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Romancing the Raj: Interracial Relations in Anglo-Indian Romance Novels

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Abstract

This article examines Anglo-Indian romance novels written by British women during the period of the Raj. It argues that these love stories were symptomatic of British fantasies of colonial India and served as a forum to explore interracial relations as well as experimenting with the modern femininity of the New Woman. With the achievement of Indian independence in 1947, British interest in India as a locus for romance rapidly declined, thus demonstrating that these novels were never concerned with India but with British lives and British colonialism.

Between 1890 and 1945, an astonishing number of novels were published in Britain dealing with the theme of romance in India or exploring the possibilities and perils of interracial love. A quick glance through Brijen K. Gupta's annotated bibliography, *India in English Fiction, 1800-1970*,¹ reveals a steady increase in novels with romantic themes from the late 1880s, reaching a peak in the interwar years. After 1945, the publication of Anglo-Indian love stories declined in Britain, although a few New York firms continued to publish romances set in India — but now involving American rather than English women. Rather surprisingly, even the resurgence of interest in India during the 1960s — when yoga and transcendental meditation became the symbols of alternative middle-class spirituality and anti-materialism, and young men and women followed the hippie trail to India with copies of the *Kama Sutra* in hand — failed to lure romance readers back to stories set in India. Compared to the great output of the interwar years, the market for romances set in India or involving Indian characters in any way virtually dried up in the postwar years until the early 1980s, when a few historical romances set during the time of the Raj were published. The brief spike of interest in Indian romances during the period denigrated by Salman Rushdie as the "Raj Revival"² soon dropped off.

India, which had represented the quintessence of romance in the first half of the twentieth century, had ceased to be of any interest to romance readers by the end of the twentieth century. This was despite the fact that by that time, readers of Harlequin Mills & Boon romance novels in India constituted the largest market outside the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.³ The Anglo-Indian⁴ romance demonstrates the vital links between British colonialism and the

romance novel.⁵ The colonial order was necessary for the production and sustenance of romantic fantasies. With its demise, the Anglo-Indian romance genre withered. These romances were never primarily about India but about the Englishness of love and the racialization of romance whereby white love stories were cast into dramatic relief against the background of an Orientalized India.

In many ways, the appeal of India as a locus of romance during the age of empire is hardly surprising. India was, of course, the “Jewel in the Crown” of empire, the symbol of Britain’s position as a great nation, and an economic and military world power. The subcontinent provided the territorial and military base for Britain’s imperial ambitions in the Middle and Far East while supplementing the army with “native” soldiers. India supplied British industry with raw materials and a ready market for manufactured goods and the investment of venture capital. The Indian Civil Service provided several generations of ruling-class younger sons with prestigious, well-paying jobs and a lifestyle beyond what they could possibly hope to achieve back in Britain. And, as Ronald Hyam has argued provocatively, the empire was a sexual playground for British men to experiment with a variety of sexual experiences they could not indulge in back home.⁶ Added to all this, was the popular association of India with romantic landscapes, elephants, tigers, and other exotic animals, and the opportunity to hunt and kill wildlife in droves – still one of the distinguishing pastimes of the British upper class.

Northrop Frye has pointed out that while “naïve romances” such as fairy tales are almost exclusively concerned with royalty, “sentimental romances” of the prose fiction variety typically revolve around aristocratic characters – the “nobility” of the hero as both character trait and social status is a lingering indication of this preoccupation with aristocracy.⁷ The development of the bourgeois romance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries certainly focused on upper-class heroes and heroines of the aristocracy or landed gentry, especially in historical romances, while contemporary romances enthusiastically cultivated the common scenario of a virtuous middle-class heroine who married upwards. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, the contemporary romance novel was beginning to focus more on the lives of the middle classes, and upward social mobility through individual effort was becoming an increasingly prized attribute of the hero – one that would remain until the end of the century. Writing about male imperial adventure romances, Nicholas Daly has argued that the popular novels of R.L. Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, Anthony Hope, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Bram Stoker chart the rise of the professional classes in Britain, expressing their fantasies of power “based on their access to and control of certain forms of knowledge.”⁸ This was equally true of the heroes in female romances. No other setting was comparable to the Raj in offering readers the immensely fulfilling fantasy of meritocratic upward mobility, whereby middle-class initiative and talent were rewarded with rapid entry into the elite ranks of society – both the British upper classes as well as Indian royalty.

Yet, few female romance authors were confident enough in the prestige and values of the middle classes to rely solely on sheer effort and ingenuity on the part of the hero; the qualification to be the hero was usually bolstered by vague familial or social connections to the upper classes, even if only in terms of their public schooling and Oxbridge education. And, of course, men from the working classes would never have been considered hero material during

this period of time no matter how worthy they were. Thus the middle-class hero who achieved upward mobility through excellence in his profession still retained the social cachet of “good family.” Nevertheless, the Raj seemed to provide the path to advancement for resourceful and energetic young men of good educational background but with little income otherwise, and poor prospects in England. The middle classes therefore looked to India as a place where the romance of upward social mobility could be fulfilled, and where ordinary members of the middle classes could hobnob with princes and be part of the white aristocracy.

