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The Mutiny Novel

Creating the Domestic Body of the Empire

The Indian Mutiny of 1857 marked a shift in governance from the Mughal emperor to the East India Company. The literature of this period indicates a movement away from India as an adventure space to India as a domestic space. This essay examines two novels, to show the dissolution of a romantic and picturesque India; instead it is a land that is feminised, determined and bound to its colonial masters.

AISHWARYA LAKSHMI

In 1897, when *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* observed, "Of all the great events of this century as they are reflected in fiction, the Indian Mutiny has taken the firmest hold on the popular imagination" [Anon: 218], it was empire as a domestic space that was being consumed. This paper argues that though the adventure novel has come to stand metonymically for the "novel of the empire", from mid-century onwards, Victorians increasingly imagined India as a domestic space standing in a contrastive yet politically and morally necessary relation to the metropolitan nation. This figuration ultimately created the moral economy of colonialism, and continued to undergird even early 20th century adventure novels like *Kim*. The key incident in this shift was the Mutiny of 1857, which marked a shift in governance from the rule of the Mughal emperor, with East India Company as protectors, to the Crown. Mutiny novels code this shift as a movement away from India as a space of adventure and begin to create the empire as a domestic space. By an examination of two Mutiny novels, Meadows Taylor's *Seeta* (1872) and Flora A Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), I show that this domestic body of the empire was gendered and deterministic. I argue that this figuration reified the early 19th century depictions of India as a "feminine land", and brought it in a morally necessary and subservient relation to Britain by yoking the previous masculine west and feminine east division within the confines of an unequal marriage.

Literary critics, in discussing the Mutiny novel, have focused on its "gothic" aspect: the fascination with rape and horror, the blatant racism, and the figuration of the English and Indian women within it as symbols of chastity and licentiousness respectively, both in need of rescue.[1] When the gendered and domestic body of the post-1858 space has been discussed, it has been in terms of the figure of the Indian woman in these novels who metonymically stands for "India" in need of moral and civilisational rescue (the converse is the figure of the English woman who stands in for the empire in need of the organisation of military chivalry) and in terms of the "separation of spheres" of the racial divide within this body. I show that it is the figuration of the land that ultimately creates the gendered, deterministic body of the empire, with India as the passive feminine and the British as the active masculine partner, and that it is this intimate and "necessary" relation that undergirds the separation of spheres policy practised in colonial relations with India post-1858.

This paper revises Antoinette Burton's claim arising from her work on British feminists in England that mid-century onwards, Victorians were increasingly imagining England and India "concentrically" rather than constrastively [Burton: 35]. Burton shows that British feminists by making the "uplift" of Indian women their special province, a task necessary for the moral good of the empire, re-imagined the national public space as a national-imperial one. This allowed them to argue for an extension of this space to include women in an enhanced public (yet still within the traditional female) role. Thus Burton argues, Victorians widened the circumference of the national space and drew India within it. While I agree with Burton that India was being imagined as an extension of the national space, reconceived as a national-imperial one, I show that this space was not a uniform space circumscribed from a fixed centre (metropole), as Burton's geometric analogy suggests. Instead, this space was differentiated, comprising of an active, masculine metropolitan and a passive, feminine, colonial space, a difference that created a "centre" and lent dynamism to it.

Thus, just as the passive figure of the Indian woman lent a dynamism to the feminist discourse, the figuration of the feminised Indian land 1860 onwards lent mobility to the colonial discourse. This feminised land, however, marks a shift from the late 18th and early 19th centuries picturesque and romantic figurations of it, where the "feminine east", stood in varying degrees of opposition to the masculine west and stalled or questioned its expansive thrust. The picturesque in the late 18th and early 19th centuries painted a feminised, unthreatening, nostalgic landscape. Images of fading, classical grandeur sublimated by temporalising present confrontations but worked as an oppositional "Other" to a dynamic, expanding Britain, albeit in limited ways. In romantic figuration, best expressed in Lady Morgan's 1811 novel, *The Missionary*, the feminine east, both in the Indian priestess, Luxima, and the exotic locale of Kashmir, serves as a counterpoint (even if a deceptive one) to the masculine west (here the Portuguese missionary, Hilarion) with the power to subvert it by seduction.[2] The Mutiny novel, by yoking this opposition (romantic of masculine Britain to feminised India) and quasi-opposition (between the picturesque fading grandeur and vigour of British expansion) into a domestic framework, not only bound east to west in an ideologically necessary relation but also made one party subservient and passive. Furthermore, any subversive potential of this feminised land was erased by depicting its picturesque and exotic beauty not as a property of the land but of the British eye. The feminised post-Mutiny India, unlike the earlier romantic or picturesque feminine, is closed in on itself and inert.

This feminised, domestic land undergirds later adventure novels set in India. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, India was recuperated as a space of adventure in fiction: in novels like *Kim,* and in popular juvenile fiction like that of G A Henty (Boyd: 66-68). Literary history has tended to see the adventuring space of India sketched in these novels as continuous with the late 18th and early 19th centuries adventure narratives of merchants and mercenary soldiers. I show that the two spaces are in fact radically different. The adventuring space traversed by boy-heroes bears little resemblance to the foreign terrain which the early 19th century adventurer-heroes like Henry Lawrence, James Skinner, and to some extent, even Meadows Taylor negotiated. Instead, these adventures take place in a bound, surveilled domestic space of India, a creation of the Mutiny novel. This paper therefore revises literary history, which by ignoring the Mutiny novel and Anglo-Indian fiction from the second-half of the 19th century, has continued to plot the empire as a space of adventure, from the late 18th to the early 20th century. It calls for a re-alignment and re-reading of the late 19th century adventure novel within the post-Mutiny domestic ideology and figuration of the empire.

