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This dissertation entitled

IMPERIAL SCAFFOLDING: THE INDIAN MUTINY OF 1857, THE MUTINY
NOVEL, AND THE PERFORMANCE OF BRITISH POWER

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the British representations of the Indian Mutiny through an examination of the English novel, interspersed with careful attention to the media coverage of the Mutiny and personal accounts of the uprising. I argue that the Mutiny novel in particular becomes a stage on which the issues of race, gender, and culture are enacted. Throughout my project I utilize the guiding metaphor of the imperial scaffold, which is both “a stage where theatrical productions take place” and also “a platform that aids in the repair or the erection a building” (OED). The imperial scaffold operates in these novels as a system of rhetorical principles—primarily set up through the binary of East versus West—that seeks to reaffirm, reconstruct, and eventually re-imagine British imperial ideals. Through an examination of four Mutiny novels, my project argues that Mutiny novelists, as well as newspaper reporters, employ a rhetorical framework in their writing that attempts to reaffirm British imperial power, but that also exposes the “fissures” in imperial ideology at the same time.

Approved:

Joseph P. McLaughlin

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To the Lord Jesus Christ,

without whom nothing would be possible.
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Introduction

This project examines representations of the Indian Mutiny, through the Mutiny novel in particular, and the ways the Mutiny novel serves as a stage of performance that allowed British authorities to re-instate their power in the aftermath of the revolt. I’ve chosen to focus on representations of the Mutiny as they appear in the British novel, since this fictional space allows a window into British representations of Indians, but also British representations of themselves and their own culture in a way that can be traced throughout the century. Because such a great number of Mutiny novels were written during the period, unlike histories, chronicles and diaries, which were written either directly following the uprising or more sporadically throughout the remainder of the century, the novel provides a way to locate patterns and progression toward British culture, imperialism, and toward India and Indians. In addition, my choice to focus on the British novel is based on the lack of scholarship in this area. To date, there is no scholarship that interweaves Mutiny novels with canonical novels of the time, while also interweaving a careful analysis of the media coverage and eyewitness accounts of the uprising. My aim is to help close this gap, and to demonstrate how Mutiny novels deserve further study not only because of their importance to British history, but because of the way they converge with larger issues of the period such as British imperialism and nation building, racial Othering, and even English domesticity.

The Mutiny spawned a slew of sensation fiction later in the century, which isn’t surprising, since the events themselves, which began on May 10th, 1857, unfolded much like the plot of a sensation novel. On that day, Indian sepoys, who were being trained as
part of the British army in India, killed their commanding officers, burned down English bungalows, and destroyed prisons before marching into Delhi and appointing a Muslim as emperor of Hindustan. This initial uprising at Meerut, however, was more than just an uprising. Instead, it began the largest and most widespread colonial rebellion in British history, throwing into flux the roles of colonizer/colonized that had become organic to British imperial thought. The initial response from British officials was to deem the uprising an isolated event rather than a Mutiny, since the latter term would suggest a more widespread discontent with British rule. As a result, initial newspaper accounts did not treat the Meerut uprising as anything more than local discontent. Within days, however, the events that took place at Meerut and Delhi began to spread across Northern India.

These events, which eventually came to be known as the Indian Mutiny of 1857, are a site where imperialism, performance, and spectacle are interwoven. The massacre at Cawnpore, a military town that housed not only British soldiers, but also their wives and children, is a prime example of this interweaving. On June 27th, a group of British soldiers, women and children were led to a nearby river with the promise of being transported to a safer city. Uprisings had already occurred by this time, not only in Meerut and Delhi, but also in Barrackpore, Ferozepore, Agra, Sitapur, Nimach, and Benares, among others, which intensified the anxieties of the British living in Cawnpore. Once the group arrived at the river, the sepoys did not allow the British to board the boats, but killed most of the men and kept the women and children hostage for nearly a month. On July 17th, the women and children were executed in gruesome fashion, and
their dead bodies were thrown into a nearby well. The events at Cawnpore became particularly important as a reminder of Indian atrocities, and by contrast, a reminder of a victimized Britain—specifically British women and children.

The Mutiny at large, and Cawnpore specifically, effectively cast the British into the role of victim and Indians into the role of perpetrator; in effect, these roles provided justification for the British military—those who had survived the attacks in various cities and those who had been sent to India as backup—to regain control of the empire through whatever means necessary. In this way, British efforts to regain their authority in India served not only as retribution, but a re-enacting of imperial power. The fact that Indian sepoys slaughtered over a hundred British women and children served as “proof,” at least in the British imperial mind, of the necessity of the colonizing mission—one that sought to tame and modernize the Other. If Indians were capable of resorting to such barbaric tactics, then they needed to be governed by a more “civilized” authority.

To be sure, the British military response to the Mutiny was fierce, and theirs were not only attempts to regain control of the empire, but to strike terror and fear in their Indian victims—in other words, to reassign Indians their role as oppressed and colonized through the spectacle of violence. Not only did British troops march into Indian cities, killing all natives in their path, but, as Jenny Sharpe has noted in *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*, they also shoved pork and beef into the rebels’ mouths, assigning the rebels to a doomed existence even in the afterlife. Indians suspected of being involved in the Mutiny were blown alive out of canons, which mimicked, as Sharpe has noted, “the death of the English women whom they had
allegedly dismembered” (77). British attempts to reclaim control in India matched, if not surpassed, the Indians’ atrocities. As Christopher Hibbert, author of *The Great Mutiny, India 1857*, notes, British troops, along with European volunteers, stormed various Indian cities, “slaughtering the inhabitants, old men, women and children as well as those more likely to be active rebels who were submitted to the travesty of a trial” (202).

Not only did British troops mutilate the bodies of suspected rebels, but they displayed the broken bodies of the sepoys, which publicly performed the disciplining of the imperial body politic. Hibbert cites the testimony of F.A.V. Thurburn, Deputy Judge Advocate General, who admitted to the use of spectacle to insight terror and fear into Indian society at large: “The gallows and trees adjoining it had each day the fresh fruits of rebellion displayed upon them….Hundreds of natives in this manner perished and some on slight proofs of criminality” (202). Similar to The Great Exhibition of 1851, which showcased the fruits of empire, these British-made gallows showcased the “fruits of rebellion”: the tortured native body. As Hibbert’s language suggests, performance became extremely important as a warning to the Indian public—specifically, that even though rebellion against British authority is a possibility, it comes at a high price. Unfortunately, even those who managed to get a trial did not fare better than those who were killed immediately. As Sharpe has noted, before trying accused rebel sepoys, British troops often forced them to lick the blood of murdered British officers and their families, which caused both Hindus and Muslims alike to lose caste (77). Trials were nothing more than formality and ended in execution (Hibbert 202). Violence in and of itself became a
public spectacle, and the mutilated bodies of the rebel natives served to re-inscribe British power in a public, performative way.

The Mutiny is important as an event not only in Victorian history, but also in Victorian literature and fiction, precisely because of its performative aspects, since the events represent the effects of sensational fiction-making. In fact, the Mutiny began as a result of a “fiction-making”—a rumor that the British had greased the new Enfield rifles, which the sepoys would be using as they trained under their British commanding officers, with cow and pig fat, the use of which would cause both Muslims and Hindus to commit an act of sacrilege. Another rumor prevalent among Indians before the Mutiny was that the British sought to convert Indians from their native religions to Christianity. Another rumor that circulated both abroad and at home blamed the outbreak of the Mutiny on the Russians, who were supposedly conspiring with the King of Delhi to overthrow British rule. After the Mutiny’s outbreak, this “fiction-making” continued; following the horrors at Cawnpore, tales of women being raped by native men, stripped of their clothes and dragged through the streets, then dismembered by cutting their breasts or noses from their bodies, ran amok and contributed to the fierce British retribution that followed.

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1 Although these “rumors” are believed to be two major causes of the Mutiny, as Disraeli noted, mutinies “are not affairs of greased cartridges” (Brantlinger 200). It is important to point out that the Mutiny was not just a military revolt, but a widespread uprising, one in which peasants as well as Indian princes were involved. Reasons for the uprising included changes in land-tenure policy, where Indian landlords were charged exorbitant amounts of money by British land-owners, and the abolishing of native and religious customs such as sati, where widows would throw themselves on their husband’s funeral pyres and perish along with them.

2 This rumor, no doubt, stems from the effects of Russian expansion into Crimea and Persia in the 1850s, which led to the Crimean War.

3 Jenny Sharpe, in * Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*, discusses at length the rumors and hysteria that pervaded the topic of British women and their treatment during the Mutiny. Patrick Brantlinger also discusses this topic and the manner in which these rumors seeped into the literature of the time.
Although one effect of the rumors surrounding the Mutiny was the fierce retribution of British forces toward Indians, another effect happened over time as the fictions created by the British mainstream press and by word of mouth were reified in the literature of the period. Put simply, in the same way that “fiction-making” had an impact on the Mutiny itself, the Mutiny, with its spectacle and intrigue, also had an impact on “fiction-making”—that is, Victorian short stories and novels. As early as 1859, the Mutiny began to filter into the plots of fictional accounts; Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins co-authored “The Perils of Certain English Prisoners” in the Christmas 1859 edition of Dickens *Household Words*⁴, and the first Mutiny novel, *The Wife and The Ward*, was published in 1859 as well. Interest in the Mutiny as a literary topic did not dissipate, but built momentum as the century progressed. As Patrick Brantlinger has noted, “at least fifty Mutiny novels were written before 1900, and at least thirty more before World War II” (200).

Representations of the uprising were not confined to novels and short stories; a variety of eyewitness accounts, diaries from British survivors (most of them female), as well as histories and chronicles were published following the rebellion and continued throughout the century. Dramatic accounts of the uprising, and of British courage, even made it to the British stage. But even though the event spawned a slew of novels, histories, and eyewitness accounts, it reads more like a blurb on the timeline of the nineteenth century than the major and influential event that it was. In universities today, the Mutiny is likely not even mentioned in undergraduate or graduate courses on the

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⁴ Although “Perils” is set in Central America rather than in India, the story’s plot clearly invokes the Mutiny through its band of pirates, who turn on British officers stationed there to protect a British mine.
Victorian period, and the amount of criticism written in response to this large body of Mutiny literature is certainly disproportionate to the amount of excitement the event stirred in the public imagination of the time.

In order to accurately represent what I see happening in the Mutiny novel from 1857-1895, I have structured my project around the concept of *imperial scaffolding*, the rhetorical framework of imperial ideology in the literature and media of the Victorian period that helped stabilize imperialism after the Mutiny’s outbreak. I find *scaffolding* particularly useful as a governing metaphor for this project because of its dual meaning; according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a scaffold is “a platform or structure that holds the workmen as they erect or repair a building” and “a platform or stage on which theatrical performances took place” (“Scaffold”). The images of “erecting” and “repairing” are key to this project, since the rhetorical framework that operates in the Mutiny novels of the time and in the media coverage of the Mutiny acts as a type of scaffold that helped England not only become a great imperial power, but also helped the nation repair the damage to its empire after the uprising in 1857. The word *mutiny* itself illustrates a type of performance of British power, since the word is defined as “revolt against and, often, forcible resistance to constituted authority” instead of an organized national war of independence⁵ (“Mutiny”).

In conjunction with the ideas of erecting and repairing, the idea of performance, or “scaffolding as stage,” is also fundamental to my study. Both the Mutiny novel and the media coverage attempt to stage imperial ideology as logical and stable, even though

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⁵ Because my project focuses on British representations of the uprising, I use the term *mutiny* throughout my project to describe the events of 1857. It is important to note, however, that Indian writers generally refer to these events as The Indian War of Independence.
these same texts also chip away at the notion of imperial ideology at the same time they attempt to reaffirm it. According to Jenny Sharpe, “colonialism was in a state of crisis throughout 1857. It was a year when to be a European meant almost certain death, and the end of British rule appeared imminent.” Although Sharpe claims that “When the uprisings erupted in 1857, the British found themselves without a script on which they could rely” (58), my project argues that the British in fact did have a script on which they relied heavily to save face in the eyes of the British public during the uprising itself, and to reinstate imperial power as the attack spread across Northern India. As I see it, this “script” is the rhetorical framework of imperial scaffolding.

Mary Poovey’s Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender also illustrates the link between ideology and performance. Poovey defines ideology as something that developed unevenly over the nineteenth century, but masqueraded as “something that is internally organized, coherent, and complete.” I draw from Poovey’s definition as I use ideology; the very nature of the imperial scaffolding implies a kind of performance, a construction of something that appears “internally organized, coherent, and complete,” but is constructed to appear so. Poovey’s definition also situates ideology within the framework of performance, since she refers to the construction of organization and completeness as a “guise” of the Victorian period (3).

In addition to the above explanations, I have developed the term imperial scaffolding also due to a gap I have found in research on British imperialism; although scholars like Anne McClintock and Jenny Sharpe discuss imperialism thoroughly from different angles—McClintock focusing on race and Sharpe on gender—they do not
elaborate on the layers of imperial assumptions and rhetoric used in media coverage of the Mutiny, which also filtered heavily into the histories, and especially the novels of the time. (McClintock, in fact, despite her very helpful global examination of the period, does not mention the Mutiny at all.) My project argues that the imperial scaffold, as it was constructed through the British media, British histories, and as it filtered into Mutiny novels, served as the script for British to reclaim their imperial power.

The binary of East/West is the lynchpin of this scaffold; this binary assigned specific characteristics to Easterners—that they were barbaric, sexually depraved, and in need of modernization—in juxtaposition to those assigned to Westerners, who were presented as modernized and self-controlled. Such representations, however, eventually deconstructed themselves. For instance, British newspapers consistently accused Indians of conspiracy, but also represented Indians as too disorganized and chaotic too organize a widespread rebellion. Newspapers reported instances of British heroism, but failed to report British war crimes. As such, the imperial scaffold as I define it and use it in this project implies performance; the scaffolding of rhetoric concerning the East and West, specifically the characteristics that applied to each, were reproduced in the media and performed in the literature of the time, creating a layering of assumptions about the East and West respectively, assumptions that eventually revealed and deconstructed themselves. It is this deconstruction in particular that I find interesting, for it reveals the

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6 Even though my examination of the media coverage and of Mutiny novels reveals the deconstruction of the East/West binary, I do not mean to suggest that it no longer exists. Edward Thompson’s 1925 work *The Other Side of the Medal*, which used current sources to expose British wrongdoing during the Mutiny, still represents India as “unsatisfied, embittered, troublesome” (1), which mimics the way Indians were represented after the rebellion—as a group who was ungrateful for the way the British saved them from an even more dangerous colonial power.
precise location of Victorian imperial anxieties involving race, gender, and culture. As such the Mutiny itself, and consequently the Mutiny novel, becomes a site where race, gender, and culture converge in interesting ways. In particular, the Mutiny novel becomes a stage where these issues are acted out.

I consider this project an outgrowth of two important texts, one in the broader field of imperial studies—Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978)—and one in Mutiny literature specifically—Patrick Brantlinger’s “The Well of Cawnpore: Literary Representations of the Indian Mutiny of 1857” (1988). Said’s work is pivotal for this project, since his definition of Orientalism provides the basis for my examination of the literary representations of India in nineteenth-century British literature. In much the same way the concept of “process writing” has become organic to the field of English Studies, Said’s work is organic to this project. Although I do not draw upon his ideas specifically within each chapter, I consider the project to be an outgrowth of his broader ideas about how the West has traditionally represented Eastern cultures and people. As such, my project extends Said’s, primarily through my examination of the four novels I’ve chosen, but also through my analysis of imperial scaffolding.

While Said’s work is instrumental theoretically to my study, Brantlinger’s chapter, part of his overall work *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914*, provided the motivation for it and showed me the need for further research in this area of Victorian literature. Until Gautum Chakravarty’s 2005 work *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*, which I’ll discuss later, Brantlinger’s work provided the most extensive look at Mutiny literature as a genre. In his chapter, Brantlinger
provides a chronicle of Mutiny literature from the earliest histories, eyewitness accounts, dramas, novels, and stories to Forster’s *A Passage to India*, published in 1924.

Brantlinger focuses on the racism and sexual hysteria that pervades Mutiny literature and uses the well at Cawnpore, a military town where hundreds of British women and children were captured, slaughtered, and shoved down a nearby well, as a symbol of the “widening chasm” of Mutiny literature—it assigns absolute villainy to Indians and absolute purity to the British (204). While many of the Mutiny texts featured in Brantlinger’s chapter are in keeping with his claim about the Mutiny as “widening chasm,” such a claim fails to explore the ways that these same novels also undermine and re-imagine the racist ideology of the time. Brantlinger’s chapter, mainly due to its bibliographic approach, also does not provide an analysis of how Mutiny novels portray the British themselves. Furthermore, Brantlinger’s chapter only includes those novels that deal with the Mutiny directly, as opposed to those novels that deal with it metaphorically.

In terms of scope, this project attempts to find a middle ground between Said, who discusses the representation of the entire Orient from the seventh to the twentieth centuries, and Brantlinger, who provides a brief overview of the literary representations of the Mutiny from 1858 through Forster’s *A Passage to India*. Neither Said nor Brantlinger provides a detailed close read of Mutiny novels, and Brantlinger, who deals primarily with literary texts, does not interweave his brief analysis of the various Mutiny novels of the period with more canonical novels that also address the Mutiny on a
metaphorical level.7 Because I feel that this gap is an important one to fill, my project re-examines two canonical texts—Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone* (1868) and Mary Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1861-2)—and their relationship to and representation of the Indian Mutiny, while also examining two Mutiny novels—Meadows Taylor’s *Seeta* (1872) and Henry Seton Merriman’s *Flotsam* (1896)—that are briefly discussed in Brantlinger’s chapter on the uprising, but have not been thoroughly investigated. It is my contention that these two lesser known novels not only provide a window into British representations of the East, but that they also reify and re-examine key elements of the imperial scaffold that helped Britain gain and keep control of India for over a hundred years. I chose *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *The Moonstone* not only for their canonical value, but also for their examination of topics that I found recurring in the Mutiny novels that both Brantlinger and Chakravarty discuss in their work. Such topics include the British military, British domesticity and family life, and racial Othering. Each of these elements helped strengthen British imperialism, but also helps expose the different rhetorical strategies writers often used to downplay British guilt and highlight Indian crime.

Although Brantlinger discusses and analyzes Mutiny literature, he never defines what characteristics make a text part of this genre. For the purposes of this study, I define Mutiny literature as texts dealing either literally or metaphorically with the uprising in addition to engaging with issues of class, race, or gender, topics that I argue are performed via the Mutiny novel specifically. It is this definition that allows me to talk

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7 Brantlinger briefly mentions Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, but does not include it in his larger argument about Mutiny novels. Instead, he references an article by William Odie, which locates Dickens’ novel in the sub-genre of Mutiny novel.
about Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone* as a Mutiny novel, even though it does not take place in India or directly discuss the rebellion. I have used an expanded definition of Mutiny literature precisely for this reason—to include those novels that deal with the Mutiny metaphorically, especially those novels that use Mutiny imagery to expose and critique British imperial culture.

My project also draws on the ideas of Robert Young, whose work traces the “inner dissonance” prevalent among Western writers of the Victorian period. In his discussion of nineteenth century British culture, Robert Young, in his book entitled *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, describes an “inner dissonance that marks a resistance to Western culture within Western culture itself.” According to Young, “the Englishness of the past is often represented in terms of fixity, of certainty, centredness, homogeneity, as something unproblematically identical with itself.” As Young goes on to argue, this “fixity” developed precisely because Englishness was “continually being contested, and was rather designed to mask its uncertainty, its sense of being estranged from itself, sick with desire for the other” (2). Drawing on Young’s definition of culture, this project applies his theory to four Mutiny novels, which demonstrate and perform the fissures in British culture, while also attempting to solidify British imperial power. While Brantlinger tends to view the Mutiny novel as following a progression throughout the century—one of cultural apathy to a growing cultural understanding—my vision of this progression is more in keeping with Young’s idea of an ever-present (albeit underlying) dissatisfaction with British culture. As this project will demonstrate, this underlying dissatisfaction gradually shifts to an overt and
overwhelming disapproval. Combining Poovey work in ideological studies with Young’s work on racial theory of the nineteenth century is an important move in scholarship, since the Mutiny provided a literary outlet for imperial anxieties involving sex, contagion, and the dissipation of British power, and since the uprising reveals the fissures in British culture itself. Poovey and Young mention the Mutiny only briefly in their work, which is surprising considering how their ideas converge fluidly with issues surrounding the Mutiny.

Gautam Chakravarty’s *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*, published in 2005, is also important to my study. Chakravarty’s book attempts to answer Hilda Gregg’s observation, as she reviewed the collection of Mutiny novels in 1897, that “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” (218). Through his examination of a variety of Mutiny genres from the chronicle, history, diary, and the novel, Chakravarty attempts to explore the reasons why the public’s imagination was stirred. Chakravarty’s work, like Said’s and unlike my project, is interdisciplinary and global in terms of scope; he isn’t concerned with literary analysis of Mutiny novels, but with providing a broad scope of Mutiny literature and the cultural assumptions and political conditions under which this literature was composed. While my project situates the Mutiny within the framework of performance and the imperial scaffold, Chakravarty contextualizes the uprising as part of what he calls “the Long War” of the nineteenth century, where war was sanctioned “as the legitimate arm of state and commercial policy,” and where expansion was viewed “as the expression of an inevitable national and racial urge with
very real material dividends” (1). Although the scope and focus of Chakravarty’s project is quite different from my own, I am fortunate that his work was published mid-way through this research project; his research, therefore, has provided a more global springboard from which I can jump into the topic of the Mutiny, albeit through the more focused lens of the Mutiny novel instead of the many genres that he covers. In particular, Chakravarty’s bibliographic work has helped me gain a greater understanding of the Mutiny novel and its development/progression throughout the nineteenth century. In addition, his analysis of marriage and its function in the Mutiny novel was particularly useful to me as I wrote chapters one, three and four, which deal largely with domesticity and its connection to empire. The following chapter summaries provide a detailed account of the progression I see happening in the Mutiny novel, as these local issues of the uprising converge with the larger issues of the Victorian period.

Chapter One, “Indian Mutiny as Victorian Theatre: The Performance of Gender Roles and Transgression in Meadow’s Taylor’s Seeta,” examines Taylor’s novel, published in 1872, through the lens of performance and through an application of Robert Young’s idea of cultural desire for the Other. Even though Taylor’s novel is published later than two of the other novels in this study, I chose to deal with it first since it sets up several key elements I deal with throughout this project: disguise/performance, the figure of the British woman, and the British military. In addition, Seeta deals with the Mutiny directly, not metaphorically, and is set in India. Because of these elements, the novel provides a basis for the other more metaphorical treatments of the Mutiny as well as those late-century, more direct representations of the uprising that I discuss in later
chapters. *Seeta* is the story of the interracial love affair and eventual marriage between the novel’s title character and Cyril Brandon, the British town magistrate. Their interracial love affair is juxtaposed with the plot of the Mutiny; Azrael Pande, the villain of the novel who becomes enraged over a family dispute about property, kills Seeta’s first husband, the man to whom his family property had been given, and then begins to plot the Mutiny against the British. Overall, Taylor’s novel deserves further scholarly examination because of its progressive portrayal of interracial love and marriage. Even though the novel has been the subject of some scholarship, namely Brantlinger’s chapter on representations of the Mutiny, most treatments, including Shuchi Kapila’s “Educating Seeta: Philip Meadows Taylor’s Romances of Empire,” fail to recognize the complexity of the novel. Neither Brantlinger nor Kapila’s work provides an analysis of the British female characters in the novel, which is a key element of the cultural critique the novel provides.

Specifically, this chapter argues that *Seeta* provides a cultural critique of British imperialism through its female characters and the way they perform empire. As their shortcomings are juxtaposed with those of the Hindu widow Seeta, and as Mrs. Smith’s racist commentary is interspersed with the mutinous plans of the novel’s villain, Azrael Pande, who is credited with planning and setting the uprising in motion, Taylor’s cultural critique comes to fruition. Specifically, I analyze the characters of Mrs. Smith, whose husband is a military official, and Lucy Home, a vapid girl of no substance who only wants to find a husband. Through these two characters, Taylor draws attention to the cultural apathy and passive aggressive racism of British imperialism, mainly displayed
through vicious gossip. And through Seeta’s love of learning and her cross-dressing, as well as her inter-racial love affair with the town magistrate and military man Cyril Brandon, Taylor’s novel imagines transformations of class, race, and gender in ways that other Mutiny novels of this period do not. But even though Taylor’s novel aims to create greater possibilities for cultural exchange and acceptance, it ultimately does not deliver what it promises. The final portion of this chapter examines the nature of this deconstruction, especially the character of Cyril Brandon, the military man of the people who ultimately cannot carry through with cultural acceptance.

Continuing with the theme of performance, Chapter Two, “Demystifying the Imperial Scaffold: Media Coverage of the Indian Mutiny and The Moonstone’s Eyewitness Account,” examines Wilkie Collins’ 1868 novel in relation to the newspaper coverage of the uprising. I contend that both the media coverage and Collins’ novel perform empire in ways that reaffirm and challenge the imperial scaffold. Drawing on and extending Albert Pionke’s “containment theory,” which argues that the newspaper coverage of the Mutiny works to contain the rebellion in an attempt to calm a terrified British public, I argue that the newspaper reports not only contained the uprising, but also reenacted empire and created widespread public panic. In other words, the newspaper reports did not simply report empire, but reenacted it in important ways, most notably through their reinforcement of the East/West binary that provided justification for British colonialism (and for British retribution when the colonized step out of line).

Collins’ novel, like the newspaper coverage of the Mutiny, utilizes the eyewitness account and a multiplicity of perspectives in order to arrive at some form of the truth.
Although Collins’ novel attempts to arrive at one version of the truth—the novel, after all, belongs to the detective fiction genre—the concept of Truth is undermined through the various and contradictory perspectives of the characters, who misinterpret the motivations of the other characters, misread events, and come to the wrong conclusions about the stolen diamond and its thief at every turn. Similarly, I discuss the erroneous news reports, as well as skeletal reporting, where events are relayed in a brief, cryptic fashion that creates widespread public panic; both styles of reporting, like Collins’ novel, reveal truth to be elusive, slippery, and socially constructed. Overall, Collins’ multi-perspective novel and examination of Truth undercut key elements of the imperial scaffold—that the British have a claim on Truth, that Truth can be established via a multitude of voices, and that the British are pure and heroic victims of Indian barbarity, ignorance and mysticism.

Chapter Three, entitled “The Performance of Empire Via Domesticity: The Cawnpore Massacre of 1857, Miss Wheeler and Lady Audley’s Secret,” expands on the ideas of performance and projection as ways to sidestep British responsibility for the Mutiny, and situates performance within an important layer of the imperial scaffold: British domesticity. Although Braddon’s novel is the earliest published novel in this study, it is not generally considered a Mutiny novel. For this reason, I chose to place it after Seeta, which is set in India and deals with the Mutiny directly, and The Moonstone, which opens with a scene set in India and gives continual reference to Eastern thought and Eastern characters (the three mysterious Hindus). It is my contention that Braddon’s novel performs the Indian Mutiny on domestic soil through its heroine and her micro-
Mutiny against the British system of marriage. Specifically, this chapter will draw upon the Cawnpore massacre—complete with its images of the well and the mysterious hybrid figure of Miss Wheeler—as it figured into history, literature, and public imagination, and will examine the way it figures into Braddon’s novel. While images of the well at Cawnpore were used to divert attention from the fissures within British culture, Braddon uses well imagery and Mutiny references in her novel to expose such fissures. Specifically this chapter re-envisions the character of Lady Audley herself, who not only serves as a rebellious sepoy, pushing her estranged husband down a well, but who also serves, in many ways throughout the novel, as a stand-in for the British imperialist. Braddon’s novel stages this role reversal not only through Lady Audley, but through other characters such as George Talboys and Robert Audley.

In Chapter Four, “Dismantling the Imperial Scaffold and Re-imagining Imperialism: An Examination of Henry Seton Merriman’s Flotsam: The Story of a Life,” I bring the project to a close with Merriman’s late-century novel, published in 1896. Merriman’s novel brings an end-of-the-century perspective to my project, and provides a site where the key components of my study—the British woman and British family, the element of disguise/performance, the binary of East vs. West, and the British military—converge in a way that shows the progression of the Mutiny novel from early to late-century. In this chapter I argue that Merriman’s novel performs overtly what novels like Lady Audley’s Secret perform under the surface: the turning of empire on itself. Through the main character Harry Wylam, a young man with a checkered past and a propensity for uncontrolled violence who eventually goes to serve in the army in India, Merriman
provides a counter-narrative to that of the heroic British military novel that characterized earlier Mutiny novels. In particular, the element of disguise helps dismantle the East/West binary that characterizes earlier Mutiny novels; while Indian characters are nearly non-existent, British characters disguise themselves as Indians as they slip in and out of Delhi. Through the element of disguise, the novel draws attention to the fluidity of cultural identity and, in several key scenes, the manner in which the British are not fighting against Indians, but are actually fighting against themselves. Merriman’s novel not only dismantles the East/West binary, but also re-imagines colonial possibilities—at the novel’s end, the qualities formerly assigned to the British military are now placed onto the British woman, specifically a woman who is neither married nor a biological mother. Such plot moves highlight the rise of the New Woman of the 1880s, which demonstrates how Merriman’s novel not only addresses issues typical to those of the Mutiny genre, but engages with the larger issues of the Victorian period as a whole.

After completing my research, I find that Mutiny literature overall, and the Mutiny novel in particular, are a valuable sub-genre of Victorian literature, most notably because the Indian Mutiny was in many ways a cataclysmic event of the nineteenth century, a glimpse into the horrors of imperialism. But the Mutiny novel also converges with larger nineteenth-century issues: 1) British national identity, 2) imperialist expansion, 3) issues of gender—specifically women’s role within Victorian culture and what happens to this role and this “female space” within colonialism—and 4) the emergence of the New Woman in the latter part of the period. Because these Mutiny novels intersect with larger issues of the period, but exist also as a means of informing
readers about an event in history with wide-ranging and incredibly important aftereffects, the analysis of these novels—both in terms of their function within Mutiny literature and within Victorian literature—is an important move in scholarship.
Indian Mutiny as Victorian Theatre: The Performance of Gender Roles and Transgression in Meadows Taylor’s *Seeta*

As the Indian Mutiny erupts in James Grant’s *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny*, heroine Lena Weston is escorted from her sister’s wedding, which has been disrupted by the confusion, and along with other English women and children, is taken to an English stronghold, a tower which overlooks the outbreak. Looming above the picturesque landscape, Miss Weston watches the Mutiny unfold through a pair of opera glasses. Through this theatrical prop, Lena sees her former beau, the brave Jack Harrower, confront the mutineers and perform his role as defender of British imperial power (139). Much like applause after the drop of a theatre curtain, Lena and the other women wave their bonnets and white handkerchiefs in appreciation of Harrower’s efforts. To be sure, this brief but significant scene in Grant’s novel can be read as a metaphor of the way the Indian Mutiny of 1857 functioned as high theatre in Victorian public imagination. The images of women being stripped of their clothing and dragged through the streets of India, of Nana Sahib’s villainy as he either ordered or allowed the massacre of women and children at Cawnpore, and of mutinous sepoys being shot from canons all served as individual scenes in the imperial production. Hilda Gregg, who completed the first study of the Mutiny novel in 1897, aptly remarked that “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” (218).

But even though depictions of the Indian Mutiny are often used to illustrate the perfect purity of the English and absolute villainy of the Indians, Grant’s scene
demonstrates how the Mutiny can also function as a lens through which to “view” Victorian culture. Grant’s scene, for instance, serves as a metaphor of women’s marginalized position in Victorian England. Lena is not part of the “main event,” but is relegated to a safe haven that often seems more like a prison. Although Lena wishes to leave the tower and search for her younger sister and her father, Jack Harrower declares that “The gates of the tower are closed and barricaded” (142). Unable to act, Lena must passively wait to be rescued by the British soldiers or captured by the mutineers. Ironically, but similar to other canonical novels of the time, her marginalized position affords her a precious freedom, and her opera glasses become a symbol of optical power. Because of her marginalized position, Miss Weston can gaze upon the Mutiny without being the object of the gaze, and through this “freedom” she learns just how heroic her former lover Jack Harrower truly is as he rescues Colonel Rudkin, the man for whom Lena leaves Harrower until Rudkin betrays her with another. As Grant’s scene nicely illustrates via the opera glasses and viewing tower, the Mutiny becomes a stage where the theatrical roles of imperial power—in this instance what it means to be female and what it means to be “other”—are acted out. 8 The following chapter will highlight such a view of the Mutiny—as a stage on which gender, social and cultural roles are performed. My study will examine the ways in which British culture is critiqued through the Mutiny, the way Mutiny novels are sometimes misread as supporting the status quo instead of

challenging it, and the ways in which Taylor’s novel, unlike other Mutiny novels of the period, imagines transformations of class, gender and race in ways that other Mutiny novels do not.

Citing the plethora of novels, histories, dramas, eye-witness accounts and sermons spawned by the Mutiny, Patrick Brantlinger has remarked that “no episode in British imperial history raised public excitement to a higher pitch than the Indian Mutiny of 1857” (199). Brantlinger’s “The Well at Cawnpore: Literary Representations of the Indian Mutiny of 1857” is to date the most extensive look at Mutiny literature as a genre. In his chapter, Brantlinger provides a chronicle of Mutiny literature from the earliest histories, eyewitness accounts, dramas, novels, and stories to Forster’s *A Passage to India*, which was published in 1924. Brantlinger discusses Mutiny literature through the lens of Orientalism, using Said’s term to point out the “extreme forms of extropunitive projection, the racist pattern of blaming the victim expressed in terms of an absolute polarization of good and evil, innocence and guilt, justice and injustice, moral restraint and sexual depravity, civilization and barbarism” (200). Indeed, Brantlinger’s concentration on race is essential; in fact, it is impossible to discuss Mutiny literature without such a discussion. Essentially, Brantlinger uses Mutiny literature to illustrate the

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way in which British authors alleviate responsibility for the uprising by representing Indians as villains and British as heroes or victims.

What Brantlinger’s examination does not provide, however, is a study of Mutiny literature that critically analyzes the way the British depict themselves, as well as how such depictions illustrate the tensions and fissures in British imperial culture and racial thought. In order to help close this gap, I draw on the work of Robert Young, whose *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995) traces the key racial paradigms of the nineteenth century. Echoing Benjamin Disraeli’s 1847 comment that “All is race; there is no other truth,” Young argues that racial thought “became one of the major organizing axioms of knowledge in general” in the nineteenth century (93), heavily influencing science, history, and literature, and the way the British defined themselves as the “imperial race” (92). Young identifies two primary racial theories during the period: monogenesis, the belief that all races evolved “from a single source…the white male,” and polygenesis, the belief that “different races were in fact different species.” Young traces this debate throughout the century, and argues that “the question of racial difference was focused on…sex, or rather its consequence, namely the degree of fertility of the union between different races.” At the center of this debate, for Young, is the issue of hybridity, “with its key question of whether the product of sexual unions between different races were, or were not, fertile” (101). Young goes on to argue that these racial theories, as they are expressed in the novels of the time, deconstruct themselves and reveal the complications of cross-cultural contact: “[r]acial theory, which ostensibly seeks to keep races forever apart, transmutes into expressions of the clandestine, furtive
forms of what can be called ‘colonial desire,’ a covert but insistent obsession with transgressive, inter-racial sex, hybridity and miscegenation” (xii).

