

Unlikely Readers: Negotiating the Book in Colonial South Asia, c. 1857–1914

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Abstract

This thesis constructs a history of reading for South Asia (1857–1914) through an examination of the eccentric relationships that marginal colonial agents and subjects—soldiers, peasants, office clerks and women—developed with everyday forms of writing. Drawing on the methodologies of the history of the book, and literary and cultural histories, it creates a counterpoint to the dominant view of imperial self-fashioning as built on reading intensively and at length. Instead, it contends that the formation of identities in colonial South Asia, whether compliant or dissenting, was predicated on superficial forms of textual engagement, leaving the documents of empire most likely misread, unread, or simply read in part.

I illustrate this argument through four chapters, each of which brings together extensive archival material and nonliterary texts, as well as both canonical and little-known literary works. The first two discuss the circulation of unread texts in colonial institutions: the army and the government office. I study Garnet Wolseley's pioneering war manual, *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service*, a book that soldiers refused to read. This is juxtaposed, in the second study, with an examination of the reception of the bureaucratic document in illiterate peasant communities, explored through the colonial archive and ethnographic novels. In the third and fourth chapters, I focus on texts consumed in part. I turn to the Bengali Hindu almanac, a form that made the transition from manuscript to print in this period, and examine how it trained its new-found readership of English-educated office clerks to oscillate smoothly between British-bureaucratic and local forms of time, as well as to read quickly and selectively. I end with a study of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, and suggest that the cosmopolitan form of the periodical and editorial practices of extracting and summarising gave women unprecedented access to a network of global print.

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Introduction

Towards a History of the Unread, c. 1857–1914

1. Empire, Paper-thin

In 1852, John Stuart Mill was asked in conversation with a Parliamentary Select Committee what, according to him, were the reasons for the phenomenal success of the East India Company. His answer, unequivocal in its emphasis, was that India was governed by writing:

All the orders given, all the acts of the executive officers, are reported in writing, and the whole of the original correspondence is sent to the Home Government; so that there is no single act done in India, the whole of the reasons for which are not placed on record. This appears to me a greater security for good government than exists in almost any other government in the world, because no other probably has a system of recordation so complete. (33)

While Mill's opinion may have been self-congratulatory (he was, after all, Assistant to the Examiner of Indian Correspondence in London at the time),¹ it was by no means unfounded. In articulating a bureaucratic universalism—that every action has, or at least should have, its very own paper trail—he reminds us of the inextricable connections between the written word and imperial rule, constructing an empire of accountability that depended on the mobility of paper objects across international networks of government offices and institutions.²

¹ Mill was appointed Examiner of Indian Correspondence in March 1856.

² For the relationship between colonial rule and bureaucratic writing in South Asia, see, among others: Ogborn, and Raman. See also: Hawkins (Ghana), Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, and McKenzie (New Zealand), Rama, and Folger (Latin America and Spain).

Studies on postcolonial bureaucracies and writing in South Asia—read, to an extent, as part of a colonial legacy—have been on the rise in the last five years. See for example, among others: Akhil Gupta, and Hull, *Government of Paper*. I discuss these arguments in detail in Chapter Two. See also Mathur, “Transparent-making Documents,” and *Paper Tiger*.

If Mill was not in doubt of the East India Company's methods of governance, his Select Committee interlocutors in this exchange present us with a contrary point of view: was not such a "system of record and putting everything upon paper at length . . . carried to an extent that it [was] practically inconvenient and cumbersome?" (71). The answer they received was both short and sharp: "It is only cumbersome in the sense of making a very great mass of records; but the system of indexing is so perfect that it is easy to refer to everything" (71–72). But even as these seeds of uncertainty were laid to rest in the course of Mill's conversation, they found expression in other forums, not least an article, "The East India Question," which appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune* in July the following year. Its author, Karl Marx, also drew attention to the increasingly paper-dependent nature of Company rule. With "commercial items" being replaced by "ship loads of correspondence and documents," and "ruling patricians" by "obstinate clerks," it was not an exaggeration, he suggested, to call the Indian Government "one immense writing-machine" ("The East India Question" 67). While Mill equates writing with a more efficient and effective rule, to Marx, the grip of imperialism on economic and political realities is, at best, fragile and paper-thin. It was "[n]o wonder, then, that there exist[ed] no government by which so much [was] written and so little done" (Marx, "The East India Question" 67).

Both statements nevertheless highlight a defining feature of the colonial state, both pre- and post-1857: its penchant for collecting written objects in their varied forms. Britain's imperial rule in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia saw the prolific production of not just bureaucratic reports, minutes, statistical accounts, and gazetteers, but also histories, anthropological and linguistic classifications, language primers and dictionaries, survey maps, and translations, to name just a few. As Bernard Cohn's now classic study, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (1986) argues, these spoke to an obsessive project of "documentation, legitimation, classification, and bounding" that spanned

both colony and metropole (3–4). As we will see in further detail in Chapters One and Two, this was fuelled by the belief that knowledge was the key to familiarity and hence to control.³ The creation of a colonial archive that was both useful and “usable” (Cohn 5) was seen to provide imperial administrators with a blueprint for governance.

While Mill and Marx have found a canonised space in introductions to studies of South Asian colonial and postcolonial bureaucracies (Hull, *Government of Paper* 7; Raman 1), I approach their comments on writing and governance from a different angle. I want to think about the implications of writing being “usable,” as Cohn describes it, looping back to Mill’s dismissal of the “inconvenient and cumbersome” nature of documents, and Marx’s belief that if one is writing, one is not actually “doing” anything. Given the sheer volume of writing produced in South Asia, how useful could any of it be? Was anyone actually reading the texts that were thought to drive the empire’s cultural, economic, and political projects?

Outside the space of the colonial office, paper circulated in immeasurable quantities through colonial South Asia in the form of locally-produced books and documents in both English and South Asian languages. Viewers of Satyajit Ray’s *Charulata* (1964), the cinematic version of Rabindranath Tagore’s Bengali novella, *Nashtanir* (The Broken Nest, 1901), will remember its depiction of Charulata’s self-styled intellectual husband, Bhupati, shouting in excitement: ““There’s nothing like the sound of a printing press!””⁴ Exaggerated as this child-like enthusiasm might seem today, publication records for the period reveal the titles of numerous pamphlets, almanacs, anthologies, instruction manuals, and newspapers that were churned out and made available to a seemingly receptive South Asian public.⁵ The relative cheapness of press technologies meant that virtually anyone could choose to be a

³ See also: Appadurai, Bayly, and Ludden. In an art-historical and archaeological context, see Guha-Thakurta.

⁴ I discuss both Ray’s film and Tagore’s novella in detail in Chapter Four’s examination of women readers of periodicals.

⁵ The records to which I refer here are the quarterly library reports that, from 1861 onwards, documented for every presidency the total numbers of works published. I discuss these and the colonial systems of governance which they highlight in Chapter Three’s discussion of the Bengali Hindu almanac.

published author and, as the colonial archive allows us to conclude, this was clearly an opportunity eagerly grasped by many. But given the still low, if rising, literacy levels in the region, to what group of readers were such texts pitched?

“Unlikely Readers: Negotiating the Book in Colonial South Asia, c. 1857–1914” is an attempt to answer this question by writing an alternative, and by necessity, eccentric history of the circulation and reception of written and printed items in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia. In order to do so, I turn to the vast expanse of the colony’s “great unread.” For Margaret Cohen, whose term I have borrowed here, this category points to a neglected and forgotten archive of literary works that might shed light on how we understand the evolution of aesthetics and genre (51).⁶ But the “great unread” in colonial South Asia, as will become increasingly clear as the thesis progresses, encompasses not just different kinds of texts and objects, but also those who make meaning of these: their readers. The larger intellectual and cultural task of this project is hinged on the implications of what it is to be unread, to leave a text unread, to seek out the unread, and to un-read—in the sense of unlearn—the presumptions that come with each of these. Most importantly, the need to qualify the finality of the word “unread” becomes increasingly apparent. For one, as we will see, “unread” people found ways to negotiate with writing. Similarly, I will also demonstrate that between “reading” and “not reading” lay an entire range of dynamic, meaning-making processes. Treating a book like an object, reading it in part, and misreading it, are just a few examples of these.

At a primary level, this thesis is situated in the burgeoning field of the history of the book—the umbrella-term that has come to denote different disciplinary methods of studying the role of writing (and by extension, reading) in social and cultural communication. Robert Darnton, whose work has been foundational to the area, argues that this ambitious project can

⁶ In part, this term has gained parlance through its citation in Franco Moretti’s theorisation of world literature, and is the reason and starting point for his alternative methods of literary analysis and distant reading. See Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature” 5, and “The Slaughterhouse of Literature” 208.

be encapsulated in three questions: “How do books come into being? How do they reach readers? What do readers make of them?” (“What is the History of Books’ Revisited” 495). Similarly, D.F. McKenzie articulates what he calls a “sociology of texts,” expanding the interests of traditional bibliography to include not merely “words on paper” but also the “physical forms, textual versions, technical transmission, institutional control . . . perceived meanings, and social effects” of books and other objects (13).

Bringing together the processes of production, circulation, and reception, as Darnton and McKenzie suggest, I address in particular the critical interest in how texts of all descriptions structured the everyday lives of readers. I focus on marginal groups of individuals who were, in this period, illiterate, or newly or functionally literate, among them soldiers, peasants and rural dwellers, office clerks, and women. By no account were these considered mainstream readers; in most cases, they would not have even thought of themselves as such. These “unread” communities, or “unlikely readers” as I call them, nevertheless derived their understanding of what it meant to inhabit empire’s modernity through their inextricable relationships with print and manuscript of all mundane descriptions. Moving away from the elite spaces of high literary texts, I will create in the chapters that follow a counterpoint to the dominant nineteenth-century view of imperial self-fashioning which was built on reading intensively and at length. Instead, I will look to how readers made sense of the documents of empire that they encountered by leaving them, most likely, misread, unread, or read in part. In doing so, I move away from considering the changes print brought to reading practices and social interactions in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century South Asia as merely rehearsing a set of established transitions attributed to colonialism: from the oral to the printed, the public to the private (and therefore

from the group to the individual), and from reading aloud to reading silently.⁷ Instead, through an examination of an expansive range of handwritten and printed objects, I interrogate what activities fall under the ambit of “reading,” extending these to include practices of textual engagement that are non-narrative, and non-linear. As Leah Price, whose work inspires many of my arguments in this thesis, argues, the act may also involve the material processes of touching, holding, and circulating (*How to do Things with Books* 5–6).

The texts that participated in these interactions—my examples are the war manual, the bureaucratic document, the almanac directory, and the periodical—highlight, above all, colonialism as a form of transaction (Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions*). As Stuart Blackburn has pointed out in the context of nineteenth-century Tamil Nadu, South Asian-language traditions of print and writing were constantly evolving in dialogue with European models introduced by colonial incursions (“Early Books” 105). By the mid- to late nineteenth century, this was unambiguously apparent in the development of both literary and nonliterary genres of writing. Older manuscript forms such as astrological almanacs borrowed from the structure of the British directory to take on a new secular (and sometimes multilingual) life in mass-produced print (Chapter Three). Periodicals emerged as patchwork texts, building themselves on the foundation of borrowed and purloined articles and opinions from similar publications that existed outside South Asia, as Chapter Four, drawing on the arguments of Isabel Hofmeyr’s *Gandhi’s Printing Press* (2013), will demonstrate. In some cases, texts—or rather, the eccentric ways in which they were received—could even foil the transactions they were intended to facilitate, and instead, get embroiled in alternative, subversive networks (Chapters One and Two). Further, as A.K. Venkatachalapathy has pointed out, traditional modes of reading in South Asia (his focus is Tamil Nadu but this holds true for the region as a whole) were highly ritualised, demarcating, for example, spaces designated for the activity

⁷ The importance of these arguments cannot, however, be discounted, and they do inform my readings in the thesis, in particular, those of Chapter Two.

(“Reading Practices” 277). By contrast, the texts I examine in this thesis have no pretensions to cultural or scholarly heights, and allow us to read transactions in a purely material way as well. As written items that were not bound by reading prescriptions, they were, in a manner of speaking, travelling texts, used in a variety of places ranging from the bureaucratic office to the railway station platform, and becoming imbricated in multiple interactions that would, in turn, influence how they were read.

While the history of the book in South Asia suffers from chronic disjointedness—unsurprising given the region’s diversity in language, culture, religion and literary traditions—recent scholarly works have attempted to construct, if not a national model of reading and writing, then at least a wide and comprehensive set of regional studies. Brought together in the form of edited collections, these studies give us some sense of the similarities and dissimilarities that shaped the journeys of print and manuscript across the region, in precolonial and colonial times.⁸ This thesis cannot claim that kind of comprehensive scope. I do not mean to suggest that “all soldiers” or “all peasants” read in the manner in which I describe here, or that their reading was restricted to the materials on which I focus. Instead, what I attempt to do is provide snapshots of episodes or events in the reception of print and manuscript in colonial South Asia. Often these, as we shall see, have been chosen for their exceptionality rather than their representativeness. The case studies remind us, above all, that any attempt to write a history of reading is always partial and prone to error and incompleteness, not only because of the private nature of the act but also the capriciousness of human beings. If the individuals who populate the pages of this thesis defied convention to read eccentrically, it is only fitting that they become a part of a similarly eccentric history.

⁸ Some recent edited collections include: Pollock ed., *Literary Cultures in South Asia* (2003), Orsini ed., *The History of the Book in South Asia* (2013), Blackburn and Dalmia ed., *India’s Literary History* (2004), and the three volumes edited by Chakravorty and Gupta: *Founts of Knowledge* (2015), *Moveable Type* (2008), and *Print Areas* (2004).

2. Unlikely Readers: People, Texts, and Practices

In the sections that follow I lay out the key themes and methodological concerns that this thesis addresses. These can be brought together by way of opening to form a single question: what did it mean to be a reader in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia? To this end, the four chapters each illustrate the characteristics of what I have called “unlikely readers”: those persons who, even as they fell outside traditional intellectual spaces, developed, borrowed, and circumvented the critical tools required to make meaning of texts. While I focus on four exemplary groups—soldiers, peasants, office clerks, and women—unlikely readers proliferated and came to include various sectors of society, from domestic servants and indentured labourers to factory workers and children, among others.

I suggest that this unlikeliness operates at three different levels on which I expand below: social and cultural position; choice of reading material; and modes of interaction with texts. My elaborations here draw on examples from South Asia and are sensitive to the fact that they are historically and geographically contingent. However, given that the history of the book in South Asia is a relatively new field, it has been necessary to engage with scholarship on the history of print from a range of different time periods and traditions. While I am careful not to over suggest commonalities between late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia and, say, fifteenth-century Europe, or the twentieth-century United States, the comparative nature of the research that the history of the book demands provides us with a rich set of methods and textures through which we can better understand the circulation of print in any given society. In drawing comparisons of this kind, my thesis hopes to make further, a case for the unlikely reader as a theoretical category.

i. Reading Positions

Reading both dictates and reflects social and cultural positions. This is nowhere as apparent as in the single document that provided the colonial nineteenth century with the dominant model of what it meant to be a reader: Thomas Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835). Putting forward the argument that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (230), this speech emphasised the value of a liberal arts education, an appropriate vehicle for the moral and cultural lessons that the British sought to pass on to their coloured subjects. Such an opinion, as Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* (1989) has demonstrated, is what led to the institution of English literature as an official academic discipline: first in the colonies, and subsequently, in the metropolis.

Macaulay's speech thus culminated in a vision of a "class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (237), fed on a regular diet of Great Western Classics (Milton's literary and Hume's philosophical works being the lynchpins on which his argument rested). This programme of reading would not only train native informants to imbibe and transmit the lessons of how to be ideal imperial subjects, but also highlighted that reading intensively was not something of the past, as Rolf Engelsing has suggested (cited in Darnton, "First Steps" 12).⁹ Rather, it formed the textual base on which colonial rule in South Asia was thought to be consolidated.

⁹ Engelsing's much-cited thesis argues that the years between 1750 and 1800 led to a reading revolution of sorts in Europe. Whereas previously individuals would buy a few books but read them over and over again, from this point onwards, the spread of print technology made it much more likely for them to engage with a wider variety of texts, if in less detail. The shift he detects is from intensive to extensive reading. Venkatachalapathy makes a similar argument for early twentieth-century Tamil Nadu, arguing for the rise of superficial, if wide, reading ("Reading Practices" 282). These arguments have, however, been heavily contested, not least by Darnton, who correctly points out that changes in reading patterns cannot be measured in single, linear directions but rather, need to account for multiple contingent factors ("First Steps" 12).

Furthermore, in chalking out a new educational regime, Macaulay's "Minute" created for the colonial public a model of whose prerogative—even privilege—it was to read. Not unsurprisingly, those who made the cut were upper middle-class men, and as autobiographical and literary accounts will confirm, this section of South Asian society was and continues to define itself through a familiarity with western cultural texts and norms (Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals* 10). It was only by reading, it seemed, or at least through instruction in the hands of someone who could lay claim to the practice, that South Asia could come to inhabit empire's modernity.

The social, cultural, and economic marginality of unlikely readers made it impossible for them to feature in Macaulay's schema: whether because of low or inadequate literacy levels (as was the case with the peasants and village dwellers of Chapter Two), or because popular characterisation made it impossible for them to enter a collective imagination as thinking, reading beings (as with soldiers and women in Chapters One and Four). By taking these individuals as its focus, this thesis thus draws on and responds to scholarship on the history of the book in both South Asia and beyond, which, over the past five decades, has been increasingly turning its interests to everyday or "common readers." We owe this term to Richard Altick's pioneering *The English Common Reader* (1957), in which he sketches a portrait of the mass reading public of Britain, comprised not of the "relatively small, intellectual and socially superior audience for which most of the great nineteenth-century authors wrote—the readers of the quarterly reviews, the people whom writers like Macaulay, the Brontës, Meredith, George Eliot, and John Stuart Mill had in mind" (6–7) but rather, "humble people for the most part, mechanics, clerks, shop men, domestic servants, land workers and their families; people who lived in the endless rows of jerry-built city houses and along the village street" (11–12). As a result of the compounding influence of politics,

religion, education and technology, these are, Altick concludes, the new readers of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

The study of the common reader has found a vibrant, though varied, afterlife in the Anglo-American world: whether in Michael Denning's *Mechanical Accents* (1998), a study of the consumption of dime novels by the nineteenth-century American working class or Jonathan Rose's comparable work, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), which focuses on the British worker from the pre-industrial age to the twentieth century. Through a combination of sociological and literary analysis, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) also made the discovery that, contrary to popular expectation, the romance novel's readership of American women in the 1980s was empowered by its efforts to appropriate and transform what were otherwise generic and patriarchal narratives.

In South Asia, recuperative scholarship of this kind has similarly been organised around the dichotomy of high and low readers and literary tastes, demonstrating how, in actual fact, Macaulay's strict prescriptions were not only irrelevant for the majority of the reading public, but also how those who came within their purview actively resisted their imposition. Readers, as Priya Joshi's *In Another Country* (2002) reminds us, read exactly what they wanted rather than what was expected of them, and more often than not, surprise us with their literary choices. Drawing on extensive library circulation figures from nineteenth-century South Asia, the profile of the "actual reader" that Joshi compiles highlights that the novel of "serious standards" had a less-successful career abroad than the arrogant administrator would have us believe. In fact, it faced stiff competition from English-language writers relegated to insignificance in Britain: prolific authors of sentimental novels like Marie Corelli, William Crawford and G.M.W. Reynolds.

¹⁰ For an overview of the holy trinity of "new readers" in nineteenth-century Europe—women, children, and workers—see Lyons. For more on the history of uneducated readers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in addition to those I cite in this section, see for example: Brooks (for Russia between 1861 and 1917), Vincent, and the three-volume annotated bibliography edited by Burnett, Mayall, and Vincent (Britain).

The story in the world of South Asian-language print is not dissimilar. While the research of, for example, Tapti Roy, focused on Bengal to construct an image of a disciplinary colonial state in which the circulation and reception of print was heavily regulated by legal and cultural codes, more recent works such as Anindita Ghosh's *Power in Print* (2006) point out that nineteenth-century Calcutta was hardly a city exclusively occupied by the Bengali *bhadralok*. Underneath its genteel surface teemed subversive pockets that churned out cheap ephemeral genres of literature, or Battala books as they were called, named for the region of the city in which they were produced and sold. They included almanacs, sentimental novels, handbooks of black magic, satirical farces and pornographic writings, among others. Challenging "respectable" literary tastes with colloquial language and more often than not, "obscene" subjects, such texts catered to the emergent middle and lower classes, functionally literate in the vernaculars, overworked, and in need of entertainment, even as they were also secretly read and circulated among elite readers. Francesca Orsini's *Print and Pleasure* (2009) sketches a similar landscape for North India and Hindi-Urdu publications: the detective novel and related forms of writing, not the canonical literary masterpiece, were the common reader's daily panaceas.¹¹

It is worth noting that despite Altick's inaugural gesture in 1957, it was only close to five decades later that this now lively body of scholarship tracking everyday reading practices has emerged. This is perhaps because even as the "common" in the "common reader" speaks to the size of this non-elite public, these individuals have predominantly existed as "hidden" or simply "forgotten" communities. "Hidden," the adjective Archie Dick uses to describe the common readers of South Africa—"slaves and freed slaves, poor Muslim and Christian children and adults, soldiers, political prisoners, township activists, and political exiles" (3)—highlights not only the archival difficulties and paucity of sources when trying to trace the

¹¹ For reading and popular culture in colonial Tamilnadu, see Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*; for late colonial Punjab, see Mir.

experiences of people who struggled to read in the face of extreme material dispossession and negligible education (their “buried” or “hidden stories”). It also draws our attention to the fact that many were forced, due to their marginal social positions, to hide what they were reading, as well as the fact that they both could and were reading (4). Elizabeth McHenry, writing of the rise of literacy and reading societies for African-Americans in the early nineteenth century, extends this argument, making us aware of the social and critical assumptions that dictate that some histories be remembered, and others forgotten. The undoing of the “historical invisibility” of the African-American as a reading subject is therefore not merely an “archaeological process” but also an occasion to confront our own assumptions about the illiteracy of racial, cultural, and social groups (McHenry 4). To ignore the multiple ways in which African-Americans “creat[ed] their own opportunities to become readers” (McHenry 3) through informal and non-institutional educational practices is to reveal our all too easy recourse to stereotypes about who can be a reader, and who cannot.

The category of the unlikely reader thus brings together these subversive reading positions—the common, the non-elite, the hidden and the forgotten—to chart out the multiplicity of interpretive communities, adopting from Stanley Fish, that existed in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia. But even as the ways in which these readers decoded texts reflected their participation in a collective social identity, it is important to remember, as we will see, that their responses cannot be reduced to that alone. As Roger Chartier has pointed out, categorisations of this kind come with the perils of believing that genres and consumption practices map on to readers in a completely unproblematic fashion and that how we read comes from a set of a priori strategies developed independently of a text, rather than in dialogue with it (*Forms and Meanings* 89).¹²

¹² Leah Price has pointed out that it is often, however, impossible to separate the individual’s reading habits from those of a collective community. This has been particularly striking in discussions of contexts of women’s reading in the nineteenth century (“Reading: The State of the Discipline” 314). The possibility of creating a

Although the structure of this thesis pairs readers and genres—so, for example, the soldier and the war manual; the peasant and the bureaucratic document, and so on—it also reminds us that these are not water-tight, closed associations. These readers’ identities were a product not simply of their affiliations as soldiers, peasants, office clerks, and women, but a complex imbrication of class, gender, and race, each of which contributed to determining how and why these individuals read as they did. To cite two examples from the chapters that follow: the British private posted in South Asia in Chapter One brings to his reading of Garnet Wolseley’s war manual a combination of a sense of racial superiority and brash masculinity, as well as insecurity about his own lower-class position. Similarly, the South Asian, if upper middle-class, women of Chapter Four read *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* at the unequal intersection of racial, gendered, and class hierarchies.

The thesis also pays attention to mismatches between readers and texts: how do people respond to genres and modes of writing that do not generally fall into their intellectual or social ambit?¹³ As we will see in Chapter One, Garnet Wolseley’s war manual, *The Soldier’s Pocket-book for Field Service* (1869), was read by almost everyone *except* the soldiers for whom it was written. Similarly, just as men became active readers of Bengali Hindu almanacs, books traditionally targeted at a female readership (Chapter Three), women were initiated into the masculine canonical English literary text through the world of the periodical, albeit in the downsized versions of the book summary and reprinted quotation (Chapter Four). Through the cross-connections that books and other documents inevitably made, they were transformed into texts and objects distinct from those their creators intended them to be.

unified identity through the shared consumption of texts is discussed in some detail in Chapter Three, and extensively in Chapter Four of this thesis.

¹³ Kate Flint, for example, demonstrates that nineteenth-century girls were, contrary to popular opinion, eager to read publications such as the *Boy’s Own Paper* and “masculine” adventure novels (217, 202). Similarly, Chartier notes that aristocratic letter-writing manuals reached the French peasantry through chapbook reprints (Price, “Reading: The State of the Discipline” 305).

ii. Bending the Rigorous Spine

Since Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), the relationship between empire and literary studies has been dominated by the novel. Though not causally related in any simplistically direct way, the study showed that the political practice of imperialism and the genre of the novel "fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible ... to read one without in some way dealing with the other" (84). More broadly, Said's statement, though by no means "book historical" in its orientation, highlights, if inadvertently, one of the primary gaps in the field. Despite its eagerness to problematise the relationship between high and low reading cultures, the field's critical attention has been overwhelming focused on a single object: that of the "book" in the form of the literary narrative.

As I will make clear, the lopsided emphasis on the consumption of fiction and other literary sources fails to demonstrate the exact nature of colonialism and its complicated interactions with texts and documents of all descriptions.¹⁴ As Elleke Boehmer reminds us, every act in the acquisition and running of empire drew on "a vast communications network [that] . . . in its heyday was conceived and maintained in an array of writings—political treatises, diaries, acts and edicts, administrative records and gazetteers, missionaries' reports, notebooks, memoirs, popular verse, government briefs, letters 'home' and letters back to settlers" (*Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 13–14). Empires were not, after all, simply built on the foundation of novels, poetry and plays; looking at the appearance of the

¹⁴ Welcome exceptions to the emphasis on fiction in book history scholarship include McKenzie, and Carter. Robert Fraser's *Book History through Postcolonial Eyes* (2008) also examines a wide range of sources in English, African and South Asian-language scripts.

The emphasis on the literary holds true for studies of non-colonial cultures well. As John Guillory, writing of the history of the memorandum in the Anglo-American world, reminds us,

all of the writing we consider to be the most intrinsically interesting—literary or journalistic, scholarly or scientific—amounts only to a small percentage of the writing of modernity, crowded to the poles of the epistemic axis. In our epoch, large numbers of people write, are even compelled to write, but they do not for the most part write poems or scientific papers; they fill out forms, compose memos or reports, send interoffice emails (112).

metropolitan Victorian novel or of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century Calcutta represents just one among many ways of reading the intellectual and material exchanges of the period.

In moving away from discussions of how readers received literary texts, whether these belonged to high or low cultures or skirted dangerously in-between, this thesis will provide a new perspective on the role that writing played as a means of communication in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia. Instead, I focus on mundane genres of writing that facilitated daily interactions between colonial agents and subjects: the war manual, petitions and licenses, almanacs and directories, and periodicals. As John Guillory notes in the context of the Anglo-American world, such forms of writing, despite being “informational” have “the same generic specificity as any other kind of writing” (112). For this reason, as we will see, they followed fixed conventions of presentation in order to elicit very specific responses from their hypothetical and assumed readers.

My examples here are decidedly “nonliterary” even though, as we will see, they often forged relationships with literary texts, and sometimes even drew on the persuasive qualities of narrative to fulfil their functions. The ubiquity of such written items in the print universe of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia meant that it was these documents that unlikely readers were much more likely to encounter than Macaulay’s prescribed works of Milton and Hume. This is not simply a game of numbers: the importance of studying such texts and objects is to demonstrate crucially that writing was often one of the only ways in which the colonial state could be accessed.

Unlike the texts that form the focus of Ghosh, Joshi and Orsini’s studies of reading in nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asia, the ones I examine in this thesis were not, therefore, at least for the most part, read for pleasure.¹⁵ Instead, they participated in, to amend Mike Esbester’s term, functional relationships: reading them led to an identifiable goal or

¹⁵ The only partial exception to this is *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* (Chapter Four), which combined pragmatic information such as reports from committee meetings with sentimental fiction, travel writing, and poetry.

action.¹⁶ So, for example, readers consulted railway timetables printed in almanac appendices in order to plan journeys (Chapter Three), just as they wrote, or had written for them, petitions and complaints to bring issues and problems to the attention of the colonial state (Chapter Two). To this end, each of these documents represented how the transactional, collaborative nature of colonial rule was shaped and consolidated by contexts of print and manuscript. They created and supported a prosaic colonial presence in the region, as John Stuart Mill proudly told his parliamentary interlocutors. As we shall see in the next section of this introduction, they also provided a site and medium for the genesis of different kinds of textual resistance.

The turn to the nonliterary colonial document also serves to remind us of the “non-book” forms (McKenzie 13) in which writing circulated in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia.¹⁷ The book was, in more ways than one, a representation of empire itself—coherent, imposing, and self-contained. The “rigorous spine” of the authoritative imperial tome was therefore thought to be synonymous with the unflinching backbone of British rule (Burton and Hofmeyr 1–2). Such objects—hardbacked, leather-bound, and no doubt, unaffordable for most people—also came with a set of presumptions about what a book was, who its readers were, and how they were to interact with it.

But the “book,” as my thesis will demonstrate, was far from being a category that was stable and bound, in every sense of the word, in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial world. Its defining characteristics derived from a still-dominant Victorian conception that books were printed volumes with identifiable authors, and were bought, sold

¹⁶ See also: Clancy’s “pragmatic literacy” in the context of medieval England, which addresses how readers developed the tools with which to navigate the increased documentation that structured their lives, and Grafton and Jardine’s conception of “studying for action” which shares its premise with functional reading, but charts out the mechanics of this practice in the context of scholarly reading in early modern England.

¹⁷ McKenzie replaces “book” with “text,” by which he refers to “verbal, visual, oral, and numeric data, in the form of maps, prints, and music, of archives of recorded sound, of films, videos, and any computer-stored information, everything in fact from epigraphy to the latest forms of discography” (13). In short, anything that speaks to “the interlacing or entwining of any kind of material” can claim the status of a text (McKenzie 13–14).

and read. These are assumptions that have been consolidated by the enormous influence of Robert Darnton's "Communications Circuit," which identifies these agents and features as central to our understanding of the production and consumption of texts ("What is the History of Books?").¹⁸ While the introduction to the history of the book's flagship journal (not unsurprisingly called *Book History*) declares that the field's objects of study are "certainly not limited to books" (Greenspan and Rose ix), the persistent focus on this one particular textual vehicle is flawed for a number of reasons. Undoubtedly, it highlights the acute methodological fetishism that continues to persist among scholars of the production and effects of writing. Perhaps even more importantly, as Heidi Hackel has brought to our attention, the singular "book" as a "reified abstraction" stands in "for all codices and their development and influence over more than a millennium" (5). For a field that, as she has pointed out, is so reliant on the power of the individual case study, book historians are all too willing to fall into the trap of assuming that the "book" is a transhistorical—and we might add, a transnational—form (5).

By contrast, paying attention to the multiple forms in which print and manuscript did in fact exist in this period, I attempt to sketch out, if only in part, a media ecology for colonial South Asia, a universe of writing that combined the printed and the handwritten, the bound and the unbound. In the chapters that follow, I look at the more mundane shapes that writing took, and which co-existed and interacted with, even as they challenged, the "book" in its traditional guise. This act of critical decentring has illuminating consequences for our understanding of material form as well as textual content. As we shall see, "books" exist as more than simply printed objects. Instead, they invite us to examine the complex interactions

¹⁸ Exceptions to this exist of course, most prominently the rising interest in the "document" and other forms of paperwork, which I discuss later in this introduction, as well as in Chapter Two. See Hull "Documents and Bureaucracy"; Kafka, "Paperwork"; and Raman. These studies nevertheless classify themselves as "ethnographies of documents" or "histories of paperwork," areas that have intersections with the history of the book through "shared references, sensibilities, research agendas" (Kafka, "Paperwork" 351), even as they define themselves as distinct.

between print, manuscript, and orality that existed in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia. As Harish Trivedi argues, despite an emphasis on oral traditions and memorisation, “writing in India is as old as almost anywhere else in the world,” and has always circulated in the region in material forms that mimic the social effects of the book, whether as palm leaf manuscripts or copper and ivory tablets (““Book”” 16; see also Williams 15). The “printed” book was just one more stage in the evolution of the written object, and did not completely replace existent material forms of communication.

In fact, as we will see, the introduction of print to South Asia encouraged what Peter Stallybrass has called in the context of early modern England, “printing for manuscript”: the emergence of genres of printed documents and texts that could only fulfil their functions *when* filled in by hand (“Printing and the Manuscript Revolution”). Examples in this thesis include books with blanks intended for readers’ notes (Chapters One and Three) and pre-printed bureaucratic forms (Chapters One and Two). Writing also persisted in textual spaces in which it was uninvited (Chapter Three). The object forms that writing took also interacted with the oral, whether through the act of dictating a petition to a scribe (Chapter Two), or of reading an almanac or periodical article to a group of listeners who could not read these for themselves (Chapters Three and Four). In the chapters of this thesis, therefore, listening, reading, writing, and printing share a common and inescapable history.

If print was invaded by manuscript in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia, as we shall see in Chapter One, print was also transformed into manuscript. Garnet Wolseley’s scrapbooks, which form part of my discussion there, take the shape of hardbound volumes, only to reveal inside crumbling newsprint, faded inked annotations, unevenly scissored edges, and gluey smudges. Demonstrating how the authority of the printed text could be subordinated to an unanticipated and unprecedented narrative, the scrapbooks are also evidence of how writing circulated in bits and pieces, in purloined and

reproduced fragments. Even in the case of texts that roughly fit the form of the book, such as the almanac and periodical, their pages are roughly sewed together between paper covers, creating a stark contrast between the book's permanence and the ephemeral nature of these genres.

Not only did the above kinds of writing co-exist with books, they also consumed, absorbed and transformed the books that filtered through their covers. As we will see in Chapters One, Three and Four, the compiled forms of the war manual, almanac, and periodical, subordinated books to their assembled projects which were constructed using extracts, summaries, reviews, and advertisements. Even the traditional "book" did not circulate among readers in just its printed and bound forms.

iii. Not Really Reading

As was mentioned in the opening section of this introduction, the chapters that follow here challenge conventional understandings of what it means to "read"—that is, reading as involving a sustained commitment to a (usually literary) narrative that is perceived to shape not only the ways in which we view the world, but also ourselves. The framework of the unlikely reader provides an alternative entry point into this debate, reminding us that the practice is historically and culturally bound: the implications of "reading" in nineteenth-century South Asia were, without a doubt, quite different from those in, say, eighteenth-century France.

Turning to a relationship that is fundamental to my argument, that of reading and literacy: as anthropologists and historians of the latter have made us increasingly aware, literacy is rarely simply the ability to decipher alphabets and letters. Rosamund McKitterick reminds us of the uneven nature of this skill-set: people can read without being able to write,

can copy text but not compose their own sentences, can make out fragments of words and phrases without being able to enjoy the arguments of a philosophical treatise (3). Following Brian Street's theorisation of ideological literacy,¹⁹ she suggests that we read as a social practice, always circumscribed by social and cultural norms and expectations (4).

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia presents us with a particularly difficult space within which to understand literacy. The first reason for this is its multilingual nature: the region was, and still is, home to hundreds of languages, dialects, and scripts. In addition to these, extended colonial contact with Europe since the sixteenth century meant that English was not the only "foreign" tongue present in the region: Portuguese, French, Danish, and Dutch were used to differing extents as well. It is important, therefore, to remember that it was completely possible to be literate in more than one language and yet be unable to understand the languages in which the colonial state managed its day-to-day operations, whether it was English or, before that, Persian. The case studies in this thesis bear witness to the co-mingling of different languages and scripts, whether through a Sinhala signature ending a petition written in English (Chapter Two), or through the bilingual almanac (Chapter Three). Such forms of print and manuscript, as we shall see, compelled and drew in different groups of readers to each of its linguistic parts; a person could potentially understand one section of a text or document to the exclusion of another. To put forward just one example, the use of English in Bengali Hindu almanacs, as we will see in Chapter Three, spoke to the widening of its brief to include not only women, but also middle-class, office-going men.

The second difficulty tackles traditional anthropological understandings of literacy as a top-down imposition from the West onto "traditional societies" (the work of Jack Goody is a representative case-in-point here). Instead, as scholars of South Asian reading cultures have

¹⁹ As opposed to deterministic idea of literacy espoused by the likes of Jack Goody. I examine these theories in more detail in Chapter Two.

pointed out, people *chose* literacy rather than had it thrust upon them. Modes of oral transmission, the form in which both secular and religious texts were circulated and passed down through generations in South Asia, were not prioritised *because* of illiteracy, or the absence of a suitable writing script, but rather despite the presence of both (Williams 7, Pollock, *The Language of the Gods* 82–83). As a result of this, even as the instating of colonial bureaucratic systems required a knowledge, or at least the use, of writing at a scale unimaginable in pre-colonial times, oral cultures persisted alongside these “modern” technologies, not as remnants of a primitive past but rather as a testament to the continuing value of speech in South Asia’s religious and cultural contexts.

Chartier’s observation for eighteenth-century France thus holds true for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia as well. Between literacy and illiteracy lay a “wide range of reading abilities, which depended on the length, structure, and forms of the written and printed text” (Chartier, “Culture as Appropriation” 236). Central to this is the need to understand the destabilisation of the oral/literate divide. Instead, as C.A. Bayly has pointed out, the distinction we need to make is between literacy and “literacy awareness.” Both pre-colonial and colonial South Asia, as he notes, were societies “acutely aware of literacy, where even the poor could gain access to writers and readers at a cost” (Bayly 13). As A.K. Venkatachalapathy concludes, and as we will see in greater detail in Chapter Two, such networks of readers and writers ensured that the inability to read did not preclude the use and consumption of texts in various forms (“Reading Practices” 290).

But if being “literate” is never just the ability to read and write, recent book historical studies (albeit focusing on Anglo-American and European cultures) have also rehearsed the argument that being able to “read” is never just about being literate. As Lisa Gitelman declares in the context of job-printing in the nineteenth-century United States, “[i]ndeed, whoever really reads receipts, bills, tickets, bonds, or certificates?” (30). Everyday documents

of these kinds provide an opportunity to enact “literacy”—we comprehend what they hope to convey—but they do not, to continue the generic metaphor, require us to read the fine print.

Similarly, William St. Clair, writing of early nineteenth-century England, casts those whose lives were entangled in “commercial documents, manuscript ledgers, accounts, and letters directly associated with their employment [and] . . . newspapers” to the space of what he calls the “literate nation” (13). This reflects a primary assumption about reading in the Anglo-European world that has been prevalent since the nineteenth century: that reading referred to one’s relationship with a literary text and, spurred on by the rise of the novel form, was generally linear and continuous. This is why for St. Clair, the ability to read a letter or an account book is not enough to admit one to the “reading nation”—the area that is the focus of his study, and which is comprised of men, women, and children who regularly engaged with printed texts that fit the description above. Gitelman’s argument confirms this: for her, functional documents and print objects do not “create readerships. They acquire users. . .” (31).

To the literates, the users and the readers, I add another group to complicate matters further: the non-reader. St. Clair defines the non-reader as one who absorbed and received writing through non-textual means, usually oral and visual (14). As can be assumed from Leah Price’s theorisation of nonreading (she chooses not to hyphenate the term), the non-reader turns the unequivocal assumption that “reading” must involve “something with the words” (*How to do Things with Books* 5).²⁰ Instead, by looking at the ways in which Victorian Britain harnessed the material and physical properties of books to the exclusion of their textual ones, Price asks an important, if unexpected question: “what meanings do books make even, or especially, when they go unread?” (*How to do Things with Books* 2).

²⁰ I examine Price’s concept of nonreading in greater detail in Chapter One’s discussion of Garnet Wolseley’s war manual.

Responding to Price's query, in this thesis I suggest that to examine the ways in which unread books are imbricated and circulated in networks of meaning, we have to turn to the range of cultural and narrative practices that were made available to readers (or non-readers) in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia. A particularly useful framework within which to understand this comes from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), in which he writes: "readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (174). The figure of the reader as a poacher is crucial here. It not only reminds us that "a book is a result (a construction) produced by the reader" (de Certeau 169)—such that any text can give rise to an infinite number of meanings—but also that the practice of reading is always fragmentary and ad-hoc. If readers are poachers, they are also hunters and scavengers: violently grabbing what they desire, or alternatively, making do with the bits and pieces that are available to them. What the characterisation of reading as a project of reassembly—of fracturing and putting back together—does, is present the text as a potential site for resistance. If Enlightenment doctrine suggested that social and cultural reform was possible through the widespread dissemination of the texts and books of the elite, the fact that reading could, in turn, transform these into something other than they were intended to be, was essential to the constitution of a playful and dissenting non-elite (de Certeau 166, 172).

So if literacy and illiteracy formed a continuum of sorts, it also becomes clear that a whole host of possible modes of reading existed between reading intensively and at length (as per Macaulay's instructions) and not reading at all. These can be mapped onto the different motives and reasons for why people did not "read" in the conventional sense of the word. Some of these motivations include: people did not read because they did not want to, (Chapter One); because they were illiterate (Chapter Two); because they did not have the

time to (Chapter Three); or because they had limited access to texts (Chapter Four). Reading from cover to cover was therefore, in equal measure, countered by both the unread, unreadable and misread text (the war manual of Chapter One and the bureaucratic document of Chapter Two) and the text that was only ever read in part (the almanacs of Chapter Three, and the periodical of Chapter Four).

If readers could make meaning of texts without reading them exhaustively, if at all, they could also do so by framing them as material objects. As Roger Chartier reminds us, “to read is always to read something” (“Labourers and Voyagers” 51)—to do otherwise is impossible, despite our tendency “to filter out the look, the feel, the smell of the printed page” (Price, “Reading Matter” 12). By looking at how the physical properties of books and documents shaped the ways in which readers responded to them, this thesis hopes to illustrate the importance of what Mark Amsler has called “affective literacy,” paying attention to the somatic and emotional reactions that these forms of writing instigated.

These are, in part, responses that reflect and determine the place of a book in the social and cultural world. As Price has noted, one’s relationship with a book is always a combination of reading (“doing something with the words”), handling (“doing something with the object”) and circulating (“doing something to, or with, other persons by means of the book”), acts that may or may not overlap (*How to do Things with Books* 5–6). In this manner, it is transformed into an object that is “not merely a source of ideas but a carrier of relationships” (Davis, *Society and Culture* 192). A useful framework within which to study this comes from a rich body of recent work on what Richard Harper, in his study of the IMF, calls the “ethnography of documents.”²¹ Primarily adopting the methodology of the social sciences, in particularly anthropology and history, scholarship on this subject reorients the manner in which we study the role of writing in the world, or the “careers of documents,” as

²¹ For other ethnographies of documents such as Harper’s, see in particular: Latour on the Conseil d’Etat (*The Making of Law*).

Harper puts it (2). As Ben Kafka reminds us, many have “discovered all sorts of interesting and important things looking *through* paperwork, but have seldom paused to look *at* it” (emphasis in original; “Paperwork” 341). Much like recent re-examinations of archival practice, Kafka is aware of how documents in various shapes and sizes are often merely read as sources, holding an authentic historical narrative that needs to be discovered and recovered. Looking *at* paperwork, by contrast, reveals a different set of preoccupations and tensions. For example, as each of my chapters here demonstrates, writing’s paper forms were consciously designed to elicit certain kinds of reactions from readers: whether awe through the complexity of official letterheads and stamps (the bureaucratic documents of Chapter Two) or the ability to consult a text with ease (the war manual of Chapter One and the almanacs of Chapter Three). Even as they invited readers to view texts in a certain way, as we will see, this purported role was more often than not, overturned.

By looking at the social and cultural processes to which writing contributed, and thus framing written objects as literary, bibliographic, and ethnographic, I will examine how these material trajectories highlight the uncertain modalities of colonial rule. In doing so, my thesis will move away from reading these as playing a mediatory role and instead suggest that they are autonomous objects that “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 39) and which therefore shape, rather than merely convey, content.

3. Literature and the Uses of History

As will by now be evident, my analysis of an eclectic mix of print and manuscript has been aided by a strongly interdisciplinary framework. I use the history of the book as a focal point to bring into conversation a range of disciplines and sub-fields that provide different,

though complementary, ways of thinking through the book in its textual and material forms: literary analysis, colonial studies, the sociology of texts, and the ethnography of documents. In this section of the introduction, I discuss some of the difficulties of writing histories of reading and look towards the ways in which the productive interface of two of these methodological approaches, literary and historical studies, may shed light on new ways in which we can think critically about reading as a cultural phenomenon. This is not, as we shall see, simply a case of what Robert Darnton calls “interdisciplinarity run riot” (“What is the History of Books” 67) but rather, an important and useful scholarly conjunction.

The history of reading is, as I have suggested, a notoriously slippery one to uncover. Adrian Johns writes that given the fact that “the experience of reading is extremely difficult to describe in words . . . capturing it may even be impossible” (385). So while “[t]he place of a reading practice, and its consequences as expressed in subsequent writings, are often traceable, being preserved in textual, pictorial, and material archives . . . the immediacy of reading itself is not” (Johns 385). Part of this difficulty, as Darnton elaborates, is that reading is shaped by historical and cultural contexts: “[b]oth familiar and foreign, it is an activity that we share with our ancestors yet that never can be the same as what they experienced . . . our relation to those texts cannot be the same as that of readers in the past (“First Steps” 5). And as Simon Eliot reminds us, the “first and greatest caveat in the history of reading” is that “to own, buy, borrow, or steal a book is no proof of wishing to read it, let alone proof of having read it.”²² If anything, as Leah Price’s *How to do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (2012) has revealed for us, people did much else with the books with which they crossed paths.

²² See “The Reading Experience Database; or, What are we to do about the History of Reading?” URL: <<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/redback.htm>>

To overcome this in part, Darnton envisages a multi-step programme towards the construction of a history of reading, involving the study of the material book, the status of reading in the society in question, and the role of institutions such as censors, among others (“First Steps”). Because of its reliance on the archive, such an approach poses a different problem for the field in South Asia. As Ulrike Stark points out, one of the reasons why “the history of the book in India is a history largely untold” (1) is the paucity of reliable empirical evidence relating to “just about every aspect of production, transmission, and consumption” (7). This was a realisation that I too was to arrive at in the course of my research: publishers and organisations are quick to dispose of their records and very few comprehensive sets exist from the colonial period. Further, termites and humid weather are not friends to paper, and where archives do exist, they are often disintegrating and almost virtually unreadable.

In this thesis, I attempt to counter this problem by incorporating as many aspects of the reading process as possible. Through these, I examine the book as a historical object, consumed and interpreted by “actual” readers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia. My sources include print and sales statistics, marginalia, print advertisements, personal correspondence and diaries, the material features of texts (size, colour, binding), and archival material such as petitions, licenses and government ledgers. This is a productive exercise, given the fact that the different parts of Darnton’s Communications Circuit are, of course, as the name suggests, interlinked and connected.

It is important to note that I do not read such archival material simply as “sources” participating in a dynamic of loss and discovery-as-recovery. The archive’s traditional role in historiography—as a repository of information—often makes a fetish of it, “a literal substitute for the ‘reality’ of the past which is ‘always already’ lost for the historian” (LaCapra 92). Anjali Arondekar describes this tendency succinctly in her discussion of sexuality’s traces in the colonial South Asian archive: “the presumption [is] that if a body is

found, then a subject can be recovered” (3). Recent criticism, however, particularly in the context of colonial records (Arondekar’s included), has redirected attention to the ways in which archives are fraught and problematic sites, continuously thwarting rather than merely shaping our expectations of history. Every “fact” that they provide us with is also accompanied by reminders of archival failure: missing files, samples of poor handwriting, torn pages, blurred video clips and scratchy sound recordings. A day in the archive is as much an act of disappointment as it is of discovery—the processes by which archives are constituted and stored require analysis and discussion just like the events and incidents which they record.²³

To this end, this thesis pays attention to what archives *do not* say as well as what they do: why, for example, and as I shall explore in Chapter Three, do some books elide public government registration while others do not? Or as Chapter Two will ask, whose voices slip into oblivion between files in the bureaucratic archive—and whose voices emerge? Just as texts are both linguistic statements and material objects, so are archives: affective, sensory objects that should be read “less as stories for a colonial history than as active, generative substances with histories, as documents with itineraries of their own” (Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* 1).²⁴

To answer the question of what it means to be a reader in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia, I also examine the circulation of books and other documents as literary tropes. Alongside the archived historical reader I therefore place the represented reader who operates and exists within spaces of the imagination. Unlike the implied reader of reader-response theory of the 1970s which is a fixed construct for a given text and determined by its internal logic and structure, represented readers, or the work of other author–readers, are multiple and can occupy a range of interpretive positions. Chapter One’s

²³ Exemplary recent studies include: Arondekar, Joseph, Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.

²⁴ For the spatial and material experience of archival research and accounts of archival experience, see the essays in Burton, ed., Dirks, Mbembe, and Steedman.

soldier readers of Garnet Wolseley's war manual reject it with a playful violence in Kipling's writings, but also need to be cautioned against blindly following it by John Wilson's anti-war pamphlet. Further, as Chapter Two will demonstrate, represented and historical readers may diverge drastically—whether because the former are subject to aesthetic license, or simply because archives do not, and cannot, account for every ramification of reading experiences.

My claims for the literary above may therefore seem somewhat contradictory, if not self-defeating—especially given my insistent refusal to study this reading public's literary tastes and habits. This is consolidated further by the fact that book historians have always been uncomfortable about the value of literary representations of reading. Most recently, William St. Clair expressed his scepticism regarding what he calls “text-based studies,” arguing that these “either ignore readers altogether or they derive their readers from the texts” and as a result, are “caught in a closed system,” incapable of accurately measuring either reception or impact (4). In his own work, “scattered anecdotal information, whose representative quality is necessarily always suspect” is used only in cases when no other information exists and while in such circumstances, has “helped to fill gaps,” “can be no substitute for information systematically collected from archives” (St. Clair 15).

In part, this thesis serves to demonstrate what historical and cultural studies can gain from the study of literary sources. I do not examine literary texts just to “fill in” gaps in the historical record, provide information when no other sources are available. In such a formulation, imaginative writing forms a secondary archive that challenges, or substitutes for, the official records, but makes these claims on the basis of an assumption: that literary texts must reliably mirror historical events. My account in this thesis works to a slightly different end. I read literary works not because of their relationship with a historical, verifiable “reality,” but rather, because their objectives are not, to borrow from Roger Chartier, “the real, or reality, but the way in which people consider it and transpose it” (“Intellectual

History” 39). By this logic, as Chapters One, Two, and Four will demonstrate, my intellectual choices accentuate a central argument: how people were imagined as reading had as much bearing on the place of a text in a society as how it was actually read. Even as these representations might not have been able to stake claim on reality, they may have had, as we will see particularly in the case of Chapter One, “real” and traceable effects.

If literature may contribute to historical studies in this manner, a second question comes to the fore: how does the study of historical documents augment our understanding of the literary? Rather than read these as authentic narratives purported to have an authentic grasp on the world, I pose another question in response: “how do specific genres of texts produce specific histories, subjects, evidence, and how are those effects mobilized?” (Arondekar 15). To this end, my eccentric account here is also an attempt to encourage a reinvigoration of literary interpretation via the nonliterary primary text. I draw inspiration from New Historicism’s aim to destabilise canonical and disciplinary hierarchies, deliberately considering major literary writers (Kipling in Chapter One and Tagore in Chapter Four) alongside minor ones (for example, Leonard Woolf and H.E. Beal in Chapter Two), as well as mundane documents, the circulation of which are my focus in this thesis. In doing so, I hope to uncover the links and connections between such “high cultural texts” and “texts very much in and of their world” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 10). History’s “unpredictable galvanic appearances and disappearances” in such texts reveals that they may have “unanticipated aesthetic dimensions” catching us unawares when we least expect it (Gallagher and Greenblatt 4, 10). I do not simply place literary texts in a historical context of production; I read the two as commensurate cultural formations that mobilise similar tropes of characterisation and storytelling, and constitute a single cultural imaginary.²⁵

²⁵ For a recent and excellent example of the productive study of literary texts and bureaucratic documents in the context of colonial South Asia, see Joseph.

As I will demonstrate, this is complicated by the relationship between the literary and the historical, as well as the literary and the nonliterary, within the confined boundaries of a single text. Chapter Four's discussion, for example, turns our attention to how *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* mobilised the dubious boundaries between imagination and reality, persuading their subscribers to read fictional accounts and letters as ethnographic forms of documentation. Additionally, nonliterary texts may tend towards the literary in their unexpected reliance on the creative possibilities of narrative. As Natalie Zemon Davis's study of pardon tales in sixteenth-century France reveals, even mundane administrative documents (such as the ones I discuss in Chapter Two) may possess "fictional" qualities; fictional not in the sense of untrue, but rather as employing "forming/shaping/moulding elements" that transform "events" into "stories" (*Fiction in the Archives* 2–3). Ann Laura Stoler makes a similar point when discussing the Dutch East Indies, that the bureaucratic document becomes host to "storeyed narratives": "fashioned cultural accounts with political effects" ("In Cold Blood" 183). Similarly, Chapter Three's examination of almanacs—the only chapter in this thesis that does not study any ostensibly "literary" texts alongside nonliterary ones—shows us how mundane prescriptions are used to structure everyday routines. (I make the case for almanacs as a mode of autobiographical or life-writing.) In each chapter, the thesis reveals how paying attention to the literary, historical and ethnographic dimensions of print objects and narratives contributes to a fuller understanding of textual transmission and reception.

The overlaying of literary and historical texts also allows me to make a methodological and disciplinary argument about their relationship and so, by extension, to return to the question of the unread. If the readers on whom I focus in this thesis do not "read" the texts they encounter, I stand in contradiction to this, relying on the vast spread of the unread that is the colonial literary and historical archive. I turn to both lesser-known works, genres, and references—the bureaucratic novel, the minor modernist text, the

thoroughly mundane (and also rather boring) colonial war manual, the inter-textual moments no one notices in Kipling's stories, the faded inked notes in the margins of almanacs, to name just a few examples. My "historical" sources, drawn from heavily-trafficked national archives, small public libraries along the British seacoast, and the dusty recesses of dilapidated South Calcutta houses, are files that have not been looked at for years, that are disintegrating from having not been read and, in some cases, are simply missing. By bringing together this wide range of literary and historical sources, this thesis also hopes to demonstrate practically as to how, as scholars and academicians, we can read the "unread."