Creating Gendered and Domesticated Space

On May 10, 1857, soldiers of the Bengal army in Mirath, India, revolted and killed their British commanding officers. The soldiers then marched to Delhi and entreated the by now titular Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, to head the revolt against the British. This appeal was followed by revolts by several other native regiments in north India, who congregated in Delhi and in other Indian courts, like that of the court of the (recently deposed) Nawab of Awadh in Lucknow. The British, who had been completely taken by surprise, recuperated quickly, and by late September 1857, the city of Delhi was retaken after a prolonged siege. The fall of Delhi was a decisive blow to the mutineers but fighting continued well into 1859 as the struggle was continued by peasants under local landlords and rebel leaders.

In March 1858, the Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was put on trial, found guilty of "treasonable design of overthrowing and destroying the British government in India", and exiled to Burma (Noorani: 19). In November 1858, Queen Victoria's proclamation enacted the transfer of power from the Mughal emperor (with the East India Company as protectors) to the Crown and granted pardon to all those who surrendered who were not guilty of murdering an Englishman or woman. The document used the language of benevolent maternalism with Victoria as a sort of mother figure, willing to grant "mercy" and "take back" her subject-sons.[3] Begum Hazrat Mahal (the queen who kept up resistance to the British in Lucknow) rebutted the proclamation and rejected the offer of surrender, pointing out that this "maternalism" was misleading at best and disingenuous at worst. Not only was there no possibility of fair trial (or any trial at all, in many cases) for those who surrendered but the offer dispossessed all those who rebelled. Moreover, entrance into the domestic body of the British empire was founded on the punishment of "a whole army and people"[4] for a rebellion against a government that did not exist prior to it.

Acting on both the past and present, the proclamation and trial heralded the domestic body of the empire. The "our government" of the trial and proclamation appeared to pre- rather than post-date the Mutiny, retroactively creating the "legal conditions" for the king to be put on trial for "treason." Furthermore, by not simply dispossessing the Mughal ruler but making him appear in court on charges of sedition, the very symbols of the past were put on trial to legitimate the present and change the shift of ruling powers: from an act of usurpation to a lawful procedure. Thus, while British counter-insurgency operations in which rebels were blown from guns and hung on trees, while villagers were burnt followed the classic Foucauldian paradigm of leaving traces of its brutality in "spectacles" to make British power visible, in discourses of the law, politics, and fiction another kind of memory formation was enacted: to erase the traces of violence and create the past as illegitimate. Since the violence of the "counter-insurgency" operations was directed against the sovereign body of the Mughal ruler, it could not function as the legitimate in discourse, unless the old law was itself put on trial and discredited.[5] The purpose of discourse, thus, was to convert violence into the form of the Law that could perform important retroactive ideological work on the past and the immediate present. Ultimately, what this discourse stands testimony to, therefore, is a usurpation and "appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who once used it".[6]

This paper focuses on one element of that discourse, Mutiny fiction, and examines two Mutiny novels, *Seeta* and *On the Face of the Waters*, to outline the ideological work these novels did for the empire. I show that the novels created a gendered, domestic space of India that in a move similar to the proclamation, erased the revolutionary potential of the Mutiny and created the empire's normativity. This was achieved in two ways: by structuring the novels as a movement from adventurous, disordered space to a domestic ordered one, and using the Mutiny to make the historical law (the historical need of the Indians for the British) visible. The latter is achieved by racialising aesthetics and the land, such that both become evidentiary and reveal this law. Like the proclamation, therefore, the novels transform the Mutiny, from a contested time-space to a transparent event that reveals India's "need" for Britain.

Seeta (1872)

Philip Meadows Taylor (1808-1876) was born in Liverpool, and set out for India in 1824 at the age of 15. He worked for the Nizam of Hyderabad and served him in several capacities: as interpreter on courts martial, assistant police superintendent, in the army, as magistrate and collector in his territories [Taylor 1986]. Taylor was one of the old school men like Skinner and Lawrence, who unlike the "competition wallah" and the Indian Civil Service (ICS) men, mixed with Indians and adopted some modes of their life. Ideologically as well, he was closer to the utilitarian reforming zeal of the 1830s. *Seeta* forms the third part of a trilogy, comprised also of *Tara* and *Ralph Darnell,* the former being set in 1657 and depicting the rise of the Marathas (which in part led to the weakening of the Mughals in the 17th century), and the latter in 1757, the year of the battle of Plassey. *Seeta,* set in 1857, and recounting a tale of the Mutiny, completes and "fulfil" the story of British ascendancy in India.

