

Copyright

by

Jeanette Marie Herman

2004

**The Dissertation Committee for Jeanette Marie Herman  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**Empire's Bodies: Images of Suffering in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century  
India and Ireland**

**Committee:**

---

Mia Carter, Co-Supervisor

---

Lisa Moore, Co-Supervisor

---

Elizabeth Butler Cullingford

---

Barbara Harlow

---

Sharmila Rudrappa

**Empire's Bodies: Images of Suffering in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century  
India and Ireland**

by

**Jeanette Marie Herman, B.A., M.A.**

**Dissertation**

**Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of**

**the University of Texas at Austin**

**in Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements**

**for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**August 2004**

## **Acknowledgments**

When I think about the history of this project over the past four years, the images that come to my mind are the faces of the many friends without whose support this work would not have been possible. I have been truly privileged to work with a committee of women who have consistently challenged me in my thinking and writing and who are in different ways my models for the kind of scholar I aspire to be. I will never be able to adequately express my gratitude to my co-directors, professors Lisa Moore and Mia Carter, for their guidance and support on so many levels. Mia's critical engagement and thought-provoking feedback have helped shape this project from its earliest stages, her commitment has taught me about what it means to gracefully combine scholarship and activism, and her generous, warm encouragement has been important to me throughout this process. From Lisa I have learned so much about feminist teaching and scholarship, and I am deeply thankful to her for reading my work so thoughtfully and offering such insightful comments, for making community and collaboration a central part of her teaching practice, and for knowing exactly what to say when I've needed support.

I am indebted to Barbara Harlow for so much, from the model of politically invested and historically grounded scholarship she has provided, to the ways she has both challenged and encouraged me in my own work, to the multiple ways she has supported my professional development. Being a part of the community Barbara has fostered through the Ethnic and Third World interest group has enriched my experience as a graduate student, and I feel very fortunate to have had such an intellectually vibrant,

engaged community as I have been writing. Elizabeth Cullingford's course on Northern Irish literature helped shape my ideas for the hunger strikes chapter, and I am grateful for her expertise and her generous feedback on all of my chapters. The first time I met Sharmila Rudrappa, I turned up unannounced at her office asking her to be on my committee, and I left carrying a stack of books she had lent me. I am thankful to Sharmila for such generosity, enthusiasm, and collegiality, which she has continued to offer at every step.

This project has benefited in countless ways from the wonderful, brilliant members of my dissertation group, who have read long drafts without complaint and always offered thoughtful, incisive feedback: Ellen Crowell, Alexandra Barron, Ashley Shannon, and Jacquie Thomas. I am especially grateful to Ellen for helping me find the most interesting parts of my own arguments, for working with me on job market materials, and for her friendship, which I treasure. Alex has been a sweet and caring friend and a generous reader, whose comments have been both thought-provoking and encouraging, and she has also been part of another group of friends and peers with whom I have been fortunate to discuss the content of two of my chapters. Our South Asian literature reading group—Alex, Miriam Murtuza, Lynn Makau, and Vinatha Vasudevan—provided a forum for discussing partition literature, *sati*, and a variety of other texts and issues, as well as a space for exchanging ideas. My particular thanks to Miriam for sharing her expertise and reading an early draft of my partition chapter.

I cannot imagine what the past several years would have been like without the love and support of my friends. I want to thank Sue Mendelsohn for helping me through

a difficult time with such unflinching kindness and honesty. My thanks to Eve Dunbar for going through the stressful last month of dissertation writing with me and for helping me prepare for my defense, and my thanks to Eve, Lee Rumbarger, and Jennifer Williams for helping me celebrate when it was finished. I am grateful to Susan Pelle for inspiring talks over coffee about work, books, and movies, and for being a friend with whom I can pick up mid-conversation even if we haven't seen each other for months. My thanks also to Neelum Wadhvani, George Waddington, Ashley Shannon, Eric Lupfer, Victoria Davis, Camile Pahwa, Vimala Pasupathi, Colleen Hynes, Kerri Sheehan, Corrie Stokes, Jeff Jackanicz, Matt McClung, and Lisa Storie.

Finally, I am grateful for the support of my family, especially my mom, Marty Herman, whose love and strength I appreciate and admire, and my dad, Chris Herman, who taught me so much about enduring hardships with dignity, about standing up for my convictions even when he didn't share them, and about refusing to quit or give up. He would have been proud to see me finish this dissertation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> <b>The Sati's Body: Corporeal Images of British India</b> <b>in the Sati Debate, Mainwaring's <i>The Suttee</i>, and</b> <b>Steel's <i>On the Face of the Waters</i></b>	<b>31</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> <b>Dismemberings and Remembering: Women's</b> <b>Narratives of India's Partition</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> <b>Famine Bodies and Colonial Boundaries:</b> <b>Abjection, Shame, and Guilt in Representations</b> <b>of Ireland's Great Famine</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> <b>Prisoners' Bodies, Discourses of Rights, and Gendered</b> <b>Political Participation: Representations of the</b> <b>Northern Irish Hunger Strikes</b>	<b>349</b>
<b>EPILOGUE</b>	<b>437</b>
<b>WORKS CITED</b>	<b>444</b>
<b>VITA</b>	<b>455</b>

## Introduction

In recent days, an unusually large number of Romans have been gathering around the statue of Pasquino.... The statue, named after a local curmudgeon, was put up in 1501, and Romans have been posting lampoons on it ever since. There are several pasquinades up now.... The most biting one so far is a collage of the now famous image of an Iraqi prisoner at Abu Ghraib, standing on a box with wires protruding from under his black shroud. In the pasquinade, however, his right arm is raised and he holds up Lady Liberty's eternal flame.

—John Seabrook, *The New Yorker* 7 June 2004

On 28 April 2004, CBS's *60 Minutes II* broadcast several photographs of Iraqi prisoners being tortured by American soldiers in Abu Ghraib prison. These images and those from the progressively more troubling photographs that have since circulated in print, on the television news, and on the Internet have become imprinted in the popular imagination: besides the image John Seabrook references in his *New Yorker* article, there are images of Iraqi men with hands and ankles bound and heads covered with hoods; of naked men tied together, piled in pyramids, or forced to pose in sexual postures; of a female American soldier holding a leash tied to a naked prisoner's neck; of the same soldier pointing to the genitals of hooded, naked prisoners lined up against a wall; of American soldiers grinning at the camera while posed next to Iraqi corpses. Whereas earlier reports of torture in Iraqi prisons operated by the U.S. military yielded little public interest, the publication of these photographs stirred emotions in the U.S. and internationally, evoking responses ranging from outrage and disgust to shock and shame. The photographs and the visceral reactions they produce have instigated public discussion not only of the practices of torture they record, but also of the images



themselves: their power to move the public where words failed; the potential for their publication to incite further violence in Iraq; their ability to “tell it all,” as one article puts it,<sup>1</sup> or to function as transparent windows to truth; their relationship to other images, whether photographs of Ku Klux Klan lynchings, pictures of the 1968 massacre at My Lai, or pornographic images; their use as tools for interrogation, as messages for circulation; their portrayal of America and Americans; their capacity to represent American “hearts,” American culture, the “truth” about who and what the nation is.

As I was immersed in the last stages of writing this dissertation about past images of suffering bodies produced by the British empire in India and Ireland—images of Indian women’s bodies burning in *sati* rituals or raped during partition, and images of starving bodies from Ireland’s Great Famine and the Northern Irish hunger strikes—this series of photographic images from the much more recent past and from an occupying force much closer to home forced me to return to the surface of my own writing, to my own historical and political context. Looking at the Abu Ghraib photographs and listening to the public discourse that has emerged around them, I have been struck not by how new or unprecedented these images seem to be, but on the contrary by the extent to which they participate in an established history of using images of suffering bodies to articulate structures of imperial domination. The photographs from what Susan Sontag in a *New York Times Magazine* article calls the “extralegal American penal empire”<sup>2</sup> at Abu Ghraib raise precisely the questions this dissertation seeks to answer through images from the British empire: Why are images of bodies in conditions of crisis so ubiquitous in representations of empire and its legacies? How do images of suffering bodies function

in the theatre of global politics? And what roles have images of corporeal violence as articulated through categories of gender, race, sexuality, religion, and culture—all of which circulate in the Abu Ghraib photographs—played in discourses of and about empire?

This dissertation argues that images of suffering bodies, drawn from the actual conditions of empire, have functioned both to undergird and to undermine structures of domination produced by British imperialism. Central to my project is the question of how similar—even, at times, the exact same—images can be used to articulate justifications for empire as well as critiques of it, to advance imperialist ideologies and to subvert them. Much of the existing scholarship on imperialism and the body has focused on the body as a tool for colonial occupation and control, revising for different facets of the colonial situation Foucault’s analysis of “the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> Such analyses, while important for what they explain about the workings of colonial systems of power, fail to account for the ways in which such investments of the body are themselves subject to manipulation, transformation, and redeployment for purposes and with consequences unintended by those in power. In Abu Ghraib, for example, the acts of torture clearly functioned as an assertion of American physical, racial, and sexual dominance over dehumanized Iraqi bodies that were under the control of U.S. soldiers. Considered from the perspective of these soldiers, the transformations of acts of torture into photographic images articulate and support these structures of domination.

But once circulated publicly, these images have been redeployed in ways never intended by their creators, in ways that function to critique and subvert precisely those forms of subjugation articulated by the photographs and the acts of violence they portray. The contribution to Rome's "talking" Pasquino statue described by Seabrook, for example, transforms one of these photographs of torture into an ironic Statue of Liberty, using an image of imprisonment and the infliction of physical and psychological trauma to comment on the hypocrisy of America's symbols of freedom and its claims to have "liberated" Iraq. Removed from their original contexts, these images have become available for Sontag's indictment of the Bush administration's doctrine of endless war and the dehumanizing treatment of the Iraqi people to which this doctrine has led; for a *Globe and Mail* article describing the pictures as "a final rebuttal to the United States' claim that it was in Iraq to protect the human rights of Iraqis";<sup>4</sup> and for Robert Fisk of *The Independent* to use the "images that betray our racism" to condemn "our illegal, immoral, meretricious war."<sup>5</sup>

My interest lies not only in the power of images of suffering bodies, but just as importantly in their instability. While we can partially understand the affective power of this corporeal imagery by analyzing acts of representation—transformations of actual suffering bodies into visual and verbal images—this dissertation argues that in order to understand how this imagery has been deployed in order to articulate, advance, and subvert structures of political domination, we must also examine the relationships between images and the historical, political, cultural, and social narratives within which they acquire meaning. Much of the discourse surrounding the Abu Ghraib photographs

has focused on the affective power of the images, their capacity to shock the public and to evoke strong visceral responses: disgust, outrage, repulsion, shame. But while these emotional responses to the photographs and the acts of torture they represent are important measures for the power of these images, at the same time they tell us little about what the images mean to the people who are responding to them, about how this affective power is being used and with what implications. George Bush's assertion in a 5 May interview on Al Arabiya television that "citizens in America are appalled by what they saw, just like people in the Middle East are appalled"<sup>6</sup> surely does not account for all the reasons Sontag finds the photographs "appalling," nor does his application of this response to both America and the Middle East speak to the variations in how this response would likely register between and within these populations.

Far more revealing than the affective responses the images generate are the narratives into which different audiences insert them. From their creation through the various phases of their circulation and reception, the photographs have been placed within layered, intertwined, at times complementary, at times competing narratives, so that it is impossible to encounter the images free of narrative context. A brief survey of the narrative deployments of one of the most discussed photographs, in which a female soldier, Lynndie England, holds a leash tied around the neck of a male Iraqi prisoner, reveals the extent to which the interpretation and function of these images are dependent on the narratives through which we encounter them, as well as the range of narratives which have already been used to contain and channel their emotional power for particular purposes. At the most basic level, the image itself articulates narratives constructed by

the soldiers who participated in its creation: it tells a story of American control over the Iraqi man in the picture; of the racial other as subhuman, fit for a leash as a dog would be; of a sexualized pleasure in sadistic relationships of domination and submission. At one level removed, there is in the photographic form an implied narrative of the image's production: the acts of violence that brought the man to the ground, clearly in pain, the soldiers' decision to pose England holding a leash around his neck, the invisible photographer taking the picture.

Once circulated publicly, the narratives applied to this image and the others published along with it have proliferated rapidly, incorporating much wider perspectives and longer historical views than the soldier-photographers could have anticipated. We have investigative journalism narratives that address the immediate questions of what happened within the prison and how many people knew about it—narratives of torture, criminal investigations, assigning responsibility, discovering whether the torture was ordered by military or intelligence officers, determining which policies enabled these acts. We have narratives of morality and censorship, of political stance and political consequences, that accompany the manner in which the photographs are circulated and questions about whether they should be circulated at all: publication of cropped versions can remove some of the inflammatory or damning content; versions with the prisoners' genitals blurred participate in larger cultural assumptions about what parts of the body are appropriate for a public audience; publications of the images on an anti-war Web site with critical captions suggest a critique of not only the torture itself, but the war that produced it; and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's protests against making the

images public suggest fears about their impact in the Middle East and their political fallout in the U.S. We have the Bush administration's attempts to contain the scandal within several repeated narratives: the abuses are the acts of a few bad soldiers who have dishonored America; the photographs "don't represent America" and "do not reflect the hearts of the American people"; Abu Ghraib is a symbol of "death and torture" under Saddam Hussein and will be demolished "as a fitting symbol of Iraq's new beginning";<sup>7</sup> and, astoundingly, the photographs are a lesson to the Iraqi people on what democracy and "a free society" mean, for "in a democracy ... mistakes will be investigated and people will be brought to justice."<sup>8</sup>

Bush's offensive attempts to use the photographs to reassert American moral superiority and justify the occupation of Iraq have, however, been largely overshadowed by competing narratives in which the photographs are deployed to criticize American human rights violations in Iraq and elsewhere, to indict the Bush administration's unjust war and the violent occupation that has followed, and to assess the extent to which the sexualized and racialized violence of the photographs *does* reflect the condition of contemporary American culture. These competing narratives insist that we recognize the ways in which the photographs are not isolated, contextless aberrations, but rather participate in interlocking histories that include the recent U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as longer histories of Western imperialism, past wars of occupation and "liberation" and the atrocities they have engendered, and human rights abuses within the U.S. Situated within historical and political narratives that reflect opposing ideological assumptions, the images thus become radically unstable texts, capable of

being manipulated to articulate, advance, and subvert different structures of domination.

Consider, for example, the following image posted on an Italian Web site:



A pastiche flag formed out of photographs from Abu Ghraib, the image's centered pieces of the American and British flags suggest that these broken national symbols have been replaced by the images of torture. The words, "YOU MAY HAVE WON THE WAR BUT YOU LOST YOUR DIGNITY," render the assaults on Iraqi dignity represented by the photographs a judgment instead of the nations occupying Iraq and perpetrating these human rights abuses. The effect of this image—criticizing not only the acts of torture but also the war and the succeeding occupation—is clearly quite different from the effect of presenting any one of these photographs by itself.

This project examines how the affective power of images of suffering bodies has been channeled through competing narratives to define and redefine the British empire, its ideological investments, and modes of anti-colonial resistance. Using a case study methodology, I analyze images of bodily suffering drawn from the colonial and neocolonial contexts of India, Ireland, and Northern Ireland: images of Indian women's bodies from nineteenth-century British representations of *sati*; images of raped and mutilated women's bodies from the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan; images of

starving bodies from Ireland's Great Famine in 1845-1851; and images of IRA prisoners' bodies from the 1980-81 hunger strikes in Northern Ireland. In some ways, my analysis participates in the process of inserting images of suffering bodies within narrative histories. The central narratives that have guided my analyses concern the histories of the British empire in India and Ireland, histories of nationalist resistance to imperialism and its effects, and histories of gendered oppression within national communities. But my project is primarily concerned with analyzing this process of manipulating the emotional and political effects of images by deploying them within different narratives, generic forms, and rhetorical contexts.

This dissertation makes three central arguments. First, through the affective potential of body images to elicit in readers or viewers an emotional response to the suffering of others, representations of the corporeal effects of empire function as mediations between those in positions of power and those subject to that power, as a means of articulating the relationships between colonizers and colonized, between nationalist leaders and marginalized groups within national contexts. Second, the insertion of these corporeal images within different narratives, histories, forms, and genres enables the manipulation of this affective power for competing articulations of colonialism and the nationalisms that have emerged from colonial contexts. And third, once these images have been put into play, once they begin to circulate publicly, they become available to be deployed and redeployed in ways that both engage with their earlier uses and revise their meanings for changing historical and political contexts. Once an image has entered the public sphere, in other words, subsequent narrative deployments



respond not only to the historical basis for the image, but to past uses of it, past narratives investing the image with political and ideological significance. In what follows, I will expand on each of these three overarching claims, provide an overview of the chapters, and discuss my choices about how to structure this project.

## **Body and Image**

Through the affective potential of body images to elicit an emotional response to the suffering of others, representations of the corporeal effects of empire function as mediations between those in positions of power and those subject to that power. The first part of my argument concerns the relationship between body and image, and the structure and impact of the body as image. In representational terms, the structure of the image—any image—is necessarily connected to the body: an image is a word or phrase that appeals directly to the senses, evoking a visual picture, a sound, scent, taste, or tangible feeling in the reader's mind. For my purposes, because I am primarily interested in how body images function in the political imaginaries of empire, I extend this definition beyond the verbal to include visual images from illustrations, photographs, and films, considering the differences between these types of images in the contexts of the texts I examine. In engaging the senses, images have the capacity to be so moving precisely because they literally incorporate into the bodies of readers, viewers, or audiences an internal, felt, sensual experience of something external to the self.

Verbal and visual images clearly work on the senses differently, rendering them effective for evoking different relationships to imagined content. A visual image from a photograph, for instance, is consumed directly through the sense of sight, without requiring the step of translating words into a mental picture as would a literary description of the same content. This direct engagement of the senses might make a visual image more shocking, more immediate, better able to convey a single picture and perhaps less subject to individual interpretations or misinterpretations. Would the Abu Ghraib images of torture, for example, have elicited such strong reactions if they had been circulated as verbal descriptions? But at the same time, verbal images can have a far more profound impact on readers in other ways. The crafting of language can emphasize and de-emphasize parts of an image with greater control than a snapshot. A verbal image can engage multiple senses with greater facility than a visual image—in which the sense of sight necessarily dominates—enabling a more complex and multifaceted embodied experience. How would public perceptions of the torture of Iraqi prisoners change if instead of the photographs, we heard testimony from the prisoners themselves describing vividly what it felt like, physically and emotionally, to be subjected to such treatment? While the visual images evoke strong reactions of shock and disgust, of sympathy in viewers disposed to feel sympathy, such a verbal description invites empathy with suffering in a way that the structure of a photograph does not.

Why the body? Why are images of suffering bodies, as opposed to other kinds of images, so ubiquitous in representations and contestations of imperialist and nationalist political structures? I would maintain that bodies are particularly powerful as means for

imagining imperial and national structures of domination for several reasons. First, bodies are relational—they act and acquire meaning in relation to their environments, to objects, and to other bodies, forming a surface where, as Drew Leder describes, “self meets what is other than self.”<sup>9</sup> This capacity to express meetings between self and other, identity and foreignness, renders the body an effective medium for articulating relationships between and among political groups, while bodies’ potential to act and be acted upon make them imaginatively potent for representing relations of power.

Second, images of bodies register internal psychic, affective, and sensory experiences—pain, physical and emotional suffering, trauma—that can in turn produce psychic, affective, and physical responses in others—sympathy, tears, shock, disgust, nausea, anxiety, desire. When the image that acts on the senses of a reader or spectator portrays another feeling, sensing body, the image functions as a mediation between the represented body and the spectator. Through their ability to produce affective responses to another’s experience of suffering, body images have the capacity to serve as compelling mediations between those in power and those subject to its effects. A visual or verbal image of suffering—the pain registered on the Iraqi prisoner’s face in the photograph of the soldier holding a leash, for example, or a description of the wrenching hunger felt by a Famine victim—thus has the capacity to elicit sympathy or anxiety in those consuming the image.

Third, images of bodies at once appeal to an intimate lived experience of embodiment and are available to be inscribed, coded, and invested with social and political significance. For this understanding of the body as at once experiential and

political, I am indebted to Elizabeth Grosz, who theorizes the body as “a kind of *hinge* or threshold ... between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the *inscription* of the body's outer surface.”<sup>10</sup> This conception of the body as a hinge between the intimate lived experience of the body and a sociopolitical exteriority suggests that part of the body’s power as image comes from its ability to negotiate relationships between feeling and politics, between the intimacy of individual desire, anxiety, or emotion and the ways in which bodies are coded, manipulated, and impacted by social contexts and political processes. The intimacy of the sensory and emotional connection the corporeal image forges between the represented body and its audience, therefore, becomes available to be invested with political significance as mediations between two cultures, nations, or racial or ethnic groups, between colonizer and colonized, between enfranchised citizens and those at the margins of the nation-state.

Finally, images of suffering bodies are powerful because imperialist conquest, colonial occupation, and nationalist resistance are processes conducted by and through material bodies. These images represent a material history of empire whose irreducible violence forms the underside of imperial ideologies and justifications. Because these body images are representations of the most troubling, disconcerting, damning aspects of empire, they form a central part of both the colonizers’ anxieties about empire and its trauma for colonized peoples. For those writers interested in extending or maintaining imperialist structures, this is a history that cannot be denied, that must be somehow recuperated for the continuing justification of empire, while from an anti-colonial

perspective these bodies are evidence of empire's violence and of the discrepancies between imperialist ideologies and the realities of imperial violence. The act of representation, of transforming these historical, material bodies into images, offers a means of exercising control over these sources of psychic attachment, anxiety, or resentment, a means of using images of these bodies in such a way as to defuse anxieties, marshal anger, and focus emotion for a particular purpose.

### **Image and Narrative**

Such deployments of images of bodily suffering for the purposes of advancing, maintaining, critiquing, or subverting structures of domination bring me to the second part of my thesis: The insertion of corporeal images within different narratives, forms, and genres enables the manipulation of their affective power for competing articulations of colonialism and the nationalisms that have emerged from colonial contexts. Turning from the structure of corporeal images to the relationship between images and narratives, I turn from a consideration of these images' affective power and political potential to an analysis of how they are invested with particular ideologies, how imperial and national power relations are articulated through discourses of embodied difference such as gender, race, culture, ethnicity, religion, and class. The portability of these images of corporeal violence, the unpredictability of their political functions across contexts, was one of the most surprising findings to emerge from the process of writing this dissertation. Whereas I approached these texts expecting that the images themselves would change—that the

images used in colonialist texts would differ significantly from those used in texts written from an anti-colonialist perspective—I found on the contrary that the images in these texts were more similar than different, that quite often, in fact, the exact same images were being used in texts with opposing political purposes.

More than the images themselves, what changes from one textual deployment to another is how the images are narrated, what stories are told about them, and how they are situated in relation to existing narratives of difference and hierarchies of value. I have already discussed the various political deployments of the Abu Ghraib photographs within different narratives—an effective example because of the relative stability of the photographic images themselves, despite the instability of their interpretations. This use of similar images for opposing political functions is, however, also at work in the other contexts I analyze. The images of Famine bodies appearing in the British press in the 1840s do not differ significantly from those appearing in the Irish nationalist press, though the British use these images to articulate Irish ingratitude and British charity while the Young Irelanders use them to shame Britain for its culpability in producing and perpetuating the Famine. Images of raped and mutilated women's bodies during the communal riots accompanying India's partition have been not so much re-imagined by women artists as re-narrated to critique this violence: the images, drawn from actual conditions of suffering and corporeal crisis, acquire new political functions as they are inserted within different narratives.

Questions of form and genre are therefore central to my analyses. Rather than focusing on a single form or genre, I analyze how images of suffering bodies travel

through different kinds of texts: this project looks at short nonfiction such as political speeches, missionary tracts, and illustrated newspaper articles; literary texts including sentimental novels, historical novels, plays, and poems; visual materials such as photographs and etchings; and films. The formal structure of a text and its mode of addressing its audiences impact how images of bodies will function within it. By combining visual illustrations with verbal descriptions of Famine victims, for example, the British illustrated press was able to use horrific descriptions of suffering to appeal to public charity while at the same time insulating readers from the threat posed by Famine victims. The Irish nationalist poets, by contrast, used the intimacy of poems with a first-person narrative voice to render these Famine bodies threatening in precisely the ways the illustrated articles sought to prevent. Similarly, the function of these images are affected by generic conventions which are themselves ideologically invested—the murder-mystery’s legal-judicial ideology of law and order or guilt and punishment, for instance, or the sentimental novel’s use of a domestic ideology to grant women political voice by virtue of their moral authority.

While my primary focus in this project is on how body images are deployed within different narratives of British imperialism and its legacies, my approach to analyzing these deployments depends heavily on other discourses of difference and domination that have operated in tandem with, in support of, and in relation to empire: gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class, religion, sexuality. These discourses are not tangential or secondary to imperialist and nationalist structures, but are integral to them. Imperialist hierarchies among abstract political entities and collective groups—Britain or

England, India or British India, Ireland or Northern Ireland—certainly can be and have been articulated in equally abstract terms, as rhetorical uses of body politic figures and personifications such as Britannia, Mother Ireland, and Mother India demonstrate. But the history of imperialism and its legacies has not been abstract or figurative. Its material effects have included famine, incarceration, partition riots, and the violent suppression of the 1857 Indian Mutiny, as well as massacres, armed conflict, slavery, and other similarly violent, exploitative processes and institutions that have been enacted on actual bodies rather than mapped territories or abstract entities. As empire's effects are embodied, so too are its images and narratives. Consequently, an analysis of imperial domination necessarily becomes at the same time an analysis of domination and oppression as articulated through gender, race, cultural practice and identity, and other embodied discourses of difference.

### **Images and Histories**

The third part of my argument focuses on the complex, layered relationships between images of suffering and historical narratives: Once these images begin to circulate publicly, they become available to be deployed and redeployed in ways that both engage with their earlier uses and revise their meanings for changing historical and political contexts. Because they are important throughout this project, I want to briefly outline three key ways in which I see questions of history and historiography operating within the case studies and in the relationships among them. The first I have already



discussed: all of the images I analyze are engaged in representing material histories of empire and its effects—*sati* and partition riots in India, famine and starvation in Ireland, imprisonment and the hunger strikes in Northern Ireland, torture in Abu Ghraib. A large part of why these images carry so much power, this material history of violence and suffering is at the core of my project and is documented throughout the chapters. At the same time, however, this history receives the least critical attention within the dissertation: while my analysis is deeply concerned with how this history is represented and narrated, I assume that the events of Ireland’s Famine and India’s partition happened and rely on historians for the details.

Second, the images I analyze are deployed within politically and ideologically invested historical narratives. Whether purportedly “fictional” or “nonfictional,” the texts I analyze use historical narratives to present images of bodily suffering for particular political purposes. In the discourses surrounding Abu Ghraib, the historical narratives applied to the photographs range from Bush’s narrative of Iraq’s “liberation,” which his trips to Europe in commemoration of D-Day attempted to align with the U.S. “liberation” of France from Nazi occupation, to narratives of the Geneva conventions on torture and their violation, to narratives of U.S. military occupation and cultural imperialism. The images of *sati* in my first chapter, likewise, insert the images of women’s bodies burning into a variety of competing historical narratives: an 1806 sepoy rebellion in Vellore and the 1857 Mutiny; missionary narratives of civilizing India through the eradication of practices like *sati*; early nineteenth-century narratives of women’s reform projects across the British empire. The competing histories through which images of suffering are

narrated in each of the chapters are part of the means by which these images are recuperated to support colonialist and nationalist power structures or redeployed to subvert them.

Third, once these images enter the public sphere and take hold in the popular imagination, they acquire their own history. This project traces the ways in which images of suffering bodies have been mobilized to different ends not only in relation to the material histories out of which they emerge, but also through different periods of colonial and postcolonial (or neocolonial) history. The imagery of starving bodies from the Famine, for instance, engages directly with the immediate material conditions of starvation and disease, but it also engages indirectly with past images of Irish starvation such as Edmund Spenser's 1596 image of Irish famine victims as "anatomies of death" whose self-annihilation would ease the way for English conquest.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, the imagery of the Famine in the 1840s becomes available more than a century later for IRA prisoner Bobby Sands, who writes about his physical experience of imprisonment and hunger during his 1978-1981 no-wash protest through a poem about people dying on a coffin ship fleeing Famine Ireland. My project traces the ways in which images of bodily suffering continue to be mobilized long after the material histories of their production.

### **Structure and Method**

The structure of this project—spanning two centuries and two very different contexts within the British empire—makes for a long dissertation, and I want to spend

some time placing the chapters in relation to each other and explaining my choices about how to construct the project. Focusing on India and Ireland, each of my four chapters analyzes a set of images representing conditions of actual bodily suffering in British imperial history. The first two chapters trace the changing appropriations and re-appropriations of Indian women's bodies within discursive articulations of the colonial relationship in the nineteenth century and national and communal identity in the twentieth century. Chapter One, "The Sati's Body: Corporeal Images of British India in the Sati Debate, Mainwaring's *The Suttee*, and Steel's *On the Face of the Waters*," analyzes the affective power of nineteenth-century British representations of *sati*, or the Hindu practice of burning widows on their husbands' funeral pyres. The chapter begins by examining two roughly contemporary representations of the sati's body—the first from political and missionary debates in the 1820s over the legal abolition of *sati* in British India and the second from an 1830 sentimental novel written by the wife of a British general in the West Indies. The juxtaposition of these different narrative deployments of *sati* imagery from the same historical moment reveals competing articulations of the British empire's civilizing mission and the relationships between England and the native populations of British India: while the official debates represented *sati* as a problem of law and government, using the practice and its abolition to construct the British presence in terms of a benevolent superiority, the sentimental novel constructs *sati* as a problem of religion and culture, using the practice to construct an affective bond between British and Hindu women as the basis for a conversion narrative. The chapter then turns to representations of *sati* in a much later text, Flora Annie Steel's 1896 Mutiny novel *On the*

*Face of the Waters*, exploring the ways in which Steel's use of *sati* imagery to articulate the more overtly racist modes of control in post-Mutiny British India continued to draw on the narrative articulations of the civilizing mission from the period of the *sati* debate. By focusing on how the image of the sati's body is deployed within these competing and changing narratives of empire, this chapter suggests that the fascination the sati figure held for the British imagination was not so much for this figure's ability to express a particular conception of the colonial project, but rather for its ability to channel affective investments in competing conceptions of British India.

Chapter Two, "Dismemberings and Rememberings: Women's Images of India's Partition," turns to the violent re-appropriations of Indian women's bodies during the communal riots that accompanied the 1947 decolonization and partition of India and Pakistan. By looking at the horrific, sexualized violence of partition through South Asian women's textual deployments of images of violated female bodies, this chapter examines how constructions of nationalist and communal identities through women's bodies replicate imperialist structures of domination, and how women artists have reimagined the gendered violence of partition in order to critique or subvert these structures. I analyze texts from three different women artists, each of whom uses a different form to grapple with the challenge of representing without replicating the discursive violence of using women's bodies as symbols for political communities. First, I read two poems by Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam, who uses the intimacy of her verse to register the disconnection between felt forms of community and identity and those forms imposed by the newly partitioned nations, and to register the disjunction between women's lived

bodily experiences of sexual violence and the external inscriptions of their bodies as symbols for communal honor. The chapter then moves from mid-century India to the South Asian diaspora and partition's fiftieth anniversary, looking at narratives of partition from two Indian-Canadian artists in the late 1990s. Director Deepa Mehta's film *Earth* uses a mode of national melodrama to construct a memory of partition for a transnational audience, enclosing a narrative of 1947's communal and gendered violence within a frame that constructs partition as a moment of rupture in India's national and colonial histories, while Shauna Singh Baldwin's novel *What the Body Remembers* uses the trope of the body that "remembers" the past to represent partition as part of interlocking histories of colonial, communal, and gendered violence.

The second half of my project begins with an experience of large-scale corporeal suffering in another part of the British empire, analyzing how images of starvation and bodily degradation during Ireland's Great Famine were used to articulate both colonialist and nationalist political agendas, and how similar images were redeployed by IRA prisoners seeking political status in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Chapter Three, "Famine Bodies and Colonial Boundaries: Abjection, Shame, and Guilt in Representations of Ireland's Great Famine," examines three different representations of Famine bodies that appeared in the English and Irish popular press while the Famine was in progress. Observing that, contrary to what one might expect, the kinds of body images used in the British press and the kinds of images used in the anti-colonial publications of the nationalist Young Ireland movement are surprisingly similar, this chapter analyzes how the formal, generic, and narrative contexts in which these images were deployed

impacted their political function. I begin with analyses of two articles from the British illustrated press, in which the combination of visual illustrations and verbal images of Famine bodies enable these publications to contain the threat they posed for the British public. The chapter then looks at Famine poetry published in the Irish nationalist press, which manipulated images of degraded Famine bodies, making them the basis for a political discourse of shame which challenged the notion that Ireland's proper position was as a dependent part of the British empire. Finally, the chapter ends with an analysis of Irish writer William Carleton's 1847 sentimental murder-mystery *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine*, a novel torn between critiquing British policies in Ireland and appealing to British charity for Famine victims. By representing Irish famine through a narrative of criminality and guilt, Carleton uses a legal juridical model to assert Ireland's dependent, subordinate position within a paternalistic imperial nation-state.

My final chapter, "Prisoners' Bodies, Discourses of Rights, and Gendered Political Participation: Representations of the Northern Irish Hunger Strikes," focuses on images of starving and physically degraded bodies from the much later colonial context of Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, examining the implications of the hunger strikes for women in Northern nationalist communities. The first part of this chapter looks at how IRA prisoners, in the process of protesting the British government's revocation of their political prisoner status, reshaped Northern nationalism by transforming their own bodies into images of imposed degradation and starvation, which the prisoners themselves and IRA leaders outside the prison inserted into strategic discourses of rights and narratives of their violation. Analyzing images of prisoners'

bodies from hunger striker Bobby Sands' account of his no-wash protest preceding the hunger strikes, his hunger strikes diary, and photographs from hunger strikers' funerals, I argue that in the transition from the no-wash protest to the hunger strikes, the prisoners strategically shifted from a narrative of individual human rights violations to one of denied rights to national self-determination, in the process rearticulating Northern nationalism as individual self-sacrifice. In the second half of the chapter, I analyze dramatic and film texts by Anne Devlin and Terry George, two Northern Irish artists who use the imagery of the hunger strikes to critique the implications of this rearticulation for women whose position within the nationalist community has always been vexed.

Choosing a structure for this project presented a number of challenges, and because my choices have resulted in a somewhat unwieldy document with an unconventional chapter sequencing, I want to speak briefly to how these challenges arose from the questions that stimulated this project, what was at stake for me in responding to them, and how my responses are reflected within and among the chapters. Although each chapter examines highly contextualized, historically-specific deployments of images, the project as a whole deals with broad questions concerning the ubiquity of body images in representations of empire; the relationships between imperial structures of domination and those based on national identity, gender, race, and other categories; the function of images of corporeal suffering in the theatre of global politics; and the capacity of these images to both advance and subvert structures of domination. The questions from which this project originated, then, suggest an analysis of images representing local corporeal experiences through global political structures and relationships, and at the same time an

analysis of how images are used within their historical contexts as well as how they travel through colonial and neocolonial histories.

Three primary commitments have guided my decisions about how to shape this analysis. First, historically grounded, local analyses of images and their narrative deployments are crucial to my exploration of the project's central questions. While the images I explore acquire, in narrative deployments both complicit with and resistant to imperial structures, significance in larger regional, national, imperial, and global political rhetorics, they are based on specific, material histories of corporeal violence and suffering—women who burned alive while the British debated what abolishing *sati* would mean for the empire's security, or the one million Famine victims who starved while the British and Irish press turned them into fodder for their political positions. There is a discursive violence in the transformation of such actual instances of suffering into corporeal images for political relationships, a violence that mirrors the material violence the images represent, that contributes to the effectiveness of these images for articulating structures of domination, and that renders the subversion of such structures through redeployments of these images both difficult and powerful. Without a careful examination of the historical and cultural contexts out of which these images emerged and within which they were circulated and re-circulated, any analysis of their imaginative or rhetorical functions not only would offer an incomplete view, but would risk replicating their discursive violence.

Second, in order to explore how these images of suffering bodies acquire their own histories, how their meanings and functions change as they are deployed within



different historical contexts, it was necessary to look at their development over time. My interest in these images derives, in part, from their repetitions and reiterations through different periods of British imperial history as well as in the third world national histories that have followed. In pairing chapters focused on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries within each geographic location, I am able to consider how a particular kind of body image—violated female bodies in India, starving bodies in Ireland—has traveled in the popular imagination through changing historical and political contexts. By applying this wider historical lens to images that continue to dominate both colonialist and anti-colonialist political discourses long after the material circumstances out of which they were created have passed, my project demonstrates ways in which nationalist discourses can replicate the imaginary structures of domination that shored up colonial occupation.

Finally, in order for this project to make an argument about colonial and anti-colonial deployments of corporeal images, and not only an argument about body images in India or in Ireland, it needed to be broadly comparative, analyzing how these images have traveled through more than one location in the British empire. In focusing on India and Ireland, this dissertation brings together two very different contexts that have both loomed large in the British colonial imagination: a large territory halfway around the world from England and a small island adjacent to it; a colony administered until 1857 by the East India Company and one that after an Act of Union in 1800 was governed directly by the English parliament; a native population divided from the English by race, religion, and culture and a population much more similar to its colonizers than the English were generally willing to grant. While both India and Ireland have a history of decolonization

through partition, India's partition resulted in two independent nations, while Ireland's left part of the country under British control. The divergent historical, political, and cultural narratives these two contexts bring to bear on the images I analyze enable a productive comparison between articulations and subversions of British hegemony in different parts of the empire.

While the differences between them have offered a useful comparison, I chose to focus on India and Ireland because both enable an exploration of how a single image of bodily suffering or violence can proliferate, circulate, and travel through changing colonialist and anti-colonialist imaginaries. In each location, a historical condition of corporeal crisis has generated images so resonant in the collective, popular imagination that they have continued to impact the literature, culture, and political history. I am not suggesting that the *sati* debate originated a preoccupation with women's bodies as markers of community identity in India or that the Famine marked the beginnings of an Irish political use of starvation, nor am I suggesting that rioters during India's partition were thinking about *sati* or that the hunger strikers were thinking about Famine victims as they chose starvation as a protest strategy. My argument is not one of establishing origins—on the contrary, I would argue that *sati* could not have become such a contested topic if gendered constructions of political relationships had not already been part of the cultural context, and the readiness with which the bodies of Famine victims became a medium for debates over Ireland's occupation derived from an already established history of colonialist and anti-colonialist uses of starvation. Rather, these analyses demonstrate the potential of corporeal images to take hold in the popular imagination, to become a

medium for contested articulations of colonial power relations, and to influence—whether directly or indirectly—subsequent representations of these relationships.

Imagery of women's bodies in India and starving bodies in Ireland offer such compelling case studies for this analysis because in both contexts, the images have been equally powerful for articulating colonialist discourses of domination and control and anti-colonialist discourses of resistance, rebellion, and revolution. The British debate over *sati* in the early nineteenth century was as much about the potential for its abolition to incite rebellion as it was about constructing empire as a civilizing enterprise, and this implicated narrative of rebellion made the *sati* image available in a later context for Steel's novel about the Mutiny. The years of the Great Famine were also a period of intense anti-colonial activity, including a failed Young Ireland uprising in 1848, and Irish nationalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have used images of starvation and acts of self-starvation as strategies for resisting British rule. Within the framework of this project, India and Ireland offer such a productive comparison because in both cases, the imagery of colonialist narratives and the imagery of resistance narratives have developed in concert with one another. Consequently, a comparative analysis reveals the ways in which historical, cultural, and political narrative deployments make these images of suffering function differently in relation to competing positions in the contested spaces of occupied colony or neocolonial nation-state.

I have chosen to introduce this dissertation through the Abu Ghraib photographs not just because they enable me to outline my project's aims, assumptions, and

arguments, but because they speak to its exigency. Abu Ghraib demonstrates, first and foremost, that imperialism is not part of a past we have left behind, but rather a mode of domination that is very much a part of our present. In exploring the ways in which images of suffering bodies in India and Ireland have been mobilized within competing narratives of domination and subversion, I hope this project will also engage with broader questions about how such images continue to function in the global political arena.

### Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Seymour Hersch, “Torture at Abu Ghraib,” *The New Yorker*, 10 May 2004, [http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?040510fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?040510fa_fact); Internet.

<sup>2</sup> See Susan Sontag, “The Photographs Are Us,” *New York Times Magazine*, 23 May 2004: “The Bush administration has committed the country to a pseudo-religious doctrine of war, endless war—for the ‘war on terror’ is nothing less than that. Endless war is taken to justify endless incarcerations. Those held in the extralegal American penal empire are ‘detainees’; ‘prisoners,’ a newly obsolete word, might suggest that they have rights accorded by international laws and the laws of all civilized countries. This endless ‘global war on terrorism’ ... inevitably leads to the demonizing and dehumanizing of anyone declared by the Bush administration to be a possible terrorist....”

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (1975, Reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 28.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ian Brown, "Lessons From Homer," *Globe and Mail*, 15 May 2004, page F3,  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20040515/ACHILLEES15/TPComment/TopStories>; Internet.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Fisk, "An Illegal and Immoral War: Betrayed by Images of Our Own Racism," *The Independent*, 7 May 2004,  
<http://news.independent.co.uk/world/fisk/story.jsp?story=518951>; Internet.

<sup>6</sup> George W. Bush, "President Bush Meets With Al Arabiya Television on Wednesday," transcript of 5 May 2004 interview,  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040505-2.html>; Internet.

<sup>7</sup> George W. Bush, "President Outlines Steps to Help Iraq Achieve Democracy and Freedom," speech delivered at the US Army War College 24 May 2004,  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040524-10.html>; Internet.

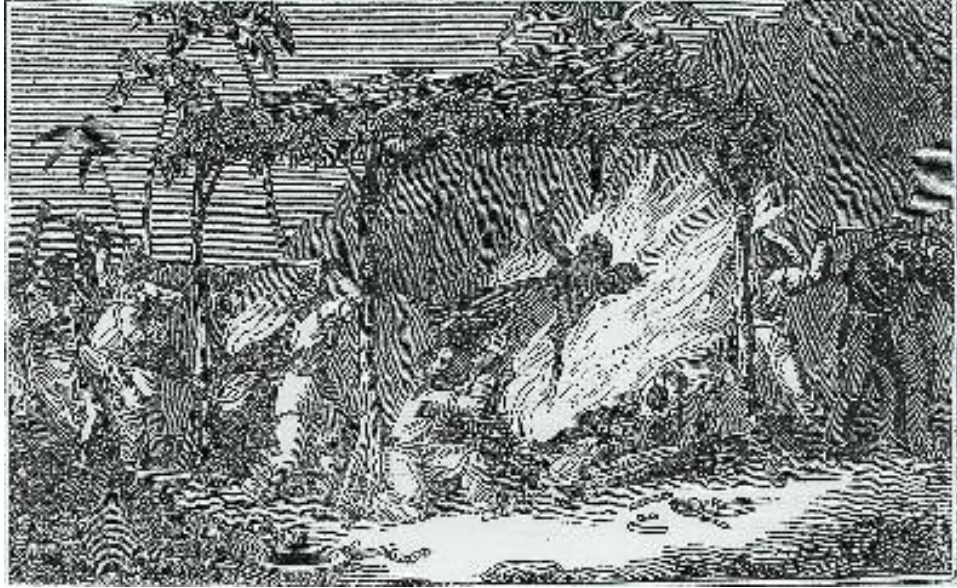
<sup>8</sup> George W. Bush, "President Bush Meets With Alhurra Television on Wednesday," transcript of 5 May 2004 interview,  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040505-5.html>; Internet.

<sup>9</sup> Drew Leder, *Absent Bodies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 33.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), ed. W. L. Renwick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 430-431.

**Chapter One: The Sati's Body: Corporeal Images of British India in the Sati Debate, Mainwaring's *The Suttee*, and Steel's *On the Face of the Waters***



Frontispiece, James Peggs, *India's Cries to British Humanity*, 1832<sup>1</sup>

The frontispiece to the 1832 edition of James Peggs' missionary pamphlet, *India's Cries to British Humanity*, was an etching of a *sati* or "suttee," as the British called the Hindu practice of widow immolation. Peggs, one of the most vocal opponents of the practice of *sati*,<sup>2</sup> was a Baptist missionary who led an expedition to Orissa in 1822, and whose pamphlets appealing to the British government and public for the abolition of *sati* went through multiple versions and editions between 1827 and 1832. The etching that opens the 1832 pamphlet depicts a black-skinned woman burning on top of a large fire while black-skinned men in white clothing wave either swords, which they are using to cut the branches that fuel the fire, or torches, which one man is applying to the sati's body. The sati, still alive though partially immersed in the flames, is raising her hand to

the sky in a gesture of appeal and has her mouth open, a visual representation of those “cries to British humanity” to which the pamphlet’s title refers. On the far right side of the image, two men, marked as British by their white skin and Western garb, turn their faces away from the pyre and cover their eyes with their hands.

In the appealing gesture of the Indian woman and the averted eyes but braced presence of the British witnesses, this etching visually represents the colonial relationship between Britain and India as one in which India must be saved from its own barbarity through Britain’s reluctant presence as the agent of that salvation—a common British deployment of the *sati* scene, which Gayatri Spivak has famously summarized with the phrase “white men are saving brown women from brown men.”<sup>3</sup> Because Peggs’ text was originally written<sup>4</sup> to criticize the East India Company’s refusal to abolish the practice of *sati*, here the averted eyes of the British witnesses could be read both as a mark of their repulsion at the practice and as an embodiment of Britain’s refusal to act to prevent the atrocity. In addressing an audience of British readers back in England, however, the image calls on the outrage, the sympathy, and the un-averted gaze of the British public to effect the intervention of which the pictured onlookers appear to be incapable. In its sentimental appeal to the British public, therefore, this image embodies the ideology of British colonialism as a civilizing mission. The triangulated relationship among the burning body of the appealing widow, the averted gazes of the British onlookers, and the outraged sympathy of the British public constructs the colonial relationship as one based on British benevolence as contrasted with Indian women’s suffering, on the one hand, and Indian men’s barbarity, on the other.

In this image, we can identify a dual structure of representation common to early nineteenth-century British representations of *sati*, both visual and verbal, in texts ranging from East India Company political documents, to missionary pamphlets, to works of literature. The etching both represents as image the actual practice of *sati* and the material bodies of the women who died before the East India Company's 1829 abolition of the practice in British India, and it works figuratively as a metaphor that justified British occupation by representing India as requiring the civilizing intervention of the British government. Colonial images use the marginality of the *sati*—a figure clearly and emphatically marked as powerless through her gender, race, religion, colonized condition, status as a widow, and imminent danger of corporeal harm—in order to embody British anxieties about the boundaries of Britain's identity in relation to its colonial others. The women who were the objects of these representations were ostensibly among the least powerful of Britain's Indian subjects, particularly since their status as widows, should they choose not to become *satis*, would render them outcasts within their own communities. And yet, these powerless women were the basis for powerful figures in the British imagination, figures whose representational power is closely tied to British conceptions not only of the nature of India, but also of England and its relationship to the empire in India. The structures that support colonial conquest and occupation are dependent on the definition and maintenance of boundaries—territorial, political, cultural, racial, and ethnic. Because they are marked by their marginality, the bodies of the women who became *satis* serve as imaginary sites for British definitions of the boundaries of empire and for the displacement of anxieties over the ways in which



these boundaries are challenged by the contradictions inherent in the colonial system. Radhika Mohanram, in *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space*, argues that “the woman’s body, at some level, is like maps of/within the nation in that it has triple functions: to encode boundaries, to reproduce sameness, and to reveal difference simultaneously.”<sup>5</sup> The figure of the sati in the early nineteenth century functions for the British as a means of creating “maps of/within” the empire in India, encoding the boundaries of the empire and the boundaries within empire, reproducing sameness and revealing difference through the capacity of this marginal body to articulate these boundaries.

Gayatri Spivak, Lata Mani, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan,<sup>6</sup> and others have located in the nineteenth-century discursive production surrounding *sati*—and particularly in the debates leading to its abolition by the East India Company in 1829—a site for analyzing the workings of the colonial administration and the British use of Indian women as a justification for India’s occupation. Focusing on different facets of British representations of *sati*, this scholarship has shown that the East India Company’s abolition of *sati* was less about the Indian women whose lives were at issue than it was about justifying Britain’s presence in India and constructing imperialism as the establisher of “the good society.”<sup>7</sup> But the question of how the sati figure was imagined by British writers in the early nineteenth century—particularly during the debate over *sati* in the 1820s and the years immediately following its abolition—and how these early images were mobilized by British writers as Britain’s relationship to India changed later in the century, is in fact more complex and multifaceted than existing scholarship

suggests. While scholars writing about the practice have dealt with gender in relation to the women who died, most work on representations of *sati* during the debates over its abolition focuses on writing by male authors, politicians, and missionaries. British women's writing on *sati* in the early nineteenth century has been largely ignored. Though the bulk of British accounts during the 1820s and 1830s comes from male authors, most of whom were interested in the legislative problem posed by the practice, British women contributed to the production of these representations, using different narrative forms and generic conventions than their male counterparts for ends that often had little to do with the question of legal abolition. An attention to how these women writers imagined *sati* through genres that differed from those used by male authors, but that relied on conventions also used by women reformers focused on other parts of the empire, can help to complicate current understandings of those fantasies, anxieties, and desires that shaped Britain's relationship to colonial India. Moreover, such an analysis of early nineteenth-century constructions of the colonial relationship through the sati figure enables us to see how *sati* images in later British writing represented a continuing engagement with and mobilization of earlier ideologies of empire even as the dominant ideologies shifted in the wake of the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion, or Indian Mutiny.

In this chapter, I will analyze representations from the debate over the abolition of *sati* in the 1820s; an understudied 1830 novel called *The Suttee, or, the Hindoo Converts*, by Mrs. General Mainwaring (her first name is unknown); and Flora Annie Steel's 1896 Mutiny novel *On the Face of the Waters*. By focusing on how the image of the sati's body is deployed within competing and changing narratives of empire, this chapter

argues that the fascination the sati figure held for the British imagination was not so much for this figure's ability to express one particular conception of the colonial project, but rather for its ability to channel affective investments in competing conceptions of British India. My analyses of the *sati* debate texts and Mainwaring's roughly contemporary novel will demonstrate that despite the fact that these texts emerged from the same historical moment, their diverging ways of representing *sati* reveal significant differences in how these writers understood the colonial relationship between Britain and India and the ideology of the civilizing mission so frequently invoked during this period to legitimate the colonial project. While there are, of course, similarities between the images of *sati* constructed by Mainwaring and those of the *sati* debate, I will demonstrate that a consideration of woman-authored texts like Mainwaring's novel reveals that there is much more variety in how images of *sati* were used during this period than current criticism acknowledges; that in the differences among these images we might in turn recognize competing articulations of Britain's relationship to India; and that popular attitudes toward *sati* outside of British India may have had more to do with a cross-empire ideology of reform than with the legal problems articulated within the official debate. Whereas representations from the official debate focus on *sati* as a problem of law and government, Mainwaring constructs the practice as a problem of religion and culture. Whereas images from the debate portray the women who died as victims either of outright murder or of a barbaric religion that makes them complicit in their own oppression, Mainwaring represents *sati* as the greatest desire of Hindu women, reflecting their devotion to their husbands past even the moment of death. And whereas the

participants in the *sati* debate represent the practice as an affront to the feelings of civilized (i.e. Western) people, Mainwaring represents it as horrible, but at the same time as the basis for an affective bond between British and Hindu women, constructed as alike in their domestic virtue and wifely devotion.

Pairing the discursive production of the *sati* debate with Mainwaring's novel, these differences in how each imagines this practice that so powerfully commanded the British colonial imagination in turn suggest that this imagination worked in varied ways, that even writers and politicians whose positions might be lumped together under the ideology of colonialism's civilizing mission may have had different, sometimes competing, conceptions of what that mission entailed, of the relationships between Britain and India, and of the relationships between themselves and the colonized peoples they represented. My analyses of these texts will focus on the centrality of a language of desire and feeling not only in constructing images of the sati, but also in projecting a fantasized bodily relationship between the sati and the British witness or public. I will argue that while both sets of representations relied on sentimental discourses for their imaginings of *sati*, the images of the *sati* debate were shaped by conventions carried over from eighteenth-century ideas about sensibility and the "man of feeling," whereas Mainwaring's construction of the sati relies on a more contemporary, early nineteenth-century discourse of sentimentality that women writers and missionaries were employing in the service of anti-slavery and social reform movements. Though they shared a common vocabulary, these two traditions did not reflect the same ideological underpinnings or imagine the same kind of relationship between readers and those on

whose behalf the readers' sympathy was elicited. By better understanding the ideological bases of these different sentimental discourses and their divergent narrative deployments of the *sati* images, we might in turn understand the ways in which these representations reflected competing conceptions of the colonial relationship.

Having demonstrated by way of the *sati* debates and Mainwaring the ideological implications of the conventions each used to construct the *sati*, I will turn to Steel's end-of-century novel *On the Face of the Waters*, a Mutiny narrative which takes a *sati* figure as one of its central characters. Just as the *sati* debaters and Mainwaring relied on differing sets of conventions already present in contemporary British literature and culture to construct their *sati* figures, Steel also relied on an established set of conventions with its own ideological underpinnings in constructing her narrative of the Mutiny. By the time Steel was writing, however, the *sati* narrative was itself an established genre in British colonial writing, a genre whose conventions would have been recognizable and legible both to Steel and to her readers, and which carried with it an investment in the ideology of the civilizing mission that the *sati* debaters and Mainwaring had been struggling to define. Also by this time, however, the British colonial ideology had changed, at least partly in response to the Mutiny that was Steel's subject. While the ideology of the civilizing mission was still present in the 1890s, it was by no means uncontested, nor was it even the dominant ideological strain in a post-Mutiny period characterized by an imperialist domination over a threatening racial other conceived as controllable, but not necessarily alterable. By importing the *sati* narrative as an ideologically rich set of conventions into her Mutiny novel, Steel enlists the *sati* narrative

and its associations with the civilizing mission in the service of a quite different definition of British colonialism in the post-Mutiny period. She too engages British feeling and affective identification, but whereas the *sati* debaters and Mainwaring were both interested in evoking feelings, Steel was rather interested in defusing them—in taking the strong feelings still stirred by the Mutiny and transforming them into a watchful, but safe, distance between Anglo and native India.

### **Feeling, Desire, and Rebellion: The *Sati* Debate in British India**

When Governor General William Bentinck legislated against the practice of widow immolation in 1829, his decision was the highly controversial culmination of decades of debate over whether to permit or abolish the practice. Except in Calcutta—where *sati* had been abolished in 1798<sup>8</sup>—until 1805 there was no official policy on the practice, and East India Company administrators were unofficially encouraged to prevent *satis* when possible through persuasion.<sup>9</sup> In 1805, after a magistrate in Behar reported that a twelve-year-old girl was being forced onto her husband's funeral pyre, Lord Richard Wellesley, Governor General at the time, asked the provincial court of Nizamat Adalat to investigate whether it might be possible to abolish *sati* and, in keeping with the Company's policy of non-interference in Hindu and Muslim religious practices, to determine the extent to which *sati* was sanctioned by the Hindu scriptures.<sup>10</sup> Based on the court's response, in 1813 the East India Company issued a circular instructing that the practice of *sati* was based on Hindu religious beliefs and outlining the conditions under

which the practice was legal—that is, consistent with the scriptural foundation—and those conditions under which the government would consider it illegal. The circular “defined an ‘illegal’ suttee as one when a widow (a) committed suttee under compulsion, (b) was intoxicated with drugs or liquor, or (c) was pregnant or had a child under three years whose nurture by another person could not be provided for.”<sup>11</sup> Following the issuance of the circular, officials began keeping a careful record of all “legal” and “illegal” *satis* in their jurisdiction, and officials were instructed to use their authority to prevent *satis* that fell outside the bounds of the Company’s definition of legality.

Despite the lack of substantial change in British policy during the period, the years between 1813 and the abolition of *sati* in 1829 saw rising numbers of recorded “legal” *satis*, as well as an increasingly intense debate in England and in British India over the practice’s continued toleration. Though the British commonly expressed repulsion at the practice, there was little agreement when it came to the question of whether the government should take action to interfere with widow immolations. Once they had established that *sati* had a foundation in the Hindu scriptures, British officials were divided about whether to follow the general policy of respecting religious customs or to outlaw the practice as part of the supposedly civilizing mission of the British government. Arguments both for and against abolition are revealing as indicators of British anxieties over the colonies in India and their implications for English identity. Advocates for abolition saw the government’s countenance of *sati* as a reflection on English morality and the national character. Peggs, for example, argues that by allowing *sati* in India, the British bring shame to themselves:

And when it is considered, that this practice causes the death of a greater number of persons in one year, who, *if they ought not to be thus burnt alive*, involve the country in all the guilt of innocent blood, than are publicly executed for their crimes throughout the whole of India in the course of twenty years, it cannot be wrong to call to this momentous subject the attention of every friend to his country.<sup>12</sup>

The willingness to tolerate in India what the British would not tolerate at home, Peggs implies, is a source of guilt for the national character.

On the other side of the argument, opponents of abolition betrayed an anxiety over the strength of the British hold on India in their fears about the consequences of interfering with Hindu religious practices. Governor generals prior to Bentinck had refused to pursue abolition on the grounds that a rebellion might ensue if the British offended the religious sensibilities of the Hindu population. Bentinck, who was faced with the problem of *sati* almost immediately after his arrival in India as Governor General, articulated the dilemma in a November 1828 circular he addressed to military officers soliciting opinions on the subject:

Of the rite itself, of its horror and abomination not a word need be said.... The whole and sole justification is state necessity—that is, the security of the British empire, and even that justification, would be, if at all, still very incomplete, if upon the continuance of the British rule did not entirely depend the future happiness and improvement of the numerous population of this eastern world.<sup>13</sup>

In particular, Bentinck was concerned that a law against *sati* would create in the sepoys a will to rebellion and an aversion to British authority:

Notwithstanding an apparent passive submission to an edict for the discontinuance of suttee, would the effect of such a measure be to create sullenness amongst the men, or any distrust of our motives; or would it be likely to generate and diffuse among the native soldiers the slightest aversion to our rule and authority?<sup>14</sup>



Despite the implication that there was not already “the slightest aversion” to British rule within the native population, Bentinck had first-hand experience with sepoy resistance to the British government. While he was governor of the Madras presidency in July 1806, there was a mutiny in the Madras sepoy army<sup>15</sup> for which the East India Company directors at the time held Bentinck responsible, and in his Minute on Sati he references this event as reason for his hesitation to abolish *sati*:

When governor of Madras, I saw, in the mutiny of Vellore, the dreadful consequences of a supposed violation of religious customs upon the minds of the native population and soldiery: I cannot forget that I was then the innocent victim of that unfortunate catastrophe, and I might reasonably dread, when the responsibility would justly attach to *me* in the event of failure, a recurrence of the same fate.<sup>16</sup>

Bentinck was by no means alone in his apprehensions. In his response to Bentinck’s decision to abolish *sati*, Sir Charles Metcalfe agrees with the decision, but worries that it will “inflame the passions of the multitude and produce a religious excitement, the consequences of which, if once set in action, cannot be foreseen.”<sup>17</sup> Even advocates for abolition felt compelled to address the problem of potential rebellion; Peggs, for instance, dedicated an entire section of his pamphlet to an argument for the “propriety and safety of the immediate suppression of Suttees.”<sup>18</sup>

On both sides of the debate, then, the British investment in the question of *sati* was an investment in defining the character of Britain as a colonizing nation. Moreover, the debate—though certainly controversial as to what action the government should take—was hardly reflective of a polarized British view of *sati* or of Britain’s involvement in India. Rather, advocates for and opponents of abolition emphasized different aspects of the same set of issues. The two sides agreed that the practice of *sati* was horrible,

barbarous, and a blot on the British nation; they agreed that though Britain would be defined in part through its relationship to India, Britain would also be identified through its difference from India; and they agreed that the British occupation of India constituted a civilizing presence that was ultimately for the good of the native population. The fantasy of national identity that emerged through this debate, therefore, was deeply ambivalent, torn between an anxious investment in the British occupation of India and a desire to distance Britain from a territory in which a practice as repulsive as *sati* was condoned.

Within this context, the imagery of burning widows functioned as one site where these ambivalent fantasies of British national and colonial identity could be negotiated. Mani argues that despite the intensity of the debate over *sati*, the women themselves were not its primary subjects: “Discursively, then, women remain a minor theme. Although it is ostensibly the question of whether they should live or die that inaugurates and sustains the debate, the materiality of their burning bodies and the anguish of their pain are remarkably absent from its purview.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, even though the rhetoric of the debate tended to hyperbolize the thousands of victims, the mothers put to death by their own sons, and the spectacle of burning, the women described are more abstract concept than material body or actual person. And yet, the imagery of *sati* repeatedly returns in both visual and figurative representations to the image of the burning body or the body in imminent danger of burning. Though “the materiality of [the women’s] burning bodies and the anguish of their pain” were not the primary subjects of the debate, these same material burning bodies were the source of its power insofar as the intractability of the

material, which was beyond the control of the colonizers, was transformed through the act of representation into the controllability of the image. As they debated and imagined the “inhuman and impious sacrifice”<sup>20</sup> of Indian women, and as they feared the potential for rebellion should they take action to prevent this sacrifice, the British colonizers themselves sacrificed the materiality of women’s bodies to the imagery of the sati’s body, creating in the process a tractable, governable image through which to define and manage Britain’s identity in relationship to its territories in India.

Beyond the control of bodies, and by extension of populations and territories, that this sacrifice suggested, this representation further enabled an appropriation of the sati’s desire and a fantasy that the British were able to define and articulate that desire. Besides the issue of the scriptural foundation for *sati*, the other constant in both official and unofficial representations that circulated before 1829 was the question of the sati’s desire to live or die. Though their language for articulating this desire varies—it has been termed desire, wish, will, consent, intention, choice, and volition—accounts of widow immolation repeatedly come to the question of whether the women who became satis went willingly to burn on their husbands’ funeral pyres, or whether they were forced to die by their husbands’ relatives, by Brahmin priests, by spectators holding the women down or smothering them with branches, or by drugs administered to make the women obedient during the ritual. Despite the varied language, however, the British were actually not concerned with will, consent, intention, or volition—all of which imply a conscious and reasoned decision. Indeed, Mani argues that the British accepted the

possibility of a *sati* based on free will only as an abstract concept: “In reality, the widows were presumed to be uneducated and incapable of both reason and independent action.”<sup>21</sup>

Rather than such conscious mental acts as will or consent, I would argue that the British were more concerned with defining the widows’ *desire*—an unconscious structure that is “beyond conscious articulation, for it is barred or repressed from articulation.”<sup>22</sup>

Unlike demand—or will, or consent—desire cannot be spoken or consciously articulated by the desiring subject. In its undermining of conscious activity, desire becomes for the observer a problem of, or an opportunity for, interpretation, where the desire of the other becomes a text to be read and explicated, where the subject’s conscious statements of will are not necessarily consistent with the unconscious articulation of desire, and where the observer in a position of relative power can use that power to appropriate the authority to interpret that desire. Furthermore, unlike will or consent, desire has the potential for a bodily expression. Will and consent are expressed verbally; both require of the subject a conscious, unforced statement of intention. Desire, by contrast, cannot be articulated in language but can find unconscious expression through the body. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz argues that desire inscribes the body: “The body is quite literally rewritten, traced over, by desire. Desire is based on a veritable cartography of the body (one’s own as well as that of the other).”<sup>23</sup> Grosz’s statement implies that the body is inscribed not only by the subject’s desire as it finds corporeal expression, but that the desire of the other also contributes to the body’s inscription. Thus even as the British observers “read” on the *sati*’s body the inscription of her desire, their representations of this body and their interpretations of its desire are more accurately a reflection of the

observers' own desires, inscribed through the acts of representation and interpretation onto the imagined body of the sati.

These representations addressed the questions of both consent and desire, but while consent was a legal designation established fairly quickly by observers based on whether or not the women uttered a verbal statement, writers offered elaborate proofs to support their interpretations of the women's desire. More often than they posed the question, witnesses and participants in the debate implicitly assumed the question of desire and provided an explicit answer, offering a statement as to the voluntary or involuntary nature either of a particular case or of *sati* as a general practice. Because British policy between 1813 and 1829 defined the legality or illegality of instances of *sati* largely based on whether the widows expressed consent, officials who witnessed widow burnings were required to ascertain that the women had, in fact, consented and were not compelled or drugged to enforce compliance. In British accounts, however, there is often a slippage from consent to desire, so that regardless of spoken consent, witnesses either based findings of legality or illegality, or of "good" or "bad" *satis*, on their readings of the widow's desire, or else lamented the law's definition of consent in the face of ambiguous desire.

As Hindu families were required during this period to apply to a government official for permission to perform a *sati* ritual, there are many accounts of British officials conversing with Hindu widows in order to establish their consent and/or their desire to ascend the funeral pyre, and, most often, to attempt to dissuade them from doing so. Mani records an 1823 account of a prevented *sati* that was printed in the *Asiatic Journal*:

“I asked her, if she intended to ascend the flaming pile of her deceased partner in life? she [*sic*] unhesitatingly replied that she did; and that the time for the ceremony had arrived.”<sup>24</sup> Following this statement of intention, the author of the account records that he succeeded in persuading the woman to change her mind by assuring her that her future subsistence could be provided for. As Mani argues, this change of decision based on an assurance of financial support suggests that questions of consent and will were in actuality quite complex and made problematic by the material and social conditions that attached to Hindu widows, who became outcasts in their communities and often lacked the financial means of supporting themselves after their husbands’ deaths.<sup>25</sup> In this example, the subsistence needs of the body become the basis for revealing the gap between consent and desire. When challenged by the promise of material security, the woman’s spoken consent to die was revealed as contrary to her desire to live. Besides claims about the gap between consent and desire in individual cases, participants in the *sati* debate made similar claims about *sati* as a practice, suggesting that even in cases of the women’s verbal consent, the extreme measures necessary to prevent women from escaping the funeral pyre reveal that the women could not possibly have *desired* to die. An observer speaking before the House of Commons in 1813 offered such an argument: “[S]urely none that saw the convulsed twitching of the hand and sinews could hesitate for an instant in thinking, that if they had not been prevented by the weight of wood, they would have endeavoured to escape from the excruciating death.”<sup>26</sup> The “convulsed twitching” of the women’s bodies, in combination with the wood that holds them on the pyre, is legible to the witness as the expression of a desire to live.

When *sati* accounts did claim that the women gave informed and unforced consent to their own deaths, they often went to extreme lengths to demonstrate that beyond the spoken consent, the women had a desire to burn with their husbands' bodies. In his *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, for example, Major-General William Sleeman records his involvement with a widow burning that took place in the village of Gopalpur in November 1829, only a few days before Bentinck outlawed the practice. Having received and refused an application from the family for permission for the *sati*, Sleeman ordered that anyone who brought wood to the husband's funeral pyre would be charged with murder if the *sati* occurred, thereby forcing the family to burn the husband's body by itself. Sleeman reports that the widow sat for days by the edge of the river and refused to eat or drink, and he records a conversation he had with her in which she assured him repeatedly that she wanted to become a *sati*:

She talked very collectedly, telling me that "she had determined to mix her ashes with those of her departed husband, and should patiently wait my permission to do so, assured that God would enable her to sustain life till that was given, though she dared not eat or drink."<sup>27</sup>

According to Sleeman's paraphrasing of the conversation, he is only fully convinced of the woman's desire to burn herself when she offers her body as evidence:

She smiled, but held out her arm and said, "My pulse has long ceased to beat, my spirit has departed, and I have nothing left but a little *earth*, that I wish to mix with the ashes of my husband. I suffer nothing in burning; and, if you wish proof, order some fire, and you shall see this arm consumed without giving me any pain". I did not attempt to feel her pulse, but some of my people did, and declared that it had ceased to be perceptible.<sup>28</sup>

Here, the woman's body is more convincing as an expression of her desire than is her word, and Sleeman takes her imperceptible pulse and her willingness to burn her arm as

evidence that her spoken consent is based on a desire to burn. Nor is Sleeman's the only account of women giving bodily proof of their desire to die. In *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India*, Catherine Weinberger-Thomas describes this "trial by fire," as she terms it, as a "ritual sequence" that sometimes accompanied *satis* when a foreign observer was involved, where the widow would prove her fidelity to her husband as well as her desire to become a sati first through a spoken declaration of her intention and then through burning a part of her body, usually her arm or a finger.<sup>29</sup>

Whether or not we agree with the conclusions these observers and debaters draw about the voluntary or involuntary nature of *sati*,<sup>30</sup> we have to question the ethics of these acts of representation and interpretation whereby women are transformed into images and their imagined bodies into legible texts. In these readings of the sati's desire, the writers use their positions of authority to deprive the actual women they describe of the agency to speak for themselves. Through these interpretations of the sati's desire, we learn more about the desires and the identities of the British who create the images than about the actual women they represent. Always mediated through the eyes and the language of others, whether British officials, missionaries, or Indian men, neither the consciousness nor the desire of these women is any more accessible to us than it was to the British who attempted to read the sati's desire through her body. What the images do offer, however, is a text through which to read the desires and fantasies that shaped British conceptions of the relationships between England and India. The tractable images of the sati's body, interpreted by British writers, became sites on which these writers inscribed British desires, anxieties, and fears about national identity in relation to empire.



But the traces of British desires are not only evident in the images of the sati's body. Within these accounts of *satis*, the observers themselves become virtual bodies, constructed through their relationship to the sati and, more specifically, through their expression of their *feelings* about the *satis* they witness or imagine. The frequency with which the language of feeling appears in these accounts is striking. Eyewitness accounts of *sati* often describe the feelings of horror and suffering the observers experienced at viewing the burning:

I can safely aver, that I suffered more on the occasion than her cruel conexions [*sic*], who prepared her for burning with all the apathy and unfeeling barbarity that we may suppose apparent in the savages of America, when urged by a sentiment of revenge acting upon a savage mind, and in retaliation for injuries received. I would willingly endure a week's gout, rather than suffer again what I did on this day, in the vain hope of saving a life; for though frequent repetitions of these cruel scenes have not blunted my feelings on the subject, I could not divest myself of the hope of success without a trial, though the cholera might have been the result.<sup>31</sup>

In this example, physical and emotional feelings are explicitly linked as the observer measures his feelings of suffering from the “vain hope” of saving a sati's life in relation to his willingness to suffer the physical pain of gout or cholera. The image with which I began—the frontispiece to Peggs' *India's Cries to British Humanity*—visually accomplishes a similar purpose. The presence of the two British figures averting their eyes in an expression of their horror, alongside the clearly suffering but also, through the depiction of her racial difference from the British observers, clearly other body of the sati, constructs British feeling in opposition to Hindu cruelty, enabling a representation of the relationship between Britain and India that suggests the need for the civilizing

influence of a government whose representatives feel the appropriate horror at such a scene.

This language of feeling extends to government accounts of *sati* as well. In his 1828 circular addressed to military officers, Bentinck self-reflexively refers to his “anxious” feeling at being called upon to make a decision regarding *sati*, then proceeds to use these “feelings of anxiety” to construct a unity of feeling among Christians and Englishmen in the face of this un-English and un-Christian rite: “But to the christian [*sic*] and the Englishman, who by tolerating sanctions, and by sanctioning incurs before God the responsibility of this inhuman and impious sacrifice ... these feelings of anxiety must be and ought to be extreme.”<sup>32</sup> The language of feeling is central to Bentinck’s Minute on Sati as well, where he frames his defense of his decision to abolish *sati* as a demonstration that he was guided by reason rather than emotion:

On the one side, religion, humanity under the most appalling form, as well as vanity and ambition, in short all the most powerful influences over the human heart, are arrayed to bias and mislead judgment. On the other side, the sanction of countless ages, the example of all the Mussulman conquerors, the unanimous concurrence in the same policy of our own most able rulers, together with the universal veneration of the people, seem authoritatively to forbid, both to feeling and to reason, any interference on the exercise of their natural prerogative. In venturing to be the first to deviate from this practice, it becomes me to shew [*sic*], that nothing has been yielded to feeling, but that reason, and reason alone, has governed the decision.<sup>33</sup>

Even as he clearly aligns feeling with the decision to abolish *sati*, Bentinck denies that feeling was the basis for his decision as he asserts the government of “reason, and reason alone.” Yet toward the end of his Minute, after he has demonstrated in detail the reason behind his decision, Bentinck returns once more to feeling: “But discarding, as I have

done, every inviting appeal from sympathy and humanity, and having given my verdict, I may now be permitted to express the anxious feelings with which I desire the success of this measure.” These “anxious feelings” have two components, one of which concerns the Hindu population and the other the British empire and government:

The first and primary object of my heart is the benefit of the Hindus. I know nothing so important to the improvement of their future conditions, as the establishment of a purer morality, whatever their belief, and a more just conception of the will of God.... I disavow in these remarks or in this measure any view whatever to conversion to our own faith. I write and feel as a legislator for the Hindus, and as I believe many enlightened Hindus think and feel.<sup>34</sup>

Though still careful to separate religious conversion from the moral reform he envisions, Bentinck uses his “heart” to portray himself as a feeling legislator acting on behalf of his Hindu subjects for their civilization and enlightenment. The second feeling Bentinck expresses is his “ambition ... to wash out a foul stain upon British rule, and to stay the sacrifice of humanity and justice to a doubtful expediency,” and his “deeply anxious” feeling “that our course shall be in accordance with the noble example set to us by the British government at home and that the adaptation ... to the circumstances of this vast Indian population, of the same enlightened principles, may promote here as well as there, the general prosperity, and may exalt the character of our nation.”<sup>35</sup> If his first feeling expresses a desire to bring the Hindus and British India closer to British conceptions of moral behavior, his second expresses a desire to affirm and increase the goodness of the British national character through the government’s civilizing actions in India. While the basis in reason that Bentinck articulates in his Minute serves to justify his decision to abolish *sati* and to lend credibility to his actions, these feelings that frame the argument

are far more compelling both as explanation for Bentinck's willingness to depart from the policy of his predecessors and as persuasive appeal to convince others of his decision.

Monika Fludernik, in her article "Suttee Revisited: From the Iconography of Martyrdom to the Burkean Sublime," has noted the language of emotion in nineteenth-century British accounts of *sati* and has linked this language primarily to conventions of the Burkean sublime and tangentially to the sentimental novel. Fludernik focuses primarily on the responses of terror and horror expressed by witnesses, arguing that in his passivity and inability or unwillingness to act to prevent *satis*, the British witness "resembles less the chivalrous knight of honor than the sentimental hero whose ineffectual emotional involvement in the misery with which he is confronted renders him a laughingstock and ... makes him subject to moral reproach and condemnation."<sup>36</sup> She suggests that British witnesses experienced both pleasure—insofar as the sublime causes a "titillating" delight or "thrill of horror"<sup>37</sup>—and guilt at their own impassivity, and that these emotions, the experiences of the observers rather than of the victims, are the central concern of British accounts of *sati*: "The entire scenario serves as a spectacle to the uninvolved tourist or British officer, and their reports catalogue the visual impact of the ritual on the male colonizer and the emotion it elicits in the mind of this observer."<sup>38</sup> While Fludernik's argument is persuasive in its reading of the language of the sublime in *sati* accounts and in its claim that the ambivalent emotional experience of the British observers takes precedence over the suffering of the *satis*, I disagree with her characterization of these witness accounts as "uninvolved" or as constructing their authors as ineffectual sentimental heroes who are rendered laughingstocks. This

characterization suggests that authors of these accounts were not only borrowing the conventions, but were actually placing themselves within a genre that after 1815, as Mary Lenard demonstrates in *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell, and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture*, was increasingly, pejoratively regarded as intellectually suspect, feminized, and associated with an indulgence in superficial emotions.<sup>39</sup> However self-involved the debaters' accounts of *sati* may have been, these writers were invested in their positions, took seriously their roles in the civilizing mission of British colonialism, and portrayed themselves neither as uninvolved nor as ineffectual "laughingstocks."

We might better understand the language of feeling in the *sati* debate not in the context of the sentimental novel of the early nineteenth century, but rather in terms of a residual structure of feeling carried over from the eighteenth-century tradition of sensibility and its role in humanitarian and philanthropic endeavors. While the idea of "sentimentalism" and the conventions of sentimental literature had by the 1820s acquired derogatory associations—in part because the sentimental novel was regarded as a women's genre—the roots of nineteenth-century sentimentalism in the eighteenth-century "cult of sensibility" and the idea of the "man of feeling" had none of these derogatory associations. Rather, the cult of sensibility emphasized the role of "refined and elevated feeling" in the formation of moral judgments and understood feeling, not reason, as the source of social benevolence.<sup>40</sup> Though Bentinck's insistence on the primacy of reason in his decision to abolish *sati* implies a hesitancy to associate himself with sentimentalism and its pejorative associations, his repeated return to his feelings on the subject, together with the fact that his feelings are so much more compelling as

justification for his decision than the reasons he offers, would suggest that despite an explicit rejection of sentimentalism, the language of feeling continues to be intertwined with ideas of social benevolence. The residual structures of eighteenth-century ideas of sensibility are even more prominent (and less apologetic) in accounts of *sati* from missionary writers like Peggs—a tendency that might be explained by the continued reliance of British Evangelical Christian movements on a discourse of eighteenth-century sensibility well into the nineteenth century, as Lenard argues that sentimental attitudes were “acceptable in religious practice long after they were devalued in literature.”<sup>41</sup>

By understanding the language of feeling in the *sati* debate not simply as a reflection of an ambivalent guilty pleasure on the part of witnesses, but rather as part of a structure of feeling related to conceptions of the roots of social benevolence and philanthropy, I contend that we can better comprehend how British participants in the *sati* debate constructed the nature of their own involvement in the *satis* they witnessed, as well as the involvement of the British public. In her study *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context*, Ann Jessie Van Sant argues that eighteenth-century philanthropic organizations enlisted the sympathy of their audiences for the recipients of aid by using images of suffering to appeal to readers’ senses of sight and touch in creating a sympathetic identification between the audience and the person in need of the audience’s help. Van Sant notes the importance of the particularized image in engaging the visual as a means to evoking feelings of sympathy: “Particularity is the writer’s means of creating images, and thus of turning readers into spectators.... [I]n order to affect the heart, one must work through the eyes, creating vivid images through

particularization....”<sup>42</sup> These images, in turn, produce not just an intellectual impression, but a physiological response in the body of the reader/spectator: “The sight of suffering produces pity because it strongly affects the nervous system, creating a corresponding, or sympathetic, pain in the observer.... The emphasis on sight ... is matched by, even gives way to, an emphasis on the physical response initiated by sight. The reader’s attention is shifted from the visual image to the internal vibrations that it activates.”<sup>43</sup> Applied to the repeated constructions of spectacular images of the sati’s body on the burning pyre, Van Sant’s account suggests that we might read the “involvement” of the creators of these images not in terms of their incapacity or unwillingness to save the individual satīs they portray, but rather in terms of their ability to elicit a particular bodily response and consequently a sympathetic identification in their readership. By presenting this spectacle of suffering to the British public, the debate participants were not constructing themselves as ineffectual sentimental heroes, but were instead using the capacity of these images to effect widespread changes in feeling that would enable a transformation of Company policy on *sati*. In the process, they constructed a virtual corporeal relationship between the imagined body of the sati and the feeling body of the British public.

