

Imagined Geographies: Mapping the Oriental Habitus¹ in 'Three Nineteenth-Century Novels

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"There is always the Other side, always." (Rhys 99)

"Power cannot be equated with economic or state power, its sites of activity and hence of resistance, are in the micro-politics of daily life." (Gallagher 43)

There are no mute spaces. Spaces are constituted within a field of discourses and permeated with narratives of varying capacities. This essay looks at the English country-house as a site for constructing the nation as an "imagined community" in the nineteenth century British novel.² The hierarchy of spaces, and the subsequent constitution and management of Oriental images as they unravel at the domestic level interest me. The twin epigraphs refer to this very unravelling of discursive realities at the domestic level.

This paper is premised on a Bourdieuesque understanding of the house as a book, and the novel form as spatial narrative. For this purpose I will trace a trajectory³ through three prominent novels of the nineteenth century—Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868)⁴. Consequently, I will examine three country-houses that provide nodal points for an explication of the imperial ethic—Mansfield Park, Thornfield Hall and the Verinder Estate. The three loci will interrogate the ways in which textual and ideological configurations of novels that depict the Orient are closely linked to attitudes of bourgeois domesticity. I hope to show that the state

¹ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. The concept of habit or *habitus* is used by Bourdieu to refer to daily practices of individuals, groups, societies and nations. It includes the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes, and other non-discursive knowledges that are often 'taken for granted' for a specific group. He sees habitus as the key to social reproduction because it is central to generating and regulating the practices that make up social life. Habitus thus implies a "sense of one's place" but also a "sense of the place of Others" (Bourdieu 1989: 19).

² See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: Anderson insists that the novel, as an immensely potent cultural form, helps to produce the idea of a homogenous identity, which leads to cultural and national cohesion.

³ "Trajectory" here is used to denote only a progression from the early decades of the nineteenth century to Victorian England and beyond. The dialogic nature of the novel, which allows for the proliferation of multiple discourses, ensures that there can be no clear-cut teleology.

⁴ Despite a plethora of overlapping elements, *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre* and *Moonstone* are often grouped under different headings—the domestic novel, the *bildungsroman*, and detective/sensational fiction respectively. The idea of a pan-generic survey is influenced by Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism": temporary solidarity which is essentially empowering.

apparatus is not the only vector of power, but rather rests on a series of “small-scale region-dispersed Panopticism” (Foucault 1986: 72) that must be examined for the phenomenon of Orientalism to be understood in its full complexity. I will use the paradigms of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu⁵ to examine the nexus between domestic space, the feminine subject, and imperial ideology. My primary aim is to contest a slew of post-colonial readings that insist that the spatial dynamics of imperial novels posit the “unquestioned ideology of imperialist axiomatics” (Spivak 248). The contention is that elements within the novelistic field are polyvalent, as each space is shaped by a multiplicity of repressive/expressive apparatuses. This undermines the concept of a monolithic hegemony and shows how

the hegemonic formation ...cannot be referred to as the specific logic of a single social force. Every historical bloc or hegemonic formation is constructed through regularity in dispersion, and this dispersion includes a proliferation of very diverse elements. (Laclau 142)

Imperial expansionism was a predominant concern during the long nineteenth century. The scramble for Africa, the consolidation of the French Imperial Union, the American annexation of the Philippines, and British rule in India made sure that the empire was a global concern. England’s imperial project was based on a factitious binary between the Self and the Other—in spatial terms, this translated into a rejection of preceding significations, de-territorialisation of the colonies and subsequent re-territorialisation, according to the imperial administration. The global spatial integration initiated by colonialism led to a homogenisation of the Orient, thereby paving the way for the proliferation of stereotypes which valorised the imperial ethic at the cost of the subaltern.⁶

Given the centrality of the Orient to the British imagination during the nineteenth century, it is only inevitable that the expressive repertoire of the novelists under consideration derived from popular sources which disseminated (mis)information about the Oriental Other. The Orient became a popular novelistic chronotope, which allowed for a fictional reinscription of history. It is the collusion of geography and history, both constitutive of national discourses, which lends these novels their unique discursive bent.

