

Introduction

In 'The Indian Mutiny in Fiction', a review article that appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1897, Hilda Gregg made an observation that bears recall. At the start of her survey of recent novels on the subject Gregg noted that: 'Of all the great events of this century, as they are reflected in fiction, the Indian Mutiny has taken the firmest hold on the popular imagination.'¹ Gregg does not quite explain her meaning, but as this book hopes to show, the imagination that seized on the rebellion of 1857–9 was the vulgate of late-nineteenth century British expansionism. The literary yield of the rebellion, as indeed the event itself, loses much of its meaning when not read alongside the many foreign and colonial conflicts of the century which provided material for fiction: from the momentous Napoleonic wars through the cycle of warfare in India as in other colonial and para-colonial possessions from the mid-eighteenth century to the Crimean and the Boer Wars. Militarily, the nineteenth century was perhaps the busiest period in British history, laying the basic groundwork for the geo-political configurations which some have called the 'world-system', and for the legal and constitutional bases of sovereignty and intervention. The need to open markets, protect commercial interests, enforce tariffs, contain European and coerce extra-European powers continuously provided reasons for armed conflict. These recurring motives make it possible to reduce the many military engagements of nineteenth-century Britain into one Long War; prefiguring the next Long War – from the Berlin Conference of 1884 to the end of the Cold War – fought over a set of constitutional issues, a single conflict suppurating at different times and places, and driven, ultimately, by the aggrandising impulses of the classic nation state.²

But it would be impossible for a nation to engage in warfare for a century without a public culture that sanctioned war as the legitimate arm of state and commercial policy, and that viewed expansion as the expression of an inevitable national and racial urge with very real material dividends. This culture took distinct and successive forms through the century,

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with exponents ranging from liberals, conservatives, imperial federationists, free traders, evangelicals, the gentlemanly muscular Christians of Rugby–Oxford, the National Volunteer League, social Darwinists, Victorian race theorists, the Society for Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and even popular periodicals like the *Boys' Own Paper*. These together gave purpose to British-led colonial globalisation, and brought legitimacy to a vast, thriving military–industrial machinery, which policed the global beat and kept markets and frontiers in order. The machinery and its operation anticipates on most counts US-led neo-colonial globalisation of the twentieth century, where gaudy malls of goods and opportunity provide the façade for arsenals, deterrent deployments and the crony capitalism of client-states. But where nineteenth-century globalisation justified multiform violence through self-serving, self-congratulatory high talk about civilising and racial missions while expropriating subject peoples and denying them agency, the second wave, which began with the Cold War, has modified the ideological schema, using the heraldic devices of democracy and freedom to prop up the despotisms of the South. Humbug has been thumpingly profitable for two centuries now: the civilising mission created jobs and funnelled wealth home along with ornamental freebies like Indian diamonds and the Elgin marbles, while State Department platitudes on democracy fuel the squadrons that bomb ancient civilisations for oil and gas.

To be sure, the imperial idea had its enemies, and for much longer than A. P. Thornton's selection of dissenters suggests.³ From the late eighteenth century, individuals, factions, loose bodies of intellectuals, and labour groups questioned the drive for territorial and commercial expansion, the wisdom of over-extending national resources and the morality of violating other forms of life and politics, even as they warned of the consequences of colonial expansion and militarism on British society and politics. But the history of dissent that dogged at nearly every step the Long War was, like the career of Edmund Burke, the Rockingham oligarch and early dissenter, that of a minority in perennial opposition. India, where it all began after the loss of America, was far too lucrative for Cabinets and MPs of all stripes, for East India Company directors, merchant lobbies, shareholders, as an unfailing source of private wealth, corporate profit, sinecures and preferment. The revival of party in the early nineteenth century, and the arrival of party government after 1832, changed British politics, government and civil society in some fundamental ways. But the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832, which created a middle-class electorate, and the Reform and Redistribution Acts of 1867 and 1884–5, which extended the vote to working men, successively introduced new and large constituencies to the heady pleasures of national

