

THE SUBJECT OF IMPERIALISM:
THE RHETORIC OF SELF IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF
FLORA ANNIE STEEL

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THE SUBJECT OF IMPERIALISM: THE RHETORIC

OF SELF IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF

FLORA ANNIE STEEL

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ABSTRACT

By categorizing Flora Annie Steel as a minor, popular, Anglo-Indian authoress, and by concentrating primarily on her literary work, studies of this nineteenth-century imperial subject have continued to position her, and the wider study of imperialism, within hierarchical, imperialist frameworks. I problematize and attempt to move beyond such frameworks by examining the ways in which Flora Steel's authority was constructed through and around her autobiographical and professional writing. I examine the production of subjectivity in genealogy through a meta-biographical investigation of Steel's memoir, *The Garden of Fidelity*. I then develop a rhetorical analysis of Flora Steel's reports as Inspector of Schools in Punjab to investigate the strategies she employed to position herself as both a woman and a government official in the context of arguments over what constitutes an educated Indian woman. Although Steel's literary career was predicated on her supposed "knowledge" of India and especially of Indian women, that career was established in late-nineteenth-century Britain, where imperial subjectivity was overdetermined by complex forces, including rapidly-changing relationships governing text-production. Moving beyond purely literary views of subjectivity and authorship, I examine the rhetorical strategies Steel used to negotiate these complex forces. Finally, I re-read one of Steel's short stories as part of an ongoing debate between East and West, and I conclude with suggestions for taking imperial subjectivity beyond such familiar polarities.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
I INTRODUCTION	1
II GENEALOGY AND THE WRITTEN SELF: FLORA ANNIE STEEL'S <i>THE GARDEN OF FIDELITY</i>	25
III <i>POSTSCRIPT</i> : ENCOUNTERING GENEALOGY	55
IV INDIAN EXPERIENCE: FLORA STEEL'S CONSTRUCTION OF A PROFESSIONAL SELF IN HER OFFICIAL REPORTS AS INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS, PUNJAB	78
V INDIAN AUTHOR (ITY): FLORA STEEL'S PROFESSIONAL LITERARY WRITING	104
VI CONCLUSION: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR SUBJECTS OF IMPERIALISM	152
WORKS CITED	165

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study concerns the life and work of Flora Annie Steel, a Victorian woman who lived in India as part of the British ruling elite from 1868 to 1889. Initially she played the role of conventional memsahib, giving birth to children and managing a household as she followed her husband through his career in the Indian Civil Service. In the 1870s, however, discovering (or deciding) that she would have no more children, and apparently growing restless, she entered public discourse first as an educator and then as a storyteller and historian. In her time she was known as the "female Rudyard Kipling," but while Kipling's life and work are still discussed and read, Flora Steel's life and work have been largely forgotten.

In recent years, with the surge of interest in the British "Raj" and in women's participation in imperialism, Flora Steel has begun to enter public discourse again. Daya Patwardhan's *A Star of India* (1963) and Violet Powell's *Flora Annie Steel* (1981) have reclaimed Flora Steel for the romance of Anglo-India mostly from her own memoirs and from the reminiscences of friends. The results have been largely laudatory, although Patwardhan's book includes useful lists of book reviews in the popular press of Steel's time. Some studies have sought to reclaim Flora Steel for her supposed heritage as in Alex M. Cain's *The Cornchest For Scotland: Scots in India* (1986) in which Steel's life and work are held up with other "Scots contributions" to education and medicine. Other critics have perceived her and her work as morally inferior to more "sensitive" (and therefore more "literary") authors like E. M. Forster (Parry 100-30), or as morally inferior to "more feminist" women in India like Annie Besant (Paxton 158-76). Yet Flora Steel's entry into public discourse cannot be reduced to her supposed identity as an Anglo-Indian, a Scot, an author, or a woman. Situated as it was between Britain and "India" in the nineteenth century, that public discourse cannot be seen apart from the wider

discursive field of European imperialism. Before I discuss Steel, therefore, I will sketch the broad outlines of a phenomenon that has been produced within and as part of the Western discursive field of which any study of Flora Steel, including this one is necessarily also a part.

1. Holding the Fort: Imperial Studies From the Centre

Imperialism, as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and other commentators have described it, is a mapping of cultural and geographical territory employing an ideology of possession and control. Viewed historically, its modern dimensions are commonly seen as extending roughly from Columbus' "discovery" of the Americas to the nationalist liberatory politics of the pre- and post-WWII nation-state configuration. In influence and sheer acquisitiveness, Britain is seen to have played the largest role. Whether decolonization has marked some sort of end to imperialism and the closely related phenomenon of colonialism, so that imperialism can be consigned to history from a "post-colonial" position, is open to debate. Nevertheless, it seems clear that "history" marks the present, and that the impulse to imperialism has found different ways to produce the same effects. Geographical and cultural imperialism and colonialism may still be very much alive in the transnational corporatism described by Masao Miyoshi ("Borderless" 1993) or in the maximizing, extractive, "separating, dominating and reactive" tendencies which continue to structure Western concepts and practices of knowledge production (Said *C&I* 39).

Indeed, studies of imperialism have tended to reproduce the very structures of domination they have sought to describe. The formal study of the British Empire is supposed to date from 1883 when J. R. Seeley published his Cambridge lectures on *The Expansion of England*. The lectures attempt to construct the empire as something which, in that infamous phrase, England has acquired "in a fit of absence of mind"(10) in addition to something which has been imposed on the English by the overwhelming force

of history, and can simultaneously be controlled through comprehensive knowledge of "Greater Britain"(11). These contradictory images of England as Empire do not primarily illuminate "history," the ostensible subject of the lectures; instead they function as the vehicle for anxiety over the future. Throughout Seeley's lectures, the spectre of pressures from within (which are simultaneously Other or without) threaten to blow apart the "gigantic dimensions," "vast politics"(11), and "prodigious greatness"(2) not only of the Empire but of the English nation itself.

J. A. Hobson's famous 1902 study similarly produces anxiety for Britain's health (and that of the world which is presumed to be dependent on Britain) in the face of the disease or perversion of imperialism that infects the more "normal" political behavior that nationalism represents in his text. Hobson locates this disease in "private folly," the acts of a few reckless men supported by a few influential statesmen (356-57). Yet these few who seem cut off from the desires of the larger nation they are said to represent apparently wield a great deal of force, not only in holding their own nation in thrall, but in subduing othered populations. Hobson writes that,

wherever white men of 'superior races' have found able-bodied savages or lower races in possession of lands containing rich mineral or agricultural resources, they have, wherever strong enough, compelled the lower races to work for their benefit, either organizing their labour on their own land, or inducing them to work for an unequal barter, or else conveying them as slaves or servants to another country where their labour-power could be more profitably utilized. (248)

Since Seeley and Hobson, an almost exclusive focus in "mainstream" imperial studies on the health of European nations and particularly on Britain has tended to reproduce these nations as dominant, yet curiously passive, and as eminently able, yet strangely anxious. The famous Robinson and Gallagher controversy of the 1950s and

1960s directed critics' attention to the question, at what point and in what manner did Britain's greatness begin to decline? Often this question has been tinged by nostalgic expressions of loss reflected in the very titles of scholarly works from Colin Cross's *The Fall of the British Empire* (1969) to D. A. Low's *Eclipse of Empire* (1991). In James Morris' aptly titled *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire* (1968), the text figures its author in a rhapsody Merchant-Ivory would envy:

I have fondly imagined my book orchestrated by the young Elgar, and illustrated by Frith; its pages are perfumed for me with saddle-oil, joss-stick and railway steam; I hope my readers will feel, as they close its pages, that they have spent a few hours looking through a big sash window at a scene of immense variety and some splendour, across whose landscapes there swarms a remarkable people at the height of its vigour, in an outburst of creativity, pride, greed and command that has affected all our lives ever since. (10)

By the 1970s some mainstream critics are expressing the anxiety that the breakdown of policy that may have spelled the passing of the "golden age" of Empire likewise may break apart the discipline of imperial studies. In his influential *Victorian Imperialism* (1978), C. C. Eldridge laments, "after two decades of intensive publication the framework for discussing British colonial policy in the Victorian age lies in shreds" (8).

At the same time, partly through these expressions of anxiety, but also in more explicit ways, there has been an effort in imperial studies to deny or efface the power that the British empire has been said to have held over the rest of the world. The view that Seeley first expressed of Britain as a powerful nation that is nevertheless not in full control of its own fate continues well into this century. In *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (1965) D.K. Fieldhouse describes Europe's acquisition of empire as though it were a game of chance at a county fête:

the selectivity of colonial expansion before 1883 reflected in part the knowledge that much of what was rejected was not worth the taking. The indiscriminate partition of the next thirty years was a lucky dip in which there were a few prizes, and those mostly well hidden when the draw was made. Most participants in fact acquired only white elephants to which their most enthusiastic efforts could give little future value. (241)

Similarly, in the 1980s, in a contribution to a collection of essays C. C. Eldridge could ask,

was there a British empire? . . . It was a loose and sometimes accidental association of units with few shared characteristics apart from their mutual origins stemming from British economic, political and cultural predominance in the world. Comparatively rarely did the British make any conscious effort to submerge the individuality of their colonies and when they did bestir themselves success was rarer still. No single code of laws, language or religion covered the empire [It] was an illusion. (*British* 168)

In the 1980s and early 1990s the passivity posited for Britain by imperial historians has been transformed (mostly it seems through the "political correctness" bogeyman of mainstream scholarship) into Britain (or the "West")-as-victim. For example, Bernard Porter's *The Lion's Share* (1984) exhibits features of the "look-what-you-made-us-do" thesis in his analysis of imperial power-relations. "As Britain's economy grew," the text explains,

her [*sic*] commercial and cultural involvement in the world grew deeper and more extensive, and came into contact with more peoples who found her demands oppressive or unreasonable, either because they were so, or because the people were not yet industrially mature enough to understand

or cope with them. Amongst these communities the encroachment of the British economy was provoking the kinds of conflict which nearly always accompanies rapid social change, and which were bound to necessitate political intervention if British interests were to be secured. (28)

Familiar arguments in the academic community surrounding works like Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991) have created an atmosphere of anxiety about the decline of imperial nations that is not uncoincidentally related to a perceived "decline" of imperial studies (see also Elie Kedoury's "Politics and the Academy" 1992). The threat has been recently expressed in P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins' introduction to their *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion* (1993), which employs the discourse of exploration narratives to discuss scholarship. The authors write, for example, that

yet another book on British imperialism needs an explicit justification beyond that provided by the enduring importance of the subject itself [G]ood cause can be shown either by updating previous surveys or by venturing a new interpretation. It is difficult to say which is the more hazardous enterprise: the former threatens to bury the surveyor alive under an avalanche of specialized research which descends faster than it can be moved; the latter offers the prospect of ordeal by public exposure Well might prospective authors pause before setting course for a journey which harbours such irreducible risks. (3)

Where the "ruins of the imperial edifice were obliterated further, as the undergrowth crept up and covered them stone by stone" (Porter 361), there has been since Seeley and Hobson a sense among some historians of empire that it can be recovered, if not geographically, perhaps through the discipline of imperial studies. As D. K. Fieldhouse

remarks in "Can Humpty-Dumpty Be Put Together Again? Imperial History in the 1980s,"

imperial historians can . . . perhaps best be regarded as a loose federation with indeterminate boundaries rather than a unitary state. There have been secessionary tendencies and some unilateral declarations of independence; but in this empire at least the centre has been able to hold. (22)

By co-opting the discourse of resistance (the allusion here is to Chinua Achebe's anti-imperialist *Things Fall Apart* as much as it is to W.B. Yeats's "The Second Coming"), Fieldhouse reveals the reactionary, recuperative, nostalgic aspect of much scholarship on imperialism, revealing also the threat of loss of control over disciplinary/geographic space.

2. Storming the Barricades: Imperial Studies of the Streets

Anxiety in imperialist discourse constitutes a salient feature of imperialism's response to attacks on its claims to moral and material authority. The "we-weren't-even-an-empire-the-colonies-made-us-do-it" syndrome is a form of "anti-conquest" as discussed in Pratt (1992) "whereby European [and now 'Western'] bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (7). This reproduction and reconfiguration of imperialist impulses in the concepts and practices of Western knowledge production has been subject to serious challenge, however.

In some ways the challenge to such reproduction and reconfiguration of imperialist impulses has presented a united front. Representatives of this challenge recognize imperialism as a form of power and see it as an *interested* form. Since it is seen as inseparable from the economic and political struggles of formerly colonized peoples most "postcolonialists" would see it as part of present and future, as well as historical conditions. Most view the challenge as involving the (re-)occupation and control of

geography and resources and most would see that as somehow related to changes in language-use. For example, writing in her introduction to the *PMLA*'s special issue on "Colonialism and the Post-colonial Condition" (1995), Linda Hutcheon describes postcolonial criticism as a movement that has "positioned itself as a broad anti-imperialist emancipatory project [which] has thereby added a more overtly politicized dimension to related work in the field of Commonwealth studies . . . as well as in various national-language literary disciplines" (8). Having arisen from conditions of domination and oppression, the challenge to imperialism is most often theorized and practiced through the oppositional frames of reference available in the imperial context itself, such as the concepts of "centre and margins," "high and popular," "literate and oral," "good and evil," and so on.

In many other ways, however, the challenge to imperialism has itself been fractured by debate, and some might say that this feature has been one of its major strengths. Most debates focus on decolonization. There are arguments about whether decolonization has already taken place, or has yet to begin. Furthermore, other conflicts revolve around what forms decolonization can take. Participants in these debates may be seen as roughly representing two groups, one positivist, the other social-constructivist. Often crossing between and among these two groups are the tropes their members use to express their political struggles. The challenge to imperialism has at times participated in what Edward Said has called the "rhetoric of blame" (*C&I* 18). At other times it has styled itself a movement of recuperation. At still other times, the challenge to imperialism has spoken languages of reconciliation or "middle-grounding." Almost all those involved in decolonization agree, however, that it represents a painful struggle, and that an easy resolution is impossible.

The positivist camp would include what I call the "voices of liberation," that is, discourses arising from the geopolitical shift of decolonization. Frantz Fanon's *The*

Wretched of the Earth (1963) and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) have often been cited in this connection as examples of the angry and violent denunciations directed at imperial powers by insurgents. First and second-wave feminist voices and organizations like Queer Nation, although their temporal and spatial connections to imperialism are not as directly apparent, might also be included in this group, because like the formerly colonized who speak in the voices of liberation, their rhetoric often makes positivist claims to the "authentic speech" of the oppressed. This speech is what Edward Said has lately referred to as the "rhetoric of blame" because of its tendency to assign agency in imperialist impulses almost wholly to the centre while assigning itself the status of victim.

Closely related to the voices of liberation because their anti-imperialist texts are also grounded in claims to authenticity are the "voices of marginality." These voices refer to groups who think of themselves as traditionally belonging to the margins, but have referred also to some groups most often associated with Western hegemony. The movement has involved locating lost, forgotten, appropriated, or previously silenced cultural groups and artifacts and restoring them to their (former, originary) cultural validity and meaning. Sometimes this aspect of imperial meaning-making has evolved into wholesale separation: one could think here of the Quebecois in Canada, or of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's famous refusal to write in English. At other times and locations, it has involved an identification of the centre with the margins: if the emergence of anthologies, course outlines, special sections in university bookstores, hiring practices geared to "minority" or "ethnic" specialties does not exactly constitute an "explosion" in the Western scholarly apparatus as some would have it, the sensitivity to/appropriation of formerly colonized cultures shown by the centre at least seems to constitute a significant shift, for whatever purpose, toward the margins. This shift has been problematized over the last decade as "Third Worldism," which, commentators warn, by participating in

humanistic claims to subjectivity and value could further marginalize the very peoples and traditions it is meant to celebrate (see Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak," 1988, and more recently Bruce Robbins' "Colonial Discourse: A Paradigm and its Discontents," 1992).

At first glance, the social constructivist camp might seem to offer an alternative to the essentializing tendencies of celebrating marginality. A common project of the social constructivist camp is to look at Western imperialist discourse, usually of the period before what is known as decolonization, for the often complex ways in which the object of this colonizing discourse gets "othered." Usually commentators examine "canonical" literature as in Patrick Brantlinger's "Nations and Novels: Disraeli, George Eliot and Orientalism," or his chapters on Thackeray in his *Rule of Darkness* (1988). Western "classics" are shown to be repositories of imperialist tendencies or racial hatred as in Edward Said's (now itself almost canonical) reading of European Romanticism in *Orientalism* (1978). Rather than singling out those literary works or movements that may "contain" imperialist tendencies, some social constructivist critics have demonstrated how the sub-genre "imperial literature" may be redundant. Their criticism often functions to break down divisions between imperialism and literature because social constructivist critics see these divisions as having been constructed to serve specific social and political ends. For example, Suvendrini Perera's *Reaches of Empire* (1991) locates imperial tendencies in the "sacred cows" of supposedly entirely "domestic" fiction of England in the nineteenth century, while Gauri Viswanathan has implicated the creation of the discipline of English Literature in the act of disciplining a recalcitrant Indian population in British-occupied India of the early 1800s in her *Masks of Conquest* (1989).

Still other social constructivist efforts have participated in acts of recuperation. Western texts not usually considered central to the literary or historical canons have been privileged for scholarly investigation because of the "othering" work they do. For

example, texts by Lewis Carroll, H. Rider Haggard, and Richard Burton are placed beside those of Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy in Daniel Bivona's *Desire and Contradiction* (1990) and consideration of Flora Steel as a "novelist" in studies by Benita Parry (*Delusions and Discoveries* 1972), Nancy Paxton ("Complicity and Resistance" 1992), and Rebecca Saunders ("Gender, Colonialism" 1989) also is part of this recuperative gesture. Chris Tiffin's "*Black and White* and the Literature of Empire" (1984) considers a popular turn-of-the-century British magazine and its advertising "literature," while Patricia Seed's "Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires" (1992), instead of doing the more canonical historical work of analyzing the constitutional apparatus of taking over a colony, meticulously compares ceremonial codes used by sixteenth-century English and Spanish explorers to establish the right of possession over newly "discovered" American territory bringing social-symbolic gestures (taking home a twig or leaving behind a pile of rocks) as well as official documents into the purview of scholarly historical study of imperialism.

One problem with the social constructivist project of demonstrating the ways in which marginality is created is that this aspect of imperial studies still tends to re-assert the old imperial divisions between centre and margins by its insistent location of meaning-making agency in Western discourse. Chris Bongie's *Exotic Memories* (1991), for example, devotes pages to the "transnational" project of exoticising the "third world," transnational meaning for Bongie the process of othering in the discourses of *England* and *France*. Similarly, Daniel Bivona writes of the usefulness of investigating how the other has been constructed by Western discursive practices, because such investigations demonstrate among other things "that the question of empire fired the imaginations of a number of important [British] literary figures during the [nineteenth] century" (*Desire* viii). At the same time, another problem seems to be that social constructivist discourse tends to flatten or even erase what others might see as important historical dimensions.

Postcolonial interpretations, for example, often include texts that might trivialize the notion of marginality. As Linda Hutcheon has emphasized in "Circling the Downspout of Empire: Post-colonialism and Postmodernism," the concept of Canada as a site of marginalized discourse could seriously reduce the effectiveness of "marginal" or "oppressed" as conceptual categories. Similarly, efforts to designate some texts of the Western tradition as "marginal" by bringing them into the canon may imperil or divert needed attention from "truly" marginalized literatures that are not routinely privileged for analysis in the academy.

Over the past five to ten years commentators on imperialism who have been united only in their desire to oppose its acknowledged power and influence have been attempting, if not to reconcile, then at least to find a workable still-potent middle ground for the problematic opposing views outlined above. Perhaps nothing indicates this more clearly than the terms that have been emerging in order to reconfigure "imperial studies."

The changes in the titles of Edward Said's "founding" gestures of imperial studies indicate a conceptual shift Said outlines in his latest work, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), perhaps influenced by poststructuralist notions of heterogeneity and Bakhtinian dialogism. Earlier, in *Orientalism* (1979), Said had written about Western cultural, chiefly what are thought of as artistic, modes of othering or orientalizing colonized cultures broadly known as the "East." One of Said's most potent and lasting arguments, by way of Gramsci, has been that art and literature of the West could be a particularly insidious way to consolidate the geographical, economic, and political hegemony modern Western culture asserted over the rest of the world. Said's rhetorical aim in choosing *Culture and Imperialism* as the title for his most recent work seems to be to point toward extending and modifying this thesis. Where *Orientalism* was conceived as a one-way phenomenon, a monolithic West circumscribing, reducing, and diluting the rich heterogeneous traditions of "Eastern" cultures, Said has sought in this latest work a model

that allows the colonized a measure of agency and a measure of influence *upon* the more heterogeneously conceived of "West" under broader headings like "culture" or "imperialism" that could "belong" or be manipulated historically by many cultures.

Said suggests that through his model of "contrapuntal readings" we might interpret imperialism as a series of "encounters" between disparate cultural traditions. Such readings could avoid (re-)asserting hegemony of one culture over another thereby also possibly undercutting what Said sees as the "alleged universalism of fields such as the classics (not to mention historiography, anthropology, and sociology) . . . [which have behaved as] Eurocentric in the extreme, as if other literatures and societies had either an inferior or transcended value" (44). Said's "contrapuntal readings" model therefore attempts to indicate a way of seeing national or cultural (hi)stories as interdependent, and change, growth, or progress as not being the exclusive property of one culture or another (38).

However, while this theory of "counterpoint" may function as a suggestive model for seeing both sides in relation to each, Said tends to undercut its possibilities in his specific analyses of texts. At the level of theory, "counterpoint" challenges critics to analyze the ways in which cultural/discursive practices are constructed in response to one another. Often, however, Said's actual application of this promising model to actual texts suggests a far too dualistic analysis, one that is perhaps inadequate to describing the multiplicity of forces that seem to be at work in imperialism.