4. Outline of Chapters

The ideas and interventions described in this introduction unfold across four chapters, each of which focuses on a different kind of text, reader, and method of reading from colonial South Asia, as below.

The first two case studies examine the circulation of texts in colonial institutions: the army and the government office. Chapter One, "*The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service: Lessons in Not Reading*," focuses on Garnet Wolseley's controversial war instructional manual (1869). While the pocket-book's contribution to discussions on soldiers' reading ostensibly carved out a significant place for it in military history, it was always represented in the popular press as a text that remained largely unread even though widely carried around by soldiers in the late nineteenth century. I focus on three instances in which it is framed as such: in an anti-war pamphlet by John J. Wilson, a set of drawings from Wolseley's own scrapbook collection, and Kipling's writings on British soldiers in South Asia. My arguments are informed by extensive archival research in the Macmillan Archive, Bodleian Library, and Wolseley's private papers at the Brighton and Hove Libraries.

Chapter Two, “The Document and the Headman: Reading the Illegible” considers another kind of unread text—the bureaucratic document. My discussion of the circulation of files, petitions, licenses, account books, and legal papers in rural colonial spaces is based on research in the National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo, and a literary study of ethnographic novels from Sri Lanka and India: Leonard Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), and H.E. Beal’s *Indian Ink* (1954). I also read Fakir Mohan Senapati’s Oriya novel, *Six Acres and a Third* (1902), in an English translation. Focusing on illiterate peasants’ confused encounters with writing, I read these documents as they would have: as material objects. In doing so, I demonstrate not only how the inability to read transforms writing into a powerful and disorienting object, but also how bureaucracy’s eagerness to record everything on paper makes it particularly susceptible to manipulation. Highlighting the fragility of the written word, I go on to explore how colonial subjects within and outside the bureaucratic office learnt to “work” a system created to control them, and also discuss examples of spaces and documents in the ethnographic novel that actively resist bureaucratic imposition.

Chapters Three and Four focus on texts that are designed to be read selectively, or in part. Chapter Three, “Reading for Time: The Almanac Directory in Bengal” illustrates this through a study of astrological almanacs which made the transition from print to manuscript in the mid-nineteenth century. Combining a study of such texts from the archives of the Gupta Press, an early contributor to the form, with print run information from the National Library, Kolkata, and the British Library, I construct a history of the genre in the early years of its mass production. Further, I argue that the new material that it came to include—advertisements, postal information, lists of governmental holidays, and railway timetables—spoke not to its traditional female readership, but rather, to English-educated office clerks. In doing so, the almanac imparted two lessons in colonial modernity: how to oscillate smoothly between British-bureaucratic and local, astral forms of time, as well as how to read quickly

and selectively. By turning to the material and textual features these books incorporated, I highlight, however, that economic contingencies made for poor print. I contrast this impossibility of efficient reading with the case of the expensive directories that the Anglo-Indian company, Thacker and Co. produced, and on which these vernacular forms were modelled.

Chapter Four, “Extracting Cosmopolitanism: *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*” examines Kamala Sathianadhan’s Madras-based English-language monthly (1901–1912). As its title suggests, this publication directed itself specifically towards a female readership, with the explicit political aim of advancing the social and literary causes of women in South Asia. By facilitating dialogue between women from across the world, it sought to encourage what I, drawing on the work of Kwame Anthony Appiah, call “cosmopolitan reading.” This not only involved reading texts from across cultures but also, I argue, across different textual and material forms. In particular, I examine how journalistic practices of summarising, extracting and serialising articles shaped this mode of reading, giving women access to a range of global print to which they would not have otherwise had exposure. Through *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, these were only ever read in such condensed or partial forms. My examples include reprinted articles, cross-references and citations to similar publications, readers’ responses to the magazine’s content, serialised travel accounts, and finally, book reviews. This, I demonstrate, allowed women to construct global intellectual and affective networks, through the shared consumption of print. I end with a discussion of Rabindranath Tagore’s Bengali novella, *Nashtanir* (The Broken Nest, 1901), equally well known in Satyajit Ray’s cinematic version, *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife, 1964). Focusing on the proliferation of periodicals, newspapers, and printed books in the novella and the film, I read these texts as representative of the failure of the cosmopolitan imagination, with written objects being

transformed into emotional and material barriers to the construction of meaningful relationships.

Chapter One

The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service: Lessons in Not Reading

1. Torn Pages, Vicious Readers

In his characteristically playful and irreverent style, Robert Baden-Powell, best known as the author of *Scouting for Boys* (1908), gives the readers of his *Indian Memories: Recollections of Soldiering, Sport, etc.* (1915) an account of his involvement in the Second Afghan War (1878–1880). Narrating his fellow soldiers' exploits, that mainly involved practical joking and pig-sticking, he ends his narrative of the war with a list of the mementos he collects from the battlefield. These are a shell, the hoof of a horse of the E. Battery Royal Horse Artillery, a belt stained with blood, and lastly, a page torn out of Garnet Wolseley's *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service* (Baden-Powell, *Indian Memories* 137–38).

Having made their way into the violent stage of the battlefield, neither Wolseley nor his book seems to require an introduction to Baden-Powell's readers.¹ This, given Wolseley's meteoric rise in the ranks of the army, and his prominent role as a commentator on culture and politics, is not surprising. Beginning his career as an ensign in the Second Anglo-Burmese war in 1852, Wolseley went on to fight in the Crimea, South Asia, China, Canada, Egypt, South Africa, and the Gold Coast of the African Continent, as well as head diplomatic missions to the Middle East and Cyprus. When he retired as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces in 1900, he was a household name, not only as the public face of many British colonial campaigns and the writer of a considerable number of published journalistic and

¹ The only other reference to Wolseley is shortly before this. Baden-Powell mentions drawing maps during the Second Afghan War; he is ordered to prepare one to be sent to Wolseley (*Indian Memories* 137).

historical works, but also as the endorsing stamp of well-known brands of domestic amenities such as tobacco and tea.²

The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service, published in 1869 by Macmillan and Co., was a small red military handbook written to assist the British Army in times of war overseas.³ Much of the information we have regarding its conception and production is patchy, pieced together from correspondence and Wolseley's own prefaces to various editions of the text. With the experience of several colonial campaigns to his name, he was among those chosen to write this "practical handbook," conceptualised by his mentor, Richard Airey (*Soldier's Pocket-book* v). When the War Office refused to sanction the funds required for the project, Wolseley took it upon himself to complete the book single-handedly, working on it, as he wrote in a letter from Canada to his brother Richard, in "fits and starts" (29 Feb. 1868). His motivations, publicity and monetary gain, nevertheless ensured the completion of the manuscript in early 1869, and the first edition of the pocket-book was published by Macmillan in April that year.⁴ By 1874, Wolseley claimed that the book had gained the status of a "regular textbook" and was being "bought by every officer now and . . . used in all military schools" (letter from Wolseley to Craik, 18 Aug. 1874).

² For Wolseley's life, see Kochanski and Lehmann.

Wolseley's published works include, among others, a two-volume autobiography, *The Story of a Soldier's Life* (1903), and *The Life of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough* (1894, also 2 vols.).

Wolseley was the face of Sofiano and Fosco cigarette makers and tobacco importers, an organisation that operated in Turkey, Berlin and London. He can also be found on the cover of the 1883 almanac of the Chinese Tea Company, and in a racist advertisement for black shoe polish, among others. Advertisements of this sort can be found in scrapbooks compiled by the Wolseley family in the Wolseley Special Collections of the Brighton and Hove Libraries. For a discussion of the popular representation of military heroes as celebrities, albeit in the context of colonial wars on the African continent, see Sèbe. Sèbe excludes Wolseley from his study, arguing that his popularity did not match the likes of Kitchener or the French Marchand, and that he was soon eclipsed by Lord Roberts (10). Be that as it may, there is ample evidence in Wolseley's personal papers—newspaper articles, book reviews, cartoons, and advertisements—to suggest that he was still very much a part of the British imagination at the end of the nineteenth century, even if in a less than complimentary light.

³ All references to the pocket-book are to the first edition (1869), unless stated otherwise.

⁴ Wolseley wrote to his brother that the pocket-book was a crucial source of income: "I intend selling the first edition right out for anything I can get for it, as I want money to pay off my debts . . ." (22 Jan. 1869), continuing to comment in 1878 that writing "pays so well" and also ensured that his name was kept "before the public" (18 Feb. 1878).

Through an exhaustive and subsequently expanding structure, the pocket-book was not only a guide to strategic armed military operations but also attempted to assist its soldier readers in adapting to terrain that was both foreign and hostile. To this end, apart from standard military information, it also contained tips for easy cooking, notes about climate, and instructions for the care of exotic transport animals such as elephants and camels. It was this eclectic supply of information gleaned from field experience that Wolseley felt distinguished the pocket-book from its inadequate predecessors, *The Queen's Regulations* and *The Field Exercise Book*.⁵ In the preface to the 1869 edition, he pointed out that both these texts were authored by men who had “never seen a shot fired in anger,” and went on to argue in the second edition (1871) that bookish qualifications, “admirable as they [were], [gave] no proof that an officer [was] fit to be entrusted with the command of men in war” (iv). The success of the pocket-book came to its culmination, as Wolseley also pointed out, when many of the suggestions he proffered in the first were made into regulations; that is, formally adopted by the British army (iii).

This chapter considers the curious place of *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service* in the history of the late nineteenth century. For a technical and specialist publication,

⁵ Wolseley was also to write another handbook in later years, *The Field Pocket-book for the Auxiliary Forces* (1873), which borrowed from the content of the pocket-book but was aimed, as its title suggests, at the less-trained sections of the army.

It is important to note that though Wolseley's manual was unique in many ways, it was not the only military instructional text in circulation. Specialised texts dedicated to the study of artillery (such as J.H. Lefroy's *A Handbook for Field Service, or The Field Pocket-book* (1854)) and engineering (for example, *Aide-Mémoire to the Military Sciences* (1853)) were available, and combined some of the concerns regarding portability and concision that structured Wolseley's volume. Having said that, none of these gained the reputation that the pocket-book did.

The British Army in South Asia was also very much a printing machine, producing a copious number of guides and manuals to allow officers to command their native battalions better. It issued, for example, a series of ethnographic studies or recruiting handbooks which subscribed to the infamous Martial Race Theory, suggesting that specific religious and ethnic communities were culturally and physically predisposed to being soldiers. Representative volumes include R.M. Betham's *Marathas and Dekhani Musalmans* (1908), R.T. Ridgway's *Pathans* (1910), B.L. Cole's *Rajputana Classes* (1922), and J.T. Evatt's *Garhwalis* (1924). In addition to these, dictionaries of military terms, translating commonly used phrases into South Asian languages for the British soldier, to facilitate communication between the racially divided sections of the army, were easily available, as were bilingual training manuals. See for example, Hutchinson's *Military Training in English and Hindustani (Urdu Edition)* (1890).

As Nile Green points out, the army was also responsible for the publication and circulation of South Asian language-print, particularly in Urdu, for example, in the form of Islamic pamphlets, and newspapers like the *Fawji Akhbar* (144).

Wolseley's text had extraordinary cultural impact. It instigated lively, and often vicious, discussions of its merits in mainstream Victorian newspapers, religious pamphlets, satirical magazines, and even in fiction of the time. These conversations remained energetic throughout the print life of the book's five editions.⁶ While it had its supporters, the majority of such popular accounts characterised the pocket-book as a dubious, if not dangerous, text—pedantic, poorly written, riddled with mistakes, voluminous, and espousing questionable morals.⁷ In short, it was considered to be much less a work of astute military thinking than a self-congratulatory gesture on the part of a notoriously egotistical man.

Examining a range of literary and nonliterary sources, I focus here on the representation of the pocket-book as a text that the public actively encouraged soldiers not to read, even though it was widely carried around by them in the late nineteenth century. Drawing on military and reading histories, and the materiality of texts, the first section of this chapter builds a case for the pocket-book as a text that embodied aspirations to self-improvement. These were made accessible through the many features Wolseley incorporated across editions to make the book an easily understood, portable object. The second section draws on recent theories of reading and not reading to examine the pocket-book's circulation as an unread text in real and imagined worlds in the late nineteenth century. I trace a transatlantic journey a copy of the book took, which provided the impetus for a pacifist pamphlet, *Construction and Destruction; or The Devilry of War* (1891), by a writer called John J. Wilson. I also consider satirical sketches I have found in Wolseley's scrapbook collection that feature the pocket-book as a questionable tool of military education. Finally, I

⁶ After its first edition in 1869, the pocket-book went through four more, published in 1871, 1874, 1882 and 1886.

⁷ Wolseley confessed in a letter to his brother Richard that the first edition had “many misprints and mistakes” and cited this as a reason for a revised second edition (1 Sep. 1869).

Advertisements for rival military manuals in the 1880s were often modelled in opposition to Wolseley's text. For example, Gale and Polden, a military textbook series, simultaneously advertised the pocket-book and manuals written by a Mr Gordon of the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, which they described as “less voluminous” (Hutchinson 124).

examine the book's appearance in South Asia through the literary vehicle of Kipling's writings on British soldiers posted in the region.

This chapter's discussion of *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service* is, to borrow Leah Price's term, a "rejection" rather than a "reception" history (*How to do Things with Books* 7). If books have traditionally been considered to shape subjectivity, I will now extend the argument I made in the introduction to this thesis, that *not* reading and misreading have as much a place in histories of reading as conventional engagements with content. As we will also see in Chapter Two's discussion of the bureaucratic document, this is a reminder that books and documents may well have vibrant lives without actually being read. The two sections of the chapter will illustrate this, proffering different lessons in how meaning was derived from the pocket-book, by reading it or not.

A note of clarification before I start: while the soldiers I discuss here are British, not South Asian, this by no means sits uneasily with my attempt to write a history of reading in the region for several reasons.⁸ As the largest employer in the colony, the army, as Douglas Peers reminds us, "stands out as the institution in which the closest and most sustained contacts were made between the colonial state and its subjects" (qtd. in Green 2). But this space was more stratified than that, and not simply divisible between Britons and South Asians. As Kipling's attempt to imitate their vernacular dialects and dubious grammatical structures highlights, the lower ranks of the British troops drew from the lowest classes of metropolitan society and so, just like the native informants we will turn to in Chapter Two, occupied the ambiguous position of colonial agents and subjects. On the one hand, they were not above inflicting extreme physical and racial violence on both their fellow native troops

⁸ Though not my subject here, as Nile Green points out, rising literacy and education levels in this period were also clearly perceivable among the South Asian ranks of the British Army. This was largely because of its exam-based system of granting promotions. From 1827, native officers had to demonstrate literacy in Persian or Hindi and later, in Urdu (or "military Hindustani") (134).

The most comprehensive study of South Asians in the British army to date is still David Omissi's *The Sepoy and the Raj* (1994). See also, among others: Alavi, and Peers.

and military opponents. On the other, as Sharon Murphy has pointed out, the unruly British soldier abroad was, like local populations, the target of a civilising mission, and was therefore a consumer, rather than simply a producer, of texts and practices that were thought to aid this project (“Imperial Reading” 75). The soldier reader’s identity, inextricably linked with, and shaped by, imperial concerns and factors as it was, was very much a part of the nation of unlikely readers explored in this thesis.

2. Lesson One: How to Read the Pocket-book

i. An Army of Readers

As a passionate supporter of reform in the army, Wolseley designed his pocket-book to be not simply a vehicle to disseminate military regulations, but also a guide to a process of voluntary re-education, centred on honing the particular merits of the individual.⁹ The British soldier, he wrote in its opening pages, was not “a machine, incapable of noble impulses” but instead, a person whose unique talents and dispositions could compensate for the shortcomings of his cohort, creating a stronger, unified regiment (6). The more soldiers were reminded of the roles they had to play in the smooth functioning of their units, the more likely they were to perform to their highest abilities. Urging them to believe that hierarchy was but a “ladder, the rungs of which all can equally aspire to mount” (1), Wolseley hoped to entice soldiers of all classes, not just officers, to read his book, on the assumption that it would facilitate their upwardly mobile journeys. A close reading of the lessons of the pocket-book, coupled with some good common sense in the field, would be an appropriate substitute for the training that others may have received through a public school education.

⁹ For more on Wolseley’s specific contributions to military reform, see Bond 116–52.

In order to locate the pocket-book in nineteenth-century military history and understand these conversations about class that it made possible, it is necessary to examine the changes that the British army underwent in this period. First and foremost were the Cardwell Reforms (1868–1874). This series of legislative measures, which, above all, was responsible for abolishing the practice of purchasing commissions in 1870, crucially reorganised the army as a professional entity. Although, as W.J. Reader points out, the qualities an officer was traditionally expected to possess were those of the country gentleman—courage, loyalty, and physical strength—the Cardwell Reforms radically suggested that, in fact, one could, and had to, be educated into military practice through specialised training (74). What this did was prioritise technical knowledge over the worth of birth and wealth, and in doing so, opened high-ranking positions in the army to anyone who could prove to possess the requisite qualifications.

To gain such knowledge, of course, soldiers and officers alike would have to be able to read. In an 1859 report on reading practices among colonial units to which I will return later in this chapter, J.H. Lefroy remarked on the limited vocabulary of soldiers and “the number of words there are in common use of whose meaning they have no idea or a false one” (58).¹⁰ Subsequently, as a result of Forster’s Education Act of 1870, legislature that made education compulsory and freely available in Britain, national literacy rates increased from 63.3 percent in 1841 to a phenomenal 92.2 by 1900 (T. Jackson 80–81). The army had also instated complementary educational requirements. By 1861, all soldiers required an Army Certificate of Education of at least the third (and lowest) level for a basic commission.¹¹ As a result of this, by 1889, 85.4 percent of Britain’s soldiers could read and write (Spiers 3).¹²

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of this report, see Murphy, “Quite Incapable.”

¹¹ From 1871, a new fourth-level degree was required (Spiers 2).

¹² Of course, both sets of figures must be qualified. “Literacy” implies a rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing, and so actual levels of proficiency varied dramatically. This was perhaps due to the fact that the effects

Coupling the abolition of purchasing commissions with an increasingly literate army, a military vocation suddenly came within the grasp of the middle classes, as well as those aspiring to that status. In positioning itself as both a technical manual and, as I have already mentioned, a text for self-improvement, the pocket-book also joined the unlikely genealogy of nineteenth-century self-help guides. Like volumes such as Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* (1859) and even Isabella Beeton's classic *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861), it ascribed to the belief that individuals could be their own educators, if given the right instructions to follow. It taught its readers that, like being middle class, being a good soldier was dependent on a cultivation of character and resourcefulness, qualities that could very much be learnt.

While the image of the soldier as an unlikely reader dominates the popular imagination—and is perhaps not helped by this chapter's focus on the act of *not* reading—recent scholarship has demonstrated that from the early nineteenth century onwards, reading was considered to be a central part of soldierly experience, both from professional and personal points of view.¹³ As Sharon Murphy, writing about the establishment of libraries for soldiers of the East India Company, has shown us, the connection between one's occupation and one's reading habits created considerable debate at the time (“Imperial Reading”).

Writing in particular about imperial soldiers, Maria Edgeworth for example, suggested in 1812 that

. . . a species of reading, which may be disapproved of for other pupils, should be recommended to the young soldier. His imagination should be exalted by the adventurous and the marvellous. Stories of giants, and genii, and knights and tournaments and “pictured tales of vast heroic deeds,” should feed his fancy. He

of the Forster's Act were uneven. As Edward Spiers points out, the Irish, a large constituent part of the British army, received none of its benefits. Similarly, by 1888, 60 percent of the army refused, or simply could not, pass the fourth-level certificate, and the army abandoned the project of compulsory schooling for its soldiers. Nevertheless, as he goes on to note, the improvement to which these figures point, was very much real (Spiers 2–3).

¹³ In particular, scholarship on soldiers and reading in the First World War has been abundant. See for example, King, Hammond and Towheed eds., and Laugesen. For the most part, however, these focus on the imaginative potential of fiction reading, rather than technical works such as the pocket-book.

should read accounts of ship-wrecks and hairbreadth [e?]scapes, voyages and travels, histories of adventures, beginning with Robinson Crusoe [sic], the most interesting of all stories, and one which has sent many a youth to sea. (qtd. in Murphy, "Imperial Reading" 76)

Soon after in 1823, Charles Colville, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal Army, made an argument in favour of the East India Company libraries for soldiers, observing that reading might "lessen the inclination to vice and induce to better principles and greater regularity of habits among the European soldiery" (qtd. in Murphy, "Imperial Reading" 77). Eleven years apart and from two entirely different professional positions, Edgeworth and Colville's arguments have a common aim: to "improve" the British soldier, either by inserting him into a highly orientalist fantasy of danger and pleasure in the East, perhaps one of the primary motivating forces behind the desire for imperial conquest, or by keeping him distracted from unseemly activities. The result was a better soldier and representative of Britain in its empire.

It is essential to note further that *what* soldiers read was considered to be of paramount importance. If books had a reforming and positive influence, and could make men better human beings as well as soldiers, a poor choice of reading material could also, by extension, prove to be detrimental.¹⁴ Wolseley was very much aware of this, and across the pocket-book and his autobiographical writings, propounded the need for "correct" methods of textual engagement. This took the form of different images of soldiers reading. Take for example, these lines from the pocket-book:

Often have I blushed for my profession, when I have seen officers sitting down under some shelter reading a book, whilst their men were working, or rather, I should say, supposed to be working; for after a little time, when the men see that their officers do not take an interest in what is going on, they soon follow suit. (142)

In his autobiography, *The Story of a Soldier's Life* (1903), a competing image emerges:

¹⁴ For studies of the redeeming and reforming possibilities of reading, see Crone, Ffye, and Hartley.

Of these [soldiers] a small proportion, taking their profession seriously, studied hard at all military sciences, and spent many of those deadly midday hours of the Indian summers in reading *military history* and the *lives of great commanders*. Happy, indeed, is the young officer who so loves his work as to find in such literature a high form of pleasure. A few of that stamp developed into able leaders, but they were men who would have achieved greatness in any walk of life. (Emphasis added; vol.1, 11)

The second image acts to qualify the first. The officer protected under the “shelter of a tree” is replaced by the earnest soldier exposed and suffering in the “deadly midday hours of Indian summers.” Leisure gives way to the trial of the model young soldier who, nevertheless, quickly learns his lesson and converts “studying hard” into an activity that gives him “pleasure.” It is the shift from the first image to the second that constitutes “correct” reading.

In describing the “resourceful soldiers” who realise the importance of reading, Wolseley shows himself to be of the same calibre:

I could have passed a high competitive examination in all the then commonly known books on light infantry and its mode of employment in the field as practised by our army in the Peninsula. For years back I had spent my spare money—it was not much, however—in buying all such books, so that my little military library far exceeded in size and useful works those of even our old generals of that time. (*Story of a Soldier's Life*, vol.1, 29)

It is important to note that he is nevertheless the exception of his times, for while the books on light infantry he reads are “commonly known,” he, not his commanding generals, is the one who can boast of possessing copies of them. In later years, he was to write to family members that his “days [were] spent in pouring over Blue books and official papers” (Letter from Wolseley to Caroline Wolseley dated 19 Jun. 1879).

This point in his personal development is not a sudden one, and is arrived at through sustained intellectual cultivation from childhood. The dedicated Wolseley grows up reading Hume's *History of England*, Alison's *History of Europe*, and Napier's *The Peninsular War*, and disliking the classics; his “exact and mathematical mind revolted against the unreal

nonsense taught [to] [him] as the history of these mean and contemptible deities, about most of whom there was nothing good, wholesome, or manly” (*Story of a Soldier’s Life*, vol.1, 8).¹⁵ Later in Burma, Wolseley was to confess when listening to the story of a war hero that the “relation of all *actual* deeds of daring” (emphasis added; *Story of a Soldier’s Life*, vol.1, 13) was of interest to him and that while “there was a heroic grandeur about it [the officer’s story] that recalled to [his] memory [his] badly learned stories of fights before Troy,” he was definitely more appreciative of the officer’s “matter-of-fact narrative” (*Story of a Soldier’s Life*, vol.1, 12). What this in essence does is establish the difference between the nonliterary text as a form of knowledge and the literary text, alternatively, as a form of non-knowledge, one that is esoteric, difficult to understand and as a result of which, not entirely “useful.” It is in the same vein that Wolseley tried to establish his writing, not excluding the pocket-book, as practical, and, by corollary, made no claim for it “on the score of literary merit” (*Soldier’s Pocket-book* v).¹⁶

That said, as J.H. Lefroy noted in his *Report on the Regimental and Garrison Schools of the Army* (1859), the majority of soldiers chose to read “inappropriate” works of fiction and sentimental novels (Murphy, “Quite Incapable” 121). By contrast, “books of travels, military works (except the historical records of regiments), and works of general literature, with comparatively few exceptions, repose[d] undisturbed on the shelves” (*Report* 57). The pocket-book, as we shall see, was destined to fight a losing battle.

¹⁵ The rejection of the classics also had a social precedent. With the Grammar School Act of 1840, schools in England expanded their curricula to include science and literature in addition to the traditional classics education they offered. Wolseley’s reading shift perhaps mirrors this larger social restructuring, which was later, in some quarters, to associate classical learning with effeminacy and homosexuality, borrowing from the Greek pedagogical model of *pederastia*. For more on these developments see Archer and Vaughan.

¹⁶ This is not to suggest that Wolseley did not read literary works. The family’s personal letters in the Hove archive attest to the sending and receiving of works of fiction and poetry, as well as reveal their many literary correspondents, which included George Meredith, Henry James, and Edmund Gosse, among others.

ii. Reading Material

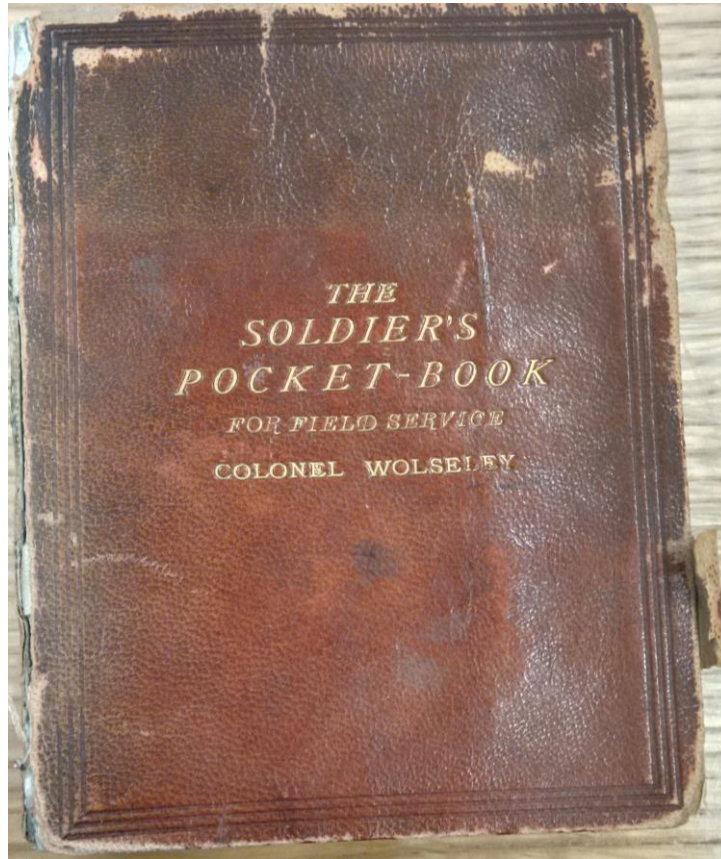


Fig. 1.1. A first edition of *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service* (1869). Photo courtesy of The British Library Board, 8825.aa.33 front cover.

As Roger Chartier and other book historians remind us, texts are not “deposited” in books: “[r]eaders only encounter texts within an object whose forms and layout guide and compel the production of meaning” (“Frenchness in the History of the Book” 307). To enable the pocket-book to carry out the pedagogical duties to which its content seemed well-suited, Wolseley had to ensure that it was actually being read by soldiers.

The first measure was making sure that it was affordable. In a letter to Macmillan he expressed concern regarding the price of the first edition of the pocket-book. At five shillings, he thought it was too high, making it unlikely that many would buy it. He suggested an

alternative price of three shillings and six pence, arguing that it would make the book more accessible, allowing it to “find its way with the volunteer ranks . . . for if it were cheap, a very large proportion of the non-commissioned officers, and even of the privates in some corps, would buy it . . . [i]f sold cheap it would be a book that would sell well on all Railway book stalls” (31 Aug. 1871).

Wolseley also incorporated different formal and material innovations to make the book as easy to hold and carry as it was to read and understand. The pocket-book’s first concern was to remain true to its name, to be a pocket-book. Included in a list of essentials for an officer’s Field Kit (under “*that which is carried for him*”), it was to be “packed in a bag attached to, and forming the pillow of, the bed, or rolled up in the bed itself” (emphasis in original; 8).¹⁷ Given that it would journey with its owner, often by foot, for the duration of a war, portability was central to its design. Even as its fourth edition was one and a half times the length of the first, the pocket-book remained a small rectangular volume that could be slipped into a trouser or shirt pocket, weighing, from Wolseley’s estimates in 1869, just under a pound.¹⁸ Its red leather covers (matching with the Red coats who would carry it) and title embossed in gold lettering made it seemingly unobtrusive. It could be easily mistaken for any other book that a person in the nineteenth century might carry with them. Wolseley was, however, increasingly aware of the growing status of the pocket-book, and in subsequent editions, was intent on giving it a more “official appearance.” For example, when discussing

¹⁷ This is forwarded as a suggestion in the first edition. In a letter to Macmillan, Wolseley wrote: “I am sure you will be glad to hear that many of the changes which I laid down in the ‘Pocket Book’ [sic] . . . have been agreed to, amongst others the small kit for officers” (6 Apr. 1871).

¹⁸ The pocket-book’s page count drastically increased with each edition. The volume, 275 pages long in 1869, grew to 510 in 1882. Its length and breadth dimensions remained nevertheless, roughly the same across its editions, around four by five inches and a third.

The pocket-book’s instructions for the officers’ kits noted the weight of the pocket-book (and tobacco) as a total of one pound, and this measure remained constant till 1886 (8). One can only imagine which was more probable: that soldiers were smoking less, or leaving their pocket-books at home.

the second edition of the text, he suggested that Macmillan continue with the red page edges, perhaps not thinking of the negative associations of “red tape” (Letter dated 2 Sep. 1871).¹⁹

What are the implications of these details for this chapter’s discussion of reading, not reading, and materiality? While, as Andrew Piper has recently pointed out, the act of reading is always already embodied, the unavoidable relationship between one’s hands, touch and making sense of a text, has specific resonance for the study of the form of the pocket-book, and its synonymous handbook (2–3). The “handiness” of Wolseley’s text thus speaks not only to its convenience, but also to the fact that this convenience derives from its size, from the ability, to return to Piper, to reduce the world to something we can hold in our hands (3). But if the pocket-book (or the handbook) can be reduced and fit for purpose, it is important to remember that it too serves as a container for other texts and objects, in turn reducing and fitting them to its own ends. Books have always provided a means of storing physical items (whether pieces of paper or dried and pressed flowers); the pocket-book form’s genesis from a book carried in a pocket, to a book with pockets, to a handbag is a case in point (Piper 11).²⁰

Wolseley’s book proved to be a container for all kinds of texts, notes, and objects. For one, even while it seemed modest in size—and therefore capability—it in fact held an ever-increasing amount of information about managing wars. It was not simply an aggregation of anecdotal stories of Wolseley’s own military experience, but an organised compilation of these along with extracts (either as direct quotations or paraphrased sections) from other

¹⁹ On 9 [month?] 1878, Wolseley once again wrote to Macmillan, this time suggesting that the edges be blue. No reason is given for this change, and on examining a fourth edition of the text (1882), it is clear that Macmillan ignored Wolseley’s suggestion—the edges of the pages remained red.

By contrast, Kipling parodies the official form of government documents in the first edition of *Departmental Ditties* (1886), which is described in Christie’s auction catalogue as “all narrow 8vo, printed tan wrappers, with the flap to resemble an official envelope, most of the spine chipped away, half of flap lacking, sides a bit stained, the red tape lacking as nearly always.” See <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/kipling-rudyard-departmental-ditties-1320280-details.aspx?intObjectID=1320280>.

²⁰ Piper also discusses how the relationship between hands and reading develops in the history of the Western world. His examples range from the early modern appropriation of the pointing hand as a textual bookmarker to the genesis of Braille in the nineteenth century (7–9).

military histories and guides (such as *The Queen's Regulations*), mathematical textbooks, and administrative rule books, among other relevant textual sources. *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service*, as Wolseley wrote in the preface to the second edition, was written as a book to “dispense with other books,” qualified by a hasty rejoinder, “other than this one” (iii). As a matter of practicality, it aimed to save the soldier from having to read hundreds of books on military history and tactics. Instead, it provided a means of glancing through neatly arranged material, whether in narrative prose, tables or, where necessary, diagrams. The task of locating information was made simple by the incorporation of various finding aids such as a systematic Table of Contents and Index, as well as a running header system that indicated the subject to which the information on any given page pertained. The promise of the pocket-book was thus, in a sense, oxymoronic; that of abbreviated—and easily navigable—plenitude.

Even though it was written by a single author, the pocket-book's encyclopaedic quality was, as Barbara Benedict argues in the case of the compiled literary forms of the anthology and miscellany, a Bakhtinian carnivorous play of sources (13). The act of compilation consolidated its authority as an instructional text, lending it a monopoly of sorts over the different texts with which it engaged. The process of absorption, in turn, transformed these into nothing more than sources, reproducible fragments subordinated to the dominant narrative of the pocket-book. As even a cursory look at Wolseley's book confirms, this process also worked to reframe the formal characteristics of the extracted and reproduced material, shaping how it was read. Take for example, the sections from the Mutiny Act in the pocket-book. In addition to a brief note on the powers of courts martial, these included extensive prototypes of forms that would have to be filled in the event of an inquiry. Reprinted in the pocket-book, these were nothing more than blanks, to be glanced over and returned to in times of need. But the fact that they could be reproduced—copied and filled in multiple times—reminds us that the pocket-book held the potential for encompassing

unrealised narratives; here, of betrayal, treachery, and punishment. The example of the Mutiny Act demonstrates, therefore, the quick switches between material forms that Wolseley's text initiated—from a text, to a fragment and finally, to an object with a narrative and material life separate from the pocket-book.

While the example of the blank form highlights the manner in which the pocket-book exploited the traffic of texts to its own ends, it also brings another activity into the picture—writing. In recognition of the necessity of writing to the practice of war, prescriptions for official and secret letters, administrative documents, and mathematical calculations abounded in the pocket-book. While these, of course, were part of the larger mechanism of fighting wars, Wolseley's pocket-book also pointed out the importance of writing to each individual soldier across the ranks. In its very first pages, Wolseley suggested that soldiers carry a small pocket-book (not his text, but a small notebook) on their person when in battle. The contents of this, he acknowledged, would vary from soldier to soldier, but should generally contain details of the war being fought—the number of soldiers in the enemy's regiments, tactical specificities, among others (*Soldier's Pocket-book* 6–7). Since the pocket-book was not to be carried into battle, this notebook gained the status of a parallel, if lesser, authority. It did what the pocket-book could not—translated general rules into the specificities of situations. It became its substitute at crucial moments.²¹

Further, Wolseley's pocket-book also styled itself as an open text. While his letters to Macmillan revealed anxieties about the need to update the information it contained, the text itself also invited the reader to participate in this process of revision, adding to, if nothing else, his personal copy. To this end, the first edition included thirty-four blank pages intended

²¹ Several such pocket-books exist in the Wolseley Special Collections in Hove, and are presumably his own. These range from containing notes from relevant historical and military works (M1/113) to one, on the cover of which is scrawled "Parta Tueri" ("defend what you have won"), which contains nothing more than doodles and ink splotches (M1/12/25). The disparity between the two demonstrates how uneven the use of such pocket-books was, even by the same soldier.

for the reader's notes.²² Further, correspondence regarding the second edition reveals information about the form of the first. Wolseley's letter to Macmillan on 2 September 1871 informs us that the publishers planned to "do away with the pencil" in the next edition, and he suggested that they substitute it with a clasp. Since the library copies of the pocket-book I examined were inevitably somewhat damaged, I did not realise that what seemed to be a stray piece of leather dangling from the side of the front cover was, in actual fact, a loop into which a pencil could have been easily slipped.²³ The literal imperative to "write!" thus came physically manifest with the pocket-book, as an irrevocable part of the lesson of how to read it, as a text and an object.²⁴ But with his attempts to have many of these innovations discarded, Wolseley also began to foreclose the possibility of the soldier reader's jotting notes and thoughts of his own, whether on the blank pages at the back, or using the book's pencil. The pocket-book was slowly being transformed into the curtailed, static text that the authors and represented readers discussed in the next section thought it to be.

3. Lesson Two: How *not* to Read the Pocket-book

Rumour has it that when Wolseley was once sent to inspect the kits of an infantry battalion, he asked a soldier, "If you had to lighten your knapsack, what is the first thing you would throw away?" "The *Pocket Book* [sic], Sir," was the prompt reply ("New Books" 122). While this may have been nothing more than a cheeky, though courageous, quip by a soldier to his superior, the anecdote encapsulates the characterisation of the pocket-book that dominates its literary and cultural afterlife across journalistic and fictional works in the late

²² Wolseley suggested these be excluded in subsequent editions, mostly because with each, the pocket-book increased by at least a hundred pages, making it rather unwieldy for a small book. Later editions of the pocket-book still, however, contained blank pages at the end (letter to Macmillan dated 2 Sep. 1871).

²³ The pencil holder too, like the blank pages and the red edges, persists across editions.

²⁴ This was not an unusual innovation and it is possible that the idea for the pencil borrowed from the example of Wilmot-Sitwell's letter packets for soldiers on Foreign Service, an example of which can be found in Scrapbook 19 of the Wolseley Special Collections at the Brighton and Hove Libraries.

nineteenth century. In the bag of a soldier already struggling with forty pounds of clothes and equipment,²⁵ the pocket-book's dead weight was increasingly clearly perceived as more than its indicated one pound. Put another way, its material bulk was not worth the textual lessons it had to offer.

For a book whose physical properties were meant to make its written value easier to imbibe, the pocket-book met a cruel fate, with its content ignored and its material innovations made irrelevant. In the case studies that follow, the pocket-book is universally labelled as nothing more than an empty object. With no attention paid to its military advice, it is instead displaced by the righteous life in *The Devilry of War*, the satirical, if poignant, thrust of the sketches I examine, and by the power of the imaginative spontaneity in which Kipling's soldiers rejoice.

In charting these negative and hostile responses to *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service*, I work towards what Leah Price has termed a "rejection history"—a form of "reader-unresponse" that, in this case, bears witness to the refusal to engage intellectually with a book as a text, which, as a result, frames it as an object (*How to do Things with Books* 7). The history I construct in this chapter, however, is complicated by questions of genre and circulation. As Price writes in another context, it is impossible for us to examine readers' responses to texts, material or otherwise, to the "exclusion of the form those opinions take and the institutions that generated them in the first place. What readers respond to is never just a text: they respond to the editor's demand for a review, to the teacher's demand for an exam answer, to the interviewer's demand for a statement, to the publisher's demand for an edition" (*Anthology* 12). The examples I discuss below—the pamphlet, the sketch, and the short story and poem—are very much public genres. Unlike the margin notes of bureaucratic documents in Chapter Two, or the scribbles in the almanacs of Chapter Three, these forms of

²⁵ This estimate is from the 1869 edition of the pocket-book (8).

reader-response were meant for mass dissemination, and contained opinions about the pocket-book that their creators wanted widely circulated. I revert to the conventional term reader-response here as a reminder that these authors did indeed read Wolseley's book, and often closely enough to take issue with isolated ideas or passages from it. My concern in the following sections is what they did concerning this deep familiarity with its content. In this manner, the examples to which I now turn are not just instances of what Michael Warner has called "uncritical reading"—a mode of meaning-making that may involve emotional responses such as sentimentalism and disgust and which we therefore consider "unsystematic and disorganised" (15). Rather, the predominant emotion that structures responses to the pocket-book—anger—makes for a set of very systematic and organised diatribes.

To draw this out, I trace not so much the rejection history of the pocket-book as the representation of this in the case studies that follow. In doing so, I examine how Wolseley's book is framed as unread, useless, and even dangerous, by the fictional protagonists of these works, as part of a larger attempt to discourage other readers from engaging with the military text. My intention is not, therefore, to use these texts as uncontaminated historical documents that reveal a clear picture of otherwise obscure and thick histories of the pocket-book's reception.²⁶ Whether or not Wilson, the anonymous artist, or Kipling, were successful in convincing their readers of the negative effects of the pocket-book is not my concern. Instead, I focus on the methods, tropes, strategies and generic conventions deployed that allowed

²⁶ This may even be dangerous, given, for example, Kipling's obvious and personal dislike for Wolseley. Wolseley was clearly aware of this: his friend, Edmund Gosse refers to Kipling as "that enfant terrible" in correspondence with Louisa, Wolseley's wife. See letter from Edmund Gosse to Louisa Wolseley dated 16 Aug. 1892.

However, Kipling was not the only writer of his time to attack the pocket-book, even as it had its defenders, and so criticisms of it should not be merely dismissed either. To cite just one example: a review in the *Scrutator* vociferously suggested that Wolseley's text was nothing but a "complacent vindication of his own infallibility and aggressive vituperation of all who have presumed to question that attribute." Even in its fifth edition, the pocket-book supposedly carried mistakes that would "disgrace a Sandhurst cadet"; Wolseley was labelled a "military Rip van Winkle" and the conclusion was drawn that "in regard to contemporary matters lapses [in the pocket-book] are rife which can scarcely fail to engender the suspicion that the author does not keep himself abreast of the march of progress in the art of war" ("Review," *Scrutator* 680–82). This was very much echoed in many reviews across the print life of Wolseley's text.

them to play out a rejection history in their texts as a projection of *what* and *how* they would like their readers to read. These are cautionary lessons in *not* reading in which the pocket-book is, against its will, co-opted.

i. Reading = Murder

When John J. Wilson entered a second-hand bookstore in Boston, Massachusetts in the late 1880s, he was not expecting to leave with a copy of the third edition of *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service* (1874). After fingering two volumes of George Fox's journal, Wilson chose the more inexpensive option, the pocket-book. His purchase and its price left him somewhat perturbed: "I left not altogether at variance with the good woman's [the shopkeeper's] estimate of the respective writings of the two men. George Fox, a man of Peace, 4s. Major-General Sir Garnet J. Wolseley, the man of war, 1s" (2).

Wilson's thoughts on the pocket-book took the form of a short pamphlet, *Construction and Destruction; or, The Devilry of War* (1891), from which the account above is drawn. Little is known of Wilson, though the reference to George Fox and the fact that an expanded version of the pamphlet was reprinted by the Friends Peace Committee as part of their anti-war publication series, suggest that he was sympathetic to the Quaker cause, if not a member of the movement.²⁷

Unlike the examples of the anonymous drawings and Kipling's stories that follow, *The Devilry of War* makes its argument in all dead seriousness. In Wilson's mind, the pocket-book is an exercise in the "studious inculcation of deceit" (5). He reveals that its soldier

²⁷ Several editions and versions of the pamphlet exist. The most common one is the 1891 version, the only one to focus on the third edition of the pocket-book. The others focus on the fifth edition (1886) of the pocket-book. The first of these was published between 1886 and 1887. It was then expanded and revised, placing Wolseley's pocket-book in dialogue with three other war manuals—C.E. Callwell's *Tactics of Today* (2nd ed, 1909), J. Bostock's *Aiming and Firing* (7th edition) and W.F. Raper's *Hints for Soldiers Proceeding to India* (n.d.). It is this version that was printed by the Friends Peace Committee in 1914. For the purposes of this chapter, I refer to the 1891 version, unless otherwise stated.

readers are told that churches are a convenient storehouse for secret stashes of gunpowder, and are reminded to burn the crops and buildings of seized villages as they retreat. For Wolseley—and even for the majority of his sceptical interlocutors—these were but strategies geared towards successful warfare. The point of contention in those attacks against the pocket-book, as we will see, was not the violent nature of war, or even its necessity, but rather that Wolseley’s suggestions were simply not as efficient or helpful as he claimed them to be. *The Devilry of War*, instead, uses the pocket-book as a stepping stone towards a broader project of “prov[ing] to the candid reader” the “unspeakably Satanic nature of war from first to last” (3).

In more ways than one, this incendiary document shares physical similarities with Wolseley’s handbook, to which Wilson often subtly draws our attention. The pocket-book, we are reminded, is a small red book (we are given exact dimensions: four inches by five, and it “fit[s][his] pocket” (2). Similarly, *The Devilry of War*’s sixteen pages, sewn between red paper covers, could have been rolled easily into a portable paper tube, or made for a large, though lightweight, stack of pamphlets for convenient distribution (and relatively inexpensive too: three shillings and four pence could buy a hundred copies), contributing to the possibility of the pamphlet’s circulating widely.

The introductory sections of Wilson’s pamphlet, setting up his discovery of the pocket-book in Boston, attempt to frame it as an unread, forgotten book. The shop from which he buys his copy is a “real old book store where the volumes were piled so closely that it was scarcely possible to read their titles;” the shopkeeper, an “old woman, worn and haggard, in perfect keeping with her surroundings” emerges from “an inner recess” (2). The dusty interior of the shop provides the perfect setting for a book that has been given away as unwanted, hidden between other books presumably also worthy of being forgotten.

To Wilson's disappointment, when he opens his copy of the pocket-book, he finds the names of not one, but three, previous owners on its flyleaf: an R.G. Chapman followed by an A.G. Chapman, and finally, an H.C. Morland (2). The pocket-book changes hands thrice, and even as I speculate here, could have participated as an object in a military brotherhood built on the exchange of words of advice, as well as personal items. Furthermore, flipping through the book reveals evidence that these soldiers read Wolseley's handbook, at least in part. Not only are sections marked in pencil, the blank concluding pages also reveal a rough note documenting that forty pounds were drawn from the paymaster from 23 June to 31 July of an unspecified year (2–3). While the pocket-book may not have been every soldier's go-to notebook or reference work, in this instance at least, it served as such.

Wilson counters this sporadic, scattered reading of the pocket-book with his own counterreading. In the process, he establishes two positions from which the text can be read, each pointing to the kind of human being the reader is. In a series of questions that follow a description of the kind of physical destruction that war and its pocket-books encourage, Wilson asks his readers:

Can we not almost hear the sobs of the children as they appeal to their parents helpless to sustain them; can we imagine the wail of mothers as their off-spring drop down one by one at their feet; can we picture the feelings of the husbands parched with thirst and faint with hunger, striving in vain to support the wives dearer to them than life . . . (7–8)

Can we? Forced to answer these questions, Wilson's readers are guiltily made to concede their positions, if only to themselves. In conclusion to the pamphlet, he returns to the necessity of identifying oneself as unambiguously pro- or anti-pocket-book: “[i]t is for each man and woman of this Christian nation to decide whether they [British soldiers] are to be **deliberately trained for battle and murder**, waste and wantonness instead of those habits of consideration for life and property, which when rightly guided, go to make a great people” (emphasis in original; 11–12). The onus of this decision is, as it were, on them.

But straightforward emotional appeals to his readers' common humanity do not form the core of Wilson's argument. Close textual analysis with the full scholarly apparatus of an academic paper does. Just as Wolseley worked painstakingly to make the pocket-book readable, so did Wilson his pamphlet. Parallel to the text in marginal columns runs a summary of each paragraph's main ideas, and page numbers for the parts of the pocket-book to which Wilson refers in his text.²⁸ Key words across the pamphlet have been printed in bold, such that even simply glancing at any page provides the casual reader with adjectives that characterise Wilson's opinion of Wolseley's methods. Page four, for example, draws our attention to "**sword,**" "**sharp,**" "**the revolver,**" "**heavy bullet,**" "**the artillery,**" "**it tears down trees, knocks houses into small pieces and mutilates the human frame**" (emphasis in original; 4), all consolidating Wilson's central argument—that the pocket-book is a dangerous book, and that its lessons in reading are effectively lessons in murder.

Systematically going through the pocket-book's four parts, Wilson summarises sections that, according to him, go against the ethical system of any Christian and make the army an unfit home for a believer. These include Wolseley's discussion of the effectiveness of different kinds of guns, the destruction of invaded villages (including tearing up the floorboards of houses to construct temporary bridges), and the steady inculcation of pride that Wilson notes throughout the pocket-book. War, and more importantly, the instruction of young Christian men in a pervasive disregard for human life and material worth, he concludes, makes it impossible for the universe of Wolseley's pocket-book to co-exist with a Christian one: "[s]urely if christianity means following the mighty Christ, the Prince and Saviour of the world, no christian with such a handbook as Lord Wolseley's before him, can enter upon such a vocation without first renouncing his faith" (12).

²⁸ I have checked these page numbers and they are all correct. That being said, some of the quotations from the pocket-book, despite being put in quotation marks, are actually just paraphrased sentences.

I turn now to a specific section of the pamphlet that discusses the appearance of the Bible in the pocket-book. Even taking into account the accusations levelled at Wolseley's unchristian methods, it still strikes one as odd that religious matters—services, travelling military chaplains, and the like—find absolutely no mention in the pocket-book. The recommendation for the officers' kit that is made in the first edition does not even include a Bible, setting the tone for the pocket-book's neglect of the soldier's religious instruction. Bibles were commonly carried by Christian soldiers going to war, whether as talismans for protection or simply familiar reminders of home. Wolseley was even to introduce a new edition of Edmund Calamy's *A Souldier's Pocket Bible* (1643), a Biblical anthology intended for the use of the Commonwealth Army in the seventeenth century. More contemporary collections of this sort, such as Matilda Mary Pollard's *Watchwords for the Campaign or the Christian Soldier's Manual* (1884) were extremely popular among soldiers fighting overseas.

The single appearance that the Bible makes in the pocket-book is in Wolseley's well-known discussion of spies. Arguing that maxims such as “[honesty] is the best policy” are but “pretty sentences for a children's copybook” and “the man who acts on them in war had better sheathe his sword for ever [sic],” the pocket-book concluded that “[a]n English general must make up his mind to obtain information as he can, leaving no stone unturned to do so” (59). To this end, it launched into a discussion of how to use the press to release false information and confuse the enemy, and finally, came to the question of the spy, and the role that a Bible may play in the act of espionage. Attesting, as Wolseley admitted, to the fact that Bibles were, in the nineteenth century, still among the most common printed, portable texts, the presence of a copy on a person would not raise suspicion and could thus be mobilised in various ways.

The first of these was as a means of identifying a spy as a friendly, as opposed to an enemy, operative. Wolseley suggested in the third edition of the pocket-book that carrying “a

Bible of a certain edition, a Testament with the 3rd or 7th leaf torn out” (*Soldier’s Pocket-book* 91) was a clever means of doing so. Wilson’s sarcastic rejoinder is as follows: “[o]ne might suggest to the Major-General that it would be expedient to tear out the Sermon on the Mount, or the First Epistle of St John, where love is substituted for revenge” (6). The second, coming shortly after, concerns sending messages between army camps. As a necessary precaution against information falling into enemy hands, Wolseley suggested that a Bible be used as a cover for such exchanges: “[i]t is a good plan to write secret correspondence in lemon-juice across a newspaper or the page of a book which, like a Testament if found on the person of a peasant, would excite no suspicion” (*Soldier’s Pocket-book* 59). Wilson’s reply, as expected, is: “[c]onsidering all the foregoing it is surprising that **“perjury”** should be **one of the gravest court-martial offences** (emphasis in original; 6).

Wolseley’s treatment of the Bible is as a useful object, rather than a text. For the tasks to which the book is put, its meaning is irrelevant, and eminently exploitable. Wilson’s comments point out what the pocket-book’s appropriation of the Bible seems not to notice—that the actions into which it is co-opted, all violent and propagating falsehood, run antithetical to its message. What is a simple strategy for Wolseley becomes resonant with meaning for Wilson. To identify oneself in times of war by a wilfully mutilated Bible is to declare one’s identity unequivocally; as a soldier first, and a Christian second. Further, with the Bible and the pocket-book pitted against each other as representative of competing life choices, the former’s authority is undermined through the counter-messages hidden between its lines, it becomes, rather, an object on which other alien texts are inscribed, that need to be “decoded” to be read.

ii. “Shew it me in the Book”

In 1874, Wolseley’s daughter Frances began, at her father’s request, to compile the first of the Wolseley scrapbooks. Housed today in the Brighton and Hove Libraries along with her father’s personal papers, this thirty-three volume collection is an extensive record of Victorian ephemera, ranging from the mundane (greeting cards, advertisements, dinner menus) to the unique (commemorative cards from Queen Victoria’s Jubilee celebrations and a white silk rose distributed to guests at the wedding of the explorer Henry Morton Stanley, which Wolseley evidently attended). The scrapbooks that possibly started as a means of spending time with Frances, with whom in later years he would share a problematic and difficult relationship, later became a larger testament to Wolseley’s keen historical sensibility, and his belief that even simple items such as pictures and advertisements might prove of interest in the future.

Wolseley’s archival interests also formed part of a project of personal documentation. Few newspaper articles that mentioned him, sycophantic poems written by those hoping to ingratiate themselves to him, reviews of his books, satirical write-ups and cartoons, escaped Frances’s scissors. These were, for the most part, grouped thematically, with individual scrapbooks being dedicated to Wolseley’s campaigns, while advertisements and book reviews, which appeared in a continuous stream over his career, feature across the collection.²⁹ While in the twenty-first-century world of digitised newspapers and searchable databases, it could be argued that many of the items in the scrapbooks could be located in their original print sources with relative ease, this section of the chapter demonstrates that the unique filtering device of the scrapbook tells us something more, not just providing narratives

²⁹ In her study of the newspaper clipping as a “modern paper object,” Anke te Heesen tells us that these could be ordered from editorial offices—both Proust and Valèry had clippings delivered to them. Valèry did lament, however, that these radically changed the way in which people interacted with print: “[p]eople look, they don’t read” (qtd. in te Heesen 237). I discuss such print items and their contexts of republication in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

of the reception (or rejection) of Wolseley and his pocket-book, but also about the ways in which the general and his daughter tracked and chose to showcase these.