Young’s focus on hybridity, especially miscegenation, is of particular importance to this chapter, since it explores Meadow’s Taylor’s *Seeta (1872)*, a story of the interracial love affair and eventual marriage of a wealthy and beautiful Indian woman, Seeta, and Cyril Brandon, a British official serving in India. Brantlinger describes Taylor’s novel as “the most remarkable of Mutiny novels” primarily because it “offers the most fully imagined account in any Victorian novel both of the scope and of the motives for the Mutiny” (212); however, Taylor’s novel has received little scholarly attention. Brantlinger’s argument concentrates on race and religion, but provides only a surface-level discussion of the novel and offers little close analysis of the British characters in the text, specifically the British female characters who operate in contrast to the novel’s title character. Of course, Brantlinger’s concentration on race, although it remains a surface analysis, is important; in fact, Taylor’s novel begins with a racist depiction of Indian greed. In the novel’s opening scene, Ram Das plots to kill his cousin, who happens to be Seeta’s husband, in hopes of inheriting the fortune Das feels his uncle denied him. Although Das believes Seeta has been killed along with her husband, she survives to tell her story. While the police search for Das and his accomplices, Cyril Brandon, the town magistrate, begins to fall in love with Seeta, whose beauty and love of learning at first seems to override their racial and religious differences. Together, the two lovers walk the cultural tightrope of their interracial affair. Along the way they face many

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obstacles—because the two are married in a Hindu ceremony, the marriage can’t receive recognition from the Christian church, and because Seeta’s religion requires strict adherence to Hindu codes involving food preparation, Cyril must build her a separate dwelling to keep her from losing caste. In addition, the two must deal with the gossip passed by British and Indians alike. According to Brantlinger, “As Brandon is ostracized by the British, so Seeta runs afoul of the Indian community—between British racism and Hindu fanaticism about purity of caste and belief, Taylor suggests, there is little to choose” (214). Brantlinger’s concluding comments about the novel, however insightful, fail to realize the complexity of Taylor’s text, especially in terms of the cultural critique it provides. While Seeta is the story of a wealthy Indian widow and her interracial relationship and marriage to a British magistrate, it is also the story of British imperialism in action, a performance of social, cultural, and gender roles, and a re-enacting of the complexity of cross-cultural contact that places British values on display and puts them in question.

The Performance of Racism and Cultural Apathy: An Examination of British Women in Seeta

Taylor’s novel, unlike other novels of the time, offers a critique of British attitudes—both racism and apathy—that played a part in causing the Mutiny. Interestingly, such negative attributes are transferred onto the British women in the novel instead of those in positions of political power. Taylor’s novel speaks out against the middle-class lady of leisure whose idleness results in serious consequences. Captain
Smith’s wife, for instance, gossips about her neighbors precisely because she has too much leisure time—her husband is busy with his work and her children are grown.

Typically middle-class women served an ornamental role in marriage—Anne McClintock has described the middle-class woman as living “to adorn the worldly ambition of her husband” (160)—but because Mrs. Smith is not interested in artistic achievement, there is nothing productive left for her to do: “She had no accomplishments, and had neglected and forgotten the little music she ever knew…So, wanting in these sources of occupation, Ms. Smith set herself to work, steadily and perseveringly, to study her neighbors’ affairs, and succeeded quite to her heart’s content” (140). Importantly, Mrs. Smith’s actions serve a far greater purpose in Taylor’s novel than spectacle or archetype. For Taylor, the gossiping lady of leisure is more than a nuisance or embarrassment; instead, the novel asks readers to align and possibly equate Mrs. Smith’s actions with those of Azrael Pande, the novel’s villain who stirs dissension and sets the Mutiny in motion.

Taylor invites such a comparison by interspersing Mrs. Smith’s gossip with Pande’s visits to sepoys. As Pande travels attempting to gain support for his cause, he performs the role of, as Brantlinger has noticed, “a Muslim priest [who]… displays enough rhetorical fireworks to be an Indian Patrick Henry” (213). Even though Taylor

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11 According to McClintock, Victorian novels perpetuate the myth that nineteenth-century middle-class women were idle, when the reality is that “idleness was less a regime of inertia imposed on wilting middle-class wives and daughters than a laborious and time-consuming character role performed by women who wanted membership in the ‘respectable’ class.” McClintock claims that when a woman’s father or husband could not afford several domestic servants, the woman must perform the domestic duties and then must “ensure the erasure of every sign of her work,” appearing in the drawing room “scrubbed clean of the telltale signs of labor.” As McClintock notes, “the prestige was gained not through idleness itself but through a laborious mimicry of idleness” (162). Because Mrs. Smith was living in India with an array of servants at her disposal, readers may assume her idleness is not a performance but a reality.

12 Sepoys were Indian soldiers trained and employed by the British armed forces, and were the first to mutiny during the uprising of 1857.
depicts Pande as inherently evil and self-serving, Pande convinces the sepoys that he’s out for their best interest: “I have heard but one cry—a cry that came from the very souls of the people—deliverance from the English!” (147). Pande convinces the sepoys that the British seek to destroy the caste system with the new Enfield rifles, greased with cow and pig fat, which would cause Muslim and Hindu sepoys alike to commit acts of sacrilege. He also reminds the sepoys how the British have changed Hindu laws so that widows can remarry, which he believes will “sap the very foundations of Hindoo faith and purity” (149). His latter argument, of course, invokes the marriage of Brandon and the widowed Seeta, which, viewed along with the change in marriage laws, causes Pande to see the union as an abuse of British imperial power. Taylor clearly presents Pande as nothing but a fraud; despite the fact that he makes some valid points about the abuses of English power, specifically the East India Company, his real motivation is to stir up dissension and to possess and control Seeta herself. Pande isn’t at all concerned about defiling the principles of Hindu faith when he plots to capture Seeta and make her his slave.

Interestingly, Mrs. Smith is depicted as similar to Pande; as she plots to break up Cyril’s marriage to Seeta, she presents herself to her English friends as a benevolent

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13 Taylor’s novel identifies Pande as the leader of the Dacoits, a band of thugs that actually existed in British India. The Dacoits were known for their secret plots to rob and murder their victims.

14 Taylor’s career and family life in British India are of particular importance here, and perhaps offer some insight into his rantings (through the character of Azrael Pande) about the East India Company. After the help of a generous family friend, Taylor was hired as part of the army of the Nizam of Hyderabad, which “meant a much lower start in life than most employees of the East India Company” (217). According to Kapila, “Hyderabad was a culturally syncretic, liberal society, more tolerant of the mixing of races and cultures than elsewhere in India…and many of the officers of the Nizam’s army were the offspring of mixed marriages between Europeans and Indian women” (218). As Kapila notes, because he “was not a direct employee of the Company, Taylor felt free to criticize its policies and maintain a certain freedom from official interference in his personal life” (217). Later, in 1841, he became Political Agent of Shorapur, and by this time he was already married to his wife Mary, whose grandmother was Indian. Kapila’s article gives a brief discussion of Taylor’s life and work in India, but for a complete account see Taylor’s Story of My Life. London: Zwan Publication, 1878.
person with the best interest of the British in mind, even though her real motivation is racism and a love of sensation. Mrs. Smith employs a rhetoric similar to Pande’s as she attempts to convince her British friends to help enact her plan. Like Pande, Mrs. Smith suggests Cyril’s marriage to Seeta is an abuse of British imperial power, since the relationship has brought shame upon Seeta’s family and caused Seeta’s grandfather to temporarily lose caste. Combined with the institution of the new Enfield rifle, which could cause the sepoys to rebel against the British, Mrs. Smith argues that she and her friends must step in and do their civic duty, i.e. “get rid of that horrible creature” before the natives retaliate:

Ah, my Ayah, you know, is great friends with a goldsmith’s wife in the town; and she told her yesterday, that madam’s [Seeta’s] grandfather, who is really a great banker, belonged to her caste, and had been put out of it, and is obliged to go and do penance at Benares, and wash way the sin this girl has brought on them. Really it is very sad to see so respectable a man brought to such a condition, and by our ‘Commissioner’ too. What will the natives say! Smith tells me, that even the Sepoys, when they hear of it, will be very savage, and there will be no holding them; in short, he quite frightened me yesterday by all he said.

What about? Asked her friends apprehensively.

O, about the new Enfields, and the cartridges, and the ‘temper’—that’s the word he used—of the Sepoys at Barrackpore and Dinapore, and half-a-dozen other places. I’m sure I don’t care a button about it, you
know; but Smith said so, and so I put that and the banker together, and if we do such things, my dears, what wonder if the poor natives take offence, and do worse! Well, I was thinking of this last night, till Smith came to bed; you know he is reading hard now, and sits up too late; and I hit upon a plan to get rid of that horrid creature, and here’s what it is. But can I trust you both? (180-1)

Interestingly, Mrs. Smith cooks up her scheme during a moment of boredom—“Well, I was thinking of this last night, till Smith came to bed; you know he is reading hard now, and sits up too late”—which suggests the lady of leisure’s destructive power. The passage also suggests the similarities between Mrs. Smith and Pande by aligning their methods: while Pande travels the country and gathers information from others who’ve been taken advantage of by British rule, Mrs. Smith, as this passage illustrates, also uses her connection in the British/Indian community—her ayah is friends with the goldsmith’s wife, for instance—to gather support for her “cause.” Both Pande and Mrs. Smith use the rhetoric of the Mutiny to serve their respective purposes; each brings up a discussion of the Enfield rifle and the revision of Hindu laws concerning marriage, which many historians, such as Christopher Hibbert, and cultural/literary critics, such as Jenny Sharpe and Gautum Chakravarty, cite as two causes of the uprising. By comparing a British lady and a Mutineer, Taylor asks readers to envision the lady of leisure as not just a nuisance, but a potential catalyst for national disaster. The complexities and difficulties of cross-cultural contact, therefore, are removed from British authorities and the British military in the novel and placed onto the British woman.
What is most interesting about Mrs. Smith is the way her remarks about Cyril’s relationship with Seeta reveal both an aversion to the Indian woman, not only because of her race, but because Seeta’s relationship with Cyril puts Mrs. Smith’s position as a white woman in flux. When a friend of Mrs. Smith’s asks if Mr. Brandon has married a black woman, Mrs. Smith’s response signals her own fears about her place in British India as a white woman:

No, she is as fair as any of us, and very pretty too…at least, she looked so through the glass; but she’s a native, and they are all niggers, and—and—I hate them—that’s all…. If men will have black ‘companions,’ you know, they ought to keep them to themselves, and not stuff them under our noses. I hate the thought of it. I feel quite sick as I look at them through the glass, and see that fine young fellow with his arm round her, and both of them laughing like children. (182)

Beneath Mrs. Smith’s racism lies cultural critique. Mrs. Smith’s comments illustrate her frustration with her own social position—an idle and bored lady of leisure who is uncertain about her position, both sexually and culturally, as a white woman. In both passages, Mrs. Smith positions herself as separate from the action, watching the couple’s happiness “through the glass.” Similar to Lena Weston’s position in the tower as she watches the Mutiny through opera glasses, Mrs. Smith experiences exhilaration and powerlessness—as she watches the lovers enact their love affair. Her anger about the marriage suggests a deep-seeded fear about the position of the English woman in British India. As she watches Cyril, “that fine young fellow with his arm around her” (my
Mrs. Smith finds herself in an uncomfortable position. If Seeta has supplanted the English woman’s place by Cyril’s side, the English woman’s place in British India is thrown into question. Mrs. Smith’s motivation for breaking up Seeta’s marriage reveals the complexities associated with cross-cultural interaction; her desperation as an English woman to vie for imperial space is an important motivation for her hatred of Cyril’s marriage to Seeta.

If Taylor’s lady of leisure is depicted as a negative and potentially destructive force in British India, Taylor’s treatment of Lucy Home, the naïve social butterfly brought to India to find a husband, seems equally unappealing. Miss Home, the beautiful but uncultivated surgeon’s daughter, suggests the emptiness/artificiality of such social roles and hints at the culture apathy, as her name suggests, at “home.” At a ball held in Lucy Home’s honor, the text shifts briefly away from Azrael Pande and his mutineers and offers a glimpse into British middle-class social culture. Readers are privy to Lucy’s preparation for the ball, where her mother coaches her not to snub Cyril Brandon, but also reminds her only to dance twice with him if she finds him appealing (72). Readers also see the process of Cyril’s initial infatuation, however superficial it may be, with Lucy—“She looked like a lady, and was by far the best-dressed person in the room.” But after performing their expected social roles at the ball, Cyril decides to “pick her brains” and is disappointed at what he finds. Despite appearances, Lucy is quite dull; she knows nothing of books, drawing, or foreign language, and although she had visited the Exhibition in London she has no memory of what she saw there (73). Lucy’s failure to recall the Great Exhibition foregrounds her cultural apathy; since the Great Exhibition
was “the first international exhibition of the products of industry” and “regarded as a triumph for British prosperity and enlightenment” (“Exhibition” 508), Lucy’s lack of interest highlights her shallow and unenlightened character. After all, if Lucy can’t recall the Crystal Palace, the principle building and architectural marvel of the Great Exhibition, her interest in India is not likely to be piqued. The Honorable Cyril Brandon, depicted as heroic because of his love of other cultures and love of learning, picks up on Lucy’s apathy. After his conversation with Miss Home, Brandon admits that after “picking her brains” he found “Much chaff” and “no grain” (74). Lucy Home is only a minor character in the novel, and as such, exists in part as an archetype of British cultural apathy. But Lucy, especially when read alongside Mrs. Smith, points to a problem for British women in India: while Mrs. Smith vies for imperial space through the only means she knows how—gossip—Lucy, with her naivety and lack of interest in culture is unequipped to create a space for herself at all. As a result, her character remains flat and uninteresting, and her position in British India remains uncertain.

Seeta as Solution: The Performance of the Ideal Wife

Through the character of Seeta, Taylor suggests an alternative or potential solution to the flaws illustrated through Mrs. Smith and Lucy Home. Although Smith and Home are uninterested in accomplishments, Seeta stretches the social boundaries of her culture and learns to read and write. When her husband is murdered by Azrael Pande’s band of thugs, the judge is surprised that Seeta can tell, and even write, her own story recounting the events. While most Indians are the subjects of British narratives, Seeta is
able to write her own. Indeed, it is Seeta’s literacy that catches the attention of Cyril Brandon, who meets Seeta for the first time as she recounts her story in the courtroom. In fact, Cyril sees her deposition before he meets Seeta in person, and is so taken aback by her level of literacy that he challenges its authenticity: “The characters, ‘Seeta, widow of Huree Das,’ were very delicate and beautiful; he had never seen such before, and he marveled that a woman could have written them. ‘Surely they are not her own,’ he said to his Serishtadar, or head officer. ‘No woman could write like this’” (60). Seeta, when asked if the signature is her own, reaffirms her literacy and, in turn, her agency: ‘It is mine,’ she said modestly, raising her eyes to his. ‘With my own hand I wrote it, and I come of my own free will’ (61). Seeta’s comments reveal literacy and agency to be interdependent. In light of Mrs. Smith and Lucy Home, who affect change either through gossip or by ascribing to a shallow set of social codes, Seeta’s method of affecting change—literacy—suggests that she is a potential solution to the problems Taylor poses through his British female characters. But even though Taylor’s novel praises Seeta’s ability to create her own narrative, it only allows the space for her to partially reenact it for readers. Just as readers are prepared to hear Seeta’s account—“What I saw I will tell”—Seeta’s first-person account of Azrael Pande’s attack on her household is cut short: “We know so much already of what she had to say, that there is little occasion to repeat it” (62). Seeta’s story gets smothered by the master narrative, which hints at the irony that pervades the entire novel—although the novel heralds Seeta’s attempt to become literate and autonomous, British culture leaves no space for her to fully utilize such skills. Seeta’s half-told story foreshadows the novel’s defining characteristic: although it provides a
cultural critique of Britain and recognizes the need for change, it ultimately fails to find a way to enact such change. Ultimately Taylor’s novel can’t carry through with the cultural critique it provides.

Although Taylor’s novel consistently asks readers to consider Seeta alongside the female British characters in the novel and suggests that she is the more appealing option, in doing so the novel often makes Seeta the mouthpiece for British imperial ideology as she declares her disdain for Indian customs. Such instances reveal the novel’s complexities; to be sure, Taylor’s representation of British culture and Indian culture is not simplistic, but one riddled with inconsistencies. For instance, Seeta is set apart from the British characters in the novel (such as Lucy Home, for instance) because she does not blindly adhere to social custom. This quality gives Seeta agency in the novel, but it also undercuts it, since one of the customs she rejects is the Indian widow ritual, which the novel codes as oppressive and backward. After her husband’s death, Aunt Ella and Grandfather wait in vain for Seeta to “perform the duties and ceremonies of a widow in full—have her beautiful hair shorn off, and break her ornaments on the place where his body had been burned—but there was no sign of this.” While Seeta’s beauty flourishes after her husband’s death, she ultimately becomes a means to critique Indian culture:

It is not a shaven head or a course garment that makes a virtuous widow, Aunt Ella! What I am, I will remain. Am I to disfigure myself to shock my boy when he grows up? No! if (sic) his father’s death were avenged, this might—might—be thought of, but, till then, let it not be mentioned.
Clearly, Seeta rejects blind adherence to social customs. Her insistence that she “might—
might” consider adhering to the custom as a means of celebrating the murderer’s
conviction highlights her agency, but also forces Seeta into the position of becoming
Britain’s mouthpiece for British discourse about the cultural inferiority of the East. While
she isn’t interested in disfiguring herself for the sake of appearance, she will only
consider enacting the custom on her own terms. Instead of devaluing her own beauty, she
becomes “even more lovely” after her husband’s death.

Along with her physical beauty, Seeta also acquires “a strange aspect of
determination” that is not present before her husband’s death (49), which further sets her
apart from Mrs. Smith’s longing for excitement and Miss Home’s apathy. Unlike her
British counterparts, Seeta refuses to perform the prescribed role, in this case the
prescribed role of a Hindu widow, which society expects:

Seeta might have settled down into the dull, usual widowhood of Hindoo
life: pious, absorbed in household cares, charitable, and patient, with no
hope for the future, and praying that a dull mechanical life might pass
away when her child grew up and entered upon his work in life.

But Seeta was not like this: the high spirit within her refused to be
satisfied with what she saw in others… (50)

Instead of seeing her husband’s passing as the end of her life, Seeta sees it as the
beginning of a life of intellectual freedom. Seeta realizes that although she was fond of
her husband, “He would have gradually drawn her down to his own intellectual level, and
her mind would have been stunted as it tried to grow. Now it was free!” Unlike Lucy
Home, whose life revolves around the pursuit of finding a husband, Seeta’s life centers around education, but again, the binary of West as intellectually progressive and the East as intellectually stagnant is apparent in Seeta’s attitude toward her former husband, and in her attitude toward education as the novel progresses:

Though she only read the sacred books and some poems and dramas, yet there were thoughts recorded in them which seemed to leap up to her own, to set her brain aching and her heart throbbing, not only at the Divine revelation, as she believed it to be, but at the language in which the strange metaphysical arguments were conveyed. Sometimes she failed to follow them; and, when she applied to her master, was often refused help! ‘They were mysteries which none but a Brahmin should know,’ he would tell her; ‘they were not fit for the tender minds of women,’ and so evaded her request; but Seeta was not satisfied….Seeta had never loved. She had held her husband in respect; she was even proud of him, and he was fond of her—she was his darling! But that was not the poet’s love—the pure ideal of a love which could be perfected only in Paradise. (50-1)

Again, these passages offer a complicated look at Seta’s place in the novel, and further set Seeta apart from the British female characters. While Lucy Home can barely recall the Great Exhibition, Seeta’s brain aches and her heart throbs when faced with the opportunity to learn something new. While characters such as Lucy Home and Mrs. Smith remain archetypes, Seeta is deep, soulful and interesting. This passage also connects the concepts of love and education and presents the two as interwoven, which is
suggestive that the novel’s hero and heroine will remain loveless until they can find a
partner whom they can fall in love with intellectually as well as physically. As the
passages quoted above suggest, the great intellectual divide between Eastern and Western
culture makes romantic love improbable across cultural lines.

The above passage also foregrounds the perceived sexism of Indian culture, which
fails to create a space for Seeta to pursue her love of learning is viewed by her own
culture as inappropriate. Her progression “caused Aunt Ella, who could not read a letter,
great uneasiness” (50), and the priest under whom she studied “was often astonished and
perplexed by her ability, which put his own to sharp tests” (49). The latter quotation hints
at a problem within Hindu culture, where Seeta’s breaking of social codes challenges not
only ideas of what it means to be female but what it means to be male. In other words,
Seeta’s desire to learn and experience intellectual growth affects not only her, but
challenges her male counterparts—those who “possess” the knowledge she seeks to learn.
Because Seeta stands out as different in her own culture, readers wonder whether she will
be able to find a place in British culture, where literacy and education among women
are encouraged and, as the novel learning and remain in a comfortable role as an Indian
woman. Indeed, Seeta’s love of suggests through Miss Home and Mrs. Smith, desireable.
But even though Taylor’s novel suggests that education is a desirable quality in a wife,

\[15\text{ Admittedly, education is a dubious term. In this chapter, my definition of the term and my application of the term to Taylor’s novel are similar to Kapila’s—to become educated is to become inculcated with European values. Therefore, when Cyril Brandon’s chief officer refers to Seeta as “very learned,” he is referencing her ability to read and write, and her potential ability to become inculcated with European values, which would make her “an ideal native subject” (212). In short, education supports empire; it causes one to move with the grain instead of against it. Lucy Home’s apathy and Mrs. Smith’s gossip do not support empire, while Seeta’s desperate desire to read Shakespeare and Milton helps speed the process of inculcation. When I claim that the British encourage education among British women, I am not suggesting a nationwide support of female liberation. As Taylor’s novel ultimately suggests, female education is only productive when contained.} \]
transgression of social boundaries is not. The fact that Seeta refuses to replace her own expectations for her life with such societal expectations foreshadows her inability ultimately to fit into a marriage with Cyril Brandon, who seeks a learned wife but perhaps not one who so readily pushes societal limitations.

Unfortunately, such passages, where Taylor provides a critique of Indian culture, have led to a one-sided reading of Taylor’s novel. Shuchi Kapila, for instance, who has completed the only published study of *Seeta*, identifies Taylor’s work as similar to other Mutiny novels, where a critique of Indian culture is used to justify England’s colonial enterprise. In the following passage, Kapila explains how nineteenth-century Orientalist scholars used what they perceived as India’s barbaric treatment of its women as justification for England’s civilizing mission:

…natives, who were originally noble and civilized, in their present fallen state had to be educated as citizens of a modern state. Adhering to eighteenth-century notions that an index of a civilized culture was the freedom it allowed its women, Orientalist scholars concluded that the low

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16 The British also employed this same line of thinking to justify their military response to the Mutiny. Much of the Mutiny literature of the time focuses on the atrocities committed against British women and children but fails to focus equal attention of the British atrocities committed against the Indians. James Grant’s *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny*, for instance, as Brantlinger has also noted, focuses on the perverse Oriental sex drive that leads to the rape and murder of many English women, while the English army called into active duty after the Mutiny’s outbreak is called the Christian Army of Retribution (209). In addition, Grant’s novel introduces readers to Khoda Bux, a man Lena and Jack meet during their attempted escape from Delhi, who is said to have treated his livestock better than his wife. Lena and Jack regretfully notice that Bux’s wife must submissively wait until he has finished eating before she can begin. Polly Weston, Lena’s sister, is also captured and placed in a zenana, which sets Indian sexual politics in opposition to those of the English. George Trevelyan’s history entitled *Cawnpore* (London: MacMillan, 18650) employs a similar tactic, as noted by Brantlinger (201). As its title suggests, Trevelyan focuses almost solely on the murder of hundreds of women and children at Cawnpore, and depicts Oriental men as opposites of British men, who “still live by the rules of chivalry.”
status of women in Hindu society was a visible sign of its fallen state.

(212)

According to Kapila, Taylor’s novel uses such rhetoric as its guiding principle, and Seeta becomes the example that illustrates the benefits of such a civilizing mission. In short, Kapila’s reading suggests that the colonizing mission would be that much easier and fruitful if colonial subjects exhibited Seeta’s desire to become educated, a quality the British perceived as “modern” and “civilized.” Admittedly, Seeta is unable to find a space within Indian culture where she can learn and grow intellectually. Seeta’s passion for books and reading makes her aunt Ella and grandfather uneasy, and even the priest under whom Seeta studies finds her quest for knowledge unsettling.

Eventually, Seeta finds the love she reads about in poetry after meeting Cyril Brandon, the town magistrate, as she recounts her story to him in the courtroom. In fact, it is her literacy that sets her apart from the traditional Indian woman and catches Cyril’s attention. As Kapila has noted, Seeta “is not an untutored savage, but a woman of learning and accomplishment, and therefore more desirable as ‘an ornament’ (87) in Cyril’s house” (224). Kapila reads Cyril’s relationship with Seeta as a metaphor of the imperial relationship between England and India. Under this reading, Seeta epitomizes the colonizers desire for more civilized colonial subjects—those with enough intelligence to “welcome colonial rule and ally themselves with British interests.” While Kapila’s reading casts Seeta as the subservient colonial subject, Cyril is cast as “the Englishman who becomes husband, teacher, father, provider, and benevolent administrator” (212).
Kapila’s reading, therefore, suggests that Cyril’s attraction to Seeta has to do with a deep-seeded colonial desire to rule a docile, yet educated population.

To be sure, Kapila’s reading is not without basis. For instance, as her argument notes, the first time Cyril meets Seeta he describes her as docile, and despite her high level of literacy—even Cyril’s head officer describes her as “very learned” (60)—his description of her as passive and loyal suggests that Cyril doesn’t view Seeta as an equal, but as a creature beneath himself, someone he can rule with ease:

The large dewy eyes were soft and pleading, but not irresolute, and the girl was quite calm. Seeta had dressed herself in a rich silk saree of a green colour, shot with crimson, which had heavy borders and ends of gold thread, and the end, which she had passed over her head, fell on her right arm and contrasted vividly with its fair colour and rounded outline. If her features were not exactly regular, they were very sweet and full of expression; her eyes were large and soft, of that clear dark brown which, like a dog’s, is always so loving and true. If the mouth were a shade too full for exact symmetry, it was mobile and expressive, and the curves of the upper lip constantly varied. For a native woman, Cyril Brandon had never seen any one so fair or of so tender a tone of colour. (61)

Seeta’s calm demeanor and the expression in her eyes, “which, like a dog’s, is always so loving and true,” suggest that despite Seeta’s intellect and character, Cyril sees her as somewhat less than human. Cyril’s initial thoughts about Seeta are part of a large body of British texts that depict colonized subjects as subhuman. When viewed through the lens
of Postcolonial theory, Cyril’s words position him in the role of colonizer and cast Seeta as the colonized, and therefore lend credibility to Kapila’s reading.

The above passage, however, points to one of several lapses in Kapila’s argument, which suggests that Taylor’s novel critiques Indian culture, but doesn’t recognize the critique of British culture within the novel. Especially with regard to education, which is Kapila’s main focus, Taylor’s British female characters are important figures to consider. Kapila, however, ignores all the female British characters except for Grace Mostyn, which leads to a misreading, or at best an incomplete reading of the novel’s attitude toward education. In light of a reading of Mrs. Smith, who is compared to the mutineers, the above passage seems to be a critique of British culture as well as Indian culture.

Cyril’s additional descriptions of Seeta, however, point to a hole in Kapila’s argument. While her reading provides a strong analysis of Cyril’s somewhat questionable intentions in his relationship with Seeta, it fails to discuss the critique of British culture the novel most certainly provides. Although Indian culture has not enabled Seeta to grow intellectually, the following passage suggests that British culture isn’t much better at encouraging women to be independent agents:

Such, he remembered, were many of the lovely women of Titian’s pictures—a rich golden olive, with a bright carnation tint rising under the sun—and Seeta’s was like them. One in particular came to his memory like a flash—the wife of the Dued’Avalos, in the Louvre picture; or Titian’s Daughter, carrying fruits and flowers, at Berlin. He could not see much of Seeta’s figure; but the small, graceful head, the rounded arm, the
tiny foot, the graceful movement of the neck, and her springy lithe step as she had entered the tent, assured him that it could not be less beautiful than the face. It was curious, too, that all present in the court had been excited, and a sound as if of a long-drawn breath had gone out even from some of the prisoners, who still sat on the floor. (61)

Because *Seeta* is a Romance in addition to Mutiny novel, Cyril’s description of the woman he will court and eventually marry is not surprising. However, Cyril’s tendency to compare Seeta to women in artwork is quite telling. On the surface, it may seem that he is heralding Seeta for her beauty through such a comparison, but the difference between Seeta and the wife of Dued’Avalos is that the former is an active agent while the latter are arrested and fixed “inside the glass.” From the moment Cyril first meets Seeta, his unconscious desire to arrest her movement, to fix her in a state of inactivity foreshadows the destiny of their relationship. In the end, after Seeta takes a bullet fired by Azrael Pande intended for her husband, the only space she can inhabit comfortably is in a portrait, tucked away behind the glass of a cabinet in Cyril’s study.

Kapila’s reading, while it provides a cursory reading of Seeta’s relationship to Cyril, fails to fully consider Taylor’s critique of British culture. In particular, Kapila ignores Taylor’s British female characters, against whom Seeta stands as a positive counterpart. Indeed, Taylor’s novel consistently invites readers to consider Seeta alongside the British characters in the novel, and consequently invites readers to envision Seeta as the solution to Cyril’s problem: finding a suitable wife. This problem is a central one for many Mutiny novels, since a romantic plot often ran alongside the plot of the
uprising. By novel’s end, British military heroes were able to recapture the empire, but also to acquire a wife. Such novels typically end with the marriage of their Mutiny heroes. Gautum Chakravarty, in *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*, discusses the centrality of the marriage plot to the Mutiny novel, and argues that “the plot of the rebellion,” when placed alongside “Anglo-Indian love, marriage and domesticity,” ensures that “the latter always contains and survives the former” (136). In Taylor’s novel, therefore, the problem of finding Cyril Brandon a suitable wife effects more than just plot development, but the survival of an empire in turmoil. And the fact that this “suitable” wife might be Seeta, a Hindu widow, further complicates the problem—both for Cyril Brandon as a character and for the Mutiny novel itself.

Taylor begins to work through this problem by placing British cultural mores up against Cyril and his new bride. Consider a quotation from Philip Mostyn, Cyril Brandon’s trusted and loyal friend, who compares Seeta favorably with British women, but also points out the insurmountable social obstacles of miscegenation:

Indeed, I often think that if there were not our horrible social prejudices against it, many of us would be happier with such a wife than with some of our own people. I think such a one as that girl would be more interesting, more useful, more easily satisfied, and—” (87)

This passage evokes the negative attributes of Mrs. Smith and Lucy Home—those who are uninteresting, not useful and not easily satisfied—and suggests Seeta as a potential solution to the problem of English womanhood. But Cyril’s abrupt interruption of Philip—he declares that a British man and Indian woman “could not be married…and
such a girl as that could not be a mistress. It would be simply shameful”—serves as proof of Philip’s point about “horrible social prejudices,” since Cyril does not object on any grounds other than cultural mores. Cyril’s response also hints that he may not be the culture-loving hero the novel initially introduces to readers, or that his love and acceptance of Indian culture only goes so far.

Taylor’s novel clearly does not intend to remove Seeta from a somewhat oppressive marriage to her Indian husband and place her into a liberating marriage with Cyril Brandon. The novel still problematizes what role, if any, Seeta can fit into because of her ethnicity. Instead of taking her from an Indian marriage into a British marriage and portraying this switch as something magical where she can find a comfortable space, the novel depicts the marriage as fraught with doubt and concern. Social custom, for instance, forbids a Hindu woman from marrying a Christian man, and even though Cyril and Seeta decide to break social custom and marry in the Hindu church, the Christian church will not recognize the marriage. In addition, if Seeta’s children are to be recognized as legitimate in England—her dream is to have a son that becomes “an English gentleman, like his father!” (373)—Seeta would be forced to renounce her faith and convert to Christianity. In addition, the Hindu laws concerning food preparation make it impossible for Seeta and Cyril to live together as a married couple. Cyril attempts to rectify the problem by building Seeta a cottage where she can live without fear of losing caste. The cottage is a strange mixture of British and Indian—the flowers which line the private hedge are English, while the inside comes complete with a pet antelope and Hindu altar—but, as the novel suggests, this supposed safe haven from societal
pressures is merely a house of cards. Despite her separate quarters, Azrael Pande and his band of thugs (as well as Mrs. Smith and her band of gossips) spread rumors that Seeta has failed to adhere to Hindu law, which puts her caste in jeopardy.

In addition, Seeta has fears about the faithfulness and commitment of her husband, who spends holidays and evenings with Philip Mostyn and his family. At first Seeta does not mind her husband’s absence, since Hindu law forbids her from accompanying Cyril to dinner parties. But after another intrusion by Mrs. Smith, who passes along the rumor that Cyril is romantically involved and planning to marry Philip’s half sister Grace Mostyn, Seeta begins to question Cyril’s commitment to their marriage. Even though Taylor’s novel presents Seeta as a potential solution to the problems of cultural apathy and lack of accomplishment among the British female characters, Grace Mostyn, the woman Cyril eventually marries after Seeta’s death and who matches Seeta’s love of learning and charm, reminds readers of additional qualities that Seeta inevitably lacks. As her name suggests, Grace possesses the refinement and dignity of a lady, and the novel continually reminds readers that she is well suited to the name she’s been given: upon meeting her, Cyril ponders “her innocent features [that] beamed with sensibility and grace,” and her face, which is described as “full of grace.” Similar to Cyril’s initial meeting with Seeta, he is enamoured of Grace’s intellect as well as her beauty; while sitting opposite her at dinner, “all she said impressed Cyril with the delicate and highly toned culture of her mind” (170). Grace also possesses the proper accomplishments of a British lady—she is a skilled singer and pianist, and is knowledgeable about opera and literature. But Cyril is also physically attracted to Grace,
as evidenced by the sexualized images of her presented when he first sees her: he notices her “lithe and rounded figure” as well as her “mouth formed in soft curves, with fresh, moist, rosy lips, which were slightly open, and showed a little of the small, white, pearly teeth.”

Although it becomes clear that Taylor’s novel is moving toward Grace Mostyn as a replacement for Seeta, the novel maintains a space for Seeta, at least for a time, through education. This “space,” however, is one that enacts Homi Bhabha’s idea of mimicry, where the colonial subject is inculcated with the colonizer’s identity and must “mimic” it; the result, however, is that this newly-acquired identity and the performance of it are flawed, since the colonized can never achieve “whiteness,” but remain “subject[s] of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (86). For Bhabha, those who enact mimicry seem to be only male—he refers to them as “mimic men,” as Anne McClintock has noted (62)—however, in Taylor’s novel, women adopt the position of colonizer and colonized, again placing the issues of colonial power and colonial identity in a female arena. In this scenario, Grace Mostyn serves as Seeta’s teacher, and dutifully helps Seeta learn to read Shakespeare, Milton, and Bunyan. The “education” Seeta undergoes, however, simply serves the purpose of Westernizing her, and eventually her own beliefs and cultural values are replaced by those of the British. Seeta puts it best when she confides in Grace Mostyn about her growing love of English culture: “‘How little do we know of you English,’ she said to me yesterday, ‘how little of your faith, or your books, teeming with glorious thoughts, and the fresh stores of knowledge that are ever opening to you. While for us—no one writes now; no one thinks; we are as the dead, with those
whose very language is dead too.’’ Clearly, Seeta has internalized the ideology of the
dominant discourse, and now believes her own culture to be lacking while British culture
lays claim to “fresh stores of knowledge.” By Westernizing Seeta through the process of
education, Taylor’s novel attempts to create a comfortable space for Seeta as Cyril’s
wife; however, no such space exists, and Seeta’s education only serves the purpose of
making her into another version of Grace Mostyn: “In truth, Seeta was growing out of old
ways and perceptions very rapidly. Grace Mostyn had taken this strange girl to her heart,
and was making her more and more like herself” (319).