As for women, Allen Greenberger observed that for English women who journeyed to India during the interwar years, the trip was invested with romance, for they expected to marry out there since that was where young men of their own social class were to be found.⁹ This was a subject dealt with by Mrs. F.E. Penny in her novel *The Happy Hunting Ground* (1914), and savagely satirized by E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India* (1924).¹⁰ However, women also found occupational opportunities during the interwar years, and “unmarried, middle-class women who were hired as governesses, zenana,¹¹ and missionary school teachers generally found the higher wages and professional status overseas preferable to employment in England.”¹²

British women had increasing ties with, and knowledge of, British India from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and this no doubt contributed to the popularity of India as a *locus amoenus* of romance. The transmission of material culture from the Raj fed this fascination. Nupur Chaudhuri has examined the interest in Indian artefacts and cookery in metropolitan Britain during the second half the nineteenth century. This interest was stimulated and satisfied by memsahibs who sent Indian shawls, brooches, and other trinkets back to their relations in Britain, or circulated exotic curry recipes in British women’s magazines.¹³ Even before substantial numbers of English women went to India, curiosity about the region was whetted by stories about the plight of “the Indian woman” and the parallels to be drawn (or denied) between her position and that of English women. Antoinette Burton has demonstrated how nineteenth-century imperial feminists such as Josephine Butler, Christabel Pankhurst, and Harriet Taylor undertook the secular work of emancipation for British women in the name of salvation for their Indian “sisters” or “daughters.”¹⁴ Nor was it only British feminists who used India as a platform for their own political gains. As Mary Procida has argued, “[t]he rise in popularity of the Anglo-Indian romance novel coincided with Anglo-Indian women’s growing involvement in imperial politics,” and novel writing was a means of conveying their often intensely conservative political opinions about the Raj to a wider British public.¹⁵

Improvements in communications and transport technology allowed more English women to travel to India, especially after the Suez Canal opened in 1869. Increasing numbers of English women went to India to carve out a profession and reputation for themselves as the champions of Indian women, particularly in the area of female education. Women such as Mary Carpenter, Annette Akroyd Beveridge, Mary Pigot, and Margaret Noble travelled to India between the 1860s and 1890s to “uplift” women through female education, training female teachers, running orphanages and zenana missions. Barbara Ramusack has discussed how these women saw themselves as “cultural missionaries,” “maternal imperialists,” or “feminist allies” of Indian women – usually of the higher castes or classes.¹⁶ The image of India that gripped these women – the poverty and degradation of “native” life – and the issues around which they rallied and

the causes they promoted such as the plight of the Indian woman, the horrors of suttee, the oppression of purdah, and the corruption of zenana life, all became stock themes of romance novels set in India.

The prewar generation of romance writers which included Bithia Mary Croker, Fanny Emily Farr Penny, Alice Perrin, and Maud Diver, were generally well acquainted with the social life of Anglo-Indians during the Raj. They drew heavily from their experiences to reveal what Benita Parry has described as “the neurotic concern with protecting their identity from pollution by strange, unwholesome and deviant India.”¹⁷ Their schooling in England probably did nothing to dislodge such fears. As Kathryn Castle has shown, India was portrayed in school textbooks as a country “in a state of anarchy and confusion, with a population ravaged by the constant warfare of constituent states.”¹⁸ Children learned that under “native” rule, the ordinary Indian suffered poverty, deprivation, and injustice; women in particular were oppressed by traditional customs such as child marriage, purdah, and suttee. In these textbooks, “native” rulers were callous and indifferent to the sufferings of their people, while superstition and tradition bound the masses to stoical acceptance of their misery. These conditions, it was argued, justified the imposition of British imperial rule, which brought order, impartial justice, peace, and progress to the country.

Children’s literature differed from romance novels in portrayals of the role and activities of white women in India. In the fiction of schoolgirls’ magazines, India served as a romantic arena of selfless service. It was portrayed as a “powerless, dependent world of schoolchildren and infirmity patients” where English women could deploy their skills as teachers and medical missionaries to the everlasting gratitude of transformed “urchins” whose “little brown eyes glistened with pleasure in their little English garments.”¹⁹ In contrast to these positive depictions of women’s work and their role in furthering the civilizing mission of imperialism, on the whole, the early twentieth-century romances reinforced the idea that the sole function of English women in India was to marry a grim and earnest Englishman whose life was dedicated to the service of the empire, whether in the form of involvement in the colonial bureaucracy, the army, or in public works such as building railways or dams. After marriage, a wife’s service to the empire took the form of creating a pleasant home environment for her husband and serving him. During the period of courtship, however, between the time when they first came out to India and when they got married, these women experienced India as a space of romantic adventure and daring exploration. Little wonder, then, that the interwar romances should have turned their focus increasingly to this time of courtship and romantic adventure – often experienced during the course of the modern woman’s work as secretary, companion, teacher, or nurse – rather than balancing the narrative between courtship and an exploration of the early days of marriage as the turn-of-the-century romances tended to do.

The romantic Raj was generally an Indian-less India. However, Indians, when they appeared on the scene, were often portrayed as incessantly salaaming servants who were utterly devoted to their imperial masters. As Saros Cowasjee observed, “the good Indian is the obedient Indian, and the best Indian has a childlike dependence on the English rulers.”²⁰ Otherwise, Indians were given the usual traits of childishness, thoughtlessness, treachery, and cruelty. They were irrational, emotional, and given to hysterical outbursts. Muslims came out

most favourably in these portrayals because of the common notion that they had been an imperial people who had conquered the Hindus. Benita Parry argued that “Anglo-Indians tended to find Moslems, Sikhs and Rajputs, the ‘fighting races’, more congenial than the ‘passive, supine’ Hindus.”²¹

Many romance novelists acknowledged differences among Indian men but focused much of their attention on “the Indian woman” – a generic creature who was assumed to be the same, whether Hindu or Muslim, and who alternated between the tyrant or victim of the Indian household. Greenberger contended that, in Anglo-Indian fiction, “[b]oth because of the large number of women writers who dealt with India and also because of the general impression of femininity that India gave to the British, the Indian woman assumes a larger role in the image of the Indian people.”²² The Indian woman was mercilessly vengeful towards the Indian man who betrayed her, but willing to sacrifice herself for the English man she loved. In both cases, she was motivated by a deeply sensual, passionate nature that abandoned itself to feeling rather than to being governed by rational thought.

