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Works in Progress: Child Characters in Victorian and Postcolonial Fiction, 1814 - 2006

Kiran Mascarenhas
Graduate Center, City University of New York

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By Kiran Mascarenhas

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Date                                               Chair of Examining Committee, Ashley Dawson, Ph.D.

Date                                               Executive Officer, Mario DiGangi, Ph.D.

Talia Schaffer, Ph.D.
Timothy Alborn, Ph.D.
Supervisory Committee
Abstract


By

Kiran Mascarenhas

Advisers: Ashley Dawson, Talia Schaffer

In this dissertation I analyze the relationship between national and individual development in Victorian and postcolonial novels set in India. My central argument is that the investment in the idea of progress that characterizes colonial narratives of childhood gives way in postcolonial fiction to a suspicion of dominant understandings of progress, and that this difference is manifest in the identity formation of the child character as well as in the form of the novel.

In the Victorian colonial narratives discussed in this study, the bildung of the child involves the overcoming of the child’s conflicted cultural identity. The children of the colonial elite are socialized in early years by their Indian caregivers. As the children begin to acquire Indian languages, tastes and mores, however, British adults, driven by cultural anxiety, seek to re-educate and Anglicize the children until there is scarcely a trace of Indian influence in the child’s appearance or conduct. Likewise, gender and class identity, though ambiguous in the years of infancy, settles towards the end of a typical colonial narrative. However, the proper classification of the child towards which the colonial novel strains is effected so anxiously that
even optimistic colonial narratives like Dinah Mulock Craik’s “The Half-Caste” (1857) or Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894) convey an awareness of the fragility of the government of child and colony.

Where in Victorian novels children eventually outgrow their hybrid identity, in postcolonial novels the gender, class and national identities of the child-protagonists never quite settle. The final chapter of my dissertation connects the figure of the neglected child in postcolonial fiction with larger questions of nation formation and argues that the veneer of investment in progress evident in Victorian novels has worn away to reveal a ubiquitous, though uneven, sense of betrayal.

The chapters are organized around texts produced at moments widely considered critical in the history of colonial India: the missionary tracts produced after the legalization of missionary work in 1813, the emergence of the “post-mutiny boy hero” in the wake of the Revolt of 1857, the repatriation narratives that proliferated in the twilight years of empire, colonial writing by Indian writers at the time of decolonization, and finally postcolonial narratives that layer the problems of liberalization, such as a perceived disconnect between the citizen and the state in an age of transnational capital, with India’s colonial past. Contrasted with the understanding of history as a series of critical moments is the narrative of slow violence over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the gradual degradation of human and environmental rights under first colonial and then postcolonial elite regimes. Finally the dissertation looks for new ways forward from this potentially debilitating understanding of colonial and postcolonial history and literature.
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My dissertation adviser, Ashley Dawson, has been a patient and rigorous interlocutor. His fresh perspectives on postcolonial concerns rekindled my love for the field, and it was he who suggested I attempt a periodization of Indian literature. His work as a scholar and activist continues to be inspirational. Talia Schaffer, who encouraged my interest in Victorian studies and inspired my interest in non-canonical writing, nurtured me not just through the writing of this dissertation, but throughout my time at the CUNY Graduate Center. Phone conversations with her at crucial moments silenced my inner Hamlet. Tim Alborn, whose intellectual inquiry acknowledges but reaches past disciplinary limits, has been incredibly incisive in his reading of my dissertation and has always pushed me to do more and do it better. The reading list he suggested for my Orals introduced me to historians like Prasannan Parthasarathi, Manu Goswami and Timothy Mitchell, with whom I still hold imaginary consultations.

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Introduction

This dissertation analyzes the relationships between representations of *bildung* and representations of the developing nation in colonial and postcolonial fiction set in India. My central argument is that in colonialist and nationalist fiction, the child is made to serve as a repository of “variously sentimentalized cultural identifications” and as the one for whom the social order is held in perpetual trust, and that this reproductive futurism means that the collateral damage wrought in the name of progress towards that brighter future is never reckoned with, but endlessly deferred. In postcolonial fiction, however, the colonial ordering of time and space is broken, development of the individual and of the nation is suspended, and the possibility of endless deferral is foreclosed. Contemporary works of postcolonial fiction function as anti-*bildungsromane* by refusing the genre’s teleological sense of direction, and in some cases, by refusing as well the *bildungsroman*’s adherence to literary realism.

A study of child characters reveals the fantasies and attitudes of their adult creators. John MacKenzie, in his introduction to Katherine Castle’s *Britannia’s Children* (1996), argues that “Most societies clearly reveal both their moral norms and their political ideologies through their efforts to acculturate the young” and points to the “powerful zone of intellectual, ideological and moral convergence in the projection of state power and collective objectives to children” (Castle vii). A similar argument has been made by Philippe Ariès, James Kincaid and Lawrence Stone. In literary representation, whether the child in question is a member of the privileged subset of humanity that receives intense parenting and arguably enjoys a care surplus, or whether the child

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1 Edelman, 11

2 In *Centuries of Childhood, Child-Loving, and The Family, Sex and Marriage* respectively
belongs to the impoverished sectors of society across the globe that suffer a care deficit, the figure of the child is invoked to add a sense of righteousness and urgency to either side of any debate about policy, religion, and even aesthetics; wars are fought, legislation is passed, and human rights are sacrificed in the name of a brighter future for that nonspecific category, “our children.” In *No Future* (2004), Lee Edelman points to the costs of this reproductive futurity, which, he argues, casts queers as antagonists. My purpose here is not to argue for a rejection of futurity but to draw attention to the specific ways in which reproductive futurity informs colonialist and nationalist narratives and to acknowledge the shift away from the optimism of this trope in recent postcolonial fiction, which strains towards a different kind of futurity, one that depends on addressing, not deferring, the dissonances of the present.

The works of fiction discussed in this dissertation are Mary Martha Sherwood’s “The History of Little Henry and His Bearer” (1814), Dinah Mulock Craik’s “The Half-Caste” (1851), Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *Kim* (1901), Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911), R.K. Narayan’s *Swami and Friends* (1934), Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980), *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995), Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (1995), Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008). The rest of this introduction briefly summarizes the kinds of colonialist epistemology that inform colonial tales of *bildung*. Where colonialist histories tend to represent the colony as a work in progress, and to suggest that the colonies are essential to the progress of the imperial center as well, nationalist historiography inverts this narrative, often hearkening back to a precolonial past to testify to India’s decline over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – this narrative of decline is evident in the early postcolonial work discussed. I go on to talk about how
later postcolonial bildungsromane center on minors and minorities, history’s exceptions and remainders, and militate against their very form to critique the logic of futurity. Finally, I reflect on the form of this dissertation itself.

Each of the texts listed above is concerned with the development and education of the child at the center of the plot. However stories of bildung invariably contain within them the representation of the opposite of bildung – the confusion and anxiety of the process of self-discovery. James Eli Adams identifies this confusion in as venerable a bildungsroman as Great Expectations (1860-61) where “the self-discovery and self-definition of the protagonist [are] emphatically social, conjured up in large part by new prospects of social mobility, a world of possibility at once exhilarating and fearful” (Adams 123). Pip undergoes what we now call an identity crisis: “I was a blacksmith’s boy but yesterday; I am – what shall I say I am – today?” (248). Adams suggests that the ubiquity of orphans in Victorian fiction indicates a cultural interest in the fluidity of identity, in a world where birth does not necessarily determine social prospects, so that identity is less secure (124). Elements of this identity confusion come through in all of the texts discussed here – the Sartor Resartus question of whether identity is simply a surface phenomenon. In “The Half-Caste,” for example, the protagonist’s transformation from Indian to Briton, from servant to aristocrat, is effected in large part through a change of wardrobe.

All the protagonists of the texts selected for this dissertation are orphans. What is remarkable about this is that I did not seek out orphan narratives, but it was difficult to find any colonial or postcolonial stories of children who are not orphans. Swami from R. K. Narayan’s Swami and Friends is a notable exception. Through his depiction of functional families in an insular town, Narayan suggests that there is such a thing as a private sphere, one unaffected by
national politics. Among the writers considered in this dissertation, Narayan is alone in this representation of a sacrosanct private sphere, but even his Swami is thrust into an unsympathetic world when his mother gives birth to a second child and Swami’s wellbeing is no longer her top priority. Parents, mothers especially, are absent or inadequate in every text considered here. Perhaps this is because orphans are easily worked into public narratives – they are exposed, unprotected by the private sphere or the mother’s embrace. They are nobody’s children; at the same time they may be claimed as everybody’s children, and lend themselves well to narratives about the villages (or cities, or countries, or world) that it takes to raise a child.

The Colony as a Work in Progress

Prose narrative, whether fiction or history, it could be argued, is necessarily driven by futurity. Colonialist histories, certainly, tend to represent gradual progress over the course of the nineteenth century. Three ways in which colonization was understood as important for the progress of both the imperial center and the colony recur throughout this dissertation: the first recurring argument is the one according to which Britons, having being blessed with exceptional constitutions and progressive institutions, are obliged to interest themselves in the moral and material welfare of the colonized;¹ the second is that the colonies provided an ideal receptacle for unfettered British masculinity, and the third is that the colonies were crucibles of modernity.

The first chapter of this dissertation shows the ideological sleight of hand through which early nineteenth century colonists represented themselves as responsible for the moral and

¹ See Gladstone, “Our Colonies” (1855) quoted in Priti Joshi’s “Mutiny Echoes,” 67
material improvement of Indians. Missionary writers like Mary Martha Sherwood, discussed in Chapter 1, proposed a version of this improvement logic that – conveniently - looked beyond the material realities of this world and suggested that colonization could benefit Indians by opening for them the gates of heaven. Child protagonists in missionary tract fiction became emblematic of the spiritually needy, and the youthful converted, it was argued, could in turn serve as the means to the end of adult conversions in the colony. The diachronic structure of this dissertation has allowed for a consideration of Sherwood’s work not only in her Evangelical milieu but also alongside Rudyard Kipling, a juxtaposition that illumines Sherwood’s role as a – perhaps unwitting - writer of colonial adventure stories. For Sherwood, the text is meant to serve as mediation between the reader and God, and any adventure is meant as allegory (the colony represents the Biblical wilderness) rather than as a prescription for tropical fun. However, as Janis Dawson writes of Sherwood’s adaptation of Pilgrim’s Progress, in which an antagonist named “In-Bred Sin” tempts children to stray from the path of virtue, “some young readers may have found [In-bred Sin’s] activities more interesting than the spiritual struggles of the little heroes, reading the book as an adventure story rather than as a guide to salvation” (274).

Sherwood’s “Little Henry and His Bearer,” likewise, is intended to guide children away from the worldly temptations of the colony, but to many readers, the colorful, prosperous, sensualist

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1 Historians like Prasannan Parthasarathi and Mike Davis have shown the hollowness of the colonial claim that in material terms, colonization was in the best interests of Indians: through resource drainage and a systematic distancing of laborers from control over their own production, colonization enriched the imperial center at the expense of the colony.

2 As Chapter 1 discusses, original sin was of central importance in Sherwood’s belief system.
figures that surround Henry could well present a preferable alternative to the increasingly milquetoast child.

Sherwood thus reinforces a second sort of colonial narrative - that the colonies were a place beyond the inhibitions of the increasingly bourgeois cultures of Europe.¹ This narrative is central to both Craik’s “Half-Caste” and Kipling’s colonial writing. Chapter 3 shows how Kipling posits a free-ranging and adventurous colonial boyhood, and treats the maturation process - which he equates with embourgeoisement, the assumption of racial, gender and class identity, and the shouldering of the burdens of adulthood - as a regrettable necessity.

A third perspective on the uses of the colonies is the view that they were crucibles of modernity, where missionaries, educators, and doctors could carry out experiments in social engineering on a target population conceived of as childlike and in need of a parental hand.² If the colonies were indeed treated as laboratories, however, we will see in recent postcolonial fiction that the conditions in those laboratories were impossible to control, and that the subjects expressed their unwillingness to participate in social experiments by circumventing and undermining them in various ways.

¹ See Ronald Hyam, Britain’s Imperial Century; Priti Joshi, “Mutiny Echoes”; Ann Laura Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power.

² John Dryden prepared the ground for the benevolent paternal power of England in his Aureng Zebe as early as 1675. Scholars who make the argument about the colonies as crucibles of modernity include Timothy Mitchell (Rule of Experts), Gauri Viswanathan (Masks of Conquest), and David Arnold (Colonizing the Body)
The Limits of Futurity

Priya Joshi contends that the novel “came to be deployed by the British as the most effective tool for representing the fabric of English culture and society to their Indian subjects in order to manufacture the ‘taste, opinions, morals, intellect’ of the Indian reader” (Culture,” 201). Colonial novels, particularly those with child-protagonists, tend to take the shape of bildungsromane, which are meant illustrate growth and maturation/development. Although these narratives of bildung presuppose futurity, as Joshua Esty and Sara Suleri have suggested, bildung is not shown to be a smooth progression into adulthood. Even colonial bildungsromane, as my discussion of individual texts will demonstrate, always already contain destabilizing elements within themselves; one need only note that maturity remains a vanishing point that is never quite attained for any of the colonial protagonists to mark the seed of suspicion of the very narrative of progress that each colonial text promulgates. As Esty writes, “In open and sustained violation of the developmental paradigm that seemed to govern nineteenth century historical and fictional forms, such novels [Esty is talking about ‘empire fictions’ like Olive Schreiner’s The Story of an African Farm (1883) and Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim (1899)] tend to present youthful protagonists who die young, remain suspended in time, eschew vocational and sexual closure, refuse social adjustment, or establish themselves as evergreen souls via the tender offices of the Kunstlerroman” (3). Although colonial texts tend to close on an optimistic note, the young

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1 According to Priya Joshi, “between 1850 and 1900, imports of books and printed matter from Britain were almost 95 percent of total book imports into India. Book imports from other countries were limited by the language barrier and the levy of a three percent “foreign” import tax, from which British books were exempt.” (“Culture,” 201)

2 In Unseasonable Youth and The Rhetoric of English India, respectively
protagonists never seem to reach that promised bright future, rather their stories end with their death, their stunting, or their being frozen on the cusp of adulthood, fated to remain forever young. This phenomenon of eternal youth, which is often rendered so attractive in advertisements, takes on a nightmarish quality in longer texts as the young protagonists fail to mature and are never able to claim the better future that has been promised. The child character remains suspended in an eternal state of innocence: only in recent postcolonial fiction do we see the figure of the innocent child give way to a more worldly, knowing figure, whose resistant outsider perspective suggests a failure of interpellation by the ideological and repressive apparatuses of dominant culture. The perfect bildungsroman, therefore, may not actually exist – and if it did, who would read it? Bildungsromane require obstacles for the protagonist to overcome, and this overcoming is seldom easy or smooth. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the problems of bildung overpower any solutions suggested in the narratives. As Ashley Dawson points out, the twentieth century, and the First World War in particular, “made Victorian beliefs in the inevitability of progress, and the triumph of British ‘civilization,’ seem the height of flabby-minded arrogance” (Routledge, 52-53).

Esty talks about jerky narratives of bildung (or, as the case may be, antibildung) as symptomatic of an awareness that development is far from a smooth process – the same may be said of the process of growing from childhood into adulthood (3). “The bildungsroman’s biographical form,” he writes, “was for generations yoked to a progressive concept of national destiny, so that to emplot a non-progressive version of national-historical time is almost automatically to trouble the inherited allegorical platform of the genre” (14). Esty’s work provides geographical and historical reasons for the ways in which empire fictions resist “the
tyranny of plot” (2). The colonial novels in this study seem to support his findings as they depict, respectively, a prematurely dead little Henry, a mere sapling of a Mary or a Kim on a precipice.

This dissertation was intended to be a study of novels, but it can no longer be called that, as too many of the texts considered – a tract, a short story, a picaresque, and whatever it is the recent postcolonial writers are doing to teleology₁ – challenge the novel form. Every chapter includes considerations of morphology and aesthetics as integral to the politics of the texts under discussion. In the case of the work of a non-canonical woman writer like Dinah Mulock Craik, for example, the dominant figures at the center of texts like John Halifax, Gentleman (1857) and “The Half-Caste” (1851) are a red herring; the implied author and ideal reader are in sympathy with a figure who is not at the center but who is narrating the story from the margins. This figure in the case of John Halifax is Phineas Fletcher, and in the case of “The Half-Caste” is Cassandra Pryor. Both narrators are characterized by restraint. Restraint is important again in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s The Secret Garden (1911), where it is in the enclosed garden that Mary Lennox is rehabilitated, and her interventions in nature temper the wilderness and restore beauty. The aesthetics of excess evident in recent postcolonial fiction seems at first to be pulling in a direction opposite to the restrained voices discussed in the first three chapters, but the excess in,

₁ Like the modern narratives Esty analyzes in Unseasonable Youth (2011), contemporary postcolonial novels “reorganize data into lyrical, pictorial, mythical, thematic, aleatory, or elegiac shapes; they weave Freudian regression and Bergsonian flux into the warp and woof of social realism; and they mount bohemian, queer, non-white and feminist challenges to the stale dictates of bourgeois socialization or the grooved contours of nineteen-century characterization” (2).
for example, Rushdie’s “debris of the soul”\(^1\) as a plane crashes in the first chapter of *The Satanic Verses* and the galloping consumption portrayed in *The God of Small Things* are meant to produce revulsion, thereby also indicating an ethics of restraint, which indicts those who refuse to acknowledge the need for a limit to their exploitation of the environment or of other people. The Romantic idea of totality as a prerequisite for art evident in the work of Sherwood, Burnett and Craik fades and morphs into the strangeness of the postcolonial novel, where the protagonist exists in a relation of alienation to the world. Yet the postmodern fragmentation of the contemporary novels under consideration here, in which things are forever falling apart, is both critical of and occasionally nostalgic for a Romanticized, coherent past.

While colonial fiction thus subtly undercuts its own onward thrust, postcolonial fiction is more openly suspicious of the narratives of progress toward a brighter future for the next generation. In a stark refusal of reproductive futurity, *The God of Small Things* ends with the incestuous joining of the twin protagonists. In *The White Tiger* it is the criminal underworld that occupies center stage, throwing critical light on the facile rhetoric of “India Rising;” *The Satanic Verses* ends in conflagration, and *A Fine Balance* and *The Inheritance of Loss* end with the battering of all hope. One of the questions addressed in the final chapter of this dissertation is whether we may read these novels as allegories of a failed nation-state. The authors of recent postcolonial works do not appear to be embracing futurelessness - the endings of their novels are certainly not prescriptive - but at the same time the dismal ending contains a critique of history’s relentless onward march in the name of the always-deferred rights of the child, and brings to the reader’s attention the collateral damage of the colonialist and nationalist narratives of improvement and development, progress and growth. The forms of the texts demonstrate

\(^1\) See Rushdie, *Satanic Verses*, 4
fragmentation, or the difficulty of achieving an integrated and whole consciousness. Such a treatment refuses a homogenous model of history; it is an aesthetic equivalent to Partha Chatterjee’s recuperation of the “fragmentary, the local, and the subjugated in order to unmask the will to power that lies at the very heart of modern rationality and to decentre its epistemological and moral subject” (Nation and its Fragments, xi). ¹ As Ram Guha points out, the Keynesian idea that in the long run we are all dead has animated development initiatives that have undoubtedly enhanced prosperity for some people over shorter terms but which discount the lessons of history and disregard consideration of the distant future (145). Contemporary postcolonial novels, in their very refusal of facile futurity, force the reader to think about what sort of future there could be for a nation plagued by galloping consumption and malignant growth, to the detriment of not just the poor but also the rich.

Recent postcolonial fiction is marked by suspicion of the homogenizing narratives and determined optimism inherent in the logics of nationalism and development and of development’s ancestor, what colonial Britons called the improvement of the colony. On an individual scale as well, our thinking about children has shifted – in the Marquise d’Asher Miner’s Conversations of Emily (1817),² virtue is defined as the acquisition of government over oneself, an understanding common in eighteenth century moral tales and in nineteenth century Evangelical tales. By contrast, the post-Freudian child is not enjoined to see itself as wrong but corrigible. When adult characters in postcolonial novels subject children to repressive strictures,

¹ It is important to remember, however, that though the writers of the novels discussed in Chapter 5, the voices most commonly associated with postcolonial Indian fiction, are all from minority communities, this does not mean they can be considered subaltern or subjugated.

² See Epinay
the implied author is never in sympathy with the adult. Yet the child characters in recent postcolonial fiction consistently fail to thrive. My own understanding of this pattern has undergone an evolution, from a critical view of what I took to be postcolonial detachment, where there is palpable despair but the reader is left debilitated rather than empowered, to an appreciation of the necessity of resisting facile reproductive futurism, and the role that the lack of closure can play in inviting the reader to participate and intervene.

Another difference between colonial and postcolonial representations of children is that Victorian representations, as Judith Plotz argues in “Literary Ways of Killing a Child” (1995) place the child smack in the midst of the world (5). Plotz cites Arthur Drummond’s painting, “His Majesty the Baby,” as one of many examples of child-centrism in Victorian culture. In the painting, a busy Victorian street has ground to a standstill to allow a toddler and his devoted nanny to occupy the center of the road – and the two don’t seem to be in any hurry to get out of the way of the patiently waiting traffic. Compare this image with Arundhati Roy’s description of the twin protagonists of The God of Small Things as “small bewildered frogs…lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic. Entirely oblivious of what trucks can do to frogs” (43). The empowered individual of “Little Henry and His Bearer,” “The Half-Caste,” or Kim has given way to protagonists who seem powerless against the hurtling traffic of globalization in contemporary postcolonial fiction.

1 Plotz is contrasting Victorian with Early Modern representations.
Collateral: Development, the Environment and Gender

The narratives of growth and development of individual children act as synecdoche for narratives of development more broadly; and both kinds of developmental narrative depend upon the willful ignoring of indicators that suggest an opposite, regressive course. One example of a deferred problem is the slow violence of environmental degradation. A diachronic study such as this lends itself well to an examination of this slow violence, occurring incrementally over centuries. In Sherwood’s 1814 text, Little Henry observes that India “would be a very good country if the people were Christians” - and therefore, by Henry’s logic, not so idle - “they would agree together, and clear the jungles, and build churches to worship God in” (56). Similarly, Bishop Reginald Heber, in his journals, would cite the extinction of wild animals as a sign of progress (“Bishop Heber,” 122). In The Secret Garden, Mary discovers in her uncle’s Yorkshire estate a collection of ivory elephants, the real elephants having been slaughtered to make little decorative versions of themselves, ones that can be contained and arranged at will (61). Rudyard Kipling questions the ruthlessness of the colonial management of Indian forests in his 1893 story “In the Rukh,” contrasting the bureaucrat’s rationalist attempts to discipline the trees with Mowgli’s emotional connection with the forest that is his home.

The British obsession with ownership, manipulation and control of nature, as identified by Patricia Seed, Richard Drayton, and Talia Schaffer, extends from plants and animals to human subjects: as Derek Jarman points out, there is a direct correspondence between the English garden, in which an elaborate simulacrum of nature is brought about through carefully concealed artifice, and British ideas about “natural” gender identity and sexual orientation.¹

¹ See Dawson, Routlege Concise History of Twentieth Century British Literature, 176
Chapter 2, on *The Secret Garden* and “The Half-Caste,” and Chapter 3, on Kipling’s work, offer evidence of this dubious cultivation, a crucial component of which is gender formation. As suggested above, in “The Half-Caste,” where the protagonist’s very identity changes as she skillfully performs her gendered and racialized roles, gender is represented as a form of masquerade. Zillah’s ability to transform suggests that she is more privileged than we realize at the outset of the narrative, but the necessity to assimilate in order to have a life suggests that she is also at the mercy of hegemonic forces.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the boy creations of Kipling and Narayan – women are manifestly absent from their narratives. In postcolonial Indian fiction, women make a reappearance, as authors as well as protagonists. The difficulties a young girl faces growing up in *The God of Small Things* or *The Inheritance of Loss*, however, are matched if not outweighed by the issues that young men face in those worlds. Why is Estha in Roy’s novel represented as having lost the power to speak? Why are the travails of Gyan and Biju in Desai’s work juxtaposed with Sai’s relative privilege? Can we say anything at all about the girl characters, such as they are, in the work of Rushdie and Adiga? These are some of the questions that the last chapter engages with.

The representation of women as history’s victims is ubiquitous in the works consulted for this study. For example, in the early nineteenth century, at the time of “Little Henry’s” publication, Indian wives of British men were losing their respectability; where they were once deemed desirable for the wellbeing of East India Company officials and useful for the incorporation of the Company in the socio-political fabric of India, they were increasingly seen as morally improper, politically unnecessary, sexually expendable and racially threatening. This story, of inequitable sexual relations and the toll they take on Indian women and children, recurs
in different forms throughout colonial and postcolonial literature. A back door provides for the fulfillment of Chacko’s “men’s needs” even as his sister becomes an outcaste for giving in to her needs in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, an arrangement that hearkens back to the provision of brothels to meet the needs of soldiers that Kenneth Ballhatchet describes in *Race, Sex, and Class Under the Raj* (1980).

**Detours and Borders: Postcolonial Challenges**

Clare Bradford has argued\(^1\) that “despite their moments of uncertainty and their occasional resistance to dominant ideologies, colonial texts are by and large organized through such binary oppositions as self and other, civilized and savage, white and black,” whereas postcolonial texts are “marked by a more complex and contradictory set of discursive practices” (197). Certainly the use of the terms “colonial” and “postcolonial” presupposes two sides, colonizer and colonized, but clearly these are not watertight categories. Scholarly interest has long been focused on the borders between colonizer and colonized,\(^2\) and this study is no

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1 In “The End of Empire?”

exception, although the selection for study of child protagonists who inhabit the borders between two cultures was not deliberate – it became necessary because in the course of researching this project, I did not come across a single child character who was not represented as a border figure in some way. Little Henry, who is of English descent but is parented by Indians; Zillah, whose mother is Parsee but who claims British identity; Mary Lennox, who is viewed in England as a representative of the colonies; Kim, an impoverished Irish child who is not apparently white; Mowgli who is raised by wolves; Swaminathan who is not so much of the Indian nation as of his own tiny corner of it; Salman Rushdie’s identity-switching protagonists; Arundhati Roy’s Bengali-Malayali twins who share a common soul…every single child is an anomaly, unless one throws out the idea of normativity altogether, as recent postcolonial writers seem to have done.

Border work, according to Ambreen Hai, can offer crucial perspectival shifts and “can have liberatory potential, because it can undo binaristic and hierarchical categories of opposition, offering useful critique and reconceptualization of either side of an opposition - be it cultural, political, or intellectual” (Hai 381). Hai goes on to say that “recent feminist and postcolonial work in particular has turned to the crossing and inhabiting of borders by third world women writers in an effort to reconsider their strategies of survival as they negotiate - often subversively - the contradictions of cultural heterogeneity, modernity, nationalism, or diasporic identity” (381-82). We will see various examples of subversion and resistance by Indian women writers in Chapter 5, and yet, there seems to have been one border that has remained unbreached over the two centuries – the border of class. Subaltern figures, if represented at all, remain subaltern.

*Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture; Margaret Higonnet, Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature*
They are not independently mobile, like the transnational elite, but are pushed and pulled to where their labor is needed. If they are unskilled or otherwise superfluous, or when they resist, as in every text they are shown to, they are ultimately wasted or contained. We see this treatment of the subaltern in “Little Henry and His Bearer,” and it persists in contemporary representations in The Inheritance of Loss and The White Tiger. As Hai puts it, “Some border crossers (for example, third world cosmopolitan elites) can assimilate and celebrate their hybridity, while others (for example, migrant workers) cannot, while still others, such as travelers from first to third world areas, have no equivalent imperative or need to ‘assimilate’” (384). I attempt here a clear-eyed examination of the border crossings and border inhabitations of cosmopolitan celebrities like Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, to assess not only the trouble afflicting third world women writers, but also the trouble occasioned by them. Too often, the crossing of borders is predicated on “the reinforcement of other invisible lines of difference” (Hai 385). The treatment of voices such as Roy’s and Desai’s as representative of Indian women’s consciousness, and the authors’ own shouldering of that burden of representation, often results in “narratival disingenuity or conflict between that purported goal and undermining counter forces” (Hai 386). This is not a problem exclusive to writers of Indian fiction; it is one that affects scholars as well; our own work is often plagued by contradictions and ambivalences.

Twentieth and twenty-first century narratives begin to foreground the nonsenses of colonialism rather than attempting to make sense of, or to sublimate, its onward and inward marches. Manu Goswami tells us that “A constitutive aspect of nationalist historiography was the inversion of the enlightenment theme of progress into a narrative of decline from the pure wonders of an ancient space-time to the degradation and fragmentation constitutive of the present” (182). In R. K. Narayan’s work however, the narrative of decline from an ancient time
of greatness (which is similar to the Orientalist conception of India) is mocked; the implied author maintains an ironic distance from the nationalist speaker who delivers an impassioned speech on the lost art of indigenous weaving, the superiority of ancient India to every other civilization, and so forth (*Swami and Friends*, 76). While more recent postcolonial fiction does dwell on the fragmentation and degradation of the present, the authors tend to be just as suspicious of ancient Indian culture as they are of Western imperialism. Can, then, these works of fiction be called nationalist?

All the writers of recent postcolonial fiction discussed in Chapter 5 belong to cultural, religious and linguistic minorities. Their protagonists are both minors and minorities. Salman Rushdie’s narrators, for example, are all outcasts who implicitly challenge the presumptive normative sway of the nation. The outlier perspective achieved through the focalization of a narrative through a minor is also evident in both colonial and postcolonial fiction. Manu Goswami suggests a connection between the minor’s position and the minority position in that both were, in the eyes of the Indian National Congress in the early years of the formation of independent India, considered “social,” not political, and relegated to the “ahistorical” and “private” realm (232). Early nationalists strove to present a coherent, majoritist front against the British; to present what Goswami calls

A self-conscious challenge to the colonial thesis of the impossibility of India, [which] maintained that the heterogeneity of indigenous society was nontranscendable [and] could not be translated into the abstract rational form of the nation. A succinct formulation of this thesis was John Strachey’s claim, ‘This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India – that there is no, and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to
European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious…That men of the Punjab, Bengal, the United Provinces, and Madras, should ever feel they belong to one nation, is impossible’ (233).

Rushdie’s suggestion that heterogeneity is India’s greatest strength (he contrasts, somewhat problematically, India’s heterogeneity with the Pakistani aspiration toward “purity,”¹) is a riposte to both the purist logic of contemporary right-wing movements and a refutation of the deployment of colonial ethnographic classifications of Indian peoples by appearance and “characteristics,” evident in the Strachey quotation above, to argue against the notion of an Indian nation. The role of the British in the making of modern India thus comes under examination in this study of colonial and postcolonial representations.

The epistemology of the Indian nation has been a subject of study for as long as there has been an Indian nation – some would date that as far back as 30,000 years, some might date it back to Mughal consolidation of much of the territory that forms the modern Indian state, some to British India, and some to decolonization, when Bangladesh and Pakistan were partitioned off and India was given her current shape. India continues to morph as parts of Kashmir come under dispute and maps are redrawn. The epistemology of a nation is, however, not merely a matter of cartography, or even of history, or even of the intersection of the two. Goswami talks about the “statist and nationalist aesthetics” of those historical accounts which chart “the predictable co-ordinates of national history for citizen spectators” in a “teleological framework” that represents disparate events such as the arrival of the East India Company and the Revolt of 1857 as parts of

¹ in Shame (1983) as well as through the character of Jamila Singer in Midnight’s Children (1980)
a continuous space-time (131). Some romantic understandings of a people united by a common
bond will emerge from the representations considered in these five chapters, but they are always
offset by my own tendency to draw from the more materialist histories offered by scholars like
Goswami, whose Producing India (2004), does much to demystify precisely that which the
colonialist and nationalist novelists under consideration here mystify. Goswami details the
process of the production of Indian national space, pointing out, for example, that “The
conception of the nation as a territorial-economic collective implied an immediate, direct
relationship between individual members and the sovereign national whole. Thus appeals to the
sovereign national whole were deployed against other competing loyalties and against critiques
based in the internal differences within the imagined national community” (232). The idea here
is not to suggest conspiracy or a systematic and deliberate plan of action or narration (although
sometimes there was indeed such a plan); rather, each chapter centers on a different kind of
literature – the missionary tract, the repatriation narrative, the adventure story, the insular utopian
tale - to show how a network of plots and myths coalesce around a few core images, such as the
light-skinned Briton responsible for the dark-skinned native, the girl-child as horticultural
specimen, or the heart-of-darkness narrative of penetration into obscure and exotic regions. Ever
present, in each of these narratives, is the argument that the actions undertaken are for the
progress, for progress is invariably understood as desirable, of the child and of the nation.

1 An article in Blackwoods describes the transition of the British presence in India from
supplicants to the Mughals to governors of large swaths of Indian territory as “As lively and as
improbable a romance, as ever came from the pen of a Radcliffe, a Cervantes, or a Scott.” (“The
Indian Army”, Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, XXI (1827), 563.
This Dissertation is a Work in Progress

The five chapters in this dissertation are not meant to constitute a synthetic or developmental account: rather they analyze at least five different ways in which children are represented. Instead of one authoritative story of a literature, this dissertation should be considered as five episodes, which center on missionary fiction, migration from India to England, late colonial depictions of childhood in India, and early and late postcolonial fiction, respectively. This study therefore suggests a scaffold for the periodization of English language writing in nineteenth and twentieth century India. As can happen with a scaffold, there is an element of violence and constraint here: certain texts and historical events are given a great deal of significance, at the expense of others, and at times the understanding of history as a series of crises seems to triumph over an understanding of history as a process, that everywhere echoes, undermines and surprises itself. For the purposes of a diachronic study such as this, periods are a necessary fiction, even if they are answers that provoke questions, to be invoked only to be denied, so that as David Perkins says, the “particularity, local difference, heterogeneity, fluctuation, discontinuity, and strife that are now our preferred categories for understanding any moment of the past” may be made apparent (64). As Frederic Jameson has written, “to those who think that cultural periodization implies some massive kinship and homogeneity or identity within a given period, it may quickly be replied that it is surely only against a certain conception of what is historically dominant or hegemonic that the full value of the exceptional – what Raymond Williams calls the ‘residual’ or ‘emergent’ – can be assessed” (178).

At a speech at the 2011 NEMLA convention on “Victorian Studies Going Forward,” Anne Humpherys talked about how in recent years doctoral scholars are becoming skilled miniaturists. This is my attempt, however flawed, to avoid a detailed miniature and instead to
bite off more than I can chew, quite deliberately. Clearly, the periodization suggested here, and the flows and trends, are imposed on history from my very situated perspective. In a diachronic study such as this one, that takes us through the stages broadly understood as “Orientalist,” “Anglicist,” “Utilitarian,” “Imperialist,” “Decolonization,” “Early Postcolonial” and “Later Postcolonial,” it can be difficult to avoid the suggestion of linearity and even causation, if not progress, suggested by such prefixes as the “De” in Decolonization, or “Post” and “Later.” Fortunately the infinitely complex worlds of children as they grow into gendered and classed citizens with British or Indian identities pose in themselves a challenge to any attempt to oversimplify. What we will see more often than continuities within periods, and discontinuities, whether understood as evolutions or moments of rupture, between periods, are reworkings, echoes, specters, loops, full circles and strange bedfellows. Selective appropriations – of, for example “ancient” Indian culture, “western” economics and the “colonial ethnographic register” - rear their heads frequently in the later works discussed here.

While acknowledging the limitations of this sort of diachronic work, therefore, let us also consider its gifts. Thinking in narrative not only allows us to make sense of our past, it also allows us to make predictions about what will happen next. At the time when the second Iraq war broke out, I sat in the offices of the New York Times, unable to believe that my highly educated colleagues were actually imagining a “successful,” short, justified war. A similar feeling that the humanity was getting edited right out of the equation haunted my perception of the mortgage crisis five years later. As problematic as it is to narrativize, and to try to make sense of crisis and change, it is more problematic, I believe, not to.

1 Ashley Dawson has written about the pitfalls of periodization in his Introduction to The Routledge Concise History of Twentieth Century British Literature – see in particular page 4.
The rewards of stepping back and taking a panoramic view of colonial and postcolonial India have been rich. This has sensitized me to large trends over time, such as the re-imagining of the mercantile relationship between England and India as a moral mission,¹ and the gradual transfer of power (which occurred, according to Amal Chatterjee, between 1800 and 1840)² from traders and soldiers to civil administrators, a shift decried by Kipling, whose love of adventure infuses his work with Orientalist nostalgia. The first chapter of this dissertation talks about the shift from Orientalist attitudes and policies to Anglicist attitudes and policies. Patrick Brantlinger and Talia Schaffer have both written of how the colonies were treated by missionaries as social vacuums “into which the energies of progressive, industrious, white and preferably Protestant races can and should flow” (Charles Kingsley, qtd. in Brantlinger 25-26). Brantlinger goes on to talk about how “India serves as a focus of humanitarian concern for the evangelicals and utilitarians in the 1820s and 1830s” (28). Authors like Elizabeth Hamilton and Mary Martha Sherwood, whose “Little Henry” is the focus of my first chapter, are located somewhere on the Orientalist-Anglicist continuum, rather than being on either one or the other side of a binary. It was not trade per se, but mercantilism that fell out of favor at around the same time that missionary activity became legal. Bernard Semmel, in *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism*

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¹ See Amal Chatterjee 34. The invocation of morality helped to naturalize the British presence in India. An 1823 entry on “Hindus” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* tells us that “The British are foreigners as well as the Moguls; but the latter, who profess the intolerant superstition of Mohammed, suffer their conduct to be influenced by it in such a manner as to treat the natives with the utmost cruelty” (497). Such an understanding of Mughal barbarity helped convince the British public that Britons in India were liberators of an oppressed people.

² See Amal Chatterjee 49
(2004), talks about how free trade theory, central to both liberal and radical thought, was itself often linked to the need for colonization to open new markets and to make the “nonproductive” areas of the globe “productive” (4), a logic that resonates with the civilizing logic of the missionaries. I have thus tried to have it both ways – both present a scaffolding that contextualizes the work under consideration and trouble the boundaries between the various periods and schools of thought even as I distinguish between them to give my argument structure.

One of the gifts of the diachronic structure of the dissertation has been the opportunity to consider writers from different generations in conversation with each other. For instance, the adventure story elements of Sherwood’s writing became clear when her work was read alongside Kipling’s. The piety in Sherwood’s work, meanwhile is reworked by Frances Hodgson Burnett, the dying child of the colony resuscitated as Burnett breathes new life into a figure whose centrality to her own moral formation she acknowledges, but bemoans. In her memoir, Burnett criticizes the tendency toward dreary moralizing in her childhood reading: “I think,” she writes, with reference to tracts like Sherwood’s, “one rather had the feeling of having been born an innately vicious little person who needed laboring with constantly that one might be made merely endurable” (25).

In addition to useful generalizations about Indian literary history, the long view taken here has allowed for a comparison of England’s increasingly dominant economic power over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the post-liberalization texts in which India’s non-aligned stance is seen to give way to what appears to be unfettered American power in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It could be argued as works like Aravind Adiga’s White Tiger increasingly speak not to the U.S., but to China, that the staff of power has
once again shifted, but to this suggestion, ubiquitous in contemporary media, I would say first, that Adiga’s own medium and context give the lie to the canard about Chinese dominance in his novel, and second, that power, like capital, cannot be envisioned as a thing in a place. It exists between places and people and is endlessly dynamic and mutable, and yet it seems to be in an incestuous relationship with its own small family.

We also continue today to hear resounding echoes of a sentiment expressed by J. A. Hobson in 1902: “It has become a commonplace of history how Governments use national animosities, foreign wars and the glamour of empire-making, in order to bemuse the popular mind and divert rising resentment against domestic abuses” (quoted in Brantlinger 34). Brantlinger shows how “The themes of nineteenth-century culture gradually shift … away from domestic class conflict toward racial and international conflict, suggesting how imperialism functioned as an ideological safety valve, deflecting both working-class radicalism and middle-class reformism into noncritical paths while preserving fantasies of aristocratic authority at home and abroad” (35). To anyone who witnessed the path to the early twenty-first century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, this logic should seem familiar. The shift from a focus on class tensions to externalized villains is evident in Indian culture as well. In Bombay cinema, the strong socialist plots of Shree 420 (1955) and Mother India (1957) have given way to the entire film industry’s relentless celebration of conspicuous consumption and glamorization of superficial prosperity as well as its underbelly: the violence that enables and supports the lifestyles of India’s mega-rich. Postcolonial novels, on the other hand, seem to have moved in the opposite direction, i.e. from the nationalist drive of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and to a limited extent R. K. Narayan, where, although India is shown to be a country riven by class, caste and gender barriers, the primary antagonist remains the British, to a greater emphasis on the internal ills plaguing the nation.
Postcolonial fiction is also characterized by a deep anxiety about the new and advancing – but whereas R. K. Narayan turns always to the old in search of answers to life’s persistent questions, later postcolonial writers are as suspicious of the fabled Brahmanical past as they are of the direction(s) in which India seems headed. Their stories are like headless chickens – running everywhere, deeply disturbing, and with no clear sense of direction; the only certainty seems to be impending doom. In my final chapter, however, I argue against this reading by suggesting that what seems at first to be resignation is actually the first step toward action, i.e. the acknowledgement of the problems of progress and development.
Chapter 1

Little Henry’s Burdens: Missionary Fiction and the Advent of Victorian India

Hope of the world, the rising race

May heaven with fostering love embrace

And turning to a whiter page

Commence with them a better age!

An age of light and joy, which we,

Alas! In promise only see.

- Anna Laetitia Barbauld, epilogue to Evenings at Home (1782-86)

Introduction

Mary Martha Sherwood’s “The History of Little Henry and His Bearer” (1814) takes us as far back in time as we can go with a study of child characters in Anglophone novels set in India. Before “Little Henry,” there was little fiction written in English about India, and

1 The term “bearer” refers quite literally to a male servant who carries his employers and their families around, either in a palanquin, or, as in the case of Little Henry, in his arms. The term is also more loosely used to designate a manservant who works closely with the family, such as a valet or a caregiver for young children.
representations of British children in India would be even harder to find, as British women and
children started to settle in India in larger numbers almost a century after the men of the East
India Company did. “Little Henry” was conceived around the time that missionary work was
legalized for the first time by the East India Company. Prose fiction, the Evangelical movement
and Anglicist1 policies also became more widespread at this time. Historians2 commonly depict
the passing of the Charter Act of 1813 as a watershed moment in colonial history, separating the
Orientalist embrace of Indian culture that went before3 from the promotion of British culture and
Christianity that was to follow. The boundary between Orientalist and Anglicist policies is a
permeable one, however. As Amal Chatterjee points out, “The status of Christianity had actually
been enhanced by the Orientalists’ study of religion, while Hinduism had sunk even lower”

1 i.e. the privileging of British culture over Indian culture
2 Percival Spear, William Dalrymple and Gauri Viswanathan, for example
3 William Jones suggests some of the pragmatic reasoning that informed Orientalist tolerance of
Hinduism in this comment on the Manu Smriti, a Hindu code of laws: “Whatever opinion in
short may be formed of MENU and his laws, in a country happily enlightened by sound
philosophy and the only true revelation, it must be remembered, that those laws are actually
revered, as the words of the Most High, by nations of great importance to the political and
commercial interests of Europe, and particularly by many millions of Hindu subjects, whose well
directed industry would add largely to the wealth of Britain, and who ask no more in return than
the protection for their persons and places of abode, justice in their temporal concerns,
indulgence to the prejudices of their own religion, and the benefit of those laws, which they have
been taught to believe sacred, and which they alone can possibly comprehend” (qtd in Amal
Chatterjee, 69).
Philip Meadows Taylor, for example, wrote of English soldiers anxious to see “a native of that noble land – a Hindoo, one who worshipped idols, whose faith and manners had been undisturbed for ages; while in the west had spread new faiths, new systems, where everything was daily advancing in civilization” (I, 301). The Orientalist fascination with Hinduism, here, is piqued by the contrast between what is perceived as a stagnant culture and the onward march of progress in British thought. The will to drag Little Henry and his bearer into a brighter age, an age of Evangelical enlightenment, is germane to Sherwood’s text and would remain central to Victorian thought.¹ Supriya Goswami, in Colonialism in Children’s Literature (2012), argues that far from being represented as insulated from the public sphere, child characters are represented in colonial British and Indian literature as intervening at critical moments in Indian history to effect change. My argument is similar to hers, particularly where she notes the anxiety that invariably comes across in narratives like “Little Henry.” However, Goswami’s reading of Boosy’s conversion as fraught with contradictions show Goswami’s own biases coming through; the implied narrator of “Little Henry” is clearly sincere in her belief that a conversion has taken place – to suggest otherwise constitutes a rather creative reading. Goswami is nonetheless correct in identifying the weird layering of optimism and anxiety in “Little Henry” – it is a text about a child who dies, yet it is hopeful for a brighter age, but not wholly hopeful; Henry’s death, and the divided sympathies within the text, signal that although it is vital to continue hoping for a brighter age, that brighter age is continually deferred. To arrive at that brighter age, to remove all traces of Orientalist and Indian culture, would be to defeat the missionary’s raison d’etre, and to eliminate any interest and tension in the sort of tract Sherwood loved to write.