In its theoretical claims, Said's study seems to assert a distinctly non-autonomous status for language and particularly for literary discourse, seeing language and literature as constitutive of imperial tendencies. For example, "to represent Africa," the text states, "is to enter the battle over Africa, inevitably connected to later resistance, decolonization, and so forth" (68). Indeed cultural representation, sometimes also called discourse, more often termed literature in the text, "makes constant references to itself as somehow

participating in Europe's overseas expansion, and therefore creates . . . 'structures of feeling' that support, elaborate and consolidate the practice of empire"(14). Gesturing toward poststructuralist theories, Said as critic proposes, "I would prefer to interpret a novel as the choice of one mode of writing from among many others, and the activity of writing as one social mode among several, and the category of literature as something created to serve various worldly aims" (315). Thus, theoretically at least, Said seems to allow for counterpoint, in that he claims to adhere to a view of cultural products as responding to one another coequally.

At more points in Said's text, however, specific textual analyses contradict allusions to poststructuralist theories, producing readings of the Western canon that replicate it as hierarchical and autonomous. In actual practice, contrapuntal readings can become more dualistic and oppositional, threatening to foreclose the hoped-for heterogeneity of response. For example, *Culture and Imperialism* treats works by Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad, Albert Camus, and W. B. Yeats in detail as "aesthetic" forms, whereas works by members of formerly colonized populations are not treated as "literature," but are summarized as "treatises," "speeches," and "actions" and verge on being dismissed as "tub-thumping" (299). The text also draws distinctions between "high" forms of literary production, such as Austen's, which apparently "encode" experience and therefore represent a challenge to the critic, and "lesser" works of Western imperialism (like adventure novels) which wear their "historical affiliation more plainly"(96-97). Contrapuntal readings at times seem to be another way of consolidating hierarchies through the quasi-religious significance of "Big-L" Literature (see Terry Eagleton's "Introduction" to his *Literary Theory* for a discussion of the ways in which some Anglo-American literary critics have mystified and deified literary discourse). The liberatory politics this text seems to advance involve bringing the "best" of Western and non-(ex-?)Western Literature together, to be considered for the "nomadic, anti-narrative energy"

that poetry seems naturally to contain (279). Unfortunately, by re-asserting hierarchies of discourse, and by highlighting "truth-value" of poetic language, in this more recent study, Said's "encounters" seem still to be one-sided, even "Eurocentric."

Mary Louise Pratt's recent *Imperial Eyes* (1992) perhaps represents a more successful attempt at "encountering" the centres and margins of imperialism. Pratt's models of "contact zones" and "transculturation" have emerged by way of linguistic and anthropological concepts and are deployed in her account principally in relation to "travel writing" that details encounters with South America and Africa. As Pratt explains, the term "contact zone" derives from the socio-linguistic paradigm of contact languages, or those forms of speech that, like "pidgin," are improvisational and arise out of the urgency and specificity of cultural encounters. While contact zones refer to the spatial and temporal region in which these "improv" performances arise, "transculturation" (perhaps Pratt's new name for imperial studies?) designates the hybrid, fluid cultural configurations forming and reforming in this volatile region. As its first and perhaps most fascinating example, Pratt's text cites an early seventeenth-century Andean text written in "a mixture of Quechua and rough, ungrammatical Spanish" in the form of a letter (twelve hundred pages long!) and addressed to King Philip III of Spain. This *New Chronicle of Good Government and Justice* proposes a new view of the world by rewriting Christian history to include Amerindian "lifeways" (2). "Discovered" three centuries later in Copenhagen, this "letter" was at first interpreted by scholars as a curiosity, and since the 1970s has been "re-interpreted" yet again as part of on-going changes in the processes of "colonial meaning-making" (4). Such examples illustrate Pratt's reconfiguration of imperialism as a continual process of complex cross-currents involving transmissions and influence not only from the colonizer to the colonized, but *from* the periphery *to* metropolitan centres, and back and forth again. For Pratt, the "isms" that partly constitute culture, for example "romantic projects of liberty, individualism, and liberalism" (138),

are forged in the volatile zones between cultures and can only be detected in the tropes and clusters of images available to the interpreter through discursive formations.

This view of culture as located in highly volatile, improvised speech acts provides for thickly contextualized, multivalent readings of imperialism as discursive acts produced from within the materiality and specificity of global cultural communication. As such it seems a far more productive model than Said's for delineating the power and interestedness of imperialism. Pratt's readings of discursive formations arising from contact avoids definitively describing or circumscribing any one culture, because locating meaning in any originary notion of culture paradoxically may deny the material presence of contact and of imperialism. Thus Pratt's method seems to assert the continuing cultural meanings of imperial power and motivations without re-empowering those interests.

On the other hand, describing the processes of meaning-making as "contact zones" and "transculturation" could potentially disguise historical distinctions among cultures, by at least suggesting the treatment of all discursive formations as indeterminate "hybrids." (I am thinking here of how the notion of a "contact zone" applies to more "tactile" contact. How, for example, would imperial scholars use this model to interpret the discourse of the wars and campaigns of extermination that characterized much of the "contact" between "West" and "East"?) A further problem with Pratt's model is that, in order properly to carry out such research into contact zones, scholars would have to use analytic tools (knowledge of several different "native" languages and their historical variants, access to "original" documents) that some Western academies are not (yet) set up to provide. Pratt's model is a provocative and useful beginning, but as academics and non-academics alike are discovering that technology like the World Wide Web can provide non-tactile "contact" with a vast range of cultural documents, we need a way of analyzing these encounters that takes into account changing types of power imbalances.

This raises the important issue not broached in Pratt's study that someone, a "representative" of some contact zone is going to be interpreting (and in many cases determining) the constitution of "other" contact zones. In this connection I would cite Pratt's use of mostly "Western" travel texts to "jump-start" the contact discourse to be interpreted. In addition, Pratt relies on what seem to be Western modes of generic classification; she demarcates travel writing from "official" writing, but does not explain what would constitute the difference. Moreover, like most discourse on imperialism, Pratt's study conspicuously genders imperial "impulses" and practitioners as male: those writers "femaled" in their own time--Mary Kingsley or Flora Tristan--Pratt has "maled" in order to fit them into the notion of travel and "contact" as masculinist practices. Nevertheless Pratt's methodology, although applied in her text imperfectly, still suggests that "thick" descriptions might be the most promising way to analyze the imperial habit of binary, hierarchical thinking.

Naming imperialism as a masculine phenomenon is part of this habit which has marked imperial studies since its inception. The effort to describe women's participation in imperialism has at least in part represented the recuperative efforts mentioned above. As the editors of *Western Women and Imperialism* (Chaudhuri and Strobel 1992) remark, however, much of that effort has involved romanticizing white women as martyrs or as intrepid eccentrics principally through visual media such as the filmed versions of *Out of Africa*, *The Jewel in the Crown*, and *A Passage to India*. "Studies" such as Margaret MacMillan's *Women of the Raj* (1988), Marian Fowler's *Below the Peacock Fan* (1987) and Pat Barr's *The Memsahibs* (1989) also could be placed in this category because of their uncritical eulogizing of white women in imperial contexts and their problematic assumptions of white women's claims to subjectivity. Although *Western Women and Imperialism* is a more reflexive treatment of the topic, claiming to delineate white women's "complicity and resistance" within imperialism, the editors and the

authors of the collected essays in this book write of white women's involvement in imperialism as *historical*: there is a sense in the collection that "we" can collectively blush and move on. In addition, the editors' framing of white women within imperialism as a "marginalized" (implying victimized) group may seem to some at the very least a spurious claim.

Partly in response to studies of white women that relate them immediately to a highly visible imperial context (white women travelers, missionaries, and official or professional wives) and partly in response to first and second wave white feminisms that style their recuperative or oppositional efforts "decolonization," women of colour (the term seems itself highly contested) have made efforts both to recuperate female indigenous subjectivities and to theorize their opposition to imperialism from what at times may seem the "ground zero" of oppression. Vron Ware ("Moments of Danger" 1992), bell hooks (*Ain't I a Woman* 1981, and *Talking Back* 1989), Laura Donaldson, Barbara Christian, and T. Minh-ha Trinh (*Woman, Native, Other* 1989), among other women, have pointed to the double (triple?) colonization of women of colour at the hands of the gendered-male white heterosexual mainstream, white feminisms, and the gendered-male heterosexual mainstream of colour. These theorists have called for new understandings between women of colour and white feminisms and have posited the investigation of the construction of white womanhood as a starting-point. Too many times, they point out, white women (and by extension white culture) have been allowed to perceive themselves as women, identity, and culture par excellence, as non-racialized and therefore as not being subject to the "distinctions" that notions of being "raced" usually confer on identities.

Among the contributions of American theorists, Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1993) has been one of the most useful of these critiques as it outlines a methodology for approaching the construction of white women. Morrison suggests looking at literature

from a writerly perspective in order to determine and analyze the choices white women authors have made in the practice of representing others. Identifying those choices, Morrison suggests, can help us more easily see the literary devices by which white women construct themselves in opposition to "Africanist" constructions which lurk in their imaginative projections and in the dominant American psyche.

Investigating race as a construction in the very region where, as a gesture of social control it is produced as not inflecting (the "right") identity in the first place, may, these theorists claim, open out debates over identity and subjectivity to dialogue through viewing "entities" such as race, sex, gender, sexuality, class, nationality -- identity -- as being constituted in relational terms. One object of this type of study, as the editors of *Nationalisms & Sexualities* (Parker et al. 1992) write, is to problematize the institutional norms that constitute knowledge-production, such as "nationalism." "How is it," the editors ask, "that the world has come to see itself divided along the seemingly natural lines of national affiliation and sexual attachment? How do these categories interact with, constitute, or otherwise illuminate each other?" (2) Such investigations may work to resituate imperial studies within the larger study of the ways in which subjectivity and identity have been constituted and marked as owned by what Chandrapal Mohanty has called "the global hegemony of Western scholarship--i.e., the production, publication, distribution and consumption of information and ideas" (336). For Western feminists, Mohanty points out, this means developing vigilant awareness of the ways in which white womanhood is constructed and interpellated in the discursive formations within which it negotiates its situation in the world.

Mohanty's work suggests that scholars must move beyond studies of "discourse" that see it as residing principally or "rightly" only in Literature with a "Big-L." Studies such as Said's *Culture and Imperialism* and Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* question Western modes of knowledge production only to reassert them to a great extent by analyzing only

literary or aesthetic texts. But these studies beg the question, why examine only artistic discourse, since the category "artistic" may itself be part of the problem? Moving beyond a limited framework, what the research suggests so far is that as scholars/practitioners of imperialism, we must investigate *all* modes of producing identities in discourse. Since we are already working within institutional/professional discursive formations, it makes sense to focus on these formations as particularly productive and disruptive arenas for investigation. Consequently, the following study aims to suggest methods for investigating the ways in which people enter institutions and professions through writing.

3. Identity-formation and the Narrated Self

In *Ideology and Curriculum* (1990), Michael W. Apple has written about the ways in which categories normalize subjects in Western knowledge production as individuals.

"We find ways," he writes,

of making the concrete individual into an abstraction and, at the same time, we divorce the individual from larger social movements which might give meaning to 'individual' wants, needs, and visions of justice. This is strongly supported by the notion that curriculum research is a 'neutral scientific activity' which does not tie us to others in important structural ways. (9)

As significant elements of curricula in the discipline of English studies, the novel and biography can be seen as discursive practices which narrate the authority of the self in Western mythology. The "constitution of a narrative subject," as discussed in Said, is "a social act *par excellence*, and as such has behind it or inside it the authority of history and society" (*C & I* 77). Biography has been credited with a similar social force. Joseph Kronik writes, "as a mimetic art form, biography is modeled after the logocentric principle of speech as the expression of truth and self. The individual self is held to be the finite form of a universal essence" (110). Through these "Grand Narratives," whether of

Robinson Crusoe or Lyndon Johnson, Western knowledge production seems to enact and re-enact identity as individual, autonomous, self-contained in authority. As André Maurois once wrote, the only lives worth writing (or living?) are those that "display the power of the individual" (142).

But there are discursive acts, novels and biographies among them, that disrupt the self-contained self and the reproduction of categorical self-containment in generic (genderic) thinking. For example, Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1991) enacts the concept of "contact zones" discussed in Pratt. A life history alternately of several "characters"--a huge seventeenth-century "dog-woman," her "son" Jordan, and the polluted Thames river--*Sexing the Cherry* presents the naturalist/explorer Jordan's efforts to bring the pineapple to England, and his attempt to graft a female cherry tree with no parent or seed. Told sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, the narrative confounds the reader's sense of who is narrating, or where or even when the story is taking place. The reader grasps the life-history in fitful spurts of narrative and dialogue, sorting through the detritus the Thames washes up from many shores and many ages to discern a thread of story. In *Sexing the Cherry*, narrative and identity, gender and genre, are just what we can make of them at specific moments of textual contact. "The self is not contained in any moment or any place," the "novel" (or is it travel narrative?) reads, "but it is only in the intersection of moment and place that the self might, for a moment, be seen vanishing through a door, which disappears at once" (87).

In the recent film (or collection of shorts) *Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould* (1993), the director and writer, François Girard, and co-writer Don McKellar gesture in the direction of the Canadian composer-musician's life through the same sorts of fleeting intersections deployed in Winterson's text. Through relational juxtapositions of images, glances, and distortions of proportion and sound, the film suggests the impossibility of circumscribing identity using the categories available to Western knowledge production.

For example, the collection opens and closes with shots of a man walking or standing alone in a frozen wasteland. The spectator wonders who or what this man may represent. Is he Gould, Colm Feore (the actor who plays Gould), the musician's father, an artist, all of humanity, or just a speck of dust? The placement of this image calls into question the relation of identity to place, of the geographical designation "Canada" to frozen aridity to artistic fruition, of the category "artist" to the category "society," and so on. Conventional notions of what kinds of representation constitute a "life" are also critiqued, when, in one of the shorts, the frame is filled with highly magnified images of prescription medications. As pink pills are supplanted on the screen by blue pills and then orange pills seemingly *ad infinitum*, Colm Feore's voice-over reads in a monotone from the *Physician's Desk Reference* description of the contraindications for each drug. This is a life? Yes, and no. Such precedents for discursively disrupting modes of Western knowledge production could be seen as examples of what Gayatri Spivak refers to as "strategic essentialism," that is, writing and living a "running self-identikit" which is at once necessary and extremely dangerous (but never adequate) to oppositional politics (*Outside* 4).

4. Flora Annie Steel in Moments of Contact

My task in the following pages is to write about an imperial subject in ways that may demonstrate modes of resisting the Imperial Subject/Subject of Imperialism. My task is also therefore to remain aware of how the concept of identity might be constituted through its discourses of sex, gender, sexuality, nationality, race, and class. Consequently, the following pages do not define a life. Rather this "life" of Flora Steel is modeled on "meta-biographies" such as *Sexing the Cherry* and *Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould*. As I write through and about the discursive formations that may constrain or enable biography, Flora Steel emerges as a subject in the brief moments of contact between Britain and "India," between late nineteenth-century authority and late

twentieth-century knowledge production, in what can best be described as a montage of specific, local discursive acts.

Borrowing from poststructuralist, specifically New Historicist, methodology, and from recent studies in the "rhetoric of inquiry," I start from the premise that identities are constructed and organized through acts of writing and through the texts those acts produce. In this way, by examining written products within and across specific, concrete situations, I look at Flora Steel's writing as part of larger cultural narratives. In order to develop thick descriptions of Steel's writing, I use methods associated with what has come to be known as "context-sensitive text analysis" (see Thomas Huckin's "Context-Sensitive Text Analysis" 1992 and works closely aligned with Huckin's such as Norman Fairclough's *Discourse and Social Change* 1992, Stuart Hirschberg's introduction to his *Strategies of Argument* 1990, and Rick Coe's *Process, Form and Substance* 1990.) Specifically, I have first selected texts which stand out for their association with the construction of Steel's authority: her autobiographical, institutional, and professional writing. I have then examined these texts for salient discourse features that reflect or disrupt this authoritative patterning. I have then verified patterns that emerge from these texts, finally analyzing them for ways in which they function to construct Steel's multivalent selves. What will develop from this investigation, I believe, is a rich, interdisciplinary reading of Flora Steel, and the contextual issues that construct imperial subjects.

I begin by experimenting with beginnings. Chapters Two and Three problematize the conventional biographical beginning by examining the production of subjects in genealogy and the ways in which Flora Steel's autobiography, written near the close of her long life, refuses this production. Flora Steel can also be glimpsed in the texts of her entrance into the discourse of public education and an examination of these previously unexplored texts forms the material of Chapter Four. Chapter Five relies on Flora Steel's

previously unexamined letters to her publishers and literary agent in order to investigate her production as celebrated author/authority. I then juxtapose this production with some of the dominant discourses of Steel's day. Chapter Six looks at the ways in which womanhood is produced in the contact zone between "First" and "Third" worlds. Relying on Bakhtin's notion of speech genres, it looks at a short story by Steel, and two "responses" to it written by "Indian" authors Attia Hosain and Meena Alexander. Throughout I have tried to suggest the kinds of cultural work that "research" may produce. Chapter Six generates further questions about Western practices of knowledge production by extending and critiquing the concept of "response" to suggest possible ways in which scholar/participants of imperialism may respond to Toni Morrison's challenge to develop a writerly awareness of imperial subjectivity. I conclude by examining advocacy as one possible mode of response to this challenge.

CHAPTER TWO: GENEALOGY AND THE WRITTEN SELF: FLORA ANNIE STEEL'S *THE GARDEN OF FIDELITY*

To be born, or at any rate bred, in a handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the handbag was found, a cloakroom at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion -- had probably, indeed been used for that purpose before now -- but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognized position in good society.'

-- Lady Bracknell-- *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895)

As I write in this 1994 United Nations Year of the Family, it seems only appropriate to open my study of Flora Steel's subjectivity with a chapter about her family history, situated in the larger context of the concept of family history in Western culture.¹ In what follows, I will first explore the various uses of genealogy as concept and practice at particular locations of knowledge production. A contact zone for various disciplinary constructions of subjectivity exists in the world's largest collection of genealogical resource material located in Salt Lake City, Utah. I will discuss the ways in which this geographical/cultural location simultaneously enables and constrains genealogical research and life-writing. By concluding with a look at Flora Steel's excursion into autobiography and her treatment of her own family history, I hope to explore a very powerful way of thinking about the origins of the self in society. As a postscript, I have added a story about my own attempt to insert Flora Steel into dominant Western modes of narrating subjectivity. An immediate purpose of this chapter is to explore Flora Steel's

¹ As the editors of *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* acknowledge, ways of speaking and writing about the "West" and the "periphery" are in process. I use the terms advisedly, awkwardly, like Spivak's catachreses which acknowledge even as they are used that they are inadequate terms for what they may desire to describe (see Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan 1994).

"background." A more general purpose is to provoke questions about just what it is that seems to constitute "an assured basis for recognition" in Western society.

1. Genealogy and its Several Uses

Genealogy is perhaps best known to Western scholars today through its use as a trope for reformulating historiography in such (New Historicist) histories as Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre* (1985), Natalie Zemon Davis' *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983) and Sara Mills's *Discourses of Difference* (1991). Where traditional historical method attempts to uncover meaning in a mysterious origin, genealogical method interprets historical change by locating and describing those haphazard points at which new interpretations emerge from the chance inheritance of all the numberless, accidental configurations of interpretations that have gone before them. In this type of historical exegesis, events are not conceived in linear or decisive terms, but as "the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked 'other.'" (Foucault, "NGH" 154). In other words, history is reconceived in genealogy not as a grand narrative but as a series of chance conflicts that partake of the intimacy, the materiality, the indeterminacy that "in-breed" between the lines of the familiar.

Aside from making historical study more engaging to do and to read, and aside from the challenging opportunities for radical critique I believe genealogical method as described by Foucault may provide, it is perhaps one of the haphazard ironies of discourse that genealogy itself gets set above its own method. As a trope for describing related phenomena, genealogy seems to get deployed unproblematically. Family history may play itself out on a "field of entangled and confused parchments" (Foucault, "NGH" 139) ; it may be only faintly visible in the rain-washed pitted surfaces of gravestones; it may provide only traces of history, unsettling the stable grounds of Western society. Yet

if historians were to apply genealogical methodology to genealogy itself, perhaps the less radical possibilities of genealogical practice would emerge. For if genealogy is seen in specific locations of practice, it becomes possible to view it as a conservative technology of social control.

In early modern times genealogy appears to have functioned in the West as a way to establish and consolidate the suzerainty or dynastic power of a few families over land and labour and beliefs. A salient feature of this function seems to have been display. For example, as David Hey has demonstrated, in late sixteenth-century England, for example, Sir William Fairfax apparently had the Great Chamber of Gilling Castle painted with a plaster frieze that circumscribed this state and family space with depictions of 443 coats of arms of the Yorkshire gentry superimposed on trees. Efforts were made to establish Queen Elizabeth I's divine right of rule through an elaborately illuminated pedigree still on display at Hatfield House which depicts the English Queen's descent from Adam. During her reign it apparently became the fashion among the aristocracy to commission pedigrees to be displayed and admired as works of art. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries heralds and county antiquarians made a living from printing the pedigrees of gentry and tradesmen who perhaps wished to assert their right to upward mobility. The well-known European practices of signalling succession in naming royalty (George III, Philip IV) and of encoding descent from the word of God in giving children Biblical names (apparently a common practice among seventeenth-century English and American Puritans) similarly enacted, asserted, and displayed in language the "fact" of descent and the importance to the consolidation of power of *noticing* descent.

From its "beginnings" in heraldic display for the purposes of governing, genealogy is thought to have since "increased" (Hey 1; Jacobson 347) and "spread" in what has been described as an "essentially democratic movement" (Quinn B2). Where once the tracing and recording of ancestry was almost exclusively a royal or aristocratic concern, the

argument goes, over the last two decades of the twentieth century genealogy has become more "honest" as it is now practiced enthusiastically by "ordinary people" (Hey 2), hobbyists who represent popular or individual "emergent identity" (Jacobson 348). Thus, genealogy is supposed to have been divorced from power.

The history of genealogy may not represent an increasingly democratic impulse, however. Even those for whom family history seems not to have much power over daily life are made aware of it if they become ill (most medical services require patients to complete a medical history questionnaire that goes back as far as grandparents), or if they want to change citizenship (in former British colonies children or grandchildren of former colonists can still become British citizens if they are declared as such before their eighteenth birthday), or if they want to advance to high levels of community or national visibility. "Who are your people?" is a common gate-keeping question in modern democracies such as Canada, the United States and Europe. The way in which President Bill Clinton's adversaries keep bringing up his "white trash" origins and relating them to his supposed inability to govern is just one particularly glaring version of this question. Even in job interviews it is legal to ask a prospective employee about his or her family history, which could bar a person from employment in some professions like the military, police, education, or child care. In short, while it is perhaps true that family history is no longer displayed or celebrated through elaborate visual representation as a way of legitimating government, genealogy may still function in the Western world at least as a means of social control in far less visible ways.