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expansion. Significantly, the Reform of 1832 coincided with the arrival of a rationalised liberal-administrative state in India following the Charter Act of 1833, headed by a peer but run by a middle-class British bureaucracy: pious, hard-working, reformist and generally parochial and xenophobic. No less significantly, the franchise of 1884–5 coincided neatly with the Berlin Conference of 1884, which set off the European ‘scramble for Africa’, inaugurating a new phase of international avarice, with more urgent need for popular endorsement and participation than ever before. This reformed an imperial–national identity that rose above intra-British ethnicity, and that was sometimes stretched to include the settler colonies and America in an imagined ‘greater Britain’: militarist, philathletic, Christian, certain of a superiority that could be proved as much by social and anthropological applications of the Darwinian model of evolution as by their intellectual precursor, the hundred-year-old ‘stage-theory’ of the Scottish Enlightenment. The ‘New’ or ‘High’ imperialism of the 1880s and after was buoyed by the newly enfranchised working men, who quickly became the shock troops of national expansion and competitive imperialism. The pathology of jingoism that John Hobson diagnosed at the end of the century grew out of these developments, and part of the pathology was the ‘popular imagination’ that settled around the Indian rebellion as among the exemplary episodes of the Long War.⁴

If the literary yield of the rebellion surpasses in volume the literary representation of the other conflicts during the long nineteenth century of expansion, it is no less prominent in the history of Anglo-Indian letters. Measured against British writing on India from the late eighteenth century to decolonisation and after, the seventy-odd novels on the rebellion from 1859 to the present day show how more than any other event in the British career in India the rebellion was the single favourite subject for metropolitan and Anglo-Indian novelists. Initially circulated by the periodical press in India and in Britain, and soon the subject of histories, first-person accounts, official reports, polemical pamphlets, sermons, lectures, parliamentary debates, poetry and the stage, the rebellion acquired form, meaning and mythography that was most fully elaborated in a spate of popular adventure novels between the 1890s and the First War. The magnitude of the event and its consequences were often occasions for a good deal of astonished apostrophising by the earliest chroniclers and publicists, and by novelists, poets and reviewers. The reasons then adduced to explain the fascination with the rebellion, and faithfully reiterated through the first few decades of the twentieth century by a class of British writings, literary and historical, form an interesting constellation. The rebellion had

threatened a territorial and commercial stake that grew into the centre-piece of British expansion following the loss of America. But unlike the American War of Independence, the rebellion and its much-debated causes underscored a model of radical conflict between cultures, civilisations and races; a conflict that at once justified conquest and dominion and proved the impossibility of assimilating and acculturating subject peoples. No less significant were the several thousand British casualties in the war the rebel militias launched. For, not only did the fatalities reveal the precariousness of British power, and the inherent difficulty of knowing and controlling the motions of the communities and polities of India, they were also a serious interruption of the habitual hierarchy of status and authority that structured British relations with India.

Yet, the many revivals of pre-British authority and government in north and central India did not converge into an organised resistance, nor did the rebel leaders in Delhi, Awadh, Kanpur, Jhansi or the numerous rebel garrisons in scattered towns have a plan for the future. By the start of the summer of 1858 the resistance grew attenuated, even as the restoration of the administrative machinery gave a moral annotation to the event in the British imagination. The suppression of the rebellion brought new legitimacy and sonority to the British in India, for the event was quickly configured in the idiom of Victorian medievalism and Christian heroism, while the fateful demonstration of superior technology was read as the unmistakable sign of an essential racial superiority. And to that extent, the Mutiny, as the rebellion came to be known, required a continuous commemoration from the faithful, an imperial thanksgiving never entirely without a trace of incredulity, and signifying always a caesural moment in the history of the Indian empire – replete with signs and wonders, as the pious Punjab evangelical Herbert Edwardes would have it – when all was nearly lost only to be regained once more, and when, more prosaically perhaps, the formal imperialism of the Crown and Parliament replaced a hundred years of the East India Company's expansion and rule.