¹ See Eli Adams 92
“Little Henry and His Bearer” belongs to a specific subgenre of Evangelical fiction: the Evangelical colonial text, or missionary text. This chapter will proceed first through a discussion of Little Henry’s literary antecedents, and then focus on Mary Martha Sherwood and her 1814 tract. The sources for this chapter include the journals of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britons in India, Orientalist, Evangelical and Anglicist writing, and contemporary works of history, postcolonial theory and literary criticism that illuminate Sherwood’s work and world.

**From the Moral Tale to Evangelical Fiction**

Mary Martha Sherwood lived through very interesting times, even before she reached Indian shores. The England she grew up in was engaged in an apparently endless war with France, accompanied by much domestic turmoil. Amid economic strain and labor unrest, radical writings against church and government proliferated.\(^1\) Traditional social structures and religious faith seemed to be beleaguered. The climate was ripe for revolution, and the Evangelical movement that swept England can indeed be thought of as a revolution, albeit a “quiet domestic” one, as M. Nancy Cutt puts it. Unlike Methodism, which had been more popular among the working classes, the Evangelical movement swept every social class. Cutt attributes the rapid spread of Evangelicalism after 1800 in part to the sheer simplicity of the Evangelical message: “Since the light of reason had failed to illuminate the darkness of the age, and there was little evidence of that general improvement of society so confidently anticipated a generation before, educators were turning to the promise of a spiritually-regenerated society held out by the Evangelicals,” who, “with breath-taking confidence, […] claimed to be able to chart a way

\(^1\) Produced by writers like Thomas Paine, William Cobbett, and Richard Carlile.
through the universal confusion and alleviate the general distress” (Mrs. Sherwood, 8-9, 21). The sharply defined principles of Evangelicalism, which saw only two alternatives in every situation, one acceptable, the other repugnant to God, served to settle even the most vexing questions. Their message found many recipients, and many of these recipients were willing ones.

While the Movement grew rapidly, and was revolutionary in its effects, it had actually been a long time coming – it was, according to Cutt, an outgrowth of the latent strain of Puritanism that had survived eighteenth century humanism. By 1800 Evangelicalism had behind it half a century of effort; by 1810, new writers for children were mostly Evangelicals or Evangelical sympathizers; and by 1820 the Movement was both respectable and fashionable (Cutt Mrs. Sherwood, 6; Ministering Angels, 20). By the nineteenth century Evangelical ideas had become fairly mainstream; they were in accordance with emerging economic ideas and, in their battle against what Cutt calls “a gaudy assortment of ballads, tales and romances in chapbooks (many extremely crude); lurid crimesheets; and, most sinister of all in the 1780s and 1790s, radical political pamphlets…” they were aligned with the British government (Ministering Angels, 14). In the context of India, the British political establishment overruled the East India Company’s policy of “religious tolerance” and allowed missionaries to proselytize freely starting in 1813, granting the Movement official sanction.

Evangelical writers sought to change the taste, morals, religious thought and religious practice of first Britons, and then as much of the world as came under British control. In this mission, their success was immense. They re-educated a high proportion of their contemporaries, and focused much of their energy on the next generation, the “rising race” of which Anna Laetitia Barbauld writes in Evenings at Home (1786).
Didactic prose for, and about, children, began to change with the cultural changes in Britain at the end of the 18th century. M. Nancy Cutt points to the many differences between Evangelical fiction and the earlier moral tales (1760-1820) for children; for example, the sense of urgency in Evangelical tales that sets them apart from such generic cousins as *The History of Little Goody Two Shoes* (1765). In a related distinction, whereas moral tales like *Goody Two Shoes* tended to proceed towards the desirable conclusion via a step-by-step rational approach, Evangelical writers relied more on emotions. Despite their tendency to be suspicious of poetry, Evangelicals drew from the Romantics, using pathos and sentiment to great effect, and emphasizing a non-rational belief that set itself apart from everyday secular convictions in that it could not be arrived at through logical argument. This actually makes many works of Evangelical fiction more accessible to modern readers than their moral-tale predecessors, where the teaching was often arrived at through overworked dialogue between a mentor and the child-protagonist. The child-protagonist thus discusses in the course of its everyday life great philosophical questions, its incredible youth notwithstanding, and winds up being not much of a child, and for that matter not much of a protagonist: as Cutt points out, “with a few happy exceptions like Maria Edgeworth’s Rosamond, [these characters] were not childlike; present, like the young reader, to be instructed, they had the sameness of creatures of fable, obviously contrived to show the progression from ignorance to knowledge. The point of view in all this

1 See James Eli Adams’s, *History of Victorian Literature* (2012) Adams tells us that poetry was seen as childish or feminine by thinkers like Bentham. Even Macaulay, who was a poetry lover, declared in his essay on Milton that “poetry was an achievement that civilization would simply outgrow.” As Adams puts it, “Macaulay loved poetry – *Lays of Ancient Rome* would be one of the best-selling poetry volumes of the age - but he loved his progress more” (19).
literature was that of the parent or mentor.” Cutt gives the example of Mary Wollstonecraft’s humorless *Original Stories* (1788) wherein the two little girls are “barely distinguishable as individuals” and “undergo a chillingly rational training under the eye of the omniscient Mrs. Mason” (*Ministering Angels*, 7,8). By contrast, “Little Henry” seems to be written for readers who, like Henry, need instruction in Evangelical Christianity; in this, we are to identify with the child-protagonist. Little Henry is a well-developed individual character, with foibles, emotions and touching qualities that are relatable and realistic. We will look here first at the substitution of Religion for Reason and the heightened individualism in children’s texts, and then at the implications of such a shift in the education of the children growing up in an age of empire and international commerce.

Eighteenth-century education on a rational and material basis, according to the Evangelicals, had promoted religious indifference, atheism and revolution (*Mrs. Sherwood*, 10). Evangelicals proposed to reverse this state of affairs by altering educational principles. Evangelical thinkers, while believing in the medium of prose narrative to demonstrate the possibility of the progress of the soul, considered the Enlightenment idea of the supremacy of human reason to be a form of pride that could not be reconciled with their understanding of Christianity, and “proceeded to replace the Rule of Reason in children’s books [with] the Rule of Religion” (*Mrs. Sherwood*, 18). Another difference between the Evangelical tale and its literary predecessors was that the eighteenth century moral tale, as opposed to the later Evangelical tale, “presupposed the stable society and the traditional parish organization” (*Ministering Angels*, 8,9). Hence the moral tale, in addition to providing dubious entertainment and immediate instruction of several kinds, attempted to mold the child, the raw material, into a socially acceptable adult. The main concern in moral tales was the improvement of society.
Towards the end of the century, the argument in the mainstream of children’s literature began to shift from the moral/social argument to the Evangelical one of individual repentance and salvation. Writers emphasized Reason and social responsibility less; the emphasis shifted to the individual’s direct relationship to God, and his relationship to his own soul. As the century progressed, the ties between Christianity and the social virtues would loosen. With the work of mid-Victorian writers like Samuel Smiles, some varieties of non-conformist Evangelicalism would become more closely connected with political economy, and the importance of charity as central to Christianity would diminish. Sherwood’s generation of Evangelicals, although distinguished from other Christian and secular movements in ministering to all social classes, was sowing the seeds for a path towards “Self-Help” as a noble and worthy end: “Little Henry,” for one, centers on individual freedom and individual responsibility in a way that has more in common with Romantic conceptions of the Self than with the more diffuse focus of the moral tale.

**Missionary Fiction**

Missionary fiction weaves together Evangelical schemes with representations of foreign spaces populated with souls in desperate need of saving. Anglicist missionary writing tended to be rather Manichean in its organization, the more so when set in the colony, where good and bad, Christian and heathen, Briton and Indian were arranged into useful (i.e. comprehensible, easily manipulated) binaries. Skilled writers like Sherwood did work some degree of complexity into their characterizations, as we will see, but tales like “Little Henry and His Bearer” show clearly the rising prevalence of Christians and Heathens as oppositional categories. For the most part the
nuance of Orientalist writing was waning in popularity. As Cutt puts it, “To like, admire or even to understand the state of affairs that one is bent upon changing, complicates the matter unbearably, and the secret of Evangelical success was simplification” (Mrs. Sherwood, 22). The Manichean organization of Anglicist and Evangelical writing also made for fairly sensational reading, and the melodramatic schema in which good is pitted against evil\(^1\) became heightened in colonial tales. A firm belief in the evils of Hinduism was invariably expressed in missionary writing until well past the middle of the century.

The melodrama in missionary tales lies partly in the pitting of virtuous, heroic and/or suffering protagonists against the threats of the Indian social, religious and natural environment, in which struggle the Christian virtues of endurance and sacrifice are shown to best advantage. A Christian triumph is shown in these tales to be entirely distinct from worldly triumphs. Earthly tragedies, like death and enslavement, may be understood in positive terms within a missionary tale.

Even as the obituary tracts of the 18\(^{th}\) century, whose protagonists died before the reader ever met them, gave way to the more realistic and entertaining Evangelical tracts of the early nineteenth century, death continued to be an important feature of improving fiction. A recurring pattern in the missionary stories that succeeded the 18\(^{th}\) century moral tale and proliferated in the first decades of the nineteenth century was the conversion of children, whose presumed innocence made them susceptible recipients of Evangelical ideas.\(^2\) The children then become the means to the end of adult conversions. Conversion was often represented as a rehabilitation, a

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1 See *Little Henry* 12

2 See Goswami 30
new life, which comes on the heels of a symbolic death. Life is seen as preparation for death; death in turn is a portal to either eternal life or eternal damnation. Deaths, especially the picturesque deaths of picturesque children, were a powerful sentimental and pathetic device for inspiring feeling (rather than thought) in the reader, as well an excellent opportunity for moralizing on sacrifice, resurrection and the call to imitate Christ.

This imitation of Christ was somewhat narrowly defined; as discussed previously, Evangelicals concerned themselves more with the individual than with society. They argued that “since all souls were equal in the sight of God, throughout eternity, the inequality of bodies here on earth, being temporary, was comparatively unimportant” (Mrs. Sherwood, 9). Evangelicals before 1850, as Cutt says in a chapter from Ministering Angels (1979) entitled “Mission and Omission,” omitted involving themselves with the homegrown needy, and put more effort into the alleviation of the perceived (spiritual) distress of slaves in the Americas and Hindus in India. As “Little Henry” shows, corporeal suffering was not seen as a thing to avoid or alleviate, necessarily; Evangelicals like Sherwood held resignation, i.e. resigning oneself to physical hardship, to be an important Christian virtue. Evangelical energies were dedicated not to the making of a better world, but to the making of better people in preparation for the next world. Unlike later writers such as Kipling and Burnett, therefore, who set store by the physical wellbeing of the child and do not see good health as an impediment to spiritual progress, Sherwood clearly puts the welfare of the soul before that of the body.

The missionary’s role vis-à-vis worldly problems was similarly narrowly defined in the early nineteenth century. Sherwood’s tale The Recaptured Negro (1821) is a fine example of the perceived incompatibility of the interests of the body with the interests of the soul: while Sherwood tells the story with her characteristic sympathy and sweetness, and while, as we will
see in the brief biographical discussion below, Sherwood was able to imagine the plight of her Indian staff with more clarity than some of her contemporaries, *The Recaptured Negro*, which culminates in the freed slave’s conversion of his pagan mother, carries the clear and typical lesson that it is better to be enslaved and Christian than free and pagan. In short the Evangelical idea of responsibility, to the poor and oppressed as well as to the non-human environment, was wonderfully compatible with *laissez-faire* principles as well as ideas of maximum resource exploitation.¹ Years later, Thomas Babington Macaulay would argue that “to trade with civilized men is infinitely more profitable than to govern savages;” Jenny Sharpe argues that this indistinguishability between humanitarian and economic aims was present in from the earliest inception of the “human-making project” of “inculcating [in colonial subjects] Western tastes and values” (7).

As British control over the subcontinent began to increase, and as the colonial government began to argue that the colonizing power was responsible for the interests, happiness and improvement of India and Indians,² British attitudes to Indian natural resources moved from relative unconcern towards an interest in what would have been understood as optimal resource exploitation. We see the direction that environmental attitudes will take being determined before the missionaries ever gained a say in it, in this letter from a returned officer from Bengal to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1772:

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¹ For more on the connections between evangelical and economic thought, see Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (1988)

² See Viswanathan
For the sake of my country, and the honour of the English name, I sincerely wish that a thick veil could be drawn over the methods of acquiring fortunes in India for some years past (especially the last seven years) as well as over the monstrous and unconstitutional powers, with which our nabobs in that country have been permitted to invest themselves […]

In the year 1765, when the *Prince and Father of Nabobs*, whose nod, like that which shakes Olympus, could destroy the inhabitants of the Earth, shook his awful brow and said, ‘Let there be a monopoly of the necessaries of life, for the benefit of my family and friends,’ he signed a death warrant for two million of his fellow creatures! […]

I have known Bengal for many years. I have travelled over that country, when it was in reality the garden of the world; when the villages were large, populous, and flourishing; when the extensive plains were covered with lowing herds and laughing husbandmen; and when the manufacturer sung under every shady tree… (69, italics in original)

The “Prince of Nabobs” referred to above is Warren Hastings’s predecessor, Governor General Robert Clive. Clive and his acolytes are charged by the writer with the sort of exploitation that would prove detrimental to the lush fertility of Bengal, the garden of the world. In “The Bramin and the River Ganges” (1774), Nathaniel Halhed seeks to distinguish Hastings from his predecessor. Where Clive had been seen as a despoiler of the Indian environment, Hastings, an avid botanist, is depicted as tending his Indian garden with a parental hand; Halhed
suggests that resistance to Hastings’ rule would be as unnatural as a plant rejecting the ministrations of the gardener:

The frail exotic might as well accuse

Th’ officious kindness of the planter’s care,

That shelters it from autumn’s sickly dews,

And blunts the keenness of December’s air. (l. 45)

Thus, as Michael J. Franklin puts it, an absolute contrast is established between Hastings and his predecessor. The reductive comparison of Hindus with botanical specimens anticipates later constructions of India involving what Ronald Inden calls “a rationalization of the irrationality of the Indians by pointing to a natural cause. Indian civilization is conceived of on the analogy of an organism [...] fundamentally a product of its environment” (127). The benign paternalism of Halhed’s gardening metaphor crops up again as the river Ganga talks about how Hastings fosters scientific research:

Yet, not confin’d to legislation’s sphere,
‘Tis He shall bid fair science to take root;
Shall nurture ev’ry plant that she may rear,
And teach her tender scyons how to shoot:
And haply animate some vent’rous eye
T’ explore the mysteries concealed so long:
To trace where learning’s earliest sources lie,
And ope the fountains of Sanscritian song. (l. 65)
Hastings, as characterized here, is moving from a purely legal/rational association with India toward something more organic. Good husbandry of extant Hindu knowledge morphs by the time Little Henry comes along, and stewardship comes to mean a transplanting of Western, Christian values rather than a cultivation of native merits (natives had by this time been thoroughly demerited) in a process understood as “civilization;” a term that carries connotations of control and utility, with reference to both vegetation and in human populations. As William Hodges wrote in *Travels in India* (1793): “Where there is neatness in the cultivation of the land, and that land tilled to the utmost of its boundaries, it may reasonably be supposed that the government is the protector and not the oppressor of the people. Throughout the kingdom of Bengal it appears highly flourishing in tillage of every kind, and abounding in cattle. The villages are clean and filled with swarms of people” (17). Co-incidental with this general flourishing were the reforms of Lord Cornwallis, whom Amal Chatterjee tells us was convinced that all Indians were corrupt and therefore promptly upon his arrival in Calcutta replaced all Indians in high positions. Native judges were replaced by British judges. Cornwallis believed that “Anglicizing” India was the only means of ensuring “stability and progress;” and his successor, Richard Wellesley, continued his policies, ensuring that revenue collectors and judges were kept at an incorruptible distance from the people. Social interaction between Britons in positions of power and Indians was brought to a minimum (Amal Chatterjee 25).

“Civilization” was a concept as central to missionary writers as it was to civil servants, and to Evangelical missionaries it was fairly narrowly defined. The Biblical idea of the “wilderness” as the preserve of Satan was opposed, in the Evangelical imagination, to Christian civilization. The colonies were to Sherwood’s generation of missionaries a vast wilderness - a complex of heathens and untamed nature in need of cultivation and control. Combating the
“wilderness,” for Evangelicals, thus entailed both the conversion of souls and, oddly enough, a more literal component. In his journal, Reginald Heber, Bishop of Calcutta, wrote:

It is curious and interesting to find both the apparently progressive improvement of the country under the British government, as contrasted with its previous state, and also how soon, how easily, in a settled country, the most formidable wild animals become extinct before the power of man. The tiger will soon be almost as great a rarity in our eastern as in our western dominions: the snake, however, will hold his ground longer. (Bishop Heber, qtd, in Bishop Heber’s Journals & c.)

Kipling would take on that biblical enemy, the ground-holding snake, in “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” (1894) at the end of the century. Meanwhile in “Little Henry” we have this pearl of environmentally irresponsible Evangelism: “Boosy, this is a good country,” says little Henry, “that is, it would be a very good country if the people were Christians. Then they would not be so idle as they now are; and they would agree together, and clear the jungles, and build churches to worship God in” (56).

The first step toward clearing the jungle, then, is the conversion of the natives, and as we have seen, the case for conversion had to be made by the elevation of British culture and Christianity above Indian cultures and religions. Anglicism at its most extreme was premised on there being no civilization outside of British civilization. Missionary activity applied that principle to the human soul, where only two possibilities were imagined: missionary cultivation, which was inherently caring and improving, or wasteful absence.¹ The paternalistic government

¹ See Schaffer 2005
was partnered by the maternalistic mission; it was primarily through missionary activity that British women were able to exert their influence, in public as well as private spheres, as writers, educators, mother figures and evangelists.

**Mary Martha Sherwood**

Sherwood belonged to the first generation of officially sanctioned missionaries in India. She was a close friend of Henry Martyn’s, and shared his mission to educate as many of the “theologically illiterate” - a category that included children and natives, and which grew to encompass readings back home - as possible. She was a deep believer in the absolute necessity of spreading her faith in order to save what she saw as otherwise hopeless souls. The merits of Hinduism, which had been obvious to William Jones’s generation, were beyond the grasp of Sherwood’s generation, or at least of her genre. She wrote in her diary: “…how anyone can contemplate the miserable effects of a false religion […] and yet make no efforts whatever for the deliverance of persons who are under these horrors of darkness, would seem almost beyond belief were it not so general.” She attributes the misery she perceives in the faces of Indian women to “those abominable creeds which we think it an act of charity not merely to tolerate but to patronize” – an apparently direct reference to the Orientalists (Darton 251-3).

In addition to her importance in the history of missionary work in India, Sherwood is an interesting example of nineteenth century Anglo-Indian womanhood. She was a member of the first generation of British women to settle in India in larger numbers, and she did not restrict her influence to the private sphere. Her life and work illuminates for us some of the ways in which British women began to be involved in the colonies, through missionary work, and through
writing. Her stories were initially written for the Indian and Anglo-Indian children she was educating, but they rapidly became popular in Britain.

As we have seen, a feature of Evangelical fiction was the urgency with which it put its message forward. M. Nancy Cutt suggests that “Doing the next thing, the work close at hand, was one way of restoring order in a chaotic world” (Mrs. Sherwood, 10). This may be understood in a broad sense as the importance to the colonists of creating in the colonies an order that would render their new environs coherent, and also in a sense personal to Sherwood, four of whose children died in India, to be memorialized, canonized even, by their namesakes in her fiction. Perhaps to her life in India was chaotic, and perhaps she was driven in part by the need to sublimate her Indian experience and find meaning in her colonial situation. For women of her generation, the work of imposing order on their surroundings seemed most achievable through education: as Cutt puts it, “they taught the ignorant to read; bought and distributed Bibles and tracts; wrote for children, for the newly-literate, for servants and villagers. This was the work to which Mrs. Sherwood had long felt herself called” (Mrs. Sherwood, 10). Through her work, Sherwood sought to remedy what to her was the unacceptable religious neutrality of the Company. She petitioned the Company in order to be allowed to evangelize in the school she opened and in the Cantonments where she taught. Company policy was at that time more generally under attack, both from within and from without, and so Sherwood’s efforts were appreciated by many. In every post she set up school, sometimes in her own verandah, and taught “native, half-caste and Anglo-Indian children” (Mrs. Sherwood, 14). There were many children on barracks, because while the East India Company restricted the number of wives to be accommodated to ten in each barracks, there was no restriction on native mistresses.
Sherwood’s expressed aspiration was always toward the greater glory of God, but to the modern reader, the lessons to be learned from Sherwood’s missionary stories may be less interesting than her impressions of India: what Cutt calls her “realism.” What comes across as realistic to Cutt, however, is not received quite the same way by Indira Ghose. Even as she says that Sherwood believed that life in India was morally debilitating (Mrs. Sherwood, 20), Cutt praises Sherwood’s vivid descriptions of Indian life, asserting that the sprinkling of Hindustani terms “made for an agreeable contrast with the humdrum domestic setting of the average tract.” Cutt repeatedly describes Sherwood’s Indian settings as “Romantic” and suggests that what seems to be melodrama in Sherwood’s work is actually realism (Mrs. Sherwood, 21). A sprinkling of Hindustani terms does not realism make, however, and a view of India and Indians as Romantic elements requires an outside perspective. In Indira Ghose’s Memsahibs Abroad (1998), Sherwood’s aversions to aspects of Indian life and her mission to control and change native belief systems become foregrounded.

Sherwood was not shy of direct proselytizing on the divinity of Christ and revealed religion, themes that an earlier generation of Evangelicals would have disparaged as undignified and Methodistical “enthusiasm” (this disparagement is represented within “Little Henry” through Henry’s frivolous Mamma). Later characterizations of Christ, such as Lucy Aikin’s interpretation of Thomas Day’s Sandford and Merton (1868)¹, eschew direct proselytizing which was once again viewed as harmful to colonial relations and to British security in the colonies.

Sherwood began to write tales and novels rather than tracts in 1825; Cutt speculates that her decreasing Evangelical fervor was attributable to the fading of the memory of the painful

¹ Day’s original Sandford and Merton was published in 1783
Indian years – heathens and dying children ceased to feature quite so strongly in her work.

Sherwood’s move from tracts to novels may have had something to do with changing perceptions of the reading public, as well: the novel began to be perceived as more respectable, thanks to the work of Maria Edgeworth, Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. Missionary fiction in India for later generations of writers took a stealthy turn: the tone taken by Frances Hodgson Burnett and Marguerite Butler is very different from Sherwood’s; in fact as far back as 1868, after the Revolt of 1857, Mary Carpenter describes a little colony of Christian converts, who are, in her opinion, better dressed and less ornamented than Indians elsewhere, she tells us that they “live consistent lives,” and has no doubt as to the cause of this sudden perceived coherence: “This little colony appeared to me a striking instance of the natural effects of Christianity” (1:78-80). Carpenter makes the case for conversion in an indirect way that is very different from Sherwood’s urgent, unequivocal protests. The onset of Christianity, in “Little Henry,” is effected by extreme effort – the fight for souls is in fact a fight to the death.

“Little Henry and His Bearer”

At the outset of his narrative, Little Henry, a toddler of British extraction, is marooned on the subcontinent in the wake of his deceased parents. He is well cared for, between Boosy, his bearer, who is almost a mother figure to him, and an Anglo-Indian lady who provides for his material needs. Neither, however, is fit to undertake his spiritual instruction; the former is a Hindu, the latter a frivolous and worldly subscriber to older Orientalist attitudes, who smokes hookahs and is by turns amused and annoyed by what she disparagingly calls the “Methodism” of her more religious acquaintances. This deficiency is corrected by a visitor to Little Henry’s
home, who teaches him to read, and introduces him to the Bible, and to a conception of himself as a sinner. She teaches him the necessity of prayer, and the concept of Eternal Life, so that when he dies, he is able to amaze those around him by his lack of fear. When she is forced to leave him, his religious teacher begs him to make a Christian of Boosy, and Henry applies himself assiduously to this task. It is only Henry’s death, however, that finally convinces Boosy to take on the Christian name of John, and to give up his caste and practice his new religion with sincerity.

This story encapsulates many Anglo-Indian concerns from the early decades of the nineteenth century: the increasing disapproval of Orientalist ways, the need for education and missionary work, and the dangers, both cultural and mortal, to which children were thought to be exposed in India. In addition, Sherwood provides us with an early portrait of a figure that would recur in Anglo-Indian writing through the Victorian era: the Indian caregiver.

“Little Henry” also exemplifies the Indian missionary tale in that it is a tract, a medium favored by Evangelicals, to whose work the circulation of print was so vital. Sherwood was a great producer of tract fiction. Cheaply produced, widely distributed, and considered readable by contrast to eighteenth-century moral tales, tract fiction was a useful tool for the education of children and the more general dissemination of ideas. Cutt tells us that “Tract fiction was a particularly useful weapon in [the] war on immorality and ignorance: aimed at the theologically illiterate; i.e. children and newly-literate adults, tracts made a sizable proportion of the printed matter of the nineteenth century, and tract fiction was until after 1900 a large proportion of children’s literature in the Dominions.” With “The History of Little Henry and His Bearer,” in addition to its didactic function, “the narrative tract came to life” (Cutt xi). “Little Henry” is an
exemplary narrative tract in that it is entertaining enough to attract and retain readers, without distracting them from its moral and religious lesson.

Other ways in which “Little Henry” is a good example of missionary fiction include the tension within the text between the belief in radical difference and belief in the civilizability of the native convert; the close connection that Evangelicals perceived between education and Christianity; and the departure from the more diffuse concern with society expressed in eighteenth-century moral tales, which had given way in the early nineteenth century to a focus on the journey of the individual soul, very often exemplified by a sentimentally portrayed short-lived child.

Short-lived children proliferate particularly in colonial novels. There may be some basis for their high mortality rate in the reality of British transplants trying without success to raise thriving children in unaccustomed environs. E. Augusta King writes: “it has always been impossible to colonize the plains of India, as the second generation, or so many as survive childhood, are weak miserable creatures, destroyed in body and mind by the heat” (104) and Emma Roberts, in the early part of the nineteenth century, writes, “Infant life in the torrid zone hangs upon so fragile a thread, that the slightest ailment awakens alarm; the distrust of native attendants, sometimes but too well-founded, adds to maternal terrors, and where the society is small, the social meetings of a station are suspended, should illness, however slight, prevail among the baba logue.” (121) In “Little Henry,” when friend of Henry’s guardian remarks that the child “was very pale, and his eyes were heavy” his guardian answers, “O, this is nothing; the child is well enough; children in India, you know, have that look” (23).
Sherwood’s own experience seems to have affected her work, which tends to center on young invalids named after the four children she lost in India. The young protagonists also tend to die, but not before converting their servants to Christianity. There is a tradition in Evangelical fiction of portraying saintly children, and Sherwood, certainly, seems to set store by the beatific qualities of infants: little Henry is thus simultaneously a sinner, in keeping with Evangelical thoughts on children, and a saint, markedly innocent, sincere in his struggle to do better on his spiritual journey, cut down early in his life, and undoubtedly saved in the end. Sherwood thus seems to sublimate her Indian experience as she allays the anxieties of her readers, by suggesting that unwholesome as the Indian environment is, it is nothing less than the divine duty of Britons, young and old, to brave it in order to bring new followers to Christ. There is also a tradition among writers from Sherwood through Frances Hodgson Burnett, and on to twentieth century writers like Marguerite Duras, of portraying the colonies as places of disease and death. How much of this unwholesomeness was reflected by the reality of life in the colonies is hard to determine, but we should bear in mind here that to a writer like Kipling, the colony was a life-giving place, a place of vitality. The dangers of the colony were, perhaps, a matter of perspective, and of adaptability or the lack thereof.

Although Sherwood portrays the colonies as dangerous in many ways, this is not a reason for retreat – on the contrary, unlike later Darwinist writers, Sherwood does not seem at all concerned for the “survival of the race:” the propagation of the faith is more important to her. She focuses on the spiritual journey of two individual characters: Henry and Boosy. There is a tension persistent in Sherwood’s novels, between a perception of fundamental difference between Britons and Indians, and the notion of the civilizability and potential for salvation of the native. The bridging of the divide between those two perceptions requires an exceptional Briton
and an exceptional native, Henry and Boosy in this case, and requires that these exceptional characters be treated as exemplary, in the case of the missionary, and reproducible, in the case of the convert. The narrative is hopeful in that resistant though Boosy is, his resistance is passive, and despite his heathen beliefs, he is at bottom more worthy, if anything, of salvation than the frivolous English guardian who caters solely to Henry’s material needs. Boosy works both as an intensely individual character, and as synecdoche for all potential Indian converts.

In an article about Evangelical thought in Charlotte Yonge’s work, Talia Schaffer talks about how Evangelicals categorized certain peoples as “wild,” associating them with untamed nature; this designation erases any sense of an indigenous culture or local structure, and recognizes missionary cultivation as the only valid sort of cultivation. As Schaffer puts it, “There is either missionary cultivation, which is inherently caring and improving, or there is a wasteful absence” (136–37). We see a similar worldview in “Little Henry” when Henry opines that India would be a very good country if only the people were Christians, in which case they would clear the jungles and build churches to worship God in. The construction of the colony as a wilderness is also evident in the attitude to Hinduism shown by Henry’s religious teacher, and then Henry himself, as he tries to convert Boosy. Henry’s so-called spiritual progress is from a belief in the equal validity of all religions to a conviction that Christianity is the only true religion, so that when his Bearer tries, passively, to resist Henry’s attempts to convert him, Henry cries out, “Poor Boosy! Poor Boosy! You are going the wrong way, and will not let me set you right: there is but one way to heaven; our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the way to heaven; and no man cometh unto God but by him” (20). The control of nature, the conquering of the wilderness and

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1 The Irish and the Melanesians, specifically, are designated “wild” by Yonge.
the advent of what Sherwood saw as the true religion are simultaneous events, inseparable from each other.

Sherwood’s focus on the individual human means that she constructs society and the environment as things to be overcome. Each is its own form of wilderness; Anglo-Indian society a series of temptations, to which Henry’s guardian succumbs, and the jungles a form of waste in Sherwood’s view. Wasted also are the inherently good qualities that Boosy has, which lie fallow until Henry intervenes and cultivates Boosy’s gifts for the greater glory of a Christian God. Like Charlotte Yonge’s quarry, Boosy is depicted as a product of nature, to be turned into a product of culture.

Yet, given her firm belief in the “horrors of darkness” under which non-Christians labored, Sherwood’s portrayal of Boosy is surprisingly sympathetic. She sees in him more intrinsic value and more potential than in Henry’s English guardian; her critique within “Little Henry” is not reserved for natives but is directed primarily at those of her countrymen who have not embraced Evangelical Christianity. Like Elizabeth Hamilton’s Hindoo Rajah, Sherwood’s Boosy is in part intended to indict the less enlightened of her countrymen, whom she portrays as debased, at least in part through exposure to foreign climes and culture. “Little Henry” thus contrasts the loyal Indian servant with the negligent English guardians of the child protagonist.

In the following passage, we see that neither the servants nor the guardian are fit to take care of Henry, in Sherwood’s opinion, but at least the servants are devoted to Henry, any shortcomings stemming from ignorance on their part, whereas the guardian has access to a church, but fails in her duty to attend to the religious education of the child in her care:

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1 In *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796)
the lady in whose house he lived (although he was taught to call her mamma) paid him no kind of attention; and it never occurred to her that it was right to give him any religious instructions. He used to see his bearer and the other natives performing *poojah*, [ceremony - offering] and carrying about their wooden and clay gods; and he knew that his mother sometimes went to church at Dinapore: so he believed that there were a great many gods, and that the God to whom his mother had prayed at Dinapore was no better than the gods of wood, and stone, and clay which his bearer worshipped. He also believed that the river Ganges was a goddess, and called Gunga; and that the water of the river could take away sins. He believed, too, that the Mussulmauns were as good as Christians; for his mother's *khaunsaumaun* [a kind of house-steward] had told him so. Henry was moreover taught by the servants many things which a little boy should not know: but the servants, being heathens, could not be expected to teach him any thing better; and therefore they were not so much to be blamed as the lady who had undertaken the charge of him, who might have been ashamed to leave the child of Christian parents under the care of such persons. (10)

Henry’s “mama” is a sort of female nabob, who “employed herself at table (when not actually eating) in smoking her *hookah,*” as well as in abusing the servants who patiently fanned her with leaves. Like the nabobs, she indulges in so-called oriental vices and lives in a fairly feudal manner. The contrast between what Sherwood sees as the worst of Anglo-Indian society: the consumerist, frivolous and worldly, with the best: the pious, austere and salvation-bound, is made most clear in an exchange that occurs when Henry and his guardian visit the Smiths of Calcutta:
It happened one afternoon, as Mr. and Mrs. Smith and Henry's mamma were in the drawing-room after tiffin, while the ladies were giving their opinion upon a magazine, which contained an account of the last European fashion of carriages and dresses, &c. (for I am sorry to say, that Mrs. Smith, although she had the best example in her husband, had still to learn not to love the world) Mr. Smith, half angry with them, and yet not knowing whether he should presume to give them a check, was walking up and down the room with a rather hasty step; when his eye, as he passed the door, caught little Henry sitting on the mat at the head of the stairs, between his bearer's knees, with his Bible in his hand. (83)

Moved by the contrast, Mr. Smith exclaims:

“For shame! for shame! Mrs. Smith, will you never lay aside your toys and gewgaws? Do give me that book, and I will let the cook have it to light his fire with. - Here are two persons, who have been nearly fifty years in the world, sitting together talking of their finery and painted toys; while a little creature, who eight years ago had not breathed the breath of life, is endeavouring to impart divine knowledge to the heathen.” (85-86)

While Mrs. Smith expresses astonishment at his assessment of her treasure “toys,” Henry’s guardian fixates on a different aspect of Mr. Smith’s reprimand, and they debate at cross-purposes, to hilarious effect:

“pray, sir, what do you mean by saying, ‘Fifty years?’ Do you suppose that I am fifty years old? - Extraordinary indeed!”
“I beg pardon,” said Mr. Smith; “I did not mean to offend - but there is that little boy trying to explain the Bible to his bearer.”

“But, surely,” said Henry's mamma, “you do not think that I am fifty years of age? - you are mistaken by twenty years.”

MRS. SMITH. O! my dear madam, you must excuse my husband. Whenever he is a little angry with me, he tells me that I am getting old. But I am so used to it that I never mind it.” (87-88)

Sidestepping, for the time, the matter of the lady’s age, Mr. Smith requests permission to further Henry’s religious education, to which the tolerant guardian has no objection, merely saying to Mr. Smith, “we know you are an oddity: take your own way, and let me take mine:” a conclusion unsatisfactory to the true Evangelical, but which resolves itself eventually, for Henry’s hitherto happy-go-lucky, worldly guardian is, like Boosy, destined to be converted by the experience of the boy’s suffering and death (24).

Boosy is contrasted favorably with the negligent guardian. Sherwood’s contemporary, Emma Roberts, is progressive compared to Sherwood in many ways, and is certainly given preferential treatment over Sherwood in Indira Ghose’s introduction to Memsahibs Abroad, but a comparison of the two writers’ attitudes to Indian servants should illustrate that, rigid though she was in her religious ideas, Sherwood had a real gift for sympathy. Emma Roberts writes that in

1 Supriya Goswami argues in Colonialism in Children’s Literature that Boosy’s conversion is not sincere, but it Sherwood writes plainly that Boosy becomes a “sincere Christian” (“Little Henry,” 66) – Goswami is bending the text to her argument, rather than the other way around, here.
early nineteenth century India, “servants were seen to be both stupid and devious;” and that dhais, or midwives, are “…expensive and troublesome appendages to a family; they demand high wages on account of the sacrifice which they affect to make…” Nor is Roberts alone in this failure to apprehend the reality of the dhai’s situation. At least two other “memsahibs,” Julia Charlotte Maitland and E. Augusta King, apparently oblivious to the irony of their charge, accuse dhais of neglecting their own children. Sherwood, on the other hand, notes with sympathy that the price for the wellbeing of the English child is often the wellbeing of the Indian baby of the wet-nurse; and Sherwood’s representation of the dhai in “The History of Little Lucy and Her Dhaye” is certainly sympathetic (Roberts 2: 121-2, Maitland 106-7, King 1:218).

Servants were the main point of contact with Indians for British women and children. Bearers, ayahs, ammahs, and dhayes, or male attendants, ladies’ maids, wet nurses and midwives, respectively (although the latter three Indian terms were used interchangeably by the British) are ubiquitous characters in the stories of Anglo-Indian children and Anglo-Indian domesticity, as readers of Frances Hodgson Burnett will know. English children were often closer to their Indian caregivers than to their English parents, as most of the novels under consideration in this dissertation, as well as autobiographical writing by nineteenth century Britons like Emma Roberts and Rudyard Kipling demonstrate. Constance Frederica Gordon-Cumming describes the caregivers of British children in a way that suggests that the system of entrusting the care of British infants to Indians survived the increasing segregation over the course of the century:

They [bearers] certainly are a curious race. So strange a mixture of childishness and cunning, delighted by the simplest pleasures, children with
children, unwearied in their devotion to the delicate white-faced little ones whom the climate renders so terribly fractious; great solemn men walking up and down for hours with unruffled patience, trying to soothe shrieking babies, and probably getting a good dose of the same sort at night in their own little hovels – hovels, by the way, from which I doubt whether any European could come in such spotless white robes. (Ghose 252-3)

The curious mixture here of admiration and scorn is a common tone in the description of Indian servants: even Sherwood who, as already noted, is outstanding in the extent to which her portrayal of Boosy is a sympathetic one, negotiates the paradoxical representation of Boosy taking on a parental role vis-à-vis Henry, even while Boosy himself is regarded as a representative of childlike natives in need of guidance from colonists and missionaries. Sherwood writes in her autobiographical notes of the devotion of bearers and ayahs to her own children; the servants never left the bedside of children when the children were sick, took an earnest and genuine interest in the wellbeing of their charges, and cared for them so much that, on the downside, the children became spoilt, indolent and easily bored from not having to do anything for themselves. This devotion gets represented in “Little Henry” in passages like this one:

Boosy (for that was the bearer's name) attended him night and day, warmed his pap, rocked his cot, dressed, and undressed, and washed him, and did every thing for him as tenderly as if he had been his own child. The first word that little Henry tried to say was Boosy; and when he was only ten months old, he used to put his arms round his neck, and kiss him, or stroke his swarthy cheek with his delicate hand. (9)
The good qualities Sherwood identifies in Boosy promote the Evangelical cause in that, rather than an aggressive assault on an equally aggressive, recalcitrant target population, the mission is shown to be a kindness toward a “token civilizable figure” who acts as synecdoche for a subject population understood, in a way similar to the Melanesians in Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain*, to be “full of supposedly inborn intelligence, eagerness, and gratitude” (Schaffer 208).

Mere decades before “Little Henry” was published, William Jones was assuming the persona of a Brahmin, speaking admiringly of an age of Hindu glory. Sherwood makes no such recognition. “Little Henry,” as we have seen, shows clearly the rising prevalence of Christians and Heathens as oppositional categories, and touts the need for specifically Christian education and reform. Sherwood believed that morality and knowledge of Christ were inseparable – that Hindu faith could not be combated with reason and philosophy, that the true faith alone could vanquish the false faith. There are instances in “Little Henry,” that remind us of the 18th century moral tale – namely the conversations on spiritual concepts that Henry engages in with his spiritual mentor, and the instance where she uses logic (of a sort) to demonstrate to him that there is only one God:

She had also provided herself with one of the Hindoo gods, made of baked earth; and she bade him look at it, and examine it well: she then threw it down upon the floor, and it was broken into a hundred pieces. Then she said, ‘Henry, what can this god do for you? it cannot help itself. Call to it, and ask it to get up. You see it cannot move.’ (11)

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1 “Hymn to Ganga,” 1785
It is not purely logic, however, but a combination of logic and something resembling Wordsworth’s “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” that leads to Henry’s total conversion. With Boosy, likewise, arguments are far less effectual than the emotional impact of Henry’s death in convincing the bearer to change his religion.

(Coleridge and Wordsworth 183)

Sherwood is also distinct from previous missionaries and from later ones in the extent to which she insists on Christ’s divinity as a compulsory lesson. Eighteenth century moralists and late nineteenth century missionaries in India generally believed that education should be pursued with the intention of propagating a morality that would eventually undermine the false faith without other prompting. This is not the lesson of “Little Henry,” however. In tones kind and concerned, the narrative “exposes” Hinduism as ridiculous, licentious, pitiful and amoral. Chief among the objectionable specifics were Hinduism’s polytheism and indulgence of human passions, aided by an insufficient grasp of the seriousness of sin, which, in the view of Boosy, could be washed away by the Ganges at will.

An article published in the Edinburgh Review in 1819 shows a conception of Hinduism similar to Sherwood’s:

One fact, indeed, may be very shortly stated, and it conveys a great deal of information. The number of Hindu gods is not less than three hundred and thirty millions! ...They have legends without number; and every man appears to have assumed the right of ascribing any such actions and any such intentions to his god, as he himself might think proper at the time…The character which the Hindus ascribe to each of their gods, is uniformly that of a man with indefinite
power to gratify all his passions, and who goes on gratifying them, wholly incapable of self-restraint, and wholly regardless of the mischief which that gratification may bring upon other beings...all are wicked to a degree far surpassing the limit of human depravity. (Religion 385)

In stark contrast to this constant gratification of human desires by man-made gods, Sherwood sets Little Henry on a path of self-mortification, although she is careful not to let the self-mortification reach an indulgent excess. Henry’s self-mortification is passive – he begins to see himself as a sinner, and constantly begs forgiveness, and when death comes, he welcomes it as a portal to eternal life. Before taking on the wilderness without, Henry is made to confront what is understood as the wilderness within. The acquisition of government over the self was of central importance to Evangelicals.

Indoctrination and government over the self are depicted as part of the process of Anglicization. Emma Roberts writes, “the education of children is shockingly neglected; few can speak a word of English, and though they may be highly accomplished in Hindostanee, their attainments in that language are not of the most useful nature, nor, being entirely acquired from the instructions of the servants, particularly correct or elegant” (2:114). Roberts is concerned about the mutual unintelligibility of English parents and children in India: raised by servants, the children speak no English, while the parents speak only English. She says that the children of clergymen have better instruction than most, presumably because of the secular education that comes along with religious education (2:14). Thus language, education, Christianity, civilization and Anglicization were perceived to be bound together. Sherwood shows this intertwined anxiety for the education and the soul of Little Henry.
In “Little Henry,” Sherwood combats the Anglo-Indian anxieties that arose from the high infant mortality rate and the fact that Anglo-Indian children often bonded more closely with their native caregivers than with their parents, learning Indian languages and manners, as well as ways of dressing, eating etc., by countering the cultural influence of the servants with the civilizing influence of the child. At the outset of his story, “No one could have told by his [Henry’s] behaviour or manner of speaking that he was not of Indian origin; but his delicate complexion, light hair, and blue eyes at once showed his parentage” (7). Unlike Kipling’s Kim, who a century later would thrive on his adventurous and free colonial boyhood, Henry must fight against all his natural inclinations in order to become a good Christian, iconic in the spirituality and innocence that would serve as an inspiration to all around him, and then to convert Boosy, whereupon he dies. Sherwood is less concerned with the survival of the British race than with the soul, and yet the soul, in Sherwood’s view, profits only through Western values of a very specific sort. Little Henry eventually succeeds in converting Boosy; his death has not been in vain, and may be viewed as a Christian sacrifice.

Little Henry’s Lessons

It is possible that even now, in the 21st century, there are some readers of “The History of Little Henry and His Bearer” who might be described as Sherwood’s “ideal readers.” To a reader informed by Victorian and postcolonial studies, however, it takes real effort to imagine Sherwood’s worldview – the intuitive reading seems to be the reading against the grain. “Little

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1 See Supriya Goswami 2004, 2009
Henry” continues to educate its readers, but the lessons of the tract may not be what the implied author intends.

One fascinating finding is how significant a part Sherwood played in the perpetuation of the Evangelical beliefs whose relation to Victorian attitudes and assumptions is described by M. Nancy Cutt as that between a root and its widely-branching tree. “Evangelicalism,” Cutt says, “was manifest in the powerful Victorian urge to teach, preach, and learn; to better oneself and to better the lot of others. It was a driving force, a motive power, as well as a way of life, a habit of thought, and a personal discipline.” Importantly for the history of children’s books, “Evangelicalism helped to create the Victorian belief in the family.” (Mrs. Sherwood, 7) Cutt attributes the moral training of the Victorians in part to Sherwood’s work (Ministering Angels, 49).