Genealogy would seem to be more than a hobby. In its specific uses across several disciplines it appears to reproduce some conservative tendencies. An examination of texts from several disciplines indicates that the practice of genealogy may assign value to the family as the primary unit of social cohesion. Through its apparent desire for continuity genealogical practice tends to assign social currency to staying within a community

(based on geography, religion, class, race, etc.), preserving oral, pictorial, or written records, preserving intact family units, allocating finances and time to record-keeping and retrieval within and between families, and relying on established convention in record-keeping (tracing ancestry patrilineally, for example).² In its specific contemporary social uses genealogical practice apparently seeks to present itself as passively, neutrally responding to "human nature," and thus tends to re-present the status quo.

Where genealogy is not functioning as a trope for methodology it is usually referred to uncritically as a practice that can have varied applications. In social scientific and medical discourses genealogy seems to function as a cure, or part of the cure, for social and biological "illnesses." In "Genealogies as Culture and Biology: Tokelau Case Study" (Huntsman 1986), for example, two ethnographers and a geneticist recount their research on a South Sea island population from which genealogies were gathered and used, not only to draw conclusions about social interaction, but to fix those social interactions in biology: "the genealogies gathered in the course of the ethnographic studies," the researchers' report states, "provides a unique opportunity to investigate the genetic evolution of a small, largely self-contained population in terms of the distribution of genetic relationship" (20). Several assumptions govern the researchers' methodology and interpretations, chief among them the assumption that knowledge of one's family history is desirable for both social and biological health. The report indicates that when the researchers encountered people who did not provide a genealogical narrative the team was composing, their subjects were treated as problems to be "resolved," usually as the text recounts, "simply by asking for more information" (21). The report implies that healthy subjects have an identifiable bloodline, and unhealthy subjects need to be "cured" through locating and establishing a bloodline. Such research sees genealogy as an

²While medical and citizenship uses of genealogy may trace connections both patrilineally and matrilineally, most Western uses of genealogy focus only on patrilineal relationships. For example, legal and religious statutes frequently place a high emphasis on the name of the father.

antidote (or anecdote?) to illness and suggests that there are natural bases to concepts like "family" and "memory."

Genealogy as a cure for social illness has also been suggested in the discourse of psychology as an "adjunct" to conventional therapy, especially for clients "who have recently lost a loved one . . . particularly if the loved one was a parent or grandparent" (Champaigne 86). According to the therapist who claims success with this technique and is recommending it to her colleagues through a report in *The Journal of Counseling and Development* (1990), in such cases the genealogical "search process connects the client with the larger living family unit by requiring information gathering and personal contact with relatives. Connectedness with ancestors provides insight and a sense of continuity in the face of loss" (86). "Benefits" include a wider "support" network by allowing the client to form affective ties to long-dead relatives, ties which may temporarily over-ride or more permanently ameliorate a present "dysfunctional" family situation and "can encourage a more positive identity as a person" (86). Champagne even suggests that therapists ask their clients visually to represent their genealogical search in a chart, although she warns that the client might resist: "an extended counselling session may be required to provide adequate reinforcement for the completion of this project" (87). Genealogy seems to be suggested, then, as a tool for reinforcing social ties, and the assumptions constitutive of this discourse are that a severing or loosening of those ties through death or forgetting signals illness.

Family ties (and by the customary extension, social ones) can also apparently be "weakened" through distance. Although several commentators advance social disruption or increased social mobility as one of the chief "causes" of what they have identified as the increase in genealogical interest, in studying this apparent increase as a social phenomenon Cardell Jacobson found that "traditionality not change" seems to determine whether or not people pursue their family history. That is, his survey (1986) found that

older, established, stable members of the (in this case) American population were more likely than others to become interested in genealogy. Jacobson comments almost parenthetically in his report that another researcher has advanced the (perhaps not particularly startling) hypothesis that conservative members of society may feel the most threatened by social mobility. This suggests, although Jacobson elides the suggestion, that genealogical practice may be perceived (at the very least by those engaged in it) as a way of maintaining hegemonic social formations.

Indeed, where commentators may celebrate genealogical interest as a "democratic" tendency genealogy seems to be touted as a way to keep this democratic possibility from being realized; that is, it could be seen as a way to prevent active engagement with power relations in the here-and-now. In his recent "popular history/manual" of genealogy (1993) David Hey remarks on the "fervour and delight" and "absorbed fascination" with which "ordinary people" pursue their ancestors. Hey claims that, even though "our ancestors may never have appeared on the national stage, . . . they and countless others like them are the real stuff of history" (12). In other words, "ordinary people" are individuals whose connection or importance to society might appear divorced from the level of power politics and (re-)located in the private world of the autonomous subject's "blood line." And even though lack of systematic methods of record-keeping prevents accurate knowledge of who one's forebears were much beyond the late eighteenth century, Hey insists that "the attempt should, nevertheless, be made" (11). Hey's reasons why "we" should relentlessly pursue what can never be found apparently come close to the escapist reasons advanced by Champagne's "therapeutic" use of genealogy: "the family historian is led into a series of different worlds, as he or she discovers more and more about the lives of each pair of ancestors" (11). Hey's understanding of genealogical practice therefore seems to indicate that it can be used to keep popular or democratic tendencies

occupied in directing resources toward valorizing normative concepts like "individual" and "family" and naturalizing those concepts as politically neutral and past.

In other words, narrating genealogy as "democratic" elides the conservative effects of its practice in specific locations: seeing genealogy as populist can in fact paradoxically advance established state interests. This is perhaps most in evidence in educational sites that call on genealogy as a learning tool. For example, an article by Murray Sayle in *The Far Eastern Economic Review* (1988) comments on the late 1980s Australian phenomenon of celebrating convict ancestry, particularly in the nation's schools and museums. The text quotes a young white Australian who has been participating in a state-sponsored game of dress-up as an eighteenth-century convict at a Sydney historical site. The girl remarks that locating "roots" in the transport ships that brought Australia's first white settlers "makes people feel more Australian" (45). "Picking pockets or palming teaspoons, however," the author of the article states, "is not the style of the modern Australian tycoon. The builders of media, property and brewing empires owe their daring, drive and resourcefulness -- and, it has been argued, lack of scruples -- to the self-reliant, lawless spirit of the goldfields, where a claim was good only as long as someone with a gun was watching it" (49). In drawing connections between family history and a rhetoric of national prosperity fostered in educational programs the article suggests that genealogical interest may be perceived as a way to conserve the interests of those in power.

In the United States, state-supported uses of genealogy have been suggested to promote cultural stability in what has been widely perceived as a society in "crisis." Michael Quinn, an archivist at Northwestern University writing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (1991), echoes the apparent concerns of many other American commentators when he writes that "adrift in a sea of instant culture of dubious meaning and marginal value [modern Americans] yearn for a genuine heritage" (B2). The cure for

this "consumerist, homogenized culture," Quinn seems to assert, is for the American educational establishment, particularly the academy, to take genealogy "seriously." In genealogical practice, Quinn claims, "long-lost traditions and values often are reclaimed. Finding one's own roots can bring a sense of security in our mobile, rootless world. In the process, ordinary citizens learn to use public records and develop a new engagement with history. It may not be grand scholarship, but it is nonetheless, genuine historical research. We can only benefit when consciousness of the importance of history is raised" (B2). Among the benefits? Quinn suggests an awareness of "family traditions," which are apparently "an important part of trans-generational cohesion," might stem the alarming "increases" in the "breakup of the nuclear family" (B2). Such assertions which link genealogy to the valorization in educational sites of the family as the normative unit of social cohesion seem to locate genealogical practice firmly within the "family values" discourse of North American right-wing politics.

While practicing genealogy has been suggested as a way to valorize the family, educationalists have also promoted it as a way to access and reinforce what are thought to be individual students' formative influences. In the United States, Mark Hutter (1987) focuses on family history as a way to get a more intimate picture of social forces apparently outside the reach of a classroom setting. Hutter advises teachers to make oral history an important part of information-gathering when students do family history research in history or social studies classes. "Oral history," Hutter remarks, "makes possible a more three-dimensional portrait of family life. It can focus on internal family processes--the roles of husbands and wives, parents and children, emotional intimacy and conflicts, dating and courtship, sexual behavior and attitudes, fertility patterns including contraceptive use and abortions, and general involvements--in a way prohibited by other research techniques" (222). Hutter also suggests that genealogy can be a valuable tool for exposing the links between the "immigrant family" and the "labour market" and "social

class variations" in order to impress upon the student that "the values cherished by individuals and felt to be threatened are related to the values cherished by the larger population, which are felt to be threatened" (222). That is, in the United States, genealogy might provide a method for exposing what was previously hidden from view and enfolding it within the surveillance of the state-sponsored educationalist. In England too, educational theory has suggested family history as an untapped source for making predictions about the educational "limitations" of students from working-class family backgrounds (see Paul E. Willis' *Learning to Labor*, 1977).

Of course, part of the perceived "democratization" of genealogy may derive from its use by "marginal" or "local" groups in search of a discursive field in which to situate and valorize their concerns. This is in part what Hutter refers to in his advocacy of the use of genealogy as a way for students representing immigrant populations to own a heritage. The problem seems to be that the heritage they end up owning is that of the dominant group, if not through their particular experiences of being Korean, British, or Somali, but through constituting particular identities through the "universal" tropes of "family" "history," or indeed "property." A similar phenomenon occurs in feminist uses of genealogy. Tracing women's forebears, whether through their literary virtuosity celebrated in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1985) or through the history of their subjection to the constraints of "linguistic exile" (DeLauretis 394), the uncritical use of genealogy as an organizing metaphor, still fails to offer a satisfying critique of family history as a way of producing hegemonic social organizations.

While genealogy's uses span discourse communities as diverse as philosophical discourse in the academy and in "popular" sites, law, medicine, social sciences, education, and liberatory politics, one of the most visible and yet, paradoxically, *in*-visible uses for genealogical practice cuts across these communities in life-writing. It is a commonplace of Western life-writing convention to insert a genealogy of the subject,

usually at the beginning of the text, almost as justification, as the ground, of representing subjectivity. Sometimes, as in Robert Caro's well-known biography of Lyndon Johnson (1982-89), the genealogy will display itself extensively so as to give the impression of painstaking research on behalf of its author, or to "root" subjectivity in a particular historico-geographical moment. Caro's biography devotes the whole of its first chapter to Johnson's family history, apparently because, as the introduction explains, "knowledge of the inner workings of Lyndon Johnson's character illuminates a Presidency; knowledge of the drama of his life--*and* of the lives so inextricably linked with his, of his father and grandfather--was played out against a panorama vast in scope: the panorama of the westward movement in America, and particularly America's Southwest" (xvii). Instead of presenting the reader with a diagrammatic genealogical "tree" as so many published lives do, Caro's life opens with a map and detail of Texas, linking family "traits" with those of geography and national destiny. Similarly, Antonia Fraser's *Cromwell: Our Chief of Men* (1975) opens with a map, important for displaying the battles of the English Civil War, but also necessary to Fraser's first chapter, entitled "By Birth a Gentleman," which painstakingly details Cromwell's supposed Welsh heritage. Traced far enough back, the Cromwell family are actually English immigrants to Wales, so, Fraser points out, it is "pleasant to reflect that Oliver Cromwell had at least his dash of Norman blood (as well as simple faith), and the pioneering blood of the immigrant at that" (10). In other words, Cromwell's lineage, like Johnson's, seems to be used by the life-writer to foster links between families and national destiny past and future.

Even in those written lives where genealogy is only briefly mentioned, that is, where it does not seem to be proportionately of great importance to the composition, a genealogical sketch nevertheless appears almost always at the opening of the written life, framing the life and gesturing at the ways in which a family history will be woven into identity, not only of the particular subject, but also of the nation-state to which the subject

"belongs." For example, Martin Gilbert's one-volume life of Winston Churchill (1991) frames what Gilbert thinks are the British leader's "outspokenness" and "independence," as well as his later military prowess in his lineage, detailed in just one opening paragraph:

On his father's side he was a child of the British aristocracy, descended both from the 1st Earl Spencer and from the distinguished John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, commander of the coalition of armies that had defeated France at the beginning of the eighteenth century. On his mother's side he had an entirely American lineage; her father, Leonard Jerome, then living in New York, was a successful stockbroker, financier and newspaper proprietor. A century earlier his ancestors had fought in Washington's armies for the independence of the American Colonies" (1).

A similarly brief genealogical sketch begins Gordon Haight's life of George Eliot (1968), but this time details of family history are reserved for the family for which Eliot's father, Robert Evans, functioned as estate agent. Haight details the lineage of Evans' employer through the landed aristocrat's family seat, describing the changes house and property had undergone with each successive generation and the management task Evans "inherited" through his occupation. Words like *prosperous*, and *well-established* attach themselves confusedly to aristocrat, estate, and estate manager until Eliot's literary production seems descended from the dominant life-ways of rural, even feudal, England. Such examples perhaps indicate the ways in which genealogy seems to weld subjectivity to national interests in a written life.

But perhaps such examples are also too obvious, drawn as they are from written lives which seem aimed at celebrating the political or cultural importance of certain subjects to their national life. However, even life writing that calls attention to itself as unconventional, controversial, or recuperative, relies on genealogy as a lens through which to view the lives. Edwin McClellan's *Woman in the Crested Kimono* (1985) is a

"life" of Shibue Io, one of the wives of an eighteenth-century physician in Japan viewed through another biographer's work on Io's husband Chusai, coupled with McClellan's own complex relationship to Japanese and American cultural imperatives. *Woman* is prefaced by a list of "characters," family members and their relationships, and the first few pages of the book contain a detailed account of the practice in certain eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japanese homes of "adopting" a male heir, whether as son or son-in-law. What will become for McClellan's Shibue Io a rebellion against prescribed roles for Japanese women of her time, and a testing of Western notions of Japanese womanhood, is foreshadowed in McClellan's concentration in these first few pages on a system of structuring family history that supposedly allowed women more freedom because "heir-adoption" tended to diminish the need for large families by "curbing the necessity on the part of women to go on bearing children until a suitable male heir was produced" (13). Even though the relationship of self (or selves) to cultural compulsions such as "family," seems to turn sour in such controversial "lives" as McClellan's Shibue Io, or Diane Wood Middlebrook's *Anne Sexton* (1991) the importance of family history is still celebrated as the structure that anchors and embeds the self in time and place.

So far in this chapter I have tried to trace a "genealogy of genealogy" by concentrating on the history of genealogical practice as a perceived "increase" in genealogical interest. While formerly genealogy may have been used to consolidate state power through display, research on family history may persist today in under-writing state power in much less visible, perceived as private, ordinary, or democratic, ways. Through examinations of genealogical practice in specific locations of knowledge-production, in medical, social scientific, and humanistic discourse, my purpose has been to demonstrate the ways in which genealogy is produced as unproblematic, and so naturalizes social norms such as the concept of family unity, continuity, and stability. One further illustration of the specific uses of genealogy will propel this project into what

Mary Louise Pratt has called a "contact zone," where often across time, two or more cultures meet, mingle, and collide. By examining this contact zone in the context of genealogy and social control I hope to problematize further the use of family history as a trope for human experience.

2. Flora Steel Visits Utah

In 1992 I traveled to Salt Lake City with my partner, who was then thinking about entering the University of Utah as a doctoral candidate. With time on my hands I explored the downtown core, particularly the group of buildings known as the Mormon Temple Grounds. In the rear of the historic Hotel Utah, lavishly restored by the Mormon church and used primarily for social functions, I discovered what appeared to be a small library, consisting mostly of very new computers mounted on gleaming rosewood carrels. "Are you interested in looking up your family tree?" a young woman asked me. I was not, particularly; however, always looking for ways to approach the "biography" I was then considering as my doctoral dissertation, I sat down at one of the computers and typed in the name of my subject. Under "marriage search," the names of Flora Annie Webster and William Henry Steel appeared. An "ordinance" had been performed for them in a Provo, Utah "ward", the Mormon equivalent of a parish church, and here, on a computer database in the middle of the desert in the American West appeared to be the beginnings of a complete family history. Knowing very little about Mormon involvement in genealogical research, and having only a weekend to spend in Salt Lake City, I unfortunately returned to Canada without investigating any further.

Besides, I had long since planned a trip to England, specifically the London area, where Flora Steel had been born and where she lived for a while on her return from India. I planned while there to follow what little I knew from her autobiography about her family and to look up her history in its "proper" place, HM Public Records Office. But London proved to be disappointing. Locating and obtaining Steel's birth records proved

no problem, but when it came to finding the records of other family members, the task became increasingly difficult. While Flora Steel was born in Harrow, now a suburb of London, her parents, grandparents, and some of her siblings apparently were not, so their records would not be housed in the records office dealing with English counties. Travel to Scotland, where I suspected her father had been born was possible, if expensive, but a journey to Jamaica, where Steel's mother *possibly* was born, was out of the question. As I stood contemplating the address of the Scottish records office in Edinburgh, a tired desk-clerk looked up from his work and said, "You're an American, aren't you? Why do you not just go to Salt Lake City? The Mormons have got all the records there; it's much easier."

Assuming, from all that I had read, that family history was a necessary convention of biography, I finished looking at Steel's letters (the other reason I had come to London), spent several days searching for copies of her books in Charing Cross Road, and without finding any, flew to Salt Lake City. While shopping for a winter coat in a Mormon charity shop, I peered into a glass case containing all variety of old turquoise belt buckles and rusted six-shooters, when the orange and blue cover-design of Flora Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896) arrested my gaze. Flora, it seems, had come to Utah.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, "the Saints," or as they are more commonly known, the Mormons, came to the Salt Lake valley in 1847 to escape what they claim to have experienced as religious persecution in Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri. Perceived as close-knit, separatist, and conservative, the Mormon community has nevertheless expanded rapidly, which its representatives claim is due to its missionary work in sites around the globe. In 1992 world church membership was estimated at 8 million active members and that figure has now approximated the 10 million mark or, in other words, church membership is roughly equivalent to almost a third of the population

of Canada.³ While the LDS church seems at first to have been in an antagonistic or defensive relationship to the United States federal and territorial powers, that relationship has altered significantly with the growth of the church and the involvement of its members in "mainstream" public positions. If the Mormons constitute a cult, which is often supposed, then they are a very large cult, and they seem to wield much more power and influence in American culture than that term might imply.

One of the arenas in which the LDS community seems to have been successful in its interactions with the larger Euro-American tradition is genealogy. Thus the Mormon church constitutes one of the more significant sites for the study of genealogical practice in Western cultures. For Mormons, genealogy would seem to be a theological imperative. Church ideology teaches that identity, and more importantly family identity, is eternal. Family units begin with the "sacred ordinance" of marriage, where heterosexual couples may be "sealed" to each other in an LDS temple. As an LDS pamphlet states, "further ordinances tie children to their parents, parents to grandparents, grandparents to great-grandparents, and on and on, linking the generations to each other" (*In a Granite Mountain* 10). These ordinances must be performed by relatives of the deceased, relation having been established by often painstaking research and documentation. Such statements indicate that increasing church membership (even if only of "souls") and maintaining strong familial ties are vital to the interests of the church's leadership. Thus genealogical practice would also seem to be essential.

³Information about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, unless otherwise indicated, was obtained from personal communication with "missionary guides," or other representatives of the church. Interviews were conducted on the Temple grounds on various occasions from January 1992 to August 1994. Other information was obtained from interpretive material, dioramas, etc. on the Temple grounds. Figures given here for church membership are "guesstimates" by church officials. No one outside the higher ranks of the church knows for certain how many members it has. The church will not reveal membership figures because all members tithed 10% of their income to the church, and its officials do not want the state of its finances to become public.

For its members to carry out necessary genealogical research, since 1894 (Arrington and Bitton 303) the LDS church has been amassing and maintaining what has come to be the most comprehensive collection of genealogical records in the world. Microfilm and computer technology have greatly facilitated this task in the last two decades: copies of over one million rolls of microfilmed records occupy the five floors of the LDS Family History Library located near Temple Square. The manner in which the original rolls of microfilm are stored perhaps indicates their importance to the church: to the East of Salt Lake City, in one of the steep canyons of the Wasatch Mountain Range, the church maintains tight security at six specially-constructed, climate-controlled vaults bored deep into the granite cliffs, each designed to hold 26 million 300-page volumes on microfilm. Although these vaults cannot be accessed by the public, the Family History Library and its international satellite system of local Family History Centers is open both to members and non-members of the LDS church as Library staffers like to boast, at no direct cost to users.

The church claims that record acquisition and maintenance are done primarily by "volunteer" labour, although official church statements refer to the innovative and highly skilled contributions of "staff members" in developing and refining archival techniques. Although the church claims to do its own microfilming of records all over the world, costs for travel and equipment must be very high: a 1992 price-list for a Utah microfilm distribution company quotes \$20,000 as the National Archives' cost to its buyers for one year of the New York City census on microfilm. A casual survey of the Family History Library's holdings, its facilities, and equipment might reveal that genealogy constitutes a substantial commitment of resources by the LDS leadership. But it may also represent quite a lucrative commitment.

Besides helping to forge important links to dominant social groups outside the church, increasing its visibility and acceptability as a mainstream community, the

church's furtherance of "family values" through genealogy may also provide a significant if indirect source of revenue. By focusing on genealogy as a vital part of Mormon life, the church would seem to generate its own tourist industry, where Mormon visitors to the Family History Center might eat airline food prepared by Mormon-owned Marriott Food Services, stay in one of the Marriott Corporation's hotels, or shop at Mormon-owned business concerns such as the Zion's Co-operative Merchants Inc. downtown shopping mall. Although such businesses are not directly church-owned, the church derives a significant portion of its revenues from strictly-collected member tithes. Under such a system organizations can only benefit from furthering the financial success of their membership. In addition, Family History Library "volunteers" seem trained to promote (through the orientation seminars new patrons are forcefully encouraged to take) the purchase of LDS-produced genealogical "research aids" such as pre-drawn charts and graphs and more expensive computer software programs available through the church-owned Deseret Book Co., which in the 1992-93 fiscal year logged approximately \$46 million in sales.