Seeta, first published in 1872, though a post-Mutiny novel is written from a perspective that was largely unfamiliar to, even condemned in the post-Mutiny era. Most markedly, the novel depicts an inter-racial marriage, something that though accepted in the early 19th century was virtually anathema post-Mutiny.[7] The marriage is central to the plot, which is as follows: Cyril Brandon, the young magistrate of Norpoor, falls in love with Seeta when she appears in court to identify the assailant, Azrael Pande, her husband's murderer. Defying convention, Cyril and Seeta get married. Soon after marriage, Cyril realises that though their marriage is happy and Seeta an accomplished woman (in Sanksrit scriptures), she will never be the kind of companion that an Englishwoman could be. He finds himself attracted to Grace Mostyn, his friend's sister-in-law. Seeta also faces trouble in the form of caste excommunication, exclusion from Cyril's English life and friends, the pressure to become Christian, and finally the realisation that her marriage will not be recognised as legitimate under English law. Any children born of the union will be debarred from the right of inheritance (on Cyril's side). The domestic troubles coincide with the coming of the Mutiny, and one day when the rebels, led by Azrael Pande, attack the house, Seeta is shot trying to save Cyril. She dies, Cyril and Grace return to England, where they get married and eventually inherit Cyril's ancestral property.

The novel uses the picturesque to create India as a domestic space and mark the difference between British and Indians, in order to delegitimise the latter's claim to the land. The picturesque is pitted against the Indian's "sacred" consumption and activation of the land. The picturesque and the sacred landscape aesthetics were in fact dominant modes of depicting the land by the British and Indians respectively in the early 19th century. The picturesque, where one viewed the land "as in a picture", derived pleasure from this act, and recorded the view in journals or sketches, was a prominent mode of consuming India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries by the British. The sacred landscape aesthetic, practised by Indians in the same period, is a more inclusive term, comprising of several landscape styles (such as the Mughal, the courtly) but all were characterised by non-realistic and hieratic depictions of the land. In the novel, the picturesque retains some of its specificity as a landscape aesthetic but the sacred landscape aesthetic transforms into the general term "sacred" denoting various kinds of engagement with and on behalf of the land – from religious worship to rebellion (guided by religious motivation). The novel, however, historicises and racialises both aesthetics. Thus instead of being modes of imaging, negotiating, and mapping oneself on to the land, they become markers of "states of civilisation": the picturesque of the modern and civil and the sacred of the static and non-modern. The final reification takes place towards the end of the novel in a "trial scene", where the picturesque and sacred are pitted against each other and the sacred loses. Like the trial of the emperor, however, this is also a staged event in which one party has lost even before entering the court.

The very opening paragraphs of the novel set up the opposition between the picturesque and the sacred. The novel begins with a picturesque description that moves into a description of how the land is the repository of layers of civilisation and ancient memory:

> It was nearly midnight. A slight passing shower had just fallen, and the moon, nearly at its full, shone out with brilliant luster over a scene at once strikingly beautiful and impressive. At the head of one of the long ravines which descend westwards from the plateau of central India, was a deep, lonely glen, the upper end of which was closed by one of those abrupt precipices of basalt, which everywhere a small stream, swelled somewhat beyond its wont by showers of the rainy season, now poured a considerable body of water with a dull continuous roar...At the foot of the fall, and bordering part of the pool, was however an open space, now covered with soft green sward, the only level spot in the glen for some miles of its course, where, on one occasion in each year, the people of the country round held a kind of fair, bathed in the waters of the pool, and worshipped the local deities to whom it was held sacred. At other times, indeed, the place had an evil reputation, and was carefully avoided.
>
> At the back of this level spot, grew a vast peepul tree of enormous size and remarkably picturesque though peculiar character. (1-2)
>
> The above leads into a description of a banyan tree, the site of Hindu worship, and the sacred character of the tree reached far beyond that, to a period when it was probably adored, together with the image of the rudely carved twisted snakes which lay at its foot, by the ancient tree and snake worshipping tribes of the country. By the side of the snake-image, too, rested a pile of stones, smeared with vermilion and lampblack. This had existed from rude times, even beyond those of the snake-worshippers...
>
> Nor was the spot destitute of other ancient religious associations. Two thousand years ago, perhaps, a Boodhist fraternity of monks or devotees had selected this spot, as they did hundreds of others, for its wild beauty and absolute seclusion, and with infinite pains and labour had excavated from the trap-rock a small Vihara or monastery ...It consisted of a square hall, at the end of which, in an apse or recess, was a large statue of Boodh in a sitting posture,...and it seemed as if the mild, placid features ever looked out benignly into the beautiful glen, and over the sparkling waters of the stream. (2)

The second passage works with a different perspective from the first, as it descends from a place of transcendent viewing to give a scene on and from the ground. It marks the narrator's interest in domestic spaces (what lies at the "foot of" and "the back of") and the division between the narrator's and Indians' consumption of the land. The first passage gives a beautiful view of the land, and the second a sense of how the land is activated by lived religious practices that call on different times and civilisations (tribal, Hindu, Buddhist). This land seems to have depth to it, but space as the villager's activation of it by worship is ultimately inert, a fact that the figure of the Buddha begins to mark. Of all the deities, the banyan tree, the snakes, the 'Vihara', that form part of the scene of the glen, it is only the figure of Buddha who is given a "gaze": Buddha presides over this scene and looks out benignly into the glen and waterfall, and sanctions the picturesque scene of the fall ("as if the mild, placid features ever looked out benignly into the beautiful glen, and over the sparkling waters of the stream"). The figure of Buddha gazes in the same manner as the narrator in the opening paragraph, and this alignment gives internal sanction to the narrator's own gaze. Buddha, here, works as W J T Mitchell's "threshold" figure, who "sits in" for the narrator (artist), and allows us entry into the native space. As Mitchell has argued, the particular task of the threshold figure is to sanction the gaze of the narrator (artist), by revealing that the native deity (figure) "sees" in the same manner as the narrator (artist).[8]

Buddha sanctions the gaze of the narrator, which emerges as the ideal and politically right consumption of the land. Only viewing in the manner of the narrator (and the proxy figure of the Buddha) gives access to wholly unproblematic, "neutral," beautiful scenes. Apart from the "view" of the waterfall (by Buddha) and of the ravine (by the narrator), all other spaces and objects are double-edged: the banyan tree throws shadows "in weird, ghastly forms", the stones, if neglected, can cause "sore penalties of sickness", and the glen itself transforms into an "evil space" at times. The other consumption of the land, that the villagers engage in with the local deities, leads to a double-edged activation of the land.