The role Sherwood played in the spread of literacy on the subcontinent was likewise a significant one. She was, as we have seen, a great producer of the tracts that were so essential to the propagation of the Evangelical message and the spread of literacy. Within “Little Henry,” we see that the literal acceptance of the Bible on which Evangelical doctrine depends requires that Henry and Boosy both possess and read the Holy Book; Henry’s conversion begins when the visiting missionary teaches him the English alphabet: “While this young lady was taking pains, from day to day, to teach little Henry to read, she endeavoured, by word of mouth, to make him acquainted with such parts of the Christian religion as even the youngest ought to know” (10). Evangelicals emphasized the importance of Sunday Schools and the distribution of Bibles. The reverberations of this movement can be felt in works written long after the central tenets of Evangelicalism ceased to be fashionable; the Bible-wielding missionary pops up frequently in Victorian and postcolonial fiction set in the colonies.
“Little Henry and His Bearer” reinforces many of the stereotypes associated with British India. It tells of an English child, his blue-eyed blondeness throwing the darkness of his attendants into relief; a fantasy portrait familiar to anyone with an interest in Victorian India, one that has been captured by numerous painters and writers. This child has been orphaned, again a familiar plot detail to anyone who reads Kipling or Burnett, and will die before he reaches adulthood, a sentimental tactic to which readers of Victorian fiction are accustomed.

Yet, “Little Henry” is a remarkable book for its time. It is one of those novels that can be seen as ushering a “Victorian” sensibility into what had been a very different landscape. In the year of its publication, sweeping changes were occurring and the British were taking a new mission upon themselves. While the fact that Sherwood reinforces many of the stereotypes of her time makes her representation of Little Henry a useful one to begin with, she also makes us rethink our understanding of missionary activity, of the roles of women in India and of the contrasts between the “Orientalists” and the “Anglicists.” The representation of the child in this text, the conditions of the production of little Henry, and, stepping backward, the generic features of missionary fiction for children in the Indian context have been the main concerns in this chapter.

“Little Henry” is intended to be didactic, but the lessons of the tract have changed over the last two centuries. Historical works about early nineteenth-century India that have been published in recent years tend to suggest that the cultural change from Orientalism to Anglicism, and the attendant rise of the missionary, was something of a pity. In White Mughals, William Dalrymple reminds us of the heady comings and goings of the 18th century and asks us not to restrict our evaluation of the British in India to the increasingly segregationist Victorian Anglicists. Indira Ghose also compares the Anglicists unfavorably with the Orientalists in her introduction
to *Memsahibs Abroad* (1998), and Kenneth Ballhatchet begins his book on race, sex and class in the Raj with the idea that with the advent of British women, the Anglo-Indian community began to insulate themselves, and ends the book with hilarious and cutting depictions of residents of a certain neighborhood who preferred living with prostitutes to allowing missionaries to attempt to purge their locale of sexual vice by “parading up and down reading scripture in mournful voices at all hours of the night” (153). We have, in short, warmer fuzzier feelings towards a time associated with “vice” than we have toward the age of “virtue” and strictures such as those of Sherwood. Orientalist vices, however, were far from victimless crimes, and Orientalist positions on race should remind us of Benedict Anderson’s contention that racism originates in class based thinking rather than nation based thinking and occurs not so much between nations as within them: while the Orientalists were very accepting of upper-class Indians, poorer Indians were routinely represented and treated as sub-human. Studying the work of writers like Sherwood from the contrapuntal perspective I have tried to adopt here lends nuance to the portrayals of them by their detractors, or, for that matter, their admirers, whose admiration generally stems from sympathy with the missionary cause (of which I have none).

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from Mary Martha Sherwood today is that contrary to popular belief, imperialism was not entirely the business of British men. Women in the colonies tend to be understood as neither the subject nor the object of colonization, which is sometimes viewed as a great game between rival European powers for world domination. This was not necessarily how the memsahibs perceived themselves, however. Fanny Parkes wrote in 1830: “Women have more influence over men in India than in any other country. All outdoor amusements are nearly denied to the latter by the climate, unless before sun-rise or after sun-set; therefore, the whole time of military men, generally speaking, is spent in the house, devoted
either to music or drawing, which of course they prefer in the society of ladies…” (140) This may be wishful thinking on Parkes’ part, and it doesn’t differ very much from Ballhatchet’s characterization of European women as “the nuclei of inward-looking social groups” (144), but Sherwood certainly challenges Ballhatchet’s description. She looked decidedly outward, and had a wide-ranging influence over British and Indian men, women and children. She does not merely tell the story of this time of greater British intervention in the social and religious fabric of India – she was as actively involved in bringing about change as she was in the production of prose fiction. What is more, her stories admonish even the nursery-bound child, who is often the object rather than the subject of the grand narratives of blood, state and soul, to take action in the world. Colonialism was thus a liberatory force for some: English women, as we have seen, found new avenues for expression and action in the world, the children of the colonial class were seen to have a role as the rising race of Anglicist Evangelists, and there was even talk of Anglicization as emancipator for Indian women: Mary Carpenter argues against Hinduism by suggesting that the oppression of women is inherent in that religion, an argument used repeatedly across the centuries by imperialist forces, which we will explore in greater detail in the next chapter. Carpenter’s argument that “…the system perpetuated in these places [temples] degrades morally and intellectually a great people, and keeps woman bound in moral and spiritual thralldom. Until she is emancipated and brought to her true position in society, the Hindoo nation cannot become what they were intended to be by the Father of all” puts a new spin on what Gayatri Spivak calls the narrative of white men rescuing brown women from brown men – here it is the white woman who represents herself as the liberator. (75-6)
Conclusion

Though Sherwood was, as we have seen, a product of her time – a “memsahib” who held herself apart from, and superior to, Indians, while seeking to save their souls, she also challenges some of our conceptions of this time. For all her belief in humility, Sherwood had the extremely lofty ambition of converting the world through her writing. Missionary novels like hers, though we may find them hard to read for pleasure or prescription, are a valuable source of information on women’s roles in the colonial project as educators, mother figures and evangelists.

Thus we find Sherwood at the helm of several important new developments in nineteenth century India: the increasing, and increasingly audible, population of British women to arrive in the subcontinent, the increasing number of British children born in the colony, the proliferation of prose of a specific sort – Evangelical fiction – and the changing British attitude to their own presence in the colonies – a perceived responsibility for the improvement of the natives, through civilization, that complex of education and Christianization. Sherwood’s work shows us that the decades of belief in British supremacy that followed cannot be attributed entirely to the Victorians. She helped set in motion a snowball of culturally-defined virtue long before Victoria took the throne, and that snowball would roll through Britain’s imperial century, increasing in girth until the time when Thomas Babington Macaulay was able to offer a toast before the Edinburgh Philosophical Society in 1846, “[T]o the literature of Britain . . . which has exercised an influence wider than that of our commerce and mightier than that of our arms . . . before the light of which impious and cruel superstitions are fast taking flight on the Banks of the Ganges!” Of course that smug verdict would be severely challenged thirteen years later, but that is a story for another chapter.
Chapter 2

Becoming Young Britons: Colonial Girls and How They Grow in “The Half-Caste” and The Secret Garden

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the process by which two young girls, Zillah Le Poer from Dinah Mulock Craik’s “The Half-Caste” (1851) and Mary Lennox from Frances Hodgson Burnett’s The Secret Garden (1911), are set on the path towards Britishness and womanhood. Zillah’s and Mary’s national, class and gender identities are formed simultaneously and shown to be relational: the children become legible as British by contrast to spectral Indians in their stories, as well as by contrast to their own former selves. Their position in society is determined in relation to the other characters as well – like the Sowerbys, in Mary’s case, and the LePoers in Zillah’s. Their gender identities, meanwhile, are formed in relation to the central masculine figures – Andrew Sutherland in “The Half-Caste” and Colin Craven in The Secret Garden.

The juxtaposition of these two texts reveals some of the changes as well as some of the consistencies in colonial attitudes over the half-century that separates Zillah’s journey from Mary’s. Zillah’s transformation from an abject colonized figure to a debutante who only displays those signs of an Indian background that please her British mentors1 is framed as a story of

1 In Representations of India, Amal Chatterjee shows how British depictions of Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century depended on the extent to which they lent themselves to British purposes – allies of the British were often described as possessed of what were assumed to be European physical characteristics (light skin, or a “majestic countenance”) and British
improvement, a classic Anglicist pattern that is complicated by the simultaneous deployment of Orientalist logic within the tale.¹ In The Secret Garden, the term “improvement” is restored to its medieval sense of cultivating enclosed property. An insalubrious colony is abandoned, and a dying family rehabilitated, through Mary’s extraction from India and transformation from a memsahib-in-training to a nurturing and subservient playmate for her cousin Colin. Each of the texts depicts a withdrawal from the colonies, a threat to the British order of things posed by a “colonial insurgent,”² and the resolution of the problem of the insurgent through assimilation/improvement/civilization.

Both texts manage the problems of imperialism through avoidance – Zillah and Mary are born in India, but their progress is represented as contingent on the erasure, and judicious revision, of their colonial past – for example, the details of the process by which several British parties consider themselves justified in claiming Zillah’s Indian mother’s wealth are relegated to a history “best forgotten” (52), but her Indianness is evoked to add fascination to her persona as she grows into a woman. India itself, in both stories, is relegated to the “long-ago” and “far-away,” and problems such as colonial greed and exploitation, and the toll empire takes on Anglo-Indian families, are referred to, and then situated in the long-ago, far-away place that is outside of the limited concerns of the text.

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¹ My use of the term “Orientalist” here is a very specific one, limited to the eighteenth-century policies of the East India Company and their philosophical underpinnings.

² i.e. Zillah and Mary
In both texts, the focus is primarily on Britons. An ideal reader of Craik or Burnett would, in addition to focusing on British interests within each story, probably internalize the religious message in either text more readily than a reader today might. “The Half-Caste” and *The Secret Garden* offer more complexity than the direct proselytizing of a missionary tract like “Little Henry and His Bearer” (1814), but they do work as parables. A clear path to heaven is laid out in each of them, and the first step on this path is Anglicization. Still, a non-specific India remains as an anxiety-inducing entity just below the surface of each story.

This anxiety lies in part in the very construction of Britishness, which in each case is dependent upon the construction of an “other.” In “The Half-Caste” Zillah is the “other” to the English woman, Cassandra, and in *The Secret Garden*, the plot moves from India - where Britons define themselves, through strict cultural and gendered prescriptions, in opposition to Indians - to Yorkshire, where once again Mary distinguishes herself from the wilderness of the moor by secreting herself in the delimited space of the enclosed, civilizable, secret garden. In both cases, however, there is this unspoken worry: if identities can shift as the colonial insurgents are integrated into upper class British society, can they not also shift the other way?

The contingent nature of national and class identity is made apparent by the shifting boundaries around Britishness over the half-century that separates the two texts. Both “The Half-Caste” and *The Secret Garden* treat colonial issues as peripheral to the central concern of achieving Britishness, but of course the very notion that Britishness – and proper gendering - are to be achieved shows the extent to which such identities are constructions, which are upheld and subverted simultaneously by the narratives. As Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper put it, the criteria used to determine who belongs where underscores the permeability of boundaries (Cooper 6), particularly as those criteria vary depending on the context – Craik’s most famous
work, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1857), is written at a time when the “Captain of Industry” figure is seen as heroic, and industrialization is seen as fundamental to Britishness and progress. By contrast, Burnett seems as cynical about industry as she is about colonization – for her, Britishness is fundamentally about the land (both in the sense of the geographical place as well as in the sense of soil and nature). Craik’s India-trader hero in “The Half-Caste” is likewise a time-bound figure, who would fall into disrepute in the course of the nineteenth century.

Through the juxtaposition of “The Half-Caste” and *The Secret Garden*, we can see the class-based distinctions of the former give way to the Manichean divide between Britons and Indians in the latter. We can also see the implicit argument in “The Half-Caste” that Britons do colonized peoples a service when they take them under the imperial wing give way to the implicit argument in *The Secret Garden* that the costs of colonization, in the case of India, outweigh the benefits.

Finally, a significant difference between the representations of the child in the two texts is the locus of power. Where in “The Half-Caste,” it is the governess who has the power to make decisions about the life of her charge, in *The Secret Garden* it is the children who are powerful. This is partly because *The Secret Garden* is meant to appeal to younger readers, and partly because by the turn of the twentieth century, the life of each child was considered more precious than it had been for previous generations.

**The Half-Caste**

Dinah Mulock Craik, like her contemporaries, Charlotte Yonge, Mrs. Henry Wood and Margaret Oliphant, met with popular approval but critical scorn in her own time. Henry James,
for example, accuses Craik of viewing the world through a curtain of “rose-colored gauze” which, he says, impedes her vision and impugns the sincerity of her writing (168). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the critical scorn persists, while the popularity is long gone. Part of the problem with Craik’s body of work is that, as Talia Schaffer has written of Charlotte Yonge, if we read her narratives against the grain, we misrepresent her central motive, yet if we read her as a “pious pedagogue,” we can find nothing to say (245). Despite this contention, which rings true to anyone who grapples with didactic Victorian domestic fiction, Schaffer herself has found much to say about Yonge without attempting to recast Yonge in a mold more acceptable to the modern reader. Similar work has been done on Craik – recent scholarship has managed to steer clear of being either dismissive of her, on the one hand, or misrepresenting her to make her appear more interesting, on the other. What follows is one such attempt to acknowledge Craik as a pious pedagogue, and yet have something to say, particularly about the place of the colony in “The Half-Caste.”

“The Half-Caste” is set in the early nineteenth century. Craik tends to set her work a half-century in the past, thereby juxtaposing the ideas that would eventually triumph with those that are, as she knows from her vantage point, bound to fade away. In the case of her most famous work, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1857), she pits the rise of the self-made man against a more feudal system. “The Half-Caste,” in turn, shows the shift from eighteenth-century Orientalist attitudes and policies to Anglicist thinking.

“The Half-Caste” is the story of Zillah Le Poer, the child of a British merchant and an Indian princess. Zillah is born in India, but upon the death of her parents she is brought to the Yorkshire home of her mercenary British uncle. To her rescue comes Cassia Pryor, who at the behest of a mutual friend, Mr. Sutherland, has accepted the position of governess to Zillah.
Lieutenant Augustus Le Poer, Zillah’s cousin, tries to seduce Zillah, but Cassia realizes that Augustus is not so much in pursuit of Zillah as of the great fortune she stands to inherit. The governess thwarts his evil designs, as well as the independent evil designs of his estranged father (Zillah’s uncle). The two ladies relocate to the home of Mr. Sutherland, who eventually falls in love with Zillah – and they live happily ever after, one presumes. The full title of the story is “The Half-Caste: An Old Governess’s Tale.” Cassia, the embedded narrator, tells this story in retrospect. She is, at the time of narration, employed in caring for the Sutherlands’ daughter, who is named for her.

The following discussion of Craik’s short story will show how Zillah becomes a young Briton through the combined efforts of the Orientalist and Anglicist characters in the tale. While “The Half-Caste” was probably not intended as a “colonial text” so much as a story meant to instruct as well as entertain its readers, positioned as it is at the crux of sweeping cultural changes in British India, it offers a rare juxtaposition of Orientalist and Anglicist styles and ideas remarkable for a text of its brevity. Curiously enough, even as Zillah moves from India to England, and colonial discourse shifts from Orientalist to Anglicist, Zillah’s story reverses the historical (chronological) order of the two sets of attitudes: she is represented first through a Mid-Victorian Anglicist lens that constructs her as impoverished, both materially and in terms of her degree of civilization, and then through the Orientalist vision that constructs her as a repository of Eastern sensuality.

As her story progresses, Zillah metamorphoses not into a completed Anglicist project, i.e. a darker copy of Cassia, but into an Orientalist ideal: “Zillah lay on a sofa reading a love-story. Her crisped black hair was tossed about the crimson cushions, and her whole figure was that of rich Eastern luxuriance. She had always rather a fantastic way of dress, and now she looked
almost like a princess out of the *Arabian Nights*” (62).

The relatively smooth courtship between Mr. Sutherland and Zillah is likewise anachronistic, even for the early nineteenth-century setting of “The Half-Caste,” premised as it is on an earlier model of class-based segregation, as opposed to the later “race” based segregation according to which their union would be if not impossible, at least unlikely enough to make it the overwhelming issue in the tale.

Mr. Sutherland represents the trader hero, a common figure in the Orientalist fiction of the previous century. A less kind appellation for him would be “nabob” – a word used by Anglicist detractors to describe India merchants whose fortunes in India were as volatile as their reputations in England. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the romantic trader-hero figure was increasingly being replaced in representations of India by “trader-villain” figures, as the East India Company fell afoul of popular opinion in England, and the British role in India came to be conceived less as mercantile than as administrative.¹

Zillah’s father, whom she suspects of the theft of her mother’s ring, represents the trader-villain – a corrupt India merchant of the type that Anglicists invoked as part of their argument for greater intervention by the British government and by missionaries in India. In addition to the two sorts of traders represented within the tale, another stock character from early nineteenth century Indian colonial fiction is in play here – i.e., Zillah herself. Zillah runs the gamut of colonialist stereotypes, from the eighteenth-century figure of the sensual Oriental woman, as discussed above, to the nineteenth century downtrodden figure in need of uplifting, as we shall see, to the transitional figure, one constructed by Elizabeth Hamilton and Edmund Burke, among others: the noble native, evoked to show the flaws of the author’s compatriots. Zillah’s full name,

¹ See Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*
which despite her uncle’s protests to the contrary is Zillah Le Poer, juxtaposes the “exotic” legacy of her mother with the European legacy of her dodgy father, highlighting the Orientalist privileging of the morally and materially noble native over the morally and materially impoverished European.

The Anglicist revulsion for nabob figures is complicated by the representation of Mr. Sutherland, who, as we have seen, is characterized as a hero. While Mr. Sutherland, like Zillah’s father, makes, then loses his fortune through India trade, and is buffeted by the vagaries of mercantile fortune just as much as Zillah’s trader villain father is, and while the wealth of India finds him again through his fortuitous marriage, as was the case with Zillah’s father, no aspersions are cast by the narrator on his character. The distinction between him and the Le Poers rests on the notion of love – his for Zillah, and the narrator’s for him - which elevates Mr. Sutherland over his mercenary colleagues.

Mr. Sutherland was engaged to an Indian woman who died, and is attracted to those aspects of Zillah that remind him of his lost love – such as eyes “like great oceans of light” (34). Cassia, who represents everything that is respectable, holds less appeal for Mr. Sutherland than Zillah, who despite Cassia’s best efforts bears a greater resemblance to a forbidden object of desire than a wholly respectable and Anglicized young lady. Zillah represents for Mr. Sutherland the possibility of transgression – acting as synecdoche for a larger pattern that Ronald Hyam identifies in *Britain’s Imperial Century* (2002). Hyam argues that the colonies represented a place beyond the inhibitions of the increasingly bourgeois cultures of Europe. Mr. Sutherland’s life in India is treated by Craik as beyond her purview, and serves as an outlet for him to which Craik feels she can in clear conscience turn a blind eye, as Cassia turns from Zillah’s parentage when she glosses over Zillah’s backstory: “The whole history of her [Zillah’s] father and mother
was one of those family tragedies, only too frequent, which, the actors in them being dead, are best forgotten” (52). The colony, for Mr. Sutherland, serves a function similar to that served by Industry in *John Halifax, Gentleman*: it provides him with a repository, outside of vigilant domesticity, for his energy.¹

Upon his return from India, Mr. Sutherland’s needs for companionship are met by Zillah, leaving Cassia’s virtue, and her vicariousness, intact. As Cooper and Stoler point out, the colonial “measures of man” were “rationality, technology, progress and reason – carefully calibrated scales on which Africans and Asians rated low;” they constituted the “Other against whom the very idea of Europeanness was expressed” (5, 6). Zillah is represented as the precise “Other” to Mr. Sutherland, thereby liberating Cassia from what would otherwise have been her role. Mr. Sutherland, in turn, seems not to entertain even the possibility of a union with Cassia and the embourgeoisement such a union might entail. In this respect, “The Half-Caste” resembles Charles Dickens’s mid-Victorian novels, where bureaucracy and domesticity have an emasculating effect. By contrast, Dickens’s short fiction from the 1850s, as Priti Joshi points out, tends to be set in the colonies, where “his characters, in the face of adversity, rise to heroism.”¹

¹ One of Craik’s central concerns in *John Halifax* is the control and useful diversion of masculine sexuality. John is likened to a river by the narrator, Phineas: “The glory of his life was its unconsciousness—like our own silent Severn…” (206), and when Lord Luxmore diverts the stream that powers John’s mill to Luxmore Hall, as the source for new fountains on the property, he is trying to punish and disempower John through the confiscation of his seminal energy. For a brief time, the regulated source of energy that is to be used for work and the betterment of the community is sucked into the aristocratic sphere to be used for the selfish pleasure of a few, but of course John eventually triumphs.
Joshi suggests that the stories “attest to a desire for a simple, uncomplicated world, one in which recognizing and embracing his – and the emphasis was decidedly on a masculine figure – identity as a Briton leads the protagonist to act nobly and valiantly.” The flip side of Dickens’s critique of British institutions and bureaucracy, according to Joshi, was “both an anxiety about the enervating influence of prosperity and domesticity and, as antidote, the craving of a landscape in which the hero is unfettered and free to express himself as British” (54).

Britain’s imperial century was punctuated by bursts of heroic masculinity. The days of spectacular conquest, untold riches and romance, of Robert Clive, Richard Wellesley and nabobs, died with the rising of the Anglicist tide; by mid-century, qua Joshi, “for most Britons India stood for the dead weight of administrative minutiae” (78).

A character like Mr. Sutherland brings the glamor back to the colonial project, with his romantic liberation of the colonized woman from the nightmare of being sexually unavailable to him. Chatterjee also talks about how in the case of sati, Englishmen found themselves saving the young widows (as Lata Mani points out, victims of sati were always represented as young and beautiful) from their oppressors. The founder of Calcutta, Job Charnock, was reputedly exemplary in this regard – viewing a sati ceremony with his soldiers one day, Charnock, it was reported, “was so moved with compassion, and captivated with her beauty, that he sent his own men to take her away by force, and conducted her to his own lodgings.” The couple then “lived happily together for many years, and when she died he built her a tomb” (59). This is exactly the language that William Dalrymple uses to describe the romance at the heart of his Orientalist history, *White Mughals* (2002), between James Kirkpatrick and Khair un-Nissa – out of his love for Khair, James builds her a garden that she can enjoy while in purdah. It should be noted here that the passive, contained woman – Zillah, the victim of sati, or Khair, is something of an
Orientalist fantasy, and her depiction as stripped of activity and agency must not be accepted as accurate. In *Allegories of Empire* (1993), Jenny Sharpe contends that the figure of the dark-skinned rapist is an effect, not a cause, of discursive production (3).\(^1\) The same might be said of the light-skinned rescuer; Gayatri Spivak suggests as much when she uncovers the narrative of how “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (1988, 296).

Dalrymple’s work, which recalls a time when it was common for East India Company officials to cohabitate and raise families with Indian women, shows us that Zillah’s history is quite plausible. Dalrymple chronicles the journey of Kitty Kirkpatrick, (1802-1889) whose real-life story is remarkably similar to Zillah’s fictional one – both girls are born to aristocratic Indian women of Persian descent and British men, and both assimilate successfully into English society by virtue of their (matrilineal) wealth and mutable appearance, even though the more Manichean Anglicist understanding of race, according to which Britons and Indians are immiscible categories, begins to replace the class-based organization of Orientalist society\(^2\) in their lifetime.

Zillah’s story is in keeping with the political developments in India, where towards the end of the eighteenth century, children of mixed British and Indian heritage began to lose their privileges; in 1786, for example, the authorities banned Eurasians from employment with the British East India Company. Those Eurasians who were light-skinned and rich enough to live in

\(^1\) Sharpe points to the proliferation, in 1857, of stories of the violation of English women, despite the lack of evidence to support such claims. She argues that rape was not a stable signifier but one that surfaced at strategic moments, moments when the colonial order was challenged.

\(^2\) In the eighteenth century, upper-class Britons were more likely to see upper-class Indians than working-class Britons as their peers.
the West worked hard to conceal the Indian part of their ancestry. As Elizabeth Buettner points out in *Empire Families* (2004), there was a fairly widespread system of foster child care in colonial England, where children born in the colonies were shipped to the metropole and families strayed far from the nuclear ideal with which the Victorians are often associated. The history of colonial family life is, as Julia Clancy-Smith says, “full of ironies—and cruel ones at that—since the domestic arrangements of empire families, whose members Buettner points out often came from the lower sectors of overseas middle-class families, violated idealized norms of family life while striving to achieve them […] The family romance of the British Empire was instead a vast extended network of broken families” (178-79). The Le Poers are one such family: the antithesis of the Victorian ideal.

Early on in the tale, Mr. Le Poer describes Zillah as an “ugly little devil,” an assessment with which Cassia privately agrees, adding that Zillah is “ultra-stupid” in appearance (19). “The Half-Caste” makes a clear distinction, however, between the “bad Anglicism” of Mr. Le Poer and the “good Anglicism” of Cassia Pryor. Cassia attempts to recreate Zillah in her own likeness; she sees this as Zillah’s only hope for a better future, while the villainous Le Poers view Zillah as a hopeless degenerate.

The Le Poers also run afoul of the values of the text in that they are not humane with their dependents, and aspire to wealth that they have neither earned nor inherited. Within the text, their professed assumption of the inherent inferiority of Asians to Europeans is counted among their sins, even though European racial superiority was a fairly widespread assumption (for which the Ethnological Society of London was seeking proof) among Britons in mid-
The Le Poers’ fortune depends on Zillah’s alleged racial inferiority, which would sanction their mistreatment of her and their acquisition of her inheritance. Mr. Le Poer on the one hand goes out of his way to ensure that Zillah’s abjection is sustained, which effort throws his theory of an inherently degenerate race into question, and on the other hand claims that Zillah’s “modicum of intellect is not greater than generally belongs to her mother’s race. She would make an excellent Ayah, and that is all” (17).

Cassia, the ultimate repository of the values of the text, takes delight in overturning Mr. Le Poer’s verdict. Craik’s view is distinct from the growing conviction, which would really gain traction in the later part of the century, that colonized peoples were inherently degenerate. As a non-conformist Christian, she believed that Indians belonged to the same – human – race as Britons. Zillah’s abject state at the beginning of “The Half-Caste” is attributed more to deficiencies in her upbringing than to any inherent quality she possesses. Zillah’s journey from “backward” to Cassia’s equal (which is achieved, interestingly, by moving backwards from nineteenth to eighteenth century British attitudes) is accomplished with such dizzying speed that the extent to which the racially marked body is a discursive production becomes apparent (54).

Zillah’s lessons are meant to help her transcend the servitude in which Cassia finds her, but also to feminize her. During the day, Zillah is educated by Cassia along with her cousins, but in the evening, Zillah receives private lessons on how to be a lady. She is encouraged to observe and participate in Cassia’s nightly feminine rituals – brushing her hair, preparing her wardrobe and so forth.

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1 A non-conformist Christian, Craik believed in “one human family.”
In the process of educating Zillah, Cassia displays the classic colonial ignorance – or strategic ignoring - of a culture outside of her own as viable and valid. She treats Zillah as *tabula rasa*. She refers repeatedly to her charge as a child, though Zillah is in her teens at the start of the story: Cassia’s understanding of her as a child has more to do with colonial assumptions about the half-caste’s “childlike nature” than with Zillah’s actual age. In 1855, William Gladstone insisted that colonization was not so beneficial to the British as it was to the colonized: “because we feel convinced that our constitution is a blessing to us…that we are desirous of extending its influence, and that it should not be confined within the narrow borders of this little island”\(^1\) – a piece of unabashed British exceptionalism which is represented in “The Half-Caste” through Cassia who, acting as an imperial force that constructs itself as benevolent, “rescues” Zillah, then explains to Zillah “how much she had been saved,” whereupon Zillah “seems grateful and penitent” (52). Cassia attempts to manage Zillah’s “fierce Eastern nature” (47) and to “improve” it, based on the classic Anglicist set of assumptions: that improvement is warranted, that it is possible, and that it requires the recreation of Zillah in her own likeness.

At the outset, Cassia firmly and uncritically believes in her cultural superiority to Zillah. In this, the views of the implied author, of Zillah’s tormentors, and of her champion are aligned: the champion champions in order to be a champion, not out of real solidarity with the oppressed. Despite what she encourages Zillah to believe, Cassia benefits from their association as much as, if not more than, Zillah. She becomes Zillah’s governess in order to support herself and her mother with her salary, and when Mr. Le Poer diverts the funds intended for Zillah’s education, the wealth that Zillah inherits from her Indian mother when she comes of age makes it materially possible for Cassia to continue living with Zillah.

\(^1\)“Our Colonies” (1855), qtd. in Priti Joshi’s “Mutiny Echoes”
In addition to the material benefits of her association with Zillah, it is through Zillah that Cassia begins to see herself as a powerful woman. On the day she meets Zillah, Cassia says she feels like a heroine, as Zillah kisses her with weeping gratitude (19), and Zillah, the colonial subject, affords Cassia many opportunities for heroism thereafter. It is Cassia who educates Zillah and nurses her back from the brink of death, and when Augustus Le Poer convinces Zillah to run away with him, it is Cassia who valiantly defends Zillah, thereby protecting her inheritance.

Zillah is viewed in the beginning as an abject figure whom Cassia claims as her responsibility. Zillah is “full of the languor of her native clime,” slovenly, and therefore unwomanly – so that she is in every way the antithesis of neat, genteel Cassia, who describes herself as “lady-like” (22, 15). Zillah is also represented as the antithesis of Cassia in that she has “no innate consciousness of right and wrong,” and in that she is unreserved in her affections and emotions. When Zillah is angry she is represented as animalistic - literally foaming at the mouth – whereas Cassia’s repressed emotions are representative of thoroughly civilized femininity (23). Cassia, like Phineas Fletcher from John Halifax, Gentleman, tells the story of a person who is excluded from the privileges that she herself enjoys, and of how this exclusion is overcome. Zillah and Phineas’s John both rise – culturally, in Zillah’s case, and socially, in John’s – and their upward movement draws the eye of the reader away from the relatively stagnant presence of the narrator. However, Zillah remains an unfinished “project” – she never quite attains the “gender-specific combination of cultural, behavioral, occupational, and class markers deemed characteristic of a privileged racial identity” (Buettner 104). In the end, Zillah’s integration into British society must be confirmed by the marriage plot. This may be the traditional comedic ending, whereas Cassia’s vicarious existence may seem more of a tragedy, but when we take
Craik’s own experience into account, Cassia’s fate seems like a good alternative to the marriage plot. The opening line of the story: “We know what we are, but we know not what we may be” seems at first to refer to Zillah’s journey, but in fact it is Cassia’s “becoming” that is signified by those words – as she goes on, “who would have thought that I, a plain governess, should in my old age become a writer?” (9). Craik, who found financial independence and pride in her work, confers on Cassia the wonderful gift of writing, in lieu of marriage to a somewhat suspect hero. When, in the end, Zillah marries the man Cassia desires, from a Christian perspective Cassia’s heroism is confirmed by her never-expressed broken heart, which both renders her legible as a martyr and assures that she is not obliged to contend with the masculine sexuality that is the cause of so much anxiety in Craik’s novels. Mr. Sutherland’s absence for most of the story allows Cassia to travel and be mobile, to find employment, to take on the role of Zillah’s protector and defender, and to write her “old governess’s tale” with an almost ecstatic repression. Outside of the marriage plot, Cassia is also free to tell what she calls Zillah’s “Cinderella Story.”

It takes an Anglicist perspective to represent, as Cassia does, the story of Zillah’s passing as a Cinderella story (19). Such an understanding would cast Cassia in the role of fairy godmother, as she prepares Zillah to be a fit consort for Mr. Sutherland by taking charge of her wardrobe and equipping her with the British, Christian speech and language patterns, knowledge, and morality which Cassia herself epitomizes.

If “The Half-Caste” is a Cinderella story, then Mr. Sutherland is the obvious candidate for the role of the prince. However, both Zillah and Cassia show more of the qualities of the fairy-tale prince than Mr. Sutherland does. Cassia routinely rescues Zillah from one dangerous situation after another; as for Zillah, it is she who is the daughter of a princess, and although she
is educated in confinement, is trained as a maid, and has small extremities, the better to fail to escape with, it is she who rescues both Cassia and Mr. Sutherland from the prospect of poverty and the prospect of boredom, with her princely fortune and style.

The positioning of Mr. Sutherland as Zillah’s rescuer is, moreover, an instance of Cassia’s wonted irony, for Mr. Sutherland is missing in action at all the crucial points in Zillah’s life – for most of the story Cassia is not even aware that he is Zillah’s guardian and her own employer. Mr. Sutherland ultimately proves more effective than Cassia when it comes to neutralizing Zillah’s alterity, however: while Zillah’s Indian heritage persists despite Cassia’s best efforts, her past is ultimately vanquished through the marriage plot. The “threat” of Zillah as an insurgent or obstruction is managed not with the use of overt violence, but via marriage and the advent of her blond, blue-eyed daughter.1 Cassia’s method for managing Zillah is clearly Anglicist, while Mr. Sutherland is Orientalist in his views, but “The Half-Caste” shows that the two are not divergent in their aims or effects, though their approaches are different.

Cassia has not quite succeeded in recreating Zillah in her own likeness, but failure is an indispensable part of Cassia’s character, fundamental to the “ethics of reserve and integrity” that Karen Bourrier identifies in Craik’s work. From a Christian perspective, the reproducing bodies in Craik’s tales are less perfect than the disabled Muriel and Phineas from John Halifax, or the repressed Cassia, who are Christ-like in their virtue as well as in their selflessness. Cassia sacrifices herself repeatedly for the happiness of others. She gives up a summer visit to her mother to nurse Zillah through typhus fever, and when Zillah marries Mr. Sutherland, she claims to be happy that her charge is spared the sorrow of unrequited love for that gentleman that she

1 This is what Levinas calls ontological imperialism: see Robert Young’s White Mythologies, 45.
herself knows (46). As Cassia narrates her own martyrdom, however, discontent seeps into her voice, making her an unusually sarcastic narrator. Craik made her own feeling of discontent in her single state known in a letter to her brother: “It seems first a bit hard that one never [should] have been really happy in all one’s life…& one isn’t quite a stone even at 34” (17 June 1860). She encourages her brother to start a family, to have a daughter “the image of Mama,” presumably so that Craik could see the more positive part of her heritage passed on in a vicarious way – just like Cassia, who creatively claims the Sutherlands’ child, and her namesake, as her “niece.”¹ Craik’s letters add weight to the idea that Craik did not see her singleness as a form of liberation – and yet in many ways it was just that (qtd. in Bourrier 212).

As Cassia prepares, grooms and presents Zillah as a debutante, we are reminded of Craik’s struggles with how to present her public self.² Like Cassia, Craik “tried to content herself with life as a literary spinster.” She shunned publicity: she vehemently objected to her aunt’s forwarding of her letters to the public, suggesting that the exposure was particularly harmful because she was a woman author. “All that the public has any right to know about me,” she wrote, “they may find in a list of authors of the time […] - viz – that I, Dinah Maria Mulock, was born at Stoke-upon-Trent in 1826…my very quiet life, completely out of the literary world, ought to be a sufficient hint of how utterly I avoid & dislike personal publicity” (4 December c.

¹ Talia Schaffer has pointed out that Victorian families were by no means uniform, and that it was quite common for people to claim relationships based on ties other than “blood,” but it is Cassia herself who confesses that she has “sinned against truth” in claiming her charge as her niece when she is in fact no such thing. (9)

² see Bourrier 219
Cassia, like Craik, leads a very quiet life, the only excitement being generated through
the lives of the theatrical characters she is surrounded by. Cassia’s description of Mr. LePoer, for
instance, is like something out of a Dickens novel – Cassia’s voice is very like Esther
Summerson’s as she praises, with heavy irony, Mr. LePoer’s gentlemanly manners, which mask
his parasitism. Zillah and Mr. Sutherland are also very flamboyant characters. In fact, apart from
Cassia, “The Half-Caste” is peopled by carefully costumed actors who are less multidimensional
(with the exception of Zillah) and less realistic than the “Everywoman” narrator who invites
identification. When Cassia’s tone carefully steers clear of censure as she describes how Zillah is
impertinent with Mr. Sutherland, how her lilacs fill his room with strong rich scent (61), how she
persuades him to give a ball even though he is, according to Cassia, not sociable by nature, we
are meant to feel a trifle indignant on Cassia’s behalf, that a woman who understands Mr.
Sutherland so well should have her romantic hopes dashed by the woman who is an assault on
his every sense.

Like her Homeric namesake, Cassia (whose real name is Cassandra) is fated to go
unheeded, even by herself, for it is apparent from her narrative that she understands much but
reveals what she sees only indirectly, making for what Sally Mitchell calls a “pleasurable irony”
in the text (25). This is a technique used by Craik in the characterization of her most famous
narrator, Phineas Fletcher from John Halifax, as well. Like Phineas, Cassia is repressed and self-
abnegating, but where these qualities make for very ambiguous gendering in Phineas, in Cassia
they confirm her as a model of ideal Victorian femininity.

1 qtd. in Bourrier 217
The impression of Cassia as a repository of Craikian values is strengthened in those places where Cassia’s voice conflates with Craik’s. Cassia often displays knowledge that she cannot have had access to. She makes a remark about Zillah’s hands, which are small and delicate, such as she has “often noticed in the Hindu race” – but there is no hint of this considerable exposure to Hindus anywhere in the details of Cassia’s life (22). This is an instance where it is clearly not Cassia talking, but Craik. Cassia is also like Craik in that she is fairly successful in her performance of ideal Victorian womanhood, but the limits of her performance show themselves. She is not particularly passive, she fails to subdue or disguise her desires, and she is heroic when even the heroic Mr. Sutherland fails her.¹ Margaret Oliphant writes of Craik’s heroism as she, “in a blaze of love and indignation, carried [her] ailing and delicate mother away” from her abusive father – in much the same way as Snow White or Sleeping Beauty are rescued from dark forces in blazes of love and indignation (qtd. in Showalter, 10). Elaine Showalter casts some doubt on this tale of daring rescue, but whatever the realities of Craik’s life might have been, the author shows us through Cassia, as she does through Olive Rothesay (from her 1850 novel *Olive*) how a strong woman is capable of rising to the occasion when a heroic rescue is called for.

Craik’s life, like those of her characters Phineas, Cassia and Olive, was marked by the failure or deferment of the heterosexual marriage plot, allowing for some flexibility in gender

¹ The illustration of Cassia’s defense of Zillah on the cover of the Whittaker edition of “The Half-Caste” is remarkably similar to illustrations of heroic British women in the colonies at the Revolt of 1857.
roles and for the privileging of filial or fraternal devotion over the connubial relationship.\(^1\) All three of these characters, it must be noted, achieve material security and find companionship outside of the patriarchal romance plot (although Olive eventually succumbs), and they are all extremely passionate; their repression only makes their minds, bodies and sexualities more intriguing. Phineas and Cassia manage to remain ambiguously positioned in relation to the central male figures in their stories: in Phineas’s case, Ursula, and in Cassia’s case, Zillah, become the complements to John Halifax and Andrew Sutherland, respectively, leaving the embedded narrators with negative freedom - freedom from compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchal marriage, as well as positive freedom – freedom to be heroic in their own way. Hence we have an interesting discrepancy between Cassia’s narrative and Craik’s story: in Cassia’s text she is neither protagonist not rescuer, but in Craik’s text she is both.

Cassia has not compromised her Christianity in the end, has played a supporting role, has been the conscience of the tale, and this is made more interesting because she is a patently imperfect character who only achieves her excellent standard of conduct through repression and martyrdom, which to Craik, who struggled through her life to let the better angels of her nature guide her, was more admirable than a natural tendency to be perfect.

While, as a good Christian, Craik was not so much concerned with the affairs of this world as with the world to come, her own life taught her the necessity of some measure of worldly wisdom and the desirability of professional success. Professional success was, however, a double-edged sword to her – it sustained her and her family, but she was uncomfortable with publicity and with the way in which her close relatives tried to capitalize on her fame. We see

\(^1\) Bourrier 205, 210
her conflicting views on worldly versus spiritual progress in her writing – very prominently in John Halifax, but perhaps even more lucidly in “The Half-Caste.” In both novels, ultra-virtuous characters like Phineas, Muriel and Cassia are dependent on the more worldly characters. They remain untarnished by mercantile or sexual activity and so remain the spiritual and moral compasses within the stories. Cassia and Zillah, thus, are codependent: Cassia depends on Zillah materially, and Zillah depends on Cassia morally.

If one were to attempt a morphology of a Craik tale, therefore, one would probably find two overlapping sets of values and two sorts of characters at the heart of each tale – the one, successful in worldly terms, the vibrant and energetic center of the story, who starts a family that represents the producing/reproducing ideal of the Victorian age, and the other, a sort of maiden aunt - the spiritual quintessence of the story, always a bit off center and non-conformist, viewing the central character from the sidelines. In fact Craik’s own life may be understood to be such an odd pairing - of the celebrity authoress and the private person, stoic in her suffering.¹

“The Half-Caste” also drives another nail into the coffin of the idea that Victorian family life was at all a “model of parental authority, loving relationships, inner harmony, and secure values untroubled by pressures from the public world,” a sentimental vision that, as Claudia Nelson tells us in *Family Ties in Victorian England* (2007), the Victorians themselves constructed (Nelson xi). Of course, this idea has long since been challenged from every angle (even as Victorian ideas of family continue to influence ideas of family today). Marriage, family and profitable work are represented in Craik’s writing as routes to stability, but the survival and propagation of the race is not her only, nor perhaps even her central, concern. The romantic,

¹ See Bourrier 204-205
affective, even passionate coupling of Mr. Sutherland and Zillah is not being put forward by Craik as a replicable prototype – it is marked in its circumstantial uniqueness, unlike the more achievable-seeming, but also deadly dull, union of John and Ursula Halifax in 1857. No, the epicenter of the didactic underpinnings of “The Half-Caste” is Cassandra, who, in her valiant, though failed, attempts to center on others, not on the self, epitomizes the Christian ideals to which Craik aspired. It could be that Cassandra’s attitude is a way of expressing anxiety about the elusive nature of ideal domesticity, but my argument here is that while Craik skillfully captures Victorian ideals, they are not necessarily her ideals, and that this is one source of the pleasurable ironic tension in her texts. There is, as is typical of Craik, a lot going on under the surface of the story. While Craik is using the half-caste as a way to add interest an otherwise colorless vision of perfection, she inadvertently gives us several insights into colonial attitudes in the process, and the fragility of an ideal vision of domesticity that is premised on imperial structures comes across quite clearly.

The Secret Garden

_The Secret Garden_, like “Little Henry and His Bearer” and “The Half-Caste,” is driven by the desire to impose control and order on a colonial world full of fissures and pitfalls. The novel also contains a definite philosophy for the raising of children, a philosophy that includes withdrawal from the colonies and involvement with nature in a certain limited way. As in the chapter on “Little Henry,” what follows is a study of _The Secret Garden’s_ literary genealogy, and a contextualization of the novel in relation to prevalent attitudes to children, especially as those attitudes intersected with the public sphere, in Britain and in India.
In the late nineteenth century, after the Revolt of 1857, the differences between Britons and Indians were coming to be seen as irreconcilable. The conceptions of colonialism as enclosure on a large scale, of the colonies as wildernesses to be civilized, and of the natives as civilizable figures – all elements of the mid-nineteenth century idea of “improvement” 1 - were giving way to more segregationist classification of people based on pseudo-scientific theories of degeneration or arrested evolution, and ideas of stewardship – of Britain being responsible for the colonies and colonized peoples - were giving way to laissez-faire principles. 2

William Hodges’ *Travels in India* (1793) captures the optimism that fuelled British expansion in India:

Where there is neatness in the cultivation of the land, and that land tilled to the utmost of its boundaries, it may reasonably be supposed that the government is the protector and not the oppressor of the people. Throughout the kingdom of Bengal it appears highly flourishing in tillage of every kind, and abounding in cattle. The villages are clean and filled with swarms of people. (17)

At the time of the publication of Hodges’ *Travels*, British fortunes were seen as closely linked with Indian fortunes, and the rejuvenation of Indian agriculture and restoration of Indian prosperity was linked to British presence there. 3 Hodges’ impressions of India are of a “featureless and formless” wilderness, a space of endless potential for British intervention.  

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1 An ancestor of the idea of “development”

2 See Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausits*: Davis shows the extreme and inconsistent invocation of the “free market” and laissez-faire economics in late nineteenth century India.