However admirable Taylor’s attempt to reconcile cultural differences might be,
the novel works itself into a quandary from which it cannot escape, since Seeta inevitably
cannot transcend her own culture or the color of her skin. When Cyril Brandon first meets
Grace Mostyn, the narrative voice reminds readers that Grace possesses an attribute that
Seeta does not and cannot ever attain: “It is not easy to describe this girl, whose fresh,
innocent features beamed with sensibility and grace. She was very fair, and the pure
English colour was as fresh as ever; that gentle mingling of the most delicate carnations
with white which no women’s complexions but those of England can boast of” (170). As
this passage suggests with the repeated references to whiteness, regardless of Seeta’s
literacy and beauty Grace Mostyn possesses something that remains an impossibility for
Seeta: Englishness. To be sure, Grace’s Western values, education, and accomplishments
allow her to be a supportive and dutiful wife within the confines of English culture;
Grace can sing Italian duets with her husband, entertain his friends, and provide
stimulating conversation about literature and culture. While Cyril’s marriage to Seeta
transgress English boundaries, Miss Mostyn is a culturally acceptable match for him. At this point it is as if the novel has introduced Seeta’s British equivalent, minus Seeta’s transgressive tendencies, which only foregrounds the impossibility of this interracial marriage and once again throws Seeta’s position into question. Grace Mostyn exists as a contained and safe version of Seeta; although she is beautiful, full of accomplishments, and the proper knowledge of a British lady, she operates within the confines of British culture and gender codes.

The Performance of Transgression (and Transvestitism) in Seeta

What is interesting about Taylor’s critique of British women, aside from the fact that neither Brantlinger or Kapila discuss it, is that it allows Taylor to place the negative attributes of racism and cultural apathy onto the women in the novel. This transference takes the focus off of the behavior of the British male characters, whose positive attributes eventually desconstruct themselves as the novel progresses. Throughout Taylor’s novel, Cyril Brandon, for instance, is presented as a self-sacrificing, culture-loving man of the people who has left his aristocratic family and given up an opportunity “to take his chance at the Bar, in the army, or even in the church” in order to join the Indian Civil Service. Because Cyril descends from “an ancient family…possessed of considerable estates,” the novel suggests that he has many paths (and monetary assistance) available to him; however, he chooses to serve in India because “its history and people, had always fascinated him” (67). Once in India, Cyril proves to be just as “Honourable” as his title: he “studied hard at Haileybury, carried off repeated prizes in
Sanscrit, of which he was very fond, and in Persian, law, and other branches of the college course.” But the narrator is quick to point out that even though his family connections may have helped him succeed, “his strong talent” and his “pleasant cheerful manner and presence” would have soon won him a good position” (68). After serving in India for six years, Cyril becomes “even more than popular” because of his “ready accessibility, even to the most humble,” and “his evident desire for the improvement and advancement of all classes.” Cyril serves as a shining example of imperial power at its best—he has native friends of all classes and can communicate well with the natives in his province: “He had perfectly acquired the common vernacular dialect of his province, and spoke it almost as one of the people” (69). Apart from the novel’s initial description of Cyril, the narrator takes occasion to praise Cyril Brandon’s character and his methods of administration:

I wish, I wish heartily, that there were more men like Cyril Brandon, though there are still many. Such as he had won the highest honours of Indian administration, had been rulers of millions of the people, had led armies and conquered, and still lived as household words in the thoughts and memories of all creeds and classes. Not such, however, are the men who declare India to be “an infernal hole;” who speak and think contemptuously of its people, who deny them their sympathy and help, who hold them as “niggers” and “black fellow,” as if they were Negro savages, who override them haughtily, who despise and refuse their society, and never even attempt their friendship, and consider themselves
demeaned by any concession to their manners or long-existing customs. Are not these men understood? Surely they are, and despised also! And alas! That only too many such have sprung up in these latter days, who, in their arrogance, deem themselves wiser than those good and great men, who set a mark upon their times which will ever live in the annals of India’s history. (70)

As this passage indicates, Taylor’s novel depicts Cyril Brandon as an administrator set apart from (and above) those who aren’t compassionate to concerns and cultural practices of the Indian natives. However, such administrators do not find their way into Taylor’s novel, and the negative traits spoken about in the above passage are transferred to the novel’s British female characters.17 Despite Cyril’s love of India and the Indian people, the overly-heroic reading of Cyril Brandon deconstructs itself by novel’s end; once again, through Cyril’s character, it is made obvious that Taylor’s novel cannot follow through with the proposal of cross-cultural acceptance that it presents as a possibility to readers.

Despite the fact that Taylor’s novel is unable to completely follow through with the model of cultural acceptance it initially presents to readers, it nevertheless remains unique because it entertains such ideas. And although Cyril Brandon begins and ends as a man of tradition who upholds the mores of British society—first by playing the role of

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17 Such a transference was not made in England after the Mutiny. Disraeli, among others, spoke out against the administration in India and, in a speech given before Parliament, claimed that the “mutineers of the Bengal army were not so much the avengers of professional grievance as the exponents of general discontent.” According to Edward Thompson, Disraeli believed that “the old principle of our rule had been to respect nationality; but the Government of India of late years had alienated or alarmed almost every influential class” (13). Thompson discusses Disraeli’s thoughts about the Mutiny in The Other Side of the Medal, first published in 1925, which seeks to expose the British atrocities committed against the Indians after the Mutiny.
benevolent imperialist and finally by marrying a proper British lady—he transgresses those boundaries in between. Like Cyril Brandon, Seeta also transgresses cultural boundaries. Unlike other novels of the time where the female Other exists as a means to an end—to provide conflict that can eventually be removed, clearing a path for the British hero and heroine to marry\textsuperscript{18}--Seeta gains a high level of literacy, testifies against and helps capture the man who murders her husband, and challenges social conventions of India and Britain alike. Even though Seeta’s death is foreshadowed early in the text—whether Seeta reads the words of the great Indian religious leaders, the Bible, or even Shakespeare, she always returns to Savitri, an Indian heroine who follows her husband into death by sati—she doesn’t expire without first crossing and challenging some important social boundaries. Taylor’s novel continually creates situations where Seeta is able to transgress gender, social, and cultural roles of both Indian and British cultures, since there is clearly not a comfortable space for her in either camp. In each instance, Seeta transforms herself through cross-dressing (and cross-cultural dressing) in order to perform roles she is not usually permitted to perform. By transforming herself into different “characters” and performing different roles, Seeta invites readers to consider the “scriptedness” and malleability of such roles in the first place.

To be sure, the idea of breaking social convention through cross-dressing is not a new one. Anne McClintock, author of \textit{Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest}, has studied instances of cross-dressing in Victorian culture-- in particular the ways cross-dressing served to challenge gender, social, racial, and class

\textsuperscript{18} Gayatri Spivak argues that Bertha Mason serves such a purpose in \textit{Jane Eyre}, which like \textit{Seeta}, falls under the Romance of Empire genre. Spivak’s article is entitled “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism.”
constrictions. McClintock focuses on two real-life Victorian figures: Arthur Munby, a barrister, and Hannah Cullwick, a servant, whose secret fetishistic love affair and eventual marriage serve as the focus of her discussion. McClintock identifies Cullwick as “a lifelong cross-dresser” whose fetishism was organized around “the iconography of empire—chains, blacking, dirt, clothes, boots, buckets, water and brushes” (174). Throughout Cullwick’s relationship with Munby, he photographed her cross-dressing as “an upper-class lady; as a rural maiden, a man, an angel, a male slave, and ‘almost nude’ and blackened from head to foot as a male chimneysweep” (136). Although some scholars have concluded that Cullwick was nothing more than a puppet for Munby’s whims, McClintock claims that Cullwick, through her cross-dressing, was able to control her own representation in an age where that kind of agency was often not afforded to women, especially those who were disenfranchised by class, gender, or race.

McClintock’s work provides a useful lens through which to read Seeta, both as a work and as a character, since McClintock establishes a link between cross-dressing, a sub-category of S/M, conventions of power, and imperialism. McClintock defines cross-dressing as “the theatrical organization of social risk” (148), and argues that both cross-dressing and voyeurism allow participants to play the roles of the operating power structures in order to disrupt them by revealing their inherent artificiality:

Hence the paradox of S/M. On the one hand, S/M parades a slavish obedience to conventions of power. In its reverence to formal ritual, it is the most ceremonial and decorous of practices. S/M is high theater: ‘beautifully suited to symbolism.’ As theater, S/M borrows its décor,
props and costumery…and its scenes (bedrooms, kitchens, dungeons, convents, prisons, empire) from the everyday cultures of power. At the same time, with its exaggerated emphasis on costumery, script and scene, S/M reveals that social order is unnatural, scripted and invented.

(McClintock 143)

As this passage suggests, the best backdrops for S/M are cites of power, specifically empire. This makes the instances of cross-dressing in Taylor’s novel difficult to ignore, given the imperial setting of Taylor’s novel as well as the time in which it takes place—the ominous year of 1857, when imperial politics between India and Britain had reached a breaking point. 19 It is also significant that Cyril Brandon and Seeta are the only ones who participate in acts of cross-dressing and voyeurism throughout the novel, since they are the ones whose performance of “everyday cultures of power” serves the purpose of undercutting and thereby transgressing society’s views of culture and marriage. It is also important to point out that while McClintock’s work is useful as a lens through which to read Taylor’s novel, Seeta, in the end, reaffirms social roles, even though it hints at the “scriptedness” and “artificiality” of such roles through several episodes of cross-dressing.

As McClintock suggests, one of the interesting aspects of cross-dressing is its demonstration that social roles and “costumery” are interconnected. In other words, the roles assigned to us in society have certain costumes assigned to them, and cross-dressing focuses on costumery to expose the “scriptedness” of these social roles, even though the

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19 As recorded in Taylor’s novel as well as historical accounts, 1857 was an ominous year because it marked the hundred-year anniversary of British rule in India, which began after Lord Clive defeated the Indians in the Battle of Plassey in 1757. After the initial battle was won, Indians predicted that English rule would last only one hundred years, and that they would reclaim power through a bloody battle.
novel ultimately cannot carry through with its dismantling of such artificial social roles. Throughout the novel, Seeta recognizes the importance of clothes in creating social roles. For instance, she realizes that the role of military personnel is connected with gender-specific attire, and when she accompanies Cyril on his military tours, Seeta cross-dresses as a boy. Such instances of cross-dressing are foregrounded by Seeta’s remarks to Cyril on one of many occasions that he prepares to leave her alone for the evening and visit the Mostyns. Seeta’s very astute observation in reference to Cyril’s clothes show her awareness that costumery and social roles are interconnected and serve the purpose of separating different classes, races, genders, etc.:

“Here I am in real English clothes,” he said merrily; “do you know me, little woman?”

“Oh, I know you,” she cried laughing; “or do I know you? Let me see.” And she got up and looked him all over, and felt the soft gloss of his black surtout. “You have a very pretty scarf round your neck, and beautiful gloves, but I don’t half like you for all that. So long as you have these fine clothes on, I feel as if I dare not touch you, and you belong to your people, and are a very great man; but I don’t know them, and I like the old ones much better, for they are mine.” (164)

What is remarkable about this passage is that Seeta clearly recognizes the scriptedness of social roles. Although she conveys her thoughts in the spirit of play, much like the spirit of play adopted by those who participate in S/M rituals, her meaning comes across clearly: a mere change of clothes can alter a person’s identity. By showing that social
roles are so easily thrown off kilter, Seeta illustrates the fragility of such roles in the first place. As McClintock notes, “S/M presents social power as sanctioned, neither by nature, fate nor God, but by artifice and convention and thus as radically open to historical change” (144). But Seeta’s words also illustrate that even though the roles are scripted and easily altered, they are extremely powerful. As her remarks suggest, a mere change of clothes can create intimacy or distance between a husband and wife.

Seeta not only employs cross-dressing as a means of exposing social conventions, but she also uses voyeurism, which McClintock identifies as another category of S/M, to expose the social rituals and conventions that ultimately separate her from Cyril. After Mrs. Smith starts a rumor that Cyril is in love with and planning to marry Grace Mostyn, Seeta becomes worried and spies on Cyril as he attends one of the Mostyn’s dinner parties. Disguising herself as a servant, Seeta performs social hierarchy in order to show its scriptedness. This section is interesting because Seeta is positioned outside the glass looking in on Cyril performing his role as a proper British gentleman.

“If I could only see them together,” she thought to herself, “I should know all, and then—if it is true—I would go away quietly, though my heart should break. If he is to be happy, let me die.” Then a sudden idea struck her. She knew where the Judge’s drawing room was, for she had seen it often from her garden. Could she not listen and see? Bheemee had gone to sleep, and some of her sarees were hanging up in the bathroom. Hastily divesting herself of her own dress, she put on one of the course garments of her servant, took off her gold anklets, and went out at the cottage-door
into the garden. There was no sound but the steps of the sentry pacing on his beat, and a faint strain of music from Mr. Mostyn’s house….She must see, she must hear, else there could be no peace; and so she went blindly on up the path which led to the house, crouching like a hare behind shrubs at times, till she was near the place she sought….She looked up, raising herself, and could see the room filled with English ladies and gentlemen sitting or standing, and she watched them with a dull, dreamy interest hardly definable. (203)

This passage shows how a position of marginalization, like Lena Weston’s position in the tower, can afford opportunities that are normally unavailable. But this passage also depicts Seeta outside the glass, a position to which she is relegated many times throughout the novel, which foregrounds the fact that although she is willing to break social boundaries, there is ultimately not a space for a woman like Seeta in a British novel. McClintock refers to dinner in Victorian times as “the theater of middle-class consumption and female leisure” (149), a performance of social roles in action. In light of this quote, Seeta’s servant costume symbolizes her dilemma—with the “script” already in place, a script involving Cyril and his middle-class English friends, and especially Grace Mostyn, the only space Seeta can safely occupy is on the outskirts of the stage, waiting in the wings in her servant’s clothes. Ultimately this passage foreshadows Seeta’s death—“If he is to be happy, let me die”—and the eventual marriage of Cyril and Grace.

Despite the novel’s portrayal of Seeta as a heroine, it cannot follow through with the cultural understanding and acceptance it at times promotes. This is evident in the
novel’s description of Seeta’s cross-dressing when she accompanies Cyril on his military duties:

With the military officers, the civilians and their clerks took their regular turns of duty, and never was Seeta absent from her husband’s side. Dressed in her boy’s clothes, she rode her spirited mare gracefully and boldly, and to the admiration of all; and many marveled to see the girl, apparently so jealously guarded before, throw off the restraint habitual to her country women, and follow her husband in a duty which was never perhaps without danger….No matter what the weather was, calm or storm, fair or drenching rain, the active hardy girl never failed, never hesitated when Cyril’s turn came round, to ride with him, and to share whatever might befall. (317-18)

Even though the novel seems to herald Seeta for the manner in which she breaks the boundaries of traditional wife, a close reading of the above passage shows that the novel only reinforces cultural boundaries. As this passage points out, the only reason the British admire Seeta’s unorthodox behavior is because it transgresses Indian gender roles, thus proving them (Indians, Indian social systems) to be insufficient in the first place. And although the novel can allow and even support Seeta when she transgresses the social codes of her own country, this same transgressive behavior makes it impossible for Seeta to remain Cyril Brandon’s wife, especially in an English setting.

Ultimately, even though Cyril and Seeta both strive to create a space for themselves to remain husband and wife, they realize the inevitable. In a conversation
with Mrs. Pratt, a former missionary who befriends Seeta and teaches her English, Seeta realizes the impossibility of living a normal life as Cyril’s wife:

“Faithfully then, and as if I were truly your mother, I will tell you, continued Mrs. Pratt. “By English law and Christian custom, if you had a son as you are, he could not inherit except what was specially given him. He would have no rank and no name; he would, indeed, be illegitimate.”

“But I am married,” she cried, starting up, with her eyes blazing. “Cyril told me I was… .I have not been living in sin, mother. O, do not say that—I should die!”

“No, darling: by the rites of your faith you are Mr. Brandon’s wife, and as such we have taken you to our hearts and love you. But the English law does not recognize that. Your rites are not ours, Seeta.”

“Then if I were married to him by Mr. Pratt,” she gasped through her sobs, which were coming heavily and fast, “should I be truly his wife, by your law and ours?”

“Yes, Seeta, you would; but Mr. Pratt could not marry you to Mr. Brandon while you are a Hindoo.”

“God help me! God help me!” was the girl’s bitter cry, as she threw herself once more on the dear old lady’s breast. “God help me, for I know not what to do!”

This passage illustrates the bi-cultural predicament that the couple faces, as well as the anguish Seeta experiences once she realizes that despite the scriptedness of social codes,
they remain powerful obstacles that cannot be overcome. And despite the fact that Cyril’s friends have accepted Seeta as his wife, English law is unmoved by friendship and circumstance.

**Conclusion**

Even though *Seeta* attempts to break cultural norms, inevitably it works itself into a quandary that cannot be reconciled. Can an Indian woman marry and live happily with a British man? Taylor’s novel suggests a negative answer. Although Cyril and Seeta are happy for a time, there is no way for Taylor to make such huge cultural problems disappear, or even to reconcile them. As a result, Cyril Brandon, who at the beginning of the novel is described as a lover of other cultures, a man to be trusted and a man of his word, begins to undermine Seeta’s acquisition of knowledge. Whereas he was once enamored of Seeta’s passion for learning, he eventually begins “leading her mind gently, and almost imperceptibly, to his own sources of knowledge” (154). And rather than “stimulate the passion for knowledge which he saw was awakening in the girl’s mind,” he eventually chooses to “direct and restrain” her love of learning:

> They were never idle, these two strangely united beings: never passed a heavy hour; and though he might often be weary with the day’s work, his evening companion gave Cyril new energy and life, refreshed him, and amused him more than he could almost realize. If he had not been patient, perhaps her keen and active thought might have wearied him; but his effort was to direct and restrain, rather than stimulate the passion for
knowledge which he saw was awakening in the girl’s mind. “She is mine for her life,” he used to think, “and there is time enough to bring out all these strange graces and mould them into form and exercise. I must be careful not to excite her too much.” (155)

As this passage suggests, Cyril’s culture and equality-loving persona begins to dismantle as the novel progresses. Clearly, Cyril sees his relationship to Seeta as one of potter to clay.

The novel not only depicts a gradual change in Cyril’s attitude toward Seeta, but also a gradual pulling away from transgression toward tradition. As Shuchi Kapili has noted in her discussion of Taylor’s novel, Cyril Brandon is slowly pulled away, both figuratively and literally, from the boundary-breaking Seeta toward the reserved Grace Mostyn:

I am sadly afraid he did not get back [to Seeta] as soon as he could on all occasions. Somehow or another there was always new music to be practiced at the Mostyns, which he could not refuse, and where his welcome seemed to grow warmer every day; and that sweet, fresh face of Grace’s to beam with greater pleasure and intelligence as she selected her favourite pieces and sung to him, now without reserve, and with all the skill and abandon of her great musical talents. I am afraid too, that Seeta’s English lessons were but slightly attended to, and the sail on the lake often altogether missed. (190)
In the above passage, tradition begins to take the place of Cyril’s intrigue with Seeta’s “difference.” When in the company of Grace Mostyn, who possesses an intelligence and love of learning equal to Seeta’s, Cyril enjoys the traditional attributes of Grace herself and his relationship with her: her love of music, the comraderie of old friends, and a relaxing dinner. Interestingly, most of Cyril’s interaction with Grace occurs during dinner parties at the Mostyns—dinners that Hindu law forbids Seeta to attend—which serves as a reminder to readers that although Cyril’s relationship with Seeta is a deep and loving one, the two are separated by forces beyond their control. It is noteworthy in the above passage that Cyril “could not refuse” practicing music with Grace when visiting the Mostyns, which suggests the inevitability of tradition.

Ultimately, there is no space left for Seeta in Taylor’s novel, and she is killed on a military pursuit when she jumps in front of her husband and takes a spear intended for him. But, similar to the structure of the novel itself, Taylor uses Seeta’s death to simultaneously challenge and reaffirm British values. Kapila views Seeta’s death as a reenactment of sati, which she believes echoes the novel’s critique of Indian culture (212). While I agree that the image of a wife going to death for her husband invokes sati, Taylor rethinks sati and puts British practices in questions. If we read Seeta’s death in light of Kapila’s claim, the “abominable heathen customs” become placed not on Indian culture, but on British culture. My contention is confirmed when Seeta, prior to her death, tells Grace Mostyn,

“I feel I was like Juliet once. But I should rather, far rather, be like Imogen. She, you know, went to meet death when her husband sent
Pisanio to kill her, and she would have died in her truth. Ah! Dear Grace, I can never read that scene without tears. She was so true, so tender, so loving, so faithful. There is but one like her, in all our dramas—Savitri, of whom you know. She went into death for her lord, and I—I should not fear death for him.” (320)

Seeta’s internalization and performance of Imogen’s dramatic act of love foreground the novel’s preoccupation with theatricality and culture, but also illustrates that following your husband in death is not only an Eastern philosophy, but a Western one as well. It is also noteworthy that Seeta is dressed as a boy during the scene, which suggests her resistance to both Eastern and Western gender boundaries. This particular instance of cross-dressing seems to serve the purpose of allowing Seeta to resist the power structures in the novel that will not allow her to live as Cyril’s wife.

But even though Seeta’s death suggests a British cultural critique, it ultimately serves the purpose of reaffirming British imperial values. Both figuratively and literally, Seeta’s transgressive behavior is ultimately her undoing, and her death paves the way for Cyril to slide easily into an acceptable marriage with Grace Mostyn. Symbolizing her uncertain role in British India, Seeta dies reciting bits of Sanscrit along with Christian hymns. Instead of a happy ending involving Cyril and Seeta, the “happy” ending features Cyril and his new wife, Grace Mostyn, although they frequently, along with their young daughter, gaze at a picture of Seeta that hangs in Cyril’s study. This study serves as a reminder of Cyril’s days in India—it is full of “Indian trophies of the chase” as well as “Indian arms and hog spears” (441). Apparently Seeta simply becomes just another of
Cyril’s trophies from India. Seeta, who earlier in the novel was described as so learned and so capable, has now simply been relegated to a position behind the glass, so to speak, and replaced by her British counterpart. Arresting Seeta’s image is the only way to contain her, since she breaks so many cultural norms on both the Indian and British sides. Cyril and Grace can gaze upon the picture with a tinge of regret, but can continue to live a happy life in England as husband and wife.

The novel’s ending, complete with the Mutiny’s hero marrying and having children, places it firmly within the tradition of Mutiny novels throughout the period. While Taylor’s novel works toward the idea of liberal improvement (of women and colonial subjects), it nevertheless falls back on tradition in order to provide stability for the empire as a whole. But Taylor’s traditional ending does not completely cancel out the rest of the novel; instead, he uses the Indian Mutiny in order to hint at the shared blame of the uprising through his critique of British culture, and in order to re-imagine the possibilities of cross-cultural connection.
Exposing the Imperial Scaffold: Media Coverage of the Indian Mutiny and The Moonstone’s Eyewitness Account

“Nothing in this world, Betteredge, is probable unless it appeals to our own trumpery experience; and we only believe in a romance when we see it in a newspaper.” – Franklin Blake

The Indian Mutiny of 1857 was heavily covered in Victorian newspapers and was the object of public attention for years after the British regained control over India in 1858. Due to the intriguing and spectacular nature of the uprising, literary accounts of the Mutiny were soon to follow and continued to be written, published, and read by both British and Indians well into the twentieth century. According to Patrick Brantlinger’s “The Well at Cawnpore: Literary Representations of the Indian Mutiny of 1857,” “at least fifty [Mutiny novels] were written before 1900, and at least thirty more before World War II” (199). Surprisingly, although Brantlinger discusses “Mutiny novels” extensively in his chapter, he fails to provide a definition of what constitutes the term, although he focuses heavily on those novels that feature the uprising as either the primary plot or as an important sub-plot. This project, however, expands the genre to include those novels that deal with the uprising on a metaphorical level. In addition, to be considered a Mutiny novel, the text must engage the broader issues of empire—race, gender, and/or class—that the Mutiny foregrounds, and must in some way engage more specific issues (of

For a more complete description of Indian readership of Mutiny novels in the nineteenth century, see India’s Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century. Eds. Stuart Blackburn and Vaudha Dalmia. Bangalore: Orient Longman: 2004. Collins’ work appeared in 11 out of 14 nineteenth-century library collections surveyed in India, which suggests that his work was appealing to an Indian as well as a British readership.
contamination, extermination, oppression, recovery) along with images, figures, or tropes commonly used in Mutiny literature.

Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone* (1868) fits nicely within this broader definition; although Collins’ novel never directly mentions the Mutiny, it focuses on the theft and recovery of an Indian diamond and the inter-workings of race, class and gender. In addition, it uses the tropes of siege, contamination, and British secrets—hiding and exposing British “dirty laundry,” so to speak. As Ian Duncan has noted in “The *Moonstone*, the Victorian Novel, and Imperialist Panic,” “Collins wrote *The Moonstone* in the decade following the Mutiny, when stories of rebel atrocities and bloody British reprisals were still flourishing and an epidemic of insurgency spread from New Zealand to Jamaica” (305). Collins’ inclusion of the three Hindus who abandon caste in order to retrieve the Moonstone, as well as the novel’s opening scene, narrated by a British soldier stationed in India during the storming of Seringapatam, foreground *The Moonstone*’s focus on issues of Mutiny, invasion, and vengeance. Because the novel contains not one, but multiple narrators, it employs a heterogeneity and a layering of voices that makes it ripe for comparison with the newspaper coverage of the uprising, which also displays a multiplicity of perspectives.

Like Collins’ novel, a work of detective fiction where one true conclusion is inevitably reached, albeit through a heterogeneity of voices, the media coverage of the Mutiny attempts to construct Truth through similar means. It is my contention that Collins’ narrative serves as a microcosm of the media coverage as it relates to the Indian Mutiny of 1857. While crime literally infiltrates the Verinder home in Collins’ tale, it
symbolically penetrated thousands of English homes via newspaper reports and eyewitness accounts as early as May of 1857, shortly after the uprising began in the cities of Meerut, Dum Dum, and Barrackpore. In this sense, newspapers such as *The Illustrated London News* and *The Times* became the public’s lifeline to the Mutiny, since they defined the uprising politically, racially, and socially for the Victorian mainstream. The onslaught of newspaper accounts constructed the events in India, as well as Indians themselves, for the British public. Before 1857, although Indians had been coded as the primitive and somewhat mystical Other, they were nonetheless viewed as souls that needed to be and were capable of being rescued and modernized. In addition to the Indians themselves, the 1857 media coverage also constructed the British as heroic victims of the attack, and coded the British recovery of India as justifiable retribution. Characters such as Nana Sahib, who either ordered or allowed the attack at Cawnpore, as well as British military heroes such as Henry Havelock, who reclaimed both Lucknow and Cawnpore from “rebel” forces, emerged not only in the literature of the time but also in the newspaper. The newspaper accounts, therefore, were instrumental not only in reporting events as they happened, but also in constructing the event that came to be known as The Indian Mutiny of 1857.

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21 This is evidenced by literary characters such as St. John Rivers in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, who views his life’s mission as carrying the gospel to a lost India.
22 Although seemingly an oxymoron, the mainstream press did represent their countrymen as both victimized—by an ungrateful India, who should be lucky they weren’t colonized by an even more controlling agent—and heroic for reclaiming the empire. The victimization, however, was largely transferred to British women through the trope of Cawnpore, which I will discuss at length in the next chapter.
23 Albert Pionke’s “Secreting Rebellion: From the Mutiny to the Moonstone” briefly discusses the fictional serials “meant to extol British heroism,” and mentions “The Poorbeah Mutiny” and “The First Bengal European Fusiliers” as examples that ran in *Blackwood’s* from January to July of 1858.
The investigation of Collins’ novel as it relates to the media coverage of the Mutiny is not a new one, but one that has not been thoroughly conducted. Although Albert Pionke’s “Secreting Rebellion: From the Mutiny to the Moonstone” discusses the relationship between Collins’ novel and the media coverage of the uprising, his work is not exhaustive and leaves room for further speculation. Specifically, Pionke discusses how the media coverage presented a “contained” version of the Mutiny to the British public by attributing the event to a few calculating and plotting men, which served the dual purpose of undercutting the Oriental (suggesting Asiatics were not intelligent enough to orchestrate an elaborate rebellion) and reifying British power by suggesting that only a few Indians were disenchanted with British imperial rule. Pionke goes on to analyze how Collins’ novel, written during a period of renewed interest in the Mutiny following the Jamaica insurrection in 1865, in some ways reverses the implications of the initial media coverage. While drawing from Pionke’s work and also showing its flaws, my study will show how, in addition to the “containment strategy,” the media coverage of the Mutiny also illustrates the opposite of containment—a dispersion in which the layers of truth that Mutiny narratives contain make “truth” more difficult to grasp. Echoing Disraill’s 1857 complaint that newspaper accounts of the Mutiny are “various and contradictory,” this chapter focuses on how newspaper reporting was

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24 Although Pionke does not explain why the Jamaica insurrection at Port Morant in 1865 created a renewed interest in the Mutiny, Gautum Chakravarty’s The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination describes the Morant rebellion as one that drew battle lines in the literary community. After 600 emancipated slaves revolted and were killed by Governor Eyre, Charles Darwin and T.E. Huxley demanded that Eyre be tried and prosecuted, while Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and Charles Dickens supported Eyre’s actions. According to Chakravarty, Thomas Carlyle called the former group “a knot of nigger philanthropists.” As Chakravarty notes, the Jamaica rebellion was a specific instance “of protest arising from crises of colonial governance and the applicability of the rule of law” (34).
instrumental in creating the narrative that became the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and the ways in which Collins’ *The Moonstone* reveals truth as slippery and multi-layered. This chapter also explores the ways in which the media coverage of the Mutiny, like Collins’ novel, performs empire in ways that both reaffirm British and undercut British imperial power.

“An Avalanche of Print”: The Dissemination of Newspapers, Sensation, and *The Moonstone*

It is not surprising that Collins’ novel, both in terms of content and structure, bears a striking similarity to the newspaper coverage of the Indian Mutiny. *The Moonstone* was written and published during a period that Don Vann and Rosemary VanArsdel, in their informational and bibliographic work *Periodicals of Queen Victoria’s Empire: An Exploration*, call “the age of the periodical” (3). To be sure, the rise of the periodical changed both the speed and the manner in which Victorians received information. According to James A. Secord, author of *Victorian Sensation*, such inventions as the steam press, machine-made paper, and railway distribution created a growing reading public, an appetite for new and exciting reading material, and “an avalanche of print” (34). Periodical sales skyrocketed during the century; in 1836, “the newspaper tax fell from 4d. to 1d., thereby setting the stage for a 70 percent increase in press circulation over the next seven years” (Secord 33). Indeed, as the number of periodicals grew, so did the public’s appetite for them, and “the circulation of periodicals
and newspapers [became] wider and more influential than that of books in Victorian society” (Van and VanArsdel 3).

A cartoon featured in Secord’s book further foregrounds the growing demand for the newest information; it features an onslaught of Victorians gathered around the newspaper window of the post-office to receive their 6pm edition. The postal workers, towering above the masses, disperse bags of newspapers and toss them into the hungry crowd. As this cartoon illustrates, the Victorian public had a growing appetite for sensational accounts, and newspaper and periodical publications became another avenue through which to feed that appetite, even for those living abroad. Periodicals weren’t just accessible to those living in Britain, but also made their way to the colonies. Even those British who resided in India could partake of the latest information. The *Bengal Gazette*, “the first Western-style journal” in India, was founded in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and six more appeared shortly thereafter (Van and VanArsdel 7). From 1830-50, thirty-eight periodicals circulated in India, most of which were introduced and funded by Christian missionary groups.25

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25 According to Brahma Chandhuri, author of the chapter on India featured in Van and VanArsdel’s work, not only did missionary groups introduce the printing presses, but they also “[introduced] newspapers and periodicals, both in English and in vernacular languages” (178). Such groups caused controversy among British and Indians alike, who believed the missionaries were “dangerous” and would incite rebellion by providing a forum for the dissemination of information. For this very reason, “The East India Company disliked the idea of Christian missionaries entering or settling in India” (178). Once the rebellion erupted, it changed the face of journalism, both in India and in England. After 1857, there was a rise in nationalistic journals, where Indians were able to vent their frustrations with British imperial rule. As Chandhuri notes, Indians realized that the way to effect political change was to take their ideas to England, and such articles written about the Indian cause “led to the formation of the Friends of India and the India Reform Society.” Interestingly, Irish nationalists developed a kinship with Indian nationalists and, in turn, were great supporters of the move toward Indian independence. While some of these periodicals were more mainstream and were focused on gaining emancipation, others were more radical in nature and existed, as Chandhuri notes, to intimidate and undermine English power (180).
Newspapers and periodicals offered Mutiny coverage of all kinds: eyewitness accounts, letters to the editor, reports of parliamentary discussions of the uprising, and panoramic reports listing each city in India and the current status of the rebellion there. Often the coverage seems more theatrical than journalistic; one eyewitness account featured in *The Illustrated London News* concludes as follows: “Thus ended the second act of our drama, and caused us far more discomfiture than the enemy” (July 18th, 1857). As this quote indicates, coverage of the Mutiny was less about objective reporting and more about a performance of empire, one that greatly satisfied the Victorian public’s thirst for sensation. The uprising, after all, had all the trappings of great sensation; in the comfort of their homes, Victorians could read about how army officials set fire to Indian ammunition wagons, engulfing everyone in close proximity, or they could devour personal account of how British civilians escaped the mutineers. The newspaper coverage also drew heavily on such literary tropes as Gothic and melodrama, as Hyungji Park’s work has noted.

Wilkie Collins’ detective novel *The Moonstone* also foregrounds the Victorian public’s appetite for sensation, and credits the newspaper for passing as well as constructing sensational narratives. After Rachel Verinder’s priceless and exquisite diamond has been stolen, everyone within the home becomes suspect, and each character’s behavior becomes the product of public scrutiny. Franklin Blake’s personal debts become cause of his suspicion, Rosanna’s Spearman’s questionable past is placed under the microscope, and even Miss Verinder’s erratic behavior raises eyebrows and causes Sergeant Cuff to suspect Rachel of stealing her own diamond. Although the gossip
of the Verinder house is the means of spreading such personal tales, so is the newspaper. As the characters await the discovery of the stolen gem, Miss Verinder receives a visit from Godfrey Ablewhite, her philanthropic cousin and the man to whom she has become engaged, whose suspicious dealings with the moneylender Septimus Luker have made their way into the London press:

“I am charmed to see you, Godfrey,” she said, addressing him, I grieve to add, in the offhand manner of one young man talking to another. “I wish you had brought Mr. Luker with you. You and he (as long as our present excitement lasts) are the two most interesting men in all London. It’s morbid to say this; it’s unhealthy; it’s all that a well-regulated mind like Miss Clack’s most instinctively shudders at. Never mind that. Tell me the whole of the Northumberland Street story directly. I know the newspapers have left some of it out.” (222)

After Miss Verinder’s request to hear the delicious details of the attack Mr. Ablewhite suffered while in the company of Mr. Luker, she, in the words of tract-toting Druscilla Clack, “actually dragged him across the room to a chair by the window, where the light would fall on his face.” Rachel’s aggressive behavior, and her subsequent command to Mr. Ablewhite—“Come, and sit down. I am brimful of downright questions, and I expect you to be brimful of downright answers” (223)—is interesting not only in terms of Collins’ mystery, but also because it describes the Victorian public’s appetite for the details of sensational accounts. This appetite is represented in *The Moonstone*, and is
evidenced by the salacious media coverage of the Mutiny, which spread through the public via the British press in 1857.