Areas outside the direct or even indirect control of the Mormon church seem similarly to find genealogy a profitable pursuit. Mormons and non-Mormons alike who are unable or unwilling to travel to Salt Lake City to take advantage of the vast Family History archives can rely on the services of one of seventeen genealogical research companies in the Salt Lake area alone. Before 1966, the Church Genealogical Department apparently hired out its own staff to do professional research for companies or private individuals. Since then, with the "increased interest" in genealogical study the church has run an accreditation service which provided, by 1977, over two hundred professional researchers, most of them former members of the department, for public hire. Of the seventeen genealogical research companies listed in the Utah Business Directory, most have fewer than fifty employees and altogether these companies represent estimated sales

from \$5 - 20 million. Support services, such as Scholarly Resources, Inc., which publishes titles such as the *Index to Naturalization Petitions of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York , 1865 - 1957* (available on microfilm for only \$3,266), and Historic Resources, Inc., which publishes *Heritage Quest Magazine*, constitute a further indication of the economic potential of genealogical interest.

The LDS Church's vast resources for acquisition, indexing and preservation of archival records have attracted more and more attention from "mainstream" arenas of Western knowledge production as genealogical interest has steadily increased. The church's Genealogical Department has had significant support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and has co-operated with University of Utah geneticists in their efforts to study hereditary diseases. One researcher, Dr. Mark Skolnick, received almost \$1 million in grants in the 1970s from the National Cancer Institute to study, with help from LDS genealogists, the links between heredity and the incidence of cancer. In addition, the University of Utah Press has been compiling a series of *Finding Aids to the Microfilmed Manuscript Collection of the Genealogical Society of Utah*. As the Press's marketing release explains, this series is designed to "provide access for scholars, librarians, students, and researchers to the vast genealogical archives of the Mormon Church" for use in studies of "demography, family structure and planning, marriage practices, land use and wealth structure and accumulation." The release is quick to point out that although scholars may be unfamiliar with the Mormon project, the Genealogical Department has been very familiar with scholarship: "the scope of the collection is truly international. The declared intention of the Society is 'to gather records on everyone who has ever lived.' As astonishing as this statement might appear, this is the Society's goal. At the present time [1979] significant collections of microfilmed manuscripts exist for the United States, Europe, Latin America, and the Far East. The library recently filmed, for example, the entire oriental collections in the libraries of Columbia, Harvard, and the

University of California, Berkeley." It would seem that the cultural work being done at this local site, that is, the practice of genealogy as affirmation and consolidation of the family as the primary unit of social cohesion which is "rooted" in a notion of recoverable, originary legitimacy, may not be very far removed from the cultural work being performed at other sites by genealogical practice.

So far I have recounted some ways in which genealogy tends to be deployed unproblematically across several different disciplines of knowledge production located in various institutional sites. Yet genealogy seems to be far from neutral. On the one hand its apparent desire for continuity reproduces conservative tendencies: at certain sites it is used to promote the concepts of staying within a community, preserving records, preserving intact family units, and allocating financial and time resources to record-keeping and retrieval. On the other hand, Foucauldian theory suggests that genealogy contains within it the possibility for radical historical critique of social formations. Although Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" suggests a radical role for genealogy, nowhere does Foucault concretely examine his text's construction of the term. In the remainder of this chapter I will enter the contact zone between Flora Steel and genealogical research in an attempt to provide a specific example of the ways in which genealogy may constitute a radical critique of its own project. First I will describe, in the larger context of Victorian women's autobiography, how Flora Steel's own life narrative calls attention to the problematic nature of family history. I will then present a part of Flora Steel's "lineage" through my own highly problematic search for her origins in the world's most comprehensive genealogy archive.

Flora Annie Steel's autobiography was written as its author neared the end of her life. Concerned mostly with Flora Steel's long "career" first as the active wife of an official in the Indian Civil Service, and then as a well-known English author, it was published posthumously in 1929 and includes a postscript by F.A.'s daughter, Mabel. Received

with mixed reviews in its day, more recently it has been treated as the transparent reflection of Flora Steel's "character," or lack thereof. It may be more useful, however, to view it as a rhetorical act, situated in relations of assimilation or resistance to the socio-linguistic conventions of its day and situated also provisionally in relation to the larger context of life-writing as a way of producing knowledge.

For several reasons, Flora Steel's written life is difficult to situate. Ostensibly written as an autobiography, it shares many features recent theorists have identified as typical of travel narrative. Not only does it range over several continents, but it also spans just over eighty years, stretching from the early years of Victoria's reign to the period between the two "world" wars. Its narrator repeatedly reminds us that she is old, a "back number" containing rather dated material. When the text is not referring to its author as herself a worn best-seller, temporarily out of circulation, it often veers between constructing her in masculine and feminine terms, and it seems often to teeter on the edge of gentility; that is, it situates itself between middle-class and lower-class norms. While *The Garden of Fidelity* might be considered to be firmly within the traditions of Victorian autobiography, it often transgresses those conventions, sometimes reminding its audience that its author was an active participant in English culture right up until her death in 1929.

Finally, one of the text's most striking features, within the context of life-writing norms, is that it seems to re-configure the self's relationship to family history, in many ways repudiating the relationship in order, it seems, to recast women's attachment to family, and to create a monumental life. Creating that monumental life within the larger context of colonialism, however, has compromising consequences for white women like Steel. In order to create her authority over a "colonial" past, Steel ironically has to distance herself from its "darker" side: its failures to live up to white mythologies of progress and human freedom. For Steel, colonialism's failures seem to have been woven into her family history and this history is a "bad fit" with the independent, successful

colonial manager Steel has created as her life's narrator. Caught between the contradictions of imperialism and her family's position within those contradictions, and trapped between the pressures of genealogy and the need to create an independent self, Steel's text cannot more than merely hint at her family history, because that history threatens to unravel the tightly-knit fabric of imperial ideology on which Steel has imprinted her identity. Steel's seamless creation of the white woman who leads colonial peoples to progress ruptures when she mentions her mother's family connections to slavery: the narrator describes seeing as a child a huge sea turtle struggling on the floor of the pantry in Scotland. The turtle had been sent from a "Jamaican" relative of Steel's mother and later ended up in soup destined for the Webster table. The text ruptures again when Steel mentions her father's bankruptcy resulting from the failure of the Australasian Bank. In having to mention her family to narrate her origins, Steel's text narrates not only the contradictions of a woman's life, but the contradictions of living as a white woman in imperialism.

Contemporary reviewers of Flora Steel's autobiography praised it for being "free from gossip and scandal," and for demonstrating the "astonishing vitality" and "matter-of-fact" mind of its author. On the other hand, the reviewers all note the author's "practical" bent, and her lack of emotion: the reviewer for *The Nation and Athenaeum* compares her unfavourably to George Sand, apparently because she did not think deeply enough, being "incapable of passion and of real intimacy . . . [and] obtuse almost to the point of hardness" (406). The apparent lack of passion in her marriage, to which the autobiography rather baldly alludes, is cited by reviewers as one example of her "cold, hard, masculine brain" (*The Spectator* 775). Almost without exception reviewers cite Flora Steel's egotism, what they view as her arrogant display of opinions and accomplishments through her life-writing, as a reason for finding the text, and by their implication, the woman herself, somewhat repugnant.

In their mixed responses the reviewers may have been reacting to the ways in which *The Garden of Fidelity* seems to flaunt autobiographical convention. Certainly in 1929 there were women presenting their own lives for public consumption--for example, Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* appeared in 1933--but generally women and particularly literary women whom one might expect to write autobiography, if they had lived the bulk of their lives in the previous century, did not memorialize their lives in print. "Most Victorian women saw autobiography as a forbidden area," Valerie Sanders has written, "and deliberately situated themselves outside its formal parameters" (5) in the less threatening formal arenas of the letter, the diary, the travel-memoir, or for some women, like Charlotte Bronte, the novel. Mrs. Oliphant's *Autobiography* (1899), for example, although published, is written in journal form. Most Victorian women, Sanders claims, thought of autobiography as a "masculine" form of expression, tainted with "egotism as well as indecency" (1). Because of certain constraints on the ways in which white Victorian women could construct their lives, if they did choose to write autobiography it usually took on distinctive formal features that tend to reveal women's relationships to the "master narratives" of Victorian culture (Gagnier 1991).

Those narratives that structured autobiographical conventions seem to have included a belief in writing as a way to express a creative, autonomous, desiring, yet contemplative subjectivity. The self was seen as progressing through time in a linear fashion, heading toward greater individuation and "freedom" (Gagnier 39). One of the most important autobiographical conventions seems to have been faith in the family as the ground and sustenance of the individual. In middle-class white Victorian women's autobiography this convention seems to have been quite strong. Socialized from birth to devote themselves wholly to domestic life, such women seem to have internalized conflicts (familiar today from similar social imperatives for Western middle-class women's lives) between writing and the cultural demands on their bodies. Valerie Sanders has shown how these conflicts

shaped the rather rare excursions this group of women made into the realm of life-writing. For example, Sanders notes that autobiographies from this group often deflect attention from the self onto family members, family history, or activities, like nursing, that supposedly show they are furthering nurturing skills central to family life. "My dear Grandchildren," Mary Sewell's "life" begins, "I entirely sympathise with your wish to know all I can tell you of your ancestors on the Wright side I want to try to immortalise my father in the memory of his descendants" (Sanders 14). Often, as in the case of Sewell's life story, focusing on family asserts a "self" without asserting an unacceptably autonomous self: the family asked for her memoirs and her sympathetic nature could not refuse. The family as impetus for focusing on the self is particularly strong in the case of Margaret Oliphant's *Autobiography*, where the narrator constantly reminds her audience that she is writing to honour, not her long career as a novelist, but her dead children.

As Regina Gagnier has noted, however, the role of family in Victorian women's autobiography was not the same for all women. Working-class women, who may not have been able to participate in the middle-class cult of domesticity, typically "truncate" details of childhood to a "first memory" in their autobiographies, and because parent-child relationships and any idea of "lineage" may have been more problematic for these life-writers, typically their autobiographies tend to be episodic, that is, less progressive and developmental (43). Gagnier also notes, however, that the prevailing ideology of the family as important to the development of the individual was strong even among the labouring classes: in working-class autobiographies as well as in those of the upper-classes, the "master narrative" of the family produced an obsession with origins, whether it was an obsession with "broken" or "lost" family ties, or concern with strong family influence the subject "knew and hated" (6).

Flora Annie Steel's *Garden of Fidelity* apparently resists such conventions. The text begins with a preface that opposes Steel's "I" from conventional ways of writing women's subjectivity: it will not be a "record of people I have met, no transcript of other folks' lives, no gossip of this world's doings [but rather will be] simply a straightforward account of things I have seen and done in eighty-two years." Moreover, it will be "foursquare," following the four seasons and modelled on the monumental "Garden of Fidelity planted by the Emperor Baber, poet, painter, musician, soldier." The text promises a life that is truthful, rational, yet cyclical and all-encompassing, balanced between contemplation and action, art and science. It also seems to seek balance between East and West, situating the British subject Flora Steel as one who, like the sub-continent's Moghul conquerors with whom she seems to profess some sort of spiritual kinship, "knows" and "loves" India. The text thus begins by situating itself as a monument erected to greatness among "snow-clad mountains," distinguishing its supposed female subject most emphatically from "ordinary" womanhood.

Such a beginning sets the tone for an autobiography which attempts strenuously to assert its subject as a leader. The text is taken up almost entirely with references to its subject's fitness and abilities for difficult, almost always public, "duties." As a child at home, the narrator recounts, Flora Steel is able to go out shooting with her brothers, she excels at art and singing, and she takes the initiative when she is told there will be no money to hire a governess, by educating herself in the family's attic with old medical textbooks. Once married and living in India, she is approached by the local Municipal Council to design a meeting hall, she is "asked" to act as doctor, adviser, and educationalist for the people of her husband's district, she rides alone and survives attacks by wild animals, exposes scandals in the British government of India, and acts as magistrate in marital disputes. Back home in Britain, she writes best-selling "expert" accounts of "Indian life" and is "asked" to speak at public functions while juggling her

role as manager of a large country household. She becomes involved in "suffrage" issues, becomes president and founder of a Women's Institute and heads a non-profit corporation that aids destitute widows in the Punjab. In old age, she sails to Jamaica to lay claim to family property that had, as the narrator puts it, "fallen into the hands of an unscrupulous overseer," and on the way, when she is mistakenly detained at Ellis Island, she summons reporters to her hotel room in New York to communicate the "outrage" to the public. By constituting her subjectivity in this way as almost fiercely autonomous, the narrator must also compensate by reformulating Flora Steel's relationship to her family.

As I have said, it is a convention of life-writing to begin the life with some account of birth and family background. Flora Steel's life, however, turns this convention inside-out. As an illustration of what I mean it is worth quoting from the first page of her autobiography almost in full:

Of course I was born; everyone is, and even in 1847 there was a sufficiency of ceremonial about the mystery of birth to employ many Sairey Gamps and duly diplomaed doctors. So I was born at Sudbury Priory, Harrow.

There had been financial difficulties in the family due to an autocratic mother-in-law, an equally autocratic husband, and an heiress wife who ought to have had control over her own money. But in those days no woman had any legal status whatever, apart from the man whom she had honoured by her love. So there had been ructions. Hence there was nearly three years between my birth and that of my elder brother. An unusual thing in a family of eleven, seven boys and four girls. I have often wondered if this voluntary cessation of marital relations on my father's part had anything to do with my inborn dislike to the sensual side of life. Heredity is a strange, masterful thing.

At the very least, I think it may be advanced that this is one of the more unconventional autobiographical beginnings.⁴ On one reading, this introduction to Flora Steel could be read straightforwardly as the kind of framing-device discussed earlier, in which family background foreshadows individual accomplishment. In this reading, heredity being "strange and masterful," Flora Steel will inherit a tendency to attract "ceremonial," to exert "autocratic" control and will become averse "to the sensual side of life."

On another reading, the assertive "Of course I was born" is strikingly at odds with the picture of family discord and the startling brush with non-existence recounted in the next paragraph. This autobiography is the only one I am aware of that roots the life, not in fruition, but in a sexual stalemate occasioned over control of family money. Such an apparent repudiation of socio-linguistic norms lends an aura of almost supernatural individuation to the subject, implying that Flora Steel was born *despite* her family, in fact, it seems, almost without them. In any case, common threads running through both readings tie them to the context in which Flora Steel's life was written. First, even though the family may be referred to in order to frame the future life, for a Victorian middle-class woman to refer to her family as in any way problematic would most likely have been seen as highly unique, and indeed the narrator seems to sense this when she "backpedals" later by attempting briefly to construct family life as happy. Second, if I were to say that the family is still a focus here, even if the focus were still one of repudiation, this seems countered by the view the narrator presents of the very negative and disruptive effect of women's lack of "legal status" -- their statutory "non-being" in families, as it were. What seems to run through this unusual beginning, then, is the

⁴Paul Matthew St. Pierre and June Sturrock have pointed out that just as unconventional beginnings have been recorded in *Tristram Shandy* and *David Copperfield*. Perhaps Steel may have borrowed from these well-known novelistic treatments of the autobiographical "I was born."

narrator's repudiation of the socio-linguistic convention that asserts individual autonomy through the (for women potentially) repressive vehicle of the family unit.

Such a repudiation is "borne out" more generally through the succeeding pages of Flora Steel's autobiography. Although the narrator mentions Flora Steel's family, nowhere are any of them named, and rarely are dates provided so that the reader might orient, for example, the age at which Flora Steel buried her first child. The closest the reader gets to a name for the subject's husband is the name the people of his district apparently gave him: "the Sahib who planted gardens" (211). At one point the narrator tells us the surname, Kennedy, of her grandmother, but she does so, it seems, chiefly to relate the rather bizarre legend behind that Highland Scots branch of the family. This legend briefly interrupts another narrative about Steel taking her very young daughter home to Scotland for a brief leave of absence from India. The narrator claims she was sorry her daughter

was just too late to see her great grandmother Kennedy, who had died during the winter. Had she been able to do so, she would have been enabled to carry on the tale that in 1872 she had seen a woman whose grandfather was twelve years old when Charles the First was beheaded. It is a vast leap in Time, but the Kennedys are a long-lived race. The dates are 1795, 1722, 1636. Her father was born when his father was seventy-one, and that father again to a father of eighty-six. There is a Gaelic poem on the unusual occurrence. (58)

Here information about the family seems to serve the larger project of relating subjectivity, not to any particular family line (we are not told to what clan the Kennedy woman's father belonged), but to an ideal of monumental, transcendental longevity, and a nationalist ideal of Scotland.

Elsewhere in the text scattered phrases of what is now known as "Walter Scottish" link the narrator to Scotland more than to metropolitan London, her place of birth and

(for her first nine years), her place of upbringing. Words like "beastie," and sayings such as "a true tale is never the waur o' bein' twice tauld," construct an intimacy with supposed Scottish folk culture. At one point the narrator describes attempting a difficult climb in the Himalayas with her husband, a party of "coolies," and her favourite cook. The cook goes missing, and is discovered buried in the snow, a piece of fabric being the only clue to his whereabouts. "It was the uttermost end of the McCallum tartan," the narrator exclaims, only implicitly laying claim to the name, "and to it, undoubtedly, the still living cook, who was discovered in the drift below, owed his life" (146). In the autobiography, Scottish heritage functions to distance Flora Steel from the British government in India (whom she claims to despise for their inefficiency), while it allows her to maintain some status as "white," and "ruling-class." At the same time, Scottish heritage is coded as a temperamental and literary affinity with the "Scottish people" through reiterating homely sayings, rather than with any explicitly displayed family ties or with a culture that functions as a nation. The masterful heredity the narrator does create for herself thus allows her to maintain distance from socially compulsory ties, while simultaneously it seems to allow her to construct a female subjectivity that is creative, autonomous, and monumental.

Yet part of that need to show her independence derives from more than Steel's own unwillingness to describe her family history fully; this unwillingness points to a *prohibition* against fully attaching herself to her family. To take her professional selves as educator and professional into account, in writing her memoirs Steel would have had to base them on her own colonial past, a past predicated on being fully in control of colonialism. But to demonstrate her complete mastery over colonialism, Steel would also have to distance herself from it, positioning herself as firmly white, so white she comes both from the snows of Highland Scotland and the literary world of London. Automatically, by taking up such a discursive position, Steel would also have to distance

herself from the "darker" side of colonialism, its "failures," which were bound up for Steel in her family history. We know this because of two brief moments in which the text of Steel's memoirs "ruptures" to reveal the discontinuity inherent in her "independence." Because the conventions of Victorian autobiography dictated that the writer must at least *refer* to his or her family, Steel does so perfunctorily, inadvertently also referring to those "darker" moments in imperial history that are a "bad fit" with the independent, successful persona based on colonial successes Steel has created. Steel is therefore cut off from her dominant culture's mode of constructing lives in that she cannot more than mention her mother's connection to slavery (connected most vividly in an apparently unrelated image of a captive sea turtle squirming on the floor of the Webster pantry before being made into soup), and her father's (and family's) bankruptcy due to the collapse of the Australasian Bank. She cannot delve too deeply into her family's history because their failures point to the inconsistencies in imperialism, and they therefore threaten to unravel her carefully rendered imperial self.

Without dates, without names, without explicit places, Flora Steel's autobiography situates itself within women's ways of resisting the project of genealogy that would insert women's lives in conventional Western narratives of human history. Trying to insert her life into these narratives of family and continuity, in the contact zone between the culture of genealogy as research and Flora Steel as written life, I have come up against a local story of what Michel Foucault has more generally theorized as the "grey, meticulous . . . field of entangled and confused parchments . . . that have been scratched over and recopied many times" ("NGH" 139), that is genealogy, that is only the faintest trace of humanity.

CHAPTER THREE: POSTSCRIPT

ENCOUNTERING GENEALOGY

My first extended encounter with the Family History Library was sort of overwhelming. I don't know what I had been expecting: one or two book-lined rooms watched hawk-like by blue-haired volunteer-ladies, I suppose. In any case I was *not* expecting five floors of orchestrated shelving crammed with books, case upon metal case of microfilm, subdued lighting, climate control, sleek modular furnishings and state-of-the-art technical support all encased in severe concrete, carefully monitored. Compared to British standards--and I had just come from the Public Record Office in London where researchers wait in queues to reserve equipment days in advance--the sheer *accessibility* of material was overwhelming.

From the London Record Office I had learned very little: only that Flora's father, the Parliamentary Agent and later sheriff-clerk of Forfarshire, was named George Webster and that her mother, the "great heiress," was born Margaret Isabella McCallum. Besides visiting the Record Office I had taken a few days out of my research schedule in London to go by train to Harrow-on-the-Hill, just outside the city. That was where Flora Steel's autobiography claimed she had been born, and her birth certificate in the Record Office seemed to corroborate the claim. So I set off to see if I could find out about Flora's beginnings in the famous public-school hamlet.

Harrow is a town split in half by the rail-line, which seems to represent the frontier of a time warp. On one side is the "new" Harrow, its run-down 1960s-style municipal buildings, pubs and row-housing overshadowed by spanking-new American burger joints and a massive Tesco. It's here that the "yobs" hang out between campaigns of violence at Wembley stadium, just one rail-stop away. On the other side of the line are the wide expanses of cricket-grounds, shaded by stately oaks, that have been host for centuries to hooligans of another sort. Above these green spaces on a heavily wooded hill stands

Harrow and the old village, its russet, moss-covered buildings virtually unchanged since the sixteenth century.

Walking up the hill to the school, I felt the scene to be very much what it must have been when the Webster family lived here in the 1840s and 50s. (The Steel family lived here too--in fact, had a deeper attachment to the place, Flora's father-in-law being a well-known teaching master at the school. But I was far more fascinated by the lack of information about Flora's family at the time to notice the abundance of information about her husband's more illustrious forebears, and if I am to describe someone's "line" I must follow it straight and not interrupt my narrative.) The hill showed its great age by the narrowness of the roads, its dank, rotten smell, and the exaggerated reach of its massive gnarled trees. At the top I emerged into a cluster of lean gothic structures hemmed in by tall iron gates and cream-coloured gravel walks, which seemed in their grandeur to shun a squat Norman church buried in overgrown lilac at the edge of the hill. Loud bells intoned, and at that signal boys of all ages, dressed in straw boaters, blue blazers, some in tails, and all in flowing black gowns, scurried from doorway to doorway until in a few minutes all was quiet again. Cars seemed not to want to invade this sanctum and people in modern dress and/or of the wrong gender (i.e. people like me) were generally stared at. Not being permitted beyond the gates, I retreated to the Norman church.