Philip Darby has suggested that prior to the First World War, on the whole, little interest was expressed on the part of male novelists in examining interpersonal relations between the British and the Indians.²³ Female romance novelists, on the other hand, were fascinated by interpersonal relations between the British and the Indians much earlier – at least by the 1890s – especially when such relations manifested themselves in miscegenation and the reproduction of the Eurasian community. In these explorations, their morbid fear of the Oriental “Other” was clearly demonstrated and they came down inevitably on the side of the superior Westerner, tediously reiterating Kipling’s aphorism that “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”²⁴ Yet, the routes they took to reach such conclusions were by no means predictable, even serving to undermine Kipling’s maxim by the trajectory and outcome of the plot. Despite the predictability arising from a loosely formulaic plot structure geared towards resolution in marriage and domesticity, a case can be made for the ways in which the genre of the female romance lent itself to more profound explorations of interpersonal and interracial relations than did masculine epic or adventure romances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, although the genre permitted and even encouraged a transgression of established social relationships in the name of “romance,” the necessity of a happy ending in romantic bliss and wedded domesticity limited how far romance novelists would venture in their explorations of interracial relationships. As Sara Suleri has commented, “the narratives of English India are fraught with the idiom of dubiety, or a mode of cultural tale-telling that is neurotically conscious of its own self-censoring apparatus,” and women’s romance was no different.²⁵

Interpersonal and Interracial Relations in Raj Romances

The work of feminist literary critics demonstrates that even before the rise of the Anglo-Indian romance novel in the late nineteenth century, Orientalist discourses had sustained – indeed, enabled – English romances. Revisionist discussions of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* argue that in order to ensure English women’s future happiness in marriage, the romantic plot has to strip English men like Mr. Rochester of their “Oriental” characteristics: despotism, deceit, brute force,

arbitrary authority over women, and excessive sexuality. The Oriental villain had to be tamed in the romantic hero so that the emasculated English husband might emerge.²⁶

The obliteration of Oriental ideas of sexuality and gender relations, and, indeed, of Orientals themselves, from the English romance novel in order to achieve resolution, is characteristic of another genre which prefigured and overlapped with the Anglo-Indian romance: Mutiny fiction, largely produced between the 1860s to the 1890s. Mutiny fiction was set around the events of the 1857 Indian uprising. It focused on the epic or heroic deeds of English men and the atrocities experienced by women, and romance was subordinated to these themes.²⁷ English women in Mutiny fiction were generally passive objects to be venerated, victimized, and rescued by men of action. Mutiny fiction therefore remained within the classical model of masculine chivalric romance, with its emphasis on knightly deeds, battle, and quests, while women served as the excuse for adventure and the reward for masculine success. There was little genuine interest in the developing relationship between men and women.

The exception, however, was Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896) - a bestseller that combined the Mutiny with romance and the exploration of interracial relations.²⁸ Critics such as Jenny Sharpe and Mary Procida have noted that *On the Face of the Waters* is a novel which crosses genres, falling into the "New Woman novel" category, as well as Mutiny fiction because the lesson that the heroine, Kate Erlton, learns from the Mutiny is the importance of self-reliance.²⁹ Significantly, this is a lesson which only English women can learn. The superiority of English womanhood is demonstrated by contrasting Kate with the Hindu widow, Tara Devi, whom the hero, Jim Douglas, saves from suttee, and who then falls in love with him. Although Tara disguises Kate as a Persian woman, teaches her Hindi, and thus enables her to survive, Kate becomes her rival for Jim's affection. Tara's inability to enter the space of English domesticity (she fails to nurse Jim back to health when he falls ill and has to send for Kate to save him) precludes a romantic resolution to this interracial relationship. Tara kills herself (in a Hindu suttee parallel to Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, as Sharpe has pointed out³⁰) by climbing to the top of a burning roof and letting the flames consume her.

By the end of the novel, all non-white women in Jim's life - his Persian mistress Zora and the Hindu widow Tara - have died, thus eradicating Kate's possible racial and romantic rivals. Kate's future romantic and domestic bliss is predicated on the deaths of non-white women. Steel's double standard of interracial relations and sexual morality is blatantly clear in that Jim is a fitting hero and husband for Kate even though he had previously kept a Persian mistress. For an English woman to have sexual relations with a non-white man, however, was anathema. It was, in fact, inconceivable except as part of the mythology of Indian rape during the Mutiny.

Mutiny fiction was read by both men and women, yet by the 1920s the romance novel would be regarded as a purely female phenomenon. Anglo-Indian romances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played a part in the feminizing of romance. They demonstrate the transition from the male-centred quest romance to the female-centred domestic romance. Even when they treat the hero and heroine even-handedly, devoting approximately equal space and narrative perspective to each character, the issues with which these novels dealt - purdah, the zenana, the Indian woman, the malevolent influence of Hinduism, miscegenation, the status of the Eurasian community in relation to the Anglo-Indian

community, and the fascination with Indian rajahs and the threat they posed to white women – were all particular concerns of the memsahibs in India. Moreover, they appealed to metropolitan female readers concerned with marriage and sexuality; they were simultaneously titillated and outraged by miscegenation between British men and Indian women.

One of the early romances which best exemplified the concerns of the Anglo-Indian community with the problems of race and how the British should relate to both Indians and Eurasians is Mrs. F.E. Penny's *Caste and Creed* (1890). Penny had deliberately set out to write a novel that would explore the possibilities of interracial romance via the Eurasian community. Such a focus provided ready-made cultural impediments to the course of romantic love within the social context of that time, for by the second half of the nineteenth century, Eurasians were often despised as much, if not more, than "native" Indians. The Eurasian community in India and Ceylon suffered more discrimination under British rule than other comparable European powers, for the Portuguese and the Dutch, who had established a presence in India nearly three centuries before the British, were particularly tolerant of intermarriage.³¹ Although relations with the Eurasian community were cultivated by the British in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as a support for British activities, by the late eighteenth century Eurasians were increasingly discriminated against, and after 1800 they were viewed as potential rebels against imperial authority and tarred with the same brush as the Bengali "*babu*."³² Both groups transgressed the boundaries of rigid classificatory systems – both racial and imperial – and were hence considered "dirt" – matter out of place, in anthropologist Mary Douglas's formulation.³³ For British women who came out to India as wives or potential wives, the Eurasian community was a further irritant in that it provided a visible reminder of European men's sexual relations with Indian women. Although Penny believed she was championing the plight of the Eurasian community by shedding light on their lives, she was unable to overcome her own prejudices to create a sympathetic picture of them in her novels.