3 See Pramod Nayar, “William Hodges”
Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Indian critics of the colonial government espoused a different view of the British utilization of Indian land:

There is an old story that is handed down to us by tradition. A greedy gardener got hold of an excellent garden in a foreign country. He was so delighted with his good fortune that he became indifferent to its preservation and improvement. His countrymen appealed to his patriotism, and induced him to transplant all the flowers and fruit trees to their own country, and the few trees and plants that still remained in the garden withered through his carelessness. When his garden was absolutely ruined in this way, he was suddenly exposed to a number of calamities, namely, famines, boundary disputes with his neighbors, and the growth of competing gardens, and so forth. He went into the garden to see if he could find anything there to gratify his hunger, but the garden was absolutely ruined. A nightingale, which was in the garden at the time, rebuked him for his folly in neglecting the garden. He remained obstinate, however, and eventually he had to abandon the garden and return to his own country… (from an 1879 issue of an Urdu newspaper, *Nassimi Agra*, qtd. in Goswami, 229)

Here, nationalist critics adopt the gardening metaphor to show the upheaval caused by colonial Britons who serve not the country they live in but the country whence they came, so that their adopted country is drained of its resources, its own needs neglected. According to this riposte, the wilderness Hodges perceived upon his arrival in India is the result, not the cause, of British intervention.
The Secret Garden moves from the land of the scolding nightingale to the land of the encouraging robin. The novel begins at the last stage of the above parable: with a colony and an imperial center that are debilitated from their centuries-long engagement. India (the “garden” in the above metaphor) is an “absolutely ruined” space. The inhabitants of both Yorkshire and India are stricken with diseases that seem to result from unwholesome lifestyles. The panacea proves to be Mary’s repatriation. Her repairing to her “own country” is a turning point for all the British characters.

This desolate vision of India is not the only one presented in the text, however. There are two Indias in the novel – a good one and a bad one – and both are summarily dealt with. The good India, which adds interest to the lives of Mary and Colin Craven without being in the least threatening, is the museumized India, enshrined in the unused rooms in Misselthwaite Manor:

In one room, which looked like a lady’s sitting-room, the hangings were all embroidered velvet, and in a cabinet were about a hundred little elephants made of ivory. They were of different sizes, and some had their mahouts or palanquins on their backs. Some were much bigger than the others and some were so tiny that they seemed only babies. Mary had seen carved ivory in India and she knew all about elephants. She opened the door of the cabinet and stood on a footstool and played with these for quite a long time. When she got tired she set the elephants in order and shut the door of the cabinet. (61)

The elephants function indeed as elephants in the room, arresting our absorption into Mary’s world as they remind us of India, despite the colony’s relegation to the long-ago, the far-away and the once-upon-a-time (literally, for Mary uses her knowledge of Indian lore to regale
her cousin with bedside entertainment). Little Henry’s dream of “clearing the jungles” and controlling the rampant wilderness in India\(^1\) would seem to have been achieved, judging by the quantity of ivory on display in the above passage. The brief reminder of colonization is quickly managed, however. As Danielle E. Price points out, “In this passage the wild and exotic has been miniaturized, made controllable, and placed behind glass for display; the elephants are like animals in a zoo” (10).

The obsession with controlling nature, evident in “Little Henry” and identified by Talia Schaffer as a characteristic of missionary novels, and the burden of “improvement” are relocated to England. Mary brings her colonial desire for dominion and her desire to “improve” the wilderness about her to the small, enclosed garden that was being neglected while her uncle travelled the world. The garden is a formless, featureless wilderness, but Mary doesn’t have to dig too deep to find the potential in the garden – unlike Hodge’s ambitious dream of cultivating India, Mary’s dream is more manageable and comes into fruition by the end of the novel.

When Mary finds, and then introduces her two closest friends to, the secret garden, the actions of the children recall Patricia Seed’s description of the “ceremonies of possession” of British colonists: according to Seed, occupation and ownership of land - that is, the soil itself - was always central to British ideas of dominion and/or stewardship. In a sense, Mary returns “improvement” to its original meaning - the word, in its fifteenth century form (emprowment) meant “managing for profit,” and Seed tells us that the word came into common usage with enclosure of formerly “wild” land. (24-25) The trope of cultivation, of taming weeds and bringing control to a wilderness, connects the work of Burnett with that of Sherwood, and even

\(^1\) Sherwood 51
Craik. All three authors draw heavily from *Genesis*, representing the ordering of the “formless void” in the Biblical story of creation as replicable on an earthly scale (Gen 1:1). Seed points to the specificity of British interpretations of Gen. 1:28 (which talks about filling, subduing, and having dominion over the earth): “in medieval England, and in England alone, Gen. 1:28 became widely understood as signifying agricultural rather than human fertility” (34). That which was to be conquered through subjugation/ cultivation was the earth. In England this act was known as “improvement,” the practical process of turning land from wilderness to garden that signaled rights of possession in English law (Macmillan 61).

Where Dinah Mulock Craik applies this mission to the colonial subject, and Mary Martha Sherwood to not only the people but the non-human environment in the colonies, Burnett brings the narrative back literally to a garden, an apparently forbidden, closed space, to which Mary, in a reversal of the story of the biblical Fall, brings Colin, thereby saving him and herself. In her memoir, *The One I Knew Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child* (1893) Burnett recalls her own childhood aversion to the focus on salvation through repentance in books like “Little Henry,” where Little Henry’s conversion rests on his acceptance of his inherently sinful nature (the Original Sin of Adam, that afflicts all the unconverted). As Phyllis Bixler Koppes tells us, “Burnett was highly critical of the exempla she had read. She described them as ‘horrible little books’ given by ‘religious aunts,’ books ‘containing memoirs of dreadful children who died early of complicated diseases, whose lingering developments they enlivened by giving unlimited moral advice and instruction to their parents and immediate relatives’” (Koppes 191). Burnett objects to the feeling evoked in the reader of these exempla, of “having been born an innately vicious little person who needed laboring with constantly that one might be made merely endurable” (25). Perhaps it is to the grave texts of her childhood that we owe her lively novels,
wherein she focuses more on the happiness to be found in this world than on the promise of happiness in the next. Where Sherwood looks to the afterlife as the reward for those who suffer virtuously through the horrors of the colonial world, Burnett’s vision of Paradise is only an ocean voyage away from the disease and death in which Mary finds herself at the beginning of *The Secret Garden*.

Burnett also represents the spiritual growth of her protagonists as inseparable from their physical and mental wellbeing. In the course of the novel, the moral rectitude of the children is shown to follow from proper nurturing of their bodies through nutrition and exercise. There is also an emphasis, which distinguishes *The Secret Garden* from Victorian literature for children, on the happiness of the individual child, to be gained from the society of its peers, and through fruitful and pleasant employment. Unlike “The Half-Caste,” Burnett’s novel is focalized not through the adult who longs to improve her surroundings, but through the child itself.¹

The fiction of Sherwood and Craik, even when it is written for children, does not treat the physical well-being of the child as paramount (it focuses rather on the child’s spiritual health). Little Henry and Zillah, like Burnett’s Mary Lennox, are orphaned and in need of caregivers, but in the case of the former, the caregiver is a missionary, who tends Henry’s soul while his body is allowed to waste away, and in the case of the latter, the caregiver is a governess, her role primarily pedagogical, and the child is conceived as a sort of project. By contrast, Burnett

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¹ This difference is attributable to the difference in the intended readership for the two texts, but also to the difference in the understanding of children and their importance: children in general were seen as much more precious by the early twentieth century than in the mid-nineteenth.
focuses on the fundamental needs of the child for nourishment and fresh air, as well as for the psychological well-being that comes from having a garden to tend.

The non-fiction writing of Sherwood, Craik and Burnett gives us clues to what they held dear. Sherwood’s letters and diaries tell us about her childhood, her marriage, her travels and her experiences as a parent, but the childhood years are narrated in a rationalized and distant manner. Even as Sherwood describes being put in “stocks” – an iron collar attached to a board for her back, so that she stood for hours while she did her lessons – she writes of her childhood as a time of undiluted happiness, her perspective clearly colored by the passage of time. Craik’s letters, as well as much of her didactic non-fiction, focus on the knotty business of being an intelligent but conservative woman, and apparently the only sensible person capable of earning a living in her family. Burnett, on the other hand, uses her memoir as an attempt to access her own mind when she was a child. She talks about how in her youth grown-ups always had their way over little children¹ for “the Children’s Century had not begun. Children were not regarded as embryo intellects, whose growth it is the pleasure and duty of intelligent maturity to foster and protect” (110). Thus she contrasts the attitudes prevalent in the early twentieth century with those that had shaped her own upbringing which, though replete with material comforts, was marked by what the sensitive young Fanny perceived as a universal disrespect for the opinions and imaginations of young children.

Despite Burnett’s aversion to the sorts of exempla she read as a child, her Little Lord Fauntleroy (1885-86), A Little Princess (1905), and The Secret Garden can certainly function as exempla, showing the saving effect of children on reclusive adults. In that child readers are

¹ See The One I Knew Best of All, 9
presumably expected to identify with protagonists who, though children, have the power to do
good or evil in the world, *The Secret Garden* is didactic, but it is more subtly so than stories
written for the previous generation of children. Burnett’s work is reflective of the nascent
twentieth-century understanding of the importance of the child.

In the first decade of the 20th century, radical changes were taking place in the
understanding of children and their national importance in a Britain preoccupied with its own
aging. Where “during the nineteenth century most political economists had tended to believe
with Thomas Malthus that excessive population was dangerous, leading to the exhaustion of
resources, and consequently to war, epidemic disease, and other natural checks on growth”
(Davin 9), from the mid-1870s the death rate began to exceed the birth rate for the first time, and
life seemed to grow more precious. Population came to be seen as a national resource, and the
survival and health of children was treated as an issue of national concern. Children began to be
seen not just as belonging to their parents but as a national asset, as the capital of the country.
Alexander Blyth, in his preface to *Infant Education* (1907) wrote:

> Over-production lessens, under-production enhances the value of
> commodities. Considering the life of an infant as a commodity its money value
> must be greater than 35 years ago. It is of concern to the nation that a sufficient
> number of children should annually be produced to more than make good the
> losses by death; hence the importance of preserving infant life is even greater now
> than it was before the decline of the birth rate (qtd. in Cooper, 88).

The Children Act of 1908 made detailed provisions across the spectrum of child welfare.
Davin talks about “a surge of concern about the bearing and rearing of children – the next
generation of soldiers and workers, the Imperial Race” – “imperial race” being glorious imperial speak for cannon fodder. The great irony here was that the need for cannon fodder increased the value of (British) life in British eyes (Cooper 90).

Burnett is engaging with prevalent discourses around children as “the future of the race” – Eugenicist discourse, for example, and the discourse of maternalism. Hardline Eugenicians, afraid that the best of British manhood had been decimated in the battlefields, resulting in what the Eugenicist W.C.D. Whetham called “a true survival of the worst” (Soloway 141) believed that the survival only of the fittest – and not all the fittest – was to be desired. In addition to high mortality, “physical incompetence” was a concern in the wake of the Boer war, where there was a discrepancy between those willing to enlist and those able to do so. Therefore, some believed that the preservation of “the national stamina” was more importance than the declining birth rate, and that a “multitude of weaklings is less to be preferred than a handful of virile men, and a healthy people pruned of its decadents by a high mortality amongst its children is better than a degenerate race weakened by the survival of its effete progeny” (William Butler, qtd in Davin 98).

The idea that the least fit members of the population were suddenly in the best position to reproduce, combined with a more generalized unease about the disruption to family patterns and “moral values” supposedly caused by the influx of wives into the workforce and the problem of “surplus women,” led to the state-driven initiatives to protect child-life, like the training of midwives, the provision of free meals to needy children, increased instruction in mothercraft in

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1 See Anna Davin’s “Imperialism and Motherhood” for a detailed discussion of Eugenicians and maternalists.
state schools and the agitation for wider distribution of free milk and dinners to school children. The effect was to place the health of the young firmly in the national spotlight (Boucher 270 – 271). Psychoanalysis and IQ testing grew out of this environment: in Burnett’s work there is a notable interest in the mind of the child.

In her characterization of Martha Sowerby, Burnett comes uncomfortably close to the maternalist discourse that proliferated as the value of children as future citizens increased. “Emphasis on the importance of women not ‘shirking’ motherhood related to the belief that middle- and upper-class women were pursuing new opportunities in education and employment rather than marrying, or were marrying but restricting the number of their children, either tendency boding ill for the race” (Cooper 92). Karl Pearson, one of the Eugenicist founding fathers, believed with the evolutionist Herbert Spencer that individual intellectual development (especially in women) might impair the reproductive powers: in 1885 he wrote that “if child-bearing women must be intellectually handicapped, then the penalty to be paid for race predominance is the subjection of women.” New women, one doctor wrote in the 1911 Eugenics Review, were “unfit to be mothers to the race” (Davin 99).

Martha Sowerby, antithetical to the new woman, is perfectly content to have borne many children and to raise them all to the best of her ability, taking on the care of Mary and Colin in the bargain. Her ability to provide for everyone, and even to give the two wealthy children the occasional gift, resembles the Biblical miracle of the loaves and the fishes in its magical defiance of the scientific law that matter cannot be produced out of nothing.\(^1\) The pleasing magical

\(^1\) Burnett’s working class characters, as noble as they are and as much as they have to teach, remain in the working class and seem happy to do so. They are supposed to be sympathetic
solutions Mrs. Sowerby provides to the childrens’ problems had a not-so-pleasing real life referent in the maternalist movement.

Anna Davin points out that the governmental focus on mothers “provided an easy way out. It was cheaper to blame them and to organize a few classes than to expand social and medical services, and it avoided the political problem of provoking … taxpayers by requiring extensive new finance” (105). The focus on maternalism “obscured to an extent which now seems astonishing the effects on child health of poverty and environment” (Cooper 90). In 1906, at the first National Conference for the Prevention of Infant Mortality, according to Davin, the focus was overwhelmingly on mothers and their roles: other than two papers on milk supply, there were no studies presented of environmental factors in infant mortality (Cooper 106).

Burnett is at times blithely dismissive of material factors - she wishes away the scarcity in the Sowerby household, for example - but she does pay attention to living conditions in her attribution of the health of the Sowerby children, and of Mary and Colin, to environmental factors. In this, her views are aligned with those members of the Eugenicist movement who, unlike Davin’s maternalists, did emphasize the consequences of poor living conditions. Richard Titmuss of the British Eugenics Society established a statistical link between economic figures in part because they are non-threatening. Nevertheless, the characterization of Martha Sowerby as a benefactor to the two wealthy children is refreshing in light of characterizations of working class people in fiction by middle class authors as deficient in culture, taste, morals etc. Charlotte Yonge, for example, sees the poor as outlets for the reformist energies of middle-class women. Similarly, even as Dickens parodies this reformist zeal in Bleak House, he has his own versions of the middle-class do-gooder in Ether Summerson and her husband.
deprivation and mortality levels. Urban living was thought to be a major part of the problem. Anxieties about physical decline were often mixed with moral concerns about savagery in the character of children deprived of sunshine, clean air and fresh foods. Dr. Thomas Barnardo, philanthropist and founder of homes for poor children, worked from the slogan “Ruralise the child,” claiming that outdoorsiness conveyed one from “stunted growth to true perfection” (qtd in Boucher 273).

Burnett shows Dr. Barnardo’s views in their ideal application – the children are all painlessly ruralized. Mary’s “ruralization” is effected through her return from the colonies to Britain; in the real world, the ruralization of the child was likely to take the opposite route, feeding into the ideology of Child Emigration. The Child Emigration Society, one of the organizations involved in the juvenile resettlement movement, sought to “ruralize the child” overseas. Cuthbert Whalley, the first organizing secretary of the CES, wrote in an article for the *Oxford Times* entitled “The Strike and Its Lessons” (1911) that “the hooligan is not born, but manufactured by his environment” (Boucher 275). The slogan of the Child Emigration Society in 1921, “For our Children, good Homes. For Australia, good Farmers. For the Empire, good Citizens” (qtd. in Boucher 277) makes, pithily, the connection between the child, the colony, and citizenship. This politicization of childhood was intimately linked with the new perception of the importance of the rising generation to Empire. The ideology of child emigration rested on the “narrative of the resurrection of the nation through imperial development, relying on a particular construction of geography that compared a vast, rural empire with a congested, industrialized Britain” (Boucher 280).

Burnett aligns herself with Barnardo’s views, and writes against the Eugenicist discourse of thinkers like Butler, in her characterization of Colin and Mary. Colin, who is characterized as
decadent, degenerate and/or effete, and Mary, who is jaundiced and, in the phrasing of The Girl's Own Indoor Book (1888) “dull, drowsy, apathetic, and peevish, if not decidedly ill” (293) in part for lack of fresh air, are rehabilitated within the limits of their own back yard; their initial failure to thrive is attributed to the hot, disease-ridden colonial environment (which claims Mary’s parents, and her Ayah) and to unwholesome childrearing practices.

Although by this time the miasma theory of contagion was giving way to an understanding of germs, Burnett seems to evoke “miasma” in her opposition of India, where there was “something mysterious in the air,” to the magically fresh air of Yorkshire – the bad air of India debilitates, while the fresh air of Yorkshire acts as a restorative. Mary and her father are both “always ill” in India, where it is “frightfully hot.” At the beginning of the novel, Mary is yellow “because she had been born in India and had always been ill” (9), but the tint in her skin fades as she works in the garden, a change that is remarked upon by both Martha, the maid, and Ben Weatherstaff, the gardener. As Price puts it, “in a reversal of the feared changes visited on creolized English subjects in the colonies, Mary’s stay in Yorkshire transforms the color of her skin, taking away the ‘yellow’ and giving her the whiteness that is rightfully hers” (8).

Almost as debilitating as the Indian climate is the social structure in colonial India, characterized by British domination and native submission, so that Mrs. Lennox, Mary’s mother, can, upon her daughter’s birth, hand her over to the Ayah, “who was made to understand that if she wished to please the Mem Sahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible” (1). Mary, like her mother, expects her every whim to be accommodated – she is a miniature despot, who can curse fluently, and knows no limits to her power. She meets her match in her cousin Colin, who despite being born in what Burnett represents as a more egalitarian system, is allowed to abuse all around him because he is presumed fatally ill. Between Colin’s outrageous
behavior, which the intelligent girl perceives as mirroring her own, and the no-nonsense attitude of Martha, the maid, who is far less submissive than her Indian Ayah, Mary soon sees that she will be happier if she changes her ways. Her transformation is brought about through the garden, of course, but also in part through her exposure to a class of people relatively untouched by colonialism – the Sowerbys and Ben Weatherstaff, who are firmly rooted in Yorkshire soil. They are presented in opposition to Mary, the child of an empire family. As Elizabeth Buettner put it, in empire families, “Exile, segregation, and physical displacements created both a pervasive sense of collective solidarity as well as alienation, ultimately forging familial subcultures so unlike the prevailing national culture of stable middle-class domesticity” (Clancy-Smith 178). It falls to the Sowerbys, who escape the heartbreak of empire families by managing to remain untouched by colonialism, to resurrect the ideal of stability. In Burnett’s idealized vision, rather than pursuing education or wealth away from home, in the colony or the city, the Sowerbys are obliged to stay in the countryside, where they learn everything they need to know to survive, such as how to subsist on eggs and foraged food. They apparently get fat on “grass and moor air” (24), for Martha Sowerby, who works as a maid at Misselthwaite, appears to be the only earning member of the family. From Burnett’s upper middle-class vantage point, fresh air and a caring circle of loved ones appear more important to a child than large meals and other luxuries.

Burnett’s depiction of the maternal Mrs. Sowerby is not entirely from the maternalist playbook, however. Those agitating for the education of working-class mothers were assuming the ignorance and irresponsibility of Mrs. Sowerby’s class of women; maternalism was premised on a) the notion that working class mothers were more negligent and ignorant than upper class women and b) the notion that maternal instinct was a myth. The socialist Margaret MacMillan certainly subscribed to the latter notion: “‘Mothers and fathers,’ it is said, ‘have a divine instinct
out of which they produce everything that is needed.’ They have no such instinct. New help does not arise out of these dim underworlds. It comes always from another source” (qtd. in Cooper, 96). Burnett writes against the idea that the worst mothers were those in the working class, and against the idea that there is no such thing as maternal instinct – her one representation of a negligent mother, Mary’s, shows an upper-class woman spoiled by the colonial lifestyle, as different as she could be from the rooted Mrs. Sowerby. The “unnatural” setting in which Mrs. Lennox finds herself ruins her ability to follow her instincts, while the natural Mrs. Sowerby remains blissfully unaffected by this colonial malaise.

In the course of the novel, Mary begins to attain the sort of nurturing femininity epitomized by Mrs. Sowerby. Just as the garden is being rescued from its own tendency to wildness, Mary is herself being pruned and tidied. John Dando Sedding, in Garden-Craft Old and New (1891) writes that “the very enclosure of our garden-spaces signifies that Nature is held in duress here. Nature of herself cannot rise above Nature, and man, seeing perfections through her imperfections, capacities through her incapacities, shuts her in for cultivation.” The use of the feminine pronoun here is not arbitrary, but sustained, and the analogy to gendering continues when Sedding goes on to talk about how Man “binds [Nature's] feet...with the silken cord of art-constraint” (36) He gives us the gory details of the interventions that are made in the name of improving Nature:

The yew and the holly from the tangled brake shall feel the ignominy of the shears. The “common” thorn of the hedge shall be grafted with one of the twenty-seven rarer sorts; the oak and maple shall be headed down and converted
into scarlet species; the single flowers, obedient to a beautiful disease, shall blow as doubles, and be propagated by scientific processes that defy Nature and accomplish centuries of evolution at a stride. The woodbine from the vernal wood must be nailed to the carpenter’s trellis, the brook may no more brawl, nor violate its limits, the leaves of the holly bush and the box shall be variegated, the forest tree and woodland shrub shall have their frayed hedges shorn, and their wildness pressed out of them in Art’s dissembling embrace. (190)

Sedding sees the cruelty of some of these interventions, yet he writes of them with relish. To what end, however, are “beautiful diseases” to be visited on the flowers, and nails hammered into the woodbine? The answer lies in Sedding’s assertion that

Its [the garden’s] perfectness puts people upon their best behaviour. Its nice refinement secures the mood for politeness. Its heightened beauty produces the disposition that delights in what is beautiful in form and colour. Its queenly graciousness of mien inspires the reluctant loyalty of even the stoniest mind. Here, if anywhere, will the human hedgehog unroll himself and deign to be companionable. Here friend Smith, caught by its nameless charm, will drop his brassy gabble and dare to be idealistic; and Jones, forgetful of the main chance and ‘bulls’ and ‘bears,’ will throw the rein to his sweeter self, and reveal that latent elevation of soul and tendency to romance known only to his wife! (15)
The point of having a child tackle the wilderness of Nature and bring it to order, then, is that Nature returns the favor: in the process of taming the garden, Mary is herself tamed.\footnote{Mary’s instantly successful foray into gardening also makes light of the labor of those who actually work the land.} Just as the orderliness of the garden is made known by contrast to the wilderness of the moor, Mary’s conversion to a civilized young British lady is brought to our attention through a series of contrasts – of her speech with that of the Sowerbys, of her whitening skin with its former choleric tone, and of the improvements in her behavior made evident by contrast to her former, Indian self.

Mary’s transformation occurs in the secluded garden, but John Ruskin, whose “Of Queen’s Gardens” has much in common, philosophically, with *The Secret Garden*, warns of the dangers of the high-walled, ordered space. Ruskin talks about the importance of outdoor activities for girls, and he also anticipates later thought on child-rearing by stressing the importance of happiness for the child. He bemoans the rapid industrialization of England and yearns for a more reverent attitude to Nature. All of these ideas are incorporated into *The Secret Garden*; and like Ruskin’s ideal lady-in-training, Mary guides a potential despot, her cousin Colin, into a more productive, conformist version of himself. Where Ruskin and Burnett seem to part ways, however, is when Ruskin says

…you shut yourselves within your park walls and garden gates; and you are content to know that there is beyond them a whole world in wilderness—a world
of secrets which you dare not penetrate; and of suffering which you dare not conceive. [...] 

This is wonderful—oh, wonderful!—to see her, with every innocent feeling fresh within her, go out in the morning into her garden to play with the fringes of its guarded flowers, and lift their heads when they are drooping, with her happy smile upon her face, and no cloud upon her brow, because there is a little wall around her place of peace: and yet she knows, in her heart, if she would only look for its knowledge, that, outside of that little rose-covered wall, the wild grass, to the horizon, is torn up by the agony of men, and beat level by the drift of their lifeblood. (103)

Mary seems to take the opposite journey from that advocated by Ruskin: she has seen the wide world, has been exposed to agony and inequality, as a child. However, having nothing to compare the colonial world with, she was inured to her surroundings and saw nothing amiss. When she is transplanted, and given the insulation she needs to begin to thrive, she awakens to a new consciousness of the world outside the garden. The story ends with the Cravens and Mary processing out of the garden, back to Misselthwaite, invigorated by contact with nature. The magic of the garden will out; it infects first Ben Weatherstaff, then Mary, then Dickon and Colin, not to mention its many non-human inhabitants, and finally reaches the worldly and world-weary adult, giving him new life and hope. In a sentiment diametrically opposed to the one from Nassimi Agra with which this study of The Secret Garden opened, the novel ends with the very Victorian suggestion that
As long as the British nobleman continues to take an interest in his avenues and hot-houses—his lady in her conservatories and parterres—the squire overlooks his labourers’ allotments—the ‘squiresses and squirinas’ betake themselves and their flowers to the neighbouring horticultural show—the citizen sets up his cucumber-frame in his back-yard—his dame her lilacs and almond-trees in the front-court—the mechanic breeds his prize-competing auriculas—the cottager rears his sun-flowers and Sweet-Williams before his door—and even the collier sports his ‘posy jacket’—as long, in a word, as this common interest pervades every class of society, so long shall we cling to the hope that our country is destined to outlive all her difficulties and dangers. (from an essay entitled “The Flower Garden,” published in The Quarterly Review, qtd. in Price, 8)
Chapter 3

Kipling’s Striplings: Mowgli and Kim

This chapter examines the ambivalence toward British imperialism evident in the portrayals of Rudyard Kipling’s two most famous boy protagonists, Mowgli and Kim. It situates Kipling’s portrayals in relation to those of his contemporaries and colonial antecedents, and it explores the tensions between the desires of the boys to live in an unorchestrated harmony with Indians and the green world, and the competing colonial imperative of classification, organization and optimal exploitation and management of resources that arguably prevails as the boys grow into adulthood.

Mowgli and Kim stand out among depictions of colonial boyhood. While Mary Martha Sherwood’s Little Henry\(^1\) and Sarah Jeanette Duncan’s Sonny Sahib\(^2\) wax heroic, Kipling’s protagonists wane. According to John Palmer, “Kipling writes of the heroic life” (8); this is so of the early years of Kim and Mowgli, but as they grow, their lives tend not toward a bang but toward a whimper. The status of tragedy cannot be conferred on such peterings out. Ian Baucom, writing of the “imperial urge to extinguish the nomadic,” talks about how Kim’s freedom from boundaries and absolute identifications poses a threat to the colonial order, a threat that is neutralized as the boy grows into “the zombielike R17…Kim, like India, has indeed been enumerated, and the colonial state has at long last succeeded in its deadly work of subject-

\(^1\) From *Little Henry and His Bearer* (1814)
\(^2\) from “The Story of Sonny Sahib” (1894)
fashioning” (Norton 353). The last chapter of *Kim* (1900-01) suggests that Kim has been successfully corralled by the colonial state inasmuch as he is not permitted to attain *nirvana*; wrested from him also are the keys to the earthly paradise of his younger days, in which, as Hannah Arendt says, “purposelessness is the very charm of Kim’s existence” (216-17). Mowgli, likewise, is harnessed in the service of the State, his glorious potential given ambiguous purpose.

The narrative voices in *Kim* and the Mowgli stories\(^1\) are redolent with nostalgia for lost freedoms: in Kim’s case, for an Orientalist India untouched by Anglicist\(^2\) attitudes, where Kim would not have to choose between his British and his Indian identities; in Mowgli’s case, for a green world that is no longer available to the grown man.\(^3\) Though the spirit of youth yearns toward a world where people and non-human creatures may live in a harmony that comes naturally, and is not conducted by an administrative superstructure, civilization is nonetheless the trap\(^4\) into which the growing boys knowingly, fatalistically, proceed, like Kafka’s mouse.\(^5\) A teleological thrust may be gleaned from *Kim* and the Mowgli stories; we may read into them Kipling’s interest in the child as an emblem of futurity,\(^6\) but this trajectory is so anxiously

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\(^1\) “In the Rukh,” (1893) *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *The Second Jungle Book* (1895).

\(^2\) “Anglicist” here refers to the privileging and promotion of British culture over every other culture, and is descriptive of nineteenth-century colonialism, as opposed to the eighteenth-century “Orientalist” approach of the East-India Company, which encouraged its high-ranking officials to understand and embrace Indian culture.

\(^3\) i.e. either the grown Mowgli or his creator.

\(^4\) Literally, in “In the Rukh,” 231.

\(^5\) From “Kleine Fabel,” c. 1920.

\(^6\) See Edelman 4.
imposed on the unwilling protagonists that it serves only to highlight, through repression, the boys’ resistance to colonial interpellation.

Initially, Mowgli and Kim vibrate with the potential that stems from their uncertain identities – both are evasive of what Benedict Anderson calls “the census-maker’s passion for completeness and unambiguity” which results in the administrative “intolerance of multiple, politically ‘transvestite,’ blurred, or changing identifications. Hence the weird subcategory . . . of ‘Others’ - who, nonetheless, are absolutely not to be confused with other ‘Others.’ The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place. No fractions” (166-167, italics in original). Kim is a study in the sort of fractions that Anderson says are the census-maker’s nightmare. Historians like Anderson and Manu Goswami have shown how the ordering of colonial space and the rendering knowable of the colony were crucial tools for nineteenth century colonists. Kipling writes against this in that Mowgli and Kim are both evasive of the authorities, their stories underwritten by a longing to be off the radar, and the suggestion ever-present that there are more things in India’s heaven (consider the Lama’s enlightenment, to which Kim has no access) and earth than are dreamt of in colonial philosophies. Yet for pragmatic reasons, like the continuation of the Anglo-Indian way of life to which Kipling was so attached, and of the colonial government that Kipling believed to be the only efficient way to administer the vast subcontinent, colonialism must prevail. Where in the Bildungsroman, the attachment to the mother must be overcome in order for the child to differentiate and progress into adulthood, in the Mowgli stories and Kim, the Indian environment stands in for the mother, so that it is India herself who gives Mowgli and Kim the sense of belonging associated with families, and it is the attachment to India that must be, tragically, overcome in the making of a colonial man.
For all the freedom granted the individual protagonists, the characters around Mowgli and Kim are subjected to the homogenizing ethnographic gaze that allows for the classification of people without their consent, and without taking into consideration the complexities of their history and self-perception/self-identification. Even Mowgli and Kim are only allowed to be evasive within limits – just enough to express the longing for a life unfettered by adult responsibilities. Arguably, Kim’s identity settles in the end, as does Mowgli’s; in fact, Mowgli’s doom has been foretold in “In the Rukh” (1893). Despite their delightful slipperiness, Kim and Mowgli are destined for fairly conventional adulthoods: they will both end up in government service, and in Mowgli’s case, with a wife and child. Kipling effects a “wily compromise” similar to that identified by Franco Moretti in the work of Jane Austen, between “narrativity and closure, youth and adulthood, free self-making and social determination” but, as Jed Esty points out, “Kipling’s closure is less comfortable than Austen’s, his protagonists’ ends less smoothly naturalized” (4). Just as the business of rendering fixed and knowable through cartography depends on the movement of the nomadic surveyor (Baucom 352) colonial stability depends on the adaptability of government servants like Kim. Thus, even if we conclude that Kim embraces his spy-identity in the end, he is still not so confined as Mowgli, who in “In the Rukh” is bound to his family, and rooted in the Forest Department. However the endings of both, Mowgli’s story and Kim’s, are wistful rather than happy – the growth into manhood means the shouldering of a burden. As Esty points out, if there is closure at the end, it is rather unsettling closure, unlike what we have seen in previous chapters, in the work of Dinah Mulock Craik and Frances Hodgson Burnett.

In Craik’s and Burnett’s stories of extraction from the colonies, India is relegated to the long ago and far away. Both, “The Half-Caste” (1851) and The Secret Garden (1911) strain
towards closure, and towards the erasure of the expatriatism and exile that defines Kipling as well as postcolonial writers who draw from Kipling. In the Mowgli stories and *Kim*, England is manifestly absent: nobody returns to England, nobody corresponds with England – it is a more complete absence than that of India in “The Half-Caste” or *The Secret Garden*, in both of which the colony, despite the apparent efforts on the parts of characters and narrator to the contrary, remains a spectral presence.

Kim, like Sherwood’s Little Henry, is more at ease with Indian culture than with British culture. He has as little anxiety as any of India’s native-born, for he considers himself to be of their number. The pointed lack of anxiety in the depiction of Kim, despite his propensity for finding himself in dangerous circumstances, contrasts dramatically with Sherwood’s portrayal of Little Henry who, though he remains in home spaces with caregivers for the duration of his tale, seems to have the sword of Damocles hanging perpetually over his head.¹ *Kim* and the Mowgli stories challenge the childrearing wisdom offered in previous chapters: both Kim and Mowgli thrive on uncertainty, parental neglect, cultural ambiguity and violence. Threats to life and limb are preferable to threats to their freedom to roam the Indian countryside. Kim and Mowgli are resistant to the indulgent Indian caregivers who “spoil” Henry and Mary² – their imperviousness to (putatively feminine) influence, combined with their serendipitous facility for extricating themselves from dangerous situations, allows their narratives to effectively evade British anxieties about raising children in India. Kim’s ease in all strata of Indian society is his greatest strength. When he runs away from school, spurred on by his longing for the road and for the

¹ The dangers in Little Henry are illness and spiritual challenges; Kim’s dangers are of a more hearty sort – his life is in constant, exhilarating jeopardy.

² From *The Secret Garden*
foods, sights and smells of his vagabond youth, his mentor Mahbub Ali does not fear for the boy because “A monkey does not fall among trees” – Kim’s childhood in the streets of Lahore becomes his safety-net (109).

While the texts discussed in previous chapters center on distinct aspects of colonial childhood, such as missionary pedagogy, Eurasian assimilation and Anglicization, each text pits the perception of India as wilderness against an idea of paradise/redemption, whether that redemption is to be in the next world, as in the case of Little Henry, in England, as in the case of Mary, or through Anglicization, as in the case of Zillah. By contrast, in Kipling’s novels, the wilderness itself is paradise to the young protagonists, and their extraction from it is a painful fall from a childhood state of innocence. The colony, like the biblical Eden, is commonly envisioned as a bounded, governed, knowable space, over which man can have dominion. Kipling’s dynamic, teeming portrayal of India poses a built-in challenge to the imperialist thrust of his oeuvre. As Irving Howe puts it, in making a case for the pleasures of *Kim* even as he acknowledges the moral obligation we have to pay attention to the evils the novel suppresses, *Kim* “brushes past social misery as more recent novels brush past personal happiness; it neglects the shadows as others neglect the lights…But *Kim* is not an idyll, not a retreat from the world; it is a celebration of, a plunge into the world” (Norton 332).

The wilderness in Kipling is a space outside of the bounds of the conventional family, organized religion, adversarial colonial attitudes to the environment, and other forms of human folly. In the Mowgli stories, the wilderness is literal – the jungle – but in *Kim* it is within the protagonist that the freedom of the wild childhood self is opposed to the civilized colonial adult male, an identity that Kim staves off until the very end of his story:
He did not want to cry—had never felt less like crying in his life—but of a sudden easy, stupid tears trickled down his nose, and with an almost audible click he felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true—solidly planted upon the feet—perfectly comprehensible—clay of his clay, neither more nor less (234).

Even when he has this epiphany about the reality of the material world, in contradistinction to the teachings of his Buddhist companion, this moment is a reconciliation of the ultimate purpose of existence (which the religious voices in the book would call Paradise) with the material realities of the world, a revelation of the dichotomy between flesh and spirit as a false one, rather than a selection of one or the other of the so-called alternatives – and this refusal to choose, or even to recognize the worlds of flesh and spirit as distinct, is intimately connected with Kim’s acceptance (without reconciliation) of his identities: he is a chela, he is a player in the Great Game, he is Irish, he is English, he is Indian, all the languages and religions that he has been exposed to he takes to as one to the country born – which in fact he is.¹

¹ Jed Esty has a different interpretation of this passage: he reads the recurring infinitive form of the “to be” as a deferral, and suggests that the novel ends with Kim’s indefinitely prolonged adolescence, and India’s deferred modernization. My interpretation depends more on the
Kipling’s attitudes to family and society set the Mowgli stories and *Kim* apart not only from the works discussed in previous chapters, but from most of the feral child and orphan narratives that proliferated in Victorian fiction in general and colonial fiction in particular. Whereas most feral child narrative suggests “deviance from a normative path of human development”¹ (Kidd 93), this is markedly not true of Kipling’s feral youths. Kipling presents the lives of the feral children in a positive light; it is the civilizing process that well-meaning adults attempt to subject the children to that is to be feared and mourned. In the previous chapters, we see the emergence of the notion of the child as an innocent, in need of adult protection and a moral education. “Little Henry and His Bearer” (1813) and *The Secret Garden* are written specifically for children, and seek to instruct as well as entertain. The protagonists in both are saved, physically and spiritually in Mary’s case but alas, only spiritually in Henry’s, through the interventions of nurturing adults. Parenting and family (although sometimes represented as manifest absences, as in the case of Henry) became important in 19th century Victorian texts, and simultaneously the child’s space came to be seen as increasingly distinct, segregated from adult space. Rudyard Kipling challenges both those ideas in his representations of dysfunctional families and unclear distinctions between the public world and the private. Kipling’s childhoods are joyous and unfettered, yet his most famous protagonists, Mowgli and Kim, resurrect pre-

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¹ All the texts discussed in previous chapters are colonial orphan narratives.
Victorian ideas of the child as an adult-in-training, thereby challenging sentimental notions of the sanctity of childhood and of family. ¹

In *Kim* and the Mowgli stories, affiliation, rather than filiation, becomes the basis for family. Where in Victorian orphan narratives the centrality of family is made manifest through the absence of family (i.e. the orphan’s situation is invariably sentimentalized, and the only possibility for a happy ending is often not his or her adoption, but the recovery of the biological family), Kipling steers clear of the mystique surrounding bloodlines and the attendant entitlements: his orphan portrayals are not meant to be pathetic, rather they are freeing, and empower the child. Mowgli and Kim both choose their families: Mowgli decides to live with Messua, while Kim decides which of the many interested adults in his life he will pay heed to. ²

Kipling’s orphaned youths receive all the benefits of family, with none of the restrictions, from a vast network that is not consanguineal, and not necessarily even human. A vast, non-consanguineal network brings to mind the prevalent colonial metaphor of empire as family; but

¹ Randall Jarrell (“Preparing to read Kipling” 341) and U.C. Knoepflmacher (“Hansel and Gretel” 179-180) have both suggested that Kipling’s stories of abandoned and neglected children are workings-through of his own troubled childhood, which Kipling writes directly about in *Baa Baa Black Sheep* and *Something of Myself*; I am more interested in the effect produced in his work, in contrast to the effect produced by the other texts here, and by other orphan narratives more generally – the suggestion ever-present that abandonment might be a blessing in disguise.

² *The Secret Garden* is an example of the orphan narrative that ultimately privileges the biological family, albeit a less sentimental one than Charles Dickens’s depictions of ingenuous middle-class orphans who suffer great hardship but are ultimately restored to their rightful place in society through reunion with their kin (*Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, and Bleak House*).
in the cases of Kim and Mowgli, Kipling inverts the metaphor wherein Britons saw themselves as having a parental role – that of ma-baap (mother-father), while the native Indian was viewed as an untrained child. In the Mowgli stories and *Kim*, India stands *in loco parentis* for the native Indian as well as the Anglo-Indian boy. *Kim* is the story of ties that are familial without being consanguineal; the Mowgli stories open the family further, to include non-human animals. Both representations may be understood as questioning family, or putting the very idea of family in jeopardy, as they show children growing without the regular intervention of parents or other relatives; but it is not the idea of family that Kipling writes against, so much as the inflexible bourgeois nuclear patriarchal family, with a bread-winning, decision making father and a mother whose sphere is the home (an image of Victorian families that was one widely accepted but has now been challenged.\(^1\) Kim and Mowgli are loved, mentored and taught by many human and non-human caregivers, yet they might be interpreted as fundamentally isolated characters who seek and find refuge from bourgeois restrictions on their liberty. Their stories belong both to a tradition of romanticizing individualism, and to a tradition of representation of the colonies as a repository for masculine energy that might otherwise be stifled in the genteel drawing rooms where middle class values are fomented.

Kipling’s representations of the natural world present an arguably greater departure from Victorian attitudes than his unconventional family values. As discussed, the novels of Sherwood, Burnett and Duncan that are set in India start out with the view that the Indian environment is hostile. Burnett’s protagonist makes peace with nature, but this can only occur within a bounded garden in England – for as long as Mary Lennox is in India, her surroundings remain threatening. Sherwood’s Little Henry actually dies of a mysterious miasmatic ailment brought on by exposure

\(^1\) See Davidoff and Hall, 2002.
to the Indian environment. Where in “Little Henry” and *The Secret Garden* we see an attitude to
time that is, in the first case, adversarial, and in the second case at least anthropocentric, in
Kipling’s novels Nature’s ways, when pitted against Man’s, often emerge the wiser (although
wisdom does not always triumph over foolishness). For example, in *Kim*, Nature dictates time,
sleep and travel – Western clock-anxiety has no place in Kim’s India. *Kim* and the Mowgli
stories portray India as a Biblical Eden (in Kipling’s pantheon, Christian beliefs can and do co-
exist with other religious systems); a harmonious relationship with the natural world as an
extended family is pathologized when man, disrespectful of nature’s restrictions, attempts to
overreach. This results in the loss of innocence, and the beginning of an adversarial relationship
with the environment.

**Kim**

*Kim* is a missing child, in two senses: he manages to elude co-optation by missionaries or
civil authorities, and he misses everything the Victorians considered the conditions of childhood
– parents, schooling, and in some ways, even innocence. His freedom from societal constraints is
reminiscent of J. M. Barrie’s Peter Pan or the innocent child of the Romantics, but rather than
trail clouds of glory, *Kim* trails clouds of dirt – at the outset of his narrative he is a very canny,
wordly mortal, whose street-smarts balance the spiritual co-sojourner, Teshoo Lama, who enters
his life early on in the story. The Buddhist monk comes to represent, variously, Kim’s dependent,
parent, guru, and his innocence and conscience. The lama is, like the child of the Romantics,
both absolutely innocent and absolutely wise. In the case of Kim, therefore, a study of the child-
protagonist means turning our attention to the Lama almost as much as to the boy. One way of
reading the double crisis at the end of the novel is as a dual coming of age: Kim, whose life is henceforward to be measured in the rational Western way that divides existence into childhood and adulthood, realizes the reality of the real: that “Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true—solidly planted upon the feet—perfectly comprehensible—clay of his clay, neither more nor less” (234). The Lama, to whom time is organized into a wheel from which he seeks liberation, pulls himself back from the paramathma, or the universal soul, for the sake of his earthly beloved (in a trajectory opposite to that of the Buddha.) Kim’s story should, morphologically, be a bildungsroman, or a quest narrative, as it sees a young boy into adulthood. Kipling, however, called it a picaresque, and even if it qualifies as a novel in that it depicts a journey, or a history, it is morphologically rather queer: the ending is the opposite of heroic, resembling, oddly enough, George Eliot’s Middlemarch (1874) more than anything else in the individual’s subsumption - despite the glorious potential evident in previous chapters, and the glorious possibility of nirvana through the mentorship of the Lama - in the practical details of the everyday. Kim concludes his grand adventure with a set of utilitarian facts (“Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to”), leading him away from the Lama’s concern with the right way of being, and towards the utilitarian concern with what he should be doing. He realizes that he is meant to serve the government, and is no longer a footloose and fancy-free urchin who may thumb his nose at the responsibilities of a colonial society.

Paradoxically, Kim’s very subsumption is heroic, in a Christian as well as a Buddhist sense, for he becomes a martyr to causes greater than his own happiness. In this curious way, his story echoes early missionary tales of martyrdom for greater causes in the colonies. Kipling thus
rationalizes the painful but necessary process of the imposition of increasing limitations on a child, who starts out a citizen of the world and a repository of unlimited potential, but ends up as something far less Romantic.