My contention is that media coverage of the Mutiny, however, is not simply the reporting of empire, but the reenacting of empire. Dissecting newspaper reports reveals the layers of what I call imperial scaffolding, or the framework of imperial ideology and rhetorical strategies that helped the British to reclaim power in India and repair the damage the Mutiny caused the British empire. In part, imperial scaffolding creates an empire-friendly narrative of the Indian Mutiny, one that dehumanized the Indians and provided legitimacy for British imperial control. It creates such legitimacy, in part, through what Pionke calls the containment strategy, which attributes the uprising to a few dark and designing individuals in order to de-emphasize the notion of widespread rebellion, to reconfirm British authority, and to re-establish public faith. Above all, the imperial scaffold is constructed through the layering of assumptions about the colonizer, the colonized, and the binary opposition between the two.

According to Pionke, the Mutiny presented a problem for many periodical writers and historians alike, who were faced with the task of reporting the frightening events surrounding the incident, but also of using the necessary rhetoric so as not to shake the public’s faith in the British empire and its power. Many writers of the time also wished to downplay the notion that the Mutiny was a widespread rebellion, since this would indicate general unrest with British occupancy.26 I do not mean to suggest, nor does

26 Although the term mutiny works nicely to strip Indians of political legitimacy, some scholars view the Mutiny as a nationalist war of independence. For such a viewpoint, see Vinayak Savarkar’s The Indian War of Independence, 1857 (Bombay: Phoenix Press, 1947). Savarkar’s work presents the event as one that was planned by Indians of a variety of backgrounds, not just one pre-meditated by Muslims or by disgruntled
Pionke, that the British press was a monolith in the way it reported the Mutiny. *The Illustrated London News*, for instance, critiqued the British government for its failure to heed warnings about the uprising before it happened. Specifically, the *ILN* critiqued the Board of Control for covering up misgovernment and for labeling those who came forward with reports of British wrongdoing as “dismal croakers”: “When the peril is imminent, a dismal croaker, disagreeable as he may be, is a more useful personage in the State than a complacent official whose self-satisfaction is as boundless as his incapacity. Warnings there were in abundance; but there was no one to heed them” (Aug. 8, 1857).

Disraeli’s was another voice of dissension reported in the press, since he believed the uprising was the result of widespread discontent with British rule in India rather than a military uprising. But even though these voices of dissension were reported in British mainstream press, they reflect the exception rather than the rule. Despite the variety of opinions and voices on the matter, my research has uncovered a pattern of reporting the Mutiny that reflects the problem Pionke outlines in his work—the problem of preserving British authority while still highlighting Indian rebellion. Although Disraeli’s dissenting opinions were printed in the mainstream press, they were also dismissed in the press as well. *The Illustrated London News*, for instance, claimed his opinion was given “without sepoy. Savarkar explores the “chain of causes” that led to the 1857 War of Independence, which he dates back to the battle of Plassey when British forces gained control of India. Savarkar also sets the Mutiny within the framework of theatre and performance, and lists several uprisings in the early part of the century that foreground his countrymen’s dissatisfaction with English rule: “Just as in a theatre, before the actual performance, several rehearsals have to be gone through, so in history, before the actual and final attainment of freedom, in order to harmonise the whole performance, several rehearsals in the shape of risings are necessary” (15). Savarkar was imprisoned for eleven years for his political writing. After his arrest, Savarkar’s manuscript was smuggled out of his living quarters, and his work was published in Germany.
warrant or proof of any kind” (Saturday, Aug. 1, 1857). The _ILN_ printed similar claims about Disraeli’s comments again on August 8th.

Pionke claims that the solution to the problem of maintaining order lay in the term _mutiny_, defined as “forcible resistance to constituted authority.” The term _mutiny_, which appeared in British newspapers as a descriptor of the uprising as early as June of 1857,27 highlights the notion of established authority rather than an ongoing, perpetual struggle or contest, which helped newspaper writers to keep public panic at bay while still emphasizing rebellion. In essence, the use of this term allows writers to foreground British authority while simultaneously presenting Indian resistance:

The problem was to acknowledge the presence of rebellious sentiment without allowing that sentiment to become outright rebellion; in other words, to excite public condemnation without simultaneously igniting public fear. The label, “Indian Mutiny,” performs this dual task admirably by casting the rebellion in a specifically colonial frame of reference and implying that those rebelling are doing so in secret and despite their obligations to England….British MPs and periodical writers thus began a practice of what might be called “secreting rebellion,” by which a rhetoric of conspiracy, centered on the figure of the secret society, could be used to represent Indian resistance to British colonial rule. This strategy was overtly nationalistic, pitting faithful British Christians against conspiring foreign heathens in a contest of national pride. (110)

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27 Even though the term mutiny wasn’t applied to the uprising in the press until June, the _Illustrated London News_ reports that letters received from Lahore, dated May 14th, 15th, 16th, describe “evident signs of mutiny at Umballa” (July 11, 1857).
But, as Pionke notes, at the same time English periodicals present the conspiracy theories, they also deconstruct them by presenting Orientals as too backward and unintelligent to carry such a plot to completion. What appears to be faulty reasoning, however, Pionke sees as a sly political move, one that paints most Asiatics as naïve and obedient and only a few as deceptive and malicious. This rhetorical move, which Pionke labels a “containment strategy,” takes the focus off of the magnitude of Indian unrest “by attributing it to a few “deep, designing men” (114). This process of transforming “widespread disaffection into conspiratorial plotting” undercuts “the revolutionary potential of Indian unrest by attributing it to the machinations of malicious individuals” (115).

The major strength of Pionke’s containment strategy is that it highlights the manner in which the British mainstream press attempted to reclaim imperial authority in the aftermath of the revolt. British authority had been challenged and shaken, and the 1857 media coverage reflects the need to reassert authority. Consider the July 18th report in The Illustrated London News, which masks a report of bad news by “containing” the mutiny to the unit where it began and by highlighting Asiatic disorganization:

The news from India is of the gravest character. The revolt has not been suppressed; the mutiny has extended to several regiments which were not

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28 Pionke’s use of the phrase “deep, designing men” dates back to Alexander Duff’s The Indian Rebellion; Its Causes and Results. In a Series of Letters, where Duff, a prominent missionary, uses conspiracy theory in an attempt to reaffirm the benevolence of British rule. Pionke uses Duff’s work to illustrate how conspiracy theories functioned in popular rhetoric to “preserve Asiatic inferiority for the majority of the rebels by eliminating their potential for agency even as it cast...the few in charge as morally inferior to the British because of their propensity for secrecy” (114). Pionke also uses Duff’s work to illustrate how conspiracy theories grew in size and scope from a smaller Calcutta conspiracy to the discovery of many separate, but larger plots to overthrow British rule.
affected at the date of the previous mail; there have been lost to our arms no fewer than 28,000 men, who are either in open rebellion against our authority or have dispersed and returned to their homes; and Delhi, the head-quarters of the rebels, after remaining a month in their possession, is still theirs. *This is one side of the melancholy story.* On the other, we find that the native potentates, with the sole exception of the king of Delhi, who has acted under compulsion, have remained faithful in their allegiance; that the mutiny is confined to the one Presidency where it originated; that the mutineers are not commanded by any one of note or eminence; that they have, in fact, no directing head, no general, no chief, but such as hazard supplies; that the measures of our commanders have been prompt and energetic; that the rebels have accepted battle outside the walls of Delhi, and have been defeated with the loss of twenty-six guns; and that, when the mail left, the remainder of them were shut up in Delhi itself, which had no means of making any prolonged or effective resistance to the British troops who were preparing to assault it. (italics mine)

Although the report begins with grim news—“the mutiny has not been suppressed” and “has extended to several regiments”—it quickly asserts that this is only “one side of the melancholy story.” The report quickly turns to a discussion of the rebels’ lack of centralized authority in order to draw attention away from Britain’s wavering authority. Mentioning that “the mutineers are not commanded by anyone of note of eminence,” and
that they have “no directing general, head, or chief,” the report minimizes the threat of the spreading rebellion and leaves the reading public with the assurance that “the measures of our commanders have been prompt and energetic.” This layering of rhetorical strategies, or imperial scaffolding, serves a specific purpose. As this report suggests to readers, if anything is to be considered out of control, it isn’t British leadership or their response to the attack, but the mutineers and their disorganized rebellion.

But although Pionke’s “containment strategy” provides a lens through which we can view the response to the Mutiny in newspapers and other periodicals, it does not offer a complete means of doing so. For instance, as its name suggests, the “containment strategy” presupposes that newspaper reports were only in the business of containing the Mutiny, which is not the case. Newspaper accounts were not only subtly protecting the empire, but were also inciting panic that led to more violence in India. Hyungji Park, in her article about media coverage of the Mutiny and Dickens’ periodical *All the Year Round*, claims that just as the Rebellion spread, guerrilla-like, around different parts of India, the press’s response matched such lack of regulation. With lines of demarcation difficult to ascertain, panicked rumours abounding, and verification of news hard to achieve, Victorian reporting of the Rebellion took on more of the elements of Gothic horror than of balanced journalism with its frequently sensational and contradictory accounts of rape, mutilation and massacre. (85)
Shortly after the Mutiny erupted, the media implicitly acknowledged its own state of confusion by insisting that even the British government knew little that could be proven about the uprising. The following *Illustrated London News* report, for instance, suggests that although the public, government, and the press were absorbed by recent events in India, and even though Parliament had been holding lengthy meetings to discuss the situation, no progress was being made in terms of determining the “real state of matters”:

At a time when the public mind was engrossed with the affairs of India—when a feverish impatience to learn the intelligence to be brought by the India mail, several days overdue, pervaded all classes of society—it was natural that the House of Commons should take those affairs into consideration. Whenever that assembly can do nothing, it can relieve itself by saying something. And what is the something that it said upon this occasion? What was the value of its opinion? And what light did its deliberations throw upon the causes or the extent of the mutiny? Mr. Disraeli spoke for three hours, and was followed by the President of the Board of Control, by the Chairman of the Directors of the East India Company, by Lord John Russell, and by Lord Palmerston, as well as by several other minor lights of Parliamentary wisdom on both sides of the House; but nothing was elicited, and nothing was proved beyond the one great fact, already more than suspected, that our statesmen know as little of the real state of matters in India as the common herd of members of
Parliament, and that these, in their turn, know as little about them as the great bulk of the public. (Saturday, August 1, 1857)

As this passage suggests, the lack of knowledge about the events in India became a fertile situation for the production of fictions—“Whenever that assembly can do nothing, it can relieve itself by saying something”—and the “feverish impatience” of British citizens awaiting the latest newest about the uprising resembles Victorian audiences waiting for the next installment of a Dickens novel. In response to this “lack of regulation,” and in order to keep fictional tales at a minimum, Lord Canning, the Governor-General of India during the Mutiny, instituted the Press Restriction Act, which limited both the British and Indian media reports in India. 29 As newspaper reports reveal, Canning was himself panicked by the ratio of Indian sepoys to British soldiers, and was also apparently panicked by newspaper reports that might inflame an already dangerous situation. One report from an Indian publication said to have prompted the Press Restriction Act was an

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29 Lord Dalhousie, the former Governor-General in India before Canning was appointed in 1855, did not agree with Canning’s decision to restrict the British press, although he did believe that the Indian press should be censored. Dalhousie’s letters reveal the binary of East/West at work, even in discussions of the media: “The government has got into great disgrace by legislating against the European Press….There was in present circumstances as wide a difference between the European and the native Press as there was between the European and the native troops; and the difference should have been recognized. It is a pity that lord Canning should have thrown away the moral support which he derived from the good word of his countrymen at such a time of difficulty” (383). Dalhousie’s critique would ring hollow, however, to many historians who cite his strict land-tenure policies, specifically his annexation of Oude, as principle reasons for the Mutiny’s outbreak. Basically, Dalhousie is accused of taking Indian land from Indian princes if they did not have an heir, even though it was Hindu custom for them to adopt an heir. For a full discussion of Dalhousie’s mismanagement of India, see Christopher Hibbert’s _The Great Mutiny._ 1978. New York: Penguin, 1982. To read Dalhousie’s letters in their entirety, see _The Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie._ Ed. J.G.A. Baird. London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1910. Laura Peters provides a limited discussion of the Press Restriction Act in India in “‘Double-dyed Traitors and Infernal Villains’: _Illustrated London News, Household Words,_ Charles Dickens and the Indian Rebellion.” Peters discusses how the British press in England reacted to Canning’s restriction, and uses this reaction to support her argument that the British press acted as “an arm of [hegemonic] power” throughout the Mutiny (110). Peters also discusses Dickens’ reliance on newspaper reports for _Household Words,_ especially for “The Perils of Certain English Prisoners,” a short story co-authored by Wilkie Collins in 1857 that was spawned by the events of the Mutiny. To read Peters’ article in its entirety, see _Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century Media._ Eds. David Finkelstein and Douglas M. Peers. New York: St. Martin’s, 2000. 110-134.
offer from the King of Delhi to sepoys of the British army offering a reward to those who
would desert their posts (Peters 112). As Canning recognized, the press, like the
rebellion, was in need of containment.

Clearly, newspapers did not just report the events of the Mutiny, but were
instrumental in creating the event itself. The major flaw of Pionke’s thesis, therefore, is
that it discusses Mutiny coverage only in terms of the reports that attempt to contain the
uprising, when, in fact, many reports actually helped create Mutiny frenzy. My analysis,
by comparison, allows space for both types of media coverage. While there are countless
reports that attempt to diminish and contain the Mutiny’s momentum, there are also those
reports that engage in what I call skeletal reporting, whereby breaking news events only
contain enough information to incite public panic, and underreporting, which
concentrates on Indian rebellion while failing to report British misdeeds. While
recognizing the validity of Pionke’s containment strategy, my contention is that the
media coverage—those reports that contain, those that create frenzy, and those that create
confusion—create British narratives of the Mutiny that reveal dispersion rather than
containment. In essence, the newspaper accounts reveal the multi-layered, contradictory
nature of British Mutiny narratives.

The June 13th issue of *The Illustrated London News* provides another example of
Pionke’s “containment strategy,” and also reveals the limits thereof. This report suggests
the possibility of a Calcutta conspiracy, and mentions the death of Mohammed Youssouf,
a known assassin, to reaffirm the concept of a few “deep, designing men” and the concept
of justice (eventual death) for those who oppose British rule. Far from an accurate report,
but similar to other stories at the time, this entry also essentializes the cause of the Mutiny by citing “greasy cartridges” as the reason for Indian dissatisfaction with British rule. Used in reference to the new Enfield rifles, which needed to be greased with a substance made of cow and pig fat and thus caused those Muslims and Hindus (who bit off the edges before loading them) to commit acts of sacrilege, this report perpetuates the notion of an isolated cause for the Mutiny instead of the myriad of causes now known to be the source of Indian unrest. Such a strategy minimizes the severity of the uprising, since it suggests a single and easily-identifiable cause that can be quickly remedied by stopping the use of the rifles. This strategy keeps public panic at bay, while also restoring British authority. The reference to “greasy cartridges,” because of its religious association, also codes Muslims and Hindus as religious fanatics instead of individuals who may have legitimate concerns about English imperial rule:

A telegraphic dispatch received at Bombay from Meerut states that the 3rd Bengal Cavalry were in open mutiny and that several officers and men had been killed and wounded. It was reported at Calcutta that a correspondence had been discovered in possession of a native officer of

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30 Although the greased cartridges was the most immediate cause of the Mutiny, political and economic factors also played a part in the unrest among the Indian population. Strict land tenure policies, the overturning of an Indian custom forbidding widows to remarry, and the outlawing of cultural practices such as suttee all contributed to the dissatisfaction with British rule. As Brantlinger has noted, Disraeli claimed that “the rise and fall of empires are not affairs of greased cartridges” (200), and attributed the Mutiny to three main causes: “our forcible destruction of native authority; our disturbance of the settlement of property; and thirdly, our tampering with the religion of the people.” Karl Marx also believed that economic exploitation was the root cause of the Mutiny, and accused tax collectors of gaining their money through forcible measures (Brantlinger 202). There is still little agreement, however, about whether sepoys were the only perpetrators of the Mutiny, or if the Mutiny should be considered the first Indian National War of Independence. The British government believed the Mutiny fell into the former category, while, much to the chagrin of the Illustrated London News, Disraeli believed the latter.
the 34th Bengal Infantry, proving the existence of a conspiracy for organizing a general rising of the entire army. The 34th is to be disbanded. Respecting the disturbances at Umballah (of which some report reached us by the last mail) the Madras *Athenceum* of May 8th says:-- The disaffection occasioned by the order to issue the greasy cartridges, or whatever other cause may have led to the feeling, has extended to Umballah. The native troops stationed in that place have burnt down the quarters, and sepoys’ houses. Our authority—the *Delhi Gazette*—adds that, in consequence of these acts, the order to use the greased cartridges has been countermanded pending a reference to the Commander-in-Chief, and that dragoons are patrolling the place, in order to prevent further outbreak. Mohammed Youssouf, a man who some short time back played a considerable political part, and who assassinated the Prince of Heart, has, in his turn, fallen by the hands of the sons of the murdered man. General Ashburnham, with his staff, arrived on the 4th ult. at Bombay, and left for China a few days after.

Clearly, the elements of Pionke’s containment strategy are evident in the above report. The reference to Youssouf reaffirms the dangerous, impetuous nature of the Indians, while the mention of “dragoons…patrolling the place” reifies British authority. The report also attempts to “contain” the uprising by citing the greased cartridges as the causes without specifically naming other potential causes for the rebellion (“or whatever cause may have led to the feeling”). Beyond the “containment strategy,” however, the
above report also illustrates the manner in which bits of news from one periodical are reprinted in other periodicals. The source for the report reprinted above, for instance, is another source: *The Delhi Gazette*. The quick dissemination of information, therefore, often brings with it layers of narrative, which often leads to inaccuracy.

The quick dissemination of information also led to skeletal reporting, which actually created public panic instead of keeping it at bay. The following report, part of a small international section of the newspaper that listed blurbs of information about various countries, still contains a narrative in keeping with Poinke’s strategy, a narrative where the British are afraid, but courageous in the face of danger, and one where the mutineers are wily, but eventually receive due payback, even if “punished by some Punjabees on the side of the road,” for their wrongdoing. But in addition, what is not reported is largely responsible for shaping public understanding of the Mutiny; such brief and cryptic reporting—short reports of burned bungalows and open Mutiny without cause and effect—led British troops, as well as those British on the home front, to panic, often unnecessarily. Indeed, even members of parliament took notice of the confusing nature of the reports; the July 18th issue of *The Illustrated London News* speaks of Disraeli’s discontent with the “various and contradictory” reports from India, as well as his call to “the Government to relieve public anxiety by some authentic information on the subject” (italics mine). The following excerpt is another example of skeletal reporting:

> Letters have been received from Lahore, dated 14th, 15th, and 16th May. They represent the British at that station as being in a state of great excitement and anxiety. The troops were paraded on the 13th; the sepoys
were ordered to pile their arms, the cavalry to throw their swords on the
ground and march to the rear; and, to the “astonishment and satisfaction of
all the English,” they obeyed. Their communication with the provinces
beyond Umballa was cut off. Three hundred of the sepoys got off to
Feruzepore; but they are said to have been punished by some Punjabees on
the road. At Ferozapore the 10\textsuperscript{th} Light Cavalry stuck to the British; the
72\textsuperscript{nd} Native Infantry burned nine bungalows and a church; but all the
Europeans were safe. The same letters mention that “there were evident
signs of \textit{mutiny} at Umballa,” though “all was quiet” at a later date. [July
11\textsuperscript{th}, 1857, italics mine]

Although the above report from Lahore was issued three months before the official
mutiny took place there on July 30\textsuperscript{th}, it is still indicative of the skeletal reporting and
panicked state of the British press. Edward Thompson fills in the gaps of such reports in
his 1925 groundbreaking reexamination of the Mutiny, \textit{The Other Side of the Medal}.
Thompson’s work specifically exposes the British atrocities that went unreported in the
aftermath of the uprising, and he uses Victorian accounts from armed officials to do so.
According to Thompson, what happened at Lahore is just one example of British panic
run amok. After the Mutiny had already begun in several other cities, “the 3800 Indian
troops at Lahore were disarmed as a precautionary measure” and heavily guarded by
British troops and Sikhs\textsuperscript{31} for a period of three months. On July 30\textsuperscript{th}, a severe dust-storm

\textsuperscript{31} Sikhs were deemed loyal friends of the English, while their Hindu and Muslim counterparts were
considered responsible for the uprising. Muslims were considered primarily responsible for the Mutiny;
however, it was later proven that the uprising was not restricted to one religion. The reason the Sikhs were
erupted, and the troops began to panic because of the storm. This alarmed British troops, and when one Indian fanatic seized a sword and ran from his hut, "bawling out to his comrades to rise up and kill the Feringhees" and then murdering an armed official, the sepoys fled and were pursued by the British. Even though just one sepoy rose up against British authority, the entire brigade was eventually slaughtered. Although the British press labeled the events at Lahore as another instance of mutiny, Thompson claims it was more an instance of British as well as Indian troops feeding off of the frenzy the initial uprisings had already created (28). News reports such as the one reprinted above played a part in creating a Mutiny frenzy and spawning retributive attacks. They also reflect that the media coverage of the Mutiny did more than contain the events; it played a part in dispersing the event itself. The distinction between containment and dispersion is an important one. To disperse, or “to break up and scatter in all directions,” illustrates the fractured, chaotic nature of the Mutiny narrative instead of the seamless narrative of East versus West that Pionke’s containment theory presents (“Disperse”). Although the British narrative of the Indian Mutiny masquerades as a seamless one of East versus West, a closer look at the media coverage of the event demonstrates a fissure in this “seamless” imperial narrative.

considered “true to their salt” is because they had previously been at war with the Muslims and Hindus, and because Sikhs were outnumbered by them.

32 Frederick Cooper, the Deputy-Commissioner who pursued the Lahore sepoys after they fled, wrote a book afterward detailing the events as they unfolded. Thompson suspects that Cooper recorded his experiences in the hopes of becoming famous, although his exploits paint him more as a sadistic and vengeful man killing in the name of Christianity. Not only did Cooper pursue the sepoys down the river, but he deceived the sepoys into believing that he intended to give them a fair trial. Once pulled from the river, he held them for several days before executing them. Just to be safe, he also ordered the execution of his Musselman troopers, “whose loyalty might not stand the strain of what he intended to do” (30). Cooper ends his book with the following quotation: “To those fond of reading signs, we would point to the solitary golden cross still gleaming aloft on the summit of the Christian church in Delhi, whole and untouched; though the ball on which it rests is riddled with shots deliberately fired by the infidel populace. The cross symbolically triumphant over a shattered globe!” (qtd. in Thompson 31).
Multi-layering, Imperial Scaffolding and Gabriel Betteredge

Collins, too, suggests with his narrative structure that truth is multi-layered. The eyewitness accounts in his novel both impede and aid the detectives as they search for the truth. Although many studies have been done concerning the Mutiny’s influence on *The Moonstone*, most notably Pionke’s study, scholars have tended to shortchange the narrative structure of the novel as it relates to the media coverage of the Mutiny. Pionke’s work, while it does heavily address coverage of the Mutiny in Victorians newspapers, magazines, and journals, makes no parallels between the periodicals and the narrative structure of Collins’ novel. But both Collins and the Victorian media use eyewitness accounts and rely on a multitude of voices to arrive at some sense of the “truth.” As do the reports and eye-witness accounts in Victorian newspapers, Collins’ novel relies on the voices of everyday people to piece together the narrative he creates. In his introduction to the novel, Frederick Karl writes:

*The Moonstone*’s text is made up of commentary by those who are usually in secondary positions in Victorian fiction or else relegated to completely marginal roles: the butler or manservant, the bedroom maid, the impecunious maiden aunt, and others of that rank. Even Dickens shunted them aside. Yet in *The Moonstone*, the so-called underclass comes to dominate, so that its voices are essential—are, in fact, the novel. (1)

Indeed, the narrative voices of the “underclass,” or the newspaper class, such as Gabriel Betteredge, the head servant in the Verinder home, Rosanna Spearman, the bedroom
maid and former criminal, and Ezra Jennings, the mysterious Eastern medical assistant, all contribute greatly to the novel’s entertainment value. But more importantly, they reveal an interesting link between Collins’ novel and the media’s coverage of the Mutiny—both use individual eyewitness accounts to piece together a unified sense of “reality” in the aftermath of a crime. Just as the media coverage is fragmented, confusing, and often erroneous, *The Moonstone* demonstrates through its narrative structure the difficulty in piecing together a story through the differing perceptions of its narrators. Through this heterogeneity, the novel continually calls the issues of memory, perception, and truth into question and challenges their reliability, especially since the novel’s thief has no memory of having taken the diamond.

Far from a seamless narrative, *The Moonstone* is more accurately an entertaining, but convoluted group of narratives created with the aim of providing “clarity” in the wake of a crime. The novel opens with a letter from John Herncastle’s cousin, who has refused to associate with John because of his questionable behavior while the two were engaged in military service in India. After relaying the legend of the Yellow Diamond, well known among the soldiers, narrator Herncastle describes his cousin’s growing greed and insistence that he would some day gain possession of the diamond. During the storming of Seringapatam in 1799, John Herncastle got his chance and obtained the Diamond, known as the Moonstone, through violent means; as his cousin entered the Palace during the storming, he found John wielding a bloody knife and standing over a dead Indian. Now he writes to his family to explain why he has “refuse[d] the right hand of friendship to [his] cousin,” which he feels his family has misinterpreted as impropriety. As he
begins his narrative, he insists upon its accuracy and reliability: “And I declare, on my word of honour, that what I am now about to write is, strictly and literally, the truth” (25). With the issues of accuracy, reliability, and truth at the forefront, the novel then shifts to an account from Gabriel Betteredge, the trusty head servant in the Verinder household.

Collins’ novel uses a similar form as Victorian periodicals to analyze and discuss the Mutiny; *The Moonstone*, similar to newspaper accounts, employs imperial scaffolding, or the layering and building of one tale upon the other to create momentum and eventually to construct an event, the guilty, and the innocent. The narrative of Gabriel Betteredge reminds readers of the layers of truth in a tale, the socially constructed nature of writing, and the double plot of the sensation novel—the avoidance of scandal alongside the production of scandal. I use the term *socially constructed* here to counter the notion of narrative as Truth, and as a means to identify the narrative as collaborative, but also ideologically charged. Betteredge, for instance, does not begin his story by his own choosing. Instead, he puts pen to paper at the request of Franklin Blake, Lady Verinder’s nephew, who asks Betteredge to create an accurate record of the events at the request of Mr. Bruff, the family lawyer who believes “the whole story ought, in the interests of truth, to be placed on record in writing—and the sooner the better” (33). But much like the media coverage of the Mutiny, the urgency to recreate events and commit them to paper is not a neutral one, but one submerged in the interest of reconfirming the good name of the British, here symbolized by the Verinder family. Blake’s insistence that Betteredge should recount the story of the missing diamond has less to do with the
interest of truth and more to do with protecting his mistress and her family, whose name
has suddenly been placed under the microscope:

the characters of innocent people have suffered under suspicion already—
as you know. The memories of innocent people may suffer, hereafter, for
want of a record of the facts to which those who come after us can appeal.
There can be no doubt that this strange family story of ours ought to be
told. And I think, Betteredge, Mr. Bruff and I together have hit on the right
way of telling it. (33)

Similar to the newspaper coverage of the Mutiny, the recounting of events in Collins’
new novel serves the purpose of re-establishing the central authority in question, and for
restoring the Verinder name, not just for those who will immediately read the account,
but for those “who come after us.” More importantly, clearing the Verinder name isn’t
just a matter of presenting the facts; the story, as Franklin Blake indicates, must be told in
“the right way,” which he and the family attorney explain to Betteredge before he begins
drafting his narrative. And even though Blake and Bruff entrust the drafting of the
narrative to Betteredge, he is not simply relaying the events as he remembers them.
Instead, Blake and Bruff help guide and direct Betteredge’s story before he even begins
to write it. Betteredge’s narrative, therefore, reminds readers that the eyewitness account,
one of the most popular means of covering the Mutiny in the newspaper, does not exist in
a vacuum, but is socially situated and socially constructed.

Betteredge’s narrative also serves as a reminder that, even with the best
intentions, eyewitness accounts are planned and sculpted by design, and that they are
penned by fallible human beings. Betteredge’s fallibility as a narrator becomes apparent as he begins his tale, since he is often sidetracked by his own interests and strays from the task at hand. Even before he begins the story of how the diamond came into Miss Verinder’s possession, he digresses by discussing his own background, his marriage, and how he came into his lady’s service. More importantly, Betteredge is not alone as he drafts his story; instead, his daughter Penelope’s curious eye also governs the narrative. When Betteredge becomes sidetracked, his daughter intervenes—she tells him he has been telling the story of himself instead of the story of the diamond—and then gives her advice about how the story should be told. As Betteredge concedes, “The question of how I am to start the story properly I have tried to settle in two ways. First, by scratching my head, which led to nothing. Second, by consulting my daughter Penelope, which has resulted in an entirely new idea” (39). Penelope’s interruptions and tweaking of her father’s story echo the socially constructed nature of the Mutiny media coverage. While social construction manifests itself in Collins’ novel through Betteredge’s collaboratively-written narrative, it manifests itself in the media coverage through the imperial ideology that newspaper reports and eyewitness accounts were built upon. Collins’ multi-voiced novel, similar to the multi-layered newspaper reports, takes readers on a journey—an attempt to find Truth amidst confusion, inaccuracy, and misunderstanding.

Like the newspapers of the late nineteenth century, *The Moonstone* is also built upon imperial ideology, symbolized by Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, which chronicles the
lead character’s experiences on a deserted island. Indeed, Collins’ inclusion of Defoe’s novel is not without design; Defoe’s text exemplifies the glorification of imperialism as Crusoe conquers his surroundings, dominates a native, and heralds himself superior to Friday, the “savage.” Collins’ uses Defoe’s text as an example of how imperialist ideology filters into the writing of history, and the extent to which writers of history cannot operate apart from imperialist attitudes. As Betteredge begins to write the story of the diamond, he makes reference to Robinson Crusoe and the impact the novel has had on various aspects of his life:

    You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as Robinson Crusoe never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years—generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco—and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad—Robinson Crusoe. When I want advice—Robinson Crusoe. In past times, when my wife plagued me; in present times, when I have had a drop too much—Robinson Crusoe. (34)

What may at first seem like a caveat is actually a central theme in Collins’ novel—imperial ideology, although seemingly operating implicitly in The Moonstone with its

33 Lillian Nayder has extensively examined the role of Defoe’s text as it operates in Collins’ novel. Nayder echoes my claim that Collins “attacks British imperialism in The Moonstone” and she also argues that Collins uses Robinson Crusoe in order to do so. Specifically and effectively, Nayder claims that Collins refigures Defoe’s novel by casting the three Hindus as Crusoe, since all are patrons in a strange land. She further contends that Collins casts Betteredge as both Crusoe and Friday, since Betteredge is both an imperial-loving Englishman, but also a working-class servant. This recasting of characters, according to Nayder, allows Collins to blur the distinction between civilized and uncivilized, which disrupts imperialist ideology in his novel. To read Nayder’s article in its entirety, see “Robinson Crusoe and Friday in Victorian Britam: ‘Discipline,’ ‘Dialogue,’ and Collins’s Critique of Empire in The Moonstone.” Dickens Studies Annual 21 (1992): 213-31.
occasional references to the three Hindus and the brief opening scene in India, is actually a guiding force in the novel and in the novel’s characters. Betteredge, the epitome of the imperialist subject, is no more capable of separating himself from the story of Robinson Crusoe and its imperialist ideology than the three Hindus are capable of returning to India without having retrieved the diamond. To be sure, it is no accident that Betteredge’s references to Robinson Crusoe appear in places where he attempts to write the narrative of the diamond. Such constant intrusions of imperial thought remind readers of the social mores that filter into a tale. By exposing the imperial assumptions on which Betteredge’s narrative will most certainly be based, Collins undermines their power. In other words, to make the implicit ideology more explicit is a subversive move.

“Sacred Regard for Truth”: Collins’ Suspicion of the Eyewitness Account

Collins’ focus on and examination of imperialism doesn’t end with Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Throughout his novel, as the Moonstone leads the Verinder family on a quest to expose the person guilty of the crime, it also exposes the flaws in imperial assumptions and ideology. One governing principle of imperialism is the assumption that truth is attainable and fixed, and that truth resides in the heart and mind of the Westerner. This assumption is evident in the media coverage of the Mutiny that pervaded the papers in 1857. Consider a July 18th report from *The Illustrated London News*, which labels the slightest disagreement with British rule “evil” and calls for swift and firm retribution against the mutineers:
There must be no smouldering discontent left unnoticed and unsuspected in the minds of the native soldiery to break forth a second time. What the Sword of Might has gained, the Sword of Right must preserve. If Today be the day of retribution on those who have done evil, To-morrow must be the day of justice to the whole population of India. That there has been injustice is painfully evident from the very fact of a widely-spread insurrection without a chief to guide it. The spontaneity of the combustion shows the phosphoric rottenness that must have produced it.

This passage suggests the belief in the inherent “rottenness” of rebel sepoys and the inherent purity and truth—the “Sword of Right”—of British imperial rule. It also references the civilizing mission of imperialism as a benevolent force; suppressing the rebellion will not just be productive for the colonizer, but also for the colonized. Punishing the mutineers can only lead to “the day of justice to the whole population of India.” Above all, this passage represents one layer of the imperial scaffolding—that Truth resides within the Westerner and must be delivered to unknowing Indians—operating in British India and expressed in the media coverage of the Mutiny.