This continuum which exists between the text, social reality, spatial location(s) and the author’s subject position is evident in Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. Sir Thomas Bertram is a slave owner at a time when slavery was a highly controversial issue. The last decades of the eighteenth century saw the rise of the Abolitionist movement in Britain—the movement garnered support from a number of denominational groups such as the Swedenborgians, Quakers, Baptists and Methodists. Quakers such as Thomas Clarkson and Granville

⁵ Bourdieu’s analysis is primarily economic and class-based. However, I will employ certain conceptual categories proposed by him to intervene and analyze the racial “Other-ness” in the novels under consideration.

⁶ The 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition can be read as a high point in such an aggrandizement of the empire and a celebration of imperial power.

Sharp; parliamentarians Sir Cecil Wray, Charles James Fox and William Pitt the Younger; and the Evangelical William Wilberforce actively opposed the practice of slavery. In 1783 Dr. Beilby Porteus issued a call to the Church of England to cease its involvement in the slave trade and improve the conditions of Afro-Caribbean slaves. The slave trade in British colonies was abolished on the 25th March 1807, and it became illegal to carry slaves in British ships.

“I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies . . . it entertains me:” Jane Austen’s negotiation with slavery in *Mansfield Park*

Given that slavery was a much discussed subject in Jane Austen’s time, Fanny’s interest in slavery is nothing unusual, and in fact Austen’s fiction refers to slavery several times. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Fanny and Elinor Dashwood are eager to hear about the tropics, while *Persuasion* refers to Sir Walter’s stint in the East Indies, Mrs. Croft’s visit to the West Indies, and Mrs. Smith’s estate in the West Indies. However, in *Mansfield Park* the silence that greets Fanny’s question about slavery in Antigua brings into play a web of connections between British power overseas and the sustenance of landed gentry in England. The novel concentrates on the minutiae of social behaviour to unveil the operations of imperial power at the domestic level. The domestic space, endowed with a complex array of mentalities and practices based on the divide between the public/private, inside/outside, and countryside/colony, unravels colonial ideology in all its value-laden configurations.

The Mansfield Estate is characterised by extravagance: “the grandeur of the house” (11) and the size of the rooms (“too large”) intimidates Fanny when she enters the household. Fanny’s liminal position in the Bertram household is similar to that of a slave: “remember wherever you are, you must be the lowest and the last” (158). Austen’s tangential critique of slavery at this point is reiterated by her choice of title. The titular Mansfield could refer to Lord Mansfield, Chief Justice of England (1756-88), who passed a rule against the forceful transportation of slaves back from England to the colonies in 1772. At first glance, the issue of slavery appears in the location of the room allotted to her: “you will put the child in the little white attic, near the old nurseries. It will be much the best place for her, so near Miss Lee, and not far from the girls, and close by the housemaids” (8). However, it is the East room, the proverbial room of one’s own, that empowers Fanny by arming her with reading and writing.

Ironically, it is this empowerment, together with the quelling of slave rebellions in Antigua, that crystallises Fanny’s gradual induction into the dominant order. Sir Thomas’s absence lays the groundwork for moral decay by introducing the Crawfords and Rushworth and paving the way for Maria’s elopement. This subversion is articulated spatially: Sir Thomas’s bedroom is transformed and a stage replaces the table in his billiard room as the residents of the house prepare to perform

Lovers' Vows. Both rooms, representative of masculinity, are transformed from within, successfully undermining patriarchal order. While Maria and Julia feel a sense a freedom in their father's absence, Fanny, who articulates her acute discomfort with the private theatrical, refuses to be an actress: "I could not act anything if you were to give me the world" (106). Fanny's vicious counter-attack anticipates Sir Thomas's Burkean drive to cleanse the house of theatricality by destroying all copies of the play. The violent suppression of female lawlessness and reinstatement of propriety offers a stark parallel to Sir Thomas's role in the colonies—the domestic and colonial are inextricably linked, for the harmony of the former mirrors the regulated order of the latter. The cumulative effect of these actions is the restoration of a space that has been profaned. The space of the parlour, the sanctum-sanctorum of the bourgeoisie, is thus naturalised in *Mansfield Park*.