Yet another activation by the rebels is also suspect, and is given in our first introduction to them: about 20 men "whose savage appearance betokened a hard, lawless life" are congregated around a fire in the cave, "and as the flames leaped high, occasionally almost to the roof, they lighted up the fierce faces around, and the great image behind with it its soft, placid features, in strange contrast with each other". (3) Just as the figure of Buddha sanctioned the narrator's gaze previously, now the figure condemns these men. The men are bandits (who will eventually become rebels), and their image, which is at odds with the calm one of Buddha, makes them internally dissonant with the landscape. The bandit rebels are the reverse of the threshold figure. Not only do they not gaze like the narrator but they are at odds with and their presence unsanctioned by the very "landscape" (on behalf of which they will later fight). Their entrance into the social body – the village of Shah Gunje, in which the novel is set – is also conceived as an infection and a threat, which is neutralised only in their deaths at the hands of Cyril and Mostyn. The community is now "rehabilitated" and is like a fair.

> Next morning the town was like a fair. The people from villages around brought garlands of flowers, and laid them at Br Brandon and Temple's feet. The dancing girls of Shah Gunje dressed themselves in their gayest apparel, and spreading carpets in the chowke [square], danced and sang ballads in Cyril's praise... Then as the old English flag was once more hoisted amidst the shouts of the people, and garlands were hung on the staff, and cast at its foot, all felt that the English were in authority once more, and there would be peace (pp 397-98).

There were no such scenes of rejoicing in the years of 1857-58; in fact, when the British did re-establish authority, it was often at great cost to the native populations of the individual cities and villages, and their return was accompanied by fear. Here, of course, entire Shah Gunje, rather than the mere market, is a "fair", and there is rejoicing "as had never been remembered before" (Seeta: 398). This "restitution" of the communal space does to memory what the counter-insurgency operations did to the land, which is to wipe out the "clinging to the memories of old rulers and old systems of government" (Seeta: 425). The novel obfuscates memory by showing the rebellion to be not part of the communal body at all. The rebels are an infection, and the rebellion the "evil year" that had to run its course, rather than a year of possibility to which were tied the hopes and aspirations of many people. What was remarkable about the Mutiny was precisely its communal nature: how, despite lacking a common cause and unitary organisation, it was taken up by diverse groups of people and its hopes adopted by even the spectators. As Kant points out in his discussion of the French Revolution, the historical potential of a revolutionary event lies not with the actors but with the spectators' reaction to the event.[9] Taylor, in denying that the Mutiny had a social spectatorial aspect – that it was even tied to the social in any significant way – by making it merely an act of personal, misguided vengeance, cuts away at the historical potential of the event for Indians.

Not only is the event of the Mutiny denied a spectatorial aspect but the Indians themselves emerge as incapable of spectation. We saw this in the opening scene, where only the narrator and the proxy figure of the Buddha were capable of gazing. The rebels lacked a gaze even of a disturbing animalistic kind (as we find for instance in Conrad). It is not only the undesirable but also the "good" subjects who are unable to spectate: Seeta, the exemplary subject, accomplished and civilised in her own right, is unable to spectate as well, and finally marks the "fact" that it is not the Indians but the British who have a claim over the land. The connection between visual purchase of and actual proprietary claim over the land is made in an incident that takes place in a "trial scene" towards the end of the novel: Seeta, Cyril, and Grace all find themselves in a temple on a hill, on the side of which a river runs. Seeta is engaged in an act of worship, and Cyril and Grace admire the prospect by picturesque gazing and sketching. It is only the latter two who are able to "properly appreciate" the land: Seeta, herself, is engaged in quite another act, and when she does cease worshipping, she becomes the subject of Grace's sketch that Cyril completes.[10]

The scene dimly echoes one in *Northanger Abbey*, where Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland are on Beechen Cliff overlooking the city of Bath, and Henry gives Catherine a lecture on picturesque viewing [Austen 86-88]. Though Austen is partly satirising the picturesque craze in the above, the scene also establishes the kind of companionship their marriage will be: one between not quite intellectual equals, but where one – only too willing and able to learn – can be "tutored" into the proper companion. In the scene on the hill in *Seeta*, the picturesque also marks the legitimate pair and the nature of heterosexual companionship. It "unites" Cyril and Grace, as they share in the pleasure of spectation, and marks that they are the legitimate pair. It shuts Seeta out by pointing out that she is not capable of being tutored into picturesque gazing (the entire novel chronicles the attempts and failure of Cyril to make her into a Victorian wife). It is not simply the possibility of conjugal happiness and "equality" of relation that the picturesque marks but also the kind of citizenships all three are capable of. Cyril and Grace because they can engage in picturesque gazing, have a greater purchase on the land than Seeta. She is not a "spectator" herself, and according to Taylor's logic, lacks the adequate modern understanding equated here with visual consumption of the land that is the pre-requisite of being a citizen. In a re-adjustment of the alignment of the actual ownership of property and proprietary viewing of the landscape in England in the early 19th century that Helsinger has pointed out [Helsinger: 103-25], here, although Seeta is the heir to a substantial amount of property, her lack of proprietary viewing (that the idea of landscape encourages) signals an inability to participate in the kind of citizenry of the empire open to the English pair. Her own worship and person can be the subject of the picturesque gaze and sketch but like the idols in the opening paragraph, is meant to merely inhabit not possess and own the landscape.