In order to illustrate how the language of feeling in the *sati* debate uses the feeling body to figure the relationship between Britain and India, I return to a passage from Peggs, in which he appeals to British feelings about *sati* by constructing Britain itself as a feeling woman:

How would Britain feel, if within herself a hundred innocent persons suffered death by some mistake of law in the course of a year! How then ought she to feel when in only one province of her foreign dominions nearly a thousand innocent widows are every year burnt to death? Were

this inhuman persecution ... directed by the supporters against any particular *sect*, or class of men, they would long ago have appealed to their rulers for redress, or they would have left the spot where they were treated with such cruelty. But how can mothers and sisters make an appeal against their own relatives? How can a wife, a mother, withdraw from her own family? They may endure continual agony under the apprehension of the dreadful doom which they know awaits them on the first fatal attack of disease on their husbands,—they may feel their anguish renewed at the sight of every female neighbor they behold led forth to the flames—they may even tremble at every touch of disease that affects their husbands, and weep at every recollection of their hapless children;—but can they leave the scene of suffering? can they make *known* their sorrows? dare they bewray [*sic*] ... the anguish which preys on their vitals? They lie bound as sheep for the slaughter;—and thus they must remain, suffering in silence, till *British feeling and sympathy shall duly realize* their hitherto unknown, unpitied misery.<sup>44</sup>

I have quoted this passage at length because, in its movement from feeling Britain to the feelings of Hindu women to “British feeling and sympathy,” this appeal brings together the desiring bodies of the Hindu women as Peggs imagines them and the feeling bodies of the British public into a corporeal image for British India as defined by the relationship between the two sets of bodies. The physicality of the Hindu wives Peggs constructs, who “endure continual agony,” “tremble,” “weep,” and feel “anguish which preys on their vitals” at the ever-present prospect of burning as *satis*, testifies to India’s desire to be liberated from its silent suffering by the morally superior, more civilized, and even more human—as compared to the “inhuman persecution” of the Hindu women who “lie bound as sheep for the slaughter”—Britain. At the same time, the appeal Peggs makes to the “feeling and sympathy” of his readers constructs them, as representatives of feeling Britain and by way of their sympathy for the suffering Hindu women, as a collective embodiment of this morally superior, more civilized, more human Britain. Van Sant notes that the relationship constructed between spectator and philanthropic object through



the spectacle of suffering is one that preserves the distance between them even as it creates a sympathetic identification: “The distance created by the artificiality of the presentation (an aesthetic distance) coincides with—even represents—the social distance between contributor and philanthropic object. The drama ... provided the illusion of immediacy and the actuality of distance.”<sup>45</sup> By representing both the women who became *satis* and the culture that persecuted them as less human than the sympathetic British public, Peggs effectively preserves a comfortable distance between India and the British public, even as he enlists the sympathy of the latter. Thus in his sentimental appeal for the victims of *sati*, Peggs constructs an embodiment of the colonial relationship that articulates a hierarchy of morality and humanity: Britain’s civilization, humanness, and moral goodness is established through the strength of its feeling for the uncivilized, “inhuman,” immoral, and suffering India.

Insofar as Peggs, Bentinck, and other participants in the *sati* debate drew on understandings of feeling as the basis for social benevolence inherited from the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility, their choices about how to construct the images of *satis* they presented were informed by a tradition which used the spectacle of suffering bodies in the service of humanitarian social change. Considered within this context, what first appear to be merely self-involved articulations of an ambivalent emotional response reappear as texts engaged in articulating and defining larger relationships between Britain and colonial India. In drawing on the rhetoric of sensibility for their images of *sati*, these writers used the spectacle of suffering to elicit the elevated and refined feeling of the British public, even as this feeling defined that public as different from and superior to

the sufferer. Likewise, this imagined relationship between the sati and the British public figuratively represented a relationship between Britain and India based on the definition of Britain as a civilizing, humanitarian presence in an inhuman place, where the very sympathy implied by the reform projects of the civilizing mission served to maintain the distance and difference between colonizer and colonized.

**Wifely Devotion and Burning Priests: Mainwaring's *The Suttee, or, the Hindoo Converts* (1830)**

Though Mrs. General Mainwaring wrote her three-volume novel *The Suttee, or the Hindoo Converts*<sup>46</sup> at the height of the debate over the abolition of *sati*, and though her representation is in some ways similar to others in the debate, both her representation and the embodiment of British India that she constructs through her *sati* narrative are significantly different from those that emerged from the primarily male voices that dominated the debate. While little information is available about Mainwaring—even her first name, which she never uses either in *The Suttee* or in her other published novel, *Moscow; or The Grandsire: An Historical Tale* (1822),<sup>47</sup> remains unknown—what we do know indicates a position at once within and outside of the sphere of the debate proper. According to an article by Robin Jared Lewis—the only recent critical work on *sati* that even briefly addresses Mainwaring's novel<sup>48</sup>—*The Suttee* was the “most widely read and influential production” within a subgenre of “reform-minded novels, most of them crude and polemical, that appeared in the 1820s and 1830s.”<sup>49</sup> As her dedication of her novel to

the Duchess of Gloucester for her “interest in ... whatever tends to advance the cause of humanity and religion” (1:i) suggests, Mainwaring’s “reform-minded” novel contributes to the political debate over *sati* from the position of a Christian missionary work whose explicit goal is to arouse sympathy for efforts to “emancipate the Hindoos from the bondage of superstition” (1:ii) by converting them to Christianity: “At length the call of philanthropy is raised, and the abominations which defile British India must be exterminated. When that desirable work is accomplished, then may it be expected that the mild but quiescent morality of the Hindoo character will bring forth the fruits of righteousness, by the influence of the Gospel” (1:ii-iii). In the missionary approach to *sati* that her novel takes from this opening dedication, Mainwaring aligns her work with the voices of people like Peggs and missionary societies in Britain that entered the debate under the auspices of religious and humanitarian reform work.

Yet even as her self-positioning aligns her with these missionary voices, it also reveals ways in which Mainwaring differs from other participants in the *sati* debate. First, Mainwaring was a resident in another part of the British empire, the British West Indies, where her husband was stationed while she was writing *The Suttee*, but at least prior to the publication of her novel, she had no first-hand experience with India. Rather, unlike most participants in the *sati* debate who either resided in India or took their cues from the reports on *sati* that were coming from British India, Mainwaring took her inspiration and her information from the writings of Sir William Jones, the late eighteenth-century poet and Orientalist scholar whose twenty-volume *Asiatic Researches* established him for the British as an expert on Indian culture and affairs. Instead of

focusing on actual recent occurrences of widow immolations, Mainwaring creates a fictional, highly romanticized and sentimental narrative of *sati* that, in taking as its setting the British campaigns against the demonized Muslim ruler Tipu Sultan beginning in 1790,<sup>50</sup> places its events prior to the legislative history of the *sati* debate that began with the circular order of 1813. Moreover, neither in the body of the text nor in the preface or dedication does Mainwaring ever allude to the issue of legal abolition. She states clearly that *sati* and other “abominations that defile British India must be exterminated” (1:ii), but her vision of how this “extermination” should happen is religious and cultural in nature, based not on an institutional reform but on a model of individual conversion away from the “superstition” of Hindu practices and toward Christianity and English cultural practice.

As Cheryl McEwan argues in *Gender, Geography and Empire*, British women’s access to the colonies in the nineteenth century was limited, both in terms of their ability to travel and in terms of any recognition that women could contribute to the production of knowledge about the empire.<sup>51</sup> As the wife of a British general and as a woman interested in missionary endeavors, Mainwaring’s presence in the West Indies and her interest in the colonies could be legitimated, but these considerations were not enough to legitimate her participation in a debate over colonial legislation or in its competing definitions of colonial relationships or identities. In the *sati* debate, women were the objects of discussion, and just as Hindu women were constructed as victims to be saved, British women were held up as their cultural and moral antitheses, preserved from the fate of Hindu women by the superior moral character of British society. British women

were thus those of whom Peggs and others could ask British men, “How would you feel if it was your mother/sister/wife?”—not voices in the debate in their own right.

Despite this exclusion, however, Mainwaring’s presence in the British West Indies in the 1820s suggests another context through which we might read her novel alongside other women’s participation in social reform movements—namely, the prominence of women in anti-slavery campaigns leading up to the 1833 abolition of slavery in British territories. According to Moira Ferguson in *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834*, following the 1807 abolition of the slave trade, there was a lull in anti-slavery activity, which did not gain momentum again until the 1820s. At that point, the campaign for emancipation was dominated by women: “Thousands of women from the provinces who had been mythologized as domestic angels and the nation’s moral instructors took to the streets, writing and distributing political resolutions door-to-door, and using their economic power as consumers by refusing to buy slave-grown sugar, tea, and coffee.”<sup>52</sup> The mid-1820s brought a proliferation of women’s anti-slavery societies, the number of which grew from four to 39 from 1826 to 1831, and women’s participation in other anti-slavery groups increased as well, so that “[a]fter 1828 women visibly dominated the movement.”<sup>53</sup> As the wife of a British officer in the West Indies during this period, Mainwaring would certainly have been familiar with these movements and with women’s participation in them.

The historical context of women’s role in the emancipation movements of this period further provides a political context for Mainwaring’s use of the genre of the sentimental novel in 1830. Whereas Bentinck was careful to distance his use of the

language of feeling from a feminized sentimentalism, women writers and reformers used the feminization of sentimental conventions as a basis for their involvement in social and political issues, producing a prolific social reform literature to support their work in anti-slavery campaigns, foreign missions, and other philanthropic endeavors.<sup>54</sup> The sentimentalist discourse that emerged in the early nineteenth century and informed this literature relied on an explicitly “feminine,” domestic ideology that identified women with a “‘naturally’ more emotional and spiritual perspective”: “This sentimentalist discourse derived from two major factors: first, material conditions that necessitated the construction of a new, affective, morality in social reform discourse and second, a domestic ideology that gave women ‘natural’ dominance over both morality, and affect.”<sup>55</sup> Such a domestic ideology and affective morality became a means by which women writers attempted to use feeling to effect political change, taking advantage of their association with the private sphere of the home and spirituality to legitimate their participation in public debates.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the language of feeling employed within the dominant texts of the *sati* debate, the sentimental conventions used by these women writers emphasized the feminine and the domestic as a means to accessing the moral and spiritual authority imparted to women by this domestic ideology.

Though its subject matter—*sati* in India instead of slavery in the West Indies or poverty at home—sets *The Suttee* apart somewhat, Mainwaring’s novel clearly belongs within this context of women’s reform literature. Written very much in the mode of the sentimental novel, *The Suttee* is overt and explicit in its privileging of feeling and appeal to readers’ emotions, its focus on the domestic sphere and “feminine” values, and its

investment in a politics based on these values. Lenard argues that women writing in this mode seized “on the political potential implicit within the domestic ideology, [and] used its imperatives to become the ‘natural’ authors of a discourse that would create affective bonds between the ‘two nations’ divided by the disappearance of the moral economy.”<sup>57</sup> While the “two nations” to which Lenard refers are the “nations” of the rich and the poor in England, the idea that a sentimental discourse works by creating “affective bonds” between distant groups could just as well describe the project of Mainwaring’s novel for India and Britain. Unlike the male-authored texts of the *sati* debate, which evoked a sympathetic identification with the images of *satis* they constructed but actively preserved a safe distance between India and the British public, Mainwaring instead uses sentimental conventions to erase difference from the British India she constructs. By recognizing the ways in which Mainwaring’s representation of *sati*, and particularly of the *sati*’s body, is informed by the conventions and ideological investments of the sentimental reform novel, we can identify in this text an alternative, sometimes complementary and sometimes competing, articulation of the relationship between Britain and India, an articulation derived more from British women’s involvement in reform across locations in England and the empire than in the specific politics of British India.

In Mainwaring’s novel, the primary voices about the practice of *sati* are those of British and Hindu women. An extended and highly romanticized story of the conversion of one Hindu Brahmin family to Christianity, *The Suttee* revolves around the family of Nuradda, a Hindu rajah who has pledged his support for Tipu Sultan against the British,

and his wife Temora. While the military battles and political maneuverings of the wars against Tipu are a constant presence throughout the novel, Mainwaring concentrates primarily on the domestic life of Temora and the other women characters—Temora’s sister Toonah, Nuradda’s sister Azuma, Temora’s ayah, and a British woman, Augusta Belmour, and her daughter Mira, who live with Temora and Nuradda’s family for many years after Nuradda and his son rescue them from tigers.<sup>58</sup> Using colonization and the military resistance of the Hindu and Muslim rulers as a backdrop for the lives of these women, Mainwaring imagines a voice for Hindu women and a dialogue between British and Hindu women about marriage, children, widowhood, and the practice of widow immolation.

Unlike most representations in the *sati* debate, Mainwaring’s narrative presents the Hindu wife not as an unwilling victim of the *sati* ritual, but rather as the most steadfast and sincere adherent to the practice. Temora repeatedly and articulately expresses her desire to be immolated on her husband’s funeral pyre when he dies, and she even expresses surprise and incomprehension that Augusta Belmour continues to live as a widow: “‘Ah! Why have you survived him?’ said Temora. ‘With us it is a duty, and a happiness, to die with the lords of our life; and the widowed spirit that ascends, in the pure flame of the funereal pile, aspires to everlasting bliss; the gates of Paradise open for such, without further probation on this earth’” (2:109). Rather than representing Temora as a victim, forced against her will to burn with her husband’s corpse, Mainwaring instead constructs her as an idealized figure who combines the domestic virtues of wifely duty with the romance of union through true love. Indeed, despite their different attitudes



toward widowhood and *sati*, Temora and Augusta express quite similar ideals of love and marriage, so that the novel does not contrast British with Indian women, but rather contrasts British and Hindu women with the condition of Muslim women. Whereas Nuradda and Temora's marriage is monogamous and based on an idealized, mutual love and respect that is similar to the relationship between Augusta and her husband, the sisters of Nuradda and Temora are at different times married to the same Muslim husband, Timor, whose polygamous household is represented as a place where marriage is a source of unhappiness, jealousy, and cruelty. In constructing Temora's desire to become a *sati* as an expression—albeit a misguided expression—of her underlying desire for union with her husband, Mainwaring suggests that Hindus are essentially admirable and virtuous, similar in feeling to the best of British society, but that the religious practice of Hinduism perverts this feeling into those “abominations” which Mainwaring addresses in her dedication to the novel. Her preface, in fact, is largely an apology and explanation for her representation of Hindus as virtuous before their conversion:

It may be considered requisite, by those who condescend to read this work, to offer some apology for adorning the Hindoo family, introduced to their notice in the following pages, with so many virtues, previous to their conversion to the Christian faith; more particularly, as some of the eminent writers of the present day have represented them in a very different point of view. (1:v)

Mainwaring further explains that though she gives the family “simple and natural virtues, attributed to them on such standard authorities” as Sir William Jones, “even if a few of those amiable traits of character are still to be found in that distant region, and among its aboriginal inhabitants, they must in part prepare their docile minds to receive with joy the

blessings that are now offered to their acceptance, by the united labours of the Christian world” (1:vi-vii).

Living up to its preface, *The Sutte* portrays Hindus as endowed with “simple and natural virtues” not as a testimony to the presence of these virtues in the Hindu religion, but as a means of presenting their conversion to Christianity as an inevitable and not at all radical change. Furthermore, the novel aligns religious conversion with an analogous change in cultural and political identification, using the narrative of conversion to effect a de-othering of the Hindu characters, making them by the end of the novel like the British in character, religion, culture, and political allegiance. The novel begins with a triangulation of potential identities within the space of British India, portraying the Hindus as caught between a political alliance with Tipu Sultan and a system of morality more similar to that of the British Christian characters. Mainwaring at once sets up a hierarchy of values for the novel, with Christianity portrayed as morally superior to Hinduism and Islam, and she represents the Hindu family as the ground for a battle between Christianity and Islam, where Hinduism is no longer a viable option and the family’s conversion to one of the other choices is inevitable. On one side, Nuradda has pledged his political and military loyalty to Tipu, who pressures his followers to convert to Islam and rewards those who do convert with status and wealth. This choice for conversion is embodied by Timor, who converted from Hinduism to Islam for political cache and abandoned the cultural identity of Hinduism in favor of what Mainwaring represents as the more permissive, more sensual way of life of a Muslim. In choosing to use Tipu as her representative Muslim character, Mainwaring draws not only on British

fears of Islam as a competing proselytizing force, but also on a history of British fear and hatred of Tipu, whose military forces presented the greatest challenge to British colonization at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries and who became in the British imagination a monstrous figure of a cruel and dangerous enemy. Tipu, who identified with French Republicanism and allied himself with the French against the British in India, represented a threat to the British not only for his military challenge, but also for his associations with revolution. Mainwaring represents the characters of Tipu Sultan and Timor as motivated by greed and ultimately untrustworthy even as allies, as becomes clear when Timor betrays both Tipu and Nuradda by joining forces with the British in exchange for the promise of Nuradda's lands. On the other side, Christianity is identified with Harley, a British officer who teaches Nuradda about Christianity and gives him a bible while Harley is being held as a prisoner of war by Tipu, and with Augusta Belmour and her daughter, who influence the family within the home. The conversion to Christianity is aligned with a political allegiance to the British occupiers and a cultural identity equated with the virtuous Englishness of Harley and Augusta.

The narrative of conversion in *The Suttee* brings together the public space of the military struggle between the British colonizers and the allied Muslim and Hindu rulers, and the private, domestic space of the home through an ideological battle over the practice of *sati*, the rejection of which signals each Hindu character's conversion to Christianity and eventual political alliance with the British. Just as representations of widow burnings within the *sati* debate relied on the figuring of an encounter—between

British observers and Hindu participants, between European values and Hindu “superstitions,” between British feelings and the desiring body of the sati—Mainwaring’s narrative of conversion uses *sati* to stage an encounter between a British Christian and a Hindu cultural and political identity. Unlike most representations within the *sati* debate, however, Mainwaring stages this encounter not as between British men and Hindu women, but as a cross-cultural, homosocial interaction, where the most important dialogues are between British women and Hindu women, and between British men and Hindu men. Whereas the *sati* debate, both in its aim of legal intervention and in its imagery, collapses the domestic space into the public sphere of legislation and constructs the encounter as what Lewis labels a chivalric rescue of Hindu women by British men,<sup>59</sup> *The Suttee* preserves the public and the domestic as separate but related realms, where the most significant encounters are not between women and men or between the domestic and the public, but between two cultures as they meet within the confines of those separate spheres.

Outside the home, Nuradda’s rejection of *sati* is constructed as the culmination of a gradual conversion to Christianity that comes through his interaction with Harley. Speaking to Tipu about his discussion with Harley on the subject of religion, Nuradda characterizes the encounter as informative and unforced rather than judgmental or prescriptive. In portraying this encounter based on mutual respect and exchange, Mainwaring is clearly modeling her ideal encounter between the cultures. This initial meeting between Harley and Nuradda is influential, so that not long after the meeting Nuradda’s heart feels “a void, which Christianity alone was capable of filling up” (2:28),

and at various points Nuradda is represented as being almost a Christian in feeling despite his continued participation in Hindu rituals and practices. Nuradda's rejection of *sati* is the last and most difficult phase of his conversion to Christianity, and this change also happens through the influence of Harley. After the resumption of battles between Tipu and the British, Nuradda writes a letter to Temora in which he recounts a conversation with Harley and asks Temora not to become a sati should he die in battle:

My friend added—"If you fall in this unhappy contest, what will become of Temora?"—"She is the daughter of Brahma," I answered—"the wife of Nuradda; she will do her duty."—"And can you," my friend continued—"can you calmly contemplate the cruel duty that condemns a Hindoo widow to dreadful sacrifice, repugnant to the feelings of all but those devoted to superstitious and degrading idolatry? ... Turn to my people, and embrace our pure faith. Bring your Temora to peace, to happiness, and to Christianity!" (2:269)

Whereas the conversion to Christian beliefs and Christian feeling is represented as the natural extension of an encounter between Hindu and Christian men, Harley's appeal against *sati* incorporates the conviction that dominates Mainwaring's dedication to the novel—that Hindu culture, in its perpetuation of the practice of *sati*, is "repugnant to the feelings" of Christian people. In this appeal to reject *sati*, Mainwaring's narrative of conversion collapses the religious with the cultural, so that Harley's command to "Turn to my people" is at once a call for the Hindu's conversion to Christianity and a call for the Indian's conversion to become more like the British people. Indeed, in Nuradda's response to Harley, even as he defends his beliefs as rooted in "early and hereditary prejudices," he also reveals himself to be allied in feeling with those British observers who experience horror at the idea of *sati*: "I own I cannot contemplate what may be the sufferings of her I love, without a sensation of horror at the religion that enjoins it"

(2:269-270). In a further collapsing of identities, Harley uses this change of feeling to call for a political conversion away from Tipu and toward an alliance with the British forces: “‘Ah then,’ [Harley] added again, ‘forsake [your religion]! embrace our mild faith, which so well accords with the benevolence of your own heart! You will not be required to join against the tyrant you are pledged to support.... It is impossible for Tippoo to resist the forces that threaten him’” (2:270). Harley here combines a plea for the rejection of *sati* with a plea to stop fighting the British occupation of India. In Mainwaring’s representation of Nuradda’s conversion through his rejection of *sati*, she presents a vision of colonial India that involves the religious, cultural, and political assimilation of the Hindu population into the national identity and way of life of the British conquerors.

Yet despite Nuradda’s acceptance of Harley’s plea to reject *sati*, this dialogue between soldiers is not sufficient to effect a political conversion of Nuradda, who decides to keep his pledge of loyalty to Tipu, and is not enough to convince Temora to reject the practice of *sati*. She receives Nuradda’s letter not as a means of freeing herself from a horrible duty, but as a request that she deny herself a privilege granted to Hindu women: “observe—he wishes me to forego the glorious privilege of an affectionate Hindoo wife, that privilege which opened the gates of paradise to my own mother. He forgets that I should degrade myself, and lose my cast [*sic*], could I consent to live, should my husband fall in this inauspicious warfare; but he does not yet know Temora” (2:273). Within the home, Temora’s arguments for *sati* are in fact stronger and less shakable than Nuradda’s beliefs, which Harley is able to change with relative ease despite his inability to shift

Nuradda's political allegiances. The primary dialogue about *sati* in the domestic space is between Augusta and Temora, and while their dialogue is no more effective at dissuading Temora from becoming a sati than Nuradda's letter, it is effective in constructing a likeness of feeling between British and Hindu women. If *sati* creates a likeness of feeling between Nuradda and Harley by evoking a horror of the practice and benevolence toward its victims, the practice reveals an already existing likeness of feeling and desire between Temora and Augusta by serving as a touchstone for measuring the love and devotion each feels toward her husband. In an address to her dead husband, Augusta compares her devotion to the sati's, arguing that she has sacrificed more in choosing to live than the sati does in choosing death:

No Indian widow could devote herself, in honour of her husband, upon the burning pile, with more self-devotion than I do, in thus exposing myself to sufferings, perhaps much greater, in order to preserve my faith and constancy till death. The termination to *their* pain is quick—my trials, for love of thee, sweet innocent! may yet be long and arduous. (2:180-181, original emphasis)

While Augusta is ultimately unsuccessful in convincing Temora to reject *sati*, their dialogue is effective in constructing a similar system of domestic values uniting British and Hindu women. Besides postponing the climactic moment of her conversion, Temora's insistence on her right to become a sati preserves the ideal of self-sacrificing devotion that serves as the basis for her likeness to Mainwaring's ideal British wife.

What brings together the various worlds of the novel—male and female; Hindu, Muslim, and Christian; political and domestic—is the spectacle of widow immolation. The novel's climax comes when, as predicted by Harley, Tipu's forces are defeated and Temora receives from Benrudda, the Brahmin priest, news that her husband and son have

been killed in battle. Temora expresses again her desire to become a sati, with Mainwaring assuring us that “Her pious soul rejoiced to quit a world, that had now become a desolate wilderness to her” (3:38), and Benrudda gives her “stupefying liquid” (3:54) to drug her as the preparations are made. Mainwaring sets the ritual, which takes place without the actual remains of Nuradda, at dusk, and she portrays Temora as the passive victim of the community’s customs:

Salad and the priest advanced, and raised between them the exhausted frame of the devoted victim: she was so weak, that she could not stand, much less walk, and they therefore supported her sinking form. Next followed her nurse, alone and unsupported; for what would life be to her without her darling child? ... Then came in succession the females of the household, lady Augusta and Mira, and after them a long train of kettrees.... (3:54)

In her construction of the scene surrounding this procession, Mainwaring emphasizes Hindu religious images, describing them so as to make the monstrosity of the images testify to the horror of the ritual:

Darkness had now nearly obliterated the last rays of the declining sun; but within the arbour, and full in view, stood the hideous image of Siva [*sic*] the destroyer, surrounded by numerous lamps, whose rays fell on the monstrous idol, making its deformities more visible than the light of day could have done.... (3:54)

Whereas most of the novel up to this point offers a relatively romantic portrait of Hinduism, here the setting of the *sati* ritual literally casts a different light on the religion, altering the portrayal to reveal the religion and its practices as “hideous,” “monstrous,” and marked by “deformities.” Like the image of Siva, the Hindu participants in the ritual, portrayed sympathetically throughout most of the novel, are transformed by their roles in the *sati* ritual:



[T]he voices of the kettrees and of the priest, in chorus, resounded, and were succeeded by the song of the attendant women, who still continued casting their flowery offering on the pile, endeavoring, in soft and animated strains, to support the pale and almost-expiring victim. Thus they sung, while kneeling round their devoted mistress, who lay, as it were, already a corpse, in the arms of Salad and the priest....

This song was repeated by the spectators, in chorus, until their souls, inflated with mad superstition, impelled their hands to approach the lighted brands to the pile. (3:57)

In her description of the “chorus” of “souls, inflated with mad superstition,” Mainwaring shows *sati* to be in practice not a ritual that “opens the gates of paradise to the devoted spirit” (2:194), as Temora understands it, but rather one that transforms India into an image of hell.

It is through the violent convergence of the novel’s separate worlds onto this hellish scene, an encounter that brings together the military-political world of British, Hindu, and Muslim men fighting over the possession of India and the private, domestic world of women and religious ritual, that Mainwaring at once saves her *sati* victim and uses *sati* to embody her vision of British India and its implications for English identity. As “the crackling flames appeared ... demanding, as it were, their expected victim” (3:57), these worlds collide:

Already the priest and Salad had raised their now-insensible burthen to the top of the temporary steps, erected for the purpose, when suddenly, and unexpectedly, a volley of musketry was fired among them, and a troop of horsemen rushed amidst the crowd, dealing death and destruction.

Salad, with the feeling of a soldier, let go his hold of the helpless Temora, turned round to face the foe, and drawing his sabre, called aloud to his kettrees, and in one moment was among them, endeavoring to make a stand against an increasing host of Mahomedans and Christians, who were assailing the garden at all points, under the command of Timor el Dowlah, who came to take possession of Elaramon, which had been ceded to him as a reward of his treachery to Tippoo. (3:57-58)

The separate but simultaneous appearance of British and Muslim troops onto the scene of the *sati* interrupts the ritual, leaving the priest wounded by a bullet and Temora falling into the arms of Aiai, her nurse. In spite of attempts by Benrudda and Aiai to continue the *sati* ritual even with the surrounding confusion, Augusta and Mira, assisted by British soldiers, rescue Temora:

“Vile and detestable Christians,” cried the priest, “impede not the happiness of one who is called by the voice of heaven. Away, I say;” and he endeavored to assist Aiai in what they both considered an act of piety. But the approach of the officers effectually prevented the barbarous deed, for they tore the resistless Temora from the grasp of the priest and the weak hands of Aiai.

“Barbarians!” exclaimed a voice in English, “blood-thirsty idolaters, is this a sacrifice for a God of mercy? Base ministers of evil, cease your impious rites, or go exercise them with devils like yourselves.”  
(3:60)

The culmination of this melodramatic spectacle, as if in confirmation of the British soldier’s judgment of Benrudda, is the substitution of Benrudda for Temora on the burning pyre:

The priest made no reply; he felt that not only himself, but his religion, had received a deadly blow. Uttering a fearful cry of despair, and lifting his hands to heaven, with one convulsive effort he sprang up the wooden steps, threw himself into the midst of the flames, and was seen no more.  
(3:60)

Instead of the Hindu widow—who, as we later learn, is not actually a widow, as Nuradda and Mirza miraculously turn up alive—the priest who urges the *sati* ritual and who enforces the exercise of Hindu customs becomes the sacrifice to the fire.

This substitution of Benrudda for Temora on the funeral pyre obviates the need for Temora to vocalize her desire to become Christian because it removes the religious, cultural, and political identification with Hinduism as a possibility within the world of the

novel. For Temora, the failure of her *sati* transforms her instantly from honored queen to reviled outcast in the Hindu community, making it necessary for her to join Augusta and the British soldiers. Beyond the individual implications for Temora as a failed sati, however, Benrudda's death signals the impossibility of sustaining a Hindu identity within a political world dominated by British and Muslim rulers and within a moral framework that refuses to accept the "barbarous" and "impious rites" of which the English voice accuses Benrudda. The despair Benrudda feels "that not only himself, but his religion, had received a deadly blow" renders his death on the funeral pyre not a sign of his devotion to his religion, but a sign of his obsolescence in view of the "deadly blow" of his encounter with a system of morality that transforms his "act of piety" into an "impious rite," his role from priest fulfilling "the voice of heaven" to a "devil" and "minister of evil." With Benrudda sacrificed to his own ritual, even the Hindu community that rejects Temora begins to disappear, forced to convert to Islam to appease the land's new rulers.

In some respects, Mainwaring's narrative resembles the common accounts of British travelers and officials chivalrously rescuing Hindu women from the funeral pyre, as it describes the British soldiers rescuing the drugged Temora from the Hindu priest trying to throw her into the flames. In her construction of the *sati* scene, Mainwaring in part falls back on conventional representations—the British rescuer, the victimized woman, the barbarity of Hindu custom versus the humanity of the European interloper—even to the point of contradicting other representations of these characters within the novel. But even as Mainwaring's narrative conforms to conventional representations of

*sati* in these respects, it also diverges from them significantly insofar as the British officers who rescue Temora from the funeral pyre are far from the chivalrous figures that dominate *sati* narratives. Mainwaring represents these officers through the characters of Charles Belmour—a corrupt cousin of Augusta’s husband whose attempts to force Augusta into remarriage for his own financial purposes are the reason for Augusta’s choice to live so long with Temora and Nuradda—and his friend Simpton. Both of these characters are self-serving, corrupt, and more focused on using Temora and Augusta to further their own interests than on helping them. Simpton uses Temora’s and Aiai’s fears of being seen or touched by strange men to extort jewels and other articles of value from them, and both Simpton and Belmour take advantage of the public interest in Temora to acquire fame for saving her: “It was known that they had snatched a rajah’s widow from the flames of the funeral pile, and everyone was eager to see the victim, and to learn her name and history.... [I]t was theirs to tell the wondrous tale, and to point out the howdah that conveyed the rescued idolatress” (3:106). By making it necessary for the *sati* to be rescued from her rescuers, Mainwaring turns the *sati* narrative into an occasion for critiquing not only Hindu custom, but also the nature of the British presence in India. In a discussion of another, later British woman—Harriet Martineau in her *British Rule in India*—writing about the condition of women in British India but largely ignoring the subject of *sati*, Sangeeta Ray suggests that in the face of the political and emotional ambivalence of British policy on *sati* as it conflicted with the rhetoric and ideology of British colonialism as a “civilizing mission,” Martineau was unable to speak about *sati* without being confronted with her own gendered disempowerment:

Confronted by the vexed idiom of British policy on sati Martineau can no longer set herself up as the excluded, privileged outsider untainted by the cultural dynamic that seeks to plot the other in a differential and hierarchical economy. The prerogative of racial difference is here occluded by the threatening presence of [the] same—alterity can no longer be contained by the allegory of difference.... The very idea of a superior autochthonous nationality that enables the rhetoric of binarism essential to the imperial mission is made impossible by the dawning realization that not all members of the nation have equal access to the privileged notion of the same. The contested ground of gender at home is made all the more visible because of the treatment of Indian women by the Englishmen.<sup>60</sup>

Whereas Martineau avoids the subject of *sati* because of its revelation of the internal contradictions within British colonial ideology and of the gendered power differential between British men and both British and Indian women, however, Mainwaring attempts to use these contradictions to launch a sentimental critique of a British colonial policy based on the values of territorial acquisition and material gain and to call for a policy based on what Mainwaring portrays as a more feminine set of values centered around missionary Christianity and ideals of domesticity. Faced with the contradictions and inequities of the “contested ground of gender,” Mainwaring does not give up the “privileged notion of the same.” Instead, she offers a changed standard for what should constitute the “same” within the colonial space of British India, a standard based on a model of British womanhood that is available to both British officers and Hindu women should they choose to convert.

Poised between the missionary mode of the conversion narrative, where Britain is the saving presence that facilitates the conversion of the Hindu population to Christianity, and the sentimental mode of political critique, where British officers are themselves criticized for failing to live up to the standards Mainwaring sets through her exemplary

Christian characters, *The Suttee* seeks at once to redefine British identity—particularly in the colonies—in terms of Christianity, and to eliminate the otherness that separates the Hindu population from this version of Britishness. The spectacle of *sati* serves as the stage upon which this definition of British identity and its relationship to India is not only enacted, but embodied through the figures of Temora and Benrudda and their encounters with the British characters. With the substitution of Benrudda for Temora on the pyre, Hinduism is revealed in Mainwaring’s imagined colonial space as a self-consuming, self-obliterating mark of otherness that is imposed and external, and that once stripped away will uncover that likeness of feeling and desire that unites Nuradda and Harley in their horror of *sati* and Temora and Augusta in their desire to be the forever devoted wife.

At the same time, the substitution of Benrudda for Temora as the *sati* figure replaces the strict adherent to Hindu practice with the convert to Christianity as the representative figure for British India’s native population. Mainwaring’s *sati* narrative is concerned not only with assigning degrees of value to religious identities, but with ascribing an identity to British India that conforms to her ideals of national identity based on the superiority of a particularly feminized British identity, centered more around the possession and extension of Christian feeling and domesticity than around the governmental, military, and Company values of territorial expansion and the acquisition of wealth. The novel supports territorial expansion not for its own sake, but insofar as it enables the spread of Christianity and the ideals of wifely duty into the previously “barbarous” territories of India. Though their fates in the novel are quite opposite, Temora and Benrudda actually function as two sides of the same fantasy of colonial

identity in Mainwaring's rewriting of British India, a fantasy based on the "extermination," to return to the language of Mainwaring's dedication, of otherness within the ever-expanding boundaries of the British empire and the replacement of otherness with a replication of that Christian, domestic identity the novel holds up as its ideal. While Benrudda's violent death in the fire of the funeral pyre intended for Temora functions figuratively as an extermination of Hinduism and literally as an extermination of its practitioner from British India, Temora's conversion functions just as powerfully as an extermination of her Hindu identity from her body as representative of those native subjects who must be incorporated into a British national-colonial identity. With her escape from the pyre and her family's conversion, Temora embodies the transformation of otherness into a secure sameness that reinforces the identity of colonizing Britain instead of challenging that identity.

Furthermore, this conversion enables the marriage of Mirza, Temora and Nuradda's son, to Mira, Augusta's daughter, and the novel ends with the information that the children of Mirza and Mira will return to India as Christian missionaries. The fruits of Temora's escape are therefore more than just the singular religious conversion and the singular refiguring of a Hindu wife in the image of an English version of ideal domesticity; rather, with the singular transformation of Temora into Mainwaring's religious and domestic convert comes a theoretically endless replication of her transformation in future generations. The interracial, cross-cultural marriage of Mirza and Mira might be read as liberal in Mainwaring's historical context, particularly as it portrays a marriage between a British woman and a Hindu man, a combination more

fraught with anxiety over the maintenance of racial and cultural boundaries than the more common relationship of British man with (rescued, beautiful, desirable) Hindu woman. Read along the lines of religion and culture, however, which are of greater concern throughout *The Suttee* than is racial difference, Mirza and Mira's wedding could be interpreted as reflecting a quite conservative fantasy of national identity in the colonial context. With his marriage to Mira, Mirza does not bring difference either into the family unit or into England; instead, he is reformed through his marriage and conversion in the image of the ideal British national-colonial identity that Mainwaring holds up in the novel, and through his reformation we have the promise of future agents of reformation with his missionary children. The conversion of Temora and her family, then, is not only a transformation of otherness into sameness, but a transformation of otherness into the means of replicating sameness as future converts themselves become the agents for converting others.

As embodied representations for the ever-expanding national-colonial boundaries of the British empire in India, the dual sati figures of Temora and Benrudda become, through their opposite fates on the margins of British India, the corporeal articulation of those boundaries for separating Britain from its others in a colonial context which is constantly challenging those boundaries. Unlike the Renaissance body politic figure—which, in its capacity as a vehicle for representing a nation imagined as clearly bounded, distinguishable from its others, is located entirely within the national borders, whether it fills those borders or stands as some part within them—Mainwaring's embodiment of colonial India is itself the active articulation of the imaginary borders of a nation that can



no longer exist, even in the imagination, as an entity independent from its occupied territories. Just as the literal boundaries of the empire's territories are always in flux as conquests are made and lost, the imaginary boundaries of the British identity that is mapped onto this territory are also in flux. The contours of this identity are challenged by the contradictions of the imperial project, where races, cultures, religions, lands, and peoples that once helped constitute the "other" by whose difference the nation could be defined now must be somehow incorporated into that conception of national identity without losing the difference, written by British writers as a superiority, which justifies the imperial project itself. In the dual representation of *The Suttee's* two sati figures, Mainwaring imagines a self-perpetuating articulation of this national-colonial boundary, where that difference which threatens definitions of British identity can be either transformed, converted into sameness, and so safely incorporated, or else burned out of existence. Though neither Benrudda nor Temora represent the ideal form of Mainwaring's imagined, desired definition of Britishness, what they do represent is far more powerful. In their capacity to articulate a boundary capable of both preserving British cultural superiority, as the judgment implied by Benrudda's death suggests, and converting the difference introduced by expanding colonial boundaries into a comprehensible sameness, Benrudda and Temora together function to legitimate empire and enable a British identity capable of withstanding the encroachments of difference.

Importantly, Mainwaring's construction of this national-colonial boundary that either incorporates or exterminates difference is not all-encompassing. While the otherness of India as defined by Hindu religion and culture disappears, Islam takes its

place in constituting the outside of colonial Britain. There is no conversion—indeed, no attempt at conversion or suggestion that it might be possible—of Muslim characters in the novel, and though the presence of Tipu Sultan is militarily and politically crippled by the end of the novel, there is no extermination of Muslims from the space of British India. In some ways, Mainwaring's willingness to tolerate the continued presence of Islam within her imagined space of British India while she systematically rids this space of its Hindu presence seems contradictory, for she generally paints a much more critical picture of Muslim culture than she does of Hinduism. While her characterization of Hindus suggests a similarity of character and of domestic life that ties them to British culture and provides a basis for their conversion, her representation of Muslims as polygamous and inherently inferior puts their conversion to Christianity or to an identity within the boundaries of her definition of Britishness beyond the novel's realm of possibility.

So why must Hindu India be either converted into a replication of British identity or else exterminated, while Muslim India is allowed to retain its identity, at once inside the territory occupied by British India and outside that definition of Britishness that Mainwaring superimposes on that territory? I would argue that what makes the coexistence of British India and Muslim India palatable for Mainwaring is that she is able to represent Muslim India as a competing colonizing and proselytizing presence rather than a population colonized by the British. Mainwaring justifies the British military presence and the colonial occupation that accompanies it by characterizing the battle for territory not as a struggle between colonizer and native population, but as a struggle between two imperial forces, one of which is identified by its oppressive regime and its

focus on the possession of lands and wealth and the other by its civilizing mission and, in Mainwaring's idealization, its Christian morality and domestic values. Whereas the novel projects a history for the Hindu characters that extends back to India's mythic origins, the Muslim history in India is consistently identified as a history of occupation: "It is well known that Tippo Saib inherited his power and dominions from Hyder Ally, and that the native princes of Hindostan, particularly those of Mysore country, had been induced to submit to his yoke, and many of them to embrace the Mahomedan faith, more perhaps from policy than inclination" (1:13-124). Thus, rather than narrating Britain's conquest as a forcible alienation of lands from their proper owners, Mainwaring narrates instead the replacement of hypocritical tyrants with benevolent and capable rulers:

[Tippoo] found himself surrounded on all sides by an enemy's force, whose destructive engines were already prepared to level to the ground the lofty walls of his apparently-impregnable fortress; besides which, he had but too much reason to distrust the fidelity of many of his principal officers, and he was further urged ... that no resistance could be effectual against European skill and valour. Under these circumstances, he accused Heaven of injustice, forgetting how many princes he and his father had despoiled of their hereditary territories, and driven from their thrones. (1:137)

By characterizing the Muslim population of India as another colonizing force rather than as the rightful possessors of the territory, Mainwaring neutralizes the challenge the Muslim presence might present for a conceptualization of British colonial identity as at once conquering and benevolent, capable of incorporating foreign lands and peoples yet retaining the integrity of a single definition of Britishness. As native population of India, the Muslims in the novel would have to be either incorporated into British India or exterminated from it to sustain Mainwaring's imagined colonial identity; as a prior

colonial presence, they can constitute the outside of British India, even in the process of their removal from power.

Identified as a competing imperial force, the Muslim characters in the novel are more than simply an acceptable, comprehensible presence. Rather, they are necessary as a means of situating Mainwaring's colonial Britain within a worldview based on a universalized colonial system, where the world is defined by divisions among different colonizers, not by a division between colonizers and colonized. I suggested earlier in this analysis that *The Suttee* begins with a triangulation of potential identities—Hindu, Muslim, and Christian/British—and ends with a flattening of the triangle into the opposing Christian/British and Muslim identities, with Hinduism eliminated as a possibility within the cultural and political space of the novel. Looking at this triangulation from a primarily political rather than religious perspective, the elimination of Hinduism by the end of the novel is also an elimination of the only identity the novel constructs as other than colonizing in nature, leaving us with a world of colonizers whose conquered subjects disappear as they are converted and assimilated into the identity of the colonial power. In effect, then, Mainwaring transforms the world of empires back into a world of nations by erasing the presence of colonized peoples from the colonized territories. Her imagining of *sati* through the conventions and the domestic-religious ideology of the sentimental novel results in a corresponding expression of a political fantasy that eliminates the difference of colonized India even as it naturalizes British colonialism.

Reading the *sati* debate texts alongside Mainwaring's less studied *sati* narrative reveals the contested nature of British conceptions of the relationship between Britain and India in the early nineteenth century. Though these texts are roughly contemporary, and though both Mainwaring and the participants in the *sati* debate were invested in the colonial project and in an ideology of British colonialism as a civilizing mission, their imaginings of the *sati*'s body indicate competing understandings of what the civilizing mission entailed and how it was to be accomplished, of the relationship between Britain and India, and of the shape of British identity under the conditions of its expanding empire. For the *sati* debate participants, the civilizing mission involved the eradication of certain practices—besides *sati*, thuggee and infanticide also received the attention of reformers during this period—among the native populations, but the preservation of difference and distance between Britain and India. These writers had no wish to elide those differences that kept the colonized peoples, with their cultural, racial, and religious otherness, safely distinguishable from themselves; rather, their concern was to ensure through legislation and governance that what they saw as “barbarous” or “horrible” within the colonies did not become a source of shame, guilt, or anxiety for British identity. For Mainwaring, by contrast, the civilizing mission involved the eradication of an entire religious, cultural, and political identity within British India, and the reformation of both Hindu India and the British colonial administration in the image of a Christian Britain informed by the “feminine” values of a domestic ideology. Mainwaring's vision of British colonialism maintains the integrity of British identity in the face of colonial expansion by converting difference into sameness, assimilating India

into her definition of British identity and expelling those elements that cannot be assimilated. The aligned projects of missionary religious reform and the social reform of eliminating the practice of *sati* together articulate a re-formation of the empire in England's image, rendering Mainwaring's vision of the empire less dependent on the different specificities of its territories than on the possibility of eliminating those differences.

### **Mutiny, Racialized Desire, and Forgiveness: Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896)**

In the more than sixty years between the publication of Mainwaring's *The Suttee* and Flora Annie Steel's Mutiny novel, *On the Face of the Waters*, the nature of the British empire in India and around the world changed dramatically. On a global scale, the empire expanded its reach and its boundaries through territorial conquests in all parts of the world:

Between 1841 and 1851 Great Britain occupied or annexed New Zealand, the Gold Coast, Labuan, Natal, the Punjab, Sind, and Hong Kong. In the next twenty years British control was asserted over Berar, Oudh, Lower Burma, and Kowloon, over Lagos and the neighborhood of Sierra Leone, over Basutoland, Griqualand, and the Transvaal; and new colonies were established in Queensland and British Columbia.<sup>61</sup>

While in 1830 Britain already had possessions or settlements in India and South Asia, Canada, the West Indies, Australia, and West and South Africa, the next sixty years brought the expansion of those possessions and the consolidation of British power in the colonies. This period included the exploration of the interior of Africa, the beginning of

the Scramble for Africa, the Afghan Wars and the “Great Game” in India, the Crimean War, the Sikh Wars, the Xhosa Wars, the Anglo-Burmese Wars, and wars in China, New Zealand, and the Sudan. The period also included rebellions in Canada, New Zealand, India, the Sudan, and Egypt. In *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, Patrick Brantlinger demonstrates that England’s relationship to its colonies underwent an ideological shift from the early Victorian period (which he roughly identifies as 1830-1870) to the late Victorian period of high imperialism. Whereas both periods, he argues, were characterized by territorial expansion, the British empire of the early nineteenth century was optimistic, dominated by an ideology of reform and the expansion of the “wonders” of British civilization into other parts of the world:

The early Victorians felt they could expand naturally, with trade goods and Bibles as easily as with guns. They could sail to the far corners of the world as explorers, missionaries, abolitionists, traders, and immigrants, opening new fields for the expansive wonders of their industrial revolution, their special forms of religious, political, and economic grace, and their bourgeois-heroic values of self-help and upward mobility.<sup>62</sup>

By contrast, Brantlinger argues that late Victorian imperialism was a “militant imperialism,” aggressively racist in its values and pessimistic in its attitude: “The vanishing of frontiers, the industrialization of travel and warfare, the diminishing chances for heroism, the disillusionment with civilization and the civilizing mission—these late Victorian and early modern themes point insistently toward another: the decline of Britain’s position in the world as an industrial, military, and imperial power.”<sup>63</sup>

Brantlinger positions the 1857 Indian Mutiny as one of several events—including the Crimean War and the Australian gold rush—in the 1850s that marked a turning point for imperialist ideology, and it would not be an exaggeration to call the Mutiny the most

significant occurrence for the British in India in the nineteenth century. Brantlinger goes so far as to claim that “[n]o episode in British imperial history raised public excitement to a higher pitch.”<sup>64</sup> Beginning with the rebellion of the sepoy army in Meerut on 10 May 1857, the Mutiny consisted of a “wave of uprisings in which Indian soldiers, princes, religious leaders, and peasants all played a role.”<sup>65</sup> The Meerut sepoys marched to and captured Delhi, installing Moghul emperor Bahadur Shah II as ruler and setting off a series of revolts in other parts of British India, notably Nana Sahib’s uprising in Cawnpore and the siege of the British at Lucknow. Though the British had retaken these cities by the end of 1857 (Delhi was recaptured in September, Lucknow in November, and Cawnpore in December), they were fighting pockets of resistance into mid-1858.

In *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*, Jenny Sharpe suggests that the Mutiny commanded such a prominent place in the British imagination not only because it was seen as a serious threat to the continuation of the British empire in India, but also because the sensationalized and exaggerated stories of “atrocities”—massacres, rape, mutilation, torture—committed by Indian men against British women and children helped to create a “racial memory” that structured the British understanding of and response to the Mutiny:

During the early days of the Mutiny a strange and horrifying tale took hold of the colonial imagination, spreading throughout Anglo-India and all the way back to England. Mutineers, the story went, were subjecting “our countrywomen” to unspeakable torments. Natives, the story continued, were systematically raping English women and dismembering their ravished bodies. The rumors had scarcely been started before they were discredited as having no factual basis. Yet the events of 1857 went on record as nothing less than the barbaric attack of mutinous sepoys on innocent women and children.<sup>66</sup>



According to Brantlinger, the British responded to these stories of atrocities “with atrocities of their own, hanging and shooting without trial, blowing prisoners from the mouths of cannons, looting, and massacring the Indian residents of recaptured towns.” He further identifies the post-Mutiny period as dominated by an intensely racist British portrayal of and policy toward India—the counterpoint to Sharpe’s “racial memory” of Indian men attacking British women:

Victorian accounts of the Mutiny display extreme forms of extropunitive projection, the racist pattern of blaming the victim expressed in terms of an absolute polarization of good and evil, innocence and guilt, justice and injustice, moral restraint and sexual depravity, civilization and barbarism. These categories are perceived as racially determined attributes in an imperialist allegory that calls for the total subjugation of India and at times for the wholesale extermination of Indians. British writing about India before 1857 was also racist, but it frequently admitted the possibility that Indians might be helped to progress in the scale of civilization.... After the Mutiny these hopeful though obviously ethnocentric possibilities are often denied. India is portrayed as mired in changeless patterns of superstition and violence which can be dominated but not necessarily altered for the better.<sup>67</sup>

In India as throughout the empire, then, the events of 1857 marked a turning point not only for the way Britain governed and controlled its colonial territories, but also for how it understood its identity as a colonizing nation. An imperialist ideology focused on domination of a racial other which can “not necessarily [be] altered for the better” might still be invested in an identity which assumes the superiority of the colonizers over the colonized, but it can no longer wholly lay claim to the civilizing mission or to the justification of a colonial presence through the assumption we see throughout the *sati* debate and in Mainwaring’s novel—namely, that the British occupation of India would result in the improvement of the native population.

In choosing to write a Mutiny novel, Steel therefore is writing about a turning point in British colonial history from the perspective of a British woman who had lived most of her life in the aftermath of the Mutiny, who had grown up having “burnt and hanged and tortured the Nana Sahib in effigy many times.”<sup>68</sup> Like Mainwaring, Steel sets her novel nearly forty years before its publication, but whereas Mainwaring’s situation of her narrative during the wars with Tipu Sultan in the 1790s serves to detach the novel from its contemporary context and from the debate over the legal abolition of *sati*, Steel’s decision to use the Mutiny for her narrative context highlights the ways in which the events of 1857 continued not just to inform the British India of 1896, but to structure Britain’s understanding of its role in India and its conception of how to maintain that role. Mainwaring, who is more interested in religious and cultural conversion than in the specific history and government of British India, subordinates the historical narrative of the wars to the self-consciously fictional conversion and romance plots that take place largely in the domestic spaces of the novel. Steel, by contrast, privileges the historical narrative of the Mutiny as her primary focus, taking great care to present an “objective,” accurate view of the events of 1857 and claiming to have written a book that attempts to be “at once a story and a history,” in which “I have not allowed fiction to interfere with fact in the slightest degree ... even to the date, the hour, the scene, the very weather.”<sup>69</sup> The lengths to which Steel goes both in her research, to ensure the accuracy of her account, and in her preface, to assure her readers of that accuracy, suggests that the Mutiny is not simply a part of the past for Steel or her readers, but rather is a piece of living history whose narration and interpretation continues to have bearing on the present.

In a sense, then, both Mainwaring and Steel write narratives of the past with the goal of present reform: Mainwaring uses the genre of the sentimental novel to articulate a reformation of the empire in terms of a Christian domestic ideology instead of the legal and military debates of the 1820s, while Steel uses the historical novel as her primary genre in order to present her audience with a more “accurate” view of an inflammatory past event, with the aim of reshaping British attitudes toward India.

Sharpe’s reading of *On the Face of the Waters* offers one perspective from which the novel’s representation of the Mutiny might be read as reinterpreting the past in order to reshape the present. Reading the novel through the lens of the Ilbert bill controversy of 1883—in which a proposed bill that would give Indian magistrates in rural districts jurisdiction over Europeans in criminal cases caused an outcry over the “humiliation English women would have to undergo if native judges were to hear cases of rape”<sup>70</sup>—Sharpe argues that Steel reinterprets the role of women in the Mutiny in order to challenge the assumptions regarding British women in India that underpinned the Ilbert bill controversy:

*On the Face of the Waters* ... reworks the racial memory of the Mutiny to reflect the greater visibility of Anglo-Indian women in public life. In this regard, I read it as a feminist intervention that was missing from the public debates on the Ilbert bill. Inasmuch as the Anglo-Indian Ladies Committee legitimated the idea that English women need to be protected from Indian men, the position it took on the Ilbert bill failed to question the racial memory of the Mutiny.<sup>71</sup>

Beyond this reading of the novel’s use of the Mutiny to comment on a specific political issue, Steel’s own statement of her purpose in writing *On the Face of the Waters* suggests

in a more general way the continued relevance and power of the Mutiny to inform British attitudes toward India in 1896:

For the rest I have tried to give a photograph—that is, a picture in which the differentiation caused by colour is left out—of a time which neither the fair race nor the dark one is ever likely quite to forget or to forgive.

That they may come nearer to the latter is the object with which this book has been written. (preface)

The call for forgiveness and reconciliation, not through forgetting the acts that still await forgiveness but through remembering them in a different way, positions the Mutiny as at once the structuring force behind Steel's present configuration of the relationship between Britain and India and the means of changing that relationship.

Steel's call for forgiveness and for a view of the Mutiny "in which the differentiation caused by colour is left out" has justly led critics to regard *On the Face of the Waters* as more complex and critical and less reliant on sensationalist renderings of Indian villains and British heroes than most of the Mutiny fiction that appeared between 1857 and the end of the nineteenth century. In his survey of Mutiny fiction in *Rule of Darkness*, Brantlinger lists Steel's novel as one of only a few exceptions within a collection of texts he describes as generally expressive of a "racist and political hysteria about the Mutiny," and he gives Steel credit for offering "a portrayal of the Mutiny richer, more complex than any nineteenth-century novel except [Meadows Taylor's] *Seeta*."<sup>72</sup> Steel's creation of a strong, capable female character in the figure of Kate Erlton, a British woman who survives the Mutiny from within the walls of Delhi, has generated interest in the novel from feminist scholars, notably Sharpe and Nancy Paxton, who focus on the novel's representation of British women in relation to Steel's own

position as a woman who uses her ambiguous status in the colonial context to negotiate greater power for herself, even as that negotiation makes her complicit with the subordination of the native population.

Despite the interest the novel has generated due to its feminist leanings and its more measured, critical rendering of the Mutiny, however, critics have largely concluded that the novel's relatively progressive elements are undermined by its complicity with the structures and values of British imperialism. Brantlinger qualifies his acknowledgement that Steel is exceptional among authors of Mutiny fiction with the provision that her "irony undercuts potentially critical ideas," and he concludes that "[f]or Steel, as for almost all Victorian writers, the Mutiny is evidence of Indian racial and cultural inferiority."<sup>73</sup> Paxton reads Steel's investment in a "racist, elitist, and politically conservative analysis of British and Anglo-Indian society"<sup>74</sup> as ultimately undermining even her ability to make the feminist interventions she tries to make on behalf of British women. And Sharpe can only make her argument that Steel "finds a place for English women's agency in the Mutiny narratives" by first setting aside questions relating to "how Anglo-Indian women reproduce a dominant discourse of colonialism."<sup>75</sup>

I would concur with each of these critics that *On the Face of the Waters* is actively invested in maintaining British hegemony in India. What interests me about the juxtaposition of these three analyses, however, is that insofar as each suggests different degrees to which Steel is at once critical of and complicit in hierarchies of power that define British India in the post-Mutiny nineteenth century, each analysis indicates a text that is divided within itself. I will argue that the textual division suggested by this

repeated rhetorical move of separating the complicit from the critical is reflective of a larger rupture in the novel's representation of British India. This rupture comes from the simultaneous construction of two different, incommensurate corporeal images for the colonial relationship through the novel's two primary narrative strands—the first focused on the historical narrative of the Mutiny and its suppression and the second focused on a romance plot which progresses in part through the agency of and in part at the expense of an Indian woman, Tara Devi, whose character is defined throughout the novel by her status as a failed sati. These two figures represent two different constructions of the British presence in India by way of two different sets of narrative and generic conventions. The first construction, articulated through the Mutiny narrative, reflects that version of late nineteenth-century British imperialism that Brantlinger identifies as militant and aggressively racist, focused on the domination of native populations in order to ensure the continuance of British power in the colonies. The second, articulated through the figure of the sati and her relationship to the British hero and heroine of the novel, Jim Douglas and Kate Erlton, imports into this post-Mutiny text a version of British colonialism more characteristic of the *sati* debate and the ideology of the civilizing mission that dominated the first half of the nineteenth century, though modified in significant ways by Steel's own context in the 1890s. By this time, the *sati* narrative was itself an established sub-genre of colonial writing—its patterns and conventions familiar to the British public through novels like Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*<sup>76</sup> as well as through travel narratives and poems—that carried with it the ideological underpinnings of the civilizing mission. By pulling this *sati* narrative into her

historical novel, Steel deploys a once-prominent model of empire-as-native-betterment within a post-Mutiny context in which the British were more concerned with maintaining order than with reforming the colonized people. I will not suggest that one figure or narrative is complicit with and the other resistant to British hegemony in India, as each in its own way is invested in the maintenance of British colonial power. Rather, the coexistence of these two divergent corporeal representations of British India highlights the instability of both British justifications for the colonial project. In attempting to use the *sati* narrative's investment in the civilizing mission to soften the hard edges of late nineteenth-century imperialist attitudes toward India, Steel creates a rupture within her own narrative that effectively undermines and denaturalizes both versions of British colonialism.

In its narration of the Mutiny, *On the Face of the Waters* is typical of a late nineteenth-century imperialist ideology based on the control of native populations and a racist differentiation between colonizers and colonized. Steel's call for forgiveness in her preface, which in some respects marks a different orientation to her subject matter than that of most Mutiny writers, is nonetheless instructive as it reveals the extent to which her stated purpose is undermined by her assumptions about India. Describing her method for representing the Mutiny, Steel constructs an analogy between her novel and "a photograph—that is, a picture in which the differentiation caused by colour is left out—of a time which neither the fair race nor the dark one is ever likely quite to forget or to forgive." Steel uses the analogy of the photograph for two main purposes. First, she shores up her own claim to accuracy with the photograph's claim to truth, to be a medium

for recording a snapshot of life that supposedly removes the potential for distortions. Second, she uses the absence of color in a photograph to support her claim to objectivity, suggesting that in removing “the differentiation caused by colour” from her narrative, she presents the reader with a less subjective, and by implication less racist account of the Mutiny than those offered in most Mutiny fiction. What I find interesting in this analogy, however, is that in its flawed assumptions about the nature of representation, it reveals precisely those ways in which Steel’s novel is limited by her inability to see how her “photograph” of the Mutiny is a product of her subjective understanding of British colonialism, and the ways in which this limitation makes her “picture” just as informed by the “differentiation caused by colour” as those more obviously racist portrayals. While Steel assumes that her photograph of the Mutiny can be accurate and objective through her attention to historical details, she obscures the fact that any photograph records only the subjective perspective of the photographer, that both her novel and the historical accounts of the Mutiny on which she bases it are accurate only in their presentation of particular British versions of the events of 1857. Even her call for forgiveness reflects a perspective limited by her investment in British colonialism, insofar as she implies that the acts that require forgiveness are the atrocities committed by Indians during the Mutiny and by the British during those points of excessive brutality that characterized its suppression—not the occupation of India which the Mutiny threatened and which was its ultimate cause. Furthermore, the implication that she is able to present a less racist account by removing the “colour” from her portrayal is not only based on a faulty analogy—as a photograph removes all color but black and white,



producing a representation which is in fact more reflective of a racist viewpoint in its reduction of its subject to two opposing colors—but is immediately undermined by Steel’s own differentiation within the same sentence between “the fair race” and “the dark one.”

I want to use this analogy of the photograph as an image for the first version of the corporeal image of British India that emerges from *On the Face of the Waters*, which I will call the post-Mutiny image. As Steel imagines a particular version of forgiveness—one embedded in imperialist histories and perspectives—between the “fair race” and “the dark one” as emerging from a representation of the Mutiny in which “the differentiation caused by colour is left out,” she suggests through the juxtaposition of “colour” and “race” that her black and white photograph of the Mutiny is in fact a photograph of black and white bodies. The picture she offers up in order to further her object of forgiveness, then, is a picture of racial differentiation, where the imaging of racially defined bodies serves to advance not just a goal of forgiveness, but the establishment as “accurate” and “objective” of the version of the colonial relationship on which that conception of forgiveness is based. Steel’s remembering of the Mutiny is therefore also a re-membering of the colonial body in such a way as to both highlight racial difference and define the proper relationships of power between colonizers and colonized. In Steel’s image of the photograph and in the Mutiny narrative this image is meant to describe, racial differentiation becomes a means for investing the bodies that populate British India with relations of power that maintain British hegemony and that assert as accurate and universal a perspective which privileges imperial ideologies.

In a compelling analysis of *On the Face of the Waters* that points, I would argue, to one significant way in which Steel's Mutiny narrative figures racialized bodies as "weapons, relays, communication routes and supports"<sup>77</sup> for the power and knowledge relations of empire, Alan Johnson reads the novel through the lens of colonial policy on health and sanitation as a "retroactive diagnostic narrative" of the Mutiny.<sup>78</sup> Steel's "diagnosis," Johnson argues, is that the Mutiny was caused by a transgression of boundaries, and her prescription for preventing another rebellion is the maintenance of boundaries through "British activity, intelligence and experience gained from the earlier event."<sup>79</sup> To support his reading of Steel's diagnosis, Johnson focuses on two figures which signify the transgression of boundaries: the Indian prostitute whose challenge (in Steel's narrative) sets off the Mutiny, and the "charlatan Tiddu, who teaches Jim Douglas the art of disguise."<sup>80</sup> The Indian prostitute, he explains, was a frequent subject of concern in the British Indian administration because of fears that her contact with British soldiers would lead to "degeneration" both moral and, through the threat of disease, physical: "syphilis was read as the visible sign of moral contamination and of illicit commingling of Indian and British bodies and spaces that undermined the 'civilizing mission.'"<sup>81</sup> Johnson reads the novel's portrayal of the "intrinsically infectious" prostitute as the instigator of the rebellion—Steel traces the Mutiny's beginning to the words of a registered prostitute who taunts an Indian sepoy, "We of the bazaar kiss no cowards" (173)—as an allegory of the dangers of "transgressive speech and space."<sup>82</sup>

Tiddu, the member of the "Many-faced Tribe of Bunjâras" who teaches Jim how to disguise himself as Indian, functions similarly as a dangerous figure who signifies the

transgression of boundaries, according to Johnson. Together these transgressive figures, he argues, expose a “retroactive diagnostic narrative, seemingly endemic to the structure of imperial thought: What caused the Mutiny? Transgression of boundaries. How do you stop such a thing? By producing boundaries. How can you be certain these are secure? By transgressing them...”<sup>83</sup> While I agree with Johnson’s reading of the novel’s preoccupation with boundaries, I want to explore further the role of disguise and mimicry in the novel’s narration of the Mutiny in order to suggest that the novel’s own coding of racial difference functions to rework those boundaries disrupted through the Mutiny in such a way as to limit the efficacy of certain kinds of transgression. By locating the political investment of bodies within British India in racial difference, Steel constructs an embodiment of British India in which the continuance of British hegemony is assured by the ability of white bodies to move unseen within the space of the other and the inability of the bodies of the colonized to effect a similar transgression.

The characters most skilled in disguise in Steel’s Mutiny narrative are Jim Douglas, whose occupation as a spy searching for evidence of plans for a rebellion carries the novel through the point of the Mutiny’s beginning, and Tiddu, the “many-faced” wanderer who teaches Jim the art of disguise. Until his tutelage with Tiddu, Jim is detectable as English even in disguise,

for there was a trick in his gait, not to be orientalised, which made the policemen salute gravely as he passed disguised to the tent, and there was an ignorance of some one or another of the million shibboleths which divide men from each other in India; shibboleths too numerous for one lifetime’s learning, which require to be born in the blood, bred in the bone.  
(62)

Jim's Englishness and his inability to pass for Indian is therefore a matter of racial difference, "born in the blood, bred in the bone," that makes him essentially different from those he tries to imitate. What Jim learns from Tiddu is not to forget his racial difference, but rather the art of deception, for "Tiddu was a consummate actor and could teach many tricks worth knowing" (67).

Interestingly, the assertion of Jim's racial difference from those he imitates appears between two very different performances on the part of Tiddu, and I want to locate the boundaries of the novel's coding of race in the differences among these two performances and Jim's own successful performances as Indian following his acquisition of Tiddu's "tricks." In the first performance, Tiddu and one of his pupils perform before an audience in the bazaar a mocking impersonation of an English man and woman:

Two white-masked figures, clasped waist to waist, were waltzing about tipsily. One had a curled flaxen wig, a muslin dress distended by an all too visible crinoline giving full play to a pair of prancing brown legs. The other wore an old staff uniform, cocked hat and feather complete. The flaxen curls rested on the tarnished epaulet, the unembracing arms flourished brandy bottles. (60)

This performance of Englishness is clearly meant to mimic and mock English customs, not to function as a persuasive disguise. By contrast, in the second performance, which takes place in the privacy of Tiddu's tent with Jim as the only audience, Tiddu transforms himself persuasively into a woman:

[H]e paused, caught up a cloth, gave it one dexterous twirl round him, squatted down, and there he was, to the life, a veiled woman watching the stranger with furtive, modest eye. "But I," came a round feminine voice full of the feminine inflections, "am of the thousand-faced people who wander to a thousand places. A new place, a new face. It makes a large world, *Huzoor*, a strange world." There was a melancholy cadence in his voice, which added to the sheer amaze [*sic*] which Jim Douglas was

feeling.... He himself, though he knew to the contrary, could scarcely combat the conviction, which seemed to come to him from that one furtive eye, that a woman sat within those folds. (64)

Unlike the previous performance, which Tiddu himself refers to as mimicry, Tiddu's transformation into a "veiled woman" is entirely convincing and suggests, in its ability to disconcert Jim and make him distrust his own knowledge, the potential power in Tiddu's "tricks." While mimicry has been a subject of much debate among postcolonial theorists, with the argument that mimicry can be a means of subverting colonial power relations, Steel simultaneously acknowledges the potential power of Tiddu's performance of Englishness in the response of an English soldier who becomes angry at the spectacle, and she dismisses this power quickly through his companion, Alice Gissing, who chooses to laugh at the performance, earning the approval of Jim Douglas:

It was a vile travesty; and the Englishwoman turned instinctively to the Englishman as if doubtful what to do, how to take it; but the passion on his boyish face seemed to make things clear—to give her the clue, and she gripped his hand hard.

"Don't be a fool!" she whispered fiercely. "Laugh! It's the only thing to do." Her own rang out shrill above the uncertain stir in the crowd, taken aback in its merriment. (60)

For Steel, the performance that holds the real power, that cannot be dismissed with a laugh, is the performance whose artifice is undetectable, which enables Jim to pass as Indian and so acquire knowledge before the Mutiny and enable his own survival during it.

In Jim's ability to pass as Indian, however, the pupil appears in one respect to surpass the teacher. Whereas the boundaries of gender are easily manipulated by Tiddu, his only performance of Englishness or whiteness in the novel is the mock waltz, where

the “white-masked” faces and the “prancing brown legs” both serve to highlight rather than obscure the racial difference of the actors from the English figures they impersonate. The implication is that while the boundaries of race are permeable for the man whose whiteness is “born in the blood, bred in the bone,” the man whose “prancing brown legs” belie the performance of whiteness but suggest an alignment between femininity and brownness is limited to mimicry, to a performance of difference rather than a performance that elides difference, when it comes to the boundaries of race. The use of disguise by two women in the novel, Kate Erlton and Tara Devi, further supports this distinction between the kinds of performances possible for white bodies and those possible for brown bodies. Kate, like Jim, disguises herself repeatedly and successfully as an Indian woman in order to survive the Mutiny from within the walls of Delhi. During the initial confusion when the mutineers capture Delhi, Kate avoids being killed by picking up a blanket and pretending to be an Indian woman:

A blanket!—a horse’s double blanket, dark as the darkness itself. Here was a chance, indeed! She caught it up, and paused deliberately in the darkest corner of the square, to slip off shoes and stockings, petticoats and bodices; then, in the scantiest of costumes, winding the long blanket round her, ayah’s fashion, as a skirt and veil. Her face could be hidden by a modest down-drop over it, her white hands hidden away by the modest drawing of a fold across her mouth. Her feet, then, were the only danger, and the dust would darken them. (243)

Though still marked as white by her face, hands, and feet, Kate is able to strategically hide her whiteness as Tiddu is unable to hide his brownness, and she takes advantage of the respect granted in India to veiled women to be certain that no one would challenge her disguise: “In this heathen land, that down-dropped veil hedged even a poor grass-cutter’s wife with respect. What is more, even if she were challenged, her proper course

would be to be silent and hurry on” (243). She uses the disguise of a native woman similarly to hide during the months of the sepoys’ control of Delhi, and her disguise as “a Hindu lady under a vow of silence and solitude” (364) eventually enables her escape from the city.

Tara, on the other hand, is no more convincing in her attempts to imitate an Englishwoman than Tiddu is with his white mask, and unlike Tiddu’s performance, Tara’s is not intended as mimicry. The months of Delhi’s possession by the sepoy rebels creates a space within Steel’s *Mutiny* narrative for a domestic romance subplot, where Jim and Kate, both trapped inside the walls of Delhi, hide in a rooftop room with Tara as servant, mirroring the household we see early in the novel in which Jim and his dying Muslim lover, Zora, live on a rooftop with Tara as servant. Both Sharpe and Ray address Tara’s desire and failure to perform the domestic role of the Englishwoman. Sharpe notes the “sexual rivalry between Kate and Tara” and argues that “Tara is depicted as always hovering at the edge of an idyllic picture of domesticity”<sup>84</sup> from which she is excluded even in Kate’s absence:

When Jim falls ill a second time (after Kate has made her escape to the Ridge and he returns to Delhi to rescue her), Tara repeats Kate’s earlier actions. She makes a pitiful attempt to re-create an English-style room and struggles to nurse him back to strength with chicken broth. Realizing her failure when he does not respond to treatment, she fetches Kate to help Jim.<sup>85</sup>

Ray, similarly, describes Tara as “caught between her desire to fulfill her role as a true Rajput widow and her inarticulate love for Jim Douglas,” but as ultimately unsuccessful in her performance of Victorian English womanhood:

In Steel's depiction of colonial India, the incommensurable differences between the domestic economies in which Kate and Tara are encompassed are made clear in the impossibility of Tara ever being able to achieve Victorian domestic propriety. Even though Tara attempts to transform the room on the roof with such singular cultural signifiers as a tablecloth and a vase of flowers, along with fitting food for a sick Anglo-Indian such as chicken broth, milk and eggs, and brandy, her presence is enough to render them improper in their significations.<sup>86</sup>

Despite her failed attempts at performing the role of the white Englishwoman, Tara does possess a facility with disguise. Not only does she assume a function analogous to that of Tiddu when she teaches Kate how to perform the role of Hindu lady in order to secure her escape, but Tara disguises herself as a sepoy by wearing the uniform of her brother Soma in order to escort Kate out of Delhi.

Reading Tara's failed performance of Englishness alongside her successful performance as a sepoy and alongside the disguises of Jim, Tiddu, and Kate, therefore, we can see a pattern in these boundary transgressions. Whereas the English characters move with ease across the boundaries of race and culture in British India, adopting Indian disguises in order to gain knowledge that would otherwise be unavailable or to inhabit spaces that would otherwise be dangerous for them, the Indian characters, while in command of fluid gender identities, are unable to convincingly perform either whiteness or Englishness. In her embodiment of a fixed racial difference through the bodies of these characters, Steel therefore also embodies the relations of power and knowledge that shore up British imperial domination in late nineteenth-century India. For in the inability of Tiddu and Tara to perform whiteness or Englishness—a performance whose potential power and danger is implied by Jim's and Kate's performances as Indian—Steel denies brown bodies the power to transgress the very boundaries whose manipulation grants Jim



Douglas the knowledge he seeks as a spy and Kate the ability to move unharmed within Delhi during the Mutiny.

The embodiment of British India that emerges from this narration of the Mutiny, therefore, uses the articulation of fixed racial boundaries whose transgression is strategic, limited to white bodies, and not threatening to the integrity of English identities in order to ensure the maintenance of British imperial power in India. Consistent with Brantlinger's differentiation between the ideologies of empire in the early and late nineteenth century, Steel's post-Mutiny corporeal image of British India relies on the fixity of racial difference and is invested in the subordination of the native Indian population to British government. The contrast between this embodiment of British India and Mainwaring's 1830 construction is clear if we look at the implications of Mainwaring's conversion narrative versus those of Steel's narrative of spies, actors, and disguises. Both narratives involve a transformation of one identity into another across racial and cultural boundaries. Whereas the conversion narrative relies on a permanent transformation, a reconstitution of the other as same, however, Steel's trope of disguise relies on the fixity of identity: the ability to strategically and temporarily alter the body, its costumes, and its actions while maintaining intact the identity beneath the disguise. Whereas race in the conversion narrative is a bridgeable difference, to such an extent that *The Suttee* ends with the marriage of an Indian man and an English woman, Tara's inability to perform Englishness in *On the Face of the Waters* demonstrates the impossibility of bridging racial differences. Whereas the embodiment of British India that emerges from the conversion narrative is based on an eradication of difference,

whether through its transformation or its elimination, the representation that emerges from the Mutiny narrative is based on the regulation of difference through its articulation and its management. If the empire is for Mainwaring a malleable territory to be reshaped in England's image regardless of the specificities of identity and culture in any individual colony, Steel's vision of the empire relies on the fixity of those differences among the colonies and between the colonies and England, for only if these differences remain fixed can the British colonizers gain the knowledge required to maintain order.

Despite the apparently opposing definitions of the relationship between Britain and India suggested by Mainwaring's 1830 image and Steel's post-Mutiny image, by importing the sati figure into her Mutiny narrative through the character of Tara, Steel also imports into her representation of British India an embodiment of colonial India more characteristic of an ideology of empire as civilizing mission than of the late nineteenth-century ideology of imperial domination. I use the word "import" here because despite the continued presence of *sati* narratives in late nineteenth-century European fiction, actual occurrences of widow burning became quite rare after Bentinck abolished the practice. Even in one of the more well-known *sati* narratives from the latter half of the nineteenth century, Verne's story of the rescue of Aouda in his 1872 novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the *sati* is placed outside the boundaries of British India, in a section of India that was not at the time under British rule. Following the abolition of *sati*, the civilizing mission took on other focuses, including, for instance, legislation shortly before the Mutiny securing the rights of Indian widows to remarry. In choosing to narrate the rescue of an intended sati from the funeral pyre in terms that

accord more with the eyewitness accounts of *satis* in the 1820s than with the actual historical context of either 1857 or 1896, Steel is therefore bringing into her *Mutiny* novel a narrative and consequently a version of British India that would have been more story than history, to use the terms of the novel's preface. Though Steel's assumptions about race make even this second embodiment significantly different from Mainwaring's representation, the embodiment of British India she constructs through Tara as sati introduces into the novel a competing articulation of the nature of the empire in India and of its implications for British identity. As I will demonstrate through a reading of Tara's character and her function in the novel, the figure of the sati challenges the post-Mutiny embodiment of the colonial relationship by suggesting that if empire is to be justified by its ability to better the situation of the colonized peoples, then the construction of fixed boundaries between the identities of colonizer and colonized—so reassuring in the post-Mutiny period—is ultimately untenable.

Just as Mainwaring's Temora is a character defined through her desire to become a sati, Steel's Tara is similarly defined through her desire to be—and through her repeated insistence that she *is*—"suttee." Unlike Temora, however, whose rescue from the funeral pyre signals her conversion to Christianity and Englishness, Tara is from her first appearance in the novel already a failed sati, "rescued" against her will from the funeral pyre by Jim Douglas, who then employs her as a household servant. Furthermore, while Temora's desire to become a sati marks her underlying similarity to British women within Mainwaring's definition of domestic virtue, Tara's desire to be "suttee"—which Steel glosses in the text as "virtuous," taking the Hindu literal meaning

of “sati” as virtuous wife—is figured as a monstrous desire, not a mark of her similarity to British characters, but the source of her incomprehensibility to them. Steel characterizes Tara as a paradox, a “mingling” of opposing characteristics:

[Jim Douglas] had been the means of saving her from her husband’s funeral pyre; in other words of preventing her from being a saint, of making her outcaste utterly. Since none, not even other widows, would eat or drink with a woman rejected by the very gods on the threshold of Paradise. Such a mental position is well-nigh incomprehensible to Western minds. It was confusing, even to Tara herself; and the mingling of conscious dignity and conscious degradation, gratitude, resentment, attraction, repulsion, made her a puzzle even to herself at times. (27)

Tara’s feelings form a study in opposites: she simultaneously feels dignity and degradation, gratitude and resentment, attraction and repulsion. Interestingly, though, this description suggests that even as Tara’s mental position is “well-nigh incomprehensible to Western minds,” it is through Western intervention and Western ideas that Tara *becomes* this paradoxical figure. For not only is it Jim’s interference in the *sati* ritual that places her in this “incomprehensible” mental position, but her rescue is itself coded as a paradox—Jim is at once the means of “saving her” from the fire and the means of preventing her from being a saint—made tenable because of the mingling of worlds and of bodies within the space of British India. Because Tara has been tied to the Western world and her English “master” through the prevented *sati*, she becomes the embodiment of this mingling even as she represents the ultimate impermeability of the boundary between the coexisting races, cultures, and religions that make up British India. In the paradox of her feelings and her mental position, she becomes the articulation within one body of those differences between British and Indian, white and brown, East

and West, which the post-Mutiny image of British India keeps separate and differentiated through the fixity of racial difference.