This reaffirmation is intrinsically ideological for "geographies of domestic disorder were also maps of moral disorder" (Armstrong 654). A disorderly house becomes symptomatic of a disorderly society. Thus, the insistence on sexual repression, central to the bourgeois novel, only becomes more pertinent with Britain's colonial project. The possession of colonial plantations is directly linked to social and moral order within the geographical confines of England. The spatial dynamic of the parlour at Mansfield Park thus becomes an ideological lynchpin for buttressing Orientalist values revolving around the subordination of slaves in Antigua. The narrative sanctions a spatial and moral order that flourishes because of the economically supportive estate on the periphery. This moral commensuration in the interplay between narrative and domestic space is central to the text. In this way, the novel form becomes central to circulating and consolidating British rule because depictions such as these provide a springboard for formal imperial investiture.

Strong authorial mediation controls the meaning generated by the text and "interpellates"⁷ the reader, allowing her to gain access to a single, coherent meaning. The gradually diminishing power of the plantation owners can be gauged from the mention of disturbances in Antigua. However, moral and colonial order is reinstated within the final schema and the cycle represented in the novel is eternalised with Susan taking Fanny's place by Lady Bertram's side at Mansfield Park. The interaction of geographical and domestic spaces thus provides a focal point by which to unravel the fabric of as thick a discourse as Orientalism. The final insistence on "the elegance, propriety, regularity and harmony—and perhaps above all the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield" (280) shows how the Empire was consolidated by fixing and naturalizing space and social relations that empower the imperial centre and subordinate the Orient.

Colonial expansion is critically implicated within, and structured by, the plot of domestic retrenchment and consolidation in Mansfield

⁷ See Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*: "What seems to take place outside ideology . . . in reality takes place in ideology . . . ideology never says 'I am ideological'" (Althusser 118).

Park, both the site and the novel. The definition of the nation is inextricably intertwined with sites abroad: nations, colonies and protectorates. Racial and cultural difference provides a ready *nomos*⁸ for novelists such as Jane Austen to represent a “knowable community” (Williams 163) and, in the process, justify the existing social order. The domestic space exemplifies the capillary action of Foucault’s “micro-technologies of power,” by showing the ways in which power unravels at the domestic level (Foucault 1980:151-2).

“She bit me . . . like a tigress”: Charlotte Brontë’s construction of the Other in *Jane Eyre*

The circulation of power at the domestic level allows the coloniser to monitor the bodies, actions and behaviour of the Other in a myriad of ways. This is nowhere more evident than in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Brontë dismissed socio-political agendas in a letter she wrote to her publisher in October 1852, telling him, “I cannot write books handling the topics of the day, it is no use trying” (qtd. in Gaskell 364). Despite Brontë’s disavowal of the social significance of her novel, however, *Jane Eyre* negotiates with the colonial dynamic in many ways.

The Abolition of Slavery Act was finally passed on 23 August 1833 and the issue of slavery was definitely part of the national consciousness when Brontë began writing her novel. Rochester’s reference to the slave trade, his “bargaining for so many tons of flesh and an assortment of black eyes” (302), foregrounds the centrality of the debate to the Victorian conscious. However, Brontë goes a step further than Austen by appropriating the metaphor of slavery to underline the nature of the patriarchal gaze and articulate resistance: “[Rochester] smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment bestow on a slave his gems had enriched: I crushed his hand . . . and thrust it back to him” (301).