At the end of her article, Hilda Gregg noted that '*the* novel of the Mutiny is still to be written'.⁵ What she meant by that emphatic article is left unclear, but it is likely that in her view – and she too wrote a Mutiny novel, *The Keepers of the Gate* (1911), under the pseudonym 'S. C. Grier' – such a novel must retail the mythography of the victors, perhaps more tastefully than its predecessors had done. At any rate, a hundred years after Gregg it seems unlikely that such a novel will ever be written. Occasional novels on the subject have appeared in each decade after the political independence of

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India, but with the end of empire and its inner circuitry of myths, memories and meanings, its statuary of heroes and villains, such novels amount to little more than ironic coda or naive nostalgia.

Precisely for that reason the present study begins with a short novel by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, which appeared in the Christmas 1857 issue of *Household Words*, and ends in 1947, when the transfer of power was the immediate provocation of C. Lestock Reid's bellicose novel, *Masque of the Mutiny*. While Dickens and Collins wrote an allegory of the rebellion set in Central America, the first novel to treat the subject directly was *The Wife and the Ward; or, a Life's Error* (1859) by Edward Money. In the following ten years there were only two novels, of which H. P. Malet's *Lost Links in the Indian Mutiny* (1867), a diffuse romance with a large cast of Indian characters, meanders from the Company's military campaigns against the Afghans and the Sikhs to the rebellion. *First Love and Last Love* (1868) by James Grant was the first three-decker Mutiny novel by an author who, before turning his hand to India, had written military-historical novels such as *The Romance of War; or, the Highlanders in Spain* (1846–7).⁶ Set in Delhi, the resurgent Mughal capital, the novel represents life in the rebel-held city, and in the British encampment beyond the city walls. Unlike *The Wife and the Ward*, which was confined to the Anglo-Indian life, these are the first novels to represent the rebel world in some detail; a development possibly encouraged by the forensic investigations of the colonial state in the years after the rebellion, and which adumbrates the future interests of the Mutiny novel.

The number goes up to four in the next decade, and of these the most significant novels were the three-deckers: *Seeta* (1872) by Phillip Meadows Taylor, *The Afghan Knife* (1879) by Robert A. Sterndale and *The Dilemma* (1876) by George Chesney. Taylor, who began as a police officer in the kingdom of Hyderabad, was the author of the *Confessions of a Thug* (1839), and his Mutiny novel was the third of a historical trilogy based on centenary episodes from Indian history.⁷ In *Seeta*, Taylor brought his interest in Indian criminology to bear upon the rebellion, and the villain of the piece, Azrael Pande, is a former *thag* and robber turned rebel leader. The plot of the rebellion is, however, subordinate to another interest, the love and marriage of a British civil servant with the Brahmin widow, Seeta.

Echoing a current debate between W. W. Hunter and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan on the religious duty or otherwise of Muslims to revolt against a non-Islamic government, over the wahabi movement of Islamic reform, and the Frontier conflicts on the north-west in the early 1870s, Sterndale's novel, *The Afghan Knife*, represents Islam as the prime mover of the rebellion and,