Like Steel, Mainwaring embodies the differences between East and West that characterize British India as she imagines it. Unlike Steel, however, Mainwaring splits this difference into two bodies through the doubled sati figure of Temora and Benrudda. The mingling of worlds that is such a source of confusion in the single body of Tara functions quite differently when split into two bodies, especially since there is no racial differentiation between the bodies. Mainwaring sees the mingling of East and West and of England and India as a necessary step on the way to a transformation of the East/India into a replica of the West/England. Consequently, she articulates the meeting of these two worlds through a narrative of religious, cultural, and political conversion whereby difference is either transformed into sameness or else excised from the political and cultural space of British India. By splitting this mingling of worlds into the doubled sati figures of Temora and Benrudda, Mainwaring defines British India as a work in process, insofar as Temora and Benrudda represent an endlessly repeating process of articulating the boundaries of Britishness through the simultaneous transformation and eradication of otherness, and as a work in progress, insofar as the novel's conversion narrative establishes the civilizing mission as the *raison d'être* of the British colonial presence in India.

By contrast, the mingling of worlds in the paradoxical sati figure of Steel's Tara suggests a vision of British India characterized not by transformation or progress, but rather by a kind of stasis created by the impossibility of resolving the differences between

the worlds of East and West. Because Steel locates the boundaries between these two worlds within a single body, she cannot simply exterminate the undesirable or ungovernable as Mainwaring does through the death of Benrudda. Instead, Tara remains throughout the novel torn in opposing directions—between her desire to be “suttee” and her desire for Jim Douglas, between her loyalty to her own people and her loyalty to Jim for saving her from being outcast among them—and unable to resolve the contradictions of her desires or her identity. Through her construction of Tara as a static figure, incapable of resolution or change, Steel constructs British India as a space dominated by impermeable boundaries and irresolvable difference.

Part of what I find interesting about the character of Tara, however, is that even as she represents this stasis of irresolvable difference, she also imports into the novel a narrative of progress in the form of the ideology of empire as a civilizing mission. Not only is her initial presence in the novel predicated on Jim’s investment in the civilizing mission, as one of the first pieces of information we learn about Tara is that Jim saved her from becoming a *sati*, but Steel reveals her investment in this ideology by repeating the narrative of Tara’s rescue. After Jim’s encounter with Tiddu, he returns home to find Tara “swathed from head to foot in the white veil of orthodox widowhood, which encircled her face like a cere-cloth” (68). With her hair shaven off, Tara informs Jim that she is going to complete the *sati* ritual she began twelve years earlier:

“I am going to the Holy Gunga. Where else should a *suttee* go? The Water will not reject me as the Fire did, since, before God! I am *suttee*. As the master knows”—her voice held a passionate appeal,—“I have been *suttee* all these long years. Yet now I have given up all—all!” (69)

Jim once again prevents Tara from completing her *sati*, this time not by calling on officers to physically prevent her but by using a piece of Tara's shaved hair to manipulate her. He threatens to either violate the rules of caste by "[ying] it up in a cowskin bag, and giv[ing] it to a sweeper to make broth of" (71) or impeach her virtue—her claim to be "*suttee*"—by saying the hair "was a love-token" (71). Jim's prevention of Tara's drowning is a repetition of his earlier "rescue" and fits within a conception of the civilizing mission in which "white men are saving brown women from brown men" as well as from themselves. His action, however, also sustains Tara's presence in the novel as an embodiment of British India that stands in opposition to Steel's other, post-Mutiny figure. Her incomprehensibility, previously established through her paradoxical mental position, is further emphasized in this episode through her desire to die for her virtue: "She would simply go down to the Ganges and drown herself. An inconceivable state of affairs, beyond all rational understanding" (69).

Jim's reflection on the encounter with Tara further identifies her incomprehensibility with a racialized construction of femininity through which he equates the "womanhood" of Tara and Zora:

But as, after climbing the stairs, he passed slowly from one to another of the old familiar places in the pleasant pavilions, the mystery of such womanhood as Tara Devi's and Zora's oppressed him. Their eternal cult of purely physical passion, their eternal struggle for perfect purity and constancy, not of the soul, but the body, their worship, alike of sex and He who made it, seemed incomprehensible. (72)

While this passage suggests that gender and femininity are just as central to Steel's construction of British India as they are to Mainwaring's, it also reveals a striking difference between the two writers' constructions of Indian womanhood and its

implications for a definition of British India. The doubled sati figure represents for Mainwaring a means of forming a boundary for British India by separating the desirable elements of Hinduism, which are for her a specific form of femininity and domestic virtue that she sees in the sati's desire for union with her husband, from the undesirable elements that we see in the figure of Benrudda. For Steel, on the other hand, the sati represents a monstrous femininity which is a source of mystery, which confounds Jim Douglas's attempts to know and therefore have power over the otherness of India. Returning for a moment to the pattern of passing in the novel, we might read the ability of Indian characters to pass only across gender boundaries as a reflection of this monstrosity, this unknowability. What disconcerts Jim about Tiddu's performance of femininity is that it makes him distrust his own knowledge: "He himself, though he knew to the contrary, could scarcely combat the conviction ... that a woman sat within those folds." As Jim's occupation as a spy gathering information about a potential uprising emphasizes throughout the novel, knowledge is a means to power and control. Insofar as the fluidity of gender boundaries in Tiddu's performance and the mystery of Tara's womanhood in her desire to be "suttee" both challenge Jim's ability to know, therefore, they also challenge British power and the stability of British rule in India.

The threat posed by the sati figure and the unknowable femininity she represents becomes clear in a passage that brings together the impending uprising with the narrative of Tara as sati. After Jim prevents Tara's second attempt to become a sati, she goes to Benares, where, according to the legend that circulates, "this fire fell on her through



prayer, and burnt [her] hands and feet” (94). Jim Douglas, disguised as a mendicant, finds himself in the middle of a procession in Tara’s honor:

Jim Douglas therefore joined the procession boldly, and forced his way into the very front of it where the red-splashed figure of Durga Devi was being carried shoulder-high. It was garlanded with flowers and censed by swinging censers, and behind it, with wide-spread arms to show her sacred scars, walked Tara. She was naked to the waist, and the scanty ochre-tinted cloth folded about her middle was raised so as to show the burns upon her lower limbs. The sunlight gleaming on its magnificent bronze curves showed a seam or two upon her breast also. No more.... [H]er face, full of wild spiritual exaltation, was unmarred and, with the shaven head, stood out bold and clear as a cameo. (101-102)

The partially burned body of Tara is here displayed for both Hindu and Muslim onlookers as a legible sign that the gods themselves are against British interference in India. At the same time, this scene is legible to Jim and to Steel’s readers as a threat—not from the gods but from the priests who display Tara’s burned body in order to excite the crowds in the bazaar—to the stability of British rule. The spectators surrounding Tara’s procession are frightening and bloodthirsty, making the scene of this procession reminiscent in mood and function of Mainwaring’s narration of the scene of Temora’s intended *sati*:

‘Jai! Jai! Durga mai ke jai’ (victory to Mother Durga).

The cry came incessantly from [Tara’s] lips, and was echoed not only by the procession, but by the spectators. So from many a fierce throat besides the corporal’s—who from Gulanâri’s balcony shouted it frantically—that appeal to the Great Death Mother, implacable, athirst for blood, came to light the sordid life of the bazaar with a savage fire for something unknown—horribly unknown—that lay beyond that life. Even the Mahomedans, though they spat in the gutter at the idol, felt their hearts stir; felt that if miracles were indeed abroad, their God—the only true one—would not shorten His Hand either. (102)

Once again, the femininity of both the sati and the “Great Death Mother” to whom she appeals is constructed as unknowable and monstrous. Interestingly, what appears in this

passage to be most threatening is the nature of the sati's desire, that "savage fire for something unknown—horribly unknown—that lay beyond life." The use of the expression "savage fire" to articulate a desire for that which is achievable only through death emphasizes the particular connection of this form of frightening desire to the sati figure. We might productively recall here the focus on the widows' desire during the debate in the 1820s over the abolition of *sati*. In some ways, Tara's partially burned body—though clearly a product of Steel's imagination rather than a reflection of any actual practices—might be read as having for Steel's text a function similar to that of the "trial by fire" for Sleeman and other British observers in the early nineteenth century. Tara's burned body expresses after the fact of her attempted *sati* what the unburned limbs of the women who underwent trials by fire expressed for the British officers and observers at the time: the sati's desire to die on the funeral pyre.

Moreover, this desire is here extended to the crowd in the bazaar by virtue of Tara's presence, the capacity of her physical self to make the "hearts stir" not only in the Hindu spectators, but in the Muslim onlookers as well. The language with which Steel describes the crowd's "appeal to the Great Death Mother" resonates with the language she uses after Jim Douglas has taken the lock of Tara's hair to describe what troubles Jim about Tara's desire to become a sati:

"Give it back, master," she pleaded wildly. "Hinder me not again! Before God I am *suttee!* I am *suttee!*"

But this same Eastern clutch of appeal is disconcerting to the average Englishman. It fetters the understanding ... and smothers sympathy in a desire to be left alone. (71)

When the “Eastern clutch of appeal” that characterizes Tara’s desire to become “suttee” is extended to the bazaar crowd, that which is merely “disconcerting” for Jim Douglas as he confronts the individual Tara is transformed into something much more dangerous. What I find most fascinating about the procession’s extension of the sati’s desire to the bazaar crowd is that this horrible desire of the sati is written not just as a vague threat to the disguised white male observer, but it becomes connected implicitly to the Mutiny in the ability of the sati’s body to unite Hindus and Muslims in anti-colonial feeling that is palpable and threatening to Jim Douglas. I suggested earlier in this chapter that one of the central concerns during the debate over the abolition of *sati* was the question of whether British interference in the practice would result in a rebellion. While Steel does not suggest that *sati* was the direct cause of the Mutiny, this scene of Tara’s procession implies that the Mutiny was enabled by the desire at the root of Tara’s insistence that she is “suttee” and the feeling that desire has the power to excite in the crowds. Indeed, the procession scene ends with Jim overhearing the Moulvie of Fyzabad, whom Steel writes as one of the key Muslim instigators of the Mutiny, as he uses the procession to prophesize the end of British/Christian power in India:

“Fire worship for a hundred years,  
A century of Christ and tears,  
Then the True God shall come again  
And every infidel be slain.” (103)

Eliciting nods of agreement from others in the crowd, the Moulvie’s ominous prophecy transforms the implicit threat of Tara’s power to excite the bazaar crowd into an explicit promise of violent rebellion.

Thus even though Steel's representation of *sati* differs significantly from Mainwaring's, both writers construct *sati* as a threat to British hegemony. Interestingly, each writer attempts to neutralize this threat through a doubling of the *sati* figure in her text. Just as Mainwaring's *sati* is a double figure, embodied through Temora and Benrudda, Steel's *sati* is also constructed through a double figure in the characters of Tara and Kate. Left alone with Tara and determined to escape Delhi before Jim Douglas has to return to save her, Kate tells an incredulous Tara her plan to disguise herself as a *sati*:

But Kate, opening the door with her eyes a-glitter, and a whole cut-and-dried plan for the future, almost took [Tara's] breath away, and reduced her into looking at the Englishwoman with a sort of fear.

"The *mem* will be *suttee* too," she said stupidly, after listening awhile. "The *mem* will shave her head and put away her jewels! The *mem* will wear a widow's shroud and sweep the floor, saying she comes from Bengal to serve the saint?" (362)

Tara's repeated appellation of Kate not by her given name, but as "the *mem*," here offers emphasis for the difference between Mainwaring's and Steel's doubled *sati* figures: whereas Mainwaring's Benrudda and Temora are differently gendered but are both Hindu, Steel's doubled figure is constructed through two women on either side of the racial and cultural divide between British and Indian that the novel is so invested in maintaining.

The prospect of Kate, or any English "*mem*," using the guise of the *sati* to escape Delhi raises questions about what it means to "be *suttee*" in Steel's novel. Tara is at first skeptical that Kate ever could become *suttee*, but then she is quite troubled at the idea that this state of being could be possible for her:

Would the *mem* really be *suttee*? She had asked herself again and again. Would she do so much for the master? Would she—would she really shave her head? A grim smile of incredulity came to Tara's face, then a quick, sharp frown of pain. If she did, she must care very much for the *Huzoor*. Besides, she had no right to do it! The *mems* were never *suttee*. They married again many times. And then this *mem* was married to someone else. No! she would never shave her head for a strange man. She might take off her jewels, she might even sweep the floor. But shave her head? never! (362-363)

Here the power of Tara's status as "suttee" during the procession, the threat posed by her "horrible" desire, are neutralized through the possibility of Kate's acquiring that status simply by shaving her head and removing her jewels. At the same time, Tara's insistence that the "*mems* were never *suttee*" serves to reinforce the division between British and Indian women with the implication that just as Kate could never become "suttee," so Britain could never lose its identity to its Indian colony. When Kate begins to cut off her hair, Tara prevents her from completing the task, snatching away the knife and protesting, "The *mems* cannot be *suttee*. I will not have it" (364). Tara, who helps disguise Kate as a "Hindu lady under a vow of silence and solitude" (364) rather than allow her to complete the "suttee" disguise, thus protects her own sacred subject position even as Kate's willingness to transform herself undermines the potential power of this position.

The end of the novel resolves the Mutiny narrative and the *sati* narrative together through the spectacle of Tara's death: as the British reclaim Delhi, Tara retrieves the lock of her hair from Jim Douglas while he sleeps, dresses in her "scarlet, tinsel-set, wedding dress" and all her jewels, and stands on top of a burning turret as it collapses into the flames. As she waits for the flames, she chants: "O! Lord of death, bear witness that I come. Day, Night, and Twilight say I am *suttee*" (424). Tara's death functions to

neutralize the threat she represents in the novel and to reassert the fixity of clear racial boundaries represented by the historical narrative of the Mutiny. First, her death removes the possibility of the Indian woman's desire for the English man and restores clear racial boundaries to the novel's representations of domesticity and desire. Tara—who unsuccessfully performs the English woman's domestic role by attempting to nurse Jim back to health after he falls sick in Delhi—is only free to complete her *sati* ritual after she brings Kate back to the rooftop room to care for him. Insofar as Tara embodies the problematic mingling of East and West within the novel, her death immediately following the reunion of Kate and Jim restores a racial order that Tara's presence threatened. Second, her death neutralizes the threat posed by her monstrous femininity, that "clutch of appeal" that Jim finds disconcerting and inscrutable, and that the procession reveals to be dangerous in its ability to excite rebellious impulses in the crowds. By enabling Tara to fulfill her desire for death, Steel removes the danger of that incomprehensible desire from the narrative, rendering the problem of comprehending this desire obsolete through its self-destruction.

Ray argues that Tara's choice to dress in red wedding attire instead of the white, unadorned garb of the widow makes it problematic to read her death as an enactment of *sati*: "Neither her dress nor the place can give Tara the status of *sati*.... She dies simply because she cannot live, and her death is reinscribed by those watching as yet another fatal accident caused by the mutiny."<sup>87</sup> Reading Tara as fluctuating "between her love for the man who has saved her and her realization of the impossibility of living as *sati*," Ray suggests that the bridal garb reflects Tara's recognition that she "can no longer lay

claim to that sacred subject position” of the sati.<sup>88</sup> Although Steel’s envisioning of Tara’s *sati* is clearly not an accurate rendering of the ritual, Tara’s chant, “Day, Night, and Twilight say I am suttee,” asserts her continued attachment to that subject position and establishes Steel’s construction of her death at least symbolically in terms of the *sati* ritual. While the articulation of Tara’s desire might make her wedding garb reflect her impossible relationship to Jim, I would argue that Steel uses the spectacle of Tara being immersed in the flames in another way. Tara’s death occurs at the same time as John Nicholson, the general who enables the British to suppress the Mutiny and reclaim Delhi, is being buried, having died in the process of reinstating British control over the city. Although Tara, certainly, does not regard her action as related in any way to the suppression of the Mutiny or Nicholson’s funeral, Steel’s narration of Tara’s pseudo-*sati* as concurrent with the funeral suggests a narrative function for her death that exceeds the character’s intention. By narrating Tara’s delayed *sati*, which can no longer take place in the time or space of her husband’s funeral pyre, during Nicholson’s funeral, Steel constructs her death as a sacrifice to the Mutiny’s suppression and the Mutiny narrative’s resolution. The fact that Tara does not jump into the flames of a prepared pyre, but rather stands on top of a burning turret—one of the “many wanton fires in Delhi during those first few days of license” after the British reclaim the city (423)—and chants as the turret “sank inwardly” into the flames, suggests that the fire on which she burns marks the death of the Mutiny itself. The simultaneous *sati* of Tara, through whom the novel represents that racialized feminine desire which is capable of inciting rebellion, and burial of Nicholson, through whom the rebellion is suppressed, implies that just as Tara’s

death removes the threat represented by Tara's mixing of racially-defined characteristics and by her femininity, it also eliminates the threat of rebellion.

Despite this use of the *sati* figure's self-destruction to contain the dangers represented by those aspects of India Steel constructs as unknowable and uncontrollable—appeal, desire, rebellion—the centrality of this anachronistic *sati* narrative within Steel's purportedly objective historical narrative of the Mutiny suggests the impossibility of resolving the contradictions embodied by these two narratives. In one sense, by sacrificing Tara to the Mutiny's suppression, Steel privileges the post-Mutiny embodiment of British India through fixed racial boundaries, where brown bodies can mimic white bodies but never be confused with them, over the pre-Mutiny ideology of the civilizing mission as embodied by the *sati* figure, with its emphasis on reform and the betterment of the colonized people. But in another sense, the novel relies on the *sati* narrative not only as an encapsulation of what the British fear in India, but for its justification of the British occupation and its attempts to defuse British feelings about the Mutiny. Even though the resolution of Steel's novel requires Tara's death, the novel's aim of encouraging forgiveness requires her presence: through Tara, the British public is offered an Indian character who saves the British hero and heroine from dying during the Mutiny, and at the same time, Jim's repeated rescue of Tara suggests a less cynical and aggressive, more altruistic construction of the colonial project than the overtly racist post-Mutiny focus on domination and control. Tara thus embodies both the novel's hopes for defusing feelings aroused by the Mutiny and the dangerous, threatening element that must be excised for the Mutiny narrative's resolution.



As the sati figure travels through the official debates, Mainwaring's sentimental novel, and Steel's end-of-century Mutiny novel, in some ways it carries with it a fixed association with the ideology of British colonialism as a civilizing mission. But in other ways, as the differences among these textual representations suggest, the malleability of the sati figure enables writers to articulate very different conceptions of the colonial relationship under the shared banner of the civilizing mission. For the participants in the *sati* debate, the practice constituted an ethical challenge and a legal-judicial problem: as legislators and missionaries weighed their repugnance of the *sati* practice against their fear that abolishing it would incite rebellion, they used a structure of philanthropic feeling for the *sati* victims to define Britain as a civilizing presence in an inhuman place, maintaining a safe distance between colonizer and colonized. For Mainwaring, by contrast, *sati* serves as the basis for an affective bond between British and Hindu women, allowing her to narrate an inevitable religious and cultural conversion of the Hindu population to English Christianity. This conversion narrative, which constructs the civilizing mission in terms of reforming hearts and minds instead of legislating behavior, enables Mainwaring to hedge against the threats of military competition, revolution, and Islamic proselytizing implied by the presence of Tipu Sultan in the novel. Finally, for Steel, the anachronistic presence of Tara as sati figure in her historical narrative of the Mutiny at once provides a receptacle for the threatening, rebellion-inciting form of racialized desire that the novel represents as underlying the Mutiny, and offers through the sati figure's association with the civilizing mission a means of defusing British

feelings about the Mutiny. Running through all of these representations of the sati's body are the interlocking discourses of desire, feeling, and rebellion, rendering the sati a powerful figure for articulations of Britain's investment in and fears about its colonial presence in India.

### Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> James Peggs, *India's Cries to British Humanity*, 3rd ed. (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1832).

<sup>2</sup> There has already been plenty of scholarly work published on the terminology of *sati*. The term, generally spelled "suttee" in British documents and "sati" in Hindu writings and in India today, has been used both by the British in the nineteenth century and by scholars in the twentieth century to refer to the practice or ritual of widows burning on their husbands' funeral pyres. As John Stratton Hawley has outlined in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), however, the word "sati," which in Hindi literally means "good woman" or "a woman devoted to her husband," has been used by Hindus to refer primarily not to a practice, but to the woman who burns—one does not "commit sati" but rather one becomes a sati. There is no standard practice in current scholarly work on widow immolation for distinguishing between the terminology for the practice and for the women themselves. Some use only the term "sati" (italicized or not), some use the British spelling "suttee," and some use a combination of the two. Since I will be referring to both meanings in this chapter, and in the absence of any standard of usage, I

---

will use the italicized “*sati*” to refer to the practice of widow immolation, and the unitalicized “sati” to refer to the women who died participating in the practice.

<sup>3</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> The 1832 pamphlet was a compilation that reprinted earlier writings by Peggs; the material on *sati* was originally published in 1827, prior to the East India Company’s abolition of the practice.

<sup>5</sup> Radhika Mohanram, *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 61.

<sup>6</sup> See Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998); and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Spivak, 299.

<sup>8</sup> Calcutta was under the jurisdiction of British law, enabling the abolition of the practice much earlier than in the rest of British India. See Mani, 16.

<sup>9</sup> V.N. Datta, *Sati: A Historical, Social and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow Burning* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1988), 22.

<sup>10</sup> Mani, 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Datta, 25.

---

<sup>12</sup> James Peggs, *The Suttees' Cry to Britain; Containing Extracts from Essays Published in India and Parliamentary Papers on the Burning of Hindoo Widows* (London: Seely, 1827), 50, original emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> William Bentinck, Government circular on *sati* addressed to military officers, 10 November 1828, *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, Governor-General of India, 1828-1835*, vol. 1, ed. C.H. Philips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 91.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>15</sup> Known as the Vellore Mutiny, this uprising of Indian sepoys and officers in July 1806 was interpreted by the British to be the result of a Code of Military Regulations instituted 13 March 1806 and sanctioned by Bentinck as governor. The new Code ordered that the sepoys of Madras wear new turbans in place of the traditional turbans, which the British officers considered clumsy, and prohibited Indian soldiers from wearing caste marks on their faces, wearing earrings while in uniform, or having facial hair on their chins. Some of the sepoys refused to wear the new turbans on the grounds that they were too like hats worn by Europeans, and they were arrested and eventually court-martialed, with some sentenced to receive 500 lashes and some to receive 300 lashes and be discharged from their positions. Other refusals to wear the turbans followed. The actual mutiny, however, was far more organized than these preceding events and involved a liaison between the sepoys and sons of Tipu Sultan who were residing under guard in Vellore, with the aim of taking the fort at Vellore from the British and reinstating descendants of Tipu as rulers. Though the mutiny was short-lived—it lasted only about eight hours—more than 100

---

British officers and soldiers were killed. For a detailed account of the Vellore Mutiny, see Maya Gupta, *Lord William Bentinck in Madras and the Vellore Mutiny, 1803-7* (New Delhi: Capital Publishers, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> William Bentinck, Minute on *Sati*, 8 November 1829, *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 336, original emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Sir Charles Metcalfe, Minute on *Sati*, 14 November 1829, *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 348.

<sup>18</sup> Peggs, *The Suttees' Cry to Britain*, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Mani, 76.

<sup>20</sup> William Bentinck, Government circular on *sati* addressed to military officers, 10 November 1828, *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Mani, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 64-65.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 56.

<sup>24</sup> Qtd. in Mani, 166.

<sup>25</sup> Mani, 160, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Qtd. in Mani, 176.

<sup>27</sup> Major-General Sir William H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of An Indian Official* (1844; reprint London, New York, and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1915), 20.

---

<sup>28</sup> Sleeman, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Weinberger-Thomas, *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and David Gordon White (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 37.

<sup>30</sup> The question of the women's consent to become *satis* has generated much debate, both in relation to the absent voices of the early nineteenth-century women who died and in relation to twentieth-century cases of *satis* in India—especially the 1987 *sati* of eighteen-year-old Roop Kanwar, whose death was widely publicized and spurred feminist critiques of and outrage over the practice. I am primarily interested for the purposes of this chapter in how *sati* has been imagined rather than in the questions of consent *per se*. For more on the question of consent, see Veena Talwar Oldenburg, “The Roop Kanwar Case: Feminist Responses,” in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 101-131; Ashis Nandy, “Sati as Profit Versus Sati as a Spectacle: The Public Debate on Roop Kanwar's Death,” in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse*, 131-148; and Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*.

<sup>31</sup> Qtd. in Mani, 178.

<sup>32</sup> William Bentinck, Government circular on *sati* addressed to military officers, 10 November 1828, *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 91.

<sup>33</sup> William Bentinck, Minute on *Sati*, 8 November 1829, *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 335.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 344-345.

<sup>36</sup> Monika Fludernik, "Suttee Revisited: From the Iconography of Martyrdom to the Burkean Sublime," *New Literary History* 30, no. 2 (1999): 411-437, 412.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 424.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 422-423.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Lenard, *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell, and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 14, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 17, 11-12.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>42</sup> Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>44</sup> Peggs, *The Suttees' Cries to Britain*, 50, original emphasis.

<sup>45</sup> Van Sant, 37.

<sup>46</sup> Mrs. General Mainwaring, *The Suttee, Or, the Hindoo Converts*, 3 vols. (London: A.K. Newman and Company, 1830). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically within the text.

<sup>47</sup> Mrs. General Mainwaring, *Moscow; or The Grandsire: An Historical Tale*, 3 vols. (London: A.K. Newman and Company, 1822).

<sup>48</sup> Monika Fludernik's essay, "Suttee as Heroic Martyrdom, Liebestod and Emblem of Women's Oppression: From Orientalist to Feminist Appropriations of a Hindu Rite in Four Narrative Genres," *Recherches Anglaises et Nord-Américaines* 33 (2000): 145-180,

---

mentions Mainwaring's novel in passing but gives an inaccurate synopsis of its plot:

“Such a skewed representation of suttee also occurs in Mrs. Mainwaring's *The Suttee*, where the woman who throws herself on the flames is actually committing suicide in expiation for her former cowardice when she shied away from the ordeal at the death of her husband” (165). Neither the heroine nor her husband ever dies in Mainwaring's novel, nor does this synopsis reflect any subplot within the novel.

<sup>49</sup> Robin Jared Lewis, “Sati and the Nineteenth century British Self,” in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse*, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Tipu Sultan (spelled Tippoo in Mainwaring's novel and in many contemporary British references) fought the British army over territorial control in India during the first and second Anglo-Mysore Wars in the 1760s and 1780s under the command of his father, Muslim ruler Hyder Ali, before taking over as ruler after his father's death in 1782. After a brief respite following a 1784 treaty with the British, fighting between Tipu and British forces resumed in 1790 with the third Anglo-Mysore War, until Tipu was defeated in 1792. Demonized by the British as a tyrannical and cruel ruler, Tipu posed the greatest threat to British territorial control of India in the late eighteenth century, and his ties to the French as periodic allies against the British through the end of the century made him a threatening figure in relation to British fears about revolution as well as colonial instability.

<sup>51</sup> Cheryl McEwan, *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in West Africa* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 4-5.



---

<sup>52</sup> Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ferguson, 260-261.

<sup>54</sup> Lenard, 69.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 47.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>58</sup> Though Mainwaring does not explicitly make this connection in her novel, the tiger was a common image associated with Tipu Sultan in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century descriptions of him.

<sup>59</sup> Lewis, 75.

<sup>60</sup> Sangeeta Ray, *En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 67.

<sup>61</sup> Qtd. in Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 20.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 33, 44.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>65</sup> Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 59.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 62.

<sup>67</sup> Brantlinger, 201, 200.

---

<sup>68</sup> Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity, Being the Autobiography of Flora Annie Steel, 1847-1929* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), 15.

<sup>69</sup> Flora Annie Steel, *On the Face of the Waters* (1896; reprint, New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1985), preface.

<sup>70</sup> Sharpe, 89.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>72</sup> Brantlinger, 202, 220.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 218, 223.

<sup>74</sup> Nancy Paxton, "Complicity and Resistance in the Writings of Flora Annie Steel and Annie Besant," in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 159.

<sup>75</sup> Sharpe, 97.

<sup>76</sup> Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, trans. Michael Glencross (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

<sup>77</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 28.

<sup>78</sup> Alan Johnson, "'Sanitary Duties' and Registered Women: A Reading of *On the Face of the Waters*," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 11, no. 2 (1998): 507-513, 512.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 509-510.

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 510.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 512.

<sup>84</sup> Sharpe, 108.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>86</sup> Ray, 84, 85.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 87.

## Chapter Two: Dismemberings and Rememberings: Women's Images of India's Partition

If one had to choose the most important date from the span of twentieth-century Indian history, undoubtedly it would have to be 14 August 1947, the day of India's official independence from British colonial rule. In political discourse and in literature, not just this date, but the symbolic moment of midnight has come to stand for two simultaneous, highly significant shifts in South Asia's political configuration: British India ceased to exist, with the lowering of the British flag marking the end of a centuries-long colonial occupation, and not one, but two new nations were established, as British India was partitioned into the independent states of India and Pakistan. Marking the symbolic resonance of this moment, Jawaharlal Nehru—the leader of the Hindu nationalist Congress party in the 1840s and the first Prime Minister of independent India—delivered his famous “Tryst with Destiny” speech at midnight as the Indian flag was being raised, describing the new nation's formation as a “birth of freedom.” And in his novel *Midnight's Children* Salman Rushdie, India's best-known literary figure of the twentieth-century, dramatically invested the stroke of midnight with symbolic resonance by narrating the celebrations of independence alongside the births of the new nation's firstborn children, whose lives become metaphors for the nation's early history.<sup>1</sup>

But the narratives contained in this symbolic moment of the end of British occupation and the beginning of the newly independent nations address only a small part of the historical, political, and social effects of the negotiations that led to partition and

independence. In addition to the narratives of decolonization and British India's division into two nation-states, partition involved the regional divisions of Punjab and Bengal, across which the borders between India and Pakistan were drawn, and the divisions of communities along the lines of religious affiliation. The months preceding and following August 1947 were characterized by massive migration, riots, and horrifying violence primarily among Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities, as Hindus and Sikhs moved to the newly defined India and Muslims to Pakistan. Between 500,000 and one million people are estimated to have died in the migrations, and many more were wounded, abducted, raped, or forcibly converted during partition riots. Tracing the legacies of partition beyond 1947, moreover, this moment of simultaneous independence and partition has continued to haunt the region. Within India, communal riots have been an almost constant presence in the past twenty years. Disputes over territory and resources along the borders established in 1947 have continued to create a hostile, volatile relationship between India and Pakistan, with the threat of nuclear war hanging over interactions between the countries.

Because the moment of partition was so traumatic, involved so many concurrent political and social shifts, and has continued to play such a dominant role in shaping the South Asian subcontinent, there is a tendency toward compression in popular and literary treatments of this history. Partition is constructed as such a central, defining moment, that despite the radical incoherence and overdetermination of this moment, it has acquired a kind of coherence as a way of naming a complex network of political and social effects related to decolonization, nation-formation, and the division of regional and

religious communities. This compressed set of political and social effects frequently finds expression through images of wounded, violated bodies, which become overdetermined vehicles for articulating the simultaneous political shifts, regional divisions, and communal conflicts of this traumatic historical moment. Just as women's bodies were particularly invested sites for the British colonial imagination in the *sati* images discussed in the previous chapter, both during partition and in literature that deals with its legacies women's bodies have been treated as highly invested symbols for the overlapping forms of community and political identity that were challenged by the events of 1947. In the nineteenth century the British appropriated Indian women's bodies through the violent spectacle of *sati* in order to embody shifting conceptions of the colonial relationship, and in the mid-twentieth century, these bodies became discursive and often literal battlegrounds, as religious communities and the newly established nations reappropriated women's bodies as symbols for other forms of collective identity in the immediate wake of Britain's occupation. While the communal violence that preceded and followed partition affected both women and men, women from Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities were targeted and became victims of sexualized forms of violence: women were abducted, raped, and forced to convert by men from other religious communities; they were killed and mutilated in sexually suggestive ways; and in some cases women were murdered by men in their own families in order to prevent the perceived community dishonor that would result if they were raped by men from other communities. Whereas Indian women's voices were absent from nineteenth-century appropriations of their bodies, however, in the wake of partition, South Asian women

have taken up these symbolic and literal appropriations of their bodies in order to represent partition as an experience of collective trauma, and at the same time to critique the denial of women's experience implied by uses of their bodies as abstract symbols.

This chapter seeks to decompress the historical moment of partition and its social and political implications through an analysis of ways in which images of bodies—and in particular, women's bodies—have been used to represent the complexity of this moment of abstract and material violence. As such, it engages with a long history, beginning with the political negotiations leading up to independence and partition, moving through contemporary literary responses to 1947 from Punjabi poet Amrita Pritam, and finishing with an examination of two recent texts—Deepa Mehta's 1999 film *Earth*<sup>2</sup> and Shauna Singh Baldwin's 1999 novel *What the Body Remembers*—that deal with the gendered violence of partition from the historical distance of its fiftieth anniversary and the geographic distance of the South Asian diaspora. This chapter addresses two central questions concerning the use of women's bodies to represent overlapping histories of gendered violence and collective trauma. First, what are the effects of compressing the complex, overlapping histories of gendered, communal, and colonial violence into a single moment, envisioned through images of overdetermined female bodies? And second, how have women writers and artists attempted to decompress the histories of violence that converge around partition by unpacking and redeploying these images of women's bodies?

Each of the texts I analyze in this chapter grapples with the challenges presented by this second question, and each offers a different approach to representing the actual

violence enacted on women's bodies during partition without replicating the discursive violence of using women's bodies as symbols for nations and communities. The chapter will first analyze two poems written in the immediate wake of partition by Amrita Pritam, one of the Punjab's most important writers of the twentieth century. Reading these poems within the contexts of the political negotiations leading up to partition and the violence against women that marked the event, I will suggest that Pritam's poems, like so much of the partition literature that emerged in its aftermath, register a disconnection between the official political narratives of partition and independence and the lived experience of violence to both individual bodies and collective forms of identity. The chapter will then turn to two more recent texts that look back at partition from its fiftieth anniversary. Indian-Canadian director Deepa Mehta's 1999 film *Earth* uses a mode of national melodrama to construct a memory of partition for a transnational audience, enclosing a narrative of 1947's communal and gendered violence within a frame that constructs partition as a moment of rupture in India's national and colonial histories. Shauna Singh Baldwin's 1999 novel *What the Body Remembers* uses the trope of the body that "remembers" the distant and recent past to represent partition not as a violent rupture in India's history, but rather as part of interlocking histories of colonial, communal, and gendered violence.

### **Rivers of Blood: Post-Partition Images**

The wretched children were not even concerned about the fact that the British had left, and that before leaving, they had wounded us so deeply



that it would take years for our wounds to heal. The operation on India had been performed by such incompetent hands and with such blunt instruments that generations had been destroyed. Rivers of blood flowed everywhere. And no one had the courage to even stitch the open wounds.<sup>3</sup>

—Ismat Chughtai, “Roots” (1952)

Beautiful neighbor!  
The Punjab was a single body,  
The five rivers its blood-vessels,  
And the overflowing waters of those rivers  
The common blood.  
Today that body has been torn apart—  
How will the blood pass  
Through the broken limbs!<sup>4</sup>

—Amrita Pritam, “Divided” (1948)

“Rivers of blood” and “broken limbs”—two instances from the overwhelming number of images of wounded and mutilated bodies that appear in writing about India’s partition—speak at once to the material violence enacted during partition on actual bodies and to the more abstract, metaphorical violence that partition itself enacted on the imagined communities of India, Punjab, and Bengal. In the wake of the official celebrations of independence, there was an outpouring of literary responses in both India and Pakistan to the widespread experiences of dislocation and violence. Many of the established Indian writers who took partition as their topic were themselves displaced during 1947, like Pritam, who had to move to Delhi from her home in Gujranwala when it became part of Pakistan, or short story writer Saadat Hasan Manto, who wrote over fifty stories about partition in Urdu after leaving Bombay for Lahore. While Ismat Chughtai, a friend of Manto’s and like him a member of the communist-leaning Progressive Writers’ Movement,<sup>5</sup> remained in Bombay after partition, her family emigrated to Pakistan and her writing reflects the loss of a literary community that began

to disperse in the years following partition. Although Manto wondered soon after 1947 whether the literature written in undivided India would “be partitioned too,”<sup>6</sup> the various post-partition literary responses from Indian and Pakistani writers, written in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and English, among other languages, have more recently been published together in collections that view these writings as linked thematically by their attempts to make sense of this traumatic history of violence.<sup>7</sup>

In these literary responses, representations of bodies in conditions of extreme crisis—bleeding, burnt, torn, dissected, dismembered, mutilated, raped—are perhaps the most common and the most affecting images. The scale and the brutality of the communal violence enacted predominantly among Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities as the boundaries of India and Pakistan were defined formed a material basis for these representations. At one level, the images of wounded and fragmented bodies bear witness to the actual violence that formed the underside of independence. At another level, however, as the quotations from Chughtai’s story and Pritam’s poem both suggest, the wounded or divided body was a powerful metaphorical vehicle for representing the more abstract violence of the divisions wrought by partition—India from Pakistan, East Punjab from West Punjab, East Bengal from West Bengal, Hindu and Sikh communities from Muslim communities, neighbor from neighbor.

That writers on both sides of the border used images of wounded or fragmented bodies, “vivisection,” and “dismemberment” to represent the partition in literary texts is not coincidental.<sup>8</sup> Images of divided bodies ran through the official debates on partition years before the actual event, forming a kind of medium through which the negotiators

could argue for their own conceptions of what an independent India would look like. From the Muslim League's<sup>9</sup> first public demand for a separate Islamic nation in March 1940, both advocates for and opponents of partition used images of bodies defined by disease and health, division and wholeness, to make their cases for the formation of either a united India or the two nations of India and Pakistan. Gandhi repeatedly referred to the proposed partition as a "vivisection," representing it as unnatural and as a form of violence by employing the metaphor of a body cut open while still alive. In April 1940, he suggested that such a "vivisection" would mean suicide for the Muslim community: "But I do not believe that Muslims, when it comes to a matter of actual decision, will ever want vivisection. Their good sense will prevent them. Their self-interest will deter them. Their religion will forbid the obvious suicide which the partition would mean."<sup>10</sup> A month later he characterized partition as a dismembering: "Pakistan cannot be worse than foreign domination.... But I do not believe that the Muslims really want to dismember India."<sup>11</sup>

Importantly, in the shifting negotiations leading up to the actual partition, these generalized body politic figures were quite malleable, so that the metaphor worked equally well as a rhetorical device for proponents of a separate Pakistan as it did for Gandhi's arguments against partition. B.R. Ambedkar, a leading political figure in the Muslim League, for example, in 1941 describes the communal differences between Hindus and Muslims as "an open and running sore,"<sup>12</sup> constructing the still-unified India as a body diseased by the coexistence of two such divided groups within one political entity. Rather than figuring division as an assault to the body politic, as Gandhi does,

Ambedkar argues that forced union would effectively kill the body of India.<sup>13</sup> Even a steadfast opponent of partition like Sardar Patel, a leader in the Congress and one of the staunchest advocates for a united India, could turn Gandhi's metaphor of division as vivisection into a pro-partition figure of division as surgery when it suited his political purposes to suggest in 1946 that it was time to "cut the diseased limb" of the Muslim League.<sup>14</sup>

While Patel's use of an image of healing through amputation might seem odd coming from an advocate for a united India, it actually gestures toward a larger pattern in Congress representations of India as they accepted that partition would happen and prepared for independence. As the event of partition drew nearer, Congress leaders increasingly turned to images of Mother India and the motherland, bodies imagined as whole, pure, fertile, and newly freed, and in the process they refocused on independence and decolonization as opposed to the partition through which independence would be accomplished. In his 14 August "Tryst With Destiny" speech, Nehru represented India as a mother figure, whose soul was "long suppressed" by colonial occupation but "finds utterance" with the "birth" of independence.<sup>15</sup> Gandhi, writing on 10 August 1947, appears to have abandoned the metaphor of partition as vivisection a few days before the event, choosing to emphasize the continued connections between the two states instead of the legal and political separation: "Division of India does not, ought not to, divide the All India body. India does not become two nations because it has been cut up into two sovereign States."<sup>16</sup> And Patel, in a speech delivered 11 August 1947, expresses a hope

that partition will remove poison from the body politic, even as he asserts the indivisibility of India:

*Today the partition of India is a settled fact and yet it is an unreal fact! I hope, however, that partition would remove the poison from the body politic of India.*

India is one and indivisible. One cannot divide a sea or split the running waters of a river.<sup>17</sup>

Compared to the earlier images of vivisection and dismembering, Patel's "one and indivisible" India cured of its poison, Nehru's representations of India waking from a "slumber," and Gandhi's disclaimer that two states does not mean two nations or a divided body of India are quite mild. Nehru's imagery in particular, which barely acknowledges partition as the cost of independence, functions to naturalize the newly defined boundaries of India—boundaries, ironically, which were not even officially decided until two days after India's formal independence<sup>18</sup>—through the figure of a vital, unviolated, uninjured Mother India. Ironically, then, as the political separation of India and Pakistan was realized, and as the communal violence escalated, the official discourse became increasingly sanitized, producing body politic figures that disavowed both the abstract partition of political identities and the material implications of partition for those people affected by the communal violence.

Read through this political conversation in images, Chughtai's statement in "Roots"—that "The operation on India had been performed by such incompetent hands and with such blunt instruments that generations had been destroyed"—can be recognized as at once a citation and a critique of the images of diseased bodies, surgically healed, running through the official debates in the 1940s. If this division was an

operation, she suggests, then its effect was not to heal, but to create wounds, and the “rivers of blood” created by the material violence that soon threatens the family in her story testifies to that wounding. As the official discourse became increasingly sanitized, the unofficial literature of partition increasingly registered an experience of violence—to the body, to identity, to family, and to community—through images of wounded, mutilated, and fragmented bodies. The disjunction between the official discourse and the literary responses raises a number of questions about the role of images of corporeal crisis in partition writing: How do we read the disjunction between the body imagery that political figures like Nehru used to figure independence and the images of violated and wounded bodies that appear in literary responses to partition? What is the relationship between the representations of material bodies harmed during the communal violence and the use of similarly violated bodies as metaphors for the more abstract violence partition enacted on collective political identities and communities? How do we understand the relationship between the gendering of India in Nehru’s mother figures and the gendered violence performed on women’s bodies in the name of nation and religion?

All of these questions concern, in one way or another, the relationship between metaphorical uses of the body as a vehicle for representing political communities, on the one hand, and material bodies that have been impacted by changes in the political organization of a group of people, on the other. The writing of Pritam, Chughtai, and others, even as it uses the body to comment on the political and community divisions of partition, also insists on the materiality of its violence to actual bodies—a materiality the official discourse fails to acknowledge. In returning actual bodies to the abstraction of

the body politic metaphors that appear so frequently in representations of partition, these writers articulate a rupture in the official discourse, brought about by a dissonance between the official narratives imposed on the events of 1947 and the lived experiences of those people affected by these events. Because the body can act, to use Elizabeth Grosz's words, "as a kind of *hinge* or threshold ... between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the *inscription* of the body's outer surface,"<sup>19</sup> representations of bodies have the capacity to function both as sites for inscribing meaning and as articulations of lived experience. In the face of the officially inscribed bodies that were constructed as representations of independent India and the new Muslim nation—bodies imagined after the event as whole, free, organic, pure—writers like Chughtai and Pritam use the lived experience of the wounded body to assert an alternative bodily representation for the shifting collective identities of partition and independence.

By insisting not only that partition *was* figuratively a dismembering or a wounding of existing political identities and communities, but that its material effects included the dismembering and wounding of real bodies, this literature constructs partition as a kind of "unhinging" of the body and the political community. Rather than acting as a "hinge or threshold" between an inscriptive "sociopolitical exteriority" and a "psychic or lived interiority," the bodies of this partition literature make visible the disconnection between these two versions of reality. In imagining and narrating this disconnection, this literature writes partition as collective trauma and constitutes itself as testimony to that trauma. Speaking to the body's capacity to represent individual forms

of trauma, Ann Cvetkovich describes “representations of trauma as a wound or shock to the self” as “[o]perating at the hinge point between the physical and psychic.”<sup>20</sup> The representations I will discuss figure partition through the violated body as a wounding not only of the individual “self,” but of the self in relation to those collective forms of belonging that tie individuals to communities. Images of wounded bodies, registering a trauma both physical and psychic, work at a metaphorical level to construct as collective trauma the unhinging of sociopolitical inscription from lived experience, of externally imposed definitions of collective identity from felt attachments to community, of body politic from those who supposedly compose it.

In the first part of this chapter, I will explore two aspects of this unhinging or disconnection by analyzing two poems by Amrita Pritam, one of the most prolific and beloved Punjabi writers of the twentieth century, within the contexts of the political negotiations that preceded partition and the violence against women that happened during the partition riots. Her poem “Divided” registers a disconnection at the level of sociopolitical community, where the concentration on defining national communities in official negotiations obscures equally, if not more important forms of felt political identification, particularly in relation to region and religious community. And through a reading of Pritam’s “The Scar of a Wound,” I will look at a second aspect of this disconnection in the disjunction between the inscription of women’s bodies as coterminous with national identity and the lived experience of violence as women were abducted, raped, mutilated, and, after the riots ended, eventually “recovered” by their communities. Read together, these two forms of disjunction between partition’s



inscription from outside and its more internal status as lived experience become for Pritam an alternative way of recording the still recent events of partition as trauma. The “unhinged” body—the site where the abstraction of the body politic and the materiality of the actual bodies that supposedly constitute the body politic should, but fail to, match up—records the recent experience of partition as the feeling of dismemberment, constructing a history inflected by the trauma of a dissociation between the personal and the collective, between internal experience and external constructions of that experience.

While these disjunctions appear in much of the partition literature written in the decade after 1947, I have chosen to focus on Pritam’s poems for several reasons. First, these poems speak eloquently and powerfully to both aspects of the experience of unhinging that registers through so much of this literature, offering in the condensed form and intensely personal language of Pritam’s poetic voice expressions of a lived experience that jars with external constructions of partition’s meaning. Second, Pritam’s identity as a Punjabi writer—she writes primarily in Punjabi, she constructs her own literary heritage through other Punjabi writers, and though she has lived in India since 1947, her literary identity and community is consistently identified through her regional background—makes her an interesting figure for representing felt attachments to region and community that do not correspond to partition’s national divisions. Besides the feelings of regional attachment her poetry expresses, Pritam herself is a writer embraced by Punjabis on both sides of the India-Pakistan border for her most famous poem on partition, “To Waris Shah I Say,” which speaks to partition’s divisions through an address to Punjabi love poet Waris Shah. And finally, Pritam’s own experience of having

to leave her home during 1947 suggests a representative experience of dislocation and loss informing her poetry.

*National Inscriptions, Communal Belongings: Political Discourses and “Divided”*

Beautiful neighbor!  
With a pair of bullocks in front of your cart  
You are driving away and away,  
Leaving behind  
On the body of our common motherland,  
Two deep scars of the heavy wheels.

You are driving away and away  
With your families,  
And your bag and baggage,  
Because our common motherland  
Has been dissected.

‘One,’ they say, ‘is Pakistan,’  
‘The other,’ they tell us, ‘is Hindustan.’<sup>21</sup>  
—From Amrita Pritam, “Divided” (1948)

In Pritam’s poem “Divided,” which was first published in Lahore’s *Civil and Military Gazette* in January 1948, the speaker constructs partition not through the division of two nation-states, but through the resulting experience of watching her neighbor leave her home. “Hindustan” and “Pakistan” in the poem are places named and defined by others, holding no personal meaning for the speaker: “‘One,’ they say, ‘is Pakistan,’ / ‘The other,’ they tell us, ‘is Hindustan’” (12-13). But the imposition of these names on the speaker’s “motherland” and its communities has real implications for the lives of the speaker and her neighbor: the “common motherland,” identified later in the poem as the regional homeland of the Punjab, and the people of different religious communities who share this homeland are the casualties of the externally imposed

naming of “Hindustan” and “Pakistan.” In highlighting the differences between the official political narratives of partition and the experiences of violence to community and home for the people affected by this political division, Pritam articulates a disjunction between external definitions of national community and felt forms of community and political identification.

The disjunction between sociopolitical inscription and lived experience has extended to the history of partition scholarship, characterizing approaches to partition as much as the event itself. Until recently, this scholarship focused almost entirely on the high politics of partition—the events leading up to 1947, the key figures in the political negotiations, and the implications of partition for independent India and Pakistan. Only in the past several years have scholars shifted their attention to the people’s experiences of communal violence, of the chaos and confusion of the mass migration of over twelve million people within a few months, and of losing homes and families. The character and belatedness of this shift are evident in the difference between two influential collections of essays, reminiscences, and contemporary materials on partition, both edited by prominent partition scholar Mushirul Hasan. The first, *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, was published in 1993 and focuses primarily on the major players in the political negotiations leading to partition: Congress leaders Nehru and Gandhi, and Muslim League leader Jinnah. The second volume, *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, was published in 2000 and focuses on new approaches to partition in the wake of its fiftieth anniversary. This volume centers less on the key figures of the political negotiations and more on the experiences of ordinary

people—the previously neglected experiences of women during partition, the experiences of those who had to leave their homes during the mass migrations, and representations of partition in literature and memory.

While the scholarly neglect for so many years of those most affected by the events of 1947 seems a glaring omission, it is an omission that reflects the distance between the men who dominated the negotiations and the majority of the people affected by their decisions and compromises. Hasan’s concluding comment in his introduction to *India Partitioned*—“never before in South Asian history did so few divide so many, so needlessly”<sup>22</sup>—speaks succinctly to this distance between the few and the many, to the extent to which the key figures were divorced from the everyday lives of the communities they represented, and to the remarkable power wielded by a small group of men over the lives of others. In the images of bodies and the articulations of political communities that appear with such frequency in both the official and the popular literature of partition, this distance and the power differential between the few and the many is reflected in the divergent, often opposing, representations of partition’s bodies. Whereas Nehru, Jinnah, and company negotiated in the abstract for different configurations of united India or the two nations of India and Pakistan, the popular literature speaks to feelings of belonging and community that do not always fit into a national or international framework.

Gyanendra Pandey, speaking to the “wide chasm between the historians’ apprehension of 1947 and what we might call a more popular, survivors’ account of it,” describes this distance as a gap between history and memory.<sup>23</sup> In her discussion of the role of memory in constructions of public histories, however, Cvetkovich suggests that memory is not

antithetical to history, but is rather an important part of people's felt experience of history: "The turn to memory is also a turn to the affective or felt experience of history as central to the construction of public cultures, to give a range of people the authority to represent historical experience, and often implicitly to suggest a plurality of points of view."<sup>24</sup> Instead of a cultural memory separate from history, then, we have an alternative, affectively experienced form of history to those official narratives. Looking at images of bodies from accounts in which partition is still a very recent memory, we might therefore recognize a gap between a nascent national history and national feeling, or the lack thereof—between the process of nation-formation through political compromise and the forms of affective identification already present within the newly defined national citizenries.

The negotiations among the Hindu-dominated Congress, the Jinnah-led Muslim League, and the British government between 1937 and 1947 centered on the constitutional issues of the strength of the federal government and the protection of minority rights. The Congress, led by Nehru, wanted a united independent India with a strong central government, while the Muslim League feared that a strong center would render the large Muslim minority population perpetually powerless in a Hindu-dominated state. In March 1940, Jinnah made the Muslim League's first public demand for a Muslim nation, later named Pakistan by the Hindu press. Drawing on the writings of Muslim scholars who were at the time advancing what became known as the "two-nation theory," Jinnah shifted the terms of the constitutional debate by redefining the Muslim "minority" as a Muslim "nation": "It has always been taken for granted mistakenly that

the Musalmans are a minority.... The Musalmans are not a minority. The Musalmans are a nation by any definition.”<sup>25</sup> Jinnah’s Lahore Resolution clearly changed the terms of the debate, forcing participants on all sides to deal both with the question of one or two nations and with the continuing problem of minority rights within an independent India. Moreover, because the question of whether one or two nations would be formed with the departure of the British government had to be resolved before any delineation of minority rights could be outlined for an independent India, the partition issue—at least in the public rhetoric of the negotiations—to some extent overshadowed the ongoing constitutional debates. While Asim Roy argues that there is evidence in the actions of Congress and League leaders that Jinnah may have been more interested in Pakistan as a negotiating strategy than as a real demand, and that the Congress leaders were willing to sacrifice their united India in order to achieve a strong central government, the party lines after March 1940 were Hindus for a united India and Muslims for Pakistan.

Without discounting the significant differences between the positions of Nehru’s Congress and Jinnah’s Muslim League in the negotiations leading to partition, I want to suggest that a look at the articulations of political communities and the body images used by both advocates and opponents of partition in these writings of the early 1940s reveal surprising and important commonalities in how the negotiators approached the political entities they were working to define. On both sides (and in the mediations of the British government as well), the primary unit of community and collective identity that was under debate was the nation. Whether cast as the single nation of united India or the two nations of India and Pakistan, both the Congress and League leaders were involved in the

definition of nations, and they either ignored other forms of community and collective political identity, or else they subordinated them to the nation(s) they were in the process of defining. Viewed solely in the context of the negotiations, the Congress and League positions appear to reflect opposing conceptions of the nature of political community, with the Congress defining the nation as a diverse, multicultural, multilingual community with shared history and interests, and the League defining the nation according to shared “religious philosophies, social customs, and literature.”<sup>26</sup>

Yet when both positions are placed alongside articulations of the experience of partition that focus on regional identities, conceptions of religious community, and other expressions of social and political identity that exist at a more local than national level, the abstract definitions of national identity and community articulated through the Congress and League positions appear to have more in common with each other than with the community attachments felt by those people they purport to represent. Pritam’s poem privileges the Muslim speaker’s relationship with her Hindu “Beautiful neighbor,” her connection to the land and rivers that surround her home, and her “motherland” of the Punjab over any national identity. Nehru, in his *Discovery of India* (1946), laments that sentimental attachment rather than reasoned thought guided Muslim responses to the Pakistan proposal:

And yet the astonishing fact remains that those who propose ‘Pakistan’ or partition have consistently refused to define what they mean or to consider the implications of such a division. They move on the emotional plane only, as also many of those who oppose them, a plane of imagination and vague desire, behind which lie imagined interests.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, despite Nehru's privileging of "facts and realities"<sup>28</sup> over the "emotional plane" of the imagination and desire, in both the survivors' accounts and the literary responses to partition, emotional attachments are precisely what constitute the "realities" of how people experienced community belonging and forms of collective identity. As partition became political reality in August 1947, therefore, alongside the idealized official discourse of unity and freedom, images of wounding, division, and dismemberment reflected an alternate version of that reality, one based on sentimental attachments, affective identifications, and imagined communities whose limits often failed to coincide with national borders.

Like Nehru, Pritam uses the language of motherhood and embodiment to describe the creation of the independent states of India (or "Hindustan") and Pakistan; Pritam's image, however, is not one of birth and unity, but rather of disfigurement and fragmentation. Whereas accounts of 1947 such as Nehru's "Tryst with Destiny" speech focus on the creation of independent India in continuity with a pre-colonial past, Pritam's account focuses on the violence of partition that accompanied the formation of Nehru's India. The embodied "motherland" of Pritam's poem is not giving birth to a new nation or even to new nations, but rather has been scarred and "dissected" by the same political arrangements that Nehru characterizes as the end of "a period of misfortune" and as a "birth of freedom." Unlike Nehru's body of Mother India, which obscures the displacement and violence caused by partition as it endures the "pains of labour" but comes away whole and strong, the body of Pritam's "motherland" has been violently and irrevocably mutilated through the local effects of partition in Punjab. For Pritam, the



dissection of “our common motherland” through partition becomes the reason for her neighbors “driving away and away,” and the bullock carts that take them away leave “[t]wo deep scars of the heavy wheels” on “the body of our common motherland.” She constructs this common motherland that has been dissected through partition not as a nationalized Mother India, but as the regional body of Punjab. As Pritam imagines the landscape of Punjab as a body with blood-vessels and blood taking the place of rivers and water, she draws a connection between the blood that flows, or now fails to flow, through the newly “torn apart” Punjab and the blood of its people, also torn apart as her “Beautiful neighbor” drives “away and away.”

Pritam’s poem uses a corporeal image radically different from those used by the Congress leaders as a vehicle for imagining and communicating an equally different conception of the same moment of decolonization and nation-formation. Nehru uses the body of Mother India as a rhetorically effective fiction that the “India” created through the definition and demarcation of independent India as it was created through the negotiations leading up to 14 August 1947 is the same entity, the same body, as the mythic, pre-colonial India which “[a]t the dawn of history ... started on her unending quest.”<sup>29</sup> For Nehru, the British occupation of India is a period of oppression in the life of a nation that precedes and survives colonization intact, so that as the British leave, “the soul of [the] nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.” By constructing India through this uttering, questing, striving, labouring Mother India figure—defined consistently through its grounding in a mythical Hindu past and its future-oriented actions—Nehru at once succeeds in naturalizing the conception of independent India that was negotiated among

the Congress party, the Muslim League, and the British government and in obscuring the confusion, violence, and displacement that accompanied decolonization.

For Pritam, the partition that enables Nehru's India to have its "birth of freedom" is an act of violence, the cause of suffering rather than its alleviation. By shifting the image of the mother's body from the Mother India figure to the "motherland" of Punjab, Pritam denaturalizes the definitions of the new states of "Hindustan" and Pakistan, and she constructs their formation as a perversion of her homeland rather than its self-realization:

Punjab is an ancient land  
Older than History itself,  
It was one even under foreign rule  
But now when we will rule ourselves  
It stands divided. (40-44)

While Nehru situates India's origins at "the dawn of history," Pritam claims for the Punjab an existence "Older than History itself"; while Nehru locates the period of Mother India's suffering in the time of British colonial occupation, Pritam suggests that dividing the land and its people is a greater violence to the "motherland" than even British rule. As she rewrites the imagined and embodied community as the motherland of Punjab rather than Mother India, Pritam challenges the definition of the nation and its boundaries that Nehru constructs, and she reveals the act of nation-formation, in political discourse and in its material implications, to be an act of violence. Moreover, the gap between the idealized, naturalized body of Nehru's Mother India figure and the broken and bleeding body of Pritam's Punjab marks a dissonance between the understanding of collective identity that informed the political compromise that led to independence through

partition, on the one hand, and the felt experience of collective identities before and after partition for those who were affected by the compromise, on the other.

***Rape and Recovery: Women's Bodies and "The Scar of a Wound"***

An attention to the category of gender in the political bodies constructed by Pritam and Nehru reveals another form of dissonance between lived bodies and bodies inscribed by others in the writing of partition. As both writers' reliance on a female, mother's body suggests, women's bodies were identified in different ways with national, regional, and communal identities. Like the dissonance between the different versions of independence and partition, there was a dissonance between the inscription of women's bodies as markers of national or communal honor, on the one hand, and the lived bodily experience of women during and following the violence of partition. There was, in fact, a battle over the right to inscribe women's bodies, and insofar as these inscriptions were effected, both verbally and in many cases literally, in the name of nation and community, these bodies became surfaces on which to write new collective identities. While women's experiences were for a long time relegated to the margins of partition studies, recent scholarship has focused on the centrality of women's experience and women's narratives for considering not only the forms of violence enacted on women's bodies during the riots, but also the ways in which both India and Pakistan were defined and legitimated as nation-states during this period. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's essay "Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour," first published in 1996, paved the way for much of this scholarship by arguing that women's experiences of partition

and its aftermath were located not at the periphery, but at the center of partition's "narrative of displacement and dispossession, of large-scale and widespread communal violence, and of the realignment of family, community and national identities as people were forced to accommodate the dramatically altered reality that now prevailed."<sup>30</sup> There is no way of knowing how many women were abducted and raped during the partition riots in 1947; estimates range from an official figure in 1948 of 12,500 to more recent figures of between 88,000 and 125,000.<sup>31</sup> Beyond abduction and rape, Menon and Bhasin list some of the forms of sexually loaded violence performed on women's bodies: "stripping; parading naked; mutilating and disfiguring; tattooing or branding the breasts and genitalia with triumphal slogans; amputating breasts; knifing open the womb; raping, of course; killing fetuses."<sup>32</sup> After the riots ended, the treatment of "women's bodies as territory to be conquered, claimed or marked"<sup>33</sup> continued past the communal violence at the institutionalized level of the state, as the new governments of India and Pakistan began efforts to recover abducted women, with or without their consent, and send Hindu and Sikh women to India, Muslim women to Pakistan—a process that entailed the searching out of abducted women and the trading of women at the border.

The treatment of women's bodies and the meanings assigned to them, both during the riots and in the recovery operations, make literal the nationalist rhetorical move of locating national definitions and national virtue in Indian women's bodies. Urvashi Butalia suggests that the Indian government's investment in the recovery of abducted women—whether or not the women themselves wanted to be recovered—was about establishing the legitimacy of the new nation-state: "For the post-colonial, deeply

contested, fragile and vulnerable State, the rescue operation was an exercise in establishing its legitimacy. Thus, both for the legitimation of the State and for the restoration of the community, the recovery of women ... became crucial.”<sup>34</sup> Sujala Singh, in her article “Nationalism’s Brandings: Women’s Bodies and Narratives of Partition,” argues that “Women’s bodies often became the markers on which the painful scripts of contending nationalisms (Hindu, Muslim or Sikh) were inscribed.”<sup>35</sup> Menon and Bhasin connect the significance of women’s abductions for their communities with their significance for the state:

The material, symbolic and political significance of the abductions of women was not lost either on the women themselves and their families, on their communities, or on leaders and governments. As a retaliatory measure, it was simultaneously an assertion of identity and a humiliation of the rival community through the appropriation of its women.<sup>36</sup>

Each of these assessments indicates that women’s bodies during and after partition became objects whose value lay in their meanings, or in their potential as inscriptive sites for communicating “material, symbolic and political significance.” Both Singh and Menon and Bhasin suggest that the treatment of women, and particularly both governments’ investment in recovering women based on religious definitions, reveals the extent to which religion and community identity defined the new state of India as much as Pakistan, despite the government’s insistence on secularism. Women’s bodies, in other words, constituted a site where the inscriptions of the new states and those of the religious communities lined up, where the need of the governments to assert the nation-states’ legitimacy coincided with the demands of community definitions of honor and virtue.

While these analyses are persuasive, they leave me with a number of unresolved questions about how to understand the inscriptions of women's bodies during and after partition. As the juxtaposition of Nehru's Mother India and Pritam's motherland of the Punjab suggests, even at the metaphorical level, the meanings assigned to women's bodies during this period do not always line up. In fact, because of the disparity among the various understandings of what happened in 1947, even where the images of women's bodies seem to constitute a stable, if problematic, link among different configurations of the events of partition, a closer look at these images reveals not a stability of meaning, but instead a radical overdetermination of women's bodies. While the intersections between the states' investments in women's bodies and sexualities and the religious communities' investments do, as Menon and Bhasin suggest, challenge the Indian government's pretensions to secularism, there are too many meanings attached to these bodies to make this intersection sufficient as an explanation for these inscriptions. Menon, Bhasin, and Butalia document the significance of women's bodies as vehicles through which the honor of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communal identities could be either maintained or violated. In the context of 1947 as India's decolonization, it is also important to remember here that images of women's bodies, and particularly images of gendered and sexualized violence, already had a long history as vehicles through which the British defined and articulated the colonial relationship between India and Britain. The nationalist investment in these bodies and in the right to define them, therefore, must be understood not only in relation to the partition of India and Pakistan or to the

communal violence, but equally as an appropriation, or reappropriation, by the nascent nation-states of a key signifier of British colonialism.

Unlike the women whose bodies and voices were appropriated by the British in the *sati* debates, however, Indian women writers participated in and responded to the appropriations of their bodies during partition and the recovery operations. In Pritam's poem "The Scar of a Wound,"<sup>37</sup> the focus is not on resolving the disjunctions among the various appropriations of women's bodies, but rather on recording them *as* disjunctions and registering an alternative mode of embodiment based on an internal, felt experience of this externally overdetermined body. The poem's speaker is the child of a woman raped during the partition riots:

When they forced my mother's womb  
I came as every child must come:  
I am the mark of that blow,  
Violation made me grow:  
In my country's agony  
They seared my mother's brow with me  
When they forced my mother's womb.

I am the curse of man today.  
Time's wound cries out in me;  
Sun and moon hid their light  
And stars fell dead in thick night  
When they forced my mother's womb.

I am the scar of that wound  
That in my mother's body burned,  
I am the shame she nursed within,  
The stench and loathsomeness of man,  
The sign of torment she must bear  
As her body's lasting wear.

Strange fruit ripened on the tree  
Of Independence—look and see!  
When they forced my mother's womb.<sup>38</sup>

Pritam's poem (which I have reproduced here in its entirety) constructs two bodies, both produced by the violence of partition. The child's body, clearly, is literally produced as the offspring of rape, "the mark of that blow." But the mother's body is equally produced by partition, as the shame and the violation of the rape becomes a garment that cannot be removed—the "torment she must bear / As her body's lasting wear"—and her brow is "seared" by the birth of the child. The mother's and child's bodies in this poem in themselves represent the materiality of partition's corporeal violence, with the poem working on one level as an individual child's voicing of an individual woman's rape, apparently by a group of men ("When *they* forced my mother's womb"). Yet these bodies also function metonymically—as the unnamed woman stands for the untold numbers who were raped and abducted during the riots, and her unnamed child for the many children conceived as a result of these rapes. At a third, metaphorical level, the status of the mother's and child's bodies as metaphors for the partitioning of India and the legacies of the partition is reinforced by the fact that identities in this poem are deliberately vague: the child-speaker's gender is left undefined, as is "my country" to which this speaker belongs; the mother is never assigned either a national or a communal identity, nor do we receive any hints in the poem that might enable us to guess whether she is Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or none of these; her attackers, only ever identified as "they," are similarly undefined by either religious community or nationality.

By refusing to define the nationality, community, or even, in the case of the child, gender of the bodies in her poem, Pritam denies her readers the luxury of resting on preconceived notions of who did what to whom. Furthermore, by constructing a partition



poem in which there is communal violence without named communities, partition without named nations, Pritam in effect reverses the divisions between nations and communities that partition created even as she asserts the lasting wounds of those divisions. She constructs through the metaphor of the violated mother's body and the child produced by that violation, in other words, a unity across these national and communal divisions through the common experience of violence and the common scars that form an embodied, lasting memory of partition. In one sense, therefore, Pritam's poem refuses to participate either in the divisions wrought by partition or in the inscriptions of women's bodies by the various communities and nation-states that claimed the power to define them. The mother's body in this poem is marked by violence, but Pritam refuses to let it be inscribed as Indian or Pakistani, or as Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh.

In another sense, however, by withholding all marks of national or communal identity, Pritam makes the mother's body available to be inscribed by any reader's fantasy of who did what to whom—the mother's lack of identifying features makes her body a blank slate of sorts, so that one reader, following the speaker's injunction to “look and see!” might see a Hindu or Sikh woman attacked by Muslim men, and another might see a Muslim woman raped by Hindus or Sikhs. I want to suggest that Pritam's construction of the mother's body as at once uninscribed by communal and national partitions and available to any inscription is not a flaw in the poem, but rather a way of making visible the overdetermination of women's bodies during partition and revealing the implications of such an excess of meaning for the nations and communities that

produce the excess. At least one facet of this overdetermination is evoked by the poem's focus specifically on the body of a raped woman who gives birth, with the speaker's repeated naming of her as "my mother" and the description of the rape as a forcing of her "womb" both emphasizing that this woman is a mother figure. By making the poem's speaker the child of this woman made a mother through partition's violence, Pritam engages the common use in the official discourse of the Mother India figure as a metaphor for independence and partition. But whereas Nehru and others who relied on this national mother figure constructed an idealized, abstracted mother's body, Pritam writes "Mother India's" material counterpart, articulated through an embodied history, through the "wound" inflicted by the events and agents of this particular time, rather than resting in the abstraction. Pritam makes literal the notion that India's independence can be articulated through the body of a mother giving birth, but while Nehru's Mother India has a "birth of freedom," Pritam's mother is the victim of rape, and the child to whom she gives birth is "the scar of that wound" inflicted on her body, and "the shame she nursed within, / The stench and loathsomeness of man..." The product of this birth, the "Strange fruit ripened on the tree / Of Independence," simultaneously evokes and undermines the abstract Mother India figure and her "birth of freedom." Independence *was* articulated through mothers giving birth, the poem suggests, but these mothers' bodies were produced by violence, not by liberation, and were subject to inscriptions quite different from those written onto the Mother India figure in nationalist rhetoric.

By combining the Mother India figure and the raped woman—the victim of communal violence with all her symbolic baggage—into a single body, Pritam demands

that we recognize the extent to which the abstract appropriations of women's bodies through nationalist rhetoric are inseparable from the material appropriations of women's bodies by Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities. It is important that Pritam does not merely juxtapose the nationalist and communal versions of women's bodies. By making the nationalist mother figure one and the same as the woman raped in the communal violence, she reveals the overdetermination of women's bodies in nationalist and communal rhetoric and actions. Furthermore, in constructing a body that is available to multiple fantasies of communal identity based on who did what to whom, but that at the same time refuses to validate any one construction of communal identity, Pritam challenges the reader's implication in this overdetermination, asking that we recognize our own ways of inscribing women's bodies. Thus the call at the end of the poem to "look and see!" could be interpreted as a demand for multiple kinds—and new kinds—of recognition. Beyond seeing women's bodies as they have been inscribed by nation and community, the poem asks that readers see the constructedness of these inscriptions and that they see their own participation in the process of inscribing women's bodies.

The poem further demands recognition that the overdetermination of women's bodies has consequences. In the final stanza, the injunction to look and see stands as a link between the rape and the child born of that rape, between the communal definitions associated with the violence to the woman's body and the nationalist definitions associated with independence, and between the material body and the metaphorical use of that body: "Strange fruit ripened on the tree / Of Independence—look and see! / When they forced my mother's womb." Set apart by a dash on one side and an exclamation

mark on the other, the imperative to look and see could equally be understood as referring to the strange fruit of Independence and to the rape that produced it. Just as the syntax makes it impossible to see one side without the other, the poem asks that we see the connections among the various inscriptions of women's bodies, and that we see the impact these inscriptions have on the communities that make them. If the meanings inscribed on the Mother India figure share a body with those inscribed through the violence of rape, in other words, then the nation whose identity is articulated through the Mother India figure will also be marked by the unwanted meanings communicated through communal violence to women's bodies. The mother of Independence is the mother produced by rape, and the child of Independence is the child of rape, and as this child-speaker tells us, s/he is "the curse of man today." The child's existence, in other words, reflects not merely on the mother at a personal level, but has broad implications for the communities that produced this birth out of violence. If the same body is appropriated as a vehicle for two different metaphors—here the woman's body as vehicle for figuring both nation and religious community—then the tenor of each metaphor will have to share the implications of what is done to that body, will have to share the meanings, whether wanted or unwanted, inscribed on it.

Beyond the implications of the overdetermined body for the national and religious communities, though, the poem articulates the implications for the women whose bodies are appropriated, metaphorically and physically. As I suggested before, the language of the poem itself refuses to inscribe the mother's body with national or communal definitions. Instead, Pritam inscribes onto this body the feelings, the affective

experience, created by the rape, pregnancy, and childbirth. The speaker refers both to his/her own body as the sign of what the mother feels—"I am the shame she nursed within"—and to the mother's body as bearing the marks of this emotional pain: "The sign of torment she must bear / As her body's lasting wear." While it makes visible the inscriptions imposed on the woman's body by nation and community, the poem itself does not reproduce these inscriptions. Pritam chooses instead to record a felt experience of emotional pain—shame and torment—as the consequence of rape. In privileging the woman's internal experience over the externally imposed inscriptions of her body, Pritam records the rape while disabling the rapists' act of appropriation and inscription: "They seared my mother's brow with me / When they forced my mother's womb." Whatever symbolic significance the attackers intended with the woman's rape does not make it into Pritam's poem. Rather, she insists that we recognize what the rape would mean for the victim, the emotional pain that sears the woman's brow, inscribing on the features of her face the pain experienced within.

South Asian women artists representing partition in film and fiction have more recently taken up the history of sexual violence against women that "The Scar of a Wound" interrogates, as well as the overlapping histories of decolonization, nation-formation, and divisions of region and community that "Divided" engages. From Pritam's poems, which separately address these histories of collective political and gendered violence, I will turn to Deepa Mehta's *Earth* and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*, which attempt in different ways to bring together these histories of violence. In critiquing the appropriations of women's bodies by nation and community

within the historical contexts of partition as decolonization, nation-formation, and violent division, both texts productively complicate the overdetermination of women's bodies in representations of partition.

### **Memory and Melodrama: Deepa Mehta's *Earth***

Fifty years have gone by since I betrayed my ayah. Some say she married Ice Candy Wallah, some say they saw her in a brothel in Lahore, others, that they saw her in Amritsar, but I never set eyes on her again, and that day in 1947, when I lost Ayah, I lost a large part of myself.

—*Earth*, 1999

Pre-production for Deepa Mehta's 1999 film *Earth*, an adaptation of Pakistani writer Bapsi Sidhwa's 1991 novel *Cracking India*,<sup>39</sup> began in 1997, the year that marked the fiftieth anniversary of partition. Appropriately for a film conceived at a moment when so many people in India, Pakistan, and the South Asian diaspora were looking back to 1947 and remembering the events, the experiences, and the legacies of partition, *Earth* is framed by memory: the film opens and closes with the voice of grown-up Lenny, remembering from the historical distance of 1997 her experiences as an eight-year-old girl in Lahore in 1947. In the extratextual context of its production history and in the frame for the story it tells, therefore, *Earth* participates in a moment of collective remembering that extends beyond both personal reminiscences and nationalist commemorations of 1947. But at the same time, *Earth* remembers partition in another sense, one specifically enabled by the cinematic medium through which it participates in this collective remembering, as it re-members—puts back together through the staging

and filming of the story it tells—the bodies and the communities destroyed by partition. Grown-up Lenny’s voice takes the viewer back to March 1947, to Lahore, India, several months before partition made Lahore part of Pakistan, and the vivid visual presentation of her memory of this time enables the film audience to see a community split apart and bodies in some cases literally dismembered by the violence of partition.

Standing at the conjunction of all these forms of memory and remembering, textual and extratextual, *Earth* raises questions about the capacity of forms of memory to transform past traumas, both to individuals and to communities, about the purposes and potentials of remembering such a painful history, and about what it would mean to remember differently those material and metaphorical bodies violated by partition—to remember without reproducing the forms of literal and symbolic violence that Pritam’s earlier work made visible. I will suggest here that *Earth* uses a mode of national melodrama to participate in and to attempt—not entirely successfully—to enlist an affective form of public participation in a transnational moment of remembering partition. Narrating the historical partition of India through the dissolution of what appears through the eyes of young Lenny to be an almost idyllic community of friends—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Parsi—the film uses the melodramatic mode to project back into the pre-partition past an idealized, united Indian national community. Melodrama’s mode of “stylistic and emotional excess”<sup>40</sup> and its temporal orientation toward past events, together with the tradition of melodrama in Indian cinema, enable Mehta to construct a national memory of partition and to evoke in her audience first an affective attachment to the community she imagines, then a sense of tragic loss as she narrates and

visualizes its destruction. Where *Earth* is powerful, I will argue, is in its use of the emotional power of melodrama to evoke in a transnational South Asian audience an affective identification with a community united across so many lines of difference. Though this “lost” community never actually existed in the past, except through the not-yet-disillusioned perspective of a child, the film’s capacity to construct a collective public response of mourning this idealized community articulates the desirability and perhaps the possibility of such a community in the transnational present. Where the film is limited, however, is in the static nature of the memory it constructs, and in its use of a form of national memory to imagine this present transnational potential. Though *Earth* asks its audience for active participation in the emotional content of the film, its controlled framing of the events of 1947 precludes participation in the act of remembering partition and therefore limits the degree to which audiences with varied relationships to partition and varied national associations in the present can identify with the content of the film’s partition memory. While the content of Lenny’s memory that shapes most of the film offers a complex representation of communal and gendered violence from the perspective of the minority community of the Parsis, the film partially undercuts this complexity by constructing the narrative as a child’s memory, enclosed within an oversimplified frame narrative based on the symbolic status of partition in national and colonial history.