Ellen Gruber Garvey's work on scrapbooking in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States correctly draws our attention to the limiting features of the form. Containing material in a "deliberate arrangement," it is a "structured performance" (207)—it conveys the stories its compilers choose to convey. As a personal record, its inclusions and exclusions speak to individual taste and interest. Wolseley's scrapbooks, it must be noted at the outset, while restricting themselves to select themes and concerns (mostly himself), worked towards, above all else, total comprehensiveness. Like the pocket-book, they were a cut-and-paste job, drawing on a range of eclectic sources and, like the little red book, unable to contain all the information that might be desirable. Any reference to Wolseley—whether a one-off mention in an article or a full-length article dedicated to an aspect of his career—was considered appropriate for the pages of the scrapbooks. An enormous undertaking, these volumes bear witness to the innumerable articles about himself that Wolseley (and Frances too) must have read, pointing to a life-long obsession with the preservation of his reputation. The result of this is a fuller, though contradictory, history of Wolseley's career, juxtaposing articles that praised his brand of militarism with those that harshly critiqued it. By simply bringing these items together, the Wolseley family, to borrow from the title of Garvey's study, wrote this history with scissors.

Compared to the printed pocket-book, the design of the scrapbook form was better-suited to attempts at inclusivity as well as to presenting a surfeit of information. As an aggregation of blank pages, it allowed the father–daughter pair to choose how they would arrange the articles that, borrowing from the vocabulary of the exercise, made the cut. This was furthered by the differing purposes of the two forms, and their relationship with the act of reading. While the pocket-book, as we have seen, reveals a material obsession with

readability, the scrapbooks work towards preserving, rather than facilitating, reading. The principles of inclusion and exclusion that are fundamental to the choices that a scrapbooker makes would involve, especially in the case of Wolseley's project, reading intensively and at length in order to note even the most fleeting of relevant references. Glancing at any page of one of the volumes will serve to remind us, however, that these scrapbooks were not particularly conducive to, as we might otherwise imagine, re-reading. Columns of pasted newsprint overlap, often obscuring each other, are folded several times to make place for other items. With all the pasted items on a page unfolded, the scrapbooks are little more than a chaotic mess. Actually to read an article in one would require several stages of physical contact—of folding, unfolding, refolding, prying apart and peering under—an exercise that is further thwarted by now crumbling, fragile paper. Trying to read the scrapbooks only ensures that others in the future will not. Passing through the hands of the Wolseleys, the jagged uneven edges, the “visible, physical, gluey marks” (Garvey 210) ironically become not only the interface between the source of print and scrapbook compiler, but also material marks of an act of reading that is no longer possible.

If items thus jostle for space on the scrapbooks' overcrowded pages, material manifestations of a messy, if overabundant history, this is complicated by the irregular documentation of their original sources. The page headers of magazines and newspapers which customarily included the title and date of the publication are sometimes included as part of articles; in other cases, these details are written in ink next to the articles. (Either way, page numbers are usually lost in the process.) There are, however, many items in the scrapbooks whose sources, and therefore the contexts of their production, are irretrievable, and, despite the facilities of the digital age, have proved very difficult to trace. This long preamble is a means of introduction to such an example: a set of sketches titled the Okehampton–1897 series.

The Okehampton sketches appear in Scrapbook 18 of the collection, which contains items such as dried leaves, newspaper clippings, advertisements for horse remedies, a list of books published in the Temple Classics series. As the title would suggest, they are set in Okehampton, which, even today, is a central military training camp in West Devon. Each humorously depicts a different ridiculous scenario highlighting the seemingly futile nature of “training” soldiers for the unpredictability of war. A set of four, they are pasted individually, though consecutively, in the scrapbook, making it unclear whether or not they were published together, let alone in what forum. How do we read these illustrations, presented in the scrapbook, but eliminated from their own contexts? Walter Benjamin’s thoughts on the figure of the collector in *The Arcades Project* are particularly useful in this regard, reminding us crucially that when items are brought together in a collection, we “represent them in our space (not represent ourselves in their space) . . . we don’t displace our being into theirs; they step into our life” (206). Extricating them thus from the contexts in which they originated, the scrapbooks subordinate their constituent items, through association, to a narrative about Wolseley’s writerly and military career. Even though they do not mention the pocket-book by name, they indirectly implicate it in a history of bookish knowledge and inept military practice.

Turning to the sketches immediately demonstrates the links—intended or otherwise—that emerge between the stories the Okehampton series depicts and the unruly history of the pocket-book that this chapter has been tracking. Read in this manner, each highlights a different, though equally undesirable relationship with textual instruction of the kind Wolseley’s text was thought to represent.

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Fig. 1.2. “The Pow-Wow.” Okehampton–1897. Scrapbook 18. Photo courtesy of Wolseley Special Collections. Brighton and Hove Libraries, Sussex.

The first and most expressive of these is “The Pow-Wow” (fig. 1.2.). Here, our attention is drawn to the strategically ajar door on the right, indicating that we are, in fact, looking in on a hierarchically-structured lecture room rather than witnessing the spirit of mutual exchange and discussion between equals that constitutes a “pow-wow.” This is clear, at a primary level, from the spatial organisation of the room. The soldiers face the instructors and so are half turned away from the viewers of the cartoon; their slouched bodies indicating their casual distraction. Prominent in the corner of the lecture room is a blackboard that indicates that this meeting is a stock-taking exercise, a means of teaching soldiers how to develop fool-proof strategies for war. In this particular case, the lessons to be learnt derive from the “[m]istakes made Aug 9th.” This day, as even a lay person would be able to

determine, seems to have been disastrous, featuring all kinds of basic errors of judgement: “delay in firing,” “wrong word of command,” “wagons not sent away” and finally, “Batt[alion] Com[mander] left his Battery.” The source for these errors, it would seem, is the sheaf of papers (possibly a newspaper) that the irate instructor clutches.³⁰ He also holds a very small book—which fits perfectly in his hand—thrust forward with the threatening, “[s]hew it me in the Book.”

What “book”? The one the instructor extends towards the soldiers, with a conveniently indecipherable title scrawled on its cover, is met with complete incomprehension and lack of interest—they have clearly not read it. Is this in fact, once again, the pocket-book masquerading in less than subtle disguise, *the* “book” with a capital B? How do we read the presence of the pocket-book in the space of the lecture room? Read in the larger narrative of the scrapbooks it becomes part of the story of Wolseley’s military career, if inadvertently.

Another sketch in the series, the fourth and final one, sheds some additional light on this. “Where Bearded Men appear today just Eton Boys grown heavy,” depicts a similar lecture-set up with a blackboard scrawled with information about “Wagon Supplies” (fig. 1.3., p. 68). While the soldiers are noticeably older than the ones in the first cartoon, some being bald and heavy-set, their expressions are the same: casual and bored. Wisdom and age, we are reminded, are not always commensurate.

Read in conjunction with each other, the two sketches introduce the objections to the pocket-book, and bookish learning in general that will arise in Kipling’s critique of Wolseley’s text and methods. To a large extent, this critique is played out in the hierarchy of the classroom setting; between the knowledgeable instructor on the one hand, and the

³⁰ This date does not, to the best of my knowledge, refer to any major British battles in 1897.

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Fig. 1.3. “Where Bearded Men Appear Today Just Eton Boys Grown Heavy.” Okehampton–1897. Scrapbook 18. Photo courtesy of Wolseley Special Collections. Brighton and Hove Libraries, Sussex.

ignorant students, on the other. Captains, officers, and the higher-ups of the army, all insistently rely on the pocket-book, but to what end? This was not the first time this question had been raised; in fact, the portrayal of the pocket-book in other forums also characterised it as a text that was read, even if superficially, only by men in power, rather than those who faced the brunt of military action. Take for example, these lines from a short article that appeared in *The Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser* in 1876. They describe the political frenzy that surrounded the Anglo-Zulu war as below:

The Prime Minister is in hourly communication with all the Cabinets of Europe. He has had speaking tubes put up between his official residence and the country seats of all his colleagues. He never sleeps, and devotes his few moments of leisure to a hasty perusal of Sir Garnet Wolseley’s *Soldier’s Pocket Book* [sic]. His Private Secretary is going through a course of instruction at Woolwich and Aldershot simultaneously, so that he may be prepared for the worst. (“War Rumours” 5)

Counting the Prime Minister among the readership of Wolseley's handbook, the newspaper article then casts the pocket-book as part of the absurd paraphernalia that surrounds the bureaucracy of war. On the face of it, the Prime Minister "never sleeps" and has but a "few moments of leisure." Our attention is, however, also drawn to the fact that "speaking tubes" (the first successful prototype of Alexander Graham Bell's telephone was completed in March of the same year) ensure that he does not have to leave his "official residence," nor his colleagues their luxurious "country seats." The pocket-book, like the military training programmes (not just one, but two) that his secretary completes as a convenient substitute for himself, becomes, in such a description, an example of all that the Prime Minister is doing to make sure that he does not actually have to do anything, that is, take to the battlefield.

To return to "The Pow-Wow," then, it becomes increasingly clear that the mistakes of 9 August are not ones caused by a lack of understanding, or reading. They are simply the consequences of human error, and more crucially, of human fear. A delay in firing is not simply the result of not knowing when to fire, but also the automatic physical recoil from taking another life.³¹ A Battalion Commander's abandonment (here euphemistically dubbed "leaving it") is not a case of poor judgement, but instead, the complete loss of it.

This loss of judgement in the heat of battle is anticipated in the third sketch of the series, "The Okehampton Ostrich" (fig. 1.4., p. 70). Central to this image is another written object, this time a notice board in the camp's practice ground, which reads: "The line of fire for No. 3 range is between the East Slopes of West Mill Tor and the West Slopes of East Mill Tor." The Commander's comment, "Why I do believe those Range Takers are taking cover behind the notice board!" is supplemented by the sketch of the soldiers on horseback, their faces hidden by the wooden sign. Once again, we are reminded that learning and reading are

³¹ Wilson's pamphlet also comments on this, in response to the pocket-book's suggestion that bayonet charges be accompanied by a "ringing cheer": ". . . a line 'could not charge in silence,' one supposes because the groans of the dying might unnerve any who remembered they were human, and prevent them '**acting in anger**'" (emphasis in original; 5).

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Fig. 1.4. (above). "The Okehampton Ostrich." Okehampton–1897. Scrapbook 18. Photo courtesy of Wolseley Special Collections, Brighton and Hove Libraries, Sussex.

Fig. 1.5. (below). "Proposed Method for Brigade Division Commander to observe indirect fire." Okehampton–1897. Scrapbook 18. Photo courtesy of Wolseley Special Collections, Brighton and Hove Libraries, Sussex.

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not enough to see one through an actual battle. If the pocket-book is put forward as the alternative text that negates the text of the blackboard and the newspaper, it is completely inadequate for this purpose, if only because no form of writing or reading can be preparation enough for the horrors of war. One cannot take refuge, literally or figuratively, behind texts.

For those who do read and rely blindly on texts like the pocket-book, the consequences are as dire as they are humorous. This is clearly depicted in the third sketch in the series, “Proposed Method for Brigade Division Commander to observe indirect fire” (fig. 1.5, p. 70). Here, a soldier is precariously perched on watch on top of a ladder attached to a very long and unstable horse-drawn cart; the wheel ominously going over a boulder on the ground makes it not difficult to imagine what might happen next. If not following the pocket-book’s instructions led to the mistakes of Aug 9th, following its prescriptions too closely and literally might not have served soldiers well either.³²

The pocket-book, or its anonymous shadow-text, gets pulled into debates that the next section’s examination of Kipling’s writing will highlight further; first, that no soldier actually reads the pocket-book and similar texts of instruction (remember how confused and bored the soldiers are), and second, that bookishness does not constitute adequate military training. Even as the Okehampton sketches transform these poignant observations to satirical effect, they propound the same issue: the problem of translation. Taking the lessons of the lecture room into the field demonstrates not only their inappropriateness for in-field situations, but also, through the naiveté of the soldiers in training, reminds us that they have very little idea of the situation into which they are getting themselves. Texts like the pocket-book might

³² Such complicated stagings of war were a common practice in training camps. Kipling’s “The Courting of Dinah Shadd,” which I will discuss in the next section of this chapter, opens through the observation of such a drill exercise, allowing soldiers to “practise in peace what they would never attempt in war” (115). Involving rival camps, “unending cavalry scouting,” and imaginary cities of “strategic importance,” this may be a “lifelike camp,” but, as the narrator reminds us, it is not war (115–16). Those who excelled in the day’s performance then “went to camps that were not of exercise and battles without umpires. Burmah, the Soudan, and the frontier [the North-west Afghan border],— fever and fight,—took them in their time” (120).

provide an always contested set of instructions as to how war should be fought, but they do little to inform those who fight them of its realities.

iii. “Which niver any soldier reads”

I begin this case study of Kipling’s writings (short stories and two poems) by returning to the anecdote with which this chapter began—the appearance of the pocket-book in Baden-Powell’s description of the Afghan War. Having established earlier the role the book was meant to play in a soldier’s military training, the inherent and complex contradictions that the loose page embodies now emerge with greater clarity. Wolseley’s book is, near the battlefield, literally *at war*. Its presence compounds its talismanic properties; it is the soldier’s piece of bound, portable knowledge that protects him from enemy fire. However, the page also shores up images that Wolseley would definitely not have anticipated. Torn out of the pocket-book, the leaf that Baden-Powell casually preserves as a souvenir is a trace of the mutilated book and a reminder of the mutilated bodies it does not mention. Wolseley’s text is thus inadvertently drawn into the story of war tarnished by death and violence that no amount of “correct” reading can overcome.

An extraordinary counterpoint to Baden-Powell’s description comes a few decades later, from the battlefields of the First World War. A Maurice Hammoneau, a soldier in the French Foreign Legion, went into battle one day. He was reading Kipling’s novel, *Kim*, at the time (in French translation), and in the excitement of the moment, forgot to take the book out of his breast pocket. He was shot in the chest, and the book literally took the bullet for him.³³

³³ It is unclear when this incident actually took place, though we know that Hammoneau sent Kipling the book as a keepsake in December 1918. The two began an extensive correspondence. When Hammoneau had a son, Kipling insisted on returning it and the soldier’s *Legion d’Honneur*, which had been presented to the author as a token of appreciation. See Kipling, “Letter” 216–17. Today, the mutilated book is housed in the Library of Congress.

Kipling would have been amused at the juxtaposition of this story with Baden-Powell's and would have been the first to point out that some books can indeed save lives. Wolseley's little red book was not one of these.

The references to Wolseley and his pocket-book in Kipling's writing range from the fleeting to the sustained, but in all cases, provide a starting point from which to consider the fraught relationship between the soldier and this much maligned text. The opposition that arises here is between soldiers who refuse to read the text, or misappropriate it, and those who unflinchingly adhere to its prescriptions, to the larger detriment of the army.³⁴ By creating this divide, these texts, as we shall see, become not only part of a history of not reading, but are also instructive in their illustration of the different ways in which this can and should be done.

Kipling's self-stylisation as a competing authority to Wolseley on colonial war stemmed from sporadic brushes with military men. As David Gilmour points out in his biography of the writer, Kipling, unlike both Wolseley and Baden-Powell, never saw a war fought in South Asia.³⁵ He visited the Khyber Pass once when he was working with *The Civil and Military Gazette*, and most of his descriptions of the North-west frontier are imaginative

For a recent example of the ways in which books take on varied functions in war, see Brittan's argument regarding books in Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. These include being appropriated to transmit secret codes, being the source for the imagining of empire, and being used as bombs (with explosives stuffed into their spines).

³⁴ It must be noted that even though Wolseley hoped that soldiers of all classes would read the pocket-book, in Kipling's stories only the officers and higher ranks of the army are shown to rely on its lessons, as the last section of this chapter has highlighted.

This sort of boisterous relationship with the pocket-book was not necessarily restricted to soldiers. In 1881, the *Dundee Courier* reported a theft from the Glasgow Mitchell Library. Among the books stolen were Hugh McDonald's *Rambles Around Glasgow*, and Wolseley's pocket-book. This was, we are told, part of a long series of similar incidents, including instances of books being mutilated by the public ("Thefts from the Glasgow Mitchell Library" 4).

³⁵ Kipling was to, later in his career, visit South Africa during the Boer War, the mismanagement of which is the subject of stories such as "The Army of a Dream" (1902), "The Comprehension of Private Copper" (1902), and "A Sahib's War" (1901). He also visited the Western Front during the First World War, culminating in his study, *France at War* (1914), as well as officially commissioned works such as *The Fringes of the Fleet* (1915), a book about naval operations. Through a collection of fictionalised letters, *The Eyes of Asia* (1918), he documented the experiences of Sepoys in Europe during the First World War.

For a useful overview of Kipling's thoughts on war, see Bradshaw, and Gilmour, esp. Chapters Two and Three.

reconstructions of that visit (Gilmour 27). He later made another visit to the barracks in Mian Mir, where he struck up a friendship with a lively and outgoing officer, Corporal MacNamara, the prototype for Private Mulvaney in his subsequent soldier stories (Gilmour 44). Kipling, nevertheless, felt very strongly about the misrepresentation of “Tommy Atkins,” the essential British soldier, whose “[life was] as hard as [his] own muscles, and [about whom] the papers never [said] anything” (qtd. in Bradshaw 81). Across his own literary works, in particular *Soldiers Three* (1888) and *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892), he sought to provide for the British and Anglo-Indian publics, a new and unprecedented portrait of barracks life abroad, a life that was at once exciting and dangerous, even as it was often simply everyday.

While Kipling’s own journalistic work at the time, as a reporter for the *Gazette*, was largely insignificant in its scope and focused primarily on the social scene of Shimla, the paper did play an important role in the development of the writer’s representations of soldiers in colonial South Asia. More often than not, his stories were not only first published in the paper, they were also based on actual incidents it reported. Such was the case with “The Taking of Lungtungpen” (1887). On 1 January 1887, the *Gazette* ran a story about a group of British soldiers who stripped naked and swam across a river to burn down a Burmese village. “The Taking of Lungtungpen” was published four months later, albeit with gross exaggerations. The number of soldiers on the Burmese side was doubled and the village was promoted to a town; both giving cause for greater celebration (Gilmour 47). Making the *Gazette* a space for an unusual dialogue between the literary and the historical, the story goes on to appropriate the tropes of journalistic reportage and uses these to establish a narrative voice that is a discreet, though irrevocable authority, to counter that of Wolseley’s.

Wolseley is mentioned only once in “The Taking of Lungtungpen,” but as I will demonstrate, the invocation of his claim to military knowledge provides the backdrop against

which the siege of the Burmese village plays out. In doing so, it contests the very nature of what constitutes “knowledge” in the context of the army and reveals, as we might anticipate, that it has very little to do with reading the pocket-book.

The events described in “The Taking of Lungtungpen” are recounted on the road to Dagshai, a cantonment town in present-day Himachal Pradesh, a state in North India. Our unnamed narrator, a “friend” of our soldier, Private Mulvaney, and a fellow butterfly catcher, provides the outer narrative frame. It is *his* retelling of Mulvaney’s account of the Burmese siege that forms the basis of Kipling’s story. While the frame narrative is notoriously unreliable, here it is turned into a journalistic manoeuvre. We assume, perhaps falsely, that the private is unlikely to exaggerate or deceive his “friend” with a spurious story. Once this position of both familiarity and authority has been established, the narrator goes on to obscure himself skilfully. He creates the conditions that allow for the telling of the story, but declares that he has little role in its development. Mulvaney’s story, therefore, is given to us as a straight monologue with no interventions, comments, or pauses. This is, of course, nothing but a mischievous trick, and the careful reader will find many instances of narrative interruption that have been slyly filtered out in the re-telling we read. One of the first instances of this pertains to an outburst against Wolseley: ““Wolseley be shot! Betune you an’ me an’ that butterfly net, he’s a ramblin’, incoherent sort av a divil, wid wan oi on the quane an’ the coort, an’ the other on his blessed silf–everlastin’ly playing Saysar an Alexandier rowled into a lump”” (15). The line above this is the one that clearly elicited the private’s violent reaction: a short comment from the narrator which we are never told. This is instead replaced by the non-descript, “I said something here” (15). This is clever manipulation on Kipling’s part. The aggression with which the deleted remark is met indicates that it is adulatory; Mulvaney’s response is structured to refute it. Rather than include the narrator’s

comment and create a balanced argument for and against Wolseley, we are left with a one-sided argument, weighted against the general.

This is not the only short story in which Kipling uses the techniques of reporting to engage with Wolseley and the pocket-book: “The Courting of Dinah Shadd” (1890) is another example. The story, put together from casual barrack-room talk, recounts the drunk exploits of Mulvaney and his marriage to Dinah Shadd, soured by multiple adulterous relationships with other women. The occasion for this is the arrival of the narrator, who no longer simply reports events to his readers. He is, in fact, a journalist embedded with a military unit in South Asia. The narrator’s profession is not, however, merely used to elicit the story that becomes “The Courting of Dinah Shadd.” Rather it becomes a central point of confrontation, pitting Kipling’s journalist–narrator persona against Wolseley the army man.

This provides the context for the first reference to Wolseley in the story. A major compliments the journalist–narrator, jovially stating that “Wolseley was quite wrong about special correspondents: they are the soldier’s best friends” (118). The general’s dislike of journalists was legendary. His letters to his wife carried references to newspapers and correspondents who are particularly virulent in their attacks against him: *The Daily Telegraph* and W.H. Russell.³⁶ On 24 February 1887 he wrote sorrowfully, “[s]hall I never be strong enough to tell reporters how I dislike their trade? What a world of shams and humbug we live in, never telling the whole, seldom even half the truth” (*Letters* 243). More important for this chapter, however, is the fact that the major’s comment refers directly to passages in the pocket-book which labelled newspaper correspondents as that “newly-invented curse on

³⁶ In a postscript dated 1 February 1874, Wolseley wrote to his wife, Louisa, of the constant anxiety he felt in the company of the journalists embedded with his battalion: “I had those horrid newspaper correspondents round me . . . [M]ost of them were in a blue funk all day, and whenever the enemy approached very near us and the firing around us became very hot, I used to catch their eyes watching mine to see if I was in a funk” (letter dated 28 Jan. 1874).

Russell appears across Wolseley’s correspondence as a much hated figure. Russell, however, had problems of his own: the failures of the Crimean War, had been attributed to him, as his newspaper articles supposedly kept the Russians well-informed of British moves (Kochanski 43).

Wolseley did, however, find other uses for the despised profession of journalists, for example, using them to spread false intelligence and confuse enemy troops (*Soldier’s Pocket-book* 60).

armies” (60). They were, Wolseley went on to argue in the third edition, “an encumbrance to an army; they eat the rations of fighting men, and do no work at all. Their numbers should be restricted as much as possible” (97).

The citation, or paraphrasing, of Wolseley’s thoughts and opinions by the major in “The Courting of Dinah Shadd” is by no means a single or exceptional case.³⁷ Kipling’s writings demonstrate a deep knowledge of the pocket-book, more often than not, quoting or responding to specific statements it contained. Within the space of the stories, this familiarity with the pocket-book’s content works as a convenient weapon, allowing Kipling to mobilise his acquaintance with Wolseley’s text into a targeted and sustained diatribe against it.

A useful framework in which to understand this relationship between reading, not reading and talking about books, comes from very different kinds of scholarship on reading practices from the nineteenth century onwards. Leah Price’s *How to do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (2012), to which I repeatedly turn in my thesis, has astutely demonstrated the nature of the contradictory term “nonreading.” This, according to her, stretches from putting a book’s materiality to “humbler” uses, to refusing to invest time and money in it because one is “too good (or not good enough) to rub elbows with others in its public” (8). All of these, needless to say, emphasise the book not as a text but as an object. At the other end of the spectrum is the irreverent work of French literary critic Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk about Books you haven’t Read* (2007). Although Bayard focuses on the practice of non-reading (hyphenated in his version) in the very different space of the intellectually superficial, if fashionable, salon, his arguments about exactly what constitutes non-reading are a useful marker for the purposes of this chapter. Non-reading, he suggests, encompasses a vast range of responses, from the most radical act of not opening a book at all to forgetting its narrative. The social and cultural compulsion to talk about books that we have not read, in whatever

³⁷ Of course, Wolseley’s views on journalists were widely known, and could be referenced even by those who had not read the pocket-book. However, as the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, several such instances work to consolidate the case that Kipling had, in all probability, read the handbook.

manner, breeds a deep-seated guilt that prompts a variety of actions—talking of the book as if we have read it, changing the topic, and substituting the book for others in our minds and conversations.

While Kipling has obviously read the pocket-book, his stories go on to remind, or make its readers believe, that reading it is hardly a normal circumstance. Wolseley returns to “The Courting of Dinah Shadd” through the words of Mulvaney to demonstrate this. When describing how he courted Dinah Shadd, he boldly says, ““If you read the *Soldier’s Pocket Book* [sic], which niver any soldier reads, you’ll see that there are exceptions”” (128). This statement unravels simultaneously in several different directions. Mulvaney’s reference to the pocket-book initially sounds like a lament that no one reads it, and that his quote reveals it to be, alternatively, a useful source of information and advice. Placed, however, in the larger narrative of the story, the conjunction of “if” and “niver any soldier reads,” the hurried qualification that follows the conditional, becomes a guilty admission of the forbidden act of reading. This is Bayard’s intellectual world turned upside down. This, the pocket-book, is a book that everyone knows about, everyone is expected to read, most possess, but which everyone refuses to admit having read. If they have, on the off chance, read it, they will categorically argue that everything it has to say is inept and ridiculous. It becomes, to return to Price’s formulation, a material presence that has no textual validity.

The alternative to textual theory, Kipling’s stories go on to suggest, is both practice and the diligent exercise of one’s imagination. “The Taking of Lungtungpen,” for one, is structured around the opposition between Mulvaney, who cuts a dashing, though clumsy, figure, and his obstinate lieutenant, Brazenose, who is “shtiff wid books an’ the-ouries an’ all manner av thrimmin’s no manner av use” (16). The historical shadow behind this opposition is, without a doubt, the legendary rivalry between Wolseley and Lord Roberts, and their two army loyalty camps, the Ashanti or Wolseley Ring and the Indians respectively. Not only

were the groups divided on questions of military strategy and reform; each accused the other of self-advertisement and unfair play. Wolseley's strong belief in meritocracy made him enemies throughout the army, especially among senior officers who were passed over for promotions. Roberts, by contrast, came across as a much more charming person, and thus managed to endear himself to the public and the media more successfully than his rival.³⁸ Kipling's hero worship of him played a considerable role in this.

Kipling's admiration for Roberts was in equal measure to his hatred for Wolseley. This was not the last time he would pit the two against each other. In a later poem, "Bobs" (1898), Kipling clearly hints at Wolseley's tendency towards self-aggrandisement, with a cryptic "An'—e' does—not advertise —/Do yer, Bobs?" (409). In "The Taking of Lungtungpen" this strain is carried forward, largely through Mulvaney's exaggerated adulation, declaring that "'Bobs is a sensible little man,'" and that "'[a]lways barrin' [his] little frind Bobs Bahadur, [he, Mulvaney] know[s] as much about the Army as most men'" (15). The next comment he makes, which I have discussed earlier in this section, is "'Wolseley be shot!,'" making clear the tension around which the story will continue to develop.

Both Mulvaney and Brazenose are eager to catch a group of dacoits lurking around their camp in Burma, but Brazenose is uneasy, for "'[a]ccordin' to the the-ouries av war, [they] shud wait for reinforcemints'" (16). He finally relents, and leads the charge to the dramatic siege of Lungtungpen. Their success demonstrates that "excepshin[s]" do indeed occur and culminates in an uncomfortable, if comic, patrol of the town:

"'Numbers off from the right!' sez the lift'nint. 'Odd numbers fall out to dress; even numbers pathrol the town till relieved by the dressin' parthy.' Let me tell you,

³⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the Ashanti Ring and its members, see Raugh, and Maxwell.

For a discussion of the opposition between Wolseley and Roberts in the story, albeit in terms of imperial hybridity and masculinity, see Deane 82–84.

pathrollin' a town wid nothin' on in an expayrience. I pathrolled for tin minutes, an' begad, before 'twas over, I blushed." (20)

The odd juxtaposition of army rigour and low slapstick comedy not only goes to show how unpredictable war and battle can be, but also how necessary it is to embrace that unpredictability with some good humour. The real lesson to be taken away from Mulvaney's story is that thinking on one's feet is much more effective than the lessons one learns in books. As he tells the now compliant Brazenose, "'you've the makin's in you av a great man; but, av you'll let an ould sodger spake, you're too fond of the-ourisin'" (21).

"The Drums of the Fore and Aft" (1889) is Kipling's extended meditation on the value and appropriateness of existing forms of military education. Here, it is more clearly articulated than in the other stories I discuss in this chapter. Historically, the story brings together two iconic battles fought in the Second Afghan War; the massive defeat at Maiwand (1880) and the subsequent victory at Ahmed Khel later the same year. It recounts the tale of a retreating army shamed into returning to battle by the naïve enthusiasm of two adolescent drummer boys, who brazenly continue playing even when their regiment has fled.

"The Drums of the Fore and Aft" refers to the pocket-book, both explicitly and implicitly, thrice. As we shall see, tracking Wolseley's text in Kipling's story allows us to unravel the former's diagnostic argument, highlighting the fundamental problems at the heart of the British colonial army, and the reasons for their perpetuation. Much like "The Taking of Lungtungpen," "The Drums of the Fore and Aft" develops around an opposition: between the commanding officers of the world and the unruly soldiers that populate the ranks of the army. The starting point for this discussion is a paraphrased statement from the pocket-book that summarises its overall thrust: "every soldier should, of course, think for himself—the *Soldier's Pocket-book* say so" (66). But despite the declarative nature of the pronouncement, the connection between the pocket-book and the soldier, between reading and thinking, is a

dangerously tenuous one. What emerges instead is its role in surrogate intellectual activity—the pocket-book thinks for others. The result of this is ineffectual study: a “moderately intelligent General” “waste[s]” his time preparing for war, a Colonel “utterly misunderstand[s]” his regiment, and a Company Commander is “deceived” about the nature of his men (64).

Opposed to this group of people are the “blackguards” they command. Here, the subjects of focus are those who *do* take chances, mostly because they have nothing to lose: the lower ranks of the army. The narrator unequivocally states that these are individuals incapable of thinking for themselves, but rather, think only “of” themselves (66). This, a sign of their collective “intense selfishness,” is not helped by “imperfect knowledge,” and the “rudiments of an imagination” (64). The questions at hand are not those broached in the first section of this chapter, of literacy and school education. Indeed, we are told that this was an “educated regiment, the percentage of school-certificates in their ranks was high, and most of the men could do more than read and write” (72). What they were not taught, however, is “what war meant, and there was none to tell them” (72). After all, as the story states in a perhaps unconscious reflection of Wolseley’s preface to the pocket-book, “of all the nine hundred men in barracks not ten had seen a shot fired in anger” (71).

“None to tell them” speaks once again to the inadequate leadership from which the army suffers. Combining poor leadership with reckless tendencies forebodes, will culminate in the following nightmarish vision:

About thirty years from this date, when we have succeeded in half-educating everything that wears trousers, our Army will be a beautifully unreliable machine. It will know too much and it will do too little. Later still, when all men are at the mental level of the officer of to-day, it will sweep the earth. (65–66)

The problem here is not that the common soldier is not reading the pocket-book. It is that those who command them it rely on its lessons far too much.

But what also becomes increasingly clear, and to which I want to draw attention, is the fact that this opposition between the soldier and the officer does not merely speak to differences in military approach, but also to fundamental—and unbridgeable—class divisions. Kipling’s imperial world, as John Kucich has pointed out, was very much fuelled by an “integrated vision of middle-class authority” (138). In a world divided between “gentlemen” and “blackguards” (66), what is missing is a solid middle-class ethic of hard work, which, if imparted to the disenfranchised poor, could save the crumbling edifice of the British empire.³⁹ So if the lower ranks of the army travel to South Asia in the hope of making money and drinking, their commanding officers are “midway men,” as opposed to middle-class men, who are not “to be trusted alone,” because their gentlemanly backgrounds have led to their developing “ideas about the value of life and an upbringing that has not taught them to go on and take chances” (66).

If one fate of Wolseley’s pocket-book was inadequacy, the other was misappropriation. Take for example, the short poem, “A Code of Morals” (1886). This is a humorous portrayal of the nondescript Jones, a newly-married soldier sent to the Afghan border, who spends most of his time trying to use a military heliograph to send sentimental messages to his wife warning her of the dangers of associating with flirtatious young men. When these messages are intercepted by a Lieutenant-General Bangs, a “snowy-haired Lothario” (13), he hears Jones relating the sordid details of his own private life, and realises, much to his embarrassment, that he has tapped a private-line.

When the Lieutenant-General decodes the signals he receives from the heliograph and reveals them to be juvenile endearments (“[m]y Duck” and “[m]y darling popsy-wop”)

³⁹ It is important to point out here that despite Kipling’s investment in schemes to uplift the disenfranchised working class (the Scouting Movement, for example), “The Drums of the Fore and Aft” advocates the need to preserve traditional class structures. This is another, if more subtle, point of contention with the pocket-book. Unlike Wolseley, whose notions of meritocracy opened all positions in the army to the capable and qualified, Kipling’s vision of efficiency, the exact opposite of what is described in the passages discussed above, derives from strong middle-class leadership that keeps the unruly tendencies of the working classes in check.

(13),⁴⁰ he responds with the exclamation “Spirit of great Lord Wolseley, *who* is on that mountain top?” (emphasis in original; 13). The invocation subsequently unravels on multiple levels that make clear the contradictory position the author of the pocket-book held in the popular imagination of the nineteenth century. At a primary level, the “[s]pirit of great Lord Wolseley” is simply used as a substitution for an exclamation of surprise. Since the characters in the poem are soldiers and the location the Afghan border, it is perhaps not unusual that Wolseley’s iconic status as a military leader suggests an omniscience on a par with God’s.⁴¹ At another level, of course, Wolseley is a misplaced presence. The poem is quickly revealed to be not about war at all; its general’s conquests, many as they are, are women. Deployed up in a story of jealousy and sexual intrigue, Kipling’s playful irreverence effectively pushes the author of the pocket-book into unknown territory, out of which he is unable to strategise himself.

The ridiculousness of planned and studied strategy is further developed through a similar conflation of war and sex in “The Courting of Dinah Shadd.” This eccentric story about the adventures of Mulvaney and a series of unfortunate accidents that lead to his marrying Dinah Shadd is characterised by the deliberate and overt use of military vocabulary and comparisons to describe the act of conquest (albeit a rocky and messy one) that forms the core of the narrative. Rather than guiding his military practices, the pocket-book provides him with the “‘gin’rl theory of attack” (127)—allowing him to devise a scheme by which to sustain multiple flirtations. In all of these, he characterises himself as a hapless victim.

Mesmerised by Dinah Shadd, he nevertheless finds himself in the arms of the red-haired, cat-

⁴⁰ Wolseley’s own letters to his wife, Louisa, contain similarly ridiculous endearments. Kipling could not have known of these; Wolseley’s letters were not published till 1922 and, as Mark Bunt at the Wolseley Special Collections informed me, they were heavily edited and censored to preserve the family’s reputation. The typescripts of the originals that are, today, housed in the archive, nevertheless reveal some particularly choice examples: “My dear little bloodsucker” (letter dated 2 Jan. 1874), “[m]y dearest little electric fish” (letter dated 3 Jan. 1874), and “[m]y dearest little lizard” (letter dated 4 Jan. 1874).

⁴¹ The association of Wolseley with military order led to the popular phrase, “All Sir Garnet” to imply the smooth running of army operations. The phrase was to subsequently become the title of Joseph Lehman’s 1964 biography, *All Sir Garnet: A life of Field-Marshal Lord Wolseley*.

eyed Judy, who along with her mother, later confronts him and accuses him of misleading her. Mulvaney's defence is a comparison:

“Oh the mane scutt that I was, my head ringin' wid Dinah Shadd! How does ut come about, sorr, that when a man has put the comether on wan woman, he's sure bound to put it on another? 'Tis the same thing at musketry. Wan day ivry shot goes wide or into the bank, an' the next day high lay low, sight or snap, ye can't get off the bull's-eye for ten shots runnin'” (133).

Musketry and literally collecting women come together in a single paragraph. Women become targets to be shot or missed; Mulvaney finds himself in a sticky position in the middle of two equally fierce enemy camps. In this situation, however, his character shows the greatest quality of any soldier described in any military pocket-book one might care to consult—resourcefulness. Grotesquely distorted to suit his less noble pursuits, this translates into a less than pleasant statement, “I tuk whatever was within my reach an' digested it,” (125–26) turning the lofty connotations of both “courtship” and the aristocratic notes of Dinah Shadd's name into a bodily, visceral act of consumption.

The comparison between war and sex is not, of course, a new one. If anything, the frankness of Kipling's deployment of this conglomeration shows us just how tired a comparison it is. But what it does, once again, is degrade Wolseley and the dictums of his pocket-book through association. The slapstick vulgarity of Mulvaney does not surprise Kipling, in fact, it makes Mulvaney more likeable to him. But it does undo the principles of honour and valour to which the pocket-book aspires and reveals them to be, in the face of an accurate portrait, entirely fictional.

4. Conclusion

Focusing on *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service*, this chapter has considered a slice of book history from the late nineteenth-century colonial world, highlighting the presence and characteristics of an unlikely readership, the soldier abroad. The book's material and textual properties, it has argued, set in motion a whole new range of subject positions that the soldier could occupy, predominantly, that of the "correct" reader, the foundation for the ideal imperial subject. These positions however, as we have seen, are challenged and contested through cautionary tales of how *not* to read. What this does is work as an important reminder, as Pierre Bayard writes in another context, that a "book is less a book than it is the whole discussion about it... [f]or it is not the book itself that is at stake, but what it has become within the critical space in which it intervenes and is continually transformed" (150). It is this sense of the book as a mutable, moving object that comes to life only through the transactions in which it participates, with people and with other books, to which my chapter has drawn attention, and which the subsequent chapters of thesis will further explore. The pocket-book represented in Wilson's pamphlet, the Okehampton sketches, and Kipling's writing, does not invalidate Wolseley's own text; nor are these texts rendered dubious because of the unreliable opinions some may consider them to express. What it is important to understand is that these are but different forms in which *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service* existed, and continues to exist, within the cultural imagination of its readers.

The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service was represented as an unread text because soldiers supposedly *chose* not to read it. What about forms of writing that colonial subjects could not read? Chapter Two will introduce a set of documents that went unread by *necessity*: the written apparatus of the bureaucratic office. As we will see, such written items, mainly in English, were required and utilised by illiterate groups of rural dwellers. Even as they were

largely not read, like Wolseley's handbook, they participated in social and material relationships that highlighted and enabled their perceived meanings.

Chapter Two

The Document and the Headman: Reading the Illegible

1. Reading the Illegible

For stories whose main characters are illiterate, there is an awful lot of reading and writing in South Asian colonial novels. Documents, many of them mundane, filter into the lives of villages through various means: petitions submitted to government authorities, permits obtained to clear plots of land for agriculture, and legal sentences read out in court from the papers on which they are written. When Silindu, the protagonist of Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), goes to the Ratemahatmaya¹ with the story of how he was driven in desperation and anger to shoot Babehami the village headman, and Fernando the Mudalali,² it may strike the reader as odd that the Ratemahatmaya interrupts him with the question: “[w]as it [the gun he used] licensed?” (238). This is a universe in which, to use Matthew Hull's words in another context, actions are guaranteed by paper, “vouching [is] done by artifacts, not people” (*Government of Paper* 8).

As I discussed in the introduction, the proliferation of books and paper is an indelible sign of colonial bureaucratic rule. Given not only the far-flung limits of the empire but also the immense diversity of its colonies, an organised system of control and surveillance that would obliterate distance and domestic difference was required.³ But of course, despite its best efforts, the long arm of the Law could not reach everywhere and instead, bureaucrats felt comforted knowing that actions were always on permanent record. In fact, it was the ability

¹ Chief headman of a district.

² Rich trader or businessman.

³ JoAnne Yates's classic study on organisational bureaucracies, *Control through Communication* (1989) makes a similar argument for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century corporate expansions in the United States (xv).

of paper and writing not only to record, but also to travel, that was perceived to fuel governmental efficiency. Even today, the state “multiplied, literalized through court papers, certificates, and forged documents . . . can enter the life of the community” (Das 245), with these documents becoming, with varied consequences, signs of its presence.

The question at hand is primarily one of legibility. In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott argues that the concept of legibility is “a central problem in statecraft” (2), creating the need and means to carve out a disciplinary space within which one’s subjects can be understood, categorised, regulated and controlled. The flipside of this is, by extension, the illegible—the unruliness of people and circumstances that makes them impossible to read. Data collection and standardisation, both of which are closely allied to the colonial epistemic project, thus reintegrate the pre-modernity associated with the local, and inevitably, the illegible, into the space of a universal, modern regime of the global. Scholarship on South Asia corroborates this through studies of the ways in which data was collated and processed by colonial systems of control. Whether we call these investigative modalities (Cohn) or enumerative strategies (Appadurai), they were methods by which all aspects of native life could be allegedly recorded and mastered.

In this chapter, I explore the double-sided nature of the illegible, examining the illegibility of people and places as Scott describes it, as well as the illegibility of bureaucracy itself. My focus is a form of writing around which these concerns coalesce—the “official” document.⁴ But, if on the one hand, bureaucracy’s documents present the practices and procedures by which people are reduced to measured sentences on pre-printed forms, on the other hand, they acquire for themselves a vague opacity—no one is quite sure how bureaucratic processes work. In the present, even as “[n]ibs still break. Ink still smudges.

⁴ Following Suzanne Briet’s classic study, I take the document to mean “any concrete or indexical sign . . . preserved or recorded towards the ends of representing, of reconstituting, or of proving a physical or intellectual phenomenon” (10). The bureaucratic document as I see it also shares characteristics with Kafka’s definition of paperwork: “all those documents produced in response to a demand—real or imagined—by the state” (*Demon of Writing* 10).

Handwriting still cramps. Signifiers still slip” (Kafka, *Demon of Writing* 12), most difficulties with bureaucracy point to a collective confusion:

even if a piece of paper carries legible, meaningful writing, even if that writing conveys accurate information intelligible to sender and addressee, the message itself can be easily lost or delayed, or it can arrive at the right place at the right time, only to be mishandled and misunderstood. Most mistakes are not the result of bad faith or even sloppiness. They are simple, but ineluctable, failures to communicate . . . (Kafka, *Demon of Writing* 12)

The failure to communicate, or the manner in which the bureaucratic document is manipulated in order to impede communication altogether, represents what Ben Kafka calls its “unpredictability” (*Demon of Writing*). Outside the Anglo-American world, such encounters were doubly unpredictable: drawing on a bureaucratic language that few understood, in addition to a linguistic medium that even fewer could comprehend: English. The vast majority of the South Asian population, barely functionally literate, thus faced a seemingly unsolvable conundrum: its day-to-day interactions with the colonial state were dependent on negotiating reams of paper it could not read. The bureaucratic document therefore, I argue, becomes the material locus around which complex relations between power, performance and writing amalgamate, to which both the colonial literary and historical archive will attest. Its ubiquity is key to this—very little could be done in the colonial world, as today, without the assistance of the “right” papers. For those who could not read, their inability was manifested in their muddled interactions with documents: confusing one set of documents for another, and being made to believe that a document said something it did not.

Although Lisa Gitelman suggests that such forms of writing, useful as they are, do not shape readerly subjectivities (30–31), in this chapter I demonstrate that books and other written objects may well enter human lives and relationships in ways that are not necessarily dependent on their being read. Our unlikely readers here, the non-readerly community of

peasants and rural dwellers, remind us again of the many different ways in which one can make meaning of a text. Such individuals are an example of how literacy, as Mark Amsler and Rosamund McKitterick, among others, have shown us, can take different forms— affective, cultural, material and social. Not being able to decode a text does not prevent one from being able to understand it or at least, attribute to it a set of inscribed meanings and associations.

In Chapter One's discussion of Wolseley's pocket-book, I outlined the strategies that soldiers employed to justify not reading it. By contrast, in this chapter I look at how illiterate groups had to develop innovative methods to overcome the fact that they could not read the texts that structured their colonised existences. To this end, I turn to the different social and material relationships into which such items of print and manuscript were co-opted, remembering, as Catherine Cole does, that "texts in and of themselves do not reality make. In order to take effect, texts—whether in the form of passbooks or constitutions—require performance. One must 'do things' with words" (xi).⁵ I want to explore how a study of the trajectories of official documents allows us insight into bureaucracy's role in the formation of modern colonial subjectivities, if only as supplements that substitute, add to, and ultimately deceive those who read (or do not read) them. This line of argument provides us with an opportunity to examine issues surrounding literacy, materiality, and even the limits of bureaucracy, and to ask once again: are books and documents ever truly left "unread"?

2. Novels and Documents

The two textual sources on which I rely in this chapter serve as important reminders that bureaucratic documents—indeed all forms of writing—can have literary, historical, and

⁵ This is uncannily played out in the verb forms associated with each of the documents that I will examine in this chapter—the permit permits, the petition petitions, the license licenses, and the document documents.

ethnographic lives. The first set is literary: I examine the representation of a range of everyday documents that the average village dweller would have encountered in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia. My primary focus is Leonard Woolf's novel, *The Village in the Jungle*. Woolf's ethnographic novel is an exemplary text for my purposes, chronicling in minute detail the decline in peasant society in early twentieth-century Ceylon and, through the representative character of Silindu, its clash with new colonial systems of rule.⁶ It was written at a moment of redefinition in the discipline of anthropology, when fieldwork was being carried out according to certain established "scientific" rules by a "man on the spot," not the colonial administrator whose work could allow him to distance himself from the native population of the provinces in which he was posted. Woolf's novel is, however, far from occupying the discredited space of the Victorian colonial memoir riddled with exotic stereotypes. Instead, it anticipates another methodological shift in the discipline. Rather than aspiring for the constructed omniscience that can be seen in the works of, for example, Bronislaw Malinowski, the new anthropology called for what James Clifford, drawing on Bakhtin, calls the heteroglossic ethnographic account, allowing for the interaction of different voices and participants in the writing of culture (21–54).

The "double-voicedness" (Boehmer, *Empire* 180) in *The Village in the Jungle* combines these two positions and thus allows for an alternative ethnographic exercise. Not unsurprisingly, the novel draws on Woolf's extensive familiarity with Ceylon's predicament, fuelled by his personal and administrative experience as Assistant Government Agent (AGA)

⁶ David Trotter suggested that Woolf's text be read as an ethnographic colonial novel at a symposium on *The Village in the Jungle* held at Wolfson College, University of Oxford on 9 March 2013. In a similar vein, Akhil Gupta turns to Sri Lal Sukla's Hindi novel, *Raag Darbari* (1968) as an ethnographic source about postcolonial India and corruption (125–38). I call the novel an "ethnographic" rather than a "paraethnographic" (Clifford 24; he borrows the term from George Marcus) or "quasi-ethnographic" (Akhil Gupta 125) genre to challenge the assumption that novelistic practice will always fall short of the "real" representation of culture. As Kamala Visweswaran has demonstrated, despite acknowledging the literariness of their craft, ethnographers continue to place their narrative production in opposition to the novel (4–5). As she points out, works such as Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (1992), which combine fiction with fieldwork notes, problematise the loss of ethnographic authority in ways that many will hesitate to admit (8).

in the Hambantota district between 1908 and 1911.⁷ His uncharacteristic proximity is clearly reflected in the novel's narrative voice. Yasmine Gooneratne has pointed out how close the text's language is to the country's popular idiom and speech patterns, from which we can conclude that the narrator is, in all probability, one of Silindu's fellow villagers (33). Woolf thus styles his novel as one that speaks from inside a culture; as, to use Karin Barber's categorisations from her work on ethnographic texts and publics, a "community's ethnography of itself," part of the process by which it "take[s] stock of [its] own creations" and identities (4). The insider narrator is, however, as disoriented as his or her anthropologist counterparts, but unlike them, is not afraid of *not* knowing. If ethnography's foundational aims, not unlike bureaucracy's, were to develop a method by which to make disparate groups of people more comprehensible, Woolf's novel attempts to expose the fallaciousness of such a fantasy of omniscience.

I place Woolf's novel in conversation with others from colonial India which also deal with bureaucratic subjects. The first of these is Fakir Mohan Senapati's Oriya novel, *Six Acres and a Third* (1902, trans. 2005).⁸ The story of a wily landlord, Mangaraj, and a series of events that culminate in his being put on trial for the murder of his tenants, Bhagia and Saria, it too aspires to the kind of literary and social realism that we see in Woolf's novel, providing its readers with "minute details of social life and economic undercurrents regulating human relationships and the variety of characters representing traditional occupational groups" (Sisir Kumar Das, qtd. in Mohanty 2). Such realism, almost analytical in nature, is aided by an active and robust narrator (Mohanty 2). Like in *The Village in the Jungle*, this character is taken from the social milieu in which the novel is set. He is,

⁷ Woolf arrived in Ceylon in 1904, and worked in various government divisions until receiving the post of AGA in Hambantota in 1908.

⁸ Dated documents in the novel tell us its events take place in 1832.

As mentioned in the introduction, I read this text in translation and so, even though in the course of this chapter I discuss metaphorical and linguistic devices it deploys, I also realise that these are comments that can only be made in the context of the English text.

however, a much more colourful presence. Rather than saying more by saying less, the so-called touter figure⁹ in this novel bombards readers with an excess of information and satirical asides, and leaves us to decide what is “factual” and true, and what is not. As we will see, in order to parody the clarity of the bureaucratic law, he wilfully withholds details, obscures and distorts others. In *Six Acres and a Third*, nothing is ever as it seems.

I also discuss another novel set in Orissa, H.E. Beal’s *Indian Ink* (1954).¹⁰ *Indian Ink* shares a context with both *The Village in the Jungle* and *Six Acres and a Third*. Like Woolf, Beal held various administrative posts in Bengal and Orissa between 1907 and his retirement in 1929, and it is from this experience that the novel’s plot draws, charting out colonial developments following those described in Senapati’s novel.¹¹ Its depiction of bureaucracy is, however, told from another perspective: from inside the government office. The trials of its protagonist, a clever if dubious clerk, Krupasindhu Mahanty, speak to the networks of intrigue created within this space, revealing a well-oiled system of bribery and manipulation. Unlike the other novels, this is not a story of tragic death and imprisonment but rather, of triumph, reminding us that, more often than not, those who exploit the system are rarely caught.

Unsurprisingly, for novels that draw on bureaucratic spaces and processes, these texts highlight their protagonists’ entanglements with writing of all descriptions. Alongside framing the presence of such objects as ethnographic instantiations and literary devices that motivate plot, I examine government documents pertaining to the Hambantota District, housed at the Department of National Archives, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Drawing my impetus from book history’s material turn, as well as social anthropology’s interest in the lives of

⁹ For a discussion of the touter figure in Oriya literature, see Mohanty 6–8.

¹⁰ The novel was written after Beal’s retirement and relocation to England, hence the post-1947 date. Nevertheless, it is very much about the workings of the colonial office in the early twentieth century.

¹¹ Very little information is available about Beal’s life. For a relatively comprehensive timeline, however, see <http://caliendi.com/Beal/indiI26.html>

documents, I read both as material objects. They demonstrate, as we will see, not only how complex systems of stamps, signatures, letterheads and filing practices, determine both content and its reception, but also that the ways in which documents are handled and circulated tell us as much about what they mean to people as simply reading them does.

At one level, my archival research findings also provide us with an opportunity to think through a relationship that is reconfigured by the material document: that of orality and literacy. Combining both as crucial modes of communication and knowledge circulation, the Hambantota archive reminds us that “writing can [not only] never dispense with orality” (Ong 8), it also draws our attention to the shifting boundaries between the two modes of communication, creating a continuum rather than an inevitable teleology (Finnegan 53, Ranković 39–45). As Ruth Finnegan and Slavica Ranković note, the oral does not simply emerge in forms of writing as a trace of an older practice of communication. Rather, the two are mutually inextricable and continuously shape the constitution of the other; the continuum, as it were, flows in both directions.¹²

At another level, these documents and historical fragments masquerade as more “authentic” counterparts to these fictional, if realistic, accounts, balancing occasionally sentimental portrayals of peasants by reminding us that bureaucracy provided many opportunities to manipulate and collaborate with colonial systems. It is also crucial to remember, however, that the tales (often spurious) of theft, personal affronts and retribution that abound in petitions and letters in the Ceylon archive point towards the heavy reliance on narrative, indeed tall tales, in these historical documents. One does not need be able to read or write to construct a convincing story.

My argument in this chapter unfolds across two sections. In the first, I examine different genres of bureaucratic writing. I read the moneylender’s account book as an object

¹² In this, they differ from Walter Ong, whose work, along with that of Jack Goody, has been considered to be representative of the belief that literacy is a historical and teleological inevitability (Finnegan 57; Ranković 40).

that redefines traditional networks of borrowing and lending along bureaucratic lines. I then turn to the examples of the file, legal papers and witness testimony, gun license, and petition, to highlight the villagers' complex, manipulative relationship with writing as a tool used to obfuscate the boundaries between the official and the unofficial. In the second and final section, I put forward a counterpoint that emerges in the chance appearance of a dirty English newspaper at the end of *The Village in the Jungle*, which replaces the act of reading with the act of imagining. If we juxtapose this with the novel's preoccupation with the jungle, we are reminded of what bureaucracies fail to admit—not everything can be read.

3. Bureaucratic Genres

Max Weber identifies two primary agents that contribute to modern bureaucratic offices: people (“a staff of subordinate officials and scribes of all sorts”) and paper (“the ‘files’” and “apparatus of material implements”) (50). These share a key characteristic: impersonal objectivity. In eliminating “for official business love, hate and all purely personal and emotional elements,” bureaucracies attempt to replace a feudal world driven by “personal sympathy and favour, grace and gratitude” with one that is “dehumanized” (Weber 58). This is manifested in writing, as John Guillory’s study of the memorandum shows us, through the creation of an alternative means of communication, discarding “the connective tissue of sentences and paragraphs in order to transmit information in a new way—by dividing up the page into fields, by offering boxes to fill or check rather than sentences to write” (126).

The sections that follow pose a challenge to the model of Weberian bureaucracy, arguing that in the case of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia, one’s affective relationships cannot be separated from one’s bureaucratic encounters. These involve not just the peasant readers on which this chapter focuses, but an entire network of reading

and non-reading agents: middle-men, moneylenders, headmen, petty officials, magistrates, among others.

i. Little, Greasy and Unintelligible

One of the most everyday bureaucratic documents that the peasant encounters in the colonial novel is the account book. The account book is wonderfully versatile, varying in size (from the small and personal, to the large and governmental) and moving between spaces as disparate as domestic interiors to colonial financial offices. In this section of the chapter, I will examine its representation in *The Village in the Jungle*, complementing this with *Six Acres and a Third*. In both, the account book is shown to be a small, portable object that nevertheless alternates between occupying a zone of unintelligibility and one of empirical truth. In both cases, it is the peasant reader who determines the book's epistemological location.