Another layer of imperial scaffolding is the belief in the binary opposition of colonizer and colonized. This assumption is heavily represented in the newspaper coverage of the Mutiny, as the British are depicted as victimized heroes while the Indians are described as evil perpetrators. One report relays the sad story “of poor young Cornet Raleigh, of the 7th Cavalry, who had only joined the regiment a day or two before, and who, being too unwell to ride, was left behind when the regiment was ordered to
cantonments.” When reinforcements arrived, they found him “lying on his face with the back of his skull blown away, so that his death must have been instantaneous.” Another report describes Lieutenant Hardinge’s narrow escape from death as he took a bayonet through the wrist and chest, but “distinguished himself greatly” by shooting his assailant. The story of Lieutenant Grant also shows up in newspaper reports. After being wounded by a mutineer, a sepoy from Grant’s own regiment alerted the rebels to his whereabouts. Grant was then “bayoneted and brutally mutilated” (Illustrated London News, Aug. 8). No stories served to widen the divide between British and Indian more than those of mutilated British women. In the July 18th edition of the Illustrated London News, one correspondent relays the account of one young lady at Delhi, who was captured, stripped naked, fastened to a tree, and “hacked to pieces with knives.” Such newspaper accounts were numerous in the press and reconfirmed the demarcation between British and Indian. While the British were depicted as heroes and victims, Indians were regarded as racially inferior barbarians. Laura Peters quotes a report from the Illustrated London News that describes Delhi as “a city steeped in…the revolting feculence of Eastern debauchery, and ever the rally-point of mischievous cabals or dangerous intrigues” (116). The assumption of binary opposition between races that paved the way for the imperial enterprise also allowed the British to justify the violent and, as some historians argue, inhumane recapturing of the Indian cities that rebelled.34

34 In order to regain authority in India, rebels, while still alive, were blown from the mouths of canons. Edward Thompson speaks of the bits of the flesh that rained down upon those who watched the spectacle. Laura Peters discusses the press coverage of capital punishment used during the rebellion. Specifically, Peters mentions an article printed in Household Words entitled “Blown Away!”, which listed and described different forms of capital punishment and their cultural origin. (Blowing men from the mouths of canons, according to Household Words, did not originate with the British, but was an ancient Hindustani custom.)
Collins’ novel is particularly interesting in light of imperial assumptions about truth and assigned roles of British and Indian. In order to interrogate truth and its reliability, Collins utilizes the eyewitness account, a genre that was heavily employed in the coverage of the Mutiny. As each character construes (and misconstrues) the events surrounding the stolen diamond, it is clear that one’s perspective and personal investment clouds ones point of view. By challenging the authority of the eyewitness account, Collins also draws into question assumptions about British authority and the validity of imperial ideology. In other words, Collins’ novel dismantles the imperial scaffold one layer at a time, beginning with the eyewitness account.

As I described earlier, Collins begins his novel with an eyewitness account of the 1799 Storming of Seringapatam in India, written by the cousin of John Herncastle, who is accused of killing three Indians in order to obtain the Moonstone. The fifty-eight year difference between this uprising and the Indian Mutiny affords Collins the distance to explore and challenge how the event was constructed, and to interrogate the British themselves. While most eyewitness accounts of the Mutiny depict the British as either heroic or as victims of Indian cruelty, the opening of Collins’ novel reverses the roles
of savage and civilized. John Herncastle, the British soldier who becomes intent upon obtaining the precious yellow diamond, is seen wielding a bloody knife as he stands over the dead bodies of several Indian officers:

A cry inside hurried me into a room, which appeared to serve as an armoury. A third Indian, mortally wounded, was sinking at the feet of a man whose back was towards me. The man turned at the instant when I came in, and I saw John Herncastle, with a torch in one hand, and a dagger dripping with blood in the other. A stone, set like a pommel, in the end of the dagger’s handle, flashed in the torchlight, as he turned on me, like a gleam of fire. The dying Indian sank to his knees, pointed to the dagger in Herncastle’s hand, and said, in his native language: “The Moonstone will have its vengeance yet on you and yours!” He spoke those words, and fell dead on the floor. (28)

In the safe setting of 1799, Collins places a British soldier in the position of perpetrator and casts the Indian officer as victim, which disrupts the eyewitness account created in the media coverage and in Mutiny texts written shortly after the rebellion. This new eyewitness account interrogates the binary of British hero and Indian villain. But Collins’ treatment of the Mutiny is complicated, and this passage also illustrates the subtle ways that Collins’ text reaffirms British imperialism, specifically the dying Indian’s promise of vengeance, which plays into the mystical stereotype about Indians that pervaded media coverage as well as Mutiny literature. The entire mystery of The Moonstone is built on critique in the papers, those critiques are far overshadowed by reports and accounts that exhibit racist and hegemonic ideology.
this opening scene, which sets the stage for how the diamond is stolen from the Indians and how it finds its way into the Verinder home. The string of narratives that comprises Collins’ novel, therefore, hinges, in the words of Gabriel Betteredge, upon “the authority of an eyewitness” (34). By novel’s end, Collins asks readers to question whether this authority is credible or dubious.

The opening scene notwithstanding, Collins continues to reproduce one of the most popular genres used in the Mutiny’s media coverage—the eyewitness account—and scrutinizes it as problematic and fallible. To be sure, the eyewitness accounts of the Indian Mutiny were numerous and served not only as informational accounts, but as the gateway to the Mutiny’s grim realities. Laura Peters has noted that “Contributions were especially welcome from both soldiers and civilians whose firsthand experience would enable much of what formerly seemed unaccountable in the Mutiny to be made ‘intelligible’ by revealing for the readers ‘the real springs of the machinery of revolt’ (112). Both the press and the public, therefore, depended upon the eyewitness account to provide fundamental insight into the Mutiny’s inner workings, and, like Collins’ novel, relied on various perspectives to achieve this insight. British soldiers, missionaries stationed in India, and women who had narrowly escaped the uprising all provided their stories for the press. Unfortunately, similar to other media coverage of the Mutiny, eyewitness accounts were not always reliable. Jenny Sharpe, for instance, has documented the inaccurate and exaggerated eyewitness accounts surrounding the massacre at Cawnpore. According to such erroneous accounts, British women were raped by Indian men in striking number, but as Sharpe points out, such accounts were disproven
even before the British regained control of India. As evidence, Sharpe cites the author of
one eyewitness account who claimed he witnessed violent attacks on British women at
Cawnpore, even though it was later discovered he had been miles from Cawnpore when
the incidents supposedly took place (35). As this case and others illustrate, eyewitness
accounts are not always accurate.

Collins’ novel continually asks readers to question the eyewitness account and its
reliability. Throughout The Moonstone, the characters misconstrue the events, allow their
passions to misguide their narratives, and ultimately arrive at the wrong conclusions at
every turn. Early in the novel, the mystery seems as if it will be easy to solve; the three
Hindus are immediately arrested, but are later released since they have alibis for the night
of the theft. Sergeant Cuff, an inspector from Scotland Yard, insists that because Rachel’s
room had been painted the day the diamond was stolen and since the paint was smeared
by someone before it dried, the key to the mystery lay in finding the stained nightgown.
Cuff, of course, believes he has solved the crime from the beginning; because he
witnesses Rachel’s erratic behavior, he believes that Rachel staged the theft of the
diamond with the assistance of her maid, Rosanna Spearman. Cuff’s suspicions grow
stronger after he has Rosanna followed and discovers she has purchased material to sew a
new nightgown. Even more incriminating for Rachel and Rosanna, Cuff discovers that
Rosanna has hidden a box in quicksand at the Shivering Sand, which he believes contains
Rosanna’s soiled nightgown.

The great Cuff of Scotland Yard, of course, is mistaken, and the eyewitness
accounts that seemed to support his premature verdict in the case are eventually found to
be true, but misleading. Indeed, Rosanna does purchase the material to make a new
nightgown, but not for herself. Instead, Rosanna makes the new nightgown for Franklin
Blake when she comes to tidy his room the morning after the theft and discovers his
nightgown soiled with the paint from Rachel’s door. Because Rosanna is in love with Mr.
Blake, she decides to take his stained gown and hide it so his “guilt” will not be
discovered. Rosanna’s hasty conclusion of Blake’s guilt and her decision to hide Blake’s
nightgown are the result of her unrequited love for him; she realizes that because she is a
servant, her love for Mr. Blake cannot become a reality and her feelings for him can
never be revealed while she is still living. The events surrounding Rachel, Rosanna, and
Franklin Blake all point to the unreliability of the eyewitness account. What these
characters see is limited and subject to their own interpretation. Furthermore, their
individual interpretations are clouded by their own experience, social position, emotions,
and assumptions. Consider the words of Blake himself, who recognizes the deceiving
nature of the eyewitness account:

In the day that followed, I have only to say that it was the longest day of
my life. Innocent as I knew myself to be, certain as I was that the
abominable imputation which rested on me must sooner or later be cleared
off, there was nevertheless a sense of self-abasement in my mind which
instinctively disinclined me to see any of my friends. We often hear
(almost invariably, however, from superficial observers) that guilt can
look like innocence. I believe it to be infinitely the truer axiom of the two
that innocence can look like guilt. I caused myself to be denied all day, to
Mr. Blake’s comments remind readers of the potential of erroneous eyewitness accounts—those “from superficial observers” who view innocence as guilt. Indeed, assumptions about Franklin Blake abound in Collins’ novel, and even lead readers to question whether he is guilty of stealing his cousin’s diamond. Through the eyewitness accounts, readers learn that Blake has accrued considerable debt, which the sale of the diamond would erase before Blake’s father was able to discover his son’s money mismanagement. Even though Rachel Verinder’s eyewitness account eventually pegs Mr. Blake as the guilty party—she sees him steal the diamond from her bedroom cabinet—it is eventually discovered that he has been framed by the calculating philanthropist Godfrey Ablewhite.

Drusilla Clack’s narrative also places the eyewitness account under suspicion and exposes philanthropy and British benevolence, also part of the imperial scaffold, as exterior facades that mask true character. Clack’s performance of the Western pose—“a Christian Englishwoman anchored firmly on her faith” (232)—eventually deconstructs itself as her self-righteous hypocrisy is revealed. Although the tract-toting Drusilla Clack professes to be a devout Christian servant, her desire for martyrdom is more important to her than her fellow man. When Lady Verinder shares the details of her fatal illness with Miss Clack, Clack self-servingly reacts with joy at the opportunity to prepare “her beloved relative and perishing fellow creature” for the afterlife (232). Instead of offering comfort to Lady Verinder, Clack scurries home to gather and mark religious readings for
Lady Verinder to peruse on her deathbed. On her way home, Clack reveals her hypocrisy and self-righteousness again. Wasting no opportunity to share the gospel with the cab driver, she leaves him a tract, which he receives “with an oath.” In Miss Clack’s own words, “If I had presented a pistol at his head, this abandoned wretch could hardly have exhibited greater consternation” (233). Refusing to give up, Miss Clack tosses another tract in the window of the cab as the driver speeds away. Drusilla Clack is not regarded as a good Christian by the other characters in the novel, but as a hypocritical, self-righteous laughing stock.

Miss Clack’s striving for purity finds its way into her use of language—she prides herself on her journaling skills, especially her ability to truthfully record every detail of life. Her insistence on capturing “truth” is immediate cause for suspicion. The following passage reminds readers of the way truth operates as a layer of the imperial scaffold. Miss Clack identifies her “regard for truth” as “sacred,” which is reminiscent of the imperial assumption that Christianity was the pathway for enlightenment for those who were colonized. In fact, rumors that the British intended to forcibly convert all Indians to Christianity are thought to be a potential cause of the Mutiny. But Collins uses Clack to poke fun of the insistence that one’s Christianity lends perfect credibility to one’s narrative. Indeed, Collins uses Clack as an illustration that even the most careful attention to detail does not necessarily lead to a claim on truth:

Nothing escaped me at the time I was visiting dear Aunt Verinder.

Everything was entered (thanks to my early training) day by day as it happened; and everything down to the smallest particular, shall be told
here. My sacred regard for truth is (thank God) far above my respect for persons. It will be easy for Mr. Blake to suppress what may not prove to be sufficiently flattering in these pages to the person chiefly concerned in them. He has purchased my time; but not even his wealth can purchase my conscience too. (212)

Despite her claim on the truth, Miss Clack’s perception leads her to the wrong conclusions at every turn. Clack continually misinterprets Rachel’s erratic behavior as a sign of guilt, when in fact Rachel’s behavior is brought on by the shock of seeing Franklin Blake, her future husband, sneak into her boudoir and take the Moonstone.

Not only does Clack misjudge Rachel, but she also believes Godfrey Ablewhite, the philanthropist who is ultimately found guilty of stealing the diamond, is a saint. Indeed, Miss Clack’s supposed claim on truth cannot be trusted, nor can her construction of herself as a vessel of loving Christian virtue. Despite her insistence that she regards truth above people, Miss Clack’s fleshly passion for Godfrey Ablewhite inhibits her from being subjective in her narrative:

Overwhelmed by the exquisite triumph of having got him back among us, I let him do what he liked with my hands. I closed my eyes. I felt my head, in an ecstasy of spiritual self-forgetfulness, sinking on his shoulder. In a moment more I should certainly have swooned away in his arms, but for an interruption from the outer world, which brought me to myself again.

(269)
While Clack represents her “ecstasy” as spiritual—she claims she is triumphant that Mr. Ablewhite has returned from his philanthropic travels—the sexual overtones of the above passage belie the fleshly desires she so desperately tries to hide. Collins uses Clack to expose the problems with the British claim on the truth, which is interconnected with missionary Christianity. Although Christian missionaries took up the white man’s burden, so to speak, delivering religious truth to foreign nations of lost souls, Clack’s lack of reliability and her haphazard and somewhat methodological tract toting make a mockery of her faith and the “sacred regard for truth” that goes along with it.

**Giving Voice to the Voiceless: Collins’ Three Hindus and Ezra Jennings**

In a novel that so clearly takes on issues surrounding the Mutiny, the least developed characters, ironically, are the three Indians who show up at the Verinder home on the day Franklin Blake arrives with the Moonstone. The three Hindus remain voiceless throughout the narrative, and all details about them are filtered through the Eurocentric Betteredge and world-traveler Murthwaite. The lack of an Indian perspective in *The Moonstone* mirrors the lack of Indian writing—both literary and periodical—about the Mutiny. Patrick Brantlinger has attributed this to the British suppression of Indian texts, since almost no Indian writing about the Mutiny was published before World War I. The suppression of the Indian perspective is reproduced in Collins’ novel; the three Hindus do
not have authority over their own narrative, since it is constructed for them on British terms.\textsuperscript{36}

This lack of character development, however, is not without design; Collins presents a mystical, mysterious, stereotypical portrait of the Indians as another imperial layer that his novel both undercuts and reconfirms. Although English literature had depicted Indians as backward and in need of spiritual rescue before the Mutiny, they were also viewed as a people that could be redeemed, given the proper English influence. Post-1857, this depiction changed significantly; media coverage gave way to a new portrayal of Indians as cold, calculating, devils who wanted nothing more than the extermination of the English from India.\textsuperscript{37} This portrayal created a distinct difference between Indians and the English; Indians were coded as dark, mystical, illogical, and dangerous, while the English were depicted as fair-skinned, Christian, logical, and pure. A cursory reading of The Moonstone seems to support the familiar East vs. West binary discussed above that had become an important part of British imperialism. The following passage, narrated by

\textsuperscript{36} Recent examinations of Collins’ three Hindus assign them even more agency than my examination allows. Lillian Nayder, for instance, sees Collins’ depiction of the three Hindus as part of the novel’s reversal of the characters in Robinson Crusoe. Nayder believes that Collins recasts the three Hindus as Crusoe himself since they adopt a “native” English boy—whom she likens to Defoe’s Friday—‘rescuing him from a life of poverty and teaching him their prophetic powers.’ According to Nayder, it is through this “switch” of characters in Robinson Crusoe that Collins critiques British society: “It is left to the ostensibly savage Brahmins to remove the ‘hungry, ragged, and forsaken’ child from the wilds of London. In this portrait of Anglo-Indian relations, Collins exposes the savagery of the English class system rather than that of the Brahmins” (222). Also unconvincing is Nayder’s comparison of Defoe’s Friday to Gabriel Betteredge, considering Friday’s lack of voice, confidence, agency, and power. As evidence of the Betteredge-Friday comparison, Nayder cites Betteredge’s working class position in society. But whatever Betteredge’s position in society, his position in the Verinder house (and in Collins’ novel) is a powerful one.

\textsuperscript{37} While the depiction of Indians as cold and devious is dominant after 1857, there are, of course, exceptions to this rule. James Grant’s Frist Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny presents such characters as Safiyah, who rescues the heroine from an Indian zenana where she is held prisoner. Grant’s novel also talks of the many Indian citizens who supported British rule and did not support or join in the uprising.
Gabriel Betteredge, supports the notion of the mystical, superstitious Indian while reconfirming the rationality of Western thought:

On the next morning (the morning of the twenty-sixth) I shoed Mr. Franklin this article of jugglery, and told him what I have already told you. His opinion was, not only that the Indians had been lurking about after the Diamond, but also that they were actually foolish enough to believe in their own magic—meaning thereby the making of signs on a boy’s head, and the pouring of ink into a boy’s hand, and then expecting him to see persons and things beyond the reach of human vision. In our country, as well as in the East, Mr. Franklin informed me, there are people who practise this curious hocus-pocus (without the ink, however); and who call it by a French name, signifying something like brightness of sight.

“Depend upon it,” says Mr. Franklin, “the Indians took it for granted that we should keep the Diamond here; and they brought their clairvoyant boy to show them the way to it, if they succeeded in getting into the house last night.” (73)

This passage foregrounds a clear demarcation between mysticism and rationality. Although Mr. Blake assures Betteredge that hocus-pocus is also practiced “in our country, as well as in the East,” Blake also mentions that the British who practice it “call it by a French name,” which still implies negative foreign influence and infiltration. In addition, Betteredge is always criticizing Blake’s German, French, and Italian sides. The above passages and other like it cannot be considered in isolation, but must be considered
in light of the characters that narrate them. The majority of the details about the Indians are filtered through the *Robinson Crusoe*-obsessed Betteredge, whom Collins’ uses to expose the narrow-minded pitfalls of imperial ideology.

Collins’ three Hindus, however, although they bring with them an air of mystery and danger, transcend the Indian stereotype prevalent in both the periodicals and literature of the time. Inevitably, they turn out to be loyal servants like Betteredge and, in a sense, heroic. Far from Pionke’s “deep, designing men,” the Indians mysteriously pop in and out of Collins’ narrative, imitating jugglers, teaching “hocus pocus” to an English vagrant boy, and creating a sensation throughout the novel. Collins further resists the “deep, designing” Indian stereotype through the ending of his novel; the Indians, despite their shortcomings, are not ultimately the perpetrators of the crime. Instead, a middle-class man driven by greed is the guilty party. In fact, in comparison to the English characters in the novel, the Indians, although continually represented as mystical religious fanatics, are at the same time portrayed as persistent and brave. While the Moonstone causes the British characters to lie, sever relationships, and even commit murder, it only binds the Indians in solidarity. As Patricia Miller Frick, author of “Wilkie Collins’s ‘Little Jewel’: The Meaning of *The Moonstone*” has noted,

the Moonstone has a completely different effect upon the Indian characters who pursue it in the novel. The Indians regard it as a sacred object which binds them together in their desire to retrieve it. For them, the gem is a symbol of unity, and it emphasizes their positive qualities of loyalty, persistence, and faith, which contrast with the doubt and disorder of the
English narrators. The Indians are sensitive to the spiritual significance which the Moonstone has, and by sacrificing their caste to regain the Diamond, they show themselves to be morally superior to the English characters who seek the gem for vain and self-serving reasons. (318)

The Moonstone rejects Pionke’s concept of deep, designing men and ventures beyond the traditional Indian stereotype. And even though the Hindus do not have a chance to speak for themselves, Collins finds a “safer” way to provide the Eastern perspective and provide a subtle critique of the Mutiny.

Through the character of Ezra Jennings—Dr. Candy’s trusted assistant—Collins gives a voice and a great deal of pathos to the Eastern perspective. The Moonstone was published in 1868, only eleven years after the Mutiny when racist stereotypes still dominated in literature and periodicals. Given the time period, giving voice to three Hindus may have seemed unpatriotic, so Collins created a safer scenario in his novel by giving voice to a vaguely Eastern character. Collins never reveals the specifics of Jennings’ origin—Jennings admits he was raised in one of the colonies, but will not admit his mother’s nationality. Readers do know, however, that he has a “gipsy complexion,” “gaunt facial bones, and “dreamy eyes” that produced “an unfavourable impression of him on a stranger’s mind.” Despite his ethnic appearance, Franklin Blake is deeply affected by Jennings. As Blake admits, “it is not to be denied that Ezra Jennings made some inscrutable appeal to my sympathies, which I found it impossible to resist” (378). Jennings gives voice to the disenfranchised; he tells Franklin Blake how slander caused him to leave his homeland and abandon his career as a physician, how his
appearance keeps him from making friends, how his family and friends deserted him, and how an internal disease led him to abuse opium. Because of this “evil accusation” brought against him, Jennings is forced to move around to avoid further slander. Jennings verbalizes what the newspaper reports of the Mutiny perpetuate—racist ideology, once put into motion, is difficult to escape. As Jennings shares with Blake, “Evil report, with time and chance to help it, travels patiently, and travels far” (388). What is most interesting about this passage is that it reveals the way “evil report,” like the stereotypical subject of Eastern vengeance, becomes the contaminating, demonized Other. In the end, Collins’ novel demonstrates that it is not the diamond thief who is the villain, but ideology itself.

Jennings, of course, does more in Collins’ novel than provide an Eastern perspective; he also cracks the case of the missing diamond. Scotland Yard’s Sergeant Cuff is unable to solve the crime, and even Betteredge cannot figure out the mystery, but Jennings provides one essential piece of the puzzle (that Blake was drugged the night he stole Rachel’s diamond) and one suggestion (for Blake to take opium a second time so they can reenact the crime under supervision) that lead to the discovery of the real thief. By novel’s end, Collins has taken a seemingly imperial text and used it to undermine imperialism; not only is the real thief British and a philanthropist, but the Hindus are found to be innocent of the crime while non-Western Ezra Jennings provides key insight that allows the British thief to be discovered. It is also noteworthy that opium is used as the technology for arriving at the truth.
Conclusion

The newspaper coverage of the Indian Mutiny provides an insightful lens through which to examine *The Moonstone*. Newspapers such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *Times* expose the imperial scaffolding that helped spawn Mutiny frenzy and perpetuated stereotypes about Indians long after the uprising ended. As my research has documented, the media coverage serves as an illustration that truth is multi-layered and elusive, since reports contradict one another and were often downright erroneous. Most importantly, such contradictions and misrepresentations are examples of the fissures that are present in the scaffolding. The structure of Collins’ novel, which showcases the eyewitness account, also presents truth as slippery and elusive, since the various accounts lead to the false conclusions that Franklin Blake, Rosanna Spearman, and Rachel Verinder are each the thief. Instead of presenting the eyewitness account as a means of achieving monolithic truth, *The Moonstone* places the eyewitness account under the microscope and challenges its reliability, since each contains a nugget of fact along with misconceptions and assumptions. Every narrative in *The Moonstone* is filtered through the eyes of a character with a unique subject position, and what Collins’ novel does so beautifully is demystify these filters.

But at the same time the structure of Collins’ novel presents truth as slippery and difficult to grasp, it also reifies the concept of monolithic truth through its form and content. *The Moonstone* is, after all, a detective story, which presupposes and delivers a monolithic conclusion—who stole Rachel Verinder’s diamond—by novel’s end. Even
though the eyewitness accounts temporarily throw readers off course, they each provide a tidbit of information that eventually leads to the solution of the mystery.

Even though Collins provides one final truth, his novel also shows that truth does not ultimately reside in the final conclusion or with the establishment, as evidenced by the bumbling of Sergeant Cuff, the inspector from ‘Scotland Yard, and the attorney Mr. Bruff. Collins’ concept of truth transcends the establishment, and even English nationalism, and resides in the layers that expose and demystify imperial assumptions.
The Performance of Empire Via Domesticity: The Cawnpore Massacre of 1857, Miss Wheeler and Lady Audley’s Secret

So far, this study has established the way Mutiny novels functioned in nineteenth-century British society as spectacle and sensation. Chapter one analyzes Meadows Taylor’s Seeta and examines the potential flaws within British culture, which are curiously performed by the female British characters in the novel. As I argue earlier, such projection allowed British officials to sidestep their responsibility for the Mutiny’s outbreak. While Seeta provides a temporary solution via education to the problems with British women, the novel ultimately cannot carve out a space for her as Cyril’s wife. Because the British script for marriage is already written, with a more suitable Grace Mostyn cast as Cyril’s perfect counterpart, there is ultimately no place for Seeta except in the wings. Chapter two, an investigation of Wilkie Collins’ The Moonstone, looks at the role media coverage played in the construction of the Mutiny, namely the way erroneous and incomplete reports draw from and reestablish what I call the imperial scaffold, or the framework of imperial ideology that helped the British reclaim power in India and repair the damage to its empire. Collins’ novel, written eleven years after the Mutiny, performs empire in ways that both reaffirm and dismantle this imperial scaffold. Collins’ mysterious Eastern character Ezra Jennings, for instance, helps demystify the role of the press in constructing the Eastern Other when he claims, “Evil report, with time and chance to help it, travels patiently, and travels far” (388). The following chapter will expand on the ideas of performance and projection as ways to sidestep British responsibility for the Mutiny, and will situate performance within an important layer of
the imperial scaffold this study has not yet identified—British domesticity. Mary
Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, published serially from 1861-2, performs the
Indian Mutiny on domestic soil through its heroine and her micro-Mutiny against the
British system of marriage. Specifically, this chapter will draw upon the Cawnpore
massacre—complete with its images of the well and the mysterious hybrid figure of Miss
Wheeler—as it figured into history, literature, and public imagination, and will examine
the way it figures into Braddon’s novel. While images of the well at Cawnpore were used
to divert attention from the fissures within British culture, Braddon uses well imagery and
Mutiny references in her novel to expose such fissures.

In the dramatic production that came to be known as the Indian Mutiny, the
massacre at Cawnpore most definitely serves as its climax. Although the Mutiny erupted
in May of 1857 and spread to various Indian cities, it is the events at Cawnpore—the
slaughter of several hundred British women and children, the well that was used as a
grave for the bodies, and the mysterious disappearance of the commander’s daughter
Miss Wheeler—that overshadow British historical accounts of the uprising and pervade
Victorian literature. These events unfolded much like a three-act play: as Brantlinger
notes, on June 27th, 1857, the British were led to the river by Indians who promised them
safe delivery from Cawnpore to Allahabad. Before boarding the boats, however, the
Indians turned on the British, killing most of the men during the battle, and kept the
women and children captive until July 17th. The mutineers then executed their captives
and threw the lifeless bodies down the opening of a nearby well (201). This dramatic act
of brutality against the gentler British sex served not only as an act of rebellion against
the British empire, but against the cult of domesticity that was at the heart of that empire.

The details that accompany British representations of the massacre at Cawnpore
serve to further demarcate the savagery of the mutineers and the defenselessness of
British women and children that were murdered. Such a rigid demarcation legitimizes the
British empire by disguising those at fault within it. Making a spectacle of those
murdered at Cawnpore by recounting the repetitive stabbings, the number of women and
children who lost their lives, and the tiny children’s shoes found after the attack allowed
British officials and the British public to concentrate on the inherent savagery of the
Indian people—a perceived savagery so deeply imbedded that even the sanctity of British
society could not alter it—instead of the problems with British imperial policy and the
British army that helped bring the massacre to fruition. To be sure, the gruesome details
of the massacre coupled with a source of blame—“those cursed women slayers” (Hibbert
123)—enabled British officials and historians alike to virtually ignore the biggest horror
of the well at Cawnpore. Buried beneath the bodies of the women and children was the
nightmare that British imperialism had somehow turned in on itself, that the quest for
greater power, influence, and economic prosperity had “swallowed up” the imperial
family. In this way, the events at Cawnpore not only illustrate the link between
imperialism and domesticity, but they also surface the anxieties surrounding such a link.

According to George Trevelyan’s popular 1865 history entitled Cawnpore, the British
soldiers who marched in to reclaim the city after the uprising were unnerved by what they
found in the inner apartment where the murders took place. The sword marks on the wall
were not eye level, but low to the ground and in corners, which suggests that the insurgent’s victims did not fight back, but crouched to avoid the attacks (359). The low sword marks not only call to mind the women who cowered in their response to the mutineers, but also remind readers of the children who were victimized during the massacre. The vivid images of women and children being hacked to pieces and carelessly discarded captured public imagination not only because of their brutality and sensation, but because they represent the threats against domesticity—the savage racial Other—that accompanied empire building.

The fact that British women and children had been the victims of the attack and that their bodies were carelessly tossed in a well shocked and angered the Victorian public and prompted immediate military retaliation. In an age where domesticity was celebrated and central to the idea of British nationhood, the murder of the very symbols of domesticity, i.e. women and children, especially when these murders took place on a foreign soil that the British believed was in proper submission, prompted outrage and calls for revenge that matched not only the brutality of the massacre at Cawnpore, but also its level of spectacle in British society. Laura Peters cites an article in *The Peenha Observer* that not only called for the “hanging, drawing and quartering of the enemy,” but also declared that “The Great Exhibition should be witnessed by all the country round” (122, my italics). This author’s comparison of British retaliation to the 1851 Great Exhibition is quite telling, since both are sites where imperialism, performance, and spectacle are interwoven. Held in the Crystal Palace of Hyde Park, the highly-attended Great Exhibition showcased the products of industry and celebrated England as a great
imperial power. With a focus on material goods produced domestically and abroad, the Great Exhibition functioned as a visual performance of this empire. By suggesting that the British add slaughtered Indians to the imperial smorgasbord featured at the Crystal Palace, Peters’ newspaper report insinuates that the British use brutality as another visual performance of empire. Indeed, this suggestion became a reality in the months after the uprising as crowds gathered in droves to witness public executions of mutinous sepoys and possible masterminds of the rebellion, who were hanged or blown alive from the mouths of canons. Visiting the Crystal Palace to view the fruits of empire was quite theatrical in Victorian society, but gathering to exterminate and display its perceived bad apples functioned as high theatre. To be sure, brutality as empire and spectacle seeped from public opinion into the newspapers and eventually into the literature of the time.

As this newspaper article suggests, the emotion and anger brought about by the well at Cawnpore were immediate and extreme. According to Trevelyan, it mattered little to the English soldiers which Indians they killed in response to the massacre; massive retribution was necessary and expected (355). In effect, military troops marched into various Indian cities—Lucknow, Allalabad, and Delhi, to be specific—and slaughtered thousands of Indians to atone for the atrocities committed at Cawnpore. Lady J. A. Harris, who arrived in Lucknow with her husband (a minister) a few weeks before the Mutiny erupted there, speaks often of the events at Cawnpore and, with her friends, awaits the latest news from this neighboring city, which came in telegraphic installments, just as she would await the latest installment of a sensation novel. In her widely read A Lady’s Diary of the Siege of Lucknow (1858), Mrs. Harris outlines the way the events at
Cawnpore function as spectacle and entertainment, especially for those who were isolated as they endured the rebel attacks and awaited military support. Harris chronicles her monotonous experiences each day from the British stronghold that she occupied with 110 others. Her tedious days and nights are broken up only by piles of *Sharpe’s Magazine* and reports from Cawnpore, which, as the following quote suggests, served a similar purpose for British inhabitants in India—“The only change or excitement of any kind we have is in the shape of bad news or horrible alarms” (44). As Mrs. Harris’s comment suggests, the events at Cawnpore function as diversion and entertainment, much like a live performance of salacious novel. Near the end of her diary, Harris describes her rescue from Lucknow, which further demonstrates how the spectacle of Cawnpore influenced Britain’s response to the Mutiny. According to Harris, once the British soldiers arrived to free those who had been under siege, they “rushed upon [the sepoys], shouting out, ‘Cawnpore!’ ‘Cawnpore!’ and killed every man of them” (173). As this excerpt from Harris’s diary suggests, the massacre remained in the minds of the British governing officials, the soldiery, and the British public and influenced the way Britain quelled the rebellion and restored its empire. Unlike the uprisings that took place in other Indian cities, the uprising at Cawnpore influenced all aspects of the Mutiny—military reaction, public opinion, and literary representation.

Although the Indian Mutiny lasted for nearly a year with battles fought in over ten Indian cities, the massacre at Cawnpore played an instrumental role in shaping Mutiny literature, with spectacle taking center stage. James Grant pushes Mrs. Harris’s Cawnpore chant one step further in his novel *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny*.
(1868). Here, the soldiers invoke the Cawnpore massacre as they recapture the novel’s fictional Indian city while crying “Remember the women! Remember the poor babies!” As Brantlinger has noted, Grant’s novel capitalizes on the atrocities committed at Cawnpore and exaggerates them, depicting not only the murder of British women, but unspeakable acts that suggest a perceived “oriental sex drive close to pornographic” (209). One of Grant’s main characters, hopeless flirt Polly Weston, is captured by the evil Abubeker and forced into his harem, which invokes a popular, but unsubstantiated rumor about the cause of the Cawnpore massacre: “Had not the Nana Sahib at Cawnpore…slain the Christian women by the hundreds and flung them into a well, because not one of them would enter his zenana?” (376). Polly, however, refuses to give in to her captor’s sexual desires and violently attacks him after one of his many sexual advances. Striking back in a stereotypically barbaric fashion, Abubeker orders the unstained Polly to be dragged through the streets until dead. Overall, Grant’s novel highlights the role spectacle played in literary representations of the Mutiny, and how this spectacle was used as a means of blaming the Oriental and diverting attention from British responsibility. The demarcated categories of purity and depravity, which became spectacle in and of themselves, are the primary tropes used to sidestep this responsibility.

The image of the well at Cawnpore, a recurring theme in the literature of the time, most effectively encapsulates spectacle as diversion. Well imagery was used not only to highlight what the Indians did to British women, but by comparison, to celebrate British society, specifically for its respect and glorification of domesticity. In his historical account of the Mutiny, George Trevelyan uses the events at Cawnpore as evidence of
British chivalry. According to Trevelyan, the massacre at Cawnpore demonstrates a key difference in moral values of British and Indian cultures: the British “still live by the rules of chivalry,” heralding the gentler sex, while Indians regard women merely as property (132). Trevelyan’s comment is lofty, to say the least, and sidesteps the way British domesticity, here defined as the British system of marriage, family, home and hearth, functions as a domestic empire of its own—one where women, like the native Other, are conquered, domesticated, and “protected,” i.e. contained, for their own good and the good of the nation. Nevertheless, his comment illustrates the use of the well as a way to drown out the problems in British society by simultaneously debasing Indian culture and celebrating British imperial values.

For Trevelyan, the Cawnpore well exists as a symbol of tainted domesticity, and the cause of this taint is a depraved and uncivilized Indian society. Depravity of such magnitude provided further proof that Indians were in need of the refinement and cultivation of British culture, a culture that regarded women as glorified angels of the house. At the same time Trevelyan describes the well as a site of attack on British domesticity, his description also celebrates and upholds Victorian values: “Where were now the tact, the cultivation, and all the indefinable graces of refined womanhood? Simplicity and affectation, amiability and pride, coquetry and reserve, discretion and sweet susceptibility, were here confounded in a dull uniformity of woe” (253, my italics).

38 It is important to note the counter-discourse of the period, which argues that women are not conquered, but rule over the domestic sphere (i.e., John Ruskin’s “Of Queen’s Gardens”). My chapter addresses this dualism in Victorian thought through its exploration of Lady Audley as both an imperialist and subjugated and rebellious sepoy. However, it is important to note that ultimately, Lady Audley is contained and subdued in the novel by a system of law that will not allow her to escape a deserting first husband and begin a new life.
For Trevelyan, the well at Cawnpore functions not only as a dumping ground for the bodies of massacre victims, but as a dumping ground for all that had gone wrong with Victorian womanhood. Despite Trevelyan’s grandstanding and despite the fact that he uses India as a scapegoat for broken Victorian womanhood, Victorian ideas about how to treat women, and how to treat the native Other, were deeply flawed. In fact, Trevelyan’s description of Victorian femininity demonstrates a link between the imperial mission in India and the domestic imperial mission in England; the “cultivation” and “refined womanhood” of which he speaks is itself a taming of the Victorian woman for her own good and for the edification of the imperial man. Similar to the colonial mission, where natives were rescued from their own backward cultures, inculcated with British values, and thus modernized, the above passage suggests that the femininity Trevelyan speaks of is not natural, but programmed (i.e. “refined” and “cultivated”). Even though the quote demonstrates how the well at Cawnpore functions as a reification of British imperialism, domestic values, and, consequently, the necessity of the imperial civilizing mission, it also reveals an underlying crack in imperial ideology: that domesticity, the bulwark of imperialism, is actually a colonial mission of its own.

