning, accused of being a participant in the gang rape by Indian youths of an English girl, Daphne Manners. After interrogation, he is interned by the British authorities, acting under the emergency powers of the Defence of India Rule.

Hari Kumar is innocent of the rape, which in fact he has been forced to witness but powerless to stop. But the suspicion that falls on him has put him in the power of Merrick, the investigating officer, who had earlier proposed marriage to Daphne and is jealous of her friendship with Kumar, a jealousy compounded by a combination of his repressed homosexual feelings for Hari and his racial hostility towards him. In 1944 Kumar, still under detention without trial, is interviewed in jail by an English officer, Captain Rowan, and an Indian official from the Home and Law Department, Mr Gopal, who have been instructed to investigate the case. It is in Hari Kumar's answers to this questioning that the events of that night in 1942 emerge (for the reader) for the first time. There is both a topical and a symbolic resonance to the fact that Hari Kumar is arrested on the day that relations between India and the British became, in effect, irretrievable, with the collapse of British efforts to secure the co-operation of nationalist leaders against the threat of Japanese invasion.

Merrick's interrogation is certainly unorthodox; Hari Kumar describes it as 'a situation of enactment'.⁵⁴ The rape, and even the interrogation, were side issues, Merrick had explained to him; the real issue was the relationship between the two of them, which Merrick construes as a trope symbolic of the reality of British rule over Indians.

'He said that up until then our relationship had only been symbolic. It had to become real.'

'What in fact did he mean by symbolic?'

'It was how he described it. He said for the moment we were mere symbols. He said we'd never understand each other if we were going to be content with that. It wasn't enough to say he was English and I was Indian, that he was a ruler and I was one of the ruled. We had to find out what that meant. He said people talked of an ideal relationship between his kind and my kind. They called it comradeship. But they never said anything about the contempt on his side and the fear on mine that was basic, and came before any comradesly feeling. He said we had to find out about that too, we had to enact the situation as it really was, and in a way that would mean neither of us ever forgetting it or being tempted to pretend it didn't exist, or was something else.'

(357)

54. Paul Scott, *The Day of the Scorpion* [1968] (London: Pan, 1988), 356. Subsequent page references in the text are to this edition.

The 'situation', as we shall see, is very highly complex, but Merrick offers an argument, and a demonstration, about rule, which could not be more simple. The fundamental and natural relationship between the ruler and the ruled is one of contempt on one side and fear on the other. Even when dressed in pious platitudes, this is the naked truth — a truth 'enacted' in the interrogation by the fact that his Indian prisoner has been stripped and stands shivering before him. There is exchange here, but hardly dialogue, for Merrick's discourse will produce an interlocutor with virtually no agency of any kind, who can be nothing but a snivelling victim, and will be reduced before the end to nothing but bodily exigencies.

'He pulled my head back again and put the cup close to my lips. Even while I was telling myself I'd never drink it and never say thank you I felt the water in my mouth. I heard myself swallow. He put the cup down and used both hands to turn my head to face him. He put his own head very close. We stared at each other.' A pause. 'After a bit I heard myself say it.' (361)

Kumar's innocence or guilt is of no interest to Merrick (perhaps he thinks him guilty); he is there because he is Indian and because the Englishman has power over him. The 'situation of enactment' is didactic, specifically a lesson about rule but also a performance of it, an extreme instance of the theatre of empire, with Kumar as helpless participant (and, of course, captive audience). A point is being made, a statement punctuated by the further horrible details of 'the persuasive phase of the interrogation' (342) as they emerge piecemeal from Hari Kumar's answers — the manacles, the beating, the sexual humiliation.

Merrick's didactic enactment of the realities of rule is a matter of the simplest of categories and no refinements at all: 'his kind', 'my kind', and the relationship between them. Under torture Hari Kumar nearly confesses, 'because the confession he wanted was a confession of my dependence on him, my inferiority to him' (358). The brutal simplicity of Merrick's view is shocking, even though it is a simplicity compromised and partially refuted by the complexity of the situation that contains it — particularly the frame in which the story is told, the frame of the second interrogation, in which the British officer and the Indian civil servant are obliged to listen to this narrative they have commissioned in re-opening the case; the fact that the brutal first interrogation and the bureaucratic second one are both functions of the apparatus of British rule; the fact that Rowan went to the same public school in England as Hari Kumar, that he is personally sympathetic and yet ready to suppress evidence to protect the reputation of another British officer; that Gopal, though brusque in his questioning, is animated by 'a fastidious dislike of the white usurper on whose bandwagon he had a seat' (342); that there is manifestly a class as well as a racial and sexual dimension to

Merrick's feelings about Kumar, though he remains the only one of the Quartet's major characters whose characterization is 'estranged', always seen from the outside; that Rowan's transcript of this interview plays an important part later in the story; that the whole scene has another spectator, Lady Manners, Daphne's aunt, who has pulled strings to get Kumar's case re-examined and now watches like a theatregoer at a tragedy from her unseen vantage as below her, 'yet another situation was in process' (342); and the fact that the story of Merrick's 'situation of enactment' comes to light a year and a half after it took place, appearing in the spatial form of the fiction far from the events that immediately preceded it in time, and as a part of the intricate system of echoing and *repassage* and symbolic tissuing that is Scott's modernist narrative.⁵⁵

Finally to this list we should add the fact of Hari Kumar's silence, through the first interrogation, on the crucial point of the questioning, his refusal to betray Daphne by revealing what actually happened in the Bibighar gardens that evening. It is a silence imposed by a very different law, and order, a promise made to a woman he loves, and paradoxically it gives him a great moral power as interlocutor in the degrading scene, and can accurately be described as heroic. All these factors are part of the experience of reading the novel, itself a rich and serious meditation on British rule in India. And yet in the end, Merrick's 'situation of enactment' stands out from them, stark. What it enacts is a model of rule as the exchange of a dialogue designed at every point to do nothing but hammer home the extreme inequality of ruler and ruled.

The next story about rule takes place in Hong Kong in the nineteen-fifties. After three years' probation in the Hong Kong civil service, the young Austin Coates found himself appointed a magistrate in the rural 'New Territories' of the colony. 'One hour by launch or car from the hub of the city, and you could find yourself, if you knew where to go, in a Chinese countryside not fundamentally changed from what it was a thousand years ago.'⁵⁶ This rural Hinterland (historically immobile in a way familiar to us) has a mental climate of its own.

55. The complex and difficult structure of the narrative is itself a recognition that Scott's subject is not to be comprehended in the straightforward order of traditional realist narrative or historiography. Though Jacqueline Banerjee, in *Paul Scott* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999), makes the case for Scott as a postmodernist, the important narrative models for the Quartet seem to be Conrad, Ford and Faulkner. Two good accounts, with a particular emphasis on this scene, are in Michael Gorra, *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 15–61, and Danny Colwell, "I am your Mother and your Father": Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* and the Dissolution of Imperial Identity', *Writing India 1757–1990*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert, 213–35.