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with a nod to the Great Game, suggests the involvement of Czarist Russia in the rebel plot. George Chesney, formerly of the Bengal Engineers regiment and wounded during the assault on Delhi in 1857, returned to England in 1867, and turned his attention to warcraft and army reform. His first novel was *The Battle of Dorking* (1871), a sensational fantasy of a German invasion of Britain that was perhaps a model for H. G. Wells's invasion fantasy, *The War of the Worlds* (1896). Chesney's first Indian novel was *The True Reformer* (1874), set in Shimla and London, where the hero, after making a fortune in India, leaves for England to become an MP and a champion of army reform. *The Dilemma*, first serialised in *Blackwood's*, was based on the rebel siege of the Lucknow Residency in 1857, and the rebellion served mainly as an exotic background to a romance plot hinged around love, adultery, scandals and mysterious jewels. Two of the three Mutiny novels published in the 1880s were *Douglas Achdale* (1885) by Katherine C. M. Phipps, a novel about the siege of the Lucknow Residency, and *The Touchstone of Peril* (1887) by D. M. Thomas. The latter was based in the fictional north Indian town of Hajipur where rebels led by the dispossessed Muslim landed gentry besieged a party of Europeans.

The most productive period in the history of the Mutiny novel was the 1890s, when nineteen novels appeared. Despite Gregg's possibly aesthetic dissatisfaction, the novels of the nineties say a good deal about the British self-image in India, as they are among the indices of a high imperial culture. The novels include G. A. Henty's first novel on the subject, *Rujjub the Juggler* (1893), Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), *A Man of Honour* (1896) by H. C. Irwin and A. F. P. Harcourt's *Jenetha's Venture* (1899). Among the novels that will be examined in detail in this study, their most obvious difference from earlier writing is that the rebellion now turns into a site of heroic imperial adventure, and an occasion for conspicuous demonstrations of racial superiority. Also, while Sterndale or Grant represented the indigenous rebel world alongside the Anglo-Indian world, in Steel and Harcourt a white hero or heroine mediates between the two and functions as a crucial instrument of surveillance, sabotage and counter-insurgency.

These altered emphases mesh well with emerging trends in late nineteenth-century popular fiction. The majority of the Mutiny novels of this period are aimed primarily at a juvenile readership, and in which character-building, empire, military exploits, and state security and espionage are among the commonest themes. Moreover, for contemporary novelists such as Henty, his closest rival and follower, George Manville Fenn, and Gordon Stables, the Mutiny was but one topic from a history

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of national expansion serially exploited in hundreds of immensely popular novels about Canada, Australia, Africa and South and Central America. This geographical range was also evident in other, less popular, novelists such as J. E. P. Muddock and Hugh Stowell Scott. Born and partly raised in Calcutta, Muddock, who was in India during the rebellion and later was the Swiss correspondent of the *Daily News*, wrote two Mutiny novels, *The Star of Fortune* (1895) and *The Great White Hand* (1896). But his fictional territory was not only India and, under the pseudonym 'Dick Donovan', Muddock published some twenty-four novels of crime detection, besides novels on espionage and the Russian secret service such as the *Chronicles of Daniel Danevitch* (1897) and for *God and the Czar* (1892). Hugh Stowell Scott, who used the pseudonym 'H. S. Merriman', visited India as a tourist in 1877–8, and was possibly employed by the British secret services in later life. His only Mutiny novel was *Flotsam* (1896), in which intrepid British heroes easily slip in and out of rebel Delhi and Lucknow disguised as Hindu 'sepoys' or fakirs. While in this novel Scott treated colonial resistance and counter-insurgency, his *Prisoners and Captives* (1891) and *The Sowers* (1896) were about Russian nihilist conspiracies, while *With Edged Tools* (1894) was a violently pro-imperialist tale of slave and ivory trade in West Africa.

The precursors of Joseph Conrad's ironic reversal of the themes of colonial adventure and espionage in *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), these novels were alive to the problems of 'pacifying' and administering foreign territory. There is a double significance to the *fin de siècle* colonial adventure hero in disguise who penetrates into rebel conclaves to thwart rebel plans or to gather intelligence. Imagined in the 1890s and extrapolated into the 1850s, such insertions suggest at once a fantasy of mastery that sutures actual intelligence failures during the rebellion; a fantasy made possible and rendered credible by British dominance in India during the 1890s, and acquiring another urgency from the great games of British foreign and diplomatic policy in India, and in Central and West Asia. But these fantasies also suggest the underlying anxieties of a colonial regime and a garrison state, in the midst of, yet usually exiled – for a complex of reasons – from the forms of life and the lived everydayness of the indigenous world. Through the historical prism of the rebellion, the novels of the nineties and thereafter represent the recurring obsessions of the colonial state: surveillance, knowledge and co-optation, which, hardly a surprise, are also the salient concerns of those two canonical Anglo-Indian novels, Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901).