The image of the well at Cawnpore continued to reveal such cracks even after the well itself was demolished. Soon after the Mutiny ended, the ladies’ house, where the murders took place, and the well, which served as their grave, were replaced by a monument and garden. At the close of his historical account of the Mutiny, Trevelyan claims that although a shrine had been erected, the British should resist the need to cover up the scene of Indian crime. Once again, his comments illustrate the use of well imagery
to glorify British heroism and cover the fissures in British imperial thought. Specifically, Trevelyan invokes the well at Cawnpore when he says

> It is good that the house and the well of horror have been replaced by a fair garden and a graceful shrine. But there let piety stay her hand. A truce thenceforward to that mistaken reverence which loves to express sorrow and admiration in guineas, and rupees, and the net product of fancy bazaars! Too often already have architect and sculptor disguised the place where a notable thing was done….There is no fear lest we should forget the story of our people. The whole place is their tomb, and the name thereof is their epitaph. When the traveler from Allahabad (sic), rousing himself to learn at what stage of his journey he may have arrived, is aware of a voice proclaiming through the darkness of the city of melancholy fame, --then those accents, heard for the first time on the very spot itself which they designate, recall, more vividly than written or engraved eloquence, the memory of fruitless valour and unutterable woe. (365-6)

Although Trevelyan objects to the monument on economic terms, his comments imply that a memorial is unnecessary due to the fame of the British soldiers. Monument or no monument, he suggests that the land at Cawnpore cries out to passersby and memorializes those who died during the massacre. What may initially appear to be his one criticism of British culture—that it overspends in order to show the proper reverence—is actually a compliment to a cultural system that respects its heroes. Interestingly, however, the suffering of British women and children is overshadowed by
British valor, which takes center stage in the passage. The women and children are a catalyst for “doing a notable thing,” i.e., regaining the empire, and their “unutterable woe” is duly noted, but they take a backseat in the above passage to British heroism.

One interesting figure that emerged from the events at Cawnpore also represents the way women were sacrificed for the good of the empire as a whole. More importantly, however, her story symbolizes the rape of the domestic family at its highest form, as well as the connection between the British empire and the domestic empire. The story of Miss Wheeler and her mysterious disappearance during the Cawnpore massacre captured public interest and, as Brantlinger has noted, made its way into personal experience narratives, histories, lectures, sensation magazines, and theatrical renditions of the uprising (295), the latter of which situates her directly within the realm of theatre and spectacle. The youngest (and interracial) daughter of Sir Hugh Wheeler, who served as commander of the Cawnpore division during the Mutiny, Miss Wheeler was either captured or rescued by Ali Khan, a cohort of Nana Sahib, during the uprising. Although the details of her eventual fate are still under question, as Saul David notes, “it was widely reported at the time that, rather than succumb to her captor’s amorous advances, she had killed him before taking her own life” (221). Specifically, as Brantlinger mentions, Miss Wheeler was thought to have “committed suicide by throwing herself down a well.” The story was believed in England for some time, but several sightings of Miss Wheeler in India stirred debate about whether she was actually dead or being held hostage. According to Brantlinger, neither of these narratives is true. Instead, a priest found Miss Wheeler on her deathbed, where she admitted that she did not kill her master.
and was not held captive, but “willingly converted to Islam and married her captor” (or, as Brantlinger notes, the man who may have rescued her). Miss Wheeler also shared with the priest “that she had been well-treated by her husband and that she had no wish to make contact with British officials” (295). The multiple narratives surrounding Miss Wheeler’s disappearance illustrate her hybrid nature in Victorian mythology—she is figured as both victim and traitor. This hybridity points to Miss Wheeler as a location for the anxieties about race and gender, as well as the anxieties surrounding women’s roles and domesticity, that the Mutiny brought to the surface. With domesticity at the core of the empire, Miss Wheeler’s choice to abandon British ways of life in favor of another system of marriage makes her a threatening and traitorous figure.

The mythology surrounding Miss Wheeler epitomizes the domestic threats that were ever-present in the imperial world, but which the Mutiny crystalized. It is not customary for women and children to follow their husbands into war zones; however, Britain was so sure of itself as governor and ruler of a submissive India that this colony, similar to the others, became viewed as an extension of England, complete with English wives, children, and all the comforts of home that were imported for the pleasure of its English inhabitants. In this way, domesticity—women who could make the tea and look after the children—literally accompanied empire. The possible abduction of Miss Wheeler represents the potential threat that women faced as they followed their husbands

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39 Brantlinger draws largely from Christopher Hibbert’s *The Great Mutiny* in his discussion of Miss Wheeler. It should also be noted that scholars still do not agree on Miss Wheeler’s fate. Saul David, for instance, in his recent work, argues that “Miss Wheeler was forced to live as her captor’s concubine” and did not contact authorities because “she was too ashamed” (221).
and fathers to India. If the daughter of the commander wasn’t safe from abduction, rape, and murder, the very core of domesticity and empire was at risk.

Even more troubling than being ripped from her family and taken hostage, however, was the potential that Miss Wheeler had willingly surrendered to the sepoys and continued living in Cawnpore with the enemy. Such actions didn’t just make Miss Wheeler a deviant, but a traitor. Phil Robinson’s 1884 work *Chasing a Fortune* demonstrates the conflation of loyalty to the English race and loyalty to the English nation:

> It is a fact, and not one to regret in the least, that both tradition and personal experience make an Englishman a born chief among Asiatics, and any disregard of the colour of his skin is high treason. And, reader, never forget this if you find yourself among dark-skinned races, that *dominion is your birthright*. Let trouble overtake you, one Englishman with a thousand Orientals, and they will all turn to you for protection as certainly as flowers turn to the sunlight” (qtd. in Wise 138).

Considering the way Robinson conflates race and nation, there was good reason why the British clung to the notion that Miss Wheeler had been abducted and committed suicide. The words *abducted* and *captured* simultaneously take agency from Miss Wheeler and uphold the greater good of the empire. Abduction, which negates her power and choice, is a better option than abandoning family (and empire) by running away with the enemy. As these narratives indicate, the idea that Miss Wheeler would choose to desert her family and marry an Indian man was so undesirable that it was preferable she end her life
rather than taint herself (and the British empire) by living intimately with a native. In this version of the story, Miss Wheeler is cast as a British martyr who dramatically throws herself to her death rather than consenting to the advances of her Indian captor.

Robinson’s quote, however, especially with its rhetoric of natural selection (“dominion is your birthright”) and containment disguised as protection, reveals that the same thinking which operates within the British imperial mission in India also operates within the domestic imperial mission at home. If it is true that Miss Wheeler abandoned her family in Cawnpore, she also abandoned the British system of domesticity (marriage, family, the potential of having British children) in favor of an alternative plan, which suggests that British domestic values are not always the most natural option for all women, that “dominion” is not the natural birthright of British men, and that British women could choose to break away from the containing “protection” of their male counterparts. Miss Wheeler’s mixed descent, of course, puts her in a more liminal (and therefore doubly threatening) position than other British women. In the “British versus native” binary which helped establish and maintain imperialism, Miss Wheeler’s mixed race made it impossible to relegate her to one category or the other, but allowed for the threatening possibility of easy passage from one culture to the other. As Robinson’s comments suggest, the idea of easy passage posed an immediate threat to the British nation and to British domesticity.

Interestingly, the most documented depiction of Miss Wheeler offers a British response to her potential micro-Mutiny against the empire. Paton’s well-known painting entitled Miss Wheeler defending herself against the Mutineers, reproduced in Charles
Ball’s *History of the Indian Mutiny* (1858), casts Miss Wheeler as a co-defender of her own femininity as well as the British nation. Specifically, the painting represents a calm, but determined Miss Wheeler firing a revolver at three garish sepoys who have broken into her apartment and are on the verge of attack. Paton does not cast Miss Wheeler as passive victim, but as Chase and Levenson note, uses her as an emblem of “heroic resistance against impossible odds.” Looking the epitome of composure, Miss Wheeler leisurely rests one hand on a chair while firing at a strikingly barbaric mutineer with the other. Falling backward with eyes bulging, the man plunges to his death along with the two other Indians that lay dead on the ground in front of her. As Miss Wheeler fires her revolver, a Scotsman appears with sword raised in her defense. As Chase and Levenson have noted, the painting was “originally drawn not with the Scottish Highlanders appearing just in time to save threatened womanhood, but with Sepoys bursting through the door, bringing bloodlust and the final indignity.” This image, however, as Chase and Levenson add, “proved so horrifying that it was painted over in favor of the image of salvation” (197).

![Figure 1: Miss Wheeler defending herself against the Mutineers](image-url)
Paton’s painting, which is reproduced today in Brantlinger’s chapter on the Mutiny and serves as the cover for Chase and Levinson’s *The Spectacle of Intimacy* as well as Jenny Sharpe’s *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*, illustrates the tension between keeping women within their prescribed roles (i.e. within the domestic empire) and protecting the empire as a whole. On the one hand, the British used the rape and murder of women at Cawnpore as proof that Indians were barbaric, and the stereotype of women as helpless and defenseless helped them do so. If the sepoys would resort to murdering women and children to take revenge against their British commanders, it was not only evidence of their inherent brutality, but of the necessity of the imperial civilizing mission. However, the painting disrupts the stereotype of British woman as helpless victim and attempts to make Miss Wheeler an active agent. By doing so, it asserts an image of Miss Wheeler, amidst the onslaught of rumor, as a defender of herself and her country. Miss Wheeler’s pointed revolver is not just aimed at the sepoys in her apartment, but toward any threats against the empire.

Ultimately, however, Paton’s painting depicts the version of Miss Wheeler’s fate that best served Britain. It seems to give agency to women—Chase and Levenson say that the painted version of Miss Wheeler “performs another influential ‘mutiny’ topos: the British woman roused to righteous violence” (198)—but it merely repositions Miss Wheeler inside the confines of the British imperial system. This revolver-wielding Miss Wheeler is one who strongly identifies with the imperial mission of taming the Other, instead of one who rejects British mores and embraces Islam as well as a Muslim man.
Miss Wheeler’s aggression is coded as non-threatening in this instance only because it helps secure her position within British domesticity. It is, after all, better to put a revolver in the hand of a British woman rather than allow her to sleep with the enemy. In this sense, the painting represents the fear of women choosing to live outside the confines of British marriage and respectability. Although the painting appears subversive, it merely reifies the status quo by disguising containment as protection. Like the well at Cawnpore, Miss Wheeler’s revolver is ultimately just another example of how the British used spectacle as a way to divert attention from the fissures within their own culture. 

The events at Cawnpore not only shaped Mutiny literature and public opinion about the Mutiny, India, and Indians, but also helped shape Victorian literature as a whole. Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, published four years after the Mutiny began, is provocative when juxtaposed against the Cawnpore massacre; both were turned into theatrical renditions, which situates them within the realm of spectacle and theatricality, both are sites where domesticity and empire converge, and both feature images of rustic tranquility that double as sites of criminal activity. Just as the mutinous sepoys used the well at Cawnpore as a grave for a few hundred British women and children in 1857, Braddon uses the well as the burial ground for Lady Audley’s deserting husband George Talboys. Surprisingly, such juxtapositions have received little attention in the world of literary scholarship. Lillian Nayder, in fact, provides the only exploration of Braddon’s Cawnpore imagery in “Rebellious Sepoys and Bigamous Wives: The Indian Mutiny and Marriage Law Reform in *Lady Audley’s Secret*.” According to Nayder, Braddon employs “the imagery of the Indian Mutiny and the racism it generated to
defend the social status quo” by suggesting “that mutinous wives and daughters, like rebellious sepoys, are ‘unnatural’ and ungrateful creatures who should be punished for their transgressions and returned to their ‘proper place.’” It is Nayder’s contention that Braddon’s use of the Mutiny in *Lady Audley’s Secret* “calls into question her status as a feminist writer” (32).

Nayder’s argument, however, relegates Lady Audley to the position of rebellious sepooy without recognizing how she (and Braddon’s other main characters) simultaneously play the part of sepooy and British imperialist. It is my contention that Braddon’s novel complicates the roles of oppressor and oppressed through this imperial role reversal. The following sections of this chapter will demonstrate how Lady Audley enacts some of the same anxieties about domesticity as Miss Wheeler, since both are hybrid figures that serve as victims and domestic traitors. Specifically, the chapter will investigate the ways in which Lady Audley’s bigamy and life of crime are presented as a micro-Mutiny against the British system of marriage that had left her victimized and helpless. However, Braddon’s novel does not simply cast Lady Audley in the role of rebellious sepooy, but disrupts the binary of oppressor/oppressed as Lady Audley and various other characters shift between sepooy, British soldier, and the women and children that were victimized at Cawnpore. Braddon’s novel, therefore, can be read not only as a Mutiny novel, but as a type of revisionist history that figures the British and Indians with a mixture of guilt and innocence. Braddon’s use of well imagery is particularly subversive since it exposes problems within British culture instead of disguising them. And, as her novel illustrates via its hybrid characters, the oppressed and the oppressor are
theatrical poses which are easily (ex)changed. In short, Braddon’s novel performs empire, specifically a Mutinous empire, via the domestic sphere in order to expose the flaws within British culture.

*Lady Audley’s Secret* is, above all, a novel about rebellion. Taking place from 1853-59, it mirrors the causes and effects of the Indian Mutiny. Just as the sepoys were oppressed by the British government in the years leading up to the uprising, Braddon’s novel charts the oppressive (and imperial) system that causes a young woman to commit fraud, bigamy and attempted murder. The novel’s protagonist, Helen Talboys, believes she can escape her drunken father and a life of poverty through a smart marriage to George Talboys, a dragoon from a wealthy family. The institution of marriage, however, which is itself a type of imperial mission to domesticate, subjugate, and contain women, does not provide Helen with the deliverance she desires. When George’s father learns of his son’s marriage to “the daughter of a drunken pauper” (191), he disowns George, leaving him and his young wife penniless and struggling. Helen’s financial struggles only worsen when George journeys to Australia on a gold-digging expedition, leaving Helen with only a brief note of explanation. Left with a helpless father and a two-week old child, Helen, who exemplifies the domestic imperial mission gone wrong, considers George’s departure as desertion. Refusing to be contained and trapped inside a marriage that, in her mind, no longer exists, she decides to work outside the confines of the law to help support herself and her son. Not only does she fake her death and change her name to Lucy Graham, but after moving to a new town and taking a position as a governess in the household of the local surgeon, she catches the eye of Sir Michael Audley and accepts
his offer of marriage. It is after her marriage to Michael Audley that Helen’s life of petty crime rises to new heights. In true Cawnpore fashion, she pushes George Talboys, who has returned from Australia with his fortune, down the well at Audley Manor in order to conceal her true identity and maintain the empire she has acquired. Then she sets fire to her former chambermaid Phoebe Marks’s inn when she fears that Phoebe’s belligerent husband might reveal her secret to Robert Audley, who has set up lodging there. The date of Lady Audley’s marriage to Sir Michael is significant; their June, 1857 nuptials coincide with the events that took place that same year at Cawnpore. Just as the sepoys rebelled against their British oppressors that June, Lady Audley begins her rebellion against the British institution of marriage through her bigamous marriage to Michael Audley. While the well at Cawnpore figuratively buries British concerns about empire turning in on the imperial family, Braddon’s novel exposes and confirms these concerns.

The Spectacle of Domestic Empire and the Exposure of British Flaws in *Lady Audley’s Secret*

The link between domesticity and empire in Victorian culture is inextricable, especially when one considers all the comforts of home that empire provided—tea, silk, tobacco, sugar, etc. During the nineteenth century, British women could scarcely open their cupboards without seeing traces of empire. Nowhere is the connection between empire and domesticity more apparent than in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Braddon’s novel not only situates empire within the world of the domestic, but performs the interconnectedness of the two. In Braddon’s novel, objects of empire adorn Audley
Manor. In Lady Audley’s boudoir, “ivory-backed hair-brushes,” “exquisite china” (69), and “fantastical India filagree work” are scattered about the room (295), and she even “wrap[s] herself in an Indian shawl; a shawl that had cost Sir Michael a hundred guineas” (373). In addition, Lady Audley serves tea from “a marvelous Indian tea-caddy of sandalwood and silver” (223). Items from other English colonies provide additional decoration and demonstrate the inextricable link between home and empire.

Braddon uses the link between empire and domesticity to expose the problems in British culture. Despite the novel’s ending, where Lady Audley is shipped away to a madhouse in Belgium, the text still suggests that she is not completely responsible for her life of crime, but is pushed into committing such evil deeds after a bad marriage and a life of poverty. Interestingly, the same charge (of greed) had been leveled at the mutinous sepoys, who had been stripped of their right to land, cultural rituals and wages. Indeed, Braddon’s novel draws a parallel between Lady Audley’s actions and those of the mutineers, which suggests Braddon’s subtle critique of a system that seeks to conquer, domesticate, and contain women in much the same way as it does its colonial subjects. The British government’s design was not primarily to help the Indian people, but to utilize the land and resources for objects of industry—the same objects that adorn Audley Manor. Likewise, the Victorian class system and system of marriage weren’t set up to help women like Helen Talboys. Similar to Miss Wheeler, Helen Talboys is expected to stick within the confines of British imperial system or die trying. While it would have been acceptable for Helen to die in her poverty, it was not acceptable for her to step outside the confines of British law and find another husband.
Readers are not left to speculate about why Lady Audley turned criminal; instead, Braddon affords her protagonist the opportunity to tell her own story, a story that exposes British culture as anything but chivalric in its attitude toward women and family. At the novel’s end, in a narrative full of pathos, Lady Audley describes a tortured childhood as her mother was sent away to a madhouse. She also recalls learning the cruelties of poverty when her father was forced to turn his beloved wife over to hired nurses because, as members of the working class, his family depended on him for survival. As Lady Audley explains, seeing her father’s struggles taught her “what a bitter thing it is to be poor” (349). Eventually, Lady Audley, then Helen Maldon, realized that she must make a smart marriage to ensure a good future for herself. As she explains, secrecy and heartlessness were not her innate characteristics, but were formed out of necessity. After meeting George Talboys, the man she initially thought of as her “wandering prince” (351), she describes her desperation after he deserted her. Unable to divorce him and unable to marry again (without a change of identity), Helen was desperate, but still tried to work within the confines of the law. Eventually, however, after teaching piano lessons, but keeping little of her wages because of her father’s trips to the pubic house, she decided to leave her father and take her chances “in that great chaos of humanity” (353). Once she married Sir Michael, she describes how money melted away her heartlessness and replaced it with kindness: “In the sunshine of my own happiness I felt, for the first time in my life, for the miseries of others” (354). Although the narrator claims that “the demons of Vanity, Selfishness, and Ambition had joined hands and said, ‘This woman is our slave; let us see what she will become under our guidance’” (297), Lady Audley’s
background points to a life of poverty and hardship as the root cause of her life of crime. In this context, Lady Audley’s resemblance to the rebellious sepoys revises British history by revealing Britain as complicit in the uprising.

Braddon’s novel also illustrates the fissures in British culture through the companion figures of Lady Audley and chambermaid Phoebe Marks. In particular, Braddon places the chambermaid Phoebe Marks alongside Lady Audley to illustrate how greed, heartlessness, and crime are not separate from Victorian culture, as media coverage of the Mutiny would have us believe, but cultivated and nurtured in Victorian society. In essence, her juxtaposition of the two women performs the fissures in British culture—a culture that leaves few options for its women. Throughout the novel, Braddon aligns the two women to highlight the similarities in their character, but also to show the difficulty that lower-class women face when they do not resort to trickery and artifice.

Lady Audley is initially drawn to Phoebe Marks because, like herself, Phoebe is “selfish, cold, and cruel, eager for her own advancement, and greedy of opulence and elegance, angry with the lot that had been cast her, and wray of dull dependence” (299). As this passage suggests, greed and cruelty are products of living an impoverished life. Like Lady Audley, Phoebe also demonstrates the way marriage functions as a domestic imperial mission that seeks to conquer, domesticate, and contain its women. Phoebe is bullied into marrying the abusive and drunken Luke Marks after he threatens to expose Lady Audley’s bigamy. Phoebe, therefore, like Lady Audley, is stuck in a catch twenty-two. If Phoebe refuses Luke’s offer of marriage, Lady Audley, who supports Phoebe financially, will be discovered and ousted as the Lady of Audley Manor. If Phoebe
consents to his offer, she will continue to enjoy financial support but will be trapped in an abusive marriage. In essence, Phoebe performs the limited option for Victorian women, and how greed is cultivated by circumstance. Lady Audley and Phoebe also demonstrate the way Victorian culture encourages artifice and deception to get ahead. In the private company of Phoebe, Lady Audley schools her chambermaid in the art of performance:

“Do you know, Phoebe, I have heard some people say you and I are alike?”

“I have heard them say so too, my lady,” said the girl quietly, “but they must be very stupid to say it, for your ladyship is a beauty, and I’m a poor plain creature.”

“Not at all, Phoebe,” said the little lady superbly; “you are like me, and your features are very nice; it is only colour that you want. My hair is pale yellow shot with gold, and yours is drab; my eyebrows and eyelashes are dark brown, and yours are almost—I scarcely like to say it, but they’re almost white, my dear Phoebe; your complexion is sallow, and mine is pink and rosy. Why, with a bottle of hair dye, such as we see advertised in the papers, and a pot of rouge, you’d be as good-looking as I any day, Phoebe.” (57-8)

Lady Audley’s conversation with Phoebe reminds readers that British society encourages artifice and deception. Because marriage was often the only way for a woman to achieve security, Victorian women, especially those born into the lower stations, must, as Lady Audley points out, become proactive in establishing a promising future. For Phoebe
Marks, who was born into the working class, a bottle of hair dye and a pot of rouge can help “make up” for her lack of grooming in the social graces. As Lady Audley’s comments indicate, becoming a lady isn’t a matter of pedigree, but a matter of performance. As Lady Audley teaches Phoebe, femininity is a tool to be used deceptively and subversively, since it distracts others from what lies beneath. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the different choices epitomized through Lady Audley, who uses performance and deceit to her advantage, and Phoebe Marks, who refuses to resort to a life of crime for personal advancement, both end up in desperate situations. Lady Audley’s double life is eventually discovered, and she is whisked away to a madhouse in Belgium, while Phoebe is left to the vices of a brutal (and now badly-burned) husband. The novel does not herald Phoebe’s path or Lady Audley’s path as superior to the other, but suggests that both paths lead to a dead end. As both characters typify, the choices for Victorian women, whether women remain confined or are freed from the domestic imperial mission, are limited and leaden with difficulty.

Braddon herself understood this last point all too well. As Lillian Nayder has noted, “Braddon was among those Victorian women who understood the importance of female employment opportunities and property rights, and had witnessed the inequities of Victorian marriage law at first hand” (33). After watching her mother separate from an adulterous husband and lose all the property she brought into the marriage, Braddon began her acting career to support them. Incidentally, Braddon’s acting career began in 1857, the year the Mutiny erupted, which is noteworthy since it signals the start of Braddon’s own decision to rebel against accepted codes of British “respectability.” After
two years of making a living on the stage, a career choice that was highly suspect in Victorian society, Braddon moved on to writing sensation fiction, another suspect career move, and to have six illegitimate children by John Maxwell, whom she eventually married after the death of his first (and institutionalized) wife. Although Braddon’s life choices were certainly not criminal, her life, like her heroine’s, demonstrates the pitfalls of a culture that promotes marriage, but does not provide adequate means for women to fend for themselves when such unions fall apart. Braddon herself, like Lady Audley, typifies the domestic imperial mission gone wrong.

The Performance of Sepoy, Imperialist, and Empire Turning on Empire in the Domestic Sphere

From its characters to its setting, Lady Audley’s Secret brings the issue of hybridity to the forefront. In Braddon’s novel, hybridity functions as part of spectacle and role playing, since it exposes the layers and performative elements of individual characters. Just as Miss Wheeler functions as a hybrid figure in Victorian mythology—she embodies different ethnicities and is cast as both victim and traitor—Braddon’s characters also enact hybridity. Lady Audley, for instance, is both a sympathetic figure and a criminal, George Talboys is a loving husband as well as a neglectful and abusive one, and Robert Audley is heroic on the one hand and cold-hearted and cruel on the other. Not only do Braddon’s cast of characters embody hybridity, but the stage itself—the landscape—plays into Braddon’s fascination with heterogeneity. Audley Court is glorious and relaxing—“a spot in which Peace seemed to have taken up her abode,
setting her soothing hand on every tree and flower” (2)—but is also a labyrinth with hidden passageways and secret chambers, “a place in which a conspiracy might have been planned or a lover’s vow registered with equal safety” (3). Consider the following quote, which elaborates on the hybridity of the English countryside:

We hear every day of murders committed in the country. Brutal and treacherous murders’ slow, protracted agonies from poisons administered by some kindred hand; sudden and violent deaths by cruel blows, inflicted with a stake cut from some spreading oak, whose very shadow promised—peace. In the county of which I write, I have been shown a meadow in which, on a quiet summer Sunday evening, a young farmer murdered the girl who had loved and trusted him; and yet even now, with the stain of that foul deed upon it, the aspect of the spot is—peace. No crime has ever been committed in the worst rookeries about Seven Dials that has not been also done in the face of that sweet rustic calm which still, in spite of all, we look on with a tender, half-mournful yearning and associate with—peace. (54)

This passage juxtaposes the rustic calm of the countryside against the criminal activity among the Seven Dials, a comparison that foreshadows the crime Lady Audley will commit at Audley Court, as well as the way Lady Audley will use the domestic realm and her domestic duties to disguise her plotting and criminal activity. Such juxtaposition also brings to mind the massacre of Cawnpore, where the normally life-sustaining well was turned into a grave.
However, Braddon uses this hybridity as a way to blur the lines between
oppressed and oppressor. Like Miss Wheeler as she figures into literature, the press, and
Victorian mythology, Lady Audley is also a hybrid figure—angelic and victimized in one
sense and traitorous in another sense. The Pre-Raphaelite portrait of Lady Audley, for
instance, reveals the exaggeratedly evil nature beneath her childlike innocence. It is no
accident that Lady Audley’s portrait is the means by which George Talboys discovers her
bigamy and falsified death, since the portrait reveals “a sinister light to the deep blue
eyes” and “the aspect of a beautiful fiend” (70-1). Similar to the painting of Miss
Wheeler, Lady Audley’s portrait surfaces the tensions surrounding her hybridity,
especially in terms of the way Braddon’s other characters react to it. When Robert tells
Alicia he doesn’t like the painting, Alicia retorts that although “We have never seen my
lady look as she does in that picture…I think that she could look so.” To be sure,
Robert’s reaction to the painting crystalizes his fear that the painting represents a reality
beyond the surface and beyond his control: “The picture is—the picture, and my lady
is—my lady. That’s my way of taking things, and I’m not metaphysical; don’t unsettle
me” (72). Robert’s attempt to control Alicia’s reading of the painting mimics the way the
painting of Miss Wheeler was altered to control the public’s reading of it. In both
situations, the women in the painting represent feminine agency and power that must be
“revised,” i.e. contained. It is also noteworthy that Lady Audley’s portrait is not a public
one, but is hidden away inside her locked boudoir. Robert and George’s forced entry into
Lady Audley’s private space—they conspire with her chambermaid and crawl through a
secret chamber to get in—suggests a fault line in British heroism and gallantry, which consequently complicates innocence and guilt.

If we are to read *Lady Audley’s Secret* as a literary representation of the Mutiny, Braddon’s focus on the layers of guilt and innocence complicates the roles of sepoy and British empire. Unlike the media coverage of the Mutiny, where the roles of oppressed and oppressor are clearly demarcated, Braddon’s novel reminds readers, both symbolically as well as through her characters and landscape, that oppressed and oppressor often reside together. Symbolically, Braddon illustrates this nicely through the travel box that Robert finds when he visits Mrs. Vincent, the schoolmistress who recommended Lucy Audley be hired as governess before she marries Sir Michael. Robert has to search to find Mrs. Vincent, who is hiding from her creditors. Braddon’s novel continually returns to the idea of impoverished women; like Lady Audley, Mrs. Vincent has become the victim of a system that punishes women for the poverty they are powerless to control. Although Mrs. Vincent’s story only comprises a small part of the novel, it is notable that Lady Audley isn’t the only woman in the novel who must operate outside the confines of the law to survive. Mrs. Vincent also reminds readers that crime sometimes grows out of oppression. Eventually, Robert locates Mrs. Vincent and her assistant Tonks, who retrieves the travel box Lady Audley left behind after leaving to accept the position as governess. When Robert sees the box, he notices a label that reads “Lucy Graham,” but, similar to the Pre-Raphaelite portrait of his aunt, he also notices something peeking out from behind the visible label. After peeling away the top layer, another label lies beneath that reveals Lady Audley’s true identity as Helen Talboys. This
scene symbolizes Lady Audley’s layers that complicate the question of her guilt or innocence. In order to escape the life of Helen Maldon, she becomes Helen Talboys. In order to escape the life of Helen Talboys, she becomes Lucy Graham. In order to rise above Lucy Graham’s position, she becomes Lady Audley. In order to maintain her position as Lady Audley, she turns to a life of crime. In the same way that Lady Audley “revises” her identity, Braddon seems to provide a revisionist history of the Mutiny in which guilt and innocence are difficult to establish.

In Braddon’s novel, the well at Audley Court also serves to destabilize the image of the well at Cawnpore as well as the categories of victimized woman/barbaric man that it came to represent. The well at Audley Court, like Lady Audley herself, functions as a hybrid of sorts—it is a rustic spot that doubles as a site of criminal activity. When Lady Audley pushes George Talboys down the well, however, she is not just committing a crime, but staging a rebellion against the system of marriage that would have kept her poverty-stricken if she hadn’t chosen to work outside of those confines. Clearly, the scene of George’s attempted murder assigns Lady Audley to the role of rebellious sepoy while relegating George to the position of the victimized women and children at Cawnpore. This role reversal—making George the victimized instead of the victimizor—illustrates Braddon’s use of Mutiny topos for subversive means.

Interestingly, Braddon uses the well at Audley Court as a signal for the fissures in British culture. Lady Audley’s crime is not the catalyst for the well’s ruin in Braddon’s novel; instead, it is ruined long before it becomes George Talboys’ intended grave.
Braddon’s first mention of the ruined well occurs in the novel’s first chapter, where its past is romanticized as pastoral and rustic:

At the end of this dark arcade there was the shrubbery, where, half buried amongst the tangled branches and the neglected weeds, stood the rusty wheel of that old well of which I have spoken. It had been of good service in its time, no doubt; and busy nuns have perhaps drawn the cool water with their own fair hands; but it had fallen with disuse now, and scarcely any one at Audley Court knew whether the spring had dried up or not. But sheltered as was the solitude of this lime-tree walk, I doubt very much if it was ever put to any romantic uses. Often in the cool of the evening Sir Michael Audley would stroll up and down smoking his cigar, with his dog at his heels, and his pretty young wife dawdling by his side; but in about ten minutes the baronet and his companion would grow tired of the rusting limes and the still water, hidden under the spreading leaves of the water-lilies, and the long green vista with the broken well at the end, and would stroll back to the white drawing-room, where my lady played dreamy melodies by Beethoven and Mendelssohn till her husband fell asleep in his easy chair. (3-4)

As this passage suggests, the well’s rustic past is dramatically different from its present state of decay. In particular, the pastoral image of the nuns living in community with one another and using the land for their most-basic needs is contrasted with the more modern image of the drawing room, where Sir Michael and his young wife can spend
their time enjoying leisurely entertainment instead of working the land. As the novel suggests, Lady Audley’s crime does not cause the ruin of the well; instead, modernity—particularly the empire that has been built inside the home—figures into this change from pastoral to modern, and is partly the cause of the well’s ruin. As Braddon’s novel suggests via the ruined well, the system of domesticity was already on its way to ruin before Lady Audley commits her crime. Through such well imagery, Braddon signifies the greatest horror of the Cawnpore well—empire turned in on itself.

Although the well at Audley Court is complicated in Braddon’s novel, Lillian Nayder mistakenly reads Braddon’s use of the well too traditionally, which leads to a rather limiting reading of Braddon’s novel, and especially Braddon’s heroine. That Braddon’s novel casts Lady Audley in dual roles is a point that Lillian Nayder’s article overlooks. Nayder identifies Lady Audley as sepoy only—a conclusion that hinges on Lucy’s pushing George down the well at Audley Court—which limits Nayder’s reading of Braddon’s novel. While the moment of George’s attempted murder is certainly an important moment in the novel, especially in terms of how it sets the war between Lady Audley and Robert in motion and evokes the massacre at Cawnpore, giving too much literary weight to this one scene leads Nayder to a one-sided conclusion: that Braddon’s title character has rebelled against an established authority and must be put back in her place for authority to be reestablished. It is true that Lady Audley’s role as the domesticated and subjugated wife of George Talboys puts her in the place of a colonized figure. When she decides to rebel against the union that is keeping her in poverty, therefore, Lady Audley takes on the role of sepoy as she perpetrates her own micro-
Mutinies in order to hide her secret. Her role as sepoys, however, changes into something far more powerful and disturbing for the nation of England when Robert Audley attempts to re-domesticate his aunt, or to put it more plainly, to relegate her back to the tea table, which the novel describes as “a woman’s legitimate empire” (222). Suddenly Lady Audley is not just the rebel that has mutinied against the system of marriage, but she is also the imperialist, fighting to defend the dynasty she has worked so tirelessly to acquire. In this way, my study situates Lady Audley within imperialism—in fact, as a representative of imperialism—in contrast to those who only fights against it. The language that Braddon’s novel uses to describe the domestic sphere—as a “dynasty” where women “reigned supreme” (293)—identifies the domestic sphere as an empire in its own right. In addition to representing the rebellious sepoys, Lady Audley also exposes the greed that accompanies empire building.