56. Austin Coates, *Myself a Mandarin: Memoirs of a Special Magistrate* [1968] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11. Subsequent page references in the text are to this edition.

Not exactly China, not exactly Hongkong, this third mental climate was older in its ways of thought, unchanged by the Chinese politics of fifty years, or by the Hongkong sophistications of a century. It was a separate climate, in which emperors were not unknown, since it lived in a corridor of time devolving directly from the distant past. Even the title of my appointment — Li Man Fu — was centuries old, an archaic imperial title. It was a job which would demand a complete change of thought and attitude after the Secretariat, occupied as I had been there with the doings of the modern world. Yet in this older world, bypassed by time, might I not find the roots — perhaps even the soul — of the people who, met in the city, held in their hearts something that everlastingly eluded me? (13)

Here in this atavistic backwater he must carry out the duties of a Special Magistrate, in spite of the fact that shortly before this appointment he has managed to avoid taking a law examination, reasoning that this would be a useless undertaking since he knew nothing about the law, had never been inside a law court in any country, and found it difficult to grasp a legal point, or understand the implications of a law.

This introduction prepares us for an account of imperial rule as light as Paul Scott's was dark. It has several of the ingredients — the gentleman-amateur colonial magistrate who narrates, the wily and quaint natives whose way of life belongs to an earlier and simpler age — of the popular *Experiences of an Irish R.M.*, Somerville and Ross's humorous and idyllic stories about a Resident Magistrate in Ireland at the turn of the nineteenth century, which must be one of its models.⁵⁷ But its genre does not disqualify its testimony, and Coates, a colonial servant of long experience and an acute observer, is part of the story too. What is perhaps most interesting in the cases he recounts is that here we have a Western magistrate laying down a version of Chinese law. 'By an ordinance promulgated when the New Territories were leased from China,' he explains, 'it was permissible for litigants to choose whether they would have the magistrate hear their suits according to the common law, or according to Chinese law and custom. The Special Magistrate therefore had to be versed in two very different kinds of law, one English, the other Chinese' (17). In his case this is not strictly true, since after two years in the job he has succeeded in not hearing a single case according to English common law. If one litigant opts for Western law, believing he will score an advantage by it, a hint is dropped to the other party who promptly chooses Chinese law, causing a difference which the magistrate decides, very correctly, in favour of the latter (123).

57. E. C. Somerville and Martin Ross, *The Irish R.M.* [first published as *The Irish R.M. Complete*, 1928] (London: Sphere, 1970).

The jurisdiction of Chinese customary law in the Hong Kong New Territories is a good example of conservative imperialism in action, the tolerance and support of traditional indigenous ways in a colonized population. The courtroom of the Special Magistrate becomes the space where British colonial authority and Chinese customary law improvise a *modus vivendi*. (Actually he did not have a courtroom. Like a mediaeval monarch, the Special Magistrate ‘just sat down and was’ [16].) Since apparently there was in Hong Kong only one known textbook on Chinese law and custom, an eighteenth-century volume written in French and owned by the University of Hong Kong library (which would not allow it to be borrowed), it is not surprising that the proceedings turn very rarely on nice points of law. Instead, the cases, much like Freud’s, are a matter of digging through layers of misunderstandings, occlusions and reticence to uncover the underlying issue. The matter, Coates suggests, can then usually be resolved by the application of the principles of fairness and common sense.

The issue as presented almost always at first seems chaotic and incoherent, perhaps farcical — the Chinese in their single-mindedness, Coates thinks, are not very good at what passes in the West for lucid and systematic explanation — but in successful cases it yields to patient questioning by resolving itself into its component parts, which might be described as local ‘Chinese characteristics’ (rhetorical and psychological) and universal ‘human nature’. The local characteristics then confirm or extend the text’s ethnographic knowledge, and human nature can be dealt with, here as it would be anywhere, according to pragmatic common sense. Coates’ very first case, for example, appears to centre on a complaint from villagers about a cow eating their grass.

‘If the cow doesn’t come by itself,’ I asked, ‘how does it get there?’

‘Get there?’ the man replied in a puzzled tone.

‘Yes. How does it come from its own village to your village?’

‘It doesn’t.’

‘But you’ve just been telling me it does, every day!’ . . .

‘It doesn’t come every day.’

‘But you have just said it does!’

‘No. Not every day.’

‘Then it doesn’t eat your village grass every day.’

‘Yes, it does.’

‘For goodness’ sake, Mr. Lo,’ I expostulated to the interpreter, ‘what is this man talking about? — Look. Either this cow comes from the other village every day and eats your grass, or it doesn’t come from the other village every day. And if it doesn’t come from the other village every day, someone must be bringing it.’

‘No. No one brings it.’

‘Then it doesn’t eat your grass every day!’

‘Yes, it does.’ (21)

This interrogation too shows the colonial disciplinary apparatus in action. The case turns out, when at length the magistrate discovers which are the right questions to ask, actually to be about divorce (the first wife, annoyed that her husband has taken a second, seeking to return to her village and take her cow with her). Crucial to this process is the hermeneutic collaboration of the British magistrate and the Cantonese clerk-interpreter, one version of the colonial-local partnership almost always to be found at the executive end of colonial rule.⁵⁸ In this case, and at length, the trust between the two provides a resolution of the case of the errant cow.

‘What d’you think we ought to do, Mr. Lo?’

He reflected an instant.

‘I should just give them a talking-to, sir.’

‘A talking-to?’ I said, aghast. ‘What d’you mean? A sort of old-fashioned homily?’

‘Yes, I think that would do.’ (31)

And so, it seems, it does. The magistrate reconciles himself to ‘this Chinese method of settling matters’, and lectures all parties impressively on spousal responsibilities and the virtues of family harmony. Behind his desk is a portrait of the young Queen Elizabeth II. We may ponder the pragmatics of order alive in this moment, a sermon on Confucian ethics given to a group of Chinese peasants on the advice of a Hong Kong government interpreter, by a young British official ‘beneath the beneficent gaze of our Christian sovereign, quietly engaged in promoting harmony among concubines’ (35). Rule did not always simply mean laying down the law of a foreign code and values on silenced indigenous people.

And finally to Leonard Woolf, who from 1908 to 1911 had been the singular personification of British rule in his sprawling region of south-east Ceylon. To tell the story of those years in *Growing* (1961), the second volume of his autobiography, he was able to draw upon his letters to friends and family, and upon his Hambantota diaries, which were found, presented to him, and published when he made a last visit to Ceylon in 1960. But his last word on Ceylon is not in *Growing*, but in the final volume of his autobiography, *The Journey not the Arrival Matters* (1969), published at his own Hogarth Press when he was eighty-nine years old. This extraordinary book ends with an account of that return visit to Ceylon in 1960, and that account ends with a conversation.