Taylor uses the picturesque to create the desirable object of the land, to prove the undesirability or inertness of the Indians' consumption and activation of it, and thus genderises as well seals the social body from within, with respect to its capacity for mobility on its own. It is finally in the scene on the hill, where the picturesque and sacred are put on "trial" – a staged event as well as a moment of a differend – that sacred and picturesque aesthetics are reified into stages in history, and the fate of the social body limited to the sacred is sealed. By equating the picturesque with modern sensibility and the right to citizenship, Taylor calls on the liberal-reformist thought of J S Mill, which rests political morality on the institutions of modernity and makes full citizenship contingent on the possession of a modern sensibility, but renders static the pedagogic dynamism of this ideology (where at the end of the road, India would be tutored into civility and modernity) by making the inability to spectate an intrinsic attribute of Indians.

In the next novel, the picturesque is used sparingly and is coded differently from *Seeta*. Instead of allowing for the attachment of affect to land created as desirable object, the picturesque appears (when applied to Indian land and buildings) as the sign of the immoral and the intellectually deficient. Steel works with a Ruskinian religious-moral understanding of aesthetics, where art and architecture speak not only to the states of civility but of moral and intellectual capabilities. This allows her to read Indian objects and land as revelatory of racial characteristics, a reading that allows her to conclude that India requires an autocratic colonial master. The liberal-reformist trajectory of *Seeta* (albeit a stalled one), therefore, transforms into a despotic, static colonial system in *On the Face of the Waters.*

On the Face of the Waters (1896)

On the Face of the Waters, first published in 1896, was written by Flora Anna Steel (1847-1929). Steel, like Taylor, spend a great part of her life (22 years) in India, and felt a strong connection with the country. Steel was a Scot by birth and came to India in 1867, as the wife of a British officer, Henry Steel, in the ICS, and remained there till 1887. She came back in 1894 to conduct the research for the novel, when she went through government archives, and like her heroine, Kate Erlton, lived on the roof of a house, to get a feel of what it was like [Steel 1930: 15]. Like Taylor, Steel was also a firm imperialist, and indeed, evinces a racism that is absent in Taylor. Steel wrote several novels and short stories set in India, and also published collections of Indian folktales.[11] She is best known, however, for her Mutiny novel, and for a handbook for Anglo-Indian housewives *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1888), that became the "Bible of young memsahibs" in India in the 19th and early 20th century [Sen: 33].

On the Face of the Waters received critical acclaim on its first publication in the heyday of British imperialism in India: it was very popular and ran into several editions. Some likened Steel to Kipling, and welcomed the novel as the first serious novel on the Mutiny [Patwardhan: 41]. The novel revolves around the story of Kate Erlton, caught in an unhappy marriage with Major Erlton, who is having an affair with a Mrs Alice Gissing. The hero, Jim Douglas (alias James Greyman) enters Kate's life when she wishes to bribe him into smoothing over an indiscretion of her husband. Their lives become intertwined when the Mutiny occurs, and Kate finds herself fleeing with Douglas. They travel in disguise for a while, live concealed in Delhi, and finally are saved when the British conquer the city in late September 1857. The novel also attempts to give the Indian side of the story, in the sub-plot of the platonic love affair between the widowed princess Farkhoonda Zamani, living in a street, Mufti's alley, in Delhi, and Prince Abool-Bukr, the king's (Bahadur Shah Zafar's) eldest son. The two stories briefly intersect when Kate is given shelter by Farkhoonda but end very differently. Kate and Jim are united at the end of the novel (Major Erlton having died in battle), whereas Abool-Bukr, on surrender, is treacherously killed by Major Hodson (the last two characters are historically real and so is the incident), and Farkhoonda continues in Delhi in relative poverty, subsisting on the income she derives from teaching at a girl's school. We are also given a sketch of the life at the palace of Bahadur Shah and his wife, Zeenat Mahal (again, both real historical characters), which was the seat of rebellion till the city fell, and the king and his wives (the princes were massacred) were exiled to Burma.

Steel uses the picturesque sparingly to describe the Mughal palaces and buildings in Delhi but codes this beauty in a Ruskinian manner, indicating that it displays the pleasure of refinement for its own sake, divorced from nature, "and thus speak[ing] to the destruction both of intellectual power and moral principle" in its Indian creators [Ruskin: 10]. The Ruskinian formulation of artistic Indian objects is complemented by the understanding of everyday Indian landscape and created objects. Here the Ruskinian tension between form that is interpretive and imitative (enamoured of its own perfection and hence uses its own form as model) is transformed into one between form and matter, terms that fall on the moral/immoral divide. Steel depicts quotidian Indian spaces as oppressive and not pleasing to the western eye, an oppressiveness that derives from a sense of twin lacks in it: of morality and of form. Both ultimately allow Steel to argue for the necessity of the British as the "form bringer" and moral agent. These twin lacks best emerge in the following description of a village:

> The winter rains had come and gone, leaving a legacy of gold behind them. Promise of future gold in the emerald sea of young wheat, guerdon of present gold in the mustard blossom curving on the green, like the crests of waves curve upon a wind-swept northern sea. Far and near, wide as the eye could reach, there was nothing to be seen save this – a waving sea of green wheat crested by yellow mustard. But in the centre, whence the eye looked, stood a human ant-hill; for the congeries of mud alleys, mud walls, mud roofs, forming the village, looked from a little distance nothing else. Viewed broadly, too, it was simply earth made plastic by the Form-bringer, water, hardened again by Sun-fire; the triple elements combined into a shell for labouring life.
>
> ... It is a scene which to most civilised eyes is oppressive in its self-centred isolation, its air of remoteness. The isolation of a community self-supporting, self-sufficing, the remoteness of a place which cares not if, indeed, there be a world beyond its boundaries (pp 118-19).