The first four words of *Kim* introduce the protagonist sitting in defiance of municipal orders astride a colossal cannon – no much-administered man¹ he. He is a liminal character, designed to raise ethnographic questions, which remain even as we learn Kim’s early history:

The half-caste woman who looked after him (she smoked opium, and pretended to keep a second-hand furniture shop by the square where the cheap cabs wait) told the missionaries that she was Kim’s mother’s sister; but his mother had been nursemaid in a Colonel’s family and had married Kimball O’Hara, a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment. He afterwards took a post on the Sind, Punjab, and Delhi Railway, and his Regiment went home without him. The wife died of cholera in Ferozepore, and O’Hara fell to drink and loafing up and down the line with the keen-eyed three-year-old baby. Societies and chaplains, anxious for the child, tried to catch him, but O’Hara drifted away, till he came across the woman who took opium and learned the taste from her, and died as poor whites die in India. (3-4)

¹ In *Kim*, Kipling tries to retrieve the Orientalist romance of India as a place of self-discovery from the all-pervasive administration that is a reality of Indian life as he describes it in his “Masque of Plenty,” from which we get the phrase “much-administered man”.
Kim is thus established as far outside of middle class norms. He is “of the very poorest,” immune to the embourgeoisement attendant on prosperity and domesticity (Joshi 54), and his racial ambiguity, in addition to his nimble evasions, spares him the ministrations of well-meaning British or Indian adults (3). This enables him to live a life free of middle-class convention, in pursuit of adventure. Rather than become the sort of child of empire that Kipling was (i.e. shipped, to his eternal dissatisfaction, away from the freedom of a colonial childhood to the stifling domain of British foster-parents), or the sheltered child of a nuclear family who would be subject to ideological guidance, Kim remains a free spirit in part because of his rocky origins. The Eurasian woman in whose care Kim has been left, who is like him racially ambiguous and outside of caste, class or racial norms, and who like him habitually evades authorities, is paradoxically the ideal parent-figure, in that she is minimally involved in Kim’s life, serving only as a barrier between him and the forces of embourgeoisement. Her failure to support him materially liberates him from possessing anything, owing anything, or depending on anything material – the beholdenness to goods and the maintenance of a certain material lifestyle being hallmarks of bourgeois culture which the Buddhist impulse in the novel mutinies against. Like Kim’s Buddhist companion, Teshoo Lama, Kim’s mother-figure refrains from action, or from intervening in the world. She “pretends” to run a second-hand furniture store – presumably little legitimate commerce takes place there. She is unmoored from the depressing practicality that Kipling associated with Indian administration. Her vices disqualify her from the claims to higher ways that the Lama, who is also exempt from the material world, is able to make (and Kim’s father is similarly dissolute). Her unreliability absolves Kim of even the dependency on a
mother figure that writers like Burnett presume as normative; Kim’s foster mother is completely expendable, vanishing after the first three pages of the book.

Kim’s father and foster mother prime Kim for his encounter with the Lama by failing to emphasize the importance of action in the world. As Kim

reached the years of indiscretion, he learned to avoid missionaries and white men of serious aspect who asked who he was, and what he did. For Kim did nothing with an immense success. True, he knew the wonderful walled city of Lahore from the Delhi Gate to the outer Fort Ditch; was hand in glove with men who led lives stranger than anything Haroun al Raschid dreamed of; and he lived in a life wild as that of the Arabian Nights, but missionaries and secretaries of charitable societies could not see the beauty of it. (5)

Kim is focused on the heady business of being – an attitude that the Lama will lend philosophical gravitas to. This description of his early life is also fraught with longing for the Orientalist lifestyles that eighteenth-century nabobs are said to have enjoyed, before missionary work was legalized in India and Anglicist attitudes began to spread. In the fantasized Orientalist India, Kim would not have to choose between his British and Indian identities. It would also be easier for him to go through life unaccounted for and without being accountable to anyone. The nostalgia here is for the world of grown upper-class East India Company workers of the eighteenth century; it is not a world that could truly be accessible to Kim, but Kim can mimic Orientalist attitudes to the extent of his insistence on the evasion of authority and the ambiguity
of his identity. Twenty-first century readers of Kim may see nothing strange in the codependent relationships Kim forms with Indians, but considering the time of the novel’s publication, in the wake of the Revolt of 1857 and the following decades of violent othering and segregation, when degeneration theories and warped versions of evolutionary theory were being used to make the case for the inherent inferiority of Indians, Kim is truly remarkable in its representations, and outstanding in relation to the rest of Kipling’s work. It is distinct both from Orientalist representations that centered on maintaining favorable relations with upper-class Indians and from Anglicist visions of the cultural and religious conversion of Indians.

Following the brief preliminary glimpse into Kim’s short past, the narrative proceeds with scarcely a backward glance. It is dynamic in every direction: India is represented as “a field upon which actions, travels and exchanges must occur ceaselessly” (Roy, Kim 402); and identities as mutable and ever-changing; yet the tale, rather than conveying a sense of progression or bildung, has a curiously static quality to it. It is not merely Orientalist nostalgia that produces this effect; it is also a stasis wrought in the midst of what should be a dynamic adventure story via suspension between disparate worlds – the private and the public, the child and the adult, the East and the West.

Kim is suspended between the worlds of the Lama and of the colonists. The twain don’t apparently meet, but they do complement each other in curious ways: there is a fatalism to Kim that is characteristic of both Victorian and Indian culture; more specifically both, the colonial way and the Buddhist way, sanction Kim’s protracted adolescence. Kim initially makes cynical use of the Lama: as the Lama’s chela, he can travel relatively easily to deliver Mahbub Ali’s message. The mixture of curiosity, patronage and cynicism with which Kim treats the Lama, however, morphs into real respect – the Lama represents the timelessness of an India that
predates the British and will outlast the Great Game. That timelessness, juxtaposed with the unsettled quality of Kim’s story, is manifest in Kim’s form, which resists the novel and aspires instead to the plotless picaresque (Something of Myself, 132). Kim, as picaro, is a marginal figure, viewing colonial society’s rules from the perspective of a satirical outsider.

Kim’s ability to straddle the divide between East and West, in fact to throw that very divide into question, is represented as a great advantage: the Anglicists within the story, like Mr. Bennett, the incurious and dogmatic Anglican chaplain who “lumps nine-tenths of the world under the title of ‘heathen’ and the newly arrived British boys Kim meets at school, are ridiculed by the narrator for their belief that British culture alone should prevail, that Britons should pride themselves on their inability to go native, and that Kim would be best served by unlearning native ways (77). Kim chafes at their attempts to Anglicize him; to him, “Trousers and jacket crippled body and mind alike” (91).

Kim is the sort of colonial whom Kipling’s native spokespersons, like the Kulu woman whom Kim encounters on his pilgrimage with the Lama, appreciate. After an exchange with a policeman (Strickland), who flatters her in the manner to which she is accustomed, and reveals that his knowledge of Indian customs comes from his having been nursed by an Indian, the Kulu woman says, “These be the sort to oversee justice. They know the land and the customs of the land. The others, all new from Europe, suckled by white women and learning our tongues from

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1 Kipling’s life coincides with the rise of the modern Theosophical Society. Unlike the texts discussed in other chapters, which tend to portray India as a vale of suffering for Christians, Kipling shows a willingness to appropriate Buddhist thought that is part of a broader current in British (and American) culture.
books, are worse than the pestilence” (67). The suggestion that Anglo-Indians are better suited to governing Indians than Indians themselves does not come as a surprise – this is one of Kipling’s better-known beliefs, and is brought to the reader’s attention in the opening scene of *Kim*, where the Anglo-Indian protagonist lords it over the local Indian boys, showing greater courage, resourcefulness and confidence than they. What is more likely to be overlooked here is the clear indictment of Anglicist attitudes. Kipling does not regard British culture and religion as endangered by Indian culture – nor does he express any anxiety over child mortality, which is the reigning obsession of maternal memoirs from Sherwood’s generation.¹ The cultural complexity that Sherwood militates against in *Little Henry* works in Kim’s favor, enabling Kim to play the Great Game with consummate success.

In the latter half of the story, Kim appears to be choosing the Lama’s Way over the Great Game. He states in the last chapter that he is not a sahib, he is the *chela* of Teshoo Lama. This identification does not last long, however – it is fraught from the outset with problems. Much as Kim might yearn for the ability to slough off his training as an imperial spy and become a wandering ascetic like the Lama, his identity is not entirely up to him – it is relational, determined in part by his ancestry, in part by duty, and in part through agreement with those around him (those who first “Englishize” and then “De-Englishize” him),² none of whom, not even the Lama, would agree that a *chela* is all Kim is. Like “Akela,” the lone wolf of *The Jungle Book* (1894), the Lama is a solipsistic figure ³ whose Way can be seen as the path to ultimate

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¹ See Emma Roberts, *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*

² *Kim* 156

³ There are those who would argue that Buddhism is not solipsistic, as the mind is thought to be as transient within Buddhist philosophy as the external world: but for those who do believe in the
maturity, but paradoxically also functions as a sustained adolescence that allows him to cling to ideals, avoid practical concerns, and eschew heterosexualization and commitment to a bourgeois patriarchal family structure. Kim’s declaration that he is not a sahib but a *chela* is a wishful one – he knows he is fated to serve the larger purposes of society, forsaking both the decadent path of his father and the superresponsible path of his Lama. Both paths are ways of avoiding worldly responsibility, albeit at the extreme ends of defensibility – the one sojourner too abased, the other too lofty to concern himself with bread or board. Kim must opt instead for what turns out to be the true middle path within the novel – the path of responsibility to those around him. The Lama himself sponsors Kim’s education, rather than claim him as a *chela*, lending legitimacy to Kim’s would-be British mentors by saying, “it is not seemly that he should do other than as the sahibs do. He must go back to his own people” (80). The suggestion that the Lama’s unworldly way is untenable is strengthened by the realization that for all his apparent poverty, when the need arises the Lama has access to the large sums of money from which he pays Kim’s fees – his unworldliness is eased by its being a choice as much as it is eased by Kim’s efforts and the charity of those who seek the Lama’s blessing. The practical factor that eases the lama’s spiritual quest is made evident again when the Russian spy, unable to perceive the Lama’s representation of the wheel as a sacred object, tries to buy it, seeing “no more than an unclean old man haggling over a dirty piece of paper.” The lama would “no more have parted with his chart to a casual wayfarer than an archbishop would pawn the holy vessels of his cathedral. All Tibet is full of cheap reproductions of the Wheel; but the Lama was an artist, as well as a wealthy Abbot in his material world, and who work in it, the Lama’s quest may appear solipsistic because of the self-absorption of his quest and the way in which he depends on those around him to meet his material needs.
own place” (202). This incident serves the dual purpose of exposing the wholly spiritual life as an unrealistic ideal, and showing the distinction between the Russian’s attitude and that of educated Britons like the museum curator with whom the lama meets in the opening chapter of Kim: even as the curator presides over sacred artifacts that have been “disinterred, unjungled, measured, photographed, reconstructed, fenced off, analyzed and displayed” (Anderson 183), he appreciates the sacred value of the objects; the Russian, who would implicitly be a far worse colonist, does not.

Convergence between the Lama’s influence and that of the colonial spies is also evident in Kim’s attitude to women, whose company he generally eschews: though the Kulu woman pleads with Kim to look on him as a mother, and the Woman of Shamlegh offers herself as Kim’s lover, Kim stays clear of feminine ties, an avoidance learned from the Lama and reinforced by the homosocial spy network to which he belongs. This network stands in defiance of most colonial categories: as Kipling’s “Ballad of East and West” puts it, “there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth!” but one boundary is left in place – that of gender (Barrack-Room Ballads, 85).

The spy network suggests a longing for the pre-Victorian days when the business of spying, so crucial to British India, had not yet been bureaucratized (spying was undertaken by extant informants in Indian courts, and was not as yet centralized and reliant on statistics);¹ and for the quasi-mythical India of the eighteenth century, characterized by adventure rather than the

¹ For more on this, see C. A. Bayly, Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
“dead weight of administrative minutiae” (Joshi 78); in terms of Indian society, *Kim* seems to hearken back to the time before European women arrived en masse to become the “nuclei of inward-looking European social groups” (Ballhatchet 144). The lap of the mother is, for Kim, the site of cowardice (8); every sexual partner is, like the woman who attempts to betray Mahbub Ali, a potential Delilah, and wives are depicted as a nagging, scolding lot. When Kim and the Lama attempt to board a train and are confronted with a crowded carriage, occupied by a Punjabi farmer and his family among others, the farmer’s wife is reluctant to make space for them. The farmer coaxes her to make room. The woman complains about being forced to mingle with men and with a young woman whom she thinks is flirting with a sepoy (27). In short, in her attempts to control those around her with her self-understood moral superiority, she represents the stifling bourgeois values that Kim militates against.

Kim joins a network of spies who avoid not only bourgeois restraints, but also the burdens of a fixed identity. The Lama’s Way and the ends of the British empire converge to mold Kim into the ideal spy in the wake of the Revolt of 1857, as Kim’s state of perpetuated adolescence makes him forgetful, or neglectful, of the colonial past, so that like the Lama he is able to ignore worldly problems and embark on the business of spying as on a grand adventure: “what he loved was the game for its own sake;” he considers his missions “a stupendous lark” (73). It is this independent spirit that makes him, like Sonny from Sarah Jeanette Duncan’s “The Story of Sonny Sahib” (1894), a valuable member of a new generation of colonialists, who are

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1 The connection between *Kim* and Joshi’s thesis about the colonies as a space outside of domesticity where Englishmen could feel themselves unfettered is strengthened by such clues as the prize Kim wins at St. Xavier’s: *The Life of Lord Lawrence*, quintessential colonial adventurer.
able to move forward from the Revolt, the conflict that threatened the continued existence of the Anglo-Indian community to which Kipling belonged. This conflict, dealt with directly in “Sonny Sahib,” is excised from Kim entirely; but both works move optimistically in the direction of peaceful reconciliation and renewed acceptance, by discerning Indians, of British rule. Supriya Goswami reads Sonny Sahib as potentially the ideal “post-Mutiny colonial administrator” who is burdened with the important task of “building bridges between the colonized subjects of India and their British colonizers in a post-Mutiny era of mutual suspicion and distrust” (38). Kim, like Sonny, is sensitive to both English and Indian cultures, and has not internalized the prejudices of his father’s generation, the generation that experienced the Revolt as adults. Kipling’s work is in keeping with a post-1857 trend of appealing to the sentiment rather than the intellect in order to rouse the British public to a renewed sense of patriotism after the Revolt (Joshi 61). However, he seems to be writing against the other post-Revolt trend identified by Stephen Heathorn, according to whom the Revolt “aided the hardening of racial categories and increased the symbolic distance between the British and their Indian subjects” (9).

Kipling’s views on Indians vary greatly from work to work, as is well known; the views in Kim most resemble the view expressed in a letter to his cousin, wherein he counsels her not to look on the Indians as

‘excitable masses of barbarism’ …or the ‘downtrodden millions of Ind groaning under the heel of an alien and unsympathetic despotism,’ but as men with a language of their own which it is your business to understand; and proverbs, which it is your business to quote (this is a land of proverbs) and byewords and
allusions which it is your business to master; and feelings which it is your business to enter into and sympathize with.¹

This is the philosophy that underpins Kim: that cultural diversity is to be celebrated, not feared, and that the immersion of its members into Indian culture is the only hope for a successful colonial administration, and for reconciliation in the wake of the Revolt.² Kim’s potential to be an efficient mediator between different classes of Indians as well as between Indians and the British is evident at the outset, when we are introduced to him as the “Little Friend of all the World” (5). Kim is also a citizen of the world in the sense of being almost pre-linguistic in his linguistic facility: as the learning and mastery of a single language always demands the unlearning of other possibilities, Kim’s partial knowledge of several languages – Mahbub’s Pashto, the Lama’s Tibetan, and Anglo-Indian English to name but three – is suggestive of the sort of linguistic potential one might find in a baby’s babble. There is a wistful quality to his characterization – the implied author desires (in vain) that he not grow into a monistic entity that closes off access to other possible languages, other possible ways of seeing the world. Kim can go anywhere, and be anything, so long as he resists growing up. Kipling repeatedly refers to imperialism as a game that requires a perpetual adolescence, for maturity is


² Some twenty-first century historians, like William Dalrymple, continue to argue against Anglicist attitudes and recuperate Orientalist attitudes as the solution to what they condemn as the divisive nature of the postcolonial theorizing of Edward Said et. al.
the enemy of the bold, greedy, thirst for adventure and gain that is colonialism. Kipling, of course, emphasizes adventure rather than gain- Kim was “Irish enough by birth to reckon silver the least part of any game;” he has a distaste for luxury, and a taste for third-class travel and street food that stands him in good stead.

When Kim solicits Mahbub Ali’s help to escape his father’s regiment, the Afghan introduces the boy to Colonel Creighton. In Creighton we have another symptom of the text’s Orientalist nostalgia, for he seeks to master India by accumulating (strategic) anthropological knowledge of the sort that Nathaniel Halhed and William Jones acquired;\(^1\) knowledge that enabled the systematic colonization of the subcontinent. At the time of his introduction to Creighton, Kim is indignant at Mahbub Ali’s resolution to send him back to school, and threatens to run away. Creighton suggests that the Afghan let Kim go, for he is sure the boy will return to the regiment when hungry. To this, Mahbub Ali replies that Kim would have no need to return, that he can survive off the land: “He was born in the land. He has friends. He goes where he chooses. […] It needs only to change his clothing, and in a twinkling he would be a low-caste Hindu boy” (93). Mahbub then proceeds to argue against the regimental school: “[…] They will […] put heavy boots on his feet and swaddle him in these clothes. Then he will forget all he knows” (93-94) and to reveal that Kim had already been entrusted with an important mission. Mahbub is suggesting that Kim would make an unusually skilled spy. In the presence of Father Victor, the Afghan encodes his plea in horse-trading metaphors: “I say that when a colt is born to be a polo-pony, closely following the ball without teaching—when such a colt knows the game by divination—then I say it is a great wrong to break that colt to a heavy cart, Sahib!” thereby

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\(^1\) see Chapter 1.
sanctioning Kim’s extended adolescence (98). The career of a spy will allow Kim to continue to wander and experiment with his identity – up to a point.

Kim’s youth works as an acceptable reason for his ignorance of the political issues of his time – an ignorance, or ignoring, that would be unbelievable, and unforgivable, in an adult. Jed Esty suggests that the “conceit of Kim as a ‘Little Friend of All the World’ makes imperial adolescence the master trope of conflict deferred” (6). Ann Parry points out that “The real nightmare for the British in India is the one of which Kim does not speak: pressure from other powers on the Frontier and from within the country” (Norton 313). Of course, the other characters in the novel, though adults, also elude the question of Indian resistance in various ways: the Indian characters fail to resist, the Britons, to notice resistance. The Lama is above politics, Kim’s parents are below, and the rest are all in favor of continued British presence in India and refuse to entertain opposition to that idea, divergent though their views may be on other issues. Noel Annan says of the imperial spies: “No doubt the future life of an agent would have entailed confounding Indian resistance to the British, but . . . in the novel such a career is depicted as the maintenance of that minimum of order such as is necessary to prevent foreign intrigue, frontier invasions and injustice by native princes and to permit the joyous, noisy, pullulating mess of India life on the Great Trunk Road to continue” (Norton 326). Kim ignores the mounting resistance to British rule already prevalent by the time of its publication, in part by deploying the image of a cosmopolitan India in which its native inhabitants rejoice – for such is the India Kipling would like to perpetuate, as he perpetuates the myth of the “happy Asiatic disorder” of “diversity without strife” (Sandison xvi). Kim also posits a timeless India, where “All hours of the twenty-four are alike to Orientals” (26), ignoring the timely issues of the Boer War, which caused Kipling no small anxiety, the Local Self Government Act, the Ilbert Bill,
which allowed Britons to be tried in court by Indian judges, the increasingly nationalist Indian National Congress, and other seeds of Indian independence that were being sown even as Kim and his spy network positioned themselves as protectors of India from potential Russian invasion.¹

Rather than mass movements, like that of the Indian people towards independence, *Kim* focuses on exceptional individuals, both Indians and Britons, who are portrayed, for the most part, sympathetically. “It is ironic,” as Blair B. King writes, “that the master storyteller of imperialism writes with sympathy and affection for the ordinary people under British rule that historians can seldom match” (Norton 309). This affection is not unqualified; Kipling’s portrayals of Indians are extremely reductive, a quality that escaped British critics in Kipling’s own time - critics, moreover, who were very alive to the reductive nature of Kipling’s depictions of Britons. Charles Carrington and J.H. Millar, for example, suggest that while Kipling’s portrayals of Indians (Mahbub Ali, the Lama, the Kulu woman and the Babu) are realistic, his portrayals of Britishers are “stock” and unrealistic. Arthur Bartlett Maurice, while on the whole negatively disposed towards *Kim*, finds redemption in the novel in the shape of Hurree Babu, whose portrayal he considers accurate: “In him we have the deliciously pompous speech of the educated Asiatic” (Norton 289). The portrayal Maurice so enjoys, and believes in, is excerpted in his essay: “Of course I shall affeeliate myself to their camp in supernumerary capacity as perhaps interpreter or person mentally impotent and hungree, or some such thing. And then I must pick up what I can, I suppose … Onlee – onlee - you see, Mister O’Hara, I am, unfortunately,

¹ Edward Said pointed to the avoidance of conflict in *Kim*. Edmund Wilson also famously wrote of how Kipling never represented conflict, rather he represented both, the colonial side and the Indian side sympathetically, and as mutually constitutive. (See Wilson 32 and Parker 10)
Asiatic, which is a serious detriment in some respects. And also I am Bengali—a fearful man” (Norton 289). To read such a speech as pompous, rather than self-deprecating (the Bengali goes on to efficiently hoodwink the Russians) and as accurate, rather than insultingly stereotypical, is to have a remarkably Anglocentric perspective. Kipling’s ethnographic style goes unnoticed by early reviewers, and is still often overlooked, or even adopted fairly uncritically, by postcolonial Indian writers (see Chapter 5). The title of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) refers back to Kipling, who dreamed of the artist who draws “the thing as he sees it for the God of things as they are” (*Collected Poems*, 239).

Like Roy, Kipling employs ethnographic language, but can also be credited with reaching past the limits of his own milieu. Mark Kinkead-Weekes has written about Kipling’s “negative capability [to get] under the skin of attitudes different from one another and one’s own; and […] a product of this last, but at its most intense and creative, the triumphant achievement of an anti-self so powerful that it became a touchstone for everything else—the creation of the Lama” (*Kim* 441). Kinkead-Weekes recognizes the Lama as representing a point of view and a personality that seem to come from beyond the limits of the colonial imagination. The possibility of the imagination of this anti-self, and the possibility of the imagination of Kim, who has the potential to reconcile apparently divergent ways of being, are the hopeful antidote to the kind of brutality that is laid at the door of the Russian and Frenchman, whose violence stems from a failure of the imagination. Unable to see the Lama’s mandala as a sacred object rather than a collector’s item, and unable to credit Hurree Babu with the wit to thwart them, the Russian and the Frenchman, like the demons of the Indian epics, come already implanted with the seeds of their own destruction.
Daniel Scott Parker calls the ending of Kim “somewhat enigmatic but unquestionably anticlimactic,” and asks whether this anticlimactic quality is a continued evasion of confronting conflict or whether it presages the “bursting stylistic tropes of modernism” (7). The lack of closure at the end of Kim is, though not self-consciously such, an antecedent for postcolonial portrayals.

Although Kipling may continue to be accurately characterized as an imperialist writer, his representations of children and of India mark a watershed in colonial history, a presaging of a postcolonial sensibility. He is fittingly positioned here between Victorian colonial writers and early Indian writing in English (a chapter on R. K. Narayan follows). Kim and the Mowgli stories both thrum with activity and adventure, but they do not lead toward a single climax – in fact, the contrary is true. In this respect, they resemble late 20th century postcolonial fiction. A Fine Balance (1995) by Rohinton Mistry, The God of Small Things (1997) by Arundathi Roy, the work of Salman Rushdie, and The Inheritance of Loss (2006) by Kiran Desai, to name but a few examples, all resemble Kim and the Mowgli stories in the representation of polyglot, culturally complex protagonists whose stories are narrated with a great deal of wit and relish, but which end with a sense, almost, of desolation. This contrasts dramatically with earlier representations like “The Half-Caste” and The Secret Garden, which, as discussed, strain towards closure.
Mowgli

The works discussed in previous chapters all pit the perception of India as wilderness against an idea of Paradise/redemption. By contrast, in the Mowgli stories the wilderness and Paradise are one: the Indian jungle. Access to this other world is gained, not through a rabbit-hole or a wardrobe, but through the prerequisite of being a child, an animal, or otherwise resistant to civilization. This world is not governed by systems easily intelligible to civilized man, but it is not anarchical, as is evident in the representation of the *bandar log*, monkeys who are outcasts because they fail to follow the jungle law. Kipling’s recognition of functional systems independent of colonial government and Christianity is quite unique. The works of Sherwood, Craik or Burnett fall short of recognizing any non-European or non-Christian belief system as viable and valid, but Kipling’s works are built upon the tensions between Eastern and Western ways. Far from arriving at a clarified, monistic conclusion, Kipling sustains the tension as if it is necessary to life. In *Kim* and the Mowgli stories, he represents colonists, Indian villages and the inhabitants of the jungle – and the last often shine by comparison to civilized man. Characters like Bagheera and Baloo in *The Jungle Book* are not managed by Mowgli, but are esteemed teachers and advisors to the young boy. Mowgli does eventually seem to master the jungle and join a cadre of forest rangers who epitomize the successful colonial management of Indian resources, but this mastery comes at a price high enough to raise the question of whether nature’s ways are not more wise than man’s.

Mowgli, like *Kim*, is privy to ways of seeing and feeling that are based on coexistence rather than exploitation and destruction. Kipling suggests, like the Romantics, that children and the green world belong together. While Victorian boys’ adventure stories – for example, *Masterman Ready* (1841) and *The Coral Island* (1858) - pitted the protagonist against nature
(and against peoples who lived close to nature) Kipling’s adventurous protagonists belong with nature, and boy and nature are pitted against adult European notions of civilization. Some of Kipling’s protagonists in *The Jungle Book* are not merely in tune with animals, they are animals – Rikki-Tikki-Tavi the mongoose, for example, and Kotick the seal. Kotick’s story, “The White Seal” is, according to Suzanne Rahn, “as strongly environmentalist as any story written today…18 years before the international treaty to preserve the Alaskan fur seal was finally signed, Kipling was describing the fur seal’s slide toward extinction and creating a seal hero…who travels the Pacific in search of a safe haven for his people. The long-extinct Arctic sea-cow plays an important part in the story” (160). Rahn attributes Kipling’s representation of Mowgli living close to nature and in harmony with it to the burgeoning environmental consciousness of the 1890s and early 1900s, which she says seemed to have a far greater influence on children’s literature than on literature for adults.

Such depictions of nature are markedly different from earlier Victorian attitudes. The Victorian fascination with the natural world stemmed in part from Romantic ideas of poetic and spiritual inspiration to be derived from nature (echoes of which we do see in Kipling’s suggestion that the child is organically “of nature” in a way that the man cannot be), and also from the new discoveries being made about nature by scientists and explorers, on an unprecedented scale. Notably, in both cases, the end object of Nature, its reason for existence, is Man, often understood as the earthly representative of God.¹ Most often, hobbies and scientific explorations alike treated nature as the object or the other, to be collected, sketched, killed, manipulated, reconfigured, replicated artificially, or examined under a microscope. Rahn says of the Victorian interest in nature that it

¹ For a detailed study of the patrician nature of Victorian environmentalism, see Drayton 2000.
was often bound up with a desire to control it, or even exert dominance over it... The widespread collecting of birds’ eggs by adults and children, for example, contributed to the decline of many species - and the rarer the species, the more avid the collector. Huge numbers of birds were shot and butterflies chloroformed in the name of scientific study. Sport hunting, too, particularly of exotic species, and not infrequently under the aegis of collecting ‘scientific specimens,’ took an increasing toll of wildlife, as did zoos. (154)

Displays of the control of nature, as in the case of the menageries and zoos that Harriet Ritvo describes in *The Animal Estate* (1987) often required the destruction of the natural object itself. This is apparent also in the army of little elephants, made out of the tusks of real elephants, in *The Secret Garden* – ivory is seen as a natural resource, raw material for artistic creation (61). The theist logic of such improvements on nature has been expertly analyzed by Talia Schaffer, who describes how the horticultural handicrafts in Charlotte Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain* are connected with the missionary activity of civilizing wild peoples.¹

*St. Nicholas*, the magazine for children in which *The Jungle Book* was originally published, offers an environmentalist logic that is far from Little Henry’s prescription for the improvement of India through the clearing of Indian jungles, but which does converge with mid-Victorian ideas of Christian stewardship, such as those found in Yonge’s work. The magazine states as one of its aims the “protection of the oppressed, whether human beings, dumb animals,

¹ In “Taming the Tropics”
or birds” (80). This recognition of the needs and desires of non-human beings is heartwarming,
but it is no less theist than Yonge’s or Burnett’s understanding of dominion over nature (and
people who live close to nature) and environmental responsibility as synonymous.

Ritvo, like Schaffer, connects Victorian attitudes to nature with Victorian attitudes to
empire when she suggests that Victorian zoos not only provided exotic subjects for scientific
study, but served as satisfying emblems both of human domination over nature and Euro-
American domination over the “uncivilized” world. The London Zoo, with its tidy rows of small,
barred cages containing wild animals from Africa, India and Australia, “re-enacted and
celebrated the imposition of human structure on the threatening chaos of nature” while giving
living testimony to “British ability to subdue exotic territories and convert their wild products to
useful purposes” (Ritvo, 217-218). This unjungling contrasts dramatically with Kipling’s view of
nature’s ways not as chaotic but as systems unto themselves. His child-protagonists are
privileged in their ability to understand these systems in a way lost to (British) grown-ups, for
whom nature’s systems register as unchristian wilderness.

Kipling’s depictions of Nature as an extended family are distinct from the St. Nicholas
manifesto as well as from the attitudes that Rahn, Ritvo and Schaffer describe in the extent to
which Kipling’s interest remains not on commonalities, but on difference. Kipling understood
difference as an essential and desirable aspect of colonial life, one that had to be sustained. While
his protagonists move toward civilization there is strong sense of resistance within the narratives
of Kim and the Mowgli stories to the resolution of the different forces that drive Kim and
Mowgli. When Mowgli chants that he is “of one blood” with the snake or the kite, he is not
speaking literally, rather he is showing the possibility of identification despite difference,
affiliation rather than filiation as the basis for strong, functional relationships, and reconciliation
where resolution is impossible. The Mowgli stories are shot through with hope for a colony in which peaceful co-existence is possible.

However, Kipling’s representations of Nature are closely linked with colonial ideologies in that as much as animals are represented as individuals, they are also treated as representatives of their particular species. Dieter Petzold identifies this tendency in Kipling’s *Just So Stories* (1902), which are mock creation myths that explain how various creatures came to possess their specific characteristics. Within the *Just So Stories*, qua Petzold, Kipling is “playing brilliantly with the tendency of etiological myths to treat animals as individuals and generic archetypes simultaneously—a peculiar kind of pre-logical thinking which corresponds to the child’s (and, quite likely, the primitive man’s, if not everybody’s) need to think in concrete terms about abstract concepts” (16). The concretization of abstract concepts such as caste and state were, as scholars like Lata Mani, Manu Goswami and Prasannan Parthasarthy have shown, a crucial part of colonial epistemology (which involves as much selective disinformation as selective information), and this categorization informs *Kim*’s ethnographic depictions as well as the depictions of animals and people in the Mowgli stories.

Kipling’s reinforcement of British management of Indian resources seems also to be borne out in the development of Kim and Mowgli into government servants, i.e. human resources to be utilized optimally by the colonial state. However, whether this is portrayed as a desired or desirable path is arguable, at the very least. As Petzold notes, “Mowgli is an

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Everyman (or rather Everybody), his story being the universal tragedy of growing up, of passing from the sheltered world of simplicity and innocence to the outside world of complexity and guilt" (17). Where in the *bildungsroman*, the attachment to the mother must be overcome in order for the child to differentiate and progress into adulthood, in the Mowgli stories and *Kim*, the Indian environment stands in for the mother, so that it is India herself that gives Mowgli and Kim the sense of belonging associated with families, and it is the attachment to India that must be, tragically, overcome in the making of a colonial man. Mowgli, for instance, must leave Raksha, his wolf-mother (*raksha* means “protection” in Sanskrit) and become more like Akela if he desires power over the wolf-pack. “*Akela*” means “alone,” and cub scout troops, famously based on *The Jungle Book*’s wolf-pack, still call their leaders “Akela” – a name that testifies to the loneliness and alienation of the boy who aspires to lead, at the expense of running with the pack. Unlike in Dickens’s restoration narratives, where the happy ending consists of a reunion between the orphan and his biological family, when Mowgli moves from the wolf-pack to human adoptive family, the matter of biological relationship is left deliberately ambiguous. Messua, Mowgli’s adoptive (human) mother thinks he is her own son, restored to her, but this is never confirmed - he is no more hers than he is Raksha’s.

In the case of *Kim*, Kim’s family – if it can be counted as such – comprises an assortment of Indian types – the Lama, the Kulu woman, the Afghan horse-dealer, the Bengali babu etc. – the Britons in the narrative never emotionally affect Kim. The authorial approbation of Kim’s being parented by an assortment of marginally involved Indians would have been a fairly startling representation in segregated 1890s, but the strangeness of *Kim*’s upbringing has not garnered much critical attention lately. Mowgli’s story, on the other hand, belongs to a category of colonial feral-child narrative that would have been acceptable to a public to whom Indian
wolf-children were a known quantity – stories of children raised by wolves have been known in every culture, but according to John Lockwood Kipling, India was the “cradle of wolf-child stories” (281). It is to today’s readership that the relationship between Mowgli and his non-human family is wonderful, rather than a naturalized given.

The animals in Kipling’s jungle are markedly not monstrous, nor are they merely anthropomorphic. It may not be possible to access the consciousness of an animal – the animal is subaltern in that it cannot speak to us, because we may not have adequate listening tools - but Kipling’s representations have a ring of authenticity: he uses what he knows of animal behaviors to inform his characterization of Mowgli, rather than projecting human behaviors onto animals. Kipling’s positive depiction of wolves, in particular, is revolutionary. In nineteenth century adventure stories, and even in non-fiction representations, wolves were considered the repository of all that was repulsive to the Victorians – unlike lions or bears, wolves were not even granted the status of worthy foes. John R. Coryell, for example, described wolves thus:

It would be difficult to imagine a more vicious brute than the wolf. It is so bloodthirsty that when one of its fellows is disabled by wounds or illness, it will fall upon the helpless animal and tear it in pieces. On the other hand, it is so cowardly that when it is captured it is so stupefied by fear that it makes no effort to defend itself.

The wolf is a native of every portion of the globe, from the hot tropics to the freezing polar regions, and everywhere he is dreaded by both man and beast. When hungry, and they are seldom otherwise, wolves collect together, and set out
in a band, ready to devour the first hapless creature that comes along. (qtd. in Rahn 160-161)

Kipling’s depiction of wolves changed perceptions of the animal forever, partly because of the enduring popularity of *The Jungle Book* and partly because of Robert Baden-Powell’s selection of the wolf – a choice made specifically based on *The Jungle Book* - as totem animal for the Cub Scouts, or “Wolf Cubs” as they were originally known. Konrad Lorenz, the “father of ethology,” credits Kipling with a beneficial influence on his mental development during early childhood. He writes, of Kipling and Selma Lagerlof, author of *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (1907):

They may daringly let the animal speak like a human being, they may even ascribe human motives to its actions, and yet succeed in retaining the general style of the wild creature. Surprisingly enough, they convey a true impression of what a wild animal is like, although they are telling fairy tales. In reading those books, one feels that if an experienced old wild goose or a wise black panther could talk, they would say exactly the things which Selma Lagerlof’s Akka or Rudyard Kipling’s Bagheera say. (xviii)

Rahn questions whether Lorenz himself would have been able to perceive the individuality of wild creatures, a discovery that would lead to his Nobel prize-winning studies of
animal behavior, had he not been exposed to Kipling’s work. “Would he have been able to make fundamental discoveries about animal communication,” Rahn asks, “if he had never known talking animals like […] Bagheera?” (162) In Lorenz’s case, an early encounter with Kipling’s fictional wolves is credited with shaping a scientific career devoted to defending, for the first time, the moral character of the long-demonized animal.

Without always including an explicit environmentalist message, Kipling communicates a loving respect for nature. When Baloo, the old teacher of wolf cubs, teaches Mowgli the words that will protect him from hunting animals and birds: “We be of one blood, ye and I,” it may be that Kipling is doing more than channeling nascent Western environmentalism (231). Some of the stories in The Jungle Book, particularly, are environmentalist not in the colonial sense of the management and control of nature, but in the sense of encouraging a sympathetic attitude toward nature and wild creatures that hearkens back to precolonial Indian attitudes to nature that are arguably less adversarial than the attitudes of the colonists. Large numbers of Indians hold pantheistic beliefs that demand respectful treatment of all beings – the human is not necessarily understood as having the special privileges that the biblical account of creation would suggest. Kipling seems to have internalized some of these beliefs – his creatures, from the wolves, bear, snake and panther of the Mowgli stories, to Rikki-Tikk-Tavi the mongoose and Kotik, the white seal, are heroic, sometimes more so than humans. Mowgli’s companions and the valiant mongoose embrace and protect humans as their own family members, teaching humans lessons about love and loyalty; in Kotick’s case the humans who may learn from him are the readers of “The White Seal;” within the story humans are the unsympathetic adversary and Kotick’s mission is not to save humans but to save animals from humans. All the while the animal protagonists remain, as Lorenz points out, authentic-seeming wild animals, rather than
anthropomorphic projections. Unlike those tales where we may perceive animal characters merely as humans in disguise, so that their animalness becomes transparent, and our interest then shifts to other aspects of the story, with Kipling the animals remain as animals to the reader.

The relationship between Kipling’s work and Darwin’s is noticed by an early reviewer in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1898:

In all the expressions of appreciation that Mr. Kipling’s Jungle Books still arouse, I wonder if any one has yet pointed out the change these works have quietly wrought in our attitude toward the rest of the animal world? Before these books, and since Darwin, we have believed, or have known vaguely that we ought to believe, that our ‘in’ards,’ both of body and of brain, are very much the same kind of ‘in’ards’ as those of a cat or a monkey; and we have perhaps prided ourselves on our openness of mind in being ready to accept such lowly relatives without repugnance. What Mr. Kipling has done for us is to make us really know and feel that the larger part of our mental composition is of the same substance as that of our cousins the animals […] Mr. Kipling, indeed, has expounded relationships in the psychology of the animal world as far-reaching as those which Darwin discovered in its morphology.¹

¹ This anonymous article, originally printed in 1898, is accessible here http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1898/06/kipling-comparative-psychologist/306590/
As Mowgli himself says, “Mowgli the Frog have I been, . . . Mowgli the Wolf have I said that I am. Now Mowgli the Ape must I be before I am Mowgli the Buck. At the end I shall be Mowgli the Man” (*Jungle Book*, 318). This may be understood as a psychological, if not morphological, evolution, but it is crucial to remember that the narrative voice of the Mowgli stories does not wholly endorse the apparent development from Mowgli the Frog to Mowgli the Man; the narration is colored, as is the nostalgic narration of *Kim*, with regret. The narrative is always double-voiced, however, for, regret notwithstanding Mowgli must, like Kim, fulfill his somewhat deflating destiny.

We are introduced to the end of Mowgli’s story before we know the beginning in the 1893 short story “In the *Rukh,*” and his value as an anthropological specimen through which scientific theories of evolution might be illustrated is evident from the outset. Herr Muller, head ranger in the Indian Forest Department, is able to call on his vast experience in the Indian jungle to contradict the local ranger, Gisborne’s, conviction that Mowgli is utterly unique. Muller identifies Mowgli as one of a colonial type that he has encountered before: the wolf-child. In fact Muller talks about wolf children as if they are a common occurrence - “Sometimes you hear of dem in der census reports, but dey all die” (254). Several stories of feral children, some presented as true and some, like Kipling’s, intended as fiction, were in circulation in nineteenth-century India. Feral child narrative, according to Kenneth Kidd, “has been understood as a transcription of both real events and psychic anxieties” (93), – this is clearly the case with Mowgli, who represents what Leslie Fiedler calls our collective fantasy that “a single human being, cast away in the jungle, might recapitulate the evolutionary experience of the race” (157). Muller says of Mowgli that “he is an anachronism, for he is before der Iron Age, und der Stone Age. Look here, he is at der beginnings of der history of man” (254).
Muller is that rare character, a heroic government official. Like Strickland, Kim, and Mowgli, he is deeply immersed not only in Indian culture, but in Indian nature; nevertheless he is able to shoulder his responsibility for the management of the forests in a rational manner – i.e. to think pragmatically as well as to feel and to believe idealistically. Government servants have not historically been cast as heroes, at least not without heavy irony.¹ Kipling comes closest to representing the government servant as heroic in this first Mowgli story, which begins, “Of the wheels of public service that turn under the Indian Government, there is none more important than the Department of Woods and Forests. The reboisement of all India is in its hands” (222). Muller’s mission is thus shown to be quite lofty - no less than the reboisement (i.e. reforestation) of India. The forest, in this short story, is depicted as a microcosm of the colony, where the ideal steward is one who immerses himself and allows himself to learn rather than attempt to teach. Kipling representations of heroic government servants are always qualified, however, by the individual concerned’s ability to exercise his individual judgment, even when – especially when – it contradicts the laws of the State. Kipling’s good colonists follow rules for the most part, but his best colonists see the limitations of government edicts. Muller, for example, chafes at the attachment to administrative paperwork that took over the beaurocratized Indian government in Kipling’s time, attachment to pettifogging administrative minutiae being, qua Kipling, the mark of the upstart to whom recommendations, reports and titles are of great importance – Hurree Babu is one such figure.

The talented spies in Kim function better when given more-or-less free reign, and Father Victor and Strickland epitomize the skilled negotiation required between life in India and the

¹ See Kim, as well as Uppamanyu Chatterjee, Arundhati Roy, or Vikram Seth’s postcolonial novels; see also Amal Chatterjee’s Representations of India.
ideals of Church and State. In the *rukh*, Gisborne, the local ranger responsible for the titular jungle, shows a willingness to bend secular laws as the situation demands - for example, he would “pay a ranger’s widow a sum that the Government of India would never have sanctioned,” while Muller’s Christianity is inflected by his pagan sensitivity to the ancient Gods of the jungle.

Muller is the epitome of Kipling’s good colonist: powerful, responsible, knowledgeable, respectful, patrician. Yet he is there, ostensibly, to serve. The “servants” of the Forest Department, Kipling writes,

wrestle with wandering sand-torrents and shifting dunes; wattling them at the sides, damming them in front, and pegging them down atop with coarse grass and unhappy pine […] They are responsible for all the timber in the State forests of the Himalayas […] They experiment with battalions of foreign trees, and coax the blue gum to take root and, perhaps, dry up the canal fever. In the plains the chief part of their duty is to see that the belt fire lines in the forest reserves are kept clean, so that when drouth comes and the cattle starve, they may throw the reserve open to the villager’s herds and allow the man himself to gather sticks. They poll and lop for the stacked railway-fuel along the lines that burn no coal; they calculate the profit of their plantations to five points of decimals, they are the doctors and midwives of the huge teak forests of Upper Burma; the rubber of the Eastern Jungles, and the gall-nuts of the South. (222)
The job of the Forest Officer is here envisioned as a set of interventions, some of which sound quite violent - wrestling, wattling, damming, pegging, experimenting, coaxing, drying up, cleaning, allowing, calculating, even birthing the forests. The forest is seen as a series of products: trees are impending timber, teak, rubber and gall-nuts, and animals are game, in the same way that resourceful youths are impending government servants. The droughts are a casual aside here, but when the word “drought” is juxtaposed with talk of plantation and transplantation, the agency of the colonial state in the recurring famines of the late nineteenth century, famines exacerbated by laissez-faire economics and poor resource management, becomes one of the specters in the Rukh, one that causes more shuddering effects through time than all the ancient ghosts that Muller senses.

The idea of natural resource management as literal and metaphorical stewardship (i.e. in the material sense of harnessing land and resources as well as in the Christian sense of tending God’s creation) is evident in Burnett’s Secret Garden and Sherwood’s Little Henry as well – and in the case of Zillah from Craik’s “The Half-Caste,” as in the case of Mary from The Secret Garden, the girl-child is, like a wilting flower, mended, tended and brought towards fruition by various interested parties. Yet when one looks at the details of this husbandry, one finds a closet full of ivory elephants (Burnett 61) and the clearing of the jungles (Sherwood 56): symptoms of what today would constitute the opposite of environmentalism. Kipling’s vision of forestry comes closer to current practices, but is in many ways gravely ecologically unsound1 – for all the

1 The Germans had managed to restore their forests using scientific management methods in the late 18th and early 19th century, and thus became “experts” who influenced nascent forestry services all around the world. But their techniques were based on species-poor temperate forests, and didn’t work in tropical situations.
awe with which Muller regards the ancient forest, he is still willing to experiment, to plant and transplant, to force it to do his bidding. If this is synecdoche for the role of the colonist, Kipling (albeit inadvertently – perhaps) represents the very pitfalls of colonialism in “In the Rukh” that he so nimbly dances around in Kim and the rest of the Mowgli stories. Muller and Gisborne seem to epitomize colonial environmentalism here. However, as always, there are other forces at work in the rukh.