The day before his departure, Woolf was visited in his hotel by a Mr Wijesinghe, an old man of eighty-six who had been a Mudaliyar or district

58. Such partnerships are rarely frictionless. Rowan is partnered in the interrogation by Gopal, and Merrick is assisted by his Indian constables, one of whom will inform on him. In the following example, the Assistant Government Agent works with and through the district headman.

headman in Hambantota when Woolf was Assistant Government Agent there fifty years before. Mr Wijesinghe had a grievance, and a story to tell. '[I]n great detail and considerable bitterness,' he reminded Woolf how, during an epidemic of rinderpest, he had accompanied him to seek out and destroy an infected buffalo, which turned out to belong to a village headman.⁵⁹ Woolf, avowedly a stickler for the letter of the law, had fined the village headman ten rupees for not destroying his infected buffalo as required by the bylaws for dealing with the outbreak, and then fined him another ten rupees for failing in his duty as village headman to report or prosecute the offender (himself) for breaking the law. This was what Mr Wijesinghe had come to complain about (for the village headman had had only ten rupees, and Mr Wijesinghe himself had had to make up the balance), and he finished his story with the ringing question: 'Was it just, I say — was it just, I ask you, Sir?'

Woolf says he replied that it was just. There were two entirely different transgressions here, and it was proper that the village headman should be punished for both of them. He had committed an offence himself and concealed the fact that he had committed it, while prosecuting and punishing other people for the same offence. The law was the law. But for the readers of his autobiography, to his public reply Woolf added the confession of a private doubt. Was it really just? Even in 1910 he had had an ambivalent feeling about the decision. Could the local instance of the law, scrupulously applied, be just, when the colonial order itself was erected on a belief in the inequality of kinds of people? 'This ambivalence with regard to law and order and justice in an imperialist society was one of the principal reasons for my resigning from the Civil Service.' For better and for worse, it is not easy to separate the 'rule of law' from the colonial order that professed it, as postcolonial histories have often shown. Nearly sixty years after his resignation, it seems rather admirable that Woolf should give the final story of his five-volume memoirs to a Sinhalese, and one who was not prepared even now to dissociate him from colonial rule or to forgive him its contradictions. The last word on rule, then, is in the form of a subaltern's question.

Even if the heavens had fallen upon our heads in the Angunakolapelessa tank or in the Galle Face Hotel, even if Jehovah or Gautama Buddha had appeared and proclaimed that it was just for me to fine the headman twenty rupees, neither the headman nor Mudaliyar E. R. Wijesinghe would have believed it. I find and found this profoundly depressing. Mr Wijesinghe had as good a right to his code of conduct as I had, and there was no real answer to his question: 'Was it just, Sir, was it just?'⁶⁰

59. Leonard Woolf, *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939–1969* (London: Hogarth Press, 1969), 205–08.

60. *Ibid.*, 208.

Not Knowing the Oriental

Useful ignorance: Orientalism and Cromer's *Modern Egypt*

Three decades have passed since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). In no trivial sense, we are all after Said. His work was never uncontested and continues to be controversial: Robert Irwin is only one of Said's hostile critics, with his blistering attack on *Orientalism's* representation of the scholarly work of Orientalists.¹ But Said's work has also been enormously productive, in propagating an understanding of Western discourse about the East as a system of knowledge/power, whereby control over a part of the world is brought about, exemplified and stabilized by knowledge and its institutions. Through 'Orientalism', Said was the first to argue, the West authors the East and becomes its authority. The prevailing understanding of postcolonial resistance is predicated on an acceptance of the same intellectual architecture. Power enables knowledge, knowledge legitimizes power.

But how much knowledge is enough? For everyone except God, there is always a horizon or frontier of knowledge, behind which stretches the great Hinterland of ignorance. This is an idea memorably expounded in a poem published in the year in which Britain acquired the island of Hong Kong, a known and chartered quantity that might be the gateway to a mainland of sublime vastness.² For Tennyson's *Ulysses*, experience, what we know, is an arch, 'wherethrough / Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades / For ever and for ever when I move'. The great imperial melancholy of that poem was to find an attenuated echo more than fifty years later in Rudyard Kipling's 'Recessional', with its call to humility and contrition, and a seemingly national

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1. Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 277–309.
 2. The Treaty of Nanjing was signed in 1842 and ratified the following year. Tennyson's 'Ulysses' appeared in his *Poems* of 1842.

modesty in recognition of one's own limits. Tennyson's hero recognized that no amount of travel and discovery will reduce the 'untravelling world' to known space, since the margin of our own ignorance travels with us and ahead of us, forever out of reach. There is always more to be ignorant of.

Furthermore, there are certainly occasions when it is more prudent not 'to follow knowledge like a sinking star', as Ulysses admitted in another rather defeatist metaphor, for, as he confessed to his mariners, 'It may be that the gulfs will wash us down', and the quest may end in disaster and drowning. This chapter is about expertise. It considers tropes of both knowledge and ignorance of the Orient, and it will return in the end to Kipling, to consider ignorance of the East in this most knowing of writers (and it is interesting that 'knowing', as an adjective in English, has a distinctly disreputable odour). My chapter title refers to this ignorance. But it is also an intertitular revision of the first chapter of Edward Said's *Orientalism* — which is entitled 'Knowing the Oriental' — and in the first part of my chapter I will consider the powerful thesis of that book, with its argument about the place of Western 'knowledge' of the Orient in the history of Western domination of the Orient, specifically by looking at one of Said's chosen examples.

Said begins the Introduction to *Orientalism* with the civil war in Lebanon in 1975–76, a couple of years before the book was published. But he begins the first substantive chapter, entitled 'Knowing the Oriental', in June of 1910, when the House of Commons in London listened to a speech by Arthur James Balfour, leader of the Conservative Party and former Prime Minister, on the problems of Egypt. While Egypt was not formally a part of the British Empire, Britain had had very important financial and strategic interests in the country since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Anglo-French dual control was established over the Khedive's finances in 1876. Britain intervened to save the Khedive from the Arabi revolt in 1881–82, and Sir Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer) was put in place to reform Egyptian finances. British administrators and troops remained in the country.

Now that Egyptian nationalism was admitted to be on the rise, there were some who questioned whether the British presence should be maintained there, and Balfour's speech of June 1910 is an eloquent defence of British involvement in Egypt's affairs.³ He pays due tribute to the greatness and antiquity of Egyptian civilization, and disclaims any superiority to it on the part of the relatively youthful

3. The speech is reprinted in A. P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies* [1959], 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 1985), 359–62. For its intellectual context, see Jason Tomes, *Balfour and Foreign Policy: The International Thought of a Conservative Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). The matter was settled when with the outbreak of war in 1914 Egypt was made a British protectorate.

civilizations of Europe. But his Western knowledge of the Orient also tells him that Egypt is a country that has never of its own motion established self-government, and that the same may be said of all other Oriental nations; it is on this knowledge, and on the record of their administrative success, that Balfour bases his defence of British *de facto* government of Egypt. For Said, this is a first instance of the way knowledge of the Orient legitimizes power over it.⁴

It is significant for the autobiographical dimension of *Orientalism* that Said's first witness is the future author of the Balfour Declaration proposing the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine.⁵ But he soon goes on to focus on a figure more centrally identified with 'England in Egypt': one of the great imperial proconsuls, the Earl of Cromer, the former Sir Evelyn Baring, of whom, when he retired as Consul General in Egypt in 1907, Balfour himself said: 'Lord Cromer's services during the past quarter of a century have raised Egypt from the lowest pitch of social and economic depredation until it now stands among Oriental nations, I believe, absolutely alone in its prosperity, financial and moral.'⁶ While Balfour's theses on Orientals pretended to be objective universality, Said observes, Cromer spoke about Orientals 'specifically as what he had ruled or had to deal with, first in India, then for the twenty-five years in Egypt during which he emerged as the paramount consul-general in England's empire'.⁷ It is with the example of Cromer that Said expounds fully his own thesis of empire as essentially a cybernetic system, dealing in the control and communication of knowledge. 'Once again, knowledge of subject races or Orientals 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'.⁸ Orientalism — Western knowledge of the Orient — was a rationalization of colonial rule, and colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism.