In the first decade of the twentieth century the number of Mutiny novels drops sharply to eight, though imperial adventure and the culture of heroism persist in boys' novels like *A Hero of Lucknow* (1905) by F. S. Brereton, *The Disputed VC* (1909) by Frederick P. Gibson and *The Red Year* (1907) by Louis Tracy, who, incidentally, started the tabloid *Sun* in 1894. The decline continues in the second decade when only six novels appeared, including C. E. Pearce's *Red Revenge* (c. 1911), *The Devil's Wind* (1912) by Patricia Wentworth and *Rung Ho! A Novel of India* (1914) by 'Talbot Mundy' (Sylvia Anne Matheson). Between 1914 and 1947 there seem to be only two novels on the rebellion, J. C. Wood's *When Nicholson Kept the Border* (1922) and *Masque of the Mutiny* by C. L. Reid, which appeared in 1947, the year of Indian independence. The last novel is interesting for several reasons, not the least of which is that a Gandhi-like 'Mahatma' is the imagined leader and chief ideologue of the rebellion. *Masque* interpolates a coherent centre that the rebellion, by all accounts, did not possess, though happily enough the novel's English hero and his Indian collaborator assassinate the 'Mahatma', a deed that helps to put out the 'Brahmin conspiracy' to free India from British rule.

After independence, the rebellion has figured as the subject of occasional novels such as *The Nightrunners of Bengal* (1955) by John Masters, *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) by J. G. Farrell, Norman Partington's *And Red Flows the Ganges* (1972), *Flashman in the Great Game* (1975) by George Macdonald Fraser and *Blood-Seed* (1985) by Andrew Ward, the historian of the rebellion in Kanpur. As suggested at the beginning of this rough guide to the history of the Mutiny novel, these novels are of no interest here. Though post-1947 novels continued to employ the themes and representational emphases of the main body of the Mutiny novel with various degrees of criticism, irony or fidelity, they are vestigial to a project that came to an end in 1947 not only with the transfer of power but also, 'poetically', with the assassination of the 'Mahatma' in a novel that draws the curtain upon a ninety-year old 'masque'.

Between the two moments of Dickens–Collins and Reid's *Masque*, the main body of British fiction on the rebellion bears the impress of formative inter-sections such as those between the historical novel and the history of empire, between popular culture in Britain and the British self-image in India, between colonial knowledge and its transcription in fiction, between the metropolis and the Anglo-Indian periphery and, not least, between the history of Anglo-Indian literature and its substantial subset, the Mutiny novel. Despite an appearance of unimaginative repetitiveness, an appearance that

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is not allayed, moreover, by the usually pedestrian writing and the often flat-footed ventures into history interwoven with febrile romance-plots, the novels of the rebellion were responsive to contemporary events in the colony and in the metropolis. While the general perspective from which the rebellion was represented in British fiction between 1857 and 1947 shows little change, there are significant modulations of theme, emphasis and register between the earliest novels and the novels of the 1890s. Some of these shifts have to do with imperial propaganda, or a Samuel Smiles-like character-building exercise where the hero represents the exemplary 'empire boy'; others derive from metropolitan gender-politics; and still others respond to an increasingly combative Indian nationalism and the exigencies of administration. The regularities governing the representation of the rebellion in ninety years of novel-writing suggest a fundamental resistance in the popular imagination to anti-colonial resistance, though there were often networks of historical, political and literary-stylistic contingencies inflecting and revising the imaginings of resistance.