The seeds of the spiritualism of Kim are already being sown here – after his blithe tampering, Kipling’s ranger,

far from the beaten roads and the regular stations, . . . learns to grow wise in more than wood-lore alone; to know the people and the polity of the jungle; meeting tiger, bear, leopard, wild-dog, and all the deer, not once or twice after days of beating, but again and again in the execution of his duty. He spends much time in saddle or under canvas—the friend of newly planted trees, the associate of uncouth rangers and hairy trackers — till the woods that show his care in turn set their mark upon him, and he ceases to sing the naughty French songs he learned at Nancy, and grows silent with the silent things of the undergrowth. (224)

The ranger undergoes changes in the course of his career that are apparently a shorthand version of a century (i.e. the nineteenth) of British rule in India: “At first he loved it without comprehension, because it led him into the open on horseback and gave him authority. Then he hated it furiously, and would have given a year’s pay for one month of such society as India
affords. That crisis over, the forests took him back again, and he was content to serve them” (224). The phase of loving without comprehension may be equated with what is commonly perceived as the initial Orientalist infatuation with India. The second phase, of furious hatred, describes the years around the revolt of 1857, with heightened mutual suspicion between colonizers and colonized. The final phase brings us to Kipling’s present moment, in which Kipling exhorts his Gisbornes and Mullers to take up the “white man’s burden,” and fantasizes about the colonizer understanding the colony thoroughly, loving it, warts and all, and serving it selflessly. At the outset, Gisborne is a benevolent monarch over the jungle, having, like Adam, dominion over his Eden: “it pleased the man to be able to say where the subjects of his kingdom would drink at moonrise, eat before dawn, and lie up in the day’s heat” (225). When he unlearns this drive for dominion, the story seems optimistic, holding out a real possibility for an administration sensitive to the voices of the Rukh. This is only a brief moment, however. When Mowgli arrives on the scene, and we follow his story line, “In the Rukh” turns implicitly tragic – for what is in the Disney version of *The Jungle Book* presented as a comedic ending is no such thing to Kipling.

The first ever sighting of Mowgli takes place as follows:

Gisborne turned with the others. A man was walking down the dried bed of the stream, naked except for the loin-cloth, but crowned with a wreath of the tasselled blossoms of the white convolvulus creeper. So noiselessly did he move over the little pebbles, that even Gisborne, used to the soft-footedness of trackers,
started… his face, as he lifted it in the sunshine, might have been that of an angel strayed among the woods. (228)

The image is one of nature-sprite, spiritual inamorata, even Christ. Gisborne has a conversion experience when he encounters Mowgli, as he moves from merely admiring him while disbelieving his outlandish stories to believing in him implicitly. In true Anglicist fashion, Gisborne then progresses from believing in this Christ-like figure to attempting to enlist him in the worldly business of running the colony. Mowgli becomes the object of Muller’s and Gisborne’s fantasies, not (or not only) sexual but colonial: the youth is part of the land in a way even the dedicated Gisborne, who calls on Allah when he exclaims, cannot match. So immersed is Mowgli that even the villagers around the jungle are strangers to it by comparison. Mowgli is the ideal of immersion to which all other Kipling characters in the Mowgli stories and Kim aspire. Paradoxically, however, the ideal steward must stop short of complete immersion in order to be successful at his task – indeed, even Mowgli must extricate himself somewhat from his jungle ways by the end of “In the Rukh.” He begins, like Kim, as “a man without caste, and for matter of that, without a father” (228), but by the end he is a father, and has been accounted for and incorporated by the colonial state. His first reaction upon arriving at Gisborne’s home, which was to leap back, exclaiming, “It is a trap” as Gisborne lets his curtain fall, has proven prophetic (231). Mowgli shares Kim’s childish disdain for material things, equating them with danger: “There are very many rich things here. Is the Sahib not afraid that he may be robbed?” and critiquing convoluted ways of the civilized man: “So much trouble to eat, and so much trouble to lie down after you have eaten! . . . we do better in the jungle” (231-32) - a sentiment that echoes in Kim when Kim chafes at the trappings of civilization (91).
Gisborne manages to persuade Mowgli that his home is not a trap, but in the end, domesticity does entrap Mowgli. Like Kim, Mowgli is, by virtue of his youth, not obliged, yet, to accede to the world of culture. Gisborne, by contrast, is attached to those trappings: “It had been his custom, to preserve self-respect in his isolation, to dress for dinner each night, and the stiff white shirt-front creaked with his regular breathing till he shifted a little sideways” (234). Interpellated as he is by colonial ideology, Gisborne’s attitude to Mowgli upon first meeting him is predictably utilitarian/Anglicist – he wonders how best to get the boy into government service, as if talents not used in service of the State are wasted. However, in addition to his initial defiance of class, caste and to an extent gender rules, as well as bourgeois values such as compulsory heterosexuality, Mowgli is resistant to the Protestant work ethic. His apparent indolence irritates Gisborne’s Muslim butler, but the butler is not a sympathetic character: the narrative voice in “In the Rukh” suggests that there is value, and certainly joy, to be found outside of obviously productive work. The longing for this to be true is evident in Kim as well – but as the lives of Kim’s parents, and even the Lama, who pulls himself back from the brink of nirvana, show, a life free of the seemingly petty concerns of the material world cannot flourish. Hence Mowgli must evolve, from the unique half-human being perceived by Gisborne and the demi-God perceived by Muller, into a family man, and a pension-anticipating government servant.

Muller puts pagan belief in its place as he exclaims,

Ah! . . . When I am making reports I am Freethinker und Atheist, but here in der Rukh I am more dan Christian. I am Bagan also . . . I remember when dere
was no Rukh more big than your knee, from here to der plow-lands, und in
drought-time der cattle ate bones of dead cattle up and down. Now der trees haf
come back. Dey were planted by a Freethinker, because he know just der cause
dot made der effect. But der trees dey had der cult of der old gods. ‘Und der
Christian gods howl loudly.’ Dey could not live in der *Rukh*, Gisborne. (249)

Mowgli himself numbers among the ancient gods perceived by Muller in the *Rukh*.
Muller refers to Mowgli as “Faunus.” However, Muller’s receptiveness to spirits is only a virtue
in that it makes him a better Head Ranger. It makes him see Mowgli’s ability to summon animals
at will as not “uncanny” (*unheimlich* – Gisborne’s interpretation) - for he is very much at home
in the colony, as Kipling was - but “wonderful.”

If there is a voice within “In the *Rukh*” that may be equated with Kipling’s, it is the voice
of Muller, particularly in his ability to reconcile – or to leave unreconciled – science, Christianity
and non-Christian religions. In explaining Mowgli to Gisborne, Muller says, “he is an
anachronism, for he is before der Iron Age, und der Stone Age. Look here, he is at der
beginnings of der history of man — Adam in der Garden, und now we want only an Eva! No. He
is older dan dot child-tale, shust as der Rukh is older dan der gods. Gisborne, I am a Bagan now,
one for all” (254). In this short speech, Muller has given credence to the scientific
understanding of Man’s evolution, inserted the Christian/ Utilitarian attitude that this Adam
wants only his “Eva,” and then dismissed Genesis as a “child-tale,” declaring that Mowgli has
confirmed his (Muller’s) paganism (though of course a true “pagan” would not refer to himself
as such).
Muller’s ultimate self-understood paganism notwithstanding, Mowgli does find his “Eva,” which event is presented with more than a tinge of regret within “In the Rukh.” Kipling’s implied resistance to embourgeoisement, in both Kim and the Mowgli stories, is evidently driven by misogyny, but the attitudes that shape Kipling’s characterizations of wives, mothers, lovers and daughters may go unnoticed by readers who succumb to the seductions of the adventurous life, as portrayed by Kipling, and accept Kipling’s ordering of his world into adventurous/lark-filled/masculine versus bourgeois/civil/feminine. Daniel Karlin, for example, laments: “To go from ‘Red Dog’ to a story where Mowgli’s wolves have lost dignity and pathos, and dance to the music of his flute in order to assist his courtship, or to go from ‘The Spring Running’ to a story where Mowgli ends up in the Indian Civil Service, married and looking forward to his pension, is almost unbearable. Is there a lover of Kipling who never blushes for him?” (qtd. in Walsh 4)

“Red Dog” is arguably the most brutal of Kipling’s jungle tales, yet Karlin evaluates it with relish, and contrasts it favorably with what he assumes is the universally unbearable descent of Mowgli into marriage and the respectable anticipation of a pension. Even as Karlin rightly observes the fall of the wolf from noble family member to lower life form, he fails to critique Kipling’s suggestion that it is marriage that estranges Mowgli from the empathetic relationship he had enjoyed with the wolves in “Red Dog,” where Mowgli declares, “There was a wolf, my father, and there was a wolf, my mother, and there was an old gray wolf (not too wise: he is white now) was my father and my mother” (Jungle Book, 312). “In the Rukh” is the beginning for Mowgli, in that it is the story that introduces him to the world, but it is also the beginning of the end for Mowgli – the boy who played with wolves and surfed on pythons (in “Red Dog”) is gone, in his place an impending government servant. This is the same place at which we leave Kim.
Conclusion

Kim and Mowgli have much in common, but the fundamental difference between them asserts itself when the two stories are compared; both boys are upwardly mobile but they are not beginning on a level playing field – Kim begins as Indian, Mowgli begins as animal. As their narratives end, Kim is on the brink of Britishness, Mowgli on the brink of Indianness/humanness. The relationship between Gisborne and Mowgli in “In the Rukh” helps us to see the relationship between Mowgli and Kim – Kim, being white, even of the very poorest, has far greater potential than Mowgli, because Mowgli is Indian. Who would Mowgli be were he transposed to Kim? Would he become the sort of civil servant we see in Hurree Babu, or be characterized as deeply spiritual, but also childlike, like Teshoo Lama? Kipling’s portrayals of Indians are affectionate, but paternalistic.

Yet, there is a powerful critique built into Kipling’s representations of progress and development, and that is that the “progress” made by the two boys does not seem to lead to happiness – the boys seem, rather, to make a series of sacrifices for the attainment of manhood and the better propagation of societal values. It never seems to occur to Kipling to reconcile two polarities – just as east and west will never meet in his vision, child and man will never meet: they are mutually exclusive categories, and their mutual exclusivity is what blocks the possibility of happiness for the growing boy-child, once he begins to differentiate from the symbiotic world of his childhood.

In “Baa Baa Black Sheep,” from Something of Myself (1937), Rudyard Kipling explains why he did not report the abuse he suffered at the hands of his caregivers to his family: “Children tell little more than animals,” he says “for what comes to them they accept as eternally
established” (11). It is this sense of fatalism that governs the lives of the jungle folk in the Mowgli stories – each does what they are fated to do. This provides a counterpoint to the ebullient optimism of *Kim*. Mowgli, Kipling’s most famous representation of an Indian adolescent, remains suspended between the two worlds of the animal and the human. Kim is more successful in repressing his instincts and narrowing his options to become a young Briton in the service of Empire, but he, like Mowgli, is never portrayed as flowering quite into manhood. They are both left suspended at that poignant spot where they must deny their animal natures and embrace civilization if they wish to progress onward.

From the beginning of *Kim*, where the Lahore museum testifies to India’s multiplicity, with its “Greco-Buddhist sculptures done, savants know how long since, by forgotten workmen whose hands were feeling, and not unskillfully, for the mysteriously transmitted Grecian touch” (8), up to the end of the picaresque, Kipling sustains the tension between cultures as if it were necessary to life. As indeed it is - for Kipling, it is in the interstices between nations that the colonial world exists. It is there that we find the members of the spy network to which Kim belongs, men who forge bonds that transcend their ethnicity or religion. Without that liminal space, Kipling’s India, the India he calls his “own place”¹ and “the best of all possible worlds,”² would cease to be - and Kim and his author would lose their place. In a letter to E. K. Robinson in 1886, he explained that he had no intention of returning to England, claiming “I shall have to go through a rough time of it if I prefer a life that I don’t know to the broad margins, uncut edges

² In a letter to Margaret Burne-Jones, September 27, 1885. See the Norton Critical edition of *Kim*, p. 263.
and pleasant type of my daily existence in this land.”¹ Despite this assertion, Kipling did return to England in three years, and in five years’ time he would leave India forever. The ephemeral quality of his immersion into, and representations of, India was borne out; and yet the India he wrote, and the form of the works discussed here (the poignant suspension that seems to stem from a fear of conclusion, the reconciliation and co-existence that resists resolution) live on in postcolonial fiction.

¹ See the Norton Critical Edition of *Kim*, p. 270.
Chapter 4

Swami and Friends: Situating Malgudi

The first three chapters of this study have explored the ways in which the representation of India varies with the perspective of the author and the conditions of production, distribution and consumption of the text. The representation of the child – its definition, rights, duties and prospects - also shifts with the shifting context. R. K. Narayan, who wrote some of the earliest Indian novels in English, set his texts in an imaginary town called Malgudi, a chronotope so strictly delimited that it seems fortified against national and international politics: but this insular quality, paradoxically, invites inquiry when we consider Narayan’s genre – realism – and the fact that he began his prolific career in the 1930s, during the heyday of Indian political mobilization against the British.¹ Narayan is interested in young people, but not in the young Indian state. Indian nationalism is only peripherally addressed in his work. Rather than engage with nationalism or colonialism at all, Narayan chooses themes that fly under or over the nationalist radar (because they are too provincial or too philosophical, respectively). He ignores the widespread nationalist euphoria of contemporary politics, drawing instead on the ancient traditions of a specific religious, ethnic and linguistic group.

Narayan’s fiction dwells on small things - the quotidian details of the lives of children and childlike adults, whose worlds he represents as ideally bounded and insulated from the

¹ The cosmopolitanism of Narayan’s chosen genre contrasts with his thematic insularity, testifying to what Pascale Casanova calls “literary domination” (xii), which can occur independently of political domination.
histories and geographies of communities other than their own; but the weight of their family traditions always anchors the mundane. The great Hindu epics inform the inner lives of Narayan’s characters, and echo in their daily experiences. Narayan’s tales are peopled by innocents who must, without losing their innocence, survive the rakshasas, or demons, who are external to their community and do not honor tradition. As strangers to the Tamilian Brahmin history of Malgudi’s inhabitants, the rakshasas embody destruction.

The vagaries of contemporary politics are only engaged with inasmuch as they are mirrored in the vagaries of domestic life; the assertions of the child as he grows into manhood give us a microcosm of the struggle for, and achievement of, Indian independence which is only ever depicted at a remove. In Swami and Friends (1935), the impact of Swaminathan’s growing pains is absorbed via the invocation of the great Brahmanical past, while the growing pains of the newly decolonized state are for the most part simply ignored.¹ Rather than any overt nationalist agenda, Narayan’s novels offer scattered allusions to nationalism that can be dispassionate or even mocking in tone. In Swami and Friends, the nationalist moment in the novel unfolds as follows: Swami stumbles upon an activist making a speech about the imprisonment of a fellow freedom fighter. When Swami, moved by the speaker’s passion, involuntarily and inappropriately shouts “Gandhi ki jai” (long live Gandhi), his friend Mani shushes him: “Fool! Why can’t you hold your tongue?” (75). The reader is inclined to agree with Mani’s assessment of Swami, for the latter is moved not by his comprehension of the importance

¹ In Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) there is the suggestion that Narayan’s eschewing of national concerns may arise partly from cynicism about the choices made by newly independent India: the use of violence by radical right-wing groups on the one hand and the push toward Western-style modernity and secularism from liberal groups on the other.
of what the nationalists are fighting for – the revival of domestic industry - but by the volume at which the speaker declaims his piece. The frenzied excitement of the moment, rather than any thoughtful resistance to colonization, also induces Swami to toss his cap into the bonfire of imported goods at the event. He has it on the authority of one of his peers that the cap is Lancashire-made. When he returns home, his father informs him that his cap was in fact homespun, and scolds Swami for his ignorant act of destruction.

In the narration of this incident, the nationalist has been characterized as shrill, his audience as ill-informed and impulsive, and Gandhian nationalism as disruptive and potentially anarchist. Moreover, Swami’s encounter with nationalism is but one in a series of unrelated episodes, and in terms of the relative importance accorded it by both Swami and the implied narrator, it ranks far below the cricket match that arouses so much anxiety in the young protagonist.

Swami is an endearingly ingenuous character, typical of Narayan’s characterizations in his innocence. As with the child protagonists discussed in chapters 1, 2 and 3, Swami’s innocence may be interpreted as a function of his youth. However, in the texts by Burnett, Craik, and Kipling, the child is always at least an impending citizen, and part of his or her maturation is his or her eventual graduation from innocence to nationalist experience. Narayan’s children, however, more closely resemble the Gandhian vision of innocent childhood as the highest, not the lowest, stage of human development. The world of innocence depicted in *Swami and Friends* is sustained in novels where the characters have moved into adulthood: Narayan’s ideal adult protagonist is always the man who holds on to his inner child. As we follow Narayan’s characters into the life stages that succeed childhood, through *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The English Teacher* (1945), the innocence persists, and grows troubling. Although the central
characters in these novels are witnesses to the birth of an independent state, they remain relatively uninvolved in nationalist activity. In *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), Narayan’s most direct comment on the struggle for independence, the central character is more cynically portrayed than is Narayan’s wont, but he resembles Narayan’s other protagonists in his lack of interest in the fate of the nation-state. Sriram gets involved in the nationalist movement because he has fallen in love with one of Gandhi’s acolytes, and stays in the movement, apparently, because of a mixture of inertia – a salient feature of Narayan’s protagonists – and doggedness. Even these suspect motives, however, are portrayed as nobler than the motives of the other Gandhians in the novel, who are a motley crew, seriously deficient in the innocence advocated by their leader.

Although *Waiting for the Mahatma* gestures toward the nation-wide civil disobedience movement, Narayan’s focus remains, as always, on a very specific South Indian community, offering a microcosmic view of lives whose particularity is never subsumed by any attempt at depiction of the nation as a whole.¹ Narayan’s protagonists are invariably young men from the Tamilian Brahmin community. These are his default subjects: he scarcely represents other communities and is therefore not obliged to consider the complications that arise from class, caste, or religious differences. His default subject is also usually male, so that gender oppressions may also be elided. Gender roles in Naryan’s tales are maintained as they have been for

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¹ In more recent postcolonial fiction this particularity has given way to a tendency to depict wide swaths of history and geography: writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, despite their disparate locations – Bombay and Kerala - are producing representations of postcolonial India that are in conversation with each other and with the rest of the world.
centuries. Women are depicted as having a measure of control over their homes, kitchens and children, but only in accordance with strict conventions, of which they themselves are the gatekeepers. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, it is Chandran’s mother who insists on astrological auspiciousness and a sizeable dowry as essential prerequisites to her son’s marriage. *The Dark Room* (1938), which is often misinterpreted as a protofeminist text, shows two women who leave unhappy marriages – the adventurous Shanta Bai from Mangalore and the pitiable Savitri. The former finds a job and takes a lover, but at the expense, it is implied, of her morals; the latter finds that it is both easier and more noble to stay in a traditional marriage that causes personal misery than to try to baulk tradition.

*Swami and Friends* shows the deep roots of gendering and class formation as it offers episodic sketches of Swami’s formal and informal education, which will outfit him to take his place as an upper-class Tamilian man. He receives training in the manners and morals of his class and community. He sees his widowed grandmother neglected and impoverished, and following the example set by his parents, is cruel to her in small ways, despite the deep mutual love they share. Granny’s position as a dependent widow is emphasized with every interaction between her and her family members. Swami also learns, through the incident of the *Swadeshi* bonfire, how to attend to his studies rather than dabble in nationalist activity. In terms of class, Swami is positioned between the non-intellectual Mani, who is stuck in the position of class bully, using his body more than his head, because he has been unable to graduate from the first form and his repeated attendance makes him the strongest and largest boy in class, and the Anglicized, cosmopolitan Rajam, who is competitive, sharp and cash-wealthy, and uses his canniness to be in his own way as much of a bully as Mani. Rajam’s entry into Swami’s life is a source of distress, which only escalates when Rajam puts pressure on Swami to excel in cricket.
Rajam’s dire threats should Swami fail to deliver in an upcoming cricket match almost lead Swami’s story into tragic climax as Swami attempts to run away from home and survives only by sheer luck. Rajam’s departure causes as much upheaval as his arrival and his influence in general – his modern ways - create far more trouble for Swami than all the weight of tradition Swami finds at home.

Rather than actual capital, Swami’s inheritance is to be the cultural capital of Brahmin intellectualism, but he has not grown into it yet. He is not and never will be a conspicuously powerful character: Narayan works rather to elide the power of caste and to portray the Brahmin as a gentle, passive being who reacts to events rather than acting of his own volition. Narayan’s Brahmin characters are also gentle husbands and fathers, provided they resist modern ways, and keep ambition, conspicuous domination and lust at bay. The Dark Room is illustrative of what happens when the demons of modernity prevail over traditional ways. One of the concerns of this chapter is the material implications of Narayan’s depictions of noble, gentle Brahmins, and of his refusal to address the striations of the Hindu past and colonial present.

Subaltern studies has shown us that bourgeois discourse can never be truly nationalist; bourgeois nationalist discourse arises from colonialism, is part of colonialism, and excludes the vast majority of Indians. In addition, the editors of The Empire Writes Back (2002) have argued that the potential for subversion in early postcolonial texts cannot be fully realized, as it is limited by the available discourse and the material conditions of production (6). Alpana Sharma Knippling has also suggested that Narayan’s ambivalence where nationalism is concerned “owes less to Narayan’s conscious engendering than to the particular functions released by English discourse in the space of his writing” (172). The conditions that enable and perpetuate colonial discursive formations must be taken into account, bearing in mind the Foucauldian
understanding of “truth” as arising not from self-willing and autonomous human agency but from particular conditions which govern and regulate the truth value of statements.¹ As Ian Hacking puts it, Foucault’s project is to analyze discourse “not in terms of who says what but in terms of the conditions under which those sentences will have a definite truth value, and hence are capable of being uttered” (79). In Narayan’s case, Graham Greene was instrumental in creating the conditions under which Narayan’s work came to be seen as truly representative of Indianness. In his Introduction to Swami and Friends, Greene claimed that without Narayan he would not know “what it is like to be Indian,” but Narayan’s texts were also initially accessible to Greene because he - the Western liberal intellectual – was always already Narayan’s ideal interlocutor.² In Narayan’s work the British are hardly represented at all, yet Narayan, like Mohan from The Bachelor of Arts, writes “Of course in English. It is the language of the world” (187), i.e. not for a Tamilian, but for an English-speaking readership, to whom, despite the specificity of his hyperlocal portrayals, and despite (or perhaps because of) his eschewing of active engagement in nationalism, he becomes representative of Indianness. Narayan’s choice of genre – realist fiction – is a clue to the readership he imagines, a more cosmopolitan readership than the specificity of his depictions might suggest.

Early postcolonial writers were limited by the conditions of circulation as much as by the conditions of production – Narayan had difficulty finding a publisher until Greene began to

¹ See Archeology of Knowledge

² Note, for instance, the names Narayan uses in his novels. Two syllable names were not common in Narayan’s generation; it is only with globalization that shorter names are popular in South India – yet Narayan’s names are readable and memorable to an international audience. Indeed, he shortened his own name upon Greene’s advice.
champion him. It was Greene who attached a more general cultural significance to Narayan’s work. Rather than dwell on Narayan’s idiosyncrasy and specificity, Greene suggested that Narayan’s work was offering him a second home by showing him what it was like to be Indian. Narayan’s Tamilian Brahmins thus became representative of Indians for Greene. Although Narayan’s work is pointedly specific and detached from nationalist narratives, Greene’s comment suggested a broader relevance that allowed Narayan’s work to be published and widely read by the English-speaking world. Narayan’s uniquely childlike protagonists (even those who are not actually children) were deemed broadly appealing. The passive and peaceful inhabitants of Malgudi were undoubtedly attractive imaginary Indians to an empire in its twilight years.

While it could be argued that colonial culture jockeys for position with Brahmanical culture in Narayan’s work, the latter coming through in themes and even form (this point will be discussed more fully below) and the former through the medium of English, it is more accurate to consider colonial culture and Brahmanical culture as inextricably intertwined. Through his depiction of a South Indian boy’s education and subsequent life of (English) letters, Narayan illustrates in detail how upper class men of his generation came to be bilingual, and acquired English as the medium of their public selves; this served to consolidate their own power as well as to further enable British imperialism. The Brahmin ownership of the representation of Indians to the English dates back, as Manu Goswami has argued,¹ to the early days of colonization. Goswami shows how India came to be known to the colonists with the help of Brahmin translator/interpreters of sacred texts and ancient laws. A specific (in terms of religion, caste and gender) group of Indians were thus designated representatives of Indianness, and produced

¹ in *Producing India* (2004)
meanings for concepts like “map” and “nation” (and as Lata Mani has shown, sati)\(^1\) in collaboration with their British interlocutors. There were material consequences to this process, for the knowledges thus produced informed colonial legislation and governance so that millions who were not represented by the lawmakers were affected by the laws. Narayan may seem far removed from these early interpreters, but Greene’s reception of his work, Narayan’s own status as a member of a historically literate, powerful and privileged community, and Narayan’s representations of the bilingual bildung of Swami and friends suggest an echo of the pattern of the confining of knowledge production to the already-privileged and the mutual enabling of the liberal Westerner and the co-operative Indian (this is a pattern that will continue into later postcolonial fiction, where representation is more or less restricted to a global elite).

While acknowledging, therefore, that the agency of the author is by no means absolute and that material factors, as well as the ways in which discourse operates, must be taken into consideration, it is important to remember those places where the author has agency. The limits of the argument that ambivalence is not so much consciously engendered as a function of discourse are evident when Narayan’s work is compared with that of Mulk Raj Anand, who was immersed in the same discourse but was much more of a radical nationalist, and who strove to be counter-hegemonic, refusing to limit his representations to the upper classes.

Ambivalence is, to an extent, an active choice made by Narayan. It is the path of least resistance for a man in Narayan’s position; his noncommittal stance serves to perpetuate the feudal system that privileged him. There are also many places where, despite his privileged position, Narayan does not manage to maintain a complete absence of anticolonial sentiment –

\(^1\) In *Contentious Traditions*, 1998
the moments where he writes against British hegemony are fleeting and few, but they are noteworthy. There are moments of direct critique of colonialism – these are rare, but powerful. More often, resistance in Narayan is insidious, almost undetectable to a reader habituated to a Manichean understanding of colonizer versus colonized. He is also resistant to a specific totalizing sort of nationalism. Narayan’s India – or rather his slice of India – is very different from Kipling’s heterogeneous nation, and yet Narayan’s texts resist Indian nationalist narratives in a way similar to Kipling: the idiosyncrasies of the unique community of Malgudi guard against the anonymity and mutual substitutability of the strains of nationalism that Narayan writes against, and the placing of the child at the center of the narrative affords the narrator an excuse for the elision of important political issues. The rest of this chapter focuses on moments of resistance, which include Narayan’s repurposing of the English language, his most direct criticism of colonial power, his use of form, his refusal to accept Enlightenment values as universal, his representations of time and work, the Gandhian and Nehruvian strains that, though distant, are certainly audible in Malgudi, and his refusal to treat either nation or colony as being of prime importance: though unequivocal subversion may be impossible given the discourse available to Narayan, the dismissive treatment given to colonization in Narayan’s work may be construed as subversive.

**Occupying English: The (Indian) English Teacher**

In early postcolonial writing, as Ashcroft, Tiffin et al. have argued, texts “come into being within the constraints of a discourse and institutional practice of a patronage system which limits

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1 In *The Empire Writes Back*
and undercuts their assertion of a different perspective. The development of independent literatures depended upon the abrogation of this constraining power and the appropriation of language and writing for new and distinctive usages” (6).¹ To what extent did Narayan subvert the patronage system by appropriating English? The word “appropriation” is widely used to describe the use of English in postcolonial countries but the word bears connotations of theft, of hijacking for one’s own exclusive use, of taking or making use of without authority or right.² The suggestion of appropriation implies that Narayan does not always already have ownership over the English with which he writes when in fact he, like most other postcolonial Indian writers, as well as like certain colonial writers like Conrad and Kipling, is truly multilingual. The question of which language is the “first” language is generally answered by naming the language spoken at home - in Narayan’s case, both Tamil and English would have fit that description. Even if Tamil is understood to be his first language at home, English is certainly his first language as an author - the first language of his public self. The question of the precedence or relative importance of Tamil and English in Narayan’s mind is a vexed one; rather than thinking in terms of first and second language it is useful to think of Narayan as belonging to a multilingual community. The Macaulayan model of a native who is to be taught the English tongue, and Europeanized in the process, is as limiting and inaccurate in understanding twentieth-century Indian writers in English as the metaphor of appropriation. A more accurate characterization of

¹ An argument which runs counter to the argument that early postcolonial writers were immersed in their discursive communities and should not be treated as autonomous. The lack of subversion in their texts is posited as a function of the way discourse operates, but the argument that they appropriate English for nationalist work suggests a great deal of authorial agency.

² “appropriated” in Merriam-Webster Online.
Narayan’s generation and class would be that they were always already immersed in English, as much as any Englishman. English literature “appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized [in Britain]” (Viswanathan 3), and a thorough knowledge of classic works of British literature would be found more easily in an educated Indian of Narayan’s generation than in the average Briton. Narayan’s English draws from his knowledge of the British literary canon, but it incorporates as well the other languages in which Narayan is conversant.

The education of characters within Narayan’s novels – Swami, Chandran and Krishna from *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, and *The English Teacher* respectively – naturalizes their relationship with English language and literature to the extent that while Swami and his father resent the attempts at Christian indoctrination at the mission school, they do not resent English as an aspect of alien culture at all. Narayan’s characters are lawyers, writers, publishers and teachers. They are heirs to the Brahmanical ownership of scholarship; their expertise in English consolidates, rather than diminishing, their class and gender privilege.

Krishna in *The English Teacher* is frustrated with the texts he teaches not because they are in English but because they do not reflect his own experiences. Narayan was presumably beset by the same difficulty, and through his writing he models a way out. He grapples with school-mediated, academy-supervised English – explicitly in the case of *The English Teacher* – inflecting it with the idiom that reflects his rigorously circumscribed reality, breaking thereby the
relationship between his English and Englishness, excising the contaminant of British
colonialism from the language.¹

English, by Narayan’s time, is not bounded so much by nation as by class—an English
education is available to upper class Indians (especially boys) as much as it is available to the
British upper class. Just as today’s postcolonial writers belong to a global Anglophone elite, to
whom English is not perceived as a foreign language to be appropriated, Narayan belonged to a
class to whom English was always the language of prose fiction, if not the language spoken at
home.

A certain kind of literary, cosmopolitan English would grow, over the course of the 20th
century, to be associated with postcolonial Indian writers, whose work, though written in
English, would be harder for readers conversant only in English to grasp. For example, Salman
Rushdie’s polyglot jokes are challenging—even hostile—to monolingual readers who have been
confined to the English of the center—although whether such a language exists any longer is
highly debatable. Upper class Indian writers and scholars enjoy a kind of hegemony in the global
literary and academic marketplace that benefits from, rather than benefitting, the vast majority of

¹ According to Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, “English literature was not indicted on ideological or
historical grounds by association with the English ruler. Rather, it became the surrogate—and
also the split-presence of the Englishman, or a repository of abstract and universal values freely
available to the colonized as much as to the colonizer.” According to Knippling, “It is this
dissociation of English literature from its national origins that has made possible its
unproblematic retention and continuance in the post-Independence education syllabus in
India.”¹⁰
Indians who are still suffering from centuries of oppression that Indian upper classes are as answerable for as colonial and neo-imperialist forces. The education of Swami and friends is illustrative of this path to privilege.

**Conservatism in Narayan**

Narayan’s tales of a little pocket of South India that is in many ways untouched by the colonial world are, as discussed, peculiar when we consider the heady progressive nationalism that was sweeping India in the early decades of the 20th century. The common man Narayan and his brother, cartoonist R. K. Laxman, represent, looks at the changing political and cultural scene of the modern world with genteel bewilderment. This figure invites reader sympathy through skillful misdirection that masks the privileges of this putatively common bystander – the privileges of (high) caste, (majoritarian) religion and (masculine) gender. Narayan’s characters, like Narayan himself, belong to a group that is in the paradoxical position of being colonized and yet privileged according to an ancient caste system. The attitude of an affluent South Indian man to the upheaval of decolonization is phrased most succinctly in *The Bachelor of Arts*: “Change, change, everywhere. Chandran hated it ” (255).

Progressive nationalist discourses did not evolve in opposition to the British colonial apparatus, and Indian nationalists as well as propagators of the idea of Indianness (defined always from a bourgeois perspective) like Nehru and Gandhi attended British or Anglo-Indian universities, and the Enlightenment ideals to which they were introduced stimulated their critique of empire. Gandhi’s *satyagraha* (truth and non-violence) movement was deliberately anti-
Western, but some elements of Gandhian nationalism – the very conception of nationalism in fact – came, like many of Nehru’s ideas, straight from the Western rational tradition.

Narayan’s conservatism is likewise not uninflected: even as he sets out to represent Tamilian culture in isolation, this representation is always already troubled by his use of the language of the cosmopolitan Indian - English. Even though he is in some ways of the liberal elite, however (as a beneficiary of liberal Britons and as a “native informant”) Narayan manages to naturalize – to render transparent – his use of language, and to effect such thematic homogeneity that he resists being categorized with the bourgeois nationalists of his time. He appears to distance himself from the international liberal conversation as he transports the reader into an insular small town imbued with timeless indigenous values. The conservatism of Malgudi, though constructed, offers a valuable variant to the sort of Indian voice most readily entertained in the West.

Bourgeois nationalists and Western rationalists have historically enabled each other, both subscribing, as they do, to the logic of liberalism: “Bourgeois liberatory discourses of nationalism,” writes Knippling, “cannot function in oppositional ways to discourses of imperialism because they are already aligned with discourses of imperialism, even contained within them” (170). When nationalism and conservatism are found together, however, they become the cause of much anxiety to colonial powers, to whom knowledge of the colonized country is of paramount importance. Opaque natives who refuse conversation with the colonizers
present a grave threat.\footnote{Consider the panic in the U.S. over the replacement of the Shah of Iran and of Hosni Mubarak – U.S. friendly secularists – by conservative nationalist groups. For an earlier example of the fear induced in colonial powers by nationalist conservatives, see \textit{The Battle of Algiers} (1966)} Postcolonial conservatism may not easily be understood, incorporated or sponsored by colonial powers.\footnote{Although as we will see in chapter 5, right-wing nationalists become strange bedfellows with neoliberal forces as globalization or American economic hegemony and growing conservative movements in developing nations mutually enable each other at the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.} Narayan’s characters do not carry the same association with terror as Islamic fundamentalists do in today’s Global North, but within the novels their ways are portrayed as beyond the easy grasp of the outsider. They have a gentle stubbornness and ancient convictions that serve as a bulwark against their manipulation by Western forces.\footnote{The final chapter will show how the gentle conservative is necessarily accompanied by his violent wingman – a pattern that is already in evidence in Narayan’s novels.} Thus the inculcation of Brahmanical values in the younger generation within Narayan’s novels may be interpreted as an attempt to answer the shocks of invasion and rapid change with deep-rooted philosophy; rather than answer the colonists on their own terms, via an equal and opposite reaction, Narayan simply opts out of the rationalist-nationalist conversation and turns his character’s attention inward, to their discrete community and to their own minds. Nowhere else in Indian postcolonial fiction can such long internal monologues be found as in Narayan’s novels – they are representations of the drive toward the ultimate stage of a virtuous Hindu life – the stage of \textit{sanyas}, or contemplation and disengagement from worldly affairs.

Narayan’s depictions of the daily lives of Hindus and the ancient roots of their customs and values skips over the immediate past of colonization and the inevitable angst political
contemplations must produce. He gives the impression of an India that has always been and will always be, of a culture nearly inviolate, colonists notwithstanding. The consistent India across which waves of temporary invaders sweep is a deeply problematic concept as deployed by historians like C. A. Bayly, in whose *Imperial Meridian* the agency of the British in the decline of colonial India is mitigated by the grand narrative of waves of conquest. While such a narration is fraught with problems, not least of which is what Johannes Fabian calls “denial of coevalness,” or the positing of a timeless colony against a progressive West,¹ the treatment of imperialism as a temporary irritant breaks the Manichean structure, where the defining relationship is between British colonizer and Indian colonized, of colonial society as understood by colonialist as well as postcolonial writers. Narayan’s South Indian realism constantly references a long history, dating back to before Western civilization, thereby trivializing colonialism to an extent, and robbing it of its importance. The worlds of his characters are small and closed, yet his truths seem universal and eternal – in this, he draws from the Romantics as much as from Indian writing.

**Time and Work: The Brahmanical Ethic and Resistance to Capitalism**

Narayan is the first author discussed in this dissertation who does not make a case for hard work and optimal use of time. It could be that Narayan’s idea of optimal use of time is to leave time occasionally fallow, like a field, so that minds and lives may ultimately be more

¹ Also, as already discussed, Narayan belonged to a class of Indians whose prosperity was scarcely affected by British occupation, but the same cannot be said for the millions of Indians displaced, disenfranchised and systematically impoverished by the British.
productive; but it is more likely that productivity was not prime among Narayan’s concerns. The
resistance of his characters – Swami, who hates his homework, or Krishna, who quits his
teaching job - to the logic of capitalism makes them intractable and unpredictable.

Narayan’s Malgudi is represented as charming and restfully homogenous. His novels
serve the same function that grandparents - and epics - serve within the novels. They sustain the
tie to the “past,” enabling the reader – and the protagonist - to experiment with modern ways
while buoyed by an underlying feeling of stability. In Waiting for the Mahatma, for example,
Sriram is able to sustain his adolescence, to behave completely irresponsibly and experiment
with nationalism (Narayan suggests, as is his wont, that nationalism is an idle and frivolous
pursuit), so long as he knows his grandmother is carrying on as she always has done, taking care
of his ancestral home and his savings. Nationalism and traditional ways are juxtaposed as the
young protagonist fancies himself mobile and follows his heart while purporting to follow
Gandhi. He neglects his duties to his home, his legacy and his grandmother. Many of the
nationalists in Waiting are represented as having fallen into nationalism for ignoble reasons,
while the grandmother, who represents tradition, is a noble, stoic, respectable and respected
figure, as well as the most perfect representation, in the novel, of the beauty of traditional ways.
When the grandmother moves into her final life-stage, which according to Hindu cosmology is
the stage of renunciation or sanyas, she leaves behind all material ties and goes to Benares to
retreat into inaction and meditation, and ultimately to die. Her absence forces Sriram to attend to
the practical stuff of his life. He comes back to earth with a crash.

Narayan’s work has a way of seducing the reader into believing in his timeless world.
Within the novels, time and work are relative and optional things. His texts operate on the
reader’s reality, and allow the reader to think in terms of grand eternities and slow his or her
frantic pace. Reader, writer and protagonist take their leisure together, and suspend the awareness that this ability to opt out of time and work is enabled in part by their belonging to a class endowed with the language, education and leisure necessary to a life of letters.

**Direct Critique**

That the timeless charm of Malgudi is a construct is made absolutely clear in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, where a rare passage\(^1\) offers direct critique of colonial economics. Part 2 of *Waiting*, which ought to be subtitled “The Education of Sriram,” opens with the Gandhians’ tour of famine-riven South India, a tour which destroys Sriram’s illusions about rural India. The visions he cherished of the Indian countryside included coconut groves, elegant village women, temples, and bulls sporting tinkling bells, their carts piloted by singing peasants. In reality, he finds a sort of hellscape:

A distant war being fought in Europe, and one probably about to start in the Far East, had their repercussions here. Though not bombed, they still suffered from the war; one did not see A.R.P. signs or even a war poster, but small wayside stations acted as a vital link, a feeding channel, to a vast war reservoir in Western Europe. The wagons at the sidings carried away night and day timber cut in the Mempi forests, the corn grown here, and the able-bodied men who might have been working on their land. (88)

\(^1\) Bearing a peculiar resemblance to the opening of Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)
Although Sriram learns that the realities of agricultural India are nothing like his fantasies, he remains inured to the devastation to which he exposed because of his obsession with Bharati, the comely disciple of Gandhi whose attractions caused Sriram to follow the Mahatma in the first place (he is no more of a sincere nationalist than Swaminathan). Once again, we see Narayan anaesthetizing his protagonists against strife, enabling them to ignore the devastation wrought by colonial economic policies by blinding them with love, occupying them with much smaller daily worries or lending meaning to their strife with ancient Hindu scripture. Sriram is thus as childlike as Swami, for whom the regard of his friends, and other matters of the heart, take precedence over great questions of ideology or politics. As scornful as the narrative voice in Waiting is of Sriram and Bharati, who remain relatively unaffected by the misery around them because they only have eyes for each other, it is equally scornful of the earnest Gorpad, who sounds like a prepared pamphlet as he recites the economic wrongs of India while doing nothing to right them. Neither he nor the young lovers do any good on the famine tour – they merely observe, just as the readers merely observe, and then move on, as the story moves on. Nevertheless, in that small passage Narayan shows that he is cognizant of the utopian quality of the rest of his Malgudi stories. Mike Davis, in Late Victorian Holocaus ts (2000), offers a substantial version of the point that Narayan is making about the colonial government’s role in exacerbating famine conditions, but Davis is making his case as a radical historian in the 21st century. It is startling to find that even as he was spinning his charming Malgudi yarns, Narayan was clear-eyed about colonial economics and wise to the resource drainage effected over two centuries of British rule. The excerpt above would not be out of place in a 21st century text informed by postcolonial theory and subaltern studies, yet it was produced a whole century before works of history like Davis’s, that are considered radical today. It is also sobering to find
that, despite his understanding of the role the colonial government played in the impoverishment of India, Narayan is content to dip a toe in the waters of direct critique, and then retreat again into the safety of Malgudi’s cocoon. Even as he destroys Sriram’s illusions of rural India, he maintains the illusion of a sacrosanct Malgudi.

Echoes of the Great Nationalists: Bose, Tagore, and Gandhi

Narayan is resistant to Romantic ideas of the nation, such as the pathetic fallacy that identifies the interests of rulers, past or future, with the interests of the people. His protagonists’ dabblings in nationalist movements¹ are just that – dabblings, trivialized and represented as symptoms of immaturity focalized through a narrator who is amused but mildly irritated by the patriotism of his characters. The narrator is sympathetic to his characters but considers their patriotic ideals to be disconnected from the practicalities of the world of the grown man.

A famous sentiment attributed, perhaps apocryphally, to Gandhi is that the Mahatma liked Christ but not Christians, seeing in the latter none of the radical brilliance of the former: Narayan, in his turn, seemed to like Gandhi but not Gandhians. There is actually no true Gandhian in Narayan’s novels, though there are many who profess to be – and since the true Gandhian is neither leader nor follower, Gandhi himself is in fact not a true Gandhian. In both Waiting for the Mahatma and Swami and Friends there is a notable lack of idealism in Gandhi’s followers. Still, in terms of the precepts by which individual lives should be governed, Narayan and Gandhi are very much of a mind. Both Narayan and Gandhi root their ideas of goodness and duty in ancient Hindu scripture (although Gandhi was more progressive and open to other

¹ See Waiting for the Mahatma 33, and Swami and Friends 75
religions and communities than Narayan). Both suggest that the traditions of the community are
important and must be preserved but that the individual’s first and primary duty is to become the
most ethical version of himself that he can conceive of. This is the original meaning of “Swaraj”
or self-government as explained by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*.

The contradiction inherent in the application of Gandhian philosophy to a large-scale
nationalist movement is often satirized by Narayan, who seems skeptical about the possibility of
getting millions to truly believe in the Gandhian way without the use of propaganda, violence or
dictatorial leadership. Narayan’s portrayal of Gandhi himself, however, is respectful. *Waiting for
the Mahatma* stands out among Narayan’s works in its form - it conforms to the classic
morphology of a tragedy, and the pinnacle of that tragedy is the assassination of Gandhi at the
end of the novel. This is a mark of respect, an acknowledgement of the epic significance of the
death of a man who is portrayed by Narayan, as by so many others, as a saint and a seer.

The aspect of Gandhian philosophy most pertinent to this study is the Gandhian
understanding of the child as an innocent - an understanding similar to the New Testament
understanding, or to the understanding of the Romantics. In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Gandhi
believes in self-denial and discipline for adults, but he indulges children, giving them the fruit his
followers offer him, and insisting that parents who have suppressed their children in his honor
cease to do so – he believes that the children should be allowed to run free. Narayan endorses
this attitude in *The English Teacher*, where Krishna befriends a man who runs an alternative
school for children. Persuaded by this school’s “Leave Alone System,” according to which the
innocence and purity of children’s visions may be preserved, Krishna enrolls his daughter in the
school and eventually decides to resign from his own teaching job and assist his friend in
experimental education.
Narayan’s protagonists are not Gandhians in the nationalist sense, but they are informed by the same philosophies that informed Gandhi: the idea of innocence, for example, of non-violence, of vegetarianism, of harmony with the natural environment and of aspiring to a superhuman nobility of character by conquering their baser erotic and thanatotic instincts. Kipling’s unworldly lama in *Kim* is an earlier example of a radically innocent character – he is powerful because he does not desire power or other worldly things. This Hindu/Buddhist idea that captivated Kipling also informs Gandhian philosophy, as well as Narayan’s texts – but both Gandhi and Narayan temper the idea of unworldliness with a touch of worldliness: in Gandhi’s case, in the form of political action; in Narayan’s, in the form of family ties.