It seems appropriate then to ask just what the Earl of Cromer thought he knew about Oriental people. Much of the answer is to be found in the two volumes of his *Modern Egypt*, published in 1908, the year after he retired from his job as *de facto* ruler of Egypt, and Said makes extensive reference to this text. In this book, which is scholarly enough with its citation of French and German as well as English Orientalists, Cromer nevertheless insists that the knowledge he deploys

4. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* [1978] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 31–36.

5. The 'Balfour Declaration' was actually drafted by Leopold Amery, 'after Milner had tried his hand', on 2 November 1917. See the discussion in Thornton, 167. Balfour was Foreign Secretary in Lloyd George's war cabinet.

6. See Denis Judd, *Balfour and the British Empire: A Study in Imperial Evolution 1874–1932* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 286.

7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 36.

8. *Ibid.*

is not that of a learned man but is empirically derived from his twenty-five years working career in the country — it is the knowledge of experience (and it is this knowledge, rather than the more textual knowledge of the scholarly profession of Orientalism, that is my topic here).

In the middle of *Modern Egypt*, between its narrative history and its political analysis, is an ethnographic and sociological account which has acquired some notoriety. Interestingly, it is presented under the sign of ignorance, being subtitled 'The Egyptian Puzzle'. This part of the book is informal, sometimes jocular, and it describes the 'Dwellers in Egypt' from the point of view of 'the Englishman', such as Cromer himself perhaps, who has come to the country equipped with ideas about individual justice, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and similar notions, with the mission that he is to benefit the mass of the population. Cromer's 'Englishman', unassuming, ironic, bureaucratic, is actually a powerful rhetorical figure in his discourse on modern Egypt. This slightly comic, haplessly well-intentioned individual, in Cromer's account, has his work cut out in the confusing and exasperating conditions of modern Egypt, formed over sixty centuries of misgovernment and oppression. 'In fact, the Englishman will soon find that the Egyptian, whom he wishes to mould into something really useful with a view to his becoming eventually autonomous, is merely the rawest of raw material',⁹ and the Englishman, wishing to point out what is to be done by way of improvement and then to step back and leave the Egyptians to do it, will find that 'to fulminate against abuses, which were the growth of centuries, was like firing a cannon-ball into a mountain of mud' (556). The cannonball, Cromer's emblematic projectile of Western modernity, could be expected to make a decisive impression on any manufactured structure; but fired into a mountain of ignoble mud, it would just disappear. Mud in Egypt is, to be sure, no ordinary mud, but acknowledged to be an enriching, chthonic, generative material;¹⁰ still, Cromer is uncompromising in his characterization of his modern Egyptians as low, formless, undistinguishable, made from a different element when compared to their Northern would-be benefactor.

Cromer has much to say about the Oriental character — as Said points out, he appears to make little distinction between the Indian and the Egyptian Oriental, both being poles apart from the European in temper and disposition. 'Want of accuracy, which easily degenerates into untruthfulness, is, in fact, the main characteristic of the Oriental mind' (573). And there follows the catalogue of arrogant and racist denigrations — irrational, silent, stagnant in mind,

9. The Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt* [1908], 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 1911), 561–62. Page references in the text which follow are to this volume.

10. 'Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun; so is your crocodile.' (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act II sc vii, 29–30)

improvident, unorganized, cunning, and so on — of which Said's *Orientalism* offers so many depressingly similar examples from various places and times. Rather than elaborate on these essentializations, I want to draw attention to the use they are put to by Cromer. For the radical difference of the Egyptian, presented as a difference in nature rather than merely in institutions, religion, ideas of government, or social customs, constitutes a barrier which, he says categorically, 'prevents the Englishman and the Egyptian from understanding each other' (579).

The difference of the Egyptians makes them essentially unknowable. And if you add to this essential difference the strangeness, from a Western point of view, of their language, arts, religion, and their most ordinary customs and expressions, it becomes clear that there is an insurmountable epistemological stumbling block between the Englishman and the object of his knowledge and government. These differences may be explained by professional Orientalists, but such explanations are beside the point for the man of practical experience, the Englishman who is 'only a diplomatist and an administrator, whose proper study is also man, but from the point of view of governing him rather than from that of scientific research into how he comes to be what he is' (586). For such a person, for whom the Orient is not an academic discipline but a practical daily problem, acknowledging that essential unknowability is the beginning of prudence, if not of wisdom. Cromer was doubtful whether 'even those Englishmen who have been actively engaged in the work of Egyptian administration have always recognized to the full that, in taking in hand Egyptian reform, they had to deal with a society which was not only in a backward state of civilization, but which was also, from their point of view, well-nigh incomprehensible' (587).

After hundreds of pages parading his expertise, Cromer's swerve into a profession of ignorance is a trope that needs an explanation, especially if we are working with a model of discourse in which knowledge and power are the same thing. If knowledge supports and justifies power, and the power wielded by the British over Egypt was absolute as Balfour described it, why this strange insistence on the unknowability of the Oriental in Cromer's book? For this is more than just the rhetorical equivalent of a good-humoured acknowledgement of the strange ways of foreigners. Part of the strategy of thematizing the cultural and natural distance between English and Egyptians is certainly to make a point about the magnitude of the task undertaken by Cromer and his English subordinates, and consequentially the magnitude of their achievement. But Cromer's insistence on the unknowability of the Orient is overdetermined, and needs also to be seen in the light of his theory of imperialism, and his ambitions for the direction of British imperial policy in the years to come.

Modern Egypt is far from reticent in its delivery of an account of what Egyptians are like, in terms of an inventory of fixed essential national characteristics, and yet this is accompanied by, and at odds with, a language of

incommensurability, featurelessness, darkness, mud. Cromer shows and shows off his knowledge of the Orient but then, in an unexpected turn, declares its inadequacy and defeat; the Orient must remain unknown. I believe the explanation of this contradiction can be sought in the contemporary debate about imperialism, in which Said in *Orientalism* showed not much interest.¹¹ In 1908 Cromer's task of governing Egypt was finished. But he still had a part to play in influencing policy, and *Modern Egypt* intervenes powerfully in the debate about empire which had been going on for more than a hundred years in Britain. Britain was a global power. What were its obligations and interests? Cromer, not surprisingly, had views on this matter, which were supported by his unsurpassed reputation as the engineer of what he himself called 'the regeneration of Egypt' (587),¹² the greatest success story of imperial administration. After a quarter of a century, what should the British do now about Egypt? In more general terms, what should they do about their empire in the East?