Caste and Creed tells the story of Zelma Anderson, a beautiful Eurasian girl whose father was a rich Scottish merchant in India and whose mother was a young Brahmin. Zelma is sent back to England to be educated away from her Hindu mother's influence, and when she finally returns to India, the past decade has made her "British by education and not Indian." However, the extent of her Britishness is constantly in question, forming the chief obstacle to the fulfillment of romance. On her voyage back to India, she meets Percy Bell, a district collector. He does not realize at first that she is half-Indian because she is "beautifully fair" – even her mother looks "just like some lovely, dark-eyed Italian dressed in Indian fashion."³⁴ As with most romances throughout the twentieth century involving non-western women, the women's non-whiteness is somewhat ameliorated by their fairness of skin. Even as she ostensibly attempted to garner sympathy and understanding for the Eurasian community, Penny reaffirmed negative stereotypes of them by emphasizing that most Eurasians "were generally the offspring of the lowest, blackest Tamulan women, and Englishmen of low tastes, if not low birth."³⁵

Zelma, by contrast, is the product of a unique union of a "Scotchman with a high caste Brahmin woman." Class and caste certainly counted for a lot when it came to determining for whom the colour bar could be lowered.³⁶ Even so, the fact that she is Eurasian initially presents an insurmountable barrier to Percy Bell, for he despises Eurasians and believes that no English

man should marry a Eurasian because of the inevitable weakness in their progeny.³⁷ When at last he overcomes his prejudice and marries her, he whisks her away from India to live in England. Zelma is, after all, half-Indian. Only by removing her from India and completely severing her ties with her Indian mother can she – and their marriage – be safe from the possibility that she might regress to Indianness and Hinduism in the future. Her Eurasian blood and culture must be diluted by intermixing with English culture and intermarrying with English stock.

While Penny entertained the possibility of Eurasian absorption into British culture, her contemporaries were far more pessimistic. The limited ability of western education to bridge the cultural chasm is firmly emphasized in Alice Perrin's *The Anglo-Indians* (1912), where Anglicization only produces discontent on the part of the "native" and fearful jealousy on the part of the English man. The hero of this story, Captain Clive Somerton, has been given charge of the Rajah of Rotah, a graceful young man whose warm brown skin "might easily have been the bronze of sunburn – indeed he was no darker than many an Irishman or Cornishman."³⁸ The possibility that he might pass as a white man is also raised by the information that he had "the blood of generations and generations of aristocratic ancestors in his veins, linked back and back till it touched the pure fount of his Aryan progenitors, whose racial stamp was still apparent despite periodical admixtures of lower blood." Somerton's task is to counteract the influence of India and instead "inculcate British notions of manliness and self-control" into the Rajah.³⁹

Unfortunately, the Rajah develops such a predilection for English things that he falls in love with the English heroine Fay. He realizes the futility of his love, however, and laments: "Why was I shown a different side to everything, making me unsatisfied with the ways and customs of my ancestors! Why should desires have been put into my heart, when at the same time I am forbidden to fulfill them?" The brief flare of sympathy for his dilemma is soon doused as the text goes on to inculcate a feeling of offence at his presumption by switching to Somerton's point of view. When Somerton finds out, he is astounded and outraged: "Like many Englishmen, notwithstanding his genuine comprehension of, and affection for, the Oriental character, it had never previously occurred to him that the Oriental of any class or position might be capable of an attitude similar to his own in relation to women."⁴⁰ This is hardly surprising, because what the romances repeatedly demonstrate throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that romantic love is a western – indeed, an English - phenomenon. Indians are almost always portrayed as being incapable of developing conjugal affection, tenderness, and care for each other; all such feelings are lavished on their offspring – usually their sons. What they are capable of feeling, however, is uncontrollable lust as well as the desire to possess the "prize" of a precious and unique woman, thus reducing the value of an English woman to that of a commodity.

Interwar women's magazines such as *Eve's Own* made regular use of the stock image of the lust-filled randy rajah in their romance stories. Such fears of predatory rajahs, and of silly white women who succumbed to their seduction, entered British consciousness at the turn of the century, particularly during Curzon's vice-royalty (1899-1905). After the Mutiny, Indian princes had been cultivated as close allies of the British. During the princes' visits to Britain, their

aristocratic status was given full recognition, and they were admitted to the most exclusive of social circles, unlike many officials of the British government in India. Ballhatchet argued that “[r]acial, social and sexual jealousy can be seen in operation together” in ensuing accusations that certain Indian princes enjoyed the sexual favours of white women of all classes.⁴¹ This fear of interracial sexual activity was discussed at length in correspondence between Curzon and Hamilton, who both agreed that there was no understanding “the craze of white women for running after black men.” Hamilton wrote disapprovingly:

Apparently it pervades all classes of society: the smartest peeresses were only too ready to make a fuss with Bikaner and other Indian chiefs, and as you go lower in the social scale, so does this tendency manifest itself more strongly and in a way characteristic of the habits and lives of the respective classes of the community. At Hampton Court the great difficulty of the officers was in keeping the white women away from our Native soldiers.⁴²