Tucked away in the early pages of *The Village in the Jungle* is a haunting description of the arrival of Mudalalis from the nearby town to collect Beddagama's debts after the harvesting of the chenas:¹³

With the reaping of the chenas came the settlement of debts. With their little greasy notebooks, full of unintelligible letters and figures, they [the Mudalalis] descended upon the chenas; and after calculations, wranglings, and abuse, which lasted for hour after hour, the accounts were settled, and the strangers left the village, their carts loaded with pumpkins, sacks of grain . . . And when the strangers had gone, the settlement with the headman began; for the headman, on a small scale, lent grain on the same terms in times of scarcity, or when seed was wanted to sow the chenas.

. . . In the end the villager carried but little grain from his chena to his hut. Very soon after the reaping of the crop he was again at the headman's door, begging for a little kurakkan¹⁴ to be repaid at the next harvest, or tramping the

¹³ Chena cultivation, an important agricultural practice in both colonial and pre-colonial Ceylon, is a slash-and-burn method of cultivation in which plots of land are alternatively cultivated and left fallow. For the history of the technique, see Gunasena and Pushpakumara.

¹⁴ Finger millet.

thirty miles to Kamburupitiya to hang about the bazaar, until the Mudalali agreed once more to enter his name in the greasy notebook. (31–32)

In more ways than one, this passage sets the tone for the novel's anticipated portrayal of the sticky bureaucratic entanglements in which its characters find themselves. It provides, to begin with, an immediate context for these—debt. The perpetual scarcity of money, and by extension, food, is the chief narrative force in the novel. The narrator reminds us that whatever the season, or however much it rains, there are never enough crops to feed a family, and so borrowing from whoever will lend can never be escaped.¹⁵ This quickly becomes a bargaining point across all sections of village society, and unleashes an entire range of responses. As I will discuss here and elsewhere in this chapter, men, in particular, the pater familias of the novel, Silindu, are forced to adopt tactics of bribery, begging and coercion to obtain the necessary food to feed their families. Significantly, too, it is by reminding each other of what has been exchanged between their husbands that women in the novel participate in a bureaucratic space from which they are otherwise largely excluded.

The real problem that the characters face, however, is not the inability to repay their debts (which it is taken for granted they never will), but that their creditors will refuse to keep them *in* debt. The locus of this gnawing anxiety, as a quick look at the passage above will serve to remind us, is the “little greasy notebook,” an account book “full of unintelligible letters and figures.” Its symbolic power develops in several directions, illuminating its role as

¹⁵ Examining economic tracts from the 1850s onwards, it is possible to argue that the case of the village community mirrors the condition of empire as one of perpetual debt. In his writings on colonialism in South Asia, Marx cited detailed evidence of this; since 1784, British activities overseas accumulated, at a rough estimate, a debt of fifty million pounds (“The East India Company” 53). Writing later of the Crimean War, he observed that such expenses were both directly and indirectly caused by the British presence in South Asia:

In fact, the whole cost of the late Russian war may fairly be charged to the Indian account, since the fear and dread of Russia, which led to that war, grew entirely out of jealousy as to her designs on India. Add to this the career of endless conquest and perpetual aggression in which the English are involved by the possession of India, and it may well be doubted whether, on the whole, this dominion does not threaten to cost quite as much as it can ever be expected to come to. (“British Incomes in India” 161)

a literary device. At one level it is, of course, a literal sign of debt, reduced from the visceral, bodily hunger that prompts seeking credit in the first place, and materialised in a set of figures on a white page. At another, it captures the inflationary aspects of debt, in that the rapidly increasing entries in its credit column, mirrored in the carts burdened with overflowing bounty from the village, contrast starkly with the images of barrenness inevitably conjured up by the Mudalalis' locust-like descent.

Perhaps most telling is the cursory use of three words to describe the account book itself—little, greasy, and unintelligible. Gesturing towards its size, feel and content, the description is a reminder that one's relationship with a book, as Leah Price notes, involves a combination of reading (“doing something with the words”), handling (“doing something with the object”) and circulating (“doing something to, or with, other persons by means of the book”), acts that may or may not overlap (*How to do Things with Books* 5–6). As a small notebook, it is slipped into the moneylender's pocket and travels with him at all times, making it a potent portable instrument of power. Drawing attention to its state, the greasy feel of the account book is an indication not only of its frequent use—dirty and well-worn, it is a material attestation to the seasons, possibly years, of hunger and exploitation the villagers have faced—but also the duplicitous nature of the dealings to which it stands witness. Passing through the well-greased palms of its owners who profit from a system rife with informal networks of bribery and coercion, as I will discuss later in this chapter, the notebook is greasy by extension, a skewed document of corruption.

The importance of the account book, in a small way, attests to the growing critiques of one aspect of imperial expansion, particularly in the early twentieth century: its economic motivations. As Michael Sprinkler reminds us, the basis of colonialism was the “unequal exchanges of goods, labour and raw materials,” and therefore “colonialism was, first and last, and always, an instrument of capitalism, a fact of which we need to be reminded from time to

time, lest the pervasiveness of colonial discourse analysis makes us forget the material conditions that produced the *melangé* of fantasies and prejudices we now recognise as imperial ideology” (xii). This now recognised and well-established line of argument took one of its earliest forms not only in Marx’s writings on colonialism, which speak of the British’s self-appointed “privilege of plundering India” (“India” 26), but also in Leonard Woolf’s *Economic Imperialism* (1920), a concise, if sweeping, history of economic policy across colonial Asia and Africa. Suggesting that the impulse behind the dominion of other countries was of four kinds—moral, sentimental, military and economic—Woolf went on to put forward the possibility of the economic being in the fore of the imperialist’s mind: “[t]he white man’s burden becomes a duty only after, in a fit of absence of mind or in order to fill his pockets, he has placed it upon his shoulders” (*Economic Imperialism* 18). It is, in Woolf’s account, the mobilisation of raw materials and labour—in short, economic and human capital—that is the driving force behind empire. An early anti-imperial economic tract, Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), makes much the same argument, but defends it from a mathematical, rather than an ideological point of view. Hobson attested to the importance of finance to the running of empire, stating that

. . . it is true that the motor-power of Imperialism is not chiefly financial: finance is rather the governor of the imperial engine, directing the energy and determining its work: it does not constitute the fuel of the engine, nor does it directly generate the power. Finance manipulates the patriotic forces which politicians, soldiers, philanthropists, and traders generate; the enthusiasm for expansion which issues from these sources, though strong and genuine, is irregular and blind; the financial interest has those qualities of concentration and clear-sighted calculation which are needed to set Imperialism to work. An ambitious statesman, a frontier soldier, an overzealous missionary, a pushing trader, may suggest or even initiate a step of imperial expansion, may assist in educating patriotic public opinion to the urgent need of some fresh advance, but the final determination rests with the financial power. (66–67)

Following this, through the careful deployment of data in the form of charts, figures and tables, Hobson’s statistical attack demonstrated that imperialism, to put it bluntly, was a poor

economic decision for Britain, contributing only a very small part to her national income. This was, to his mind, not only simply “unsound business” but also, quoting Thomas More, a “certain conspiracy of rich men seeking their own advantage under the name and pretext of the commonwealth” (51). Empire, as Marx would put it, was expensive. If the meta-account book of empire suggested otherwise, it was nothing more than a record of false and fabricated data.

Perhaps more importantly, the account book introduces the very complex and uneven relationship between writing (in this context, in the form of figures) and truth, a concern that I will return to repeatedly in this chapter. Mary Poovey’s excellent study, *The History of the Modern Fact* (1998) is a useful source. Poovey’s larger argument, regarding what kind of information came to obtain the status of a “fact” in the modern period, uses the rise of the practice of double-entry book keeping in early modern Europe to outline this. The numerical transcription of information gives it a certain universalism, not unlike the kind of authority given to statistics in the early nineteenth century. Since numbers were thought to follow “rules” that words did not, a well-compiled system of accounting was considered to be precise, and above all, put forward the importance of transparency. Merchants’ trade books became a sign not merely of profits and losses, but rather, a material manifestation of their honest dealings (Poovey 29–92).

This becomes a point of particular interest when we turn to the example of *Six Acres and a Third*. While the materiality of the worn account book is central to Silindu’s reaction to it, in *Six Acres and a Third*, it draws its power from its very absence. The question of accounts and record keeping is always mentioned in connection with Mangaraj, the oppressive landlord and the prime villain of the novel. Take for example, a narratorial comment from an early chapter. The narrator is discussing a question of importance—exactly how much money was spent on building Mangaraj’s house? The landlord, of course, avoids

answering this, quipping that he has lost a great deal of money in the process. As the narrator's following comments remind us, this is the kind of flippancy that is made possible only by eclipsing facts. Drawing up a mock-epic lineage for his protagonist, the narrator tells us of the Emperor of China's putting to death all the men who worked on the Great Wall, lest they revealed the expense incurred. Of course, as he also notes, numbers are eternal, and "[n]ine hundred years after the Puri temple was built, a Sahib was able to figure out exactly how much money had been spent on its construction" (43). By a logical extension, the narrator concludes: "[i]f documents exist recording the sales of vegetables from Mangaraj's orchard, *can it be that difficult to locate records* indicating how much was spent on his house?" (emphasis added; 43). The missing record and its disappearance hold the material key to a story that is otherwise well known.

There is, nevertheless, comfort in the often unhelpful realisation that facts and figures do not, or rather, should not, lie. The novel remobilises the absent account book to make a case against Mangaraj, in which this piece of documentary evidence is upheld as a vehicle of truth. The narrator once again cheekily remarks on Mangaraj's protestations that he makes little profit on his moneylending transactions. Nevertheless, "intelligent readers will be able to draw their own conclusions from the following figures" (43):

We would maintain that, in fact, the business involved considerable losses for him. After all, not much profit is to be made by lending grain at fifty percent interest. Not just that; whereas he lent out old husked grain, he took in only new juicy grain in return. Dear reader, if you have ever compared the weights of dry and wet clothes you can easily understand Mangaraj's situation. On last year's accounts the bookkeeper had written off the sum of eight rupees and six annas. He was taken to task for forgiving such a huge amount. A summary of the bookkeeper's explanation is as follows: Bhikari Panda took a loan of five rupees. The compound interest on this comes to twelve rupees five annas and eleven paise. The amount collected from Bhikari Panda was seventeen rupees five annas. The remainder was written off. (44)

Shortly before this, the narrator directs our attention to the difficulties that *other* documents pose to the truth-telling functions of the account book. The figures cited above, we are told,

were obtained surreptitiously from a peon in the Income Tax department, and those pertaining to loans of grain remain elusive because the relevant papers “have not been sorted for the last twenty years” (41). But as for the information that could be obtained: the absent remainder masquerading as the landlord’s bounty is only too clearly documented in the account book.

This brings us back to Poovey’s argument about the power of numbers as facts. Mangaraj’s example makes us aware that the truth-telling value of the account book is contingent on several factors. As an object of surveillance of sorts, it becomes part of a “mechanism of detection” (Poovey 35), allowing an investigator to mark exact points and moments at which double-dealing has occurred. As we are reminded, though, this depends on how and when the account book is updated—just because the books balance does not mean that the figures are correct. In the light of the information recorded on the page, they may merely *seem* correct. Poovey’s study masterfully makes a distinction on the basis of this realisation: what the account book as a factual object in the modern world does is create what she calls an “effect of accuracy,” presenting precision as veracity.

If the account book represents in its supposed arithmetical precision the moral deeds and misdeeds of colonial bureaucratic agents, it nevertheless remains an immobile object for Silindu. While *Six Acres and a Third* and even Dinabandhu Mitra’s controversial play, *Nil Darpan* (The Mirror of the Indigo Revolt, 1859), use the belief that numbers do not lie to mobilise the spurious account books of their oppressive landlords and expose their double-dealings, Silindu’s failure to do so is for a simple reason—he cannot read. Having no access to writing, that ultimate sign of modernity, is enough to transform the account book in his imagination into a referent of power, *because* of his inability to comprehend it.¹⁶

¹⁶ Importantly, Silindu’s reaction to the account book is not indicative of the entire range of peasant experiences in Ceylon. A quick look at any file of petitions from the period will demonstrate that levels of literacy among the peasant population varied considerably. While some petitions (predominately written in English by scribes) are signed by the petitioner’s thumbprint or a cross, others end with a shaky Sinhala or Tamil signature, clearly

I will return to the sometimes false dichotomy of illiteracy and domination later in this chapter, but for now, it is important to remember that it is not that Silindu does not understand the concept of debt and repayment, but rather misapprehends the form that it takes in the account book. He is, for example, familiar with what could be called divine or cosmic debt. This is best highlighted in a single off chance statement made by Punchirala, the witch doctor infatuated with Silindu's daughter, Hinnihami. The family goes on a pilgrimage to a Hindu shrine in order to heal an ailment Silindu has contracted (hinted to be the work of Punchirala himself), and after praying to the deity, Punchirala produces a rupee to be given as an offering, saying "[e]ven the gods require payment" (116). This is reiterated through the echoing "something must be given" (121, 122), that functions as a refrain of sorts in the novel. Though not explicitly stated as such, the line reflects the notion of the ritualistic promise or pledge, of asking the gods for something, but having to repay the favour in money or kind. The promise, made at the moment of seeking the favour, acts as collateral. If it is not kept, there will be inevitable consequences. In return, the successful completion of this divine transaction is sealed with a sign of fulfilment acting as a spiritual receipt. Hinihammi, for example, sees the child to which she gives birth soon after as a symbol of protection; the gods are now satisfied. The fatalistic dimensions of the novel and the belief in a redemptive universe are perfectly comprehensible to its characters, even as its reinscription in a new language by the machinery of colonial bureaucracy is not.

So while Silindu is shrewd enough to realise the power of the notebook and the importance of having one's name written down in it, he often forgets that documentary evidence is intractable.¹⁷ Begging for loans from Babehami, more often than not he slips into

the petitioner's own. Though not in Silindu's case, the question of illiteracy can be further complicated by the co-existence of multiple languages in a social space, extremely common in colonial societies. Nineteenth-century Ceylon would have at least four different language groups: English, Dutch, Tamil and Sinhala.

¹⁷ A useful parallel to Silindu's difficulties in understanding the differences between documented and oral promises comes from D.F. McKenzie's detailed study of *The Treaty of Waitangi*, the document that marked the transfer of Maori lands in New Zealand to the crown. As McKenzie writes, and as the printer of the treaty,

exaggerated declarations, promising to repay him “twofold” (39), “threefold” (40). These are momentary enunciations, not binding promises to which he expects to be held. He thus fails to realise that once words are on paper, they cannot be taken back. Headmen are as unforgiving as the gods.

ii. Lost and Found

With the file, we truly move into the space of the bureaucratic office. The popular vision of the file draws from a typical Kafkaesque nightmare of proliferation, put beautifully by Cornelia Vismann:

[f]iles pile up on desks, accumulate in offices, and fill attics and basements. Though registered, their order collapses time and again; though collected, quashed, dispatched, sold, shredded, or destroyed in some other way, they keep mushrooming. Their incessant proliferation seems a natural phenomenon. Masses of paper arise and merge into mountains that join together to form entire mountain ranges. Floods of paper empty into oceans; ravines flanked by shelves cut through impassable terrain . . . They can appear in all shapes and forms: as loose pages, lying in little boxes, wrapped in packing paper, or enclosed in capsules; they may present themselves as bundles tied with a string or assume the shape of vertical folders ready to enfold anything that can fit between two paper covers. (xi)

Vismann’s description reminds us that files are incredibly versatile and that they can be used and stored just about anywhere. But above all, we are given a sense of the sheer numbers in which they come. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, and as J.S. Mill’s parliamentary interlocutors warned him, the tendency of files and paper to proliferate

William Colenso had also noted, the majority of the barely functionally-literate Maori population could not “accept a signature as a sign of full comprehension and legal commitment, to surrender the relativities of time, place and person in an oral cultural to the presumed fixities of the written or printed word” (81). They did not understand what they were signing because their concepts of land and ownership could not be translated into print. Having said that, as Akhil Gupta points out, literacy and orality are not mutually opposite, but rather culturally contingent, categories. The preponderance of orality does not always necessarily imply an absence of writing systems (Akhil Gupta 196–97).

can make them numerous to the extent that they are not particularly useful, or even, as we shall see, easily traceable.

While this realisation was played out every day in the space of the colonial office, in the present, the vision of an impregnable fortress of paper brings to mind another space that is the guardian of the file: the government-run archive. Achille Mbembe and Carolyn Steedman have demonstrated that the act of archival research constantly reminds us of its “inescapable materiality” (Mbembe 19), a materiality that draws its power from the “entanglement of building and documents” (Mbembe 19). As Mbembe’s statement makes clear, the word “archives” instantly reminds us not only of collections of files and paper, but also the physical, architectural space in which they are stored and which we visit to consult them: “the” archives.

This was more than apparent when I was carrying out archival research for this chapter in the National Archives of Sri Lanka in Colombo in December 2013. An impressive and beautiful building, the institution, like many of its kind, re-enacts the sacred nature of the bureaucratic space. The building is (perhaps coincidentally) opposite a police station, its own entrance is watched by security guards; access is only possible once one’s passport and identity have been checked.

More telling is the manner in which access to files is regulated. “Process” in vague and unwritten terms limits the number of files one can consult during a single visit. Each time a file is taken out of its storage place, a note is made in a large ledger that sits on the desk of the archive’s administrative officer. The files, arranged according to historical period and district, are, like many of the documents this chapter discusses, objects that are made up of other document objects, handled, exchanged, separated into their constituent parts, copied and stored in huge impregnable steel cupboards in the colonial office.

As an organisational tool, the file represents, as Matthew Hull argues, a “material infrastructure of decision” (*Government of Paper* 114), containing within it the documents and counter-documents that lead up to the process of closing a “case.” For this very reason, Hull states that the file has the potential to eliminate foul play in the office. Since everything it contains is marked, noted and signed as the file changes hands, does it not create its own rubber-stamped trail? As Hull’s own fieldwork in present-day urban Pakistan goes on to demonstrate, this possibility is equally met by the networks of dysfunction opened up by the material object. As Akhil Gupta argues, or as any individual who has had to work his or her way through a South Asian bureaucratic system will have discovered, the “wheels of government grind to a halt without a file” (146). If it is missing, it simply ceases to exist.

This was a fact with which I had to grapple constantly in the archive. Files are indexed on handwritten cards in the National Archives, and through a systematic examination of several hundreds, if not thousands, of these, from the Hambantota District alone, I drew up a very promising looking list. Files concerning headmen requesting pencils and notebooks seemed like a necessary and exciting complement to the evidence for the circulation of bureaucratic documents that I had already noticed in *The Village in the Jungle*. To my dismay, I was told that most of the files from the district were “destroyed” or could not be found. I later realised that while the files had serial numbers, they had not been stored in serial order. It was therefore practically impossible to locate specific ones. The lessons of the archive are a lesson in bureaucracy—files go missing and no one realises this, not simply because of their sheer numbers, but because they have not been needed and so are untouched, gathering dust. Unread, they are as good as lost.

This experience—every research scholar’s nightmare—rehearses a common situation in the bureaucratic office, the difficulties of dealing with missing files. In this section of the chapter, however, I put forward a counter-situation. Following Hull and Akhil Gupta in

arguing that the file is undoubtedly the central decision-making object in the office, I ask: what happens when a long-forgotten or missing file is suddenly rediscovered? My example comes from *Indian Ink*, which demonstrates how careful machinations can ensure that adversaries are easily entangled in a bureaucratic web not of their making, while on paper, of course, nothing illegal has been done by those responsible.

The most extended example of this is from an early chapter of the novel, in which Krupa decides that he must learn how to “make” money. The head clerk of the office is due to retire, and rumours begin to circulate amongst the Oriya employees that a Bengali, presumably a Haridas Babu, will be given his position. Motivated by a combination of regionalism and office politics, the junior clerks plan to embroil him in a bribery scandal purely of their concoction. At the centre of this, not unusually for an office drama, is a file.

A certain Jagarnath Parida, a local landlord provides an entry point. As the narrator tells us, he grew in prominence in the community with his affluence and charitable works, leading to his being recommended for the title of Rai Bahadur by the local government. It is only after this that the then District Collector discovered several dubious deals made by Parida, which motivated him to write a confidential note forbidding his being recommended for any higher titles. Krupa quickly remembers that “it [the note] must be in the file in which are the papers relating to the granting of titles, and that file is in the confidential almirah in the English office, and Haridas Babu keeps the key. It all depends on Haridas Babu” (27). The clerks then approach him with a fictitious offer from Parida, asking for the note to be suppressed, and are caught by other bureaucratic officials when Haridas Babu is arguing over the bribe he is to receive for the job. This allows for an intriguing turn of events. Haridas cannot extricate himself from this false situation, because he was indeed negotiating his price. The revealed presence of the note in the file, of course, testifies to his motivations. The file and note then become curious but crucial lynchpins in this bureaucratic plot. They never

emerge from the cupboard in which they are locked away, forgotten about till this moment. This is not only because of the uniform nature of their form (one file can easily be mistaken for another at a first glance, as can one note for another), but also because of the simple fact that such objects are handled, signed and circulated, but more often than not, *not* read. It is the material nature of their presence, and the documentary truth value associated with them, that nevertheless allow for the complex fabrication of the plot we see in *Indian Ink*, made true and validated by the discovered file and the note it contains. This bureaucratic object's power derives from the fact that it exists, and can be consulted if necessary, whenever that may be. To use the words of a town planner Matthew Hull interviewed in present-day Pakistan, “[f]iles are always ready to talk, if not now while you are in your seat then later. The file is there, perhaps someone will read it later . . . [f]iles are time bombs” (*Government of Paper* 129). That is, if they can be found.

iii. Trial by Paper

“The trial,” writes Susan Sontag, “is pre-eminently a theatrical form” (qtd. in C. Cole ix). Sontag’s statement is not, and should not be read as, a flippant dismissal of the seriousness of the legal process. Rather, as public trials in both the pre-modern and modern worlds continue to remind us, it is this theatricality and the possibility of performance from which the staging of the trial draws its potential power. As has been pointed out, remembering Hannah Arendt writing in the context of the Eichmann trial, the very shape and setting of the court room sets itself up for drama, dividing space into that occupied by the spectators and that occupied by those involved in the case, the “actors,” to continue with the theatrical metaphor. So if, in the case of the Eichmann trial, “[n]o matter how consistently the judges shunned the limelight, there they were, seated on top of the raised platform, facing the

audience as from the stage in a play” (Arendt, qtd. in C. Cole 1), it does not strike us as odd to see a similar deployment of space in a novel like *The Village in the Jungle*. The courthouse is elevated, atop a hill; the judge sits in front of the falsely accused in the case in question: Silindu and Babun, his son-in-law. When they are made to stand in the witness box, they feel like hunted animals being thrown into a cage to be displayed, poked and prodded.

The trial room does not always make for good theatre. As Mark Gevisser notes in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings in South Africa in the 1990s, the “hundreds of hours of testimony have been, almost by definition, banal and routine rather than heightened and dramatic. The halls are drafty and echoing; neon lighting flattens all contours; amplified sound deadens voices and simultaneous translation renders testimony affectless” (qtd. in C. Cole 12). In *The Village in the Jungle*, however, the connection between performance and law emerges in very specific ways that once again point to questions of reading, materiality and legibility, the key concerns that run through this chapter. The focus is, once again, the document; in this case, the various forms it can take in a legal setting. Questions here include: does the deployment of the legal document within the space of the courtroom engender a certain kind of performance? What other entities are caught in this performative act? How are stylised ways of speaking and reading tied up with the successful conclusion of a legal suit? As Catherine Cole reminds us, the space of the courtroom is determined not so much by “what [is] said, but also how the event itself [is] scripted, produced, rehearsed, stage-managed, and represented” (xv).

A useful starting point is the first court scene in *The Village in the Jungle*. Silindu and Babun find themselves being tried for fabricated charges of theft concocted by Babehami and Fernando the Mudalali, who is insulted that Babun is unwilling to give his wife, Punchi Menika, to him. The result of this is multiple levels of miscommunication. The two villagers are overwhelmed by the presence of the English judge, are baffled by legal jargon in which

they are the “accused” in a “case” (190), and, since the proceedings are being translated into Sinhala for them, not sure if the judge is speaking to them, or if the translator is freely interpreting his words. In an unfortunate and curious twist of events, the scene appears before them like a “dream” (190, 195); they are part of, as well as outside it, merely watching with incomprehension.

All of this stands in stark contrast to Babehami’s own sense of familiarity with the space of the courtroom: “Babehami knew exactly what to do; it was not the first time that he had given evidence. He was quite at ease when he made the affirmation that he would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” (191). Not only does this point towards the headman’s experience in these circumstances, as well as his complete ease with perjury, but it reminds us once again of the proliferation of documents in the novel. The courtroom scenes carry within them the invisible form of these, hinted at, but not always mentioned.

Babehami’s oath must have been sworn on, if not a Bible, then some other book of equitable authority. The entire court scene proceedings would also have been recorded in the form of a case report. This becomes particularly important when we examine the reiteration of the necessity of “evidence” in the courtroom. Within this space, only when proof is substantiated and takes the material form of a recorded, written testimony, does it become true. Against Babehami’s trumped-up story, Babun struggles to find “evidence” to prove not only his innocence, but also the deceitful nature of the headman and his plot for revenge. That “[n]o one will give evidence against the headman” (196) is undeniable.

The magistrate who records Silindu’s confession of murder is perhaps the only person in the novel who realises that things are not all that they seem. While the evidence against Silindu is damning, it contains within it a history of cruelty, hunger, and exploitation that cannot be recorded in bureaucratic documents, and yet is no less true for it. This contradictory quality of paperwork, what David Dery calls “papereality,” creates a universe

in which the “world of symbols, or written representations . . . take precedence over the things and events represented” (Dery 678). So while later in the novel when Silindu is on trial for shooting Babehami and Fernando, the magistrate confesses that he ““shouldn’t want to hang Silindu of Beddagama for killing your rascally headman”” (246) and that “[t]here is almost certainly something behind this case which has not come out,”” there is little he can do to prevent the hanging. What becomes clearer as a result of these episodes is that there is a definite gap between truth and reality on the one hand, and the perception of these on the other. The incommensurability of circumstance, character and evidence, is one that the material document cannot bear up.

Six Acres and a Third also reminds us of the document’s juxtaposition of fact, rumour and complete falsehood, which also comes to a climax in the court scenes of that novel. Once again, this plays out around the veracity of bureaucracy or more specifically in this case, the legal document. Here, the complex set of connections between testimony, reports, attestations and signatures—interdependencies between documents—works to problematise the transparency not only of the transcription of events and speech into writing, but also the claimed neutrality of law itself. Once again, paper and its realities cannot bear the weight of too much contradiction.

Key to this is the question of evidence. Reports, witness statements and depositions abound in the three chapters that culminate in the trial of Mangaraj for the murder of his tenants, Saria and Bhagia. We are told that thirty-two witnesses are called on to give testimonies that are recorded over two days, though, as the novel proceeds, the number of reliable witnesses fluctuates in the munshi’s statements, dropping finally to four. Reluctance, force and coercion all come together to provide the reader with the few depositions to which s/he is given privileged access.

Of particular interest is the manner in which these depositions are recorded. The novel reproduces for its readers proformas on which witness statements are recorded. These present themselves as ethnographic documents, revealing each witness's caste, age, occupation, village, subdivision and district, reminding the reader of the very wide range of communities and social classes from which they have been drawn. It is these records that truly shape our reception of the document as a material object. The witness form that we are shown, for example, is first presented as a copy of the actual document, substantiated by the fact that the statements are quotations, suggesting an exact transcription of the oral statement. It is only after four such statements that the narrator sneakily tells us "[w]e have, unfortunately, had to leave out many things, are only able to provide a summary of his deposition" (163). We realise in retrospect that this probably holds true for all the statements that precede this point, and those that may follow after. While the narrator keeps reassuring us that he has obtained "duly attested copies" of various reports written in conjunction with Mangaraj's trial, we are only ever shown summaries or extracts from these, deployed, revealed or withheld, much in the way in which the munshi is fleetingly accused of "tailoring" the witness statements to suit his report. So, while the report states that "it has been firmly established that these four men were eyewitnesses to this murder," a quiet "may the mistakes in this report be graciously forgiven" (170) also finds its way into the text. The material report that the narrator claims to have in his possession is constantly hidden, and substituted with tantalising hints at what it may contain.

Similarly, some material documents take precedence over others. This is particularly seen in the callousness of the English magistrate who makes a brief appearance in the novel. The narrator wryly comments: "[w]henver a criminal case was scheduled to be heard, the Sahib would open an English newspaper and read it, or leisurely write a letter . . . All he did was sign the documents recording the depositions of the witnesses and pronounce the

judgment” (175–76). The legal space is thus overrun with documents that do not strictly belong to there, that compete with those that do, and that, symbolically, through the magistrate’s indifference, oust them.

Key to any reading of the legal document is the question of attestation. The obsession with the document that has been stamped by a government authority filters into *Six Acres and a Third* through questions about the authenticity of the witness statements collected in preparation for Mangaraj’s trial. While the narrator slyly slips stories of witness intimidation and tampering to us, the deposition statements are all declared to be convincingly true, largely because of the signed declaration that accompanies each. How does the signature, as an act of guaranteeing, frame the relationship between identity and the document? At one level, of course, it introduces to us standard questions of writing, literacy and agency. It is important that the method of signing that the witnesses use changes not only according to social class, but also according to gender. The only two signatures that are inked names written in full are Mangaraj’s and Baidhar Mohanty’s, suggesting a certain social and class position, and access to literacy. Both the women whose depositions are reproduced for us, those of Champa and Marua, are attested with the imprint of their rings—indicated by a circular stamp under the statement. Not only does this remind us that both of these women are representatively illiterate, it replaces the impersonal inked signature with a mark of the body, which is, through the impression of their rings, directly on the paper statement, tying them to their speech in a much more fundamentally material manner.

More interesting perhaps are the three signatures from Bana Jena and Dhakei Jena, the farmhands, and Khatu Chand, the weaver. Substituting for each signature is a symbol: in the case of the farmhands, a stick; and in the case of the weaver, a U, which the narrator tells us is a boat. At one level, there is a clear ethnographic explanation behind this. Turning to William Herschel’s pioneering study on the role of fingerprinting in identification, *The*

Origin of Finger-printing (1916), we see that in colonial Bengal, caste, and by extension, identity, was expressed through the drawing of symbols that linked one to one's profession. A barber, for example, would be represented by a mirror; a shopkeeper by a pair of scales (Herschel 36). This, Herschel suggests, is, within the hierarchy of writing, more "ambitious" than providing an impression of just the tip of the finger (*tep-sai*) or a simple cross in ink (*dhera-sai*) (37).¹⁸

What arises out of this, a question that Herschel does not address, is that the use of symbols instead of signatures undoes the unique property of validation that comes with the latter. The stick at the end of Bana Jena's statement does little to differentiate itself from Dhakei Jena's, a substitution of one man's deposition for the other by a quick switching of their names would not be altogether impossible or difficult. The signature's ultimate performative property, of supplementing presence in a repetitive and timeless manner, thus stands imbued with a level of uncertainty in the novel.¹⁹ *Six Acres and a Third's* obsession with the authentic document reminds us that the signature destabilises, ironically enough, that to which it supposedly lends veracity.

¹⁸ Signing with a cross can also be seen in the petitions I examined from colonial Ceylon.

In the case of *Six Acres and a Third*, the stick that both of the farmers use to attest their depositions could easily stand for some sort of cultivation implement, though the link between the boat and the weaver is somewhat more unclear.

¹⁹ This, as Bhavani Raman's study of early nineteenth-century Tamil Nadu demonstrates, has a particularly colonial context. Writing of concerns regarding forgeries and false signatures, Raman argues that the authenticity of the document becomes more tenuous largely because of the different modes of attestation to which it was open. For example, a person of note could validate a document, which would override any doubts regarding the authenticity of the signature it bore, creating endless possibilities for bureaucratic mischief (137–61).

In modern South Asia, as Francis Cody's detailed case study of the practice of petitioning and literacy drives in rural Tamil Nadu demonstrates, fingerprinting instead of signing is looked upon as a sign of extreme backwardness, with common slogans such as "This is the time of footprints on the moon/Shame on you for using your thumbprint!" circulating among the rural community (359).

iv. Stamped and Unstamped

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Fig. 2.1. A gun license signed by Leonard Woolf, 1909. File 27/399. Photo courtesy of National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo. Note the attested stamp in the bottom left-hand corner.

The question of the material document as official document re-emerges in the specific case of the gun license (fig 2.1). The obtaining of gun licenses is a major concern not only in *The Village in the Jungle*, but across all kinds of bureaucratic documents in early twentieth-century Ceylon. At one level, the license reaffirms many of the characteristics of material bureaucracy that this chapter has already discussed. It stands as a document that authorises the possession and use of firearms and is thus once again a sign of the regulatory control of the colonial government. At another level, this assertion of control also makes it susceptible to the difficulties of negotiating the boundaries of the official and the unofficial.

An excellent example of this is a file from the Hambantota district, “Missing stamps on gun licenses issued by AGA on circuit” (file 27/715 G 261). According to the first document in the file dated 19 March 1913, a large number of the gun licenses issued in the

district were not properly validated—they were missing the necessary revenue stamps. Orders were circulated, calling for a systematic examination of all the licenses in the district, but these efforts were quickly foiled by the non-cooperation of the village headmen, who claimed that the villagers had gone for chena cultivation and taken their licenses with them. Further investigation in East Giruwa Pattu, a region in the district, revealed a second twist to the problem—the revenue stamps had, in some cases, been affixed to the counterfoils of some licenses, rather than to the licenses themselves (8 May 1914). Despite the careful paper trail of empire, the situation was not helped by claims that no one remembered exactly what had happened in their districts (29 Mar. 1915). Matters came to a head when a letter was received from G.F. Roberts, an official who was the AGA at the time the licenses in question were issued, in which he summarised the situation:

In view, however, of the fact that the kachcheri Mudaliyar stated definitely that the stamps were affixed to the licenses, whereas the investigation revealed that they were not so affixed, I am not at all satisfied with the decision [simply to recall the faulty licenses]. The stamps were issued by me and were affixed to the licenses by the kachcheri Mudaliyar, yet are not to be found on the licenses. It would not appear to be a difficult task to trace exactly why the stamps do not appear on the licenses, and what became of them. (5 Jul. 1915)

While Roberts clearly implies that the Mudaliyar has stolen the stamps, my concern here is not merely that this is an example of the corruption of the petty government official. Rather, I suggest that file 27/715 G 261 highlights the insidious relationship between the official and the unofficial in the colonial world. This can be seen primarily in the connection between the licenses and the stamps. The stamp gives the gun license its legitimating power; without a stamp, it is little more than a piece of paper. This becomes almost a parody in the case of the stamped counterfoils. This could have happened either due to simple carelessness or in a crafty effort to make sure that, along with the counterfoils, the stamps remained with the headmen in question. Either way, what this seemingly simple confusion would have occasioned is to allow the shadow of the original license, the counterfoil, to masquerade as

real and authentic, in what becomes an ironic statement on the fluid nature of bureaucratic rules and protocol.

What of the missing revenue stamps? This brings us to a crucial question that extends across the British empire in the nineteenth century, that of forgery. Bhavani Raman, writing of the difficulties of verifying signatures in nineteenth-century Tamil Nadu, cites the 1811 Bengal Regulations on Forgery as encompassing “[a]ll fraudulent and injurious fabrications or alterations of written deeds or written or printed papers, counterfeit seals, or signatures and the illicit imitation of any public stamp or stamped paper established by the government” (145). Reading this as a specific form of the relationship between institutions, practices and the circulation of capital, I turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu to understand the interactions of the “authentic” and the forged. The bureaucratic state, Bourdieu suggests, is based on the fundamentally misleading premise of its neutrality; that it stands for the universal, rather than the particular, good of society. The result of this, as we have seen from the example of Woolf’s novel, is not merely the problematic absolute authority of the state, but the much more deep-seated concern mirrored in the realisation that “when it comes to the state, one never doubts enough” (Bourdieu 36). Of course, as Bourdieu goes on to argue across much of his theoretical work, this is a reflection of the bureaucratic state’s power to “produce and impose . . . categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world—including the state itself” (35). It also prevents us from reading the subtle manipulation of both symbolic and informational capital as hidden gestures of the state to control, unify and totalise people, categories and knowledge in acts of silent domination. Behind every product of the state is the:

mobiliz[ation] [of] a symbolic capital accumulated in and through the whole network of relations of recognition constitutive of the bureaucratic universe. Who certifies the validity of the certificate? It is the one who signs the credential giving license to certify. But who then certifies this? We are carried through an infinite regression at the end of which “one has to stop” and where one could, following medieval theologians, choose to give the name of “state” to the last (or to the first)

link in the long chain of official acts of consecration. It is the state, acting in the manner of a bank of symbolic capital, that guarantees all acts of authority—acts at once arbitrary and misrecognized as such . . . (Bourdieu 51)

These are “official” acts of discourse, effective because the signatories are given a certain authority by their positions in the state, and the documents that issue from this, as Bourdieu argues, become institutors of socially guaranteed identities. One must exist on paper to exist at all.

The misplaced stamps therefore create a loophole that Bourdieu’s analysis anticipates. Presumably the stamps in question had been kept by the headmen for their personal use—to authorise illicit documents they may have wanted to distribute without paying the requisite tax or fee. With a revenue stamp affixed to it, such a document would have all the markers of a truly authorised “official” document. A possibility like this once again shores up the limits of bureaucratic power that, in this case, itself creates possibilities for its own subversion.

Let us consider this subversion more carefully, by examining what other purpose a forged document could have in colonial space. It has been suggested that this practice of duplication disturbs the assumed relationship between the counterfeit and the authentic, the copy and the original. For one, a forged document, as Akhil Gupta argues, does not necessarily mean that the act to which it attests is untrue, and this holds even more in a context in which documents are routinely not delivered or collected, lost or damaged (229–31). But while, as both Veena Das and Akhil Gupta note, forgeries of this sort can be used to challenge authoritarian state practices (227; 227–28), it is important to see how they can also create smaller pockets of oppression. In the case of the gun licenses, for example, the theft of the revenue stamps leads to the construction of an alternative power hierarchy. While the headmen “subvert” the state-given right to attest and verify, this subversion is simply for personal gain, rather than in anti-governmental protest. Undermining the power of the state is

only a means of consolidating local power, and directing it towards the unsuspecting and helpless inhabitants of their villages. In doing so, new spaces of domination are created.

The relationship between the official and unofficial does not, of course, only play out at the level of documents. Instead, as we will now see, these get imbricated in complex networks of pleading, promises and bribes, which crucially shape bureaucratic outcomes. Far from an impersonal, mechanical Weberian system, *The Village in the Jungle* presents us with a documentary machine saturated with fraught affective relationships.

Excellent examples of this can be found in the interactions and manipulations of Babehami, the village headman in *The Village in the Jungle*. While we are told by the narrator that he can write his own name (having learnt to do so quite by accident), Babehami is, for all practical purposes, illiterate. Nevertheless, he quickly learns to take advantage of the illegibility of state practices. The ability to do so not only comes from his position as the local “big man;” indeed, it is this ability that legitimises that position. This makes him particularly mobile. On the one hand, his power is, as Veena Das and Deborah Poole write in another context, personalised, consolidated by the soliciting of favours and the acceptance of bribes (“State and its Margins” 14). The villagers astutely realise that while “[with] the traders in Kamburupitiya the transactions were purely matters of business . . . with the headman . . . they were something more” (32). On the other, he remains the representative of the shadowy, neutral state. He vacillates and arbitrates thus, between the legal and the extralegal, the official and the unofficial, according to his needs (Das and Poole, “State and its Margins” 14).

The villagers soon realise that pleasing Babehami automatically implies the protection of their own interests, even as this arises from a complex interaction of threat and blackmail:

It was a very good thing for Babehami, the Arachchi,²⁰ to feel that Silindu owed him many kurunies of kurakkan which he could not repay. When Babehami

²⁰ Village headman.

wanted someone to clear a chena for him, he asked Silindu to do it; and Silindu, remembering the debt, dared not refuse . . . And Babehami was a quiet, cunning man in the village: he never threatened, and rarely talked of his loans to his debtors, but there were few in the village who dared to cross him, and who did not feel hanging over them the power of the little man. (32–33)

The implicit threat is, of course, the withdrawal of such support, and that is precisely where the dramatic impetus of the novel lies. Such a moment is introduced to us by the narrator, who tells us that according to colonial regulations, every individual in Ceylon must pay what is rather dubiously termed a “body tax.” This is soon revealed to be part of an elaborate scheme to obtain free labour: defaulters have to work on public projects such as road construction. Moreover, we are told that Babehami usually takes further advantage of the penniless villagers, offering to pay their taxes for them and then demanding repayment with exorbitant interest. A shift comes about when all of a sudden he uncharacteristically refuses to pay Silindu’s tax on his behalf. This becomes an increasingly common phenomenon, best portrayed in the novel in a moment when Babehami presses him to get a license for his gun. His answer to Silindu’s pleas of not having enough money to pay for one is the obstinate “[i]t is the order of Government” (38).

Babehami’s insistence on the matter of the gun license is one of the first instances in which he embraces the immutability of colonial law, fulfilling his task as headman and representative of the government. We would do better than to believe that this change is out of deference. Instead, his exaggerated insistence disguises the fact that this is the most effective way in which, at the time, he can exploit Silindu. An excessive adherence to the rules does not, in this case, consolidate their power but quite contrarily, appropriates them as tools to reinforce Babehami’s own position. The gun license’s presence, legitimising Silindu’s possession of a weapon, thus stands as a material reminder not only of the colonial attempt to categorise and codify, but rather, within the logic of the novel, of Babehami’s own machinations, and of favour lost.

Here we must keep in mind that the complete dependence of the villagers on the headman is not entirely fictional. Leonard Woolf's administrative diaries, meticulously kept bureaucratic documents themselves, contain an unusually sensitive passage about chena permits and the callousness of bureaucratic middle-men. On 18 January 1909 he wrote:

. . . [t]he sins of the headmen are frequently and unfortunately necessarily visited upon the villages, e.g. in East Giruwa Pattu last year one vidane arachchi failed to send in his list of chena applications by the due date—consequently in that V.A.'s [vidane arachchi's] division no chena permits were issued. The result is that a villager in that division must either lose all opportunity of a chena crop or chena illicitly and pay double rent. Of course, one is told at once that the villagers did not apply in time: but it is the V.A. who knows the date by which applications should be in and if he does his work properly the villager will apply in time. This is a case of “the house that jack [sic] built.” The villager does not apply because the V.A. is slack and the V.A. is slack because the Mudaliyar is slack. (*Diaries* 42–43)

While, of course, Woolf's frustrated comment highlights the fractures in the native colonial hierarchy, this should not obscure the fact that a well-established system of checks and balances, whatever its effectiveness, did exist to keep government-employed officials in place. This was in the form of conduct registers—large, unwieldy volumes maintained by the offices of the Assistant Government Agents of each district. There was a register for each province, and several pages for each official employed—policemen, Mudaliyars, Vidane Arachchis—noting, from the time of their employment to its termination or conclusion, all the “rewards” and “punishments” they received for their actions. These ranged from giving false evidence in court to sending requested information and reports late. Meticulous detail characterised the maintenance of these registers, with the dates, circumstances and details of actions and their consequences noted. We also see that officials are dismissed for every single one of Babehami's connivances.²¹

²¹ In my reading of historical scholarship on British Rule in Ceylon, I have been unable to find any details regarding official conduct registers. A chance mention in the set of petitions regarding misappropriated buffaloes in the National Archives, Colombo, of the Mudaliyar's misdemeanour being entered in a “blacklist” pointed me to their existence, after which I was able to examine one such register from the West Giruwa Pattu province of the Hambantota District extensively. See File 27/529.

Woolf's comment makes it clear that while in most cases, the difficulties of village life could be attributed to the village headman, the very process of bureaucracy made this impossible to determine. Not only was laziness reinforced by a hierarchical chain of commands (villager to Arachchi to Mudaliyar), one had to make do with the "official" reasons provided for various inconsistencies. "The villagers did not apply in time" is clearly not the whole story. Any attempt to assert an alternative story meant being swamped by "peons and clerks and headmen" (Woolf, *Village in the Jungle* 182). This highlights yet another crucial element of the peasant's relationship with colonial rule—it is not the white British official who is his direct enemy, but the petty native ones who prevent access to him. As we will see in the next section, this took yet another documentary form: that of the petition.

v. "The Daily Tangle of Red Tape"²²

Woolf's comment on the difficulties of village life is most succinctly expressed in a brief encounter in *The Village in the Jungle*. When Silindu and Babun go to Kamburupitiya to register a complaint regarding the confiscation of their chena by Fernando and Babehami, they meet a Moorman who helps them draw up an official petition to submit to the relevant government office. He is, however, sceptical about its outcome, and tells the two men

I should like to stop that swine's [Fernando's] game. But it is difficult. One wants time. We must send a petition; the Agent Hamadoru²³ would stop it if he knew. But there are always peons and clerks and headmen in the way before you can get to him. Cents here and cents there, and delays and inquiries! You want time, and we haven't got it. (182)

²² On 26 January 1905, Woolf wrote to Lytton Strachey, his most regular correspondent in the Ceylon years: "[y]our letter came today, as it always does, among petitions and drafts and reports and the daily tangle of red tape" (*Letters* 76).

²³ Assistant Government Agent.

The Moorman's statement is an excellent starting point for this section, for it not only introduces another crucial colonial bureaucratic document—the petition—but also the extensive network of individuals who mediate the relationship of the petitioner and the petitioned, the “peons and clerks and headmen” who were seen to block the honest subject's access to justice.²⁴

Petitions are among the most common bureaucratic forms encountered in the Ceylon archive. As some of the best preserved historical sources across the world, they provide an excellent entry point into how ordinary citizens perceived their government.²⁵ From medieval Europe to contemporary Pakistan, the petition is characterised by the fact that it is a universal tool. Anyone can file one, articulating the “indisputable right of the meanest subject” (Zaret 86). Therefore it participates in a global history of asking for that to which one is entitled, albeit through certain established norms of form and address.²⁶

In the National Archives in Colombo, petitions are recorded and stored in two different ways. Most of those raising matters that were brought to a quick and easy resolution, and therefore did not extend beyond two or three written exchanges, have been bound together with other petitions from the same year, or a period of two or three years (indicated on the front page of the ledger). This allows the researcher to flip through these as a petition book of sorts. In the case of more detailed petitions that required communication

²⁴ In fact, the only person in *The Village in the Jungle* who manages to extract information out of a peon without bribing him is Silindu's daughter and Babun's wife, Punchi Menika, who asks if her husband, who was incarcerated on trumped up charges by Babehami and Fernando, has died. The peon, perhaps surprised and uncertain of how to react to the entry of a woman into a bureaucratic space, confirms that he has, even though Punchi Menika has no money to give him (298–300).

²⁵ Akhil Gupta makes a distinction between complaints, “a demand to redress wrongs committed by a person in power” and petitions, “written by supplicants who desire to obtain something as a favour” (167). By these definitions, the documents I discuss here are complaints, even though they draw on the rhetorical characteristics of the petition. However, in the National Archives, these files are all labelled as petitions and to avoid confusion, I will follow that nomenclature in this chapter.

²⁶ There is no dearth of historical scholarship on petitioning. The practice dates back to medieval Europe, and, as Hull writes, in South Asia, petitioning was by no means just a product of colonialism. It was very much an established practice in the early modern period. Many of these traditions, particularly questions of address, carried on into the nineteenth century, where they were translated and adapted to the more bureaucratic medium for which the colonial office called. See Hull, *Government of Paper* 66–111 for a review of scholarship that deals with the question of address and the petition. See also, Bayly, Raman, and Siddiqi.

For histories of petitioning in Europe, see Heerma van Voss, ed., and Zaret.

and investigation by the AGA's office over an extended period of time, all such correspondence has been kept in the original, and now decrepit, files, and serially ordered in the archival record. The clusters of documents that make up these files are of particular importance to the study of material form, not only because they remind us of the written networks of circulating information that bureaucracy necessitates and nurtures, but also the uniformity that these documents exhibit.

At a fundamental level, the efficacy of bureaucracy is highlighted in the stationery on which bureaucratic reports were written. Take for example, the range of forms that exist in a single file. File 27/745 G 32, on which the discussion in this section will hinge, is comprised of three different government forms. General 5 (EF2) is a simple letter form with boxes for the details of the addressee, the addresser, the subject of the letter, a reference number. It even has, as expected, a pre-printed address and conclusion: "Sir, I have the honour to—" and "I am Sir, Your obedient servant." General 17 (F2*), titled "Report on Petition," includes spaces for the date of the petition, a reference number, and a blank area for the narrative to come. Finally, General 18 (F2*) is blank, to be used to inform petitioners of the results of their suits. Even as this preponderance of bureaucratic paraphernalia draws on the power of the government institution, it also restricts the narrative forms in which this is expressed. As Lisa Gitelman notes of pre-printed documents in the nineteenth-century United States, such "blanks" invite very specific comments, working to "shape and enable, to define and delimit, the transactions in which they were deployed" (12).²⁷ So even as they do contain space for the elaboration of the nature of the complaint, official forms such as the ones I describe above reinforce a Weberian notion of bureaucracy by not only determining modes of expression, but also by ensuring that these can be repeatedly deployed across a variety of contexts.

²⁷ Of course, this was not always true. As Peter McDonald shows in the context of South African apartheid literary censors, the specific demands of the bureaucratic form were often displaced by long paragraphs of prose, becoming a space for the expression of personal views, in his case, on the value of literary writing (46–47).

My discussion of petitions here focuses on a specific example from the Hambantota district, File 27/745 G32. On 6 July 1906, a petition was received by the AGA's office. According to the two petitioners, Palawinnege Babun Appu and Manage Babehami, on 22 June, three government officials, the Constable Arachchi²⁸ of Kanukaligampalla, the police officer of Lunama and the acting police officer of Batata, "wrongfully unlawfully and maliciously with intent to cause wrongful loss and damage to the petitioners and without any just and reasonable cause, seized and took into their charge and custody the 103 head of buffaloe [sic] cattle" which were being driven back from muddying paddy fields in Tihawa. It was claimed that eleven of these were stolen. The petitioners argued that they had permits to drive the cattle, but the headman they were brought before declared that these were not signed, as they should have been, by the Mudaliyar²⁹ of West Giruwa Pattu (a fact later repeated in correspondence with the AGA). The two men then got the permits duly signed and endorsed, but were dismayed when the headman not only charged them for the upkeep of their cattle while the animals were in custody (a regular practice), but also confiscated five of the buffaloes, presumably for himself. With the hope that "justice may be administered," the wronged men had a petition drawn up and submitted to the AGA.

The second document in the file is a report from the village Mudaliyar, dated 9 July 1906. In this version of the incident, he stated that he heard of a large number of cattle passing through the area, and so sent officials to check whether or not the owners had the requisite permits. On doing so, it was discovered that the cattle drivers had a *report* granting them the transport of forty-one cattle (a number much lower than their estimated 103), countersigned by the Vidane Arachchi³⁰ of Galagam. The men were told that they had a report, and not a permit, and when they failed to rectify this mistake within a stipulated period of time, a fine was imposed on them.

²⁸ Head police officer.

²⁹ A Tamil caste with a long-standing tradition of acting as native informants to colonial powers.

³⁰ A village headman, but lower than an arachchi.

What the file immediately highlights is the number of people the single problem of the misappropriated buffaloes brought together. While Matthew Hull suggests that the form of the petition links three main sets of people: the citizen, the bureaucrat and the supplicant (*Government of Paper* 93), what the example of File 27/745 G32 does, as perhaps many such colonial files do, is demonstrate how the very nature of the bureaucratic process could extend that network to encompass a busy traffic of material documents, notes and files, between multiple levels of intermediaries who did not necessarily mark their presence in writing. In the case of the file in question, for example, we have the two petitioners, the scribe who drew up the petition (whose name is untidily and illegibly scrawled under theirs), the AGA, the headman who submitted his report and assessment of the situation, various clerks who replied to the AGA's written queries on the documents in the margins of the documents, not to mention the peons who would have carried the file from office to office, and from person to person. Each time a document passed through a writing subject's hands, however, it came to bear the marks of its having been read, creating a bureaucratic space in the margins of documents to the exclusion of the petitioners. For example, a form entitled "Report on Petition," drawn up on 22 August 1906 in response to the AGA's order to investigate whether or not the petitioners were indeed overcharged by the Mudaliyar (and containing a statement from him that they were not), bears dated signatures (10 and 13 September 1906) that are well after the date it was drawn up, each marking a reader's appraisal of the document (fig. 2.2., p. 127).

While each document was thus read multiple times, often by more than one reader, it is important to note that the petitions, reports and letters in the file did not exist independently of each other. One document spurred on the need for another; each was constantly cited by others through cross-references. This is further complicated by the marginalia that each document bears. An unlabelled report dated 20 September 1906 concluded that the Mudaliyar

had, indeed, clearly “not acted fairly” and had overcharged the cattle-drivers. The report was annotated by the AGA, who dated his comment “I concur,” and ordered that the money be

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Fig. 2.2. “Report on Petition,” 22 Aug. 1906. File 27/745 G 32.
Photo courtesy of National Archives of Sri Lanka, Colombo.
Note the two dates and margin notes.

refunded, to which another comment replied, “[a]ttended to.” While it is possible that the same document did not pass through the AGA’s hands again after his orders had been stated, the second “attended to” puts the matter to rest, as well as on record, to avoid possible complications in the future.

A useful perspective on these writing practices can be found in Ann Laura Stoler’s work on archives pertaining to the Dutch East Indies. She suggests that margin notes and footnotes are potential sites of colonial fracture, as they reveal the “hesitant” control and the “uncertain knowledge” of colonial rulers:

[w]hat was written in prescribed form and in the archive's margins, what was written oblique to official prescriptions and on the ragged edges of protocol produced the administrative apparatus as it opened to a space that extended beyond it. Contrapuntal intrusions emanated from outside the corridors of governance but they also erupted—and were centrally located—within that sequestered space” (*Along the Archival Grain 2*).