Radical innocence seems at first to be incompatible with political engagement. Gandhian nationalism seems to be an unstable mixture of *swaraj* in its purest sense – the individual’s self-government - with an ambitious materialist mass movement. However, the privileging of innocence is a form of resistance to the Enlightenment-derived philosophies that underpinned liberal nationalist movements, and innocence proves radical because it is, unlike rationalist nationalism, foreign and disorienting to the colonial government, who found Gandhi very hard to reason with indeed. If knowledge was a major source of the power of the European colonists, as Manu Goswami argues in *Producing India* (2004), then Gandhi’s emphasis on childlike simplicity, which is anathema to the rational idea of Enlightened adulthood, would be perceived by the colonists as a form of weakness, of arrested development – an error in understanding that put the colonists at a disadvantage. Gandhi drew on Eastern philosophy to present innocence not as a weakness but as the ultimate stage of development for mortal man. This is also an idea that can be found in the New Testament of the Bible, as well as in Romantic philosophy – but Gandhi was drawing from the Hindu life-stages, where salvation is understood to be the renunciation of,
and freedom from, worldly concerns. Where Kipling’s lama is not just innocent, but impotent as far as worldly matters are concerned, Gandhi’s way, by contrast, called for a unique blend of innocence with pragmatic concerns. Narayan, while emphasizing the importance of family responsibilities, depicts innocence in a way that more closely resembles Kipling’s lama than the ideal Gandhian. His protagonists are suggestible and unable to assert themselves; if justice is ever restored in Narayan’s stories, it is the hand of fate that does the restoring.

Narayan is sometimes satirical about religion, but the value he places on innocence, non-violence, and the aspiration to a superhuman nobility of character is without irony and respectful of the Hindu/Buddhist tradition. His characters resist anything outside of that tradition, including violent resistance. Their gentle traditionalism is thrown into relief by the characters around them. Characters like Mani and Rajam from Swami and Friends, Kailas from The Bachelor of Arts, Jagadish from Waiting for the Mahatma and Vasu from The Maneater of Malgudi (1961) are men of action, who move quickly, and are violent and abusive.\(^1\) The appropriate response to such intrusive characters, we learn, is not to react in an equal and opposite manner but to wait, passively, for the antagonist to auto-destruct. When Natraj, the protagonist of The Maneater of Malgudi, is plagued by Vasu, the taxidermist whose lifestyle is anathema to Natraj, Natraj’s employee Sastri, an avid reader of the epics, counsels his boss with the story of Kumbhakarna, a rakshasa from the Ramayana who seems indestructible until he accidentally turns his own destructive power on himself. The self-destructive power of the rakshasa sanctions Natraj’s continued passivity even in the face of an aggressor, and Natraj’s inaction is vindicated when Vasu’s extreme physical strength leads to his accidental suicide. There might be a suggestion

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\(^1\) Gandhian self-control, which is also prominent in Narayan’s writing, requires the shunning of addictive substances as much as it does the command over baser passions.
here that Vasu’s case is synecdoche for the powerful antagonist on a larger scale – the British, for example. They contain the seeds of their destruction in their own ill-advised ways, and the best response to them would be a passive response, not an equal and opposite one. Narayan would most probably object to such an extrapolation, however, and insist on the particularity of his Malgudi stories.

As suspicious as he was of Gandhian nationalism, Narayan’s portrayal of Gandhi is a sympathetic one. He seems less able or willing to find common ground with the more secular, more cosmopolitan Nehru - though his criticism of Nehru is milder than his caricature of Subhash Chandra Bose’s violent tactics via Jagadish in Waiting. In The Maneater of Malgudi, Natraj is, like all Narayan’s protagonists, apolitical, but his friend the journalist gives voice to widespread concerns at the time about Nehruvian five-year-plans, and none of the other characters defends Nehruvian economics, not even the habitually contrarian Vasu.

The aggressor is always an avatar of an antagonist from the epics, and like an epic antagonist he is generally an outsider. Narayan’s antagonists are generally also modern and Westernized, and cause temporary disturbances in the lives of Malgudi’s inhabitants. In Waiting for Mahatma, which as we have seen addresses nationalist concerns more directly than Narayan’s other works, a clear connection is made between the violent character and the Indian National Army. Jagadish is a study in how not to fight for independence. His is the kind of active resistance advocated by Subhash Chandra Bose and rejected by Gandhi. Yet Gandhi and Bose are understood by many to be complementary – perhaps neither would have been successful without the other. The conclusion of this chapter and a part of the final chapter of this dissertation will elaborate further on the interdependence of Gandhian gentleness and violence. Narayan or Gandhi would argue, however, that successfully overthrowing the British never was the most important aim of a
Gandhian: independence from colonial government is meaningless without the achievement of a higher form of self-government.

When it comes to the portrayal of women, Narayan has more in common with Tagore than with Gandhi. The figure of Mother India in the avatar of the goddess-like woman of the house recurs in Narayan’s work as it does in Tagore’s. Narayan’s male lovers are worshipful of the objects of their desire, and his married women are for the most part happy to fulfill their traditional roles, empowered at home and free of the desire to venture into the business of earning a living.¹

As discussed earlier, Narayan’s work is not nationalist in the way that Mulk Raj Anand’s is, partly because he represents Brahmanical culture to the exclusion of the countless other cultures to which Mysore alone is host, and naturalizes this exclusion through his circumscribed realism. Even in a novel about nationalism like *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the cultural diversity of India is magicked away, leaving only the high-caste Hindu culture of Narayan’s protagonists in place. The spectral presences of the most canonical national figures, Gandhi and Nehru, are versions of Brahmanism – and because they are not South Indian, they remain specters in Malgudi.

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¹ Bharati from *Waiting for the Mahatma* is politically engaged, but is an unwitting siren who lures Sriram away from his duty. Savitri and Shanta Bai from *The Dark Room*, decide to work but the one fails miserably, and the other succeeds all to well: her success in the work place is the root of all evil within the tale.
Narrating the Nation: Narayan’s Novel Forms

In terms of thematic content, Narayan’s work is for the most part conservative; in terms of form as well, there are conservative elements, but there are always unanswered questions and even open endings that undercut the closure that his small town, for the most part, offers. Morphologically, Narayan’s stories are built around the tension between old ways and new, represented by elderly characters and young ones, as well as by the juxtaposition of Malgudi’s lifelong inhabitants with newcomers. The old ways are generally presented as the correct ways of living. Malgudi is a discrete world whose survival depends on its remaining for the most part closed to outside influence. Yet, the texts lack formal closure; and just as Narayan’s hyperlocal specificity offers an alternative to the problematic concept of national unity, the lack of formal closure in his texts is antagonistic to the totalitarian end toward which nationalism strains.

Narayan also breaks away from the tendency of nineteenth century narrative texts toward either tragedy or comedy; rather than adopt extant forms for his novels – which we only call novels for want of a better word – he gives us a series of episodes that conclude more or less arbitrarily. *Swami and Friends*, for instance, flirts with both comedy and tragedy, but does not commit to either. The overwhelming concern of the boys’ life in the latter episodes of the text is a local cricket match. Swami shows potential as a bowler, and the ambitious Rajam puts a great deal of pressure on his friend to prioritize cricket above all else. A victory in the cricket match would have given the text a recognizably comedic ending, but this is not to be. Swami’s anxiety mounts until he runs away from home. Just outside the bounds of his civilized small town is a forest, where all bets are off. Swami is soon lost and starving, and very nearly meets a tragic end. This is also averted, however. Swami is found and restored to his family, but the cricket match,
the potential climax of his short life, has taken place without him. Rajam leaves town, and Swami’s story peters out into silence.

Silence is often understood as consent, as the path of least resistance, and as a means of allowing the status quo to continue – but here let us entertain the possibility that for Narayan, the refusal to endorse or to rebel against colonialism, the same attitude to nationalism, and the quiet endings of his texts, are more interesting than that. Narayan frequently refuses to dwell on the singular event of overwhelming importance. The cricket match is one example of a case where rather than anything of national importance, Swami’s world is dominated by a leisure activity. We see this also in *The Maneater of Malgudi*, where Natraj, who is generally indifferent to the needs of his paying customers, works feverishly to print and then celebrate the unfinished work of his poet-friend, who is attempting a retelling of the story of Krishna in monosyllabic verse. This absurd effort becomes the focus of the poet’s life and that of his friends. Natraj’s excitement over the festival is as idiosyncratic as Swami’s anxiety over his cricket match. This is not to say that it is invalid. The stories suggest that their local fervor more relevant than the nationalist fervor that crops up on the peripheries of their lives. The pattern of stories that revolve around nothing and ultimately lead nowhere - as Pico Iyer puts it in his appreciation of Narayan, “Midnight’s Uncle,” Narayan’s stories are “all about going nowhere and getting nothing done” - challenges the importance generally accorded the historical event. Nationalism, the moment of India’s independence and the transition from colony to postcolony all happen at a remove from the immediate concerns of Malgudi’s inhabitants, and this is conveyed formally as well as thematically. In Narayan’s fiction two things emerge as supremely important - the quotidian, the little incidents of daily lives, and tradition, narrowly defined – the traditions of his community. These two are linked, for tradition continues to inform the quotidian in Narayan’s world, while
national political events serve as a backdrop. Narayan’s Malgudi stories therefore operate at at least two distinct levels – they engage with current affairs at a superficial level, while suggesting a consistency to Indian lives that persists a much deeper level.¹

In terms of form, Narayan’s texts draw more from Indian traditions than from Western ones, so that form and theme are organically intertwined, and are deployed together to produce the soothing effect Narayan has on the reader. The form of Narayan’s stories (Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts, The English Teacher) gives us both closure and continuity. Each of these works as a finite episode, and each corresponds with a Vedic life stage, yet they contribute to a whole when taken together. As with Kipling’s protagonists, at the end of Swami and Friends we find not conclusions or closures for the young boy, but a portal into the unknown. Narayan, like Kipling, finds utopia in the present moment, but where Kim and Mowgli end their stories on the precipice of banishment from the childhood world of bliss, Swami’s prospects are less doleful. In Kipling the threshold between boyhood and manhood offers the crosser a future informed by Western bourgeois ideas of modernity, with jobs and families in the offing. In the case of Narayan, the other side of the threshold is the next life-stage according to Hindu cosmology, which is also the stage of the householder, but in Narayan’s world embracing the duties of the householder at the proper time is a positive thing. Kipling, while bowing to the imperatives of society, pines for the unfettered individualism of his characters’ younger days, whereas Narayan is a deep believer that the traditional path into householding is the only true path to a peaceful existence: his characters are fortunate to mature out of an existence fraught with the frantic joy and other strong emotions that characterize Kipling’s youths, and that

¹ This is something Narayan has in common with Kipling – in Kim, for instance, Kipling contrasts Kim’s action-packed world of political affairs with the spiritual constancy of the lama.
Kipling seems nostalgic for. The most traumatic passages in Chandran’s life in *The Bachelor of Arts* are those where Chandran attempts to break with tradition and enter into the householding or the renunciation life-stage prematurely: breaks with tradition in all Narayan’s works give rise to traumatic episodes. Everything must occur at its fated time.

**The Anti-Malgudi**

Narayan’s success as a writer of stories that are “all about going nowhere and getting nothing done” is a true literary feat. It is as hard to describe Malgudi as it is to describe Swami, Chandran or Natraj. These protagonists are designed to be everyman; even readers who do not identify with their nationality, caste, class, religion, language or gender can identify with their position within the tales, for it is through them that the stories are focalized. We see the barbarous outsider through the Tamilian Brahmin’s eyes. The “TamBrahm” himself is meant to be invisible to us. To see this transparent figure more clearly, it is helpful to anatomicize the antagonist who throws him into relief.

The Anti-Malgudian is a composite of those characteristics that arouse anxiety in the breast of the mild-mannered traditional man. Sastri from *The Maneater of Malgudi* identifies Vasu, the madman in Natraj’s attic, as a *rakshasa*. Postcolonial readings of the rakshasa figure have drawn attention to the racial elements in the construction of the demon. Upper-caste Hindus to whom the production and consumption of the epics was confined for millennia posited an outsider figure whose race – for *rakshasas* were not of Aryan stock – was intertwined with his raging sexuality and obscene physical vigor. Narayan’s antagonists are similarly wrought from a complex of biological and psychological traits.
The enemy of the bucolic sanctuary is speed: either speedy action or speedy transportation. Jagadish from *Waiting for the Mahatma* is impatient with Gandhi’s slow-moving plans, and resorts instead to acts of terrorism, which bring about immediate and devastating results. Narayan also disapproves of speedy modes of transportation; in this he is aligned with Gandhi’s view, for Gandhi disapproved of fast-moving trains as an aspect of western modernity that would allow “Bad men to fulfill their evil designs with greater rapidity” (*Hind Swaraj* 28). The train brings sorrow to Swaminathan when it whisks away his friend. Automobiles are even worse. Vasu from *The Maneater of Malgudi* drives a jeep, and forces Natraj to ride along with him. Natraj is picked up, dropped off, forced to abandon his store and then abandoned in his turn in a strange village where he has to borrow money for the bus fare to return home. This loss of control over his own comings and goings is traumatic in the extreme to Natraj, even without the mortal danger that he finds himself in due to Vasu’s reckless driving. Vasu nearly kills himself, his passenger, and several pedestrian passers-by, and enjoys the thrill of causing panic with his monstrous vehicle. The jeep is an accessory to Vasu in more ways than one: he also uses it to transport the victims of his heinous and illegal slaughters.

We have seen the ways in which Narayan is resistant to Western influence. His critique of American culture, however, is far stronger than his passive resistance to British culture. It is clear that Vasu draws inspiration for his gangster tactics from American films. His villainy seems of a piece with his use of slang. Vasu’s use of guns, as well, is associated not with British military repression but with the glamorization of violence in Hollywood films. Guns, as well as the consumption of meat and alcohol, are anathema to Narayan’s Brahmin vegetarian protagonists.

As much as the outsider signals destruction, he is invariably also a catalyst who works in ways that are paradoxically as complementary as they are threatening to the protagonist. The
destruction wrought by the hearty activity-oriented outsider seems to sanction and explain the passivity of the protagonist, whose stationary quality seems suddenly noble by contrast to the stress-inducing shenanigans of the newcomer. The *rakshasa* can be interpreted as an essential part of the Narayan story – the demon within that gives the narrative some direction. In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Jagadish represents the tactics of Indian National Army, whose relationship with Gandhian nationalism is, like the relationship between Narayan’s antagonists and protagonists, one of codependence as much as repulsion. In *Waiting*, the demonic element triumphs when Gandhi is assassinated at the end. Narayan suggests through his retelling of Gandhi’s story that when newly independent Indians choose violence over *ahimsa,* something dies: not merely a man, but a symbol of the best of Brahmanical values and in Narayan’s view the best way forward for the nation. Narayan’s rare foray into national affairs has become a version of the tale he repeatedly tells: of a war between avatars of epic figures, as disconnected from active politics as possible.

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1 i.e. non-violence
Chapter 5

Afterward: Midnight’s Grandchildren

The film version of Salman Rushdie’s 1980 novel, Midnight’s Children, has just been released as I finish writing my dissertation and I wish it hadn’t been. The film is more difficult to understand than the book, which is no mean feat, and this is so for all the wrong reasons. In translating the layers of pickled meaning from Rushdie’s text into a far more attention-deficient medium, the makers of the film have pared away what may seem to be extraneous maximalist detail in the book, and have tweaked the narrative arc until it is more in keeping with the narrative conventions of commercial cinema. To this end, the litany of systemic horrors that make up the bulk of the narrative is chased by a facile ending where, as in Danny Boyle’s Slumdog Millionaire (2008) the suggestion of impending personal happiness allows the protagonist to ebulliently dust the dirt of the rest of India off his shoulders. The effect is much more debilitating than the famously dark ending of the novel, which recognizes, rather than deferring, the dissonances of the present; the lack of closure at the end of the novel means that the problems within it are not contained, and may not be dismissed.

At the end of the novel, the protagonist, Saleem, has lost track of his nemesis – there will be no resolution of conflict there. A marriage proposal from his sweetheart gives him brief hope for the future, but even this whiff of a comedic ending is given the Rushdie treatment: Saleem is resigned to marriage as a “last, vain, inconsequential pleasure” (621). Marriage, then, is not a milestone on the road toward the receding horizon – it is a last pleasure, a vain and inconsequential one. Besides, what sort of pleasure is it if it comes on the heels of Saleem’s
cynical observation that “Love does not conquer all, except in the Bombay talkies...optimism is a disease” (621)?

Saleem is reunited with his long-lost childhood nurse, Mary Pereira, but the reunion is no resolution. Saleem’s last epiphany is that the song Mary Pereira had always sung to him, with the lyrics “anything you want to be you can be,” is “the biggest lie of all” (647) and that all the people he has known, and all the persons he has been (for life, unlike syntax, allows more than three) will annihilate him and his progeny. “Yes, [Saleem writes], they will trample me underfoot...they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died” (647). In this ominous reversal of the Arabian Nights, where contra the Orientalists who were on their way out in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, but have been continually evoked and finally, now, turned upside down by postcolonial writers, Rushdie envisions infinite death and despair, rather than infinite hope for a protagonist who is “handcuffed to history;” whose fate is represented as contiguous with that of the nation (Midnight’s Children, 5). The facile ending of the film version of Midnight’s Children is harmful rather than uplifting because it drowns out Rushdie’s deeply thought-out critique of reproductive futurity in the novel. The horror of the Midnight’s Children film is that the loose ends are tied up.¹ The film rehearses the Romantic idea of totality as a prerequisite for art, an ideal that colonial novels aspire to, but that contemporary postcolonial novels challenge.

¹ Unlike the book, the movie offers a melodramatic Bollywood confrontation between Saleem and his nemesis, Shiva, and ends with a child as a symbol of hope.
In this chapter, through a survey of critically acclaimed novels written between 1980 and 2010, I identify trends in the genre as a whole. The modes of resistance to colonialist and majoritarian ordering of time and space in these novels, particularly through the representation of children, include the break away from linear time, the maximalist attempt to encompass everything in the novels, so that there is no outside or afterward to which problems can be relegated or deferred, the explosion of the right-wing nationalist construction of a homogenous India through a formal tendency towards fragmentation and a privileging of hybrid and heterogeneous characters, and the simultaneous critique of easy multiculturalism through the depiction of neoliberalism’s seamy underbelly. The chapter then engages with extant critiques of contemporary postcolonial novels – for instance, that they are the work of cosmopolitan celebrities, and are not representative of Indian realities - and offers new critiques of the aestheticizing of postcolonial problems, and the focalization of the novels through a child character. The addressing of postcolonial problems in fiction produces the illusion that something is being done about the gross inequalities and cultural conflicts in contemporary India; aesthetic exposure could inure the reader to Indian realities, and obscure the need for action by producing a satisfactory sensation within the reader of having been alerted to third-world predicaments, which are then ameliorated in the novels through the use of sentiment and irony. Irony and sophistication inoculate the novel against an engagement with contemporary Indian problems that would be so serious as to render the text debilitating, unreadable, or bereft of the aesthetic arsenal that marks it as fiction rather than polemic. In a related critique, I show how the protagonists through whom these novels are focalized not only belong to minorities but are also minors and as such enable the implied author and the ideal reader to defer the burdens of
adult citizenship, despite the laudable tendency in the genre as a whole to address the dissonances of the present.

Finally, I talk about how, despite these problems, maximalist novels offer a useful counterpoint to the punchy, slogan-driven register in which a crisis-based model of history is propagated in contemporary news and digital media, as well as to the relatively smooth progression of colonial novels. In the large, unwieldy, postcolonial novel, the novel form is reworked to move past the understanding of an area as a “permanent geographical fact,” to convey rather the impression of incessant motion, of processes, of migrations. The different speeds and levels of smoothness with which migrations take place in today’s world are evident not only in the themes and forms of the novels, with their contrapuntal representations of the voluntary movement of transnational elites and the often forced migrations of India’s agricultural and urban poor, but also in the relative fluidity with which the authors themselves negotiate the international literary “republic of letters.” The large scope of the novels also allows for contrapuntal depictions of crises and slow violence, of neoliberalism and religious fundamentalism, and of the current right-wing aspiration to a Hindu state that is simultaneously atavistic and violently modern.


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1 See Appadurai 8
unlike in Sherwood’s or Burnett’s work, the mistrust of progress/reproductive futurity becomes foregrounded, overwhelming in the end any hope of a brighter future for the next generation. However, the lack of linear progression and the bleakness of the endings in these novels should be interpreted not as debilitating pessimism but as critiques of facile futurity, and warnings that we need to pay attention to the casualties of so-called development.

**Critiques of Development in Postcolonial Stories of Bildung**

The understandings of time, space and of a people as homogenous, on which the narratives of colonial and nationalist progress depend, are challenged in recent postcolonial fiction. The works considered here also offer a counterpoint to the narrative, propagated by neoliberal thinkers like Tom Friedman, Fareed Zakaria or Anand Giridharadas,¹ of India Rising. This putative upward trajectory is premised on the facile jollity of Kiplingesque multiculturalism, i.e. the peaceful coexistence of cultures, classes and religions in India. By contrast, in the novels discussed here multiculturalism is shown to be extremely tenuous; violence bubbles just below the surface, ready to erupt at a moment’s notice. Popular uprisings are shown to be orchestrated by groups who gain political power via right- or left-wing platforms, but who are generally driven more by pragmatic than by idealistic motives, and who do not reciprocate the support they are given by their impoverished and desperate foot-soldiers. Economic disparity thus lends itself to the purposes of an exploitative ruling class. I will explain

¹ See Friedman’s *The World is Flat* (2005); Giridharadas, *India Calling* (2011) and Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (2011)
here how contemporary novels disrupt linear time, as well as conceptions of space as either homogenous or bounded.

Defying Time

Both bildung and the narrative of national development and progress are dependent on a linear understanding of time; resistance, therefore, to the logic of futurity undergirding these narratives necessitates a break from the formal constraint of linearity. Representations of arrested or ill-conceived development abound in the novels considered here, particularly in the characterization of children.

In a colonial text like “Little Henry and His Bearer” (1814), the child is represented as adrift in a wilderness, and might be seen as an alien with a slight shift in perspective, but there is always a moral compass guiding little Henry toward heaven; even his premature death only ensures his progress toward his true home in the next world. Moreover, he assists the adults around him on their spiritual journey. Thus, though the linear progression of the colonial novels discussed in previous chapters is not without its detours - Henry dies, the girl children in “The Half-Caste” (1851) and The Secret Garden (1911) become enclosed and closed off, and Kipling’s youths spend much of their narratives on zigzag lines to nowhere - in the end, the dissonances of bildung are always managed, and the point of view that comes across is coherently colonialist or nationalist. No such coherence, or sense of direction, is available to the child protagonists of contemporary Indian novels.

Recent postcolonial fiction displays a postmodern suspicion of the happy ending. The drive toward the resolution of every issue that characterizes nineteenth century novels gives way
to the representation of the past as bitter, the present as at a remove, distanced by the ironizing perspective of the narrator, and the future as a void. There are no heroes in recent postcolonial fiction (except perhaps Velutha)\(^1\); the protagonists are victims of an unsympathetic world. They tend to be cynical and pessimistic. In a chapter entitled “The Optimist and the Pessimist,” Arundhati Roy shows how even the thoroughly unsavory optimist’s idea of progress applies only to himself: he is not interested in the direction in which the nation is moving, and this might explain his optimism.

In terms of national development, rather than a smooth transition from uneven developments and gross disparities to a better life for all, contemporary postcolonial fiction depicts changes like liberalization as a shock to the system, the effects of which ripple outward and affect everyone in ways that are not only uneven and disparate but which seem exponentially intensified and speeded up. Rushdie notes the unevenness of so-called progress in postcolonial India as early as 1988:

And Saladin himself, reflecting on the nature of change, thinks “evolution theory had come a long way since Darwin. It was now being argued that major changes in species happened not in the stumbling, hit-and-miss manner first envisaged, but in great, radical leaps. The history of life was not the bumbling progress - the very English, middle-class progress - Victorian thought had wanted it to be, but violent, a thing of dramatic, cumulative transformations: in the old formulation, more revolution than evolution” (432-33).

\(^1\) From *The God of Small Things*
This view of development – as a series of shocks rather than a smooth process – presented by Rushdie in juxtaposition with what he calls a very English, middle-class progress, comes through in all the late twentieth and early twenty-first century novels discussed here. Advances in technology, such as the widespread use of the Internet, and the opening up of Indian markets in the nineties, seemed to throw our understanding of time and space into disarray. Instantaneous communication via the Internet caused an “annihilation of space” similar to what Ashley Dawson identifies in late nineteenth-century Britain, with the introduction of the telephone. “If modernity was defined by a sense of forward motion into an open future,” Dawson writes, “the twentieth century seemed to catapult people into the unknown at hitherto undreamed-of speed” (Routledge History of Twentieth Century British Literature, 60). In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the speed has accelerated. It is represented in contemporary postcolonial fiction as the stuff not of dreams but of nightmares.

Where R. K. Narayan’s bucolic Malgudi is focalized through characters who walk everywhere, sometimes at a snail’s pace, taking everything in, so that the character who drives a jeep (in The Maneater of Malgudi) is perceived to be moving at a speed that is dangerous and traumatic, Rushdie’s Satanic Verses opens with a plane crash. Air travel is ubiquitous in contemporary fiction, disorienting passengers by challenging their conceptions of time and space. Rushdie’s novels, like the films of Sergei Eisenstein, challenge the smooth unfolding of narrative, demonstrating in the form of the novel, as well as in the themes, that time is experienced as compressed, dilated, at a standstill or galloping. Rushdie’s novels break the linear
ordering generally imposed on experience through narrative, layering simultaneous events and allowing past and present to interpenetrate, conveying what Bergson called duration.¹

The complexity and layering of past and present is suggested in the recurring metaphor of the pickle – the embedded narrator of Midnight’s Children opposes the bad Orientalist pickling of Dr. Schaapsteker’s brains (257) with the good pickles produced by former nurse Mary Pereira, which stimulate his memories in a good way. He narrates the story of his life to Padma, the pickle-making narratee, in Mary’s pickle factory, which he now superintends. In The God of Small Things, the twins’ grandmother finds financial independence via Paradise Pickles and Preserves, a small business that she runs out of her home. On the day of her cousin’s death, the day that leads to their separation and lifelong misery, Rahel accidentally dips a corner of her hideous yellow lace dress into a vat of orange pickle-oil. It is an omen. The past is about to impinge on her present, the complex layers of historic caste, class and gender structures, as well as the bitterness of family rivalries, are about to ruin the one source of consolation the twins have – i.e., each other.

Nor is the future any more friendly than the past. In the fictional coastal town of Ayemenem, time jogs along, steady and slow, until the moment – and indeed it seems both momentary and momentous – of the arrival of international Cable TV, with which the experience of time and space, for the last remaining denizens of the ancestral home, changes dramatically:²

¹ I am indebted to Ashley Dawson’s Routledge History of Twentieth Century British Literature for some of these insights into time and narrative. See Dawson 14, 60.

² Roy’s representation of the older ladies’ embrace of American soap operas is similar to Zadie Smith’s depiction of corporatized Raggastani culture in White Teeth (2000): “everything,
“It happened overnight. Blondes, wars, famines, football, sex, music, coups d’état—they all arrived on the same train. […] And in Ayemenem, where once the loudest sound had been a musical bus horn, now whole wars, famines, picturesque massacres and Bill Clinton could be summoned up like servants” (28). The mention of the American president reminds us that liberalization is not a form of ideological stateless apparatus, coming out of nowhere. Roy’s novel is in part a dirge for Nehru’s socialist experiments, which died a drawn-out death when one super power waned and India’s fragile non-aligned stance proved futile. The God of Small Things follows a South Indian family through three generations, through the end of colonization, the attempts of the nascent nation to remain non-aligned, the death of that dream and the rise of the United States as a superpower. The form of the novel reflects how the embrace of neoliberal strategies by successive governing regimes in recent decades has effected a turn away from the Nehruvian developmentalist imperative of equalizing growth across disparate regions.  

Though The God of Small Things spans three generations and talks about the slow moving wheels of history, liberalization is depicted as above: an overnight phenomenon, a disorienting cultural invasion with the seductive and perfectly inverted illusion that the blondes, the wrestlers and the American president are at the mercy of the aunt and the cook who turn the TV on every night. This moment of cultural crisis, where the secluded rural home is abruptly opened to a world from which there is no retreating, has been centuries in the making, but it is experienced as sudden, as a rupture. Throughout her novel Roy plays with the idea of ruptures,  

everything, everything was Nike™; wherever the five of them went the impression they left behind was of one gigantic swoosh, one huge mark of corporate approval” (200-1)  

1 See Goswami 3-4.
shocks and crises existing alongside a sense of stagnation and causation. While it could be argued that Ammu’s love affair with a man deemed untouchable, the twins’ attempt at running away from home, and the death of their idolized cousin, for which they are blamed, are crises, none of those moments has the world-altering capacity of the advent of cable TV. Suddenly, space and time are altered. The rate of change increases until life seems dizzying, and spaces collapse together, merge and are confused; where before “India” and the “U.S.” might have been meaningful categories, with contiguities between geography and culture, now within India there are those who belong in the Global North, the amphibious elite who move and act with relative freedom, and those who inhabit the Global South, whose lives bear no resemblance to the lives of their bourgeois neighbors. Representations like Roy’s suggest that globalization is an entirely new form with which later postcolonial novels contend, and draw attention to the unique problems of the violation of the national form through their depiction of children adrift in an unevenly globalizing world.

Cable TV arrives in Ayemenem like the outsiders in Narayan’s Malgudi. Unlike a finite, flawed character, however, who can be controlled or cast out, the antagonist in contemporary fiction is discursive, systemic, and enmeshed in contemporary national culture. Even while writing against static representations of India or against globalization, the implied authors participate in both.

Contemporary Indian fiction shows the temporal characteristics that Jed Esty identifies in modernist novels: the “stylized alternation between compression and expansion” so that “characterization does not unfold in smooth biographical time but in proleptic fits and retroactive starts, epiphanic bursts and impressionistic mental inventories, in accidents, in obliquity, in sudden lyric death and in languid semiconscious delay” (2). However, the Janus-faced embrace
of all time in recent postcolonial fiction performs important functions in the representation of India. The contemporary postcolonial novel shows that with the apparent unmooring of capital from a geographically specific center, the center-periphery model, as well as the post-label, no longer seem accurate. The field of postcolonial studies cannot be organized around a binary axis – neither the axis of time that the “post” implies nor of space, which phrases like “Global North” and “Global South” imply. This field is interested in power and powerlessness, but power is an unwieldy category; those who are powerless because of their gender may not sincerely be able to form a strategic essentialism with people who are powerless because of their religion, for example. The contemporary Indian novel is the medium that comes closest to conveying such complexities in late twentieth and early twenty-first century India. Rushdie illumines striated space in The Satanic Verses, where he explains that the distance between Bombay and London is “Five and a half thousand as the crow. Or: from Indianness to Englishness, an immeasurable distance. Or, not very far at all, because they rose from one great city, fell to another. The distance between cities is always small; a villager travelling a hundred miles to town traverses emptier, darker, more terrifying space” (41).

Defying Space

The understanding of space in this section is not an abstract one – this is a consideration, rather, of the representation of human geography in contemporary postcolonial fiction. As such, this discussion of postcolonial space includes an analysis of the identification of Indian national space with the Hindu conception of Bharat, and considers what this identification means for minorities in India.
We are witness in contemporary India to a profound crisis of democracy, developmentalism, and the nation state. The twin forces of neoliberalism and escalating fundamentalist activity resist any attempt at simplification. The novel form lends itself well to the representation of the complexity of contemporary India. Consider, for example, Roy’s incredibly multilayered narrative in *The God of Small Things*, a narrative that begins in bucolic Ayemenem, a coastal town that is the eye of the coming storm of globalization, a town that, no matter how remote it seems, is connected via the movies, the travelling children, and the specters of the colonists to large swathes of history and geography. The punchy slogan-driven register\(^1\) of Roy’s non-fiction, which is decisive, active and goal-oriented, is much less representative of Indian reality than her novel. Roy’s non-fiction reminds us of what the novel form can do to enhance understanding that other forms cannot. The novel has lots of space for detail, it represents multiple perspectives, it does not pare its politics down to bullet points. It resists the crisis-ridden tempo of other media, where information is disseminated in titillating bytes.

The grand Orientalist cliché that South Asia was a “vegetative space, a timeless space of ceaseless reiteration,” (Goswami 107) an idea perpetrated by thinkers as diverse as B.H. Baden Powell, Karl Marx, Max Weber and John Stuart Mill, and evident in Narayan’s work as well, is not entirely dispelled by contemporary postcolonial novels. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy depicts temples, rivers and the village of Ayemenem itself as serene proof against waves of cultural change. The village of Ayemenem is a place where “until recently, the loudest sound had

\(^1\) Roy does not share Narayan’s aversion to “polemic and tract writing” (see *A Story Teller’s World*, 14-15)
been a musical bus horn;” in this, it resembles Narayan’s Malgudi, although to Roy’s protagonists, who are women, children and men from the most historically disadvantaged castes, the changelessness is not as empowering as it is to Narayan’s benign patriarchs. Roy constructs a static India so that liberalization assumes enormous significance – it is, in Roy’s version of history, only with the influx of Western capital in the nineties that Ayemenem must, at long last, change. Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, written a decade later, offers a more contrapuntal depiction of globalization and right-wing nationalist reactions; through the contrasting depiction of a working-class child and an upper-middle-class one, Desai engages throughout her novel with the seductions of cultural “purity,” which she opposes to Western influence.

Desai sentimentalizes the home that Biju, an adolescent character from *The Inheritance of Loss*, yearns for, and opposes the rootedness of Biju’s underprivileged family to the rootlessness of the middle-class characters; Sai’s grandfather, who has spent a lifetime denying his rural Indian background, ends up belonging nowhere, and Sai’s parents, who leave her in a boarding school in order to be free to travel the world, are killed in the course of their travels.

Home and family, given a poignant, sentimentalized treatment in *The Inheritance of Loss*, are treated with a bitter humor in *The Satanic Verses*, where air travel is Saladin Chamcha’s downfall. As a child, Saladin cultivates an Anglicized facial expression and accent, but England makes an Indian of him: he, the migrant, the opposite of the Englishman, is conflated with the opposite of the good, i.e. Satan. According to the novel’s epigraph, which is taken from Defoe’s *History of the Devil*, “Satan, being thus confined to a vagabond, wandering, unsettled

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1 *The God of Small Things*, 28

2 See pages 33, 65, 152, 165, and 284
condition, is without any certain abode; for though he has, in consequence of his angelic nature, a kind of empire in the liquid waste or air, yet this is certainly part of his punishment, that he is . . . without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon.” As Gillian Gane points out, “Recontextualized, Defoe’s Satan becomes a migrant who shares the ‘transcendental homelessness’ said to characterize our own era, an age when ‘all that is solid melts into air’ and the ground beneath our feet is cut out from under us” (19).

The plane crash that inaugurates *The Satanic Verses* lets loose an avalanche of debris that falls from the sky; not only the material paraphernalia of air travel – “reclining seats, stereophonic headsets, drinks trolleys, motion discomfort receptacles, disembarkation cards, duty-free video games, braided caps, paper cups, blankets, oxygen masks” (4) - but also ephemeral traces of the passengers - “mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, land, belonging, home” (4-5) - that testify to the humiliation of immigration, of being treated with suspicion and hostility until, and usually even after, one passes intrusive interrogation by immigration officials. Wealth and privilege does not, in Rushdie’s view, insulate one against such hostility. Both Rushdie and Desai explore the pain of Indian children sent to England to be educated, confronted with varieties of aggression, both active and the passive meanness of, say, schoolmates who will not explain how to eat a kippered herring (*The Satanic Verses*, 44). Desai, however, complicates the story of Jemubhai’s *bildung* - his humiliation and his development of a hatred of all things Indian – with Biju’s much more difficult migration, showing that wealth does indeed make a difference; and for Adiga’s and Roy’s social outcast characters, Balram and Velutha, international travel is
never an option at all. As Aijaz Ahmad reminds us, the celebration of hybridity requires a privileged perspective: “History does not consist of perpetual migration. [. . .] Most migrants tend to be poor and experience displacement not as cultural plenitude but as torment” (“Politics” 289).

Rushdie’s Saladin, like Desai’s Jemubhai, has the Indianness whipped out of him by the contempt of his schoolmates, but when he returns to England as an adult, his self-identification as English is made nonsense of as, will-he nill-he, he morphs into a new, monstrous avatar. His disorientation upon landing in England proves robust – hiding out in the home of a compassionate Bangladeshi man, watching TV while confined to his room, he continues to flounder in vain for something solid, real, or normal:

It seemed to him, as he idled across the channels, that the box was full of freaks: there were mutants – “Mutts” - on *Dr Who*, bizarre creatures who appeared to have been crossbred with different types of industrial machinery: forage harvesters, grabbers, donkeys, jackhammers, saws, and whose cruel priest-chieftains were called Mutilasians; children’s television appeared to be extremely populated by humanoid robots and creatures with metamorphic bodies, while the adult programmes offered a continual parade of the misshapen human by-products of the newest notions in modern medicine, and its accomplices, modern disease and war. A hospital in Guyana had apparently preserved the body of a fully formed merman, complete with gills and scales. Lycanthropy was on the increase in the Scottish Highlands. The genetic possibility of centaurs was being seriously
discussed. A sex-change operation was shown . . . The effect of all this boxwatching was to put a severe dent in what remained of his idea of the normal, average quality of the real . . . (419-20)

This parade of freakishness, so alarming to Saladin, is written with relish by Rushdie, who is, as Gane puts it, unambiguously on the side of what Radha Radhakrishnan calls “the post and the trans,” the cosmopolitan, and the global. Saladin’s great flaw is that his bildung has involved a closing off of possibilities. He must now be broken down again in order to arrive at a new sense of himself. Timothy Brennan identifies Rushdie as the archetypal representative of those literary celebrities he calls “Third-world Cosmopolitans” (vii). In his writings Rushdie has repeatedly celebrated newness, hybridity, pluralism and migrancy, while decrying the fetishization of ‘authenticity’ – in Imaginary Homelands (1991) he points out that the burden to be “authentic” is placed squarely on postcolonial shoulders. (67) The Satanic Verses, according to Rushdie,

celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. The Satanic Verses is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves. (Imaginary Homelands, 394)
The terms “change-by-fusion” and “change-by-conjoining,” however, hold on to something of an original identity. They suggest a grafting of the new onto the old, rather than outright rejection of everything that has gone before. Change that is so extreme as to constitute a total rupture with the past can be a dangerous thing. Muhammad Sufyan, font of wisdom and proprietor of the Shaandaar Café, “self-taught in classical texts of many cultures” (252), discusses identity and change with Saladin, contrasting the perspectives of Lucretius and Ovid on the “mutability of the essence of the self.” Where Lucretius, in Sufyan’s own translation, expounds on the necessity of the death of the old self to make way for the new, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* depict outward changes that leave an immortal essence of being intact. Sufyan believes that Ovid has it right: “Your soul, my good poor dear sir,” he counsels Saladin, “is the same. Only in its migration it has adopted this presently varying form” (285). Saladin, however, arrives at a different conclusion. He determines to “be another, discrete, severed from history” (297). Having had monstrosity thrust upon him, Saladin decides to embrace what he decides is an entirely new identity: “Newness: he had sought a different kind, but this was what he got” (298). He does not become the Englishman that colonial nostalgia has taught him to aspire toward; he becomes an entirely new type of animal.

Benedict Anderson asks why nations “celebrate their hoariness, not their astonishing youth” (“Narrating the Nation,” 659). This question remains relevant in the context of contemporary postcolonial fiction; while Rushdie celebrates hybridity, the monistic refusal of all past influences, a la Saladin, is in Rushdie’s view no more laudable than the discourses of origins, authenticity, indigeneity, and unitary identity that he writes explicitly against in
Imaginary Homelands. The discourses of the post and the trans, in Rushdie’s novels, are inextricable from the past, and from the idea of a homeland. All the authors under consideration here start out from a notional home, and all portray their characters’ journeys from that home as difficult. The characters are buffeted by push and pull factors, overwhelmed by forces much more powerful than themselves. Poor migrants, especially, are shown to have material difficulties, but no migrants are shown to assimilate smoothly. Even migrants who move from the first world to the third are shown to suffer. The migrant’s dilemma – of the extent to which the past may be allowed to impinge on the present – is ubiquitous in contemporary postcolonial fiction. This dilemma was reduced to the facile binaries of the culture clash theories that circulated when The Satanic Verses was first published, and the Ayatollah Khomeini issued his infamous fatwa on Rushdie; but Rushdie contests the premise that there is a fundamental opposition between Islam and modern British culture. After the publication of The Satanic Verses, he was attacked not simply by Islamic fundamentalists but also by many progressive intellectuals who saw his work as complicit with Orientalist representations of Islam. Such an understanding of The Satanic Verses fails to credit Rushdie’s representation of the complex and not altogether antagonistic relationship between British racism and Islamic fundamentalism.

Resistance to hegemonic understandings of national space is evident, for example in the contemporary postcolonial refusal of the idea of the homogenous, or even harmonious, nation. Tobias Boes argues that since the late eighteenth century, the bildungsroman has facilitated the creation of national communities among its readers, but such attempts always stumble over what

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1 Such as Father Booty in The Inheritance of Loss, and Father Mulligan and Mrs. Joe in The God of Small Things
Boes calls “cosmopolitan remainders,” identity claims that resist normativity and do not allow for complete closure at the end of the novel of formation (3). In contemporary postcolonial fiction, the protagonist is the cosmopolitan remainder, and exists in a relation of alienation to the world. The novels selected for this chapter were chosen because each of them centers on a portrayal of postcolonial childhood. As it turns out, they have a second thing in common: they were all written by authors who belong to minorities in India: Christians, Muslims, Parsees, atheists, and if Hindus, non-practicing, multiracial, diasporic Hindus who are not about to ride the tidal wave of what the Hindu Right keeps claiming as mainstream nationalism. Minority perspectives that garner so much national and international attention could potentially do much to complicate the monistic nationalism that is often “the only discourse credited with emancipatory possibilities” but which often functions by suppressing any kind of dissent, any minority and subaltern perspectives (“A Literary Representation,” 245). The writers discussed here consistently challenge fundamentalist positions such as the nativist project of seeking a pure precolonial identity.

In the formative years of the modern Indian nation-state, anticolonial thinkers like Bipin Chandra Pal and Pandit Mohan Lal defined the borders of the country, and selected for it an Aryan genealogy that excluded not only Muslims and Christians, but also lower-caste Hindus from their vision of India (which they insisted should be called “Bharat” after the ancient Hindu king in the Puranas.) ¹ Their argument was that since “the oldest inhabitants of this country used this term it is the most appropriate” (Pandit Mohan Lal, quoted in Goswami 197). They used the

¹ See Goswami 197
“hoariness” argument to counter the empiricist framework of colonial geography,¹ which had at once a pedagogical and disciplining function: “it was widely held that the diffusion of modern geographical knowledge would spawn rational colonial subjects liberated from the fictions of received cosmological schemas” (Goswami 143). Pal denounced the colonial thesis that India was an abstract geographical entity, extricable from religious, social or metaphysical meanings, as well as the colonial contention that there “never was such an animal as an Indian, until the British rulers of the country commenced so generously to manufacture him with the help of their schools and colleges, their courts and their camps, their law and their administration, and their free press and open platform” (30). The term Bharat, according to Goswami, has been read by postcolonial Puranic geographical scholars² as irrefutable evidence of an ancient, historically continuous, and geographically stable nation; but the term, paradoxically, serves to illustrate the selective appropriation of received categories. The supposedly transhistorical national signification of the category Bharat prompted the Indian constituent assembly’s decision in September 1949 to adopt Bharat as the official name for India as expressed in the first article of the Indian constitution, which states, “India, that is Bharat, shall be a union of states.” However, the conception of Bharat as a national-territorial entity, and the identification of its territorial and cartographical coordinates as roughly analogous to those of the colonial state, only emerged during the 1860s and 1870s, when, according to Goswami, Indian nationalism became widespread (7). The term Bharat, which was to assume an inflated ideological significance in

¹ See Bayly, Empire and Information (2000), 300-302

² See e.g. Dineshchandra Sircar, Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1971), and Amarnath Das, India and Jambu Island (Delhi: Vidya Publishers, 1985).
later works, had multiple, shifting, geographical referents, but has now been naturalized to the point where the Hindu Right feels able to claim India as an ancient Hindu land. The understanding of India as *Bharat* that keeps resurfacing in postcolonial writing is one that bears close examination, fraught as it is with irony: it is a violently modern conception of the nation-state, yet it selectively appropriates precolonial and even colonial ideas of India. Even as right-wing Hindu groups, who profess to provide an alternative to globalization for India, insist on *Bharat* as the originary India of the Vedas to which the nation must return, the nation-state they aspire to is just as much a product of colonial ideas of India cherry-picked by East India Company officials like Sir Thomas Munro, who said, “No system for any part of the municipal administration” (of India) “can ever answer that is not drawn from its ancient institutions or assimilated with them.”¹ The Orientalist idea of a reified Ancient that is to be a permanent fixture in Indian systems is mocked in *Midnight’s Children* (1981) through the character of Schaapsteker, a German Indophile who peddles pickled Oriental stereotypes. The ideas of the eighteenth century Orientalists enjoyed a renaissance in the twentieth century as nationalists developed a keen interest in the Vedic past as a means of critiquing the colonial present, and they are currently gaining importance in Indian politics again at the hands of such nationalist parties as the BJP. The manipulation of “traditions” and sites that take the place of communal memory in nineteenth century representations of India is laid bare in the postcolonial novel, where the

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¹ Quoted in the title page of William Adam’s *Third Report on the State of Education in Bengal*, 1838.
process by which memory makers such as Rushdie’s Schaapsteker selectively adopt and manipulate traditions for “memory consumers” is rendered transparent.¹

All of the authors discussed here engage with and contest this selective appropriation of ancient Indian culture. In *The God of Small Things*, for example, the Kathakali dancers adjust the length of their performance to fit the attention spans of tourists in a five-star hotel. At night, however, by way of penance, they dance the entire epic in the temple grounds. In another cultural oddity, it is the local communist leader who explains the nuances of the Hindu epics to the two young Syrian Christian children – he is a better Hindu than he is a communist, as the tragic forsaken foot soldier, Velutha, eventually finds out, when the communist leader refuses to protect him from the police because he is considered untouchable, with the result that Velutha’s idealism is literally stomped out. In both, Hindu nationalist and colonialist versions of history and geography, the position of the subaltern remains unchanged. Despite the apparently anticolonial position taken by thinkers like Pal, colonial interventions tended to consolidate ancestral privileges; and despite the professed egalitarianism of the communist leader’s ideology, in reality, he is too pragmatic to stick his neck out for the powerless Velutha.