It is important to note that the line between sepoys and imperialists is a murky one, in history as well as in Braddon’s text. In fact, power is the one characteristic that separates the actions of rebel from one whose primary aim is to build empire. During the Mutiny, scheming, murder, and acts of greed took place on the part of rebels and British alike, as my previous chapters have shown. Braddon’s novel draws attention to this cultural double standard, and each character embodies a mixture of innocence and guilt. Although Lady Audley is initially cast as the rebellious sepoys who pushes George Talboys into the well, Braddon’s main female character is also figured in the novel as an imperialist who rules her dynasty with massive dominion. In doing so, she offers a bird’s eye view into imperial culture via domesticity, and especially shows the danger of
imperialism turning in on itself and destroying the imperial family. Like British colonists, Lady Audley sets out to new and different places to multiple her material wealth for the better of herself and her family. Audley Manor becomes the tangible symbol of Lady Audley’s empire; as mentioned earlier in this chapter, all the decorations signify imperialism. Braddon exposes the greed that accompanies empire building in a scene that occurs half-way through the novel. After Robert Audley confronts his aunt and threatens to expose her secrets, she retires to her chamber, filled with Pre-Raphaelite paintings, exquisite draperies, and objects of empire. As she looks around the room, her image is multiplied by the mirrors that have been strategically placed in her apartment: “My lady’s fairy-like embroideries of lace and muslin, rainbow-hued silks, and delicately-tinted wools littered the luxurious apartment; while the looking-glasses, cunningly placed at angels and opposite corners by an artistic upholsterer, multiplied my lady’s image, and in that image reflected the most beautiful object in the enchanted chamber” (294). In a culture that cultivates the idea that the more one multiplies material wealth, the more one’s own image is multiplied, Lady Audley reigns supreme. Of course, it is worth noting that the novel admits and normalizes a certain kind of empire for women—the tea-table is described as “a woman’s legitimate empire” (222). Lady Audley’s quest to maintain her empire, however, takes her far away from such “legitimate” feminine concerns and on an aggressive imperial mission to stop Robert Audley’s attempts to re-domesticate her. Not only does she follow Robert to London and steal George’s letters, which contain her handwriting, but she tracks his every move.
Indeed, Lady Audley’s manipulative efforts to maintain her empire demonstrate the negative effects of imperialism on the imperial family. Her quest for material prosperity causes her to leave little Georgey, her son, in the hands of her drunken father. Lady Audley’s greed also negatively impacts her step-daughter Alicia, whose familial stability decreases after her father remarries. The following passage demonstrates how Lady Audley’s newly-acquired empire has created a chasm between Sir Michael and Alicia:

Her father was changed—that dear father, over whom she had once reigned supreme with the boundless authority of a spoiled child, had accepted another ruler and submitted to a new dynasty. Little by little my lady’s pretty power made itself felt in that narrow household, and Alicia saw her father gradually lured across the gulf that divided Lady Audley from her step-daughter, until he stood at last quite upon the other side of the abyss, and looked coldly upon his only child across that widening chasm. (293)

In this passage we see the description of domestic empire, as well as the harm done to Sir Michael and Alicia when empire turns on itself, or in other words, when the problems with empire are represented as British versus British instead of British versus Indian. The fact that the gulf between Alicia and Sir Michael is described as a “widening chasm” is especially noteworthy, since is invokes the well at Cawnpore and its divisive power. As I’ve already mentioned, Brantlinger refers to the well as “a widening chasm dividing the forces of absolute righteousness from the demonic armies of the night” (204). Here,
however, Braddon’s language signals that the chasm doesn’t separate English from the Other, but separates the members of the imperial family from one another.

The turning of the imperial family on itself is most clearly demonstrated through the micro-Mutinies performed by Lady Audley and Robert. Braddon sprinkles her novel with references to the Mutiny, which appear in specific places that highlight the battle between Lady Audley and her nephew. In doing so, Braddon’s novel performs empire by casting Lady Audley as a mutinous sepoy and her nephew Robert as the militant soldier who must bring her to justice. These roles complicate the roles of oppressed and oppressor—in this instance a British woman is cast as perpetrator of her own mutiny instead of the victim of the Mutiny, but she is also an imperialist who seeks to maintain her empire, while her accuser also occupies an uncertain position—on one hand he represents the domestic imperialist who wishes to redomesticate and contain Lady Audley, and on the other hand he is depicted as a heroic savior for the Audley family name. To further complicate matters, Lady Audley and her accusers reverse roles during the novel, establishing that the roles of perpetrator and victim are difficult to demarcate. Such role reversal is established in a quote spoken by George Talboys, who has returned from Australia and, after searching for his wife, is led to believe that she has died:

“Do you know, Bob,” he said, “that when some of our fellows were wounded in India, they came home bringing bullets inside them. They did not talk of them and they were stout and hearty, and looked as well, perhaps as you or I; but every change in the weather, however slight, every variation of the atmosphere, however trifling, brought back the old
agony of their wounds as sharp as ever they had felt it on the battle-field.

I’ve had my wound, Bob; I carry the bullet still, and I shall carry it into my coffin.” (49)

George’s quote signals the beginning of Lady Audley’s rebellion against the British institutions that have caused her suffering and hardship. Interestingly, George’s analogy aligns his wife Helen, a.k.a. Lady Audley, with a rebellious sepoy, which prepares readers for the war that will ensue between Lady Audley and her enemies. Even more interesting is George’s comparison of himself to a British soldier fighting against the mutineers in India. Although he momentarily plays the part of British soldier when he confronts Lady Audley about her true identity, Braddon reverses this role when she casts George as a victimized British woman who winds up at the bottom of the well at Audley Court. This role reversal shows Braddon’s ambivalence in regard to George’s desertion of his young wife. On the one hand, George gains sympathy through his victimized position at the bottom of the well. However, this eventual emasculated position—from active, heroic soldier to passive, victimized woman—suggests Braddon’s recognition and potential condemnation of George’s crime. Braddon’s novel not only complicates the roles of oppressor and oppressed, but reiterates through what happens to George Talboys that rebellion sometimes grows out of oppression instead of innate evil.

Braddon continues to complicate the roles of oppressed and oppressor through the character of Robert Audley, who not only plays the part of Lady Audley’s nephew, but also plays the British soldier to her rebellious sepoy. Even though George is initially Lady Audley’s primary enemy and prime target, Robert, who is initially charmed by his
aunt’s artifice and begins to fall in love with her, is eventually her most dangerous rival and works steadfastly toward her demise. It is Robert who must unravel the mystery behind George’s disappearance and reveal Lady Audley’s secret identity, but he doesn’t just play the part of detective. Instead, he must also be her judge and jury, determining her guilt and removing her to a madhouse in Belgium:

The young barrister had constituted himself the denouncer of this wretched woman. He had been her judge; and he was now her gaoler. Not until he had delivered the letter which lay before him to its proper address, not until he had given up his charge into the safe keeping of the foreign mad-house doctor, not until then would the dreadful burden be removed from him and his duty done. (382)

Robert’s position as his aunt’s judge and jury is similar to that of British soldiers during the Mutiny, who took it upon themselves to determine the guilt and the fate of Indian natives and sepoys during the recapturing of Indian cities. According to Christopher Hibbert’s 1978 history entitled The Great Mutiny, fear and confusion were in such abundance as the British attempted to regain their empire that prisoners were “slaughtered out of hand” in what Hibbert calls “wholesale execution.” Hibbert records the story of one British soldier who “told the guard that any man who wanted to fire off his musket (in case of damp) might come and shoot a sepoy.” When a sepoy threw himself at the soldier’s feet and begged for mercy, the soldier responds that the only mercy he’ll give him is to be shot first. All the sepoys in sight were then shot, their bodies discarded into the river. (331).
Similar to the British soldiers after the mutiny, Robert must act as his aunt’s judge and jury after her rebellion. In Braddon’s novel, however, family emergency takes on the characteristics of a national emergency. In fact, Robert compares his role as judge and jury to fighting in a war. When Sir Michael appoints Robert as his aunt’s judge and jury, Robert likens his circumstances to those of a military soldier: “If he has a battle to fight, let him fight it faithfully; but woe betide him if he…hides in the tents when the tocsin summons him to the scene of war!” (368). The fact that Robert views stopping Lady Audley’s series of crime as not just an obligation, but a national duty illustrates the importance of domesticity in Victorian England as well as in Braddon’s novel. The fact that Robert insists on exposing his aunt’s crime—especially since he was initially described as a “lazy, care-for-nothing fellow” who, instead of practicing his profession as a barrister, was excited about nothing except reading his French novels (32)—reveals the way a family emergency takes on national proportions in Braddon’s novel. In this instance, Robert is not just protecting his family name and the family safety, but he approaches the task at hand as if protecting the empire. As Robert’s quest illustrates, containing subversive women takes on the same characteristics as the imperial mission. In essence, Robert seeks to conquer, capture, and tame his aunt in much the same way the imperial mission in India sought to conquer and tame the natives.

Interestingly, this series of micro-Mutinies between Lady Audley and her nephew is performed in the domestic realm, which signals that while Robert is defending his domestic empire (i.e., his family heritage), Lady Audley is defending a domestic empire of her own. In this way, Braddon’s novel presents their battle not as sepoy against
empire, but as empire confronting empire. Lady Audley’s rebellion begins with artifice and theatricality, since she believes that playing the part of the innocent, coquettish wife will disguise her secrets. In fact, Lady Audley takes the domestic duties normally used to contain women and uses them to contain and distract Robert. As Lady Audley is repeatedly pitted against Robert in a battle of wills, direct references to the Mutiny highlight the key points of this micro-Mutiny. The first battle between Lady Audley and her nephew occurs the day of George’s disappearance, when Robert notices a bruise on her wrist amid all her fine jewelry as she plays the piano. When Lady Audley explains that she had received the bruise a few days prior from a ribbon she tied too tightly around her wrist, Robert deduces that his aunt merely “tells little childish white lies” (88). During Lady Audley’s first antagonistic encounter with Robert, she reveals her skills of innocent questioning and spinning falsehood. This initial encounter between the two sets up the battle lines: Lady Audley’s weapons of choice will be her feminine charms and her performance as a dutiful wife, while Robert will arm himself with deductive reasoning and determination.

The succession of battles that ensues between Lady Audley and her nephew leave readers wondering who will win, the rebellious imperialist herself or the noble, but merciless British soldier. Of course, there are wins and losses on both sides. Robert baits his aunt by threatening to retrieve George’s letters, which would allow him to match Lady Audley’s handwriting against Helen’s, and by threatening to bring Mrs. Barkamb, a lady from Wildernsea who could identify Lady Audley as Helen Talboys, to Audley Court. In due course, Lady Audley outwits Robert by persuading Sir Michael to throw
Robert out of Audley Court and using feminine persuasion to convince Sir Michael that Robert has gone mad. She also trails Robert to London, claiming to pay a bill she’d acquired in decorating Audley Manor, when she really makes the trip to steal George’s letters before he can study Helen’s handwriting. But by far her most effective strategy is her incessant questioning of Robert, which she accomplishes while serving tea, turning the pages of her music, pretending to flip the pages of a novel, or painting a picture. Robert’s battle cry after George’s letters turn up missing sounds strikingly similar to the cries of the soldiers who ravaged various Indian cities after the Cawnpore massacre—“Justice to the dead first…mercy to the living afterwards” (158).

Lady Audley possesses a unwaivering ability to perform her domestic duties, even after setting fire to Phoebe Marks’ inn and awaiting the news of Robert Audley’s certain death. As Lady Audley goes through the motions of a normal day—having breakfast and polite conversation with her husband, even though she had committed arson and possibly murder the previous night—Sir Michael tells his daughter Alicia about a recent conversation with a friend of his serving in the army in India. When he asks Alicia to guess their topic of conversation, her reply is not just a casual reference to the Mutiny, but a signal that Lady Audley’s rebellion is about to implode:

“I haven’t the remotest idea,” replied Alicia, rather disdainfully. ‘Perhaps he told you that we should have another war before long, by Ged, sir; or, perhaps, he told you that those fellows are getting themselves into a mess, sir; or that those other fellows were reforming this, and cutting down that and altering the other in the army, until, by Ged, sir, we shall have no
army at all, by-and-by—nothing but a pack of boys, sir, crammed up to the eyes with a lot of senseless schoolmasters’ rubbish, and dressed in shell-jackets and calico helmets. Yes, sir, they’re fighting in Oudh in calico helmets at this very day, sir.” (329)

Alicia’s reference to Oudh, the Muslim Kingdom, is significant. When the British took control of India, Oudh was an area they had agreed to leave in the power of Muslim leaders. Before the Mutiny, however, the British took control of the area and, as Christopher Hibbert notes in his 1978 historical account *The Great Mutiny*, they arrested its King because of a possible Mutiny plot (166). Although the land was eventually given back to its Muslim inhabitants, the British annexation of Oude is thought to be a primary cause of the 1857 rebellion. Alicia’s casual mention of it, especially when Lady Audley’s rebellion has reached a nearly climactic point, references the greed that eventually causes empire to turn on itself. It is shortly after this conversation that Robert shows up at Audley Manor and confronts Lady Audley about her criminal behavior. During this conversation, Robert confronts Lady Audley as a defender of British domesticity, specifically the Audley family, and also as a defender of Britain. As such, he represents British empire, and seeks to maintain the status quo by confronting his aunt and containing her. Lady Audley, however, because of the empire she has attained, confronts Robert not as a rebellious sepoy, but as empire as well.

The struggle between Robert and Lady Audley in some ways signals the turning of empire upon itself and mimicks the struggle between the rebellious sepoys and the British government. This ambivalence about guilt and innocence is also reflected in
Braddon’s attitude toward Lady Audley’s fate. Even though Robert pursues his aunt’s demise in order to spare the Audley name, the novel’s narrator doesn’t unequivocally consider him a hero for doing so. Instead, he becomes “a pitiless embodiment of justice, a cruel instrument of retribution” (271). In effect, Robert trades in his role as British soldier and becomes a rebellious sepoy himself when he, figuratively speaking, buries his aunt alive in a Belgium madhouse. Interestingly, by novel’s end Lady Audley no longer occupies the role of imperialist or rebellious sepoy, but instead is cast as the victimized women and children at Cawnpore. Such role reversals suggest the malleability and the constructed nature of such roles, as each of Braddon’s main characters shift easily between guilt and innocence.

For all of its subversive undercurrents, Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*, similar to Meadow’s Taylor’s *Seeta*, does not provide an ending that matches its challenge of the establishment. Lady Audley, like Miss Wheeler, is ultimately cast in a role that puts her back into the confines of the British imperial mission. Like Paton’s painting of Miss Wheeler, which is “painted over” to ensure salvation for the empire, Braddon’s subversive tendencies in the novel are also revised to uphold imperial ideals. By novel’s end, Lady Audley has been buried alive in Belgium, while Robert Audley and Clara Talboys marry in what can only be described as a revision and a repairing of the imperial family. Like the marriage between Cyril and Grace Mostyn, Robert’s marriage to Clara helps to not only restore British domesticity, but to relegate those who challenge the establishment—Seeta and Lady Audley—to static paintings on the wall. Braddon,
however, does not surprise readers with such an ending, but foreshadows Lady Audley’s inevitable “statue-like immobility” in the following passage:

The lines of her exquisitely-moulded lips were so beautiful, that it was only a very close observer who could have perceived a certain rigidity that was unusual to them. She saw this herself, and tried to smile away that statue-like immobility; but to-night the rosy lips refused to obey her: they were firmly locked, and were no longer the slaves of her will and pleasure.

(311)

Lady Audley’s “statue-like immobility” is worthy of note. Just as the Mutiny monuments served as a means of covering up British responsibility for the Cawnpore massacre and the crimes committed against British domesticity, Braddon’s choice to cast Lady Audley in stone sidesteps the novel’s subversive tendencies and places the blame on Lady Audley for her domestic deviancy rather than on the establishment that helped cause it. But even though Lady Audley’s story is buried in favor of a more suitable imperial ending, one where domesticity is repaired and domestic deviants are contained, such an ending seems too neat and tidy within a narrative that questions imperial ideology and exposes the fissures in British culture. The ending of Braddon’s novel seems to draw attention to itself as misplaced. As the reconstructed imperial family enjoys a happy day, remnants of a dark past—George Talboys and his son Georgey—still remain as a reminder that domesticity is a flawed imperial culture of its own.

While Seeta’s portrait is uncovered and enjoyed by the new imperial family, Lady Audley’s portrait is covered up in the empty Audley Manor, only viewed by those
tourists who visit to hear the stories of the lady who is no more. Interestingly, the three subversive female figures in this study—Miss Wheeler, Lady Audley and Seeta—are contained in works of art and viewed as a spectacle. Sometimes the painting is revised, sometimes displayed in a room filled with objects of conquest, or in the case of Lady Audley’s portrait, it is hidden away and viewed only by those who transgress and look beneath the cover.
Dismantling the Imperial Scaffold and Re-imagining Imperialism: An Examination of Henry Seton Merriman’s *Flotsam: The Story of a Life*

Published in 1896, Henry Seton Merriman’s *Flotsam* brings a twentieth-century perspective to the Mutiny novel in its handling of central Mutiny topics such as the East versus West binary, British morality, the British military, British women and colonialism, the British family, and the perpetual question of who is to blame for the rebellion that shook the very foundation of the British empire in 1857. In dealing with such weighty issues, Merriman’s novel offers a dark portrayal of British Anglo culture; specifically it highlights what happens when a culture has become so immersed in imperialist ideology that the very ideals which promise cultural enlightenment bring about the destruction of British morality, threaten the family unit, and reconfigure the way Britain defines itself as a nation. In examining such issues, *Flotsam* offers a late-century commentary on the myths of British sanctity and wholeness. Specifically, Merriman’s novel brings issues to center stage that, in earlier Mutiny novels, had operated under the surface—most notably the effect of imperialist ideology on the moral fibre of England as a whole.

As earlier chapters have demonstrated, Mutiny texts function as a stage where the roles of imperial power are enacted. As I have discussed previously, early Mutiny novels focus on the perceived inherent differences between East and West, which allowed writers to assign perfect purity to their British counterparts, demonize Indians for the rebellion, and thereby sidestep a direct examination of British policy and politics. Patrick Brantlinger defines this dichotomy, which is performed via the Mutiny novel, as “extropunitive projection, the racist pattern of blaming the victim expressed in terms of
an absolute polarization of good and evil, innocence and guilt, justice and injustice, moral restraint and sexual depravity, civilization and barbarism” (200). Novels that enact this dichotomy—James Grant’s *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny*, for instance—focus on the long suffering and heroism of British soldiers, who struggle through various bands of mutineers to defend their beloved empire (and usually their betrothed as well).

To be sure, the British military, the British family and the British empire are crucial components of the imperial scaffold defined in Chapter 2. Imperial scaffolding—the framework of imperial ideology and rhetorical strategies that helped the British to reclaim power in India and repair the damage the Mutiny caused the British empire—operates by constructing an empire-friendly narrative of the Indian Mutiny, one that dehumanizes Indians and provides legitimacy for British imperial control. Above all, the imperial scaffold is a layered set of assumptions about the colonizer, the colonized, and the binary opposition between the two. Representations of family and the military are powerful and effective components of the imperial scaffold, because they provide a way for British writers to create the binary opposition between Indian and British values. The image of Britain as a nation centered around the concepts of family and domesticity directly contrasted Indians, who were depicted in many Mutiny novels as anti-family, at least in terms of British norms. Indian harems, after all, fly in the face of British norms. I have extended the definition of *family* to include the romantic pairing of men and women in addition to the traditional definition of husband, wife and child. Of course, this extended definition does not just apply to *Flotsam*, but to Mutiny novels as a whole. It is important not to gloss over the former definition of family in relation to the Mutiny novel, since such novels are often about the journey of winning back an estranged partner in addition to winning back the Empire at large. Because many Mutiny novels end with the marriage of the hero or heroine, romantic relationships are an important component of the way family was represented in this sub-genre.
respectability, and the use of such tropes provided a sharp contrast between the cultural values of East and West. Similarly, representations of the British military as heroic and organized contrasted representations of Indians, since Indians were allegedly operating in cowardice and chaos as various uprisings occurred across Northern India. This theory of chaos, as it was represented in both the media and literature of the time, reaffirms another layer in the imperial scaffold—the insistence that the events of 1857-8 were a mutiny, a rebellion against established authority, instead of an organized national war of independence. This theory of chaos perpetuated throughout the nineteenth century and continued into twentieth-century representations of the uprising, most notably E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, published in 1924. In particular, Forster’s opening chapter foregrounds India’s lack of progress, modernity, and organization through the town of Chandrapore: “the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life” (4).

In order to construct a convincing public image of itself as an empire worthy of power and worthy of holding dominion over half the globe, Britain also had to represent itself (in both the media and in fiction) as a nation with family at the heart of its empire and a nation that prided itself on military integrity. In relation to the Mutiny novel, the combination of family and military is a powerful one; often a romantic plot runs alongside the military plot of subduing the rebellion and reclaiming the empire, and many Mutiny novels end with the marriage of the hero or heroine after the empire is out of

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41 In Chapter 2, I provide a lengthy discussion of the chaos theory and the political implications of defining the rebellion as a mutiny. Deeming the actions in 1857-8 mutinous suggests that Indians were revolting against the established authority—England—while naming it the First War of Indian Independence gives validity to the uprising and political weight to the Indians’ cause.
danger. In this way, the Mutiny novel presents the British family as a microcosm of the British nation—threatened, but not yet ruptured. In times of distress for the nation, particularly in 1857 when British imperial power was being challenged and threatened with such intensity, it makes sense that novelists represent the family as ultimately whole and unified. According to Guatam Chakravarty, author of *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*, the marriage and family plot is extremely important to the Mutiny novel, since this central focus of British culture helps to reduce the horrors of the Mutiny and ensure the survival of British culture in the face of attack. The marriage and family plot provides the Mutiny novel with another layer, constructed by the author, that can be placed alongside the Mutiny plot to provide readers with a sense that the empire is safe and will continue to thrive. As Chakravarty notes, “Faithful to, yet transcending the historical archive, such processes enable the novels to articulate the plot of the rebellion with the plot of Anglo-Indian love, marriage and domesticity, thus ensuring that…the latter always contains and survives the former” (136). Chakravarty’s point is well taken. Because marriage and family—the domestic drama—are central to the idea of empire, it is especially important to study how marriage and family survive in the Mutiny novel and how their performance seeks to restore faith in British imperial values. It is, however, also important to examine how Mutiny novels use the themes of marriage and family to critique British imperial values. This chapter will examine the nature of this critique.

Throughout this project, I have demonstrated how Mutiny novels perform the imperial scaffold in ways that both reaffirm, but also undercut British imperial power. Later Mutiny novels, represented in Chapters 2 and 3 of this project, move from a binary
representation of East vs. West to a more covert critique of British imperial culture. Importantly, this covert critique happens via the British family. Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*, for instance, revolves around the solving of a crime committed against the British family and the attempts to save the sacred Verinder name. Although this crime is assumed to have been committed by a group of Indian Brahmins, the criminal eventually turns out to be an English philanthropist—a man who very explicitly represents a rupture in British morality. What is even more threatening is that the criminal attacks the British family from within, and he is able to do so not only because he is a trusted member of the community, but because the other characters are distracted by their suspicions of the Indian Brahmins. Like *The Moonstone*, Mary Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* also enacts the British family under an attack from within. Specifically, Braddon examines the ways in which the British system of marriage colonizes British women and forces rebellion, greed, and murder. Both Collins and Braddon provide a critique of the British family—namely the manner in which it functions as a rather shaky pinnacle of British imperial culture—even though the critique operates under the surface of what takes center stage: spectacle and mystery. As I’ve argued in earlier chapters, Collins and Braddon undercut the imperial scaffold by exposing the fissures in British imperial ideology.

Henry Merriman’s *Flotsam* overtly performs what *The Moonstone* and *Lady Audley’s Secret* perform under the surface: the disintegration of the scaffolding as the empire turns in on itself. In this way, Merriman’s novel offers a late-century perspective of how imperialist ideology works to bring about the Mutiny and destroy Britian’s core values. According to Webster’s, *flotsam* is defined as “the wreckage of a ship or its cargo
floating at sea” (519). Part of the wreckage to which the title refers is protagonist Harry Wylam, who embodies the problems with the British military and with imperial attitudes before and after the Mutiny. This theme of wreckage is reflected through the tone of Merriman’s novel, a dark depiction of the British military system that chronicles the break-down of British moral and familial values, the response to and aftermath of one of the most violent confrontations in Victorian history, and the wreckage of imperialism as it had been defined and inculcated into the Victorian sensibility. If the Mutiny is a performance of British and Indian cultures, then Flotsam serves as the climax of such a performance, where the deep flaws in British culture are exposed, the imperial scaffold is dismantled, and new possibilities are imagined. Specifically, the novel dismantles three key elements of the imperial scaffold discussed in Chapter 2. First, Merriman’s novel reveals the artificiality of nationality and the collapse of the binary between the British and Indians through the element of disguise, as the characters switch back and forth between the “costumes” of British and Indian. Second, the novel examines and interrogates the figure of the British soldier, specifically what makes a good defender of Britain and Queen Victoria during the Mutiny, and most importantly whether the British soldier is a protector of Britain or one whom Britain needs protection from.

Third, the novel challenges the representation of the British family as whole and unified. Without a doubt, the image of the British family found in Merriman’s novel is one that is fractured and fragmented. This fractured nature of the family is due not only to the aftereffects of the Mutiny, but also reflects emerging anxieties of the 1890s such as the rise of the New Woman, who rejected marriage and children, joined the workforce,
and lobbied for economic independence for the female sex. *Flotsam* engages this issue mainly through the character of Miriam Gresham, the woman Harry promises to marry, but rejects in favor of a more intriguing and sexy prospect. Interestingly, Miriam embodies the qualities of the New Woman on some level—she chooses not to marry or have children—but by novel’s end still retains traditional, self-sacrificial tendencies, allowing Harry to maintain some semblance of masculine power. Through its examination of both the military and the family, *Flotsam* dismantles the imperial scaffold in order to reimagine new possibilities for British imperialism that emerge from the wreckage.

**The Military and the British Family: the Collapse of the East/West Binary**

The imperial scaffold operates by creating an empire-friendly narrative of the Mutiny and presenting imperialism as an ordered and unified system—one that benefits both the colonizer and the colonized. In Mutiny literature, specifically the Mutiny novel, the representation of the English military is a key component of the scaffold, and helped to solidify Britain as an imperial power that was moral, just, and heroic. Many Mutiny novels feature members of the military as main characters, although curiously, the plots of such novels are often more about romance than the uprising and the military’s response to it. Rhetorically, such novels operate by leaning heavily on the core of British family values, and assuming that readers will equate the military man’s loving, genuine and sincere actions toward his betrothed with his military pursuits. These novels, through their military characters, attempt to present British imperial power at its best. Because of
Flotsam’s publication date—1896—it is important to situate my discussion of this novel’s representation of the military within the broader context of earlier representations of the military in Mutiny novels from 1857 earlier in the century. This discussion of the military and its function in Mutiny novels (in general, but also Merriman’s novel specifically) will provide the groundwork for the discussion of the family that will follow.

Mutiny novels reveal a definite pattern of showcasing the English military’s supposed moral fiber and heroism. John Peck’s War, the Army and Victorian Literature, which devotes a chapter to an analysis of the military in Mutiny novels, is important to this discussion, because it provides insight into the cultural milieu of Britain during the Victorian period that helps explain the military’s depiction in the Mutiny novel and its progression over the century. Peck describes the representation of the military directly after the Mutiny as Christian militarism, a conflation of morality with politics and patriotism. Simply put, the military was represented as having not only a political reaction to the uprising, but a political response interwoven with a moral and patriotic one. As I’ve discussed in earlier chapters and as Peck has noticed, this “mixture of religion, politics and patriotism” can bring about “a blood-thirsty desire for revenge” that is evident in many novels (and in real-life reactions) of the time. The representation of fictional military characters as heroic Christians is the result of several key factors, as Peck has outlined in his work. First of all, the Mutiny was different from the other military enterprises in which Britain was involved during the nineteenth century, since the attack was, at least on some level, an attack from within. The sepoys, after all, had
been trained by British soldiers to be a part of the British army. And unlike other military conflicts during the century, the Mutiny was an attack where “Christians were being threatened by non-Christians,” and by an army that, unlike the other armies that came against Britain in the nineteenth century, were more equipped to fight. Put these factors together with failed military conflicts that occurred in close proximity to the Mutiny—the Crimean War, for instance, where the largely aristocratic army was shown to be incompetent, and “the loss of the American colonies” in the late eighteenth century, which dealt a severe “blow to national self-confidence” (Peck 72), and the Mutiny was a situation ripe for a strong and severe military response.

James Grant’s *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny* (1868) most aptly represents Peck’s idea of Christian militarism, and creates such a great moral divide between East and West that there is no reprieve for the former; as a result, revenge fantasies loom large in the text. Grant’s novel does not focus primarily on the Mutiny itself, but on the loyalty and moral fiber of military man Jack Harrower, who has been

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42 Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the aftereffects the Mutiny had on the military and on British imperial policy, Ronald Hyam provides a detailed, accessible, and interesting discussion of this topic in *Britain’s Imperial Century, 1815-1914*. Hyam refers to the period between 1855 and 1865 as the “decade of crisis for the grand design,” a period of resistance against British rule which occurred across the globe, and was brought about, in part, because of the Indian Mutiny. Shortly after the Indian Mutiny began, an “anti-white protest” began in South Africa, when a prophetess convinced her countrymen “to stop planting corn and to destroy nearly all their cattle, in the expectation that their ancestors would return, drive the white men (supposedly the cause of all their woe) into the sea, and superintend a general resurrection from the dead of their beloved cattle.” Approximately thirty-five thousand became “starving refugees” and another thirty-five thousand died as a result of this rebellion, which bears similarities to the Mutiny in India and the belief that the white man’s rule would end in 1857 and that the country would be given back to its ancestors. Hyam also describes the “poisonous bread plot” in Hong Kong, when Viceroy Yeh Ming-ch’en “laced the bread in a local bakery with arsenic.” Ming-ch’en’s plan was foiled, however, because the dose of arsenic was “too high to be lethal” and “simply led to vomiting.” Although no Europeans died because of the poisoning, the response was, according to Hyam, “fierce” and involved gunboats, arrests, and deportation (145-6). Hyam’s work illustrates the wide-ranging reverberations of the Mutiny on British imperial rule, and on Britain’s response to uprisings after 1857. Interestingly, neither of these incidents was deemed a mutiny.
betrayed by both his love interest Lena Weston and, later in the novel, his sepoys. This pattern of placing female conquest alongside imperial conquest is not unique to Grant’s novel, but remains a pattern throughout Mutiny literature, and illustrates the interconnectedness of military and domestic concerns that I’ll discuss later in this chapter. At the beginning of Grant’s novel, readers learn that Harrower has been jilted by Lena Weston, who has developed affections for another man. It is through this trying love relationship that Harrower’s resolve is documented most concretely. Harrower does not give up easily, but continues to vie for Lena’s affections, even in the midst of a tremendous military crisis. In order to further highlight Harrower’s strengths, Grant’s novel places Harrower alongside sexually depraved Indian characters, who abduct British women and attempt to add them into their zenanas. Lena’s sister, after she refuses to become a part of Abubeker’s harem, is dragged through the streets naked and hung as an example in the town square of Delhi. These representations of depravity pave the way for Grant’s momentary cries for revenge, which, although not central to the novel, leave an overall impression of vengeance. For instance, as the troops march into Delhi to reclaim the city, their battle cry—“Remember Cawnpore. Remember the poor babies.”—reminds readers of the centrality of family values to the military’s response. Grant’s novel is an example that even when Mutiny novels represent the military’s reaction to the Mutiny, it is described as a justifiable revenge. As I’ve mentioned in earlier chapters, such novels fail to accurately represent the military’s response to the Mutiny, since they ignore the acts of violent retribution against Indian townspeople who were not taking part in the
uprising, as well as the military’s premature executions of those Indians who had not been tried for their alleged crimes.

In Taylor’s *Seeta* (1872), readers see an idealistic representation of the military through the main character, Cyril Brandon. Although Brandon is described as a military leader who develops a strong rapport with the Indian villagers—he can converse so fluidly with them in Hindi that they cannot detect an accent, and he has an “evident desire for the improvement and advancement of all classes” (69)—Brandon’s love of culture and of Indians is demonstrated most concretely through his love relationship with Seeta. Because Brandon takes an Indian woman as his wife, the novel suggests that he is culturally accepting in the most concrete way. As in Grant’s novel, Taylor’s novel also places Brandon up against male Indian characters who are neither accepting nor heroic, which further highlights these traits in Brandon himself. Seeta’s husband, after all, is murdered at the hands of a greedy male relative, who kills Seeta’s husband as an act of revenge over a lost inheritance. And Seeta’s other male relatives do not encourage her freedom and education. As I pointed out in Chapter One, however, Taylor’s overly accepting and heroic portrayal of Cyril Brandon deconstructs itself by novel’s end, and Taylor ultimately cannot follow through with the proposal of cross-cultural acceptance that he presents through this heroic military man of the people. Brandon’s relationship with Seeta begins to resemble colonizer and colonized, and by novel’s end Seeta is dead and Brandon marries Grace Mostyn, a more suitable English bride. But even though a close reading of Taylor’s novel reveals the flaws in the English military—it’s lack of real cultural acceptance and its need to conform Indians into a version of Englishness—this
critique operates under the surface. The general impression of the military in Taylor’s novel is a favorable one, and one that represents the army’s response to the Mutiny as warranted and fair.

Merriman’s novel fits into this larger context of military representations as an end-of-the-century response to the Mutiny, one where hindsight provides greater insight into the pitfalls of the British military and into Christian militarism, which had been celebrated in earlier Mutiny novels. Unlike Grant’s novel, Merriman’s novel does not call for revenge or for the extermination of Indians, but provides a closer look at the British military, and shows the turning of empire upon itself and the wreckage that ensues. Unlike Taylor’s novel, Merriman’s critique of the military and of imperialism does not operate under the surface; instead, this wreckage functions as the central trope of the novel. In a number of ways, *Flotsam* seeks to disrupt the imperial scaffold constructed in earlier Mutiny novels—novels that heralded the British military, focused on the binary of East and West, and placed the blame for the uprising squarely on the Indians themselves. The lynchpin of the imperial scaffold is the presentation of British imperialism as an ordered system, and Merriman’s novel disrupts such a narrative and reveals the ruptures—indeed, the wreckage—of the British military that helped bring about the Mutiny in 1857. Merriman’s disruption of this military and imperial narrative is not surprising, given England’s colonial crisis in the 1880s and 1890s, including the “scramble for Africa” and the Mutiny anxieties that resurfaced. William Harcourt, Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, overtly expressed this anxiety “when he wrote to Prime Minister Lord Rosebery asking whether ‘we [are] to attempt to create another India
in Africa?” (qtd. in Chakravarty 35). Although the Mutiny was long over, the memory of it was ever-present, and novels like Flotsam, where British characters are able to slip in an out of Eastern dress and spy on mutineers (and on each other) became more popular.

Similar to earlier Mutiny novels, Flotsam does not focus primarily on the Mutiny itself, but chronicles the life of Harry Wylam, who eventually grows up to serve as a soldier in the Indian Mutiny. Through Harry’s troublesome life, Merriman raises questions about those British soldiers who serve in the Mutiny and the lack of moral values that led to the “wreckage” the novel’s title specifies. No longer are the British portrayed as pure, innocent, brave, and victimized only; Merriman’s novel assigns them a troubling past. When he is only three years old, Harry is left an orphan after his parents die tragically from cholera, and he is then shipped back to England to live with his uncle. In this way, Harry “embodies the colonial crisis of origins,” as Anne McClintock has argued in regard to the protagonist of Kipling’s Kim, published only five years after Flotsam (69). Unlike Kim, however, Harry is volatile, often violent and unpredictable as a young child, which foreshadows his decision to eventually join the military and serve in India. This element of the novel draws the British empire, specifically the British military, into question; the British military is no longer a moral representative of the nation, but morally and ethically bankrupt. At a very young age, Harry is caught beating his Indian nanny with the leg that has broken off his rocking horse, a scene that mirrors the entitled attitude with which the British empire treated its Asian colony, and draws attention to the master-servant relationship between West and East. Although Harry’s guardian, John Gresham, attempts to make him a gentleman by sending him to school,
Harry does poorly and eventually runs away to the docks where he declares his intention to join the military and serve Queen Victoria one day. Running away only gets him kicked out of school, so Gresham buys Harry a commission to bear a sword for the Queen when he comes of age. Harry’s lack of self-control and discipline sets him apart from fictional soldiers represented in earlier Mutiny novels—specifically the gallant Jack Harrower in Grant’s novel, and the culturally accepting Cyril Brandon in Taylor’s. By providing readers with a negative portrait of its main military character, Merriman’s novel overtly tears down this part of the scaffold—the glorification of the military—piece by piece.