### ***Mawkish or Moving? Earth's Reception***

The fiftieth anniversary of partition was a transnational moment of looking back, including not only the national communities of India and Pakistan, but also communities of the South Asian diaspora. From its history of production to its distribution, screening, and reception, *Earth* reflects the transnational character of this collective remembering. Though because there is no co-production treaty between India and Canada, the film is officially considered an Indian film, Mehta emphasizes the importance of contributions not only from Canada, but from around the world. More than half of the financing for *Earth* came from Canada, Mehta's own home since she emigrated from New Delhi in 1973, and the production crew came from Canada, India, the UK, and France. The film, set in Lahore, was shot in New Delhi—a choice made necessary because Mehta had trouble getting permission from the Pakistani government for a shoot in Lahore. Mehta describes the post-production as a series of “endless trips” between Toronto, where the film was edited, and Madras, where prominent Bollywood composer A.R. Rahman, who composed *Earth*'s musical score, was based.<sup>41</sup>

The script was a similarly collaborative project, crossing national boundaries. Mehta, writing in English, adapted her script from the novel (also in English) *Cracking India* by Pakistani writer Bapsi Sidhwa—who was involved in the adaptation of her novel and made a cameo appearance at the end of the film as grown-up Lenny—and then had it translated into Hindi (the film's dialogue is spoken in Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Punjabi, and English) by London-based Nasreen Rahman. The conditions of *Earth*'s production, therefore, were thoroughly transnational. Mehta herself comments on the importance of

her diasporic location for enabling her to make this film in the way she did: “The irony of our situation hasn’t escaped either Bapsi or myself. Bapsi is from Pakistan and now a US citizen. I’m from India and now living in Canada. If neither of us had moved from our respective homelands, the film just wouldn’t have been possible. Pakistan and India, since the Partition of 1947, are sworn enemies.”<sup>42</sup> She describes her style of filmmaking as “hybrid,” “not ‘Bombay’ and not ‘Western,’” and sees this self-positioning as granting her a freedom with her subject matter that would not be possible if she were working within the bounds of Indian cinema: “I can be uninhibited about subject. Whether it is about choices for women (*Fire*) or Partition (*Earth*) I did not have to think about the repercussions as I would have in India. Nor did I have to wonder about the censor board.”<sup>43</sup>

While Mehta’s diasporic location and transnational production process enabled her to make a film that would not have been possible within the limits of India’s national film industry, the widely varying responses to the film from Western, Indian, and South Asian diaspora viewers raises questions about the limitations, as well as the potential, of such a film. In large part because it was produced and financed across national borders, *Earth* had an international audience that most Indian films do not enjoy. The film was first screened at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 1998, it opened a year later in India and the US, and it has since had screenings in England, Australia, and France. The reception of the film across these locations, however, varied from deeply affected and enthusiastic to unmoved and critical. Though some critical South Asian viewers have attributed the more enthusiastic responses to the film’s catering to Western

audiences who are poorly informed about the history of partition<sup>44</sup>—a bias that Mehta, who claims she did not think about audience when she made the film,<sup>45</sup> denies—the reception does not divide easily along national, regional, or cultural lines. An Australian reviewer who describes the film as “an intelligent and deeply moving personal account of the partition of India” criticizes a British film critic who “described *Earth* as a ‘mawkish look at the impact of partition ... a Bollywood influenced confection ... that attempts to shock with a catalogue of atrocities’”: “These condescending remarks are without foundation and leave one wondering what sort of film would satisfy this critic. Perhaps a cold impersonal account, in which real people are translated into silent, abstract numbers, figures to be examined like microbes in a laboratory test-tube?”<sup>46</sup> A Pakistani reviewer who saw the film screened in New York (the film was banned in Pakistan) offers an enthusiastic review and records the “resounding” applause of the audience in the theater;<sup>47</sup> a critic for the *IndiaStar Review of Books*, however, calls Mehta’s representation of partition “simplistic,” distorted, and built on poorly developed characters and storylines: “In this film Mehta manages to distort the complex history of partition and in the process depicts the role of Hindus and Sikhs falsely and negatively.”<sup>48</sup>

While there is certainly some truth to charges that Mehta’s film oversimplifies the complex history of partition, I believe that in order to address the question of historical complexity or accuracy, as well as to understand the divergent responses to the film from both South Asian and Western audiences, we must consider *Earth*’s relationship to melodrama. Overwhelmingly, whether in positive or critical reviews, responses to the film come back to the question of whether the viewer was emotionally affected by its

portrayal of partition. The Australian reviewer's description of the film as "deeply moving" is one of many enthusiastic responses that depend on the film's ability to evoke strong feelings in an individual viewer. Conversely, even for those viewers who articulate problems with the film's historical complexity, with its character development, or with its representation of the violence of partition, the primary basis for their responses appears to be that the film failed to "move" them. What I find most interesting about these divergent responses is that while they express radical disagreement over the film's emotional power, they agree on the fundamental assumption that the film's value should be measured by its emotional effect on the viewer. That such different responses should come from the same evaluative criteria suggests that viewers are coming to this film with different expectations about how a film—and in particular a partition film—should move its audience and what kinds of emotions it should produce. Moreover, neither set of responses suggests that the film is void of emotional content; on the contrary, those viewers who claim to be unmoved by the film attribute its failure to an excess of emotion, an over-use of sentiment, a too-heavy-handed attempt to elicit a response from its audience. The British reviewer's use of the word "mawkish" speaks to this excess of sentiment, as do critiques that charge the film with playing on shock value to provoke a response. One participant in a discussion forum about *Earth*, for instance, attributes her own lack of emotional response to what she sees as the film's use of images of violence as provocation:

[Mehta's] characters lacked development—I kept thinking at the end that I felt nothing for any [of] them including the child whose story [Mehta] is telling. There were many people who felt that it was a powerful tale, but I kept thinking that it was just not moving enough. Why? We have all seen

films about the violence and bloodshed during partition. Why is it that film makers continue to use carnage as a way to provoke audience reaction? Why is a train full of bloodied Moslem/Hindu [*sic*] bodies used to illustrate the madness of that time? Doesn't any one see that [Mehta] exploits the images in her tale of religious hatred for the commercial/shock value?<sup>49</sup>

What offends this viewer and what makes her feel nothing for the characters is not a lack of emotionally charged material, but precisely the presence of those emotionally charged images and her sense that Mehta exploits these images to achieve a response.

The criticisms levied against *Earth*—that it is “mawkish,” relies on shock value, exploits images to manipulate the viewer’s response—have long been levied against melodrama as a genre. As Charles Affron describes these criticisms, “It is argued that blatantly emotional films cheapen and banalize emotion *because* they are blatant. Their promptness to elicit feeling offends those who consider being easily moved equivalent to being manipulated, victimized, deprived of critical distance.”<sup>50</sup> Melodrama—“driven by the experience of one crisis after another, crises involving severed familial ties, separation and loss”—would appear to be an appropriate generic category for *Earth*, a film that begins with a small community of friends united by their admiration for Lenny’s ayah, Shanta, and narrates the violent dissolution of this community through a succession of increasingly traumatic events, culminating with the abduction of Shanta by a mob led by one of her admirers, Dil Navaz, or Ice Candy Man, as Lenny knows him. In film melodramas, the “narratives generate emotional intensity involving not only the figures within the melodrama but the external audience, and affect is conveyed primarily through gesture, music, and iconography which are indicative of the limitations of conventional verbal language to express the intense psychic and bodily pains or pleasures experienced

by the characters.”<sup>51</sup> Despite charges that melodrama is manipulative or overly sentimental, feminist critics have demonstrated the potential power of melodrama as a mode for negotiating the internal contradictions of established social structures and orders. Critics like Christine Gledhill and Jackie Byars have shown that the stylistic excess of the melodramatic mode performs an expressive function, bringing to the surface repressed elements of social life: “[Melodrama] accesses the underside of official rationales for reigning social orders—that which social convention, psychic repression, political dogma cannot articulate.... [I]ts enactment of the continuing struggle of good and evil forces running through social, political, and psychic life draws into a public arena desires, fears, values and identities which lie beneath the surface of the publicly acknowledged world.”<sup>52</sup> Mary Ann Doane makes a similar argument about what she calls the “moving effect” of melodramas—the ability of their stylistic excess to evoke tears or other emotional responses. According to Doane, the moving effect of melodrama is tied to a “form of mistiming, a bad timing” that “allows the slippage between what is and what should have been to become visible.”<sup>53</sup> In this view, then, melodrama’s use of stylistic elements to work on its audience’s emotions is not so much about provocation or shock value as social or political critique.

Though Mehta herself has responded to an interviewer’s labeling of *Earth* as melodrama by countering that “calling the film melodrama is a put down,” her film does rely on such external tools as music, lighting, and gesture both to express the internal emotional states of its characters and to make the audience share in those states. Consistent with the claims that Gledhill and Doane make about melodrama’s potential as

a mode for enacting social critiques, Mehta's film relies on its audience's emotional participation for the power of its critique of both the British colonial presence in India and the violence that accompanied India's independence. The musical score composed by A.R. Rahman—one of the most prolific and popular composers for Bollywood melodramas—serves as an emotional barometer for the film's characters and enlists the audience's participation in those feelings, using deep, rhythmic drum beats to evoke foreboding or a sense of doom, high-pitched strings to evoke tension or hysteria, and interludes of joyful music that make the scenes of crisis all the more painful by contrast. Furthermore, Mehta's own descriptions of her experience and purposes in making the film center on feeling. In an interview she discusses her own emotional engagement in the film, and she articulates a philosophy of representation that privileges intimacy over "epic sweeps" and "ordinary people" over politicians: "I have to be engaged personally on an emotional level with all my characters. To make epic sweeps and have politicians representing the anguish that the ordinary people went through is not for me. I wanted to tell this really large story from the standpoint of an intimate group of friends from different ethnic groups and trace out the process of partition through them."<sup>54</sup>

Ironically, then, many viewers cite *Earth's* melodramatic qualities as preventing them from experiencing precisely the kinds of emotional engagement and intimate identification with characters that Mehta herself felt as she made the film and hoped to extend to the larger film audience. I want to argue that we can understand this lack of emotional engagement—the film's failure to "move" these viewers—not directly as a failure of the melodramatic mode. Rather, by looking more carefully at the film as a

form of remembering, and in particular at the ways in which its methods of framing the events of 1947 construct partition as a passively experienced memory of national trauma, we might understand this failure to move viewers as a function of the film's construction of a *national* melodrama, where viewers are positioned to experience affective responses to a lost national community that never actually existed in the past. Because Mehta's film addresses a transnational audience, its reliance on a fantasy of a lost, harmonious Indian nation, ruptured irretrievably by partition, presents problems for those viewers who cannot identify with that national fantasy—whether because of a conflicting Pakistani national identification, a diasporic location that challenges conceptions of national affiliation, an experience of the continuing disharmony of communal relations in India, or other ways in which viewers' relationships to partition's history or legacies might challenge the national fantasy that grounds *Earth's* partition memory. In using melodrama to remember partition, Mehta employs a potentially quite powerful mode to elicit viewers' emotional participation in a national fantasy they might not necessarily want to share.

As a film framed by Lenny's memory of partition, released at a moment of collective remembering of that traumatic history, *Earth* and its divided reception force us to question the purposes of remembering this history of violated bodies and torn communities fifty years later. What work does the act of remembering partition have to accomplish, for whom, and why does *Earth's* mode of remembering fail to accomplish this work for so many viewers? These questions take on even greater significance because the film addresses a transnational audience at a moment when the escalating



nuclear tensions between India and Pakistan and the continuing communal violence among Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities were rendering the legacies of partition's divisions and violence clear, present, and potentially quite destructive within and across national boundaries. In order to explore these questions, I will analyze three key sequences in which *Earth* represents partition through successive images of increasingly traumatic fragmentations or dismemberings of bodies and communities. In terms of both their narrative function and their construction as film images, these are among the most heavily melodramatic parts of the film, and they constitute the most emotionally charged parts of Lenny's memory of partition. At the same time, these sequences are designed, through their representation of violated bodies and through their use of the audio-visual medium of film, to evoke feelings in the body of the viewer, and so to enlist the audience's emotional participation in the memory of partition as the film constructs it.

### ***1. Frames and Feelings***

Loaded with meaning and feeling, the first sequence I will examine comes at the very beginning of the film, immediately following the title shot, and it uses the domestic setting of Lenny Sethna's home to establish the film's melodramatic mode, set up its dominant themes and metaphors, and construct a number of overlapping frames through which the ensuing partition narrative will be presented. Consistent with the workings of film melodrama, gesture and music evoke an emotional response to a pair of scenes that otherwise would appear to be fairly empty of significance—the film's title shot and the portrayal of a child coloring a picture and breaking a plate. In the opening shot of the

empty earth, the camera slowly pans upward over a terra cotta-hued stretch of land that fills the screen, stopping as fragments of the word “EARTH” come together to form the film’s title, superimposed in black letters over the land, which fills the negative space of the letters. The black letters shift apart, fragmenting the title and filling the frame with black, where the year 1947 appears in white Hindi script. The screen fades entirely to black for a moment before cutting to the next scene, in which we see eight-year-old Lenny using crayons to color outlined segments of a map of India, while we hear a voiceover narration by older Lenny, an adult in the present of the film’s production, situating the audience within her own memory of 1947:

I was eight years old, living in Lahore in March of 1947, when the British empire in India started to collapse. Along with talks of India’s independence from Britain, came rumblings about its division into two countries: Pakistan and India. Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, who had lived together as one entity for centuries, suddenly started to clamor for pieces of India for themselves. The arbitrary line of division the British would draw to carve up India in August of 1947 would scar the subcontinent forever.

While the voice of older Lenny speaks, locating her narrative historically and politically, young Lenny finishes coloring, stands, and limps with her braced leg into the next room. As the voiceover finishes, young Lenny picks up a plate, holds it in front of her for a moment, deliberately drops it, and then stares at the shattered pieces on the floor until Shanta, Lenny’s ayah, runs in and scolds her. Shanta, whose voice is the first we hear from the 1947 characters, begins to pick up the pieces of the broken plate as the household servants enter, followed by Lenny’s mother, Buntty Sethna. Lenny immediately tells her mother she broke the plate, is praised by her mother for speaking the truth, and asks, “Can one break a country? What happens if the English break India

where our house is? How will I get to the park then?” Mrs. Sethna dismisses Lenny’s fears and those of Shanta—who has heard rumors that the British would dig a long canal before they leave, dividing India from Pakistan—as “rubbish.” The scene ends with Lenny and her mother leaving the room as Shanta finishes picking up the pieces of the broken plate. The scene’s dominant colors complement the terra cotta of the opening shot of the earth: the entire scene appears in earth tones of warm reds and yellows, created by Lenny’s red dress, the walls and curtains, the red saris of Shanta and Mrs. Sethna, and lighting that creates the impression of a dark room partially illuminated by light entering from the windows.

The music of the title shot, the *Earth* instrumental theme, also connects the opening shot to this next scene, and it constitutes an important presence in both scenes. The piece begins and is held together by the repetition of two notes, a lower note followed by a slightly higher one, played at a slow, constant tempo on a santoor.<sup>55</sup> The santoor is joined slowly by another string instrument, a sarod, and by vocalists humming the melody of the piece at a higher pitch. In the opening shot, the melody builds slowly as the camera pans upward over the earth, adding to the santoor first the simple melody of the sarod, slowly becoming fuller and more complex as the vocalists join the piece. As the word “EARTH” begins to form on the screen, high-pitched strings carry a suspended note, increasing in volume to create a sense that something momentous is coming, succeeded by a swell of music as strings and a vocal chorus come in, playing the same series of seven notes three times, at different octaves. While the letters of the title splinter and the screen fades to black, the swell of music also fades back to the slow,

repetitive notes of the santoor and the quieter melodies of the sarod and the vocalists. As the next scene begins, with the frame showing us young Lenny and the voiceover of older Lenny beginning her narration, the music accompanies her, once again slowly building from the drone of the santoor to the increasingly complex melody brought first by the sarod, then by the vocalists. Paralleling the trajectory of the music in the title shot, the high-pitched strings again carry a suspended note that begins when Lenny picks up the plate and grows louder until she drops it; with the shattering of the plate, the swell of music that accompanied the formation of the title letters again enters, this time as Lenny stands staring at the shattered plate, gradually fading as Shanta comes in and begins to pick up the pieces. As the scene ends, the music transitions to a short finishing section that does not parallel the music of the title shot, aptly described by a reviewer of the soundtrack: “Towards the latter half of the piece the chorus/string section explores scale changes making the listener slightly uncomfortable. But, this is intentional as [Rahman] is trying to [portray] the fear of the Unknown by this technique. For the last time the strings and chorus haunt the listener ... gradually fading with time.”<sup>56</sup>

The parallelism between the music of the title shot and that of the following scene directs viewers as to where meaning should attach and how they should feel about the pictured content. The high-pitched strings that precede the appearance of the film’s title on the screen parallel those that accompany Lenny’s action of picking up, then dropping the plate, informing the viewer that just as the appearance of the title is the most important element of the title shot (especially since empty earth and the names, in much smaller letters, of the actors and director form the only other content), the shattering of

the plate and Lenny's reaction to it are the most important elements of the second scene. The swell of music that follows the strings in each scene provides an emotional release from the palpable tension created by the strings, and at the same time signals to the viewer that the action of breaking the plate has an emotional content for young Lenny, whom we see in the frame, for older Lenny, whose voiceover has ended just in time for the sound of the strings to take over the space that was filled by her voice, and for the viewer, who is enlisted by the music to feel along with the characters.

In case the viewer has managed to miss the symbolic content of Lenny's deliberate gesture, the music's insistence on the emotional content of the action tells the viewer to look for meaning in the gesture, which resonates with the segmented map of India that young Lenny colors and with older Lenny's description of the communities which had lived for centuries as "one entity" suddenly clamoring for "pieces of India for themselves." Furthermore, whereas the high-pitched strings in the title shot release into the swell of music, as one would expect, when the title comes onto the screen, in the next scene, the release from the strings is slightly delayed from what the viewer might expect—the high note held by the strings does not release with the shattering of the plate, but only after the plate has shattered, as the frame focuses on Lenny's reaction. In effect, this delay prevents the viewer from experiencing the shattering as the moment of emotional release—the music tells us to hold onto the tension past that moment, symbolically past the moment of partition and the splintering of community. The somewhat unsatisfying connection of the swell of music to the anticlimactic shot of Lenny standing still, in conjunction with the "haunting" movement of the strings and

chorus connecting the end of this scene to the beginning of the next, creates a sense that the tension is still building, that the shattered plate prefigures more shattering events before the true climax and the true emotional release will be allowed.

Besides establishing the melodramatic mode of the film through the music, the opening shots introduce several frames through which the film presents its partition narrative, positioning the viewer to see partition in a particular way at the same time as the music positions us to feel in a particular way. Older Lenny's memory is clearly the dominant frame for the narrative, emphasized by the voiceover that introduces us to young Lenny and by the final scene, in which older Lenny (played by Sidhwa) is walking in the park while the same voice from the beginning of the film (spoken by Shabana Azmi) closes the narration. Older Lenny also provides a historical frame for partition, enclosing it between March and August of 1947, fifty years in the past for the narrator and the viewer. This historical distance enables her to project for the viewer several months ahead of the time of the scene that accompanies her voice, alerting the viewer from the start that partition and communal riots are coming, and to project much further into the future with her claim that the "arbitrary line of division" drawn by the British would scar the subcontinent "forever." This attribution of responsibility to the British, alongside the words young Lenny and Shanta use to ask Mrs. Sethna about the partition rumors, further situates partition politically within a narrative of colonial occupation and decolonization. Finally, by describing India as a previously whole, unified entity, scarred and broken by partition, where "Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs ... had lived together as one entity for centuries," Mehta also frames her narrative as one of national tragedy. The

voice of older Lenny projects into the pre-partition past an Indian nation—albeit a colonized Indian nation—and thus casts the partition narrative not as a national origin story, but as a story of national loss. Interestingly, moreover, the framing voiceover focuses on the dominant communities of “Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs” instead of the experience of the minority Parsi community to which Lenny and her family belong. In Sidhwa’s novel and in the portion of the film that takes place in 1947, we see partition’s violence through the perspective of the Parsis, a small community that remains neutral in the communal conflicts; in the 1997 frame, however, this perspective is folded into the national-colonial narrative of 1947. All of these “frames”—these methods of positioning partition for the viewer—are literalized by the cinematography, which controls what the viewer sees within the frame of the movie screen. Both the title shot, in which the word “EARTH” stretches to fill the entire frame of the shot, and the following scene—in which the lighting, the deliberate use of color, and the enclosure of space by walls, windows, and doors highlight the degree to which this scene has been orchestrated for the camera—emphasize the cinematic frame and the careful construction of what appears within it.

This opening pair of scenes, therefore, introduces the film as partition memory through the two very controlled and controlling elements of these framing devices and the melodramatic musical score. Both elements evidence Mehta’s command over the form and content of this memory. The framing devices within the world of the film, as well as the cinematic frame that encloses the images on the screen, tell the viewer what constitutes this remembering of partition, while the music tells the viewer how to feel—both physically, in the bodily sensations created by the music, and emotionally—about

that remembering. What I find most interesting about these two elements in the film's opening, however, is that while both assert control over the film content and the viewer, one controls by enforcing the viewer's participation in the remembering of partition and the other by excluding the viewer from participation. The music, more than just inviting the viewer to participate in older Lenny's memory, attempts to coerce an emotional participation that makes the viewer share in Lenny's experience. But at the same time, the careful framing of partition within older Lenny's memory, within a bounded historical context, within a political perspective, and within the cinematic frame functions to exclude the viewer from any participation in forming the content of that act of remembering partition.

In *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition*, a study that argues for a systematic relationship between embodied mental processes and film's ability to evoke particular feelings and emotions in viewers, Torben Groddal argues that film melodrama as a genre is an inherently passive form, both in terms of narrative content, which is concerned with the portrayal of characters who are the passive victims of circumstances beyond their control, and in terms of how these films affect their viewers, who experience autonomic (non-voluntary) embodied responses such as tears, laughter, fear, or dread. Groddel suggests—using a more physiological set of criteria to make a similar argument to those of Gledhill and Doane about melodrama's political potential—that this passivity can be a powerful means of enacting social criticisms, making viewers identify with characters' powerlessness in order to launch a critique of the social or political forces that act on them. Discussing *Gone With the Wind*



as a prototypical melodrama, Groddal suggests that the film presents a historical narrative in such a way as to place the viewer in a passive position in relation to the narrated events, evoking through this helplessness a “passive, melodramatic feeling”:

The addresser positions the viewer at a historical distance from the narrative. The historical development is not open: not only, has it already taken place, but it has been written down and given an authoritative form. The viewer is not able to construct the events as matters that can be changed by voluntary acts, and this in itself evokes emotional reactions....

... The spectators feel that they are passive participants in events that cannot be altered by hypothetical expectations and simulations of acts that would alter the grand narrative. This passive, melodramatic feeling in the viewers is evoked by a special narrative strategy: the telling of a well-known story, such as a historical event. The outcome will be known beforehand, and the time represented will be a passive one in which the human beings are objects of major forces.<sup>57</sup>

This description might easily be applied to the historical narrative of *Earth*. Set fifty years in the past, narrated from beginning to end by the authoritative voice of the person who lived the events, and positioned within a history of millions of people whose lives were affected, *Earth* remembers partition through a closed narrative in which the characters’ lack of control over their lives is matched by the viewers’ lack of control over the narrative. At a moment of collective remembering of partition, therefore, Mehta’s film constitutes a form of remembering that positions the viewer as passive participant in a memory of community and individual trauma.

## ***2. Embodied Trauma, Collective Memory***

If *Earth*’s opening structures the film’s remembering of partition and positions the viewer to be a passive participant in that memory, then the next sequence I will analyze shifts the content of that memory from the symbolic to the corporeal, from prefiguring to

vividly imaged, and from evoking dread to fulfilling it. The building tensions created by the coming partition and the growing strain on the small community surrounding Lenny and Shanta culminate in three different sequences that image the source of partition's lasting "scars" through moments of violence enacted on bodies: in the first, Dil Navaz waits for his sisters to arrive on the train from Gurdaspur, but finds instead a train full of brutally murdered and mutilated bodies; the second depicts a riot, viewed by Lenny, Shanta, Dil Navaz, and Hasan from a balcony, in which a man is tied by his arms and legs to two vehicles and pulled apart; and in the third, a Muslim mob led by Dil Navaz abducts Shanta from the Sethna home. I will focus primarily on the first and third of these scenes, which, bridged by the riot scene, together function to extend the film's remembering of partition past the individuality of Lenny's experience and to close out the frame of this remembering.

The train scene opens with a close shot of Dil Navaz, squatting among birds on the platform at the train station and smoking a cigarette, the smoke surrounding his face in a sulfur-yellow colored cloud. The camera first focuses closely on his face, which fills half of the screen, leaving the background out of focus and making it difficult to determine where he is until the scene cuts to a wider shot, in which he sits in a crowd of others waiting for the train's arrival. As he stands and crosses the platform to question the station attendant, we learn that he is waiting for the train from Gurdaspur, which is twelve hours late. The music that accompanies this scene begins with and is dominated by drums—what a reviewer of the piece calls "thumping orchestral drums" that "change to another kind of leathery drum only to go back to the thumping orchestral drums

towards the end of the song,” and describes as a “simple but powerful melody filled with emotions”—joined by other instruments and a chorus. The reviewer suggests that the rhythm of the music is “vaguely reminiscent of a train,” and as Dil Navaz recrosses the platform to return to his spot, with the camera again focused on his face and leaving the background blurred, the rhythm gets faster and the volume louder, sounding more like an approaching train, until the sound creating the rhythm shifts from the drums and music, which subside, to the actual sound of an approaching train. We first see the train, out of focus, as the light shining from its first car appears behind Dil Navaz, over his right shoulder in the upper left corner of the frame while he walks along the platform. Dil Navaz turns to look at the approaching train, and as he does, the focus shifts so that the train comes into sharper focus as his body becomes blurred. His face comes back into sharp focus when the shot cuts away from the train to center on his face watching it arrive. The scene cuts from Dil Navaz to a wider view of the platform as the train comes toward the camera. The train is on fire, with smoke the same dark, sulfur color as the smoke from Dil Navaz’s cigarette billowing from the top and sides of the cars, and as it approaches, the chugging sound is succeeded by the sounds of pounding feet as people run to the cars. Dil Navaz runs to the first car and the camera focuses on his face as he looks inside and touches his hand to the floor of the car, which is covered with blood. As his face registers the horror of the sight in front of him (still unseen by the viewer) and the realization of what happened, the sounds of pounding feet are joined by wailing, as the other people from the platform discover in other cars sights similar to that viewed by Dil Navaz.

With the camera still focusing on Dil Navaz in the train car, the music returns, now dominated by vocalists who echo the wails of the people on the platform and by high-pitched strings, tense, repetitive, creating first the impression of a heart beating, then of flies buzzing. The scene cuts from Dil Navaz to what he sees inside the car, an image the viewer knows—from the cues of the music and Dil Navaz’s reaction as well as from knowledge of the brutality of the attacks on trains during partition’s communal riots—will be horrible. Though the dark lighting of the shots within the car leaves much to the imagination, what we can see of the dead and mutilated bodies suggests a gruesome spectacle of bodies past the point of crisis. Focusing first on an arm hanging from the top of the frame on the left, blood dripping from the fingers, and a blood-stained leg draped along the other side of the frame, both ambiguously attached to a body not visible in the shot, then moving to progressively more confusing assemblages of body parts, the shot uses the frame and the concealing power of the dark lighting to prevent us from ever seeing a whole body. Instead, the frame fills with bloodied clothes and limbs, positioned in impossible combinations, so that contiguous body parts in many cases could not possibly belong to the same body. Our view inside the train closes with an image of a neck and head, resting below an arm and hand that touches the neck, but whose angle in relation to the head is distorted, grotesque, suggesting parts that should be but are no longer connected. The scene ends with a shot of Dil Navaz’s face as the buzzing is broken by the screeching sound of a bad radio reception. The image of Dil Navaz is replaced by the group of Lenny, Shanta, and her admirers listening first to reports of the violence in Gurdaspur, then to Nehru’s “Tryst with Destiny” speech. We learn from the

conversation that Dil Navaz's discovery occurs on August 15, and that Dil Navaz's sisters had been on the train, on which were found four sacks filled with women's breasts.

Positioned at the moment of political partition, this scene is in some ways the fulfillment of the symbolic breaking figured in the opening scene with the shattered plate, and in other ways the scene itself prefigures further breaks within the community of friends, the communities of Lahore, and by extension, the communities of the subcontinent to which older Lenny refers in the beginning of the film. The moment of India's partition and Pakistan's formation is marked by and marked on the mutilated, dismembered, wounded bodies of the refugees on the train, rendering the bodies meaningful not only as the material effects of the political partition, but also as metaphor for the increasingly divided community. Beyond marking the "arbitrary line of division" with which the British carved up India, the scene functions as a turning point for Dil Navaz that signals the dissolution of the diverse community surrounding Shanta. The use of focus in this scene helps to emphasize the significance not only of the atrocities on the train, but equally of the impact the bodies have on Dil Navaz: by alternating between shots in which the camera focuses sharply on the platform or the train and shots in which the focus is on Dil Navaz's face, Mehta constructs the primary significance of the murdered bodies not as the fact of their existence, but as their influence on the feelings and actions of Dil Navaz. Moreover, this means of structuring the viewer's gaze—such that we look through Dil Navaz's eyes at the train and bodies, but we also look at him looking—in turn structures the viewer's emotional response to the scene. We are asked

to feel with Dil Navaz to some degree, to share in his response to what he witnesses, but insofar as the film positions us to watch him looking at the bodies, it also distances us from his perspective. The scene asks the viewer to understand Dil Navaz's feelings and to partially identify with him, but at the same time, it makes those feelings a source of tension and foreboding. The music, too, constructs this dual response in the viewer, evoking the darkness and depth of Dil Navaz's feelings, but also suggesting building tensions. Just as the opening scene uses the music to sustain tension past the climactic moment, this scene closes on a suspended, high-pitched note, signaling that more violence will follow.

The train sequence asks us to remember partition literally as an experience of dismemberment, of the violent breaking of bodies and of community, and psychologically as an experience of mental and emotional trauma that is similarly fragmenting at an internal level. This symbolic use of violated bodies to mark emotional trauma is echoed a few scenes later by the image of a man being tied by his arms and legs to two jeeps which drive in opposite directions—an image whose emotional and psychological impact registers in Lenny's subsequent action of tearing a cloth doll in half, and in Shanta's frantic attempts to pin the doll back together. But whereas objects—the plate in the opening scene, the doll following the riots—signal Lenny's and Shanta's internalization of partition, the evidence for Dil Navaz's internalization of what he sees inside the car is instead the proliferation of violence enacted on bodies. While Lenny, Shanta, and Masseur watch with horror the murders and burning buildings during the riots, Dil Navaz, who before the train scene behaves with more tolerance toward

Hindu and Sikh friends than some of the other Muslim characters, expresses approbation for the Muslim firemen who spray petrol to fuel the burning of Hindu tenement buildings and articulates his own sense of a “beast” within himself that could make him behave in a similarly violent way. In a later scene, he admits to throwing grenades into Hindu homes and participating in the mob violence, and the film implies that he is responsible for the murder of Hasan, whose body Lenny finds just before Shanta’s abduction.

What sets the train scene apart from these other images in terms of the film’s structure of remembering is Lenny’s absence from it. In Sidhwa’s version of the train’s arrival from Gurdaspur in her novel, which she narrates entirely through young Lenny’s perspective, we hear about the atrocities on the train only as a third-hand report brought to Lenny, Shanta, and the group of admirers by Ice Candy Man, who has himself only heard about the bodies on the train from other witnesses. In the film, by contrast, not only does Ice Candy Man/Dil Navaz see the mutilated bodies first-hand, but the viewer sees them along with him, even though Lenny does not. The train scene is, in fact, one of only a few scenes in *Earth* that stand outside the realm of Lenny’s individual experience. Since the voiceover narration by older Lenny opens and closes the film, casting the narrative and images as her memory, Mehta’s decision to include the train scene as witnessed image rather than mere report challenges assumptions about the relationship between memory and experience. Departing from Lenny’s individual experience but still comprising a part of her memory of partition, the train scene posits a collective form of remembering that transcends the limits of personal experience.

Moreover, the film elicits the viewer's participation in this collective remembering. The image of the train full of dead bodies is almost an iconic image of partition, made synonymous with partition's violence by the accounts of those who lived through it as well as by literary works such as Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and the film adaptation of his novel. Borrowing this image of the train and at the same time integrating the sounds of partition—the chugging of the arriving train, the pounding of running feet, the cries of the people on the platform—into the musical score that accompanies the image, Mehta in effect turns the film medium into the means of constructing a memory of partition for an audience that, for the most part, has had no first-hand experience of it. The separation of memory from experience in *Earth's* construction of a collective remembering of partition in some ways resembles the subordination of lived bodily experience to the body's sociopolitical inscription in the official discourse of partition. In both the film's partition memory and the imagery of the official rhetoric, the fragmented body serves not primarily as a measure of individual experience, but as a vehicle for representing a particular fantasy of collective identity, with the important difference that Nehru uses the body to project an imagined community still in the process of being formed, while Mehta uses the body to construct a shared memory of the historical events that helped shape the present nations of India and Pakistan, as well as the more nebulous communities of the South Asian diaspora. Whereas the official discourse inscribes the body in order to construct a collective, affective identification with national communities, Mehta's film uses the remembered bodies within the film as well as their ability to evoke physical sensations and



corresponding emotional responses in the bodies of the film viewers to construct a shared, transnational identity through historical trauma.

### ***3. Rape without Recovery—National Loss, Transnational Community***

The question with which *Earth*'s representation of this historical trauma leaves us—the question implied by many of the viewer responses to the film—concerns the purpose and the implications of this memory of partition as trauma: Fifty years after the event, in the middle of India and Pakistan's nuclear tests, in the wake of recent acts of communal violence that recall on a smaller scale the brutalities of partition, to what end does Mehta's film remember this trauma? The act of representing or remembering moments of individual or collective trauma can, of course, do important cultural and political work. Remembering can, for instance, do the work of making visible previously ignored facets of partition's trauma in their representations of women's experiences. One might suggest that Mehta's film does such work by making partition's violence visible to an international audience largely unaware of the violence that marked British India's decolonization. But implicit in this suggestion is the assumption that Mehta's primary audience is neither South Asian nor part of the diaspora—an assumption which Mehta herself disputes, and which would severely undercut the film's political potential. Unlike many other artistic representations of partition, Mehta's film does not make visible facets of partition ignored by South Asian communities; on the contrary, it relies on what is by the late 1990s a well-established iconography of partition in its staging of the train arriving full of dead bodies, the riots, and Shanta's abduction.

Clearly it is important to remember those painful histories out of which our present social and political structures emerged. Vijay Mishra suggests in his discussion of the relationship between trauma and diaspora that “failure to keep the specters of diaspora alive—indenture, plantation barracks, racism ...—can only lead to an intellectually weak diaspora theory.”<sup>58</sup> But it is equally important to consider the implications of *how* one remembers these histories. Mishra, who sees “an impossible mourning of the moments of trauma” as “the decisive centre of the diasporic imaginary”—cautions “[a]gainst a celebratory rhetoric” of diasporas and argues for

the necessity of understanding their agony, their trauma, their pain of adjustment with reference to other pasts, other narratives. And we need to accept that contrary to idealist formulations about diasporas as symbolizing the future nation-state, diasporas are also bastions of reactionary thinking and fascist rememorations: some of the strongest support for racialized nation-states has come from diasporas.”<sup>59</sup>

Particularly resonant in the late-1990s political context, Mishra’s warning speaks at once to the importance of remembering traumatic histories like that of partition in a transnational, diasporic community, and to the potential dangers of this remembering. Ranjana Khanna, writing about the ethical problems attending to the project of a transnational feminism, suggests that “postcolonial nations and international relations” are “haunted by colonialism,” and that “Any inroad in a discussion of the *future* of transnational feminism has to find a way of accounting for such spectral overshadowing, without surrendering to the ghost.”<sup>60</sup>

Representations of past traumas can be productive, can remember without “surrendering to the ghost” of a colonial past or fueling an exclusionary nationalism, insofar as they are able to effect a transformation of that past trauma for the present

context. Healing, certainly, is the most familiar form such transformations can take, but Ann Cvetkovich suggests that by moving beyond a medicalized and therefore individualized construction of trauma and healing, we might recognize the public, collective dimensions both of traumas and of potential responses to them: “Once the causes of trauma become more diffuse, so too do the cures, opening up the need to change social structures more broadly rather than just fix individual people.”<sup>61</sup> She advocates, instead, representations that create a public sphere around trauma, that acknowledge traumatic loss as a “resource for creating new cultures,” and that “open up possibilities for constructing cultural loss as something other than traumatic or irretrievable loss.”<sup>62</sup> In the case of *Earth*, I want to suggest that the film’s representation of partition’s violence to people and communities does attempt to construct the traumatic loss brought about by partition as a resource for creating new, transnational public cultures. This attempt, however, is limited by the film’s framing of its partition narrative as national loss: whereas the content of Lenny’s memory, the center of the film, offers a complex view in which gendered violence and communal prejudice form the underside of a community that maintains a fragile balance, the film closes out its 1997 frame story in such a way as to remember partition as the “traumatic and irretrievable loss” of a united national community. As my analysis of the final sequence in the film will demonstrate, *Earth*’s ending not only carries partition’s trauma into the present, but suggests that recovering from this trauma is impossible. By constructing young Lenny’s idyllic national community as not just the irretrievable lost object, but as the desirable form of community with which its transnational audience is positioned to identify, the film

undermines its own efficacy as a vehicle for building transnational public cultures or communities.

The final two scenes of the film present, first, Shanta's abduction by a Muslim mob and, second, an image of older Lenny in a deserted Queen Victoria's Park, accompanied by a voiceover narration by older Lenny. The abduction scene begins with Lenny and Hari—the Sethna family's gardener, who tells Lenny that he has just converted to Islam and changed his name to Himmat Ali—discovering the murdered body of Hasan, the Masseur, who had planned to marry Shanta and leave for Amritsar that day. The music again becomes a significant presence, as high-pitched woodwinds bring an almost mournful sound to accompany the discovery of the body, interrupted by the noise of shouting and chanting from a mob of men approaching the Sethna house as Hari/Himmat Ali and Lenny return home. Mehta's depiction of the abduction scene follows Sidhwa's novel fairly closely: Shanta hides in the house as the rest of the household—the family protected by the neutral position adopted by the small Parsi community and the Hindu servants by their conversion to either Islam or Christianity—meets the mob. The mob asks for the Hindus in the household, and Imam Din, the Muslim cook, informs them that Hari has converted to Islam, which the mob verifies by forcing him to recite the Kalma and to show that he has been circumcised, and the sweeper to Christianity. When one of the men demands to see the Hindu ayah, Imam Dim swears that she has left for Amritsar. Dil Navaz enters the scene, pretending to intervene with the mob and demand that they leave the family alone. Lenny, seeing someone she trusts, runs to him from her mother's side and answers truthfully when he

asks her to tell him where Ayah is. At Lenny's response, Dil Navaz puts Lenny down and informs the mob that Shanta is inside.

The scene changes rapidly from the quiet of Lenny's whispered response to chaos. As the men enter the house to find Shanta, Lenny realizes what she has done and screams to Dil Navaz that she was lying and Ayah had gone to Amritsar. Dil Navaz retreats from the mob, squats in the same position as in the opening of the train scene, and smokes a cigarette as he waits for the mob to bring Shanta outside. The music also returns, first with a pulsing, suspended note, then, as Shanta is dragged from the house, combining the sound of the drums from the train scene with an echo of the sequence of seven notes that was repeated in the film's opening. The music thus positions the image of Shanta—her sari falling off her shoulders, her hair disheveled, and her expression terrified—being dragged out of the house by the mob as the fulfillment of both the delayed climax of the opening scene and the foreboding mood of the train scene. Though Shanta's body remains intact, unlike the bodies pictured earlier in the train scene and in the riot, her abduction signals the final destruction of the community—a destruction visually represented in this scene as Shanta is carried away in the back of a cart, Lenny is separated from her mother, and the coherent groups dissolve into a crowd of separate individuals. Shanta's cries to Mrs. Sethna, asking that she tell Hasan what happened, only reinforces the tragedy of the scene. As the camera focuses on Lenny's face and fades to black, the music closes the scene with a series of repeated, suspended notes and drum beats, creating the impression of a pulse, or a heartbeat, and thus bringing the fragmentation of the community back to bear on the body of the viewer, whose emotional

participation in this remembered symbolic dismemberment is once again enlisted by the melodramatic mode of the film's representation.

The film's final scene opens with the sounds of birds and an image of a British statue in the park in which Lenny played as a child, where, as Sidhwa writes in her novel, "Queen Victoria, cast in gunmetal, is majestic, massive, overpowering, ugly. Her statue imposes the English Raj in the park."<sup>63</sup> As the camera scans several such statues of British figures positioned around the otherwise deserted park, coming to rest finally on a distant view of older Lenny sitting at the base of a stone pedestal, the voiceover from the beginning of the film returns, closing the frame of Lenny's memory and again contextualizing young Lenny's experience within the larger context of Britain's occupation of India and the violence of its departure:

Two hundred and fifty years of the British empire ended in 1947, but what's there to show for it, except a country divided. The massacres and kidnapping ... and more violence, was it all worth it? Fifty years have gone by since I betrayed my ayah. Some say she married Ice Candy Wallah, some say they saw her in a brothel in Lahore, others, that they saw her in Amritsar, but I never set eyes on her again, and that day in 1947, when I lost Ayah, I lost a large part of myself.

The film ends with division: young Lenny's separation from Shanta in the previous scene, older Lenny's statement fifty years later that Britain left a "country divided," and, in the final words of the film, the articulation of a kind of internal division within herself, a "large part of myself" lost with the loss of Ayah, with the divisions of partition.

Lenny's internal division, her loss of self, is reflected in the scene's separation of her voice from her body, as the image of Bapsi Sidhwa portraying the grown-up version of her alter-ego in the park diverges from Shabana Azmi's voice closing the narration.

Importantly, Mehta departs from Sidhwa's novel in this closing narration. Whereas in the film Lenny hears only rumors of what happened to Ayah but "never set eyes on her again," in the novel Lenny's family does, in fact, find her with Ice Candy Man, and Lenny's mother, who works with the Ministry for the Rehabilitation of Recovered Women, arranges to remove her from Ice Candy Man's house and send her first to the Recovered Women's camp, then to Amritsar. By choosing to end Shanta's story with her abduction and Lenny's story with her abiding sense of loss, Mehta not only reinforces the divisions created by partition, but she also suggests that there is no recovery from them.

Mehta's refusal to resolve Shanta's story with the closure of an easy recovery is a powerful choice for the film. As Butalia's and Menon and Bhasin's analyses of the state recovery and rehabilitation operations for abducted women reveal, the so-called "recoveries" of women in the aftermath of the riots had much to do with an attempt to legitimate the new nation-states and little to do with the actual complexities of the women's experiences. By leaving Shanta's fate unresolved, her body unrecovered, the film demands an acknowledgement that the trauma of partition runs deeper than allowed by state efforts centered more on forgetting than any meaningful recovery. At a symbolic level, moreover, Shanta's abduction signifies the loss of that community united across so many lines of difference, and by refusing to resolve her story, the film asks us to mourn this loss of community. The potential of the melodramatic mode and the cinematic medium for this partition memory lies in its capacity to create a public culture in the present through the film's evocation of a collective mourning of this lost community of the past. Sumita S. Chakravarty, in her article "'Can the Subaltern Weep?' Mourning as

Metaphor in *Rudaali (The Crier)*,” argues that for postcolonial nations, the transition from pre-independence nationalist movement to post-independence nation-state involves a simultaneous mourning of the past and forgetting of the exclusions through which the new nation consolidates its power:

The heroic narrative of the nationalist struggle is kept alive by ritual acts of mourning, the death of the national father(s) providing the totemic source of renewal for the community; on the other hand, the tasks of building a new nation entail a great deal of forgetting and a denial of difference that can feed into the interests of a hegemonic consolidation of power. What then happens as a nation goes about reconstructing its history in the light of contemporary realities and concerns is that the rhetoric of inclusion through which the past is mourned (all groups, dominant and marginal, helped in winning independence) exists alongside new regimes of exclusion and the institutionalization of hierarchies.<sup>64</sup>

Against the nationalist process of mourning and forgetting that Chakravarty describes, where a rhetoric of inclusion masks a practice of exclusion, Mehta asks her audience to participate in a process of mourning and remembering. In mourning the loss of Shanta and the kind of heterogeneous community she represents, we are asked to participate in a desire to retrieve that lost community even as we are forced to recognize that it is, in fact, lost—that just as Shanta’s abduction cannot be resolved by the state recovery operations, the loss of those forms of community she represents have not been resolved by the nation-states that have emerged from partition.

Leveraging the power of film as a medium that can both have a transnational creative genesis, as *Earth*’s production history demonstrates, and address a transnational audience, Mehta’s film articulates the potential for a transnational, heterogeneous community united by this process of mourning and remembering. Yet, as the film’s varied reception suggests, the film is less successful in realizing this potential. I want to



suggest two ways in which *Earth* critically undermines its own power to transform the trauma of partition. First, the basis for the transnational community *Earth* tries to construct is a shared desire to retrieve an idealized national community that the film represents as lost because of the events of 1947, but that is actually an illusion, a community that never existed except in a child's eyes. The national character of the idealized lost community, emphasized through the closing voiceover's reference to "a country divided" as the legacy of colonialism and partition, renders it problematic as either model or desired object for the film's transnational audience. The idealization of a lost united India already speaks to a national bias, to a particular historical narrative, that would be far more palatable to an Indian audience than to a Pakistani audience, for example. Even the melodramatic mode of the film—its musical score, composed by one of the most well-known Bollywood composers, its star actors, its debt to the conventions of Bombay cinema—situates *Earth* within an Indian national cinematic tradition. In order to project into the past an idealized united India, therefore, the film subscribes at least in part to forms of national culture that undermine its transnational appeal. Moreover, by representing this pre-partition united India as lost, rather than as itself an imaginary construction, *Earth* enacts its own form of forgetting.

Whereas the nationalist rhetoric forgets the exclusions and internal tensions post-independence, Mehta's closing frame forgets the communal strife of pre-partition India as it privileges Lenny's naïve perspective on the community of friends surrounding Shanta. The center of the film productively questions this naïve vision of the community through representations of the gendered violence and communal tensions already present in the

community. The image of Hari/Himmat Ali being forced to prove that he has been circumcised at the end of the film, for example, echoes an earlier scene in which the Muslim members of the household staff playfully, but at the same time disturbingly, pull off Hari's dhoti. This targeting of Hari's Hindu dress by the Muslim characters in a way that clearly makes him uncomfortable and that becomes overtly violent at the end of the film, suggests an underlying sexualized tension between the communities that Lenny's childish perspective does not recognize, but that the film makes available to viewers. Similarly, the abduction of Shanta at the end of the film could be read as an enactment of a form of gendered violence that is implicit in the attitudes of many of the male characters throughout the film, from Lenny's young cousin, who offers to show Lenny what rape is one day, to the possessiveness of Dil Navaz in his relationship to Shanta, who does not return his affections. While the center of the film offers a productive critique of this underlying violence, however, the closing frame at least in part undercuts this critique by reinserting the partition violence too simplistically within a colonial narrative: "Two hundred and fifty years of the British empire ended in 1947, but what's there to show for it, except a country divided. The massacres and kidnapping ... and more violence, was it all worth it?" Whereas the earlier representations of gendered and communal violence suggest that this violence was always present in the community, that partition exacerbated a condition that already existed beneath the surface, the closing frame implies that the end of the British empire in that symbolic moment of partition was responsible for the massacres and kidnappings.

The second way in which *Earth* undermines its transformative power is in its inability to imagine any form of recovery for Lenny. While the choice not to close Shanta's story with a recovery, as I have argued, serves an important purpose, the film's extension of that impossibility of recovery to older Lenny forecloses the very potentials for transforming partition's trauma that the film's melodramatic mode and cinematic medium begin to enable. Ending with the image of older Lenny alone in an otherwise deserted park, the film fails to envision any form of community in the present. Though *Earth's* address and its use of the melodramatic mode to act on the bodies of its audience suggest a desire for community, ultimately the film itself offers no images of community. Though it articulates the need to transform the trauma of partition, the film leaves us with images of divided communities, in the staging of Shanta's abduction, and abiding trauma, in the separation of older Lenny's body from her voice, which itself articulates a loss of self that has never been recovered.

### **Remembering Histories of Violence: Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body***

#### ***Remembers***

I have grey eyes in this lifetime and they are wide open as I am severed from my mother's womb. The futility of tears is for those who have not, as I have, rolled the dice a few times.

If the circle that is your body falls on a ladder inscribed on the game board of time, you climb. If it lands on a snake, you slip-slide back. Resume your journey again.

And if you do not learn what you were meant to learn from your past lives, you are condemned to repeat them....

So angry am I, my eyes are open wide—never open your eyes in a new life without forgetting your past ones.... A girl who comes into this world with her eyes wide open will never lower them before a man.

—*What the Body Remembers*, Prologue<sup>65</sup>

Shauna Singh Baldwin's 1999 novel *What the Body Remembers* opens with the words, "UNDIVIDED INDIA, 1895," marking the time and place of the (re)birth of one of the novel's two heroines through a phrase that anticipates India's partition just over fifty years later. Although most of the novel has a third person narrator, Satya—whose name means "truth"—narrates her own birth in the first person. Like *Earth*, then, Baldwin's novel opens with a first-person narrator framing the story that follows, and just as Mehta's frame foregrounds Lenny's memory, Satya's thoughts at her birth introduce the theme of remembering that runs through the novel and gives it its title. But unlike *Earth*, in which one disembodied voice's act of remembering yields a static memory of the past, retrievable and communicable but unalterable, *What the Body Remembers* focuses not on *memory* as a static object, but rather on *remembering* as an embodied process or activity. Based on a notion of karma and rebirth—which the prologue figures on an individual level with Satya's rebirth as a girl who remembers with anger her past life as she enters her present body—the novel's trope of bodies that remember extends beyond individual experience to construct a collective engagement with history. The body that remembers becomes in the novel a figure for the presentness of history as a gendered, culturally specific, politically invested category.

Though participating in the same moment of transnational collective remembering as Mehta's film, therefore, *What the Body Remembers* represents a different kind of

partition history and suggests a different relationship to 1947 as history and memory. Whereas *Earth* begins in the present moment and looks back at partition as a relatively compact historical narrative, spanning less than a year, Baldwin's novel presents a much longer, and what at first appears to be a more linear, historical narrative, beginning with Satya's birth in 1895, jumping forward briefly to 1937 and the first meeting between Satya and the novel's other heroine Roop, following the central characters from 1928 until shortly after partition, and ending again with a first-person narration of Satya's rebirth in "NEW DELHI, DIVIDED INDIA, 1965" (470). Despite this apparently linear historical trajectory—which is underscored by subheadings marking place, month, and year that carry the reader through the narrative—the novel uses the trope of bodies that remember to present a view of history which is more akin to the recursive, reiterative game of snakes and ladders referenced in its prologue (and borrowed as a framing device from Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*) than to any conception of a progressive march of time. The newly reborn Satya tells us that "if you do not learn what you were meant to learn from your past lives, you are condemned to repeat them"—condemned, extending the metaphor of the board game, to "slip-slide back" down the snake. The model of history as learning suggested here is complicated by the question of who decides what one is "meant to learn"—the prologue articulates Satya's anger at being reborn again as a girl, despite a "whole life of worship and expiation" in hopes of being born a man in the next life. At a collective level, however, by casting history as learning and failure to learn, the novel represents partition not as a violent break from the past or as the fragmentation of a previously whole community, but as part of a history of violence and

communal division that has precedents in the past and must be learned from in the present.

As it opens, therefore, *What the Body Remembers* introduces as one of its central concerns the question of how to understand the presentness of history, the role of the past in constructing the present, and the potential to transform histories of violence or oppression to achieve a different future. I will argue that by constructing partition through the embodied acts of remembering, learning, and witnessing, *What the Body Remembers* articulates an approach to the collective trauma of partition whereby remembering partition's violence to bodies and to communities can be a transformative act, enabling the possibility of new forms of community in the present and future. Furthermore, the novel's representation of remembering as an activity both presently embodied and historically engaged insists on a gendered dimension to partition and keeps the imagery of bodies grounded in their materiality. Rather than locating women within existing historical narratives, Baldwin uses gendered bodies to assert collective histories that are also gendered. Rather than using women's bodies as symbols for partition's divisions, she historicizes the act of appropriating women's bodies as symbols in order to examine the implications of such appropriations. A narrative first and foremost about the lives of two women characters, *What the Body Remembers* makes gender the lens through which we as readers see—or remember, or witness, or learn from—partition as a moment in which the histories of colonialism and communal strife violently converge. Baldwin foregrounds the ways in which women's bodies have been organizing sites and images not just for the concentrated violence of 1947, but for the long histories of both colonial

and communal violence that precede and follow partition. In so doing, she constructs partition neither as an anomalous break with the past nor as a historical event from which the subcontinent has recovered, but rather as yet another—albeit a more intense and contracted—instance in an extended history of gendered colonial and communal violence which is still ongoing.

***“Sita in her man-inscribed circle”: Remembering as Feminist Pedagogy***

*What the Body Remembers* tells the intertwined stories of two women, Satya and Roop, who become co-wives of the same man, a wealthy and relatively powerful Sikh known only by his title, Sardarji, who has risen to the highest post available to an Indian man in the Indian Service of Engineers. Satya, the older wife by 26 years, is capable, defiant, intelligent, fiercely anti-British, and, as predicted by the prologue’s assertion that a “girl who comes into this world with her eyes wide open will never lower them before a man,” unwilling to be the deferential, self-sacrificing wife Sardarji expects. Because Satya is unable to have children, almost twenty-five years after his first marriage, Sardarji marries sixteen-year-old Roop. Though when we first meet Roop as a seven-year-old girl she is independent and adventurous, by the time she marries Sardarji, Roop has learned to be compliant, deferential, and obedient, while retaining the “ambitious, slightly vain, lazily intelligent” (110) character that causes her to agree to become the second wife of a wealthy man.

Based on these sets of characteristics, we might expect to identify with Satya’s independence, her anti-colonial political convictions, and her sympathetic position as an

older woman forced to share her husband and her home with a younger second wife. By opening and closing the novel with Satya's voice, Baldwin would seem to further strengthen our identification with Satya through the structure of the narrative. We might likewise expect Roop's shallow desire for pretty clothes and jewels, her lack of independence, and her willingness to fill the role of the obedient wife, by contrast, to make her an unsympathetic character. But the novel complicates these expectations through its narration of the relationship between Satya and Roop. Though the point of view shifts—so that we have alternating access to Roop's, Satya's, and Sardarji's thoughts—we see the relationships among these characters primarily through Roop's perspective, more familiar to us than the others by this point in the novel because we have followed Roop from childhood to her marriage. Satya's character further alienates the reader by treating Roop with steadily growing contempt and cruelty. After initially gaining Roop's trust, Satya becomes increasingly jealous and calculating, first isolating Roop within the household, then demanding that Roop's first two children be handed over to her own care, to be considered her children rather than Roop's. Having taken both children, Satya decides that she must make Roop leave the household, leading her to believe that she would poison her in order to make Roop stop eating and eventually return to her father's house for refuge. Satya's treatment of Roop makes it difficult to sustain any sympathy for the older woman and strengthens the reader's identification with Roop. By constructing her characters and structuring the novel in such a way as to make readers sympathize with one character, then using the novel's plot and narrative voice to make us sympathize with the other, Baldwin creates a complicated structure of



identification, where readers' sympathies are elicited in opposition to their expectations and where it is difficult to fully identify with either character at the expense of the other.

Because this structure of identification takes away the option of labeling one woman good and the other bad, or constructing one as heroine and the other as villain, the novel forces readers to look beyond the individual characters to assign responsibility for the condition of both women. Rather than blaming Satya for Roop's misfortune or Roop for Satya's, the novel asks us to see that both women are enmeshed in a society that systematically devalues women's lives, educates them to be submissive and self-sacrificing, and imposes harsh punishments if they are not. Viewed within this context, Satya's behavior toward Roop—while reprehensible—can be understood as stemming from her own powerlessness within her marriage, within the social system which forces her to accept her husband's second marriage or else fear for her own welfare. Roop's lack of independence and her readiness to bend to her husband's will, likewise, can be regarded not simply as a personal weakness or flaw, but as the direct result of her education as a young girl, where she is taught to pliable, obedient, and self-sacrificing—and taught what the consequences will be if she fails to learn these qualities.

The figure and narrative of the *Ramayana's* Sita, the wife of Lord Ram whose virtue is tested in a trial by fire after her abduction by the foreign king Ravana, circulates in Baldwin's novel both as an idealized model for women's education—a pattern to which women are expected to conform—and as a cautionary tale for the consequences of failure to conform to this pattern. Despite the differences between Roop and Satya, each character must engage with the Sita model and must negotiate the implications of her

choices about how to conform to and how to depart from this pattern. For Roop, the Sita story provides the basis for her education as a young woman, and once she is married, it both helps her to make sense of the sacrifices she is required to make and explains the fear that makes her comply with Sardarji's demand that she give up her children. For Satya, on the other hand, the Sita narrative paradoxically becomes a source of empowerment. Satya focuses on an aspect of Sita's story which is masked by the pedagogical use of Sita as a model for women's behavior—namely, the fact that despite her perfect conformity to the pattern of the ideal woman, her constitution of that pattern in fact, Sita is still sent into exile by her husband. In Sita's response to her unjust exile, Satya finds a way of reclaiming a position of critique and a kind of agency in her own life. Through their diverging ways of engaging with the Sita model, the characters of Roop and Satya therefore enable Baldwin to articulate both a critique of the systematic education of women to be obedient and self-sacrificing, and a potential for re-education, or unlearning, by way of a transformation of the learned stories and patterns.

Whereas we see Satya and Sardarji only as adults, we follow Roop's character as it develops from seven-year-old child to her marriage at age sixteen. This section, spanning from 1928 through 1937, is primarily a narrative of education, showing the process by which Roop learns from her father and from the adult women in her life “what women are for” (33), how she is expected to behave in order to fulfill that purpose, and what will be the consequences should she fail. One of Roop's first lessons comes as she witnesses her mother—aided by Roop's grandmother, the family's servant, Gujri, and Revati Bhua, a cousin of Roop's father who lives with the family—giving birth in a

breech delivery that soon afterwards results in the deaths of both Roop's mother and the baby:

“Ay, learn,” says Nani, cuffing the back of Roop's head so she almost falls into the room, “learn what we women are for!”

The rough cotton of Gujri's chunni wipes Roop's cheeks. Gujri reassures her gently, “Learning is just remembering slowly, like simmer coming to boil.” (32)

The women of the household are responsible for teaching Roop that the primary function of a woman, what “women are for,” is to produce sons.

The remaining content of Roop's education consists of a set of aphorisms, “truths,” and rules pronounced by family members and internalized by Roop, who carries the lessons along with her as phrases she applies to her life throughout the novel. From her father, she learns that for women, “to listen is to obey” (101): “There should be no difference between one and the other” (39). From Lajo Bhua, a cousin of Roop's father, she learns a set of rules for behavior:

“Rule number one: You want to make a good marriage; you must be more graceful, more pleasing to your elders. I want to hear only ‘achchaji,’ ‘hanji,’ and ‘yes-ji,’ from you. Never ‘nahinji’ or ‘no-ji.’”

“Rule number two: Speak softly, always softly!”

Rule number three: “Never feel angry, never, never. No matter what happens, or what your husband says, never feel angry. You might be hurt, but never ever feel angry.” (76, 77)

Finally, from Gujri, Roop learns not to be ziddi, quarrelsome, or else “if you're not careful everyone will say: ‘Let her be alone’” (95). The consequence of failing to obey, of saying no, of expressing or even feeling anger—of departing from Sita's pattern—Roop learns, is to experience Sita's punishment, to be exiled or left alone.

Despite Roop's internalization of this education, however, Baldwin's construction of learning as a process of "remembering slowly"—marked throughout the novel by Gujri's phrase "like simmer coming to boil"—prevents Roop's learning process from being either totalizing or limited to those aphoristic lessons pronounced by her family. Learning, as Baldwin constructs it, is one form of remembering, and is therefore constructed in the novel as, first, an embodied process, and second, a process that engages with a collective history extending beyond individual lives or lessons. That learning is embodied means that the excesses and the crises of the body, the ways in which material bodies fail to conform to the patterns of ideals like Sita, can convey alternative lessons to those articulated through Sita's immaterial body. That learning is historical and collective means both that Roop's individual education is not anomalous but connected to a larger social and cultural context of women's subordination, and that as the processes of learning change, so might the position of women within this larger context.

For Roop, the internalized lesson that "to listen is to obey" becomes incoherent through her body's inability to listen with both ears after typhoid leaves her deaf in one. Significantly, Baldwin aligns nine-year-old Roop's connection between her deafness and her obedience with an episode in which Roop, expecting to see a woman walk through fire like Sita, sees instead that women are not proof against fire. Having wandered away from her family and into a crowd of Gandhi supporters burning foreign cloth, Roop watches as a woman throws her foreign-made chunni onto a bonfire:

A bonfire is built before her and the crowd backs away as its flames grow strong and leap as high as Jeevan said Mama's funeral pyre had flamed.

But Roop is afraid for this woman, this determined woman who speaks so loud in the street, away from her own home, who must be attracted to flames like a moth to a candle. She waits for the woman to walk into the fire, as Sita did, when Ram tested her in the *Ramayan*.

But the woman does not....

Now the determined woman throws her white chunni on the bonfire, and the flames attack it.

*This is what Mama's body must have looked like, on the pyre. (73-74)*

Roop, prevented from seeing her mother's funeral pyre because she is a girl, connects the determined woman's chunni, burning in place of her body, with her mother's dead body, and she reenacts her mother's funeral by throwing her own chunni onto the fire:

Roop feels her hands pull at her own throat till it is naked, and then she is walking towards the fire, carrying a length of muslin across her arms, like a dead woman.

And Roop throws her own white chunni into the flames, Mama's white chunni, watches it burn.

*It is not proof against the fire. Nor was my mama. (74)*

The burning chunnis, standing in place of the burning bodies of the determined woman and Roop's mother, present to Roop's mind an alternative narrative to the story of Sita walking through flames and emerging unharmed. The body's vulnerability, in other words, reveals the holes in the Sita pattern, its problems when applied to material bodies rather than the construct of the perfect woman. Likewise, Roop's own bodily vulnerability—her deafness, which her father warns her to hide as a flaw that could prevent her from finding a husband—is transformed through this episode at the bonfire into a disguisable, but nevertheless present, tendency toward disobedience. Scolded for running away with the crowd, Roop decides that she will “pretend she's listening and obeying like a good-good sweet-sweet girl with two working ears and who will ever know the difference?” (75).

As her learning is embodied, therefore, Roop's education loses its internal coherence. By the time she is married, Roop has learned well to fear exile as the consequence of failing to be like Sita, but she has also learned that matching the pattern of Sita has its own consequences. When Sardarji asks pregnant Roop to give her first child to Satya, she recognizes his request as a "fire test," one that could result in her being sent home to her father should she fail:

This is a fire test, the kind of test Ram asked Sita to take when he became unsure that Sita was worthy to be his queen.

Roop's test is not like Sita's—Sardarji does not ask for an *agnipariksha*, a walk through fire. But unlike Sita, who was a goddess and so pure she could not fail, Roop is only mortal.... Roop could fail this test because she isn't good-good sweet-sweet as Sita; she isn't generous enough to let Satya have a child. (167)

Though Sardarji, who assumes that Roop will be happy to comply with his wishes, does not actually give her a chance to refuse, the consequences for Roop of passing her "fire test" are an emptiness she feels as a hole at the base of her stomach and an experience of isolation within the house and her marriage:

There are a few small rooms close to the cookhouse where her voice ... becomes softer, softer. When she stands in the smallest, a room so small she can only stand within it and watch the world beyond its threshold, she is Sita in her man-inscribed circle.

Her voice, now just a whisper.

Idol in her niche. (191)

In giving up both her children and her voice, Roop becomes "Sita in her man-inscribed circle," less a person than an "Idol in her niche." In the process, however, she trades the exile she fears—her expulsion from Sardarji's home—for a far greater sense of isolation within the home, as she takes her place in her "niche" where she can watch the world, but not be of it, and as in conforming to Sita's pattern, she sacrifices her self.

Roop's character thus demonstrates the irony in the Sita story that Baldwin articulates as Satya watches a performance of the Ram-Lila on stage: though Sita remains "pure," innocent, the very pattern of the "good-good sweet-sweet" woman, she is still exiled on the suspicion of wrongdoing. The novel constructs Sita's punishment as the unspoken, masked part of the narrative, and by extension of women's education: "No one asked the actors to act the rest of the *Ramayan* story: the story that did not end with Ram's homecoming as the celebrations of Diwali—how Ram rejected Sita, innocent though she was, because a mere washerman suggested that ... Sita might have become impure" (252). For Roop, contrary to the fears instilled in her by her education, the more like Sita she becomes, the more isolated she becomes, and it takes an act of rebellion—she goes back to her father's house, sends for her children, and keeps them there with her until her father and brother intercede on her behalf with Sardarji—for her to regain her children and become integrated into Sardarji's home. Through Roop's rebellion, therefore, Baldwin articulates one form of unlearning or reeducation. Finding at least a relative degree of power through a subversion of the Sita narrative she was taught to emulate, Roop manages to elude Sita's fate by refusing to completely succumb to her pattern.

Satya, likewise, subverts the explicit lessons of the Sita story, but whereas Roop subverts the narrative by escaping exile, Satya does so by embracing it. In the masked conclusion to the *Ramayan* story, the part no one asks the actors to act, Satya finds a form of empowerment in the performance of duty: "And how Sita shamed [Ram] for all time, outdoing him in performing her duty. But everyone knows the story ... how Sita called

upon the labia of the earth to open wide again, take her back within them, how Sita walked into the maw of the earth with her eyes wide open and her izzat intact, dying of her own will, the same way she was born” (252-253). Once exiled, in this reading of the narrative, Sita’s innocence and her exercise of her own will in choosing to die become a means of empowerment for her. In “outdoing [Ram] in performing her duty,” she shames him by revealing the injustice and the oppressive nature of his actions towards her. After Roop’s family confronts Sardarji, Satya’s narrative mirrors this post exile, silenced portion of the Sita story. Though Roop’s rebellion in leaving Sardarji’s house is forgiven as her brother, Jeevan, attributes Roop’s actions to her fear that Satya would harm the children, Satya’s more subtle forms of rebellion result in her actual exile from the rest of Sardarji’s family. One of Jeevan’s conditions in his negotiations with Sardarji is that Satya should be made to live separately and alone, away from Sardarji, Roop, and the children. Forced to choose between Roop and Satya, Sardarji bases his decision on the contrast between Roop, who “will listen to him admiringly, carefully, her eyes upon his mouth as if ropes of pearls fell from his lips,” and Satya, who “has never lowered her eyes before him and carries herself far too confidently” (286).

Left alone, exiled by Sardarji’s command, Satya sees all of the choices available to her for living as bound by Sardarji’s will. Unwilling to live in her “man-inscribed circle,” Satya chooses instead to make a martyr of herself:

Body and nobody.  
That is the key.  
She can release herself, yes.  
She does not have to be trapped in matter. There is a place she can go by choice. By her will, her own free will. Somewhere there may be life without fear, where she can begin again.



But not now, not here.  
Go simply.  
Burn away flesh, burn it away slowly.  
*Simply go.*  
Surrender to death, tempter of all martyrs.  
Wake to that dignity that comes from refusal, refusal to live without izzat  
[honor]! (309)

Like Sita walking into the “maw of the earth with her eyes wide open and her izzat intact,” Satya chooses to die as a means of asserting her will, and through this assertion she exercises the power of commanding shame: “Such altruism will Satya display, Sardarji will always be reminded of his guilt. Let silence reverberate forever with the absence of Satya, the knowledge that but for a little more love, she would still be” (311). Furthermore, by imagining her death (actually accomplished through the intentional contraction of tuberculosis) as a burning away of flesh, linked to another fire image of Sita walking “into the earth’s fiery core” (311), Baldwin implies that Satya’s suicide is part of a history of Indian women’s power through self-sacrifice that includes the women who became satis—a connection confirmed by Sardarji’s fantasy that he would mourn Satya’s death by building a “samadhi ... like the lotus-shaped ones in Lahore, commemorating the suttee deaths of four of Maharaj Ranjit Singh’s wives” (338).

The connection of Satya’s suicide to both Sita and the suttee monuments, while consistent with Satya’s own construction of her death as a means of exercising power, foregrounds how problematic it is to construct self-sacrifice and death as Satya’s mode of self-empowerment. In terms of the options their characters offer for women, neither Satya’s self-assertion through death nor Roop’s minor rebellion, as mitigated by her willingness to act the part of the admiring and submissive wife, would appear to be useful

models. What makes the novel's narration of these two characters' choices useful, I would argue, is that neither is presented as a model for behavior. Instead, read together, Roop and Satya's actions constitute a feminist intervention into the Sita story's deployment as a pedagogical model for women's behavior. Neither Roop nor Satya offers an alternative model for *behavior*, but they do offer models for alternative, feminist *pedagogies*. While both Roop and Satya have learned, through their own educations, to view Sita as a model for behavior, Roop's minor rebellion and Satya's interpretation of the masked power in Sita's story both lead to future forms of learning that offer the potential for changed models for women. Roop draws on her own experience to offer her daughter, about to be taken away and given to Satya, different lessons than those she received from the women in her own family:

The baby laughs and kicks and sleeps again. How will she learn without Roop? [...] No, this baby will be motherless, the way Roop was motherless. So she will repeat Roop's life—*can there be no other way?* "Listen, but do not obey everything," she tells the baby, and begins to pour into her tiny ears all she might tell her in ten, twenty, fifty years. "Always speak. Never be silent. Respect your elders, but don't be too generous ... say what you want."  
*Don't be like me.* (180-181, original emphasis)

The lessons of Roop's childhood, together with Roop's experience of the consequences of complete obedience, silence, and being too generous, become the basis for a radically different version of women's education, one that provides for remembering without repetition.

Moreover, through Satya's death Baldwin articulates a version of this different mode of learning, this remembering without repetition, that extends the individual intervention of Roop's alternative lessons to a vision of a more collective, widespread

change for women in the future. Satya imagines her death not as an ending, but as the possibility of existing in a future that values women's lives:

Then she can close the book of this life in which she has been incapable of writing and wait for a better time, find Sardarji again.

Find Sardarji in some later time, when women like her, prickly as cactus, shall not be abandoned and ignored....

Surely there will come a time when just being can bring izzat in return, when a woman will be allowed to choose her owner, when a woman will not be owned, when love will be enough payment for marriage, children or no children.... (310)

Satya's death is therefore not a model, but an occasion for Baldwin's feminist critique and for an articulation of an alternative vision of the future.

Satya's death is imagined in the novel as a vehicle for a kind of learning that advances this feminist vision of the future. In the moment of her death, Satya passes on part of her spirit and her character to Roop:

And in that breath, Satya joins the virulence of her unremitting anger to Roop's hope. For the one long moment that Roop feels the smoulder of Satya's anger the open wound of Satya's humiliation passes past flesh, past bone, past breath. For that moment, Satya's desires flame within Roop, and her times and Roop's grasp hands, dance forward, the balance between Word and Silence restored for just one instant. (325)

Beyond sharing something of Satya's anger and her desires, Roop becomes her pupil, in a way, as Satya's remembered past lives—her connection to a history of the devaluing of women's lives—become available for Roop to learn: "The experience of the world will not be the same, ever again. Roop has changed, is more than her haumai, more than Roop. What Satya's body remembered has been felt for one long moment by Roop's and it will simmer, waiting some day to boil" (326). The content of Roop's embodied

learning shifts, through Satya, from Gujri's lesson that women are for producing sons to Satya's way of experiencing the world through her anger and her desire.

***“They cannot be divided any further, except by themselves”:* Remembering Partition's History**

If the Sita story represents women's internalized education within the gender-based hierarchy of the Punjab, then Sardarji's internalized education is represented by Mr. Cunningham, his “English-gentleman-inside” who teaches him to be a good colonial subject—emulating the British but cognizant of his inferior position. “Acquired” when Sardarji was in school in England, Cunningham is an internal voice that teaches Sardarji how to think, how to behave, what to say:

Cunningham still saddles Sardarji's mind, hoary phantom remnant of his years in England. And now Sardarji cannot remember how he thought before he learned to think with Cunningham. Cunningham, grafted so long ago, does the watching now and argues less and less as long as Sardarji asks only the questions Cunningham approves of, walks and talks the way Cunningham has taught. (133)

Cunningham is one piece of an extended analogy in the novel that relates the subordinate position of women within a patriarchal society to the position of India and Indian men within the British empire. Satya, the novel's most trenchant and vocal critic of the British empire, makes this analogy explicit: ““What can I teach anyone? All of us need our own ideas, not foreign ideas; this is what I tell Sardarji. But he—his mind is their colony also.... I told him, “I too am a colony—your colony””” (240). Roop, too, recognizes this analogy as she observes Sardarji's interactions with his British direct superior in the Indian Service of Engineers, Mr. Farquharson: “Understanding glimmers

in Roop: Mr. Farquharson is the man who draws the circle beyond which Sardarji cannot go” (209). From her own experience of her “man-inscribed circle,” Roop comprehends the hierarchical power relations that limit Sardarji.

While Satya makes sense of her own disempowerment through her understanding of colonial power relationships, Roop’s glimmer of understanding uses her own experience to make sense of the colonial dynamic she witnesses between Sardarji and Mr. Farquharson. Together, these articulations of this analogy between women and colonized India suggest a co-implication of two forms of subordination. A similar analogy structures Baldwin’s construction of power relations between majority and minority religious communities: Just as Satya and Roop’s experiences of gendered disempowerment form the lens through which the novel explores colonial power relations, a gender-based analogy guides the novel’s exploration of partition’s communal violence through the trope of the guest who can be made to leave. Echoing the novel’s description of Roop as a “guest for a while, just till her marriage” (23) in her father and brother’s house, Sardarji likens the position of Sikhs in a Muslim state to guests relying on the hospitality of a host:

He and his entire household—indeed the entire Sikh quom, only five million strong—will be guests at the mercy of their Muslim hosts if Pakistan is created in Punjab Province.

*Guests....*

*What’s the worst one can do to a mehmann [guest]?....*

*Make him want to leave, make him need to leave.*

.... And living in Jinnah’s Pakistan will, he is sure, require Sikhs and Hindus and even Christians to be always on their best behaviour, acutely aware of the religion and customs of their hosts. (339-340)

Sardarji experiences the prospect of being a perpetual guest in Jinnah's Pakistan as a feminizing powerlessness—he feels “helpless as a woman” (340). As the novel moves toward 1947 and partition, Baldwin draws on the colonial and communal histories of appropriating women's bodies as symbols, but she extends the analogies to work in both directions and to encompass a broader view of women's lives. Unlike the inscriptions of women's bodies as symbols for communal, colonial, or national forms of collective identity, the novel constructs extended analogies on the basis of relationships of power, such that each helps to illuminate the others. Through these implicated analogies, mapped onto bodies that remember—that make present—gendered, colonial, and communal violence in the past, *What the Body Remembers* locates partition within a long and continuing history of violence and oppression.

Just as the embodied process of learning makes the history of women's subordination present, to be either repeated or transformed, in Roop and Satya, the novel constructs the rising communal tensions as historical violence made present through bodies that remember past relations of power and experiences of violence. Similar to the content of *Earth's* partition memory, which represents the potential for communal violence as already present before it was unleashed by partition, but unlike its frame narrative, which presents a coherent and peaceful community broken by partition, *What the Body Remembers* presents partition's communal violence within the context of histories of violence remembered in such a way as to either repeat or transform the past, increasing in intensity as the negotiations for power become more and more divisive.

From Roop's childhood, Baldwin constructs the religious practices and texts of her Sikh community as infused with rememberings of past violence:

The Ardaas reminded them of ... Sikhs cut limb from limb by Muslim tyrants; two sons of the tenth Guru bricked up alive in a wall for their refusal to convert to Islam; martyrs whose scalps were removed; men who were tied to wheels and their bodies broken to pieces; men and women who were cut by saws and flayed alive by Mughul emperors for their faith, but did not convert to Islam. (50)

The bodies remembered here as part of religious practice, stories read aloud specifically to prevent the community from forgetting them, speak to a history of corporeal crisis based on the shifting and contested relations of power in the subcontinent.

In these images of bodies "cut limb from limb," "broken to pieces," or "flayed alive," Baldwin traces a recursive history of repeated corporeal trauma that, through its ability to evoke a more emotional and psychic community trauma, feeds the violence surrounding partition. Because history cannot be left neatly in the past, the novel suggests, the traumas of the past become the basis for deeply felt fears in the present. Faced with the Congress demands for power in a secular India, for example, the novel articulates Muslims' "fear that Hindus will make their raj in the very image of this British raj" through an embodied knowledge of history: "Men foretell one another's actions by their own, and Muslims know deep in the bone that Hindus have not forgotten the Mughal raj" (127). This knowledge "in the bone" is mirrored by Sardarji's fear later in the novel when he hears that the Muslim League has asked for a separate state:

Does Rai Alam Khan think the Sikhs can survive under the Muslims again—the same who slaughtered and martyred their Gurus? Sardarji's body remembers life preserving fear, passed down centuries in lori rhymes his mother sang to him, in paintings displayed in the Golden Temple Museum in Amritsar, in poem and in story.... But if fear of Muslims is

what Sardarji's body remembers, though his ancestors were once Muslim, how much more piercingly will illiterate Sikh farmers feel its chill? (339)

Throughout the novel, Baldwin interweaves the individual stories of her characters with a larger view of the political history leading to partition. What link the personal to the political narratives, these passages suggest, are the feelings, the memories that political events evoke within individuals and groups.

The form of history narrated in this novel, then, is one that is “not the prerogative of the historian,” as Raphael Samuel suggests in *Theatres of Memory*, but is rather “a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands.”<sup>66</sup> Samuel argues for an understanding of history that recognizes “popular memory,” or the “sense of the past, at any given point of time, ... [as] quite as much a matter of history as what happened in it.”<sup>67</sup> History, in this view, is not so much an investigation into the past *per se* as it is an examination of a particular society's or culture's engagement with the past through popular forms such as oral tradition, local lore, legend and myth, or memorabilia:

Popular memory ... eschews notions of determination and seizes instead on omens, portents and signs. It measures change ... in terms of generations rather than centuries, epochs or decades.... In place of the pedagogue's 'causes' and 'effects' or the scholar's pursuit of origins ... it deals in broad-brushed contrasts between 'now' and 'then', 'past' and 'present', the new-fangled and the old-fashioned.<sup>68</sup>

Handed down through the oral traditions, the performance of religious practices, and the proverbs, prejudices, and fears passed from one generation to the next, Baldwin's version of history meshes with Samuel's definition of popular memory, and her partition narrative thus engages with the past not as verifiable fact or as the means of tracing a



causal relationship between past and present, but rather as a means of understanding the power of received, felt notions of the past to impact the present. Sardarji's embodied memory of "life preserving fear," passed down through rhymes, paintings, poems, and stories, can therefore be read as a means of historicizing the feelings of fear evoked by partition's shifting relations of power. Through the extended analogies she uses to illustrate the implicated power hierarchies along the axes of gender, religion, and colonial status, Baldwin thus narrates partition as the convergence of three histories of oppression, each made present through the embodied process of remembering past violence. As the novel imagines partition's divisions through familiar images of bodies dismembered—Sardarji, for instance, suggests that the British are about to "cut a land in three, West Pakistan, India, East Pakistan, like cutting arms from a body" (382)—it articulates history and memory as one dimension through which partition might be seen as part of a continuum rather than a break.