Some people — nationalists in Egypt, and anti-imperialists in Britain — were of the opinion that the Egyptians, and others of what Cromer called the 'subject races', should be allowed to direct their own affairs as an independent nation, or — to put it less flatteringly — that Egypt should be left to 'stew in its own juice' (904).¹³ Others felt that it was high time that Egypt was formally incorporated into the British empire. The first alternative was, in Cromer's view, simply impractical. A British withdrawal from the country would see Egypt slide back from the modernity he had so painstakingly conferred upon it, and soon be given over, he feared, to despotism under 'a retrograde government, based on purely Mohammedan principles and obsolete Oriental ideas', and then become the prey of one of the less benevolent of the European powers. As for the option of bringing Egypt fully into the empire, 'I never have been,' he says firmly, 'nor am I now in favour of the British occupation of Egypt' (904).

The incompatibilities between British and Oriental people were frankly too large to sustain a permanent relationship, the Earl of Cromer maintained. In the absence of 'community of race, religion, language, and habits of thought, which ordinarily constitute the main bonds of union between the rulers and the ruled' (908), only artificial bonds could be forged, and these could never be reliable. 'Neither by the display of sympathy, nor by good government, can we forge bonds

11. The charge was often made that in *Orientalism* Said presented the hegemonic discourse as more monumental, unitary, and unchallenged than it actually was. Some of these criticisms are met in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

12. This language of Britain's mission of secular redemption in the Orient was, as we have seen, at least as old as Macaulay.

13. Similar arguments were being made at this time about India, though it was not until after the Great War that the cause of independence for India began to attract significant support in Britain.

which will be other than brittle' (909). His quarter-century of Egyptian experience had left him unsentimental about the imperial family of races. The British, he conceded, were not liked by their Oriental subjects, and never would be. And although the trade advantages of empire brought with them the burden of good government, it had never really been British policy or practice to get very close to their subject people.

He expatiated on this view in an address to the Classical Association a couple of years later, which was published as *Ancient and Modern Imperialism*. It is hard to imagine a more exemplary imperial occasion, as the great proconsul deploys his classical learning¹⁴ and his Oriental experience to deliver his views on a comparison of the British with the Roman Empire, one of the favourite themes of English imperial discourse. It is a comparison made, to very different ends, in such fictional works as Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* and Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness', but the assimilation of the colonial to the classical paradigm went back to Renaissance times. 'Europeans knew the world through its signs and correspondences to things known. The exploration of the terrestrial world was being carried out at the same time that Europeans were exploring their own origins in the pagan past of Greece and Rome.'¹⁵ The acknowledged correspondence between imperial Rome and imperial Britain was one of the ideological underpinnings of the classical curriculum studied by the sons of the governing classes.

Cromer's lecture, then, dealt with a very familiar topic indeed, but he reached some rather unexpected conclusions. There were many similarities, he said, but the chief difference was that the Romans assimilated their subject peoples, in a way that none of the modern European empires had managed or attempted. 'There has been no thorough fusion, no real assimilation between the British and their alien subjects, and, so far as we can now predict, the future will in this respect be but a repetition of the past. [. . .] From this point of view, therefore, British Imperialism has, so far as the indigenous races of Asia and Africa are concerned, been a failure.'¹⁶

He argues that this is because modern imperialists face barriers of religion, racial antipathy, and language loyalty, unknown or insignificant to the Romans.

14. Unlike his contemporaries Lord Milner (Kings College School, London, and Balliol) and Lord Curzon (Eton and Balliol), Cromer's educational path had taken him at the age of fourteen to Woolwich to train for the Royal Artillery. This did not indicate underprivilege. After active service and a spell at the War Office, in 1872 he became Private Secretary to the Viceroy of India, Lord Northbrook, who was his cousin.

15. See Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 79.

16. The Earl of Cromer, *Ancient and Modern Imperialism* (London: John Murray, 1910), 88, 89. In the post-imperial world the debate about assimilation has shifted its ground to that of ethnic relations in the former 'home country' of the empires.

The British had to deal with 'subject peoples' who were just too unfathomably different. Indeed, whereas Latin may be assumed to have united the empire under Rome, the acquisition of a European language by modern Orientals more often than not does nothing to inspire political sympathy, but on the contrary 'furnishes the subject races with a very powerful arm against their alien rulers'.¹⁷ The alienation that exists between the rulers and subjects of the modern Orient is a gulf that cannot be overcome; the antipathies that exist between them would make it dangerous to try. And this is why Cromer sets a limit on British knowledge of 'the dwellers in Egypt', and on British power. The aim is indeed eventual British withdrawal, and Egyptian autonomy, though this will take at least another generation to come to pass, he believes. This is of course the familiar mission of liberal imperialism, with the usual deferral attached; for several generations, liberals had been saying much the same about India.

Meanwhile 'the Englishman' in Egypt can deploy his detailed knowledge of the Oriental mind to help him govern wisely, and with sympathy; but he will recognize and even welcome the fact that his knowledge runs only up to a point, and beyond that point the Oriental remains unknowable in his radical difference. This, as Cromer sees it, is no reason to repine: on the contrary. Assimilation is not possible, or desirable, and the Englishman's authority and identity are guaranteed by what we might call a prophylactic ignorance. The close contact of intimate knowledge is dangerous, and the enquirer, like Hunter on the brink of Bubbling Well, runs the risk of being swallowed up in that dark, muddy and alien interior, and disappearing into it for good. An aloof, even philistine refusal to know plays an important part in the discourse of colonial experience, and suggests that in some circumstances power may be served by not knowing as well as by knowledge. The trope of ignorance, the disclaimer of knowledge, could be a shield and protection.

What Strickland knew: Kipling's policeman and dangerous knowledge

The Orient was a network. Cromer had been on the Viceroy's staff in India. The programme of administrative reform under his leadership in Egypt was carried out by British officials and technicians trained in India, and its dominant theme was the introduction of techniques, institutions and projects based on their own Indian experience.¹⁸ British Egypt was created out of the experience of British

17. *Ibid.*, 107.

18. Robert L. Tignor, 'The "Indianization" of the Egyptian administration under British rule', *American Historical Review*, 68 no. 3 (April 1963), 636–61.