The "form-bringer" in this scene is not the human beings but water: it is what renders this scene dynamic and creates shapes. It is no wonder that this scene is "oppressive" to the western eye, for apart from the natural element of water, there seems no higher human activating principle that is capable of giving form and dynamism to this inert matter of the land. Indeed, the Indians, when they do give "form" and create, manage to create nothing better than an "ant-hill", and their agency here is purely of the natural labouring kind, a fourth element in the quartet of earth, water, and sun. The post-script , which seems to offer a kind of counter-assertion to the "civilised eye", in fact ends up reinforcing this eye and its gaze, for it points out that the "counter-gaze" to the civilised eye is not a gaze at all but a lack of one: the villagers do not care to and do not look out to the world.

The Mutiny renders dynamic this still, oppressive picture, and works as a potential "form-bringer". When Douglas hears the report of a spy that Moulvie, a rebel, is wanted for he is to give the "word" that is to start the rebellion,

> Jim Douglas felt an odd thrill. He had never thought of that before. Some one, of course, must always give the word, the speech which brought more than speech. What would it be? Something soul-stirring, no doubt; for Humanity had a theory that an angel must trouble the waters and so give it a righteous cause for stepping in to heal the evil (p 162).

The rebellion, pictured here not simply as an act of blind or bestial vengeance but aligned with the "word", points to not only a rational organisation behind the event but to an active human agency guided by a divinity or prophecy that could render the social body and history dynamic. The latter emerges in the passage's biblical allusions: to *Genesis,* where the word and "Spirit of God mov[ing] upon the face of the waters" (*Gen* 1.2) creates form out of the void earth, and to kings, where the prophet Elisha smites the water and casts salt in it to heal it, so that there will be "no more death and barren land" (2 Kings 2.21). Historically as well, the Mutiny was understood prophetically: as a fulfilment of the centenary prophecy that British rule would end a hundred years from the Battle of Plassey, 1757 [Kaye: 356-57]. Moulvie's giving of the "word", therefore, could follow the above formulations, as a human act that is ultimately guided by a divine power. It could also work within a secular framework, where the "word" has the possibility of "making history" in the western historiographic sense, of a willed act that sets a certain trajectory in motion. The "word" would then open up history and reality by working as the "latent, unuttered future word", as a signal, pointing to a yet unimagined future, as set forth in the following formulation by Dostoevsky: "reality in its entirety is not to be exhausted by what is immediately at hand, for an overwhelming part of this reality is contained in the form of a still latent, unuttered future Word" [Morris: 100].

The rebel's word, however, is none of these. It is not the Indian spy but Jim who recognises the place of the word in making history and feels the "thrill" at this understanding. The Indian use of the word is purely instrumental and not a little base: to use "soul-stirring" rhetoric to arouse immediate passion for the cause. While the rebels might well work within and be guided by a prophetic framework, the letter of the prophecy is false and their use of it base. Finally, they are unable to take a spectatorial stance towards the prophecy that would allow them, like Jim, to understand its place in making history. Though the rebel's word precipitates the rebellion, the action merely follows the letter of the word; hence is an act of repetition rather than an act that opens up the present and future. Instead, it is the ripple caused by the gain-bringing angel, recalled from kings that works as the true "word" in the passage. The movement of the ripple sets a certain historical action in motion (the rebellion), necessitating the intervention of the British, as agents of god and healers. This "word," however, though it seems to be opening up present reality, actually "exhausts" it, for it is able to predict and mark the course of the future. The openness of the present, therefore, that is real in Dostoevsky, both in the actual socius and in the novel that portrays the "reality" of the socius, becomes part of a causal sequence in *On the Face of the Waters.* The passage does, however, mimic the dynamism of the "latent Word", creating an internal, mystical dynamism of colonialism.

Instead of opening up the oppressive scene of the ant-hill, the Mutiny reinforces its inertness by showing that the "word" of the Indian cannot be aligned with the spirit that activates history. His/her action is incapable of working as the "form-bringer". If the mutiny is aligned with the "spirit", it is that of the angel, of Steel's recalled *Kings* or the God of Genesis who temporarily causes a disturbance on the waters so it can purify it and rid the land of "barrenness". The Mutiny does, however, split the oppressiveness in another direction: the land is no longer intractable to the western eye but signals its need for that eye to confer form to it. The first major act of the rebellion, the ousting of the British from Delhi and the control of the city by the rebels under the kingship of Bahadur Shah, makes this clear:

> And the birds, startled from their roosting-places by the stumbling, falling figure (of a drunk sepoy), waited, fluttering over the topmost branches for it to pass, or paused among them to fill up the time with a last twittering song of good-night to the day; for the sun still lingered in the heat-haze on the horizon as if loath to take its glow from that corona of red dust above the northern wall of Delhi; mute sign of the only protest made, as yet, by the Master against the mutiny.
>
> And now He had left the city to its own devices. The rebels were free to do as they liked (p 235).