Merriman’s novel also dismantles another crucial part of the scaffold—the representation of the British family as unified and whole. In fact, one defining characteristic of Merriman’s novel is its representation of the family unit as ruptured and decentered. This separates Flotsam from its predecessors—those Mutiny novels that use the uprising to showcase and even celebrate the sanctity and wholeness of the British family. Grant’s novel, for instance, is book-ended by events revolving around British family and marriage. The novel’s opening chapters describe the courtship of Harrower and Lena, who find themselves in the midst of the worst colonial rebellion in British imperial history. As a whole, the novel revolves around Harrower’s quest to find Lena after the two lose touch during the Mutiny’s outbreak, and the novel closes with their marriage celebration. Even the novel’s representation of Indian culture and Indians themselves serves the purpose of celebrating the British family unit. When Lena’s sister is captured by a mutineer and forced to become a member of his zenana, as I discussed
earlier, the novel uses the incident to contrast the perceived sexual depravity of the Indians against the purity and sanctity of the British family. Because of the novel’s 1868 publication date—a mere eleven years after the Mutiny began—its representation of the British family still reveals the need to justify British traditions and moral codes against the backdrop of Indian immorality. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, the Mutiny novel evolves to reflect a guarded, covert view of the fractured family. *Lady Audley’s Secret*, for instance, represents the family unit as fractured, but the fractures of the cultural system are disguised behind female crime and greed.

In Merriman’s novel, the family unit is part of the wreckage to which the title refers—the wreckage caused by imperialism. Unlike other Mutiny novels, where the traditional British family survives the uprising, *Flotsam* contains no representations of the traditional British family to begin with—Phillip Lamond is a single parent whose wife is in prison, John Gresham is a single parent to his nephew Harry and to his biological daughter Miriam, and Harry survives a volatile marriage and ends up alone. *Flotsam* also differs from other earlier Mutiny novels in another important way—instead of presenting the British family struggling against the backdrop of Indian greed and violence, the British family struggles against its own greed, violence and poor decisions. This disruption of family life is interwoven with the critique of the British military. Both are depicted in the novel as fractured and broken, and both are key parts of the wreckage of

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43 Generally Mutiny novels feature mutinous sepoys, and by contrast, the token Indians who offer to give the British assistance. Interestingly, Merriman’s novel features hardly any Indian characters, and the ones that it does mention are surprisingly not part of the East/West binary—either villains or loyal British supporters. In one key scene in the novel, Harry must visit two wealthy Indians to ask for a loan to pay his gambling debts. The Indians are clearly men of great financial and political power, which illustrates Merriman’s dismantling of the East/West binary and his critique of British values through Harry’s lack of judgment.
imperial ideology, which likely represents the fears of degeneration that abounded in the 1880s and 1890s, after decades of racial theory that scientifically legitimized the superiority of the white race, alongside the growth of certain “undesirable” demographics of the British population, such as the poor, the Jewish and Irish, and prostitutes. Both the family and the military, which had earlier been used to symbolize British imperial power and superiority, undercut British values and power and show the brokenness of British imperialism by the end of the century.

It is through the avenue of the family—specifically Harry’s romantic love interests—that the novel questions two differing views of colonialism. The characters of Maria, Lamond’s daughter and eventually Harry’s wife, and Miriam Gresham, Harry’s cousin and his love interest before leaving for India, also offer a look at competing views of colonialism, which the novel dismantles and reimagines at the narrative’s end. Harry’s cousin, Miriam, serves as the ideal imperial wife. Loving, dutiful, and self-sacrificial, she represents the characteristics that helped support and construct the imperial scaffold. It is also interesting that throughout the novel, Miriam remains in England, untainted by the violence and greed that are part of Anglo-India. Before Harry is sent to India, as he is expelled from school and discharged from the military, Miriam stands by him and offers a kind of self-sacrificing unconditional love. When Harry professes his love to her and promises to return from India having saved all his money to offer her a comfortable life, she tells him, “with that faint tone of maternal care which is never wanting in a woman’s love,” that she doesn’t want his money, but only cares for his safety (84). Miriam

For a full discussion of degeneration, specifically the racial theory of the period, see Anne McClintock’s Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and the Colonial Contest.
represents traditional British imperialism, where family, honor and duty are at the core, making Britain a worthy colonial power justified in civilizing and modernizing the world.

Of course, Harry’s volatility and his poor military choices are not limited to his time in India, but occur before he leaves England, which I believe signals Merriman’s critique of British cultural values. India does not lead him astray; instead, it is his own impetuous nature, violent temper, and quest for notoriety that cause his downfall. These impulses lead him into card-playing and fighting within his regiment. Harry is eventually discharged from his regiment after a duel with another soldier, Montague, whom he almost kills. The dual is significant in this context, since it signifies a code of military honor that, as the novel points out, was no longer prevalent in England. Harry’s insistence on working outside the bounds of honor to settle a dispute illustrates his lack of self-control and foreshadows his eventual fall. Harry’s guardian tries to convince him to apologize to Montague instead of going through with the duel, but Harry refuses and, during the duel, fires a bullet into Montague’s neck. Harry’s reaction afterward shows that he is not without feeling—he rushes to Montague’s side, “as quick to repent as he had been to act” (74)—however, as Merriman’s novel illustrates repetitively, the reverberating consequences of military and political actions are wide-ranging. The Colonel dismisses Harry from the unit, but gives him some advice—“In some regiments you would get on splendidly”—and suggests that Harry try India (77). According to the Colonel, Harry is better suited for military life in India because of his impetuous nature, since life in India is “volcanic,” as described by another character later in the novel. However, Merriman does not suggest that the “depravity” of the Eastern world has
contaminated Harry; his volatility is present from a very young age, even throughout his upbringing in England. Even though Merriman uses the duel to point out Harry’s character flaws, he also uses it to point out the flaws in the British military system, since the duel, although illegal, was ignored and Harry was not brought up on charges: “A great scandal to the regiment had been averted, for no regiment is the better for a court-martial. It was an open secret that Montague and Wylam had fought, and the offence was gravely ignored by those in authority” (76). This passage stands out in the Mutiny novel as a genre, since most novels aim to herald the British military and its code of honor. Merriman’s novel, by contrast, draws attention to the mishandling of military affairs.

Merriman doesn’t just critique imperialism through the military, but also through Maria Lamond, Philip Lamond’s power-hungry and tempestuous daughter. Maria represents the dark, mysterious, and dangerous side of colonialism—a view of colonialism that centers around greed, monetary gain, and notoriety. Maria treats romantic love as conquest; at the Bachelors’ ball, for instance, Maria stakes out the enemy—other women—and diminishes their self-confidence with a glance:

Maria’s dark eyes flashed a bright welcome or a scornful semi-indifference, according to the sex of her friend, as she recognized here and there an acquaintance. Indeed, the change from the one expression to the other was bewilderingly rapid. If some fellow-votary at the shrine of Venus possessed a pretty figure, Maria looked that shapely form up and down with an imperfectly concealed commiseration. If it happened that the hair of her rival was fair and soft she noted the dressing of the same
with a pitiful little smile. Whether it happened to be face or figure, arm or hair, or merely dress, Maria seemed to discover at one glance the particular point upon which the possessor prided herself, and her glance disparaged it. (135)

As this passage suggests, Maria’s opportunism supercedes her desire for human intimacy. Maria’s focus, in this passage and throughout the novel, is on gaining and maintaining power, notoriety, and financial stability. After Harry has been discharged from the army, Maria leaves him without a word of goodbye. The next time Harry sees her, she reveals her vindictive and cruel nature, which had been masked by mystery and flirtation. Interestingly, in order to demonize Maria, the novel assigns her stereotypically male characteristics. For instance, in the following passage, as Maria ridicules Harry for being discharged from the army, her language and level of aggression are coded as transgressive:

‘You are disgraced. It is a degradation to bear your name. A British officer, indeed. A pretty officer you are! Why, you have been turned out of the army.’—she hurled at him such a storm of vituperation as he had never conceived possible from the lips of a woman. She used words, common enough, alas! In the mouths of those men who had been his companions, but of which Harry had deemed all women—even the lowest—happily ignorant. (320-1)

Maria’s womanly wiles suddenly turn masculine in an attempt to vilify her and adhere to a gendered system of demarcated categories. As in earlier Mutiny novels, Merriman’s
novel uses women as a representation of different colonial systems. This becomes apparent not only in Maria’s greed for money and position, but in her choice of a second husband after leaving Harry. Eventually Maria chooses to wed the future president of a Spanish colony. Maria’s greedy nature and her close ties to colonialism suggest a kind of imperialism that has gotten off course.

In addition to Maria, a variety of other questionable English characters draw attention to the flaws in the military, and the way that family and military are interwoven in disturbing ways. Once Harry arrives in India, he comes in contact with a host of mysterious, even eerie, characters. Lady Leaguer, for instance, the Colonel’s wife, is a cold, ruthless woman, and although she never commits an act of violence, she remains one of the most spiritually bankrupt characters in the novel. She takes pleasure in the hardness of her husband’s military persona—she compliments Fred Marqueray, another high official in the military, by telling him that he and her husband “are the hardest men in India” (138)—and seems oddly delighted at the news of the Mutiny’s outbreak: “‘It has come,’ said the Colonel, under his breath. ‘Where?’ whispered his wife, and all the while she smiled.” (143). Phillip Lamond, the man who attempts to get custody of Harry after his parents die in order to get his hands on the family money, also works his way back into Harry’s life as soon as Harry arrives in India. Lamond’s opportunistic behavior actually begins much earlier in the novel when he passes himself off as Mr. Wylam’s solicitor after Wylam’s death, even though he had only been Wylam’s servant. By doing this, he is able to begin collecting the rent money from Wylam’s properties and can take charge of Wylam’s orphan son, which he believes will lead to something more profitable
later. Unfortunately for Lamond, John Gresham, Mr. Wylam’s cousin who lives in England, is the next of kin and demands that young Harry be sent there immediately. Lamond has no choice and hands the child over. Once Harry returns to India to serve in the military, Lamond begins to befriend Harry with two ulterior motives: to convince Harry to marry Maria so she will be well cared for, and to coerce Harry into an illegal scheme to benefit financially from the Mutiny. Lamond believes there is a fortune to be made if he and Harry can figure out a way to help the British recapture Delhi, so he makes a proposition to Harry that they team up and blow up several buildings and a mosque outside the city where rebels are hiding.

In this way, even though Lamond is not a member of the military, Merriman uses him to show the way capitalism and greed have become such a large part of British imperialism that they begin to turn in on the British themselves and destroy the culture’s morality from the inside out. Harry and Lamond succeed in their plan to loot the mosque, although Harry is eventually charged with looting and dismissed from the British army. After the scheme has been completed, readers discover that Lamond intends to blackmail Harry—his choices are to marry Lamond’s daughter Maria and to sign over his fortune to her, or take the risk that Lamond will turn him over to the commanding officers for his illegal actions. Harry cannot resist at this point, since Lamond knows enough to cost Harry his military career and his reputation. Harry’s lack of self control, discipline, and honor follows him throughout the novel; his lack of impulse control is not helped, however, by Lamond’s capitalist impulses. Lamond is described as having the “spirit of commercial enterprise” (186), which, coupled with Harry’s impetuous nature, is a time
bomb waiting to blow—a time bomb that is even more destructive than the Mutiny itself. If Harry represents the volatile, opportunistic, and capitalistic British empire, Merriman also illustrates through Harry’s fall from power how the empire is ultimately its own worst enemy.

Indeed, Harry’s downfall is the result of his own evil desires, and what happens to him in Merriman’s novel is a portrait of the British empire crumbling from within. Harry’s family background is important to this discussion as well, since his father worked for the East India Company as it began to gain prominence in India. Many Mutiny scholars criticize the East India Company for its mishandling and abuse of power—both economically and militarily—since the company had control of India until the crown took control after the Mutiny’s outbreak. Because of the link between capitalism and the military that is illustrated so aptly through the East India Company, it is interesting and worthy of investigation that in Merriman’s novel, the fruit of the company—Harry Wylam—also abuses his military power by looting and plundering for capitalistic gain. Indeed, one inner/imperial demon that the novel surfaces within the British military is greed. After blowing up the mosque and stealing a fortune, Harry is angry that he does not receive the Victoria Cross he so arduously coveted since he was a boy. Merriman’s novel, however, suggests that those who explicitly seek financial gain over honor will

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45 The East India Company had a long and compromising history in India. It was given a charter to trade there at the end of the sixteenth century, and began to get more corrupt with time (and the influence of profit, of course). In order to secure the Indian territory, the company’s officials paid Indian rulers high sums of money in exchange for access and control. Once the company had control over a large number of Indian territories, it began to institute changes in various cultural practices and in land-tenure policies, which meant that Indians were charged more and more money for their own land. For a more detailed account of the East India Company’s dealings, see David Saul’s *The Indian Mutiny*, which contains a chapter on the subject.
receive only disappointment: “Fortune thus ever appears to smile on those who woo her
carelessly, while others, seeking her favours more earnestly, must needs go without
them” (198). Harry does receive his own company for his exploits in the taking of Delhi,
but is unable to fool his superiors for long. Eventually, he is discovered as a looter and a
liar. Merriman’s portrayal of Harry Wylam offers a striking contrast to soldiers depicted
in other, earlier Mutiny novels, which follow fairly predictable patterns. In Grant’s novel,
Harrower, for instance, is brave and courageous, and devoted to Lena Weston. In Seeta,
although Cyril Brandon breaks the mold of other Mutiny soldiers by falling in love with
and marrying an Indian woman, he is nevertheless portrayed as a devoted man of
integrity. Harry stands as a sharp contrast to these other characters. Victorian readers
could not miss the fact that Harry wished he could achieve the fame of Frederick Cooper,
who desired notoriety but became infamous for his “eye for an eye” handling of the
Mutiny at Ujnalla. 46

To be sure, Merriman exposes the careless violence within the British military,
not just through Harry’s admiration of the savage Frederick Cooper, but through the
mosque scene and through an initial illustration that appears before the novel’s first
chapter. The mosque scene draws attention to careless British violence, since Harry and
Lamond are not avenging British deaths through their actions, but are trying to make a
financial profit. Throughout this scene, the Indians and their supposed “savagery” are no

46 Cooper was initially heralded for his bravery, but shortly thereafter criticized for his handling of the
sepoys at Lahore. As Thompson notes, Cooper’s desire for fame was granted, although he is not famous for
his bravery but for his savagery. Thompson cites the work of H.H. Greathed, who was acting Civil
Commissioner at the time, who wrote the following in response to Cooper’s massacre: “Yes, it is one of the
memories of India, as Cawn pox is of England. Cooper’s narration reaches its climax in these words:
‘There is a well at Cawnpoor; but there is also one at Ujnalla.’ I see no reason why he should be denied the
immortality he craved so earnestly. Let his name be remembered with Nana Sahib’s” (33).
longer the central focus; instead, the British and their fury take center stage. Interestingly, it is difficult to assign guilt and innocence throughout this scene; this East/West binary is dismantled, and in its place is a chaotic portrait of power and greed. As Harry and Lamond attack the mosque, for instance, the narrator describes the way the soldiers attack in “an avenging fury” (217):

Here in the narrow streets ensued a fight upon which the historian will scarcely care to dwell; for the long pent-up fury of the men broke all bounds of humanity, and their officers scarce sought to restrain them. Women, indeed, were spared, but boys and old men, bearing no sort of arm, were cut down ruthlessly. Peaceful citizens, coming trembling to their doors to welcome their deliverers from the horrors of anarchy and licentiousness, were bayoneted on their own thresholds, because their faces were black. It was indeed impossible to distinguish between friend and foe, and the deadly fire for the windows of the houses was some excuse for the bitter retaliation wreaked upon old and young. A thousand deeds of heroism, as well as many acts of fury and revenge, were done by individual fighters: for this was a soldier’s battle in the narrow streets of Delhi. (216)

This scene echoes the historical episodes of British troops forcefully reclaiming Indian cities after the Mutiny began, but what is remarkable about this passage is its focus on the “bitter retaliation” of the British troops, which presents a different perspective than earlier Mutiny novels, which called for the extermination of the rebels and the reclaiming
of the empire by use of extreme force. Merriman’s solution is much more subdued; while Harry embodies the former approach, the novel does not support it. This passage is also important because it represents the manner in which the two sides of battle have become murky and difficult to demarcate. Another noteworthy part of the passage is that the action of the British soldiers is described as violent and reckless in addition to heroic, an admission that had been merely hinted at in earlier Mutiny novels. What is perhaps even more striking is Merriman’s recognition and admission that the historians will not represent the vindictiveness of the British as they break “all bounds of humanity.” In this passage, Merriman seems to speak to historians and earlier novelists alike who recorded heroic tales at the expense of those that were more compromising. This passage alone dismantles many components of the imperial scaffold and paves the way for a reimagining of colonialism.

The illustration of the mosque scene, which appears at the beginning of the novel, also dismantles the binary of East and West and shows the reality of British imperialism, specifically its impact on British morality. This illustration presents a key scene in Merriman’s text as protagonist Harry Wylam, a member of the British military serving in India during the Mutiny, joins forces with opportunistic capitalist Phillip Lamond, a longtime British resident of India, to make a fortune by finding a way into the city of Delhi, which the rebels have taken hostage. As the two carry out their plan to loot and then blow-up a mosque on the outskirts of the city, events run smoothly until an Indian priest, gleaming sword in hand, blocks the exit from the mosque as Harry attempts to carry a load of stolen money from the building. The illustration at the beginning of
Merriman’s novel captures the climax of the events that take place in the mosque; as Lamond appears behind the holy man and strikes him with his sword, sending the priest to the ground, Harry, who has struggled to get past the priest to no avail, is positioned near the forefront of the illustration with his sword raised and ready to fight.

![Figure 2: Empire turning on Empire](image)

Figure 2: Empire turning on Empire

Although at first glance the illustration appears to document the traditional East versus West binary established and perpetuated in earlier Mutiny novels, it actually dismantles this binary—a key component of the imperial scaffold—altogether. Readers eventually learn that the Indian priest blocking Harry’s exit from the mosque is actually Fred Marqueray, a mysterious British spy who longs to save Harry from his own selfish
The fact that Marqueray has to dress as an Indian holy man to convince Harry to choose the proper moral path calls British morality into question and lends a credibility to Indian spirituality in ways that earlier Mutiny novels do not. In addition, the positioning of the characters—none of the three is in the center—implies a loss of center and foreshadows the upset of traditional imperial values that surfaces in Merriman’s novel. Most notably, however, the illustration, which essentially documents the British fighting not natives but themselves, takes the symbolic value of the well at Cawnpore—empire turning in on itself—and elevates it to a more literal and overt level.

Indeed, the scene featured in this prefatory illustration encapsulates several key themes of this dissertation: the element of disguise and its importance in Mutiny literature, the dangers and fears associated with imperialism and the Other, and the binary of heroic British soldier versus the depraved Indian. Harry’s response when he sees the priest—“Out of the way, you damned nigger”—is not just evidence of the racist attitude that pervaded nineteenth-century imperialism, but reveals something deeper; the man he is berating and insulting, after all, is not a native but a British comrade wearing a disguise. The only thing separating the British soldiers from their Indian counterparts in this scene is a costume, which suggests the constructed nature of nationality. In contrast to the painting of Miss Wheeler previously discussed in Chapter 3, where the line between English and Indian was clearly demarcated, the line has collapsed in this illustration. While the illustration appears to show two British men fighting an Indian, the British only appear to be fighting the Other. In reality, they are really fighting against

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47 Merriman’s interest in the secret service was not limited to fiction. Interestingly, he is thought to have been a member of the British secret service later in life.
themselves. As such, the illustration draws British imperialism into question and collapses the East/West binary fundamental to the imperial scaffold discussed in Chapter 2. As this illustration suggests, the line between English and Indian boils down to a costume that can be slipped off and on at will.

The element of disguise is a motif that appears throughout Mutiny literature, and is used in Merriman’s text as a way to break apart the imperial scaffold and reimagine imperialism from a different angle. It is also used in other novels of the late nineteenth century, most notably Kipling’s *Kim*, where the title character shifts easily between Eastern and Western dress and is able to pass as Indian throughout the novel. Earlier Mutiny novels employ the element of disguise in quite a different way from Merriman; through disguise, Meadows Taylor drives home the point of insurmountable cultural difference in the most overt way—Seeta adopts the dress of a boy when she accompanies her husband on his military tours, and is shot during one of their last tours together. Originally, this episode of cross-dressing masquerades as a celebration of cultural difference, since both Seeta’s cross-dressing and her desire to accompany her husband both work against traditional marital and cultural roles of both the East and West. In fact, Seeta attires herself in boy’s clothes precisely as a safety precaution—both Cyril and her husband are afraid of possible retribution against her because the act of accompanying her husband goes against Hindu gender codes. Ultimately, however, this instance of cross-dressing only functions to show the insurmountable difference between Cyril and his Hindu bride. Her precautionary cross-dressing does not save Seeta from death; instead, in an act that resembles the Indian tradition of suttee, she throws herself in the
path of a bullet she thinks is meant for her husband. Through the element of disguise, specifically cross-dressing, this scene suggests that cultural difference cannot be overcome, that Indian women ultimately cannot become modernized, and that the penalty for cultural difference should be placed upon the Eastern woman.

Merriman certainly handles the element of disguise differently than Taylor. While Taylor reaffirms difference through this motif, Merriman uses it to erase difference. In *Flotsam*, the element of disguise has to do with the issue of national identity and the fluidity of East and West. There is no longer the clear demarcation between the pure and brave English soldier and the depraved Indian. Part of the break-down of these categories has to do with education, according to Merriman’s novel; as the English and Indians have grown to know more about one another’s cultures, these boundaries have broken down and lost their stability. Several of the novel’s characters have studied Indian culture thoroughly, so much so that they can pass for Indians. Fred Marqueray, for instance, is described as “sphinxlike” and “a hard nut for physiognomists to crack” precisely because he has studied Indian culture and knows so much about it that he can walk among them unnoticed. Marqueray’s knowledge of other cultures has made him unreadable; it has erased the stability of his national identity. Instead, his knowledge has led to a fluidity of identity: “Few Europeans knew so much of Brahmin and Mohammedan as Fred Marqueray; few had studied the thousand intricacies of caste and religion; few had attained to such a knowledge of the native character. He spoke their tongues as one of

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48 It is interesting to compare Merriman’s take on education to Taylor’s in *Seeta*. As discussed in Chapter 1, education serves the purpose of grooming the title character to become more assimilated into British culture. Although Seeta reads Shakespeare and Milton, the demarcation between English and Indian simply cannot be collapsed in Taylor’s novel, as is evidenced by Seeta’s eventual death and by her husband’s choice to marry Grace Mostyn, who has both the proper education and the appropriate ethnicity.
themselves—he had passed among them a thousand times as one of them” (118).

Marqueray becomes the primary example, through the element of disguise, of the collapse between East and West and the erasure of difference.

This fluidity of roles suggests that there is no longer a good side and a bad side as depicted in earlier Mutiny novels. Instead, Merriman’s portrait of imperialism is much more complicated and chaotic. In one scene, Marqueray admits that whites are just as untrustworthy as Indians, and in another scene, an Indian man, after finding out that British officials were keeping a list of those Indians who could be trusted and those who could not, tells Marqueray that another list should be made of white people who shouldn’t be trusted. These scenes set up the collapse of the East/West binary that Merriman develops throughout his novel. The majority of characters in Merriman’s novel are English, white, and untrustworthy. Interestingly, Fred Marqueray, one of the most mysterious and ominous characters in the novel, ends up being Merriman’s hero. Marqueray, who disguises himself as an Indian fakir, or priest, during the novel, is dark and mysterious throughout the story, but ends up saving Harry from prison and exposing British wrongdoing. What is interesting about Marqueray’s Indian dress is that Indian culture is portrayed in a respectful light through the element of disguise. The hero spends the majority of the novel dressed in Indian religious garb instead of military clothing, which pays homage to Indian culture that had not previously been paid in earlier Mutiny novels.
The element of disguise is used in several ways throughout Merriman’s novel, most notably to expose British wrongdoing. Phillip Lamond, for instance, provides a sharp contrast to Fred Marqueray when he disguises himself as a rebel sepoy. While Marqueray dresses as an Indian priest in order to expose British wrongdoing, Phillip Lamond dresses as a sepoy in order to discover how to make easy money during a vulnerable time for both the British and Indians. Despite the contrast of why the men slip in and out of Indian and British cultures through their dress, the results are strikingly similar. In both instances, disguise serves as an erasure of cultural identity: “He donned the flowing robes of the dead sepoy, and Phillip Lamond of Calcutta was no more. In place of him a sepoy, in the robes of his caste, cautiously raised his head and looked around” (178). The interesting thing about this passage is that it suggests the power of disguise. By simply donning the attire of a sepoy, Lamond’s identity is erased and he crosses cultures. The English have become what, at least in earlier Mutiny novels, they had feared; they have become the Other. In Merriman’s novel, however, the fluidity of cultural identity is not described with fear and trembling, but with normalcy. In fact, there

In Merriman’s novel, language also functions as an element of disguise, since learning to speak another language helps British characters to “pass.” Both Marqueray and Philip Lamond fit into this category, since both men can slip easily between Eastern and Western culture through their use of language. The written language—letter writing in particular—also operates in Flotsam as a performative pose; through the writing of letters Merriman’s characters presents themselves as they would have others see them, which is often a skewed version of reality. It is important and fitting to discuss the ways that letter-writing operate in Merriman’s novel as deceptive and performative because of the way letter writing functioned during and in the aftermath of the Mutiny as not only private correspondence among family members in England, but also as a public expression of national solidarity—often books of letters written during the siege were bound and published in the aftermath of the uprising. Instead of drawing on this topoi to increase British power, Merriman’s novel takes this element and demystifies it by showing how the British use letter writing as a performative pose. Phillip Lamond is the character who writes the most letters, which is fitting since he is the most deceptive character in the novel. Aside from his initial manipulation through letters, where he masquerades as a close family friend of Harry’s father, he continues in his deception by keeping in touch with Harry’s guardian by writing letters to England. Throughout Merriman’s novel, there is a lot of deceptive letter-writing, but mostly the letters are referred to and not included in the novel.
aren’t many Indian characters to speak of in Merriman’s novel; instead of depicting India through the rebel sepoys, Indians are depicted through British dressed as Indians. It is almost as if Indians don’t exist, that Mutiny is about the British fighting themselves and their own inner/imperial demons. In effect, the erasure of difference operates in Merriman’s novel as another form of colonization—the colonialis’t’s ultimate dream, in fact, where the imperialist mission has succeeded to the extent that the British can move easily between Indian and British culture while Indians exist merely to move the plot line along. Merriman’s novel does not present the colonialis’t dream, however, without also showing the negative consequences of such a dream. The dark, racist undertones of Merriman’s novel support this theory. In one scene, for example, Harry pours an iced brandy over a servant’s head and calls him “black scum of the earth” (111). Throughout the novel, the British characters remain unscrupulous, calculating, and, with only a few exceptions, without moral character. Long gone is the concept of Christian militarism, where patriotism and morality are conflated. Merriman’s novel does not conflate the two, but shows a British military system devoid of morality.

Although it is difficult to tell whether the characters in Merriman’s novel are “good” or “bad,” “guilty” or “innocent” throughout most of the book, the characters eventually reveal their “true colors” and are presented in either a positive or negative light. Although Maria is originally depicted with a mixture of girlish innocence and cunning manipulation, she is eventually revealed as a primarily deceptive, self-seeking, power-hungry woman who leaves Harry after he has been charged with looting and then agrees to give custody of her daughter to Harry in exchange for a handsome sum of
money. When Harry meets Maria to negotiate the terms of their agreement, Maria is described as a loose woman as she laughs and flirts with her newest conquest—an another military man. Merriman’s description of Maria reiterates a theme that reoccurs in the novel—that characters are sometimes not what they might at first seem, but are eventually revealed for what they truly are: “She was dressed loudly, and wore jewellery at her throat, and bracelets on her white arms, which were bare in open elbow sleeves. Harry wondered whether her style had deteriorated with a strange rapidity, or whether he had hitherto failed to see her as she was” (319).

Unlike Maria, Miriam Gresham represents a model of self-sacrifice, moral integrity and cultural acceptance—those traits that had been formerly assigned to the British military, but are now cast onto the British woman. In contrast to Maria Wylam, Miriam Gresham is one character who remains unchanged throughout the novel. Of course, Harry is not true to Miriam in India, since he allows himself to be slowly deceived into marrying Lamond’s daughter Maria. Miriam, however, remains loyal in her love toward Harry. After Harry is discharged from the army and gets custody of his daughter, Miriam’s self-sacrifice takes on Christ-like proportion as she offers to raise his daughter while he leaves to earn a living for himself. Miriam, of course, remains unmarried throughout the novel, and seems to exist as a figure to wash away Harry’s mistakes, “save” the English family, and sacrifice herself for the good of others. The final exchange between Miriam and Harry moves beyond youthful adoration or lust and into something more deeply spiritual:
‘Do you want me to take care of her, Harry?’ asked she, in a low voice; and Harry nodded.

‘I cannot think how I can ask you to do it,’ he muttered, staring at the carpet, and biting his thumb. ‘But she is so helpless.’

‘Yes, I know,’ answered Miriam, in a voice which thrilled with heaven only knows what woman’s dreams. For it is to heaven that such dreams belong, and the realization of them on earth must, it seems, be part of Paradise. ‘Where is she?’

‘At the Golden Cross in Trafalgar Square.’

‘Then I will go and bring her here,’ said Miriam, going towards the door which he held open for her to pass out as if she had been a queen….Thither indeed he had hastened with a new dawn of hope in his heart. As he walked along the familiar streets through which he had passed as a boy on his way to school four times a day, there arose in his heart a strange inexplicable sense of exultation, the same sense that had made itself heard in Miriam’s voice. A note as it were of joy in a chord of grief. Let those explain it who can. (336-7)

Despite Miriam’s self-sacrifice, the novel does not reunite Harry with Miriam; to do so would re-establish the traditional British family and undercut the novel’s dismantling of those key concepts that it works to undermine. Even in 1896, it isn’t possible for Harry to right his wrongs completely and marry the girl he always loved. Instead, Merriman creates a compromise where both characters remain unattached, but committed to one
another through Harry’s daughter. The novel closes with a description of Harry’s life years later. Now a common laborer, Harry becomes sick and falls under the care of a traveling bishop, who knows the Gresham family and, prompted by Harry’s questions, tells him that Miriam never married and never will. Harry also asks the bishop about his daughter, since he is worried that she is dark (in complexion) like her mother. The bishop’s assurance that she “was fair, with blue eyes” suggests that the child will not be tainted by Maria Wylam, but will reap the benefits of being raised by the saintly Miriam Gresham (349). After being reassured of Miriam’s chastity and his daughter’s well-being, Harry breathes his last breath and succumbs to death. It is also interesting that Miss Gresham is the only character who does not have the stain of India upon her, and she is the one left entrusted with raising Harry’s daughter.

Just as the English hero takes on a different face in Merriman’s novel—the face of an Indian priest—the traditional English family takes on a different face as well. By novel’s end, Harry has left England to earn a living for himself, while his daughter is left behind in the care of Miriam Gresham. In Merriman’s novel, marriage proves to be an interesting, although scarce topic. Harry Wylam’s marriage is one of convenience and does not survive, while the woman described as his fated love ends up alone, not pining for Harry but raising the fruit of his marriage to Maria. Certainly, Miriam’s position in the novel is an interesting one, especially since she appears only during the beginning of the novel, before Harry leaves England for India, and reappears only at the novel’s end, when Harry returns to England after the Mutiny is over. This type of book ending closely aligns Miriam with the home front, the nation of England that has not been tainted by the
first-hand experience with the Mutiny. If we are to read Harry and Maria as symbolic of different approaches to (and problems within) imperialism, the novel’s end is a hopeful one since Miriam is left in charge of Harry’s daughter. Miriam, who has neither Maria’s lust for money and position nor Harry’s impetuous and irresponsible nature, is responsible for rearing the future of the empire: Harry and Maria’s child. But Miriam is also an odd choice as the potential solution to the problems with the British family that Merriman’s novel surfaces, since she embodies the characteristics of the New Woman. The fact that Flotsam places a woman—one who is neither a wife nor a biological mother—in charge of the empire’s future suggests a possible new direction for British imperialism—one that is less traditional and more progressive. Her self-sacrificial nature and devotion to Harry through his daughter, however, keeps her from being too transgressive.

Merriman’s novel also paves a way for a solution to the problem with the British military. Interestingly, this solution turns out to be Fred Marqueray, the man described early in the novel as one who had received an English education but could combine the knowledge of East and West. Not only does Marqueray save Harry from going to prison by bringing forth testimony against Phillip Lamond, but he advises Harry how to get custody of his daughter from the conniving Maria. The novel indicates that Marqueray was able to resist Maria’s advances, which makes him the perfect candidate to help instruct Harry how to sever ties with her. Although mysterious throughout the novel, Marqueray emerges at novel’s end as the voice of reason that shows the flaws in Harry’s reckless abandon. Harry’s recklessness may have been celebrated at certain points in the
novel, but it is eventually denounced. What is most remarkable about Marqueray’s position as the hero at the novel’s end is the way he shifts from an Englishman to an Indian fakir (priest) throughout the novel and exposes British wrongdoing in the Mutiny. In this way, the novel presents a hero who is not strictly British, but who has a fluid identity and can easily cross cultures. And, by exposing British wrongdoing instead of Indian wrongdoing, Merriman’s novel not only undercuts the scaffold of imperialism built carefully by British historians, journalists, and literary figures, but dismantles it completely. Overall, Merriman’s novel presents an image of the British military that is dramatically different from earlier Mutiny novels. Although representations of the military had been a key component of the imperial scaffold, Merriman tears down the image of the military as a heroic and moral institution.

By the novel’s end, *Flotsam*’s darkness suddenly lifts; instead of ending with a wedding or a reuniting of lovers separated by the Mutiny, the novel imagines a different possibility for imperialism that deviates from tradition. Harry turns almost completely from his reckless ways after he is charged with looting and then discharged from the army, even though he still possess a tendency to act in the heat of the moment instead of thinking with rationality. For instance, after working for a Dutch farmer for some time, he physically assaults the man after the farmer attempts to strong-arm Harry into marrying his daughter. The novel presents Harry as honourable in his refusal; after all, he would never consent to marry another besides Miriam Gresham. He is even described as a coward, which the novel presents as a much-deserved result of his wrongdoing. Not only does he appear shabbily dressed before John Gresham, his childhood guardian, but
he also humbles himself and accepts money from Gresham. Along with the humbling of Harry Wylam, the novel places Miriam in the position of, at least figuratively speaking, raising the “fruit” of the empire—Harry’s daughter. The New Woman, albeit a watered-down version—one who possesses the finer qualities formerly assigned to the British soldier—is now responsible for imparting wisdom to the next generation. Unlike earlier Mutiny novels, which ended with the reclaiming of British empire and a marriage between the heroic soldier and his British bride, saved and untained by the unspeakable horrors of the uprising, Merriman’s novels ends without a marriage and without a celebration of British imperialism. It is this detail that provides a reimagining of imperial ideals.
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