Inside the heavy stone building I found a ladies' guild busily decorating for Harvest Home. Sudbury Priory? They knew no place of that name, but there was a subdivision down the other side of the hill called Sudbury Gardens. I might find the house there. No. No one here had heard of the Webster family, nor of the "Priory" where Flora Webster was born, but Thomas Steel was a legend. Feeling much disappointment I descended the other side of the Harrow hill by Sudbury Hill, in search of literary beginnings. I even imagined contacting whatever society puts up those blue ceramic commemorative

plaques on most of the older buildings of London: "Mozart Composed Here"; "Ben Jonson Lived in a House on This Site"; "Flora Annie Steel Was Born Here"

I had walked a mile and a half through mostly wooded country when I came upon Sudbury Gardens. Behind what looked like a very old tavern, crammed against another wooded rise was a jumble of imitation Tudor villas built possibly in the 1950s. Most were run down, or had been unsuccessfully "re-modelled," and little attempt had been made to reclaim gardens from the overgrown orchard amongst which the houses were sitting. I could find no trace of an older looking house, save for the pub, but the street-names told me I had found what used to be the Webster home: Priory Close, and Sudbury Lane were the last surviving traces.

My next step would be the local archives on the other side of town. As I turned to leave I noticed a family emerging from one of the houses and I got a distinct sense that *that* house must stand on the former Priory site. The family were Indian-English and, as they eased themselves into their late-model Jaguar, I let the flash of bright saris be my last glimpse of Flora's birthplace.

At the Middlesex County Archives I learned that Sudbury Priory had been built in 1828 by newly gentrified people from London seeking further to distinguish themselves with a "country seat." The resulting gothic-style brick and stone "Priory" was named with that in mind. Like the houses of the nouveau riche today, there was no more a priory on Sudbury Hill than there have been "King's Mews" in rural Mississauga or "Sunny Braes" in out-lying Vancouver. Far from being an ancient nunnery dissolved by Henry VIII, or a dark series of catacombs confiscated in the English Civil War, Sudbury Priory had after-all been a rather ordinary suburban show-piece for upwardly-mobile city-dwellers apparently like the Websters, who occupied it in the 1840s. The only romantic piece of literary history I could uncover was that Anthony Trollope's family had owned a large farm in the same district. A check of the census might provide more information, but here

too I was told that the best place to do that would be in "a place called Salt Lake City, Utah."

Once in Salt Lake City, perversely, I decided to hunt for Flora Steel's mother first: my tiny act of rebellion in an overtly patriarchal system. I had collected scant information about her. I knew from *The Garden of Fidelity* that Flora Steel's mother had married young a man nearly eighteen years her senior. I knew from Flora's birth certificate that Margaret Isabella McCallum had been her mother's very Scottish name. That, and references to Scottish grandmothers led me to believe she was born there. But names are not enough to go on: I badly needed some dates.

I might get that information from census records. Official census records were not taken in England before 1841. Knowing Flora was born in 1847 I decided she and her family would appear on the 1851 census, so that was the one I would start with. To examine census records, however, one needs to know where the person lived in a given census year. Flora mentions in the autobiography that in addition to Sudbury Priory her parents kept a house in Old Palace Yard, Westminster, where they entertained many famous literary and political people of the day. Reasoning that the family might have spent most of their time here since it was close to George Webster's place of occupation, I unfortunately began with the London census, concentrating on the Westminster area.

This resulted in a long and mostly fruitless search. Census records in 1851 were taken quite systematically, dwelling by dwelling. However, as I discovered from the microfilm in front of me, the census-taker usually began with all the dwellings on one side of the street, moving all around particular districts and then returning, apparently at random, or depending on the boundaries of the district, to record the other side of a street. Needless to say London streets in 1851 were a tangled mess of lanes and courtyards, alleys and coach-houses, which makes reading census records fascinating, but frustrating if time is at a premium. No wonder professional genealogists charge by the hour, I

thought, as, scanning frame after frame of microfilm, my eyes began to sting from sorting out the several different styles of handwriting from several different census-takers for the district.

Finally Palace Gardens, New Palace Yard, and then frame after frame of names of soldiers, kitchen-boys, laundresses, commanding officers, grooms, all living in army barracks at the edge of Regent's Park. No Old Palace Yard. But one of the fascinating by-products of reading census records is that a person's occupation is usually recorded. The record thus gives a picture of the neighborhood in which George Webster and his family, at least for a while, apparently lived. And what a motley crew it seems to have been. Laundresses, coopers, chimney-sweeps, and workhouse inmates living cheek-by-jowl with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Duke of Connaught (whose occupation is listed as "Duke"). Such a contrast to the way in which contemporary urban zoning keeps low-income housing near the airports and sewage-treatment plants, and single-family dwellings near the golf courses and universities, with a shopping mall in-between. So different too, from my concept of Victorian gender relations. While most women have their occupations listed as wives or domestic servants, a sizable proportion of this particular cross-section of mid-Victorian London work as grocers, hairdressers and seamstresses, and many are listed as the heads of households made up of one or more sons of labouring age.

Finally Old Palace Yard, near the end of the roll of film. But the name of the family living here is not Webster. I return to the autobiography. It seems that when Flora was "three years of age," that is, in 1850, the family's "financial crisis" forced them to remove from the Priory to a much smaller villa by the Harrow cricket grounds. This could (and from the census apparently did) mean that the family were also forced to give up the house in Westminster, if indeed the autobiography can be trusted and the Webster family ever occupied it in the first place. My imaginings about Flora's literary beginnings having

been partly fostered in a busy, various milieu of "great personalities of the day," military regalia, and independent women have to be put aside. I go back to the census records, this time for the district of Hendon, which covers Harrow.

In 1851 most occupants of Harrow-on-the-Hill were farmers and their labourers. Some were pub-owners, and many were domestic servants in the households of teaching masters at Harrow school. Included in the census are list upon list of "scholars," or boys between nine and fifteen years of age who lived elsewhere, but at the time of the census boarded in the school's various "houses." I come across the Websters unexpectedly, near the middle of the film. Suddenly the whole family is there, as though I have walked into their sitting-room.

In 1851 the Webster family lived at 88 Boxeth Villas. The family was composed of George Webster, fifty-one years of age, a Parliamentary agent born in Scotland, his sons MacCallum, aged thirteen, a scholar at Harrow, John, aged twelve and George aged nine, also scholars at Harrow, James, aged six, listed as a scholar at home, daughters Isabella, aged seven, Flora aged three, and Rose, aged one. Their mother also appears on the census under her middle name Isabella, aged thirty-three years, born not in Scotland, but in Jamaica.

Although Boxeth Villas seem to have represented a step down the social scale from the Priory and a house in London, the family still retained four servants in their employ: they are listed in the census as Susan Grainger, Margaret Parr, Emily Hurton, all in their twenties, and Sarah Johnston in her early teens. Families of note living in the area had between four and twenty servants. The Reverend John Cunningham, vicar of Harrow and one of the few people from Flora's early life her autobiography mentions by name, maintained his two unmarried daughters and four servants at his home, while Charles Vaughn, headmaster of Harrow at the time, maintained a household consisting of his wife, his wife's sister, several visitors, and fifteen house-servants.

The families in the Websters' immediate neighborhood represented quite a variety of social types. At 89 Boxeth Villas lived Mary Ann Greenhill, widow of a farmer with two house-servants, at number 87 Margaret Pigon (whose occupation is listed as "lady") lived with four children, a niece, and no servants, at number 90 lived James Page, an agricultural labourer and his wife, a laundress, and at number 86 lived a widow pauper and her agricultural labourer son. While some families were evidently quite comfortably well-off, many were not. The census-taker recorded twenty-four agricultural labourers and transients living in a barn at the edge of a Harrow farmer's field. It can be reasonably guessed, both from this census information and from Flora's autobiography, that the Webster family lived rather precariously on the edge of gentility. Here in Harrow they would have been close to, but not in, London society. Furthermore, in 1856 the family seemed to drop almost out of sight. In this year, according to Flora's autobiography, the Websters moved to an isolated house in Scotland where money enough apparently could not be found for Flora's education.

There seems to have been just enough money for Flora's parents to have quarreled over and to have kept the family from pauperism. What money there was seems to have come from Flora's mother, referred to by her daughter as an "heiress." Armed with the information that Isabella McCallum was born in Jamaica, and guessing the specific location from Flora's trip there in her old age to be Cousins Cove, my next step was to go to the "International" floor of the Family History Library.

At the reference desk I was told to speak to the "Jamaica lady", who is, I discovered, the woman in charge of reorganizing the Jamaican records. She is actually Australian, here fulfilling her year of "mission work" for the Mormon church. I find her perched on a footstool, balancing a tray of microfilm boxes on one arm and shelving them in the rolling cases with the other. She does not want to be distracted and it takes me a few minutes to get her attention.

She has a pinched, scared, and yet also severe look in her face as she sighs heavily and scrambles down from the stool. I'm suddenly reminded of Miss Jean Brodie, or Rabbit of the Winnie the Pooh stories.

"You want to look at the Jamaica things?" she says and there is so much fear and despair in her tone that I almost tell her to never mind. But I hold fast and tell her I'd like to see the "births" for a place called Cousins Cove.

"It's probably not on the map," she says with a note of finality, and continues shelving.

"Would the map give parishes?" I ask hopefully, knowing that if I can identify which parish Cousins Cove is in I can get my roll of film and be on my way.

"I've never heard of it and even if you get a parish the records won't be there. The Jamaicans are a mess, don't you know."

"Pardon me?"

"Well they just can't be trusted to keep up their records or to keep them in any order. Their cataloguing systems are a disaster and I've got to sort them out. I'm in the middle of sorting them out and I don't know a Cousins Cove."

But seeing that I refuse to acquiesce in characterizing "the Jamaicans" (the people themselves or the records?) as a "mess" and that I won't just go away, the "Jamaica lady" gets down off her stool and gives a perfunctory tug at her knit jumper. She looks very annoyed and marches past me muttering that I am to follow.

We weave through the stacks until I find myself in a little room that is crammed to the ceiling with a jumble of boxes and piles of papers strewn about on the floor and on a small table. The Jamaica lady rummages in the heaps of paper and dust and pulls out a map. She then clears a space on the table and spreads it out.

"When was your ancestor born?" she asks, and I am concentrating so hard on the map I forget to tell her I'm just a researcher, not a family member. I think about 1817 or

1818 but I'm not sure. To appear more sure of myself I say 1817. Ten years after the official abolition of Britain's slave trade and sixteen before abolition in Britain's colonial "possessions."

"There's something I'll have to warn you about," says Jamaica, and suddenly I realize that she's leaning over me, her pink polyester skirt brushing my leg. I turn to see her pinched face almost leering at me.

"What's that?" I ask, becoming interested in the map again partly to avert my eyes from her insistent stare and partly because I'm genuinely eager to find what I'm looking for. I see Cousins Cove, a tiny dot in the north-east corner of the Island. Hanover Parish.

"Before you go looking in those records I need to tell you something," she insists, and actually clutches my arm. We are co-conspirators now, hissing at one another in a back room. "Things were different back then, don't you know."

Hoop skirts, disease, sea-sickness, Luddites, *biedermeier*.

"Men were looser-like in their arrangements, if you know what I mean. With the blacks."

"What?" I say startled, feeling like I'm trapped in an elevator with a flasher.

"They had relations with the blacks in those days, and well, your ancestor might be among them. Oh, I'm not saying it's for sure," she cautions quickly, assuming I'm horrified, "but you should know before you look. Sometimes they even christened the results with their own names and took them back to England with them just as if they were their own children. I'm not saying it was *your* ancestor, but you ought to know. If you don't want to see the film I'll understand. It's probably not here anyway. A lot of the records were destroyed. Shameful really." And she begins to pack up the map, as though we are finished here.

I am filled with revulsion but I'm uncertain as to whether it is due to this woman's racism, clinging to this place and its sacred "records" like a sticky paste, or to my own.

For part of me is attracted to the idea that Flora Steel was a mulatto or quadroon and part of me is also attracted to the difference that information might make in evaluating her as a writer. My literary/historical training has taught me to love romance and scandal raised to perfection in art. I insist on seeing the record, with the greedy sense that there is a Bertha Mason lurking in "my" subject's history.

And the record seems at first to fulfill these white fantasies. Plantation names roll by: "Harmony Hall, Kew Estate, Castle Hyde, Comfort Hall, presided over by solid English and Scottish names like Harding, Spence, James, and Buchanan. A vision of Mansfield Park flashes through my mind, the order and stateliness of Fanny Price's adopted home maintained through Sir Thomas Bertram's manly struggle for harmony or comfort on his West Indies plantation. Reading and writing novels or research require harmony and comfort, I think.

But harmony and comfort give way. The smooth surface of tradition cracks under the weight of so many names of "families" forcibly created through rape, barter, bloodshed. Through the years from the 1750s to the early 1800s, the years covered sporadically by the Jamaica records, names flicker into life and are extinguished as human beings are sold or impregnated or "rechristened," as they are incorporated in the holdings of Harmony and Comfort. "Sambo" becomes "John" and then as fashions change he will end his life as "Buchanan Charles Spence." "Queenie" becomes "Sarah" and, if she is "lucky" enough to live past her twentieth birthday may be re-named "Amelia Louisa Charlotte." Depending on their hue, her children by one of the white slave owners or by one of the many men of colour might be re-named "white," "free," and "Esquire." Names that are allowed in this society and age to carry cultural, not bodily, currency.

It seems from these records that the dominant culture has constructed its "others" as commodities so they can easily be bought and traded. They are, in the white vision of them which Toni Morrison has referred to as "Africanist," without a history, without

family ties. But in order to set themselves apart from that construction, white people have strenuously opposed themselves to it. Does this past of exploitation call into being whites' construction of themselves--what they have tried to call "humanity"--as organically, naturally connected, related, through genealogies, like the branches of a tree to its roots? Does this perhaps explain why Alex Hailey's appropriation and reversal of the trope of the family tree has been so significant to African-American redefinitions?

What's in a name? Names are given cultural currency in part through records like the one I am reading, records which are preserved and venerated as fact. Yet this particular record of births, deaths and rechristenings in Jamaica and many records like it are riddled with inconsistencies and ambiguities. From such a record any number of stories might be told about ancestry. I will tell just a few of them here in order to indicate the range of possibilities from which Flora Steel and other imperial subjects might have drawn (either negatively or affirmatively) to fashion their identities. First I will list the entries pertaining (or seeming to pertain) to Alexander McCallum which are recorded in the surviving *Registrar General's Department, Spanish Town Jamaica Indexes: Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Parish of Hanover, 1725 - 1839*, then I will propose some scenarios which could be extracted from them by someone wishing to refashion imperial subjectivities.

--The Index refers to the prior existence of at least six volumes of records for Hanover Parish. Only portions of volumes 1-2 are available. The remaining volumes are missing or have been destroyed. Below (see fig. 1) I have extracted and paraphrased those entries which pertain, or probably pertain, to the McCallum family.

<i>McCallum</i>	<i>Lauchlin, sailor, interred 22nd October 1795</i>
<i>McCallum</i>	<i>----- carpenter, lately arrived from Scotland was interred June 29th 1800</i>
<i>McCallum</i>	<i>John McCallum a free Mulatto Child son of Ann McCallum a Negro Slave, Catharine Pulies daughter of Elizabeth McCallum, Sarah McCallum a grown up Negro Slave to d[itt]o were baptised the same day [11 October 1801]</i>
<i>McCallum</i>	<i>-----Son of Alexr McCallum died and was buried the day following [1813, no day given]</i>
<i>McCallum</i>	<i>Daughter of Alexr McCallum by Nancy Allen of Colour died the ----- day of ----- [1813] and was buried the day following</i>
<i>McCallum</i>	<i>Margaret Daughter of Alexr McCallum Esqre by Margaret his wife was born ----- on ----- and baptised the 30th of Nov. 1813</i>
<i>1814</i> <i>-----ret McCallum</i> <i>-----ther</i> <i>-----Callum</i> <i>---mothers</i> <i>Mary Wollery Kennedy</i> <i>Elen McIntosh</i>	<i>Daughter of Alexander McCallum Merchant in Lucea [principal town of Hanover Parish, near present-day Montego Bay] in the parish & Margaret his wife was born at Dukesplace [plantation or settlement name], in said parish on the 25th day of October 1811 and baptised at the same place the 30th of November 1813</i>

<p><i>Mary Kennedy</i> godfather <i>David Murray</i> godmothers <i>Mrs. Murray</i> -----<i>n Catharine Storer</i></p>	<p><i>Daughter of Angus Kennedy Esq. of the parish of Westmoreland and Mary Wollery his wife was born the City and parish Kingston on 20th day of December 1812 and Baptised at Dukesplace in the Parish of Hanover the 30th November 1813</i></p>
<p><i>McCallum</i> <i>Gray</i></p>	<p><i>Robert }blacks baptised the 15th March 1814</i> <i>Edward }</i></p>
<p><i>McCallum</i></p>	<p><i>Rebecca a free Quadroon child born 10th August 1810 baptised the 6th of October 1812 or thereabouts</i> <i>Omitted in place</i></p>
<p><i>McCallum</i></p>	<p><i>Allen born 24th Nov. 1814 Son of Alexander McCallum Esqre by his wife Margaret</i></p>
<p><i>McCallum</i> <i>a Slave</i></p>	<p><i>A Negro woman slave belonging to Alexander McCallum formerly called Mary McDormond now baptised Amelia McCallum 25th Augt 1815</i></p>
<p><i>McCallum</i></p>	<p><i>John son of Jane Buchanan a free woman of Colour born 10th April 1814 baptised 26th Aug 1815</i></p>
<p><i>McCallum</i> <i>McCallum</i></p>	<p><i>Margaret Isabella baptised 12th March 1819</i> <i>Alexandrina -----d:-----d:-----d:-----Daughters of Alexander McCallum by Margaret his wife</i></p>
<p><i>McCallum</i></p>	<p><i>Allan Son of Alexr McCallum Esqre and Margaret his wife died 25th April [1819] and was interred the day following in the Church Yard</i></p>

25 of July 1817	1. James Hartly Johnston
Baptism of Mary Atkins	2. Judith Hartly Johnston
Slaves	3. Thomas Hartly Johnston
	4. William Alexander McCallum

fig. 1 Records of the McCallum family in the Hanover Parish Register, Jamaica.

Life Story #1

Margaret Isabella McCallum was born not later than 1819. Her father, Alexander McCallum was the child of a slave and a sailor, Lauchlin McCallum, who died when the boy was 15 years old. Alexander became a merchant, having begun that occupation while still a mulatto or quadroon slave in Miss Mary Atkins's service. In The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself, one of the first slave narratives related by a woman, Mary tells of how she saved money toward her manumission by acting as a trader on her owner's Antiguan plantation during one of their long absences. It is possible that Alexander McCallum was enabled to buy his freedom, as some slaves could, both through his appearance of whiteness, and his skill as a merchant (see Higman 152 for a description of the ways in which slaves in Jamaica could, through a combination of miscegenation and commerce, "become legally white and free within one or two generations"). He may have owned an interest in a plantation or settlement called Dukesplace, or he may have been enabled to live there after marrying Margaret Kennedy, sister of its owner. Isabella and Alexandrina had several half-sisters and brothers through their father's rape or seduction of women on neighboring properties.

These children remained as slaves, one even named for him remaining in the service of the very Miss Atkins from whom he had himself purchased his freedom.

Life Story #2

Margaret Isabella McCallum and her (perhaps twin) sister Alexandrina were born to Alexander McCallum, white merchant of Lucea and owner of Dukesplace, possibly a coffee, sugar or pimento plantation, or one of the many mixed-culture "settlement" farms in Hanover parish. Their mother Margaret was possibly of mixed race and seems to have been sister to a man named Kennedy who lived in Kingston but frequently visited his brother's plantation. Proud of her appearance of whiteness, and of her marriage to a prominent white man, Margaret could not bear to see her own children baptised alongside her husband's mixed-race bastards. Convinced that this blasphemy was what might have killed her precious namesake, and her beloved only son Allan, she had her "second Margaret" and this child's sister Alexandrina baptised at home with their cousin and refused all further marital relations with her husband, who continued to seek solace elsewhere.

Life Story #3

Margaret Isabella McCallum was born to Margaret Kennedy and Alexander McCallum. Margaret senior had been born in Scotland to a wealthy absentee owner of a Jamaican plantation. He sent his second son Angus there as manager and Margaret accompanied him. She met Alexander at the Governor's Ball in Kingston and they met again at the house of an old friend of the McCallum and Kennedy clans, Reverend Atkins, in Lucea. The Reverend's daughter Mary was so taken with Alexander that she had her finest slave baptized with his name, later modifying it again when she married her cousin William. A contest for Alexander's affections ensued. Margaret, having the better dowry, was to marry Alexander and the two settled in Lucea, where they bought two or three slaves to assist in the household and in Alexander's business. For a while the business

prospered, until Alexander became restless and made more and more trips into the country to see his business acquaintances and to stay at the home of his brother-in-law. Alexander's bastard children were never mentioned to Margaret. Due to complications of difficult childbirths, Margaret had become an invalid who spent her days languishing behind closed shutters. She never knew of the existence of her husband's other children, nor did she care. Her main preoccupation was with her own children, who grew sickly and died. When she left Lucea after Alexander was killed in the slave rebellion of 1831 she took with her her only surviving daughter Isabella and went to live with another brother in Edinburgh. Isabella could not know that she left behind an extended family in the land of her birth. She would never return to Cousins Cove.

Following her father's death, Isabella McCallum left Jamaica and was living in Edinburgh when she married George Webster. This according to an entry in the Parish register of St. Cuthbert's in the city. George Webster, of Old Palace Yard, Westminster, and Margaret Isabella McCallum were married in 1836 in St. Cuthbert's by the Reverend G.H. Tenot or Tenet, a minister of St. Paul's Episcopal chapel in York Place, Edinburgh. Isabella would have been about 18 years old, while her new husband would be approaching 40. It was this marriage announcement that led me down my first garden path in the hunt for George.