Sexual dalliance was bad enough; the prospect of interracial marriage was even worse. And enough examples of this occurred to stoke the sexual, social, and racial anxieties of British men. The Rajah of Jind had married Dorothy, the daughter of a European aeronaut. The Rajah of Porbandar had a long-term relationship with an English woman. Maharajah Tukoji Rao Holkar of Indore and his son both married American women. The Francophile Maharajah of Kapurthala, Jagarjit Singh, married the illegitimate daughter of a Hungarian Count. After her suicide, he married a famous Spanish dancer, Anita Delgrada. News that the Maharajah of Patiala intended to marry a working-class English woman by the name of Florry Bryan caused considerable consternation because all sorts of boundaries were being transgressed: class, caste, racial, and social. These considerations dogged the marriage of Melbourne-born Molly Fink to Martanda Bhairava Tondaiman, the Rajah of Pudukkottai, in Sydney in 1915 - a marriage which caused George V to complain in “very strong terms” to the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge.⁴³

Such real-life cases provided the inspiration and underlying tension for plots involving randy rajahs. At the bottom was the fear and outrage that a white woman should have sexual relations with a “coloured” man; these sentiments had first come into play in the Indian context during the post-Mutiny era, when wholly unsubstantiated stories of the rape of English women by sepoys began to circulate in Anglo-Indian society, their brutalized bodies serving as a metaphor for a government that saw itself betrayed and its trust violated.⁴⁴ The literary trope of the English woman raped by Indian men had a remarkably long life, reappearing in Paul Scott’s *The Jewel in the Crown*. Inverting the conventional use of the metaphor, Scott had intended the gang rape of Daphne Manners as a metaphor for the violence and rapacity of colonial relations. In a scathing attack on the novel and the television series, however, Salman Rushdie criticized the appropriateness of the metaphor:

It is useless, I’m sure to suggest that if a rape must be used as the metaphor of the Indo-British connection, then surely in the interests of accuracy, it should be the rape of an Indian woman by one or more Englishmen of whatever class. So much

more evocative to conjure up white society's fear of the darkie, of big brown cocks.⁴⁵

In Perrin's novel, this fear is precisely what prompts Somerton's revulsion at the thought of the Rajah of Rotah falling in love with Fay, even though they both knew that the Rajah's desire could never be fulfilled. Somerton feels "almost maniacal antagonism" towards the Rajah for "unconsciously, he was in the grip of that primitive sense of repulsion innate in white-skinned humanity towards the notion of race admixture with a dark-skinned people – a repulsion arising from Nature's tendency to breed upwards, not downwards."⁴⁶

If interracial love was to be contemplated, it could not be between an Indian man and an English woman, only between an English man and a high-caste Indian woman. Maud Diver's romance novel, *Lilamani* (1910), daringly presented the prospect of an English gentleman who has a happy and successful marriage to a high-caste Brahmin woman. Although this was done ostensibly to explore the possibility of interracial relations between the upper classes of both societies, Diver was obviously using Oriental femininity to contrast with, and castigate, the development of the New Woman, of whom she strongly disapproved. The English New Woman in this novel, Audrey Hammond, is contrasted unfavourably with the impossibly idealized, submissive, spiritual femininity of the Indian Lilamani. Audrey is an unfeminine woman, boyish and prosaic with little romance in her. Her passion is in her work to "uplift" Indian women and "let a little light into their custom-ridden souls."⁴⁷ Her ambition is to bring Lilamani to London, help her to study medicine, and turn her into another Cornelia Sorabji, the "wonder-woman of India," to whom many references are made in this novel. Of Audrey's ambitions, Diver commented: "It is a question whether girls of her type – products of extreme reaction from mid-Victorian ideals – are not cultivating brain and ego at the expense of the natural emotions; a doubtful gain for themselves and for the race."⁴⁸ The Audrey sub-plot demonstrates that English women who clamour for political, economic, and educational equality will lose out in love to the traditional femininity of Oriental women. Equality must be found in other ways: through class and race.

When Lilamani's father finally agrees to the marriage, he uses class as the basis of equality between Lilamani and Nevil: "To me it seems no more honour for her to marry with you than with any fine young fellow of her own caste. She is of old Rajput family, of good birth and lineage, like yourself. In fact, if you had not been her equal in that, I would never give consent."⁴⁹ Nevil, however, justifies the union on the basis of racial mythology, and here, the English ambivalence about the racial identity of high-caste/high-class Indians is explored. Not only is Lilamani a Brahmin, but she is also of the soldierly Rajputs, claiming Kshatriya descent – the second of the four great Hindu castes. As such, she too is descended from the Aryan race, like Nevil himself.

The British acceptance that an ancient Aryan civilization was common to both Britain and India stemmed from the work of classical philologists who established that the ancient Indian language, Sanskrit, was part of the Indo-European group of languages. This linguistic commonality was later extended to the hypothesis of a common racial origin for both groups, prompting the notion that India had degenerated from the cultural zenith of an ancient Aryan

past. The marriage between Lilamani and Nevil is therefore rationalized on this basis, leading Nevil to assure himself that for him to marry Lilamani is no more remarkable than if he were to marry an "Italian" or "Spaniard." This had been a daring novel for its time — so daring, in fact, that Diver took pains to counteract the idea of interracial romance in the sequel, *Far to Seek*, in which Lilamani converts from Hinduism to Christianity. Lilamani then urges her son *not* to marry an Indian woman because, "for an old English family like his, with roots down deep in English soil and history, it is not good that mixture of race should come twice over in two generations."⁵⁰

As timid and unsatisfactory as Penny's and Diver's explorations of intimacy between the English and Eurasians or Indians had been, few other romance novelists of their generation were prepared to go as far. Indians and Eurasians rarely served as heroes or heroines; they were far more likely to be the villains or the seductive Other Woman of the story. Negative portrayals of the Eurasian community in India and the importance of keeping the British and Indian communities separate continued during the interwar years. The dangers of doing otherwise were explored in Alice Eustace's *A Girl from the Jungle* (1928), a startling and daring novel in which the English heroine, Karin Braden, is brought up as a "native", forced to marry an Indian man, and gives birth to his child, thereby spelling out plainly that an English woman actually had sex with an Indian man. The crime is rendered even more horrific (and the heroine's role as a consenting partner diminished) by the fact that Karin was a child when this happened. She is thirteen when her father dies, and she is forced to dress like an Indian woman and marry his Indian butler, Goulam. She has a child by him at the age of fourteen, her child dies a year later, and her life is a nightmare until she manages to escape. The tragedy of Karin's Indian marriage demonstrates the necessity of keeping the races separate. Restored to her English guardian by the hero, she learns that:

In India the white man finds himself one of a tiny minority, set down among a people whose thoughts and habits are utterly alien to his own, whose lives are governed by customs which he does not like, and can but faintly understand. There are but two ways open to him — isolation or fusion . . . Now the Portuguese chose the latter — fusion . . . And to-day . . . the bearers of once famous names are half-caste cooks and waiters . . .⁵¹

The British, on the other hand, "preferred isolation, and generation after generation the same stock returns, fresh, virile, strong, cherishing the same ideals, to govern, and uphold the law, in a country which but seldom in its history has known either justice or good government."⁵² Complete separation of the races was a common sentiment among the British, and was apparently approved by Anglo-Saxons of all nations. In Diver's *Ships of Youth*, an American woman enthuses: "I reckon it's proof of your racial strength that you spend the best years of your lives in this amazing country; and you don't merge."⁵³

Issues of "going native" — either among the Indian or Eurasian communities — were inevitably connected to loss of class status in women's romance novels. In Juliet Armstrong's *Single Ticket* (1938), the heroine, Elsa Feldick, leaves her job in London to travel to India after

being jilted by her fiancé. Things go wrong for her and she is forced to take a job at a hotel at which many Eurasians work. When she loses that job, she is offered shelter by a Eurasian family. Although she is grateful for their kindness, the experience of “descending to the level of the ‘poor white’ and Anglo-Indian”⁵⁴ is demoralizing. Elsa winces at the sound of their voices, gags at the smell of the garlic and *ghee* they use in their cooking, is offended by their obnoxious offspring, and is bleakly amused by their proud and pretentious claims to relations in London who live in a shabby street in Peckham. The Eurasian community is not only associated with racial, but also with class inferiority.

The right of English women to work, to gain their financial and social independence and self-respect through paid employment, and to participate in empire-building, is strongly emphasized in Mills & Boon novels. In Juliet Armstrong’s *The Singing Flame* (1940), the heroine travels to India to work as a secretary, nurse, and travel companion to a writer. In the course of her work as a nurse to the rajah’s son and consultant to a hospital for women and children, she builds a bridge between the Indians and the British, and is told: “If more Englishwomen of your type came out to India, how quickly the old antagonisms would die away.”⁵⁵ Such a statement was significant during the interwar years, when portrayals of Anglo-Indian memsahibs such as in E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* castigated English women for creating a rift between the races. Armstrong, who was born and raised in India, would surely have felt the injustice of such sentiments. At a time where calls were made for women to return to the home after the war and to vacate their positions for returning soldiers, many of the Mills & Boon romances reiterated doggedly that a self-respecting woman cannot marry simply to ease her life and to gain financial security. Women should only enter into marriage on the basis of mutual love and respect.

The triumph of Armstrong’s English heroines, though notable for their time, came at the expense of Indians and Eurasians; thus racial hierarchies and conventions were maintained, even as gender relations were transformed. Alice Eustace’s Mills and Boon novels, however, broke many contemporary social taboos. *Flame of the Forest*, which was dedicated to the Maharajah Jamsaib of Nawanagar and the Princess Bhaniba, had as its heroine the Indian Princess Kesuda, whose name is a flower meaning “Flame of the Forest.” She is described as a woman of “character, self-control, will-power, and, that rarest of all attributes, the power of self-discipline.”⁵⁶ Such a description applying to an Indian was immensely significant, especially since at no time does Eustace ever attribute to Flame the usual negative traits that characterize the colonial discourse on Indians. Even the improbable masquerade she undertakes in the course the novel is not presented as a slight on her Indian character because it is done for the most noble and patriotic reasons. When her twin brother goes on a drinking binge, falls into the Thames, and drowns just at the moment when he accedes to the throne of Rajistan, Flame impersonates him so that she can become the next maharajah because her people need a good ruler after the chaos of her elder brother’s misrule.

When Flame returns to India, the two men closest to her become rivals for her love. The English Bryan Carr is her secretary of state. He is determined not to fall in love with her at first because she is coloured and he does not believe in miscegenation: “It leads to no *good*,” he says. “Haven’t you read any eugenics?”⁵⁷ Later, when he does succumb to his love for her, he tries to

persuade her to abandon her masquerade as the maharajah, leave India, and marry him instead. Although Flame loves Bryan, she refuses to abdicate because of her obligation to her people. Romantic love is no longer the sole purpose of a woman's life in these novels.

Flame's cousin Ajit is also in love with her, but he nobly relinquishes all claim to her in favour of Bryan, and encourages her to continue ruling her province wisely and justly. That he is able to rise above his baser sentiments can be attributed to his Sandhurst education, which once led a viceroy to commend him thus: "So far as I know Ajit is a white man, bred in the tradition of Sandhurst and a product of the British public school."⁵⁸ This exemplifies the imperialist idea that Britain's civilizing mission, when successful, could raise the moral nature of the "natives" to the high standards set by true English men. Nevertheless, during the 1920s, for Eustace to portray Indian characters, however westernized that they might be, in a positive light was no small concession. These characters could love fully, nobly, and self-sacrificially.