While my research has not uncovered any such idiosyncrasies, this is not to say that they do not exist in the Ceylon archive. Stoler's lines, nevertheless, remind us of how bureaucratic documents are far from being stable sites of ideological and writerly expression. Instead, the continuing conversations that took place on each document in the file turn the paper objects on which these were being carried out into more than just the bearers of static, unchanging information. With the comments contradicting or concurring with the core substance of the documents in question, these become almost palimpsestic in nature—writing, erasing and rewriting the actual narrative of the incident—and destabilising the security that words on paper, often irrationally, seem to give us. Only when the file would have been laid to rest (as per the uniform instructions on its cover: “[w]hen not in use to be at once placed in Current Records Almirah in Pigeon Hole”) would its materiality lose its protean quality. These are documents that grew, and whose narratives were asserted and reasserted over a period of time, making them fluid spaces of meaning-making.

The series of petitions provides us with an opportunity to consider the relationship between the oral and the written that was first broached in Silindu's encounter with the moneylender's notebook. It challenges the basis of what de Certeau has called the scriptural economy—the inevitable overreliance on the written word that constitutes a society's progress into modernity. JoAnne Yates's study of corporations and documentary systems of control suggests a linear movement from orality to writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (xv). Instead, File 27/745 G 32 calls for, (as no doubt other files in the archive also do), an expansion of the bureaucratic scriptural economy to include not only a

unique range of manuscript (the handwritten report and notes) and print (the pre-printed forms and letterheads which invited the handwritten comments), but also orality. The first petition, drawn up by a scribe, highlights the transformation of an oral story, here of injustice and theft, into written form. It stands in for the petitioners' testimony; it is their presence-in-absence. Similarly, the marginal notes I discuss above not only substitute for conversations through script, they also draw our attention to exchanges that took place over documents, even as they did not find their way into their written narratives.

Finally, I turn to a comment that the Mudaliyar made in his report to the AGA, which acquires particular resonance in the study of historical documents. He stated that while the documents that the cattle-drivers have was supposedly signed, the signature was completely "illegible." The difficulty of negotiating poor handwriting is every historian's nightmare, (not the least my own when going through hundreds of pages of scrawls in the National Archives). Most colonial bureaucratic documents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were primarily written by hand (another way of determining an approximate number of readers of any given document), creating possible technical obstacles to reading. In *Indian Ink*, the difficulties that poor handwriting presents, alternatively, work to Krupa's advantage. He spends many hours in the Balasore government office "making fair copies of letters in his best handwriting;" we are reminded that "typewriters were not known then in Balasore" (21). His daily tasks involve keeping up office routine: posting the letters the Sahib has signed, loading files that need to be looked over by him into a sack to be sent to his bungalow. As the novel progresses, this careful craft of writing is quickly replaced by the typewriter, and once again, Krupa distinguishes himself by learning shorthand from an American Missionary organisation and becoming the Sahib's stenographer.

The question of handwriting comes back into the novel towards the end, in the course of a fleeting but telling episode in the office. Krupa is no longer the shy, cowering junior

clerk, afraid of cutting corners and refusing to leave for the day unless instructed to do so. A Rai Gopal Krishna Mahanty comes to Krupa with a problem of some seriousness. The daughter of the magistrate of his village has given birth, and since her husband died some time ago, there are suspicions regarding the legitimacy of the child. Concealing a birth, particularly an illegitimate one, is a punishable offence. Asked to investigate the matter, Mahanty's fears are confirmed, yet he dares not to submit a false report concealing the magistrate's misdemeanour. Krupa's advice is simple and comes to him easily:

“[Y]ou will write a report, and you will not have it fair-copied or typed by one of the clerks, but you will submit it to the Sahib in your own handwriting, which is exceedingly bad. And when the Sahib sees it, he will call me, and he will say, ‘Babu, I can’t read this muck. Take it away and type a copy.’ And in typing a copy I shall change the name of the month in which the lady’s husband died, so as to make it appear that he might have been the father of the child. And if the change is found out, I shall take the blame on myself and say that I made a mistake in copying, because your handwriting is so exceedingly bad.” (117)

Two points of importance arise from this passage. The first, quite obviously, is the ease with which Krupa devises this solution to the Mahanty's problem. Not only do the various parts of the scheme flow into each other seamlessly, Krupa also accurately anticipates how they will work, as the novel proves; he even has a back-up plan should he be discovered.

The second is less obvious but takes us back to the importance of the materiality of the document. The report that Mahanty submits to the Sahib's office is written by him, is not read by the Sahib, and is then passed on to Krupa, who types it and returns it to the Sahib. In the process, the document undergoes a series of changes that are central to Krupa's scheme. The “exceedingly bad handwriting” of Mahanty becomes the propelling force here, the catalyst that spurs on this bureaucratic chain reaction of events. We understand from Krupa's instructions that it is no longer customary practice to submit handwritten documents to the office, and that the reintroduction of an older material practice is simply to allow the sort of subtle manipulation that will ensure the success of his scheme. Playing on writing's status as a vehicle of the truth, Krupa takes advantage of the fact that the Sahib believes that the written

word, in Mahanty's handwriting, will translate accurately into the uniform word of the typed page with which Krupa is ordered to provide him. He assumes that the process is one of transcription rather than transformation. Taking advantage of the fact that behind each document are "hundreds or thousands or hundreds of thousands more opportunities to misspell a word, miscalculate a number, misread a blank, misunderstand an instruction, misaddress an envelope" (Kafka, *Demon of Writing* 10), Krupa's scheme enacts a strange reversal, acting on not just paperwork's unpredictability, but also on the unpredictable nature of the handwritten document itself. In its various forms, it emerges as a palimpsest, on which different versions of Mahanty's story are written, erased and rewritten. The original document displaying the truth cannot be read—poor handwriting being the obstacle—and when it is made legible by Krupa's typing, it only hides the truth.³¹

Indian Ink reveals that Silindu's contrasting and unsuccessful attempts to work his way around bureaucratic practice (blocked by Babehami's reluctance) is not a typical case of peasant experience in South Asia. In a recent PhD thesis, Uday Chandra has demonstrated, in the case of India and in the particular circumstances of the Santal Hul of 1855, that contrary to popular Subaltern Studies readings, such a revolt arose not from a spontaneous moment of radical peasant consciousness or religiosity, but rather from the long-term grievance that in the fight against landlords and moneylenders, middle-men were blocking their access to justice.³² This can be traced, as Chandra's archival work demonstrates, to a long history of negotiation with the colonial state, largely through the form of the petition (125–38). Ceylon and the Hambantota district are no exception. Records at the National Archives in Colombo

³¹ A similar moment occurs in Senapati's *My Times and I* (1985). Writing of his experience as a legal assistant, he says, "in one of the cases I had decided, there had been an appeal. When about to send the file to the higher court, I had noticed the sheet was almost illegible because of numerous crossings-out. I had torn the sheet up and rewritten the sentence legibly on a fresh one." He quickly goes on to say, however, that "I had of course not changed the wording" (72).

³² Briefly, the Santal Hul was a "tribal" rebellion in Bengal against the atrocities of local *zamindars* and moneylenders. Extensive research on the incident has been conducted in South Asian colonial historiography, which Chandra examines in depth. See for example, Guha, Chakrabarty, and P. Banerjee, "Historic Acts," *Politics of Time*.

today reveal that huge numbers of petitions were filed. Woolf certainly complained about the constant stream of papers with which he was confronted daily.³³

Contrary to what *The Village in the Jungle* would have us believe, a close examination of the petitions submitted to the AGA's office reveals numerous examples of bureaucratic manipulation by peasants. I will describe two of these here. The first example returns to File 27/745 G 32, in which an illuminating turn of events provides a useful counterpoint to the official discourse of the other reports in the file. In a second follow-up petition, sent by only one of the petitioners, Babun, the following was cheekily suggested:

[W]ith the greatest deference . . . your Honor [sic] [the AGA] will not be able to hit at the truth by an inquiry from the Mudaliyar alone. If the constable Arachchy [Arachchi] of Kanukitigama and acting Police commissioner of Batatta are examined on a day to be appointed for their examination, and the Vidane Arachchy [Arachchi] of Modanagama division and the police officer of Lumana are examined on a different day [,] giving no room for the two sets of headmen to arrange among themselves the replies they should give at their examination, whole truth is sure to come out. (8 Sep. 1906)

The request, it seems, was not considered, though the dispute was resolved in favour of the petitioners, and the officials were suitably chastised.

Another important example is from a petition submitted by a villager from Tissamaharama, accusing the headman of carrying a gun without a license. He vociferously stated that he saw the headman then bury the gun to hide it, and concluded the petition with the meaningful "I therefore beg that you may be pleased to enquire into the above matter and though he being a headman, I am of the opinion that he has no right to use a firearm without a

³³ This is a constant refrain in Woolf's letters to Strachey. On 17 November 1905, he wrote: "I am sick of Salt and Relief works, of the births of illegitimate children, the deaths of venereal old men" (*Letters* 107). Earlier in the year, on Pongal (a festival celebrated on 14 or 15 January each year), he wrote: "[a]nd the insanity of the work! Signing letters and issuing licenses, and counting and receiving rupees, inspecting carriages, trying and fining miserable wretches, answering petitions, checking accounts which I don't understand, deciding questions about salt and coolies and family quarrels, and irrigating and injustices, I began work yesterday at 7.30 AM and only finished at five" (*Letters* 73).

license, if I am not mistaken” (26 Apr. 1911). The accusation, investigation revealed, was a false one.³⁴

I want to step back from these examples for a moment, and consider not only how they support a historical argument against the naiveté of the peasant, but also how they remind us of the limits of literacy. While my arguments earlier in this chapter highlighted how literacy was circumscribed by the oral, here, I suggest here that its social and cultural importance, as a means of upliftment, needs to be qualified as well. In the work of anthropologists in the 1960s and 70s, most prominently Jack Goody, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Walter Ong, the ability to read and write has been associated with modernisation, civilisation, and industrialisation. Alphabets thus become part of a systematic process of domination, separating those in possession of knowledge from those who are not. Of course Lévi-Strauss, for example, qualifies his own argument about the power of writing by reminding us that the major advances in human society—agriculture and the domestication of animals—took place at a time when graphic practices were unknown (291). Later, Jack Goody was also to say in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977) that in “non-literate societies there is no evidence that individuals were prisoners of pre-ordained schemes of primitive classification, of the structure of myth. Constrained, yes; imprisoned, no” (33). More recently, Akhil Gupta reminds us that literacy, as opposed to the possession of assets, has a minor role in both the perpetuation of and resistance to structural violence (208).

My own examples in this chapter demonstrate each of these theses, to which I want to add a few qualifications. To begin with, we must remember that what distinguishes the dominated from the subversive is not simply the ability to read or write, but rather, the skills to manipulate these tools to desired effect. Babehami’s authority, deriving in part from the

³⁴ It is unclear whether or not this petition was written by the petitioner himself. A scribe’s name is absent, though this could possibly simply be an error of omission. Even if it is not, the example still serves to highlight the way in which colonial subjects of a range of literacy levels learnt to manipulate bureaucratic systems in various ways.

fact that he can write his name, recalls Lévi-Strauss's famous "Writing Lesson" in *Tristes Tropiques* (1961): it is the ability to perform, to appear to have command over written modes of expression, which guarantees power (286–97). The very act of having petitions drawn up and submitted importantly reminds us that illiteracy did not stop colonial subjects from harnessing writing as a tool aimed to solve their grievances. This not only points to a vast compensatory network of professional scribes and letter writers, but also highlights that it is in fact, language, rather than literacy, that is our central critical category here.

Petition narratives also serve to highlight, as I have discussed in the introduction to this thesis, what Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt have called the "unanticipated aesthetic dimension" of nonliterary texts (10). As Natalie Zemon Davis and Ann Stoler's work on historical narratives demonstrates, these come with their own set of prescribed strategies on how to write a story, and to what end (*Fiction in the Archives*; "In Cold Blood"). This is evident even in the petitions in the Ceylon archive. As the petitioner was unequivocally constructed as a helpless figure, documents ended in flamboyant appeals to the ultimate power of colonial rule, drawing on a strategy Appadurai terms "coercive subordination," that is, placing oneself in such a position of inferiority that it is the government's obligation to address one's needs (Hull, *Government of Paper* 100). The petition from the two men robbed of their buffaloes thus ended in the hope that "justice may be administered" (6 Jul. 1906). Another petitioner claiming that his gun was confiscated on false grounds (he did not renew his gun license in time as he was not aware of the last date to do so), asked plaintively, "[a]nd honoured Sir, the poor petitioner makes to ask, whether this is British Justice" (9 Jun. 1911). The extent to which they were more deceived than deceiving is difficult to say; the confusion of the peasant could be as much a carefully crafted narrative position as a historical reality. Nevertheless, this does bring our attention to the universal presence of certain strategies and ways of telling stories in bureaucratic prose.

While each of the examples I discuss above demonstrates a complex use of fictional narrative in the construction of real and imagined stories, it is crucial to note that the potential for this is not eliminated by illiteracy. Indeed, those who could not read are shown to be not only aware of how others manipulate the system, but also of how to do so themselves. At the end of the day, being able to enact or project the social effects of the writing may count as compensation enough.

4. Newspapers and Illegibility in the Jungle

Following those moments in *The Village in the Jungle* in which material documents are revealed to be inadequate, or co-exist with other means of understanding laws and rules, the chapter now focuses on a striking instance through which the limits of bureaucracy are highlighted: Silindu's meeting a Buddhist mendicant towards the end of the novel. This chance encounter of Silindu's, en route to prison for shooting Babehami and Fernando, allows us to rethink the relation of reading to material form. While the proverbial mad man's exaggerated gestures point towards a complex Buddhist cosmology of sin and merit, these are oddly prefaced by the appearance of an unlikely object: an English newspaper. The paper is old and dirty, marked perhaps by signs of touch such as fingerprint smudges, though the man admits that he cannot "read writing or letters" (261). The newspaper is, however, preserved because it is given to him by a white Mahatmaya; it is preserved precisely because it cannot be read. Gaining a power that is not dissimilar to that of the account book, the lure of the exotic here translates the dirty paper into a sentimental object.

However, the newspaper also opens up alternative possibilities of legibility for the old man. While the peon escorting Silindu impatiently reminds them of material contingency, grumbling that "it is hard enough to live on the eleven rupees which the

Government gives us” (268), for the old man, the newspaper is of “great power” (261), making possible a set of imaginings that he could not otherwise articulate:

“. . . I will look at it like this afterwards, for some short time—staring hard—then I shall *see things on the paper*, not the writing—. . . —but I shall see things themselves, a little hut up there in the jungle, if you desire it—your hut, my son—and I’ll tell you what is doing there, that the woman in lying in the hut, crying perhaps . . . before I could only see what was doing in this country; but now, by its help, I can see over the sea, to the white Mahatmaya’s country. Then they say this is a mad old man.” (Emphasis added; 261–62)

While this is followed up by a seemingly unconnected discussion of sin and punishment, the mendicant also recites a Pali stanza for Silindu (the content of which we are not told) and urges him to repeat the “holy words” as part of his attempts to “acquire merit” (271).

Meditating on it, he suggests, will allow Silindu to find his way to the Right Path. Of course, being illiterate, the man has obviously heard, learnt and remembered the stanza, doing away with the need for writing at all. The stanza allows him to “see” in a manner that overrides his inability to “read,” wrenching the epistemological act away from the written document.

If the account book’s “unintelligible letters and figures” (32) remain baffling to Silindu, the mendicant’s lesson reminds him of something that he has known all through the novel—that not only are there different ways of reading, but that some objects and spaces constantly, by their very nature, resist being read. A key example of this is the representation of the jungle. Take for example, this extended passage from the novel:

The jungle surrounded it [the village], overhung it, continually pressed in upon it. It stood at the door of the houses, always ready to press in upon the compounds and open spaces, to break through the mud huts, and to choke up the tracks and paths. It was only by yearly clearing with axe and katty that it could be kept out. It was a living wall about the village, a wall which, if the axe were spared, would creep in and smother and blot out the village itself. (1–2)

The village is not only *in* the jungle; daily existence is pivoted on the constant necessity to fight its oppressive presence, mirrored in the untamed profusion of description in the novel.

The narrative truth on which the novel is hinged is the understanding that “the rule of the

jungle is first fear, and then hunger and thirst” (5). Linked in this manner to both the metaphysical and the very mundane aspects of life, it becomes an object that cannot ever be known. So integral to the life of the Sinhala and yet so life-denying in its cruelty and power, it is a zone of reference that remains inexplicable to every character in the novel, even to Silindu and his daughters. They continuously, therefore, place all that cannot be accounted for within the space of the jungle’s activity. When Hinnihami, Silindu’s daughter, is unable to understand her sister’s sudden attraction to Babun, the nephew of the village headman, the narrator notes, “[s]omething had happened which she did not understand” (67) and Hinnihami thinks to herself that ““an evil had come out of the jungle”” (67).

It is this absence or rather, impossibility of meaning, this active resistance of consumption that characterises Silindu’s relationship with the jungle. It stands thus both as perpetrator of and witness to all events in the novel: the exactor of dues and punishment, the place of both god and the devil. It embodies a fatalism that Silindu understands perfectly—hence his realisation that the jungle cannot ever truly be known or mastered. Accepting its illegibility serves as a forewarning of bureaucracy’s fragile grip on meaning-making. This becomes progressively clearer as the novel moves on. Take for example, this description from the court scene I have already discussed:

The court-house stood on a bare hill which rose above the town, a small headland which ran out into the sea to form one side of the little bay. The judge, as he sat upon the bench, looked out through the great open doors opposite to him, down upon the blue waters of the bay, the red roofs of the houses, and then the interminable jungle, the grey jungle stretching out to the horizon and the faint line of the hills. And throughout the case this vast view, framed like a picture in the heavy wooden doorway, was continually before the eyes of the accused. Their eyes wandered from the bare room to the boats and the canoes, bobbing up and down in the bay, to the group of little figures on the shore hauling in the great nets under the blazing sun, to the dust storms sweeping over the jungle, miles away where they lived. (189)

What immediately strikes the reader is the scale of the description, the smallness of the imposing judge and courthouse against the “interminable jungle” that stretches beyond the

horizon and human vision. It is this sort of panoramic vision that Babun sees when he is being questioned, “[h]e looked out through the great doors at the jungle. He tried to think where Beddagama was; but, looking down upon it from that distance, it was impossible to detect any landmark in the unbroken stretch of trees” (196). The jungle may “choke,” “creep in” and “smother” the village, but it cannot be coincidental that it is also described as having the power to “blot [it] out” (2). A careless drop of ink from a leaky pen can render a document different, and this is, to return to Ben Kafka’s comment from earlier in this chapter, but one of the “hundreds or thousands or hundreds of thousands more opportunities to misspell a word, miscalculate a number, misread a blank, misunderstand an instruction, misaddress an envelope” (*Demon of Writing* 10) with which writing presents us. The jungle’s final inky threat is that bureaucracy, just like anything else, is answerable to the vicissitudes of nature.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted, through a series of micro-studies, to demonstrate the ways in which the South Asian colonial novel both highlights and challenges the nature of bureaucratic documents. Emphasising their materiality, it has examined how they circulate in the space of the colonial village, the bureaucratic office, and indeed, in the colonial subject’s imagination, as texts as well as objects, accruing a varied set of meanings. These meanings are both generated and deployed, as I have shown, through the dubious negotiation of the boundaries of officialdom. To return to Veena Das and Deborah Poole, the state’s attempt to negate the “wilderness, the lawlessness, and savagery” (“State and its Margins” 7) of marginal spaces (such as the village and the jungle) is constantly thwarted from within, not just by the limits of procedure but also by the very fragility of writing itself. By tracing, in

this manner, both expectant and errant trajectories, it has laid bare the workings of the colonial bureaucracy: as a contradictory melding of transparency and opacity. The material document thus becomes the false vehicle of what appears to be true, simply because it is written. If, as Ben Kafka via Marx suggests, books and words do not have to be read for them to master us—their material forms are formidable enough (*Demon of Writing* 112)—the space of the jungle, or the crumpled pages of a dirty newspaper master us when we realise that they cannot be read.

The chapter has also shed further light on the category of the unlikely reader, drawing attention to the qualifications that must be applied to the study of literacy's relationship with meaning-making. The material document, and the social interactions in which it participates, remind us that one can claim to be literate in different ways, espousing what C.A. Bayly calls "literacy awareness" (154). By bringing affective, cultural, and material frames to bear on the written document, the texts and archives I have examined elucidate not only how the supposedly "unread" classes made sense of writing, but also how uneven these capabilities can be within a single social group, an issue that will be addressed further in Chapter Four's study of women readers. But even as these alternative methods of understanding documents prevail, in the background, as always the only noise is the "scratching of the pen on the paper" (Woolf, *Village in the Jungle* 209).

Moreover, while this study of the bureaucratic document has made apparent the unequal relationship between the colonial subject and the state, Chapter Three will introduce a form of print that was influenced and circumscribed by this relationship: the almanac. If petitions and licenses were met with incomprehension by the vast majority of South Asia's population, the almanac, as we will see, provides us with an alternative case, highlighting how readers of such volumes negotiated between different political and temporal regimes through the act of selective reading.

Chapter Three

Reading for Time: The Almanac Directory in Bengal

1. Transformations in Print

In the second half of the nineteenth century, an instructive case in the study of colonial South Asian print is the renewed life of Bengali Hindu astrological almanacs, or *panjikas* as they were called.¹ These were texts that structured everyday Bengali Hindu life through a set of prescriptions that allowed readers to determine the most auspicious times for events as varied as getting married, buying a house, or embarking on a journey. Prior to the nineteenth century, this information was traditionally accessed in manuscript or oral form, drawing on the expertise of Brahmin astrologers, or *jyotishs*, who held a monopoly over the calculation of personalised astral charts. While printed almanacs were produced in Bengal as early as 1818, it was only by the late nineteenth century that what might be termed an almanac printing boom took place, with hundreds of thousands of copies being produced by different publishing houses annually.²

The reason for the popularity of these texts was simple—every Bengali Hindu household needed a *panjika* to conduct its day-to-day affairs. The Gupta Press, a publication house to which I will return later in this chapter, hyperbolically but perhaps not incorrectly, states that even today its readers span rural households in remote villages to “the highest echelons of society”—politicians, industrialists and administrators.³ *Panjikas* were bought by families, so even in the nineteenth century, each copy had an average of four to six readers, in

¹ I use “almanac,” “almanac directory” and “*panjika*” interchangeably in this chapter.

² The 1818 almanac was produced by a Durgaprasad of Jorasankho, who hoped that the exercise would bring him “wealth” (qtd. in Bhadra 277).

³ <http://www.guptapresspanjika.com/about.htm>

addition to people who could not read and would ask their literate acquaintances to consult the volumes on their behalf. The texts endure even today, circulating in a global network of CDs, DVDs, Facebook groups and telephone hotlines.

One of the primary achievements of the *panjika*'s transition from manuscript to mass print was the standardisation of domestic ritual practice. By constructing micro-levels of operation instructing readers on how to distribute their smaller units of time—days, hours and minutes—the volumes created what Eviatar Zerubavel calls in another context, “temporal symmetry” (*Hidden Rhythms* 16). Disparate readers from around the region came together as an invisible community by reading the same instructions and performing the same rituals in exact, auspicious synchrony. In the process, they held the potential to galvanise, according to the Gupta Press's own account of its history, an anti-colonial, if religiously conservative, force against the enemies of “modernisation,” “progress” and “western thoughts.”⁴ Though this was not a secular enterprise, the readers of *panjikas* were much like Benedict Anderson's newspaper readers, joined together in anonymous community (35).

As ubiquitous print objects in the late nineteenth century, *panjikas* provide insights into the possibility of writing an alternative history of reading in colonial South Asia. At a primary level, their overabundance to which I have gestured above is a necessary reminder of the fact that it was nonliterary and technical forms of writing such as these that predominately comprised the colonial universe. It was, therefore, through the assimilation of such mundane documents that the colonised subject was given lessons in how to inhabit colonial modernity, not through the opaque and inaccessible filters of the high literary text, as has often been suggested. Moreover, crucially to the argument of this chapter, informational genres such as *panjikas* demanded a different kind of textual engagement of those who sought them out. Understanding that many of their readers had neither the time nor the ability to commit to

⁴ <http://www.guptapresspanjika.com/>

extended narratives, texts like the almanac directory were designed for reading that was quick, interrupted, and selective, and were thus opened up to a much larger, and much less elite, colonial population.

In more ways than one, the religious role that the astrological section was seen to play in nineteenth-century Bengali society was influenced by its new three-part structure. From the 1860s onwards, *panjikas* began to expand their briefs to include large amounts of paratextual material. At first this was bureaucratic information such as railway timetables, postal rates, lists of government holidays, and then, from the 1880s, copious advertising that preceded the text's astrological core. Readers of these almanacs first encountered a section of advertising, followed by astrological information, and finally, the bureaucratic portions. The *panjika* then, in its new *dairaktari panjika* or almanac directory form, acquired an unlikely secondary function in the period. If its astrological prescriptions were to assist Bengalis in living auspicious lives, its miscellaneous advertisements and timetables provided another kind of self-help: how to navigate a new and confusing colonial world of commodities, trains, and government offices.⁵ As both Parna Sengupta and Gautam Bhadra have pointed out, the revised form of the print *panjika* acted as a conduit between two forms of time, and by extension, two worlds—local, astrological time on the one hand, and imperial bureaucratic time on the other (215; 279–82).

The new elements in the *panjika*'s structure borrowed from and amended the format of English-language publications such as the magisterial Thacker's Indian Directory. This almanac-cum-directory was produced annually between 1885 and 1958 by Thacker, Spink and Co., a Calcutta-based, British-run publishing house. Until its closure in 1960, the company produced a wide-range of books, from *Indian Horse Notes*, a popular equine care

⁵ The inclusion of such secular information was the reason why, as the present director of the Gupta Press, Arijit Roy Chowdhury, informed me, *panjikas* came to gain a non-Hindu readership as well. Further, as flipping through any volume will demonstrate, the texts also contained some information about key dates of other religions, and woodcuts depicting their festivals.

manual, and Kipling's early works, to travel guides to major cities of this imperial space. Including, among other information, a list of employees of colonial administrative offices and street directories, the volume soon became a central reference point for Anglo-Indian society, and remains a valuable resource for trade and family historians of South Asia. It even had the distinction of being cleverly advertised in Kipling's short story, "Wressley of the Foreign Office" (1888). The fame of Wressley, a well-meaning if pedantic clerk, is proclaimed in Kipling's story thus: "[a]ll men knew Wressley's name and office—it was in Thacker and Spink's Directory" (303). The fact the reference requires no explanation to readers suggests how well known it was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a volume that people at least flipped through, if only absent-mindedly recalling its content. Given its unwieldy size in later years—between four to five inches thick and regularly running into over a thousand pages—one could hardly expect otherwise.

Apart from its size, Thacker's directory had other obvious problems. For one, its primary source was information sent to the publishing office that was not subjected to rigorous verification or fact checking, making many of its claims unreliable. More importantly, it had a clear Anglo-Indian bias. Not only did it contain basic introductory information about South Asia, such as charts of seasonal vegetables and local temperatures, suggesting a readership of newly-arrived Britons, it also managed, through its advertisements and street directories, to create the illusion of a British South Asia with practically no South Asian subjects to rule.⁶ Coupled with its high price of twenty-six rupees—an annual expense—the directory was of little or no use to the vast majority of the South Asian population. The *panjika*, as we shall see, more than compensated for these deficiencies.

⁶ Editions of the directory from the 1920s onwards showed a much greater South Asian presence. Somewhat surprisingly, the 1931 edition carried an advertisement for The Indian Silk House, proclaiming that "Swadeshi Silk of every description was available [there]" (xiv). Given the political climate of South Asia at the time, the phrasing of the advertisement (the use of "swadeshi") seems a particularly sensitive and unlikely inclusion in a publication by a British-owned company.

This chapter's primary goal is to trace how readers interacted with *panjikas*, subjecting them to the kind of selective, superficial reading to which I have already alluded. My arguments draw almost exclusively from a single archival source: the offices of the Gupta Press. The historical frame I construct therefore depends on information regarding the sales, distribution and readership of volumes produced by this particular press. I do, however, also refer to other *panjikas* that exist in the company's collection, including early printed editions by Cones and Co., and Day, Law and Co.; well-known contributors to the print form of the almanac, as well as a stray volume of *Lord Ripon's Panjika* (1884–1885) in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. I read these alongside colonial archival records; specifically the Bengal Library quarterly catalogues that record minute details of all published texts in the presidency over three month periods, as well as reports on the state of vernacular publishing post-1857. These narratives complement each other, fill gaps and provide explanations when a single source seems inadequate, while also giving us a momentary glimpse into the world of colonial print regulations.

My argument unfolds over four sections. First, I provide a necessary introduction to the almanac form, and discuss its trajectories in colonial South Asia, and mid- to late nineteenth-century Bengal. I then go on to discuss what I mean by selective reading, arguing in particular for its re-framing as a resistant practice. This is followed by three short examples, each highlighting a different way in which the *panjika* invited individuals to read in this manner, while also pointing out how economic and material factors often made this, at best, a failed enterprise.

Like the bureaucratic documents I examined in Chapter Two, almanacs were certainly read by multiple groups of readers. Traditionally considered to cater to a female readership, women are, without a doubt, among those who referred to these texts selectively. However, in the final section of the chapter I consider in more detail another group of readers towards

whom the almanac's directory elements gesture: middle-class men. At one level, it might seem absurd (as well as contradictory) to label this class of readers "unlikely." But while the fact that these men could and did read is not remarkable, it is indeed surprising that they chose to read almanacs. Examining this mismatch of reader and genre, traced through both almanac content and marginalia, sheds further light on the bridging role that these texts were to play for all genders and sections of society in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengal.

Finally, I am well aware that there is very little that is "literary" about almanacs.⁷ In this chapter, however, I follow Adam Smyth's suggestion in his work on the genre in seventeenth-century England, and read it as a "potent source" for life-writing (201). While his excellent account relies almost exclusively on marginal annotations by readers as an entry point into the kind of "writable identity available to almanac readers" (209), I demonstrate how the almanac in Bengal participated in multiple, intersecting life-writing projects. At one level, as Smyth points out, pages and margins provided literal spaces in which to write, if only fragmentarily, about one's life, including references to important events, household accounts, doodles, among others (204–06). At another level, as we shall see, almanacs and *panjikas* also put forward templates according to which readers could construct their own lives, whether on the basis of a railway timetable or astral predictions, or by purchasing a certain product or commodity chanced upon in one of the volume's prefatory advertisements. In this manner, the form not only became a space that documented lives but also provided its readers the tools with which to write their own.

⁷ Unlike the British almanacs of the early modern period, *panjikas* did not contain songs or poetry of any description, even as, in the case of the former, these were "far more modest than their authors believed" (Capp 225). For the literary elements of their British counterparts, see Capp 23, 225–37.

2. Almanac Histories

i. What is an Almanac?

In 1976, Louis James stated that the almanac was “the most widely diffused and least known type of printed ephemera in our period” (by which he referred to the nineteenth century, the subject of his research), further commenting that “even cottages without a broadsheet or chapbook [both considered emblematic forms of popular print culture] would be likely to have a sheet almanac pinned to the wall” (53). While James’s statement points out the ubiquity of the genre, it also reminds us that almanacs are, even in our times, still a largely neglected historical source. Few full-length studies have been dedicated to the genesis and cultural role of the form (Bernard Capp’s *Astrology and the Popular Press* (1979) and Maureen Perkins’s *Visions of the Future* (1996) being the only two major exceptions, and a forthcoming study on the Bengali form of the genre by Gautam Bhadra). Even when almanacs are evoked, this is as repositories of information that are collected and studied, often at the exclusion of the print contexts from which they emerge. Examples of this tendency are Projit Mukherjee’s study of medical advertisements in Bengali almanacs, and Katherine Anderson’s mining of British forms of the genre for insights into Victorian meteorology.

One of the primary reasons for the paucity of extensive studies is perhaps, as Adam Smyth suggests, the technical difficulties of access. Despite, or perhaps even because of, their “sheer ever-presentness” (Smyth 202), almanac reading has gained a sort of “cultural invisibility” (Smyth 202). Further, their ephemeral nature meant that “[m]ost almanacs disappeared pretty quickly—literally up in smoke, in many cases, or under pies” (Smyth 243), a classic case of Leah Price’s theorisation of objectified nonreading that I discussed in

the introduction to this thesis. As Smyth goes on to argue, “[t]he confluence of these vast production and low survival rates means that almanacs, while intensely, perhaps even prosaically, familiar to early modern individuals [in his account], remain far less familiar to scholars of the period [in his context, the seventeenth century]” (203).

These arguments apply as much to the Bengali form as to the seventeenth-century English texts Smyth studies, with some variation. For one, while Smyth draws to our attention the fact that few libraries hold copies of almanacs (one has to turn to “lightly catalogued” (200) provincial archives for those), researchers of nineteenth-century Bengal have more than one repository to which to turn. Almanac printing companies that are still in business have in their storerooms archives of texts from the last two centuries; volumes can also be found with the priests of *zamindari* families, as well as in major institutional collections, such as those of the National Library of Kolkata. The real problem to face, instead, is the near un-readability of these texts: poor infrastructural conditions and harsh weather have left many early printed almanacs close to complete disintegration.⁸ Further, next to no documentation exists on the actual production of these texts. So while, as we shall see, governmental records inform us how many *panjikas* were printed on average per year, there is little information to shed light on other stages of the communications circuit: the agents involved in their production, the costs of printing, how many were sold per year, the rationale behind editorial inclusions and exclusions, to name just a few.

It is also possible that part of the disinclination to study almanacs as a coherent genre arises from a difficulty of definition—what is an almanac? The overwhelming number of almanacs in circulation from the early modern period to the nineteenth century is perhaps not simply a testament to the popularity of these texts but also, as Bernard Capp notes, to the

⁸ Some nineteenth- and twentieth-century almanacs have been digitised by Jadavpur University’s School of Cultural Texts and Records, in collaboration with the British Library’s Endangered Archives Project. They form part of a larger collection of texts and ephemera grouped together as “Popular Market Bengali Books.” See EAP 127.

looseness with which the term “almanac” was affixed to collections and directories of all kinds, perhaps with the hope of elevating their authority in the print world (24).⁹ At a primary level, this could be attributed to a fluidity of material form, which makes the almanac difficult to categorise as an object. As Maureen Perkins writes, “European almanacs, or calendars, existed in manuscript and carved on wood or bone as early as records exist, and even Stonehenge has been called a neolithic almanac” (2). The earliest printed almanac was a product of the Gutenberg Press in 1448, and by the 1470s, large numbers of these texts were circulating across Europe. Early modern England saw almanacs in their print forms—octavo, quarto and sheet—while its pre-modern ancestors took the more exciting form of “clogs” or pieces of wood, and xylographs, which were wood engravings produced on strips of vellum (Capp 25–26). Confusions over content, too, added to the difficulties. Uncertainty about the characteristics of the almanac were such that as late as 1890, the British statistical Whitaker’s Almanac, felt the need to include a short article defining the genre, in which its readers were informed that

the ultimate origin of the word *Almanack* is still an unsolved problem, but a great deal of valuable information has been collected concerning it, of which a complete summary is given in Murray’s New English Dictionary, which should be consulted. Word borrowed from continental forms. Book containing a set of tables of the apparent positions of the sun and moon &c. whence the astronomical data for any year could be ascertained. The business of the almanac-writer is, indeed, to record such facts as are likely to be most useful to such as consult it during the year of its date; and amongst such records the Calendar takes the chief place. (609)

Problems of classification took an official turn in Bengal in the nineteenth century, fuelled by the fact that the *panjika* was very much a print tool enlisted in Hindu religious practice; a “simple reference book” and “handy reckoner”¹⁰ to check appropriate times to perform rituals and the like. However, the *panjika* had a much more uncertain status as a text. While

⁹ Smyth also notes that in the seventeenth century “there was considerable slippage between the terms ‘diary,’ ‘almanac,’ ‘calendar,’ and ‘ephemeris’” (221).

¹⁰ www.guptapresspanjika.com

according to the Gupta Press, *panjikas* are “revered in all homes where [they] find [their] place next to the family deity. For the religiously inclined, [they] are gospel,”¹¹ the *panjika* is not a religious object; it has no sacred connotations attached to it. Further to this, by the early twentieth century, there was no public debate regarding the classification of the *panjika*. In the quarterly reports of the Bengal Library from the period, the Gupta Press *panjika*—for that matter, all Bengali Hindu *panjikas*—were listed under the category of “Bengali–Sanskrit miscellaneous” books (Sanskrit presumably because the astrological calculations would have been dependent on Sanskrit texts, the language of Hindu religious practice). At some level, which is however outside the scope of this chapter, this could perhaps be read simply as a political move, especially since Christian almanacs printed by the Tract Society of Calcutta are listed as religious books, whether in Bengali or English. The government was quite concerned by the overdependence of the colonial subject on *panjikas*, which they thought propagated irrational superstitious beliefs, and so the Tract Society and the Church of English Missionaries printed for circulation several Christian almanacs to stem the spurious effects of their Hindu counterparts. Needless to say, these did not sell particularly well (Long xxi).

Perhaps the only universal element across almanacs is the calendar and the emphasis on temporality, a point to which I will return later in this chapter. But these print objects were much more than simply that: they were compendiums of the events to come in the year, and thus extended their brief according to their audience. A farmer’s almanac, for example, would carry relevant agricultural information, notes on the weather, seasonal tips for planting and harvesting. Army almanacs, such as the *Indian Military Almanac* and *The Indian Empire*, published until 1932 for British soldiers travelling to South Asia, contained not just official dates and military regulations, but also short articles in an ethnographic vein teaching them relevant matters relating to South Asian languages, culture and religion, through a single text.

¹¹ www.guptapresspanjika.com

In the case of the astrological almanac, one of the earliest forms, the movement of the planets and stars was used to put forward prophetic advice to its readers, the reason for which, in England and Europe, they were considered to be sensational works by the Church.

ii. Almanacs and the Colonial State in South Asia

In the late nineteenth century, as I have already mentioned, Bengali almanacs—indeed, almanacs from all parts of South Asia—were in constant dialogue with British print forms available and in circulation in the region, whether through relationships of influence or through the more overt intervention of the government in their production and distribution. This chapter will now look at examples of interactions between almanacs and empire to highlight the extensive circulation of the genre in the period.

The colonial archive yields some trace evidence of orders for British-printed almanacs, predominantly statistical ones, to be sent to South Asia. Rummaging through routine paperwork highlights the regularity with which this process of order and dispatch was carried out. I discovered identical letters sent year after year from the Registry and Record Department to the Judicial and Public Secretary asking him at the “close of the year to submit a nominal list of gentlemen on the permanent establishment only of his Department” whom he desired to be furnished with almanacs, while also reminding him that “any gentlemen entitled to a copy of Goldsmith’s Pocket Book may be allowed to receive in lieu thereof a copy of Whitaker’s Almanac should so be desired” (underlining in the original).¹² The letter was always returned with a note on the side, listing never more than three officers eligible to receive a copy of one of these almanacs.

¹² See, for example, letter dated 8 Oct. 1888 (IOR/L/PJ/6/234, File 1505).

The substitution of Whitaker’s for Goldsmith’s also speaks to the intertwined histories of the almanac and the pocket-book. For more on this subject, see Colclough.

As Maureen Perkins writes, the statistical almanac, of which Whitaker's is the best example from the nineteenth century, developed in Britain as part of an attempt to counter the customary prophetic role of the astrological almanac that dominated the early modern period.

To this effect, Joseph Whitaker wrote in the introduction to the first edition in 1868 that

[n]o attempt has been made to peep into futurity. Predictions respecting the Weather, the fate of Kingdoms, and the fortune and death of Eminent Persons, are made only by those who rely upon the superstition, the gullibility, and the ignorance of that imperfectly educated class, which, happily, is every year decreasing in number. (Qtd. in Perkins 81)

Disconnecting astrology and the form of the almanac, Whitaker's and other printing companies chose to give their readers data in the form of statistics. Its first edition contained 368 pages of tabulated statistics, alongside the customary calendars and lists of important dates, the less "sensitive" components of the traditional almanac. Given that the volumes were always over 700 pages long, this accounts for over half the total content of the almanac. Perkins reads this transition, from supposition to fact, as a sign of Whig scientific propaganda in the 1830s, arguing that the compilers believed that "the status of a fact was enhanced by its demonstrability, and so it followed that accumulated observations increased reliability, and the number of times a phenomenon occurred was a significant factor" (55).

This is a plausible explanation for the avalanche of numbers typed up in very small print that Whitaker's readers encountered. But what statistics found their way into the pages of these almanacs? A colonial historian will instantly notice the overwhelming presence of empire, broadly conceived, in these books. Alongside lists of the provinces of each South Asian presidency, and summary articles with titles such as "The British Empire in India" and "The Administration of India under the Crown" for a quick though rather boring read, Whitaker's gave its urban and provincial British readers detailed figures on colonial debt, public works expenditure charts, accounts of the revenue received from the opium trade, and even, in its 1890 edition, an Islamic calendar in its very first pages. Perkins, without referring

to empire in her study of these volumes, suggests that the almanac became a vehicle for government transparency, much like an annual review, and that “[t]he new almanac made an impressive showing on any bookshelf, the means by which the government could make its achievements known, and testimony to the owner’s knowledge of the complex social relationships of nineteenth-century Britain” (56–57). More significantly, Whitaker’s had another function, of becoming, like many other almanacs of this kind, a conduit between metropolis and empire—of bringing the empire home, unwittingly, to the tables and bookshelves of provincial Britons, acting as a reminder of the country’s presence in colonial outposts.

The statistical almanac also appealed to a different readership. While across cultures, the astrological almanac was primarily directed towards women and drew upon varied levels of literacy, the content of Whitaker’s—public service directed as much of it is—seems to suggest an upper middle-class male reader, Oxbridge-educated and working in the higher levels of bureaucracy or entrepreneurial organisations. To this end, the statistical almanac, like Thacker’s directory but unlike the Bengali *panjikas* this chapter will examine, was an expensive acquisition. Hardbound and ornately embossed in gold, these were precious commodities, a fact corroborated by the unwillingness of the Revenue department to hand out more copies to colonial officers than seemed necessary—one had to earn one’s Whitaker’s.

Almanacs that were British-produced, though imperially inflected, were not the only volumes of their kind that colonial officials, however, were reading. While later in the nineteenth century, government restrictions were to regulate the free circulation of these books in South Asia by means of the Vernacular Press Act of 1878,¹³ as early as 1836, bureaucrats were required to have a copy of a “native” almanac, determined by the presidency in which they worked. A detailed example of the level of thought and

¹³ For more on the Vernacular Press Act, see Roy, Darnton, “Literary Surveillance.”

conversation that went into the selection of a suitable edition can be found in a series of correspondence between the Board of Revenue and the Chief Secretary to the Government concerning the district of Tanjore, situated in the Madras Presidency, between 1836 and 1837 (IOR/F/4/1695/682). Bureaucratic offices in the region relied on—this was prior to the mass-printing of almanacs—a specially prepared “native” almanac, drawn up by the astrologer of the local college, considered a “useful and necessary book of reference” (letter no. 66). The correspondence began to halt the suggestion that the “Native Almanac of Tanjore,” the *Vakin Punchangam* which remains in print even today, should replace the college almanac. A tabulated list of the advantages of the former was presented to the Secretary to the Government, which led to the order for substitution being withdrawn. Among these included the wide-ranging information on which the college almanac relied: it contained the Tamil and Telugu calendars, drew on Hindi, English and Malayalam calendars as well, while also providing guidelines for rituals across castes and focusing on several districts in the Presidency. The *Vakin Punchangam*, by contrast, catered to a very specific Tamil Brahmin Tanjore-based community (letter no. 59). Importantly, this short and perhaps seemingly insignificant exchange sets the stage for the later sections of this chapter, by demonstrating how the South Asian almanac strove, in its many forms, to mediate between communities, languages and religions, becoming the site at, and pages on which colonial interactions were not only recorded, but also the rules and methods of shaping those interactions were sought.

iii. The *Panjika* in Context

Historians of popular culture in nineteenth-century Bengal have situated the almanac within the “small book” trade, or the Battala Press.¹⁴ Battala, an area in North Calcutta which had the highest density of printing presses in this period, was known for its prolific, almost overwhelming, production of cheap pamphlets and low-brow literary works that were inexpensive to the point of being disposable. Once read, these were sold off to the local paper-seller to be repurposed or recycled. Participating in a system of quick turnover, almanacs became some of the highest printed books in Bengal.

Available numerical data confirms this. A particularly useful and much drawn-on resource is James Long’s *Returns relating to Publications in the Bengali Language, in 1857* (1859). The catalogue, spurred by Long’s interest in Bengali literary culture (later reflected in his role in the translation and circulation of the controversial play, *Nil Darpan*), was an inquiry into the state of the vernacular press in the presidency. Based on Long’s interviews and conversations with readers, booksellers and printers in Calcutta and its surrounding provinces, the catalogue took the form of a very readable report, which systematically categorised print into genre, as well as listed the names of a large number of operational presses and difficult-to-obtain print run figures for their publications. Almanacs, unsurprisingly, are among the genres that Long discussed at length. He noted that nineteen kinds were in print in 1857, thirteen presses were responsible for their production, and at least 135,000 copies were in circulation (xx).¹⁵

¹⁴ Historical and literary scholarship on Battala print is extensive, as I have suggested in the introduction to this thesis. See for example, S. Banerjee, Ghosh and Roy.

¹⁵ Long suggested that 250,000 was probably a more accurate number (xx). The shortfall was due to the uneven nature of book registration. Books were only listed in government records if their printers registered them with the relevant local office: many refused to do so, in fear of censorship or being made to pay extra taxes.

For a list of the thirteen presses, including the other books they were responsible for publishing, see Long 3–61.

Numbers aside, the report also gives us poignant ethnographic descriptions of just how far these books travelled in Bengal:

Almanacs circulate where few other Bengali books reach; just previous to the beginning of the Bengali year is a busy season with the Native Almanac sellers of Calcutta; book-hawkers in numbers may be seen issuing from the printing presses, freighted with the store of Almanacs which they carry far and wide some of which they sell at the low rate of 80 pages for one anna. The Bengali Almanac is as necessary for the Bengali as his hooka or his *pan* [beetel-nut leaf], without it he cannot determine the auspicious days for marrying (22 in the year), for first feeding an infant with rice (27 days in the year), the feeding the mother with rice in the fifth month of gestation (12 days), for commencing the building of a house, for boring the ears, putting the chalk into the hands of a boy to teach him to write, when a journey is to be begun, or the calculating the duration and malignity of a fever. (Long xx–xxi)

The Bengal Library reports, issued quarterly from 1861 as appendices to the *Calcutta Gazette*, provide us with a second crucial source to determine almanac print production and sale trends in the presidency. Each of these reports was theoretically to carry the details of all books, pamphlets and periodicals printed over a period of three months. The range of information that accompanied each listed print item was exhaustive. From the reports, we can determine not only its title and author but also the address of the press at which it was printed, its number of pages, size, and price, and whether it was typographed or lithographed. A clear sense of the structures of almanac printing can thus be obtained.¹⁶ For example, the reports allow us to determine the different types of almanacs produced in the late nineteenth century (financial, astrological), their size (single sheets hung on walls like calendars, expanded exhaustive volumes of typically three hundred pages, and smaller portable ones of hundred pages or less), the different languages in which they were printed (Bengali, Oriya, Persian, English) and in the case of astrological almanacs, the different religious traditions

¹⁶ The records can, however, be rather unreliable at times. While till the late 1860s, almanacs of all descriptions flood the reports, they almost completely disappear from record in the late 1870s, despite the fact that there is evidence that almanacs were indeed being printed at the time. Perhaps this relates to the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, which curtailed the freedom of the vernacular press substantially, and would have discouraged many book-sellers from registering their products. The curious thing, however—for which I have no explanation—is the fact that print run numbers for Gupta Press *panjikas* are not included until the twentieth century, while minor publications by the press crop up in the records of the 1880s. Why register some books and not others? This remains unclear.

and calendars they followed (the Islamic *jantri*, the Christian daily prayer book, or the Bengali Hindu *panjika*).

As a mass-produced genre fuelled by quick production and low costs, the *panjika* showed little variation in format and content across the different editions in which it was available. Portable, mundane objects carried around by their readers, they were most frequently pocket-sized though often unusually thick for the purpose, and ran regularly into over five hundred pages. Printed on cheap paper, they have, even today, a newspaper-like quality, with delicate, transparent pages that are easily torn or bent. Bound together with thread between soft paper covers, *panjikas* were available at astonishingly low prices, a key reason for the large number sold each year. A typical copy cost a mere six or seven annas as opposed to the princely sum of twenty-six rupees for which Thacker's Indian Directory sold, and, despite some changes in size and paper quality because of paper shortages during the world wars, prices remained constant for a thirty-year period.

Given the cheap quality paper and print, as well as its shelf life of a single calendar year, the *panjika* soon became associated with disposability. Though many family priests kept old copies in their personal libraries for future reference, most people threw their volumes away at the end of the Bengali calendar year (13 or 14 April). An excellent case in point is the Gupta Press archive itself, from which my textual examples in this chapter draw. Unaccountably, the office's collection, while extensive and dating back to the 1860s, contains, as I have already noted, a large number of *panjikas* printed by rival presses, predominantly Cones and Co. and Day, Law and Co. Many of these copies have their owners' names written on the first page, from which it is easy to determine their caste affiliation and safely suggest that, given the workings of nineteenth-century society, it is unlikely that they were relatives of the Gupta family. The itinerant trajectories of these personally-owned books illuminate for us the very little monetary value that these held for the

average Bengali reader who, despite having branded ownership on his copy,¹⁷ often across the cover of the *panjika*, and personalised it through annotations and notes of individual significance, did not miss or bother much about a lent or lost copy.¹⁸

By the late nineteenth century, there was an already existing market for *panjikas* and a well-established readership. Against this backdrop, two clear controllers of the market emerged in Bengal: the Gupta Press, established in 1869 and P.M. Bagchi and Co., established in 1883 and producing its first almanac in 1886. Both presses had convoluted, itinerant histories. The Gupta Press began as an all-purpose printing company, not only producing pocket dictionaries, political histories such as *The Berlin Congress and the Treaty of San Stephano: The Anglo-Turkish convention and the Berlin Treaty* by a Govinda Prasad Mukherji (1878) and Bengali primers, but also soliciting, as advertisements in their almanacs indicate, private print jobs for wedding invitations and self-financed pamphlets. In fact, the Bengal Library catalogues have no record of almanac production for the Press till 1903, despite the fact that almanacs were certainly printed before this date. P.M. Bagchi's history was even more eccentric, having begun as a company that produced ink, as well as commodities such as perfume (Bhattacharya 71–75). Following the same astrological school, the *Odriksiddhanta* (as opposed to the *Driksiddhanta*) which draws on a sixteenth-century revision of a 500AD text Hindu astronomical text, the *Suryasiddhanta*, the two catered to the same Bengali Hindu community as their readers. By the early years of the twentieth century, however, the Gupta Press had outstripped the sale and production of P.M. Bagchi's *panjikas* by a huge margin: for example, in 1920, they produced 190,000 as opposed to P. M. Bagchi's 100,000, as can be seen in the Bengal Library catalogues of that year.

¹⁷ I use this gendered pronoun deliberately. All the readers names I found scrawled across the front pages of almanacs belonged to men, an unusual fact that I discuss later in this chapter.

¹⁸ The organisation of almanacs in the Gupta Press's office also draws attention to the ephemerality of print. Of different sizes, they are lined up in a cupboard, wrapped carefully in bits of newspaper, recycled primary school tests, pages from an arithmetic workbook with seven cats on them, and the instruction pages of an examination booklet which reminded me sternly that cheating will not be tolerated.

3. Reading Temporalities

Temporality has always been a central category in colonial discourse, filtered through the lens of the colonial modern. Imperial rule, like ethnography as Johannes Fabian has influentially demonstrated, is based on a disjunction in how groups of people are perceived to inhabit time. He refers to this as a “denial of coevalness,” which he defines as the “*persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*” (emphasis in original; 31). The object of study, the “other,” is continuously argued to be a remnant of sorts of an earlier historical moment, a reminder in the present, of our own “primitive” selves.

The connection between modernity, history and time is crucial here. As historians such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Thomas Trautmann remind us, history was a site of contestation in colonial South Asia. Eighteenth-century European and British orientalist such as Hegel and William Jones juxtaposed a western linear narrative of incremental progress, the cornerstone of modernity, alongside the vast simultaneously destructive and regenerative cycles of 4,320,000 years they encountered in ancient Hindu structures, and came to the conclusion that the region had no sense of history (Trautmann xix, 31). South Asian time, it seemed, was not about moving forward but rather, of being perpetually in one place. Becoming modern historical subjects did not mean simply finding a “time of their own, in negotiation with the time of modernity” but also remembering that the future was thus limited as “a deferred, only so different, replication of a present already played out elsewhere” (Banerjee, *Politics of Time* 1).

Grappling with South Asian time-sense became a primary target of the British, very much in continuity with a global project to create a system of standardised time measured

against the Greenwich medium.¹⁹ As was the case across South Asian cities, Calcutta in the run-up to the adoption of Indian Standard Time (five and a half hours ahead of Greenwich medium) became a muddle of different measures. While by 1905, railways and telegraph systems were following the new system, local clocks in the city and offices continued, in protest, to use local time. It was not an exaggeration when in 1919, a journalist commented that “Calcutta is already possessed of more times than she knows what to do with” (qtd. in Ogle 1389). With the imposition of infrastructural and bureaucratic changes that created the need for such measures, South Asians began to realise that their time was no longer their own. They had been unwittingly incorporated into the temporality of the British empire.

As Sumit Sarkar among others has pointed out, the binary between cyclical and linear time that orientalist scholarship and time reforms created is on many levels grossly misleading. It not only, as I have just mentioned, creates an image of an exotic and timeless Orient, but also encourages us in the present to read colonialism as a clean rupture: a perfect transition from the “pre-modern” to the “modern” (Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames* 12–13). Rather, contrary to popular opinion, South Asian notions of temporality were heavily influenced by multiplicity and simultaneity. This was not merely a phenomenon of the colonial period, but one that can be traced back much further. For example, as Prathama Banerjee writes, pre-modern time could be read at once philosophically as “an eternal substance, as the concrete becoming of matter, as instantaneous being, as a philosophical transcendent or even as an indeterminate entity,” or politically through the *purana–itihās*, “a technique of narrating past regimes with hindsight but in the form of future prophecies” (*Politics of Time* 40). Time could follow the natural or seasonal cycles, or the astrological calculations of the almanac that allowed one to live from one appropriate moment to another. Colonial modernity’s intervention was simply to meld these together in a “unilinear series of

¹⁹ For a detailed description of the transition between different kinds of time in colonial South Asia, against a global frame, see Ogle, and Prasad. For studies outside South Asia, see Galison, and Zerubavel, “Standardization.”

empty measurable units” (Banerjee, *Politics of Time* 41). It is here that the *panjika*’s role, as a book that prescribed time, became particularly important, making it a tool that had the potential to articulate a critical stance towards the disruption of everyday practice by the new colonial system. Almanacs were already associated with time reform of sorts: the print version conformed to standard systems of astrological calculations. Nevertheless, as Prathama Banerjee notes, traditional astrological calculations resisted linear temporality, measuring time by “acts of the body”: “as *nimesha* (the twinkling of the eye), as *matra* (metres and rhythms of utterance), as *prana* (a full breath), or as the subtlest moment of piercing a single lotus leaf with a needle” (*Politics of Time* 63).