Since he and Isabella had been wed by an Episcopalian minister, I thought their families might be of that denomination. Accordingly I spent several weeks looking for the appropriate parish registers of the Episcopal Church of Scotland. There were several factors which complicated my search. First, I was told that census records for 1841 were largely inaccurate, since the census takers in that year often rounded up or down the age-of-occupants by as much as five years. Second, although there were significant numbers of practicing Episcopalians in Scotland in the nineteenth century, the Church had been involved in battles with the Presbyterians for supremacy in Scotland throughout the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, through periods in which the Episcopalian faith was threatened with extinction. Since Presbyterianism eventually became the state-sanctioned religious practice in Scotland, records for Episcopalian parishes were not kept as faithfully or systematically. Seeing that I was unlikely to locate George in these Episcopalian records, I turned to records that presented themselves as accessible, on the chance that history may have recorded George as Presbyterian.

But looking for a George Webster, who would have been born somewhere in Scotland around 1800, to a family that may have been in a parish for generations, or may have transplanted themselves from Argyllshire, or Aberdeenshire, where there were also legions of Websters, would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. I needed some further clues to narrow my search.

I remembered that the description I'd found of Sudbury Priory in Harrow had said George Webster had lived with his brother William, and, on consulting the 1841 census I found that William was considered to be five years younger. Now all I had to do was to look through the Genealogical Index for parents that had had two sons with the names William and George born around 1800 within about a five years of each other: a long shot considering the preponderance of Williams and Georges in the British Isles. I further narrowed my search by guessing that Flora's father's appointment as Sheriff-clerk of Forfarshire represented some kind of home-coming -- that it wasn't completely random but came out of some connection George Webster likely had with that area of Scotland.

Forfarshire, in the east of Scotland, is now called Angus. To the north west of the county, the Grampian Mountains tower over the valley of the Strathmore, sloping gently upwards again in the south to meet the Firth of Tay and the Sidlaw Hills. Known in the nineteenth century for its granite and building stone, its jute, linen, and (on the coast of the North Sea to the east) its shipbuilding industries, the area was also thought to be

typically Scottish, "wild" and "picturesque." It was perhaps best known in the British imagination, however, as the home of Glamis Castle, featured in Shakespeare's *MacBeth*.

The International Genealogical Index indicates that Websters (originally meaning weavers) had been living in this wild and picturesque county for some quite some time. I entered the name George Webster and under "parent search" a list several pages in length of names popped up. All were parents of George Websters from the 1500s to the present. From 1797 to 1805 there were 15 Webster couples who named their child George. Only one of those couples also had a child named William within five years of George. It looked like a match, so I went to the film of the parish entries for the children of Charles Webster and Clementina Binny.

Charles Webster and Clementina Binny were married 1 October 1785 in Forfar. Their eleven children, John, Charles, Alexander, Isabel, Thomas, Helen, James, Elizabeth Amelia, and another Alexander were all born between 1786 and 1803. George was born in 1799 and his brother William Binny Webster in 1806. Charles Webster is listed in the register as a merchant. He was born 17 October 1768, the only son among the five children born to Ann Ker and Thomas Webster, a baillie in Forfar. George Webster's mother's history is less straightforward. A record dated 26 December 1766 lists a Clementina Binny who apparently gave birth on the 21st to a posthumous child by John Brown, "late shoemaker." Although the child was baptized on the 23rd, he or she is not named in the register. It is possible that this child was Clementina's mother and that the daughter took her mother's name since the father of the perhaps illegitimate union died. This would mean that Clementina was 19 years of age when she married 17-year-old Charles Webster.

Another rather unlikely but at least possible scenario would be that this Clementina Binny of 1766 (who according to another birth record might be as young as 9) was the same one who married Charles Webster. This would mean that the 17-year-old Charles

wed a woman 11 years older. She would still only be 28 although that would put her at 49 when her last child, William was born.

One way to verify these conflicting scenarios is to check the rather haphazard notations in Scottish parochial records, against what are equally unreliable records of gravestone inscriptions. Several local history groups in Scotland have collected inscriptions from gravestones (a form of record that is always in danger from vandalism and/or erosion) and have printed them in several published sources. The principal printed source available to researchers is a five-volume set compiled by the Scottish Genealogical Society in 1979. While the Society's compilers often went "on location," working directly from gravestones in various churchyards all over Scotland, they also relied rather heavily on another printed source from the 1880s.

After searching through these volumes for the Webster family stone, I finally come across it in a diagram of the graveyard of Forfar Parish church. The key identifies it as a table stone, the kind used for families of a certain note or wealth or both, and luckily the inscription on it is quite detailed. Finally, I have found George Webster's family!

The inscription reads, "Chas Webster mert & provost Forfar, w Clementina Binny 1.4.1822 61[meaning she was 61 years of age at death] 2s[second son] Chas Lieut EICS [East India Company's Service] Bengal establishment d. Saharanpore 4.11.1816 29, 6s [sixth son] George d. Madras 30.6.1824 chn Alex & Isabel d. young" (Mitchell 118).

So close! After weeks spent going blind in front of scrolling microfilm I was reluctant to believe this was *not* the right George. Yet if he had died in 1824 he couldn't have married Isabella McCallum in 1836 and fathered 11 children by her. That the inscription was wrong seemed unlikely, but I comforted myself with the thought that mistakes might have been made in recording the inscription.

In my frustration I turned to a number of published histories of Forfar which the library has on hand hoping they might mention the Websters. I found two intriguing texts.

One mentions a Patrick Byce, minister of the parish church at Carmylie for forty-five years. Byce died in 1816, and the text claims "his only child married ----Webster, minister of Inverarity, son of a merchant and Baillie in Forfar. Six of their sons were lawyers, and one a physician. One of the six is now Sheriff Clerk of Forfarshire" (Warden 86-87). This entry is even more frustrating, since it seems accurate in several details, but out of sync with my previous version of George Webster's history by a generation. Perhaps Charles had a brother who married a woman whose family name was Byce, not Binny, and they also had two sons also named William and George.

This unlikely scenario is what I seemed to be left with after a month-long search until I came across another history of Forfar, this time authorized in part by George Webster's daughter Flora Steel. This history of Forfar is short and specific. Bound in red calf, and embossed in gold, *The Muster-Roll of Angus* is a "record and a tribute" to the sons of Forfarshire who fought in the "South African War" of 1899 - 1900. It is primarily an album of photographs of young men in uniform, interspersed with engravings, poems, songs, and stories by notable sons, but mostly daughters, of Angus. As I flip through it I am arrested by Flora Steel's familiar signature, decoratively appended to a story I have never heard of, entitled "On Guard! (Founded on Fact)."

The story is about a young boy, Alexander Kidd, who leaves his parents' humble Forfar cottage to follow the fife and drum to India. Once there he becomes part of a large army of soldiers who are to take part in welcoming Queen Victoria for the anniversary of her proclamation as "Empress of India." Sandy Kidd marches and drills furiously, determined to be a credit to his company. The heat and noise and colour of India, and the excessive demands of living up to his regiment's honour are too much for him, however, and he falls ill with fever (which, it is hinted, he could also have contracted from drinking the milk "natives" sell at rail-stops; older members of the regiment it is noted, drink whiskey). His comrades strip him to his shirt-tails and leave him alone in the barracks to

recover, but he becomes delirious, grabs his gun and takes over the guard post directly beneath the British flag while the guard on duty has turned his back. Meanwhile the Queen and Viceroy are about to recess out of the tent just opposite the flag. The men who are supposed to be on duty, sensing what would be known today as a breach of protocol, argue about the best way to get rid of the half-naked young recruit. One man suggests they shoot him. Too late, they freeze when the Queen and her escort appear, the delirious recruit screaming "halt!" at the top of his lungs. Realizing immediately what has happened, Her Majesty suggests merely calling out a changing of the guard. The recruit accepts the scenario and the day is saved. The story shifts to an army hospital where Sandy Kidd lies apparently recovering, and where he receives a bunch of violets from Victoria herself. Again the story shifts, this time to Sandy Kidd's funeral and to a two-sentence encomium that ends the tale: "For enteric [typhoid] kills more young soldiers than any war," the narrator warns, "and will do so, till we choose to fight the wrong that lies at our own doors."

As a story in a war-tribute volume aimed at stirring patriotism, "On Guard!" is a strange story indeed. On one reading it could be seen as loyal to an idea of benevolent Empire, but harshly critical of a malevolent government administration that spends more money on pomp and circumstance than on public sanitation in a hostile, gullible India thought to be in love with pomp and ignorant of basic sanitation. Such a reading would be in keeping with possible public anxiety over the supposed mis-management of the armed forces which led the South African War, a "raiding party" against a few "Boers," to stretch into three years and cost Britain much in men, materiel, and pride.

But another reading might take into account the positioning of the story's hero and his (almost) savior. Alexander is a complete innocent, "for 'sandy' he was and not even a baby in arms could have been more child-faced, more child-hearted, than this 'kid'" (57) who laughs at everything and drinks milk, because "his young healthy taste had not as yet

taken to strong drinks" (59). He is also completely vulnerable, offering his "bare white limbs" in sacrificial-lamb fashion before the Queen herself. But then Her Majesty is "just an Englishwoman," a "soldier's daughter," "a lady with a kind face," and a "mother" (62). It is the commonsense knowledge of the English mother that saves the day and allows Sandy to return, albeit in delirium and death, to "be a boy again fishing in the Curbett, laughing at everything," and forgetting "even the Empire" (63). Here the power of the Empire rests with the efficiency, practicality, thoughtfulness, and wisdom of the English mother and not with the short-sighted brutality of childish men whose only answer is to kill.

Yet another reading might see in this short story a reversal of "The Emperor's New Clothes" in which a young recruit exposes the naked pretensions of British Imperialism, "right before the entrance to the *darbar* tent; right in view of everybody who came to do honour to the Representative of the Queen Empress; right in front of every Rajah and Nawab, big or little, reminding them that they were but vassals of Empire!" (60). In this version of the story, the pursuit of Empire, in India as in South Africa, causes innocent young boys to die.

A song written by another "daughter of Angus" immediately follows Flora Steel's story. Entitled, "Sons & Brothers: A Song of Empire," the fifth and final stanza and the refrain make explicit the contradictory subject positions available to women in the British Empire. The song asks God to remember the "bitter cry, The mournful wail of women, who give their dearest to die" for the Empire. Simultaneously the song also asks its audience to remember that "We are sons of the same great Mother, and guardians of her name,/ we are heirs to Britain's glory of her sway over land and sea." In Flora Steel's story and in this song women seem to be both the motive forces behind Empire and yet passive participants in it.

By placing a such a short story in the Angus commemorative book, Flora Steel once again seems to construct a Scottish history for herself. As in the case of her autobiography, the narrator's easy familiarity with Scottish (usually peasant) diction and dialect, and with local history and customs marks her apparent desire to be a Scotswoman, when in fact, technically she was English born. Although the narrator of her story displays some familiarity with some of the principal families of Angus, and although the commemorative book includes photographs of two of her young nephews who, the editors tell us, fought in the South African War, her affinity is not with any particular family: she does not mention the Websters or their possibly long connection to the county, although her mention of the Binnys provides a shadowy link to Clementina.

What is more striking to me is that through her placement of the story and through its narrative events Flora Steel seems to sever ties to England by writing as a Scottish subject, and a woman who has to negotiate allegiance to the Scottish "nation" at the same time as she explores the roles of woman-as-mother/mother-as-nation. This story, and its context in Scottish/British, male/female patriotism, questions allegiance to nation and to family and by extension to imperialism at a moment in history when unquestioned allegiance was a cultural commonplace.

This story, however, was produced for a limited audience, although it does form an important part of the identi-kit of an imperial subject. The ways in which an imperial subject might construct stories about herself will be further examined in the following chapters with reference to Flora Steel's more widely disseminated work, work which had perhaps a less local impact.

CHAPTER FOUR: FLORA STEEL'S CONSTRUCTION OF A PROFESSIONAL SELF IN HER
OFFICIAL REPORTS AS INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS, PUNJAB

In 1884 the British Government of the Punjab appointed Flora Annie Steel as one of the first female Inspector of Schools, an official position that was not then open to women in Britain. As part of her duties, Steel made a tour of over 70 district schools and wrote detailed reports. The British Government treated these reports very seriously, and the official who reviewed them recommended that many of Flora Steel's proposed changes be implemented. Steel's later power as a popular author rested principally in her "expert" status created through these reports. For example, commenting on a dinner speech Steel gave at a literary gathering in 1897, a correspondent for *The Queen* magazine wrote,

Mrs. Flora Annie Steel came up before English readers like a gourd in the night, took a first-class position among novelists at once, and has maintained it with ease and certainty, but long before this she was known as practically the author of the highly successful system of education for women in India. . . . She is, without doubt, the most important woman worker of the day.

As a worker for women Steel was said to know the "real" India, because she had been inside its homes. Rudyard Kipling seemed to recognize this when, in reply to a correspondent who wanted to know some detail of Indian life, the author of *The Jungle Book* characteristically responded,

I know that [Steel] has had at least 25 years' experience of India and knows more about certain twists of the native mind [sic] than anyone I know. It seems to me that if you could get *her* novel you'd be likely to be buying something really good. She's a beautiful writer and she *knows*. (Kipling "To Robert Underwood" 1895; emphasis in original).

In the context of calls for scholarship to trace the history of colonial discourse as it affects its "others" (see Jane Haggis' "Gendering Colonialism or Colonising Gender?" 1990, and Sangari and Vaid 1991) and especially in light of the need to look at white women's participation in colonialism (see Chaudhuri and Strobel 1992; Morrison 1993), Flora Steel's entry into public discourse as simultaneously woman and government official can be of interest to feminist and (post)colonialist scholars because that entry intersects issues of gender, nationalism, class, race, and religion in complex ways. Moreover, echoes of the issues surrounding that entry continue to reverberate in conflicts over educational policy for women in what has become post-Independence Pakistan and Northwestern India. Steel's life has already been a focus of study and in what follows I will extend that scrutiny to her short career as a British Government official in order to illuminate some of the primary documentation of the beginnings of the present-day conflicts. First I will briefly discuss some problems and limitations associated with the scholarship on Steel to date. Second I will examine what can be traced of the events of Steel's upbringing relevant to her appointment, and then I will examine her reports and the recommendations contained in them in light of some of the dominant discourses on female education of the time.

Flora Steel has been studied before in the context of revisionist examinations of white women's participation in colonialism (see Saunders 1989; Parry 1972; Paxton 1992). These studies have usually focused on her long career as a popular writer and have almost always relied on rather superficial readings of Steel's posthumously published autobiography, *The Garden of Fidelity* (1929). At the height of her fame Steel was known as "the female Rudyard Kipling," and this comparison has been extended in post-colonial assessments which portray her and her work as a poor and equally jingoistic imitation (see Parry 1972; Mitchell 1988). In addition, in feminist assessments Steel has been compared unfavourably to other white women closely identified with colonial India, such

as Annie Besant (Paxton 1992) and Sara Jeannette Duncan. (Saunders 1989). Comparisons to Kipling position Steel as an honorary man, aligning her with (male) imperialism in opposition to (female, indigenous) victim-status. Comparisons with Besant and Duncan position Steel as a failed woman, one who had all of the same experiences but who nonetheless "sold out" her feminist sisters. But such comparisons are misleading because they fail to examine the details of Steel's life in their full context, flattening distinctions in a contest to locate the most feminist white woman in a troubled and troubling time for (white) feminism. Failure to examine discourse practices both in their specificity and in their relation to broader cultural movements can only exacerbate a situation in which imperialism is seen as a battle of manichean forces. Although "colonial" writing is often treated as a subgenre (so that we can imagine that more canonical Victorian writing is somehow "non-colonial") and colonial writers are often treated as a homogenous group, white women such as Besant, Duncan, and Steel often wrote out of very different backgrounds which the surface similarities of their lives may obscure. Although Steel's life has been outlined in previous chapters, the salient details relating to her educational background need repeating here. Steel's apparent solidarity with high Victorian imperialist ideology hides a much more complex scenario, which starts with the details of her upbringing.

1. The Heiress and the Bankrupt

Flora Annie Webster Steel begins her autobiography unconventionally, not with her birth, but with the circumstances of her conception. George Webster had quarrelled with his wife, the former Isabella McCallum, over money she had inherited from her family's presence in Jamaica. Flora points out that in the days before the Married Women's Property Acts (1870 & 1882), her mother had little control over this money, so it is not clear what could have allowed the quarrel to take place at all. But it took the form, apparently, of marital relations ceasing between her parents, which Flora tells us,

accounted for the gap in ages between her and her next older brother. According to the autobiography, financial difficulties continued to dog the family. Archival records confirm the Websters' decline. When Flora was born in 1847 the family lived comfortably in a large suburban house called Sudbury Priory just outside of Harrow-on-the-Hill, the site of the famous public school. George Webster at the time was a Scottish Parliamentary Agent who kept a house as well in Westminster, where the autobiography claims he kept company with some of the great thinkers of the day. By the time of the 1851 census Webster had given up his residence in Town and moved his family into the town of Harrow proper to a cramped villa among neighbours of the genteel and not-so-genteel poor. The autobiography states that the reason for the move was George Webster's bankruptcy resulting from the failure of the Australasian Bank. Apparently, Mrs. Webster's money kept the family afloat until George Webster was appointed Sherriff-clerk of Forfarshire, Scotland. In 1856 he returned with his brood, soon to number eleven, to a remote rural area of his native land. The move, from the center of English public life to his remote birthplace could only have represented a significant step down the social ladder for Webster and his family. Although the family were not poor, Flora apparently did not benefit from what one commentator has misleadingly labelled a "solidly middle-class upbringing" (Parry 102).

Although class divisions were thought to be rigid in high Victorian Britain, the common occurrence of debt and bankruptcy served to blur those divisions. For women, the consequences of bankruptcy could be severe (and these consequences were explored by "feminist" novelists at the time. For example, George Eliot demonstrated the awkward positions into which bankruptcy could force dependent female family members in two novels, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Daniel Deronda*. See also Barbara Weiss's *The Hell of the English: Bankruptcy and the Victorian Novel*, 1986). For Flora Webster, her family's downward social spiral meant that, unlike some of her contemporaries, she had a

restricted social circle and very little formal education. Even with a formal education, employment options for middle-class women were extremely limited (Levine, 1987; Hughes, 1993). Without a formal education, as Bernard Shaw was to argue at the close of the century in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, the choice was little better than one between marriage or starvation.

Education in Britain in the 1850s and 1860s was largely voluntary and non-standardized, resulting in a very catch-as-can affair, dependent on variables of class, nationality, gender, and religion. England's system was seen as rigidly class-bound even by its reformers, who called for increasing state support that did not fundamentally challenge the system's class hierarchy. Scotland by contrast had a well-developed, less class-restrictive parochial system in place by the beginning of the 1800s, but by mid-century it was beginning to erode from the pressures of increasing population and denominational squabbles. A nationalized system of education was brought in with the Education Act of 1870 in England and 1872 in Scotland. It was argued at the time that the situation was most desperate for the children of the middle classes. For women of the middle or professional classes, as we know from early feminist agitation in Britain, education was felt to be practically non-existent. Some girls, like Annie Besant, got well-rounded and progressive educations through family connections or sheer good fortune.¹ For girls like Flora Webster, whose families felt themselves to be caught between classes, too proud to send their girl children to state or church-subsidized schools and too poor to be able to retain a governess *and* take the necessary step of educating their sons at a good public school, formal education was out of the question.

¹There are unusual parallels between Besant's and Steel's early lives. Both women lived in Harrow and had to leave it in 1856 under possibly traumatic circumstances. But there the similarity ends. While Steel went to live in a remote part of Scotland, according to Anne Taylor's *Annie Besant: A Biography* (1993), Besant was "adopted" by a distant relative, a wealthy "bluestocking" experimental educationalist, who, through her fashionable salon on the outskirts of London, exposed the young Besant to the cream of London intellectual society (8-9).

There were still other factors complicating matters in Flora Webster's case. Webster was nine years of age when her family relocated to Scotland. Although she might still have attended a parochial school the question was, which one? Flora's parents' religious affiliations are uncertain, but their marriage record indicates that the marriage might have been "mixed" in the nineteenth-century sense. Her own religious proclivities apparently fluctuated: she writes in her autobiography that she "converted" to the Church of England when she was sixteen. Indeed, as Neil Smelser notes, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, upper class Scottish families (or those having pretensions to the upper classes) routinely converted to the Church of England (238). Parochial school might have been seen as a further step down, since, short as money seems to have been, enough was still scraped together to send all the Webster sons to Harrow. In addition, Flora's elder sister Isabella had enjoyed the services of a governess. Since the move to Scotland, though, Flora claims, the distance in ages between the girls would now render hiring a governess for just one girl unfeasible. Flora tells us she was left to study alone, mostly by reading medical texts left to the family by a "Jamaican" cousin. A short stint with one of her sisters in a school in Belgium (possibly like the one Lucy Snow teaches at in *Villette*) "finished" Flora for the marriage market.

As an old woman Flora Steel wrote in her autobiography that she had wanted to become a doctor. Given her remote location, her family's social circumstances, and the pressure of dominant discourses of the time, though, this would have been an almost impossible goal. Indeed, studies have shown that women who stepped out of conventional roles usually did so through forming and fostering close networks of female community (Caine, 1992; Levine, 1987). Flora Steel does not seem to have had the opportunity to form close female associations, nor does the Webster family seem to have kept up any links to London, which, as the main centre of reforming activity for women

at the time, might have enabled Steel to make the break from convention.² Flora Webster seems to have spent most of her time either alone, with her father as he rode out in the country as a magistrate or with her many brothers, although she does lament that as a girl she was also expected to perform domestic services for them as well. By the time Flora Webster became Flora Steel by marrying an acquaintance of her Harrow childhood in 1868, other better-situated British women had made significant gains for the British women's movement by pressing for reform of women's education. Flora's new husband Henry Steel was a member of the Indian Civil Service and the young couple sailed for India almost immediately following the wedding. Ironically, one proposed educational reform called for women to be educated in geography, so they could leave with their husbands on various colonial missions without being in total ignorance (as they were of sex?) of the world they were to confront (Bodichon in Lacey, 1991). Perhaps because Flora Steel did not share in the benefits that educational reforms were beginning to extend to white women in Britain, she would carry versions of this discourse into the colonial context as an educational reformer in Punjab, where she and her husband were posted for most of the twenty years Steel spent in India. In constructing "othered" peoples as "in need" of formal education that she and the British Government could provide, Steel could construct for herself the educated status her own social circumstances had denied her.