This continuum of memory, furthermore, implies the importance of tangible feelings and sentiments against the rationality and the abstractions of divisible numbers and two-dimensional maps that can be carved into pieces. One expression of this continuity along the axis of memory appears through Sardarji—up to this point a staunch advocate of rationality as opposed to sentiment—who is asked to draft the Sikh community's recommendation to the Punjab boundary commission about where to draw the line between India and Pakistan. As "[h]is divider pricks the map," drawing a boundary that takes ninety percent of Sikh-owned land as well as Sikh "hallowed ground, where Guru Nanak was born, where he traveled ... out of reach of the Islamic state, into

India” (386), he considers memory as a fourth dimension that should enter into the commission’s decision:

He will make his request and pen his argument even if the Punjab Boundary Commission is composed of men with their minds closed to Sikh rights, population and the all-important word that Sikh hopes have been pinned upon—“Other Factors.” The pleader will show them this corner of the planet in two dimensions and the map will ask that the honorable judges imagine a third dimension and, more important, a fourth—memory. (387)

Part of these “Other Factors,” memory is that which cannot be quantified in the boundary negotiations, and that which cannot be divided:

“Other factors,” Sardarji’s worried voice said, recently, “very important other factors, and unfortunately, there is no scientific basis for evaluating other factors.”

One, two and three are prime factors, he said. They cannot be divided any further, except by themselves, and by one. (414)

Paradoxically, numbers here become a metaphor for the unscientific, irrational, but “very important” considerations of feelings, attachments, hopes, fears—all those dimensions of community and belonging that cannot be drawn on a map or told through population figures.

Narrating partition’s historical continuity through memory and feeling, the novel constructs memory’s relationship to history as double-edged. On the one hand, memory is potentially a means of perpetuating or repeating historical violence, as remembering makes the past present through the body. Roop’s fear that Pavan will repeat her own life speaks to this potential for painful repetitions, as does Sardarji’s embodied memory of “life preserving fear,” based on a history of communal violence which in turn fuels the perpetuation of this violence in the present moment. On the other hand, however,

memory is also the realm of those “other factors”—hopes, attachments, stories and pieces of the past that help to constitute present communities. Without memory, there is population without community, mapped territory without homelands. Were it possible to subtract memory from history, the novel suggests, its absence might very well assuage the intense fears, prejudices, and hatreds that fuel communal violence, but it would also eliminate the bonds that hold groups of people together.

The suppression or manipulation of memory—or “forgetting to remember,” as the novel phrases it—is thus one tool for the consolidation of colonial power, as it reduces people to population figures and homelands to maps. Maps, with their two dimensions and their clear lines of division, are instruments of conquest:

Maps lie, for their colours can show nothing of what a man feels when he says “I come home.” They say nothing of the distance a man will ride to avoid passing through areas inhabited by another’s caste or quom, or the direction a man turns when he bows his head to pray. Maps lie, their scrupulous lines diminishing height to hair’s breadth, contracting realms of the material to fit in the mind. Maps lie, the artful cartographer separating earth from sea with a simple line that refuses to tell that one does not end where the other begins, but continues, undergirding the sea.

They are an aesthetic achievement, that’s all. Essential preparation for the next map that will be drawn, essential for discussions and negotiations, but in themselves mere approximations of the terrain, aids to dreams of conquest, marking familiar places in the roaming of the mind.  
(380)

Eliminating memory and feeling, inscribing divisions that obscure continuities, and abstracting the material for purposes of negotiation, maps are “aids to dreams of conquest.” The novel constructs the British colonizers as people who disavow memory, manipulating the Hindu and Muslim memories of communal violence but “forgetting to remember” the violence of their own regime and colonial history. In an internal dialogue

with Cunningham, Sardarji—who becomes increasingly alienated from his “English-gentleman-inside” as partition approaches—makes the familiar move of linking the communal divisions in India to British colonial policy: “*Divide et impera*, he reminds Cunningham. *That was the policy, divide and rule. Separate electorates for Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, remember? The Hindu and Muslim faiths were tools, the instruments by which you British divided us, then stood back complaining how we Indians fight, never giving you any peace*” (373). The demand that his internal British voice “remember” the colonial government’s cultivation of division as an aid to conquest highlights the utility for the British of forgetting that history of colonial violence.

***“Roop will remember Kusum’s body, re-membered”*: Remembering as Transformative Activity**

In presenting memory as double-edged—on one side carrying the fears and prejudices that perpetuate communal violence, but on the other carrying the attachments and sentiments that constitute communities and homes—Baldwin suggests that as a static object, memory has no inherent value or meaning. Instead, the novel shifts our attention to forms of *remembering*, to those activities through which we construct memory, relate to it, assign to it value and meaning. Through her narration of two women’s experiences of violence on the eve and day of the official partition—Roop’s confrontation with a group of Muslim men as she travels to Delhi, and the death of her sister-in-law, Kusum, as filtered through its telling by Roop’s father and brother—Baldwin ties together the novel’s exploration of gendered violence and the colonial and communal histories of

violence. Articulating through these stories three different ways of remembering violent histories in the body, the novel demonstrates the dangers of remembering as the repetition or perpetuation of these histories; instead of presenting “forgetting to remember” as a valid alternative, however, the novel privileges the activities of learning (already partially modeled through Roop’s and Satya’s transformations of their gendered educations) and witnessing as its models for remembering without repetition.

Undoubtedly the most wrenching, emotionally difficult part of the novel, the unfolding of Kusum’s death—first through the words of Jeevan (Roop’s brother) and second through those of Roop’s father—graphically renders the dangers of remembering so as to perpetuate gendered and communal violence. Because Kusum’s story is told to Roop in two parts, by tellers with knowledge of different pieces of what happened to her, we first hear from Jeevan about the discovery of her murdered body, and then from Papaji about the circumstances leading up to her death. Jeevan narrates his discovery of Kusum’s body as a literal re-membering, where the violated body has been put back together in such a way as to communicate a message of hatred from one community to another. He returns to his father’s home and discovers a body positioned beneath a white sheet in the center of the room: “A woman’s body lay beneath, each limb severed at the joint. This body was sliced into six parts, then arranged to look as if she were whole again” (446). Recognizing the body as his wife’s, Jeevan proceeds to “read” this re-membered arrangement of limbs:

“... Why were her legs not bloody? To cut a woman apart without first raping—a waste, surely. Rape is one man’s message to another: ‘I took your pawn. Your move.’”...

This woman's body ... was also cut just below the ribs. Looking closer, he realized that he, like her assailants, could put his hand into her very flesh the way a European surgeon might....

He received the message. Kusum's womb, the same from which his three sons came, had been delivered. Ripped out.

And the message, "We will stamp your kind, your very species from existence. This is no longer merely about izzat or land. This is a war against your quom, for all time. Leave. We take the womb so there can be no more Sikhs from it, we take the womb, we leave you its shell."  
(447)

Both the literal re-membering of Kusum's body, minus her uterus, and Jeevan's reception of her body as "one man's message to another" articulate the female body as an inscribable surface through which communal identity and honor can be either preserved or attacked. Deprived of Kusum's voice, Kusum's body becomes a medium for messages of war and communal hatred. The arrangement of her limbs is a re-membering whose purpose is the perpetuation of violence: not only does her body recall the history of violence between Sikhs and Muslims, but insofar as it is made to communicate a message of war that Jeevan receives and understands, it also becomes the basis for future repetitions of this violence.

Even as we see, in Jeevan's images of Kusum's body and in his interpretation of its message, the potential for remembering to replicate violence, the novel uses the gaps between Jeevan's and Papaji's narratives along with Roop's reception of the told and untold parts of Kusum's story to offer a second model for remembering without repetition. Embedded in Jeevan's interpretation of the missing "womb" as communicating an intention to stamp out the Sikh community is the lesson from Roop's childhood education, that women's purpose is to produce sons. As Roop hears Papaji's version of what happened to her sister-in-law, however, the relationship of this embedded

lesson to Kusum's murder becomes explicit, a means of demonstrating the extent to which the history of communal violence is intertwined with a history of women's subordination. Papaji's narrative reveals that before her body became the medium for Muslim rioters' message to the Sikh community, Kusum's murder was his own attempt to prevent her from being raped, and therefore potentially carrying Muslim children:

“But Kusum, she was my responsibility ... I said to myself: Kusum was entrusted to me by Jeevan, she is still young, still of childbearing age. I cannot endure even the possibility that some Muslim might put his hands upon her. Every day I had been hearing that the seeds of that foreign religion were being planted in Sikh women's wombs. No, I said: I must do my duty.” ...

“I called to Kusum.... I took her into my sitting room and I told her what Sant Puran Singh said we Sikhs must do, and that I had to do it now. She understood. Always she made no trouble....” (455-456)

Papaji proceeds to describe Kusum's obedience and cooperation, turning her back and baring her neck to enable him to behead her. By adding Papaji's narrative, Baldwin does not allow the responsibility for Kusum's death to lie solely with communal violence at the moment of partition. Rather, through Roop's reception of both tellings Baldwin shows the communal violence to be implicated with the histories of treating women as placeholders for community honor (“*Papaji thinks that for good-good women, death should be preferable to dishonour*” [456]) and of educating women to silently submit to male authority:

How will she explain ... that Kusum—daughter-in-law who always followed rule number one, never saying “nahinji” or “no-ji,”—could not find the words *nahinji* and *no-ji* when the kirpan lifted above her bare neck? That those words could not get past her lips because her lips had no practice in speaking them, because those words drowned before they took shape or sound, in the blood she bore within. (457)

The Roop who receives Kusum's story, unlike the character of the beginning of the novel, has access to a subject-position from which she can critique the same system of women's education and subordination that structured her own childhood and marriage.

In Roop's changed character as she hears her father and brother's versions of Kusum's death and interprets the silences and gaps within their stories, Baldwin posits a politically conscious form of witnessing as one potential model for remembering without repetition. After Jeevan finishes telling Roop how he found Kusum, he instructs her to keep this information to herself:

“Don't tell Papaji, when you see him,” Jeevan adds. “He thinks we still have something to go back to. Let him remember Pari Darvaza the way it was as long as he can.”

*But I must remember, thinks Roop. I must remember Kusum's body.*

Roop will remember Kusum's body, re-membered. (451)

In response to Jeevan's command to not tell Papaji what she knows—to enable him to hold on to his memories of how their town was when he left it—Roop silently asserts to herself the importance of remembering Kusum's body. Her determination to “remember Kusum's body, re-membered” suggests that beyond simply remembering the violence of Kusum's death, she will remember the act of putting her body back together as a message, the act of transforming a woman's body into a symbol for community hatred and aggression. By placing Roop's remembering of Kusum's body alongside “Kusum's body, re-membered,” Baldwin positions Roop's response as an alternative model for how to remember histories of gendered and communal violence. As opposed to the literal remembering of limbs, which assigns meaning and value to a body for the purpose of perpetuating violence, Roop gives us a model of remembering as witnessing, where the



narratives of violence must be spoken and retained, not for the purpose of communicating hatred or inciting acts of retribution, but because the suppression of memories of violence—as with the colonizers who “forget to remember” the violence of colonial history—enables its continuance and obscures responsibility for the past. Before Papaji tells Roop what he did to Kusum, Roop guesses what he is about to say, but she still insists that he say it:

An old wave of pain begins low in Roop’s tummy, a fear-ache that burns from above her womb to her heart. “Then?” she whispers, though she knows his answer. She knows it before Papaji speaks.... Roop knows because Papaji’s story cannot be so very different from other men who see their women from the corners of their eyes, who know their women only as bearers of blood, to do what women are for. She knows this story, knows it like some long-forgotten, undeciphered dream.

But it must be spoken.

Roop wants her Papaji to say it, now. Tell this story, just one story of so many.

Say what he did. (455)

By insisting that the violence against Kusum be spoken aloud and remembered, Roop models the form of remembering-as-witnessing in which Baldwin herself participates through the novel’s narration of partition and its place in a history of violence.

By witnessing the violence of partition, Baldwin offers a model of remembering-as-learning, where the speaking and acknowledgement of this violence as part of a longer history become the grounds for transformations in the future. Roop’s own experience during her journey to Delhi on the night of the official partition/independence serves as an instance of this form of learning on an individual level. Accosted by a group of Muslim sepoys while her car is overheated and immobile, Roop overcomes her usual fear and docility, orders her servants to take her children and hide behind some sugar cane,

and faces the sepoys with her Bengali Muslim maidservant. Speaking “with a voice imitating Satya’s, surprising herself with its firmness” (421), Roop addresses the men with an authority she has not previously possessed, protecting herself and her servant first by claiming to be Muslim, and then, when the men proceed to attack her servant anyway, by demanding to know their names: “ ‘Where is your officer? ... What is *your* name? And *yours*? ... What is your father’s name? And *yours*?!’ ” (421). Unlike Kusum—who “always followed rule number one, never saying ‘nahinji’ or ‘no-ji’ ” and therefore “could not find the words *nahinji* or *no-ji* when the kirpan lifted above her bare neck” (457)—Roop has learned to find exceptions to the “rules” of her childhood education:

Anger, pure heat of anger like molten steel within her. Does this anger violate rule number three?—“Never feel angry, never never never. No matter what happens, never feel angry. You might be hurt, but never ever feel angry.”

No. This is the kind of anger Vaheguru knows is as pure as a steel kirpan; this anger is for another, not for herself. (422)

Whereas Kusum’s body is re-membered without her voice or her agency, put back together to communicate a message of hatred from one man to another, Roop uses her own body to save her life. Asked by the sepoys for further evidence that she is Muslim, Roop produces her left arm, which bears a tattoo received in childhood of her name in Persian script. A source of embarrassment for most of her life, since the Persian script is an inappropriate inscription for the body of a Sikh woman, here the inscription and the rebelliousness it signifies enable her to survive. Roop’s use of her tattoo to lay claim to an identity for the purpose of survival suggests that the model of learning Baldwin articulates through her involves a detachment between bodily inscription and identity. The Persian script, though legible to the sepoys as a transparent indicator of identity,

serves instead a means by which Roop manipulates her body, making it communicate the message she wants to convey rather than those assigned by others. Roop's ability to claim her own body—to be the agent of meaning rather than, as with Kusum, the medium for messages between men—is the source of her authority and the reason for her survival.

Through their representations of the discursive and material violence enacted on women's bodies during partition, Pritam, Mehta, and Baldwin reclaim the overdetermined images of women's bodies as figures for colonial, national, and communal identity. From Pritam's poetic images of the raped woman's body inscribed by the felt emotional experience of violence, to Mehta's use of the melodramatic mode to enlist viewers' affective identification with victims of gendered and communal violence, to Baldwin's insistence on the sentimental dimension of memory in histories of violence, these texts challenge the inscription of women's bodies with externally imposed narratives of partition by asserting women's lived experience of this history through feeling and memory. At the same time, through their representations of women's experiences, each artist challenges the compression of partition's regional and communal divisions into the nationalist narrative of 14 August 1947 as a moment of symbolic rupture. By reinserting this symbolic moment into the interlocking histories through which it was created and lived, Pritam, Mehta, and Baldwin articulate alternative histories of partition through the experiences of women, through felt attachments to regional and community, and through the perspectives of minority communities.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Knopf, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> *Earth*, dir. Deepa Mehta, prod. David Hamilton, Jhamu Sughand, Anne Masson, and Deepa Mehta, 110 min., Cracking the Earth Films, 1998, distributed by Zeitgeist Films, 1999, videocassette.

<sup>3</sup> Ismat Chughtai, "Roots," in *Stories About the Partition of India*, vol. 3, ed. Alok Bhalla (New Delhi: Indus, 1994), 9. Chughtai's "Roots," written in Urdu and alternately called "Jadein" or "Jahren," was originally published in a January 1952 collection of her essays and short stories. See Sukrita Paul Kumar and Sadique, eds., *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (New Delhi: Katha, 2000), 98.

<sup>4</sup> Amrita Pritam, "Divided," Trans. Charles Brasch, in *Writings on India's Partition*, Ed. Ramesh Mathur and Mahendra Kulasrestha (Delhi: Simant Publications India, 1976), 32-39.

<sup>5</sup> Chughtai and Manto are among the most important Urdu writers from the 1940s onward, and the Progressive Writers' Movement of which they were a part included a number of Muslim writers who have published partition fiction. Chughtai, who was prosecuted for obscenity for her 1942 story "The Quilt"—which influenced Deepa Mehta's controversial 1997 film *Fire*, the story of two women from a joint family who fall in love with each other—also published another short story on partition in 1966, which was adapted into the partition film *Garam Hawa*.

<sup>6</sup> Qtd. in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995), 10.

---

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Ramesh Mathur and Mahendra Kulasrestha, eds., *Writings on India's Partition* (Delhi and Calcutta: Simant Publications India, 1976); Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995); Alok Bhalla, ed., *Stories About the Partition of India*, 3 vols. (New Delhi: Indus, 1994); and Saros Cowasjee and K.S. Duggal, eds., *Orphans of the Storm: Stories on the Partition of India* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> For example, Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, a novelist who was active in the Muslim League in the 1940s, refers to partition as the “vivisection of ‘Mother India.’” (Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, *The Heart Divided*, in *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, ed. Mushirul Hasan, vol. 2 [New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995], 13.) Another writer and socialist activist, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, claiming that the communal violence of partition “killed India,” notes, “That an imperialist power planned the dismemberment of our country in the very hour of our freedom is not surprising.” (Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, “Who Killed India?” in *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, vol. 2, 234.)

<sup>9</sup> The Muslim League, led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and the Hindu-dominated Congress party, led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi, were the key negotiators with the British in the decade leading up to partition.

<sup>10</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, “A Baffling Situation,” *Harijan* 6 April 1940, in *Communal Unity*, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1949), 294.

<sup>11</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, “An English Suggestion,” *Harijan* 4 May 1940, in *Communal Unity*, 306.

---

<sup>12</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, “Thoughts on Pakistan” (1941), in *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Asim Roy, “The High Politics of India’s Partition,” in *India Partitioned: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 126.

<sup>15</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, “A Tryst With Destiny,” 14 August 1947, in *Independence and After: A Collection of Speeches, 1946-1949* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, “Some Questions,” *Harijan* 10 August 1947, in *Communal Unity*, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1949), 703.

<sup>17</sup> Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, “In Tune with Millions,” speech delivered 11 August 1947, in *The Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, Vol. XII, Ed. P.N. Chopra (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1998), 153.

<sup>18</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 33, original emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 50.

<sup>21</sup> Pritam, “Divided,” 1-13.

---

<sup>22</sup> Mushirul Hasan, *India Partitioned: Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 43.

<sup>23</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> M.A. Jinnah, “Presidential Address of M.A. Jinnah—Lahore, March 1940,” in *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, in *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 77.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>29</sup> Nehru, “Tryst with Destiny,” 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, “Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour: Three Perspectives on the Recovery Operation in Post-Partition India,” in *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women’s Sexuality in South Asia*, ed. Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996), 3.

<sup>31</sup> See Menon and Bhasin, “Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour,” 7.

<sup>32</sup> Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 43.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

---

<sup>34</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State, and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India," in *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 97-98.

<sup>35</sup> Sujala Singh, "Nationalism's Brandings: Women's Bodies and Narratives of Partition," in *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*, Ed. Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 122.

<sup>36</sup> Menon and Bhasin, "Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour," 5.

<sup>37</sup> First published in English translation in 1967 in the collection *The Black Rose*, "The Scar of a Wound" was written in Punjabi sometime before 1964. "The Scar of a Wound" and "Divided" were both translated into English by Pritam herself, working in collaboration with New Zealand poet Charles Brasch. Brasch, who worked with Pritam on the translations in 1964, describes the translation process as follows: "I do not know Panjabi, and Amrita Pritam translated each poem for me literally, line by line. I then reshaped the lines gradually, reading successive versions over to her to make sure I had neither misread her meaning nor lost it. Where the literal translation seemed impossible, she would read the poem and explain it while I made notes, afterwards turning the notes into lines as close to hers as I could get. I made further revisions later, always referring them to her, until I felt I could do no more." Amrita Pritam, *The Black Rose*, trans. Charles Brasch (New Delhi: Nagmani, 1967).

<sup>38</sup> Amrita Pritam, "The Scar of a Wound," Trans. Charles Brasch, in *Writings on India's Partition*, Ed. Ramesh Mathur and Mahendra Kulasrestha (Delhi: Simant Publications India, 1976), 36-37.



---

<sup>39</sup> Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1991). Originally published as *Ice-Candy Man* (London: Heinemann, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," in *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 142.

<sup>41</sup> See Deepa Mehta, "Zeitgeist Films: Earth: The Production," <http://www.zeitgeistfilm.com/current/earth/earthproduction.html>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Deepa Mehta, "Zeitgeist Films: Earth: Origins," <http://www.zeitgeistfilm.com/current/earth/earthorigins.html>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Rehan Ansari, "Interviews with Deepa Mehta and Naseeruddin Shah," *Himal Magazine* December 1998, Vol. 11, No. 2, <http://www.himalmag.com/98Dec/deepa.htm>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> One posting to a discussion forum on the film, for example, suggests that the film is too Hollywood-influenced: "I myself was disappointed, felt it was a movie made for a non-Indian audience, too 'Hollywood'. I felt the movie was more about getting reactions and satisfying audiences ... rather than telling the story that needed to be told." See Kavitha Chetty, *Earth* forum posting, "Sawnet: South Asian Women's Net," <http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/cinema/earth.html>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Ansari, "Interviews with Deepa Mehta and Naseeruddin Shah."

<sup>46</sup> Richard Phillips, "One of This Century's Human Tragedies, As Witnessed by a Child," July 21, 1999, "World Socialist Web Site," <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/jul1999/sff6-j21.shtml>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

---

<sup>47</sup> Kaukab Jhumra, "Asia Society Screening of *Earth* in New York," January 29, 1999, "Pakistan Link Headlines," <http://www.pakistanlink.com/community/99/Jan/29/01.html>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> The same reviewer is similarly critical of Sidhwa's novel, which he describes as "weak as a partition story" and never coming "to grips with the events of the partition of the Punjab and the historical roles of the British, the Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikhs." C. J. S. Wallia, "Review of *Earth*," *IndiaStar Review of Books*, "IndiaStar," <http://www.indiastar.com/wallia22.html>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Meena Narahari, *Earth* forum posting, "Sawnet: South Asian Women's Net," <http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/cinema/earth.html>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Affron, "Identifications," in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 99, original emphasis.

<sup>51</sup> Marcia Landy, "Introduction," in *Imitations of Life*, 14, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), 33.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Ann Doane, "The Moving Image: Pathos and the Maternal," in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 300.

---

<sup>54</sup> Richard Phillips, "An Interview with Deepa Mehta, Director of *Earth*," August 6, 1999, "World Socialist Web Site," <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/aug1999/meh-a06.shtml>. Accessed May 7, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> A santoor is a stringed instrument of Persian origin used in Indian classical music since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It consists of a flat, trapezoidal wooden box with about 100 strings stretched across it, and it is played with two metal forks.

<sup>56</sup> Shashi Kumar Srinivasan, "Review of 1947/Earth," "Rahman Online," <http://www.rahmanonline.com/movies/revs/earth2.shtml>. Accessed May 10, 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Torben Groddal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 254-255.

<sup>58</sup> Vijay Mishra, "Diasporas and the Art of Impossible Mourning," in *In Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts*, ed. Makarand Parajape (New Delhi: Indialog Publications, 2001), 31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Ranjana Khanna, "Ethical Ambiguities and Specters of Colonialism: Futures of Transnational Feminism," in *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 105.

<sup>61</sup> Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>63</sup> Sidhwa, *Cracking India*, 28.

---

<sup>64</sup> Sumita S. Chakravarty, “‘Can the Subaltern Weep?’ Mourning as Metaphor in *Rudaali (The Crier)*,” in *Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory, and Cinema in the Third World*, ed. Diana Robin and Ira Jaffe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 289.

<sup>65</sup> Shauna Singh Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999),

2. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

<sup>66</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

### **Chapter Three: Famine Bodies and Colonial Boundaries: Abjection, Shame, and Guilt in Representations of Ireland's Great Famine**

In the years marking its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there was such an outpouring of scholarship on Ireland's Great Famine that this previously neglected period of Irish history overnight became its own sub-discipline within Irish studies. Between 1995 and 1997 alone, as commemorations of the potato blight's appearance in 1845 and the Famine's peak in "Black '47" were in progress, more than twenty book-length studies and essay collections appeared in print, the bulk of this material from historians and economists studying the Famine's causes, its historical and political contexts, and its impact on subsequent Irish history.<sup>1</sup> This scholarship has established that the Famine's impact cannot be overstated: more than a million people are estimated to have died from starvation or famine-related diseases between 1845 and 1851, about the same number are estimated to have emigrated from Ireland, and the Famine had such sweeping effects on Ireland's social, cultural, political, economic, and religious landscapes that it is common for historians to divide nineteenth-century Irish history into pre- and post-Famine periods.<sup>2</sup>

While Famine scholars have primarily focused on historical, economic, and political contexts, a much smaller group of critics have turned their attention to the literature of the Famine, and in particular to the extent to which the Famine has influenced subsequent generations of Irish writers. Much of this criticism has centered on establishing Famine literature as a field of study and on addressing the question of

how writers dealt with the problem of how to represent an event that encompassed so much suffering. The three most extensive literary studies of the Famine, Christopher Morash's *Writing the Irish Famine*, Melissa Fegan's *Literature and the Irish Famine*, and Margaret Kelleher's *The Feminization of Famine*, each offers a different approach to this question of representation. Morash, whose 1995 book was the first to focus on Famine literature, takes a poststructuralist and new historicist approach to analyzing how literary texts, by using the generic conventions of Malthusian narratives of progress and religious narratives of apocalypse and retributive justice, replaced the "Famine itself" as an event that "eludes definition" with a semiotic system of Famine representations.<sup>3</sup> Fegan's study "sets out to prove that the Famine had an impact on literature in Ireland and elsewhere," using literary history to examine how "one [can] adequately represent the magnitude of the Great Famine and the impact it made on individuals as well as on Ireland."<sup>4</sup> And Kelleher, whose book looks at representations of famine in Ireland and Bengal, uses feminist film theory on the gaze to argue that writers responded to what she calls famine's "inexpressibility" by representing it through spectacular images of female bodies. Despite their varied critical approaches, all three studies focus on the question of how the Famine was imagined, how it was transformed into literary representations.

This chapter will analyze representations produced by Irish and British writers during the Famine not in order to examine how these writers addressed the problem of representing the Famine, but rather how they *used* representations of Famine bodies to imagine and reimagine the political relationship between Ireland and England. I will demonstrate that representations of Irish bodies in colonialist and anti-colonialist

constructions of the Famine are surprisingly similar: while the kinds of corporeal images produced on both sides vary widely, both British and Irish writers are concerned with how textual representations of physically degraded, suffering Famine bodies contain, manipulate, and challenge social and political boundaries. This similarity between British and Irish images suggests to me that the central issue in examining this literature should not be *how* writers imagined the Famine, but rather how they deployed their images to articulate competing definitions of the colonial relationship that produced this crisis. Two primary questions guide my examination of this corporeal imagery: First, how might we understand the overwhelming similarity in British and Irish images of Famine bodies? And, second, how can the political effects of this similar imagery be so different in British and Irish hands—why can the same body images be used with equal efficacy in texts that support the British presence in Ireland and in those that oppose it? While the first question concerns the fantasies expressed by these images, the kinds of psychic and affective responses that the encounter with actual starving bodies evokes in observers with different social and political relationships to the people starving, the second concerns the rhetorical function of this imagery for writers with particular colonialist or anti-colonialist perspectives and aims.

I will argue that by inserting these images of degraded Famine bodies within different narratives, by investing them with competing colonial and anti-colonial ideologies, British and Irish writers use the corporeal imagery of the Famine to articulate different definitions of Ireland and its relationship to England. After surveying this imagery within the historical context of the Famine, this chapter will analyze

representations of Famine bodies from the British illustrated press during the late 1840s, from Irish nationalist poetry published in the *Nation* and other nationalist newspapers during the same period, and from William Carleton's 1847 novel *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine*. I have chosen these texts for two principal reasons. First, because all of these representations were created and circulated in the press as the Famine was in progress, they offer a means of analyzing competing public discourses of the Famine's implications for Ireland and the colonial relationship at this time of crisis and massive change. And second, the generic differences among these texts—illustrated newspaper articles, poetry, and a cross between a sentimental novel and murder mystery—enable an examination of how the ideological functions of discrete body images are impacted by the forms in which these images appear.

Tracing the deployment of Famine body images through these three very different textual representations, I will argue that the intense preoccupation with national and colonial boundaries during the Famine had a profound effect on the terms of the discursive battle over the relationship between England and Ireland. On one side, the colonialist British press—initially sympathetic toward Famine victims but expressing “Famine fatigue” as the crisis continued—used the structure of illustrated articles to contain the threat represented by Famine bodies imagined as abject, representing Ireland as internally divided and horrific in its suffering while at the same time reasserting the boundaries dividing England from Ireland. On the other side, anti-colonial nationalists made the degraded Famine body the basis for a political discourse of shame which challenged the notion that Ireland's proper position was as a dependent part of the British



empire; instead, these poets constructed Ireland as an oppressed nation within an international community, and in the process they disputed the colonialist model whereby Ireland was included in the legal system of the British nation-state while Britain denied culpability for the conditions of the Famine. Finally, Carleton, an Irish Protestant caught between critiquing British policy and appealing to British charity during the Famine, represents the famishing Irish body through a lens of criminality and guilt, separating those deserving of sympathy and charity from those whose threats to the social and political order must be contained, and in effect using a legal-judicial model to assert Ireland's dependent, subordinate position within a paternalistic imperial nation-state.

### **Troubled Boundaries: British and Irish Images of the Great Famine in Context**

The *Free Press*... says "there is more business doing in the trade in guns, pistols, and blunderbusses, than in any other in this town." Birmingham pants at its stithy, and cannot sufficiently supply weapons to famishing Ireland; one proof that Ireland has a very ostrich-like stomach; and wanting food, can make a very dainty meal off iron. We think we shall commission our artist to execute a fancy portrait of starving Erin swallowing, like an Indian juggler, knives by the dozen: and caring not to lay her money out upon necessary bread and potatoes, enjoying the luxury of gunpowder and, *à la Chinois*, dishes of slugs.

—*Punch*, 19 December 1846

[T]here is in Ireland, her Majesty has been advised to say, a complete "absence of political excitement;" and so she invites her faithful Commons to "take a dispassionate survey of that country." Yes; from that distance they can take a dispassionate survey:—there are no verdicts of Death from Starvation ringing in their ears there; no wasted corpses searing their eye-balls, and grinning frightfully through their dreams there. Before Heaven, they disbelieve all this, and have taken care not to admit the horrid tale.... Ah! most gracious Madam, beware of lying councilors! The "disease" is sheer Hunger—the "increased mortality" means that thousands of strong

and healthy men and women have been slaughtered more cruelly, more surely, more hideously, than if your Royal troops, Oh gracious Queen! had swept their villages with shot and shell.

—*The Nation*, 29 November 1845

From guns, pistols, and blunderbusses to slugs, shot, and shell—it is not coincidental that the language of weapons and ammunition appears alongside images of Irish starvation from opposite sides of the Irish question during the Great Famine. The period from the first appearance of the potato blight in 1845, through the climactic year of “Black ’47,” through the continuing conditions of starvation, disease, evictions, and emigration that persisted into the early 1850s was at the same time a period of intense Irish nationalist and anti-colonial activity. At the onset of the Famine, according to Christine Kinealy, “the Irish population [was] one of the most politicized in Europe, largely due to the activities of Daniel O’Connell, a Catholic barrister and MP who had dominated Irish politics since the 1820s.”<sup>5</sup> The repeal of the 1800 Act of Union—which had dismantled the Irish parliament and placed Ireland under direct rule from London—was the common goal of O’Connell’s Repeal Association and William Smith O’Brien’s more extremist Young Ireland movement, which broke off from the Repeal Association in 1846 because of its disagreement with O’Connell over the question of armed rebellion. Labeled “agitation” by the British parliament and press, these anti-colonial movements built up intensity during the first three years of the Famine, culminating with the Young Ireland uprising in July 1848. While the combined effects of the protracted Famine and the British government’s imprisonment or transportation<sup>6</sup> of the Young Ireland leaders involved in the uprising resulted in a tapering off of anti-colonial activity after 1849, the concurrent escalation of nationalist activity and increase in Famine-related deaths

contributed to a political rhetoric of famine and starvation on both sides on the Irish question. The Irish body imagined through famine—starving, consuming, craving food—became during the late 1840s and early 1850s a vehicle for competing definitions of the relationship between Ireland and England.

In this battle of images, there are, as one might expect, instances where the kinds of images of starving and consuming bodies used for colonialist ends clearly differ from those used for anti-colonialist ends. In one famous illustration, for instance, labeled “The Real Potato Blight of Ireland. (From a Sketch Taken in Conciliation Hall.)” and published in London’s *Punch* in December 1845, shortly after the potato blight first appeared as a serious problem, O’Connell is pictured as a gigantic, corpulent, potato-like figure seated in a fancy chair, with a tray of coins at his feet. More a commentary on O’Connell’s practice of collecting public donations, or Repeal rent, to fund the activities of the Repeal Association (a favorite theme of the *Punch* editors throughout the 1840s) than a portrayal of famine, this offensive image of corpulence in reference to the starvation that the potato blight would later mean is clearly at odds with any images of the Famine coming from Irish sources.

But despite the presence of images like this one, in the wide variety of Famine images that appeared on both sides of the political debate over Ireland, there is a surprising degree of similarity between the kinds of bodies that the English and the Irish used to represent their very different positions on Ireland’s colonial status. In both countries, the abstracted images of personified England and Ireland appeared within a far more prominent imagery of Irish bodies starving, naked or clothed in rags, skeletal,

spectral. Without accompanying captions, it is difficult to separate illustrations printed in *The Illustrated London News* from those printed in Belfast's *Vindicator* or Dublin's *Freeman's Journal*. Even *Punch*, in its less satirical and more sympathetic moments, contributes to the stock of pictures of thin Irish peasants huddled together, dressed in rags. The *Nation's* image of "wasted corpses ... grinning frightfully," projecting the animation of "grinning" onto dead bodies, mirrors an image from *The Illustrated London News* that compares living people to buried corpses: "In this horrible den, in the midst of a mass of human putrefaction, six individuals ... were huddled together, as closely as were the dead in the graves around."<sup>7</sup> In a report to British Treasury Secretary Charles Trevelyan, an inspecting officer for West Clare compares starving women and children to "a flock of famishing crows"<sup>8</sup>—drawing on a dehumanizing language of animality that appears not only in British descriptions of the Famine, but also in the *Nation*, which describes the starving people as "more like famishing wolves than men."<sup>9</sup> And, moving from natural to supernatural horrors, the language of ghosts, spectres, and skeletons forms a standard vocabulary<sup>10</sup> for describing the starving people not only in British newspapers, one of which describes "crawling skeletons, who appear to have risen from their graves,"<sup>11</sup> but also in the *Nation*, which reports in 1847 that in Ulster, "gasping men totter like ghosts along the roads."<sup>12</sup>

Though these images of starving Irish bodies multiplied and became more varied during the Great Famine, they were not new images. By the mid-1840s Ireland already had a long history not only of periodic famines, but also of writers manipulating images of famine and starvation to define the colonial relationship between England and Ireland.

Famously, Edmund Spenser's 1596 *View of the Present State of Ireland* envisions English success in wars of conquest as coming not through military victory, but rather through a kind of Irish self-consumption enforced by self-imposed conditions of famine:

Out of every corner of the woods and glynnes they came creeping forth on their hands, for their legges could not beare them; they looked like anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves; they did eat the dead carrions, happy where they could finde them, yea, and one another soone after, insomuch as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves ... that in short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentifull countrey suddainely left voyde of man and beast; yet sure in all that warre, there perished not many by the sword, but all by the extremitie of famine, which they themselves had wrought.<sup>13</sup>

Spenser's unselfconscious imagery of skeletal Irish people, cannibalistic in their desperation for food, is picked up in a satirical vein more than a century later by Jonathan Swift's "Modest Proposal," which critiques British policy on Ireland through the ironic suggestion that the Irish alleviate their own poverty and hunger by selling their children to be consumed as food. Spenser's and Swift's opposing articulations of colonial politics through images of hunger were given continuing relevance and immediacy by a centuries-long succession of actual famines and periods of food scarcity in Ireland: famines precipitated by Elizabeth I's and Cromwell's wars of conquest in the late-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries;<sup>14</sup> the poor harvests of 1725-29, the devastating famine of 1740-42, which killed nearly as many people as the Great Famine a century later, and a series of poor harvests spanning the eighteenth century;<sup>15</sup> and more recently a series of short-lived famines and years of poor harvests in 1800-1801, 1816-17, 1821-22, and 1830-31.<sup>16</sup> By the 1840s, hunger and colonialism were so connected in Irish nationalist political rhetoric that John Mitchel—an editor for *The Nation* from 1845 to

1848 and the most aggressively anti-British voice in the Young Ireland movement—used Spenser’s *View* to lend historical weight to his accusation that the British manufactured the Famine in order to depopulate Ireland and subdue anti-colonial resistance,<sup>17</sup> and he wrote the introduction in 1847 for a republication of Swift’s 1728 *Short View of the State of Ireland*, which (echoing Spenser’s title but challenging his colonialist assessment) argued that the English were responsible for Irish suffering.<sup>18</sup>

When the 1845 potato blight first appeared, therefore, there was an established history and political rhetoric of famine already available to British and Irish writers. Even before it became apparent that the failure of the potato crop would lead to such widespread devastation, writers began using images of famine bodies to characterize the relationship between England and Ireland at this historical moment. Drawn at first from the inherited stock of abstracted body politic metaphors and personifications of England and Ireland, this imagery constructs Ireland as a diseased body in need of England’s aid to be cured, or else uses common personifications to construct the relationship as familial, whether as a marriage between John Bull and Hibernia or as a sibling bond between Britannia and Hibernia or Erin.<sup>19</sup> As Fegan notes, the metaphor of the diseased body or part of the body is a common means of either figuring Ireland as a drain on an otherwise prosperous English nation or figuring England as the source of Irish suffering.<sup>20</sup> Other equally abstracted metaphors substituted a single body for the Irish nation and another for the English nation, articulating the relationship between the two countries through the relationship between the two bodies, as in a January 1847 *Illustrated London News* article that drew an analogy between Lazarus begging for

charity and Ireland's need of England's aid.<sup>21</sup> Another common embodiment of the two countries—popular especially in *Punch*—were the figures of Daniel O'Connell and the current Prime Minister of England—first Peel, then Lord John Russell, whose Whig administration took office at the end of June 1846. And, shifting to lower-class personifications, in 1849 *Punch* complained about the financial burden of Famine relief by picturing Ireland as a racialized old man, grinning and holding a sack of money, carried on the shoulders of a thin and hunched English laborer.<sup>22</sup>

Drawing on such figurations primarily in the *Times* and the *Nation*, Fegan argues that the English and Irish press did not just record the history of the Famine, but produced it:

*The Nation* and *The Times* self-consciously created the history of the Famine, periodically propagating a potted history of a famine of genocide and eviction, or of ingratitude and betrayal. The Almighty may have sent the blight, the government may have exacerbated the famine, but the Famine, the textual creation that remains to us, was created, related, and exploited by journalists.<sup>23</sup>

If, as Fegan persuasively claims, the journalists who constructed the Famine for the pages of their newspapers were responsible for creating its history, then I would argue that in order to understand the intentionally politicized histories they produced, we must look not only at the abstracted body politic figures that Fegan focuses on, but also at the far more prominent images of actual starving bodies that appear throughout the Famine writing. While the explicit body politic figures that dominate most scholarship on journalistic constructions of the Famine<sup>24</sup> reveal the political rhetoric through which English and Irish writers constructed it as a political event in the history of the British occupation of Ireland, the verbal and visual images of starving bodies that overwhelm

these abstracted metaphors speak more to the political fantasies and anxieties stirred by the Famine. The abstracted body politic metaphors refer obliquely to the Famine's material effects, but the images of starving bodies demonstrate the degree to which the materiality of suffering during this period impacted the fantasies, the desires, the anxieties, and the affective identifications of British and Irish writers with regard to their colonial relationship.

Unlike Fegan, Kelleher focuses in *The Feminization of Famine* not on abstracted images but instead on representations of material starving bodies. Kelleher argues that in the face of what she describes as famine's inexpressibility, writers responded by feminizing famine, drawing on the "affective power" of the female image to move the reader or spectator and expressing famine's inexpressibility through images of individual female victims: "The spectacle of famine, as early as the 1840s, is thus frequently constructed through female figures, its traces inscribed on hunger-ravaged, unclothed bodies."<sup>25</sup> Unlike the abstracted body politic figures and personifications, which substitute bodies for England and Ireland in order to comment primarily on the political relationship, the images Kelleher describes are primarily concerned with how witnesses engage with the spectacle of famine. Whereas the abstracted figures elide actual suffering in the service of political rhetoric, Kelleher argues that by representing famine through individualized images of women, especially images of mothers with their children, writers actually de-politicize the Famine, moving "the discourse on famine away from the political and economic spheres and into a moral register."<sup>26</sup> Contrary to Kelleher's suggestion that these individualized images move the Famine out of the



political sphere, I read such images as just as politically invested as the more overtly ideological representations that *Punch* disseminated.

Between Fegan's focus on the overtly political rhetoric and abstracted body images through which journalists produced the Famine and Kelleher's claim that writers removed the Famine from the political sphere by imagining it through "hunger-ravaged, unclothed" female figures, we have the problem of how to read the political implications of the different kinds of bodies through which the Famine was imagined. Though one way of reading the gap between Fegan and Kelleher might be to see them as engaging with two different sets of body images, one concerned with the colonial politics of the Famine and the other with the spectacle of suffering, I read the representations they analyze as too connected to be able to separate the political rhetoric from the individualized images. As the two quotations with which I began this section illustrate, the abstracted figures would not hold the same power in the political rhetoric if they did not draw on the suffering of actual people, nor can the political implications be subtracted from representations of individual starving bodies that appear in the same publications alongside the images of diseased body politic figures or personified Erins. While *Punch's* December 1846 image of "Erin swallowing, like an Indian juggler, knives by the dozen" and spending her money on "dishes of slugs" rather than "bread and potatoes" uses the Famine and the widespread reports of starving Irish people to vilify the agitators for Home Rule, the *Nation* bolsters its critique of the colonial government not with abstracted figures for Ireland and England, but with images of "wasted corpses ... grinning frightfully" and with the numbers of "strong and healthy men and women" who

have been “slaughtered” by hunger. These quotations demonstrate that, far from separating the political debates over Ireland’s occupation from the bodies of actual Famine victims, the two kinds of representations informed each other: the ongoing political debates in part determined how observers viewed the bodies of the starving people, and conversely, the reports about these people helped to shape and provide evidentiary support for the political discourse.

By looking at the textual production of Famine bodies as a public field of discourse in which these images appear not as isolated representations, but in conversation with one another, we open up for analysis a wide variety of body images produced during the Famine, extending beyond both the abstracted images and the specific images of female figures Kelleher identifies. A survey of the Famine representations in the *Times*, the *Illustrated London News*, the *Nation*, other contemporary journals, and other kinds of texts—travel narratives, letters, fictional works—reveals no single type of corporeal imagery for the Famine that dominates the discourse. Rather, this imagery is widely varied: male and female; ranging in age from children to the elderly; bodies animalized or made supernatural through the language of skeletons and spectres; single bodies, families, crowds, and mobs; corpses and living people; diseased and starving bodies; bodies consuming, wanting, insatiable; weak or threatening bodies.

Despite the wide variety of body images, they overwhelmingly share a preoccupation with boundaries that have been threatened or violated through the conditions of the Famine—boundaries between men and women, old and young, Ireland

and England, natural and supernatural, animal and human, life and death. If, as Kelleher suggests, female Famine victims, as “scene of hunger and ‘bearer of meaning,’”<sup>27</sup> receive a detailed physical inspection and are often represented as naked or partially unclothed, then the “feminization of famine” could be understood not simply as a focus on female figures, but equally as a construction of male figures in feminized terms. Brendan Ó Cathaoir recounts in his *Famine Diary*, for example, a report in the *Waterford Freeman* of a man who “dies of starvation surrounded by his seven children crying for food,”<sup>28</sup> mirroring the common images of mothers struggling in their own starvation to care for their children. Conversely, women are reduced to laboring “like men”: “it was melancholy in the extreme to see women and girls labouring in mixed gangs on the public roads. They were employed not only in digging with the spade and with the pick, but in carrying loads of earth and turf on their backs, and wheeling barrows like men and breaking stones.”<sup>29</sup> These reports represent a disruption of the codes and conventions governing normative gendered behavior, so that the inappropriateness of the women’s labor or the powerless man with his children in the writers’ eyes become a measure for famine’s ability to trouble the social order.

Beyond fracturing gender boundaries, the Famine is imagined as collapsing other social categories, including age and class. Reports of poverty-stricken people demanding food from landlords and bakery owners emphasize the threat posed when desperation leads the poor to impose on the rich, and other reports lament that industrious workers are no longer separable from vagrants and prostitutes: “Hundreds—thousands—bred to industry, have now to make their fellowship with the hardened vagrants ... and the

outworn prostitute.”<sup>30</sup> Conditions of starvation render children indistinguishable from old men and women: William Forster, who participated in the Quaker Famine relief efforts, reports that children’s faces appear “wan and haggard with hunger, and seemingly like old men and women,”<sup>31</sup> and Ó Cathaoir describes an 1847 report from a visitor who “mistakes children of nine and ten ‘for decrepit old women, their faces wrinkled, their bodies bent and distorted with pain ...’.”<sup>32</sup>

As observers become more horrified at the spectacle of Famine, the boundaries breached under these conditions shift from those governing social divisions to those distinguishing states of being—life from death, animals from humans, and the natural from the supernatural. I have already referred to cases where the language of animation is used to characterize dead bodies, or where living people are compared to the dead. Other common images that represent a collapsing of the boundaries between life and death focus on the literal mixing of living and dead bodies—starving babies attempting to breastfeed from mothers who have died, women carrying dead children,<sup>33</sup> starving people and corpses lying together in the same space.<sup>34</sup> This troubled division between the living and the dead extends into the common language of skeletons, spectres, and “ghastly forms” that appears in descriptions of Famine victims. Finally, the boundaries between human beings and animals are blurred with disturbing frequency, with representations comparing starving people to wolves, sheep, crows, “cholera Pigs,” and rabbits;<sup>35</sup> describing groups of people with terms used for groups of animals, such as “swarms of wretched beings” or “hordes of poor”;<sup>36</sup> portraying human corpses as covered or eaten by rats or dogs;<sup>37</sup> and describing human diets as worse than those given to zoo animals, their

shelters as either shared with animals or similar to “burrows” and other places where animals live.<sup>38</sup>

As this brief survey demonstrates, to analyze representations of the Famine solely through the abstract body politic figures that appeared in the press or solely through depictions of female Famine victims risks taking a reductive view of a vast, varied set of images. By focusing almost exclusively on one subset of this imagery, Fegan and Kelleher each obscure the degree to which the maintenance of boundaries is a primary preoccupation in Famine discourses. Despite their differences, these body images all represent the Famine through reversals of the boundaries and borderlines between seemingly stable categories within Irish society. Even the limits of the body, the physical borders separating the Famine victim from the witness, appear to be threatened and threatening in these images, with fears of contagion and infection, reports of people whose “bones protruded through skin,”<sup>39</sup> and images of diseased bodies literally bursting: “In many cabins the husbands or sons were prostrate under that horrid disease ... in which first the limbs and then the body swell most frightfully and finally burst.”<sup>40</sup> What becomes apparent in examining all of these images of Famine victims’ bodies is that writers and observers constructed these bodies as abject—as that which is “radically excluded” from the subject, and yet remains to challenge the borders of the self. In *The Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva uses the figure of the corpse to explain abjection:

If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything... I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is

death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object.<sup>41</sup>

Kristeva's articulation of the corpse as "the utmost of abjection" speaks directly to the prominence of corpses in Famine imagery, and the phrase "death infecting life" aptly characterizes the many images of dead bodies that appear to be alive, living bodies that appear to be dead, and the uncomfortable proximity between the dead, the living, and the dying that observers describe.

But beyond this direct correspondence, Kristeva's description of the abject in terms of borders—"the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders"—resonates with the preoccupation in Famine representations with borders that have been threatened or collapsed. The world of Ireland during the Famine, as imagined by contemporary witnesses, is a world that has erased its borders, a world that is threatening because it "disturbs identity, system, order.... does not respect borders, positions, rules."<sup>42</sup> Famine Ireland, as imagined by the English and Irish press, by travelers, and by government and relief workers, has been thrown into a condition of disorder. Not surprisingly, when observers find themselves within this disordered world where borders have been erased, the border they are most invested in maintaining is the one that separates themselves from the Famine victims they witness, and witnesses respond to threats to this border with particular horror. Again and again, reports describe the terror of witnesses confronted by starving people alone or in groups. The report of a magistrate from Cork who begins by viewing a group of six people and finds himself surrounded by "at least 200 such phantoms" testifies to this fear, as he continues, describing pestilence and Famine victims as posing a physical threat to his own body: "My clothes were nearly torn off in my

endeavor to escape from the throng of pestilence around, when my neckcloth was seized from behind by a grip which compelled me to turn, I found myself grasped by a woman with an infant just born in her arms and the remains of a filthy sack across her loins—the sole covering of herself and baby.”<sup>43</sup> Crowds, mobs, “flocks,” “swarms,” and “hordes” represent another kind of threat, with the multiplication of starving people turning weakened individuals into a source of terror for witnesses. Warning its readers in February 1846 of the consequences if the worsening famine conditions are not treated, Belfast’s *The Vindicator* predicts that crowds of hunger-distracted people will create social anarchy:

[B]ut, if things be left as they are, until law is forced to yield to necessity—until ravenous hunger drives distracted millions to disregard the rights of property—until the rebellion of famine adds to pestilence, social anarchy and a forcible seizing of provisions—until the bonds of society are broken—who, then, will calm the stormy waters?—who will restrain the populace, protect life, restore order?<sup>44</sup>

Insofar as they render otherwise orderly and law-abiding people rebellious and unrestrained by social bonds, the bodily conditions of hunger become—in this prediction and later in the Famine images that represent its fulfillment—reflections of (and here, causes of) a collapse of order and boundaries at a collective, social, and political level.

The abjection that characterizes images of Famine bodies, then, is not just the effect of individual psychological responses to the spectacle of famine, but reflects anxieties over larger collective identities, social orders, and political relationships. Concerned with borders, locations, and demarcations, the abject as Kristeva articulates it is a spatial and relational construct, and therefore quite resonant for articulating the fantasies that structure colonial identities:

Instead of sounding himself as to his “being,” [the deject, or the one by whom the abject exists] does so concerning his place: “*Where* am I?” instead of “*Who* am I?” For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh.<sup>45</sup>

This demarcated territory of abjection, moreover, represents something once coveted before it became repulsive and excluded:

The abject from which he does not cease separating is for him, in short, a *land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered. Once upon blotted-out time, the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness. But the ashes of oblivion now serve as a screen and reflect aversion, repugnance. The clean and proper (in the sense of incorporated and incorporable) becomes filthy, the sought-after turns into the banished, fascination into shame.<sup>46</sup>

As an articulation of anxieties over political relationships and collective identities, the abject body serves—because of its capacity to map one’s relationship to a territory coveted and repugnant, once perceived as “incorporable,” but when “incorporated” transformed into something which must be expelled from the self—as an appropriate figure for what Simon Gikandi has called the “paradox of Englishness,” “the need to define the national character against a colonial other that it must then disown.”<sup>47</sup> In the hands of writers with different investments in and relationships to Ireland, different positions within this demarcated colonial map, the imagery of abject Famine bodies serves as a screen on which writers project their conceptions of the relationship between England and Ireland, their mutually dependent identities within the historical context of the Famine and the concurrent anti-colonial activity between 1845 and 1849.



## **The Famine in the Illustrated British Press**

For British journalists appealing to a readership that was at once invested in its Irish territory and impatient with the ever-present question of how to deal with Ireland, appalled by the degree of suffering within Famine Ireland and horrified by accounts of the social disorder that resulted from this suffering, the project of mapping the relationship between England and Ireland was a vexed one. Edward Lengel, in his study of British perceptions of the Irish during the Famine years, argues that during the 1840s British conceptions of the relationship between England and Ireland underwent a significant shift. He argues that while Ireland's relationship to England at the onset of the Famine was regarded as closer, more integral than just colonial possession—an estranged “member of the British family of nations,” a “spouse or ‘sister island’”<sup>48</sup>—the Famine led the British to redefine this relationship, emphasizing Ireland's alterity through gendered and racialized representations and moving it more firmly into the category of colony. In terms of Famine discourse, Lengel and others have shown that this hardening of public opinion manifested in a shift from British sympathy for the Irish at the start of the Famine to impatience with the “Ireland question” long before the Famine was over.<sup>49</sup>

Although I agree that the dominant British attitude toward the Irish, and in particular toward the Famine victims, shifted during the late 1840s, I believe that the British imagery of the Famine during this period reveals a greater degree of ambivalence in British constructions of Ireland than this account of a change in attitudes over time indicates. Whether one looks at British writing from 1846 or 1849, within a single

publication, a single article, or a single letter or speech, the image of Ireland that emerges is divided. I will suggest here that British discourse during the Famine constructed Ireland as divided within itself, and that having established this divided character of Ireland, British writers and officials repeatedly attempted to define and demarcate the line of division: Ireland was at the same time part of the Union and a British colony; the Irish were fellow countrymen and indolent burdens, greedy landlords and oppressed peasants, victimized landlords and disorderly mobs or criminals; and horrific scenes of famine appeared in newspapers alongside idyllic illustrations of Irish scenery.

Rather than simply separating England from Ireland, the British—still heavily invested in maintaining possession of Ireland, despite its problems—defined Ireland as a mixture of elements desirable and repulsive, sympathetic and horrifying. By representing Ireland as divided within itself, the British press and government could make half of Ireland the scapegoat for the other half's problems. In the process, Britain not only chose which elements of Ireland were desirable, but also relieved itself of responsibility for Ireland's problems. If, as Lengel suggests, the ideology of the civilizing mission in Ireland came into crisis at this time, the articulation of Ireland as split between those worthy of sympathy and those responsible for Ireland's ills enables a simultaneous assertion of Britain's commitment to civilizing Ireland and lament about Ireland's unwillingness to be civilized. Imagined repeatedly in British writing and visual art during the 1840s, the abject, Famine-afflicted body became one site where this divided Ireland was defined and redefined. The anxiety over troubled boundaries represented through images of abject Famine bodies is thus displaced away from the border between

England and Ireland and limited to boundaries that have been collapsed within this internally divided Ireland. Looking at the relationship between verbal and visual representations of Famine bodies in the generally sympathetic *Illustrated London News* and in the less sympathetic *Pictorial Times*, I will argue that contradictory depictions of the Irish during this period are not simply a reflection of a highly divided British opinion about Ireland, but of an investment in maintaining both sides of the contradiction, in showing Irish identity—not British opinion—to be contradictory and divided.

By way of context, the British government's attitude toward Ireland during the Famine was itself divided, and the trajectory of Famine relief legislation reflects this inconsistency. At the onset of the Famine, after initial resistance to the idea that the potato blight would be extensive enough to cause widespread starvation, the attitude of the British press was predominantly sympathetic, and this sympathy was mirrored to some extent in government relief efforts and to a larger extent in the forms of private philanthropic aid sent to Ireland between 1845 and 1847. Private charity from English and international donors and religious organizations played an important role in Famine relief measures from late 1845 through 1847, after which fund-raising dropped off sharply as the press reported Irish ingratitude, the government assured the public that the blight was over, and the public grew increasingly tired of hearing about the Famine victims. In the early years of the Famine, however, private benefactors made financial contributions; relief fund-raising groups, aided by the press, collected donations of money, food, and clothing from the public; and religious groups (most notably the

Quakers, who sent relief workers to Ireland from late 1846 through 1847) organized various forms of aid.<sup>50</sup>

On the government side, the politics of Famine relief were driven by domestic political and economic disputes between Peel's Conservative party and the Whig party, which were divided in 1845-1846 over the Corn Laws and the question of how to deal with Home Rule agitation in Ireland. Peel's approach to Famine relief involved ordering a supply of Indian corn from America in November 1845, repealing the Corn Laws in June 1846, and setting up a Relief Commission, whose primary purpose was to set up local committees to raise funds for relief, purchase cheap food supplies, organize employment plans, and distribute cheap or free food to those affected by the crop failure. Peel's approach to Ireland was, however, dictated not only by the demands for Famine relief, but equally by the problem of maintaining order. While small-scale, local protest was common in Ireland before the Famine, the appearance of potato blight and the threat of famine changed the character of this agitation. The immediacy of hunger and poverty resulted in increasing food riots, with groups protesting inflated prices, low public works wages, and exports of grain from Ireland.<sup>51</sup> As the numbers affected by starvation, disease, and evictions increased, the organized riots and protests declined, and there was a sharp increase in agrarian crimes—theft of food and property and attacks on landlords. Along with these hunger-related protests, Irish nationalist activity intensified during this period, escalating from the appearance of blight in 1845 until the failed Young Ireland uprising in August 1848. Though their causes and character were significantly different, the British lumped food riots, agrarian crime, and Home Rule activity together under the

label “agitation,” which they viewed as a sign of Irish ingratitude for Famine relief measures. Criticized within his own party for his position on the Corn Laws and outside it for the slowness of his Famine relief programs to distribute food, Peel also came under criticism for the repressive nature of his approach to social disorder in Ireland. Instead of reforming the landholding structure in response to agrarian unrest, in 1846 Peel proposed a coercion bill that would impose punishments for crimes against landlords. His administration was replaced by Russell’s at the end of June 1846, when Peel was voted out by Whigs and Irish representatives angry at the coercion bill and by members of his own party upset by the repeal of the Corn Laws.<sup>52</sup>

Russell’s administration took a different approach to Famine relief, ending Peel’s practice of importing Indian corn in all but a few counties, making public works programs the primary basis of relief plans, and shifting the financial burden of relief from the English government to Irish landowners.<sup>53</sup> Working from the start on the non-interventionist theory that government aid would cause Ireland to deteriorate rather than improve, and paying more attention to reports of social disorder in Ireland than to relief workers’ reports about the Famine, the Russell administration refused to raise public works wages to a level that addressed inflated food prices, and by the winter of 1846-47, there was a sharp increase in mortality from starvation and dysentery. Recognizing the failure of the original plan, in 1847 the government replaced the public works scheme with a Temporary Relief Act that set up soup kitchens to distribute free food until a more permanent program could be established. Though the soup kitchens were the most successful relief policy of the Russell administration, they were discontinued at the end of

1847 as the responsibility for administering relief was transferred to the Poor Law, which had been modified to transfer financial responsibility from the British government to Irish landlords. By 1849, though conditions of starvation, disease, and evictions continued, the British government was maintaining that the Famine was over and taking a non-interventionist approach to Ireland.

The Russell administration viewed Ireland as afflicted by the “evils” of misgovernment, and it constructed Ireland as both internally divided—between the victims of this misgovernment and those engaged in perpetuating it—and divided as a whole from the more orderly, better-governed, morally superior England. In an April 1846 letter, Russell articulates the problem of Irish law through a division between rich and poor—“As it is all the laws affecting the poor appear to have been framed for the protection of the rich”<sup>54</sup>—and he uses a similar class-based division between tenants and landlords in a November 1847 letter that characterizes Ireland as engaged in a civil war: “The murders [of landlords] are atrocious, but so are the ejectments. The truth is that a civil war between landlords and tenants has been raging for 80 years, marked by barbarity on both sides. I am willing to finish the contest, if it can be finished by leaving the law to its operation, by the gradual influence of civilization, by introducing and fostering education.”<sup>55</sup> For Russell, the civilizing mission involves the resolution of Ireland’s internal divisions, not through direct intervention, but through legal reform based on a *laissez-faire* mode of governance. Trevelyan, who as Treasury Secretary was responsible for administering Famine relief under Russell, similarly articulates Irish legislation as a project of education and legal reform, not of government intervention:

“Besides, the greatest improvement of all which could take place in Ireland would be to teach the people to depend upon themselves ... instead of having recourse to the assistance of government on every occasion.”<sup>56</sup> Beyond this conviction that in the long term Ireland would be harmed rather than helped by Famine relief—which proved deadly as the mortality figures climbed—the administration’s hesitation to intervene in Ireland reflected a fear that the boundaries separating Ireland from England would be threatened. Trevelyan on more than one occasion claims that he is doing everything in his power to help Ireland “short of transferring the famine from Ireland to England.”<sup>57</sup> Earl Grey, Colonial Secretary from 1846 to 1852, uses language similar to Bentinck’s characterization of *sati* as “a foul stain upon British rule,” suggesting that Ireland’s misgovernment has already disgraced Britain: “Ireland is the one weak place in the solid fabric of British power; Ireland is the one deep (I had almost said ineffaceable) blot upon the brightness of British honour. Ireland is our disgrace.... It is so regarded throughout the whole civilised world.”<sup>58</sup> Ireland here is constructed as both separate from England and as England’s worst part, the weak place in the fabric or the “blot” on the empire’s honor. It is this condition of being at once part of Britain and other from it that requires continual demarcations of Ireland in relation to England and within itself.

Within the British press, this internally divided Ireland was defined and redefined through imagery of Famine-afflicted bodies. The treatment of the Famine in illustrated journals, which proliferated and acquired large readerships in the 1840s, is particularly interesting because of the visual, spatial nature of the observers’ self-conscious differentiation between themselves and the victims they describe. *The Illustrated London*

*News (ILN)*, which was founded in 1842 and was selling 200,000 copies per issue by the mid-1850s, and the *Pictorial Times*, its short-lived imitator,<sup>59</sup> combine text and illustrations to offer different versions of Ireland and its relationship to England. The *ILN*—edited from 1842 through 1848 by Frederick Bayley, who was born in Ireland, moved to the West Indies at age thirteen, and returned to Ireland at seventeen<sup>60</sup>—was the most sympathetic to the Irish of the major British newspapers and was instrumental in marshalling the British public’s contributions to private relief funds. In February 1847, with the explicit purpose of “making [Ireland’s] affliction known to the charitable public,” the newspaper commissioned illustrator James Mahoney to create an illustrated report on the conditions of Famine in the West of Ireland, published in two installments in the 13 and 20 February issues of the newspaper. His images, some of the most familiar pictures of Famine victims, helped the British Relief Association raise large sums for Famine aid early in 1847.<sup>61</sup> Presented along with Mahoney’s verbal report of his visit to towns hit by the fever epidemic, the illustrations are offered as objective documentation of the Famine—as documentary photographs might be offered later—bringing the British public images of suffering people without exposing them to the dangers of disease or to the three-dimensional “horrors” Mahoney describes. Though the account that accompanies the illustrations is extensive, the illustrations are clearly presented as the primary content, “accompanied by such descriptive notes as he was able to collect whilst sketching the fearful incidents and desolate localities.”<sup>62</sup>

Interestingly, though the illustrations are supposedly the primary content of the article, they offer a much more distanced, much less horrifying vision of Ireland than the



accompanying “descriptive notes.” Beyond the interweaving of visual and textual description, the article is layered with three different speakers: an editor from the *ILN* introduces and concludes both installments of the piece; Mahoney, his words set off by quotation marks, describes in travel narrative form his visit to the towns and his sketches; and at one point within Mahoney’s narrative he quotes the diary of Dr. Donovan, whose reports on Famine victims had been appearing in the *Cork Southern Reporter* and other Irish newspapers. The *ILN* editor offers the entire piece and the choice to commission Mahoney’s observations as a means of establishing for the British public the accuracy of reports of Irish suffering:

With the object of ascertaining the accuracy of the frightful statements received from the West, and of placing them in unexaggerated fidelity before our readers, we commissioned our Artist, Mr. James Mahoney, of Cork, to visit a seat of extreme suffering, viz., Skibbereen and its vicinity; and we now submit to our readers the graphic results of his journey ... premising merely, that our Artist must already have been somewhat familiar with such scenes of suffering in his own locality, so that he cannot be supposed to have taken an *extreme* view of the greater misery at Skibbereen.<sup>63</sup>

Offered as eye-witness evidence, supposedly more reliable because a resident of Cork would be already accustomed to seeing suffering people around him, the images, Mahoney’s account, and Dr. Donovan’s account as extracted by Mahoney become increasingly graphic and horrifying, so that the horrors of the Famine are offered to the British public at several removes. The more troubling the content, the more distanced it is from the readers through the structure of the article.

Of the illustrations that constitute Mahoney’s visual report—seven in the first installment and five in the second—only three offer views of Famine victims detailed

enough to show readers their faces or bodies. Seven of the remaining nine portray views of the towns or landscapes with huddled figures in them, covered by clothing (the only indication of the figures' genders), too small for their bodies to display any sign of the suffering described in Mahoney's verbal account, and often portrayed from behind, so that readers see only their backs. Two of the illustrations contain no human figures at all, offering instead exterior images of the huts that house the people Mahoney sees. The images that do focus on human forms, while affecting for the desperation they suggest, refrain from confronting readers with the graphic effects of starvation and disease that the article describes verbally. The first image that offers a detailed picture of a human form—the closest view in either installment of the article—is labeled “Woman Begging at Clonakilty” and portrays a woman Mahoney meets, carrying a baby in one arm and holding a tray for begging in the other.



The image is clearly presented for emotional effect, with the grouping of mother and child becoming, as Kelleher suggests, “iconic, with strong evocations of the Madonna and Child; traces of famine are inscribed on the face of this Irish Madonna through her

wrinkled skin, drooping lip and ‘staring’ eye.”<sup>64</sup> The woman’s face—the only skin or defined body part other than her hands visible from beneath the cloth that conceals the rest of her body—is expressive, her raised eyebrows and down-turned mouth voicing dejection, her eyes gazing slightly upwards, expressing the appeal for help also figured in her outstretched hand that begs for alms. Significantly, the woman is only pictured from the waist upwards, making her appear more posed and closer to the iconic Madonna and Child images Kelleher describes, and she has been isolated from her surroundings, taken out of the context in which Mahoney saw her.

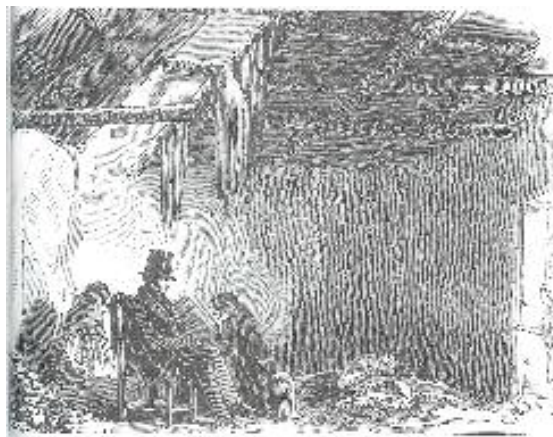
Mahoney’s accompanying verbal description, by contrast, places her within a context of poverty and among numerous other starving and begging people, and it tells the reader that the baby she carries is dead—a fact which could not be discerned from the visual image:

I . . . saw little until we came to Clonakilty, where the coach stopped for breakfast; and here, for the first time, the horrors of the poverty became visible, in the vast number of famished poor, who flocked around the coach to beg alms: amongst them was a woman carrying in her arms the corpse of a fine child, and making the most distressing appeal to the passengers for aid to enable her to purchase a coffin and bury her dear little baby.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast to the woman’s isolation in the visual image, Mahoney’s description refers to a far more threatening “vast number of famished poor.” While the visual illustration confines the woman’s “distressing appeal” to her eyes and hand, the accompanying description speaks to the “horrors of poverty” that confront Mahoney in his comparative comfort as he stops to eat breakfast at the local hotel. Sitting in their own comparative comfort, British readers are thus invited to identify with Mahoney’s concern for the

woman from the physical distance of their own location and from the structural distance of Mahoney's narrative, framed and made comprehensible by the *ILN* editor's introduction, which, in calling for charity, explicitly tells readers what their expected response is to the appeal that confronts them. Though Mahoney's words articulate boundaries troubled by the conditions of famine—the living mother carrying her dead baby, the “flocks” of poor people imposing on the observers who can afford to be served breakfast—the narrative structure and the carefully isolated and confined image ensure that the British public can view these troubled boundaries from a safe, untroubled distance.

Though the most graphic verbal descriptions in Mahoney's account refer to what he and others witness inside the huts and buildings that shelter Famine victims, only one of the illustrations, labeled “Mullins's Hut, At Scull” and offered in the second installment of the article, pictures the interior of one of these shelters.



Unlike most of the other illustrations, this one is accompanied not by Mahoney's words, but by the *ILN* editor's paraphrasing of his description:

A specimen of the in-door horrors of Scull may be seen in the annexed sketch of the hut of a poor man named Mullins, who lay dying in a corner upon a heap of straw, supplied by the Relief Committee, whilst his three wretched children crouched over a few embers of turf, as if to raise the last remaining spark of life. This poor man, it appears, had buried his wife some five days previously, and was, in all probability, on the eve of joining her, when he was found out by the untiring efforts of the Vicar, who, for a few short days, saved him from that which no kindness could ultimately avert. Our Artist ... [adds] that, to make the sketch, he was compelled to stand up to his ankles in the dirt and filth upon the floor.

Despite the “dirt and filth” in which Mahoney has to stand to sketch this illustration, both the illustration and the editor’s description of it are mild compared with the other “in-door horrors” in Scull and other towns that receive descriptions without accompanying illustrations. The descriptions unaccompanied by illustrations present far more graphic images of suffering bodies, which become more horrifying the more removed they are from the reading public. In Bridgetown, he describes “one house, without door or window, filled with destitute people lying on the bare floor; and one, fine, tall, stout country lad, who had entered some hours previously to find shelter from the piercing cold, lay here dead amongst others likely soon to follow him.” The threats posed by this house—where a “stout country lad” can enter and be dead within hours, and where the boundaries between the living and dead are challenged not only by proximity, but by the contagious nature of the disease that afflicts them—appears only in the frame narrative. The illustration of the Mullins’s hut, contrasting with the imagery from Mahoney’s verbal account, is calculated to evoke sympathy rather than horror. The largest and most visible figure in this portrayal is not the man dying—who is visible only as a pile of blankets on the ground—or his “wretched children” who face the wall, but rather the well-dressed, respectable Vicar who is helping the family. With the Vicar seated calmly in the

foreground and the afflicted family lined up behind him, the reader is separated from the scene of suffering by the agent of charity, whose presence can reassure the public that something is being done to assuage this suffering.

The language of horror figures prominently in this article, but in such a way as to make horrific images a narrative attraction, designed to fascinate rather than threaten the reader. The most troubling accounts, those offered by way of Donovan, are couched within two sets of quotation marks and removed from the reader several times, framed by the *ILN* editor's presentation of Mahoney's report, and then quoted by Mahoney not from Donovan himself, but from the textual source of Donovan's diary. Mahoney includes two extracts from Donovan, and in both cases, the extracts provide a narrative to explain the places Mahoney visits on his tour, so that his task of verifying the "accounts from the Irish provincial papers" takes the form of visiting after the fact the "scenes of suffering" that Donovan describes:

We next proceeded to the Chapel-yard, to see the hut, of which Dr. Donovan gives the following graphic account in his diary:—  
'... [O]ne family, named Barrett ... literally entombed themselves in a small watch-house.... [I]n fact, this hut is surrounded by a rampart of human bones, which have accumulated to such a height that the threshold, which was originally on a level with the ground, is now two feet beneath it. In this horrible den, in the midst of a mass of human putrefaction, six individuals, males and females, labouring under most malignant fever, were huddled together, as closely as were the dead in the graves around.'<sup>66</sup>

As Martin Tropp suggests in his study of Victorian horror stories, writers documenting the "real horrors" of the period used conventions from popular fiction to reproduce in readers the insulating, "safely remote" experience of reading a horror story: "Horror stories, when they work, construct a fictional edifice of fear and deconstruct it

simultaneously, dissipating terror in the act of creating it. And real horrors are filtered through the expectations of readers trained in responding to popular fiction, familiar with a set of images, a language, and pattern of development.”<sup>67</sup> Donovan’s description uses Gothic conventions—the graveyard setting with “newly made” graves, the terror of the observer, the details of the house walled by graves and surrounded by a “rampart of human bones”—to articulate the spectacle of Famine’s horrors through familiar, and therefore comforting conventions.

The second extract from Donovan functions in a similar way to reproduce this experience of reading a horror story. Offered at the end of the first installment as a narrative so unbelievable as to compel Mahoney to investigate for himself, the extract creates suspense within Mahoney’s travel narrative, acting as a hook to ensure that readers will return to the second part of the article:

Having returned to Skibbereen, my next object was to seek out the truth of the following extract from Dr. Donovan’s Diary ... :—

‘A man of the name Leahey died in the parish of Dromdaleague about a fortnight ago; his wife and two children remained in the house until the putrescent exhalations from the body drove them from their companionship with the dead; in a day or two after, some persons in passing the man’s cabin, had their attention attracted by a loud snarling, and on entering, found the gnawed and mangled skeleton of Leahey contended for by hungry dogs.’<sup>68</sup>

Mahoney records his own skepticism at Donovan’s account, allying himself with readers disposed to doubt the accuracy of reports on Ireland, and describes the next phase of his journey as investigative: “This, I need not tell you, I looked upon as designed for an effect; and so I started for Dromdaleague....” Picking up on the road to Dromdaleague in the beginning of the next week’s installment, Mahoney confirms Donovan’s story by

talking to the Reverend Creedon, who prepared Leahey's body for burial, visiting the house where Leahey's body was found, and talking to villagers who inform Mahoney that "the case was even more disgusting than [Donovan] stated; and, horrifying as it was, the man's mother, who found the dogs about him ... went out to beg as much as would purchase a coffin to bury him in."<sup>69</sup>

By bringing in Leahey's mother, going out to beg money to "purchase a coffin" for her son, Mahoney recalls the illustration and description of the woman in Clonakilty who begs for alms to buy a coffin for her baby. In transforming the "gnawed and mauled skeleton" into the mourned body of a mother's son and in recalling the sympathetic image of the mother and baby from Clonakilty, Mahoney imports into Donovan's horror story a sentimental appeal for sympathy. Using conventional elements of horror narratives, carefully confined and communicated by individuals constructed as reliable observers of the Famine's horrors rather than participants in them—people who view scenes of suffering rather than those who suffer—the article offers *Illustrated London News* readers a site for engaging the horror of the abject, the Famine's capacity to collapse boundaries, from the safety of the clearly-defined position of witness. Immediately after he finishes the "horrifying" and "disgusting" story of Leahey, Mahoney seals off the Famine's horrors, giving a reader a "barrier" to demarcate the territory in which these scenes of suffering appear: "Having heard much of the wants of Dunmanway, I proceeded thither, and am delighted to say that this large and thriving town (of which I send you a sketch, taken from the bridge on the Cork road) seems to be the barrier to the dreadful want further west."<sup>70</sup>





Whereas the dog-eaten skeleton receives no illustration, the “large and thriving town” receives a panoramic sketch, with well-dressed women and men in top hats featured in the center. Confined in this way behind an untroubled border, the horrific details of the Famine bodies become the basis for a call for British charity. Offering Mahoney and Donovan as surrogate observers whose proximity to the scenes of suffering marks the boundary between witness and victim, between the “large and thriving” Ireland of Dunmanway and the horrifying Ireland of Scull and Dromdaleague, the article presents the Famine’s horrors, the boundaries it collapses, as external to the British public, a form of disorder on the other side of a barrier.

While most of the British press shared the *ILN*’s sympathetic attitude in the early years of the Famine, this sympathy was often short-lived, and it usually functioned more as an argument that the British were already behaving charitably and humanely than as a call for future charitable actions. Implicit in such constructions were justifications of the Union on the basis of Ireland’s need for English assistance, and critiques of Irish resistance to the British presence. The *Pictorial Times* in January 1847, for example,

represents Britain as compassionate and undivided in its efforts to alleviate Irish suffering:

The government has wisely suspended all other business to direct more effectually the measures proposed for the alleviation of the misery and distress that is now depopulating Ireland. Our sympathies, in common with those of the inhabitants of all England, go with Ministers in their object and their endeavors. Party spirit is hushed, public opinion undivided, when the necessity is urged of immediately and sufficiently supplying the wants of our fellow-countrymen, unable from their situation and circumstances to do aught in favour of themselves.<sup>71</sup>

Here the article uses the suffering of Famine victims neither as a means for eliciting charitable contributions nor, as the *Nation* does repeatedly throughout the Famine, as evidence of British culpability for the conditions in Ireland; on the contrary, Irish suffering is constructed as evidence that Ireland needs England. Furthermore, the article suggests that by administering Famine relief, the British will convince Ireland of their good intentions and create an amicable relationship between the countries:

We can well understand with what feelings of joy the famished inhabitants of these districts must behold each fresh arrival of provisions for their sustenance. They will not, at least, curse us whilst they receive our bounty. There must be some truce to national jealousy and misguided prejudice, when they see such ample proof of our sympathy and social affection. False prophets may indeed interrupt or suspend amicable feeling for a time between the inhabitants of the two countries; but if the Irish can distinguish between bread and stone, the experience of the present time must for the future enable them to perceive who are Ireland's best friends, and who her most dangerous enemies.<sup>72</sup>

As if in confirmation of the writer's projections, the article is accompanied by an illustration of a group of people standing on the shore, waving excitedly out to sea at an arriving ship.



In satisfying Irish hunger and alleviating suffering with bread, the article suggests, the British will create an Ireland in the future which will recognize Britain as a friend and the “false prophets” who argue against the Union as enemies. By representing Ireland’s “enemies” as internal, as Irish people who agitate for Home Rule, the article constructs Ireland as the source of its own troubles.