With the coming of colonialism, adopting the Christian calendar’s numerical system would be a practical step towards the region-wide coordination of time and ritual practice. However, the fact that Western time was measured relative to the sun, a moving point, as opposed to Hinduism’s reliance on a fixed star, the *dhruva*, made it potentially difficult to shift from the one system to the other. Having said that, late nineteenth-century *panjika* compilers universally decided to resort to the former, while continuing to note “unreformed” time alongside it, for religious continuity (Banerjee, *Politics of Time* 63–64). Bengali Hindus thus continued to live in astral time, disguised and in translation as it was in the pages of the revised printed *panjika*.

Simultaneity was manifested in changing forms of visual representation as well. While, as Gautam Bhadra draws to our attention, “disorderly” notions of time were customary “tamed” by images of Hindu gods and goddesses such as Siva and Parvati on their covers, late nineteenth-century publishers found new icons of authority to grace the opening pages of their almanacs, and after whom to name them. An excellent example is Benimadhab Dey’s *Lord Ripon’s Panjika* (1884–1885), which featured a portrait of the stern Viceroy surrounded by angels. The fact that this image was followed by one of Ganesha a few pages

after, and existed in tension with the various woodcut images of Hindu deities throughout the *panjika*, stood as an attempt not to replace one frame of time with another but rather to acknowledge them both, and encourage them to exist collaboratively (Bhadra 279–82). Modernity, as Prathama Banerjee writes, is rearticulated in a Bengali context through the dual processes of “subordination” and “a mode of resistance” against it (*Politics of Time* 44)—here, strategically embracing a colonial temporality (sometimes grudgingly), while, at the same time, working to highlight its limits.

The doubled and intermeshed nature of time also allowed Bengali readers of *panjikas* to rethink in different ways their desired relationships with the future. Almanacs, as Bernard Capp notes, have always responded to humankind’s fear of being unable to control worldly and extra-worldly forces (15). Through its claims to prediction, these texts encouraged their readers to believe that they could determine personal outcomes through foresight; in the case of the *panjika*, by using this knowledge to choose when or when not to perform certain actions. The future, it would seem, could thus unravel in a series of self-determined moments, neatly woven together to create the texture of one’s life.

The directory function of the mass-produced *panjika* served, further, to remind its readers that like time, their futures were also precariously double. In the face of a new bureaucratic and cultural system in which their fates were uncertain and changing, readers realised that there was an aspect of the unknown that they could control: they could plan railway journeys in advance and at convenient times, decide when to visit their local post office (not on a listed government holiday), and check when the next day’s tide would come in. If the vast unknowable future lay before them as vague and undetermined, mastering the mechanics of daily colonialism provided some welcome reassurance.

Almanacs also initiated a temporal shift in *how* readers read. As an informational genre, it made a pragmatic connection between the retrieval of information and the

performance of an action. Mike Esbester calls this “functional reading” (157) and, in the case of the *panjika*, this could include checking a railway timetable to plan a journey, or making a note of the next full moon. As opposed to the narrative demands of the literary texts, these forms were acutely aware that in a fast-paced world, the modern reader did not have the time for textual engagement that was anything other than interrupted, discontinuous, and selective. Even the astrological section, which unfolded in serial order by virtue of being organised chronologically according to the calendar year, would not be read as an uninterrupted narrative. Rather, the *panjika* was a text to which readers returned throughout the year, whenever they felt the need to consult it. As a result of this, the genre initiated both an expansion and contraction in reading time. Readers might spend less time engaging with the textual content of the volumes, but it was guaranteed that they would refer to it more frequently over a period of time.

This oscillation between the contracted nature of reading on the one hand, and the rising frequency of the act itself on the other, was a mounting concern for *panjika* printers. If readers were to construct their own narratives from almanacs, choosing what they thought was necessary for themselves, how would compilers go about putting together a volume that could address the needs of each individual? Take for example these statements by almanac compilers that relayed this concern:

There will be *no difficulty*. This almanac *contains everything*. *Consult it when you want to*. (Emphasis added; qtd in Bhadra 278)

An almanac is a most essential book. In fact, one has to consult this book every day for conducting daily domestic affairs. I have worked hard to add to it a variety of necessary details with great care. I present this almanac and directory to the general public at a very cheap price so that everyone can use it *without difficulty*. (Emphasis added; De, qtd. in Bhadra 282)

Read alongside each other, these quotations highlight what the nineteenth-century reader expected of an almanac or directory—consultation without any “difficulty.” The

measure of an almanac's worth was whether or not it could live up to its promise of accurate information at any given moment. More importantly, however, these quotations reiterate the kind of engagement that these texts demanded of their readers—selective consumption in bits and pieces.

It is important to focus on exactly what constitutes selective reading—how and why did different readers choose to engage with some parts of a text over others, and how do the different components of the almanac give us insight into the varied readership on which it was drawing? More urgently, how can we set up selective reading in a genealogy of subversive practices of reading? What are the implications of theorising selective reading as a legitimate means of textual engagement in the context of late nineteenth-century Bengal?

A useful way to begin is by thinking through selective reading not merely in terms of the content of the almanac—what is read and what is not—but in terms of the speed of reading. Not reading exhaustively made the act short, in the moment, and, above all, fast-paced. This came with its own concerns and anxieties: of superficial knowledge, and decreasing attention spans.²⁰ Against this mode of reading developed a resistant practice, what Isabel Hofmeyr, drawing on the Gandhian newspaper *Indian Opinion*, calls “slow reading” (*Gandhi's Printing Press*).²¹ Formulated as a counter to speedy and erratic reading of the kind the almanac encouraged, this publication emerged as an “anti-commodity, copyright-free, slow-motion newspaper” (Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press* 4) with a clearly articulated ethical agenda. “Resisting macadamization” and “slow[ing] down the system” (Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press* 19), the Gandhian reader would reclaim the pointless act of trudging through unmanageable quantities of print that inevitably led to a superficial

²⁰ It is outside the scope of this chapter but still worth noting that many of the anxieties about fast and selective reading in the nineteenth century reappear in public discourse today. These have been rechanneled through debates about the internet and portals such as Twitter that can only accommodate very short lines of text. See, for example, “The Art of Slow Reading.”

²¹ The speed of printing could also contribute to the creation of print counter-cultures. In the case of Victorian Britain, “slow printing” as Elizabeth Miller calls it was associated with niche, radical periodical presses that sought to position their publications against mass-consumerist ones.

engagement with it and instead, would approach texts with patience. The goal was to “contemplate what they read rather than to hurtle forward,” for if we are to “read thoughtfully, we cannot speed up the pace at which we read and we cannot outsource the activity to someone else” (Hofmeyr, *Gandhi’s Printing Press* 4). This method of reading, as Hofmeyr goes on to argue, becomes very much a part of Gandhian everyday practice, working against a narrative that equated speed with “efficiency” and progress (*Gandhi’s Printing Press* 4).

Given this characterisation of slow reading, it appears that selective reading—against which it developed—had little revolutionary potential. If anything, it was a form of mindless mass-consumption that emphasised conformity rather than exceptionality. The history of reading in Europe may lead us to a similar conclusion, though through a different route. As early modern scholarship has drawn to our attention, selective reading was not (at least globally) the post-industrial phenomenon Gandhi imagined it to be. Rather, its origins were closely tied to the widespread circulation of the printed book in fifteenth-century Europe. Driven by the fear of there being, to use the title of a study by Ann Blair, “too much to know,” the period saw the development of various reference genres as well as material and textual finding aids in the service of rapid and easy reading, allowing readers “random access [to texts] for specific ends” (Stallybrass, “Books and Scrolls” 46) in an age of what Ann Blair calls an “information overload” (3). In fact, as Peter Stallybrass has argued, selective reading has existed as the dominant and normative means of textual engagement since the genesis of the “navigable book” as we know it today, the book that “allowed you to get your finger into the place you wanted to find in the least possible time” (“Books and Scrolls” 44).²² It is only

²² Stallybrass contrasts the book with its predecessor, the scroll, which functioned through a “literally unwinding, in which the physical proximity of one moment in the narrative to another was both materially and symbolically significant” (“Books and Scrolls” 46), and whose form demanded continuity rather than the dynamic possibility of “hav[ing] our fingers in many different places at the same time, and to move rapidly from one to another” than the book allows (“Books and Scrolls” 42).

with the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century, that continuous reading—demanded, of course, by narrative development—came to be seen as a superior method.

While Stallybrass rightly mentions that technical manuals and phone books are genres that are always read discontinuously (“Books and Scrolls” 47), a case for the counter-cultural potential of selective reading in late nineteenth-century Bengal can still be made. This is at the level of colonial discourse, as well as traditional Hindu caste practice. As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, reading of the “correct” kind has always been central to the construction of the ideal colonised subject, evinced by a document like Macaulay’s Minute. Yet, even as this chapter focuses on the influx of new material into the almanac form, turning to the astrological section of the texts remind us that selective reading and repeated consultation also displaced a traditional Brahmanical model of learning. Prior to the arrival of the printed book in South Asia, reading and writing—and the calculation of astrological charts—was seen as the caste prerogative of a handful of male, Brahmin scholars, whose exhaustive studies both relied on and led to their being able to commit vast amounts of texts to memory. The printed text, the almanac included, eliminated the central place that both memory and literacy had in such a pre-colonial system of knowledge hierarchies.

Democratising what was earlier the product of years of training, cheap print transformed the “knowledge” that contributed to the plotting out of ritual time, into information—available at the flip of a page, in a universal, standardised form that everyone could negotiate. Reminding us that “rigid disciplinary reading practices could hardly be expected from a populace still inhabiting the borders of literacy and the print world,” Anindita Ghosh argues that the print almanac could be negotiated with only a basic knowledge of letters, a characteristic emphasised by publishers when marketing these texts to the semi-literate or functionally literate (184). This was particularly empowering for women readers, the primary and traditional market for *panjikas*.

What then of the almanac, when placed side by side with the greats of English literature recommended by Macaulay's Minute, or the laboured production of the rapidly dwindling personal astrological chart? Through its much larger readership, the almanac directory reoriented the target of colonial reform to the Bengali Hindu masses, so as to speak, demonstrating that it was in the negotiation of everyday bureaucratic structures—the office, the train and the ticking of the wall-clock—that colonial subjectivities were overwhelmingly constructed, rather than in the assimilation of literary, or arcane religious truths. If the “advantages” of colonial rule seemed available only to the English-speaking, literate classes, and those of reading to a small caste-group, the *panjika* reminds us that this was, in fact, far from the truth.

4. Selective Reading in Practice

Yet the selective reading of late nineteenth-century almanacs instantly throws up an inescapable paradox. While on the one hand, these texts were meant to be conveniently sized, on the other, it was difficult to tell what demands for information a reader might make of them. As is typically characteristic of compiled texts, the almanac developed through mix-and-match, bringing together often disparate fragments of miscellaneous information. The result of this, as we have seen, was that pocket-sized versions continued to proliferate in length making them rather unwieldy little volumes, often running into over six hundred pages. As a counter measure, *panjika* printers resorted to poorly-spaced page layouts, with different advertisements and bureaucratic material jostling with each other for space.

As Bonnie Mak argues, the “architecture of the page is . . . a complex and responsive entanglement of platform, text, image, graphic markings, and blank space” (5). The relationship between the “matter and mattering of the page” means that “each page facilitates,

circumscribes, and even checks the transmission of thought” (Mak 3, 8). The textual organisation of the *panjika*, however, undoubtedly undermined its function to an extent. The quality of the print, very small pages and narrow margins, taken along with the volume of information included, meant that tables and charts on a single page often became indistinguishable from each other. So while, as Gautam Bhadra writes, directories are made for perfunctory reference and for “spotting relevant information” (285), the printers of their colonial forms did not make the process of “spotting” very easy for their readers.

A useful counterpoint to this textual intermeshing comes from Thacker’s Indian Directories. Not far behind in their absorption of uncontrolled amounts of information, the directories were soon printed at a standard length of over 1800 pages, over three times the length of their Bengali counterparts. Despite emphases on portability, the company inadvertently made sure that it was impossible to carry the volumes anywhere. Unlike the *panjikas*, however, a range of very sophisticated finding devices and material printing strategies were incorporated into the directories, making them eminently navigable, if overwhelming. The primary reason for this was economic. *Panjikas* had to be cheap since they were disposable and catered to a cross-section of Bengali society (unlike the elite colonials for whom Thacker’s printed its directories). These considerations—to save paper and maximise profits—often worked against its ethic of selective reading, in a manner in which it did not with Thacker’s.

This section of the chapter examines how material and formal features allowed, as well as impeded, the form of reading Bengali Hindu almanacs styled themselves to promote. In the case studies that follow, I look at how readers may have used almanacs selectively, substantiating some of my speculative conclusions with marginalia and ephemeral finds in the Gupta Press office archive. I start by focusing on simple, though not always effective, finding aids that almanacs provided their readers, and go on to examine the visual

representation of information, whether in tabulated form (as was the case with the railway timetable), or in text-and-image combination (as documented in advertisements). I also draw attention to the measures taken to ensure that, despite the textual overloading, “vital” parts of almanacs were not simply ignored by flippant readers.

i. Guided Reading

So that readers could locate information in the shortest possible time, *panjikas* used finding aids to maximise the ease with which they were used.²³ Even before the coming of the printed book, different kinds of finding aids and devices were employed to ensure this. The first of these were of the reader’s own making—margin notes and summaries that allowed the second and subsequent readings of a text to be faster. Examples include the practice of bookmarking, or dogearing a page to remind oneself of its importance. The second are what Ann Blair calls, in the context of fifteenth-century Europe, “formalized finding devices” (177): elements incorporated as text or paratexts to allow readers to navigate books that were not of his or her making. These varied from a simple Table of Contents to an alphabetical index.

The most rudimentary evidence I was able to uncover of a reader’s trying to mark his or her place in an almanac, was a tram ticket tucked between two pages of the astrological

²³ For a detailed history of finding devices and reference genres in early modern Europe, see Blair’s excellent study on “info-lust,” the belief that every book may have something of value to read and remember (6). She also extends these arguments to the Islamic world and China. The *panjika*’s attempt to style itself as a readable text is mundane, drawing on information management practices that Blair traces back to the Renaissance. See Blair, as well as Blair and Stallybrass.

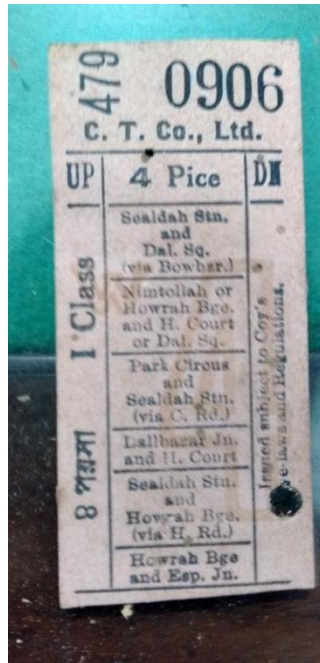


Fig. 3.1. Tram Ticket found inside a copy of a Gupta Press almanac for the year 1888–1889. Gupta Press Offices, Kolkata.

section of a Gupta Press almanac from the year 1888–1889 (fig. 3.1).²⁴ Its most sophisticated finding device was not much more advanced—an alphabetical index at its start, taking the place of a Table of Contents. Introducing the astrological section, this allowed readers to select the festival or ritual they wanted to look up in the book, and turn to that page, where they would find the information available in a series of tables. Erratic methods of pagination, however, limited the usefulness of the index. This is particularly true of the other two sections of the almanac, the advertisements and the directory. While Projit Mukharji points out that early advertisements often ran into several pages and had their own self-contained page numbers (101), in many almanacs I examined page numbers were altogether absent from this section of the text. While this is somewhat understandable, given that advertisements were not consulted in the same way as the astrological section was, it is less

²⁴ I have not been able to determine how old this ticket is, as there are no dates or identifying marks on it. That said, since it mentions the Howrah Bridge, which was only built in 1935, it is no doubt a later insertion.

easy to account for the absence of the directory section from the index. If readers wanted to check train timings quickly, they would have to leaf through the volume themselves to find the pertinent schedule. As the part of the *panjika* that was practically guaranteed to be read selectively, its conspicuous absence from a textual tool that aimed to enhance the reader's ability to do so is puzzling. Barring the separation of the astrological section from the opening advertisements (by the placement of the index), the sections run neatly into each other like a continuous text. The filtering role of the index indicates what *panjika* compilers, if not readers, still considered to be of paramount importance—ritual—creating an information hierarchy within the volume that resists the imposition of colonial over traditional practice.

In the astrological section, where page numbers did exist, there was no guarantee that they were correct. The Table of Contents of a copy of an 1895–1896 Gupta Press *panjika* had, to which handwritten amendments alerted me, no less than thirteen mis-numbered sections. A careful reader compensated for these errors, neatly cutting out the incorrect page number in pen and substituting it with the accurate one (fig. 3.2., p. 171). As we will continue to see, readers often had to take selective reading into their own hands.

Thacker's directory, on the other hand, provided its readers with multiple finding aids that worked collaboratively to detract from the disadvantages of its size. It contains several textual organisational tools: a basic, overarching Table of Contents as well as more specialised thematic indexes, such as one containing details of its advertisers and directing readers to their products. The text of the volumes was divided according to presidency, and prefaced with a divider page with a section title on it—"Bombay", for example, or in the case of a sub-section, "Calcutta Advertisements," creating a different picture from the messy run of *panjika* text.

ii. Reading Vertically and Horizontally

In 1857, a triumphant traveller to South Asia returned to Britain to write about his experiences in *Fraser Magazine*. Frustrated by the stereotypically tardy South Asian, he called for a different kind of “education” in time-management—the “glorious, much abused, and as yet little understood invention of the railway.” While “Blackey,” the representative colonial in the piece, frequently “lingers for his quarter or half-hour of dearly loved dawdling,” the “awful mechanical punctuality” of the railway means that when “the clock strikes, the bell rings, the dead-alive engine whistles,” the train is ready to depart, leaving the tardy passenger behind—“inexorable metal trip succeed in teaching the lesson which flesh and blood could not impress, and Blackey is never late at a railway station” (qtd. in Aguiar 12–13). While the anonymous writer perhaps overrated the punctuality of the Indian railway system, nowhere were the new lessons of clock-time more apparent than here, in one of the largest infrastructural projects in the colonial world, and the primary impetus for a uniform nationwide time (railway time, followed in 1905 by Indian standard time).

The railways and the subsequent standardisation of time found their most mundane expression in the form of the timetable. In 1950, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, C.N. Annadurai declared that “[t]wo books sell the most in our society: one, the almanac; the other, the railway timetable” (qtd. in Venkatachalapathy, *Province of the Book* xviii). In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengal, the two were often indistinguishable. While timetables were available at a very nominal price, travel times could be easily planned by referring to the listings included in the directory section of almanacs, and most readers managed by buying the one book rather than two. Thrift aside, the coming together of astrology and the railways has other critical consequences, at the heart of which is a conflict of different conceptions of time.

As material objects, these timetables were not easy to negotiate, in particular for the vernacular speaker. As Aparajita Mukhopadhyay writes in the case of the railway timetable, they were predominantly published in English, be it in the form of railway advertisements (in “The Friend of India” of 1854), or in travel guides such as Newman’s and Bradshaw’s (30, 40). The first Indian-language timetables were only to be printed in 1866 (Mukhopadhyay 41). What she does not mention, however, is that railway information was also made available to “native” travellers—in Bengal at least—through the medium of the *panjika*. As early as the 1860s, *panjika* printers of all descriptions began to add pertinent railway information to the directory section of the volumes. This typically included a list of railway regulations, often up to three pages long, along with a tabulated list of the price of single tickets on Morning, Evening and Sunday services, determined by whether one chose to travel in first, second or third class, as can be seen in fig. 3.3 (p. 174) from an 1861–1862 copy of Cones and Co.’s almanac.

Juxtaposed with the astrological material of the *panjika*, the railway timetable is a classic example of the manner in which the Bengali colonised subject existed simultaneously within two frames or conceptions of time. A *panjika* would traditionally be consulted to decide on an auspicious moment to begin a journey. With the fixed system of arrivals and departures on which the railways operated, religious considerations were replaced by practicality—the stars were, in effect, circumscribed by mechanical rhythms. Much like the standardised almanac, the railway timetable created a system that ensured that groups of disparate people came together at a particular time through the joint necessity to travel. In the timetable in fig. 3.3, the columns from left to right indicate: destinations from Calcutta, timings for morning services (three), the evening service, and the Sunday service, followed by the prices for single tickets (first, second and third class). As a common and widely

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Fig. 3.3. Railway Timetable. Cones and Co.'s almanac for the year 1861–1862. The columns, from left to right, indicate: destinations en route from Calcutta to Rajmahal, timings for morning services (three), the evening service, and the Sunday service, followed by the prices for single tickets (first, second and third class). Gupta Press Offices, Kolkata.

disseminated organisational tool, the timetable came to represent what E. P. Thompson describes in the context of the factory and bureaucratic office, as a culture of Foucauldian time-discipline: “[t]ime is now currency: it is not passed but spent” (61). Train schedules not only marked the promise to transport the individual from one fixed point to another in a stipulated period of time, but also highlighted the repetitiveness of the act—that this could be, and was, performed again and again at regular intervals. Even while the form came to represent, in the context of colonial Bengal, an “impersonal cash nexus and authority, embodied above all in the new rigorous discipline of work regulated by clock-time” (Sarkar,

“Kaliyuga” 1549), it also brought to readers and travellers the comfort of convenient familiarity. So even if, as Eviatar Zerubavel notes in another context, the form of the timetable represented the authority of one social group to organise and regulate the time of others, there was, in the case of the railway timetable, the opportunity to choose within this limited framework (“Timetables” 91).

As print items that are never read in full, the railway timetable highlights both the advantages as well as the difficulties of designing an object for selective reading. Take once again, the example of fig. 3.3. In a single page, it holds information for a total of 232 potential journeys, to different destinations at different times and in different classes of travel, obtained through the recombination of variables in the table. Don Bouwhuis points out that the typical reader of this format would have looked for “one specific piece of information, but [would have] to make his or her way through the [item] in order to recover it. It [would be] entirely natural to stop reading when the desired information [was] found” (352–53). This statement also draws our attention to the fact that the act of reading such a functional object is as repetitive as it is selective. Having no need to read it in its entirety, let alone remember it, a reader must once again consult the timetable if and when looking for another suitable train to catch in the future. Readers who, however, travelled on a few routes regularly, found simple ways of making these tables even easier to negotiate, either by circling or underlining the once-selected information, or, in the more rare case of a narrative timetable (with destinations, and the trains that would pass through them, listed in paragraph form), by writing the relevant details in the margins for future consultation.

As Mike Esbester notes in his study of British Victorian railway timetables, the unusual form of a matrix of information (with the reader locating the required information at a ninety degree angle of intersection between the relevant row and column) could baffle first-time users (163). At one level, the tabulated form meant that more information could be

included on a single page, a cost-cutting mechanism to which almanac printers often resorted. But the inclusion of a range of information made it possible for the timetable to be read selectively in multiple directions—between columns and rows, horizontally, and vertically. A selective reader and casual vacationer could check to see how far from home the cheapest ticket could take him or her. For a railway platform vendor looking for a timely moment to hawk his wares to passengers, the fares column would be totally irrelevant. The selective beauty of the grid system is that it makes sense however (and in whatever direction) it is read.

There was also, however, a simpler material concern for the almanac reader. While the tables had clearly defined titular rows and columns, each piece of information was not separated into an individual cell. Reading as a grid demands, both horizontally and vertically, meant that travellers could easily find themselves with the incorrect information, that is, the information pertaining to the row above or below the one they selected. This was particularly likely in the example of the timetable in fig. 3.3., which involves three different variables for any given reading (destination, timing and price). To aid the untrained eye squinting at closely-packed small print, readers such as the owners of an 1890–1891 copy of a Gupta Press almanac drew lines in pen indicating which values in the rows corresponded with those in the columns (fig. 3.4.).

Fig. 3.4. Part of a table indicating the price of train freight services. Gupta Press almanac for the year 1890–1891. The columns indicate: distance of travel, followed by five different categorisations of parcel weight. Note the ink connecting the variables. Photo courtesy of Gupta Press Panjika Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata.

But while the railway timetable provided readers with the technical information they required to make use of train services, almanacs were also sources of surreptitious reminders, especially of the established social etiquette that was associated with travel. These were as much a part of the process of the colonial subject's instruction into modernity. Take for example the case of fig. 3.5. Woodcuts of trains generally decorated the headers of pages of the almanac pertaining to train travel, the level of detail varying from publisher to publisher. Here, the woodcut of the train is much larger than was customary, and each carriage is labelled according to the class of travel (first, second and third). On close examination, the passengers who can be seen through the windows of the first two are exclusively European as

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Fig. 3.5 Woodcut of a train. Cones and Co. almanac for the year 1862–1863. The carriages are labelled according to the classes of travel: first, second, and third. Gupta Press Offices, Kolkata.

suggested by the elaborate hats and bonnets that they are wearing. The third class carriage, meant for South Asian passengers, is conspicuously empty. Despite being hailed as an equalising force, leading South Asians to travel together in compartments with people of different castes, the exclusionary implications that the woodcut highlights are undeniable. The almanac's seemingly innocent image thus works in an ambiguous way—either to remind Bengalis of their place (in third class) as part of the social codes that structured the inhabitation of this new technology, or alternatively and more subversively, drawing their attention to the uneven nature of modernity itself. While not articulated in words, a simple glance at the image makes its secondary meaning clear enough.

Bureaucratic time did not simply affect clerical staff— it also controlled and determined the interactions the colonial public had with the state. As I discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the office was the conduit between the colonial state and its subjects. Bengalis had to learn how to work their way through the complexities of the administration that regulated their everyday life. The almanac gave them basic information on how to go about this. Its directory section included information regarding the filing of taxes and the registration of complaints, as well as court timings and lists of official holidays. For example, readers needed to know the days of the weeks and the structure of the Gregorian calendar to understand how the bureaucratic office operated. The almanac presented this information through neatly tabulated schemes. Some simply carried a note on the unfamiliar calendar, listing the months and the number of days they contained in serial order, almost in the form of a lesson that the reader had to memorise. Other editions, through lists of holidays for the year, allowed readers to see equivalences between the English, Bengali, and sometimes Islamic, days of the year. For example, from fig. 3.6 (p. 179) a reader could tell that *Mahalaya*, the first day of *Durga Puja*, would be on the eighth day of the

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Fig. 3.6. Table showing correspondence between different calendars. Cones and Co. Almanac for the year 1862–1863. Gupta Press Offices, Kolkata.

Bengali month of *Aashin*—23 September, which was also a Tuesday, and for which one day of holiday would be granted to the citizens of the province. The table allows the vernacular reader to literally translate, for the purpose of public interaction, between seemingly incompatible times. This need not be a chaotic process, the neat tables seem to suggest, but simply a modern necessity with which one must deal.

Unlike the railway timetable and calendar, both of which highlighted for the average Bengali the restrictive aspects of colonial modernity, time-keeping would also take an exciting turn that flourished in the advertisement section of the *panjika*, which preceded the central astrological section. While the clock tower in the town square was considered to be a sign of colonial power and oppression, and was often the focal point of anti-colonial protests, the incursion of colonial rhythms into domestic space, reorganising the experience of


personal time, coalesced around the coveted item of the individual's watch or family clock. Sumit Sarkar notes that clocks and watches came to colonial South Asia relatively late, only making an appearance at the turn of the nineteenth century (*Beyond Nationalist Frames* 10). By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, they had been transformed into necessary, if luxury items, initiating the upwardly mobile journeys of those who could afford to possess them (Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames* 25). Several companies used almanacs as an effective medium in which to advertise them.

The personal watch revolutionised conceptions of personal time in several ways. For one, it reminded colonial subjects that time could be measured precisely (Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames* 17). As Stephen Kern puts it in the context of the Anglo-American world, temporality thus took on a distinctly material turn in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: “[c]locks produced audible reminders of the atomistic nature of time with each tick and visible representations of it with their calibrations” (20). Worn on the body, whether hanging on a chain or strapped to a wrist, time was suddenly “immediately and personally knowable” (Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames* 17), and had to be regulated by each person according to his or her own needs.

It is not surprising, then, to see the sheer variety of watches and clocks advertised in almanacs. These mapped onto the multiple spheres and daily patterns that were reorganised by colonial intervention. One needed, these volumes seemed to suggest, a different kind of watch or clock depending on one's personal and occupational relationship with time. The alarm clock, for example, stood as a testament to the fact that men who worked for a living now had to wake up at a fixed time every day in order to reach work at the appointed hour. That they often had to travel substantial distances to reach their offices is evinced in turn by the many advertisements for “The Railway Regulator” whose advantages included its keen


ওয়েস্ট ওয়াচ কোং।

লেডী সাইজ ওয়াচ।



মুখখোলা, চাবি-বিহীন, ঠিক সময় রাখে, অত্যন্ত ছোট সাইজ, দেখিতে সুন্দরী, মূল্য ১নং ৪।০, ২নং ৩।০, ঐরূপার ৫।০, মাং ১০/০, গ্যাং ৩৪ সন।

টেবিল টাইমপিস।



৫ইঞ্চ ডায়াল, নিকেল কেস, ঠিক সময় রাখে ঘণ্টা, অর্ধ ঘণ্টা এবং এলাস্টিক বাজিবে। এন-সোনিয়া মেকার মূল্য ১।০, জার্মান মেড। (এলাস্টিক নাই) ৩।০, মাং ১।০/০, গ্যাং ৩ সন।


কুরভাইজার ফেরিস

ওয়াচ ঢাকনীদার, পৃথক চাবি, রূপার কেস, সুদৃঢ় কল, ঠিক সময় রাখে ছোট সাইজ, জুয়েলযুক্ত। মূল্য ১৩, ঐ লিভার ১৫, মাং ১।০, গ্যাং ৫ সন, গ্যাস প্রীং, কে সুবাল্ল ক্রী

যুগভঙ্গান টাইমপিস।

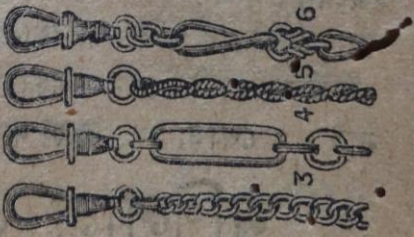
৪ইঞ্চ ডায়াল, ঠিক সময় রাখে, সেট টমার্ক-এলাস্টিক ৪, এনসোনিয়া এলাস্টিক ৩।০, ঐ জার্মান এলাস্টিক ২, মাং ১০/০, গ্যাং ৩২ সন।

বাইজী টাইমপিস।



৪ ইঞ্চি ডায়াল, নিকেল কেস, ঠিক সময় রাখে, বাইজী হান্ডি-মুখে চক্ষু ঠারিয়া দর্শকের মন হরণ করে। মূল্য ২।০, মাং ১০/০, গ্যাং ২ সন।

হোয়াইট মেটাল চেন।



লম্বে প্রায় ১২।। ইঞ্চি, ব্যবহারে রূপার ন্যায় রং থাকিবে, ৩নং ৪নং ৫নং ৬নং প্রত্যেক মূল্য ১, মাং ১০।

Fig. 3.7. Clock advertisement for West Watch Co. Gupta Press almanac for the year 1914–1915. Clockwise: Table clock, Alarm Clock, White Metal Chain, Courtesan/Prostitute Time piece, Courvoisier Freres' watch, Ladies' sized watch. Photo courtesy of Gupta Press Panjika Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata.

temporal precision—it could run without being wound for three days at a stretch. Similarly, with the daily rhythms of the household being restructured by the routines of the male members of the family, women entered the market as a significant buyers, highlighted by the widespread availability of “Ladies’ sized” watches. Despite the negative connotations of

time-discipline, watches and clocks were marketed as luxury items that conferred prestige on their owners. However, the fact that a watch was not a necessary purchase for all is reflected in a particularly racy advertisement in a 1914–1915 *panjika* for a “Courtesan/Prostitute watch,” the smiling face of a woman on the dial of which was said to “seduce” potential customers into buying it (fig. 3.7, p. 181).

iii. Medicinal Oil, Gonorrhoea, or a Detective Novel?

The isolated example of the racially-segregated train in the last section provides a starting point for the next case study, on another component of almanacs that commonly drew on images and visual elements to aid the process of selective reading—the advertisement. As I have already mentioned, advertisements were an increasingly prominent part of almanacs from the 1880s onwards. The volumes would generally open with details of a variety of products: hair curlers, cures (real and imagined) for sexually transmitted diseases, detective novels and watches are just some of the commodities available to the Bengali middle class from the pages of its almanacs. The number of advertisements increased with each year—a testament to the acknowledged popularity of the almanac which made it an excellent vehicle for capitalist aspirations. The exact number depended on the popularity of the edition—*panjikas* produced by the Gupta Press and P.M. Bagchi carried more advertisements, often accounting for close to thirty percent of the volume’s page count, whereas the less popular *panjika* named after Lord Ripon, of which I have only been able to locate a single issue, had no more than five to six pages of advertisements. As Projit Mukharji has pointed out, drawing on Gautam Bhadra’s work on vernacular advertisements, *bigyapan*, the Bengali word that is generally translated as “advertisement,” was also synonymous with prefaces to printed books. Bengali advertisements were often extremely wordy, a far cry from the snappy one-liners that

we associate with efficient marketing today, and so gesture towards a broader category than the English word suggests. Often printed on coloured pages to separate them from the rest of the almanac text, they formed separate textual units to be read and examined in their own right (Mukharji 101).

However, the point of these advertisements was, ultimately, to ensure the sale of advertised products. There was no way to guarantee that the advertisements included in almanacs were being looked at, let alone read. Included in the first section of the almanac, advertisements were separated from the main body of text, and so could easily be skipped by uninterested readers. Given their length, it is quite possible that these wordy narratives have only found readers in contemporary historians of colonial Bengal.

Thacker's directories too carried discrete advertisement sections, organised by city and province. Advertisements that did not occupy a full-page were included in the "Traders, Merchants and Manufacturers" section, with services and products organised alphabetically. A reader was given therefore information about multiple retailers and manufacturers for any given commodity. In this manner, a comparative frame was created that allowed readers to work their way through the different choices available to them, much like window shopping. Transforming the selective reader into the ideal consumer, Thacker's directory fulfils the role that the *panjika* sets out to occupy, though the latter made its readers actively work against its material barriers of format and poor print to complete their education in modern living.

The volumes did, however, work with a much more organic interfusion of text and advertisement unseen in *panjikas*. Commodities are interspersed throughout the volume, appearing alongside core information, on the section divider pages and, in an aggressive strategy, on the spines and page edges of its volumes. In the case of the 1903 directory, the red cover of the volume carries advertisements too for automobile-related products, such that one could easily mistake it for a directory dealing with mechanical concerns.

An excellent example of such targeted marketing, aiming to slip through the gaps selective reading creates, is that of Henley Cables, a telegraph company. Advertisements for the organisation appear not only on the page edges of the 1931 volume (such that you are reading the advertisement even when the directory is closed) but also consistently before each new section, catching the reader who skips and skims at every possible opportunity. Readers who may have missed part of the directory could have their attention captured in this way.

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Fig. 3.8. Advertisement for H. Dey's Wonderful Gonorrhoea Mixture. Day and Brothers' almanac for the year 1885–1886. Gupta Press Offices, Kolkata.

The design and layout of the *panjika*'s advertisements, particularly their use of typeface and images, nevertheless suggest that artists and the nineteenth-century equivalents of marketing executives also spent some time considering the suitable arrangement of text and images, to lure the casual reader into the swirl of commodities on offer. The primary and most effective way in which this was done was through the use of images which, as we would expect, correspond with the items being advertised. An example of this, which highlights and points to, once again, the practices of selective reading, is an advertisement for a cure for gonorrhoea (fig. 3.8.). The text size that the advertisement uses is particularly small—the skimming reader is alerted to it by the striking image that appears above it. A scantily clad

man faces us, propped up seductively on his left arm, his legs coyly crossed. The titillating possibilities of this image may arrest a reader, only to see what is written across his bare torso: gonorrhoea. While the text of the advertisement is in Bengali, this key word in the image is written in English. Though the image filters out some readers, by whether or not they are in need of the potent cure mixture, the English speaker has an edge over his vernacular counterpart in this respect.

However, not all images printed as part of an advertisement could immediately be associated with the product being advertised, thus qualifying their role as guides to selective reading. The partial mismatch of image and text can be seen, for example, in a double advertisement for two medicinal products, drops claiming to prevent cholera and curative oil for arthritic pain (fig. 3.9, p. 186). The image between them is that of the deity Jagannath, flanked by his brother Balaram on the left, and sister Subhadra on the right. None of these deities are associated with the alleviation or prevention of disease. On the face of it, therefore, the sacred image stands as a placeholder; a neutral, if confusing image. It is only when one turns to the wordy passages of text about the cholera drops, does the advertiser's choice become clearer. We are told that while the period around Rath Yatra, a chariot festival associated with Jagannath, is known for high incidences of cholera (understandable, given that it is usually in July, during the height of the monsoons), products such as these cholera drops have, in recent years, been able to keep the disease in check. That being said, a reader flipping through an almanac looking for a medicinal product would have been unlikely to pause on this image.

It could be argued that for the most part, advertisers did not need their advertisements to be read carefully since the fact that they were published in a *panjika* gave their products an established authority by association. There were, however, some that had to be read—those for newly published books. Almanacs carried notices of the publication of several kinds of

কে, কে, দস্তুর

বাতের তৈল ।

ইহা একবার মাত্র পরীক্ষা করিয়া দেখুন। ইহার অসাধারণ কল্প-
 দায়িনী শক্তিতে বিলাতি পেনকিলার ও দেশীয় মহামাষ তৈলকে ইহা অতিক্রম
 করিয়াছে। সর্বপ্রকার বাত বেদনা নিবারণে এ তৈলের সমান অল্প কোন
 বেদনা নিবারক ঔষধ অদ্যাপি আবিষ্কৃত হয় নাই। যিনি একবার মাত্র এই
 তৈল ব্যবহার করিবেন তিনি আজীবন ইহার গুণানুকীৰ্ত্তন না করি
 কাস্ত থাকিতে পারিবেন না। ইহাতে গোট্টে বাত, চলতি বাত, একাঙ্গনী
 বাত, লম্ব্যাগো বা কোমরের বাত, গাঁট ফুলা, কনকনানি বন্বনানি
 গর্তন জনিত বেদনা ফিক্বেদনা প্রভৃতি আশু বিদূরিত হইয়া থাকে।
 মালিসের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে ইহার গুণ উপলব্ধি করিতে পারা যায়।
 এক শিশির মূল্য ৮০, প্যাকিং ১০ ডাকমাণ্ডল স্বতন্ত্র।

কে, কে, দস্তুর

কলেরা

ড্রপস্ ।

ইহাতে বিসৃচিকা, অতিশার ও সর্বপ্রকার উদরাময় রোগ আশু বিদূরিত
 হয়। প্রতি গৃহস্থের ইহার এক শিশি ঘর বলিয়া রাখা উচিত। ওলাউঠা
 রোগের সর্বপ্রকার ঔষধ অদ্যাপি আবিষ্কৃত হইয়াছে তন্মধ্যে এই ঔষধটী সকল
 ঔষধের শীর্ষস্থান অধিকার করিয়াছে বলিলে অত্যাঙ্গি হয় না। দেবাদিদেব
 ঋষীঃ জগন্নাথ দেবের লীলাভূমি শ্রীক্ষেত্র পুরী ধামে তীর্থসেবী যাত্রিদিগকে
 সন্তোষ ও রথযাত্রার পূর্ব বৎসরের গ্রায় এই ভীষণ ব্যাধি তাদৃশ নিধন
 পান্য সোধন করিতে সক্ষম হয় নাই। উক্ত স্থানীয় কতিপয় কৃতবিদ্য ব্যক্তি উক্ত
 ঔষধের স্বাপক্ষে ইংরাজিতে বাহা লিখিয়াছেন তাহার অবিকল বঙ্গানুবাদ :—
 কামিনীমণি দেবীর অর্শ ও ভগলর রোগের ঔষধের আধুনিক স্বাধিকারী।

Fig. 3.9. Advertisement for anti-Arthritis Oil (above) and Cholera drops (below), with the image of Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra dividing the two. Gupta Press almanac for the year 1902–1903. Photo courtesy of Gupta Press Panjika Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata.

প্রতিভাবান ডিটেক্টিভ উপন্যাসিক শ্রীযুক্ত পাঁচকড়ি দে নরনারী

সচিত্র ডিটেক্টিভ উপন্যাস

নিম্নলিখিত ডিটেক্টিভ উপন্যাসগুলি লক্ষপ্রতিষ্ঠ প্রখ্যাতনানা ডিটেক্টিভগণের গভীর রহস্যপূর্ণ চুরি জুয়াচুরি জাল খুন ও ডাকাতি নানা নতায়টনা অবলম্বনে লিখিত। সকল সংবাদপত্রে প্রশংসিত। পুস্তক ২৫৩০ পাতার যেমন তেমন ছোটগল্প নহে, ২৫০,৩০০ পৃষ্ঠার এক এক প্রকাণ্ড উপন্যাসগ্রন্থ। অথচ আমার বাজে কথায় পূর্ণ নহে, এক একখানি উপন্যাস ২৩।২২ খানি বড় উপন্যাস পাঠের আনন্দলাভ হয়। পুস্তকগুলি এতদূর আ হইয়াছে যে ৫।৬ বার সংস্করণ হইয়াছে এবং হিন্দী উর্দু তামিলী ইংরাজী প্র সকল ভাষাতেই অনুবাদ হইতেছে। নূতন অক্ষরে পুস্তক গ্লেজ কাগজে অতি সু রূপে ছাপা, বিলাতীধরণে সুরমা বাঁধান। রহস্যপূর্ণ ডিটেক্টিভ উপন্যাস প্র পাঁচকড়ি বাবু বঙ্গসাহিত্যে সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ আমনলাভ করিয়াছেন।

* সকল পুস্তকেই বড় আকারের অসংখ্য ছবি আছে—নমুনা দেখুন।*

যনোরমা কামরূপ দেশবাসিনী মিস্‌মী জাতীয়া কোন সুন্দরী রমণী পৈশাচিক কার্যকলাপপূর্ণ অগূর্ব জীবনকাহিনী, কামরূপ দেশের স্ত্রীলোকদিগের অনেক কথা অনেক জানেন, কিন্তু ইহার নিকট নকল কিছুই নহে, ইহাতে দেখিবেন কামরূপদেশের স্ত্রীলোকদিগের হৃদয় অসামান্য পরাক্রমে ও সাহসে পরিপূর্ণ, সেই ভয়ানক হৃদয়ে যখন যে বিকসিত হয়, সে প্রেমও কত ভয়ানক ও আবেগময়, সেই পৈশাচিক প্রেম জনা, অতুলনায় প্রেমোন্মাদিনী হইয়া তাহার না পারে এমন ভয়াবহ ক পৃথিবীতে, কিছুই নাই, একরাতে সেই রমণীর করে পাঁচটি গুপ্ত নরনারী হ তাহার প্রকৃষ্ট প্রমাণ। মূল্য ১৮০ স্থলে ৮০ মাত্র।

মাহাশিবিনী প্রলঙ্করী জুমেলিয়ার লোমহর্ষণ বিত্তীষিকা হত্যা-উৎসব পাঠে শুরুর রোমাঞ্চিত এ ধমনীতে রক্তস্রোত প্রবল বেগে প্রবাহিত হয়। মূল্য ১, স্থলে ১০ মাত্র।

পরিমল বিবাহ রাত্রে বিমলার আকস্মিক হত্যাবিত্তীষিকা পরিমলের অপার্থিব মারল্য, তীক্ষ্ণবুদ্ধি ডিটেক্টিভ (গোয়েন্দা) নগীষচন্দ্রের কোশলে গুপ্তরহস্যভেদ, হীরডাকাতির ও তা

Fig. 3.10. Bookseller's advertisement. Gupta Press almanac for the year 1902–1903. Photo courtesy of Gupta Press Panjika Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata. The first book is an illustrated collection of detective stories. Note how the font size of the book titles elongates as we proceed down the page.

books—dictionaries, encyclopaedias, short story collections. However, they primarily carried extended lists of cheap detective novels, the Battala pulp of the nineteenth-century reader. These advertisements generally contained short summaries of the plot, followed by details of price and availability. The advertisers often bought limited space, and so had to fit a large number of books in a few pages. As a result of this, they allocated this space to highlight some books over others. The primary level on which this was done was through the manipulation of font sizes. Take for example, fig. 3.10 (p. 187). The first book advertised, *Sachitra Dectective Upanyash*, an illustrated collection of detective stories, is evidently the publishing house's priority. The last two books, *Mayabini* (Femme Fatale) and *Parimal* (the name of the protagonist) get three lines each, and their titles are aligned to the left in order to utilise margin space. On the offchance they may still interest readers, their titles are in a bigger font as a reminder of their presence, though this makes them awkwardly elongated.

As a final significant feature, rather than simply hoping that their readers would pore through the texts of their advertisements, companies perhaps relied above all on selective reading's most powerful ally—repetition. The same advertisements appeared in consecutive editions of almanacs (health tonics and hair oil being particularly resilient), often in the same place as they did in the earlier edition. If nothing else, advertisers could depend on the fact that bombarding their consumers with identical advertisements would make them at least familiar, if not memorable.

5. Unlikely Readers: Middle-class men

Over the last sections of this chapter, I have outlined some of the ways in which late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century *panjikas* adopted certain techniques of format and presentation in order to allow their readers to interact with them selectively. To me, an urgent

question remains—who are these selective readers? Overwhelming evidence, as Anindita Ghosh points out, suggests that women were, indeed, the primary target readership of the genre (176). Adapted in its standardised form to allow women to carry out daily domestic and religious rituals with minimum male interference, the *panjika*, as I have already suggested, definitely plays a central role in the gendered democratisation of print. A female readership is further highlighted in the kinds of advertisements that are included in the volumes—for personal beauty products, jewellery and cheap novels. It is important to note, however, that unlike the astrological section of the almanac that can be navigated with rudimentary literacy skills, the advertisements are pitched to a very specific class of women: urban, literate and middle class. Not only do the lengthy advertisements presume literacy, all the companies advertising their products are based in Calcutta.

While it is always difficult to tell how readers reacted to different texts, a useful way in which the colonial reading subject can be retrieved from the pages of the *panjika* is from its margins. H. J. Jackson, in her extensive study of marginalia in over two thousand books writes that readers' notes in books are a "familiar yet unexamined phenomenon" which often generate uncomfortable feelings of "shame and disapproval" in us (4). Despite their unreliability, the act of readers writing in books "maybe valued all the more, nowadays, for being the work of nameless readers" (H. J. Jackson 2). As momentary musings that are private but now, have become public, these notes must be read as an expression of personality, as reflective of an intimate connection between text and readerly experience. The disposable nature of almanacs has, across cultures and history, encouraged their readers to write in them. William Sherman, for example, reminds us that early modern English almanacs often contain scribbles that had little or no connection with their content, including and not restricted to shopping lists, drafts of letters and arithmetical calculations (15). A purpose was found for every blank space in the almanac.

The *panjika* was no exception. One would expect the family *panjika* to be tattered, if not torn, thumbed through, and scribbled on with relevant and irrelevant notes. As Gautam Bhadra writes, later *panjikas* often came with blank pages included in them, inviting readers to use them to record personal information of their own in the book, and making each copy of an almanac unique (282). This impulse possibly drew from the form of the pocket almanac, such as Tilt's Almanack and subsequently, the Brahmo Pocket Diary and Almanack. These contained pages alongside the usual calendar to allow readers to record events of trivial though personal importance.

None of the *panjikas* in the Gupta Press archive included blank pages, but that did not deter their readers from writing in them. My own rummage through the collection revealed multiple traces of readers who presented me with notes of various kinds. Jackson suggests that different kinds of blank spaces invite different kinds of marginalia from readers—the top margins for comments on titles, the side margins for corrections and comments on the core body of the text (37). However, the books Jackson examines all broadly belong to a literary, historical and philosophical canon and therefore have a certain intellectual status. Whether Bengali readers of the ephemeral and disposable *panjika* were more unruly or not, and their notes are hardly as neatly structured as Jackson seems to suggest that her readers' are. They “trespass” into the text (H. J. Jackson 28), and often the handwriting obscures the printed text it runs across, once again giving us a reminder of the status of the almanac.

The most common examples of writing I encountered were marks of ownership. The names of readers were written across the soft paper covers of the *panjikas*, and sometimes on the inner flyleaves, often several times. Similar evidence can be found in the volumes' margins. In a *panjika* published by the Gupta Press for the year 1902–1903, the owner has written the year twice, in Bengali and English, in what appears to be nothing more than an exercise in boredom, doodling, as one would on a newspaper. William Sherman makes a

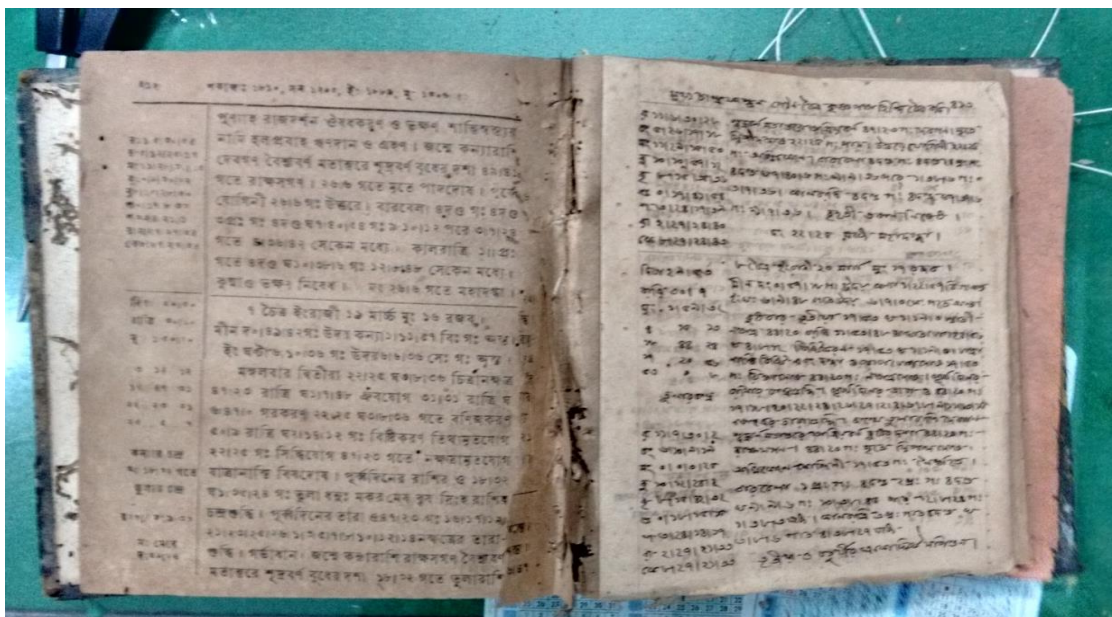
valid point regarding the classification of notes of this kind: “[m]any of the notes that readers wrote in their books—doodles, pen practices, ownership formulae, and a wide variety of quotations, marks that were entered in books simply because they offered a convenient space for writing and archiving—do not qualify as ‘annotations’” (23). He provides several useful alternate terms, the most appropriate in this case being graffiti, which he draws from Juliet Fleming’s work. In providing us with the graffiti’s “most simple and paradigmatic instance,” “‘I was here’” (Fleming, qtd. in Sherman 23)—the scribbles of these *panjika* readers not only remind us of the ways in which readers make their marks. They also remind us, again, of how *panjikas* were valued in families—as convenient, but ultimately, ephemeral texts.

A particularly amusing instance of this can be seen in a Gupta Press almanac for the year 1882–1883. Like other almanacs, this contained black-and-white woodcut prints depicting different religious festivals. But in this particular copy in the company’s archive, several of the illustrations have been (very neatly) coloured in with red and blue pencil (fig. 3.11, p. 192). Almost certainly the work of a child, the fact that these appear across the archive in other volumes as well makes clear that this was a permitted use of the almanac. Yet other forms of writing and notes found in almanacs demonstrate that despite their disposability, they were essential and important documents. For example, a Gupta Press almanac for the year 1888–1889 revealed that four torn out of the astrological section (pages 413–16) had been replaced by the same information neatly copied out in hand making sure that the text was still usable. (fig. 3.12, p. 192).



Fig. 3.11. (above). A woodcut of Christmas, presumably coloured by a child. Gupta Press almanac for the year 1882–1883. Photo courtesy of Gupta Press Panjika Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata.

Fig. 3.12. (below, left to right). Printed and handwritten pages in a copy of a Gupta Press almanac for the year 1889–1890. Photo courtesy of Gupta Press Panjika Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata.



More “serious” notes qualifying as annotations (in the sense of demonstrating a direct engagement with the printed text on the page) can also be found across all sections of *panjikas*. In one case a conscientious reader has even transliterated into Roman script the titles of the books in a publishing house’s advertisement (fig. 3.13.). Apart from somewhat expected sets of calculations alongside astrological charts, the astrological section of another

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Fig. 3.13. Bookseller’s advertisement. Day, Law and Co.’s almanac for the year 1896–1897. Gupta Press Offices, Kolkata. The title of the book, *Upakhyan Manjari* (Garland of Stories), appears above in roman script.

panjika revealed a note across the time chart for 29 Chaitra (10 April), “[a]t ten minutes past nine in the morning J.N. Sen got a son” (fig. 3.14., p. 194). *Panjikas* were not generally used, as family bibles were, to record significant events such as births, deaths and marriages, not only because of their disposable nature but also because writing has little place in Hindu ritual. A sacred text may exist in print or manuscript but gains power only in the act of recitation. On its own, it is not much more than an ordinary object. The text underneath cannot be read for the inked handwritten note above it; the palimpsestic quality of the text beneath the text, of meanings superimpose note that is not meant to be a gloss for the printed text, but makes it irrelevant, unreadable, even, perhaps the work of a bored Bengali babu.