2. Indian Education: Punjab

Some commentators have argued that the national system of education adopted in Britain by the 1870s was first experimented with in India, when the occupying British

²There were other strong centres, notably Manchester, where Lydia Becker was based, and there may have been some activity in Edinburgh and Glasgow as well. But the Webster family's new home just outside of Forfar was geographically very remote. Steel mentions in her autobiography that railways were still a new phenomenon when the Websters relocated to Forfar in 1856. Frequent travel to large cities would have been time-consuming and expensive. Over a century later, there was still no main rail line connecting Forfar to any of the larger Scottish cities.

over a series of decades imposed their own educational aims at the expense of indigenous systems long already in use (see Viswanathan 1989). Although this scenario is plausible, it is unlikely to have been the case for regions like Punjab, which was annexed by the British much later than other parts of India. Consequently in most accounts of educational change in India, Punjab is treated as a special case.

Although the outlines of Indian education in the British colonial period are well known, recent research on formal female education in India, especially that concerning Punjab, is in short supply. The 1883 *Report of the Indian Education Commission* and a monograph written in the late nineteenth century by H. R. Mehta for the British Government remain the most comprehensive sources in English.³ Indigenous education had existed in Punjab, as it had elsewhere in the subcontinent, before the British apparently destroyed it in order to institute their own system (see Jeffrey 1987). That system gained prominence in Punjab slowly, as compared with other areas of British-controlled India. Female education under British Government direction in Punjab began with a few scattered schools teaching mainly the alphabet in the late 1850s following the opening of the Punjab Education Department in 1856. State-supported schools for girls got a local boost in the 1860s when leaders of the indigenous community responded favourably to an appeal for support from the Lieutenant Governor of the time. However, popular support for the Government system is said to have fallen dramatically by the late 1870s due apparently to poor attendance, incompetent instruction, lack of qualified teachers to undertake that instruction and consequent partial withdrawal of State financial assistance. According to available statistics the number of departmental and aided schools had changed from 1,029 in 1865-66 to 318 in 1883-84. Consequently the British Education Commission set up in 1882 to evaluate "progress" in India appeared to view

³My own Western education limits my research to those texts written in English and French. There may be several studies of Indian Female Education written in various Indian languages, but I do not as yet have access to them.

efforts to educate women in Punjab as worrying, given that in the Commissioners' view expenditure far outpaced results and missionaries seemed to be having greater success (*India Report* 45). The Commission was exasperated, commenting in its official report that "No Province of India entered upon the task of diffusing education of the modern type under greater difficulties or with less assistance from private enterprise than the Punjab" (44) and concluding, "There is no Province of India in which the Commission has found so much controversy as in the Punjab" (46).

British reformers approached female education in Punjab as an almost insurmountable difficulty because of its comparatively "late" start and also because they perceived cultural traditions to be particularly entrenched in the province. Apparently, to the local population, education that might lead women to go out of the home to work "was naturally looked [at] with uneasiness, if not abhorrence," the only acceptable education for a woman being that which gave her "no taste for anything outside her home and no interest in any man except her husband" (*India History* 72). The need for agricultural labour, and the practices of early marriage and purdah (seclusion of women from men) were also seen as "hindrances" to the "progress" of female education, particularly in Punjab which was at the time predominantly rural and predominantly Muslim. Recent scholarship has reconfirmed these perceptions while at the same time pointing out how the contest over female education in the larger context of colonialism persistently positioned indigenous women as the conduits of competing versions of tradition and therefore of nationality (Sangari & Vaid 118; Chanana 37).

The Indian Education Commission's 1882 call for certain goals to be obtained in female education reflects these competing versions of tradition. Generally, the Commission Report (published in 1883) is careful to situate its own programme within the broad aims stated by the British Government in two previous statements on female education:

The Despatches of 1854 and of 1859 declared their cordial approval of all reasonable steps for the promotion of female education under the system of grant-in-aid. But the latter Despatch fully recognised the impediments which lay in the way of any great or rapid extension, and the risk which would attend official attempts to force on a sudden change in native custom in regard to the education of girls. (521)

In addition to claiming to be restricted by local custom, the Report situates itself within Government fiscal restraint. The Government's purpose is to promote female education, but not at long-range expense; in other words, it will spend now so it will not have to spend later. Therefore it also will attempt to convince "Natives" to appreciate the "value" of education for girls so the Indian public will eventually take over full financial responsibility for a State-imposed system.

While recognizing its limitations and the element of "risk" it has to negotiate, the Report also implies recognition that changes in "native custom" brought about through State support of female education could outweigh potential risks. For example, the Report details a "history" of Indian female education so far, pointing out its opinion that Indian women have innate managerial capacities that have been heretofore insufficiently tapped. One main goal of female education in India should be, it claims, to get Indian public opinion to "appreciate" this managerial potential. The Report emphasizes the important connection between female education in India and the Government's ability to change social customs by repeating the words of Sir R. Montgomery, Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, who in 1864 had stated that schools already begun there "were chiefly remarkable as a proof of the zeal and readiness with which the people of these Provinces could respond to an external impulse involving a radical change in their habits, provided they were assured of its beneficial tendency" (527). Although it frames its interference in female education with reference to caution and delicacy, the Commission Report

indicates an awareness of the benefits of female education for the purpose of social control. The Report suggests this broad purpose through its repeated injunctions to make female education in India "uniform" and to institute "identical" standards.

Another broad aim of promoting female education, according to the Report, is to deal with the "widow problem." The Report positions Hindu widows as a vast army of young, single women who are by and large poor and idle. State support of female education would increase the demand for female teachers and would kill two birds with one stone, ameliorating the position of a "large class of women whose lot in life is very hard," while replacing the male teachers who are seen by the Report as one of the chief obstacles in getting Indian parents to send their girls to instruction.

The Commission worked out its specific goals for female education within these broader aims. As the importance of female education was not thought to be popularly appreciated, expenditures were to be increased, although private efforts such as the Arya Mahila Samaj, an association of Marathan women, were to be encouraged as "one of the hopeful signs of the times" that popular support would take over from Government (532). For the time being, the Report recommends,

it must not be forgotten that native public opinion in the matter of girls' instruction is very much in the same stage as it was a generation ago in regard to boys' education on the modern system. If rigid financial tests had been applied to the extension of boys' education in India forty years ago, it would have expanded much more slowly than it has done. We think that female education is a proper subject for a still larger expenditure than heretofore from Provincial, Municipal, and District Funds; especially by liberal encouragement to agencies that have shown a genuine interest in the cause. We have, therefore, in our Recommendations provided for a

liberal treatment of girls' schools as regards finance, and for a patient consideration of their difficulties as regards results. (542)

This patient consideration due to the expenditure per results in female education was part of another specific aim: to develop a system of education that would be gender-specific. The Report treats Indian women as a separate caste, claiming to do this in deference to "native custom." For example, it comments with reference to the physical space of instruction that "there seems to be a general consensus of opinion among witnesses examined by the Commission, that mixed schools are not suitable for this country" (532). In addition, in discussing the dearth of female teachers for girls' schools, the Report comments, "the majority of girls' schools are still conducted by male teachers. Only elderly men are considered suitable for the work, and any attempt at a wide extension of female education by means of young male teachers, would be opposed to the sentiments of the people" (538). Regarding curriculum, the Commission appears similarly cautious: "In this country even more than in others," the Report reads,

the life of women is a thing apart from that of men, and it is unlikely that books prepared for boys will be either interesting or suitable to girls. Morality, no doubt, is the same for both sexes and for all classes; still the particular lessons in morality to be inculcated on boys, are certainly not those primarily needed for girls. For example, we desire boys to grow in manly virtues; the native community does not wish to see its girls advancing in boldness and independence of spirit. (534)

In keeping with these views the Commission goes on to recommend a separate educational system for women, and it calls explicitly for English ladies to support the work of missionary women already begun in the direction of "zanana schools," or instruction of the women of a family within purdah (535). It also recommends emphasizing needlework in the curriculum for girls, and an increase in support for female

Normal schools. Such recommendations aimed at creating a female education system staffed by female teachers, supervised by female managers, and controlled by a female inspectorate.

In 1884, one year after the Commission published its findings, the British authorities in Punjab appointed Flora Steel to the post of Inspector. At the conclusion of her tour, she submitted two reports, one dated 11 March and the other 11 April 1884, to Denzil Ibbetson, the Officiating Director of Public Instruction in that province. These reports were submitted to Ibbetson's superior, together with his own assessment of them, and were published and circulated in the official *Proceedings of the Government of the Punjab*. Ibbetson's remarks act as a gloss on Steel's reports, and serve to highlight the ways in which she attempted to insert herself in official life. Steel's reports appear detailed and thorough; they display her skill and acumen in asserting her own authority by negotiating the various competing discourses--those defining private and public life in Britain and in India--constraining and enabling her efforts. By analyzing the rhetorical strategies Steel employed in writing her report among these competing discourses, we may be able to see what was at stake in instituting a system of female education in colonial Punjab that largely prevails in the same form in modern-day Pakistan.

3. "Mrs. Steel's Reports On Female Schools in the Punjab"

Flora Steel's claims about female education in Punjab differ significantly from Denzil Ibbetson's assessment of them. In keeping with British Government concerns, Ibbetson stresses that not enough Indian girls and women are under instruction and, in analyzing this problem, Ibbetson focuses on teaching. He claims that standards need to be revised so that the system can be assured a steady stream of teachers. "The provision of competent teachers for girls' schools is," he maintains, "in the Punjab as in the rest of India, the greatest difficulty that we have to face" (*India Proceedings* 155). He claims that school hours should be shortened so as to allow female teachers to spend part of their

time in Indian homes recruiting more pupils. The more female teachers the Government can call into its service, he concludes, the more Indian girls and women it can claim to have under its tutelage.

By contrast Steel's reports emphasize learning. Steel claims that Government expenditure far exceeds results and that by stressing quantity of pupils over quality of schooling, the British Government fails in its accountability toward the tax-paying Indian public. "It may be necessary to foster female education at the expense of strict justice to the tax-payer," Steel warns in reference to the Government's policy of liberal grant-in-aids, "but it is worse than useless to waste money without achieving anything, which at present is unfortunately the case in many of the schools I visited" (162). Moreover, she comments not just on the revenues from taxes but also from charitable subscription: "Many native gentlemen give liberally," she claims about the support for teacher-education in Lahore, "and it must be most disheartening to them to see so little return for their generosity" (162-63). Some of Steel's recommendations, such as dismissal of teachers who resist keeping records, streamlining curricular goals, abolishing the "paisa" or payment-for-attendance system, closing some schools because of inefficiency, and halting grants to zanana schools, at first glance seem at worst draconian or at best capricious. In light of her concern over quality of education, however, they are better understood as part of Steel's attempt both to assert her authority as a home-educated woman within an all-male official setting and to make that setting accountable for its actions.

Steel relies heavily on her own observations for support of her major claims. She observes that she has had to spend "much valuable time," and by implication more revenue, in "searching through old registers to ascertain how long each girl had been in school" so she can assess the quality of teaching. She is appalled by the numbers of "idle" girls she has observed, or those learning "absolutely nothing," and she is baffled by a

school full of elderly women, who are only learning needlework, but who nevertheless are supported by public money. Hence the recommendation that "classification should be enforced, and teachers heavily fined for any infringement of rules" and that the "paisa" system should be abolished. "The school becomes choked with pupils who never mean to learn," Steel complains of the evils she sees as the result of stipends for attendance, "while more likely girls are prevented from entering because the higher stipends are held in perpetuity by *protégées* of the teachers" (159). Moreover, while Steel praises the missionaries and their Mission schools "on account of the common sense and firmness to be seen throughout," she is very critical of missionaries holding zanana classes. But her criticism is not, as some have seen it, a sign of unsisterly competition with female missionaries (see Paxton). Steel claims to have visited zanana classes and she claims to approve fully of what she sees there, mentioning in particular the achievements of one young woman from a zanana class who is about to read for the Calcutta University Entrance examination. Nor does her criticism seem to derive specifically from intolerance of Indian customs such as purdah (although elsewhere she is very critical of the practice). Rather, she observes that "fully two-thirds of the zanána pupils are the wives and daughters of well-to-do people who have no possible claim on the tax-payer," and so should not expect public money to support them. Where her superior Ibbetson relies for his claims on Steel's evidence and on the opinion of "native gentlemen," Steel's observations strengthen her authority as an Inspector and as a woman, one allowed to enter some of the more private Indian spaces only missionary women have previously dared to go.

Yet to ensure that her discourse is taken seriously as the language of a Government official, Steel's discourse has to distance itself from the intimate world of the Indian home by taking on some of the features of official discourse. In keeping with British Government protocols for report-writing as the Indian Education Report indicates, Denzil

Ibbetson's gloss on Steel's reports is humbly submitted to his superior, the Officiating Junior Secretary to Government, Punjab, in the form of numbered paragraphs, sub-headings in sub-script in the margins. The paragraphs serve to keep the official from unnecessary repetition as he can simply refer the reader to numbered items, while the sub-headings summarize and organize ideas with efficiency. Ibbetson organizes his information by issue and by order of importance of that issue to the Government. Further, Ibbetson frames those matters under discussion by devoting paragraphs at the beginning and end of his report to emphasizing Mrs. Steel's importance to Government. Steel's reports share features of this official style. She "begs to lay before" and "begs to forward" her reports to Ibbetson. In addition, her remarks are arranged deductively, starting from the proposition that Government has been eager to improve a bad situation and observing evidence of this "not very satisfactory state of affairs" (161). This strategy enfolds Steel's reports within the Government's ostensible reasons for employing her while at the same time adding credibility to the need for such intervention in the first place. Moreover, Steel demonstrates her knowledge of the conventions for presenting evidence in official reports by providing detailed tables showing the number of girls under instruction and the cost per pupil to Government. In addition, she provides lists of the numbers and types of schools she has inspected, and whether, and by how much, they are aided.

Yet, while demonstrating her knowledge of official discourse through copying many of its formal features, Steel also demonstrates her distance from these features. Instead of itemizing her remarks, she writes in paragraphs and sometimes in apparently isolated pronouncements that seem spontaneous. Further, she organizes her discussion by district, and by school, as though she is transcribing notes made on location, so she is often forced to repeat important points needlessly, and to mix observations with recommendations, hypothetical outcomes, and seemingly indiscriminate amounts of detail. For example, in

writing about the Lahore female schools she interrupts a discussion of the stipendiary system to exclaim,

I would also bring to the notice of the Committee that some of the teachers are most inefficient, noticeably Pandit Dharm Chand, and Mussummát Wauda Muhammad. There should be no difficulty in replacing them from the Normal School, where the complaint is that work cannot be found for the passed pupils.

I must also remark on the enormous miscellaneous expenditure in the branch schools, which in 1883 reached a total of Rs. 1,002. Surely so many chaprásí, books, mattings, &c., cannot be necessary in 8 small schools. The corresponding charges at Gujránwála are Rs. 32, and I venture to say that if the Committee were to spend half the sum in providing for some kind of supervision -- of which at present there is none -- that the results would be more satisfactory. (160)

Such moves give the impression that Steel's remarks occasionally and suddenly gallop off in all directions, betraying a certain amount of novice enthusiasm and too close an engagement with her subject in place of official poise and aloofness.

Steel's word choice and the tone of voice this choice achieves do little to dispel this impression. Her language is often embellished, suggestive and sometimes extreme. For example, in discussing the "paisa" or stipendiary system she scolds, "so far from ensuring attendance, the registers are cooked in consideration for blackmail levied by the teachers, [and] the school becomes choked with pupils who never mean to learn," and further she remarks that "long practical experience has taught me that to give such stipends is simply ruination to a school." Such extreme language makes her recommendations sound high-handed. In recommending changes to the Lahore schools she exclaims,

I should therefore distinctly recommend an entire reorganization of the present school. The stipend system should be swept away, and a fixed reward for passing into each class put in its place. The Gurmukhi department should be amalgamated with the Hindi: at present it is doing no good at all. (161)

Similarly, in remarking on the course of studies to be followed she tells Ibbetson point blank, "You will observe that I omit Persian altogether. I look on it as sheer waste of time, as it is never taught intelligently" (171). Moreover, her almost constant habit of beginning remarks with "no doubt," and "doubtless" or her use of "in fact," or "absolutely" give her comments a rigid air. On the other hand, her indiscriminate inclusion of detail sometimes leads her to employ a gossipy tone. In remarking on one school that she finds satisfactory she writes, "One branch school (Ahmut-ul-Majid's) which is under a home-educated teacher, whose brother are [sic] employed in Government schools, is in excellent order in every way" (163). In most instances, though, Steel responds to the Government's need to see the female education system in crisis with a tone of incredulity: she punctuates her remarks with phrases like "I cannot conceive why," "I do not see why," "the best comment I can make," and "it appears to me to be insuperable." This unbending language Steel employs coupled with a stern and sometimes gossipy tone of voice mark her as a novice at the same time as her language and tone reveal her status as a white woman; she takes on the voices of the scold, the gudewife, and the schoolmarm within the voice of the official.

By contrast, the official discourse of the British Government is very plain, non-committal, carefully measured, discreet, and understated. Ibbetson's gloss on Steel's reports is a good example of the way in which official discourse in British India attempts to flatten and neutralize extremes or conflict. For example, when Ibbetson introduces Steel he comments that she has been appointed to visit "some of the principal girls'

schools at which examination by [male] Inspectors is objected to" (155). Ibbetson here presupposes his superior knows that prominent Indian men had been "objecting" to male inspectors overseeing "their" women's schooling and that this was seen as a major stumbling block to instituting the Government's plan to introduce Indian women to Western literacy-based education. By employing this strategy of presupposition Ibbetson can simultaneously signal his own "insider status" while also coming across as discreet. Moreover, he adds to this impression by deferring both to his superior officer and to Mrs. Steel. He displays deference to his superior by using a standard tone of humility in such phrases as "I now have the honor to submit," and "I proceed to notice." Similarly he says he "entirely agree[s]" with Mrs. Steel, "demur[s]" to her opinion in several matters, and remarks that "we are greatly indebted to Mrs. Steel" for her services, again indicating that he is an insider at the same time as he subsumes his own voice in a "debt" to hers. That understated tone continues in Ibbetson's use of mostly passive constructions and nominalization, and a certain squeamishness or delicacy in some of his phrasing. For example, he writes, "I would fix some not too strict limits," "the question of religious instruction is a delicate one," "proper precautions must be taken," "I should be inclined" and "if it would meet with the approval of Government." In contrast to Steel, Ibbetson marks himself as non-committal by such phrases as "it is doubtful whether," "I doubt whether," "I am very doubtful as to the advisability," "I have my doubts," and "I should be prepared to go so far as." Moreover, his language is punctuated with qualifiers, so much so that it is difficult to see him asserting anything at all. For example, in commenting on standards of instruction he writes, "And at any rate, for the present, and in the Government and Board Schools of the Punjab, we should not aim higher [than the Upper Primary level]" (156). In short, Ibbetson employs language and sentence structures that create an institutional tone of voice, one that attempts to flatten and silence discord.

Ibbetson can do this because as a civil servant and product of the education system for middle to upper-class British men he is positioned securely within state machinery; in fact he is so far within that machinery that his own voice disappears. But that position may be compromised. In presenting the British Government's opinion of the state of female education in Punjab, Ibbetson's discourse indicates the extent to which the Government has had to rely on non-institutional voices: those of Indian men (Ibbetson refutes an argument of Steel's by referring to what Indian men have told him) and British women. Ibbetson's discourse displays this kind of fissure most visibly in the discussion of standards, where his comments are made up almost entirely of quotations directly from Steel:

With respect to standards, I think we must accept the Upper Primary as the highest to which we should for the present attempt to teach, except perhaps in the case of girls who are under training as teachers. Mrs. Steel says in her report of the 11th March: 'When once a girl can read any book that is set before her, can write a simple letter, and has sufficient arithmetic to keep household accounts, the sooner she leaves school the better.' . . . To quote Mrs. Steel again -- 'It will be time enough for the State to ask for higher attainments when the subjects have availed themselves of the lower.' We have much to do before we teach even this rudimentary standard effectively; for out of the 1,647 girls in the Primary Department examined by Mrs. Steel only 209 had reached it.

In opening up this space for Steel's voice, Ibbetson also creates discursive space for the conflicts inherent in the picture of authority, the ethical appeal, on which Steel's whole project as Inspector is based. These conflicts revolve around Steel's investment in and resentment of her own lack of formal education. Thus, by extension, Steel's entry into official discourse ultimately compromises that discourse's appeal to its own authority.

While the purpose of Steel's reports and Ibbetson's communication of them is ostensibly to comment on the sad state of female education in Punjab and to suggest ways in which the British Government can intervene in female education until it becomes so acceptable that the Indian populace takes it on as its own project, the reports also clearly indicate that a larger purpose is to buttress the British Government's authority. For example, in addition to the ways in which Ibbetson supports his major claims with evidence, style, language and tone of voice that reflect his official status, the way he describes Mrs. Steel also attributes authority to the British Government. Since, as he acknowledges, the Government has decided to call on "experienced and independent ladies" to be Inspectors, he has to demonstrate that Steel falls under that category. He therefore comments that

Nothing but an earnest desire to promote the cause of female education among the natives of the Province could have induced [Steel] to undertake a duty which involved much tedious labour; and I would suggest that, if His Honour agrees with me, a formal recognition of the value of her work should be conveyed to her by the Punjab Gov't."

Further, Ibbetson explicitly emphasizes Steel's authority while tempering it with a reference to her feminine attributes when he writes that

Mrs. Steel speaks with authority on the subject; her suggestions are valuable as the result of much experience and inquiry; her criticism of these schools where she has had to point out defects is most kindly; and I think her reports should be made more generally available than they can be in manuscript.