India. And knowledge was certainly thought of as power in British India,¹⁹ as many instances in Kipling's fiction can attest. In *Kim* (1901), the Ethnological Survey is a covert state apparatus for surveillance — Saidian Orientalism in its ideal form. But there are hundreds of less institutional instances in Kipling's fiction where information is crucial for control of a situation, and correspondingly where ignorance exposes its possessor to impotence, failure and ridicule. Kipling was enamoured of intelligence in the military-political sense, an enthusiasm not very surprising in a journalist, and his whole career testifies to his appetite for expertise — the combination of intelligence and experience — preferably of an arcane and professional kind. Expertise sustained the personnel of British India, where a relative handful of white officials exercised hegemony over a huge and varied population, and there and elsewhere in the empire it conferred on them a sort of class identity.

Who is more knowing than Kipling's Strickland? Strickland is an English police officer in India, a character who recurs in a number of Kipling's stories, and always with the authority that comes not only from his office but more importantly from his knowledge of India.²⁰ The tale 'Miss Youghal's Sais' (1887) gives us most information about him. 'He held the extraordinary theory that a Policeman in India should try to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves.'²¹ He has spent seven years educating himself to this end, and is a compendium of linguistic knowledge and ethnographic lore, for he has not only witnessed but also participated in various cults and occult ceremonies, of which Kipling gives a preposterous catalogue with his usual relish.

He was initiated into the *Sat Bhai* at Allahabad once, when he was on leave. He knew the Lizard-Song of the Sansis, and the *Hälli-Hukk*

19. C. A. Bayly has extended understanding of this issue in important ways, and corrected a tendency to oversimplify it, in his study of the 'information order' of pre-imperial British India, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The period in question in *Empire and Information* is pre-Kipling and pre-Cromer, but Bayly touches on many of the issues raised here. Of particular relevance is his contention that the information revolution and the accumulation of institutional knowledge on which British authority depended in India were punctuated by knowledge gaps and 'information panics'. C. A. Bayley, *Empire and Information*, 165–79.

20. Strickland first appeared in 'Miss Youghal's Sais', in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, 25 April 1887, reprinted as the fourth story in *Plain Tales from the Hills*. He also figures in 'The Bronckhorst Divorce Case', 'A Deal in Cotton', 'The Mark of the Beast', 'The Return of Imray', and *Kim*, and finally in 'The Son of his Father', in which he has acquired a small son even more knowledgeable than he is. Rudyard Kipling, *Land and Sea Tales for Scouts and Guides* [1923] (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1926), 205–36.

21. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1890) ed. H. R. Woudhuysen with an introduction and notes by David Trotter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 51.

dance, which is a religious can-can of a startling kind. When a man knows who dance the *Hállli-Hukk*, and how, and when, and where, he knows something to be proud of. He has gone deeper than the skin. But Strickland was not proud, though he had helped once, at Jagadhri, at the Painting of the Death Bull, which no Englishman must even look upon; had mastered the thieves'-patter of the *chángars*; had taken a Yusufzai horse-thief alone near Attock; and had stood under the sounding-board of a Border mosque and conducted service in the manner of a Sunni Mullah.²²

And much more besides. Here indeed is the Orientalist as agent, the man of fieldwork experience, in the know. Baroque elaborations of this fantasy of incorporation and control were to appear in Jim Douglas, the hero of Flora Annie Steel's Mutiny novel *On the Face of the Waters* (1896),²³ and in a later generation in the legend of Lawrence of Arabia, and in John Buchan's *Greenmantle*. There were two well-known real-life precedents for Strickland. One was the legendary 'thug-buster' W. H. Sleeman, who was credited with extirpating *thuggee* in a vigorous campaign of intelligence-gathering and policework in the 1830s.²⁴ It is a thoroughly Kiplingesque (and of course Foucauldian) story, for the campaign depended on the creation of a body of Western knowledge about a shadowy Oriental 'mystery' — in the double sense, for *thuggee* was seen as both an enigma and something like a trade guild — and then a transformation of existing legal structures of authority to master it. Sleeman's agents had to create a knowledge of *thuggee* in order to bring it under control, and his apparent success in this perilous enterprise made him one of the heroes of British India in the East India Company days.²⁵

Another real-life precedent for Strickland was Richard Burton, who famously made the pilgrimage to Mecca in Oriental disguise and wrote a book about it, and whose writing is discussed in *Orientalism* as the history of a consciousness negotiating its way through an alien culture by virtue of having successfully absorbed its system of information and behaviour. 'Burton's freedom was in having shaken himself loose of his European origins enough to be able to live as an Oriental. Every scene in the *Pilgrimage [to Al-Medinah and Meccah]* reveals him

22. *Ibid.*, 51–52.

23. Steel's Jim Douglas is less successful in his disguise than Strickland, for 'there was a trick in his gait, not to be orientalised, which made policemen salute gravely as he passed disguised to the tent'. Flora Annie Steel, *On the Face of the Waters* (London: Heinemann, 1897), 61.

24. This achievement is credited to the fictional Rodney Savage's father, William Savage, in John Masters' *Nightrunners of Bengal* (1951) and *The Deceivers* (1955).

25. See Radhika Singha, "'Providential' Circumstances: The Thuggee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation', *Modern Asian Studies* 27:1 (1993), 83–146. Singha's conclusion is that the success of the campaign was very much inflated.

as winning out over the obstacles confronting him, a foreigner, in a strange place. He was able to do this because he had sufficient knowledge of an alien society for this purpose.²⁶ Said adds, though, that Burton's knowledge is informed by a European's self-awareness of society as a collection of rules and practices. 'In other words, to be a European in the Orient, and to be one knowledgeable, one must see and know the Orient as a domain ruled over by Europe.'²⁷

This is obviously also the case with Kipling's policeman Strickland. When he solves the mystery of the disappearance of Imray, a government official (in 'The Return of Imray'), he is able to reveal not only that he was murdered by his Indian servant, but also why — the servant believed Imray had cast the evil eye on his child, who subsequently died. Strickland concludes that Imray lost his life 'simply and solely through not knowing the nature of the Oriental'.²⁸ If anyone knows the nature of the Oriental, it must be Strickland. He knows how to interrogate Imray's servant and trick him into a confession, because his knowledge makes Strickland an insider to the discourse of the Indian irrational, what the modernizing British dismissed as 'superstition'. 'Only such as are served by devils,' says the culprit admiringly, 'only such could know what I did.'²⁹

In another and yet more Gothic story from *Life's Handicap*, called 'The Mark of the Beast', it is again Strickland's knowledge of the East that tells him that his friend Fleete's lycanthropy is the result of a spell cast upon him by a leper he has inadvertently insulted in a drunken escapade in the temple of Hanuman. Strickland (this is very much to the point) also knows *what to do*, and his police experience again comes in useful when the leper is captured, interrogated, tortured, and forced to lift the curse, after which Strickland closes the case by returning to the temple to offer redress for the pollution of the god. His expertise is specifically in those areas of dark alterity where the irrational, religious and superstitious life of the Orient makes it most mysterious, and closed, to Western eyes.

Strickland then ought to be a great asset to British authority over India. He is, as Dante says of Aristotle, *il maestro di color che sanno*, a master of knowledge. However, he has acquired his expertise, at some personal risk, through a kind of transgression, and at a price. For he has developed an 'outlandish custom of prying into native life'.

26. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 196. Before famously taking part in the pilgrimage to Mecca, Burton while serving in the Indian Army had gone undercover to investigate the Indian underworld, submitting a report to the government of India. The adventure seems to have led to a mistrust by his superiors that damaged his career prospects.

27. *Ibid.*, 197.

28. Rudyard Kipling, *Life's Handicap* (1891) ed. A. O. J. Cockshut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 203.

29. *Ibid.*, 202. It is another instance of the magical powers attributed to the cultural transgressor.

When a man once acquires a taste for this particular amusement, it abides with him all his days. It is the most fascinating thing in the world — Love not excepted. When other men took ten days to the Hills, Strickland took leave for what he called *shikar* [hunting], put on the disguise that appealed to him at the time, stepped down into the brown crowd, and was swallowed up for a while.³⁰

Like his almost exact contemporary, Stevenson's Dr Jekyll (1888), Strickland's clandestine excursions on the wild side arouse suspicion in his professional colleagues.

To acquire his knowledge of the Orient, Strickland has had to become part of it, to be engulfed in the brown crowd. He acquires Orientality, literally leaving behind the uniform of his office and the complexion of his ethnicity. But although he thereby becomes an authority, he does so at the price of a double alienation. For he alarms his own people, who cannot see why he does not sit in his office and write reports like everyone else, while at the same time earning the animosity of Indians. 'Natives hated Strickland; but they were afraid of him. He knew too much.'³¹ He has sacrificed or lost a part of the ethnic identity which sustains his kind. He has turned something of a witch-doctor himself, and is accompanied by a huge dog alleged to speak to him in a language of her own and believed by 'the natives' to be a familiar spirit.³²

When Fleete bays at the moon, the English doctor diagnoses hydrophobia; but Strickland knows that it is magic. The English doctor, if it were left to him, would have continued to treat the case as a medical — that is, scientific — problem and Fleete would have died, another casualty of the white man's burden. Strickland undoubtedly saves the life of the lycanthropic Fleete, when he recognizes that his friend is the victim of the leper's magic, and forces the leper to lift his curse. But for Strickland, to accept the challenge of the Silver Man's magic, which is the only way to save Fleete, is also to be interpellated as an Oriental subject, so that when he competes with the leper's magic he has already capitulated to the leper's vision of the world, his Eastern modality, and agreed to play the deadly game according to his rules, admitting the inadequacy or irrelevance in this case of the enlightened discourses and practices of Western medicine, godliness and law, all three of which are scandalized by Strickland's unorthodox measures. To combat the Silver Man's magic and save Fleete, Strickland Orientalizes himself, and in doing so he makes the narrator his accomplice. 'Then it struck me,' says the narrator, 'that we had fought for Fleete's soul with the Silver Man in that room,

30. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 52.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Rudyard Kipling, *Life's Handicap*, 193.

and had disgraced ourselves as Englishmen for ever . . .'³³ This knowledge has led to a fall.

Here we are back in the presence of a recurring theme of Kipling's Indian writing, a chronic problem that besets his English characters, and it meets us in familiar terms. In order to control their subject people, they need to know them. Power depends on knowledge, and knowledge is acquired at close quarters. Yet they cannot afford to abolish the prestigious distance that sustains their authority. They must keep a certain aloofness, even at the price of allowing an epistemological no-go area into which their enquiries cannot reach.³⁴ The Earl of Cromer, with his views on mud and what it is apt to do, would no doubt counsel Strickland against his taste for stepping down into the brown crowd. (And likewise the prudent Captain Marlow in 'Heart of Darkness' declines to go ashore from his steamer to join in the African dance, or to enquire about the rituals of the cult of Mr Kurtz.) Strickland's superiors certainly feel his researches have gone too far; consequently he is considered 'a doubtful sort of man' (as Burton was), and passed over for promotion. When he marries an English girl, it is 'on the strict understanding that Strickland should drop his old ways, and stick to Departmental routine, which pays best and leads to Simla' — in other words, to promotion.³⁵

At the end of 'Miss Youghal's Sais', we are told that Strickland is losing his knowledge of the Indian underworld, 'the slang, and the beggar's cant, and the marks, and the signs, and the drift of the under-currents'; to fit into the career environment of British India, he has naturally selected to become a conventional bureaucrat, dutifully filling in his Department returns, and renouncing his wanderings and his discoveries. The circulation of paperwork has replaced the acquisition of ethnographic experience as his speciality, and his bureaucratic duties, as well as the disapproval of Mrs Strickland, presumably keep him in the office and insulated from the brown crowd. We must assume that now he will smoothly ascend the ladder of promotion towards a higher and higher ignorance. Too much knowledge is surplus to requirements. The acquisition of knowledge can effect a kind of assimilation; it puts separation, and therefore power, at risk. It may be better not to know. In other words, it is not only those who want to dissociate themselves from the imperial will-to-power who are likely to renounce any claim to a penetrative expert knowledge of the Orient. This renunciative move may also be a useful gambit for those who want to exercise control over others, unencumbered by compromising ties to them.

33. *Ibid.*, 190.

34. See Chapter 6, and Douglas Kerr, 'Three ways of going wrong: Kipling, Conrad, Coetzee', *Modern Language Review* 95:1 (January 2000), 18–27.

35. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 56.

We might add digressively that the traffic of knowledge in the other direction is equally problematic, as we have seen in Kipling's unremittingly hostile representation of Western-educated Indians. Balfour too was to maintain that Egyptian nationalism was the unfortunate consequence of Orientals' acquisition of Western political ideas, a knowledge that was in a fundamental sense foreign to them, unoriental. By the end of the nineteenth century most imperialists deplored the policy of modernization through English sponsored by Trevelyan and Macaulay in the eighteen-thirties, on the grounds that it led to the acquisition of inappropriate knowledge. 'For more than half a century,' Cromer warned, 'we have, perhaps unavoidably, been teaching English through the medium of English literature, and that literature, in so far as it is historical, may easily be perverted from a disquisition on the advantages of steady progress achieved by a law-abiding nation into one which eulogizes disrespect for authority, and urges on the governed the sacred duty of throwing off the yoke of unpalatable Governors.'³⁶ The argument, which we find with variations again in early twentieth-century contemporaries including Lugard and Clifford, represents a quite widespread view among the imperial class that liberal educational policies, intended to strengthen the loyalties of the subject peoples, might have had the opposite effect.