The novel, published between 1832, when the Reform Bill was passed, and mid-century prosperity, traces the induction of Jane, a “poor,” “obscure,” “plain” governess, into the leisure class. Jane’s marginality, like Fanny’s in *Mansfield Park*, is articulated in spatial terms from the very beginning—she confines herself to the small room adjoining the drawing-room and draws the red curtain about her, to enshrine herself “in double retirement” (14). However, Jane moves from a position of liminality to centre-stage by using the rhetoric of abolition in post-emancipation Britain. Brontë’s interventionist method appropriates the metaphor of slavery to espouse a dual critique to serve this end: of the subjugation of women within the domestic space and the subjugation of the racial Other in the colonies. But the implicit critique of British domination gradually metamorphoses into a validation of the imperial project. Jane’s “rebellious feminism”

⁸ Bourdieu defines *nomos* as the fundamental principles of “vision and division” (the division between mind and body for example, or male and female), or organizing “laws” of experience that govern practices and experiences within a field.

(Gilbert 369) is premised on ethnocentric descriptions of Bertha and the Caribbean. *Jane Eyre* highlights shared oppression, drawing attention to British exploitation, but the novel's figurative use of the racial other betrays this agenda and disturbs any neat categorization.

Jamaica is constructed as the spatial Other while signs of bestiality and grotesquery are constantly displaced onto body of the Creole subject. Bertha's body becomes the repository of the social space, an attestation to the political and economic exploitation involved in imperialism. The topoi of racial otherness are evident in the descriptions of Bertha, who is described as "discoloured," "purple," "swelled," and "blackened." Interestingly, Bertha, the racial Other, is also morally "stained" by intemperance, infidelity, impurity, profanity, madness and bestiality to form a cluster of referents by which Brontë denotes the person of Bertha. Therefore, Brontë reinforces typologies of the untrustworthy, sensuous native that demonise the historically muted subaltern woman. An examination of the authorial gaze exposes the mechanics of the constitution of the Oriental habitus by the Occidental subject.

However, this is complicated by the fact that Bertha's presence upsets the stable domesticity of the Victorian country-house. Thornfield Hall proves to be a "contact zone"⁹ (Pratt 4) that paves the way for the co-habitation of the coloniser and the colonised subject. The spatial dynamics of this "contact zone" deserve fuller attention. Specifically, Bertha's presence allows the author to introduce desire within the parameters of the bourgeois domestic novel. Clearly it is only in a dialectical relationship with the Other that the Self can define its own subject position—the Other impinges on the subject, creating disturbance and fracturing the stability it seeks. But this is deemed possible only via the introduction of the trope of the Gothic and the relegation of desire within the space of the attic, the room where Bertha is imprisoned. Moreover, this unsettlement is followed by the obliteration of the Other, i.e. Bertha. This entails the reconfiguration of the potentially heterotopic space of the attic within Oriental paradigms.

Furthermore, despite Jane's insistence that she would not be "hurried away in a Suttee" (306) and the British Abolition of widow sacrifice in 1829, Bertha's death, vaguely reminiscent of the act of Sati, allies the Oriental to older norms and pagan rituals. This conformity is ideologically loaded as the novel seems to validate the self-immolation of the Oriental subject. It is in this tension, between disturbance and subsequent obliteration, that *Jane Eyre* needs to be situated. Jane and Rochester cannot be united until and unless Bertha sets Thornfield Hall, a signifier of misbegotten colonial wealth, and her own person, on fire. The free will of the Oriental female subject is effaced in order to affirm the will of the English subject. A stark contrast is established between the two women:

"that is my wife" said he. "Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know . . . and this is what I wished to have" (laying his hand on my shoulder) . . .

⁹ See M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*: Pratt defines the "contact zone" as a social space "where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with one another" (Pratt 5).

“compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk.” (328-29, emphasis mine)

The demonisation of Bertha Mason underscores the dual act of containment of the political and sexual Other and the naturalisation of the virtuous heroine as normative. The novel ultimately relies on a valorisation of the bourgeois norms of domesticity: the rhetoric of selfhood, love and conjugality is used to reaffirm and circulate colonial stereotypes. In fact, it is the ideology of imperialism which aids Brontë in her vindication of the socially marginalized woman.¹⁰

To avoid simplistic conclusions, one must remember that an author's dependence on pre-existing representations to incite pre-conscious apprehension amongst the reading public cannot be underestimated. For instance, the change brought about in Sir Thomas Bertram owing to the weather in the colonies—“he had grown thinner and had the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate” (127)—as opposed to Fanny's ruddy and blushing self, is replicated by Brontë in her depiction of Jamaica¹¹ and India. Stereotypes about colonial territories/ peoples, or what I have called the oriental habitus, then become part of the genre Brontë inherits.¹²

This habitus is most visible in her reproduction of colonialist historiographies, grounded on what Gautam Chakravarty calls the “syntagmata of caste, religion, language and geography” (32), in order to counter-pose the chaos of Thornfield Hall with the order of Evangelicalism. Missionary efforts during the nineteenth century, premised on the axiomatic supremacy of the white Christian race, were institutionalised to target whole communities and peoples. St. John's doctrines are based on the evangelical vision, and are predicated on the assumption that heathenism resided outside the individual and was characteristic of entire communities. His ideology seems to replicate the assumptions of colonialist treatises like Charles Grant's *Observations on the state of society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain* (1792), and James Mills's *History of India* (1826), which offered polemical accounts of Indian manners and morals. The insistence on an evangelical system of mission education conducted in the English language was partly a belief in political reform along Christian lines. The suggestion seems to be that the diffusion of Christianity, and consequent moral improvements, will construct a

¹⁰ The spatial dynamics of *Jane Eyre* chart socio-economic changes and the gradual rise of the bourgeoisie. The third storey at Thornfield Hall contains old furniture, chairs, stools and tapestries, what Nancy Armstrong calls the “cultural debris of the aristocracy” (208) laying waste for it cannot be reproduced in a middle-class world. Aristocratic curios acquire the air of artefacts and the display at Thornfield is akin to a museum display. It comes as no surprise that this age saw the founding of a number of museums in England: The National Gallery (1824), National Portrait Gallery (1856) and The South Kensington Museum (1857). *Jane Eyre* thus delineates the matrix between the rise of the bourgeoisie and imperial expansionism.

¹¹ “The air was like sulphur steams—I could find no refreshment anywhere. Mosquitoes came buzzing in and hummed sullenly around the room” (346).

¹² The extent of acculturation can be witnessed in Brontë's childhood stories, penned at Roe Head. She describes Angria, an imaginary British Colony in Africa, as an infernal world.

particularly appropriate form of colonial subjectivity. This is mirrored in Brontë's characterisation of India as "the realm of ignorance . . . war . . . superstition" (417), the Rivers's insistence on Jane being "much too pretty, as well as too good to be grilled alive in Calcutta" (462) and Jane's reiteration of the same idea: "'Alas! If I go to India, I go to premature death'" (450).

Historically, the period saw the formation of numerous organisations which reflect the evangelical spirit: The Baptist Missionary Society, The Church Missionary Society, The London Missionary Society, and The Bible Society. The Christian mission furthered the process of empire building by creating a hegemonic cultural practice that offered middle-class evangelical men and other marginalised citizens a means of identifying with the English state—the empowerment of the marginalised worked as a covert stratagem to quell resistance within the body politic. Brontë appears to draw attention to this by illuminating the dark underside of St. John's character, and to his coldness and inability to love. Brontë goes to great lengths to illustrate that "he did not appear to enjoy that mental serenity, that inward content, which should be the reward of every Christian" (393). However, the daughter of an Anglican minister and a conventional Christian, Brontë seems to approve of the "world redeeming work of the missionary" (6). It is for this reason perhaps, that Jane's closing thoughts revolve, not around herself, but around St. John's missionary activities in India.