Unlike the *ILN* article’s manipulation of suffering and horror to evoke British sympathy and charity, the *Pictorial Times* assumes British sympathy in order to minimize Irish suffering—the “feelings of joy” it projects on the Irish at “each fresh arrival” of provisions suggests that because of government relief measures, the “famished inhabitants” are already in the process of being relieved of their troubles. Whereas the *ILN* article divides Ireland along the lines of the British public’s emotional responses—the Ireland whose conditions evoke horror versus the “thriving” and scenic Ireland that can set the public at ease—this *Pictorial Times* article divides Ireland according to Irish feelings about Britain and the Union. Less critical of the government’s approach to Famine relief than the *Illustrated London News*, the *Pictorial Times* presents a view of Ireland as internally divided along the same lines as articulated by government officials:

the Ireland of suffering people versus the Ireland of disorder and rebellion, and the “civil war” between landlords and peasants. In a 10 October 1846 article, “Food Riots in Ireland. Conduct of the Liberator,” the *Pictorial Times* brings these divisions together through the image of a food riot.



The article and illustration refer to a food riot in Dungarvan at the end of September 1846, during which about 4,000 people protested the export of grain from Ireland.<sup>73</sup> Commenting on the same riot, an editorial printed in the *Waterford Freeman* on 3 October 1846 describes a demonstration intended as a peaceful protest against the “whole fleets, laden with the produce of our soil ... steering from our harbours, while the cry of hunger is ringing in their ears”: “It is evident that they did not intend to commit any violence, as they came unarmed.... The force of public opinion was the only weapon they meant to use, for they carried neither pike nor gun. A collision took place between these defenseless and unfortunate people, and several were wounded.”<sup>74</sup> While the editorial is sketchy on the details of the violence, it is clearly sympathetic to the

protesters, placing the riots within the context of the export of food supplies from a country of starving people and using them to argue that the British government should change its trade policy: “a wise government should at once issue an order prohibiting the exportation of provisions from this country until the wants of the people shall have been sufficiently provided for.”<sup>75</sup>

The *Pictorial Times* article, by contrast, weaves back and forth between sympathy and reproach for the Irish, partially collapsing the food riots with the Repeal “agitation” of O’Connell (the “Liberator” referenced in the article’s title) and constructing the Irish as at once starving and “rapacious.” Instead of discussing the riots, the article begins with a claim that Ireland is responsible for its own misery:

It is idle to look beyond ourselves for the source of whatever ... misery befall us.... Ireland should reflect upon this. Her grievance-mongers have now for more than a quarter of a century been agitating upon the pretended injustice of England towards her weaker sister, but without the least benefit, as we can perceive, accruing to the Irish people therefrom. They are still what they ever were, a discontented and starving people. And should they get their last demand, even *Repeal*, would they be better off? Not one bit.<sup>76</sup>

The implication here—one made repeatedly during the Famine—is that the Irish brought the Famine on themselves, that not only have they not helped their conditions by “agitating upon the pretended injustice of England” and demanding Repeal of the Union, but they have in some way caused the “misfortunes” that leave them “a discontented and starving people.”<sup>77</sup> By placing this criticism of Repealers’ “discontent” alongside an illustration of the food riots in Dungarvan, the article initially appears to be criticizing the protesters, treating all agitation in Ireland as equal.

In the next paragraph, however, the article changes its tone, expressing sympathy with the victims of Famine and leaving, for the moment, the politics of Repeal out of the scenario:

But indeed, at the present moment, it is ungenerous to upbraid; Ireland needs something more than advice. Famine, the most pinching, has added its horrors to the misery previously unbearable. Fathers see those they love slowly expiring for the want of bread. Men, sensitive and proud, are upbraided by their women for seeing them starve without a struggle for their rescue.

The gendering of this description is revealing. Drawing on a rhetoric of family to create pathos for the starving people, the article constructs men and fathers as those who witness—who “see”—their families’ suffering, not as participants in the suffering.

Though the article uses a different family relationship, that of the stronger and weaker sisters, to characterize the relationship between England and Ireland, it also constructs relief measures in paternalistic terms:

Feed the distressed first, and perhaps they will listen afterwards to our exhortations and advice. In the meantime we must assist in the good work of forwarding the measures of relief, that benevolent individuals throughout the kingdom are carrying out.... Able-bodied men at all events will get employment and wages. But this will not be sufficient; the aged and infirm, the women and children, have also to be provided for.

Britain is here the benevolent provider, standing in for the “able-bodied” Irish men who can work for themselves, but cannot provide for Irish women and children. Aligned through this role of provider with the “[m]en, sensitive and proud” and fathers who must watch their loved ones starve, Britain is here loosely identified with one representation of Ireland that is absent from the article’s first paragraph—the hardworking Irish man who tries to alleviate his family’s suffering.

Against both England's sympathy and this representation of Irish fathers and husbands, the article represents Irish merchants (rather than English trade policies) as the source of suffering for the Irish poor:

Around them is plenty; rickyards, in full contempt, stand under their snug thatch, calculating the chances of advancing prices; or, the thrashed grain safely stored awaits only the opportunity of conveyance to be taken far away to feed strangers. Do the children of the soil hesitate to see the avarice of man, thus speculating on the visitations of Heaven and do they not resent the inhumanity as treason to our common nature?

As Russell's description of a civil war in Ireland between tenants and landlords testifies, the vilification of Irish property-holders as responsible for the suffering of the poor was not uncommon. What makes this condemnation of the grain speculators and exporters interesting is that instead of aligning, as the *Waterford Freeman* editorial does, these merchants with the British, whose trade policies permit the inflated prices and the export of grain, the article aligns the merchants with O'Connell and the Repealers, the British government with the suffering poor. Referring obliquely to the deaths resulting from the food riots in Dungarvan, the article at first seems to be suggesting that the government is at fault: "And if they attempt to take of the fatness of the land that belongs to their lords, death by musketry, is a cheap government measure to provide for the wants of a starving and incensed people." In the illustration of the riots, however, there is no British presence. The protesters, carrying poles with loaves of bread tied to their tops or holding up their starving children, stand between a building labeled "BAKER" on the right side of the illustration and a line of people, one holding a musket, on the left. The musket holder is not a uniformed officer or otherwise identifiable as a British official; rather, he wears a tattered coat and, like the line of people behind him and unlike the protesters, a

hat. Furthermore, the article goes on to present England as the generous provider: “England indignantly denies all that Irish agitators have alleged, and to prove the sincerity of her sympathy she must now advance unhesitatingly that relief which can alone save the Irish people. And she will do. England will give with an open hand.”

The Repealers, by contrast, are constructed as “greedy” and “rapacious,” in language harsher even than that used to describe the merchants hoarding grain. Labeled “grievance-mongers”—traders in discontent—they are, according to the article, the “curse” of Ireland:

We shall not stay to calculate ... what considerable portion of the relief forwarded may go to swell the exactions of greedy, needy demagogues, whose stock in trade is their country's misfortunes, and who, vampire like, suck the life-blood of their infatuated followers, fanning their victims with the idle wind of winged words to lull suspicion and secure repose. These are, indeed, the curse of that unhappy land. Cruel, unnatural leaders, who cannot meet each other without mutual smiling at the unsuspecting gullibility upon which they prey.

Like the merchants who take advantage of the Famine to raise their prices, the leaders of the Repeal movement are constructed as traders who profit on “their country’s misfortunes.” The Irish nationalist press repeatedly cited the export of grain during the Famine to accuse England of growing fat on Irish grain, but the *Pictorial Times* article graphically turns these allegations back onto the Irish nationalists with the horrific image of nationalist leaders preying, “vampire like,” on their followers. The Repeal leaders, who supposedly “swell” on funds allocated by the British for Famine relief, are accused of killing the Irish poor—sucking their “life-blood”—by taking advantage of the Famine to secure followers and financial support for their nationalist activities.



The language of horror and sympathy thus becomes within the British illustrated press a means of separating Ireland into a guilty, criminal population of Ireland's oppressors and an innocent, noble population of Ireland's oppressed. By eliding the differences between the actions of merchants who hoard grain and the actions of Repeal leaders, this rhetorical division of Ireland into oppressors and oppressed imposes a standard for judging guilt and innocence based on an assumption that the imperial nation-state is a benevolent, paternal provider for its Irish subjects, and that actions against the imperial nation are thus active attempts to inflict suffering on an Ireland whose people depend for their very lives on England. The combination of visual and verbal images of Irish famine offered by these British newspapers, therefore, placed a spectacle of suffering before the public in such a way as to assert British sovereignty over Ireland while displacing the blame for Irish suffering onto those who would challenge that sovereignty.

### **The *Nation* Poets: Famine Bodies and a Political Rhetoric of Shame**

If illustrated articles formed an effective medium for the British press to represent Ireland during the Famine, then the chosen medium for the Irish nationalist press was poetry. Whereas the British press relied on the objectification of Famine bodies within a visual medium to demarcate Ireland and to shield the British public from too close an identification with its sister country, the nationalist press was invested in constructing a unified Irish identity with which its audience could readily identify. Throughout the

Famine years, three prominent nationalist newspapers—the *Nation*, the *Irishman*, and the *United Irishman*—regularly published verse that used the Famine to build support for both the nationalist cause and Young Ireland activities. These poems offered verbal images of Famine bodies remarkably similar to those that appeared in the *Illustrated London News* and the *Pictorial Times*—ranging from bodies in conditions of extreme suffering to horrific bodies represented as skeletal or as animalistic. Thomas D’Arcy McGee, a journalist and co-editor of the *Nation* during the Famine, depicts a horrific landscape strewn with corpses and skeletons in his poem “The Famine in the Land”: “Death reapeth in the fields of Life, and we cannot count the corpses; / ... / In the laneways, and in highways, stark skeletons are lying” (1-3).<sup>78</sup> Speranza (the pseudonym of Jane Elgee, later Lady Wilde) peoples her poems about the Famine with “Corpses lying in fever sheds— / Corpses huddled on foundering decks” (“The Exodus” 7-8), “Fainting forms, hunger stricken” (“The Famine Year” 3), and “a wildered multitude” of “Thousands [who] wail and weep with hunger” (“France in ’93” 4, 7).<sup>79</sup> An anonymously authored poem called “Thanatos, 1849,” which was published in Dublin’s *Irishman* on 5 May 1849 and represents the Famine as the fulfillment of a Biblical apocalypse, begins with an epigraph from the book of Kings that might remind us of the *ILN*’s description of Leahey’s body “gnawed and mangled” by hungry dogs: “Him that dieth of Baasa in the city, the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth of this in the country, the fowls of the air shall devour.” The poem goes on to describe the Irish victims of the “famine-scream” and “fever-breath” (8), bodies “gnawed” by Famine (14), a mother

starving to the point that she “gorged the flesh” of her child (20), and “flesh ... melting off from bone” (28).<sup>80</sup>

As Christopher Morash has noted, the nationalist “Thanatos” poet “lays claim to the same bestial and demonic images which were so much a part of the imperial discourse of Ireland.”<sup>81</sup> Morash, who places the nationalist poetry of the Famine within the context of Evangelical Anglican prophecy and its notion that the Famine was a punishment for national sin, observes that these poets rely on a theological ideology and vocabulary more commonly associated with their political opponents.<sup>82</sup> According to Morash, Irish cultural nationalists used the Evangelical doctrine of national sin to insist on the sanctity of the Irish nation and to project an apocalyptic end to the nation’s subjugation. One of Morash’s central assumptions in *Writing the Irish Famine*, inherent in the book’s structure<sup>83</sup> and articulated in the introduction to his earlier volume of collected Famine poetry, is that Irish writers constructed the “textual world of the Famine”<sup>84</sup> out of a set of narrative conventions and a vocabulary drawn largely from English forms and traditions:

Had the Great Famine taken place a half century earlier, it could have found expression in a native Gaelic tradition that embraced a long history of famine, exile and destitution. But by the 1840s, all of the great Irish language poets of the eighteenth century were gone, and the Gaelic revival was still fifty years away. Although with some poets ... we see the first attempts to adapt Irish models to the English language, on the whole the only available poetic models came from a country in which famine was a foreign concept.<sup>85</sup>

For Morash, the nationalist poets appropriated English forms and Evangelical narratives out of a kind of representational necessity, engaging with established English traditions to articulate an Irish national identity through the Famine.

Fegan, by contrast, takes a biographical approach to the nationalist poets, arguing against Morash that the poets Charles Mangan, Richard D'Alton Williams, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, Speranza, Samuel Ferguson, and Aubrey De Vere were all transformed by their experience with the Famine, which resulted in a personal turn toward a more engaged political life.<sup>86</sup> Whereas Morash reads the use of narratives of prophecy and apocalypse in this poetry as a nationalist appropriation of imperialist forms, Fegan argues that the "intrusion of the visionary and apocalyptic modes ... indicated a recognition of impotence."<sup>87</sup> Unlike Morash, who is interested in the textual production of the Famine and in a textual articulation of Irish cultural nationalism, Fegan looks for a more practical mode of political action, which she finds (albeit in a frustrated form, as the poets had to deal with the implications of the 1848 Young Ireland uprising's failure) in the lives of the poets but not in their writings: "In their real lives, each of these poets was forced to come to terms with the Famine and how it transformed them; but in their poetry, they attempted escapism, and a resolution that evaded them in reality."<sup>88</sup>

I believe that Fegan is too quick to remove the nationalist poetry from the realm of political action and relegate it to that of escapist fantasy. Her separation of the poets' "real lives" from their poetry ignores the centrality of the nationalist newspapers that published these poems to the political activities of the Young Irelanders. As Fegan notes, the tone and style of these poems are remarkably similar, but I would suggest that their similarity has more to do with a common rhetorical purpose than with any common moment of transformation in the individual poets, whose work often appeared under pseudonyms or anonymously in the newspapers that published them. Sean Ryder, in his

article “Reading Lessons: Famine and the *Nation*, 1845-1849,” notes that the purpose of the *Nation* as articulated by its founders was a particular kind of pedagogy whose end was supposed to be political action:

The original slogan of the *Nation*, ‘To create and to foster public opinion in Ireland...’, indicates the intention of its founders to use it as an instrument of national consciousness-raising.... [T]he ‘fostering of public opinion’, points clearly to the pedagogical function of the paper. But this is not just education for the sake of it; Ireland needed to be educated in order to free itself. Education and learning are understood merely as a prelude to action.... [T]he *Nation* did not see itself in terms of neutrality or objectivity. It defined itself in terms of efficacy.<sup>89</sup>

The *Nation* was a vehicle for nationalist political rhetoric, and its purpose, as Ryder claims, “was the production of no less than a unified national culture.”<sup>90</sup> The leaders of Young Ireland during the 1840s were identical to the founders, editors, and contributors to the *Nation*: Charles Gavan Duffy and Thomas Davis founded the paper in 1842; William Smith O’Brien was a regular contributor; and John Mitchell became a Young Ireland leader through his involvement with the *Nation*, where he began as a contributor and served as editor from 1845 until 1848, when he parted with Young Ireland and started his own *United Irishman* newspaper. Moreover, the British government viewed the advocacy of revolution in these papers as treason, just as prosecutable and dangerous as the actual rebellion they forecasted.<sup>91</sup> The spring before the August 1848 uprising, O’Brien and fellow Young Irelander Thomas Meagher were tried for treason and released, and Mitchell was tried, convicted, and transported. While the Famine poems published in the *Nation* and the other nationalist newspapers later became part of the oeuvres of their individual authors, at the time of their original publication in the 1840s, they were part of the nationalist political project of the Young Ireland movement, and as

such they functioned rhetorically to produce the nation their founders and editors were trying to bring into being.

Looking at this poetry as nationalist political rhetoric whose aim was the production of a unified Irish nation, I would argue that the poets were not simply adopting English forms and traditions—or using Famine body images similar to those illustrated in the British press—out of a lack of Irish models for dealing with the Famine. Rather, their method of producing the Irish nation relied on an engagement with these English representations of Ireland as sinful, horrific, inhuman, barbaric—as abject in so many ways. Whereas the British press contained the threat posed by suffering Irish bodies to English identity and security by using a visual structure to build layers of barriers between the English public and the Irish, the nationalist poetry uses these suffering bodies to confront England, to cast blame on Ireland’s occupiers, to confer shame on those whom Young Ireland held responsible for the Famine. Instead of erecting barriers between the bodies of Famine victims and the Irish readership of these poems and the periodicals that published them, these poets invited and demanded through the narrative voice of their poetry an identification with these suffering, degraded Irish bodies. Instead of constructing these bodies as abject, they embrace images of physical degradation, using them to demonstrate that as much as England may want to separate itself from these frightening Irish bodies, its occupation of Ireland carries with it a responsibility for Irish suffering. By simultaneously demanding Irish identification with the Famine body and shaming England for producing this degradation, this poetry produces the body whose suffering has been inflicted by the imperialist conquerors as the

figure for the Irish nation. Far from rejecting British representations of Famine Ireland, these writers embrace them and make them the basis for an articulation of Irish national unity.

This production of the Irish nation through a politics of shame is evident in an 1849 poem, attributed only to “J.” in the *Irishman*,<sup>92</sup> which published the poem 4 August 1849 on the occasion of Queen Victoria’s visit to Dublin that month. In order to examine in detail the dynamics of shame in relation to the Famine body in “The Queen’s Visit,” I will reproduce the poem here in its entirety:

Rise, wretched Erin, from thy children’s graves,  
No longer, prostrate, let thy sorrows flow;  
Thy grief offends—it is not meet that slaves  
Should thus indulge ‘the luxury of woe’;  
Up, and obey the brutal Whig’s behest,  
Thy guerdon cool contempt, or sneers but ill suppress.

Wipe from thy pallid brow the damps of death;  
Conceal thy garb of wretchedness and woe;  
Exchange the cypress for a rosy wreath,  
And o’er thy squalor festal garments throw—  
Suppress the bursting sod, and clothe, the while,  
Thy ghastly features with a hollow smile.

Then, while gaunt famine decimates thy sons—  
Famine, thy masters could, but would not, stay—  
Go, join the pageant of the mighty ones,  
Shine at their revels, gayest of gay;  
And show a shuddering world, with what disgrace,  
Contented slavery stamps the human race.

The poem is written as a series of ironic commands to “wretched Erin,” telling an Ireland afflicted by famine and grieving for the dead to “Conceal thy garb of wretchedness and woe,” to disguise its degraded state for the occasion of the Queen’s visit: “Go, join the pageant of the mighty ones, / Shine at their revels, gayest of gay.” The trope of disguise

and pageantry sets up a contrast throughout the poem between the authentic body of Ireland and the clothed body made fit for the “pageant of the mighty ones,” for the eyes of the “shuddering world.” Ireland’s “real,” authentic state is constructed as “wretched,” “squalor,” and “gaunt famine” which takes the physical form of “ghastly features” and a “pallid brow” wet with “the damps of death.” Though the poem commands that Erin cover this wretchedness, its clearly ironic tone functions to make the poem do just the opposite: we as readers are confronted with Ireland’s degradation, its wretchedness, and its grief, which are rendered all the more poignant by the implication that this Ireland is unfit to be seen in its actual condition.

Indeed, instead of disguising Ireland’s wretchedness, the poem puts it on display. The event of Victoria’s visit was marked by pageantry, a show of Ireland recovering from the Famine and joyfully welcoming the Queen’s visit, so that the *ILN* projected in an article published the same day as the *Irishman*’s poem,

[T]he landing of Queen Victoria in Ireland—like a beneficent messenger of peace and goodwill—will be celebrated throughout the country with manifestations of popular love and rejoicing.... Cork, Dublin, and Belfast raise the unanimous cry of loyalty and affection; and it is certain that the national “CEAD MILE FAILTE,” or “A hundred thousand welcomes,” will be shouted on the progress of Queen Victoria by ten times a hundred thousand tongues.<sup>93</sup>

Ireland is here represented as unified by a sincere version of precisely the smiling, festive gaiety that the poem constructs as artificial. But whereas the *ILN* insists that the “fervent character” of the Irish assures that their reception is sincere and “heart-deep,” the poem constructs this version of Ireland as a show. By insisting that readers recognize the



pageant Ireland as false, the poem highlights the other Ireland, the authentic Ireland that bears the marks of famine and poverty and that grieves, “prostrate,” over the dead.

The choice to figure national identity through the image of a “wretched Erin” lying prostrate at her children’s graves is oddly self-deprecating for a poem published in an Irish nationalist newspaper. Yet this self-deprecation offers a far more powerful sense of national identity than the sanitized, colonialist fantasy of an Ireland raising a “unanimous cry of loyalty and affection” and a “national” shout of welcome to the British queen. Ironically, by appropriating the most degrading version of Ireland offered through British representations and eschewing attempts to recuperate Ireland, to make it fit to be seen by the “shuddering world,” this poem uses British constructions of a wretched, squalid Ireland to simultaneously discredit Britain in the world’s eyes and assert the existence of an Irish nation. In embracing physical degradation to define Ireland through the Famine-afflicted body and conferring moral degradation on the British, the poet articulates Irish identity and British culpability through a mutually-constitutive dynamic of shame. In her discussion of shame in her article “Queer Performativity,” Eve Sedgwick describes shame paradoxically as a desire for self-effacement that takes the form of a display or performance: “shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself skin side outside; shame and pride, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove: shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, *is performance*.”<sup>94</sup> Through its vacillation between Ireland’s authentic condition of degradation and the show of gaiety and presentability, the poem puts on a display of Ireland’s physical self-effacement. Whereas the *ILN* article actually

effaces the conditions of famine from its portrayal of Ireland, the poem makes a show of self-effacement by exhibiting the national body which has been reduced to a ghost-like existence, to squalor, and to prostration not before the visiting queen, but before the graves of its own dead people. Sedgwick argues that shame is an identity-constituting affect: “[I]n interrupting identification, shame, too, makes identity. In fact shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating.”<sup>95</sup> This individuating capacity of shame, its ability to make identity, makes it a useful category for the assertion of a national identity for Famine Ireland. By taking on the “wretched” body and rendering it an Irish nationalist image of Ireland, the “Queen’s Visit” poet appropriates British constructions of Ireland as inferior or squalid and transforms them into the basis for a unified national identity.

What makes this poem’s use of shame to construct Irish national identity powerful, rather than simply demeaning, is that the poet uses Ireland’s physical degradation to confer shame on Britain for putting Ireland in that state. Sedgwick asserts that shame is contagious:

Shame—living, as it does, on and in the capillaries and muscles of the face—seems to be uniquely contagious from one person to another. Indeed, one of the strangest features of shame ... is the way bad treatment of someone else, bad treatment by someone else, someone else’s embarrassment, stigma, debility, blame or pain, seemingly having nothing to do with me, can so readily flood me ... with this sensation whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable.<sup>96</sup>

By being willing to, choosing to display the bodily marks of Ireland’s degradation in the eyes of the “shuddering world,” the poet confers shame on Britain for causing that

degradation. The opening command that Erin rise, so that her grief will not “offend,” recognizes the potential power of such a display: “Rise, wretched Erin, from thy children’s graves, / No longer, prostrate, let thy sorrows flow; / Thy grief offends ....” The contrast between the pageantry that accompanies Victoria’s visit and the conditions of death and squalor imposed by the unstayed Famine conveys the poem’s implication that in Ireland’s physical degradation is the evidence of Britain’s bad treatment, the evidence that Britain should be shamed in the eyes of the world, even if the British do not experience this shame themselves.

Although the primary responsibility for Ireland’s condition is assigned to Britain, the poem also suggests through the language of slavery that the Irish are partially responsible for their own condition. If the poet enacts a kind of disingenuous national self-effacement in portraying Ireland as physically diminished and degraded by the Famine its “masters ... would not, stay,” he hints at a more sincere experience of national shame with the phrase “contented slavery”:

Go, join the pageant of the mighty ones,  
Shine at their revels, gayest of gay;  
And show a shuddering world, with what disgrace,  
Contented slavery stamps the human race.

While the first use of the language of slavery in the poem (“it is not meet that slaves / Should thus indulge ‘the luxury of woe’”) connects Ireland’s enslavement to “the brutal Whig’s behest” and therefore blames the English government for Irish slavery, this reference to “Contented slavery” in the last line of the poem suggests that what is shameful and disgraceful is contentment with the conditions of slavery—not simply enslavement itself, but the slave’s attitude toward it. The series of ironic commands that

constitute the poem describe what “contented slavery” is: not the prostration at the graves of the dead, but the willingness to rise from them to greet the Queen; not the “garb of wretchedness,” but the willingness to conceal them; not the “ghastly features” of a famished land, but the willingness to clothe them with a “hollow smile.” The world’s “shuddering,” which we might expect to refer to international responses to the conditions of Famine, takes on another possible meaning if the world is shuddering not at Ireland’s physical degradation, but at the display of contentment that conceals it. The irony that suffuses this poem is particularly appropriate for the dynamic of shame that informs its political rhetoric, because the doubleness of meaning in the ironic tone gestures in two directions at once, implicitly suggesting an alternative form of national identity beneath the display of “contented slavery” it articulates. For if contented slavery involves the concealment of Ireland’s degradation, the poem implies, the alternative is discontented slavery, resisting colonial subjugation through the opposing display of those conditions of enslavement which have reduced Ireland. Paradoxically, then, the mode of colonial resistance becomes in this poem not the display (or exercise) of strength in opposition to the British, but rather the display of prostration and corporeal degradation. The way to escape the true shamefulness of contented slavery is to force Britain and the world to view Ireland’s degradation as Britain’s shame.

Such a political rhetoric of shame is not limited to “The Queen’s Visit,” but rather guides much of the poetry of the Famine published in the nationalist press during this period. Though the willingness to support armed rebellion, if necessary, to achieve Home Rule was the basis for Young Ireland’s split with O’Connell and the Repeal

movement in 1846, the efficacy of the threat of Irish physical force deteriorated more and more as the material conditions of the Famine literally weakened or killed much of Ireland's population. Any rhetoric of armed resistance thus had to contend with the growing poverty of Irish resources and the literal weakness of the population's arms and bodies. Furthermore, Young Ireland was a movement whose goal was the production of a unified Irish nation, but whose own political genesis came through a splintering of the Repeal Association into two factions, and since the question of physical force was a primary reason for this division, an imagery of Ireland rising up strongly against its occupiers was inherently problematic. Within this context, the rhetorical values of physical strength and physical weakness undergo a partial shift. The particularized forms of corporeal distress and impotence inflicted by the Famine become, in this rhetoric, the basis for a unified Irish nation. Where physical strength fails to represent national unity, the rhetoric of starvation and physical dependency succeeds.

Yet even as an imagery of physical weakness and a political rhetoric of shame enable the *Nation* and the *Irishman* to embody a unified Irish nation, this imagery and rhetoric are intrinsically problematic. Clearly, the project of revaluing degradation and weakness in the service of political strategy is necessarily fraught—Ireland's degradation may be an effective indictment of British colonialism, but it does not offer an attractive national identity for the Irish. But beyond the undesirability of physical degradation as an identity rather than just a strategy, the dynamic of shame and the use of the Famine to construct a forced degradation as an image of national identity result in the construction of a temporary nation, a nation-in-crisis. When the Famine ends, the "starving nation"

ceases to exist. Furthermore, this production of the nation through shame works only as long as Ireland remains a colonized nation. If Young Ireland were to succeed in freeing Ireland from British occupation, there would be no oppressor on whom to confer shame for Ireland's reduced condition, and the dynamic would collapse. Circumscribed in this way both by its colonial status and by the conditions of the Famine—both of which the nationalist journalists and poets are striving to bring to an end—this rhetoric of shame thus produces a radically contingent Irish nation, one whose conditions of present existence are at the same time threatening its future survival. This Ireland is a nation which has only a present and a colonial past, and which cannot exist in the same form in any future that its poet-journalist creators would want to see.

The strategic production of an Irish nation in this nationalist poetry was thus contingent on some envisioned transformation of this present nation-in-crisis into a future nation emerging from the present circumstances. Alongside the imagery of present physical weakness, then, the poetry offers alternative embodiments of a future Ireland, one which emerges from the present but is different from and superior to the strategic figure of Ireland as imagined through the Famine bodies. In Thomas D'Arcy McGee's "The Famine in the Land" (originally published in the *Nation* 17 April 1847 as "Life and Land"), a present Ireland of "stark skeletons" (3) lying along the roads in which "we cannot count the corpses" (1) is made the basis for two opposing articulations of a possible future. The poem begins with a description of Famine Ireland in the present, a mixture of dead bodies visible across the landscape and their still-living families crying out to heaven:

Death reapeth in the fields of life, and we cannot count the corpses;  
Black and fast before our eyes march the busy biers and hearses;  
In the laneways, and in highways, stark skeletons are lying,  
And daily unto Heaven their living kin are crying—  
'Must the slave die for the tyrant—the sufferer for the sin—  
And a wide, inhuman desert be, where Ireland has been;  
Must the billows of oblivion over our hills be rolled,  
And our Land be blotted out, like the accursed lands of old?' (1-8)

A dynamic of shame similar to that expressed in “The Queen’s Visit” is evident in the first stanza of this poem as well. Imagery of skeletons and corpses depicting the physical conditions of Famine Ireland becomes the basis for the people’s cry of protest, in which the responsibility for Ireland’s suffering and enslavement is ascribed to a tyrannical, sinning Britain. The second stanza displays this degraded Ireland for an international audience:

Oh! hear it, friends of France—hear it, our cousin Spain,  
Hear it, our kindly kith and kin across the western main—  
Hear it, ye sons of Italy—let Turk and Russian hear it—  
Hear Ireland’s sentence registered, and see how we can bear it—  
...  
We are beggars, we are cravens, and vengeful England feels  
Us at her feet, and tramples us with both her iron heels. (9-16)

Like the “shuddering world” in “The Queen’s Visit,” the international community is here invoked to witness Ireland’s death-sentence and its degradation beneath England’s “iron heels.” By calling on other nations as “friends,” “cousin,” “kith and kin”—as peers to Ireland—McGee asserts Ireland’s place of belonging as one nation among others.

Even as he asserts the existence of this Irish nation-in-crisis, however, McGee emphasizes its impermanence. The cries of the “living kin” do more than lament Ireland’s present condition—they project its annihilation, speaking of a process already in progress by which the people will die, the land will be “blotted out” beneath “the billows

of oblivion.” Having called forth witnesses to the degradation of the present Ireland, trampled by England’s rule, the poem envisions the fulfillment of this blotting out of Ireland through the dual agency of the English, imagined as vultures “come to reap the booty” (32), and of “the Spirit of the Plague” descending on Ireland (37). The question—“Must ... our land be blotted out ...?”—from the first stanza is transformed into a statement: “And the slave falls for the tyrant, and the suff’rer for the sin / And a wide inhuman desert is, where Ireland has been” (39-40). While the next lines assure us that this picture of Ireland “’Twas a vision—’tis a fable—I did but tell my dream—” (41), they reiterate the possibility and the fear that this dream might come true: “Yet twice, yea thrice, I saw it, and still the same did seem. / ... / And I fear me, God permitting it, it may fall out true at last” (42-44). The poem’s first articulation of a possible future transformation of the nation-in-crisis, then, is the nightmare that the present degradation will end in the nation’s complete erasure, in the substitution of a depopulated, “inhuman” territory for the nation of Ireland.

For McGee, the only way to avoid the fulfillment of this nightmare and to escape the present degradation of the nation is to replace it with a nation of young men whose bravery recalls the heroism of the past. Calling for “countrymen and kindred” (49) to “Plant your flag upon the common soil” (50) and “make yet another stand” (57), the poem contrasts a wished-for nation of heroes with the present nation of “beggars” and “cravens” (15) who submit to England’s oppression. If Ireland’s physical degradation is a cause of shame for England, then the poem constructs Ireland’s present submission to



English rule as shameful for Ireland by contrasting the heroes of the nation's distant past to its present "cravens":

They of that Celtic war-race who made the storied rally  
Against the Teuton lances in the lists of Roncevalles—  
They, kindred to the Mariner, whose soul's sublime devotion  
Led his caravel like a star to a new world, through the Ocean.  
No! No! they were begotten by fathers in their chains,  
Whose valiant blood refused to flow along the vassal veins. (19-24)

McGee's articulation of the poem's ideal nation through a reclamation of a heroic past—"Let the sleeping souls awake—the supine rise self-reliant— / ... / Up, Mononia, land of heroes" (52-55)—results in a gendered, age-specific definition of future Ireland through the image of the strong young man. The genderless corpses and skeletons are held blameless for Ireland's condition, and the women and elderly of the nation are offered as reasons for the men to fight: "Shall we look upon our fathers, and our daughters, and our wives / Slain, ravished, in our sight, and be paltering for our lives?" (47-48). Although the young men of Ireland are shamed for their submission to England's rule, the shame ascribed to them is the basis for a degree of agency that the poem denies the Famine victims, who are either already dead or crying impotently to Heaven, and to the nation's women and elderly, whose fate is placed not in their own hands, but in the hands of the "countrymen and kindred." The present nation-in-crisis is one whose dire circumstances are derived from its submissive position—England is the agent of Ireland's impending destruction, the weak and feminized people are its passive victims, and the young men who, in McGee's assessment, have the capacity to act against this destruction decline to do so. For McGee, then, the most important function of a rhetoric of shame is not the assertion of either a national existence or England's moral responsibility, but rather, the

incitement of Ireland's young men to exercise their agency, to rescue a nation on the brink of extinction, and to transform a passive, degraded, feminized Ireland into a nation of heroic men worthy of its history and ancestry.

This division of Ireland into a feminized, submissive present bookended by a masculine past and future is typical of McGee's Famine poetry. In "The Living and the Dead," published in the *Nation* 5 June 1847, McGee appeals to a past period of powerful Gaelic chiefs who acted rather than spoke:

Oh! for the time, dear Erin—the fierce time long ago,  
When your men felt, sad Erin, and their hands could strike a blow!  
When your Gaelic Chiefs were ready to stand in pass or breach—  
Danger but made them steady—they struck and saved their speech.  
But where are the men to head ye, and lead your face to face—  
To trample the powers that tread ye, men of the fallen race? (7-12)

Though the poem invokes a female personification of Ireland in its address to "Erin," its vision of what the nation should be is entirely defined by a particularly bellicose version of masculinity which is identified with physical strength and action, with "hands" that "could strike a blow." In contrast with this powerful physical ideal, the poem offers an image of present Ireland in which both men and women have been physically diminished:

The sinewy man is sleeping in the crowded churchyard near,  
And his young wife is keeping lonesome company there;  
His brother is shoreward creeping, has begged his way abroad,  
And his sister—tho', for weeping, she scarce could see the road. (15-18)

Alternating lines describing male and female figures reduced by a "yoke" that "No other nation, Erin, but only you would bear" (20, 19), the poem opposes a present Ireland whose men have no more power than its women to the past of Gaelic chiefs whose physical presence defended the nation. Like "The Famine in the Land," this poem ends

with an injunction for the people to unite, and though the command goes to “Erin,” it is intended for an audience of men: “Then call your people, Erin—call with a prophet’s cry— / Bid them link in union, Erin, and do like men, or die—” (25-26). Just as the shame of Ireland’s present degradation is constructed here and in “The Famine in the Land” as the basis for a powerful nation that would emerge from a desire to negate this shame, speech and prophecy are offered as only transitional national forms, which are useful in the present only so they can be replaced in the future. After demanding that the people “learn now, or never, to dare, not to deplore” (22) and calling for a return to a time in which men “struck and saved their speech” (10), the poem calls on Erin to “call with a prophet’s cry” (25) for Irish men’s union and action: “Bid the old and the young man rally, and trust to work, not words” (29). Insofar as the poem is itself doing what it asks of Erin in calling for Irish men to unite, the poem takes on the voice of the present nation, calling for the transformation of words into action, of an Ireland feminized in its diminishment and its submission into a nation of men united in action.

For Jane Elgee and Elizabeth Willoughby Varian, who wrote for the *Nation* as Speranza and Finola, respectively, the alternate future world that appears in their poetry consists of different versions of a spiritual world centered on the Christian belief in a day of judgment. In Finola’s “Our Welcome,” a poem written, like “The Queen’s Visit,” on the occasion of Victoria’s trip to Ireland in 1849, the poet compares the queen’s “welcome” to Famine Ireland with the projected welcomes of the Irish and the queen into heaven, using the promise of a spiritual future to cast a different light on the present. In its first stanza, the poem, whose title evokes the “national” cry of “A hundred thousand

welcomes” praised in the *ILN* article on Victoria’s visit, replaces the national trait of hospitality and “welcome” with one of justice and equitable exchange, of yielding only “the homage that is due” (2):

We dare not bid thee welcome, to ourselves and Ireland true;  
Ungrudgingly, we freely yield the homage that is due:  
For love, unbounded gratitude, for hatred, bitter scorn,  
For every gift of good or ill, a just and fair return. (1-4)

In contrast to the show of welcome and homage the queen expects, the poet reframes the queen’s visit in economic terms, promising a “just and fair return” for England’s “gifts” to Ireland. Like “The Queen’s Visit,” this poem contrasts the pomp of Victoria’s arrival with the degradation of the Irish people, setting up the master-slave relationship that appears throughout nationalist Famine poetry. Constructing a mutually dependent relationship of English pride and Irish submission, the poet projects the queen’s pleasure at the grandeur of her arrival in Ireland:

Doubtless it was a goodly sight to see thy vessel’s prow  
Speed through the gleaming path of foam, a proud and gallant show.  
And England’s crimson banner, as it floated from the lea,  
In honour of the captive host, lowered to the very sea!

Aye, ’twas a goodly sight to see the captive nation bow  
Before the jeweled sceptre and the crown upon thy brow:  
Offering the heart’s vain homage to the glittering array  
Of courtly knights, and gentle dames, the actors of the play! (9-16)

The bowing and the homage of the “captive nation” is part of the “proud and gallant show” of England’s greatness, so that like the ship, the crimson banner, the sceptre and crown, Ireland’s captivity or enslavement is constructed as one more visible component of English pride.

Challenging this picture of a submissive Ireland that contributes to England's pride, the poem confronts the visiting queen with Ireland's poverty and suffering, repeating that "We dare not bid thee welcome" (17), citing the vengeance called for by "Our brothers' blood" (18) and the "tattered rags" that more properly "befit a nation's holiday" (20), and demanding that instead of listening to the "paeans of the plundered slaves" (6), the queen "Hark! to the famine cries, the shrieks of stalwart men struck down" (21). Returning to the theme of welcome and imposing the standard of "just and fair return" established at the beginning of the poem, the poet demands that Victoria listen to the sounds of the Famine and "Then, ask thy conscience, lady, what welcome waits for thee?" (24). With its reference to conscience and the moral and spiritual realm it suggests, the poem reverses the dynamic of pride and shame, asserting the existence of an Ireland where "until the martyr's free, / Free on the soil that gave him birth, no welcome waits" (26-27) for the queen of England, and charging that Victoria, by allowing tyranny in Ireland, has herself become a slave rather than a queen:

Must *thou* obey the savage will of men, so lost to shame?  
 They plot and scheme, like dastard knaves, and murder in thy name;  
 If crime, in all its blackest dyes, a royal robe may screen,  
 This is to be undoubtedly a *slave*, and not a queen!

A slave? ah, worse than slavery, to fashion thought and speech  
 To suit their base designs who dare the tyrant's creed to preach!  
 What are thy glittering baubles, the gems on breast and brow,  
 That we before their brilliant rays in mock obeisance bow? (29-36)

The materialist, worldly shows of pride, the poet suggests, are props that disguise or "screen" a more significant moral degradation. The queen is herself a show, a "royal robe" to cover the machinations of those men in government with the real power. Having

set the moral realm of conscience at a higher value than the worldly shows of pride and power, the poem ends by gesturing toward a spiritual “welcome” that, like Ireland’s welcome, will be denied to the queen:

No doubt it was a gallant sight to see thy fleet ship glide,  
Fast through the opening waters, in all her stately pride;  
But a nobler sight awaits us, and a welcome, warm and free,  
For the convict ship, and felon band—no welcome waits for thee!

Come, if thou wilt, to us, to ours it is the same—  
No hand is raised to bless or curse, no tongue shall praise or blame;  
It were a venal deed in us, too abject, base, and mean,  
To swell the chorus of the slaves, and shout God save the Queen! (37-44)

Assigning primary importance to a future, non-material world in which the Irish convict-ship, but not the queen’s “fleet ship” with its “stately pride,” will find a “welcome, warm and free,” the poet reverses the system of value by which Ireland is degraded and England proud. By owning its physical, material degradation in the present and refusing the moral and spiritual degradation that would come from offering the shout of homage, “God save the Queen” (44), Ireland secures a “nobler sight” and freedom in the future. Finola thus uses a political rhetoric of shame that works on both a physical and a spiritual level, so that Ireland’s physical baseness in the presence of England’s materialist displays of pride become the basis for English shame and Irish nobility on a spiritual level.

While McGee offers a militant, masculine, strong physical alternative to replace the degradation of Famine Ireland, Finola dispenses with any reference to armed uprising or resistance, presenting instead a version of national freedom that comes through the rejection of the material world in favor of the spiritual. In Speranza’s poetry, which emphasizes the experience of bodily suffering during the Famine more graphically and

effectively than either McGee's or Finola's poems, the physical and spiritual planes come together, so that an army not of strong men, but of horrific, famine-starved bodies rises up to indict England on a spiritual judgment day. In "The Famine Year," which was first published in the *Nation* on 23 January 1847 as "The Stricken Land," an anonymous voice poses a series of questions to Irish Famine victims, eliciting responses that place both the conditions of starvation and England's responsibility for creating those conditions starkly before the questioner's eyes:

Weary men, what reap ye?—Golden corn for the stranger.  
What sow ye?—Human corpses that wait for the avenger.  
Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see you in the offing?  
Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger's scoffing.  
There's a proud array of soldiers—what do they round your door?  
They guard our masters' granaries from the thin hands of the poor.  
Pale mothers, wherefore weeping—Would to God that we were dead;  
Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them bread. (1-8)

Though the questioner, in addressing the respondents, offers a picture of them as vaguely sympathetic and pitiable—"Weary men," "fainting forms, hunger-stricken," "pale mothers"—this picture is challenged by the confrontational replies, which decline to participate in the sympathetic image the questioner tries to construct. Instead, the replies insist on refocusing the gaze of the questioner onto the "stranger" whose ships take food away from the "hunger-stricken" people, and onto the "masters" whose granaries are guarded from the poor by soldiers. The questioner, who does not engage with any of the replies but rather moves on from group to group with new questions, appears to be out of touch with the surrounding people, posing naïve questions about what the "proud array of soldiers" is doing, and asking starving children why they cry ("Little children, tears are strange upon your infant faces, / God meant you but to smile within your mother's soft

embraces” [9-10]). The last question, at the end of the second stanza, again seeks to frame the Famine as a sympathetic spectacle and to present its victims as “praying” for relief: “There’s a gaunt crowd on the highway—are ye come to pray to man, / With hollow eyes that cannot weep, and for words your faces wan?” (15-16).

The poem’s four remaining stanzas take the form of the reply offered by the “gaunt crowd,” which begins by simply but definitely contradicting the questioner’s supposition that they have come to “pray to man” for aid: “No; the blood is dead within our veins—we care not now for life” (17). Combining horrific, graphic images of Famine bodies with direct accusations against the “stranger” who “reaps our harvest,” the “alien” who “owns our soil” (28), the dynamic of shame constructed through images of abject Irish bodies takes on a threatening posture in this poem. These body images eschew sympathy, using the discomfort caused by broken boundaries as a tool to disconcert the questioner and the reader: “We left our infants playing with their dead mother’s hand: / We left our maidens maddened by the fever’s scorching brand” (21-22). Rather than emphasizing the humanity of the Famine victims, the poem compares them to animals, “Dying, as a dog would die” (32) or worse:

The wild bird, if he’s stricken, is mourned by the others,  
But we—we die in Christian land—we die amid our brothers,  
In the land which God has given, like a wild beast in his cave,  
Without a tear, a prayer, a shroud, a coffin or a grave. (35-38)

The Famine, in other words, reduces human beings to the conditions of animals by not only killing them, but doing so in such a way that even the civilized customs of mourning the dead properly are denied them. Because this poem clearly attributes the Famine to the British presence in and exploitation of Ireland, it suggests that far from enacting a



civilizing mission, British colonialism has stripped Ireland of its civilized practices by reducing it to this maddened, physically degraded condition.

In contrast both to McGee, whose construction of a physically imposing Irish national resistance supplants the degraded and physically impotent Famine bodies, and to Finola, who skips over the physical world and resistance entirely in her privileging of the spiritual, Speranza melds the physical and spiritual worlds in such a way that she builds a force of anti-colonial resistance out of the present, degraded condition of Ireland.

Ha! but think ye the contortions on each livid face ye see,  
Will not be read on judgement-day by eyes of Deity?

We are wretches, famished, scorned, human tools to build your pride,  
But God will yet take vengeance for the souls for whom Christ died.  
Now is your hour of pleasure—bask ye in the world's caress;  
But our whitening bones against ye will rise as witnesses,  
From the cabins and the ditches, in their charred, uncoffin'd masses,  
For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes.  
A ghastly, spectral army, before the great God we'll stand,  
And arraign ye as our murderers, the spoilers of our land. (39-48)

Unlike McGee, who replaces physical weakness with militant male bodies, Speranza constructs an army that becomes more powerful and more effective as its physical condition deteriorates. In these lines, the imagery progresses from living, suffering bodies to dead bodies animated only by their judgment against their “murderers”—moving from the “contortions on each livid face,” to “wretches, famished, scorned,” to the skeletons and spectres whose “whitening bones against ye will rise” and who will stand as a “ghastly, spectral army.” By moving these dying and dead bodies from the “wayside” where they die unmourned to the metaphysical scene of “judgement-day,” imagined as a court of law before God as judge, the poem casts them as witnesses

arraigning their murderers. Moreover, in this last stanza, the “gaunt crowd” identifies the questioner to whom it addresses its reply as the “stranger” who will be judged: “Now is *your* hour of pleasure—bask *ye* in the world’s caress; / But our whitening bones against *ye* will rise as witnesses” (43-44; emphasis added). As the poem announces its judgment, it also enacts it, confronting the anonymous questioner, transforming the “gaunt crowd” which is supposed to “pray to man” into a “ghastly, spectral army” which appears as witness before a vengeful God.

Although the spiritual scene of judgment day in “The Famine Year” makes it similar to some degree to “Our Welcome,” Speranza’s vision of this scene does not merely replace the physical world with the spiritual, but rather imports each world into the other, rendering her poem’s judgment threatening and politically effective in a way that Finola’s cannot be. Not only do the horrific Famine bodies in “The Famine Year” refuse to comfort the questioner with the reassuring position of superiority and charitable distance offered by the language of sympathy, but they make themselves more disconcerting, more confrontational by asserting their presence—“We are wretches, famished, scorned, human tools to build your pride” (41)—and refusing to disappear even after death. Furthermore, the deliberate vagueness of the point of death throughout the poem—the mixture of dead and dying bodies, the movement in the last stanza from living “wretches” to animated “whitening bones” without any explicit description of a moment of death—functions to make this army of spectres and skeletons pose a threat in the present, material world, not just in some spiritual future.

While McGee, Finola, and Speranza offer different visions of the form that Ireland's liberation will take, each of them accesses this national liberation through a dynamic of shame, where the display of Ireland's physical degradation during the Famine becomes a mode of anti-colonial resistance, a means of shaming the nation's oppressors in the world's eyes, and evidence of England's guilt in its treatment of Ireland. Turning toward William Carleton, another Irish writer whose novels addressed Famine Ireland during the 1840s and whose images of Famine victims blend sympathy and horror, animal and human characteristics, I want to suggest that the political rhetoric of shame that characterized much of the nationalist Famine poetry constitutes an important context for understanding the ways in which Carleton's representations of Famine Ireland both engaged with and diverged from those of these Young Ireland poets.

### **Hunger, Guilt, and Famine: William Carleton's *The Black Prophet* (1847)**

Carleton's *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine* was first published by *Dublin University Magazine* in eight installments from May through December 1846, and it was published the following year in book form in London and Belfast.<sup>97</sup> The only novel about Irish famine published during the period of the Great Famine, *The Black Prophet* is part sentimental novel, part famine narrative, part romance, and part murder-mystery, following the intersecting stories of an unsolved murder plot, a forbidden love plot between Con Dalton and Mave Sullivan (whose uncle was supposedly murdered by Dalton's father), and a year of famine and disease and their effects on the community.

Whereas the Famine is itself the murder to which the “whitening bones” of Speranza’s gaunt crowd testify, in Carleton’s “Tale of Irish Famine,” the murder of Bartle Sullivan on which the novel’s primary plot turns takes place twenty years before the 1817 famine to which the title refers. Briefly, the novel centers on three families who are all involved in some way with each of the primary narrative threads: the family of Jerry Sullivan, whose brother was supposed to have been murdered twenty years earlier (his body was never found) and whose daughter Mave is in love with young Con Dalton; the family of Condy Dalton, who was arrested on suspicion of having killed Bartle Sullivan but released for lack of evidence, and whose son Con is in love with Mave; and the family of Donnel Dhu McGowan (also known as the Black Prophet), his wife Nelly, and his daughter Sarah McGowan. The Black Prophet is vaguely connected to the murder throughout the narrative—he claims to have been keeping secret for twenty years his knowledge that Condy Dalton committed the murder, while Nelly suspects that her husband is himself guilty of the murder—and he uses his position as a prophecy man to manipulate the other characters for his own gain, pursuing one plot to have Mave Sullivan abducted by the dissolute son of the local big house landlord, Dick o’ the Grange, and another plot to rob the Grange. The novel ends with a resolution of the three primary plots: the 1817 famine ends; Mave and Con Dalton marry; and after two dramatic courtroom trials, the murder-mystery is solved, with the revelation that Condy Dalton did not kill Bartle Sullivan (who returns alive to testify) and that the Black Prophet is guilty of killing his brother-in-law. Throughout the novel, the worsening conditions of famine and typhus affect all of the characters: the Dalton family suffers

from starvation and typhus, the once-prosperous Sullivan family teeters on the brink of starvation, and Sarah McGowan first nurses the Dalton family and eventually dies of typhus.

Although the famine referenced in the novel's title takes place not in 1846-47 but in 1817, the narrator writes from the author's present in the mid-1840s and periodically steps out of the past time of the narrative to comment on the present famine. Carleton repeatedly presents imagery of famine bodies alongside scathing critiques of those groups of people and social systems he holds responsible for producing or exacerbating the conditions of famine—his narrator addresses the country misers and moneylenders who take advantage of periods of scarcity to charge high prices for food, creating “a kind of artificial famine in the country” (176, 48, 151); middlemen landlords and the landlord system (72, 117); and a legislature whose laws “had but one aspect—that of terror” and that “did not consider it any part of its duty to take a deep interest in the domestic or social improvement of the people” (260). Any of Carleton's social and political criticisms could just as easily be applied to the 1840s as to 1817, and his images of famine victims, likewise, fit in well with the images of Famine bodies that flooded both the British and the Irish press at the time of the novel's publication. As Kelleher notes in her discussion of *The Black Prophet*, Carleton at times seems sympathetic toward the famine victims he represents, offering portraits of people suffering from hunger, poverty, and disease, as in the novel's first extended description of famine conditions at the house of Darby Skinadre—a miser and “mealmonger” whom Carleton labels the “very Genius of Famine” (50) for his practice of hoarding grain and charging exorbitant prices for it

during famines. Carleton describes Skinadre as “surrounded by distress, raggedness, feeble hunger, and tottering disease, in all the various aspects of pitiable suffering, hopeless desolation, and that agony of the heart which impresses wildness upon the pale cheek, makes the eye at once dull and eager” (50). Elsewhere, Carleton describes the “melancholy scene” of a funeral where “we might read the sorrowful impress of the famine and illness which desolated the land” (109):

The groups around the poor departed one were marked with such a thin and haggard expression as general destitution always is certain to leave behind it. The skin of those who, with better health and feeding, had been as fair and glossy as ivory, was now wan and flaccid;—the long bones of others projected sharply, and as it were offensively, to the feelings of the spectators—the overlapping garments hung loosely about the wasted and feeble person, and there was in the eyes of all a dull and languid motion, as if they turned in their sockets by an effort. (109)

These scans of the physical signs of starvation on the bodies of famine victims appear throughout the novel, and they are designed to present images of “pitiable suffering” to the reader or spectator, to elicit sympathy through a visual spectacle of famine’s effects.

At the same time, as the description of a “wildness” impressed on the cheeks of starving people and the suggestion that their protruding bones are “offensive” to spectators might indicate, Carleton’s famine bodies are abject, with the potential to be threatening in their abjection. They trouble boundaries between civilization and savagery, human and animal, sanity and madness, and they are capable of threatening the social order. In one troubling description of the crowds at public soup kitchens, for example, the narrator compares people receiving charity to “hungry vultures” preying on a carcass:

Here were wild crowds, ragged, sickly, and wasted away to skin and bone, struggling for the dole of charity like so many hungry vultures about the remnant of some carcass [*sic*] which they were tearing, amid noise, and screams, and strife, into very shreds; for, as we have said, all sense of becoming restraint or shame was now abandoned.... (150-151)

As Kelleher argues, such “representations of famine victims display features familiar in colonial descriptions, such as the conjunction of passive and threateningly active qualities, of human and animal terms.”<sup>98</sup> While this analysis might also be applied to the images of famine victims in the nationalist poetry, where the use of horrific bodies has a quite opposite political effect than their use in a colonialist rhetoric, in Carleton’s novel these images of threatening or horrific bodies alongside images designed to elicit sympathy produce what Kelleher describes as an ambivalence in the author’s attitude toward famine victims. She argues that the novel offers a “progressive ... analysis of famine’s causation” that is “significantly at odds” with its unsympathetic portrayal of famine’s effects.<sup>99</sup>

In describing *The Black Prophet* as caught between a progressive view of the Famine’s causes and an unsympathetic, regressive imagery of its effects, Kelleher charges Carleton’s novel with an ambivalence that many of Carleton’s critics have used to describe his literary career and persona. Carleton on the one hand has been called the “Father of Irish Literature” and praised by W. B. Yeats as “the great novelist of Ireland,”<sup>100</sup> but on the other has been criticized for being anti-Catholic and anti-nationalist, for lacking firm political conviction, and for being a “pen-for-hire” who would tailor his writings to the views of whoever was willing to pay him.<sup>101</sup> Critics draw on Carleton’s biography to construct him as an in-between figure. Born into an Irish-

speaking peasant family of farmers, Carleton was recognized as the authentic voice of the Irish peasantry even as he differentiated himself from the peasant class he was supposed to represent.<sup>102</sup> He grew up in a Catholic family and for a time considered entering the priesthood, but he converted to Protestantism in the 1820s and proceeded to write anti-Catholic stories prior to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, publishing in the *Christian Examiner*, an Anglican journal that was founded in 1825 for the purpose of exposing “the evils of popery.”<sup>103</sup> And although Carleton expressed anti-Home Rule sentiments and relied on the British government to fund his writing during the Famine, he also contributed to the *Nation* and (briefly) to John Mitchel’s *Irish Tribune* in the 1840s, and he wrote three novels (including the nationalist *Valentine M’Clutchy*) for the *Nation* editors’ Library of Ireland series.<sup>104</sup>

Perhaps appropriately for a figure whose writings positioned him so ambivalently with regard to so many groups and political stances, Carleton himself articulates a dual purpose for *The Black Prophet*—one focused on influencing British legislation for Ireland and the other on an appeal to the benevolence of the British public. The 1847 book-length publication of the novel is accompanied by an author’s dedication and preface, both of which address the ongoing Famine of the 1840s, rendering that present event a lens through which readers encounter Carleton’s portrayal of past famines. Carleton dedicates *The Black Prophet* to Lord John Russell, “prefixing your Lordship’s name to this *Tale of Irish Famine*” by virtue of Russell’s “character of Prime Minister,” and claiming that if Peel had still been in office he would have dedicated the novel to him



(i). Carleton cites Russell's position as legislator for Ireland as reason for the propriety of this dedication:

I cannot help thinking that the man who, in his ministerial capacity, must be looked upon as a public exponent of those principles of Government which have brought our country to her present calamitous condition, by a long course of illiberal legislation and unjustifiable neglect, ought to have his name placed before a story which details with truth the sufferings which such legislation and neglect have entailed upon our people. (i)

Carleton expresses his hope that the novel will have an impact on legislation for Ireland, so that Russell—the first English Prime Minister to have a “tale of Irish famine” dedicated to him—will use his “enlarged and enlightened policy” to “put it out of the power of any succeeding author to ever write another” (i). While the dedication addresses legislative causes and solutions to the Famine, the preface that follows it addresses the British public in sentimental terms, expressing Carleton's hope that his novel will “excite a strong interest in the breasts of all those who can sympathize” with Irish sufferings (iii). Speaking of himself as author in the third person, Carleton enumerates his motives for writing, citing first the aim of awakening “those who legislate for us into something like a humane perception of a calamity that has been almost perennial in this country” (iii), and second the aim of stirring public sympathy into active benevolence to aid Famine victims:

[H]e hoped ... that by placing before the eyes of those who had only *heard of* such inflictions, faithful and unexaggerated pictures of all that the unhappy people suffer under them, he might, perchance, stir that sympathy into active and efficient benevolence, at a period when both were so wofully [*sic*] required. (iii, original emphasis)

Carleton positions his novel as a piece of sentimental realism, stating his purpose of affecting public sentiment and soliciting charitable aid even as he asserts the authenticity

both of his images of suffering from the 1817 famine and of their relevance to the 1840s

Famine:

The pictures and scenes represented are those which he [the author] himself witnessed in 1817, 1822, and other subsequent years; and if they be false or exaggerated, there are thousands still living who can come forward and establish their falsehood. They have been depicted, however, in the midst of living testimony, and they not only *have* escaped contradiction, but defy it. (iv, original emphasis)

Like the “whitening bones” and the “ghastly, spectral army” that rise up to testify against England in Speranza’s poem, Carleton offers the Famine victims of 1847 as testimony in support of his “authentic history” of Irish famine.

But whereas the testimony of Speranza’s Famine victims has a single purpose—to arraign England as “our murderers, the spoilers of our land”—Carleton’s “testimony” has a dual aim. On one side, Carleton’s address to Russell and the legislature would seem to rely on a less scathing version of the political rhetoric of shame that Speranza and the other *Nation* poets use. Carleton’s critique of Russell is mitigated somewhat by his expressed belief that Russell is “sincerely anxious to benefit our unhappy country” (i) and by the fact that he accuses the legislature not of enslaving Ireland (the position of the nationalist poets) but rather of “a long course of illiberal legislation and unjustifiable neglect” (i). By dedicating his “tale of Irish famine” to Russell, however, Carleton nevertheless uses the physical degradation of Ireland and its people to shame the British Parliament. In expressing a hope that his images will awaken the legislature to a “humane perception” of almost perennial states of famine in Ireland, he implies that this legislature at present is inhumane and so renders his images of famine victims as living testimony to that inhumanity.

The other side of Carleton's stated purpose in writing this tale of famine, however, is to evoke sympathy and elicit charity by placing "faithful and unexaggerated pictures" of suffering before "the reader—especially if he be English or Scotch" (iv). As we have already seen with Mahoney's equally explicit attempt to elicit charity from the British public in his *ILN* article—which was published, incidentally, in the same month during which Carleton wrote his preface to *The Black Prophet*—the project of deploying images of famine bodies to evoke sympathy depends on a quite different dynamic than that used by the nationalist poets to shame Britain. Whereas the speakers of the *Nation* poems identify with the suffering figures they represent and, using first person plural pronouns like "we," "us," and "our," invite their readers to similarly identify, Mahoney and his editors carefully insulate their British readers from too close an identification with Irish Famine victims. Whereas Speranza, McGee, and Finola all construct a vision of a unified Ireland enslaved by Britain, Mahoney softens the judgment of the British public for Ireland's suffering by constructing an Ireland divided within itself. Whereas Speranza's poem rejects the British questioner's sentimentalized vision of Famine victims and counters with disconcerting, threatening images, Mahoney's article couches horrific images within sentimental conventions and provides readers with the comfort of charity as an explicitly articulated outlet for any emotions stirred by the account.

Carleton's dual aims in *The Black Prophet* thus depend on two opposing rhetorical stances, resulting in a novel that is not simply ambivalent, but actively undermines its own stated goals as Carleton outlines them in his dedication and preface. The political rhetoric of shame in the nationalist poetry only works because the poets are

ready to dispense with British sympathy, to offend British readers, and to render the physical degradation of Famine victims contagious as it ascribes a moral or spiritual degradation to England. Carleton, on the other hand, gestures toward legislative responsibility but ultimately *wants* the sympathy of British readers—including Russell and the legislature, to whom Carleton in 1847 was applying not only for better legislation on behalf of Ireland, but for a writer’s pension on his own behalf. Whatever the reasons for Carleton’s decisions about how to portray England’s responsibility for Irish famine, the challenge to the legislature in the dedication and preface is followed by a novel that treats the British legislature deferentially, assigning the greatest share of blame for its pictures of suffering not to the British, but to the Irish mealmongers, moneylenders, and unscrupulous landlords. Whereas the miser Darby Skinadre is described as “the very Genius of Famine” (50), in one of the few places in the novel where the narrator refers directly to the legislature, he leaves it to his readers to decide whether the legislature is at fault:

It is not our business, any more than it is our inclination, to dwell here upon the state of those sumptuary enactments, which reflected such honour upon the legislative wisdom, that permitted our country to arrive at the lamentable condition we have attempted to describe. We merely mention the facts, and leave to those who possess position and ability, the task of giving to this extraordinary state of things a more effectual attention. (152)

In a similarly noncommittal gesture, the narrator refers to the fact—reported so often in the nationalist press during the 1840s—that Irish grain was being exported to England during a period of famine, but he finishes the sentence by describing the *incoming* ships carrying the same provisions back to Ireland as charitable donations from England:

Day after day, vessels laden with Irish provisions, drawn from a population perishing with actual hunger, as well as with the pestilence which it occasioned, were passing out of our ports, whilst, singular as it may seem, other vessels came in freighted with our own provisions, sent back, through the charity of England, to our relief. (152)

The crime of the British legislature, according to the novel, if such a crime exists, is one of omission rather than commission: the greedy and immoral segment of the Irish population represented by the middleman landlord Dick o' the Grange and by Darby Skinadre are the villains of Carleton's famine narrative, and the fault of the British legislature is only its failure to enact laws that would protect the people and prevent the "iniquitous" practices of these men. The nationalist poetry uses Irish physical degradation to shame the British by representing the famine conditions as inflicted on Ireland by England—Speranza arraigns an England that has spoiled Ireland's land and murdered its people, McGee describes an England that has enslaved Ireland and trampled it with "iron heels," and Finola calls Victoria a "tyrant" who listens to the "paeans of the plundered slaves." In contrast to these representations of actively inflicted harm, Carleton describes a passive but well-intentioned England whose fault is only in its failure to act.

Like the illustrated British press that presented the public with images of an Ireland divided within itself—offering a noble, suffering Ireland with which to sympathize and a greedy, disorderly, or horrific Ireland to scapegoat for this suffering—Carleton represents the Irish people as internally divided, unlike the idealized representations of a united Ireland that emerge from the *Nation's* poetry and articles. There are several different lines along which the novel divides and assigns a moral

hierarchy to Ireland; Morash, for example, sees a division throughout Carleton's body of work between the peasantry with bourgeois values and the rest of the peasantry, and Kelleher suggests that Carleton sympathizes with his Irish characters so far as they remain orderly but fears the disorder of famine riots and mobs. Within these segments in *The Black Prophet*, however, characters fall variously along a moral continuum. Tom Dalton (one of Condy Dalton's sons), for instance, participates in famine riots out of a temporary madness and is reformed by the end of the novel, unlike the simply greedy character of Roddy Duncan, an accomplice in the Black Prophet's plots. I would suggest that the ultimate basis for Carleton's division of his Irish characters follows the generic logic of the sentimental novel: the "good" characters in the novel are those who feel the appropriate emotions of love or pity upon witnessing suffering, and the "bad" characters are those who do not feel these emotions and therefore cause suffering rather than either experiencing or alleviating it. Throughout the novel, tears are a sign of a character's basic goodness and can have a transformative effect on the characters who respond to scenes of suffering by weeping. For example, Sarah McGowan, a character who attacks her stepmother with a knife in the first chapter of the novel and who is alternately described as beautiful and "savage" (9), is transformed when she weeps at the spectacle of a starving mother with her children: "And as she spoke she wept. Her heart had been touched by the distresses of her fellow-creatures, and became, as it were, purified and made tender by its own sympathies, and so she wept" (95). Darby Skinadre, by contrast, one of Carleton's most unambiguously and irredeemably immoral characters, is defined by his ability to make an outward show of compassion while actually feeling nothing:

“Such was his smoothness of manner, and the singular control which a long life of hypocrisy had given him over his feeling, that it was impossible to draw any correct distinction between that which he only assumed and that which he really felt” (52-53). In contrast to Sarah’s genuine tears, Darby’s hypocrisy is punctuated as he “wiped away a drop of villainous rheum which ran down his cheek ... with such an appearance of sympathy, that almost any one would have imagined it was a tear of compassion” (54-55).

Setting up a moral hierarchy based on the extent to which one is emotionally moved by scenes of suffering, Carleton provides for his English readers a moral high-ground that contrasts sharply with the nationalist poetry’s ascription of moral and spiritual degradation to England. The novel places extended scenes of highly sentimentalized suffering from hunger and disease before the reader’s eyes, positioning the reader to feel for the characters even as feeling and emotion are established as the measures of moral authority. Carleton, moreover, aligns the narrative voice of the novel more with the English readers he addresses than with his Irish subjects. Although he refers to Ireland as “our unhappy country” (35) when he describes the famine conditions, Carleton’s narrator takes the position of spectator and witness to the Irish famine victims he represents rather than a position that would make him a participant in their suffering.<sup>105</sup> Consistent with the aim articulated in the preface, Carleton provides his readers with “pictures” of suffering, scanning the make-up of crowds and the bodies of individuals. The famine mother and children who cause Sarah to weep are described as a “poor, famine-struck looking woman with three or four children, the very pictures of

starvation and misery” (93). Carleton objectifies the starving people he represents, offering detailed physical descriptions of how they look to the observer: “Go where you might, every object reminded you of the fearful desolation that was progressing around you. The features of the people were gaunt, their eyes wild and hollow, and their gait feeble and tottering” (149).

Interestingly, Carleton’s “pictures,” though highly detailed in their descriptions of the external signs of physical suffering, are oddly vague in other ways. In narrating Sarah’s encounter with the mother and children, for instance, he does not know whether the beggar woman has “three or four children.” Morash describes Carleton’s narrative position as “an attitude of incredulity towards his own text,” where Carleton’s need to convince his English and Scottish readers of the authenticity of his famine representations results in a preemptive attempt to ward off charges of exaggeration.<sup>106</sup> I would suggest that Carleton’s narrative stance indicates more than an attitude of incredulity toward his text; his lack of knowledge about whether there are three or four starving children with the woman suggests not an unwillingness to *believe* the pictures of suffering he proffers, but rather an unwillingness to *see* them. Carleton directs a reluctant gaze on the famine victims in the novel, taking the position of a witness who forces himself to testify, despite his own discomfort, to something he wishes he did not have to see. After having described in an earlier chapter the Dalton family’s suffering from starvation and fever, Carleton protests that “it would be an infliction of unnecessary pain to detail here the sufferings which this unhappy family had individually and collectively borne” (148). Without saying whether the act of detailing these sufferings would inflict pain on his



readers or himself, Carleton implicitly aligns his own reluctant gaze with that of his readers.

Adopting a narrative stance that aligns him with his English readers rather than his Irish subjects, soliciting his readers' sympathy and granting them the moral high-ground, and directing his harshest criticism against Irish misers rather than British legislators, Carleton thus draws on the imagery of physical degradation that appears in the nationalist poetry without using that degradation to shame Britain. The dynamic of shame intimated in the dedication and preface falls apart within the novel itself, leaving behind an imagery of Irish physical degradation which in the world of Carleton's narrative—unlike in the poetry—forms an accurate reflection of a spiritual, psychological, and moral condition. For Carleton, physical features are a reliable indication of a character's moral and spiritual condition. The Black Prophet—who, in addition to his plots against Mave Sullivan and the Grange, is revealed at the end of the novel as a murderer—has features “indicative of a twofold character, or, we should rather say, calculated to make a twofold impression. At one moment you might consider him handsome, and at another his countenance filled you with an impression of repugnance, if not of absolute aversion, so stern and inhuman were the characteristics which you read in it” (14). Mave Sullivan, by contrast, the most compassionate and idealized character in the novel, is described as so beautiful that her smile “might turn the hatred of a demon into love,” with features “so replete with an expression of innocence and youth, as left on the beholder a conviction that she breathed of utter guilelessness and angelic purity itself” (26). In the descriptions of both Mave and the Black Prophet, Carleton refers to the

capacity of physical appearances to evoke an appropriate emotional response in others—the repugnance and aversion generated by the Black Prophet’s “stern and inhuman” aspect, or the power of Mave’s smile to turn hatred into love. For both characters, then, physical features determine the character’s value in two different ways: their features reflect their own interior moral conditions, and their features affect the emotional and spiritual condition of those who see them.

The physicality of suffering in the novel, likewise, has a dual function, acting as both a reflection of the spiritual and moral condition of the sufferer and as a potentially transformative spectacle for the observer. In his portraits of starving and disease-stricken people, however, Carleton imagines famine-induced suffering as having very different effects on the witness and the sufferer. For the witness, whether a character in the novel or the British and Scottish readers who witness through Carleton’s narrative, the spectacle of starvation has the potential to be spiritually transformative through the power of another person’s suffering to elicit an observer’s sympathetic emotional response. Throughout the novel there are moments when characters are fully or partially transformed after witnessing another character’s physical suffering. Jerry Sullivan, who blames Condy Dalton for his brother’s death, forgives him and allows his daughter to care for the Dalton family when he learns the degree of suffering experienced by the family. At the funeral of Margaret Murtagh, who dies while trying to get food for her starving parents from Darby Skinadre, the neighbors see the state of starvation of the girl’s parents and bring food for them: “They had no sooner appeared, than the sympathies of the assembled neighbors were deeply excited, and there was nothing heard

for some minutes, but groans, sobbings, and general grief” (110). Sarah McGowan, who is initially brought to tears by the beggar woman and her children, later in the narrative is so emotionally affected by the suffering of the people around her that she leaves her father’s house to provide care for them, nursing the Dalton family back to health.

While suffering has a spiritually beneficial effect on witnesses, however, the conditions of hunger and physical degradation created by famine produce precisely the opposite effect in those who experience suffering. Just as the Black Prophet’s and Mave Sullivan’s features are accurate reflections of their moral and spiritual characters, the bodily degradation of famine victims in Carleton’s representations reflects a spiritual and moral degradation caused by hunger. In one of the most detailed and disturbing representations of a famine victim in the novel, Carleton describes a dying mother with her dead and dying children, all lying in an abandoned cabin where Nelly McGowan and a priest find them. The woman, who tries ineffectually to comfort one child and breastfeed another, is represented as being emotionally and morally paralyzed by her suffering:

Between these two claimants was the breaking heart of the woeful mother divided, but the alternations of her love seemed now almost wrought up to the last terrible agonies of mere animal instinct, when the sufferings are strong in proportion to that debility of reason which supervenes in such deaths as arise from famine, or under these feelings of indescribable torture which tore her affection, as it were, to pieces, and paralyzed her higher powers of moral suffering. (272-273)

Carleton describes the condition of starvation as one that takes over every aspect of the woman’s body, mind, and spirit, stripping her of her humanity and reducing her to an animal-like state:

There lay in the woman's eyes—between her knit and painful eyebrows, over her shrunk upper forehead, upon her sharp cheek-bones, and along the ridge of her wasted nose—there lay upon her skeleton arms, pointed elbows, and long-jointed fingers, a frightful expression, at once uniform and varied, that spoke of gaunt and yellow famine in all its most hideous horrors. Her eyeballs protruded even to sharpness, and as she glared about her with a half conscious, and half instinctive look, there seemed a fierce demand in her eyes.... Stripped, as she then was, of all that civilized society presents to a human being on the bed of death ... she might be truly said to have sunk to the mere condition of animal life.... (273-274)

The woman's body is here the source of the narrator's evaluation of her reduction to "the mere condition of animal life." From the methodical scan of the parts of her body—eyes, eyebrows, forehead, cheek-bones, nose, arms, elbows, fingers—the narrator concludes that the body itself "spoke" of famine "in all its most hideous horrors." Instead of the evidence of compassion or love that we first see as the woman tries to comfort her children, the "fierce demand" in her eyes overwhelms her humanity.

For Carleton, what causes the suffering "in such deaths as arise from famine" to render its victims morally paralyzed is the presence of hunger. Describing an assembly of starving people at Margaret Murtagh's wake, Carleton likens the effects of hunger to those of guilt on a person's mental and spiritual condition:

They were all mostly marked also by what appeared to be a feeling of painful abstraction, which, in fact, was nothing else than that abiding desire for necessary food, which in seasons of famine keeps perpetually gnawing, as they term it, at the heart, and pervades the system by that sleepless solicitation of appetite, which, like the presence of guilt, mingles itself up, whilst it lasts, with every thought and action of one's life. (109-110)

Articulated in these terms, the "fierce demand" in the starving woman's eyes, the "abiding desire for food," and the "solicitation of appetite" become all-consuming desires or wants that take over the hungry person's mental, spiritual, and emotional being. That

Carleton compares the pervasiveness of hunger to the “presence of guilt” is particularly telling, for having represented the physical degradation of an Ireland in which famine is “almost perennial” without externalizing the moral responsibility for this degradation, Carleton replaces the dynamic of shame with a condition of guilt. Repeatedly throughout the novel, Carleton uses the language of evidence, guilt, judgment, and punishment to construct the famine conditions and the starving people. Describing the famine riots, Carleton acknowledges that most of the rioters are “goaded” by hunger and suffering, but he nevertheless represents them as transformed into inhuman, savage creatures by a form of judgment: “Their cadaverous and emaciated aspects had something in them so wild and wolfish, and the fire of famine blazed so savagely in their hollow eyes, that many of them looked like creatures changed from their very humanity by some judicial plague, that had been sent down from heaven to punish and desolate the land” (176-177). Carleton maps the judgment and punishments of “heaven” onto the breaking of human laws during the famine riots, going so far as to pass judgment on hunger itself, which becomes criminal as the people break the law in order to obtain food:

[O]thers, more fortunate, were tearing and devouring bread, with a fury, to which only the unnatural appetites of so many famished maniacs could be compared. As might be expected, most of these inconsiderate acts of license were punished by the consequences which followed them. Sickness of various descriptions, giddiness, retchings, fainting-fits, convulsions, and, in some cases, death itself, were induced by this wolfish and frightful gluttony on the part of the starving people. (178)

The notion that famishing people could have “unnatural” appetites or that starving people could be accused of “gluttony” imposes a moral judgment on the condition of hunger, and Carleton reinforces this judgment by characterizing the sickness caused by starving

people eating too quickly as a punishment for the “inconsiderate acts of license” through which they obtained the food.

As hunger and guilt are constructed as analogous states in the novel—both capable of pervading an individual’s entire being, both carrying with them judgment and punishment—the famine narrative and the murder-mystery plot become closely connected. Kelleher suggests that the famine and the murder-mystery narratives have competing requirements, so that they work against one another in the text: “As the novel develops, and in particular as it draws to a close, the differing, even competing requirements of its various plots become apparent; the conventions of love-story and murder-mystery demand complete resolution, the famine material defies such closure.”<sup>107</sup>

I would argue, against Kelleher, that even though the famine and murder plots would seem to have different narrative requirements—especially if the “famine material” concerns the 1840s famine during which Carleton writes rather than the 1817 famine about which he writes—Carleton treats them as similar plots. For Carleton, both the 1817 famine and the twenty-year-old murder have disrupted the social order, both require a recognition of guilt, and both can be resolved once a true recognition occurs. Like the Black Prophet’s murder, which has continued to haunt the community and the Sullivan and Dalton families for twenty years, famine and hunger represent a collapsing of the social and moral boundaries that hold Carleton’s Ireland together. After describing the state of the country during the famine, including the food riots as a response to misers and mealmongers, Carleton offers a meditation on the effects of hunger on society:

Hunger, they say, will break through stone walls; and when we reflect that, in addition to this irresistible stimulus, we may add a spirit of strong

prejudice against these heartless persons, it is not surprising that the starving multitudes should, in the ravening madness of famine, follow up its outrageous impulses, and forget those legal restraints, or moral principles, that protect property under ordinary or different circumstances. (151)

Hunger is a problematic state for Carleton because of its ability to break through “stone walls” that he would rather see unbroken. If the resolution of the murder-mystery involves finding the truth behind a law that has been broken years ago in order to set right again the social order within the community, then the resolution of the famine narrative involves alleviating that hunger which is causing the social order to break down in the novel’s narrative present.

Carleton, like the journalists and poets I discuss in this chapter, was representing Ireland as it was undergoing sweeping changes brought on by the Famine. Just as the Famine impacted so many other elements of Irish society, it changed both British and Irish discursive constructions of the relationship between the two countries by putting into circulation a set of images through which starving, degraded bodies, a nationalist discourse of shame, and a discourse of guilt and criminality became connected in the political imaginary. Through their capacity to figure disputed national and colonial boundaries, these images of Famine bodies enable writers with different personal and political investments to articulate competing definitions of Ireland’s relationship to England. The British illustrated press uses the structure of the illustrated article and the alternating appeals to horror and sympathy to construct the troubled boundaries of Famine bodies as figures for an internally divided Ireland, whose boundaries with

England remain intact despite the colonial relationship. In the revolutionary verse published in the Irish nationalist press, by contrast, the emphasis shifts from divisions within Ireland to the nature of the boundary between Ireland and England, with writers figuring a unified but enslaved Irish nation through the Famine body's conferral of shame on an oppressive occupying England. Finally, Carleton represents the condition of hunger itself as a threat to the boundaries that maintain Ireland's internal order, and by using a legal-judicial model of criminality, guilt, and punishment to contain the Famine body's power to threaten social and political boundaries, he reinserts Ireland within the order of the imperial nation-state whose policies he seems to challenge in his novel's dedication and preface.

### Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> In *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion* (Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave, 2002), Christine Kinealy counts that "Between 1995 and 1997 more books were published on the Famine than in the previous 150 years" (3). For some of the most significant of these publications see Cathal Póirtéir, ed., *The Great Irish Famine* (Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press, 1995); Christopher Morash and Richard Hayes, eds., *'Fearful Realities': New Perspectives on the Famine* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996); Margaret E. Crawford, ed., *The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast, 1997); Christine Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland* (London and Chicago:



---

Pluto Press, 1997); and Cormac Ó Gráda, ed., *Famine 150: Commemorative Lecture Series* (Dublin: Teagasc: University College Dublin, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> For a concise survey of the Famine's impact on Ireland, see Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion* (Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave, 2002), 211-221.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1995), 2, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine*, 182.

<sup>6</sup> See Brendan Ó'Cathaoir, *Famine Diary* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 173: "Four of the captured rebels, O'Brien, Meagher, Terence Bellew MacManus and Patrick O'Donohue, were convicted of high treason and sentenced to death. The state prisoners ennobled their attempted rising by refusing to ask for pardons. The government, wishing to avoid creating martyrs, passed a measure commuting their sentences to transportation for life."

<sup>7</sup> *The Illustrated London News*, 13 February 1847. Reprinted in Colm Tóibín and Diarmid Ferriter, eds., *The Irish Famine: A Documentary* (London: Profile Books, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Ó'Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 90.

<sup>9</sup> *Nation*, 5 December 1846. Qtd. in Ó'Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 85.

---

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the language of skeletons and spectres in famine literature, see Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92-95.

<sup>11</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 15 December 1849. Reprinted in John Killen, ed. *The Famine Decade: Contemporary Accounts, 1841-1851* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995), 232.

<sup>12</sup> *Nation*, 27 March 1847. Reprinted in Killen, ed., *Famine Decade*, 131.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), ed. W. L. Renwick (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 430-431.

<sup>14</sup> Cormac Ó'Gráda, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>15</sup> Christine Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland* (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997), 42, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Christine Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (1861; Glasgow and London: Cameron & Ferguson; Stationer's Hall Court, 1876).

<sup>18</sup> See Robert Mahoney, "Historicizing the Famine: John Mitchel and the Prophetic Voice of Swift," in *'Fearful Realities': New Perspectives on the Famine*, eds. Christopher Morash and Richard Hayes (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), 131-137, for an interesting discussion of Mitchel's interest in Swift's text at the height of the Famine.

<sup>19</sup> The Britannia/John Bull and Hibernia/Erin figures were especially popular in *Punch*, which borrowed the national personifications for primarily anti-Irish poems, illustrations,

---

and satirical articles, such as an 1845 poem in which Britannia urges Hibernia to berate her “useless members” (“Britannia to Hibernia on Her Useless Members. A (Thoroughly) English Melody,” *Punch*, 22 February 1845), or, more sympathetically, an 1846 illustration of Hibernia as Cinderella, with Britannia and Caledonia as the wicked stepsisters (“The Irish Cinderella and Her Haughty Sisters, Britannia and Caledonia,” *Punch*, 25 April 1846). For a discussion of the John Bull/Hibernia marriage as a metaphor for the Union, see Edward G. Lengel, *The Irish Through British Eyes: Perceptions of Ireland in the Famine Era* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 10-12.

<sup>20</sup> Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 10 (2 January 1847), 2. Qtd. in Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 40.

<sup>22</sup> “The English Labourer’s Burden; or, the Irish Old Man of the Mountain,” *Punch*, 24 February 1849.

<sup>23</sup> Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 72.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to Fegan, see Edward G. Lengel, *The Irish Through British Eyes: Perceptions of Ireland in the Famine Era* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger Publishers, 2002), and Robert Fitzroy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: A. Lane, 1993).

- 
- <sup>25</sup> Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 7, 29.
- <sup>26</sup> Kelleher, 39.
- <sup>27</sup> Kelleher, 24.
- <sup>28</sup> Ó Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 52.
- <sup>29</sup> Qtd. in Ó Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 106.
- <sup>30</sup> *Nation*, 27 March 1847. Qtd. in Ó Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 107.
- <sup>31</sup> Qtd. in Ó Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 87.
- <sup>32</sup> Ó Cathaoir, *Famine Diary*, 104.
- <sup>33</sup> See Kelleher, 23, 21.
- <sup>34</sup> James Mahoney, "Sketches in the West of Ireland," *Illustrated London News*, 13 February 1847. Reprinted in Killen, ed., *Famine Decade*, 111-114.
- <sup>35</sup> See Ó Cathaoir, 85, 87, 90, 118, 125.
- <sup>36</sup> See Ó Cathaoir, 149; and Killen, 166.
- <sup>37</sup> See Ó Cathaoir, 91, 126; and Killen, 99, 148.
- <sup>38</sup> See Killen, 133, 232; and Ó Cathaoir, 154, 156.
- <sup>39</sup> Killen, 59-60.
- <sup>40</sup> William Bennett, *Narrative of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland* (London and Dublin, 1847), 26. Qtd. in Ó Cathaoir, 109.
- <sup>41</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3-4.
- <sup>42</sup> Kristeva, 4.

- 
- <sup>43</sup> Nicholas Cummins, letter to *Times*, 24 December 1846. Qtd. in Ó Cathaoir, 91.
- <sup>44</sup> *The Vindicator*, 4 February 1846. Reprinted in Killen, 53.
- <sup>45</sup> Kristeva, 8, original emphasis.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, original emphasis.
- <sup>47</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 55-56.
- <sup>48</sup> Edward G. Lengel, *The Irish Through British Eyes: Perceptions of Ireland in the Famine Era* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 6.
- <sup>49</sup> In addition to Lengel, see Leslie A. Williams, *Daniel O'Connell, the British Press, and the Irish Famine*, ed. William H.A. Williams (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003); and Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- <sup>50</sup> See Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine*, chapter 3, for a detailed account of private charity during the Famine.
- <sup>51</sup> Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine*, 125.
- <sup>52</sup> For a more detailed account of the political battles over the Corn Laws and coercion, see Lengel, 55-66; or Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine*, chapters 2 and 5.
- <sup>53</sup> Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine*, 37-38.
- <sup>54</sup> John Russell, April 1846 letter to Lord Bessborough, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1846-47. Reprinted in Colm Tóibín and Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Irish Famine: A Documentary* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2001), 78.

---

<sup>55</sup> John Russell, November 1847 letter to Lord Clarendon, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1847-52. Reprinted in Tóibín and Ferriter, 78-79.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Trevelyan, 3 February 1846 letter to Sir Randolph Routh, Head of Army Commissariat Department. Reprinted in Tóibín and Ferriter, 70.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Trevelyan, 9 October 1846 letter to Lord Monteaule. Reprinted in Tóibín and Ferriter, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Earl Grey, 23 March 1846 speech to the House of Lords. Reprinted in Tóibín and Ferriter, 73-74.

<sup>59</sup> Leslie A. Williams, *Daniel O'Connell, the British Press, and the Irish Famine*, ed. William H.A. Williams (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 9-10. *Punch*, an illustrated satiric weekly that differed from the more serious *Illustrated London News* and the *Pictorial Times*, was also founded in the 1841.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, *Daniel O'Connell, the British Press, and the Irish Famine*, 9, 77.

<sup>61</sup> Noel Kissane, ed., *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995), 114.

<sup>62</sup> James Mahoney, "Sketches in the West of Ireland," *Illustrated London News* 13 February 1847.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Kelleher, 23.

<sup>65</sup> James Mahoney, "Sketches in the West of Ireland," *Illustrated London News* 13 February 1847.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>67</sup> Martin Tropp, *Images of Fear: How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture (1818-1918)* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 1990), 5.

<sup>68</sup> James Mahoney, "Sketches in the West of Ireland," *Illustrated London News* 13 February 1847.

<sup>69</sup> James Mahoney, "Sketches in the West of Ireland," *Illustrated London News* 20 February 1847.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Pictorial Times*, 30 January 1847. Reprinted in Noel Kissane, ed., *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995), 83.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine*, 131.

<sup>74</sup> "Riot in Dungarvan," *Waterford Freeman*, 3 October 1846. Reprinted in Kissane, *The Irish Famine*, 54-55.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> "Food Riots in Ireland. Conduct of the Liberator," *Pictorial Times*, 10 October 1846.

<sup>77</sup> The notion that "a retributive justice" is responsible for national misfortune is consistent with the commonly held idea, outlined by Christopher Morash in his study of nineteenth-century literary representations of the Famine, that the Famine was an act of God, sent as punishment for national sin. See Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1995), chapter 5.

---

<sup>78</sup> Thomas D’Arcy McGee, “The Famine in the Land,” *Nation* 5:236, 17 April 1847.

Reprinted in Christopher Morash, ed., *The Hungry Voice* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 194-195. Line numbers for all poetry will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>79</sup> Speranza (Jane Francesca Elgee), “The Exodus,” “The Famine Year” (originally “The Stricken Land,” published in the *Nation*, 5:224, 23 January 1847), and “France in ’93: A Lesson from Foreign History” (originally published in the *Nation*, 5:233, 27 March 1847). Reprinted in Morash, *Hungry Voice*, 219-220, 221-222, 225-226.

<sup>80</sup> Anonymous, “Thanatos, 1849,” *Irishman* 1:18, 5 May 1849. Reprinted in Morash, *Hungry Voice*, 165-166.

<sup>81</sup> Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 114.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-5.

<sup>83</sup> *Writing the Irish Famine* focuses primarily on two narrative forms that Morash sees as structuring the textual production of the Famine: the Malthusian narrative of progress and millenarian narratives of apocalypse. In the first two parts of the book, Morash spends a chapter exploring the English foundations of these narratives and how they governed English constructions of the Famine, then he turns to Irish Famine representations that work with or against the English models. The final chapter and conclusion focus on William Carleton as a writer whose body of work displays attempts to use these narratives models, but, repeatedly finding them lacking, ends with a crisis of representation that Morash describes as “the end of writing.”

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Christopher Morash, ed., *The Hungry Voice* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 18.



---

<sup>86</sup> Fegan, 168-9

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>89</sup> Sean Ryder, "Reading Lessons: Famine and the *Nation*, 1845-1849," in *'Fearful Realities': New Perspectives on the Famine*, eds. Christopher Morash and Richard Hayes (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), 152.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine*, 206.

<sup>92</sup> Morash suggests that "J." may have stood for John De Jean Frazer, a carpenter who wrote for the *Nation* and the *Irishman* during the Famine years and died in poverty in 1852. See Morash, *Hungry Voice*, 286.

<sup>93</sup> "The Queen's Visit to Ireland," *Illustrated London News*, 4 August 1849. Reprinted in Killen, ed., 223.

<sup>94</sup> Eve Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," *GLQ* 1:1 (1993), 5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> William Carleton, *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979). Originally published in London and Belfast: Simms and M'Intyre, 1847. Subsequent page references will be included parenthetically within the text.

<sup>98</sup> Kelleher, 34.

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 33, 30.

<sup>100</sup> Qtd. in Robert Lee Wolff, *William Carleton, Irish Peasant Novelist: A Preface to His Works* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1980), 3.

<sup>101</sup> Fegan, 131-132.

<sup>102</sup> See Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 155-187. Morash argues that Carleton was regarded as an authentic representative of the Irish peasantry at a time when groups ranging from the Young Irelanders to Evangelicals were trying to appropriate the peasantry for their own political purposes. Looking at the ways in which Carleton's writings resisted such appropriations of the "people's" voice, Morash reads Carleton as reflecting an internal division within the Irish peasantry, articulated in his writing as a set of the peasantry with bourgeois values that is elevated above the rest and that enables the middle class to see in Carleton's peasantry "a flattering reflection of themselves" (60).

<sup>103</sup> Eileen A. Sullivan, *William Carleton*, Twayne's English Authors Series, #376 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 17.

<sup>104</sup> Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 156.

<sup>105</sup> Carleton's narrator does insert himself briefly into the narrative at one point, supplementing his description of the place where the 20-year-old murder was committed with a reference to his memory of having played in the place as a boy: "We remember having played in it when young, and the feeling we experienced was one of awe and terror, to which might be added ... an impression that we were removed hundreds of miles from the busy on-goings and noisy tumults of life, to which, as if seeking protection, we generally hastened with a strong sense of relief, after having tremblingly gratified our

---

boyish curiosity” (7). This self-insertion, however, has nothing to do with the famine conditions, functioning only to establish the novel’s setting and the narrator’s first-hand knowledge of the story he is about to tell.

<sup>106</sup> Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, 175.

<sup>107</sup> Kelleher, 31.

## **Chapter Four: Prisoners' Bodies, Discourses of Rights, and Gendered Political Participation: Representations of the Northern Irish Hunger Strikes**

In 1980 and 1981, Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland staged two hunger strikes demanding the right to political prisoner status and protesting the British government's criminalization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army's<sup>1</sup> politically motivated violence. The hunger strikes were the culmination of a series of escalating protests by men and women within the Long Kesh and Armagh<sup>2</sup> prisons beginning in 1976, when the British government revoked special category (or political) status and the rights this status entailed; the prisoners responded first by refusing to wear the prison uniform and later by refusing to wash themselves or slop out their cell chamber pots. The first hunger strike, in which a total of 37 men in Long Kesh and three women in Armagh participated, began on 27 October and ended on 18 December 1980, when the prisoners, fearing for the life of one hunger striker who was rapidly deteriorating, accepted a compromise offered by the British government. The compromise refused to grant the language of political status but was supposed to have met the substance of the prisoners' demands, which included the right to wear their own clothes rather than prison uniforms and to freely associate with other political prisoners. When it became apparent that the agreement did not adequately address the demands and that the government had no intention of honoring the spirit of the compromise, the prisoners in Long Kesh organized a second hunger strike, which began on 1 March 1981 and resulted in the deaths of ten prisoners. At stake, for the prisoners themselves and for the overwhelming numbers of

Catholics in Northern Ireland who showed support for the hunger strikers, were not only the prisoners' specific demands to rights inside the prisons, but the relationship between England and Northern Ireland and the rights of a nation within an occupied territory.

Running throughout the public discourse on the prison protests and the hunger strikes, the language of rights is a central part of the history of the Troubles and the resurgence of militant nationalism in Northern Ireland. The catalyst for the Troubles was a series of public civil rights demonstrations by Northern Catholics, who began organizing in the late 1960s to protest discrimination in government elections and voting laws, public housing allocation, and public sector employment. The Troubles are widely considered to have begun in October 1968, when the predominantly Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) police force violently broke up a peaceful civil rights march in Derry, leading to two days of rioting between Catholic residents and the RUC. One of the most emotionally charged events in the early history of the Troubles was Bloody Sunday, when on 30 January 1972 the British Army opened fire and killed 13 people during a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association march protesting the 1971 introduction of internment without trial. With the Provisional IRA forming in 1970, militant Republicanism gained more support as policies like internment were enforced and events like Bloody Sunday galvanized the community. The Northern nationalist movement thus reemerged out of protests for the civil rights of Catholics as minorities within a Protestant-dominated sociopolitical context and as oppressed subjects within an imperialist state.

By focusing on the collective subordination of the Catholic nationalist community through its effects on individuals within that community, the civil rights movement represented the rights of the individual and the rights of the national community as inseparable. In this chapter, I will argue that the discursive construction of Northern nationalism in relation to the language of rights underwent a significant shift during the prison protests and the hunger strikes, with troubling implications for the position of women within the nationalist community. Most work published on the hunger strikes has been either journalistic investigations into the history of the strikes, such as David Beresford's *Ten Men Dead* and Padraig O'Malley's *Biting at the Grave*, or anecdotal accounts of the prison protests from the perspective of men who were IRA prisoners in the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as Lawrence McKeown's *Nor Meekly Serve My Time* and *Out of Time*.<sup>3</sup> Focusing on representations produced by the prisoners and the Sinn Fein leadership during the protests and immediately following the deaths of the ten hunger strikers, the first half of this chapter will draw on these histories in order to chart how the discursive and visual constructions of the prisoners have impacted articulations of Northern nationalism. Whereas the civil rights movement regarded the rights of the nationalist community and the rights of individuals as integrally linked, the discursive and visual constructions of the prisoners' bodies during the prison protests and the hunger strikes disarticulated these conceptions of individual and collective rights. Moreover, the relative success of the hunger strikes as compared with the preceding prison protests resulted in a shift away from protecting individuals from their governments and toward emphasizing the rights of the nation over the rights of those who compose it. In their

constructions of the pre-hunger strikes no-wash protest, which failed either to achieve political status or to generate widespread public support, the prisoners strategically downplayed their nationalist political aims by deploying a human rights discourse centered on the torture of individual prisoners. With the hunger strikes, however, the rights discourse shifted from emphasizing the individual to emphasizing the rights of the nation, such that the hunger strikers' willingness to sacrifice the needs of their own bodies for the symbolic attainment of national liberation effectively subordinated individual rights to the aims of the nationalist movement.

This shift raises the question that guides the second half of this chapter: What are the implications of the hunger strikes for women within the nationalist community, whose rights have always been relegated to a subordinate status? While Begoña Aretxaga and Laura Lyons have productively analyzed the ways in which the Armagh women's participation in the blanket and no-wash protests helped to complicate the positioning of Republican women, there has not been the same scholarly attention to the implications of the hunger strikes for women. In the transition from the no-wash protest to the 1981 hunger strike, the publicly circulating images of Republican women change from images of actively protesting women prisoners to images of prisoners' mothers, wives, and sisters—women defined by their relationship to the male prisoners, portrayed as the bearers of the nationalist movement's coffins and the mourners at its funerals rather than as full participants. The second half of the chapter will explore the implications for Northern Irish women of this changing imagery and the hunger strike's idealization of individual sacrifice through three textual representations of the hunger

strikes: Anne Devlin's screenplay *The Long March*, her play *Ourselves Alone*, and Terry George's film *Some Mother's Son* .

### **From Individual to National Rights: The No-Wash Protest and the Hunger Strikes**

The dying and the dead of Clare lay rotting in their slime  
And in the inky gruesome darkness they screamed for her behind,  
The smelling loathsome stench of rotting flesh hung in the air  
A sea of putrefying human waste engulfed them everywhere.  
The little helpless children cried no more in hungrying pain  
'Neath Atlantic waves in watery graves ne'er they'd cry again.  
For seven days a tempest raged and the coffin ship was tossed  
And when a calm fell upon the earth the pride of Clare was lost....

But down the years her tortured heart was warmed by a risen spirit  
A resistance sown by her sons of sons that we today inherit.  
And at night I hear the rat go creeping and *The Star of Hope* sails by  
The walnut table has turned to gold but the fat man will not hear my cry.  
And the stinking filthy stench of rotting flesh and waste, screams out, a  
    living Hell!  
'Tis my body dying in my coffin ship in this lonely tomblike prison cell.  
    —Bobby Sands, "Ghosts in My Tomb," 41-48, 53-58.<sup>4</sup>

In many of the poems and short pieces Bobby Sands wrote while he was a prisoner in Long Kesh's H-Blocks, he constructs his own imprisonment as part of a long history of Irish nationalist resistance to British occupation by alluding to heroic figures out of a nationalist past: Wolfe Tone, the Botany Bay prisoners, Fenian rebel and prisoner Tom Clarke, James Connolly and Padraig Pearse, and twentieth-century hunger strikers Terence MacSwiney, Michael Gaughan, and Frank Stagg.<sup>5</sup> Among these allusions to past Irish revolutionaries, Sands' poem "Ghosts in My Tomb," which compares his prison cell to a coffin ship from the Great Famine, seems slightly out of



place. Whereas the litany of names refers to a history of active resistance and an idealization of self-sacrifice for the Irish nation, the images of dying people on the coffin ship evoke large-scale oppression, and the focus on a group of refugees fleeing Ireland for America suggests a survivalist impulse that runs counter to the tradition of nationalist martyrdom. Moreover, while the political education Sands received as a member of the IRA would certainly have included the failed Young Ireland uprising of 1848, he chooses in his poem about this moment in Irish history to ignore the uprising and to engage instead with a narrative of extreme suffering under horrifying conditions, of powerlessness in the face of oppression.

Yet because of the particular conditions of Sands' imprisonment at the time he wrote this poem,<sup>6</sup> the graphic images of physical suffering and bodily degradation that mark representations of Famine victims are at the same time strikingly resonant for the experience Sands is communicating through his poetic analogy. Between September 1976 and the start of Sands' hunger strike in March 1981, Republican prisoners staged a series of escalating, increasingly physically degrading protests against the British government's policy of criminalizing the IRA. As part of a compromise designed to secure an IRA ceasefire, in 1972 the British government had granted "special category" status for Northern Irish prisoners convicted of politically motivated offenses. This status carried with it a number of rights: prisoners could wear their own clothes, abstain from prison labor, associate freely, plan educational and recreational activities, and be granted a fifty percent remission of their sentences for good behavior. In 1976, however, as part of a new strategy for dealing with the political violence in Northern Ireland,<sup>7</sup> the British

government rescinded special category status and its privileges, so that IRA members convicted before 1 March 1976 would continue to be treated as political prisoners, while those convicted after that date would be classified and treated as ordinary criminals. The “blanket protest” began when Ciaran Nugent, the first IRA member convicted after this policy went into effect, entered Long Kesh and refused to wear the prison uniform, covering himself with a blanket instead. The protest escalated mostly in response to confrontations with the prison guards (called “screws” by the prisoners and the Republican community). The “no-wash” protest began in 1978 when, after guards refused to allow prisoners a second towel to cover themselves while they showered, the prisoners refused to leave their cells to wash or use the toilet. The protest quickly escalated in response to confrontations with the guards over emptying chamber pots; prisoners first tried to throw the contents out through their windows or spyholes, and when guards threw them back into the cells, they poured urine through the cracks of their doors and smeared excrement on their walls.<sup>8</sup>

If the names and stories of Irish martyrs speak to the political goals and ideals for which Sands endures the conditions of his imprisonment, then the images of Famine victims aboard a coffin ship speak to the physicality of what he endures during the no-wash protest. Tim Pat Coogan, an Irish journalist who recounted his visit to the H-Blocks during the protest in 1980, describes the cell of one of the prisoners on protest, which he compares to nineteenth-century punishment cells used for Fenian prisoners in Tasmania: “It was covered in excrement almost to the ceiling on all four walls. In one corner there was a pile of rotting, blue moulded [*sic*] food and excrement....”<sup>9</sup> Beyond

the repulsive conditions imposed by the no-wash protest itself, the decision to join the protest carried with it repercussions imposed by the warders: prisoners were confined to their cells for twenty-four hours per day, with no exercise or recreation; all furniture except for a foam mattress and a chamber pot were removed from their cells; they were limited to one visit per month; their diets consisted of inadequate quantities of food that was often inedible; and they were subjected to beatings and degrading body searches by the prison guards. Written from within such an environment, Sands' imagery in his poem of Famine refugees locked inside the hold of a coffin ship, sitting "meekly in their tomb" (33)—a word Sands uses repeatedly to describe his prison cell—and engulfed in "a sea of putrefying human waste" (44) becomes as much an articulation of Sands' own present as a recounting of suffering 130 years ago. In the poem's final stanza Sands inserts the narrative of resistance offered by the heroic figures he invokes in other writings by claiming inheritance of a "resistance sown" by the coffin ship's "sons of sons," but more compelling than this relationship of ancestry and inheritance is the one with which he begins the poem:

I joined them somewhere on the road from Clare  
Their sunken expressions familiar like living corpses  
Their grey sunken eyes peered through tattered hair  
A dying hoard [*sic*] of ragged, wretched suffering. (1-4)

This opening assertion that Sands has "joined" the Famine refugees, that he has become one of them, resonates with the clear parallels he constructs between the conditions of his "lonely tomblike prison cell" and the conditions of the coffin ship. Instead of the linear narrative of ancestry that makes Sands the inheritor of a resistance movement inspired by the coffin ship victims, past folds into present, making Sands a participant in their

suffering and oppression. The familiar imagery of the Famine becomes “familiar” in Sands’ present for its capacity to describe the H-Blocks’ thin, ragged, unwashed blanketmen.

This continuity of body imagery linking the Famine to the H-Blocks in Sands’ poem reflects a broader discursive continuity that connects the discourses of the Famine period to the political negotiations between Northern Ireland nationalists and the British government in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Like the political discourse of shame that structured the Young Ireland poetry of the Famine, the IRA prisoners’ strategic constructions of their own bodies for a local and international audience during the no-wash protest and the hunger strikes leveraged appalling images of bodily degradation in order to indict the British government in the court of world opinion for its practices in Northern Ireland. Conversely, the British government’s policy of criminalization—which, along with the related language of terrorism and terrorists, became its standard line in describing the IRA—parallels the Famine-period discourse of guilt and criminality in British coercive legislation and the press’s preoccupation with food riots, violence against landlords and merchants, and theft as threats to law and order. As the images in Sands’ poem suggest, the association of physical suffering with a discourse of shame and guilt continues to exist long after the discursive battle over Famine bodies ended.

Within the historical and political context of the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, this network of associations with images of degraded bodies functioned in significantly different ways than it did during the Famine. Besides the intervening history of Irish anti-colonial resistance, the partition of the twenty-six-county Irish Free

State and the six counties of Northern Ireland in 1921, and the subsequent formation of the Republic of Ireland, I want to argue that two international histories were important both for the sequence of events leading to the end of the hunger strikes in October 1981 and for the constructions of these events and the prisoners' bodies for the public: First, the emergence of an international human rights discourse following World War II and the trials of Nazi war criminals, which placed narratives of inflicted bodily suffering and visual images of physical degradation within a new discourse of crimes against humanity or human dignity; and second, the wave of anti-colonial liberation movements in the mid-twentieth century and the resulting formation of third world nation-states around the world. Though the actual bodies of the prisoners were confined to cells in Long Kesh prison, the strategically constructed images of their bodies from the no-wash protest through the end of the hunger strikes circulated within an international arena that was informed by these two contexts.

Looking more closely at Sands' representations of the no-wash protest and the beginning of his hunger strike, as well as other representations of these events from the international press, Sinn Fein, and the British government, I will argue that the images of the prisoners' bodily degradation effectively disarticulated constructions of the rights of the national community from the rights of individuals within that community by positing a relationship between individual and collective rights that required the strategic privileging of one over the other. Whereas during the no-wash protest the prisoners invoked—with little success—a discourse of individual human rights based on a controversial claim that the H-Blocks conditions were inflicted on the prisoners by the

British government, the hunger strikes and the demonstrated political support they elicited from the Northern Irish Catholic community translated these claims of oppression from an individual to a collective political level, constructing the prisoners' violated "rights" not through individual claims of politically-motivated bad treatment, but through a collective claim that the British government was denying the right to national self-determination. The imagery of the hunger strikes, by rendering the bodies of the prisoners more meaningful as metaphorical sacrifices for the nation than as representations of personal suffering, thus effectively shifted the dominant discourse of political rights in Northern Ireland away from privileging the individual who must be protected from the oppressive imperialist state, and returned to a 1916 Connolly and Pearse discourse privileging the Irish nation, which must be liberated through the sacrifices of individuals.

### ***The No-Wash Protest***

In *One Day in My Life*, Sands presents his experience in the H-Blocks at the height of the no-wash protest as an unrelenting sequence of assaults on his body and dignity. Smuggled out of the H-Blocks—like other written communications (or "comms") between the prisoners and the IRA leadership—in the body cavities of prisoners and their visitors, Sands' account was written over a period of time during the no-wash protest, though it supposedly represents the events of a single day. Sands, the Public Relations Officer for the H-Blocks prisoners during the blanket and no-wash protests, was clearly fashioning his day-in-the-life account for a public audience.

According to Laurence McKeown, another participant in the no-wash protest who was on the 1981 hunger strike for 70 days before his family agreed to medical intervention, the prisoners were conscious of and pleased by the increased media coverage that accompanied the protest's escalation: "Within the H-Blocks we felt we had achieved a victory by creating a stir in the media. We also began to develop a growing awareness of the power of the media and the need to propagate our beliefs and aspirations to a wider audience."<sup>10</sup> Sands, who wrote statements for the press and whose smuggled writings appeared in IRA newspapers during his imprisonment, was savvy and strategic about how to represent the prisoners for the media. In a comm he wrote to outside IRA leadership not long before his hunger strike began, for example, he writes explicitly about his wife and parents as potential "dangerous loose ends" if the press were to interview them, and about how his sister Marcella "if groomed" might be helpful with the press.<sup>11</sup>

In his construction of the no-wash protest, Sands narrates an experience of bodily degradation, deprivation, and abuse. References to the body or its parts appear so frequently that Sands' body becomes the narrative's primary object and its suffering the primary plot. From the opening paragraph, he directs attention to his body's condition and sensory experiences: the cold is "biting at my naked body," and "every bone in my body seemed to be protesting" at sleeping on a damp foam mattress on the floor. Emphasizing his nakedness, he provides readers with a description of his cell—the primary setting for his narrative—filtered through each of his senses:

Naked, I rose and crossed the cell floor through the shadows to the corner to urinate. It was deadly cold. The stench rose to remind me of my situation and the floor was damp and gooey in places. Piles of rubbish lay scattered about the cell, and in the dimness dark, eerie figures screamed at

me from the surrounding dirty, mutilated walls. The stench of excreta and urine was heavy and lingering. I lifted the small water container from amongst the rubbish and challenged an early morning drink in a vain effort to remove the foul taste in my throat.... It was beginning to grey outside as dawn approached, and the crows began to assemble themselves in long black lines upon the snow-covered barbed wire fencing.... Apart from the caws of the crows it was sinisterly quiet. (26)

Through this sensory narrative of waking to another morning in his cell, Sands establishes his own lived bodily experience as the text's primary source of authority and point of reference.

Intertwined with this subjective construction of the body, however, is an equally important construction of the body as an object, displayed for the reader as a spectacle of degradation and abuse. In a description of his own body that recalls the many eyewitness descriptions of Famine victims, for example, Sands catches sight of his reflection in a window after a visit with his family:

Other screws came walking past me, their searching, probing eyes glaring at me as if I were something out of the ordinary. But then I was, I thought, staring at my reflection in the window again: my uncombed hair ruffled and shaggy and my long beard untamed and wild like a bramble bush, and from somewhere in between, ghostly white and, dare I say it, somewhat frighteningly, appeared my own face, rugged and aged before its time. My cheeks and eyes were sunken and withdrawn into my face, creating a hollow from where my glassy, piercing eyes peered back at me, and unseen and covered by the prison garb stood my dilapidated, physically wrecked body. (59)

As his subjective gaze meets the image of his face, and as he creates an imaginary impression of what his body must look like beneath the prison uniform he wears in order to be allowed a visit, Sands constructs himself as at once spectacle and spectator, the frightening image of a "ghostly" figure that stares out of sunken eyes and the frightened onlooker who is confronted by this image.



This vacillation between lived experience and body as object, between spectator and spectacle, enables Sands to make his narrative function both as the testimony of a torture victim and as eyewitness account of human rights abuses. He self-consciously employs human rights language to describe his treatment in the H-Blocks. In words that echo the preamble to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), which recognizes the “inherent dignity” of “all members of the human family,”<sup>12</sup> Sands describes the prison guards’ “pleasure in attacking the dignity of the naked prisoners-of-war” (29) and his humiliation at having his body scrutinized by them: “If I had been able to speak I would have told them that they had humiliated me enough and any more humiliating to be done *they* could do it. They had forced me to degrade myself enough already” (60). Much of Sands’ language throughout his narrative recalls Article 5 of the *Universal Declaration*: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” He repeatedly refers to his treatment as “torture,” the guards as “torture-mongers” (46), the punishment block as a “torture centre within a torture centre” (47). Moreover, Sands twice invokes the context out of which the *Universal Declaration* arose—the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders for “crimes against humanity” following the end of World War II—by comparing himself to “something last seen in Stalag 18 or Dachau” (35) and claiming that the prison grounds “reminded me of a clip of film I once saw, when I was young, of a Nazi concentration camp in winter” (61).

Explicitly arguing that the H-Blocks represent a case of human rights abuse, Sands extends his claims to inhuman treatment beyond the guards' beatings to encompass the living conditions within the prison:

Who among those so-called humanitarians who had kept their silence on the H Blocks, who among them could put a name on this type of humiliation and torture, when men are forced by extreme torture into the position that they had to embark upon a dirt strike to highlight the inhumanity poured upon them! ... An unwashed body, naked and wrecked with muscular pain, squatting in a corner, in a den of disease, amid piles of putrefying rubbish, forced to defecate upon the ground where the excreta would lie and the smell would mingle with the already sickening stench of urine and decaying waste food. Let them find a name for that sort of torture, I thought.... (41)

Sands' characterization of the conditions within his cell as torture, central to his claims of inhumane treatment in the H-Blocks, raises the central point of controversy provoked by the no-wash protest: the question of whether the H-Blocks conditions were imposed on the prisoners by the prison authorities and by the British government that authorized them, or whether these conditions were self-inflicted by the prisoners as a result of their protests. As the reference to "so-called humanitarians" keeping their silence suggests, the no-wash protest elicited little support from human rights organizations, despite formal complaints submitted by the prisoners and ample documentation of the prison conditions, which Archbishop Tomás O Fiaich, the Roman Catholic Primate of All Ireland, publicly compared to "the spectacle of hundreds of homeless people living in sewer-pipes in the slums of Calcutta."<sup>13</sup> While the European Commission on Human Rights and Amnesty International had both taken notice of Northern Irish prisoners in 1978 reports about interrogation practices for Republican detainees,<sup>14</sup> neither organization regarded the H-Blocks conditions as a human rights violation. The European Commission on Human

Rights in June 1980 rejected four prisoners' complaints that their conditions of imprisonment violated the European Convention of Human Rights, stating that these conditions were the result of "self-inflicted debasement and humiliation to an almost sub-human level."<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International suggested that the prisoners should not be deprived of exercise for long periods of time, but it largely ignored the other claims of abuse in the H-Blocks and expressed its opposition to the prisoners' claims to political status.<sup>16</sup> Both organizations—as well as much of the Republican community—viewed the H-Blocks conditions as self-inflicted by prisoners who were degrading themselves in an attempt to elicit public sympathy for their demand for political status.

The question of who bears responsibility for the conditions in the H-Blocks becomes, in Sands' writings and in other accounts, a project of determining levels of agency. For the European Commission on Human Rights, as well as for the British government and representatives of the Protestant Unionist community in Northern Ireland, the prisoners themselves were the agents of their own degradation, and their willingness to live voluntarily in cells covered in their own excrement served as evidence of an essential "sub-human" character and corroborated representations of the inhumanity of IRA violence. In response to Cardinal O Fiaich's "slums of Calcutta" statement, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) located agency at the level of placing excrement on the walls: "These criminals are totally responsible for the situation in which they find themselves. It is they who have been smearing excreta on the walls and pouring urine through cell doors. It is they who by their actions are denying themselves the excellent modern facilities of the prison."<sup>17</sup> Agency, from the authorities' perspective, lies in the

prisoners' repulsive actions within their cells, in their decision to refuse to conform to prison regulations, and in their participation—direct or indirect—in IRA violence. The NIO statement, for example, follows its claims about the prisoners' actions within their cells with an assertion that the prisoners are not political, but “convicted criminals”: “more than eighty have been convicted of murder or attempted murder and more than eighty of explosive offenses. They are members of organisations responsible for the deaths of hundreds of innocent people, the maiming of thousands more and the torture, by kneecapping, of more than 600 of their own people.”<sup>18</sup> A 1978 statement from the Governing Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland similarly turns the question of agency within the prison into an indictment of the IRA's violence outside the prison, referring to IRA attacks on prison guards as evidence of “the primary responsibility of the prisoners themselves for the situation. They have freely chosen so to act as part of a campaign which, out of prison, has been waged by them and their associates with bomb and bullet...”<sup>19</sup> These statements thus displace the question of responsibility within the prison by focusing either on the immediate act of smearing excrement on the walls (ignoring the sequence of events that led the prisoners to resort to this measure) or on IRA violence outside the prison.

In accounts written from the perspectives of the prisoners and their supporters, the location of agency becomes a complex negotiation between representing the protests as active decisions, where the prisoners' bodies become weapons for continuing within the prison the battle they began outside, and representing their treatment as inflicted either in an immediate sense by the prison guards or in a broader sense by the British

government's criminalization policy. The vexed character of these negotiations is evident in the vagueness of later descriptions of the trajectory of the protests within the prison and in the discrepancies among these descriptions. All accounts agree about prisoners' agency in starting the blanket protest—the least controversial phase of the H-Blocks protests and the most understandable for the Republican community, given the clear link between the refusal to wear a prison uniform and the act of resisting a policy of criminalization. The question of agency becomes more complex in the series of actions and reactions between the prisoners and the prison authorities through which the protest escalated. According to McKeown and other Republican prisoners, writing years after their experiences in the H-Blocks, the no-wash protest began as the result of an active decision on the part of the prisoners to escalate the blanket protest, which they believed was not working and had become simply another routine that caused the prison authorities little trouble.<sup>20</sup> McKeown describes the decision to begin a no-wash protest as a shift from passivity to action:

I read a comm Séanna gave me from Sean McKenna ... and it outlined how we would increasingly withdraw co-operation from the regime by firstly refusing to wash and so on. I was excited by the prospect of us taking some action. It was moving from a passive position to one of being proactive.<sup>21</sup>

While McKeown represents the decision to smear excrement on the walls as a reaction to the guards' denial of toilet access and refusal to empty chamber pots, he constructs the no-wash protest itself as active, a means of resisting criminalization and achieving political status.

Beresford, by contrast, treats the entire sequence of events as a string of actions and reactions in which the prisoners were primarily reacting to circumstances imposed by the prison officers:

In 1978 a dispute started over the circumstances in which the prisoners were allowed to wash and go to the toilet. They were allowed down the corridors provided they covered themselves with a towel. But they were refused a second towel to wash themselves and, on the principle that they should not be forced into nakedness even in the washrooms, they refused to leave their cells. The “no wash protest” had begun.

Brawls ensued with prison officers over the emptying of their chamber pots and they started slopping out by throwing the contents through the spyholes and windows, the warders sometimes throwing it back. The openings were blocked, so the prisoners resorted to pouring the urine through cracks and dispersing the excrement by smearing it on the walls. The “dirty protest” was under way.<sup>22</sup>

From this description, the “protests” become not so much intentional acts as reactionary events that occur without the agency of those involved. O’Malley, likewise, resorts to passive and reaction-based sentences to describe the escalation of the protests, offering substantially the same sequence of events as Beresford. IRA leader Gerry Adams, in his introduction to Sands’ prison writings, also offers an account of the protests that constructs the prisoners as active in their refusal to wear the prison uniform, but otherwise as passive and acted upon by the guards: “In March 1978 the prison authorities in a further attempt to break their will refused the H Block prisoners access to toilets and washing facilities and forced the prisoners to live in filthy conditions. This no wash/no slop-out protest continued until March 1981.”<sup>23</sup>

While Sands’ prisons writings do not offer any narrative history of the protests, they do participate in the construction of the H-Blocks prisoners as passive victims who must endure the inhumane conditions imposed by the prison authorities. His description

of the “torture” inflicted on the prisoners veers back and forth between active and passive language: “men are forced by extreme torture into the position that they had to embark upon a dirt strike to highlight the inhumanity poured upon them.” In this phrase the prisoners are the passive recipients of the force of torture, of the necessity to embark on the dirt strike, and of the inhumanity “poured upon them,” but at the same time they actively “embark” on the strike with the intention to “highlight” the inhumanity to which they are subjected. Sands’ primary mode in *One Day* is that of passive endurance. His description of a beating by the prison guards, for example, clearly assigns active verbs to the guards and gives Sands a passive role:

Two strong pairs of arms gripped me from behind. My arms were wrenched up my back and my feet left the floor. A mass of black thronged around me and moved in a sudden burst of speed dragging me along with it. I came back to earth and a well-polished pair of leather official issue boots ground into my feet. A screw on the perimeter of the now excited gang kneed me in the thigh. I felt like vomiting and screaming surrender but I remained mute. (27)

Sands’ only actions in this description, which continues for over a page, are feeling and remaining silent. Resistance here consists of the absence of action, the ability to endure brutality without “screaming surrender.” Sands thus constructs his own actions and those of the other prisoners as part of the tradition of endurance passed down from previous Irish nationalists, whose names Sands invokes in his writings and who embodied what Coogan describes as the “code of endurance”—the principle articulated in 1920 by hunger striker Terence MacSwiney as a contest not of “rivalry or vengeance but of endurance. It is not those who can inflict the most but those that can suffer the most who will conquer.”<sup>24</sup>

In the political context of anti-colonial resistance movements, passive resistance on a collective level of course has an important history through Gandhi and his influence around the world. Certainly in one sense, the Republican prisoners were drawing on a tradition of enduring suffering in the name of national liberation that bears a close relationship to the principle of passive resistance, and in McKeown's account of the protests years later—*after* the events of the hunger strikes succeeded in eliciting demonstrative community support for the prisoners—an explicitly political rhetoric of resistance dominates his description. But I would argue that there are several important ways in which the prisoners' discursive construction of their protests while they were happening actually worked against the political aims they were attempting to advance. Most obviously, the fact that the prisoners were claiming to be passively enduring oppressive conditions within the prison while their counterparts on the outside were engaged in a violent campaign against the British government and the Unionist prison guards undermined their claims to passivity. Moreover, there was an uneasy relationship between the prisoners' construction of the prison conditions as inflicted on them by the government and prison administration, on the one hand, and their characterization of their own actions as a series of "protests," on the other. Even if the narratives of how the protests escalated often constructed the prisoners as passive or reactionary rather than as instigators of the escalations, the word "protest" carries with it the connotation of intention and choice. Because the prisoners ostensibly had the option of improving their conditions by ending their protests, in order to accept that their conditions were imposed rather than self-inflicted, one would either have to draw a line beyond which the prison



authorities cannot venture in their punishment of uncooperative inmates, or one would have to accept the political agenda of the prisoners and view the denial of political status as itself a violation of their rights.

Without a clear mandate either from the international community or from the nationalist community in Northern Ireland at the time of the no-wash protest, despite the essentially political reasons for their protests, the prisoners strategically courted public and international support through a human rights appeal based on the claim that they were being subjected to torture and to “cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.” By foregrounding acts of torture inflicted on individual bodies, Sands in effect makes the nationalist political basis for the protests secondary to the individualized claims to human rights abuses. In a discussion of the emergence of an international human rights discourse out of the Nuremberg trials and the drafting of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and other human rights documents, Devin Pendas suggests that these foundational texts advanced the notion that “rights adhered to individuals not as citizens but as human beings.”<sup>25</sup> Whereas the civil rights campaigns of the late 1960s reflected an integrated understanding of individuals and the social and political groups to which they belonged, the *Universal Declaration* is concerned with the rights of individuals within and across the borders of nation-states, not with the rights of political groups or entities: of the thirty articles that delineate the “fundamental human rights” proclaimed by the document, twenty-five begin with the word “everyone” and three with “no one.” All of the articles refer to the rights granted to individuals as human beings. In articulating a claim of torture and in explicitly comparing their plight to that of Jewish concentration

camp prisoners—in a short piece on acts of torture by the guards, Sands claims that they exhibit a “mentality much the same as those who maintained and organised the Nazi concentration camps and the subsequent genocide of the Jews”<sup>26</sup>—the prisoners ground their appeal in a discourse that is predominantly focused on the rights of individuals.

The problem with this construction is that even though they use this language, the prisoners are not primarily interested in individual rights: their goal is, as Sands acknowledges once the battleground has shifted from the no-wash protest to the hunger strike, “not humanitarian, nor about better or improved living conditions. It is purely political and only a political solution will solve it.”<sup>27</sup> By strategically—and unsuccessfully—deploying a discourse of individual rights to advance the prisoners’ nationalist political aims, Sands’ constructions of the no-wash protest discursively separated individual from collective rights. While the failure of their human rights appeal either to secure political status or to elicit public support resulted in a shift in discursive strategy with the move to the hunger strikes, the disarticulation of individual and collective rights during the no-wash protest laid the groundwork for a hunger strikes discourse that represented “humanitarian” and “political” issues as separate. In the discursive shift to the hunger strikes, instead of reintegrating the notions of individual and collective rights, the prisoners simply reprioritized them, articulating a nationalist politics that subordinated the lives of individuals to the attainment of national liberation.

## *Hunger Strikes*

Throughout the no-wash protest, the possibility of a hunger strike in the H-Blocks was always present. Beresford records that serious discussions of a hunger strike were underway in mid-1978, only months after the no-wash protest began, and as early as the summer of 1979 the prisoners began planning for a hunger strike, from which they were dissuaded by the IRA leadership.<sup>28</sup> The degree to which the threat of a hunger strike weighed on prisoners' families before the first strike actually commenced is clear from Coogan's account of the "dirty" protest in *On the Blanket*: though the epilogue to his book, which appeared in print in the middle of the first hunger strike in November 1980, is dated 5 June 1980, the likelihood of a hunger strike is such a preoccupation of those he interviewed that the book seems to prefigure the events that followed. This level of anticipation and the sense both within and outside the prison that a hunger strike was the next logical step were supported by a long history of hunger strikes by Irish nationalist prisoners. Drawing on a tradition passed down from the time of Brehon law in medieval Ireland—when the legal code included a provision whereby a wronged party could seek redress for a perceived injustice by starving himself outside the door of the offender—some of the more famous Irish nationalist hunger strikers early in the twentieth century include Thomas Ashe, who died in 1917 after being force-fed on a hunger strike for political status or release, and Terence McSwiney, who died in 1920 after a 73-day hunger strike in Brixton prison. During the Irish Civil War, a number of IRA prisoners went on hunger strike in Southern jails: Patrick McGrath was released after a successful hunger strike in 1939; Tony D'Arcy and Jack McNeela died on hunger strike in 1940;

and IRA chief of staff Sean McCaughey died after seventeen days on a hunger and thirst strike in 1946. Perhaps most importantly for the 1980 and 1981 hunger strikes, the successful 1972 hunger strike of 40 Republican prisoners, led by Billy McKee, in Belfast's Crumlin Road Jail resulted in the British government's granting of special category status for Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland.<sup>29</sup>

When seven H-Blocks prisoners started a hunger strike on 27 October 1980, therefore, the escalation of their protest made sense within an established tradition of Irish Republican resistance, and despite the objections of Catholic clergy and political groups such as the trade unionists, it succeeded in eliciting widespread support for the prisoners in the Northern Republican community. The seven prisoners<sup>30</sup> began their hunger strike simultaneously—the beginning of the strike was timed so the prisoners would be near death by Christmas—and they were joined on 1 December by three women on the no-wash protest in Armagh prison and on 15 and 16 December by thirty more prisoners in Long Kesh. Preceding and during the hunger strike, the prisoners and the supportive National H-Block Committee launched a widespread letter-writing campaign for public support in the national and international arenas, “imploping individuals, groups, political parties, trade unions and churches to press the British government for an honourable settlement.”<sup>31</sup> Although the goal of the protest was political status, in negotiations and in the public appeals crafted by the National H-Block Committee, political status was broken down into five demands: the prisoners' right to wear their own clothes; the right to abstain from prison work; the right to free association; the right to organize their own educational and recreational activities; and the

restoration of remission of their sentences. In keeping with the varied and international focus of this public campaign, during the first strike the prisoners dealt with various intermediaries to attempt negotiations with the British government, which publicly declared itself unwilling to make any concessions toward political status but quietly held meetings with the prisoners. Besides talking with representatives from the NIO, the prisoners used unofficial mediators to negotiate, notably Father Brendan Meagher, a priest from Dublin who conveyed messages between the leaders of the hunger strike and the NIO representatives.

As the hunger strikers' bodies deteriorated and the condition of one of them, Sean McKenna, became critical, these negotiations yielded an offer from the NIO that provided for clean cells for prisoners coming off the protest; the permission to wear their own clothing during visits and association periods, with "civilian-style" clothing at all other times; evening and weekend association within the blocks; and a vague definition of prison work that could include educational activities. The prisoners had reservations about the offer and asked for clarifications on parts of the compromise; while they were waiting for a response, McKenna's condition became critical and Brendan Hughes, the leader of the hunger strikers, called off the strike. The requested clarifications from the government, which arrived after the strike had ended, made it clear that the prisoners' demands were not going to be met. The prisoners issued a public statement saying that they had been given a document that "contains a new elaboration of our five demands" and that they expected "the British government to act in a responsible manner towards ending the conditions which forced us to a hunger strike."<sup>32</sup> Selected blocks of prisoners

attempted to come off the no-wash and blanket protests to test whether the government would permit them to wear their own clothes. When it became apparent that the government had no intention of conceding this point, providing instead a “civilian-style” alternative prison uniform, the prisoners went back on the protest and began planning for a second strike. The 1981 hunger strike began 1 March 1981 with Bobby Sands, who was followed on 15 March by Francis Hughes and on 22 March by Raymond McCreech and INLA member Patsy O’Hara. After Sands died on 5 May 1981, additional volunteers began hunger strikes to replace those who died. Whereas the prisoners were willing to work with intermediaries during the 1980 hunger strike, their experience at the end of that strike made them highly skeptical of mediation attempts by Church representatives, the International Red Cross, the Irish Commission for Justice, and other third parties, whom the prisoners thought were being used by the British government to deceive them into ending the strike. Ten men—eight members of the Provisional IRA and two members of the INLA—died during the 1981 hunger strike, which lasted until 3 October 1981, when the family members of several of the hunger strikers permitted medical intervention.

In contrast to the no-wash protest, the hunger strikes succeeded in mobilizing widespread support both from the Northern Ireland Catholic community and from the international community. At home, Sands was elected with more than 30,000 votes as the M.P. for Fermanagh-South Tyrone on 9 April 1981, and when he died less than a month later, an estimated 100,000 people attended his funeral. O’Malley describes the international response to Sands’ death as one of worldwide attention and empathy:

Members of the Portuguese Parliament observed a one-minute silence. The highly influential French daily newspaper *Le Monde* condemned the British.... In Mozambique, the semiofficial daily newspaper *Noticias* said that Sands died because the British government had refused to accept “the simple and indisputable fact that he was a freedom fighter,” and the *Sowetan*, South Africa’s main black-run newspaper, devoted a full tabloid page, which it headlined “Belfast Pays Tribute to Martyr Bobby Sands,” to Sands’s funeral. The *Hindustan Times* said that Mrs. Thatcher “had allowed a member of the House of Commons, a colleague in fact, to die of starvation. Never had such an incident occurred in a civilized country.” Anti-British demonstrations took place in cities all over the world, including Athens, Antwerp, Milan, Oslo, Brisbane, and Chicago.<sup>33</sup>

John Feehan, in his book about Sands, records the response in the U.S.: more than 10,000 people in New York, San Francisco, Boston, and Chicago marched to the British consulates in protest; American dockworkers boycotted British ships entering U.S. ports on the day of the funeral; and a group of senators sent an appeal to Thatcher for an end to the conflict with the prisoners. By shifting the tactics of their battle from the no-wash protest to the hunger strikes, the H-Blocks prisoners succeeded in legitimating their claims to political status in the eyes of the world. Although the second hunger strike ended with no concessions by the British government (in the months following the end of the strike, the government substantially granted each of the prisoners’ five demands), the hunger strikes made the IRA and Sinn Fein a recognized political, as well as military, force in Northern Ireland, and they generated interest in and support for the Republican movement around the world. Whereas appeals to international support during the no-wash protest yielded statements from Amnesty International and the European Commission on Human Rights denying the political status of the prisoners, the hunger strikes drew political recognition worldwide from governments, organizations, publications, and individuals. In order to examine the discursive shift from the no-wash

protest's privileging of individual rights to the hunger strike's privileging of the nation—and why this shift resulted in such a drastically different reception of the prisoners' claims to political status—I will examine briefly three representations of the hunger strikers: the statement issued by the prisoners at the start of the first hunger strike; Sands' diary of his first seventeen days on hunger strike; and visual and verbal images from the hunger strikers' funerals.

If Sands' and others' constructions of the no-wash protest drew on an established language of international human rights and the *Universal Declaration*, then the prisoners' public statement at the start of the 1980 hunger strike drew on another established language of rights, one that was part of the wider human rights discourse but differed in important ways from the language of individual rights in the article on torture. The prisoners' statement opens by making a clear, unambiguous claim to political status the single reason for and goal of their actions:

We, the Republican Prisoners of War in the H-Blocks, Long Kesh, demand as a right, political recognition and that we be accorded the status of political prisoners. We claim this right as captured combatants in the continuing struggle for national liberation and self-determination.

We refute most strongly the tag of “criminal” with which the British have attempted to label us and our struggle, and we point to a divisive partitionist institution of the six counties as the sole criminal aspect of the present struggle.<sup>34</sup>

While the statement eventually does reference the brutality of the H-Blocks conditions, here those claims are relegated to a supporting role—background historical information provided as context for the larger “struggle” and as evidence of the prisoners' resolve: “We don't have to recite again the widespread, almost total forms of punishment,



degradation and deprivation we have been subject to. All have failed to break our resistance.”

Instead of focusing on the treatment of individual prisoners, the statement places the Republican struggle within the context of anti-colonial resistance and national liberation movements, and within the context of the international community’s recognition of national self-determination as a right. The statement’s articulation of the prisoners’ “right as captured combatants in the continuing struggle for national liberation and self-determination” directly echoes the first two articles of the 1961 United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which asserts “the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations”:

1. The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation.
2. All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.<sup>35</sup>

Adopted and sanctioned by the international community, the Declaration on decolonization thus adds the rights of collective “peoples” to the rights of individuals articulated in the *Universal Declaration*. In referencing the language of self-determination in their claims to “freely determine their political status,” the H-Blocks prisoners placed their hunger strike within the recent historical context of decolonization and the string of independent nations formed after WWII—including more than thirty former British colonies granted independence in the 1960s and 1970s alone.

Sands' diary of his first seventeen days on hunger strike, which the IRA leadership outside the prison had asked him to keep as a "statement for posterity,"<sup>36</sup> similarly constructs the hunger strike as part of a larger battle for national liberation, which Sands defines as the attainment of the pre-partition Republic asserted through the Easter 1916 uprising: "I may die, but the Republic of 1916 will never die. Onward to the Republic and liberation of our people" (228). The entry from the first day of the hunger strike asserts Sands' political status:

I am a political prisoner. I am a political prisoner because I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, oppressive, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land.

I believe and stand by the God-given right of the Irish nation to sovereign independence, and the right of any Irishman or woman to assert this right in armed revolution. (219)

The difference between the beginning of the hunger strikes diary and the beginning of the no-wash protest day-in-the-life narrative is telling. Whereas *One Day in My Life* opens with a narrative of individual physical suffering, offering the political reason for enduring this suffering only much later, the diary opens with statements of nationalist and anti-colonialist political conviction. In contrast to the passive language of *One Day*, the language of the diary is active and assertive, both in Sands' articulation of the "right of the Irish nation to sovereign independence" and in his construction of his own actions toward achieving that independence.

I believe I am but another of those wretched Irishmen born of a risen generation with a deeply rooted and unquenchable desire for freedom. I am dying not just to attempt to end the barbarity of H Block, or to gain the rightful recognition of a political prisoner, but primarily because what is lost in here is lost for the Republic and the wretched oppressed whom I am deeply proud to know as the "risen people". (219)

Quoting Pearse in invoking the “risen people,” Sands also articulates his reasons for the hunger strike through the language of “wretched” oppression—echoing the title of Franz Fanon’s anti-colonial text *The Wretched of the Earth*, which Sands read along with the work of other revolutionaries such as Che Guevara, Amilcar Cabral, and Camilo Torres.<sup>37</sup> Importantly, Sands de-emphasizes the prisoners’ claims on their own behalf, subordinating the problems of the H-Blocks and political status to the larger claims of the “Irish people” and “Irish nation.” By stating that he is dying “because what is lost in here is lost for the Republic,” Sands constructs his body and his death as sacrifices on behalf of the people and the nation.

As medium for nationalist self-sacrifice, Sands’ body in his diary becomes more important for its metaphorical significance than for its individual existence or experience. Whereas *One Day in My Life* focuses on Sands’ bodily experience and physical sensations in order to communicate individual suffering, in his hunger strike diary, Sands distances himself from his body, treating it as an object to be measured and overcome rather than as his primary mode for engaging with the world. There is a clinical detachment to Sands’ construction of his body in the diary. He records on each day his weight, as established by the doctors who examine him daily, and whether he has any physical “complaints” such as fatigue or cold: “My weight is 58.75 kgs [129.25 pounds]. They did not take a blood sample because they want to incorporate other tests with it.... Physically I have felt tired today, between dinnertime and later afternoon. I know I’m getting physically weaker” (231). As it charts the deterioration of Sand’s body in clinical terms, the diary measures the strength of his desire for national liberation through his

ability to overcome his body's desire for food: "Now and again I am struck by the natural desire to eat but the desire to see an end to my comrades' plight and the liberation of my people is overwhelmingly greater" (230).

Though Sands uses the word "desire" to refer both to his craving for food and to the pursuit of liberation, his suppression of the body's "natural desire to eat" represents a privileging of a nationalist desire over the body's need for sustenance. In the entry for 17 March, the last day he kept his diary, Sands elaborates on the relationship between his body on hunger strike and the desire for liberation:

I was thinking today about the hunger strike. People say a lot about the body, but don't trust it.

I consider that there is a kind of fight indeed. Firstly the body doesn't accept the lack of food, and it suffers from the temptation of food, and from other aspects which gnaw at it perpetually.

The body fights back sure enough, but at the end of the day everything returns to the primary consideration, that is, the mind....

But then where does this proper mentality stem from? Perhaps from one's desire for freedom....

If they aren't able to destroy the desire for freedom, they won't break you. They won't break me because the desire for freedom, and the freedom of the Irish people, is in my heart. The day will dawn when all the people of Ireland will have the desire for freedom to show. (239)

In emphasizing the primary importance of a desire for freedom in making his hunger strike possible, Sands constructs its psychology and its symbolic function through neither need, which must be overcome for the strike to continue, nor demand, which is ostensibly the political structure of a hunger strike. Despite the loftiness of Sands' ultimate goals of freedom and national liberation, realistically neither he nor the other hunger strikers expected their protest to achieve the Easter 1916 pre-partition Republic. Their articulation of the five demands as a negotiating platform, moreover, suggests that they

did not even expect the British government to concede the language of political status: rather, their immediate goal was the concession of rights within the prison that they could spin publicly as de facto political status. In constructing the suppression of the body's needs not as the means of attaining the actual demands, but in terms of the desire for something that the hunger strike in itself would not achieve, Sands makes the hunger strike and his own death function primarily as metaphor rather than tactic.

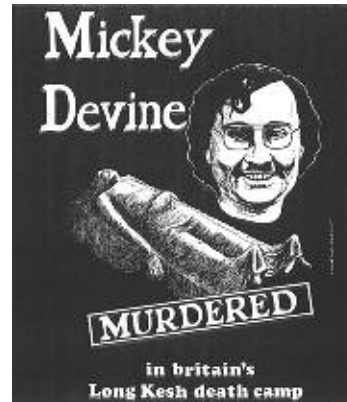
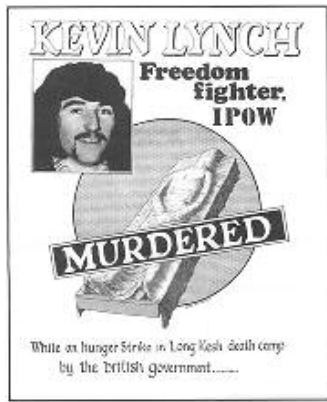
For Sands, transforming his body into a metaphorical sacrifice for the Irish nation required the suppression of his physical body. Once he and the other hunger strikers died, however, the imagery of their bodies became central to the continued deployment of this metaphorical sacrifice. Through the hunger strikers' funerals, the symbolic function Sands assigned to his refusal to eat became the community's accepted interpretation of the hunger strike's meaning: the prisoners immediately became martyrs who had sacrificed themselves for the nation, joining the ranks of past "generations of resistance fighters in Ireland" who "would be remembered for all time in the annals of our country's history,"<sup>38</sup> as one eulogy phrased it. A compilation of phrases from the eulogies delivered at the funerals makes explicit the nationalist, anti-imperialist symbolic function of the hunger strikes and demonstrates the degree to which they successfully embodied the ideal of sacrifice for the Irish nation:

The strikers were eulogized as "symbols of the struggle for freedom," "symbols of Irish resistance to British rule in Ireland," "symbols of the true Irish nation which never had surrendered and never would." They had, we were told, "epitomized the history of our country: suffering and hardship and sacrifice."... They had placed their bodies "before the juggernaut of imperialism, placing their frail bodies there to be crushed."... "These hungry and starving men on their beds of pain, by

superior moral strength, had pushed the British government to the walls and had shamed them in the eyes of the world.”<sup>39</sup>

The enlistment of frail and starving bodies to shame Britain “in the eyes of the world” draws on a rhetorical construction familiar from the nationalist poetry during the Famine. Though the psychological and performative demands of being on a hunger strike required a kind of stoicism and a denial of the body in Sands’ own written construction of his strike, the nationalist rhetoric emphasizes and puts on display precisely the physicality that Sands downplays.

From the ritual of displaying the bodies of the dead as they lay in state to the huge funeral processions that followed behind their coffins, the imagery of the hunger strikers in the Northern Catholic community emphasized the deterioration of the ten dead men’s bodies in order to highlight the extent of their sacrifice for the nation. Images of the hunger strikers from photographs taken before they became prisoners circulated alongside images of their corpses or descriptions of their suffering, visual markers of the degree of suffering they voluntarily underwent. In these campaign posters, for example, the photographs of Kevin Lynch (the seventh to die, on 1 August 1981) and Mickey Devine (the last to die, on 20 August 1981) offer portraits of smiling young men in stark contrast to the images of their draped corpses.<sup>40</sup>



The greater the contrast, the more weighty the charge of “murder” levied against the British government and the more meaningful their sacrifice. The prominent lettering of each man’s name next to his face at the top of the posters invites sympathy with the hunger strikers as people, while the centered images of undifferentiated, anonymous corpses, reduced to veiled and faceless bodies, speak to the termination of these individual lives. The repetition of this poster format from one hunger striker to another, moreover, constructs a single visual narrative of depersonalization and murder to which each man is subjected.

Like the posters, the funeral rituals for the hunger strikers were orchestrated visual spectacles surrounding the dead prisoners. Conducted as public ceremonies and arranged by Sinn Fein officials,<sup>41</sup> the displays of the bodies and the funerals contrasted the small, deteriorated corpses not only with images of the prisoners before their incarceration, but also with the size of the crowds that mourned them. The hunger strikers were transformed into martyrs through the asceticism and self-sacrifice represented by their corpses and through the spectacular, excessive shows of public grief by the crowds at the funerals. Photographs of the bodies lying in state show their visual

power, as in pictures of Thomas McElwee (the ninth to die) and Patsy O’Hara (the fourth to die), whose father asked that a picture be taken to record what looked like abuse inflicted on the corpse—cigarette burns on the skin and a broken nose.<sup>42</sup>



Patsy O’Hara’s body lying in state.



Thomas McElwee’s body lying in state.

Even without the post-mortem wounds, the images of both bodies are shocking: the emaciated faces with the effect of blackened lips, nostrils, and eyelids gives them a skeletal appearance. O’Hara’s body is covered with a blanket of holy cards and flowers, providing an impression of community regard that so far exceeds the reduced size of the body as to bestow on it greater significance.

The staging of the corpse is even more striking in another widely circulated photograph of O’Hara flanked by an INLA honor guard.





As in the posters of Lynch and Devine, the contrast between the photograph of the smiling young man on the wall behind the casket and the emaciated body within it constructs a visual narrative of a life tragically sacrificed, while the flag draped over the body indicates the cause for which that sacrifice was offered. The INLA honor guard—men uniformed in black and camouflage, appearing disconcertingly like ghosts themselves with only their eyes visible—protects the body, which in part through the guard’s presence acquires a sacredness and a symbolic resonance that makes it more similar to the flag or to the crucifix on the coffin lid leaning against the wall than to the men standing in the room. The formidable presence of the guard dwarfs O’Hara’s corpse, which is literally covered with so much symbolic material as to be folded into it, his face becoming another potent symbol, part of the nationalist imagery that dominates the room. By folding O’Hara’s body into the nationalist symbolic content and covering the only living people in the room not just with depersonalizing military uniforms, but with balaclavas that disguise their faces, the image reveals a visual rhetoric of the hunger strikes that subordinates individuality to the nationalist cause. While the hunger strikes, as O’Malley claims, might have given a “human face” to IRA violence,<sup>43</sup> they did so only insofar as the “human faces” represented people who were willing to give up their lives for the dream of a liberated and united Irish nation. Begoña Aretxaga, who did field research in Northern Ireland in 1988-1989, describes the continuing potency of the figures of the dead prisoners in the memories and in the homes of people she interviewed:

Republicans talked to me about the hunger strikes with deferential respect, almost awe. Their voices were lowered, their gazes often lost in distant space. Many houses had portraits of the hunger strikers or memorials of

Bobby Sands hanging on the walls under the rubric “Our Martyrs,” beside pictures of the Sacred Heart or the Virgin Mary.<sup>44</sup>

The images of the human faces of the hunger strikers—circulated in print, plastered on walls, painted in public murals—represent a shift in the nationalist movement away from a discourse of civil or individual rights and toward a discourse of the rights of the people and the nation. The faces of the nationalist movement are the faces of those who sacrificed themselves to it, who represent the nation more powerfully through their absence than through their presence.

### **Hunger Strikes, Nationalist Self-Sacrifice, and Women’s Rights**



Mural honoring women participants in 1980 hunger strike.<sup>45</sup>



Thomas McElwee’s sisters carrying his coffin.



H-Blocks prisoners’ wives carrying Kieran Doherty’s coffin.<sup>46</sup>

What happens to the status of women's rights, their desires, and their relationships to the nationalist community when that community has publicly embraced the images of ten dead men as national martyrs and has legitimated the ideal of individual sacrifice these hunger strikers stand for? Since the beginning of the civil rights movement and the start of the Troubles in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Republican women have been important and consistent participants in the nationalist movement, their involvement taking a wide range of shapes: organizing and participating in civil rights marches; forming political action committees and staging protests in response to British policies and police actions; patrolling the streets and banging garbage bin lids to warn the community of impending army raids; and taking on active military roles in the IRA.<sup>47</sup> As the photograph of a mural commemorating the 1980 hunger strike in Armagh prison reflects, IRA women prisoners participated in every phase of the fight for political status in the prisons in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The women in Armagh staged their own blanket protest, and following a particularly brutal cell search in February 1980, when male prison guards from Long Kesh were called in to help surround and subdue the women prisoners, they began their own no-wash protest as well.<sup>48</sup> While the IRA leadership declined to use any volunteers from Armagh during the 1981 hunger strike, three women participated in the 1980 hunger strike.

Yet despite the extent of women's participation in the prison protests specifically and in the Republican movement generally, the honored portraits of hunger strikers hanging on the walls of Republican homes are exclusively images of the ten men who died, and Republican women continue to have what Aretxaga calls an "uneasy

positioning within Northern Ireland's politics."<sup>49</sup> The problem of the positioning of feminist and other minority rights claims within nationalist movements is familiar in Ireland and around the world: nationalist discourses use women's bodies as figures for the nation—Mother Ireland or Mother India, for example—but deny women's claims to equal citizenship within the nation.<sup>50</sup> Women are encouraged to participate in nationalist movements, but the question of their equality within these movements is postponed so as not to distract from the fight for national liberation.

I want to place the question of women's uneasy positioning in Northern Republican politics within the shifting discourses of rights through which the prison protests and the hunger strikes were constructed. In the rhetorical and symbolic transition from the civil rights movement's integration of individual and collective rights, to the blanket and no-wash protests, which focused on individual bodies of nationalist prisoners through a human rights discourse, to the hunger strikes with their focus on national rights and individual sacrifice, the dominant nationalist discourse shifted from one in which women's rights and national rights could be configured as complementary pursuits to one in which the nationalist cause subsumed all others. In her reading of the women's dirty protest in Armagh prison, Lyons suggests that the protest enabled a productive intervention into both the trope of woman-as-nation and the conception that women's rights and nationalist movements necessarily worked against each other:

By moving the question of these women's demand for political status from inside the prison to the outside public sphere, the protest brought the already weakening image of 'Mother Ireland' into a state of crisis and raised the possibility of a new connection or articulation of interests between the discourses of feminism and republicanism.<sup>51</sup>

If the women's no-wash protest opened such possibilities, however, the hunger strikes effectively closed them. As Aretxaga argues, "the hunger strike was constructed as a gendered model of historical action in which men figured as the hero-martyrs and women as the supporters."<sup>52</sup> The funeral photographs of hunger strikers' wives and sisters carrying the coffins on their shoulders eloquently speak to this gendering of political participation, offering a very different image of Republican women than the image of women hunger strikers in the mural. In order to examine how the shift in nationalist discourses of rights and gendered political participation has impacted representations of women in Northern nationalist politics, I want to look at three texts in which Northern Irish artists use the imagery of the hunger strikers' bodies to explore the implications for Republican women of a nationalist narrative of self-sacrifice: Anne Devlin's 1984 screenplay *The Long March*, her 1985 play *Ourselves Alone*, and Terry George's 1996 film *Some Mother's Son*. Although Devlin and George articulate different relationships between women's rights and the post-hunger-strikes nationalist movement, both artists use the imagery of the hunger strikes to critique the nationalist narrative of self-sacrifice and its implications for women. While neither Devlin nor George offers a compelling alternative vision for what a simultaneous commitment to feminism and nationalism might look like—each replicates the disarticulation of individual and national rights as political pursuits in conflict with one another—they do challenge the ways in which the nationalist idealization of sacrifice imposes a structure of gendered domination within the Republican movement. Their texts reveal the ways in which this particular nationalist

narrative of suffering bodies has been deployed at women's expense, as well as how entrenched this narrative has become.

***Anne Devlin's The Long March and Ourselves Alone: Hunger Strikes Images and Articulations of Women's Desire***

The history and imagery of the hunger strikes are important contexts for Devlin's *The Long March and Ourselves Alone*, both because of the nationalist interpretation of them as symbols of oppression and self-sacrifice and because of this interpretation's instability. In order to accept the hunger strikers as representative simultaneously of British oppression and Irish resistance, one must first accept that the IRA prisoners are, in fact, political prisoners rather than terrorists; that the element of choice implied by the difference between refusing food and being denied food does not make the hunger strikes any less the result of British oppression; and, perhaps most pertinently for Devlin, that self-sacrifice is a legitimate method of resistance rather than a kind of suicide. While the hunger strikes did elicit an overwhelming amount of public support in the Northern Catholic community, especially after Sands' election as M.P., there was also strong opposition: The Catholic Church, led by Bishop Daly, was vocal in its condemnation of the tactic, and others, including Devlin's father, who was active in trade union politics, disagreed with the underlying assumption that the prisoners should have special category status.<sup>53</sup> Just as the received nationalist discourse of the hunger strikes makes them a powerful metaphor, the controversy surrounding them enables Devlin to invest the images of the prisoners' starving bodies with her own political significance, using them

to engage feminist concerns about the subordination of women's desires to the demands of the nation. Because the hunger strikes represent nationalist resistance as self-sacrifice, a rejection of individual needs and desires for the sake of the nation, the figures of the men dying willingly for Irish political resistance are for Devlin potent metaphors for the conflicts between personal and nationalist desires that women in the North must negotiate.

The narrative of *The Long March*, which first appeared in 1984 on BBC1 Television, covers the period between 30 March 1979 and the end of the first hunger strike in December 1980.<sup>54</sup> The screenplay narrates the events of the strike from the perspective of Helen Walsh, a trade union leader's daughter who returns to Belfast from England after separating from her husband. While conducting research for a pamphlet supporting the H-Block prisoners, Helen forms a relationship with Colm, a member of the INLA, and watches as her parents are nearly forced out of their home because of her father's refusal to support the first hunger strike. Devlin represents the prisoners on the blanket protest and on the hunger strike only through the reactions and feelings of the community outside the prison. The off-screen battle that the prisoners are fighting over special category status becomes reflected on-screen not as a battle between the British and the Irish, but rather as an internal ideological battle among the different segments of the Catholic community. The positions of the Catholic characters on the strike are wide-ranging: Helen's trade unionist father, Joe Walsh, refuses to support the prisoners because he sees the Provisionals as terrorists; Bridie Molloy, the mother of one of the hunger strikers and Colm's aunt, supports the prisoners but is not willing to let her son

die; Mona, a fiercely nationalist woman whose sister is on the no-wash protest in Armagh, is willing to burn down the Walsh family's house because they do not support the prisoners. Helen's own position lies somewhere in the middle—she supports the prisoners for humanitarian reasons, but she cannot comprehend the level of nationalist commitment that leads Mona to put her politics before any personal relationship or obligation.

Unlike Mona, Devlin struggles with the relationship between personal and nationalist commitments throughout her screenplay. Devlin intertwines her narrative of the no-wash protest and the hunger strike with the more intimate events in the lives of Helen and the other women characters: Helen's separation from her husband; her sister's marriage; the old friendship between Helen's mother, Rose, and Bridie Molloy; and Helen's relationship with Colm. Throughout the screenplay, involvements represented as political and collective repeatedly appear in conflict with those represented as personal—separate categories in Devlin's construction despite feminist work problematizing the personal/political dichotomy. Within Helen's family, Rose is the voice of personal commitment, while for Joe every aspect of his life is political. At his daughter's wedding, Joe gives a speech in which the language of "union" refers as much to his own labor union as to Pauline's marriage:

When she came to tell me six months ago she said, "Daddy, we'd like to get married." You notice, it's the women in my family who do the talking. So I said to Jim, "There's only one condition, if you want to marry a daughter of mine." "What's that?" Jim asked, rather nervously. "That you're a member of a union—because if you're going to marry one of my girls—you'll need all the help you can get!" ... All I can say is that I hope Pauline and Jim's union will be as successful as mine. With my wife that is. (124-125)



Rose, by contrast, puts personal commitments before politics, as her impatience with the union's "go-slow" reveals:

ROSE: Look at this place! Look at this mess. It's been three weeks since my bins were lifted. And these plastic bags are useless. The cats have them pulled all over the yard.

JOE: (*Looks relieved.*) For God's sake, Rose, I thought there was something wrong. I told you it's a go-slow. Until the corporation stop cutting back on the men there'll be a go-slow. And I'm the one who's telling them to go slow. So there's no point in blaming the men. Go and protest to the Corporation.

ROSE: That's all very well, but what am I supposed to do with Christmas a week away? (138-139)

Though Joe's politics are quite opposed to those of the nationalists who support the prisoners, his willingness to have a dirty yard for the sake of political protest mirrors the prisoners' willingness to live in filth for the sake of their political status. Rose, on the other hand, establishes her politically uncommitted position through her unwillingness to have her Christmas spoiled by the garbage in her yard.

By using stage directions to associate her with images of the blanket protest and the hunger strike, Devlin represents Helen's commitments as caught between the personal and the political. The text's first reference to the prisoners, for example, takes place within the context of Helen and Rose's discussion of Pauline's wedding plans:

ROSE: (*Staring inconsolably at the table which is full of invitation cards, magazines, papers, dress patterns for bridesmaids, scraps of material and menu cards*) I wish you'd given me some warning. You told me you wouldn't be at the wedding....

HELEN: Look, I can't go on saying I'm sorry any more.  
(*They stare at each other in silence.*)

Why don't you just count me out.

ROSE: (*Repentant*) Don't be ridiculous. What are you planning to do now?

*(Helen's attention is caught by a copy of Fortnight with four blanket women on the front.)*

HELEN: Get a job.

*(She picks it up. Underneath is a copy of the magazine Brides.)*

This juxtaposition of the four blanket women, protesting the conditions in Long Kesh, with the *Brides* magazine and the table full of wedding preparations represents the conflict between Devlin's constructions of political and personal commitments. Helen's desire to be included in the wedding celebration, while she picks up the magazine picturing the blanket women rather than the bride, suggests that she is torn between her mother's insistence on weddings and the blanket women's call for political action. At the same time, Helen herself remains uncommitted to either: she has just left her own marriage, and she has become such an outsider to Belfast politics that she still thinks of the student civil rights protests in 1968-1969 rather than the current situation, she has no idea what the INLA is when she hears that it has claimed responsibility for the murder of Airey Neave,<sup>55</sup> and she doesn't recognize that she is repeating "the Provo line" on special category status until someone tells her.

Devlin's second evocation of the blanket woman image occurs after Helen has formed new involvements at both the personal and the political levels. Her passing interest in the magazine turns into an active decision to support the prisoners by conducting interviews for a pamphlet about their families. In the process, Helen forms a sexual relationship with Colm, a young man whose cousin is in Long Kesh. For a time Helen pursues her relationship with Colm and her support for the prisoners without either experiencing a conflict or understanding an explicit connection, but her encounter with Mona, a friend of Colm's, begins to call into question her conception of the two realms as

detached. Mona puts personal relationships on the same plane as nationalist involvement by questioning the basis of Helen's friendships:

MONA: It's funny about you growing up on the Falls and yet nobody knows you.  
HELEN: I don't make my friends on the basis of territory.  
MONA: On what basis do you make your friends? (123)

While Colm prevents Helen from having to answer, he reinforces Mona's implication that friendships cannot be apolitical:

COLM: You know your trouble, Helen, you don't think politically.  
HELEN: (*Laughs.*) Are you trying to tell me that when you look at Mona you see her politics. She has a beautiful face....  
COLM: Jesus. You say she's beautiful but you can't see what it is that's beautiful about her; it's not her face, it's her commitment—it's so total and unrelenting. She doesn't look for approval from anyone, man or woman, in or out of uniform. She's incorruptible because she puts her politics first. That's what's beautiful about her. (123)

For Colm and Mona, as for the prisoners in Long Kesh and Armagh, nationalist commitment should be the basis for all other commitments.

Though Helen tries to keep politics out of her bedroom, the convergence of her sexual relationship with Colm and a raid by the British Army visually turns her into one of the blanket women she sees on the magazine cover:

BRIDIE: Five o'clock. Get up quick, Helen. Get you into the spare bed immediately.... Ah Holy God, that's it. It's started.... Oh Jesus, Mary and Joseph! (*She watches Helen who is climbing out of bed over Colm in the dark.*) Have you no nightdress on! Oh my God! ... Cover yourself up! (*She grabs a blanket off the bed and pushes it at Helen.*) In the name a' Jesus! Oh Holy God, this is a punishment.... (*She leaves. Helen is standing in the blanket by the bed. Cut on Helen standing with the blanket round her shoulders. Her stance should resemble the photo of the blanket women in the magazine she looked at at the beginning of the play.*) (131-132)

Despite Helen's insistence that sexual desire has nothing to do with politics, she cannot keep the two from colliding. Helen's nakedness causes Bridie to shove the blanket at her, to force her into the double performance of the colonial oppression endured by the prisoners and the theatrical resistance of the women in the Relatives Action Committee. Helen takes the place of the women she before only viewed in a magazine, suggesting that she can no longer remain uninvolved, but at the same time her involvement, like her performance of the role of blanket woman, is unintentional.