This image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

Fig. 3.14. The astrological section for the 29th day of the Bengali month of *Chaitra* (10 April). Day, Law and Co.'s almanac for the year 1872–1873. Gupta Press Offices, Kolkata. The note reads, “At ten minutes past nine in the morning, JN Sen got a son.”

Smyth calls such notes “single record[s]” or “non-narrative” modes of expression that nevertheless have a “ghostly significance” (218). Even if we are afforded just one peek into the events of a person’s life through the textual records in almanacs, such a moment points to all that is not documented and remains unrecorded and inaccessible to us.

I say Bengali babu above despite an earlier claim that women were the primary reading demographic of the traditional *panjika* for several reasons, which will be revealed by a quick examination of the notes discussed. What is most surprising about these otherwise rather mundane doodles is that, with the exception of the astrological calculations, all of them are in English. The readers were, however, without a doubt, Bengali. While in some cases this is clear from a Bengali name written on the cover of the volume, the case of the transliterated advertisement is more curious. Abhijit Gupta has pointed out to me in personal conversation that transliteration of this kind was a common archiving practice and that many

copies of vernacular books in repositories such as the British Library would also yield such examples. However, the fact that this book belongs in a personal collection makes it safe to assume that these are indeed markings of a non-institutional, everyday and presumably, Bengali reader. That the reader was conversant in Bengali—and was not transliterating for the purposes of another reader who was not—is evinced in the fact that no translation of the books' titles is indicated in these interlineal notes.

What the presence of the colonial language on the pages of this vernacular book points to is that English-educated, Bengali men too were owners, if not readers, of almanacs—using the directory sections to organise their interactions with the colonial state, and the astrological sections their domestic lives. *Panjika* publishers were clearly aware of this. Not only did some Bengali advertisements in the volumes contain words written in English, *Lord Ripon's Panjika* for the year 1884–1885 even includes a six page extract from the newspaper, the *Indian Mirror*, in English. This is evidence of at least a sizeable section of the *panjika* reading community having not just a working knowledge of, but the ability to comprehend English narrative prose. This corroborates my argument that in the late nineteenth century, the *panjika* was circulating in a new sphere dominated by colonial English education. This did not, however, as we can see, necessarily displace the book's role or importance in everyday Bengali Hindu life. Rather, with its sweeping demographic, the *panjika* demonstrates its outreach to a less than likely group of “modern” readers.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to chart a brief history of a commercially-motivated and ubiquitous nineteenth-century genre, the Bengali Hindu almanac. Through a study of its material tropes of textual organisation and repetition, I argue that the text shapes itself as one

that allows, if not encourages, the practice of selective reading. Though this is perhaps not unusual for a reference book, I highlight the resistant potential in superficial textual engagement that stands in opposition to an imperial history built on reading intensively, and at length. This alternative mode of reading, as we have seen, becomes not only a central force in the construction of the Bengali colonial subject as modern, but also importantly makes this identity available to a cross-section of society that is otherwise excluded from colonial intellectual debate. I complicate the process of selective reading, arguing that these texts are framed by multiple contingencies—the need to be portable and yet exhaustive, the need to be able to be read selectively and yet trick the reader into prioritising certain parts over others. In doing so, I conclude that despite their dynamic form, *panjika* printers were often forced to create antithetical textual objects—ones that were almost unreadable in their attempts to balance informational and economic factors.

The structural principle that holds the different sections of this chapter together is temporality. Time enters the lives of *panjika* readers in different yet simultaneous ways—through bureaucratic listings, through astrological predictions, and through the railway schedule. The capacity to demonstrate to its readers that modernity was not predicated on choosing one kind of time over the other, but through managing the co-existence of local and global forms of temporality, is what made the almanac a key vehicle in the everyday lives of nineteenth-century Bengalis.

While Chapters One and Two's examples of unlikely readers drew from classes that were not conventional associated with reading of any kind, this chapter has, by contrast, reminded us that unlikeliness also arises from the mismatch of text and consumer. In this case, we have seen how the diversified form of the *panjika* claimed for itself a readership of English-educated Bengali men. Tracing their material marks, it has become clear that the process of colonial intervention did not eliminate the role of traditional texts, but rather,

reframed their cultural position through strategic adaptation. The next and final chapter of this thesis will add another layer to our definition of the unlikely reader, highlighting fractures and hierarchies even within a single social and gendered group.

Chapter Four

Extracting Cosmopolitanism: *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*

1. Reading Gender

In September 1904, “Newspapers and Magazines,” a short article written by a T.K. Rammuni, was published in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, an English-language monthly printed in Madras. In a magazine to which Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant were regular contributors, an op-ed by an unknown woman would hardly expect to receive much notice. Rammuni’s piece, however, usefully for my purposes in this chapter, summarised a topic of considerable contention at the turn of the twentieth century: the relationship between reading and genre. Making a distinction between “trashy literature” produced to satiate the “prurient curiosity of certain classes of people” and “good newspapers and magazines,” she argued that periodical literature had multiple, often overlooked, merits (85). First, it provided readers with news from around the world, while adhering to journalistic standards of “truth” and “good taste” (85). By bringing to notice “various benevolent schemes,” it invited them to participate in the common cause of humanity by addressing issues ranging from the outbreak of contagious diseases to “scandalous methods in the administration of any country” (85). Further, while periodicals were castigated in particular for their role in destroying the “love of reading the standard authors of the English language,” Rammuni argued that the “literary appreciations” and book reviews they published put many an errant reader on the “track of books which he might not have even dreamed of reading had he not read reviews of them in the periodicals” (85).¹ More than simply a source of information, the periodical, as she saw it,

¹ I will address the relationship between book reviews and reading in a later section of this chapter.

provided global readers with the opportunity to debate and collaborate on collective causes, and discover unknown texts, if only through the consumption of thin printed pages.

As was conventional for the time, Rammuni's article insistently uses masculine pronouns to refer to the hypothetical readers of the periodical but, as we will see, the form counted among those who engaged with it a perhaps unlikely readership: South Asian women. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the development of the genre in the region was intricately linked with public debates about what it meant to be a woman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² Like the almanacs I discussed in Chapter Three that helped readers adapt to the bureaucratised space of colonial modernity, locally-produced periodicals served to initiate women into the challenges that colonialism posed to traditional gendered roles and the structure of the family. In this regard, they shared some characteristics with other common forms of didactic literature available at the time; predominately, the domestic manual.³ Borrowing from the model of the Victorian conduct book, such publications drew on and highlighted a set of complex and now well-known, if not overstated, arguments about the development of civil and political life in colonial South Asia. As Partha Chatterjee, among others, has demonstrated, these revolved around the binary spaces of the public, masculine world of action, and the private, feminine sphere of domesticity. Even though there was some degree of exchange across these uneven boundaries, for Chatterjee, these demarcations signalled a dramatic transformation of the "women's question." While in the early and mid-nineteenth centuries, the fate of women was hotly debated and led to a series of legislative reforms, by the close of the century, it was thought to be a topic that belonged to the private space of the home (P. Chatterjee 120–21).

² For scholarship on periodicals for women in South Asia see: Minault (Urdu); Borthwick, and Bannerji (Bengali); Sreenivas (Tamil), Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, and Nijhawan (Hindi).

The gendered element of the periodical form holds true in other cultural contexts as well. See, for example, for Victorian Britain, the volume by Fraser, Green and Johnston.

³ Extensive scholarship on instructional literature for colonial South Asian women exists. See, among others: Walsh, *Domesticity*, and *How to Be a Goddess*.

One of the consequences of this was the creation of a new model of ideal South Asian womanhood. While reformers in the first part of the nineteenth century had to battle against anxieties about the place of the modern, literate woman in society,⁴ didactic literature produced in the late nineteenth century aimed to demonstrate how this individual could be shaped to suit the demands that the public sphere made on its male inhabitants. So, while the establishment of an increasing number of schools and colleges for middle-class women in this period erased some of the taboos and superstitions that surrounded the gendered act of reading, this was to the end of absorbing educated women into the patriarchal project of modernisation. Learning how to read and perform basic arithmetical calculations, for example, became but a means of assisting a new generation of English-educated men in their tasks. These practices subsumed the radical potential that literacy held for South Asian women by substituting questions of formal education with those of home economics, and the need for university degrees with sanitary health tips (P. Chatterjee 126–32).

Early twentieth-century periodicals, as we shall see, embodied these aspirations and concerns in more ways than one. But they also enabled a radical shift: unlike their nineteenth-century counterparts, they were now both written *for* and *by* women. This marked a clear departure from a male-dominated publishing sphere that determined what were or were not legitimate subjects for female reading.⁵ The new periodicals thus emerged as potent, if conflicted, sites in which the vocabularies of gender and nation were discussed and continuously reshaped. As Francesca Orsini writes in the context of the Hindi magazine from the period, these magazines not only told their readers that these definitions were not fixed and could (and should) be altered and remoulded, they also reminded them that women had as much a right to participate in this process as men (*Hindi Public Sphere* 273). The result

⁴ For the history of gendered social reform in colonial South Asia, see among others: Borthwick, Burton, *Burdens of History*, Forbes, the essays in Sangari and Vaid, as well as the volume edited by Sarkar and Sarkar.

⁵ That being said, male involvement was not entirely pre-empted (Sreenivas 61). Nijhawan also goes further to note that the inclusion of male contributors in the twentieth century was a deliberate move, in an attempt to gain a larger audience and therefore political effect (4).

was a complex community space, often populated with contradictory ideas of what it meant to be a South Asian woman in the early years of the twentieth century.

The shift to women editors and contributors came with an associated change in the approach of the new periodicals: they became spaces which encouraged the expression of emotion. The emergence of women's voices, as Orsini notes, led to the articulation of the "right to feel": emphasising the importance of both the experience and expression of one's emotions (*Hindi Public Sphere* 274). Certain literary forms were mobilised to aid this process—first-person narratives, confessional letters to the editor, the serialised social novel (*Hindi Public Sphere* 284). Mytheli Sreenivas suggests that a similar tendency can be seen in Tamil-language publications of the time, which based their critiques of gendered institutions on broad affective appeals to their readers (60). Most importantly and implicit in the arguments of Orsini and Sreenivas is the public dimension of this display: female interiority was not something to be secreted away, nurtured but hidden, but rather, to be discussed, written about, and shared in print. Even if women could not overcome the physical barriers of the homes, at least their stories could.

The manner in which periodical reading, therefore, allowed women to transcend the mundane and private nature of their existences, forms the core of this chapter. Specifically, taking *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* as my example, I will trace how this print medium hoped to facilitate conversations between different groups and women and therefore frame reading as a practice that, as Rachel Ablow tells us was the case in Victorian Britain, involved both critical and affective understanding ("Introduction" 2). Like the other chapters in this thesis, I suggest that these twin purposes were advanced by a specific kind of textual interaction. In this case, I borrow from Kwame Anthony Appiah and call this cosmopolitan reading. I expand Appiah's definition to include both the textual and the material aspects of the periodical: women read widely across a range of articles that discussed different cultures,

just as they read across sections and issues of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* itself. In this manner, as we shall see, cosmopolitan reading is another configuration of the selective consumption that I discussed in the case of the almanacs in Chapter Three. It did differ in one significant way, however. While almanac readers were given textual “wholes” that they chose to read in part, the readers of the periodical were almost always presented with extracts, parts that referred to complete texts that may or may not have ever been accessed in their full forms.

The women readers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* also differed from those I gestured towards in Chapter Three. Almanacs, as we have seen, were styled as textual objects that could be utilised by members of all social classes, and of even a basic level of literacy. By contrast, the women I discuss here were part of the English-educated middle classes. That being said, as I will demonstrate, a close examination of the periodical form still provides us with opportunities to understanding the dynamics of an unlikely readership. We should not forget that obtaining literacy was a struggle for women irrespective of their background. I suggest that those who did become readers did so less because of their elite status, though this was definitely an enabling factor, than by the “sheer force of will” (Forbes 6). As a complement to Chapter Three, my discussion of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* reminds us how heterogeneous reading publics can be, revealing differences and stratifications even within single social and gendered groups.

My case study here unfolds across four sections. After tracing the history of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, I develop a model of cosmopolitan reading, and consider what purpose it may have served in early twentieth-century South Asia. I suggest that at a time when women's lives were described in metaphors of confinement and entrapment, publications such as *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* provided a means of escape, if only textual. In order to do this, I argue that reading periodicals, in particular, *The Indian Ladies'*

Magazine, was, and still is, a cosmopolitan act. The next section identifies different ways in which extracted material shaped the dynamics of this mode of reading, focusing on the following examples: the reprinted article, the cross-reference, staggered responses from responses to articles, the travel account and letter, and finally, the book review. I end with a coda: a discussion of Tagore's Bengali novella, *Nashtanir* (The Broken Nest, 1901), equally well known in Satyajit Ray's cinematic version, *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife, 1964).

Focusing on the proliferation of periodicals, newspapers and printed books in the novella and film, I read *Nashtanir* as a story of the failure of the cosmopolitan imagination, in which reading and writing are recast as private, hidden acts; tools to obstruct rather than build intellectual and affective communities.

2. A Brief History of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*

In July 1901, Madras saw the publication of the first issue of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*. Its editor, Kamala Sathianadhan, was no novice to the world of publishing. The holder of a Master's degree, she was the second wife of Samuel Sathianadhan, a prominent Tamil Christian intellectual and educator, whom she had already assisted in compiling the collected writings of his first wife, Krupabai, who many consider to be the first English-language novelist from South Asia. Kamala also wrote short stories, some of which appeared in a co-authored volume with Samuel, *Stories of Indian Christian Life* (1898), and was later to publish a series of children's books. At the time of her death in 1950, she was a member of prominent political and reformist organisations such as the Madras Senate and the Andhra University Senate, as well as the founder of the YMCA in Madras, the local branch of the

Red Cross, a childcare and maternity centre in Tinnevely, and a Ladies' cooperative society in Anantpur.⁶

After her husband's untimely death in 1906, Kamala had to support herself and her young children by tutoring a local Rani. She nevertheless continued to run the magazine in its monthly instalments until 1912. The editorial and publishing processes rested largely on Kamala, and competed fiercely for her attention with her professional teaching commitments and domestic duties. Nevertheless, the arrival at the Saththianadhan residence of its printed issues, ready to be posted, was something of a family ritual. Her daughter, Padmini, recounts the event as one of material wonder and pleasure:

[t]he large packages of the journal would arrive each month, and we would avidly scan the pages. Our next task would be to sit and roll each journal separately for the post. How vividly I can see the neatly stacked piles rising before us, and my brother and I and the servants sitting on the ground busy with our task of rolling, gluing and stamping, while Kamala and "Nani" [maternal grandmother] would sit back and watch us. (Padmini Sengupta 8)

After 1912, however, international travel and dwindling subscriptions made the production of the magazine come at "great personal cost" (Feb 1932, n. pag.): its publication became increasingly erratic. It appeared in 1918, 1919 and finally, in a bimonthly form between 1927 and 1934, after which it was discontinued (Padmini Sengupta 191).

As its title suggests, *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* was directed towards a female readership, and with an explicit political aim. By tracking and encouraging "social and moral reform," the magazine hoped to be, as was declared in its first issue, part of a movement to "advance the cause of the women in India" in its social, literary and philosophical dimensions (Saththianadhan, "Introduction" 1). *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, in fact, distinguished itself not only through its eclectic range of content (from columns about cooking and cleaning to short stories, book reviews, and summaries of the meetings of reformist organisations) but

⁶ For more on Kamala's life, see *The Portrait of an Indian Woman* (1956), the biography written by her daughter, Padmini Sengupta, as well as Eunice D'Souza's *The Saththianadhan Family Album* (2005).

also through the variety of public opinion that filtered through its pages. As I have already noted, its regular contributors ranged from the well-known activists and writers Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant, to anonymous women from across South Asia. Showcasing the famous and making place for the unknown, the fluid form of the periodical allowed readers to respond to articles and contribute original pieces of writing. The result of this was that Sathianadhan's publication became a space for lively conversations that, as we will see, often continued across its different issues.

Who was reading *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*? While actual reading experiences are, as ever, elusive, details of its subscription rates, for one, point us to the readers to whom the magazine was pitched: women of the middle classes. The inner page of each issue carried its Terms of Subscription: “[t]he annual subscription in India, Ceylon and Burmah is Rs. 4 including postage. English rate of subscription including postage is 6 shillings. Subscriptions from America may be remitted for \$1.50.” At a time when the average printed book cost not more than one rupee, four rupees for twelve issues of a magazine seems considerably steep, and many readers would have thought twice before taking on an annual subscription. What its price does, however, is also shed light on how *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* conceived of itself as a print object—*not* as ephemeral newsprint. It not only aimed to provide its readers with nuggets of timeless interest, it took its aspirations to being a “solid” publication to the level of the material. Unlike a newspaper of topical significance, or even the almanacs I discussed in Chapter Three, *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* was presented to its readers as a desirable, luxury object. While it still exhibited features of the standard periodical format—soft paper covers, limited length supporting its portability, and a consistent layout across issues (Beetham 96)—it was not curtailed by any of the cost-cutting tactics to which producers of cheap print often had to resort. Its paper was of a surprisingly fine quality, its layout spacious and readable, and it contained countless photographic reproductions. Further,

while readers could choose to have the latest issue of the magazine posted to them each month, the year's worth could be purchased retrospectively as a bound, single volume. Moving from the format of the periodical to the book, the change in material form signified exceptions of long-term preservation, as opposed to the use-and-throw-away policy commonly associated with periodicals.⁷

The subscription information also points to the circuits in which *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* was expected to circulate. With copies making their way across South Asia and to England and the United States, the local readers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* were to be linked through a networked reading community made possible by the cosmopolitan trajectories of the material object. In reality, however, was *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* making the national and international journeys its editors hoped it would? While this is difficult to determine, the magazine's content points to at least some instances in which it did. The August 1901 issue, for example, began with a two-page section on the "Opinions of the Press." This detailed national responses to the first issue of the magazine in July. A total of eighteen, these are remarkable in the regional range that they show. The short reviews are primarily from the South (Bangalore, Madras, Madras and Calicut); there are also public responses from Allahabad, Bombay, Calcutta and Lucknow (n.pag.). If not definitive evidence of the magazine's popularity in these cities, such a compilation nevertheless indicates that it was available across the country, and was certainly considered worth discussing in major newspapers.

Regular subscriptions aside, the magazine also circulated through everyday exchanges between readers, who could, and did, pass articles and issues on to friends who they thought might find them to be of interest. While these textual journeys are virtually impossible to uncover, since they leave few traces, at least one example of this can be found in *The Indian*

⁷ On the reframing of ephemera as permanent print in the Victorian context, see Brake.

Ladies' Magazine, and highlights for us the print and oral routes that the publication both moved through and enabled. In October 1902, the magazine reprinted "Indian Ladies," an article from London's *The Daily Telegraph* originally written by Sir Edwin Arnold, the author of the popular *The Light of Asia* (1879). A discussion of the merits of Sathianadhan's initiative, which he applauded, Arnold's article also mentioned that he received a single issue of the magazine in London "by the kindness of one of the most distinguished of our Indian visitors" (127), present in the metropole to attend the coronation of Edward VII. The traffic of people and texts coalesces around the moment of multiple exchange that Arnold went on to describe: "[a]t the moment when this little magazine was brought to my notice I had been thinking about what wonderful reports those princely and intelligent Orientals, with their suites, will be taking back to their own countries to be discussed in many a palace and hunting lodge" (127–28). The article thus highlights for us the simultaneous, intersecting journeys in motion here; of the magazine to England, only to return to the subcontinent in the modified form of Arnold's review, and of the travelling South Asians who return with interesting anecdotes from London. Highlighting thus, the formal and informal transnational networks through which information traveled—print and gossip—the text and oral reportage become tools that shape readers and listeners' entries into cultures other than their own. So the magazine, as Arnold noted, was laudable in its publicisation of topics that frequently came up in "native talk" (128), such as the question of purdah and women's seclusion, just as experiential accounts of the coronation ceremony retold in South Asia might have a positive effect on "Hindu thought and sentiment," if only by demonstrating for the "curtain-ladies" of South Asia the liberty of their British counterparts, who were able to stand in public on roads and balconies to watch the royal proceedings. If these were stories they "never will tire of listening," surely, Arnold's article seemed to suggest, this repetition of desire could nudge South Asian women towards a strategy of collective gender reform.

Evidence aside, all womankind could not have been reading *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, if only for the simple reason that it was written exclusively in English. While this overcame regional linguistic boundaries within the country and so theoretically meant that the magazine could be read across a larger geographical area, it also meant that the total number of readers was relatively small. While conceiving of the publication as cosmopolitan, drawing on contributors from across the country, as well as Britain and the United States, Sathianadhan's editorial preface to the first issue made it clear that the target audience was very select: a university-educated, English-speaking female public. It was with these women, Sathianadhan argued, that the "future of the women of India rest[ed] largely . . . and more especially with those belonging to it, who without losing what is distinctly Indian, have come under the best influences of the West" (Sathianadhan, "Introduction" 2).

In addition to the "modern" South Asian woman, Sathianadhan also hoped that the magazine would "serve as an effective link between European ladies and their Indian sisters" (Sathianadhan, "Introduction" 2), and therefore be read by British women with social-reformist interests. This, as I will discuss later in the chapter, was extended in a variety of ways, whether through the inclusion of articles on women in Egypt and Japan, or through editorial collaborations with British metropolitan publications that shared the interests of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*.

That said, the magazine attempted through various means to reach out to those who could not read its content independently, and in doing so, counted them among its "readers." For one, Sathianadhan repeatedly encouraged English-educated South Asian men to subscribe to the magazine and translate its content for their wives. Further, hoping to "extend the benefits of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* to a large circular of vernacular readers" (Sathianadhan, "Introduction" 2), several of its articles were translated and reprinted in South Asian-language journals that may have had a more extensive readership. An example

of this is a series of articles aimed at generating awareness about public health issues, written by Isabel Brander. In the March 1903 edition of the magazine, Sathianadhan informed readers in an editorial note that these were being translated for publication in other periodicals: into Tamil for the *Dravidavarthamani* and the *Tamil Zenana Magazine*, into Telegu for the *Ravi*, into Malayalam for the *Monorama*, as well as into Kannada for the *Suvasari* (Brander, “Food and its Relations to Health” 278). Once again, we are reminded that texts were used and consumed in different ways, whether or not they were being “read.”

3. What is Cosmopolitan Reading?

Turning to literary and autobiographical works of the late nineteenth century, it is noticeable that their descriptions of women reading—and also writing—drew on shared vocabularies of entrapment and secrecy. Take for example, Rassundari Debi, whose *Amar Jiban* (My Life, 1876–1906) is considered to be the first South Asian autobiography by a woman. Written when she was sixty-six, it details the arduous process by which Rassundari learns to read and write in secret, hiding books in the kitchen, and using its walls as her slate. Her teachers are the books to which she has easiest access—her son’s school textbooks and a worn-copy of the *Lakshmi-panchali* left lying about in the *puja* room. Rassundari’s ambitions are at first conservative; she wants to read sacred texts as an expression of her religious devotion. In a second example, Uma, the child protagonist of Tagore’s short story, “Khata” (The Exercise-book, 1894), scribbles on walls and other people’s writing (most often that of her intellectually pretentious brother, Gobindalal), until she is given a small notebook in which she records her disparate, jumbled, and often contradictory thoughts. When she is married off to Pyarelal, a man of the same mould as her brother, her notebook initially provides her with refuge from the unfamiliar and sometimes hostile household of her in-laws.

When she is discovered, however, it is transformed into an object of stigma. Pyarelal may write in journals and newspapers, but he certainly does not want a wife who possibly could too. Finally, I turn to Tagore's "Strir Patra" (The Wife's Letter, 1914), a short story about Mrinal(ini), who not only justifies why she leaves the oppressive and rigidly patriarchal atmosphere of her husband's home in epistolary form, but also reveals the startling fact that she finds solace in writing poetry.

It is important to remember that the entrapment and claustrophobia these stories describe are shaped by the interplay of both affective and real, material conditions of confinement. So when Rassundari Debi repeatedly describes herself as a "caged bird," this is meant to draw our attention to the fact that she is both contained by the regulations of her husband's family as she is by the four walls of her kitchen, even as this space provides her idle pots and pans in which to hide her books. Similarly, while Uma's insistence on reading behind locked doors turns her bedroom into a space of liberation and a convenient one in which to hide her notebook, it is quickly destroyed on being discovered by her sisters-in-law, who peep through the keyhole of her locked bedroom door and turn her intimate act into one for public mockery. Mrinal too is constantly reminded of her place behind the boundary wall of the inner compound of the women's quarters, a physical space of containment that is brought into sharp contrast with the limitlessness of the sea at Puri, the seaside pilgrimage town to which she escapes at the end of the story, and from where her "letter" is written. In each of these cases, reading provides a means of transcendence, if uneven and temporary.

To understand better the relationship between reading and transcendence, I turn to the concept of cosmopolitanism. As the proliferation of studies in the fields of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, as well as colonial and postcolonial history demonstrates, the figure of the cosmopolitan has become a subject of much debate in recent

years.⁸ Above all, these speak to the difficulties of definition; as Jini Kim Watson writes, theories of the term have themselves become “more and more cosmopolitan” (85). While in the nineteenth century, the term, in its conventional derogatory usage, referred to a wanderer with no form of attachment, over the past fifteen years, cosmopolitanism has been described diversely as a state of “(re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance” (Robbins 3), a literary style (Walkowitz), a “specious mastery of the whole” (Brennan 27), a sensibility, not an ideology (Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*). It can erase as well as consolidate national borders. And if people are cosmopolitan, so are ideas, texts, objects, and communicable diseases.⁹

Further, cosmopolitanism has now also lost much of its elite sheen to include disenfranchised but still highly mobile groups of people—refugees, labourers, and migrants, for example—leading to what Watson calls “a variety of cosmopolitanisms ‘from below’” (85). But, in this context, what about women? The introduction of the category of cosmopolitanism to my analysis in this context may seem unjustified, given not only the inherent masculine presumptions of the category, but also that its basic premise is travel and movement. How can the immobile, often sequestered, women of late colonial South Asia by any measure be described as cosmopolitan? In the introduction to a special issue of *Public Culture*, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sheldon Pollock point out the inherent paradoxes in melding cosmopolitanism and feminism into a collaborative “cosmofeminism.” Cosmopolitanism, it seems, returns feminism to fraught questions of homogeneity, the abolition of global boundaries, and universalism. More urgently, how does cosmopolitanism as an expansive category grapple with the intimacy of the domestic sphere,

⁸ In particular, there has been a spate of studies relating to Victorian literature and cosmopolitanism, representative of which are: a special issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture* edited by Agathacleous and Rudy, Agathacleous’s examination of the British periodical and empire, and Amanda Anderson’s discussion of the Victorian novel’s theorisation of detachment.

⁹ For cosmopolitan diseases and the Victorian novel, see Carpenter.

without reducing it to just that, the domestic? Urging a redirection of focus to the “public life of domesticity” by studying “projects of the intimate sphere that are conceived as part of the cosmopolitan,” these critics are hopeful of recovering domesticity as a “vital interlocutor and not just an interloper in law, politics, and public ethics” (584).

This chapter shares certain impulses with the cosmofeminist critical project described above. In this regard, *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* and the form of the colonial periodical in general do provide us with an opportunity to consider the “public life of domesticity.” One of the ways in which they do this is by highlighting the fruitful connections that can be drawn between women and both nationalistic and cosmopolitan projects: urging women to be what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006) “cosmopolitan patriots.” In this context, the reformulation of notions of femininity in which the magazine, among others, participated, balanced local and global concerns, harnessing intercultural sympathies in the service of nation building. While I do discuss the formation of cosmopolitan subjectivities of this kind among the readers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, my focus is primarily on how we might think of cosmopolitanism as a *reading experience*—one that enabled women to create imagined networks with fellow readers that transcended cultural, geographical, temporal, and textual boundaries. To this end, I lay my critical emphasis on how the content and form of the periodical enabled intellectual and affective engagement of this kind.

The idea of cosmopolitan reading is not entirely new. In an essay of the same title, Appiah discussed the importance and value of the practice, suggesting that “we travel in books to learn ‘mutual toleration’” (“Cosmopolitan Reading” 203). Reading in this manner is part of the project recognising the differences of others, and realising that we have much to learn from these:

Cosmopolitan reading presupposes a world in which novels (and music and sculptures and other significant objects) travel between places where they are

understood differently, because people are different and welcome to their difference. Cosmopolitan reading is *worthwhile* because there can be common conversations about these shared objects, the novel prominent among them. Cosmopolitan reading is *possible* because those conversations are possible. (Emphasis in original; “Cosmopolitan Reading” 224)

Appiah goes on to argue that cosmopolitan reading is possible not simply because we subscribe to “shared” human values—which of course, we do—but also because we all possess the capacity to imagine—to “follow a narrative” and “conjure a world,” as distant and removed as this may seem to us (“Cosmopolitan Reading” 225). The facilitation of such shared conversations, as I have pointed out, was one of the primary aims of *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*.

However, in the subsequent sections of this chapter, I extend and qualify Appiah’s argument in several ways. The first is at the level of genre: what kind of print supports the cosmopolitan project of travel, conversation, and imagination? Despite gesturing towards “other significant objects,” the novel is Appiah’s unequivocal answer. In this belief he is not alone: Martha Nussbaum’s discussions of cosmopolitanism repeatedly return to the example of the novel form; more recently, Joseph Slaughter’s *Human Rights Inc.* (2007) has illuminated the intertwined histories of human rights law, sympathy, and the *bildungsroman*. In all of these accounts, the novel is credited as the literary form that trains its readers in sympathy and by extension, a distinctly cosmopolitan tolerance of the other. By contrast, I argue that cosmopolitan reading as it develops in my analysis is inextricably tied to the periodical, a print object that, as Tanya Agathocleous’s *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (2013) has shown us, can potentially embody the cosmopolitan spirit in both its content and its material and textual forms. This was particularly true of *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, which regularly included a range of articles about women from different parts of the world. Writing about women from not just Britain and the United States, but also China, France, Japan and Korea, it sought to encourage “wider

interest in life elsewhere,” an “openness to the world” (Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* 5). By tracing similarities and differences between these cultures and the readers’ own, it gave them the opportunity to defy the rootedness of their lives through metaphorical travel, participating in a global continuum created by the linking possibilities of printed texts. Women may not have been able to travel extensively, but that did not stop their stories from doing so. By encouraging women to read, *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* not only highlighted the double-sidedness of confinement and transcendence, but taught women how to overcome it.

The periodical was also aided in its cosmopolitan project by its generic refusal of textual and material boundaries. As Margaret Beetham has pointed out, the flimsy paper covers that characterise the form make the “physical boundaries of the periodical hard to define” (97). This is true even of its page layout that brings together disparate articles in print space; cooking and women’s rights jostle for contradictory dominance in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*. Moreover, the fact that articles and stories were commonly serialised meant that a reading cycle could cover not only an extended period of time, but also several issues of a magazine. Women therefore read not only across printed items, but also across texts, disturbing the narrative coherence that the form of the book, for example, assumes.

In my definition, cosmopolitan reading therefore is always already selective. The simplest explanation for this comes from an understanding of the periodical form itself. As Beetham notes, the periodical’s miscellaneous form (like that of the almanacs in Chapter Three) invited readers to pick and choose what they wanted to read, and thus invited them to “construct their own texts” (98), in a sense actively calling de Certeau’s reader-poachers to arms. However, as we will see, the selective dynamics of the colonial periodical were not always a product of choice. Rather, it was because of its heavy reliance on a particular literary and journalistic form, the extract. I use this term to encompass the range of synopsis content that found its way into publications like *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, if

only ever in part—cross-references to other magazines, reprinted and summarised articles, and serialised items, whether staggered responses from readers, or articles printed over a period of time. In some cases, such as the multi-part publication, readers were given access to one part, in anticipation of another part to come. In others, such as the reprinted article or the summary, the part worked to stand for the whole, gesturing to a complete narrative that lay outside the bounds of the magazine, and to which its readers did not have access. So while for Appiah, our cosmopolitan capacities are dependent on our ability “to follow a narrative,” the periodical form reminds us that cosmopolitanism also comes in disjointed, non-narrative, and partial-narrative modes.

4. Reading the Extract

i. Cut-and-Paste Activism

While *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* commissioned and published a considerable range of bespoke writing, the collaborative network it sought to cultivate was equally aided by what Meredith McGill has called in another context, “cultures of reprinting”—of reproducing, with or without explicit permission, news and literary writings from other sources. Each issue of the magazine was constituted by the textual intermeshing of bite-sized news items, as well as summaries and extracts from articles originally published in other newspapers and periodicals from around the world. The diversity of sources on which it depended was impressive, ranging from well-known publications such as London’s the *Daily Telegraph*, to obscure published reports.

The criss-crossing of local and global print in the pages of the imperial periodical was not, however, unique to *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*. As Isabel Hofmeyr’s study of

Gandhi's experimental paper, *Indian Opinion*, demonstrates, "cut-and-paste" techniques provided the "primary building blocks" for small-scale publications across empire (*Gandhi's Printing Press* 13). The mutual agreement, or expectation, to borrow from each other, if only in part, was formally known as "the Exchange." The editor's task was literally to select and "scissor" out sections that would be of interest to readers, and thus collate a patchwork text composed of bits and pieces brought together as a coherent whole. In many provincial and imperial peripheries, this was often the primary means of obtaining information and news, providing the opportunity, at negligible cost, to create as it were, a "miniature empire" on each printed page (Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press* 13).¹⁰

What were the consequences of this cobbled-together, scrapbook-like quality, for the imperial periodical, and in particular, the readers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*? In this section, I offer close readings of three examples of borrowed material—extracts, summaries, and short news items—that constituted the official and unofficial exchange on which the periodical depended. By tracing their intellectual and material trajectories within and outside the periodical, I will demonstrate that reprinting not only supported global women's solidarity, but also indicated the many levels of material transformation that the process demanded.

To begin, let us consider the following reprinted articles in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*. In May 1903, *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* published an article called "The Wonderful Story of Helen Keller." Attributed to "an Indian Lady," a casual reader would assume she was its author. However, as its first few lines reveal, it is, in fact, a summary of an article about Keller's life that the "Indian Lady" had just finished reading. The full-length article, we are told, was in *Ladies Home Journal*, a popular Philadelphia-based magazine that ran between 1883 and 2014. Though the summary does not indicate this, "The Wonderful

¹⁰ For a detailed history of the Press Exchange, see Garvey and Harvey, and also te Heesen.

Story of Helen Keller” drew from the serialised publication of Keller’s autobiography, *The Story of My Life* (1902), in the American journal.

Other reprinted articles in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* arrived through similar multi-routed journeys. “Women in China,” an article published in the July 1902, started out as a report prepared by a Mrs J.L. Whiting for the International Suffrage Conference in Washington D.C. It was subsequently extracted for *The Woman’s Journal*, a Boston-based feminist periodical that ran between 1870 and 1932. It is *The Woman’s Journal* that was *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine’s* primary source. An extract of an extract, the form in which its South Asian readers received it was thrice removed from the original report.

To trace the trajectories of these writings is not simply to bring attention to the different geographical spaces that they occupied—South Asia, America, and beyond—but also to remind ourselves of how these trajectories are enabled by different kinds of upcycled and recycled print, terms I borrow from Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr. For example, the serialised publication of Keller’s autobiography is transformed not only into the impetus for the summary in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, but also served as the basis for Keller’s three-part book, published later in 1903. In these different forms, the same article calls for a dizzying range of reading practices—the staggered, prolonged commitment of the serial form, the intensive continuity of the autobiography-as-book, and the part-consumption of the summary. Similarly, “Women in China,” moves between an institutional form, the report, to the more easily consumable newspaper article.

The Indian Ladies’ Magazine also published several news columns, another customary feature of both the imperial and metropolitan periodical. These included the domestic “What is being done for and by Indian Women,” and the globally-focused “News and Notes.” They provided readers with discontinuous snippets of information from different parts of the country, and the world. Loosely aggregated around the theme of “women’s

issues,” these were remarkable in their scope, including items from small-town Japan, as well as urban centres such as London and New York. The sources for these columns, however, varied dramatically. While they often comprised of bulk quotations from *The Indian Social Reformer* and the *Calcutta Gazette*, many entries had no source and a distinct anecdotal flavour. For example, the September 1904 issue carried news of the botanist Marie Stopes’s appointment to a junior position at the University of Manchester. This is followed by the uncorroborated fact that “[t]he Czarina frequently reads, before bed-time (which comes about 11 o’clock) an English novel or the *Times* to her husband” (“News and Notes” 94).

This lengthy description of the printed, reprinted, and spoken trajectories of the content of *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* serves as a starting point for my discussion of how these items functioned within the space of the publication. As Ellen Gruber Garvey suggests in the context of scrapbooking, the re-circulation of articles from one publication in another—whether private (in the case of the scrapbook) or public (in the case of republication in another magazine or newspaper)—involves an associated re-ordering of meaning (5). What did it mean, then, to read about the Czarina’s bedtime reading habits in provincial South Asia, or receive the news of Marie Stopes’s university appointment?

At a primary level, reprinting allowed South Asian women access to a network of publications of which they could not otherwise have possibly heard. By cursorily perusing these, in the condensed forms in which they were included in the periodical, these women were enabled to join a community of readers that did not include the national spaces of just a few countries, but rather, forged ties simultaneous across an increasingly global and international space. This sense of shared feeling and virtual community finds a theoretical model in Benedict Anderson’s discussion of newspaper reading, which I considered briefly in Chapter Three of this thesis. But while Anderson’s focus is urban, metropolitan, and national, as Elleke Boehmer points out, reading in the colony requires that we reframe his argument.

The imperial periodical's reports brought the metropolitan Anglo-American world home to the colonies, almost as if events in these cities were, indeed, running parallel to those in its various colonies. Creating proximity of experience, the newspaper collapsed both time and distance. The consequence of the "juxtaposition of geographies and social worlds," connected but distant, was that, as Boehmer points out, colonial elites found London much less baffling than one would expect, stemming from a textual familiarity with the city and its ways (*Indian Arrivals* 14). While I will return to this point in a later section of this chapter, for now it suffices to say that with the imperial periodical transcending the boundaries of the nation, our readers were similarly no longer a national community, as the one Anderson imagines, but rather, part of a cosmopolitan, free-ranging one.

The reprinted stories, therefore, were chosen for their suitability to the aims of the magazine, because they told stories that held universal potential and particular application to local contexts. The "pretty pathetic little sketch" of Keller's life then becomes a general statement about how "afflictions may be looked at in such a way that they become privileges" ("The Wonderful Story of Helen Keller" 347), and overcoming literal blindness becomes a model for how South Asian women could potentially overcome the metaphoric blindness of their upbringing. Similarly, a reader of "Women in China" would be invited to draw parallels between their situations and those of their Chinese counterparts—focusing perhaps on foot-binding and purdah as comparable evils, and the role of missionary education in reforming traditional social practices. By reading and imagining in a comparative frame, reprinting therefore provided the subscribers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* with a global overview, conveniently repackaged in an accessible form.

ii. Sympathy through Citation: c.f. *Womanhood*

In this section of the chapter, I pair the readers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* with their British counterparts. If South Asian women learnt about the Anglo-American world through the act of periodical reading, the same could be said about the British. The short history of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* earlier in the chapter clearly showed that a desire to facilitate interaction between South Asian and British women was one of its most prominent aspects. As scholarship has demonstrated, Victorian Britain's increasing interest in South Asia was not only fuelled and assuaged by "cheap return tickets, Mr Kipling's books, Liberty's shop, Zenana Missions, and Lady Dufferin's Fund" (attributed to Flora Annie Steel, "Editorial Notes" 330), but also by the proliferating references to the region in the local periodical press. Its commodities entered the British market through advice on where to buy "Oriental" fabric, shawls, and curry powder, bringing the exotic into the domestic space of the English household (N. Chaudhuri).

Material objects apart, it was not at all uncommon for readers to find articles or references to South Asian women in both mainstream and radical periodicals targeted at women of the time.¹¹ These not only brought news about women from across the empire home to British readers (through the established form of the "Foreign Notes and News" column), but also assisted in raising money for various philanthropic endeavours. Their twin objectives were information and action. Harnessing women-centred social action as a tool to further, rather than overturn, the imperial project, readers of and contributors to such periodicals constructed a now familiar image of the helpless Oriental woman whom readers, in the guise of a missionary or a social reformer, were urged to save. As Antoinette Burton has pointed out, the rise of Victorian feminism was very much connected with this

¹¹ See, for example, the essays in the volume edited by Codell.

phenomenon, which she calls the “white woman’s burden”: liberal bourgeois morals were dependent on the salvation of the South Asian woman, who provided a convenient foil against which Britain could measure itself on a national index of progress (“The White Woman’s Burden”). This sense of “responsibility” was aided by the periodical’s travelling, flexible form, which created the possibility of bringing together South Asia and Britain in a shared community of “sisters under the skin” (Burton, *Burdens of History* 121).

South Asian magazines, in turn, were eager to co-opt British women and reformers into their own publication projects. As Meredith Borthwick notes, late nineteenth-century Bengali periodicals made frequent references to the activities of Harriet Martineau and Mary Carpenter, among others (292). These were names with which local readers would, as a result, be familiar. *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* was no exception. Even as it explicitly referred and encouraged its readers to subscribe to other magazines with similar aims (South Asian examples include *Bharati*, *Antahpur*, and the *Indian Social Reformer*), it lay particular emphasis on British publications, most prominent of which was *Womanhood*. This was a London-based journal edited by A. S. Ballin that ran between 1898 and 1907, and framed itself as a document of “women’s progress and interest.” Readers of *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* could obtain a sample issue of *Womanhood* in the post, as a gesture of reciprocity between the publications. While the number of readers who participated in this material exchange was probably limited, the magazines were in constant dialogue with each other, sometimes printing the same articles simultaneously, writing articles directed at the audience of the other, and more often, by referring to each other in their publications.

In this section of the chapter, I examine how *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*’s call for cross-cultural interaction took a distinctive formal turn—cross-referencing. By considering the example of its collaboration with *Womanhood*, I will demonstrate how the practice of citation brought into South Asian and British readers’ imaginations a world of print to which

they did not have access, but to the existence of which they were alerted. These efforts took different forms in the two magazines, as I describe below.

In August 1901, Sathianadhan published an article entitled “The Social Intercourse between Indian and English Ladies” in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*. In this, she not only reiterated the importance of cross-cultural collaboration to the upliftment of South Asian women, but also outlined the reasons for the failure of past endeavours. Among these were the segregation of British and South Asian life in the colony, the lack of a common language for clear communication, and often, mere lack of interest. In the next issue of the magazine in September 1901, Sathianadhan’s article received a response from a Mrs C. Besley. In this, she articulated her “strong” feelings on the subject of the imperial responsibilities of British women:

Rudyard Kipling has so ably sung of the “*White Man’s Burden*,” but the White Woman—has she no burden to bear? The burden of an important duty to perform? A duty towards her Aryan sister? A duty, the importance of which alas! is not sufficiently realised. The law of Compensation teaches us that to those to whom much is given from them much is expected. We English women who have had so many social advantages and so much intellectual training, what do we give for what we have received as our birthright?. (“Social Intercourse” 57)

The patronising impulses of Besley’s strong declarations aside, the two articles are a key example of how print came to play an important role in political collaboration in the early twentieth-century. For one, as we will see later in this chapter in further detail, the periodical form’s open structure allowed for the exchange of ideas, through the continuation of themes and narratives across issues through the reader’s response, of which Besley’s article is an example. Further, as riffling through the magazine’s print run demonstrates, Sathianadhan’s article served as a starting point for an on-going debate and conversation incorporating both Anglo-American and South Asian interlocutors.

Two terms were central to this dialogue, and are repeated obsessively across both Besley's subsequent articles in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*: knowledge and sympathy. In April 1903, for example, she wrote:

for generations past India has been the country of our adoption, but yet we cannot conscientiously say that we really understand its people or know much of their interests, sympathies, and domestic lives . . . what we need is that English and Indian women should have a better knowledge of each other, and should see each other in a true light, with all their individual characteristics. We want them to see us as we are. ("Social Intercourse" 302–03)¹²

The cosmopolitan project of revealing and, by extension, knowing and understanding, is aided by print's capacity to not only represent, but also to create sympathetic bridges between disparate and distant parts of the world:

I would that distance were not such a serious obstacle! I would that the various ladies who have written in your columns of this subject, would meet, to discuss this question! But alas! That is impossible, for though the sea lies between us, it does not prevent me in spirit and feelings, being in the land of my adoption—longing more than ever to do something to [bring] myself and my Western sisters into a closer and more intimate touch with our mutual Indian sisters. (Besley, "Social Intercourse: A Rejoinder" 316)

The columns and responses become, therefore, paper connectors across the sea: flimsy, but essential. In that meetings were impossible, reading was not a totally inadequate substitute.

After her first article in September 1901, Besley returned to *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* in October 1901 to suggest concrete measures to forge relationships of print between the two races of women. This was to be in the form of an informal group, "The

¹² Besley does receive antagonism from certain quarters. For example, a respondent to her article, Sukumari, writes of the complete impossibility of sympathy in the face of difference, and invokes these through the lens of the cosmopolitan:

Our manners, customs and our language are entirely different from theirs, so that it is a matter of much difficulty for us to intermingle "heart to heart and mind to mind." We and they have not many feelings in common and our sympathies lie entirely apart. They wonder at us and our want of refinement as they call it, and we wonder at their curious social etiquette, their conventionality and freedom that they, ladies, enjoy, so that they cannot realize and place themselves in our position, nor we in theirs . . . Is this social intercourse? . . . It is impossible for any nation to be Cosmopolitan, it must have an individuality of some kind,—and the more national this distinctive element is, the more will be the gain in grace and dignity. (58–60)

Guild of Victoria,” which was to embody her pan-imperial ideal. This, she felt, might enable greater social intermingling, but the key object of her focus, which binds the plan together, is a leaflet. Outlining the organisation’s intentions, this would be distributed “all over India,” in both English and Urdu (“Social Intercourse: A Suggestion” 122). Drawing on the patchwork, mobile characteristics of the periodical itself, the leaflet would work to the same end: to bring women together in political and gendered solidarity. For many of the readers of Besley’s articles in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* who did not get an opportunity to participate in its compilation or read it, they would at least have known of its existence through her references to it.¹³

Claiming knowledge of a print object through reference—but without actually ever reading it—presents us with another configuration of non-reading, and provides us with an entry point into Besley’s next writerly project. While she continued, between 1901 and 1903, to contribute to *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, her preliminary dialogue in that forum led to her seeking a more permanent space in which to express her thoughts about the plight of the South Asian woman and the programmes that could be instated to address it. This was a regular column in *Womanhood*, “What Women are doing in India.” It first appeared in the 1902 issue of that magazine. Styled as open letters, these short pieces were not “merely to chronicle feats which sp[oke] of the development of the intellect of the women of the country [India],” but also to “portray to the women of the West the surroundings and feelings which actuate the lives of their sisters in the East” (“What Women are doing in India” 373). While *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* sought to create bonds between South Asian and Anglo-Indian women, Besley’s foray into *Womanhood* opened up these issues for metropolitan women, whose only contact with the colonies was no doubt through its pages. In the light of this, how do we read the relationship between the two journals?

¹³ The November 1901 issue has several letters from readers who show interest in the scheme, but are sceptical about its logistics. It is unclear from the magazine, however, if the plan ever materialised.

A strand of interest that arises here and can be linked to the discussion of the reprinted article in the last section of this chapter, is the practice of simultaneous publication. As Sathianadhan's editorial notes tell us, Besley's April 1903 article appeared in the same form in *Womanhood*. Emerging in a print-continuum, the two magazines are framed as interchangeable. In the case of the article in question, reading *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* is the same as reading *Womanhood*, the "London" periodical ghosted into the readers' imaginations through a footnote.

While material contingencies suggest that it is unlikely that women would be reading *both* magazines, citations of this kind constantly reminded them of the advances made and programmes set out by the other. So readers of the March 1903 issue of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* would know, for example, that *Womanhood* had organised an essay competition for the London public on the subject of imperial gender relations, even if they would not be in a position to read the entries that won and were subsequently printed in that magazine. Similarly, fleeting but repeated references to *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* in Besley's column draw our attention to the fact that in the absence of actual material copies, this was one of the only ways in which the British public would be aware of the existence of Sathianadhan's publication.¹⁴ Even though they possibly did not read *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, in complete or extracted forms, such citations conjured up the existence, if unverifiable, of this publication.

iii. Omelettes and Hulwa: Reading Now, and Later

A useful point of entry into this discussion of the relation between textual parts and wholes is *The Indian Ladies' Magazine's* heavy reliance on the dynamics of serial reading.

¹⁴ It is important to note that while Besley wrote for both magazines, none of Sathianadhan's own articles appeared in *Womanhood*: she exists in that publication only through citation and reference.

Though it did contain serialised short fiction, the majority of the periodical's content was in the form of multi-part articles. Ethnographic write-ups, such as Miss Sidgwick's "How the English Girl Lives," gave readers a consecutive view of aspects of female life in the metropole. Similarly, Isabel Brander's "Lectures on Public Health," to which I previously alluded, put forward monthly suggestions about ensuring a sanitary domestic space. Like the regular newspaper column, and unlike the units that constituted the serialised novel, these articles came together to elaborate a single theme, whether public health or British cultural life, and could be read as individual pieces, and as part of a continuous whole. Nevertheless, the fact that they unfolded across several issues of the magazine created a textual space that was potentially cosmopolitan in its boundlessness, ignoring both the limits of temporality and the material page.

Though they were not strictly "serialised," readers' responses to articles, I will argue in this section of the chapter, also borrowed from the staggered rhythms of the periodical form to both narrative and economic advantage. It also, as we shall see, demonstrated how the form's openness to dialogue allowed it to combine an unprecedented number of diverse voices and opinions.

I focus on a particularly illuminating case here: Annie Besant's "The Education of Women" (Dec. 1901), which raised much debate. Emphasising that the education of women is more important than that of men, Besant argued:

[I]t is clear that if the mothers of the nation are ignorant, the children of the nation must suffer in intelligence, and that—as the children of the nation are its future citizens—the prosperity of the nation must decay. From one standpoint the education of women is even of more national importance than the education of men, for women mould the future men and stamp them with marks they never lose. (155)

That said, Besant went on to qualify these statements by putting forward a programme for a South Asia-appropriate model of female education. She connected the rise in university-

educated women in England with an increase in the number forced to support themselves and therefore to compete with their better-equipped male counterparts:

[i]f the social and economic conditions of India were identical with those of England and if crowds of unmarried women were found struggling for bread here [India] as there [England], then there might be something to say for transplanting here the education suited for the needs of England. But everyone knows that the competition which has already forced down the wages of educated men is not likely to be intensified by the influx of thousands of women. Why then transplant into India the education which will make her women fit to be the bread-winners they will not be? (155)

University education for women is, in this account, a necessity in England, whereas it is an unsuitable and superfluous luxury in South Asia, best replaced by studying subjects that can be used to enrich domestic space—the study of languages for personal pleasure, hygiene, medicine, religion and art.

In February 1902, *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* published another article on the subject, “The Higher Education of Women.” Taking Besant’s arguments about the suitability of British education systems in South Asia as his cue, its author, the well-known barrister Alfred Nundy’s polemical prose attacked the “modern” South Asian woman and her aspirations to education altogether. Telling his readers that he had travelled widely, from “Peshawar to Tinnevely, from Assam to Katiawar and the Malabar coast,” and therefore had “the privilege and pleasure of becoming acquainted with by far a large majority of lady graduates,” Nundy constructed his perspective as an informed, rather than a provincial one. It was this first-hand experience that led him to declare emphatically that university education had done “considerable harm and is likely to do greater harm as the number goes on increasing of those who are eager to grasp at it” (228).

In any case, book-learning and university examinations were not an accurate marker of anyone’s intelligence, he wrote. But while “necessity compels a man to go through such a

course, unsatisfactory though it be, for it is the only avenue by which he can obtain a livelihood,” he went on to exclaim that

surely farce need not be gone through by girls; it neither qualifies them for the chief end they ought to have in view, that of becoming good wives and mothers, nor happily has any one yet desired to lay down that one of the qualifications in a wife should be that she should be a graduate, or that the duties of a mother cannot be satisfactorily performed where there is an absence of knowledge of higher mathematics. (229)

Nundy warned his readers of the associated “risks” the “craze” for higher education might have—it may affect the health of women by encouraging inactivity, and more expectedly, as above, make them unfit mothers and wives. The crux of this is in an eminently quotable paragraph of the article:

It may be he [the hypothetical husband] is a graduate himself, but the average graduate is generally a poor man who has to make his way in the world, and he looks in a wife rather for one who will be able to make a good omelette or a delicious *hulwa*, and be otherwise an expert housekeeper, than for one who will fling a mathematical problem at his head or quote Shakespeare and Milton when a badly cooked dinner is served before him. But I have been told if men will not appreciate such women, they can do without them. (229)

Nundy’s regressive arguments are not my concern here. Rather, in order to highlight the manner in which the impact of his article (and by extension, Besant’s) unfolded in serial-fashion in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, I turn to the many responses that the debate engendered. These appeared in three different issues of the magazine, between February and November 1902. None of these articles put forward unexpected arguments—they mocked the suspicion with which men approach “blue stockings,” criticised a social system in which marriage was thought to be the ultimate, and only, goal in a woman’s life, even as they continued to assert motherhood and familial responsibility as duties commensurate with the public life of women.

The first rebuttal, “Is the Indian Lady Graduate a Failure? A Reply to Mr Nundy” was published in the same issue as Nundy’s article, written by an anonymous “Indian.”

Appearing a few pages after Nundy's, it provides a sudden and unexpected counterpoint for the reader, who would certainly not have been expecting a reply in the same issue of the magazine. Sathianadhan would have been aware of the dangers of allowing Nundy's viewpoint to stand alone in an issue of her magazine, and indeed, we are told that the prompt rebuttal was included by editorial design. Sathianadhan is silent on her opinion of Nundy's arguments, but the anonymous article by an "Indian" comes with an aside, informing us that "we [the editorial team] thought it fair that the other side for the question should also be represented," followed by a note informing readers that "proof copies of his article [have been sent] to some of the Indian Lady graduates and some friends of higher female education" (274). The circulation of the proof copies alerts us to and reminds us of all the untraceable movement of articles and papers behind the making of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*.