The novel culminates with Jane's inheritance of her uncle's money, an offshoot of British earnings in Madeira, which seems to validate capitalism and international trade. Then again, the rhetoric of emancipation, used to describe Jane's personal struggle throughout the novel, climaxes with her retirement to the periphery of the country estate. Brontë's vision is fraught with an ambiguity and is clearly not absolutist as some postcolonial critics would have one believe. This points to the conflictual economy of colonial discourse; it is from such gaps, slippages and "paradoxical half-openings of discourse" (Certeau 194) that authorial interventions, which have the potential to generate dissent, may emerge.

Nevertheless Brontë's novel remains an incomplete gesture circumscribed by the spatio-cultural architectonics of colonial ideology. On the one hand, *Jane Eyre* makes a case for desire by showing that conformation to domestic ideology entails a relegation of sexuality to other spaces, whilst on the other hand, the novel relates Bertha's disruptive presence to the disintegration of the domestic space. The novel acknowledges Otherness, only to disavow it, and then critiques Evangelicalism, only to reinforce it.

Collins's representation of the "cursed Indian jewel":
Orientalism in the sensational novel

The validation of the evangelical creed in *Jane Eyre* is in stark contrast to Collins's satire of Victorian religious hypocrisy through Miss Clack and "our Christian hero" (199), Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite in *The*

Moonstone. *The Moonstone* was published in 1868, by which time myths and facts about the British and the Mutiny of 1857 were firmly entrenched in the national consciousness. One of the widespread repercussions of the mutiny was a loss of power for the East India Company. This led to a spate of writing which sought to valorise the Colonial regime. Witness for instance, Tennyson's elegiac description of the mutiny in "The Defence of Lucknow:" "And ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England flew" (76). Although he invokes similar memories, Wilkie Collins links looting and violence with colonial maladministration. The novel focuses on colonial invasion, expropriation, and exploitation while rejecting stereotypical binary oppositions to show the complications and entanglements of the British imperial moment. Collins had earlier collaborated with Dickens to write "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners," which they published in *Household Words* in 1857. It commemorated "some of the best qualities of English character that have been shown in India" (Dickens 894). *The Moonstone*, however, represents a shift away from such an unambiguous celebration of the British Empire.

In many ways then, Collins's *The Moonstone* represents a distinct challenge to the colonial mindset. Although the majority of the tale takes place in England, the Indian location of the prologue and epilogue root *The Moonstone* within the context of the colonial experience in India. The colonial space is not an incidental embellishment; rather, it provides the site for the theft of the eponymous jewel, carried out by John Herncastle—an upper-class Englishman. Moreover, the theft of the moonstone, which typifies colonial greed, takes place during the siege of Seringapatam in 1799, an event which consolidated the dominance of the East India Company in colonial India.

The Moonstone offers a version of imperial history that is simultaneously private and domestic, thereby collapsing the divide between public and private spaces, the nation and foreign territory. It represents the spread of social and moral chaos to the inner sanctum of the country-house, infecting that emblem of British upper-class domesticity. Hostile critics attacked the sensation novel, which Collins invented, for destabilizing the Victorian domestic ideal. "What do we know of the mysteries that may hang about the houses we enter? Foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs," Robert Audley tells his aunt in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (94). *The Moonstone*, in a similar fashion, records the infiltration of the country-house of the landed gentry—first with the theft and later with Sergeant Cuff's investigations: "look at the household now! Scattered, disunited—the very air of the place poisoned by mystery" (170). This intrusion is symptomatic of a culture in transition. The vulnerability of the landed gentry is evident in the detective's insinuation that Rachel, a lady, is the thief, and in his disregard of hierarchies when he decides to investigate not just the servants and maids of the household but "everybody—from her ladyship downwards" (105). As a result, the Verinder Estate is "brutally democratised" (Miller 156), and Rachel, unlike Fanny who maintains the stability of the bourgeois domestic