After relinquishing his claim to Flame, Ajit proves his love and loyalty by protecting Flame in an attack and losing an eye. Lest the Indian man should come across as the more noble and heroic character, in a rather ridiculous twist, Bryan then dies when he in turn saves Flame from a panther attack. As he is mauled to death, he tells her to marry Ajit: "After all, if he has your dear body, I shall have what is far more precious – your spirit. That, I know, will always be mine."⁵⁹ If Philip Darby is correct in claiming that "[m]ost of the narratives of British India are intensely political and they are knowingly so,"⁶⁰ then this love plot could be read as a metaphor for British-Indian relations during this period of growing Indian nationalism. Is it too great a leap of the imagination to see in Bryan's death the eventual heroic sacrifice of masculine Britain for feminine India, nobly entrusting India into the hands of a western-educated Indian man who is practically white?

In Eustace's interwar romance, issues of women's independence and equality with men are played out through the discourse of feminist orientalism.⁶¹ The advantageous position of women in the West as opposed to Indian women is repeated often, with western-educated and "modern" Flame contrasting her own life and attitudes with the tradition-bound women in her family: "She came from generations of women who have been the slaves of their men. Submissive, gentle, humble, docile, holding that the woman only found her soul when a man loved her, and she became the mother of his son." Flame, on the other hand, "will not be given in marriage" because "[d]uring those years in England the most precious thing I learned was this freedom, the woman's right to choose her mate."⁶² At the end of the novel, Flame marries Ajit, sloughs off her disguise, and steps forward to take the throne as the first female ruler of the state. The whole plot justifies the belief that high-caste Indian women should be "taught as Western girls are taught – to ride, to swim, to drive a car, to study, to learn." Through such an education, Indian women would be free to benefit the nation, for "[w]hen there is no equality between men and women there can be no respect. It is not well when the man looks down on the woman as on an inferior. Therefore let the girl go forth to England also, and learn the English ways, for they are good."⁶³

If the events of the novel urge the spread of British culture to the Indian elite to prepare them for self-government, they also urge equality between British men and women by presenting it as a *fait accompli*. Thus, in this Mills & Boon romance, British readers are gently

encouraged to embrace gender equality by contemplating the play of this fantasy in a distant and exotic land. *Flame of the Forest* is a truly remarkable romance novel in that the female protagonist is a strong, independent “native” whose right, as a woman, to exercise political leadership is unquestioned, and who finds love and happiness with an Indian man. In positing such a character, Eustace broke not only with romantic but with the dominant literary traditions of her day. She acquiesced to conventional wisdom, however, in her retreat from interracial marriage as a resolution to the romantic plot. Perhaps she was unable to contemplate the prospect of English masculinity in political subservience to the leadership of a strong Indian woman.

Conclusion

After the Second World War, few romance novels were set in India. With the loss of India as a colony after 1947, British romance readers seemed to lose interest in the region. Most of the romances set in India during the 1950s and 1960s were published in New York, rather than London.⁶⁴ This is significant because the general shift in the axis of romance publishing from London to New York had yet to occur. Not until 1971 did Mills & Boon merge with the Canadian company Harlequin, while New York-based romance lines such as Silhouette, Loveswept, Avon, and others were launched in the 1970s and early 1980s. Moreover, the few postwar romances set in India were already demonstrating signs of a nostalgic orientation to the historical past of the British Raj rather than present-day India.⁶⁵

These days, coming across a contemporary romance novel set in the Indian subcontinent at all is rare. The region is simply not seen as a romantic locus for westerners to find love and adventure. In the days of the Raj, however, romance was synonymous with the landscape and with the heroic men and women who went out there to serve the empire. Especially after the bloodbath of the First World War, when emasculated, traumatized men were represented in metropolitan British novels, India still offered middle-class men the opportunity to be heroic: to build something worthwhile, work for a mission, help the unfortunate, command their social and racial inferiors, and thereby raise their self-esteem. As for women, India offered the New Woman and the Flapper heroine of the interwar years opportunities for travel and adventure, and occupations more exciting, challenging, and financially rewarding than if they had stayed in Britain.

Anglo-Indian romances insisted that desire was generated for whiteness in general, and for white women in particular. This desire functioned as a symbol for the power of imperial rule and imperial culture; a desire which was shown to be as irresistible as it was futile among Indians, since it could never be fulfilled because of the strong prohibition against miscegenation. At the same time, the marital relations between Indian men and women were never portrayed as affectionate, let alone romantic. They were tolerant at best, and punitive and brutalizing at worst, robbing both partners of their humanity, emasculating men or reducing women to the status of cowering, passive victims. Love was clearly a western phenomenon; in these novels it stemmed from the vestiges of chivalry among British men and the innate respect they had for British women even if they denied them equality in the home and workplace.

Anglo-Indian romances were obsessed with interracial relations from their inception. Racial differences provided the structural hierarchy and plot framework within which bourgeois romance functioned. In early twentieth-century romances set in Britain, heroes and heroines were free to indulge in love and courtship because they did not have to work. Their wealth was created by the labour of the working classes in fields or factories, while their leisure time and social lives depended on the domestic servitude of others. In India, this function was taken over by devoted Indian servants on the rare occasions that the servants appeared in these novels.

In other ways, representations of Indians were crucial to the plot advancement and resolution of the Anglo-Indian romance. The “half-caste” Eurasian or Indian woman often served as the literal “Other Woman” in opposition to the heroine; her happiness, love, and even her life, had to be sacrificed in order to ensure the British heroine’s success in the romance of the Raj. Poverty-stricken “urchins” and Indian women became the medium through which British heroines displayed their virtues, thus confirming their right to be heroines, to marry well, and to live happily ever after. This explains why heroes may sometimes utter racist sentiments, but heroines rarely ever do so – not knowingly, at least.

Anglo-Indian romances portrayed the British presence in India as heroic and self-sacrificial, wholly given over to modernizing endeavour, alleviated by courtship and rewarded by love. British characters apparently got little or nothing from India but gave their all to its abstraction. After a suitable period of service, they sailed away back to Britain to live in their inherited landed properties. However, their experiences in India gave them the opportunity to prove that they deserved the romantic ending of love, happiness, and wealth which, amazingly, was never related to the exploitation of Indian resources or power over Indians.