The land finally meets the desire and narcissism of the civilised eye and works as a sign signalling its own need of this eye. The very sun is unwilling to take its glow from the red dust created by the hoofs of the rebel horses in Delhi, in protest of the British "master's"departure from the city. The birds, the sun, all go about their tasks unwillingly and wait the return of "the master's" steps, and when the British re-conquer it, the city is described as "once more echoing to the master's steps, and the city-folk, as they looked eagerly from the walls, had the first notice of defeat in the smoke and flames of the sepoy lines" (280-81). There were, of course, no eager spectators when the British entered the city; they had to, in fact, win the city street by street, as the rebels and citizens kept up the fight in small alleys, like the Mufti alley, which proved strategic for them. Like Taylor, therefore, Steel too shuts out the disturbing spectatorial aspect the Mutiny had for Indians. Taylor's notion that Indians welcomed the re-instantiation of British rule finds a new formulation here, for the Indians are shown as welcoming not only a benevolent but a tyrannical paternalism.

The elision and strategic re-insertion of the gaze of the land and Indians finally creates a master/slave dialectic between British and Indians.[12] This relationship works with a body metaphor, with the British as "spirit" and Indians as the "body", and not only makes the relation between the two a spiritually necessary one but also converts what is a despotic relation depending on stasis for its continuation, into a mystical and dynamic relation. It also makes Indians emerge as non-spectators at a higher (or lower) level than in *Seeta*: Indians are intrinsically unable to be activating agents of history – their agency is only of the natural, labouring kind (and never goes beyond this even in the rebellion), and will never be able to take the spectatorial stance that the "spirit" can towards history, which is the prerequisite for "making history" in this schema.

Changing Figurations of India

Both novels create a gendered domestic body of the empire. It is the elision of the "gaze" of the land, however, (apart from a narcissistic one) that marks a major shift from early 19th century romantic and picturesque figurations of India and creates land as not only feminised, as in the past but determined and bound to its master. This imagination of the empire was popular, as the sheer number of Mutiny novels (around 40) published in the latter half of the 19th century indicates, and heralded the major Anglo-Indian novel form, the "station romance", that came into its own and dominated the second half of the 19th century. It was also, however, a fantasy – of obliteration of the revolutionary historical potential of the Mutiny, and of a "new" post-1858 space in which no traces of the past would linger. In this it parallels other colonial discourse from the times, which also set out, ambitiously and fantastically, to create a blank slate of India.

A brief example will suffice. In June 1858, Lord Canning, the last governor-general of the East India Company and the first viceroy of the crown, issued a proclamation to confiscate all proprietary rights in the land of Awadh, so that that once the land had been cleared of all previous titles, it could more easily be awarded to the new proprietors as a "free and incontestable grant from the paramount power" [Metcalf: 147]. In reality, Canning's fantasy of obliterating past titles could not be acted out. James Outram, commissioner of Awadh, was aware that such a move would prolong the rebellion and realising that the country could not be restored to peace without the help of the old taluqdars (landlords), sent out the proclamation with a cover letter granting a one-on-one settlement of lands with the landlords, thus limiting the force of Canning's proclamation. Ultimately Canning himself came around and was instrumental in creating a powerful body of taluqdars, with increased rights in the land in Awadh, serving as a bulwark for the empire against the unrestful agrarian, peasant population [Metcalf: 150-56].

Memory transformation and even erasure did take place but not in the initial 'tabula rasa' fantasy of Canning or of the Mutiny novel, which effectively creates a blank slate of Indian memory. The reinstatement of the taluqdars took place by disregarding all customary rights of the peasants in the land, which had hitherto given them negotiating power with the landlords. The taluqdars, therefore, continued, not as mere revenue collectors of the Mughal emperor or the Awadh nobility but as magistrate and landlord all rolled into one [Metcalf: 150-54]. What appeared to continue from the past, therefore, the taluqdari system, only resembled it in name, and in fact concealed massive ground-level changes. What was lost and erased did not manage to make its way into narrative and legal discourse, except for occasional concerns expressed by British and Indian champions of peasant rights. British policy, post-1858, generally followed the trend of Canning's revised decision and was consistently characterised by "non-interference" and a preservation of "tradition." This "tradition," however, was a creation of colonialism. Its "preservation" only led to a hardening of previously fluid institutions.

Similarly, the Mutiny novel obscured memory of the picturesque and sacred aesthetics by a continued usage but in changed and historicised forms. The historicised picturesque and sacred aesthetics not only pre- rather than post-date the Mutiny in the novel, and hence like the taluqdari system appear to emerge from the "past", obscuring their early 19th century usages but also become "evidentiary": of the historical necessity and inevitability of British victory and Indian defeat during the Mutiny. Historicism's marking of these aesthetics as historical winners and losers gained ground in the latter part of the 19th century and continues to inform post-colonial India. In the 1880s, when proto-national figurations of India begin to emerge, it is the picturesque which is used to create a mythological, sacral landscape of India. In post-colonial India, in re-tellings of the Mutiny, the sacred is depicted as the sign of a limited imagination, incapable of taking a spectatorial, "progressive" stance towards history, and the picturesque, yet again, helps organise nationalist sentiment. Thus, though the novel did not, like Canning's proclamation, manage to erase the revolutionary potential of the

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Mutiny or the past for Indians, historicism transformed the very medium of expression of the resistance when it came.