order, finds herself enmeshed in a sordid tangle of theft and deception. This spatial disruption is reflected in Collins's choice of name for the geographical site which surrounds the Verinder Estate: the name "Shivering Sands" perhaps best describes the state of the aristocracy during the mid-nineteenth century. This state is evident in the destabilisation of the opposition between the public and the private as the "detective fever" (147) spreads and Betteredge's room becomes the "court of justice" (111). This fracture of stable domestic relationships, I believe, is central to the Collins's undercutting of the imperial ethic.

Moreover, the novel links the idea of violation of a woman's chastity to imperial theft. The post-Freudian reader can easily recognise the connotations of the theft of a precious jewel from Rachel Verinder's unlocked cabinet. The presence of the stained gown, too, suggests the potential for loss of virginity. Tamar Heller points out that the juxtaposition of plots of courtship and colonialism "suggests an analogy between imperial and sexual domination" (Heller 145). The male theft of the moonstone and the threat implied by Rachel's approaching loss of virginity are equated with the colonial rape of a feminized India.

Collins goes to great lengths to undermine the myth of imperial necessity and generosity that validated imperialism in nineteenth-century Britain. While Collins's descriptions are not saturated with contempt, an underlying anxiety still can be sensed in his tale of detection. The moonstone, which has a sinister quality, has to be expelled from the country to the bourgeois home to regain its stability. Gabriel Betteredge, for instance, sees the sanctity of the English home as having been "invaded by that cursed Indian jewel" (278).

Betteredge's view of *The Moonstone* echoes Eric Stokes's *The English Utilitarians and India* (1959), which characterises India as a "disturbing force, a magnetic power placed at the periphery tending to distort the natural development of Britain's character" (Stokes qtd. in Bhabha 85). The novel, like *Robinson Crusoe*, is littered with the "structure of attitude and reference toward" the empire that Edward Said considers part of the culture of imperialism (Said 1993: 73). It does not completely expel the myth of colonial enterprise: although multiple thefts of the moonstone expose colonial greed, satirizing the colonial project and rendering it ironic, the novel seems to insist that the worth of the moonstone in India lies solely in its spiritual associations. Collins undercuts the values through which colonial hegemony perpetuates itself, but the colonized space is still linked to the idea of pagan ritualism. However, one must remember that supra-political objectivity was hardly possible in an age characterised by the mass dissemination of stereotypes about the Orient.

What is more, the predominant presence of the Orient is significantly, though not exclusively, shaped by generic demands which foreclose/open certain narrative possibilities. Popular responsiveness to the racialization of cultural difference by Victorian intelligentsia had its roots, not only in colonial expansion and the creation of an urban proletariat, but in folk myth and long-standing domestic prejudice against Jews, gypsies, and Celtic vagabonds. The

overlapping nature of these concerns can be witnessed in the explicit interrelation of discourses on itinerancy, class, criminality, race, colonialism and empire in the context of writing about London, the empire's capital, which is best exemplified in Mayhew's writing: "The nomadic or vagrant classes have all a universal type, whether they be the Bushmen of Africa or the 'tramps' of our own country" (qtd. in Himmelfarb 721). Writing with John Binny, Mayhew repeated these assertions in *The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of Prison Life* (1862): "If the Carib Islands have their savages, the English Capital has types almost as brutal and uncivilized as they. If India has its Thugs, London has its garotte men" (4-5).