The bulk of the responses—all solicited—to Nundy's article appeared in the subsequent March 1902 issue. A set of four, they were grouped under the same general title of "Is the Indian Lady Graduate a Failure?" Their counter-arguments were not particularly original and largely similar to each other, but what immediately strikes us, perhaps once again a reflection of Sathianadhan's consciously cosmopolitan imagination, is that their authors are geographically well-distributed, with at least one article from each of the major intellectual urban centres of the country. We read the opinions of an unnamed "Bombay Lady Graduate," a Mrs Margaret Ghose from Calcutta, a Miss Hannah Ratnam Krishnammah and T.K. Ramunni of Madras, the author of the article on periodicals with which this chapter opened. The collective experience of these university-educated individuals (whose qualifications follow their names in the magazine) are brought together as an attack on the false cosmopolitanism of Nundy, who claimed to have based the observations in his article on experiences of travel in South Asia, "from Peshawar to Tinnevely, from Assam to Katiawar

and the Malabar coast” (277). More than one rebuttal noted how unfortunate it was that his extensive travels did not lead to a commensurate broad-mindedness. TK Ramunni expressed surprise that a man of Nundy’s “position” could have such conservative views (“Is the Indian Lady Graduate a Failure” 275), and Hannah Krishnammah tellingly stated, “[i]f a man of his experience, insight and learning, who has seen much, read much, and travelled much, be thus prejudiced in his views, are we justified in blaming our ignorant mothers-in-law and orthodox old women when they veto our studies?” (276).

What is striking about these responses when seen as a whole is the manner in which they ensured that parts of Nundy’s article remain in the public reading imagination, by deliberate citation and repetition. So while Annie Besant, the point of origin of this argument, remained largely forgotten (only “The Bombay Lady Graduate” cites her article), what readers of the periodical would remember, as they moved across issues of *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, was the reference to women as the makers of omelettes and *hulwa*. This was repeated as a refrain in all but one rebuttal,¹⁵ and gained a curious afterlife in more than one forum. Sarojini Naidu is said to have started a lecture in the United States on women’s education with an invocation to the by then infamous omelette and *hulwa* (13), and in the November 1902 issue of *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, we are informed of yet another resurrection of these. As readers of the March 1902 issue would recall, Hannah Krishnammah ended her reponse to Nundy with a mock-call to her fellow women, writing sarcastically that “I think it will be well, if all the lady graduates constituted themselves into a society, and electing Mr Nundy as Judge, send him samples of their house-keeping, for instance, an ‘omelette’ or a ‘hulwa.’ Perhaps then he would change his opinion” (278). A visitor from Calcutta to the Indian Christian Industrial Exhibition in Madras, opened on 17 November 1902, reported the odd presence of a “sample of ‘halwa [sic]’” as an exhibit:

¹⁵ TK Ramunni’s rebuttal is the only one that does not pick up the refrain; it does, however, refer to cooking in general.

Amongst the many things that struck me there, I noted with very great pleasure and had the privilege of tasting it too a specimen “halwa” specially prepared for this Exhibition by one of our Indian Christian Lady Graduates [a Miss Chhuckerbutty, MA]. I should feel very grateful indeed if the authorities of the exhibition would kindly send a little of this specimen to our esteemed friend Alfred Nundy Esq., Bar-at-law, who felt so uneasy about it a few months ago, just to show him that, after all, our Indian Lady Graduates can prepare very good “halwa” for their husbands, if necessary. (“Indian Lady Graduates and Halwa” 202)

The framing editorial voice here—“[o]ur readers will remember that in a scathing article against Indian Lady Graduates written by Mr. Alfred Nundy, Bar-at-law, in our journal” works alongside the repeated references to Nundy’s article between its first appearance and November of the same year as a means of refreshing readers’ memories. These remind us not only of the eccentric trajectories the article had outside the periodical, whether as a humorous opening to a speech or a mock-object in an exhibition, but also crucially draw attention to the very nature of periodical reading—that to read an article, periodical-style, is to read and re-read a whole cluster of associated pieces of writing, if only through consistent re-invocation. To read a response to Nundy’s article is to read an article written in the shadow of his, and by extension, to cross-refer mentally with the February 1902 issue of the magazine while reading a piece that cites it in November. In this manner, the space of the periodical is hardly bound to its discrete issues, but expands across different issues in the form of continuing conversations.

iv. Postmarked Suez/London/New York City

So far, this chapter has focused on the ways in which texts travel, whether through reprinting, citing, or serialisation. This section serves to remind us that people did so as well. Despite anxieties about female mobility in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an increasing number of British women began to travel to the colonies, whether as the wives

and daughters of administrative officials, missionaries, or schoolteachers. But as Anna Snaith has recently pointed out, this period is exceptional because it witnessed numerous “voyages in” rather than “out”: of colonial women travelling the “wrong way” and finding themselves ready to confront the promises and disappointments of the imperial metropolis, London (2). Providing the conditions for the creation of a “mobile selfhood,” such journeys formed part of the woman subject’s coming to terms with the cosmopolitan categories of “home,” “belonging” and “return.”

Given *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*’s emphasis on a global vision of womanhood, it is not surprising to see that it gave a great deal of space to such accounts of travel, as vicarious outlets for its South Asian readers. These appeared in both serial and standalone article form; the consequences of which I will return to later. Women readers would have accompanied Lady Harnam Singh to Japan, and Miss Sidgwick to the Alhambra in Spain; they would have also followed confused students grappling with their “first impressions of Cambridge” and visitors to the United States shocked at the speed of its motor cars and omnibuses. Being part of the magazine, these did not simply present interesting snapshots for leisurely consumption. Instead, as I will argue in this section of the chapter, they participated in its project of instruction: of teaching its readers how to negotiate cultural spaces as cosmopolitan citizens.

Before I turn to examples of such writing from the magazine, it is important to discuss the generic positions that they occupied. “Travel writing” as a broad category is notoriously difficult to define, not only because of its literal and metaphorical connotations, but also the diversity of forms from which it draws strength. As Jan Borm rightly points out, it may be more useful to think of it as “a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional and whose main theme is travel,” and which may then include:

“memoirs, journals, and ships’ logs as well as narratives of adventure, exploration, journey and escape” (“Defining Travel” 13).

If travel writing, then, in any of these forms, documents encounters with the unfamiliar, and thinks through ways of understanding cultures and people different from our own, what is its status vis-à-vis the other disciplinary mode that emerges in the twentieth century to do exactly this: ethnography? As I mentioned in Chapter Two, James Clifford, borrowing from George Marcus, has classified such forms as para-ethnographies—guided by ethnographic impulses but lacking the required professional methodology to perform its tasks (24). However, as Jan Borm and Mary Louise Pratt have noted, the relationship between these two ways of making sense of the world is more complicated and fraught: “[t]o the extent that it legitimates itself by opposition to other kinds of writing, ethnography blinds itself to the fact that its own discursive practices were often inherited from these other genres and are still shared with them today” (Borm, “In-betweeners?” 82). As we shall see, the examples from *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* anticipate, rather than inadequately represent, key modes of ethnographic description and analysis: among them, participant-observation, the establishment of narrative authority, and the use of the first-person narrative.

I will discuss three examples here, each of which outlines travel experiences from differing cultural perspectives, and employs narrative and descriptive techniques suited to their purpose. These, as we shall see, upset the “us–them” dichotomy on which ethnographic practices depend and, instead, reverse its gaze. Here, South Asia, whether through the eyes of an American girl who calls Bombay her home, an elite South Asian tourist, or an Anglo-Indian returning to London, stares unblinkingly back at the world.

My first example is from the October 1904 issue of the magazine: “Rambles in London” by “[a]n Anglo-Indian.” Articles of this mould were extremely common, outlining famous places in the city in minute detail. Equipping readers with an extensive knowledge of

its by-lanes, bus routes and ticket fares, and names of parks and shops, such writing re-created London as a realistically conceivable and inhabitable space, if only in one's imaginative rambles. In fact, as Elleke Boehmer notes and to which a whole body of colonial and postcolonial literature from South Asia will attest, elite South Asians were already familiar with these spaces, refracted through the lens of literary writing, historical accounts, and family stories of travel to the metropolis (*Indian Arrivals* 10). As Anglophilic characters in more recent works such as Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) remind us, this knowledge was not limited to the valuable and essential acquisition of "cultural and linguistic codes" (Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals* 10) that made it possible both to imagine and navigate the city, but also included an intimate mapping of its physical and material spaces, populated by street names and shops like the iconic toy store, Hamley's. In this manner, as Boehmer writes, many South Asians had "gone abroad even before they embarked for England" (*Indian Arrivals* 37). For many readers, "Rambles in London" would therefore have a double function: to provide them with information about the city, as well as confirm what they already knew.

The article, which focuses on a morning in Battersea Park, is styled as a *Mrs Dalloway*-like reverie, even as it was written more than two decades before Woolf's novel. With the narrator-writer, we enter a narrative in the present tense that allows us to observe old couples sitting on park benches, look through the glass of shop windows, and (tellingly) hear the sound of the Big Ben. But these are not simply details to be read and forgotten; for we are reminded that even a casual stroll provides opportunities to "study" "life . . . in its various aspects" (114).

The possibility of studying "life . . . in its various aspects," unveils the ethnographic intentions of this article, even as it undermines them. This is particularly evident from the confession of identity with which the article opened: it was written by an "Anglo-Indian."

She therefore occupied, if unevenly, two cultural spaces at once, which lent her both the authority to observe and instruct.¹⁶ With this information, we are confronted with the transformation of what would have been an auto-ethnographic piece of writing into an ethnographic one. Examining London through sun-worn eyes, the Anglo-Indian's article is not merely a documentation of the city, but rather, a subtle documentation of difference. The article repeatedly turned to exemplary moments and practices that might reveal for the South Asian what it meant to be a Londoner. For example: “[g]reat shops of the Western World are a source of great interest to the newcomer from the East, and furnish one means by which Western life can be understood” (116). Such “specimens” thus become pedagogical tools in the instruction of difference. Similarly, to tell us of women walking alone in the city streets, or inhabiting public spaces (such as Battersea Park), for example, is to draw attention to the colony in which they cannot.

While “Rambles in London” marks an Anglo-Indian's return to the contested space of home, my second example moves across the Atlantic to the United States. In March 1906, *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* published an article entitled, “General Impressions of America.” Written by an anonymous “Indian Visitor to America,” it provides a useful entry point into the comparative questions of race and colonialism, reminding us that cosmopolitanism also has its limits. At the beginning of the article, the anonymous writer expressed concern at her own “impertinence . . . after a flying visit to the United States, to generalize on the character of the American nation, or of their institutions,” but went on to argue that “there are certain prominent features of American life and character that force themselves on the attention of even the casual visitor” (285). Turning from the particular to the general, she identified these defining characteristics. Of particular relevance to this

¹⁶ It is not clear from the article if the “Anglo-Indian” author of the article is a white colonial, or a Eurasian. It must be noted that, if the latter, her claim to the space of the imperial metropolis would be constrained and circumscribed by considerations of race and miscegenation. The article, however, makes no mention of this.

chapter are her thoughts on the American nation as “consist[ing] of the most heterogeneous races and communities”:

A traveller, wishing to have an idea of the varying elements that go to make up the American nation, has this opportunity on board any of the huge Atlantic liners that ply between Liverpool and New York, or Southampton and New York. In the steamer, in which I crossed over to America, there were over 600 steerage passengers, mostly emigrants to the United States. They were of all nationalities, —English, Welsh, Irish, Scotch, German, French, Italian, Russian, &c., and were drawn chiefly from the poorer working classes, and did not appear to be the very best specimens of their classes either. The American Government is now taking precautions to keep out the refuse of the European population from their country, but it is nevertheless a fact that from more than two centuries Europe has been pouring into America the very dregs and offscourings of its population. Very remarkable indeed has been the transforming and uplifting influence of American civilization on these undesirable elements. (285–86)

Surprisingly contemporary in its concerns, this passage is one of the few published in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* that highlights the “dangers” of cosmopolitanism—who does one admit into one’s borders? While cosmopolitanism as a *political* practice is celebrated as a means of cross-border solidarity, it is hinged here on the assumption that people would, in the long run, remain in or return to the countries to which they belong. Certainly the “refuse,” “dregs” and “offscourings” of others are not welcome.

While the article is sensitive to the racial biases of the American system, the complete lack of self-reflexivity in the description of immigrants to the United States nevertheless highlights what Peter van der Veer has argued in the case of South Asia: that colonialism is the bedrock of cosmopolitanism. It not only legitimises the expansion of borders (reiterated in the references to the “family of empire” throughout the magazine), but also reminds us of the civilising project with which this comes: “transforming” and “uplifting” those lucky enough to be taken into its fold.

Finally, I now focus on a six-part series published in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* between July and December 1904, “Letters from an American Girl on her way to America from India.” Editorial retractions and silences leave us with little information about this

“American Girl,” whose name we are never told. Across the parts published in the magazine, however, we do learn that she is an American missionary who repeatedly refers to Bombay as her home. The “letters” as we read them in the magazine, document her travels from Bombay, through the Suez Canal, to London, and then the United States, providing us with details of cities and ports she passes through, the people she encounters, and her own thoughts of what it means to talk about India abroad.

While, as I have already noted, *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* carried numerous accounts of foreign travel, these letters are unique in that they are written in the voice of an American, rather than a South Asian or an English woman. Implicated in the colonial project of enlightenment as a missionary, and yet distant from its cultural implications of British civilisation, she represents an ambiguous middle-position and original perspective on the colonial spaces through which she travels.

The first letter in the series further informs us that these are “extracts,” rather than the documents in their entirety. This begs the question: where are the “real” full-length letters? To who are they addressed? In some, the “you” they address is revealed to be the girl’s mother; at other moments, it refers to a collective group, perhaps her family. This is further complicated by a paratextual detail that accompanies the letters in the published form in the magazine: a small sketch of our illusive reader. On close examination, it reveals a South Asian woman in a saree reading what is clearly *not* a letter, but instead, a book-like object. Is this perhaps *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*? Are the letters, in fact, addressed to its readers, written for the express purpose of publication? Or instead, in the light of the reasons I will discuss below, are these simply fictional pieces written to simulate “authentic” travel?

In any case, these “letters” are yet another example of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine's* textual and material cosmopolitanism. They not only provided a means of thinking through crucial cosmopolitan categories: “home,” “belonging” and “return,” they also reminded

readers of how difficult the experience of border-crossing could be. As material objects with a supposed life outside the periodical, they not only document travel, but have to travel themselves to fulfil their purpose of conveying information.

The case for the fictionality of the letters is not difficult to make. As Padmini Sengupta writes in her autobiography of her mother, many of the anonymous and pseudonymous articles in the magazine were, in fact, mostly written by Sathianadhan herself (48). The details in the letters, largely generic geographical details about the passage to London and then to America, and marking the representative moments in a journey through the Suez Canal—the Indian Ocean, Aden, the Red Sea, Suez Canal, Port Said, the Mediterranean—could have, for one, been obtained from any standard travelogue or account of the period. However, this is not to undermine the importance of marking these points for the readers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*. As Elleke Boehmer writes, the canal crossing was a wondrous event that held a paradigmatic place in stories of travels to the West: as the midpoint between home and the rest of the world. In this manner, the journey came to be read as a rite of passage of sorts, allowing travellers to forge new selves as “cross-cultural migrants” and “citizens of the world” (Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals* 36). This experience, of course, was not restricted to South Asians embarking on lives in the West, but also held particular resonance for British imperial families, whose existences were split across these waters and worlds (Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals* 45–51). For the American girl, the trip “home” is complicated by her allegiance to Bombay; the passage represents an uncertain shedding of her “new” self and morphing into an old one that she can no longer recognise. In this, her transformation is closer to those of her South Asian readers who, along with her, develop a new readerly identity that is, if nothing else, vicariously cosmopolitan.

The letters not only register the flow of people, texts and objects across the colonial world and beyond, but also come to embody that very sense of motion and change: they enact

it as documents whose purpose it is to connect places. As a result of this, the sending and receiving of letters creates a double channel of movement. The American girl travels through Suez (from where the first letter is received), the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, Crete, London, and then New York; her letters, too, will pass through each of these places once they are posted, but in the reverse order. By running counter to the direction of travel, arriving in India as its writer moves away, such documents serve to remind us that we are always travelling in different directions, whether through reading, writing, or otherwise. This is reinforced by the periodical form. While the first letter is dated 12 March, it is not published in the magazine till July 1904. Of course, infrastructural limitations meant that a significant amount of time would elapse between the writing of the letter and its being read in India, and the dynamics of serialised publication mirror the presumably staggered receipt of these letters. This is a narrative, we are invited to believe, that unfolds across issues, not simply because of the form of the periodical, but also due to the mechanical contingencies of travelling itself. Further, like the article on American society, these letters remind us that border-crossing comes with its own cultural and material difficulties. Borders are controlled and policed: whether in the form of medical checks when embarking to sea, quarantine restrictions at international ports, or the more mundane form of import taxes on foreign goods. The reality of barriers reminds us that cosmopolitanism is, at some level, nothing more than an ideal.

v. The Literary Summary and Puzzle

In its December 1908 issue, *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* published a lecture called "Books and Reading" by an A. Zechariah, which outlined the importance of reading to the intellectual development of young women. "The companionship of books," she told her

listeners and readers, is “like no other companionship in the world. Seat yourself among these friends and what a pleasure you feel in their mere presence” (192). Much like the model of cosmopolitan reading this chapter has developed, reading helps women find not only friends *through* books, but also friends *in* books.

Zechariah also warns her eager audience of the associated dangers of the love of reading, the problem of plenty:

But perhaps in these days we have too many books and our greatest difficulty is to make a wise selection from amongst the multitude offered to us by innumerable publishers all over the world . . . In the library of the British Museum, there are upwards of a million and a quarter books, and upwards of three million in the National Library of Paris. It would require hundreds of years to read the titles alone of all the books in the world’s libraries. It is settled therefore for us that we must leave the great mass of published books unread. (193)

While she went on to outline on what principles women must select the books they choose to read, importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the passage above highlights the give-and-take between the extensive and intensive, between superficiality and depth. To read extensively and in depth, Zechariah reminds us, is a fantasy. Even to read the titles of all the books in the world—an example of the type of reading for which she castigated women (“aimless rambling from book to book achieves little”) (194)—is, we realise in the face of numbers, a sheer impossibility.

Zechariah’s parting words were simple: “select wisely, systematically” (193). *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* played a key role in this process, hoping to encourage its readers to engage with some books, and to ignore others. The informal creation of this programme of reading in its pages took various forms, some conventional, others less so. Readers learnt about the classics of English Literature through the “Suggestions for English Reading” column that was first published in the March 1903 issue (with a discussion of John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* (1865)), and through the channel of the literary-critical essay that usually focused on a single author, or a character. Edmund Spenser was thus deemed a worthy topic

for the January 1907 issue, while frequent articles on Shakespeare and Tennyson's heroines provided imitable (if terribly skewed) models of femininity for the readers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*.

From the examples listed above, a contradiction arises. In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that the greats of the English literary world as identified by Macaulay's *Minute* were classified as texts almost exclusively for men. How then do we read, not the single, but the repeated appearance of figures like Milton and Browning in this magazine written for and by women? In this section of the chapter, I will argue that while these literary works percolate into *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, the form in which they do and are consumed supports, rather than negates, my argument about alternative modes of superficial reading. As we shall see, both the contributors and the readers of the magazine used the canonical literary text to selective effects and ends.

At the heart of this is the key aim of the book review and critical essay forms: to reproduce the experience of reading the text in question. For the women who bought *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, this condensed experience, as reviewers continuously emphasised, was meant to be the stepping stone to a more intensive form of reading that the movement from the review to the text would initiate. This, in turn, was to contribute to their development as cultivated, cultured individuals. To such an end, and perhaps to the confusion of the contemporary reader, these pieces of writing were not only unusually long (often running into six or seven close-typed pages of text), but contained a detailed recounting of the work in question. In the case of a novel, the entire story with every single plot twist was spelt out; in the case of poetry, the reader was confronted with lengthy representative quotations.

While this might violate the rules of reviewing as we know it today (not to give away the story) as Nicholas Dames points out, quoting at length was, in actual fact, very much a part of "nineteenth century review protocol" (12). The excerpt included, therefore, was meant

to provide evidence of the reviewer's acuity in selecting the "smallest viable unit of the host text that [could] still express the general tone or emotional concerns of the text" (Dames 13), rather than his or her opinion of the text itself (Dames 18). Such reproduced fragments were meant to plunge the reader into the affective space of the text to the extent that these no longer functioned as parts of a whole, but rather, as Dames writes, "the whole itself" (13).

This principle is clearly in operation in the literary assessments published in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*. For example, the article on Spenser that I mentioned earlier in this section began thus:

Are you wearied with this work-day world of ours and would you forget for a moment the sufferings and griefs of men and women that live and toil in it, poor insignificant figures at best? Or has familiarity with early joys made them already distasteful to you, longing to soar above the trifles of this world, and to find pleasure in a realm of pure unfettered imagination ("Edmund Spenser" 234)

Spenser, we are told, is the answer. And if sceptical readers could not take the essayist at her word, an extended set of descriptions is put before them:

Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,
And low, where dawning day doth never peepe,
His dwelling is; there Tethys his wed bed
Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth steepe
In silver deaw his ever-drouping hed,
Whiles sad Night over him her mantle black doth spread.

And, more to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe,
And ever-drizling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne.
No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,
As still are wont t' annoy the walled towne,
Might there be heard; but careless Quiet lyes
Wrapy in eternall silence, farre from enimyes. ("Edmund Spenser" 234)

The presence of the passage above in the essay creates a series of contradictions which, as will become clear, characterise the selective cosmopolitan reading that this chapter has been elucidating. Reading is, at one level, intensive: concentrated in the restricted space of the

proffered fifteen lines. But it is also selective, focusing not only on just on the single author, but also just those few lines. An article that attempts to encourage women to become serious readers, paradoxically offers only a superficial engagement with Spenser. These lines are correctly pointed out to be a description of Morpheus's house, but nowhere are we told that they are from Canto One of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, a text that itself would require extensive and intensive reading to locate the phrase. In fact, the name of not a single poem by Spenser appears in the essay, even as it is copiously peppered with block quotations from his writing. Framing these less as exercises in or encouragements to reading, the article instead puts forward a series of "quotable quotes"—shortcuts to being able to talk eloquently about the Renaissance poet in public forums.

Cosmopolitan reading as extensive and reliant on parts instead of wholes also appears in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* in another form: the literary puzzle. While the women readers of the periodical may have very well conscientiously left their magazines for lengthy narrative poems, the literary puzzle demanded that, if nothing else, this knowledge was expressed in superficial forms. In July 1908, the magazine presented its readers with a poem with blanks. Each blank had a corresponding author's name, and was to be replaced by the title of one of his or her books. The result was to be a "set of nonsense verses in the same metre as that in which Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' is written" (21). One instantly recalls Zechariah's caution against reading the titles of literary works, reproduced here as a test of memory and an extensive acquaintance with, if nothing else, the names of books. In the process, intensive literary study is converted into an exercise in sophistication.

5. Coda: *Nashtanir* and the Periodical's Failed Cosmopolitanism

Even though the obvious “literary” figure to study in relation to *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* is Sarojini Naidu, for whose poetry the magazine served as a first publication forum, I turn instead in this concluding section to Rabindranath Tagore, who finds no mention in this Madras-based, if cosmopolitan, publication. In both his literary and nonliterary corpus, Tagore was, of course, a vocal proponent of cosmopolitanism. Many of Nikhil's often unfortunately pedantic speeches in *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World, 1916) were taken from Tagore's own non-fictional, polemic work on the subject; his novel *Gora* (Fair Skinned, 1910), a *Daniel Deronda*-like story, describes the turmoil that its fervently nationalist protagonist undergoes when he discovers his Irish parentage. In his series of lectures, *Nationalism* (1927), Tagore espoused a productive coupling of the East and West in South Asia, the exemplary model of which, according to him, was Japan. Envisioning a global society united in love and truth, Tagore put forward the ultimate cosmopolitan vision—a world without borders, even while individual cultures retained their kernels of uniqueness.

While this chapter has outlined the ways in which the periodical, as both a material object and mode of reading, celebrates cosmopolitanism as the basis for gender reform, my coda will demonstrate, by contrast, its failures. Turning to his novella, *Nashtanir* (1901), rather than either *Ghare Baire* or *Gora*, I will examine the proliferation of material metaphors in the text to reveal how the periodical is transformed into a secret, intimate object.¹⁷

The centrality of writing and print is made apparent even in Satyajit Ray's *Charulata*, his 1964 film based on the novella. The credits of the film scroll across the black and white image of a woman's hands embroidering a handkerchief with the letter “B,” surrounded by a

¹⁷ I have read *Nashtanir* in its Bengali original and cite, for the purposes of this chapter, the English translation by Supriya Bari and Mary Lago. This translation is perhaps closest to the original, preserving the metaphors of materiality on which Tagore's text depends, and which I discuss in this section.

leaf motif. Readers of Tagore's text will instantly recognise the person for whom the handkerchief is intended: the protagonist Charulata's negligent, if well-meaning husband, Bhupati. The handkerchief will continue to appear in the film at key moments. When Charulata gives it to her husband, we see it held up against a handwritten script for a speech he has been practising, the clear contours of the single English letter standing out against the inked scrawl of Bhupati's hand. At various points in the film, we find him tracing the shape of the letter with his fingers. When he realises that he has unwittingly lost his wife's affections to her young brother-in-law, Amal, with whom she shares an unfruitful love of literature, he wipes his tears with the very same handkerchief, only to look at his embroidered initials for the last time—it is, the film appears to suggest, writing that finally keeps the couple apart.¹⁸ If reading, as the earlier sections of this chapter demonstrates, has its uses in terms of women's writing and education, and cultivation as cosmopolitan subjects, it also has its misuses.

The failures of reading to create a cosmopolitan subject in *Nashtanir* can perhaps be linked to the purposes that the written word has in the novella. I agree with Supriya Chaudhuri's observation that Charu's will to write is largely instrumental in both texts (n.pag.), a means to an end, rather than an expression of the desire to become an autonomous and, for the purposes of this chapter, cosmopolitan, subject. But the failure, I suggest alternatively, stems from a mis-deployment of periodical genres as private, rather than public enunciations. Focusing on the examples of periodical publications that the novella is constructed around, the literary magazine and the newspaper, I argue that the characters of *Nashtanir* use the periodical in its various forms to play out private, interior fantasies that prevent them from constructing the kinds of extensive, if not international, intellectual communities at which *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* is, in part, successful.

¹⁸ Characters in neither Tagore's text nor Ray's film are surprised by the fact that Charu can read: her sister-in-law Manda's lack of interest in the Charu–Amal pair's literary activities, it is suggested, stems not from her illiteracy but rather from her unrefined cultural sensibilities.

If *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* attempted to gain unbounded circulation, print of all description is used to thwart inter-personal relations in *Charulata* and *Nashtanir*. Books are used by Charu and her associates as protection against being hit (Amal holds up a periodical to shield his face), an excuse not to talk to other people in the room (Charu picks up a random book to show that she is not interested in talking to Amal: one may notice that she randomly opens it onto a page which indicates that she is probably not reading at all at that moment, but rather pretending), characters hide behind bookcases, clutch letters to their chests and take pleasure in the smell of fresh newspapers, reminders, as Rachel Ablow argues, that books are not merely texts, they are also “barriers, windows, screens, affective, erotic and aesthetic experiences” (“Introduction” 9).

This role of the book as an object that allows for the creation of intimate spaces is one that needs to be considered further. Particularly useful in this context is once again the work of Leah Price, who, albeit writing about readers in the works of Antony Trollope, makes a persuasive case for what she calls the book’s ability to become a “prop for privacy” or a “prompt for interiority” (*How to do Things with Books* 47). Characters hide behind books to avoid uncomfortable conversations with their spouses, or the interested, unwanted glances of strangers at close-quarters (such as in a train compartment). The effectiveness of the open book or newspaper, therefore, lies “less on its being looked at [or read] by the character who holds it than on the person’s being looked at himself” (*How to do Things with Books* 47). It is the act of hiding behind one’s reading material that is thus emphasised, such that, as Price goes on to note, there is often not much difference in the nineteenth-century novel between pretending to read, and actually doing so. In the same vein, the act of writing (or even reading) replaces content for Charu. Instead, it creates a metaphoric space populated with material objects that serves to enable illicit and intimate interactions with Amal.

If print creates barriers and restrictions, it also creates possibilities. As Ravi Vasudevan argues (in relation to *Charulata*), Amal and Charu's sense of interiority is shaped by a similar engagement with the literary domain, as well as the fact that reading is an activity that they can legitimately perform together (on the pretext that Amal is instructing Charu as requested by Bhupati) (n. pag).¹⁹ The nineteenth-century novel's preoccupation with its characters' sense of interiority is here played out at the literal level of physical space, and how it is inhabited—here, intimately. Take for example, an early scene from *Charulata*. Charu is shown stopping in front of a heavy wooden bookcase, and we are given a close-up shot of her fingers running over each book, individually, almost caressing them, before sitting before a piano placed in the middle of the room. Amal's first appearance in the film is almost identical, as he traces exactly the same steps as his sister-in-law, with Bhupati unsuspectingly looking on. While all three are repeatedly shown to be surrounded by careless heaps of books and papers, it is a common language of play and desire that brings Amal and Charu together—the two read almost exclusively lying down on their beds, casually, whimsically. This intimacy, as it were, is further accentuated by the film's suggestion that the act of reading and the act of seeing are often interchangeable; reading is used as an excuse or cover for looking, peering and spying.

An excellent example of this is one of the first scenes of writing in the film. Charu has just given Amal a handmade notebook in which to write, and then watches him as he lies on his stomach in the garden. The film's viewers shown a series of superimposed pages, all covered with Amal's writing; the palimpsestic nature of the shot also highlighting the inconsequential nature of its content, through the opera glasses that have become synonymous with her cinematic portrayal (the glasses are not mentioned even once in the novella). She stops to say “*ref dile na?*”—he has missed a letter in the word he is writing—he

¹⁹ This is not only demonstrated through their shared activities of reading and writing, but also through the subtle mirroring of the ways in which they inhabit the physical space of doing so.

looks down at the page, smiles, and makes the correction. But what this simple moment of writerly collaboration does is bring together a much more powerful set of configurations. Charu, on the pretext of reading Amal's work as he writes it, is actually much more focused on *watching him*, not unlike the opening scene of the film, in which she uses the glasses to peek through the shutters at people on the road. This is a kind of surreptitious, though harmless, surveillance, the forbidden action of looking at something that is not hers to look at, but disguising it as legitimate and wholesome reading. It is the act, not its product, which is at the forefront of this exchange.

The ability to share physical space in this intimate manner is further enabled by Charu's suggestion that Amal and she start a periodical of their own. Charu, who by now is enamoured of Amal's florid and pretentious writing style, tells him that this product of their literary companionship will have just the two of them as contributors and readers. Copied by hand, the periodical, she tells her brother-in-law, is meant to be "just yours and mine," "no one else will read it . . . [w]e'll put out only two copies, one for you, one for me" (57). As Moinak Biswas writes, the "interiority within which Amal has come to acquire an affective presence was not something to be publicized, to be brought out into the open, but to be secretly nurtured" (n. pag).²⁰ While publications like *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* worked on the assumption that reading was a sociable, if solitary activity, Charu's suggestion radically puts the periodical form out of circulation, and instead, transforms it into a document that has a personal, diary-like quality.

The periodical is transformed into an unusual object in *Nashtanir* and *Charulata*, deployed for these uncharacteristic purposes. This secret is harnessed to exclude other readers. A secret document harnessed rather, to exclude other readers, the periodical takes on a formidable materiality against Manda, the novella's irritating sister-in-law, "[t]here was no

²⁰ <http://www.ipv.pt/forumedia/5/9.htm>.

way for Manda to get inside [into] their journal; the door was closed to outsiders” (57). The attentive reader will note here echoes of a narratorial comment from early on in Tagore’s text, when we are told that Charu’s inability to create a meaningful bond with her workaholic husband is said to be a failure to “break down the newspaper barrier and get possession of her husband” (26). The deployment of metaphors of print objects to illustrate relationships continues through the novella: Bhupati’s engrossment in his work is described as his being “hypnotised by the newspaper” (26) and takes on particular sexual resonance when it is remembered that he repeatedly describes the newspaper as Charu’s rival co-wife in the film.

The destruction of intimate space in the novella and film is similarly predicated on the destruction of the intimate materiality of writing. Charu’s plan for a two-person periodical, in fact, is a response to his composition, “The Notebook,” being published in *Sharoruha*, a local periodical. With this, Amal’s social role in the novella alters: he becomes more popular with Charu’s sister-in-law, Manda, and begins to receive fan letters from unknown readers. So whereas formerly “Amal’s writing belonged to Amal and Charu . . . Amal the writer, Charu the reader,” their literary space is now populated by hundreds of readers and commentators, “[n]ow everyone would read that composition, and many would praise it” (39). “Everyone,” the mass imagined community of readers, intrudes upon Charu’s imagination, reversing the metaphor of the closed door, “[a]ll at once the closed doors to their committee sessions stood open, and a Bengali readers’ circle stood between them” (39), but also the physical presence of flirtatious fan letters from young women, of which Amal receives a considerable number. Her subsequent writing and the publication of her literary works is read by Amal as jealousy and as an attempt to gain ascendancy over him, but is, at the same time, a lesson in the pains of failed intimacy.

Charulata also constantly highlights Bhupati’s more solitary relationship with print. This is the novella’s, as well as the film’s focus. Neither Amal nor Charu have the kind of

purpose and absorption seen in Bhupati as a reader. He is almost always shown reading while walking or sitting at a desk—he often passes Charu by in corridors of the house simply because he is engrossed in the book he is holding. His newspaper, an English-language daily, is a public failure largely because it is nothing more than a document of Bhupati’s personal enthusiasm for writing and politics. The self-involved nature of this intellectual engagement is reiterated through the material aspects of the newspaper. In *Charulata*, his excitement regarding his intellectual ventures is often conveyed to us through the pleasure he gets from the newspaper itself, and it is this pleasure that he evokes to create alternative affective intellectual communities with other characters. While we are constantly reminded of his differences from Amal, to whom England is characteristically the “World of Shakespeare” not the “World of Macaulay, Gladstone and Disraeli,” Bhupati does attempt to co-opt Amal into the newspaper business as his manager, surprisingly enough with the tantalising smell of fresh newsprint. When his failed relationship with Charu comes to the fore, his attempts to salvage it include the suggestion that they collaborate and produce a bilingual paper, with political content in English and literary articles in Bengali. He jumps up and down on the beach that they are visiting, and on which this conversation takes place, declaring with childlike enthusiasm (and in English) that ““there’s nothing like the sound of a printing press!””

The newspaper and periodical are print objects that, as we have seen in this chapter, characteristically forge communities rather than create barriers to their construction. The busyness of the periodical page and its readerly possibilities is here instead replaced by images of blankness. So when Bhupati tells Charu at the end of the novella that he is leaving their home on business, she asks if she can accompany him. His reply, which is no, he instantly regrets—but by then Charu truly realises the nature of her situation. The narrator describes her thus: “All the colour drained from her face and left it white and dry, like a piece

of paper” (103). Readers may remember the exaggerated paean to white paper that Amal scribbles off when Charu gives him his first notebook:

“Oh my pure-white notebook, my imagination has not touched you yet. You are unstained. You are as mysterious as the forehead of a child still unmarked by the god of destiny. How distant is the day when I shall finish writing the last line of the conclusion on your last page! Today, not even in dreams do your shining infant pages imagine the concluding words recorded in ink for all eternity.” (33)

By the conclusion of the novel, writing has taken a full circle. If Amal’s poem was to excite us with the possibilities and potential of what was yet not written, Charu’s paper-white face is a document of being un-written; not blank, but erased.

6. Conclusion

Through a close examination of *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine*, this chapter has outlined the dynamics of another mode of non-normative textual engagement: cosmopolitan reading. As we have seen, cosmopolitan reading not only provided women with a means of cultural and temporal escape from the restricted nature of their domestic lives, but also suggested that reading was an activity that could escape the textual and material boundaries of the printed volume itself. Central to this has been my study of the extract: a journalistic technique that manifests itself in different ways in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* but to a single end: to frame the experience of reading through the relationship between part and whole. Whether through the summary of a novel or a section of a reprinted article, the readers of the periodical were made aware that these texts operated in conjunction with other texts elsewhere, to which they may not have had access, but to whose existence they were aware. Like the unlikely readers in the earlier chapters of the thesis, this mode of reading reminds us of the inescapable connections between text and object: cosmopolitan reading speaks as much to an engagement with content, as it does to the material form of the periodical.

This chapter has therefore provided an alternative entry point into the issue of selective reading that Chapter Three introduced. If almanac readers read selectively by choice, the unlikely women readers of *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* did so by necessity. This did not, however, leave them with an incomplete grasp on the material they read. Rather, as we have seen, it encouraged their cultivation as cosmopolitan subjects, as capable of moving between cultures as between articles, texts, and issues of the periodical.

One of the important aspects of cosmopolitan reading that this chapter has highlighted is its capacity to create readerly communities, through the simultaneous consumption of printed texts. This, as Kamala Sathianadhan also believed, was the basis for a network of cultural and political solidarity based on the capacity to read, imagine and sympathise. As in the earlier chapters of the thesis, in particular Chapter Two's discussion of the bureaucratic document, the periodical's literal and metaphoric journeys highlight its role, to revisit Natalie Davis in another context, as a "carrier of relationships" (*Society and Culture* 192). By contrast, a text like Tagore's *Nashtanir* marks the failures of this cosmopolitan ideal, replacing it instead with unsuccessful attempts at domestic, if illicit, intimacy.

Conclusion

Reading Networks

In November 2012, while researching my proposed doctoral project on public works and the literary imagination, I stumbled upon a stray reference to Garnet Wolseley's *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service* in one of Kipling's short stories about soldiers in South Asia, now the subject of Chapter One. While I had started my foray into the imperial space of South Asia through the technologies that held empire together—bridges, railway systems, and telegraphic networks—I soon realised that ordinary cultural objects, as part of a “complex system of social and political choices,” also performed the same “technological” functions (Murray 2).¹ Through its careful documentation of what went into the making of imperial warfare, Wolseley's instructional manual provided a means of, as Cara Murray writes in another context, “doing business that in turn made imperialism business as usual” (4).

I had never heard of Wolseley's manual, but my interest was piqued by its reappearance in several other stories by Kipling. In my ignorance of the book, I was not alone. As I soon discovered, Kipling was but one among a whole host of cultural commentators vociferously attempting to convince the reading publics of Britain and South Asia that no one ever read *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service*, and nor should they. As I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis, this was a story that was replayed in different forms and disguises in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia, whether through the illegible bureaucratic document in *Indian Ink*, or the selectively-read astrological almanacs of Bengal. Like those with steam engines and typewriters, early encounters with the “book” in South Asia have been described as dependent on a vocabulary of wonder and

¹ Here I am inspired by Cara Murray's discussion of representations of the Suez Canal in the nineteenth century. She describes aesthetic forms ranging from the novel to the travel account and autobiography as cultural and “narrative technologies” that shaped contemporary perceptions of the Middle East. See Murray, esp. 1–5.

reverence. Homi Bhabha's essay, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817," is a case in point. My rummaging in the literary and historical archive of colonial South Asia revealed otherwise: if books and other written documents were used to consolidate empire, they were as easily transformed into tools that aided its subversion.

While my thesis has focused on the particular case of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia, it is useful to note here that the issues that surround the forms of textual engagement that I have discussed are not unique to the region, even as they manifest in culturally and socially specific ways. Elleke Boehmer's observation for the jingo poem holds true for other aesthetic and non-aesthetic genres of writing. These, she argues, were "portable form[s] that unfix[ed] easily from wherever [they were] first heard, proclaimed, or published" and gained meaning through their global circulation ("The Worlding of the Jingo Poem" 43). Bureaucratic documents and instructional manuals appeared as sites of contention not only in South Asia, but also in places as distinct as Australia and Nigeria. Readers in different parts of the imperial world read and found ways to read, as well as resisted the readings that were forcibly imposed on their own.

My understanding of the cultural and social importance of ordinary forms of writing in colonial South Asia unfolded as my very own archive story, to borrow Antoinette Burton's term: a narrative about "how archives are created, drawn upon, and experienced by those who use them to write history" ("Introduction" 6). The shift in my intellectual interests not only began in the archive—to paraphrase Derrida, that place of all beginnings—but also in the kind of serendipitous experience that has come to characterise, if problematically, our understanding of archival space. Amidst never-ending catalogue entries and proliferating files, records, and letters, chance encounters stood out as exceptional moments: when a scrap of paper in a bound register labelled "Petitions" was revealed to be a gun license signed by a

certain L.S. Woolf, or when, a trace of a reader in the form of a tram ticket, fell out of an almanac barely held together by torn string. But rather than merely reinforce my sense of wonder, that archives hold such treasures and that the “answers,” whatever they might be, are lurking somewhere at the back of a cupboard in a forgotten file, these incidents and finds simultaneously drew my attention to the archive’s excess—excessive to the point of being crippling. Embodying the paper-ed nature of colonial South Asia, as also of other parts of the empire, the archive presented numerous reminders of its own un-readability. To amend Ann Blair’s phrase for fifteenth-century Europe, there was often just too much to read.

A primary concern of this thesis has been to investigate the contrast between the visibility and sheer ordinariness of the documents of imperial contact in South Asia on the one hand, and the eccentric ways in which these were used on the other. As we have seen, people did not merely read or not read the texts involved but rather, employed an entire range of intellectual and material tools in order to attribute meaning to different forms of writing. They listened to others read; they defiantly misread and misappropriated; they expediently consulted books selectively; they read in part because of the constraints of genre, form, and print markets; and they read texts as objects. If we thought that only the so-called colonial subject interacted with texts in this manner, we were wrong. Instead, these practices involved an entire gamut of colonial subjects and agents; more often than not, the very functionaries of empire—its soldiers, headmen and clerks—were also reading in an uneven manner.

Unlikely readers extending from peasants through to soldiers, and office clerks to women of varying levels of education, are the subject of, just as they are subject to, the colonial archive, and are everywhere both absent and present, silent and garrulous. In this thesis I have attempted to follow the journeys on which their traces have led me: journeys that have proved to be literary, historical, bibliographical, and even ethnographic. In doing so, this project has enabled me to understand some of the contingencies of the archiving process

itself: what is preserved, and to what end? The voluminous nature of the archive is also, therefore, deceptive: all collections of documents and objects are, by necessity, based on exclusions. Working against the grain, I have combined literary, historical and bibliographical methods to carry out a multi-faceted, alternative history of reading (or not *really* reading), one that would otherwise threaten to disappear into oblivion.

This thesis has therefore revealed that unexpected people read in unexpected ways in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century South Asia. In doing so, it has also turned our attention to the unusual and unpredictable textual and material forms that books and other written documents could take, in this context, as well as others. As we have seen, empire in South Asia was not built on the imposing hardbound volume alone. Rather, it depended as much on more modest forms—pocket-books and instruction manuals, ephemeral magazines and almanacs, and the paper document—that were used and thrown away as desired. Combining varied modes of print and manuscript, bound volumes and loosely tied sheaves of paper, the media ecology of colonial South Asia was as heterogeneous as those who engaged with it. These texts and objects did not just circulate as material artefacts. As I have tried to demonstrate, representations of them appear across the cultural archive of the period, whether in visual print (such as the pocket-book in the form of “the Book” in the Okehampton Sketches of Chapter One), the literary text (such as the bureaucratic document in the novels of Chapter Two), or in film (for example, the periodical in Ray’s *Charulata* in Chapter Four). It is only by attending to the several configurations that writing took in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century that we can understand its place and role as a cultural object that both consolidated and challenged imperial rule in South Asia.

The shape-shifting nature of the “book” as we know it is also manifested in its reception. How the documents I have explored were read has also resulted in switching interpretative emphasis. Rather than the author, the onus of interpretation lies with the reader

who, in de Certeau's formulation, took on the characteristics of a poacher, employing his or her unique and individual insights to transform a text into something other than itself. The connotations of the word "poacher" mark this out as a surreptitious, if not illegitimate, activity. This, as we have seen, is reflected in the playful ways in which the unlikely readers of this thesis engaged with texts, whether by reframing Wolseley's pocket-book into a manual on the art of flirting, or by recasting the intensive study of the literary text into a memory puzzle in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*. In this manner, the reader-as-poacher represents both the strength and weaknesses of the possibility of writing a history of reading for any given region or time period: the rich variety of reader responses that a single text can elicit, versus the fact that the personal nature of each reading experience makes such an intellectual task virtually impossible.

This thesis has attempted to grapple with this sometimes productive, sometimes limiting, double-bind, in several ways. Perhaps the most important of these ways-in is the structure I have used. The thesis unpacks the relationship between writing, reading and not reading, and imperial rule through four case studies, drawing inspiration from intellectual history's turn to microhistory from the 1970s onwards. The first of these is a reduction of scale. One of the first instances of microhistory's being used to denote such a re-sizing is George Stewart's *Pickett's Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Charge at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863* (1959) which, as Carlo Ginzburg points out, is a discussion of a battle in the American Civil war that lasts twenty minutes but yield enough to fill over three hundred pages of text with analysis ("Microhistory" 11). Ginzburg also borrows this model in his *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976), an examination of the anomalous reading practices of a sixteenth-century miller, Menocchio, which embodies his definition of this particular historiographical approach as the "minute analysis of a circumscribed documentation, tied to a person who was otherwise unknown" ("Microhistory" 22). Roger Chartier writes in support

of this method: “it is only this reduced scale, *and probably only on this scale*, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationships between systems of belief, or values and representation on the one hand, and social affiliation on the other” (emphasis in original; “Intellectual History” 32).

The case studies in this thesis are structured in a similar fashion, as episodes or events in the history of reading, whether the manipulation of writing by a petitioner, or the margin notes left by anonymous readers in copies of Gupta Press almanacs. By thus tracking their lives and afterlives through readers, what does this thesis hope to have achieved? While looking at historical and cultural phenomena in small units no doubt reveals, as Chartier notes in the statement above, the intricate tropes and strategies that are in operation and which constitute the worldview of any given individual, the value of this approach to the writing of histories of societies and cultures is less easy to pinpoint. More specifically and in the context of this thesis, how does studying practices of reading, misreading, and not reading at a microscopic scale tell us something new about the way in which colonial transactions functioned in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia?

This brings us to another central tenet of microhistory: the relationship between the part and the whole, the micro-units of analysis and the macro-universe to which they belong. The practitioners of different forms of microhistory are not particularly helpful in their discussions on the subject. As Ginzburg notes, an event can be chosen for study because of its anomalous or unique nature (and therefore for the fact that it does not and cannot be mapped onto a macrohistorical whole) or, following Ferdinand Braudel and others, because its repetitive and regular nature makes it representative of a wider social reality; a microcosm, as it were (“Microhistory” 13). In this thesis, I follow the third possibility that Ginzburg highlights. Drawing on the work of the visual cultural theorist, Sigmund Kracauer, he argues for a history that combines macro- and micro-perspectives. As we have seen, microhistory

may usefully qualify the finding of a macro-approach, but, that said, it cannot provide us with the overarching view of historical change that the latter aims to construct. The solution, then, is to bring together and modulate between them, or, to continue the cinematographic vocabulary of Kracauer's work, to balance "close-ups" against "extreme long-shots" and, in the process, create a "comprehensive vision of the historical process through apparent exceptions and cases of brief duration" (Ginzburg, "Microhistory" 27–28). The result is an affirmative realisation that "reality is fundamentally discontinuous and heterogeneous" (Ginzburg, "Microhistory" 27).

Chapter One's discussion of Wolseley's *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service*, for example, examined the pocket-book's cultural impact. A broad sweep of the archive suggests that the manual was immensely popular, evinced by the fact that it was being widely reviewed even in its fifth edition, and that any mention of Wolseley in the press was necessarily followed by a reference to his status as the text's author. It is only when we begin picking apart the minute transactions in which the pocket-book participated, whether in Kipling's short stories or in the forgotten Quaker pamphlet, that the complicated ways in which it was constructed as an undesired or un-wanted book becomes apparent. Similarly, in Chapter Three, the scribbles and other marks that almanac readers have left in copies of these texts constantly work against the totalising perspective of sales figures and print regulations with which government archives provide us. It is only by juxtaposing the macro and micro scales of analysis within the same frame that colonialism's true character becomes apparent, as a form of, to return to Ann Laura Stoler, "hesitant" control and "uncertain knowledge" (*Along the Archival Grain* 2).

While this thesis has emphasised the portable, travelling nature of books and written objects, the history of reading, not reading, and partial reading it has charted out concentrates on a specific location and historical period, that is, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-

century South Asia. Even as the history of the book outside Europe has become an exciting area of study, research still tends to focus on purely “national” models of reading and publishing. Future work in the field, whether related to South Asia or beyond, must pay more attention to the ways in which written objects enabled inter-imperial, global relationships. Postcolonial studies’ discussions of aesthetic form has, no doubt, attempted this through a study of the factors that have led to the creation of Pascale Casanova calls “the world republic of letters.” But what an emphasis on the rise of the literary prize, the emergence of world markets, and the popularity of social media does, is obscure the fact that the globalisation of reading, readers, and information was a phenomenon to which even late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publics were witness. As the politics of imperial comparison makes clear, the British empire was composed of intersection networks of people, affect, places, objects, and ideas. Made possible by the widespread development of technologies of travel and communication, this meant that imperial provinces around the world were not only in constant dialogue with the London metropolis, but also with each other. Personal and professional letters were sent to and from the colonies to create sustained, if fragile, paper channels of communication and exchange. Further, the fact that imperial careers often spanned different parts of the imperial world, what Lambert and Lester term “imperial careering,” meant that the ideas and experiences of one space could influence and structure one’s presumptions in the other.

This brings us to a crucial set of realisations: that imperial ideas were, as Ann Stoler reminds us, portable ideologies that were co-constituted from the experience and practices of empires as a whole (“Considerations of Imperial Comparisons” 39). What comes to the fore here is the need to compare “NOT imperial structures, but imperial effects” (Stoler, “Considerations of Imperial Comparisons” 33). The units of our analysis, therefore, are “imperial formations” rather than simply nations or regions, “not fixed macropolitical

entities, but ongoing processes that produce gradations of sovereignties, not as exceptions to their architecture but as constitutive of them” (Stoler, “Considerations of Imperial Comparisons” 35). If nothing else, the number of recent critical studies on the subject of empire that have words like “network,” “web” and “entanglement” in their titles is a testament to this intellectual shift.²

Representations of the empire in South Asia were, therefore, inextricably linked not to the isolated material text but rather, to chains and trails that connected literary works, historical paperwork, personal correspondence, instruction manuals, cheap magazines, among other forms of writing to different parts of the imperial world. In this light, how might we conceive of a comparative, connective—even global—history of the South Asian book in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? A common point of entry to these questions has been through the histories of printing institutions. As the work of Rimi B. Chatterjee, and Priya Joshi has demonstrated, publishing houses such as Oxford University Press and Macmillan (through its colonial library series), placed the dissemination of scholarly and literary works in South Asia in constant dialogue with the metropolis. Recent work on African book cultures has revealed similar participants, as Caroline Davis’s study of Longman’s history in the continent highlights, as, too, does Gail Low’s examination of textbook cultures in the Caribbean. Other important players in the period were missionary presses. Abhijit Gupta has drawn our attention to the Baptist missionary press that operated out of Serampore in India, and which was central in forging networks of print that spanned not only South Asia, but also countries such as China, Java and Sumatra. Isabel Hofmeyr’s work on the colonial afterlife of Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in southern and eastern Africa also makes such inter-imperial connections apparent.

² Examples include, among others: Elleke Boehmer’s *Indian Arrivals, 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire* (2015); Tony Ballantyne’s *Webs of Empire* (2012) and *Entanglements of Empire: Missionaries, Māori and the Question of the Body* (2014); and Kris Manjappa’s *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (2014).

A global history of the colonial book, then, would need to look not just at Britain's print relationship with its colonies, but also at how books, documents, and institutional paradigms, travelled between these spaces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To take a specific example, we might consider the almanac. As I noted in Chapter Three, almanacs travel today in different virtual and digital media forms. In the nineteenth century, diasporic South Asian communities also accessed these calendars mainly through the downsized, condensed form of the newspaper column. Isabel Hofmeyr notes that Gandhi's experimental newspaper *Indian Opinion* carried weekly Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi calendars (*Gandhi's Printing Press* 74). Similar practices can be seen in other publications of this period: in issues of the *Natal Mercury*, for example. This particular case extends the concerns of this thesis in new directions. For one, it points to how the almanac adapted not only to a new temporal space (South as well as East Africa), but also to a new material form, the newspaper column. The religiously syncretic space created is not just a product of the migration and interaction of different communities in another country. It is equally shaped by the expense involved in the transportation of books, and therefore the need to include as much information as possible in an easily accessible issue of a newspaper. A study of transformations of this kind would greatly enrich the study of the global trajectories of colonial print.

This thesis has also pointed to print's imbrication with other forms of media, notably, the assembled form of the scrapbook, the illustration, and the film. The implications of this for a history of the South Asian book in the world are manifold. A particularly insightful example, which I hope to pursue in detail in the future, is the circulation of lecture texts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period saw an unprecedented number of South Asia's representatives travel abroad to deliver lectures to the global public about the literary, cultural and political concerns of the region. While it may seem odd to label an

examination of the lecture form as a book-historical concern, this project will crucially highlight the interdependencies between speech and writing. Not only were lectures organised and publicised through announcement posters and the exchange of personal letters, most people, in fact, accessed lecture texts in their printed, rather than spoken, forms: transcripts and reports in newspapers and journals, and through the lecture-turned-book. In an attempt to capture the immediacy of the spoken word, these often contained minute details of a speaker's tone and gestures, as well as the audience's response, a narrative turn that looked towards, even as it would ultimately be made redundant by, the audiovisual medium. The spoken lecture was transformed in print through the addition of textual supplements such as explanatory footnotes and suggestions for further reading. If people could only travel to one place at a time, their texts and writing were nevertheless available to a global public who were made to believe that the act of reading substituted for listening.

To return to the question with which this thesis began: what did it mean to be a reader in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia? It meant, as we have seen, to read, not read, misread, and read in part. It also meant to touch books, to write in their margins, or even across their pages, and to cut them into pieces to be pasted in other books. Placing these eccentric reading practices in global perspective, it becomes increasingly clear that these were strategies no doubt available to people across the imperial world, and were indeed constituted through networked relationships with other people, places, and kinds of media. If anything, this thesis and my proposed future lines of inquiry remind us that reading has always taken, as it will continue to take, unexpected and surprising forms.

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