The consolidation of ancestral privileges is once again evident in the mutually enabling forces of liberalization and religious fundamentalism - a major thematic and formal influence in contemporary postcolonial fiction. Right-wing leaders draw strength in part through mobilizing what they claim is a resistance to cultural erosion. Nationalist leaders at the time of independence were also reacting to British depictions of Hinduism as amorphous, like the precolonial Indian nation. The representation of India as a gift from the British – what Rushdie characterizes as the

¹ See Kansteiner 180
European belief that the Indian “was somehow the invention of their ancestors” (*Midnight’s Children*, 6) elicited the strong reactions cited above from Brahminist nationalists like Pandit Mohan Lal and Bipin Chandra Pal. Right-wing reactions are also elicited by Western constructions of Indians as a mild and peaceful people.

British representations of Hindus as weak, yielding and receptive proliferated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Amal Chatterjee’s book on colonial representations of Indians cites, for example, a 1756 article in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* that characterized Hindus as ridden with superstition but “quite free from bigotry,” and the claim in Captain Sleeman’s book about thugs in India, written in 1839, that Muslims could freely follow Hinduism without giving up Islam, because Hinduism is more a way of life than a religion (Chatterjee 147). The 1823 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes Hinduism thus:

> The greatest singularity, however, in the Hindoo religion, is, that so far from persecuting those of a contrary persuasion, which is too often the case with other professors, they absolutely refuse to even admit of a proselyte. They believe all religions to be equally acceptable to the Supreme Being…Every religion, therefore, they conclude to be adapted to the country where it is established; and that all in their original point are equally acceptable (474).

According to Chatterjee, “Hinduism’s ‘toleration,’ oft noted and remarked upon, was interpreted as ‘passivity,’ not as a sign of any intrinsic good but rather as one of fundamental non-masculinity which prevented its adherents both from improving their own religions and from
understanding the ‘truth’ of Christianity’ (89). Chatterjee’s argument certainly applies to this excerpt from Robert Orme’s *History of the Military Transactions* of the British nation in Indostan from the year 1745:

An abhorrence to the shedding of blood, derived from his religion, and seconded by the great temperance of a life which is passed by most of them in a very sparing use of animal food, and a total abstinence from intoxicating liquors; the influence of the most regular of climates, in which the great heat of the sun, and the great fertility of the soil lessen most of the wants…have all together contributed to render the Indian the most enervated inhabitant of the globe.

He shudders at the sight of blood, and is of a pusillanimity only to be excused and accounted for by the great delicacy of his configuration. This is so slight to give him no chance of opposing with success the onset of an inhabitant of the more northern regions. (5-6)

The colonial texts cited in this dissertation also support this thesis of Chatterjee’s – from Elizabeth Hamilton’s depiction of a gentle “Hindoo Rajah,”¹ through Sherwood’s and Burnett’s depictions of devoted Indian servants, and Craik’s representation of easily-seduced Indian women. Narayan’s work, and the widespread understanding of the Indian independence

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¹ In *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796)
movement as a non-violent one, do little to contradict the image of the Hindu who is peaceful to a fault.

This thesis would be challenged by missionaries, who listed instances of Hindu brutality as evidence that the harmless Hindu was an Orientalist invention\(^1\) (Chatterjee 98), and again in 1857, with the Indian Mutiny and subsequent struggles for Indian independence, when right-wing Hindu groups formed, including the RSS, which organized the assassination of Gandhi. Right-wing violence is not a radical new trend in Hinduism. The ancient Aryan epic, the *Mahabharata*, is about a battle between two branches of a family belonging to a caste of warriors. Nor is violence necessarily honorable or reciprocal. Ekalavya, a low-caste boy, has his thumbs cut off for watching an archery lesson intended only for the young princes. Ancient conceptions of justice propagated by the ruling class were not shy of blood, and the cruelty of the punishment increased if the perceived transgressor was a low-caste outsider.

Ashley Dawson provides an important response to Benedict Anderson’s argument that sacral kingdoms that depended for their coherence on the non-arbitrariness of the sign were threatened by the formation of the nation state. Dawson points out that it is not religious fundamentalism but the secular nation-state that is everywhere at risk today (Dawson 133).

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\(^1\) Eliza Hamilton’s *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* is a late Orientalist text, dedicated to Warren Hastings, but reviews of it refute Hamilton’s portrayal of gentle Hindus.
Religious fundamentalists may often be found in the same places as proponents of neoliberalism.¹

The neoliberal narrative of “India Rising” edits out and at the same time depends upon the trajectory of Muslims in India, from their status as rulers of much of the Indian subcontinent to their position in the eighteenth century as allies of the British, through their studied demonization in the nineteenth century, to their subjection to widespread Islamophobia in twentieth and twenty-first century India. Manu Goswami says that at the time of Indian independence, “In popular corporatist and gendered visions of national space time, the figure of the Muslim designated an internal negativity that had to be overcome and subsumed in order to establish a stable collective national identity” (201). Many anti-Islamic nationalist ideas derive from Orientalist notions encapsulated in such works as Hamilton’s Letters of a Hindoo Rajah (1796) written in the wake of the Hastings trial. Hamilton’s work makes interesting reading against William Dalrymple’s White Mughals (2002), which uses the exact rhetoric with the hero and demon roles reversed; where Hamilton writes of noble Hindus awaiting British liberation from invading hordes of Muslims, Dalrymple’s is the narrative of genteel Muslims beleaguered by barbaric Hindus (and both portray East India Company officials as allies of the injured Indian party in question). Dalrymple’s ideological closeness to Rushdie, evident in his celebration of secular Islamic traditions and his negative representation of Pakistan, and his (and Rushdie’s) simultaneous repudiation and reworking of Orientalist ideas make them interesting figures in terms of the “Muslim Question.”

In his introduction to *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie reflects on the increasing alignment of Indianness with Hinduism. I would go further and say that it is not Hinduism but Brahminism that has increasingly been invoked by powerful representatives in and of India, muscling out or suppressing the claims of others to an Indian identity. The Hindu majority is enlisted in the Brahmin fight to retain supremacy; Hindus from underprivileged backgrounds, as Rushdie shows in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, are deployed as foot soldiers in a movement whose ultimate goal is not the improvement of subaltern lives but the consolidation of historic privileges.

*Defying Limits*

In previous chapters we have seen the extent to which colonialism and nationalism privilege borders. *The Secret Garden* and R. K. Narayan’s work, in particular, represent the border as symbolic of safety from the unruly world without. Other types of boundaries manifest in the texts previously considered are the generic boundaries of the novel, its drive towards closure, and the boundaries around childhood, even in the case of the free-ranging youths in Kipling’s novels. They remain free so long as they remain children. There is a clear boundary-line between youth and adulthood, and both Kim and Mowgli are left on that boundary at the end of their narrative.

In postcolonial fiction, all three types of boundaries – the generic one as well as the boundaries around nations and between childhood and adulthood - are compromised. Often there is an actual leaky border in the novel; the boundary between India and Nepal in *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), which is no less powerful for being imaginary, suggests the power as well as the arbitrariness of other partially permeable metaphorical borders.
The recent crop of Indian postcolonial writers seem loosed from the local specificity of the previous generation. Narayan strove to put boundaries around his Malgudi; the outsider figure in his novels is always the focal point of the narrator’s anxiety. The opposite is true of Rushdie, who has always identified as an outsider, and has been a determined advocate for hybridity. The depiction of religion and culture as rooted and delimited, so comforting in Narayan’s view, becomes fundamentalist oppression in Rushdie’s texts. Yet Narayan’s restrained, utopian world and the alienating worlds of Rushdie and Adiga are two sides of the same coin – the former imagines a place outside of all strife because of his acute awareness of, and rage at, the strife in which his country is embroiled, and the latter’s satires suggest that they do cherish some idea of utopia – some vision of how things could be better – even as they protest the current course of India’s development.¹

The postmodern fragmentation of contemporary postcolonial fiction is fraught with nostalgia for a unity of being in a Romantic past, without which idea things cannot be shown to fall apart. Consider, for example, the treatment of economic growth in the two generations of postcolonial writers. While Narayan depicts a closed community in which restrained or proportionate social and personal growth can occur, in later postcolonial fiction, unrestrained growth or modernization is plagued with a bad infinity, shown to have no checks or balances. In Narayan’s work, the field of the author’s concern is strictly delimited – as with the nation, or the bildungsroman, there is the idea of a bounded jurisdiction, beyond which there is an “outside” where evil may reside. In Narayan’s stories, chaos always comes in to Malgudi with an outsider, and trouble is always eventually banished beyond the town’s borders. Narayan’s blameless

¹ Frederick Jameson talks about this relationship between satire and Utopian writing in “Third World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism” (80)
Brahmin protagonists are usually arranged in opposition to demonic outsiders. In the contemporary novel, the demons and protagonists are shown to be inseparable, and both are inextricable from religious and governmental institutions. The idea of a discrete culture is challenged, as unfettered capitalism disturbs, as Jed Esty puts it, any “dreams of measured, yet inevitable, human progress” (6). Contemporary Indian novels may then fall under the category of “antidevelopmental fictions” which work to cast doubt on “the ideology of progress” (Esty 3).

As all that is solid melts into air, the child protagonists of the novels are left with no protections and nothing to hold on to. The novels of Rushdie, Roy and Desai are populated with detached parents and detached citizens, watching in detachment as their children, and the nation, negotiate constant jeopardy. Arundhati Roy describes the twins in The God of Small Things as “a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other’s company, lollipping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic” (42). The twins are but two examples of the uncared-for child who recurs almost without fail in postcolonial writing; sheer ubiquity should alert us to the importance of this figure. Detachment breeds detachment: beleaguered by class resentment, absent parents and a rapidly changing world, one of the twins takes refuge in silence. While we continue to hear and sympathize with the voice of his twin sister, the boy becomes inscrutable, even impossible, as he grows. Estha’s adolescent years are passed over in the novel, and when he returns to Ayemenem as an adult he is in a state of fugue, having repressed memories of his parting with Rahel. When he is confronted with his twin the pain of his childhood rejection comes rushing back.

The difficulties a young girl faces growing up in The God of Small Things or The Inheritance of Loss are matched if not outweighed by the issues that young men face in those worlds. Bourgeois women and children have historically been categorized as inhabitants of the
private sphere. Boys are supposed to grow out of the protections of childhood into men who shoulder the burdens of the workplace and of political life. In Roy’s novel, however, Estha is represented as having lost the power to speak; and the travails of Gyan and Biju in Desai’s work are juxtaposed with Sai’s relative privilege. Roy’s Rahel, like Desai’s Sai, is spatially or architecturally cocooned, as is the Kulu woman in her palanquin, in Kim, and Mary Lennox in her secret garden.¹ These representations are driven by the logic of feminine vulnerability; the feminist argument is that this cocooning means that women and girls pay the price for gender violence: it is their sexuality that is always controlled, by both dominant and subordinate groups. The position of girls and women in contemporary Indian fiction may be understood as triangulation on a large scale, where women and girls are used as “pawns in sectarian struggles between incommensurable patriarchies” (Mongrel Nation, 132).

However, feminine seclusion is also represented as a privilege, premised as it is on access to private spaces: a home up on a hill station, or a car. When Ammu, in The God of Small Things, loses caste, she is forced to take a bus, leaving her vulnerable to the advances of the bus conductor, a threatening lower-class male figure seething with class resentment, much like the orangedrink-lemondrink man who abuses Estha. Even private spaces, however, like the Bengali sisters’ home in The Inheritance of Loss and the car in The God of Small Things, are not proof against popular invasion. As disparities widen, popular uprisings seek to re-order national space.

¹ According to Manu Goswami, “Both colonial state agencies and elite male subjects conjured female bodies as the repository of a reified tradition along discrete class lines. Middle-class female bodies were sequestered outside the public gaze but within the protective sphere of the colonial state. In contrast, subaltern female bodies, categorized as ‘public property,’ were literally and symbolically externalized” (125).
When subaltern movements such as the Nepali revolt in *The Inheritance of Loss* and the communist uprising in *The God of Small Things* gain critical mass, gardens are invaded, cars brought to a halt and their occupants terrorized.¹

¹ Manu Goswami inflects the idea of a pure culture that has been invaded by foreign capital in recent years by showing how the very reified social divisions that right-wing Nationalists now claim are salvaged from the precolonial past actually grew out of the colonial state’s attempt to manage popular uprisings of the sort that Roy and Desai depict in their novels: uprisings that result from the anger of the disenfranchised poor at having no recourse. According to Goswami, in response to widespread peasant insurgencies in the 1860s and 1870s, the alienation of land, the growing masses of landless laborers, and ineffectual famine relief policies in the Madras and Bengal presidencies, the United Provinces, and the Punjab, the colonial state, rather than acceding to popular demands for the reduction of land revenue assessments and water taxes, the organization of rural credit associations, and the reorientation of irrigation and railway projects, “instituted a series of legislative acts inhibiting and proscribing the sale of land to what were identified as ‘non-agricultural castes’ and ‘urban interests’.” These measures, rather than improving the lot of the cultivator or tenant, had the effect of binding “social groups in a territorial and social particularity;” i.e. reinforcing categories such as “agricultural castes” (Goswami 64). In addition to the reification of the caste system, uprisings were managed through what Ranajit Guha calls “the prose of counterinsurgency” wherein the poor are constructed as obstructing global and national progress (*Tensions of Empire*, 35).
If we contrast the girl characters with the boys in all the texts discussed in this study, the girls are more secluded and restrained, but the effect of this restraint varies. In Kipling’s and Burnett’s representations the boys are shown to have a lot more freedom and mobility than girls, but in the postcolonial novel this is shown to be a negative freedom – the boys are free from gender-based restraint, but what are they free to do? They are represented as unprotected and even more vulnerable because their contact with a hostile world is not restricted as it is for the girl children. This comes through starkly in *The God of Small Things*, when Estha, who is never made to nap with his mother and who is given permission to do things on his own because the only available chaperones are women who cannot, for example, accompany him to the restroom, is sexually abused (Roy 102). Boys are thrown to the wolves – when the twins’ mother is banished in disgrace, Rahel is kept safe by her grandmother, but Estha is sent off on a train to an absentee father who, as far as his mother’s family knows, is an alcoholic. Rushdie and Adiga focus overwhelmingly on the predicament of male gendering in postcolonial novels, an overwhelming issue in what is arguably the most canonical postcolonial novel, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

The neglect of children in postcolonial fiction may be taken literally as well as figuratively; the latter reading would draw from Paul Gilroy’s suggestion\(^1\) that the traumas of colonization and decolonization were never adequately addressed, they were simply replaced by more insidious forms of oppression, and the melancholia that infects much postcolonial writing is a symptom of the disconnect between hopeful narratives of patriotism and progress and the ground realities of the postcolony. The isolation experienced by the children and by Ammu in

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\(^1\) In *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2006)
The God of Small Things shows their inability to connect with something beyond themselves. In each of these novels, there is a failure on the part of the members of the privileged class to take on the burdens of the postcolonial country. Their affiliation is not congruent with the boundaries of the nation-state; they belong to an international cosmopolitan set, a mobile, educated, liberal class that, when able to look beyond their individual predicaments, looks past, not at the nation but at a globalized world; this class is able to transcend national concerns.

The Limits of Defiance: Critiques of Contemporary Indian Novels

Contemporary postcolonial fiction has provided a counterpoint to the Hindu Right’s attempt at reification of ancient Indian culture, but the revolutionary potential in the novels is always undercut by nostalgia for the good old precolonial days, and complicated by a competing nostalgia for a selectively imagined colonial lifestyle.¹ The beginning of Imaginary Homelands, where Rushdie talks about the childhood influences that informed Midnight’s Children, is very similar to the beginning of David Copperfield:

An old photograph in a cheap frame hangs on a wall of the room where I work.

It’s a picture dating from 1946 of a house into which, at the time of its taking, I had not yet been born. The house is rather peculiar - a three-storeyed gabled

¹ Consider, for example, the depiction of hill stations as climate as well as cultural refuges, where British-Indian culture sets the tone, in The God of Small Things and The Inheritance of Loss
affair with tiled roofs and round towers in two corners, each wearing a pointy
tiled hat. ‘The past is a foreign country,’ goes the famous opening sentence of L.
P. Hartley’s novel *The Go-Between*, ‘they do things differently there.’ But the
photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it’s my present that is
foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of
lost time (9).

While Rushdie notes and rejects moves to claim Mumbai in the name of Hinduism, he
seems to embark on an equal and opposite project when he says, sounding quite colonial,
“Bombay is a city built by foreigners upon reclaimed land; I, who had been away so long that I
almost qualified for the title, was gripped by the conviction that I, too, had a city and a history to
reclaim” (*Imaginary Homelands*, 10). Rushdie goes on to talk about how exiles and expatriates
cannot reclaim precisely the thing that was lost, but will create “fictions, not actual cities or
villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (10). At what point,
however, does it behoove us to engage with the real?

In addition to this disabling nostalgic quality, I engage here with the critique of
cosmopolitanism in contemporary Indian fiction, and consider the limits of a resistance whose
vanguard consists of cosmopolitan intellectuals. In the sections above, I talk about the breaking
of temporal and spatial boundaries; here, I look at whether this boundary-breaking actually
constitutes some form of liberation. I look at the difficulties of breaking out of colonialist and
neoliberal frameworks in postcolonial fiction. I then question the politics of the representation of
the subaltern in contemporary fiction and the aestheticization of third world misery. Finally I
have a small section on how postcolonial novels defend themselves against the excessive seriousness that their themes demand, but that would make for dry and sad reading: in addition to the luxuriant aesthetics, the cosmopolitanism and the nostalgic feeling of contemporary postcolonial fiction, the tactics of sentiment can have a reactionary effect; and what seems at first to be the opposite of sentimentality, the bitter sarcasm that is part of this postcolonial arsenal, is also potentially stymieing: I raise the question of how much linguistic play is too much.

The “Indianness” of Indian English writing has become hard to define: the best-known Indian writers today are invariably diasporic, transnational, Indo-Anglian or all three. This has been found to be exciting by the international literary community; the fantastic facility of writers like Rushdie and Roy has come to be seen as congruent, almost, with heroism. The breaking of boundaries has its liberatory aspect, no doubt, but it does not always mean the same thing, and is not always automatically a cause for celebration.

Much has been written in recent years about the radical potential of border work: the potential for transnational or cross-cultural alliances between those in different locations and positions, and the need to explore the increasingly complex and contradictory positions of diasporic subjects, whose yearning, within the novels, for a home is always already troubled both by the external political realities as well as by their own complicated subjectivities. Edward Said has written of the frontier between insiders and outsiders – the “perilous territory of not-belonging […] of refugees and displaced persons” (“Mind” 51). The crossing or breaking of borders, as Ambreen Hai points out, “has begun to carry an automatic, ipso facto resonance of laudability;” proponents sometimes revert to relatively uncomplicated notions of border-crossing. Border-crossing here needs to be considered in the specific context of late postcolonial
fiction, where the celebration of the ability to transcend borders needs to be “re-examined and deployed with caution” (Hai 383).

The Pakistani writer Aamer Hussein, in an interview in *Postcolonial Text*, talks about the pitfalls of writing in English: “We still look at ourselves through the lens of Western literature and through the way we imagine the Other reads us…I write in English and I know that …I am being read over my shoulder” (Bilal 2). He goes on to say that he writes for people who don’t “immediately or intimately know what [he writes] about” (3). Such a statement implies that Urdu speakers are more “immediately and intimately” sympathetic with each other than English speakers, who come from all over the world and qua Hussein can never shake the association of English with colonization. That Urdu is not very much more indigenous to the Pakistani region than English is an argument that has been made; I should like to add to this a version of the argument made about race – that there are often greater variations within a linguistic group than between linguistic groups. Women, for instance, in Arundhati Roy’s work and in Mahasweta Devi’s work share experiences that men in their own linguistic milieu do not share with them, though they are represented through different languages.

“Somewhere,” Hussein continues,

the reader will always start putting in nuances which will make the fiction exotic or Other. And then they might say this fiction feels like something they are so familiar with, as if it is a trial for them to identify me with something that comes from elsewhere. And the minute they do they say the experience is universal. That level of universality is always defined by a Eurocentric view of the world and that’s why I am very wary of words like ‘universal’ (Bilal 3).
The editors of *The Empire Writes Back* address the issue of discursive constraint in Anglophone writing particularly in early postcolonial texts, claiming that the potential for subversion in their themes cannot be fully realized because the available discourse and the material conditions of production for literature in early post-colonial societies restrain this possibility. “The development of independent literatures,” they argue, “depended upon the abrogation of this constraining power and the appropriation of language and writing for new and distinctive usages. Such an appropriation is clearly the most significant feature in the emergence of modern post-colonial literatures” (6).

This thesis is demonstrable in R. K. Narayan’s *The English Teacher* (1945). Narayan’s first-person narrator describes a class he teaches: “I spent the rest of the period giving a general analysis of the mistakes I had encountered in this batch of composition—rather very, as such, for hence, split infinitives, collective nouns, and all the rest of the traps that the English language sets for foreigners” (431). Such a comment is on the surface critical of the dead weight of grammatical or idiomatic minutiae, but even as it identifies these problems as traps set for foreigners, suggesting that command over English belongs to the English, Narayan’s own skilled writing undercuts that suggestion. Postcolonial writers and even scholars, however, continue to treat the English language with the anxiety and pleasure of the converted.

Rushdie, for one,\(^1\) turns the hostility of English to outsiders, which Narayan complains of, back on England and America by playing with it, even torturing it, until the language is hostile to anyone not from his specific milieu – the empire is really striking back here. Most readers will from time to time in the course of a Rushdie novel have a rhetorical door slammed in

\(^1\) and even a scholars like Gayatri Spivak, for example
their faces. An instance where Rushdie really seems to be cracking an insider joke almost at the expense of the least ideal, monocultural reader, is in the character Borkar from *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The name “Borkar” signifies Maharashtrian origins, but the members of the wealthy cosmopolitan family who take Borkar in (after running over his leg) do not care what his name is or where he comes from - they blithely baptize him “Lambajan Chandiwala” – Long John Silverfellow – given his amputated limb and his pet parrot. This cosmopolitan joke testifies to the family’s – and Rushdie’s - interest in muddying any notion of ethnic purity. The blithe baptism, however, depends on a facetious translation, which is a recurring joke for Rushdie, but one that depends on an upper-class perspective. The renaming underlines Borkar’s powerlessness, and shows an insensitivity to his self-identification and a disregard of his perspective that leaves him vulnerable to exploitation by the right-wing Maharashtrian purist politician, Mainduck (a fictionalized Bal Thackeray), who deploys the disenfranchised Borkar as a foot soldier in his violent war on outside influence. While Mainduck is clearly a villainous character, it is quite true that unlike the Zogoiby family that crippled and then employed “Lambajan,” Mainduck took pains to find out all about Borkar’s origin, his needs, his family situation, his resentments. Ultimately, however, Lambajan’s welfare is neither the subject nor the object either of the Zogoiby family’s machinations or of Mainduck’s – the former hurt him through negligence, the latter are more cynical in their purposeful courting of subaltern bodies.

Within these novels, subaltern perspectives are gestured towards, but this should not be taken as evidence of the subaltern speaking. In the aestheticized narrative of *The God of Small* 

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1 The Shiv Sena, whose honcho, Bal Thackeray, is fictionalized in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* as “Mainduck,” runs on a platform of reclaiming Maharashtra, the state of which Mumbai is the capital, for Maharashtrians.
Things, for example, the subaltern is somehow represented as foreign, as untouchable in the sense that he is not representable – even when he is being quite thoroughly touched. Roy’s Velutha is, like Mulk Raj Anand’s Bakha from Untouchable (1935), focalized through the middle-class narrative voice as an exotic object of desire.

This is not to say that there aren’t places, in each of the novels under consideration here, where the minority perspective is shown to be sympathetic with the subaltern perspective. Arundhati Roy, in an interview with David Barsamian for Progressive.org, says somewhat disingenuously that as a child she was “the worst thing a girl could be; thin, black and clever.” Roy misrepresents herself as underprivileged.¹ She has certainly been actively engaged in environmental and social justice work, and should certainly be given credit for her continuing adoption of counter-hegemonic perspectives, but the identification of the minority - and the minor - with the subaltern in her novel, just as in the novels of any of the other authors discussed here, is a kind of literary slumming. It is dangerous to conflate the powerful voice of the cosmopolitan minority writer, so celebrated in the international marketplace, with the subaltern. Reading the novels then feels like counterhegemonic work. However, the underprivileged voices in the novels are ventriloquized, assumed, even appropriated.

Children are often represented as subaltern – to be seen but not heard by the adults in the novels - and this identification is made most clear in The God of Small Things where the children identify strongly with Velutha and his brother, who belong to an untouchable caste. At the same time, the twins are privileged in their incredible facility with the written word – they can even read backwards and upside down. According to Benedict Anderson, the reading of the documents in which the nation is imagined is crucial to citizenship. This rather passive and

¹ In part by drawing attention to her skin color, an extremely sensitive topic in India
contractual model of citizenship is apparent in characters like Sai, Rahel and Estha, who are isolated and do not experience any solidarity with any community but who are always reading, unlike the illiterate masses whose ominous approach signals the fragility of print-based bourgeois nationalism.

Print, then, does not always create solidarities: fiction, in particular, can serve as a bulwark against realpolitik. Unlike the children or the subaltern characters who are involuntarily transient, (moved around without their choosing to be), upper class adults in the novels are voluntarily transient (although they, too, experience pain as immigrants). The cosmopolitan writer has even more control over his or her forays into different states (pun intended), and the cosmopolitan reader may be the one who experiences transience in the least painful way possible. In de Certeau’s vision, the polymorphic reader mutates to slip into the author’s place, which “makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person’s property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient” (xxi). The reader might succumb to the dangerous illusion that living for a moment with Saladin in hiding is some form of counterhegemonic activity. However, the reader’s voluntary and imaginary immersion into the world of human pain in contemporary Indian fiction is very different from the real-world movement of immigrants pulled into wealthier countries, like Biju from The Inheritance of Loss, or women and children who must pay for security with unquestioning subservience, like the twins and Ammu from The God of Small Things. As de Certeau argues, “readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves …. Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself and also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly…” (174)
R. K. Narayan was a proponent of this sort of temporary immersion into a fictional world. As discussed in the previous chapter, Narayan used his Malgudi as a buffer between the real world and the world of his imagining. Where Narayan thus opts out of overt engagement with national politics, the implied authors of recent postcolonial fiction seem to simply give up. Even as they engage critically with ancient Indian epics that Narayan draws more uncritically from, current Indian novels are reminiscent of the epics in their apparent aspiration toward moksha – release from the cycle of worldly problems through freedom from desire. Distance, detachment, and the aestheticization of pain/grief/misery are common in contemporary postcolonial fiction. Endings are never resolutions.

Rudyard Kipling saw the colonies as the white man’s burden; in contemporary postcolonial fiction, while there is an acknowledgement of the burdens of the nation, there is a corresponding unwillingness to take them up. Rushdie, for example, has an interesting relationship with the nation’s history: he plays with it and contests it but often embraces and incorporates it, and even becomes part of it, but there is no sense of futurity in his novels, no attempt to resolve any of the problems he identifies. It is fair to question why he should be expected to take responsibility for shaping the imagined nation: the question Saleem Sinai asks, “Why, alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?” could just as well apply to Rushdie (Midnight’s Children, 376). Rushdie’s position as

1 Although the poem “The White Man’s Burden” (1899) is about American colonization and is ironic in tone, the trope of the colony as the white man’s burden runs through the body of Kipling’s work, often without irony.

2 Aamer Hussein also chafes at the imposition of responsibility for representing his country: see Bilal 3.
a postcolonial writer comes with burdens already piled on – we are obliged to pay attention to
the inadequacies of his medium, to the ways in which his works are produced and distributed,
and how they then function in the world. We ask questions of postcolonial writers that we do not
ask of writers of contemporary American fiction, for example; the latter are not called upon to
take responsibility for the representation of their nation.

When compared to the colonial work of Frances Hodgson Burnett or the nationalist work
of Mulk Raj Anand, contemporary postcolonial fiction appears to be interested in nation
demolition rather than in nation building. As Anne McClintock puts it, “the almost ritualistic
ubiquity of ‘post-’ words in current culture¹ (post-colonialism, post-modernism, post-
structuralism, post-cold war, post-Marxism, post-apartheid, post-Soviet, post-Ford, post-
feminism, post-national, post-historic, even post-contemporary) signals … a widespread, epochal
crisis in the idea of linear, historical ‘progress’” (85). Yet, as McClintock points out, the term
postcolonial seems invested in the very imperialist idea of linear development that the field seeks
to dismantle.² In concentrating on texts written in English and French at the expense of
enormously varied literatures in other, especially non-European, languages, postcolonial theory
has privileged “writing back,” diaspora, migration, border-crossings, in-betweenness, and
hybridity as the defining features of a so-called “postcolonial condition.” As Wail S. Hassan and
Rebecca Saunders have written, “The Anglocentric focus of postcolonial studies has, ironically,
preserved the primacy of English and established both British colonialism and British literature
as a frame of reference […] so that, for instance, only Anglophone African, Caribbean, and

¹ McClintock is writing of current culture in 1992.
² the notion of the civilizing mission, addressed in Chapter 1, gave way after World War II to the
colonial notion of development, which lives on in postcolonial India
Indian writers are studied and taught in English departments, while their compatriots who write in other languages tend to be neglected” (18). Anglophone postcolonialism is widely critiqued as a mimic canon - where authors are influenced by Kipling and Conrad more than by writers whose medium is Hindi, Bengali or Urdu – that “functions effectively to reinforce neocolonial hegemony” (Hassan and Saunders 18).

According to Rushdie, “Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians’ version of the truth” (Imaginary Homelands, 14). This is true to an extent, as I concede in this chapter, but it would be nice if it were truer; unfortunately, all too often contemporary postcolonial writers lend themselves well to neoliberal purposes. Rushdie often seems to be speaking in concert with writers like Thomas Friedman and William Dalrymple, in his simultaneous celebration of India and vilification of Pakistan,¹ for example.

Hassan and Saunders’ point about the literary genealogy of contemporary postcolonial fiction is also hard to contest. Like Kipling’s work, contemporary Indian fiction gives the reader a sense of hurtling time, and of a culture that abhors simplification, and will not hold still for a portrait. The aesthetics of excess, and of the debris and the trash circulating untrammelled, hearken back to the pullulating life of Kim, as does the child’s comfort with things deemed unspeakable by genteel folk – trash, poverty, nature. Contemporary fiction, like Kim, also arrives at a whimpering end.

There should be more difference between the imperialist tone taken by Kipling and that of contemporary Indian writers – but the upper-class identification of contemporary Indian

¹ See Friedman, The World is Flat; Rushdie, Shame (1983)
writers is if anything less connected with the Indian poor than Kipling was. As for the manifest “absence of England” that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin suggest disqualify Kipling from consideration as an example of Indian writing (The Empire Writes Back, 5) – that absence is just as manifest in, for example, Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss. The difference between Kipling’s work and contemporary works of Indian fiction is more a question of perspective, and of temporality. Kim looks at India from a camera on a crane, whereas the twin protagonists of The God of Small Things use a low-angle lens. Kim’s is a bird’s eye view, while the twins’ is a worm’s eye view. Kim is optimistic, the twins are pessimistic. Kim represents the variegated millions of India living in harmony, whereas The God of Small Things is about strife. As Irving Howe puts it, Kim “brushes past social misery as more recent novels brush past personal happiness; it neglects the shadows as others neglect the lights…” (Kim, 322). Contemporary Indian fiction does not suffer from this neglect of the shadows. Its young protagonists grow into betrayal by a hideous world, a rude awakening that Edward Said notes the absence of in Kim (Kim, 344).

Kipling is determinedly interested in the present, and resistant to historicization – Sara Suleri writes of the perpetual adolescence of his work, of his structuring Kim as a series of surprises that occur seemingly without context (119). Esty writes that this explains why Kipling is more of a great storyteller than he is a great novelist – he does not seek deep historical roots for the events in Kim (10).

Contemporary Anglophone Indian fiction, on the other hand, is forever “Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/ The other powerless to be born…” It is always mindful of the past – both in the sense of understanding India as an ancient nation and in the sense of being wary – and it also expresses anxiety over the future. In The God of Small Things, Roy constructs
the History House to ironize the idea that History is some undifferentiated entity that can just be stepped into and out of\(^1\) (an idea that is presented with less irony through the museum in \textit{Kim}). \textit{Midnight’s Children} and \textit{A Fine Balance} mark the beginning of the end of hope for the postcolonial nation. Both novels depict the second generation of post-independence Indians as a miserable majority oppressed by a tyrannical native ruling class.

It could be argued that the genre of later Anglophone postcolonial fiction is itself hopeless, riven as it is with the voices and concerns of the privileged, who are celebrated globally, but whose work does not provide solutions or even inspiration to the masses of Indians whose lives they represent. As discussed above, the subaltern cannot speak though these novels. Representations of the silencing of the subaltern are common in recent Indian fiction, as are other symptoms of things coming to a head, such as representations of popular uprisings. These representations, however, do not in themselves constitute solidarity with the poor. In the novels considered here, minors are conflated with minorities, and minorities with the subaltern – these sleights of hand need to be noted and unpacked.

The position of the minor and the position of the minority have, in the mainstream narratives of nationalism, been considered “social,” not political, and relegated to the “ahistorical” and “private” realm (Goswami 232). Contemporary postcolonial fiction, however, contests this relegation to a private sphere, particularly in the representation of underprivileged children. Poor children do not have access to private spaces. They negotiate public spaces either

\(^1\) See \textit{White Mythologies}, 55
with simplicity and joy,\(^1\) or they are sarcastic young hustlers\(^2\) - in either case poor child characters are free of self-pity; pity and sentiment is reserved for the bourgeois child characters who are constructed as endangered innocents.\(^3\) The reader’s pity is invited through the figure of the inadequately cared-for child, who is always in physical and emotional jeopardy, and whose prospects are distinctly hopeless. Whether they are poor or rich, however, children are shown to be thrust out from the putative private sphere to be caught between the mutually enabling forces of right-wing fundamentalism and liberalization. While they are not generally represented as actively participating in political movements, child characters are the observers through whom the narratives are focalized. This is a problematic perspective in that identification with an innocent child, rather than with a parental figure in the text, absolves the ideal reader of responsibility for the events and actions within that text.

It is illuminating, for example, to compare the dying children in Mary Martha Sherwood’s novels with the dying child in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. In both cases, the precious British life is lost in the ungovernable wilderness of India. There is one crucial difference, however. The death of Sophie Mol in *The God of Small Things* is focalized through Indian children, not through the maternal British narrator of *Little Henry and His Bearer*. What is more, this kind of narration – from the point of view of the developing individual, not the one who oversees development, is common to all the works of fiction that informed this chapter. Does then the ideal reader of these novels, like the ideal reader of *David Copperfield* or *Great Gibreel Farishta* from *The Satanic Verses* and briefly, Biju from *The Inheritance of Loss* are represented in this way.

\(^1\) Gibreel Farishta from *The Satanic Verses* and briefly, Biju from *The Inheritance of Loss* are represented in this way.

\(^2\) Balram Halwai from *The White Tiger* is a stellar example of this type of characterization

\(^3\) Particularly in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The God of Small Things*
Expectations, identify with the child? What does that mean for responsible adult citizenship? The maternal or paternal tone adopted by the implied authors of colonial fiction is clearly not one that contemporary Indian authors can continue to adopt, but is the alternative to be regression? Perhaps the answer lies in the contemporary novels’ refusal of futurity. Perhaps it is only with the acknowledgment of the problems of current narratives of development that new stories can begin to be written.

Defying Gravity: Sentimentality and Irony

The feeling of nostalgia and of a discrete if imaginary homeland in the Rushdie quotation above haunts as well *The Inheritance of Loss*,¹ where an Anglo-Indian (i.e. British on Indian soil) priest is deported, to the chagrin of the rarified little hill community, and a pair of refined Bengali sisters, so attached to their garden,² pride themselves on imported foods and the RP English of one of their daughters, who is a newsreader for the BBC. The Bengali sisters are semi-comical figures, but the implied author is not altogether out of sympathy with them. The *Inheritance of Loss* is about a middle class – women in particular, and the growing girl child most of all - that feels itself increasingly insecure, trapped between a remote national imaginary that they are not wholly invested in and an insurgent subaltern class, which is represented in lurid and threateningly sexualized terms.³

¹ as well as Jhumpa Lahiri’s descriptions of diasporic experience

² See Chapter 2 for more on the importance of gardening to British self-understanding.

³ Ashley Dawson’s analysis of 1930’s England helped me formulate this argument – See *The Routledge Concise History of Twentieth-Century British Literature*, 77.
The chief antagonists of the children in *The God of Small Things* - the sexually abusive orangedrink-lemondrink man, and the resentful cook, Kochu Maria, belong to the class that threatens the bourgeoisie. The children’s hero, though a subaltern character, protects and loves them and their mother, so that although in an abstract sense, given his Communist affiliations and their nominal status as landed gentry, they are at political odds, he does not represent an immediate threat to their persons. The sentimental portrayal of Velutha in *The God of Small Things* resembles the sentimental portrayal of Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* in that both characters are treated as exceptional in their loyalty to the bourgeois protagonists – where subaltern masses are threatening, the sympathetic portrayal of these individual characters saves the novels from appearing obviously classist.

Conversely, in Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, the individual whose *bildung* is central to the narrative begins as a servant, and his life improves vastly after he murders the scion of the family he works for.¹ In *The White Tiger*, the class resentment that is always bubbling beneath the surface of the contemporary postcolonial novel boils over. Adiga’s is an unsentimental portrayal of a working-class revolt.

The sentimental portrayals in *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* of individual characters’ attempts to escape their position in India’s hierarchy serve, in the end, to defuse middle-class anxieties about the poor – and the reader’s experience of sympathy might come to displace and defer more concrete responses to human suffering. In Rushdie’s and

¹ This character is diametrically opposed to the unquestioningly devoted servants in Sherwood’s, Hodgson Burnett’s or Sarah Jeanette Duncan’s stories – *The History of Little Henry and His Bearer, The Secret Garden, A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Story of Sonny Sahib* (1896).
Adiga’s fiction, where sympathy is hardly asked for, humor and irony direct the attention away from real feeling, and enable a passive sort of enjoyment. Ashley Dawson has said that “Rushdie’s text is filled with puns, double entendres and other word games that defamiliarize and undermine the claims of hegemonic language to authenticity and authority” (*Mongrel Nation*, 135). But these puns also ironize and disable action, and defamiliarize less educated Indians, their exclusivity possibly enhancing the delight that cosmopolitan and highly educated transnational elites derive from them.

In his introduction to *Swami and Friends* (1935), Graham Greene writes that he knows what it is like to be Indian through R. K. Narayan’s work. This sounds as though Narayan’s specific India is being embraced by Greene, but in fact it is Narayan’s emphasis on human commonalities are what make his texts so friendly, compared to the unfriendly particularity of postcolonial fiction, exemplified in the Lambajan Chandiwala joke. The Lambajan joke requires a perspective that is both inside and outside that amorphous self-perceived Indian culture. Successful companies have been launched on jokes like these – where ephemeral “global desi”

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1 In Hindi, “Desi” means from India - the “des” or country.
do not shy away from the issues plaguing the country, but which do not devastate the reader, because the problems within the text are always managed through humor or sentimentality.

The novel allows the writer to remain commitment-shy – he or she does not have to spell out any arguments or positions. Everything can be implied, ironized, self-contradictory. The superior, complex, aesthetics of postcolonial novels work against the association of virtue with transparency and make a mockery of any earnest quest for truth; they also obstruct the activist impulse by invoking reader sympathy so that the reader feels sensitized to third-world predicaments, which can be a satisfactory sensation. Roy’s nonfiction writing lacks nuance, but it does not lack purpose. The contrast between her fiction and nonfiction suggests that amorality is a literary value. There is no insipid virtue, such as we might find in Mary Martha Sherwood’s work, and no absolute morality except the manifest absence of an interest in futurity that invites the reader to leap into that breach.

The Uses of Disenchantment

In his introduction to The Vintage Book of Indian Writing (1997), Rushdie himself sums up the criticisms of recent Indian writing in English:

Its practitioners are denigrated for being too upper-middle-class; for lacking diversity in their choice of themes and techniques; for being less popular in India than outside India; for possessing inflated reputations on account of the international power of the English language, and of the ability of Western critics and publishers to impose their cultural standards on the East; for living, in many cases, outside India; for being deracinated to the point that their work lacks the
spiritual dimension essential for a ‘true’ understanding of the soul of India; for being insufficiently grounded in the ancient literary traditions of India… (xiii)

Rushdie defends “Indo-Anglian” literature, pointing out that English is as much an Indian language as his native Urdu, that Indian English is a medium that is only enriched by its inherently hybrid quality, and that some of the world’s most celebrated writing in recent years has been Indian English writing. He also points out that the criticism leveled against Indo-Anglian writers is rarely based on the merit or demerit of their writing – it tends instead to presuppose some sort of authenticity that is violated through the use of English by an Indian author. This is, for the most part, true. The one literary criticism in Rushdie’s list of the charges against Indo-Anglian writers, the one about the failure to represent diversity, is more applicable to Narayan than to the current crop, who are careful to represent every class and culture in their novels.

The only hierarchy by which English may be ranked lower than other Indian languages is the hoariness argument – that English is a relatively recent addition to the Indian babel. To make such an argument, we have to become strange bedfellows with the regionalists who demand that their own language be preserved at the expense of all others. English is to many Indians a first language, and not all the Indians who call English their mother tongue are cosmopolitan elites.

Given the limitations of reading and writing, and having admitted to what reading and writing cannot do, I want to dwell, at the end of this dissertation, on what it can do. A work of postcolonial fiction can and does haunt the reader.\(^1\) The unresolved problems, open endings, and

\(^1\) R. K. Narayan has asserted in interviews that he wishes to give his readers an alternate world that is closed off, but even he experiments with haunting fiction in *The English Teacher* (1945)
the stories of failed *bildung* work against the transient nature of our usual engagement with fiction, compelling the reader to remain unsettled.

The long-form novel allows us to observe how much of the project of modernity is not the eradication, but the containment of social injustice, both in a spatial sense – Velutha is relegated to a separate island, Saladin to a single room in Brixton, and the slum dwellers in *A Fine Balance* to a quarry, so that progress may be shown to be made - and in a temporal sense: the management of history, so to speak, through which objects, places and concepts are preserved in historical ways, and become fixed, easy manipulated versions of what was once an internalized social memory. The novels discussed here pit sites like Roy’s History House against the teeming dynamics of the lived experience of contemporary India. The History House does not speak for itself: its message is contingent on who remembers what, and why. Contemporary postcolonial fiction thus questions “the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the [collective national] past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests” (Kansteiner 180).

Finally, the largeness of the novels discussed here allows for the representation of what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence” – the sort of socioenvironmental degradation that takes generations to unfold and that does not give the onlooker the immediate *jouissance* of action-movie style violence. The contemporary Indian novel, with its representation of children whose bleak past pales only in comparison with the bleakness of their future should have the effect, in the end, of enjoining us to turn our attention to the present.
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