Given these intersections and the presence of politically significant inflections, it is curious that there has not been more historical and literary critical engagement with the Mutiny novel. There is a longish history tucked behind the present study, a history no less responsive to political and cultural mutability than its subject matter. The study of Anglo-Indian letters in general and fiction in particular began in the late 1840s with J. W. Kaye's review articles in the *North British Review* and the *Calcutta Review*. These early formulations were followed by 'high imperial' assessments from the 1890s through to the 1930s: review articles by Alfred C. Lyall and Hilda Gregg among others, and studies such as E. F. Oaten's *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (1907), P. Sheshadri's *An Anglo-Indian Poet: John Leyden* (1912), *India in English Literature* (1923) by Robert Sencourt and *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (1934) by Bhupal Singh.

It often goes unnoticed that early Anglo-Indian literary criticism too had theorised the relation between national expansion and literary writing, and on the characteristics and habits of culture of an expatriate community, stratified by administrative and military rank, and ruling over vastly different peoples. In the reviews by J. W. Kaye – author of the Punjab war novel *Peregrine Pultuney* (1844) – there was already the sense that Anglo-Indian literary culture was intimately responsive to the British project in India, with its militarism, its drive towards centralisation and the sense of a reformist mission, and to everyday life in a garrison society surrounded by but self-consciously distant from the subject indigenous society. It was specifically the conquest of Punjab and Sind over the 1840s,

and the ensuing work of colonial 'settlement', which prompted Kaye's own review article 'The Romance of Indian Warfare'.⁸ These events helped to design a potent and fashionable Anglo-Indian sub-culture of the frontier hero or Punjab administrator over the next hundred years or so: a gloomy 'berserker' spirit leading irregular corps to 'pacify' Waziristan or Chitral on the Afghan border, or carrying out administrative and judicial settlements from Lahore with a mix of evangelical dourness and liberal-reformist energy. Lyall's 'Novels of Adventure and Manners' (1894) elaborates the same theme half a century on: that adventure was the most appropriate subject of the British-Indian aesthetic, built around the settlement of conquered or ceded territories, the memories of the Mutiny and the ongoing warfare at the frontier culminating in the somewhat humbling experience of the Tirah Expeditionary Force in 1897-98.⁹ Unlike Kaye, however, Lyall saw a larger design in this aesthetic: adventure in India was part of a global narrative of Anglo-Saxon adventure, following the steady commercial, military and governmental penetration of four continents, and recently reinvigorated by the emergence of European competitors.

The candid correlation between expansion, warfare and novel writing grew muted in later years, and was replaced by other interests such as, for example, the oddities of Anglo-Indian life and society, and some literary-critical attention to the representation of the subject people in the novels. There was, moreover, in Sencourt, Oaten and Singh an urge to classify Anglo-Indian fiction writing into periods distinguishable by particular forms of attitudinally determined literary engagement with India as the subject, a tribute perhaps to the burgeoning corpus of metropolitan and expatriate novels about India that made classification and periodisation necessary. The classificatory impulse survived the end of empire. To take two examples, Allen Greenberger's *The British Image of India* (1969) and *Delusions of Discoveries* (1972) by Benita Parry pull out correlations between Anglo-Indian literary history and distinct periods of the British empire in India. Mutations of racial, cultural and political attitude are highlighted to explain the working of novels; and these studies venture beyond 1947 to attach the post-1947 British-Indian novel to a list that begins with the late nineteenth-century. It is a rather late starting point, for the Anglo-Indian novel had been around since the end of the eighteenth century, with a fairly rich crop that appeared between the 1820s and 1857.

Two interests stand out in these literary-historical mappings: broad-gauge periodisation, and an interest in British attitudes towards empire. The correlation of attitude with empire offered a method for reading the representation of expatriate life in Anglo-Indian letters. *Nabobs* (1932) by Percival