Ultimately, these novels legitimized British imperialism. Romances naturalized the colonial order by normalizing the Raj as an exotic background to British love, telling the love story in such a way that the local Indian population, which vastly outnumbered the British, was marginalized and written out of its own landscape and history. As Rushdie pointed out about Raj Revival films and television serials, “Indians get walk-ons, but remain, for the most part, bit-players in their own history. Once this form has been set, it scarcely matters that individual, fictional Brits get unsympathetic treatment from their author. The form insists that they are the ones whose stories matter.”⁶⁶

Notes

1. Brijen K. Gupta, *India in English Fiction, 1800-1970. An Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1973).
2. Salman Rushdie, “The Raj Revival,” *The Observer* (Sunday, 1 April 1984): 19.
3. Radhika Parameswaran, “Western Romance Fiction as English-Language Media in Postcolonial India,” *Journal of Communication*, 49, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 84.
4. The use of this term is notoriously problematic. British residents in India used to refer to themselves as “Anglo-Indian” until the Eurasian community successfully claimed the right to call themselves “Anglo-

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Indian" in the early twentieth century. In this article, I retain the romance writers' original usage of "Anglo-Indian" to refer to both the British in India and also as a shorthand to refer to romances set in India authored by British women.

5. The commonly accepted twentieth-century definition of a female romance novel focuses on the development of heterosexual romantic love between two protagonists, deals with conflicts in the romantic relationship - either because of internal or external problems - and which generally has a happy ending in marriage and domesticity. Although there have been many other more notable female authors of Anglo-Indian novels - Rumer Godden, Christine Weston, and Ruth Praver Jhabvala among them - I have not discussed their works because they are not strictly romance novels.

6. Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

7. Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 161.

8. Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.

9. Allen J. Greenberger, *The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism, 1880-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 2.

10. F.E. Penny, *The Happy Hunting Ground* (London: Methuen, 1914); E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Edward Arnold, 1924).

11. Women's segregated quarters.

12. Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 94-95.

13. Nupur Chaudhuri, "Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain," *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 231-246.

14. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

15. Mary A. Procida, *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 5.

16. Barbara N. Ramusack, "Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945," *Western Women and Imperialism*, 119-136.

17. Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination 1880-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 6.

18. Kathryn Castle, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonialism Through Children's Books and Magazines* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 13.

19. Castle, *Britannia's Children*, 36.

20. Saros Cowasjee, "Introduction," *Women Writers of the Raj*, ed. Saros Cowasjee (London: Grafton, 1990), 13-14.

21. Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, 50.

22. Greenberger, *The British Image of India*, 54, 55.

23. Philip Darby, *The Fiction of Imperialism: Reading Between International Relations and Postcolonialism* (London: Cassell, 1998), 91.

24. Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West," first published in *Macmillan's Magazine* (London: December 1889).

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25. Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3.
26. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 262-80; May Ellis Gibson, "The Seraglio or Suttee: Brontë's *Jane Eyre*," *Postscript*, 4 (1987): 1-8; Susan L. Meyer, "Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*," *Victorian Studies*, 3, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 247-268; Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, 27-55; Joyce Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of *Jane Eyre*," *Signs* 18, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 592-617.
27. Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, 99.
28. See Sharpe's discussion in *Allegories of Empire*, 85-110.
29. Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, 88; and Procida, *Married to the Empire*, 124.
30. Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, 103-104.
31. Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), 96.
32. Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*, 98-99. See also Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
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35. Penny, *Caste and Creed*, 85.
36. Penny, *Caste and Creed*, 85.
37. Penny, *Caste and Creed*, 64.
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39. Perrin, *The Anglo-Indians*, 25, 26.
40. Perrin, *The Anglo-Indians*, 275.
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42. Hamilton to Curzon, 17 September 1902, MSS Eur F111/161; cited in Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*, 120.
43. Edward Duyker and Coralie Younger, *Molly and the Rajah: Race, Romance and the Raj* (Sydney: Australian Mauritian Press, 1991), 51, 53.
44. Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, 6.
45. Rushdie, "The Raj Revival," 19.
46. Perrin, *The Anglo-Indians*, 271.
47. Maud Diver, *Lilamani: A Study in Possibilities* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1910), 7.
48. Diver, *Lilamani*, 40.
49. Diver, *Lilamani*, 130.
50. Maud Diver, *Far to Seek: A Romance of England and India* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1921), 101-102.
51. Alice Eustace, *A Girl from the Jungle* (London: Mills & Boon, 1928), 147.
52. Eustace, *A Girl from the Jungle*, 148.
53. Diver, *Ships of Youth*, (Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons, 1931), 76.
54. Juliet Armstrong, *Single Ticket* (London: Mills & Boon, 1938), 219.
55. Juliet Armstrong, *The Singing Flame* (London: Mills & Boon, 1940), 136.
56. Alice Eustace, *Flame of the Forest* (London: Mills & Boon, 1927), 28.

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57. Eustace, *Flame of the Forest*, 10.
58. Eustace, *Flame of the Forest*, 49.
59. Eustace, *Flame of the Forest*, 245.
60. Darby, *The Fiction of Imperialism*, 79.
61. See Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave."
62. Eustace, *Flame of the Forest*, 169.
63. Eustace, *Flame of the Forest*, 15-16.
64. See, for example, Jean Bothwell, *The Silver Mango Tree* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960); Lesley Blanch, *Nine Tiger Man* (New York: Athenaeum, 1965); and Cecile Leslie, *The Rope Bridge* (New York: Doubleday, 1964).
65. See, for example, Ethel Mannin, *At Sundown the Tiger* (London: Jarrolds, 1951); Lynne Brookes, *Mistress of Koh-I-Noor* (London: Mills & Boon, 1984); and *Master of Shalimar* (Masquerade Historical Romance, London: Mills & Boon, 1984).
66. Rushdie, "The Raj Revival," 19.