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Notes

1 On the Mutiny gothic see, Robert Druce, "And to Think that Henrietta Guise was in the hands of such human demons!": 'Ideologies of the Anglo-Indian Novel from 1859 to 1957', *Shades of Empire,* C C Barfoot, Theo D'haen (eds), Amsterdam-Atlanta, G A Rodopi, 1993, pp 17-34; Patrick Brantlinger. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914.* Cornell UP, Ithaca, NY, 1988.
For an excellent discussion of the Mutiny novel see Gautam Chakravarty's *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination.* This paper extends the recent work of Chakravarty, which marks a shift in work on the Mutiny novel, by arguing that the novel is not the originator of but continuous with early 19th century representations of India. The paper shows that this continuity was maintained by appropriating and transforming earlier representations.

2 This novel was, incidentally, re-published in 1857 with slight revisions under the title of *Luxima, The Prophetess: A Tale of India,* to cash in on the renewed interest in India, as well as to offer an interpretation of the "religion" of Indians (Islam and Hinduism are conflated here) that played an important part in the Mutiny.

3 I quote a brief extract: "We deeply lament the evils and misery which have been brought upon India by the acts of ambitious men who have deceived their countrymen by false reports, and led them into open rebellion. Our power having been shown by the suppression of that rebellion in the field, we desire to show our mercy by pardoning the offences of those who have been thus misled, but who desire to return to the path of duty.
Already in one province, with a view to stop the further effusion of blood and to hasten the pacification of our Indian dominions, our viceroy and governor-general has held our the expectation of pardon, on certain terms, to the great majority of those who in late unhappy disturbances have been guilty of offences against our government and has declared the punishment which will be inflicted on those whose crimes place them beyond the reach of forgiveness". 'Proclamation by the Queen (of England) in Council, To the Princes, Chiefs, and People of India', November 1858, *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh* (*FSUP*), Vol 2, Rizvi, Bhargava (eds), pp 526-27.

4 This is taken from Hazrat Mahal's proclamation. The sentence, of which this quote forms a part, reads as: "If the Queen has assumed the government, why does Her Majesty not restore our country to us when our people wish it? It is well-known that no king or queen ever punished a whole army and people for rebellion; all were forgiven; and the wise cannot approve of punishing the whole army and people of Hindustan" 'Rejoinder to Queen Victoria, Proclamation by the Begum of Oude (Awadh)', December 1858, *FSUP* (ed) Rizvi, p 530.

5 What is important about Foucault's discussion of public execution is that it is crucially tied to the law. It is this that makes it a political ritual. As he elaborates: "We must regard the public execution, as it was still ritualised in the 18th century, as a political operation. It was logically inscribed in a system of punishment, in which the sovereign, directly or indirectly, demanded, decided and carried out punishments, in so far as it was he who, through the law, had been injured by the crime. In every offence there was a 'crimen majestatis' and in the least criminal a potential regicide." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* trans. Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, New York, 1995, pp 53-54.

6 The entire quote, which bears on the nature of the event of the Mutiny is also worth quoting: "An event, consequently, is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked "other" Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice,* trans. Donald F Bouhard, Sherry Simon, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1977, p 154.

7 Thus a reviewer of *Seeta* in the *Calcutta Review* (1873) regards such marriages as "doubtful and dangerous", and another in 1879, comments thus on his characters: "Taras and Seetas, it need scarcely be mentioned, are absolutely never to be met with in Anglo-Indian drawing rooms or boudoirs, and if dear interesting Aunt Ella herself, with her wearyful beads, short petticoat, and long staff, were to apply for an ayah's place in one of the nurseries of Chowringheee, her merits would have small chance of being recognised". As quoted in Bhupal Singh, *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction,* Oxford University Press, London, 1934, p 50.

8 I borrow the term and understanding of the "threshold figure" from W J T Mitchell's discussion of such (Maori) figures in John Alexander Gilfillan's painting, *Native Council of War* (1855), W J T Mitchell, *Landscape and Power,* p 23.

9 Kant is interested in reading the French Revolution as a "sign" (of progress) in history, a sign that reveals something (the fact of progress) in the past, the present and the future. A sign, by definition, for Kant, has to read on all three dimensions, Kant. *Kant: Political Writings,* pp 177-90. The nationalist reading of the mutiny, will read the event like Kant's "sign", where it reveals the "desire for the nation" in the past, present (the historical moment of the nationalist present), and the future.

10 Immediately following this scene, Seeta and Grace each throw a garland into the river, which according to local custom, will sink or swim deciding the fulfilment or denial or a person's wishes. Grace's garland, predictably swims and Seeta's sinks, reinforcing the fact that it is the land that ultimately and in each instance denies the Indians' claims and wishes, and sanctions that of the British. *Seeta,* pp 212-23.

11 For a list of Steel's works, see Daya Patwardhan. *A Star of India.* Poona, India, A V Griha Prakashan, 1963, Appendix A and B.

12 As Indrani Sen notes, Steel drew on "a master/slave model reminiscent of Mannoni's infamous formulation, and identified a 'dependency complex' among the populace whom she stereotypically inscribed as effeminate/ sensual, as children who needed, indeed wanted, to be mastered by the British who were natural masters", Sen, *Woman and Empire,* p 150.

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