Furthermore, Helen's dream in the preceding scene suggests that the Republican movement is responsible for giving her this role:

Helen is alone on a dark road.... She turns to find she is being followed by four uniformed shadowy figures in black; she breaks into a run, but no matter how hard she runs they are always the same distance away. Suddenly, she breaks away from her pursuers and runs towards the security gates. They are locked. Sobbing, she grips the gates with her hands, as if to shake them apart. Through the gate she can see Colm in profile. He does not respond to her. He seems unable to see or hear her. (130)

In the dream, the play's representatives of Republicanism turn into frightening figures that threaten and imprison Helen. The four figures of the blanket women from the magazine turn into four uniformed pursuers, presumably members of the British Army or the police. Colm, who reveals himself after the raid to be a member of the INLA, becomes not the prisoner behind bars, but the warder who keeps Helen from passing through the gate. This dream reverses the roles of oppressor and oppressed for the nationalists, placing them in the position of the British or the prison warders and Helen in the position of the prisoners.

Devlin reinforces this reversal through a third association between Helen and the prisoners, where she takes on the appearance of the hunger strikers: “Helen is standing with an artist’s portfolio in one hand and a small rucksack in the other. She is greatly changed, principally thinner, even younger-looking, with the sucked-in face of someone who is travelling very fast. She has cut off her long hair, looking more like a boy” (139). Joe reinforces the connection to the hunger strikers with his comment, “I must admit I’ve seen better looking come out of the Maze myself” (139). Through the dream and the visual associations between Helen and the prisoners, Devlin implies that the conflict between nationalist politics and personal desires does to Helen what British rule does to the nationalist prisoners—deprives her of her freedom, takes away her dignity, and requires her to choose between her own desires and a political commitment that requires the sacrifice of those desires.

While Devlin’s use of stage directions to link Helen to the hunger strikers is not a subtle connection, I find her representation of the politics behind the strikes highly ambivalent, resistant to any single reading. Even as she uses the images of the blanket women and the hunger strikers to criticize the Republican subordination of all personal concerns to the nation, she also reveals desire to be necessarily connected to politics. Furthermore, Devlin shows respect for the political commitment of the strikers, and she uses characters’ memories of the Long March to Derry—a four-day civil rights march in January 1969 from Belfast to Derry, where participants were attacked by a Loyalist mob on the last day of their march—to establish a common starting point for people who, ten years later, fight among themselves over the strength of political commitment, particular

beliefs, and ideas about how to be politically active. The imagery of the hunger strikes enables Devlin simultaneously to invoke the power and importance of political commitment and to claim that political commitment can be just as destructive as colonial oppression when its actors forget the personal dimensions of politics.

In *Ourselves Alone*, Devlin connects her exploration of the problematic relationships between personal and nationalist commitments even more explicitly to gender politics. The play centers around three Republican women living in Belfast, each of whom experiences a different kind of conflict between her personal desires and her position in relation to the nationalist political movement: Josie is a courier for the Provisionals who ends her ten-year affair with IRA leader Cathal O'Donnell when she falls in love with British IRA volunteer Joe Conran; her sister, Frieda, limits her political involvement to her singing but finds herself unable to escape the political dimensions of her personal desires; and Donna has a daughter with Liam, an IRA member and Josie and Frieda's brother. For each woman, being politically committed to the Irish nation means compromising her own desires in ways that are unnecessary for the male characters. Unlike the hunger strikers, however, Devlin's female characters are ultimately unwilling to sacrifice themselves for the sake of a nationalist politics.

Though *Ourselves Alone*, first performed in Liverpool and London in 1985,<sup>56</sup> relies neither so heavily nor so obviously as *The Long March* on the narrative of the hunger strikes, they remain a strong presence throughout the play. Devlin's stage directions place the portraits of Sands and the other men who died on the walls of the Provisionals' club:

The setting is a club, the centre of Republican activity, political and social, in West Belfast. The period of Republicanism in the post-hunger-strike days is set by the wall hangings; the traditional prominence of Pearse and Connolly has given way to the faces in black and white of ten men: Sands, Hughes, McCreech, O'Hara, McDonnell, Hurson, Lynch, Doherty, McElwee, Devine. (13)

Read alongside *The Long March*, these figures on the wall stand for nationalist resistance, but they also signal Republican unwillingness to value personal needs and desires. As an ideal of political resistance through self-sacrifice, the images of the hunger strikers enable Devlin to explore the implications for her women characters of the sacrifices required by the nationalist movement.

In the beginning of the play, Josie comes close to the ideal of self-sacrifice. The desires she articulates are overtly nationalist. Her relationship with O'Donnell, a powerful member of the Provisionals, is in part based on a fantasy through which she takes his place as warrior:

JOSIE: Sometimes when we make love I pretend I'm somebody else.

DONNA: Who?

JOSIE: Not someone I know. Someone I make up—from another century. Sometimes I'm not even a woman. Sometimes I'm a man—his warrior lover, fighting side by side to the death. (17)

For Josie, “there are no personal differences between one person and another that are not political” (23). She constructs the political goals of the Provisionals as an impossible object of desire: “The thirty-two-county Workers' Republic. Connolly's dream. Some of our people, and I'm one of them, believe it to be an impossibility. A place we will never come into. But we'll die trying to get there, because I suppose this is our country and as it is our lives are meaningless” (45-46). Josie articulates Republicanism as a

structure of desire, worth sacrificing individual lives even when the desired object is unattainable.

Josie's articulation of her politics fits well with the nationalist rhetoric of the hunger strikes insofar as she subordinates the value of individual lives to the greater dream of the Irish nation. What complicates the discourse of oppression and self-sacrifice in *Ourselves Alone*, however, is that the Republican movement that demands self-sacrifice as a form of resistance is as much a source of oppression for the women in the play as the British government. The hunger strikers whose images grace the walls of the club died protesting British colonial policies that, on the basis of England's claim to possession of the territory of Northern Ireland, dehumanized, criminalized, imprisoned, and inflicted violence upon Republicans who conceived of themselves as soldiers fighting against an occupying military force. Through her dramatization of the positions available to women within the nationalist community, however, Devlin represents the male-dominated nationalist movement as replicating these oppressive policies in its treatment of Republican women. For the prisoners in Long Kesh and Armagh, the no-wash protests demonstrated the dehumanization of IRA members under British rule. For Josie, however, her sense that human life in the North is not as valuable as the nation comes from her father's nationalist rhetoric: "When I was little my daddy used to say— 'When the British withdraw we can be human.' I believed that, since the south of Ireland was already free, there I could be human" (44). Liam's demand that Josie kill her unborn child because the father, Joe, turns out to be a traitor represents a similar subordination of human life to nationalist politics. That Josie's brother would call for an abortion because



of the father's betrayal of a movement whose object is the "thirty-two-county Workers' Republic" is particularly ironic given the illegality of abortion in the South as well as in the North: his readiness to destroy his sister's wanted child in the course of achieving a political entity in which she would not have the option of aborting an unwanted fetus highlights the contradictions Devlin reveals between the ends and means of the Republican movement.

Just as the nationalist concerns contribute to the dehumanization of the women in the play, the Republican men also replicate the criminalization, imprisonment, and violence that the hunger strikers endured at the hands of the British. Liam, himself imprisoned within Long Kesh, treats Donna as a criminal, a suspect to be interrogated, when he accuses her of being unfaithful and of not loving him like she loves other men:

LIAM: It wasn't just McNamee. There were others. They told me. They'd all had you. After the dances.

DONNA: Oh Jesus God!

LIAM: In the Kesh they told me about you after the dances. They all had you. But now you don't want me! Were they better than me, was that it?  
(55)

Frieda, similarly, becomes a suspect because of her associations with John McDermot: "My father thinks I'm in the Workers' Party, and he thinks you and I are lovers. Jesus, when our Liam gets out of the Kesh he'll probably kill both of us" (41). Both Frieda and Donna find their freedom limited and their actions criminalized when it comes to their sexual activity and their associations with men. Furthermore, the violence these women experience comes as much from the men in their families as from the British soldiers. Frieda tells the story of her aunt Cora, who was disfigured and lost her hands not because of violence from soldiers, but because some ammunition she was storing for her brother

exploded by accident: “They stick her out at the front of the parades every so often to show the women of Ireland what their patriotic duty should be” (29).

While Frieda uses aunt Cora’s disfigurement to demonstrate the destructiveness for women of the Republican movement—not only by accident, but through its conception of the “patriotic duty” of the women of Ireland—Josie constructs Cora’s accident through the familiar rhetoric of self-sacrifice:

JOSIE: She was supposed to have been a beautiful girl, my auntie Cora. My father told me that. So I suppose you could say she really had something to sacrifice.

DONNA: We’ve all got something to sacrifice.

FRIEDA: You’re right! And when there’s a tricolour over the City Hall, Donna will still be making coffee for Joe Conran, and Josie will still be keeping house for her daddy, because it doesn’t matter a damn whether the British are here or not.

JOSIE: That’s just your excuse for not doing anything.

FRIEDA: Aye. But it’s a good one. (30)

Unlike Josie, Frieda refuses self-sacrifice as a viable strategy for resistance. For Frieda, the sacrifices of personal desires that Josie and Donna make in order to do their “patriotic duty” and help the IRA are not working toward the Irish nation, but rather are the sacrifices women would be asked to make for men with or without the British presence.

Frieda’s objection is not to resisting British rule, but to the demands that women sacrifice themselves for the nation. In the play’s most explicit connection to the hunger strikes, Frieda sings a song she wrote after Sands died:

When I grew up my first love  
Whispered in my ear,  
What do you most desire, my love?  
What do you most desire?  
Lying on a moonlit beach  
I held his hand and said  
To be a Volunteer, my love,

To be a Volunteer. (36)

In the song, the moonlit beach, the intimate whispering, and the hand-holding do not conflict with the political desire to be a Volunteer. In the remainder of the scene, however, Frieda finds her own personal desires condemned in the name of the hunger strikers for whom she wrote the song. When her father, Malachy, finds her with McDermot, he becomes physically violent and accuses Frieda of being politically suspect on the basis of her relationships:

MALACHY: You'll not make little of me. Siding with the people who condemned Bobby Sands.

FRIEDA: (*Backing away towards the door*) They didn't condemn him. They said he beat his wife! Hard to believe, isn't it?

MALACHY: Get out of my sight. (*Overtured club furniture stands between them.*)

FRIEDA: They say when he was dying she was so afraid of him she wouldn't go up to the prison to see him. In fact she wouldn't go near him until she was sure he was definitely dead.

MALACHY: Never let me see your face again. (39)

Even as Malachy defends Sands against those who "condemned" him, he enacts the very domestic violence that Frieda names as the basis for these complaints.

Unlike Frieda's song, in which a woman can be both an individual and a committed Republican Volunteer, this scene reveals the place of "Volunteer" to be dominated by men like Malachy, who use the cause and rhetoric of nationalism to enact violence against women and to circumscribe their personal freedom. For Frieda, however, the nation is not worth the sacrifice of those individuals who would compose it or of the relationships between people:

FRIEDA: You know something, Father? You've been burying your friends since 'sixty-nine. But do you know something else, your friends have been burying you!

MALACHY: Never cross my door again!  
FRIEDA: (*Desperation*) We are the dying. Why are we mourning them!  
(*She points at the portraits of the dead hunger strikers....*) (39-40)

Frieda's gesture toward the portraits calls into question the priorities of a political movement that thrives on self-sacrifice, and she implies that in valuing symbolic death over actual life, her father and the other Provisionals kill themselves and the people around them.

While Devlin's use of the imagery and discourse of the hunger strikes in *Ourselves Alone* and *The Long March* is effective as a criticism of the treatment of women within the Republican movement and of self-sacrifice as a strategy for resistance, in both plays, she makes this criticism at the expense of any meaningful or collective political commitment. At the end of *The Long March*, there is a reversion to personal commitments as the political crises surrounding the first hunger strike come to a close. Bridie calls the hunger strike "a victory," not because the prisoners' demands are met, but because "[t]hey're going to live" (153). As Devlin's audience in 1984 would have known, the first strike was *not* a political victory: special category status was never a part of the agreement, and the second hunger strike took place because the British government still refused to allow prisoners to wear their own clothes. At the same time, Joe ends the union "go-slow" by telling the negotiators, "I wasn't going home without a settlement, my wife would give me no peace" (154). In the cases of both the hunger strike and the union strike, Devlin represents the "victory" as the return to personal commitments and relationships—Bridie's concern for her son and Joe's for his wife. The screenplay ends with Helen, "tired of the weight of being Irish" (154), standing alone as a voiceover

contemplates the impersonal nature of the political movement that began for her with the Long March to Derry in 1969:

HELEN: (*Voice over*) I still remember that time when we thought we were beginning a new journey: the long march. What we didn't see was that it had begun a long time before with someone else's journey; we were simply getting through the steps in our own time.... What we didn't see was that we never had a time which we could call our own. (155)

Helen recognizes that the politics of the Long March and of the hunger strikers has a much longer history and wider reach than herself and her friends, but she laments rather than appreciates her involvement in this historical narrative. Being a part of a collective history of political commitment is not as important to Helen as the need to be distinguishable from that history.

In *Ourselves Alone*, there is even less a sense that a woman can be both committed to her personal desires and politically committed within the nationalist movement. Josie gives up politics as soon as she becomes pregnant and starts to think about having a baby: "I'm so afraid of losing it. It's like a beginning within me. For the first time the possibility of being happy. So I'm going to tell O'Donnell that I won't accept this or any other assignment" (77). The possibility of personal happiness takes such complete precedence for Josie over the impossibility of the thirty-two-county Workers' Republic that she can no longer be politically active. Donna is excused throughout the play from political activity on the grounds that she has a child. Frieda consistently subordinates politics to personal relationships, and she proudly claims to "judge ideas by the people who utter them" (61). Furthermore, the play ends with Frieda

leaving Ireland for England, as Devlin herself did, suggesting that the only solution for women in the North is to leave.

While presenting such an absolute division between personal and nationalist commitments, Devlin seems to hold out artistic creation as the only possibility for political commitment that does not compromise personal needs and desires. Helen, who replaces her nationalist activities with her own painting after Colm is killed, protests before he leaves that his poetry gives him an alternative to INLA involvement:

HELEN: But you're a poet. Doesn't that mean anything? You have a voice. An alternative to this.

COLM: Padraig Pearse and Joseph Mary Plunkett were poets; and James Connolly's prose is beautiful. (134)

Devlin implies that artistic creation can function as both a personal and a political act, but that Helen and Colm each takes art to a different extreme. Helen shows Frank and Bridie Molloy a painting of an empty room so intensely personal that Helen is the only one who can understand it. Colm, on the other hand, sees poetry and politics as intertwined, and like Pearse, he dies as a result of his political involvement.

In *Ourselves Alone*, Frieda tries to balance personal desires and politics through her singing, which Devlin constructs as a form of political involvement that provides an alternative to Republicanism:

JOE: Why are you so critical of your family's involvement in the Republican movement?

FRIEDA: Oh, I wouldn't say I was critical exactly. I mean, I respect them all very much. My father's a great man and Josie's so committed. You have to admire her and Liam's dedication. I mean, what the Brits have done to my family would make you weep.

JOE: But you're not an activist?

FRIEDA: No. Well, I used to be. I gave all that up in the seventies. God, I was on more demonstrations than enough.

JOE: So you're not political at all now?

FRIEDA: Well, that's not true either. I sing. (32-33)

Devlin not only suggests that Frieda's singing, like Helen's art or Colm's poetry, is a kind of political act, but by comparing Josie's defeated choice to go back to keeping house for her father with the comparative freedom of Frieda's decision to go to England and sing, she also suggests that art is a superior form of political involvement for women in the North. Indeed, Devlin's own practice of political theatre endorses her character's decision to confine her politics to singing.

While Devlin criticizes the ideal of sacrifice in the performance of the hunger strikes, her substitution of personal art for collective political involvement subordinates politics to the requirements of individual creativity. She leaves no room in either *The Long March* or *Ourselves Alone* for a woman to be committed to a political movement larger than herself. As a result, her use of the hunger strikes to make a valid criticism of Republican treatment of women and the politics of self-sacrifice can lead only to Frieda's decision to leave Northern Ireland. There is no sense in either of Devlin's plays that an integration of individual and nationalist commitments is possible. In their construction of Republicanism as synonymous with the curtailment of individual rights and happiness, Devlin's plays at once offer an effective gender-based critique of Northern nationalism in the 1980s and are themselves a product of this post-hunger-strikes period in which individual and national rights were represented as separate, competing pursuits. While Devlin's vision of individual creativity as an appropriate substitute for collective political commitment may not offer an effective alternative, her appropriation of the hunger

strikes imagery to intervene in nationalist justifications of violence against women and the criminalization of women's personal desires is important and powerful as critique.

***Terry George's Some Mother's Son: Maternal Rights and the Agency of Sacrifice***

In the preface to his screenplay for the 1996 film *Some Mother's Son*,<sup>57</sup> Terry George describes his impetus for creating the film through a narrative of his own encounter with a series of televised images during the 1981 hunger strike—images not of the hunger strikers themselves, but of their mothers:

And as I watched I became transfixed by an image that was repeated over and over as each man died. In the harsh glare of TV lights the families of dead hunger strikers would emerge from the wire cages to the Maze Prison, and a mother would step up to the microphones and announce that her son had died and that the family would like to bury their child with dignity.

Inside the prison those same mothers were forced into a parent's ultimate nightmare as they sat and watched their children die a slow, painful death. This horror was made more unbearable because all of the families were informed that they could save their sons' lives.... The mothers could save their lives by wrecking their cause.<sup>58</sup>

In *Some Mother's Son*, George and his collaborator, Jim Sheridan,<sup>59</sup> refocus the hunger strike narrative through this image of mothers watching their sons die. The film, which opens in 1979 and ends with the first mother's decision to take her son off the 1981 hunger strike, presents a fictionalized narrative of the H-Blocks protests based on what George calls "compilations of mothers, sons, politicians and clergy who all struggled through this event."<sup>60</sup> The film focuses on two women whose sons are arrested at the same time and sentenced to terms in the H-Blocks, where they join first the blanket protest, then the no-wash protest and the hunger strike. The central characters are



Kathleen Quigley (played by Helen Mirren), a middle-class Belfast schoolteacher with three children—Gerard, her oldest son, goes on hunger strike—and Annie Higgins (played by Fionnula Flanagan), a working-class Belfast woman whose son Frank goes on hunger strike and whose daughter Theresa is a student in Kathleen’s class. Taking Kathleen’s and Annie’s experiences as its primary perspectives, the film loosely follows the trajectory of events in the prisons, weaving the characters of Gerard and Frank in with the well-known names and events of the hunger strikes.<sup>61</sup> The film narrative builds to the point of crisis in Gerard’s and Frank’s hunger strikes, when on the same day that Kathleen chooses to take Gerard off the strike, Annie allows Frank to die.<sup>62</sup>

Like Devlin’s plays, *Some Mother’s Son* is interested in the personal implications of the nationalist narrative of sacrifice for its primary women characters. But whereas Devlin represents Republican men as exercising a great deal of agency in their daily lives and political activities, George represents the hunger strikers themselves as powerless, their decisions more reactionary responses to Thatcher’s policies and the prison administration’s actions than well-informed strategy. The film implicitly grants the British government—and Thatcher in particular—the most powerful position with the clearest path between policy decision and practical effect. In the first three scenes, for example, we see a sequence of events tracing the effects of Thatcher’s policies on the lives of the main characters. The film opens with archival video footage of newly elected Thatcher quoting St. Francis of Assisi to the press as she alludes to her responsibilities on taking office. As she quotes, “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony,” the film cuts to an image of the coast of Northern Ireland, where Gerard and another man pull a

boat into the dock and begin unloading fish. Thatcher's spoken commitment to bringing "harmony," "truth," and "hope" immediately becomes ironic, as first Gerard standing on the dock and then his mother and siblings standing at their window watch a British army convoy blow up a nearby bridge. As the camera focuses on Kathleen's worried expression through the glass, where we see at the same time the reflection of the explosion, we hear the voice of Farnsworth, a "Thatcherite yuppie" newly appointed to the Northern Ireland Office, saying "The Prime Minister..." The film cuts to Farnsworth addressing Northern Ireland civil and military personnel, explaining that Thatcher

... wants an entirely new approach to the Northern Ireland problem. We've drawn up a three-pronged strategy. Isolation, criminalization, demoralization. We cut off these routes across the border, we take control of these roads, we isolate the communities. Criminalization. These people are criminals. They are not soldiers. They are not guerrillas. There is no war. There is only crime. Demoralization. I want to see these people in jail.

By having a Thatcher appointee articulate this somewhat modified version of the "Ulsterization, criminalization, normalization" strategy not in 1975, but immediately after Thatcher's election in 1979, George constructs a cause-and-effect relationship between Thatcher's policies and the events in Northern Ireland in 1979-1981. With Farnsworth's words, the destruction of the bridge becomes comprehensible as part of a strategy to isolate the communities in the North and cut off escape routes for the IRA. Furthermore, the policy sets in motion the series of events through which Gerard and Frank are arrested and sentenced: in retaliation for the bridge explosion, Frank and Gerard blow up the jeep of an army officer, killing a soldier in the process.

Within the prison, likewise, the prisoners do not act so much as they react. The no-wash protest in the film does not begin as part of a conscious decision to escalate the protest, as McKeown remembers, but rather as the result of Farnsworth instituting a new policy in the H-Blocks. We first see a conversation between Farnsworth and Harrington, a British civil servant from the Foreign Office who has been working in Northern Ireland:

FARNSWORTH: How many are on [the blanket protest] at the moment?

HARRINGTON: Approximately three hundred, though the figure does vary.

FARNSWORTH: I want these men in prison uniform.

HARRINGTON: Well, we've pretty much tried everything.

FARNSWORTH: No you haven't.

Two scenes later, we see Farnsworth overseeing the prison officers, dressed in environmental suits and carrying plastic shields, as they initiate a confrontation with the prisoners by refusing to allow them to slop out their chamber pots unless they put on a prison uniform. The pattern of administration action and prisoner reaction is clear in Gerard's description of the conflict to his mother: "They won't let us out to the toilets.... At the start we put it out the windows. Then they blocked up the windows, so we put it under the door. Then they blocked up under the door, so now we spread it on the walls." Like the policy of isolating the communities outside the prisons, the prison policies reflect the British government's attempts to control prisoners by taking away every option but conformity.

Whereas the film represents the Thatcher administration as the means of denying the prisoners agency, the prisoners' reactions appear to have the same disempowering effect on Kathleen. In the beginning of the film, Kathleen has a comfortable middle-class life, touched only indirectly by the conflict between the British and the IRA. With her

husband having died some time before the events of the film begin, Kathleen is in control of her household, has a steady professional job as a Catholic schoolteacher, and drives a car, which gives her more mobility than Annie has. Through the effects of Gerard's involvement in the IRA, George represents Kathleen as becoming increasingly drawn against her will into IRA politics—with which she disagrees on the grounds that she will not support violence—and finding herself with less power in her own life as she becomes more involved. As she becomes more involved, the film represents the violence she opposes as becoming incrementally more invasive in her life and her body. While the bridge explosion that opens the film makes Kathleen go to her window to watch, the camera constructs the explosion as a relatively distant event, keeping her safely behind the unshattered glass. In the second explosion, by contrast, which occurs when Gerard takes Kathleen's car to blow up the army jeep, the glass does shatter, visually destroying that distance and safety not through the actions of the British, but through the actions of her own son. Kathleen's students are rehearsing for an Irish dance performance, and George cuts back and forth in slow-motion between the girls' dancing and Gerard and Frank preparing to destroy the jeep, with the dance music and the pounding feet building to the explosion: we see the students' bare legs, cut to Frank launching the explosive, cut back to the girls dancing as Kathleen hears the launcher, cut back to the missile exploding the jeep, and then back to the classroom, where the windows shatter from the force of the explosion outside and the film speed returns to normal as the girls, screaming, are evacuated from the building. Through the juxtaposition of Kathleen's invaded classroom with the exploded jeep, the film figures the IRA retaliation against the British as an

assault on the Northern Catholic community as well, which George represents through the image of the girls dancing as a space of innocence and of a particularly feminized cultural and religious Irish identity.

Once Gerard is arrested, IRA politics and violence invade not only Kathleen's spaces, but her body as well. On the night Gerard is arrested, the police forcibly enter the domestic space that was left untouched at the beginning of the film. By the time of Gerard's trial and sentencing, Kathleen's personal possessions have to be searched for her to enter the courtroom, and the police handle her body with the same force they use to search her home: after a protest on behalf of the prisoners disrupts the trial, a policewoman physically removes Kathleen from the courtroom. In one of the most jarring scenes, the film represents a visit to Gerard in the H-Blocks as a violation of Kathleen's body first by Gerard and then by the prison guards. In order to send a message from Bobby Sands (Gerard's cell mate) to the fictional Sinn Fein leader outside the prison, Gerard uses Kathleen as a conduit:

GERARD (*whispers*): Look, I have to get a message out to Danny Boyle. This is really important, ma.

KATHLEEN expects him to say something. Instead he leans over, puts his arm around her neck, kisses her full on the lips. His tongue slides into her mouth, she tries to pull away, he holds on, slides something into her mouth, then breaks away. KATHLEEN is stunned.<sup>63</sup>

The instructions in the screenplay explicitly construct this moment as a violation of Kathleen's body, as Gerard's arm holds her despite her attempts to pull away and his tongue enters her mouth to leave the rolled up comm there. On screen, the image of Gerard kissing his mother on the lips, particularly after we have watched them interacting

as mother and son in the first part of the film, visually suggests a violation of incest taboos and of Kathleen's role in the film as the central mother figure. The indignity of the kiss is compounded as Kathleen leaves the visiting area with the message in her mouth and has to submit to a body search by the prison guards before she can leave or remove the message from her mouth.

As the progressively more invasive violations of Kathleen's space and her body suggest, the film constructs IRA and Sinn Fein involvement as a source of disempowerment at least as limiting as the British government actions. While Kathleen loses personal agency as she becomes more involved with the prisoners' agenda—carrying the message to Boyle, attending a Relatives Action Committee meeting, campaigning for Sands' election to Parliament—Annie's actions are circumscribed by her family's involvement in the IRA throughout the film. Annie's husband was active in the IRA before he became physically unable to continue; one of her sons was killed by the British; Frank is a leader in the IRA; her daughter Theresa obstructs the path of a British tank as the students are evacuated after the explosion; and Annie herself is staunchly Republican, described by George as a "stoic Irish rebel mother" and a "warrior's mother" for her support of her son's activities. Annie's lack of agency, which the film articulates in terms of her working-class background, is figured through her limited mobility and her inability to inhabit certain coded spaces. We first see Annie driving cattle along the road where the army is constructing a roadblock that, as she tells the RUC officer, will prevent her from getting to her cattle. Unlike Kathleen, Annie has no car, and when she tries to drive Kathleen's car on the beach, the car gets stuck in the sand, ironically requiring the

assistance of British soldiers to move it out of the water. When Kathleen takes Annie to a bar in a Protestant neighborhood, Annie refuses to sit under a portrait of Queen Elizabeth, stating as Kathleen looks at her with disbelief, “I’m not sitting below her. She’ll sour the drink.” These limitations of Annie’s movement are visually encapsulated in a protest for the hunger strikers, where she and Theresa publicly enact the blanket protest by standing inside a makeshift cage on the street, dressed only in blankets. In contrast with the image of Annie behind bars, performatively imprisoned for her political convictions as the prisoners are for theirs, Kathleen slowly drives past the protest, emphasizing Annie’s incarceration through her own comparative mobility.

The film’s portrayal of the hunger strike and its effects on Annie and Kathleen clearly constructs personal agency as incompatible with IRA involvement. Contrary to Devlin’s representation of the hunger strikes as a sacrifice chosen by the prisoners but thrust on Republican women, George represents Kathleen’s decision to take Gerard off the strike as the only real choice, with neither the prisoners’ decision to begin a hunger strike nor Annie’s decision to let Frank die articulated as an actively chosen path. Like the no-wash protest, George represents the hunger strike as a response to British policy: after Harrington negotiates a deal to allow the Republican prisoners to wear their own clothes, Farnsworth reinterprets the deal as providing for “civilian-style clothes” for all prisoners in Northern Irish jails, stating that “You do what it takes to draw [the IRA] out into the open and then you finish them off.” The prisoners go on hunger strike in order to end the dirty protest: “We’re not going to be forced to live like pigs any more.” While the hunger strikers in the film are clearly resolved to follow through with their strike,

their resolve comes as a response to a chain of events that have been imposed on them externally, and the film offers no sense that the action is taken as the result of coherent strategy. Rather, Gerard in particular is represented as blindly following to its conclusion a decision made when he chose to become involved in the IRA. At one point during his hunger strike, an emaciated, glassy-eyed Gerard tells his family that “I’ve never seen things as clearly before, as I can see things now.” His assertion that he sees clearly, however, is ironized by his appearance as he speaks these words with eyes glazed over and “trancelike,”<sup>64</sup> by his seeming inability to see the effects of his convictions on his family, and by the scene that follows, in which a voiceover from the radio announces an IRA statement threatening to target prison officers.

Through a conversation between Gerard and Kathleen and another between Annie and Kathleen, the film articulates two possible choices for its Irish characters: to follow the IRA agenda or to depart from it. The exchange between Kathleen and Gerard takes place in the prison hospital wing, where Gerard lies in bed hooked up to a heart monitor and clearly near death:

GERARD: I’m proud of you.

KATHLEEN: Why?

GERARD: For respecting my beliefs.

KATHLEEN: Oh Gerard. Who said I respected your beliefs? You had a choice in what you did, but you left us with no choice.

Their conversation is interrupted by the cries of the family of another hunger striker who has just died, a reminder of the implications of Gerard’s beliefs and his “choice” not only for himself, but for his family as well. The language of choice here is revealing. While Kathleen leaves ambiguous the exact nature of the choice Gerard made, her use of the



past tense suggests that she is referring not to his decision to go on hunger strike—which is ongoing, what he is doing instead of what he “did”—but to a prior decision, perhaps his choice to help blow up the army jeep or his decision to become involved in the IRA in the first place. In either case, Gerard’s involvement has served to limit her own choices, her own agency, by forcing her to support the IRA in order to support her son.

Despite Kathleen’s claim to have been left without choices by Gerard’s decision, the film ends with her decision to take him off the hunger strike, providing Kathleen’s character with a degree of agency inaccessible to any of the other characters. The film suggests that Kathleen’s ability to depart from the IRA party line is what provides her with this agency, which Annie, with her stronger ties to the IRA, cannot exercise on behalf of her own son. After Frank dies, Kathleen meets Annie in the corridor of the prison hospital and tells her she has taken Gerard off the strike:

ANNIE: Sure his sufferings are over now anyway.

KATHLEEN: I took Gerard off. I had to do it.

ANNIE: Somebody had to do it. You’re lucky you had the choice.

Annie’s own decision to let Frank die is constructed as the absence of choice, as the necessary course of action for a Republican family. At the same time, her affirmation of Kathleen’s decision with the statement that “Somebody had to do it” is punctuated by the visual image of Kathleen following Gerard’s stretcher in one direction toward medical attention while Annie and Theresa follow Frank’s body toward the morgue.

While the film is highly concerned with questions of agency, it challenges the discourse of rights that runs through constructions of the prison protests and the hunger strikes. Kathleen’s recovery of her agency at the end of the film, in fact, is constructed as

possible only because she extracts herself from the conversation over rights. Before she decides to allow medical intervention for Gerard, Kathleen attempts to facilitate a deal between Harrington (acting without the knowledge of Thatcher-surrogate Farnsworth) and Danny Boyle:

HARRINGTON: The prisoners can have their specific demands.

BOYLE: As a right?

HARRINGTON: As a right. Provided the hunger strike is called off first, and your organization makes no statement claiming to have won prisoner-of-war status.

The language of rights proves to be a deal-breaker as Farnsworth, who discovers Harrington's meeting with Boyle, intervenes by sending a second deal through Father Daly, the Catholic priest who attends the prisoners and has been vocally critical of the hunger strike. As Kathleen and Boyle wait for confirmation that the British will accept Harrington's offer, Daly enters and, ignorant of the negotiations with Harrington, tells them that the Cardinal has organized a deal with Farnsworth's office:

BOYLE: You fucking idiot.

DALY: What's wrong?

BOYLE: "Prisoners will have the privilege of their own clothes"... Privilege.

DALY: It's only a word.

BOYLE: We have been in direct negotiations with Harrington, who was prepared to accept the five demands as a right.

DALY: It's only a word.

BOYLE: And, and nine men have died for that right ....

While Daly's character comes across as naïve and easily manipulated, by removing the language of rights from any articulated political context, the film seems to agree with his repeated protest that "It's only a word," representing Boyle's stance as a privileging of abstract politics over human lives.

The argument between Boyle and Daly over the language of rights serves as the catalyst for Kathleen's decision to take Gerard off the strike, which is represented on film through a slow motion scan of the room from Kathleen's point of view as the men's arguing continues, unintelligible, ending with her opening the door and leaving.

George's instructions for this scene in the screenplay are revealing:

As their voices rise, KATHLEEN moves away from them. The men are screaming at each other now, a wall of sound, the words drowned out, each arguing the righteousness of his position as the seconds tick away on Gerard's life, the sound invades Kathleen's head, she has to get away from it, get out of that room, as she turns ...

The camera pans the combatants from Kathleen's P.O.V. We find the hunger striker's girlfriend crying in the corner, then the wife of the prison officer is crying, clutching her fifteen-year-old son, the victims of this wall of righteous sound.<sup>65</sup>

The language of rights here devolves into the "wall of righteous sound" created as the men argue for their own positions, and once we move to Kathleen's privileged point of view, the differences between these positions become literally indistinguishable as their voices blend together to become "sound" instead of words. The images of the hunger striker's girlfriend, whom we see earlier in the film walking out with the family of the man who dies as Kathleen confronts Gerard about his choices, and the wife and son of a prison officer killed by the IRA, also seen briefly earlier in the film, reinforce the meaninglessness of the argument over rights and righteousness. In an interview, George describes these images as "ghosts" who "clearly couldn't be in that room.... It was to suggest what was in Kathleen's mind."<sup>66</sup> Both the girlfriend and the prison officer's family represent the human casualties of the debate over rights—Boyle's insistence on them as well as the government's refusal to grant them. The prison officer is killed

following an announcement by the IRA in which the language of rights becomes a justification for violence: “In a further escalation of the prison crisis, the IRA have issued the following statement: ‘Our comrades are prepared to die for their rights. Those who try to take those rights away must be prepared to pay the same price.’” Although George never explicitly describes the IRA’s claims to the prisoners’ rights in terms of the collective people’s or nation’s rights—in the negotiations he focuses instead on the five demands, which emphasize the conditions of the prisoners’ incarceration more than the symbolic implications of political status—he clearly constructs the language of rights as detrimental to individuals and as destructive to families.

More than any political position or allegiance, the film constructs the nuclear family as the primary form of affiliation and the mother-child relationship as the most important bond. Indeed, while it devalues the language of rights for which the hunger strikers are prepared to die and for which their IRA counterparts on the outside are prepared to kill, the film makes a legal right the basis for Kathleen’s ability to take Gerard off the hunger strike:

FARNSWORTH: You may or may not know that it is in fact you that will decide your sons’ fate. The law clearly states that if your sons would lapse into comas, then you have the legal right to take them off the strike. Surely no mother would allow her son to die.

Although Farnsworth’s statement, coming from the most vilified of the British characters in the film, is clearly designed to manipulate the mothers into ending the strike before any hunger strikers die and without government concessions, the film does in the end represent Kathleen’s invocation of this legal right as its privileged position. By signing the papers to take Gerard off the strike, Kathleen asserts a value for individual human life

that contrasts with the stances resulting in the hunger strikers' deaths as well as the deaths of the prison officers and the soldier who dies in the jeep explosion. In her decision, as in her response to Gerard's earlier justification of his actions by the fact that the man killed was a British soldier—"He was somebody's son like you're mine!"—Kathleen represents a privileging of maternal rights above all others.

While *Some Mother's Son* might seem to suggest that women have access to power to the degree that they are able to depart from IRA politics, the film's construction of this potential power through a discourse of motherhood results in a very limited articulation of the choices available for Northern Catholic women. With its use of the Irish Catholic mother figure as its measure of moral force, the film draws unironically on the Mother Ireland figure, whose symbolic power as a representation of Irish women has been critiqued in the 1988 documentary *Mother Ireland*, which looks at the impact of the figure for Irish women. As Lyons explains, the figure has been closely connected with the Mater Dolorosa or "sorrowful Virgin" version of Mary as the "suffering mother of the adult Jesus," which was used to construct the proper role for nationalist women as one of purity and chastity, but also of mothers of Ireland who "like Mary, 'were losing their sons to a great and noble cause.'"<sup>67</sup> *Some Mother's Son* draws powerfully on the religious associations of the Mother Ireland figure. As Sands dies, for example, the film represents a demonstration in the street outside the prison—part protest and part death-watch—as a call-and-response rosary prayer to Mary, led by Kathleen. The words of the prayer, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus," uttered by

a crowd of women as Sands dies for his beliefs, constructs the hunger strikes allegorically through the crucifixion narrative.

George's film might be interpreted as revising the Mother Ireland figure for the event of the hunger strikes. If the Mother Ireland figure historically has been a nationalist figure for a mother who raises sons to die for the nation, then Annie, who allows Frank to die for his cause and will stand dutifully and mourn at his funeral, would be the film's version of this figure. By positioning Kathleen as the central mother figure and privileging her decision to save her son, however, the film articulates as its ideal a version of Mother Ireland that challenges the nationalist tradition of self-sacrifice and the role of Irish women in facilitating that sacrifice. In emphasizing the rights of mothers over the nationalist political tradition, moreover, the film uses Kathleen to articulate the mother-son relationship as the basis for commonality across lines of difference: the British soldier is "somebody's son like you're mine"; the image of the assassinated prison officer's wife with her son suggests sympathy for victims of violence across religious divisions; and Annie and Kathleen seal their friendship across the divisions of class and nationalist commitment by bonding over their prisoner sons and through Annie telling Kathleen that she lost a son, to which Kathleen responds, "That must be a terrible thing to lose a child." In effect, the film replaces the passively nationalist Mother Ireland figure with an active Irish Mother figure whose identity and agency are defined by a construction of a universal motherhood.

In some ways, by constructing a more active ideal role for women and by granting so much power to Kathleen's decision, the film privileges women's rights over the

nationalist cause. But in another sense, by drawing on the revised Mother Ireland figure and by constructing Kathleen's identity primarily through her motherhood, the film imposes a representation of Irish women just as prescriptive and limiting as the IRA-prescribed role it critiques. The only choice the film articulates as active choice—rather than reactionary response, as in the prison protests, or passive acceptance, as in Annie's decision to let Frank die—is the decision to depart from the IRA party line and assert the moral and legal rights of the mother figure. In replacing the nationalist Mother Ireland figure with a universalizing Irish Mother figure, the film substitutes one prescriptive role for another and effectively constructs the interests of Northern women in opposition to the interests of Northern Republicanism.

The hunger strikes are widely considered to have transformed the Republican movement in Northern Ireland. O'Malley argues that the election of Bobby Sands and other IRA candidates to political office resulted in the abandonment of the IRA policy of political abstentionism and the decision to contest elections with Sinn Fein candidates, providing a mainstream political platform that drew on electoral successes for legitimacy and aligned the IRA with other national liberation movements around the world.<sup>68</sup> The editors of *Nor Meekly Serve My Time* assert that the hunger strikes “changed the Republican Movement by heralding electoral intervention and mass political involvement, they transformed wider politics and they rocked the British into a dual strategy of increasing repression and building a wide anti-republican coalition.”<sup>69</sup> In the introduction to their screenplay, George and Sheridan refer to the hunger strikes as a

“watershed in recent Irish history,” which “allowed Gerry Adams to argue for a shift toward politics and laid the foundation for secret peace talks and the eighteen-month cease-fire of 1994-1996.”<sup>70</sup>

Just as the hunger strikes impacted the political landscape and transformed IRA strategy, the imagery of the hunger strikers’ bodies had an equally powerful effect on the discursive construction of Northern nationalism, with troubling implications for women’s positioning in the nationalist community. The hunger strikes imagery and the associated IRA narratives of nationalism as self-sacrifice functioned to subordinate individuals and minority groups to the requirements of the Republican movement. While Devlin and George both critique the resulting devaluing of women’s lives and curtailment of their rights, their texts, which replicate the hunger strikes’ construction of an either/or relationship between the rights of individuals and anti-colonial politics, can be better understood as products of the post-hunger strikes Northern nationalist milieu than as effective alternatives. Read together, Devlin’s and George’s narratives privileging women’s desires or mothers’ rights over nationalist political commitment demonstrate the problems with a discursive disarticulation of individual from collective or personal from political. The result is a succession of narratives requiring a choice between individual and collective political investments, where the most obvious way of critiquing the choice privileged in one narrative is to privilege the opposite choice: the no-wash protest’s emphasis on individual human rights shifts to the hunger strikes’ narrative of nationalist self-sacrifice, which Devlin and George challenge by again subordinating the collective to the individual. If the hunger strikes were, in fact, a watershed event that changed the



Republican movement, then the stasis implied by this succession of political narratives suggests the necessity of looking at the impact of this change for women and other minorities within the nationalist community, as well as the need to narrate more integrated relationships between the national collective and its constituent individuals and groups.

### Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> The militant Provisional IRA and its political wing, Sinn Fein, split from the “Official” IRA in January 1970, after the Official IRA Army Council voted to recognize the parliaments of London, Dublin, and Belfast. In this chapter I will refer to the Provisional IRA simply as the IRA, unless additional clarification is necessary given the context.

<sup>2</sup> Long Kesh, the men’s prison, is officially known as the Maze prison. The Northern Republican community continues to refer to the prison as Long Kesh, its name when the facility served as an internment camp in 1971-72. Armagh is the women’s prison.

<sup>3</sup> Maud Ellman, in *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Impisonment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), has also written on the hunger strikes. Her interest is in metaphors of self-starvation, ranging from the hunger strikes to anorexia to Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*, and in its exploration of the metaphorical connections among disparate forms of self-starvation, her analysis decontextualizes the hunger strikes historically and politically. For example, Ellman reads the practice of hunger strikers writing brief autobiographies for the IRA leadership upon embarking on their strikes as a surrendering of life through the act of writing it for posterity: “There is a sense in which

---

the hunger striker is already dead as soon as he embarks upon this discipline of memory, for in this moment he surrenders food for words and life for legend.... He writes his life in order to create his own memorial but also to disgorge his mind of history, just as he voids his body of the fat that represents its frozen past” (88). This analysis, which is characteristic of Ellman’s approach to the hunger strikes, demonstrates why her separation of the strikes from their political context is problematic. First, while these autobiographical comms were used when the strikers died, they were also used strategically during their strikes to build public support and attempt to pressure the government for concessions to end the hunger strike. Second, the notion that in writing their personal histories the hunger strikers were voiding their bodies of history ignores the degree to which the hunger strikers viewed themselves as becoming *part* of a long history of Irish hunger strikers, as well as the historical narrative of the Troubles and Irish Republicanism that instigated their protests. Finally, Ellman’s representation of the hunger strikers’ self-starvation in terms of eliminating fat from the body suggests an understanding very different from what the hunger strikers themselves articulate; on the contrary, as part of the political strategy of the strikes, the hunger strikers drank water and expended as little energy as possible during their strikes precisely in order to keep their body weight up and extend their lives.

<sup>4</sup> Bobby Sands, “Ghosts in My Tomb,” in *Bobby Sands: Writings From Prison* (Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997), 187-188. Originally published in Bobby Sands, *Skylark Sing Your Lonely Song* (Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press, 1983).

---

<sup>5</sup> See Bobby Sands, *Writings From Prison*, 88, 180, 85. Michael Gaughan and Frank Stagg were IRA prisoners who died in English jails on unsuccessful hunger strikes for political status in 1974 and 1976 (see David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* [New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987], 14).

<sup>6</sup> The volume in which “Ghosts in My Tomb” originally appeared, *Skylark Sing Your Lonely Song*, was published posthumously in 1983; the pieces that appeared in this volume, however, were written mostly on pieces of toilet paper while Sands was a prisoner in the H-Blocks and smuggled out with visitors. “Ghosts in My Tomb” would have been written sometime after the prisoners’ no-wash protest began in March 1978 and before Sands began his hunger strike in March 1981.

<sup>7</sup> The denial of political status was part of a British government strategy known as “Ulsterization, criminalization, and normalization.” Ulsterization meant that the Unionist RUC and Ulster Defense Regiment forces replaced British security forces in Northern Ireland; criminalization referred to the policy of eliminating political status for the IRA, constructing its members as criminals and its activities as terrorist offenses; and normalization meant returning Northern Ireland to a normal life. See Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket: The Inside Story of the IRA Prisoners’ “Dirty Protest”* (1980; reprint, New York and Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002). Chapter 4 provides a good explanation of this strategy, the government’s rationale for it, and the chronology for its implementation.

<sup>8</sup> In their accounts of the trajectory of the H-Block protests, journalists Tim Pat Coogan, David Beresford, Padraig O’Malley all separate the “no-wash” protest into two phases:

---

the “no-wash” protest, which began when the prisoners refused to wash themselves when they were denied a second towel, and the “dirty” or “no-slop out” protest, which arose out of the confrontations with the guards over emptying chamber pots and eventually led to prisoners spreading excrement on the walls. Accounts from the prisoners and other IRA-related sources, however, identify only two protests preceding the hunger strikes: the blanket protest and the no-wash protest. In his account of this period in *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners, Long Kesh, 1972-2000* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2001), Laurence McKeown, an ex-prisoner who participated in these H-Block protests and spent 70 days on hunger strike in 1981, writes that term “dirty protest” was used by the prison authorities and outside commentators but not by the prisoners, for whom the “idea of covering the cell walls in our own excreta was not something we had envisaged when we stepped up our protest. It simply evolved in the course of the action and re-action by the prison authorities. For this reason we always refer to that period and our actions then as the ‘no-wash protest’” (58). In this chapter I will use McKeown’s nomenclature when talking about the phases of the protest, referring to the “dirty” protest only when examining the language of other accounts of these events. See also David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 16-17; Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket*; and Padraig O’Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket*, 223.

<sup>10</sup> Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time*, 58.

<sup>11</sup> Beresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 40.

---

<sup>12</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 217A (III), 1948.

<sup>13</sup> Archbishop Tomás O Fiaich, 1 August 1978 statement. Reprinted in Coogan, *On the Blanket*, 170. Two priests who visited the H-Blocks, Fathers Denis Faul and Raymond Murray, also published a pamphlet on the prison conditions, and the European Commission on Human Rights sent representatives to the H-Blocks in 1980. See Coogan, 187-191, and O'Malley, 24.

<sup>14</sup> See Coogan, 144-155. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg found the British government guilty on 18 January 1978 of “inhuman and degrading treatment” for techniques used by the security forces to interrogate Republican detainees. These techniques included forcing prisoners to stand for hours against a wall with their arms raised above their heads; placing black bags over the heads of detainees during interrogations; subjecting them to continuous noise; depriving them of sleep; and depriving them of food and drink.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in O'Malley, 24.

<sup>16</sup> O'Malley, 24-25.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Coogan, 173.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Coogan, 174.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Coogan, 176.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Campbell, Laurence McKeown, and Felim O'Hagan, eds., *Nor Meekly Serve My Time: The H Block Struggle 1976-1981* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1998), 29-48.

<sup>21</sup> Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time*, 56.

---

<sup>22</sup> Beresford, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Gerry Adams, “Foreword,” *Bobby Sands: Writings From Prison* (Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Coogan, 31, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Devin O. Pendas, “‘Law, Not Vengeance’: Human Rights, the Rule of Law, and the Claims of Memory in German Holocaust Trials,” in *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, ed. Mark Philip Bradley and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>26</sup> Bobby Sands, “Fenian Vermin, Etc.,” in *Writings From Prison*, 96.

<sup>27</sup> From the diary Sands kept for the first seventeen days of his hunger strike, 10 March 1981. In *Writings From Prison*, 229.

<sup>28</sup> Beresford, 21.

<sup>29</sup> For discussions of these and other Republican hunger strikes, see Beresford, 10-14; O’Malley, 26-28; and Coogan, 27-44, 61-63.

<sup>30</sup> Six of the prisoners were members of the Provisional IRA, and one was a member of the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army), a militant splinter group that split from the Official Sinn Fein movement in 1976.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Campbell, Laurence McKeown, and Felim O’Hagan, eds., *Nor Meekly Serve My Time*, 112.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in O’Malley, 33. For a more detailed description of the 1980 hunger strike and its conclusion, see O’Malley, 28-34.

<sup>33</sup> O’Malley, 4.

---

<sup>34</sup> “Statement at Start of First Hunger Strike,” reproduced in Laurence McKeown, Brian Campbell, and Felim O’Hagan, eds., *Nor Meekly Serve My Time*, 114-115.

<sup>35</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Official Records, Supplement 16, *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV), A/4684, 1961.

<sup>36</sup> Beresford, 61.

<sup>37</sup> Beresford, 43.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in O’Malley, 159.

<sup>39</sup> O’Malley, 158-159.

<sup>40</sup> “Kevin Lynch Hunger Strike Campaign Poster,” reproduced on Irish Republican Socialist Movement Web Site, [http://irsm.org/fallen/lynch/kevin\\_lynch\\_poster.html](http://irsm.org/fallen/lynch/kevin_lynch_poster.html); Internet; and “Mickey Devine Campaign Poster Used After the Hunger Strikes,” reproduced on Irish Republican Socialist Movement Web Site, <http://irsm.org/fallen/devine/md02.html>; Internet.

<sup>41</sup> O’Malley, 94.

<sup>42</sup> Beresford, 167. For images, see “The Irish Hunger Strikes: A Commemorative Project: Scenes from the Funerals,” <http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals>, Updated 20 November 2003. I include the photographs, “Patsy O’Hara Lying in State,” [http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/ohara\\_funeral02.html](http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/ohara_funeral02.html); “INLA Honour Guard with Patsy O’Hara,” [http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/ohara\\_funeral01.html](http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/ohara_funeral01.html); and “Thomas McElwee Lying in State,” [http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/mcelwee\\_funeral02.html](http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/mcelwee_funeral02.html).

---

<sup>43</sup> O'Malley, 211.

<sup>44</sup> Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 83.

<sup>45</sup> "Ireland's Own: Murals: Struggle For Political Status,"

<http://irelandsown.net/womenhs.jpg>, 2004; Internet.

<sup>46</sup> "The Irish Hunger Strikes: A Commemorative Project: Scenes from the Funerals,"

<http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals>, Updated 20 November 2003. I include the

photographs, "The Coffin of Kieran Doherty Being Carried by Christina Carney

(National H-Block Committee), Elisabeth O'Hara, Goretti McDonnell, and Pauline

McElwee," [http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/doherty\\_funeral01.html](http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/doherty_funeral01.html); and

"Thomas McElwee's Sisters Carry His Coffin, With an IRA Honour Guard,"

[http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/mcelwee\\_funeral04.html](http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals/mcelwee_funeral04.html).

<sup>47</sup> For an excellent survey of women's participation in the Republican movement from

the start of the Troubles until the hunger strikes, see Aretxaga, 54-79.

<sup>48</sup> The community responded to the women's no-wash protest with even more shock and

disgust than they did to the men's no-wash protest, in part because the women at first

refused to use sanitary towels. For an interesting analysis of the gender politics of the

Armagh dirty strike, see Laura Lyons, "Feminist Articulations of the Nation: The 'Dirty'

Women of Armagh and the Discourse of Mother Ireland," in *On Your Left: The New*

*Historical Materialism*, ed. Ann Kibbey, Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry

(New York: New York University Press, 1996), 110-149.

<sup>49</sup> Aretxaga, 4.



---

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the introduction to *Nationalisms & Sexualities* ed. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> Lyons, 113.

<sup>52</sup> Aretxaga, 80.

<sup>53</sup> Paddy Devlin, *Straight Left: An Autobiography* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1993), 284.

<sup>54</sup> Anne Devlin, *The Long March*, in *Ourselves Alone, A Woman Calling, and The Long March* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986). Subsequent page references will be cited parenthetically within the text.

<sup>55</sup> Airey Neave, a British politician and friend of Thatcher's, was killed in 1979 by a car bomb planted by the IRA. Northern Catholics frequently cited his assassination as reason for Thatcher's intransigence when it came to conceding any of the prisoners' demands or negotiating a compromise. See O'Malley, 147.

<sup>56</sup> Anne Devlin, *Ourselves Alone* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically within the text.

<sup>57</sup> *Some Mother's Son*, dir. Terry George, prod. Jim Sheridan, Edward Burke, and Arthur Lappin, 112 min., Castle Rock Entertainment, Columbia Pictures, and Hell's Kitchen Film 1996, videocassette.

<sup>58</sup> Terry George and Jim Sheridan, *Some Mother's Son: The Screenplay* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), x.

<sup>59</sup> George and Sheridan collaborated on the screenplay for *Some Mother's Son*, which began as George's project. The film is the first George directed on his own, with

---

Sheridan as a producer, after working with Sheridan on the screenplay and filming of *In the Name of the Father* (1993). The two subsequently collaborated on *The Boxer*.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>61</sup> There are some factual inconsistencies between the film's chronology of events and the actual history of the prison protests. The film collapses the trajectory of the no-wash protest and hunger strikes: when Gerard and Frank enter the H-Blocks in 1979, the no-wash protest has not yet begun, and George represents the escalation of the protest as instigated by the British officials and prison warders rather than by the prisoners. Most significantly, the film omits the 1980 hunger strike altogether; instead, the film represents Cardinal O Fiaich's visit to the H-Blocks and his "sewers of Calcutta" statement—which the film places sometime in 1979 instead of July 1978—as the impetus for negotiations towards a compromise.

<sup>62</sup> Historically, this representation of Kathleen's and Annie's decisions reflects two different moments in the trajectory of events that ended the 1981 hunger strike: the first family to take a prisoner off the hunger strike once he had lapsed into a coma was Paddy Quinn's on 31 July 1981; the film perhaps draws more directly on the events of 20 August 1981, when Mickey Devine died on the same day that Pat McGeown's family became the second to take a prisoner off the hunger strike. The film, which represents the fictional Frank Higgins as the tenth hunger striker to die, constructs Kathleen's decision to take Gerard off the strike as both the first family decision to intervene and as the decisive act that effectively ends the hunger strike, since no deaths occur after Frank's.

---

<sup>63</sup> George and Sheridan, *Screenplay*, 79.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>66</sup> Gary Crowdus and O'Mara Leary, "The 'Troubles' He's Seen in Northern Ireland: An Interview with Terry George," *Cineaste* 23, no. 1 (1997): 24-29. Available at <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=9710132580&db=aph>.

<sup>67</sup> Lyons, 114-115.

<sup>68</sup> O'Malley, 238-240.

<sup>69</sup> Campbell, McKeown, and O'Hagan, xv-xvi.

<sup>70</sup> George and Sheridan, 18-19.

## Epilogue

I am writing this epilogue on Father's Day, and as I think about what I want to say to end this project, I find myself acutely aware of how seldom it is actually possible to draw a satisfying conclusion to experiences or relationships that matter to me. In my writing, I have always struggled with conclusions. The effective summation, the encapsulating phrase, the final word—these consistently elude me. Instead of what I tend to experience as the artificiality of my conclusions, I generally spend more time and energy on the processes of researching, reading, and writing, which probably in part accounts for the length of both my sentences and my chapters. Rather than face the difficulty of conclusions, I would prefer to extend the process, look at another angle, another text, another image.

And so, in ending this project, I find it appropriate and important to look back at my process. In my introduction, I outlined three ways in which questions of history and historiography were key to this dissertation—the material history of empire represented within the images I analyze, the historical narratives into which these images have been inserted, and the histories constituted by the mobilizations of the images themselves in relation to each other. As I look back at my own writing process, I want to add a fourth historical dimension in considering briefly the various histories—personal, intellectual, and global—within which and out of which this project has emerged. I will look first at the history of the project itself, where it began and how it has changed, how my thinking

has developed in relation to the images and texts I examine. Second, this project has a personal history, having developed in relation to events in my own life that have probably been more influential than I have as yet acknowledged or been fully able to comprehend. Finally, as my decision to introduce this project through the Abu Ghraib photographs reflects, it has emerged within a particularly troubling global political milieu that demonstrates the extent to which the past histories of oppression and suffering are still very much part of our present context.

## I

While there was no dramatic moment in the process of writing this dissertation at which I reconceived its focus or arguments, it has nonetheless changed significantly since its inception. The project began as an analysis of the figure of the body politic within the material conditions of colonial and postcolonial political contexts. From the start, I was invested in an analysis grounded in empire's material histories, in looking at how bodies at the margins of empire have been central to its articulation, and in learning more about the political imaginaries of colonialism and its legacies through these bodies. Stated simply, I set out to analyze how an essentially abstract metaphorical figure was impacted by the concrete forms of corporeal crisis produced by empire.

In the process of engaging with the material histories of nineteenth and twentieth-century India, Ireland, and Northern Ireland, however, I quickly found that the images of bodies that most compelled my attention, that appeared repeatedly in the texts, and that loomed largest in the political imaginaries of these contexts were not abstract at all, but

were astonishingly, disturbingly concrete. The first major shift in this project came from a recognition that empire's material history was not just a context, but was the basis for these body images. This shift did not involve a change in focus—I continued to look at the same images within the same contexts—but a change in my understanding of these images. Instead of thinking about images of *satis* or Famine victims as abstractions formed from concrete conditions and functioning as figures or metaphors for colonial relationships, I began thinking about them as images that were working primarily through concrete representations of actual suffering. Dropping the figurative language of metaphor and the body politic and refocusing on the concrete structure of the image enabled me to recognize the centrality of not just bodies, but suffering and violated bodies in articulations of political domination; to better understand the ways in which imperialist and anti-imperialist political imaginaries are shaped not only by psychic processes such as desire and identification, but also by affective, emotional, and physical responses; and to consider how these images work to advance and subvert structures of domination in multiple ways rather than looking only at metaphorical uses of the body.

The second major change I want to note here concerns the importance of narrative. Although an analysis of how body images have been deployed and redeployed within different narratives has become central to my project, this was not part of my initial conception of the project, which was focused entirely on the structure of the images themselves. A consideration of the narrative deployments of the images became part of the project not because of any expectation on my part that questions of narrative would inform the overall project, but rather because of a relatively quick decision I made

when I began working with Mainwaring's *The Suttee*, the first literary text in the project. After having recently finished a prospectus outlining a project all about images and metaphors, this three-volume novel with its generic specificity and its overlapping plots forced me to decide how I would approach reading these body images as they appeared within longer texts. And of course, trained in literary criticism and textual analysis, it was an easy choice to read these images in relation to the narrative forms and generic conventions that structured how these images were presented in the texts.

I have described these two changes in the project both because of their centrality to its development and because they demonstrate the degree to which engaging with the texts has shaped my theoretical contributions, rather than approaching the texts through the lens of particular theoretical models. In many ways this project's aims, texts, and methods are interdisciplinary. But its shape and its overarching arguments have come from textual analysis. Moreover, as far-flung as this project is historically and geographically, at its core are two images: Indian women's violated bodies and starving Irish bodies. My dissertation has taken its current shape by looking at how these two images have been deployed and redeployed from different perspectives, through different narratives, and across different historical contexts.

## II

Whereas I have a clear sense of how my engagement with images of actual suffering from the past has shaped my project, I have very little clarity about the relationship between my work and a more intimate, immediate experience of another

person's suffering. I wrote this dissertation while watching my father endure several years of physical suffering as his body deteriorated through cancer, its treatments, and successive infections. Almost from start to finish, this project's development has been punctuated by this personal experience: I learned that he had lymphoma as I was beginning to write my prospectus; I researched and wrote in between the innumerable trips between Austin and Ohio for visits, hospital stays, and emergencies; and last September I spent almost a month watching him die as I read about the Famine in the hospital waiting room and revised my writing sample for the job market. I have avoided analyzing my dad's experience or my own responses to it, choosing to keep my professional and intellectual life separate, as much as possible, from my relationships with my family.

But throughout this process, I have been confronted again and again with how these two parts of my life have impinged on one another in ways that run much deeper than the writing time I gladly gave up to spend extra time with my dad. Reading descriptions of feeble and skeletal famine victims while my dad, who had lost more than 60 pounds and all of his muscle tone over the course of his illness, was hooked up to a ventilator, it was impossible for me not to wonder how much difference there was between his body and the body of a famine victim. Months later, I had a similar response to seeing photographs of hunger strikers' bodies from their funerals. A central part of my project has been analyzing how images of suffering produce affective responses in readers and viewers, and my own emotional responses to these images have been formed at least in part through these involuntary associations. Conversely, more



often than not getting back to work after a crisis with my dad or after his funeral meant returning to images of suffering, and I am certain that the process of writing this particular project has impacted my personal experience, intensifying my emotional responses at some times and providing an analytical outlet from them at others. The narrative of this project's creation is, for better or worse, also a narrative of this personal experience with physical suffering and loss. While I cannot articulate all the ways in which these two parts of my life over the past four years have influenced each other, I feel it is important to acknowledge their implication and to include, at least in this brief and tentative vein, the intimate dimensions of this intellectual endeavor.

### III

In concluding with a glimpse at the kinds of global historical narratives within which this project has taken shape, I end where I began. If my writing process has been circumscribed on a personal level by my dad's illness, on a global level it has developed in the midst of the Bush administration's oppressive policies in the U.S. and violent wars in the Middle East. Beyond the atrocities committed in Abu Ghraib and by all accounts in Guantanamo, beyond the war in Iraq and the U.S. occupation, the global histories of the past several years have reflected the extent to which the forms of domination and the images of suffering that this dissertation analyzes continue to shape this present context. Famines in Africa continue to be exacerbated and perpetuated by Western economic policies. In South Asia, women's bodies and their sexuality continue to be treated as placeholders for national and community honor. Discourses of human rights and images

and narratives of their violation are ever-present around the world. Written from within this global context, in which narratives of resistance to these modes of domination seem to be increasingly necessary, this dissertation is thus as much about the present as about the past. With an endless stream of images of suffering, an endless series of narratives through which these images are deployed, I will conclude by expressing my hope that this project will contribute to the growing stock of resistant narratives and will provoke continuing critical engagements with similar images of suffering and the material conditions they represent.

## Works Cited

- Affron, Charles. "Identifications." In *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- Ansari, Rehan. "Interviews with Deepa Mehta and Naseeruddin Shah." *Himal Magazine* 11, no. 2 (1998). Available at <http://www.himalmag.com/98Dec/deepa.htm>. Internet.
- Aretxaga, Begoña. *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Baldwin, Shauna Singh. *What the Body Remembers*. New York: Anchor Books, 1999.
- Bennett, William. *Narrative of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland*. London and Dublin, 1847.
- Bentinck, William Cavendish. *The Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck, Governor-General of India, 1828-1835*. Vol. 1. Edited by C.H. Philips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Beresford, David. *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987.
- Bhalla, Alok, ed. *Stories About the Partition of India*. 3 vols. New Delhi: Indus, 1994.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Brown, Ian. "Lessons From Homer." *Globe and Mail*, 15 May 2004, page F3. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20040515/ACHILLES15/TPComment/TopStories>. Internet.
- Bush, George W. "President Bush Meets With Al Arabiya Television on Wednesday." Transcript of 5 May 2004 televised interview. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040505-2.html>. Internet.
- . "President Bush Meets With Alhurra Television on Wednesday." Transcript of 5 May 2004 televised interview. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040505-5.html>. Internet.

- . "President Outlines Steps to Help Iraq Achieve Democracy and Freedom."  
 Transcript of speech delivered at the US Army War College 24 May 2004.  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040524-10.html>. Internet
- Butalia, Urvashi. "Community, State, and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India." In *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, edited by Mushirul Hasan. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Campbell, Brian, Laurence McKeown, and Felim O'Hagan, eds. *Nor Meekly Serve My Time: The H Block Struggle 1976-1981*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1998.
- Carleton, William. *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine*. (1847) New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979.
- Chakravarty, Sumita S. "'Can the Subaltern Weep?' Mourning as Metaphor in *Rudaali (The Crier)*." In *Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory, and Cinema in the Third World*, edited by Diana Robin and Ira Jaffe. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Chetty, Kavitha. *Earth* online forum posting. "Sawnet: South Asian Women's Net."  
 Available at  
<http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/cinema/earth.html>. Internet.
- Chughtai, Ismat. "Roots." In *Stories About the Partition of India*, vol. 2, edited by Alok Bhalla. New Delhi: Indus, 1994.
- Coogan, Tim Pat. *On the Blanket: The Inside Story of the IRA Prisoners' "Dirty Protest"*. 1980. Reprint, New York and Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002.
- Cowasjee, Saros, and K.S. Duggal, eds. *Orphans of the Storm: Stories on the Partition of India*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors, 1995.
- Crawford, Margaret E., ed. *The Hungry Stream: Essays on Emigration and Famine*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast, 1997.
- Crowdus, Gary, and O'Mara Leary. "The 'Troubles' He's Seen in Northern Ireland: An Interview with Terry George." *Cineast* 23, No. 1 (1997): 24-29. Available at <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=9710132580&db=aph>. Internet.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003.

- Datta, V.N. *Sati: A Historical, Social and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow Burning*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1988.
- Devlin, Anne. *The Long March*. In *Ourselves Alone, A Woman Calling, and The Long March*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986.
- . *Ourselves Alone*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986.
- Devlin, Paddy. *Straight Left: An Autobiography*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1993.
- Doane, Mary Ann. "The Moving Image: Pathos and the Maternal." In *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- Earth*. Directed by Deepa Mehta. Produced by David Hamilton, Jhamu Sughand, Anne Masson, and Deepa Mehta. 110 min. Cracking the Earth Films, 1998. Distributed by Zeitgeist Films, 1999. Videocassette.
- Ellman, Maud. *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Fegan, Melissa. *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Ferguson, Moira. *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.
- Fisk, Robert. "An Illegal and Immoral War: Betrayed by Images of Our Own Racism." *The Independent*, 7 May 2004. <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/fisk/story.jsp?story=518951>. Internet.
- Fludernik, Monika. "Suttee as Heroic Martyrdom, Liebestod and Emblem of Women's Oppression: From Orientalist to Feminist Appropriations of a Hindu Rite in Four Narrative Genres." *Recherches Anglaises et Nord-Américaines* 33 (2000): 145-180.
- . "Suttee Revisited: From the Iconography of Martyrdom to the Burkean Sublime." *New Literary History* 30, no. 2 (1999): 411-437.
- "Food Riots in Ireland. Conduct of the Liberator." *Pictorial Times*, 10 October 1846.
- Foster, Robert Fitzroy. *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*. London: A. Lane, 1993.

- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 2nd ed. Translated by Alan Sheridan. 1975. Reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- George, Terry, and Jim Sheridan. *Some Mother's Son: The Screenplay*. New York: Grove Press, 1996.
- Gledhill, Christine. "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation." In *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill. London: BFI Publishing, 1987.
- Gikandi, Simon. *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Groddal, Torben. *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- . *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.
- . *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Gupta, Maya. *Lord William Bentinck in Madras and the Vellore Mutiny, 1803-7*. New Delhi: Capital Publishers, 1986.
- Hasan, Mushirul, ed. *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*. 2 vols. New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995.
- . *India Partitioned: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- . *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Hawley, John Stratton. *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Hersch, Seymour. "Torture at Abu Ghraib," *The New Yorker*, 10 May 2004, [http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?040510fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?040510fa_fact). Internet.

- “Ireland’s Own: Murals: Struggle For Political Status.”  
<http://irelandsown.net/womenhs.jpg>. 2004. Internet.
- “The Irish Hunger Strikes: A Commemorative Project: Scenes from the Funerals.”  
<http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/funerals>. Updated 20 November 2003.  
 Internet.
- Jhumra, Kaukab. “Asia Society Screening of *Earth* in New York,” 29 January 1999.  
 Available at “Pakistan Link Headlines,”  
<http://www.pakistanlink.com/community/99/Jan/29/01.html>. Internet.
- Johnson, Alan. “‘Sanitary Duties’ and Registered Women: A Reading of *On the Face of the Waters*.” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 11, no. 2 (1998): 507-513.
- Kelleher, Margaret. *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?*  
 Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- “Kevin Lynch Hunger Strike Campaign Poster.” Reproduced on Irish Republican  
 Socialist Movement Web Site.  
[http://irsm.org/fallen/lynch/kevin\\_lynch\\_poster.html](http://irsm.org/fallen/lynch/kevin_lynch_poster.html). Internet.
- Khanna, Ranjana. “Ethical Ambiguities and Specters of Colonialism: Futures of  
 Transnational Feminism.” In *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New  
 Century*, edited by Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka. New York: Columbia  
 University Press, 2001.
- Killen, John, ed. *The Famine Decade: Contemporary Accounts, 1841-1851*. Belfast:  
 Blackstaff Press, 1995.
- Kinealy, Christine. *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland*. London and  
 Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997.
- . *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion*. Basingstoke, UK, and  
 New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- Kissane, Noel, ed. *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History* Dublin: National Library  
 of Ireland, 1995.
- Kristeva, Julia. *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S.  
 Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Kumar, Sukrita Paul, and Sadique, eds. *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times*. New Delhi: Katha,  
 2000.

- Kumarappa, Bharatan, ed. *Communal Unity*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1949.
- Landy, Marcia. "Introduction." In *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- Leder, Drew. *Absent Bodies*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Lenard, Mary. *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell, and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999.
- Lengel, Edward G. *The Irish Through British Eyes: Perceptions of Ireland in the Famine Era*. Westport, CT, and London: Praeger Publishers, 2002.
- Lewis, Robin Jared. "Sati and the Nineteenth-century British Self." In *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, edited by John Stratton Hawley. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Lyons, Laura. "Feminist Articulations of the Nation: The 'Dirty' Women of Armagh and the Discourse of Mother Ireland." In *On Your Left: The New Historical Materialism*, edited by Ann Kibbey, Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry. New York: New York University Press, 1996. 110-149.
- Mahoney, James. "Sketches in the West of Ireland." *Illustrated London News* 13 and 20 February 1847.
- Mahoney, Robert. "Historicizing the Famine: John Mitchel and the Prophetic Voice of Swift." In *'Fearful Realities': New Perspectives on the Famine*, edited by Christopher Morash and Richard Hayes. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996. 131-137
- Mainwaring, Mrs. General. *Moscow; or The Grandsire: An Historical Tale*. 3 vols. London: A.K. Newman and Company, 1822.
- . *The Suttee, Or, the Hindoo Converts*. 3 vols. London: A.K. Newman and Company, 1830.
- Mani, Lata. *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998.
- Mathur, Ramesh, and Mahendra Kulasrestha, eds. *Writings on India's Partition*. Delhi and Calcutta: Simant Publications India, 1976.



- McKeown, Laurence. *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners, Long Kesh, 1972-2000*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2001.
- McEwan, Cheryl. *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in West Africa*. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000.
- Mehta, Deepa. "Zeitgeist Films: Earth." Available at <http://www.zeitgeistfilm.com/current/earth/earthorigins.html>. Internet.
- Menon, Ritu, and Kamla Bhasin. "Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour: Three Perspectives on the Recovery Operation in Post-Partition India." In *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, edited by Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996.
- . *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998.
- "Mickey Devine Campaign Poster Used After the Hunger Strikes." Reproduced on Irish Republican Socialist Movement Web Site. <http://irsm.org/fallen/devine/md02.html>. Internet.
- Mishra, Vijay. "Diasporas and the Art of Impossible Mourning." In *In Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts*, edited by Makarand Parajape. New Delhi: Indialog Publications, 2001.
- Mitchel, John. *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)*. 1861. Reprint, Glasgow and London: Cameron & Ferguson; Stationer's Hall Court, 1876.
- Mohanram, Radhika. *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Morash, Christopher. *Writing the Irish Famine*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Morash, Christopher, ed. *The Hungry Voice*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989.
- Morash, Christopher, and Richard Hayes, eds. *'Fearful Realities': New Perspectives on the Famine*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996.
- Nandy, Ashis. "Sati as Profit Versus Sati as a Spectacle: The Public Debate on Roop Kanwar's Death." In *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, edited by John Stratton Hawley. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

- Nehru, Jawaharlal. "A Tryst With Destiny," 14 August 1947. In *Independence and After: A Collection of Speeches, 1946-1949*. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.
- Ó' Cathaoir, Brendan. *Famine Diary*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999.
- Ó'Gráda, Cormac. *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Ó'Gráda, Cormac, ed. *Famine 150: Commemorative Lecture Series*. Dublin: Teagasc: University College Dublin, 1997.
- Oldenburg, Veena Talwar. "The Roop Kanwar Case: Feminist Responses." In *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*, edited by John Stratton Hawley. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- O'Malley, Pdraig. *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Parker, Andrew, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, eds. *Nationalisms & Sexualities*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Patel, Sardar Vallabhbhai. *The Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel* Vol. XII. Edited by P.N. Chopra. Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1998.
- Paxton, Nancy. "Complicity and Resistance in the Writings of Flora Annie Steel and Annie Besant." In *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, edited by Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Peggs, James. *India's Cries to British Humanity*. 3rd ed. London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1832.
- . *The Suttees' Cry to Britain; Containing Extracts from Essays Published in India and Parliamentary Papers on the Burning of Hindoo Widows*. London: Seely, 1827.
- Pendas, Devin O. "'Law, Not Vengeance': Human Rights, the Rule of Law, and the Claims of Memory in German Holocaust Trials." In *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, edited by Mark Philip Bradley and Patrice Petro. New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

- Phillips, Richard. "An Interview with Deepa Mehta, Director of *Earth*," 6 August 1999. Available at "World Socialist Web Site," <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/aug1999/meh-a06.shtml>. Internet.
- . "One of This Century's Human Tragedies, As Witnessed by a Child," 21 July 1999. Available at "World Socialist Web Site," <http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/jul1999/sff6-j21.shtml>. Internet.
- Póirtéir, Cathal, ed., *The Great Irish Famine*. Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press, 1995.
- Pritam, Amrita. *The Black Rose*. Translated by Charles Brasch. New Delhi: Nagmani, 1967.
- . "Divided." Translated by Charles Brasch. In *Writings on India's Partition*, edited by Ramesh Mathur and Mahendra Kulasrestha. Delhi: Simant Publications India, 1976.
- . "The Scar of a Wound." Translated by Charles Brasch. In *Writings on India's Partition*, edited by Ramesh Mathur and Mahendra Kulasrestha. Delhi: Simant Publications India, 1976.
- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Ray, Sangeeta. *En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Roy, Asim. "The High Politics of India's Partition." In *India Partitioned: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, edited by Mushirul Hasan. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. New York: Knopf, 1981.
- Ryder, Sean. "Reading Lessons: Famine and the *Nation*, 1845-1849." In *'Fearful Realities': New Perspectives on the Famine*, edited by Christopher Morash and Richard Hayes. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996.
- Samuel, Raphael. *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*. London and New York: Verso, 1994.
- Sands, Bobby. *Bobby Sands: Writings From Prison*. Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997.

- Sedgwick, Eve. "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*." *GLQ*, No. 1 (1993).
- Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Cracking India*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1991.
- Singh, Sujala. "Nationalism's Brandings: Women's Bodies and Narratives of Partition." In *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*, edited by Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray. London: Macmillan Press, 2000.
- Sleeman, William H. *Rambles and Recollections of An Indian Official*. 1844. Reprint, London, New York, and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1915.
- Some Mother's Son*. Directed by Terry George. Produced by Jim Sheridan, Edward Burke, and Arthur Lappin. 112 min. Castle Rock Entertainment, Columbia Pictures, and Hell's Kitchen Films. 1996. Videocassette.
- Sontag, Susan. "The Photographs Are Us." *New York Times Magazine*, 23 May 2004.
- Spenser, Edmund. *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. (1596) Edited by W. L. Renwick. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
- Srinivasan, Shashi Kumar. "Review of 1947/Earth." Available at "Rahman Online," <http://www.rahmanonline.com/movies/revs/earth2.shtml>. Internet.
- Steel, Flora Annie Webster. *The Garden of Fidelity, Being the Autobiography of Flora Annie Steel, 1847-1929*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1930.
- . *On the Face of the Waters*. 1896. Reprint, New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1985.
- Sullivan, Eileen A. *William Carleton*. Twayne's English Authors Series, no. 376. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.
- Tóibín, Colm, and Diarmid Ferriter, eds. *The Irish Famine: A Documentary*. London: Profile Books, 2002.
- Tropp, Martin. *Images of Fear: How Horror Stories Helped Shape Modern Culture (1818-1918)*. Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 1990.

- United Nations General Assembly. Fifteenth Session. Official Records, Supplement 16. *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*. UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV), A/4684. 1961.
- United Nations General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* Adopted and proclaimed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 217A (III). 1948.
- Van Sant, Ann Jessie. *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Verne, Jules. *Around the World in Eighty Days*. 1872. Translated by Michael Glencross. London: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Wallia, C. J. S. "Review of *Earth*." In *IndiaStar Review of Books*, available at "IndiaStar," <http://www.indiastar.com/wallia22.html>. Internet.
- Weinberger-Thomas, Catherine. *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India*. Translated by Jeffrey Mehlman and David Gordon White. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Williams, Leslie A. *Daniel O'Connell, the British Press, and the Irish Famine*. Edited by William H.A. Williams. Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003.
- Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." In *Film Genre Reader II*, edited by Barry Keith Grant. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- Wolff, Robert Lee. *William Carleton, Irish Peasant Novelist: A Preface to His Works*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1980.

## VITA

Jeanette Marie Herman was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on December 22, 1976, the daughter of Martha Jean Herman and Christopher Thomas Herman. After graduating from St. Ursula Academy high school, Cincinnati, Ohio, in June 1994, she entered the University of Cincinnati. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the University of Cincinnati in June 1997. In August 1997 she entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin, where she received the degree of Master of Arts in May 1999.

Permanent address: 701 Highland Ave., Apt. C, Austin, TX 78703.

This dissertation was typed by the author.