The social world of the novel can be understood as a symbolic system premised on the logic of difference. Portsmouth, by virtue of "the smallness of the house . . . the thinness of the walls" (273), is constructed as the dark underside of Mansfield Park. Rochester's reference to the "mud and slime of Paris" as opposed to the "clean wholesome soil of the English country garden" (Brontë 164) relies on the construction of a similar binary. Clearly the novel form relies on a series of dualities, even as it seeks to highlight an organic view of society, and the Orient provides a more sinister and non-negotiable geographic territory to serve this end. The ethnological discriminations, thus, cannot be said to mirror the ideology of the author in any straightforward way. In that sense, the colonies can be categorised as designed space—designed to suit the generic demands of the novel. It is perhaps in this context that one must read Collins's emphasis on the moonlit wilderness of India and his representation of the country as an exotic, mysterious land outside the matrix of time and history.

While some of this can be explained away by underscoring the centrality of wild, subterranean elements in the sensational novel, the closure of *The Moonstone* deserves fuller inspection. The restoration of the Moonstone to the forehead of Vishnu in the temple of Saumnath and the union of Blake and Rachel are integral to Collins's vision of social harmony within a hierarchical society. Notwithstanding the desire to restore some kind of harmony once crime is expelled, the novel ends with the assertion that "the same events revolve in the cycles of time" (464). The modalities and implications of such a representation, which rejects manichean binaries, lie in preparing the way for later imaginings of resistance. The use of colonial markers and the subversion of stereotypes, used to illumine the dark underside of the colonial project, highlight a link between the destabilisation of the bourgeois home and colonial exploitation.

Despite his stereotypical representations of the three Indian Brahmins, Collins subverts popular expectations by focusing his critique on the underlying disorder and hypocrisies of English society. Collins elicits sympathy for Ablewhite's murder in a decade when the racist discourse of colonialism saturated large sections of British society. He uses the novel form to interrogate rather than empower colonialist ventures. U.P. Mukherjee draws attention to the culture of dissent, which espoused a powerful criticism of colonisation during the

latter half of the nineteenth century and insists that fictional works, such as Collins's novel, "play a disruptive rather than monolithically constitutive role" (9) in the imperial process.

Collins's most important intervention, however, occurs at a meta-fictional level. He seems to question an unambiguous replication of oriental discourses by pointing to the unstable nature of the process of writing itself as his multiple narratives seem to suggest that writing can never establish absolute truths, for it is always mediated by ideological locations and conditions under which an author writes. There is an abdication of authority by the narrator as several narrators contend for pre-eminence within the body of the meta-narrative. This narrative strategy foregrounds British anxieties regarding the expanding empire and "the struggle over geography" (Said, *Orientalism* 6).

The novel can thus be understood as an allegory of the English nation—its "imagined geographies" are a tool of power, a means of controlling and subordinating certain areas. The English identity marginalises that which defines it: foreign spaces, colonised territories, and the colonised subject. The novel itself forms a field—a system of social positions structured internally in terms of power relationship—and it provides a social arena of struggle over the appropriation of certain races. The images of the Oriental *habitus*, circulated by the popular novels of the period, became central symbols for conceptualising the social and economic changes associated with imperial expansionism in England. The inter-linkages between bourgeois domesticity and imperialism can be gauged from the reaffirmation of both stable domesticity and imperialism in *Mansfield Park*; from the fraught discursivity of *Jane Eyre*, which ruptures the domestic ethic to introduce desire but reinforces Oriental stereotypes and validates the white-man's burden; and from the ultimate destabilisation of the hierarchical ethic of the country-house and the colonial self/colonised other in *The Moonstone*.

These novels need to be read as resonant cultural artefacts endowed with symbolic power. The appropriation of history, the historicisation of the past, the narrativisation of society, and the interrogation of social spaces all lend the novel form its force. The continuum between geography, knowledge and power, with Britain always in the master's place, bespeaks a specific epistemological framework peculiar to England—or at least to those who advocated Empire—in the nineteenth century. The construction of domesticity is closely linked to the construction of imperialism in the novel. However, I hope I have demonstrated that, despite the prevalence of ethnocentric and imperialist binarisms in these novels, the process of mapping the Oriental *habitus* generates dissent in novels like *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Moonstone*.

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