Strickland, in the interest of his career, executes a trope of ignorance, turning back from the frontier of knowledge. Had he pressed on, the gulfs might indeed have washed him down. Kipling gives us an example of the Faustian damnation awaiting a man who pursues knowledge of the Orient too far. This is McIntosh Jellaludin in 'To be Filed for Reference', the last story in *Plain Tales from the Hills*. He is a man who has sacrificed everything — career, status, reputation, prosperity, friends, health — to pursue knowledge, and is thoroughly assimilated and 'sunk' into the East, adopting an Oriental name, wife, and religion, and living in poverty and dirt as a Mahommedan *fakir*. 'He used actually to laugh at Strickland as an ignorant man — "ignorant West and East" — he said.'³⁷ The point about McIntosh Jellaludin is that his knowledge takes away his Englishness (which survives in scraps of classical learning and a pompous way of speech), and destroys him. In the end he is wasted, helpless, on his deathbed, and he entrusts 'the Book' of his experience to the narrator, who is quick to disclaim responsibility for it: 'McIntosh Jellaludin and not I myself wrote the Book of Mother Maturin'.³⁸ In the end, Kipling never published the book whose paternity he denies in this story, and which was to contain his knowledge of the Indian underworld. It seems his father advised against it.

36. The Earl of Cromer, *Ancient and Modern Imperialism*, 106.

37. Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales*, 275.

38. *Ibid.*, 277.

Not knowing the Oriental

'Knowing the Oriental' was essential in order to control the Orient. But knowing the Oriental too well weakened that epistemological and political barrier whose function was to keep people, rulers and ruled, in their proper places; to put it a little differently, as Bart Moore-Gilbert does, 'the very forms of knowledge which imperialism generates and on which it relies depend on a dialogue with native culture, which allows the native subject to turn those discourses back against the dominant power'.³⁹ Ignorance, and a protestation that the East was fundamentally unknowable, might be a strategy for avoiding too assimilative a contact, and too symmetrical a dialogue, with it. Here those most anxious to preserve their authority over the East found common ground with those who wanted no such authority in the first place: Eastern ways were none of their business. And yet the very strangeness of that other world was an irresistible provocation; and so the dialectic sways through the discourse, the desire to trope, the risk of being troped in turn. There the East was, in its fascination, seemingly wanting to be known, not just textually but experientially. If a character like Strickland risks a Faustian fate, his courage and curiosity also make him a hero, faced with a temptation of the kind Tennyson's (and Dante's) Ulysses was familiar with.

Who could resist? Not Trejago, in Kipling's 'Beyond the Pale', who gains access to the world of the pretty Indian widow Bisesa through his knowledge of Oriental topography, language, and customs. He stumbles at night, in the Oriental disguise of a boorkah, up a dark alley where Europeans never go, and woos her in her own language at the bedroom window through which he will be given access to her. Trejago knows Bisesa, penetrating in secret into the sequestered world where he has discovered her. Yet when tragedy strikes and her family take a terrible revenge, Trejago does not know *enough* to rescue her. The window is barred against him, and he cannot even find the front door of the house where she is being kept, and punished, 'in the City where each man's house is as guarded and as unknowable as the grave'.⁴⁰

It had seemed Trejago's knowledge had opened the mysteries of the Orient to him, but in fact he had scarcely broached it, gaining access instead into a potentially infinite regress of the unknown, a *mise-en-abîme*. Bisesa's voice speaking poetry in the darkness, which at their first encounter he had understood and answered, is at their last encounter just an inarticulate sobbing, one of those horrifying uninterpretable sounds — we could also adduce the echoes in the Marabar Caves and in Bubbling Well — described by Homi Bhabha as 'the

39. Bart Moore-Gilbert, 'Reading Kipling, Reading Bhabha', *Writing India 1757–1990*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 117.

40. *Ibid.*, 167.

inscriptions of an uncertain colonial silence that mocks the social performance of language with their non-sense; that baffles the communicable verities of culture with their refusal to translate'.⁴¹ Beyond the reach of Trejago's Orientalist knowledge, out of his sight, stretches the Oriental interior — the inside of Durga Charan's house, where the mutilated Bisesa must spend the rest of her life, being a spatial figure here for that vast Hinterland of experience forever receding before Trejago and his kind. Knowing the Oriental too intimately could be risky; on the other hand, the Oriental can never be known *enough*.⁴² The desire to know, and the self-protective swerve from knowing, alike produce an inadequacy of knowledge.

This area of darkness, immeasurable and invincibly strange, is the other kind of ignorance — we might call it sublime ignorance — that besets Western writing about the experience of the Orient, punctuating it with blind spots, indecipherable signals, untranslatability, impenetrable thickets of the unknown, beyond representation, gestured at throughout colonial and Orientalist discourse with helpless capitulations to the mysterious, the inscrutable, the ineffable, the veiled East. The mapping (not the filling in) of these blank spaces is a project that could tell us a good deal about the history of Western attempts to know the Oriental. The vaunted imperial gaze, usually taken as a trope of complacent possession, is often contemplating something it will never know and cannot represent, something that always escapes into its own life beyond.

Kipling, again and finally, gives a sort of emblem of this in one of his earliest stories, 'The City of Dreadful Night' (1885), an atmospheric piece in which the narrator, one sweltering sleepless night, wanders the city of Lahore, taking in its sights. 'The pitiless Moon shows it all'.⁴³ He climbs one of the minarets of the Mosque of Wazir Khan, which affords him a panoptic view of the moonlit scene exposed before him. We may recognize this as a variation on the triumphalist 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' vantage, influentially analyzed by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*.⁴⁴ This is a story about appropriation and knowledge. The city is converted into Western discourse, textualized and rebaptized with the title of a

41. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Articulating the Archaic', *The Location of Culture*, 123–38; 124.

42. 'Beyond the Pale' is presented as a cautionary tale about a man who 'knew too much' (the same phrase as was to be applied to Strickland) and 'saw too much' (*ibid.*, 162), but complicated by the fact that the narrator who makes these judgements is manifestly at least as knowledgeable about 'native life' as Trejago, since otherwise he would not be able to tell the story properly. See Bart Moore-Gilbert's discussion in his 'Introduction' to *Writing India 1757–1990*, 12–17.

43. *Life's Handicap*, 273. There are extremely interesting similarities between this scene of the contemplation of moonlit Oriental sleepers, and Chapter 3 of Conrad's *Lord Jim*, in which Jim on the bridge of the Patna looks down on the Muslim pilgrims asleep on deck.

44. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 201–08.

fashionable Victorian poem: Kipling, or his narrator, seems to make the city his own. The minaret itself is a modality. Up there, the colonial interloper occupies the commanding perspective of one of the mightiest religions of the East. The inhabitants of the city exist in the story as a spectacle for his contemplation, and in the moonlight they seem ghostly, like the dead, less fully human than their observer. But while this tale, written at the very beginning of Kipling's career, is a story of the authoritative colonial vantage, it is also about ignorance, not knowing the Oriental.

The Muezzin stumbles down the dark stairway grumbling in his beard. He passes the arch of the entrance and disappears. Then the stifling silence settles down over the City of Dreadful Night. The kites on the Minar sleep again, snoring more loudly, the hot breeze comes up in puffs and lazy eddies, and the Moon slides down towards the horizon. Seated with both elbows on the parapet of the tower, one can watch and wonder over that heat-tortured hive till the dawn. 'How do they live down there? What do they think of? When will they awake?'⁴⁵

His exalted viewpoint endows him with knowledge of the East only in the form of questions to which he has no answers.

45. *Life's Handicap*, 275.

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