Such statements establish Steel as an independent and "very exceptionally qualified" source, and they serve to validate and reinforce her "exceedingly able and suggestive"

observations at the same time that they establish the Government's ethos by demonstrating that it has the ability and the acumen to call on that source for service.

Moreover, Steel adds to this ethos by asserting her own importance in her reports. Even though she has supported her claims in occasionally unorthodox style using extreme or figurative language and employing a distinctive voice, on another level she bolsters the Government's need to assert her as an "independent" source. (In light of this, Nancy Paxton's disparaging comment that Steel got her position as Inspector through her husband seems to make little sense). Like Ibbetson, Steel is concerned in her report to be explicit in building her credibility. She claims to have had the courteous assistance in her inspections of prominent members of the educational community, referring to schoolmasters, naming specific "native gentlemen" members and patrons of school societies, and indicating her cordial and co-operative reception by female missionaries. In addition to reinforcing her expertise, she creates for herself a largess of spirit and willingness to reach consensus in writing that the suggestions she offers are

not the mere outcome of my personal experience in school work, although that has been large, but are the result of my consultation with many native gentlemen interested in female education They [the suggestions] have also found favour with nearly all the Mission ladies with whom I have come in contact.

Thus by appealing to her audience on the basis of her authority as a woman educator, Steel simultaneously creates a space for herself in public life while allowing the Government to demonstrate that British women are independent, and able to take up positions in British public life.

But these reports also reveal the irony of Steel's position: she is an official woman educator, but not an officially educated woman. In the face of her "lack" of education, Steel compensates by situating herself as a knower of less-educated women (from the

dominant point of view of education as literacy-based) and particularly of Indian women because she then has the authority to enter Indian homes and comment on the missionaries' zanana-teaching. Steel and Ibbetson and the British Government and the voices of "native gentlemen" speaking between the lines in these reports all base their positions on Indian women, who represent the lowest common denominator in this equation. In Ibbetson's report the voices of Indian women are completely silenced. His "top down" approach sees Indian girls as so many numbers "under instruction" and his concern is almost wholly for how they can be turned into teachers who will bring more girls under instruction. In this way he objectifies them completely when he makes such suggestions as "I would also inquire from the districts whether arrangements could not be made to send girls who had passed the standard for admission to be trained in the teacher's classes with a view to their being eventually employed as teachers in the neighbourhood of their own homes." In the last part of this comment Ibbetson responds to the concerns of Indian men, some of whom have expressed concerns about the influences of educating "their" women. In her reports, Steel responds to similar concerns (even though earlier in the same report she seems to praise efforts to educate Indian women to University standards) by decreeing that Indian girls cannot expect an education that will take them outside the home. For example, regarding the hours of instruction she comments, "Four hours is the most exacted in England in girls' high schools, and why we should claim *six* out here passes my comprehension. One of the most frequent excuses for refusing to let girls come to school is that their services are required at home, and the excuse is a perfectly valid one"(171). Further, at one point in her recommendations Steel erupts,

A girl passing a [simple 3R] standard such as I have suggested is surely amply educated so far as the State is concerned, and higher attainments should be left to private tuition. Our own great grandmothers were

satisfied with even less book learning, and it is simply ridiculous to expect native girls, with their centuries of inherited ignorance, to pass the same standard which obtains in our Board schools at home.

Nowhere more clearly than in this racist outburst do Steel's reports reveal the discontinuity between competing versions of tradition: the contradictions and complexities inherent in taking up a position as an official woman in the context of colonialism. This position Steel has taken up as an "independent" British woman forces her to address that part of her audience that would see British women's claims to independence then gathering considerable force in Britain as valuable and reasonable even though, as she implies in the reference to "our grandmothers," she has been excluded from them. As a woman raised to appreciate women's abilities to keep a large and unwieldy household in order even in the face of mismanagement by the male head of that household, she would be compelled to consider that part of her audience (including many members of the women's movement in Britain, as well as Coventry Patmores in Britain and in India) who would be guided in their educational outlook by domestic ideology. By contrast, her position as an official of the British Government would mean that she would have to demonstrate her commitment to literacy-based education and to what she imagined or knew to be the Government's views of it, while simultaneously demonstrating her womanliness, her literacy skills, her independent critical thought, her knowledge of Indian domestic life, and her knowledge of Government documentation conventions.

Her reports demonstrate that, in the midst of all of these conflicting demands, Steel was able to negotiate a position that was not independent in the Government's or the British women's movement's sense of independence, but a position that expressed an alternative position at least on some levels. Although the Government's concern seems to have been to increase the numbers of Indian girls under instruction no matter what the

cost, Steel took the position that Government, if it was going to rule (and she never took issue with Britain's right to rule), had to be responsible to the Indian people. That meant making expenditure equivalent to results. To that end, Steel resisted Government's demand that English ladies give unqualified support to the zanana system because she claimed it did not fulfill the educational needs of the masses. She also recommended closing down schools or firing teachers because she claimed they were not doing the real work of education which she felt was to promote learning, rather than teaching. Perhaps because of her background, she saw the education system from a student's rather than from a teacher's point of view. Although she recommended lowering standards on the basis of what she saw as an innate Indian backwardness, she nevertheless recognized and applauded the high educational achievements of some Punjabi women. Moreover, in recommending lower standards ostensibly because the mass of the female population had not reached Western standards of basic literacy, she claimed these lower standards as the first step, implicitly acknowledging that higher steps could and would later be supported if the quality of the first step could be improved. In short, her reports lead us to the conclusion that Steel was arguing in favour of responsible use of public money for the purposes of educating women in keeping with the demands of "native" men and even of those Punjabi women who were expressing a desire for university education.

On one level Steel's reports can be seen as successful rhetorical acts in that they were well-received by the Government that authorized them even though they sometimes express contrary views. On another level they are unsuccessful in that they suffer from the central contradiction that Steel's position implies. Just as Denzil Ibbetson's reliance on Steel forces cracks to appear on the smooth surface of his articulation of the British Government's authority, so Steel's reliance on Punjabi women opens problematic fissures in the logic of her own discourse.

These fissures occur in Steel's assessment of what Punjabi women need from Western-style education. Although Steel is careful before making her recommendations to list the many people with whom she has consulted, such as missionaries and "native gentlemen," so as to appear to be giving voice to their concerns, the only moment in which the voices of Punjabi women enter her text is the point at which she is discussing the "paisa" system. In the course of noting why the system will not work, Steel gives her strongest evidence: an anecdote recording a short classroom exchange. Steel writes, "One girl who will come to school from a desire to learn is worth one hundred who come, as they do now, simply to draw a stipend. . . . I have heard a child say to a Mission lady who threatened to withhold the stipend for irregular attendance: 'Then I will leave school altogether.'" Given her background, Steel's horror here at the possibility that girls should *not value* formal schooling is perhaps understandable as an explanation of the motives at work in her reports. But this scene also reflects the contradiction inherent in the position she was compelled to take, and it lends an unsettling note of resistance to the effort to impose a Western-style education on Punjabi women. Moreover, that resistance is inherent in Flora Steel's situation as an uneducated woman official trying to assert the value of education for women who cannot share in that official life.

The conflicts raised by Flora Steel's reports are still endemic to the provision of education for women in modern-day Pakistan (see Shaheed and Mumtaz, 1993, and Manindra, 1986), and in other areas of the world where women are often faced with the choice between Western-style education and adherence to the cultural norms of their own communities. For some, it is not a choice; a recent study by the World Bank points out how the economic returns of education to individuals, their families and communities are not something that can be easily overlooked in a market-driven capitalist world economy. For others, the "choice" means careful negotiation among competing discourses in order to adopt provisional, partial positions that allow them to survive.

CHAPTER FIVE: INDIAN AUTHOR (ITY): FLORA STEEL'S

PROFESSIONAL LITERARY WRITING

*I'll never
Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand
As if a man were author of himself,
And knew no other kin*

Coriolanus V. iii. 34

It is a common practice of the discipline of English Literature to make judgments about the literary value of texts. Past studies of Flora Annie Steel have been firmly situated within this practice. But the concept of literary value has been challenged because investigations of its historical roots have located literary value in colonialist impulses. Moreover, examinations of its philosophical presuppositions have shown it to adhere to a moral framework that sees meaning residing in a text (or in the deconstruction of a text) and not in the relations necessary to communicative acts between the producer of the text and its rhetorical context. As Susan Miller has noted, "what has been at stake in excluding from [literary studies'] history the educational and material circumstances for creating visible texts has had much to do with spiritual regulation, a process of assuring a well-behaved, cooperative body politic" (*Textual Carnivals* 28). Critiques of traditional literary exegesis suggest that looking at a literary career as just one attempt in an interrelated set of attempts to construct a self in discursive space may be a more productive way of analyzing literary subjectivity; in Flora Steel's case an authorial self is made present in the discursive space of late-nineteenth-century print culture.

Nineteenth-century industrial and colonial expansion included the print industry in its wide reach. Studies have shown how the concepts and practices of authorship changed within and around increases in rate and breadth of print circulation and the introduction of copyright. (see Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, and David Glenn Kropf's *Authorship as Alchemy: Subversive Writing in Pushkin, Scott, Hoffmann*.) Recently, studies of late nineteenth-century publishing practices have illuminated the immensely complex

alterations at that time in the way the printed word was produced and circulated. Literary careers rose and fell dramatically as fiction publishing was transformed into a fetish for things and people literary. Flora Steel published two books in India in the 1880s, but her literary career began in earnest in the early 1890s. In what follows I will examine the production of this career by looking at Flora Steel's publishing history. My data for this study come from collections of MS letters. Some of these letters, such as the ones Steel wrote to Frederick Macmillan, which are included in the Macmillan Archive at the British Museum, have been indexed and are already familiar to Steel scholars. However, a large collection of MS letters housed as part of the Wolff collection at the Harry Ransom Research Center in Austin, Texas has only recently been purchased by this public research center from a private collector and so has only recently become accessible. As part of my project is to bring to light obscure primary sources on Steel, these letters from Steel to her literary agent Morris (sometimes spelled Maurice) Colles will form the bulk of the material on which this chapter is based. I will also be examining the varied published texts that were a result of the process that constitutes the construction of Steel's authorial self.

When Flora Steel died on 12 April 1929 she was sufficiently famous for her death to be noticed internationally and with some degree of fanfare. "Mrs. Flora Steel, Noted Writer, Dies--Novelist of India Second Only to Kipling," the *New York Times* proclaimed breathlessly in a "wireless" from its London office (25). Slightly more reserved, the *Times of London* announced the death of "Mrs. F.A. Steel, The Novelist of India" but devoted a longer, more detailed column to the event (19a). Even though Steel was in her eighties, both papers treated her death with surprise. To the press, she appeared to be some kind of immortal force from a bygone era, celebrated for her longevity and vitality; the papers commented on her "immense," "incessant," "widely ranging," "dynamic" "astonishing," and "continuous" activities and they note that, at the age of eighty-two, she

had been working on two books and had just returned from a trip to Jamaica. In the death notices, in subsequent reviews of her two unfinished works, and in the many entries in reference works and literary guides such as the *DNB*, the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, and the *Index to Women*, which are themselves something of an indication of literary reputation, Flora Steel's notoriety derives from her activities: as a traveller and worker in India, as a writer of India, and as a worker for women. Her persona as an author seems to have derived from all these activities, not solely from the acts of writing and publishing. While all of these sources indicate that Flora Steel's fame was at its height in the 1890s, they also indicate that by the time of her death her reputation had declined: any claim to an impact on the twentieth century was being bolstered by references to Kipling and Lord Balfour, who had said, it was noted, that Flora Steel knew India better than any other Englishwoman. Indeed, in an article written in the *New York Times* the day after her obituary appeared, the columnist filled most of his (or her) space with anecdotes about Sir Thomas Urquhart, the translator of Rabelais, and a former occupant of Flora Steel's home in Scotland ("Anglo-Indian" 28). That she had at one time been a famous author was, however, undisputed and the *Times of London* correspondent went so far as to suggest that her suffrage work might have some lasting impact and that her best-selling novel of 1895 was "not unlikely to become a classic."

Studies have shown that the turn of the last century was a volatile time in which to establish oneself as an author. As we know from George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), old, seemingly stable ways of establishing a "name" in literary practice were giving way to the fluctuations of a competitive world market. Gissing's struggling author Reardon captures this state of flux and the insecurity it could engender when he remarks about patronage to his friend Jasper Milvain, "Coleridge wouldn't so easily meet with his Gillman nowadays" (202). Some have viewed this time of "crisis" in materialist terms. For example, the Berne Convention of 1886 introduced international copyright to the

concept of ownership by individual authors, extending that ownership at the same time as it solidified it within national boundaries. Moreover, new societies sprang up to protect various group interests: the Society of Authors was founded in 1884, the Associated Booksellers of Great Britain and Ireland in 1895, and the Publishers' Association followed in 1896. In addition, the Net Book Agreement, which fixed retail prices, came into effect in 1900, while during the last twenty years of the century, "the literary agent, practically unheard of before A.P. Watt went into business around 1875, became a powerful mediator between author and publisher (Rose & Anderson ix).

Other critics have seen these material factors as part of the turn of the century economic shift from a "petty-commodity" free-trade stage to a late-capitalist monopoly one. Thus the reorganization and increasing regulation of authorship and publishing processes has been seen as symptomatic of a larger economic dialectic. (See Norman Feltes's *Literary Capital and the Late Victorian Novel* 1993.) As part of this dialectic, publishing houses became differentiated between those like Macmillan's, which were established and relied on the surplus value of an author's past or future contribution to their "list," or those like Heinemann's, considered upstarts, which relied on speculative and immediate capital generated from a best selling author. These practices in turn may have created late-nineteenth-century "crazes" for book-collecting, or societies dedicated to studying one author and may have helped to solidify Romantic notions of the author or work as singular vessel of genius. Further, differentiation between high and low culture, art and trade or craft, is reflected in late nineteenth-century literary criticism. In 1892, looking back from the pinnacle of his long career, the powerful critic George Saintsbury could write in an anxious tone about the need, in a glutted market, to set the English novel above mere traffic in goods: the novelist "is at the present moment, perhaps, the only artist whose art is liable to be confounded with the simple business of the ordinary

tradesman" ("Present" 419; see also Thomas Strychacz's *Modernism, Mass Culture and Professionalism*, 1993).

In turn, material forces perhaps contributed to or were complicated by other late-nineteenth-century tendencies toward differentiation and fetishization. New "sciences" such as philology and eugenics created anxiety about the loss of racial superiority through loss of cultural capital (see Dowling; Bradon; Said). Caught up in this crisis, words like "author," or "literary" became increasingly associated with things and people masculine. According to some commentators (Tuchman & Fortin), realigning the publishing process effectively removed women from their formerly fairly prominent position in "literature," relegating them to the considerably less-revered realm of popular romance. In sum, the late nineteenth century presented new and significant challenges to a number of aspiring women authors.

Within this context of rapidly changing relations among publisher, bookseller, writer, and reader, the question arises, how did Flora Steel become a famous author? Moreover, what comprised the conditions under which she could translate that literary authorship to a more pervasive authority? In modern terms, we might ask a question like this: what combination of factors allows someone like Margaret Atwood to move from her subject position as "author of *Surfacing*" to "authority on NAFTA"? In examining Flora Steel's career, we might ask what happened between her return from India, the publication of her best-seller, and her position as an authority on the Woman Question? In order to consider these questions, we can examine literary authorship as a cultural phenomenon that can be constructed in a variety of ways. Flora Steel's writing from the time of her husband's retirement from India, in 1889, to her death, indicates the extent to which her career in India formed the basis of her literary ethos. But her writing also demonstrates other factors at work. These factors include but are not limited to:

- 1) the locations in which Steel lived and worked,

- 2) her relationships with publishers,
- 3) her decision to employ a literary agent,
- 4) visibility,
 - a) social and literary engagements,
 - b) publicity around travel,
 - c) personal appearance (clothing, hairstyles, deportment),
- 5) membership in literary societies,
- 6) reviews of her output,
- 7) sales and copyright agreements,
- 8) type of circulation format (the switch from old-fashioned, more expensive three-decker to modern 6s. one-volume format),
- 9) intertextuality (drawing on already-authorized texts/textual traditions),
- 10) the "accessibility" of India and particularly its private spaces signified in Indian women, to Steel directly and to the British public as sites of knowledge-making.

In the period under discussion (that is, the 1890s to 1929), many of these factors were new to the business of authorship and were being approached by the various people in the book business--readers, hacks, authors, publishers, vendors, advertisers, literary agents--in different ways to different purposes. An examination of the various subject positions Steel occupied as she negotiated these factors will reveal how Steel used writing, specifically literary rhetoric, to gain power at a period in history in which the positions of "woman" and "author" were hotly contested sites.

The first indication that Flora Steel was embarking on a literary career comes in a letter in the Macmillan archive dated 9 August 1892. In it Steel responds to a request from the publisher to agree to terms for a book Macmillan's have accepted. Her tone is conciliatory as she concedes ignorance of "marketable values" and wishes to defer to

Macmillan as an "expert" in his business. She accepts his offer of £200 for the copyright (a note in another hand on the back indicates that this was for publication and serial rights) adding that she thinks the sum "quite sufficient" for a "first venture by an absolutely unknown writer." Steel concludes by alluding to "the next time," implying that although she admits to being a novice, this first venture should be considered as the start of a literary relationship with Macmillan's house.

A year later, after the book has been serialized in *Macmillan's Magazine*, Steel is addressing her letters "Dear Mr. Macmillan," rather than just "Dear Sir," and in one letter is writing to thank Macmillan for her presentation copy of the book his firm brought out in October 1893 in a "three-decker" edition selling for 31s. 6d. Her tone is intimate as she describes her busy life in Scotland supervising a "house crammed full of shooters, [and] fishers." While a year earlier she had disclaimed concern with "business," now her concern is for sales, with most of the letter being taken up with imploring Macmillan to bring out an edition of her *Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (Steel; Letter 9 October 1893).

Steel had co-written *Housekeeper* in the late 1880s with her friend, Grace Gardiner, who, according to Steel, was still living in India. The book had been published there by a Bombay press and further editions came out under an Edinburgh imprint. In her letter Steel mentions that Thacker & Co. are considering English publication, but in Steel's opinion they are offering too low a royalty. Lest she appear too forward in business matters, however, Steel adds that Grace Gardiner has "but this one banting [and is] anxious to continue in the same successful way of producing golden eggs." As an incentive to Macmillan, Steel lists sales figures, confidently asserting that the book has sold 2000 copies in three years and, being unique, will be much in demand. Finally, she closes by manipulating Macmillan into the role of villain if he declines. She mentions Mrs. Gardiner again and implies that by not agreeing to issue the work, Macmillan would

virtually be taking food out of the mouths of that good lady's eleven babes! Steel then clinches the argument by sending her "kind regards" to Mrs. Macmillan.

Thus, by the early 1890s, Steel had established a relationship with Macmillan based on her previous success as a co-author of a household manual for British women going out to India. She buttressed her ethos with references to her own housekeeping prowess and her concern for the plight of British women in India. However, references to this book, which lists ways to manage the "filth" and "slovenliness" British women would "inevitably find" on going out to India serve also to distance Steel from India, emphasizing her whiteness and her improved condition in England. Her first venture into novel-writing also supported her ethos, both in its mild success with readers and in its thematic concerns.

That first published novel was *Miss Stuart's Legacy* (1893). Concerned mainly with life on an Anglo-Indian "station," the novel relies for its episodic structure and dramatic style on conventional high romance in the tradition of Fielding and Scott. Unrestrained by the long passages of moral or philosophical commentary that characterized most eighteenth and nineteenth-century romances, however, the first half of *Miss Stuart* speeds through plot twists and mysterious doings, movement that is more characteristic of late-nineteenth century novellas like Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. Also characteristic of late-nineteenth-century fiction is the way in which *Miss Stuart's* narrative combines frenetic romance with static, even deadening realism. Movement between pungent scenes of intrigue and treachery on the Afghan frontier and arid, stifling scenes detailing the heroine's married life remind the reader of narrative movement in Conrad's *Victory*. But this is a woman's novel and as such its content mirrors the concerns of earlier women's novels like *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre*, combining the theme of emergent womanhood with adventure to create something not unlike a *fin de siècle Moll Flanders*.

The mix of romance and realism in this first effort by Steel (and in several of her later novels) is also typical of Victorian sensation fiction. Although it had its heyday in the 1860s through such best-sellers as Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860), and Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), recent research has shown that features of sensation fiction crept into works of a much later period, such as fiction by Thomas Hardy (see Lyn Pykett's *The Sensation Novel*, 1994). Typically plot-driven, experimental, and disruptive of Victorian social and moral codes (Pykett 10), sensation fiction explored themes such as family relations and the Woman Question, critiquing Victorian norms of family stability and the practice of mercenary marriage. Often sensation plots were propelled by passionate or demonic women (Pykett 32 & 66), the narrative usually revolving around some sort of deep secret most often involving mis-laid or mis-used wills. Resolution of the narrative would rely on the heroine awakening from a kind of somnambulant state, to a discovery of the secret, and recognition of her own power. As we shall see, in Flora Steel's treatment of sensation conventions, the secret to be discovered and dealt with by the heroine would be India, and the devious, confounding, and demonic qualities attributed to English women in the earlier sensation novels proper, would, in Flora Steel's version, be transposed on to Indian women or women who could not separate themselves from India.

Discovering India, being profoundly affected by it, and then separating oneself from it is one of the major themes of *Miss Stuart's Legacy*. The narrative recounts the career of Belle Stuart, a young Indian-born Scotswoman who, after growing up in Britain, comes to India hoping for a reunion with her remarried father, the Colonel in charge of a remote station. However, like Fanny Price, Belle finds that her father and her new family frustrate her romantic visions of unity: Colonel Stuart is a kindly but dissolute drunkard and his Eurasian wife and step-daughters appear shrill and vulgar to the home-bred Belle. To make matters worse, her ungainly and immature cousin Dick proposes; when she

refuses him, he gets himself posted to dangerous telegraph-work on the Afghan frontier, and is killed. The young boy had written a will leaving a sizable fortune to Belle, but by a complicated route, the will disappears. Meanwhile Belle's father dies under potentially disgraceful circumstances, but Major Philip Marsden, a somewhat disreputable aide-de-camp and frontiersman manages to disguise the disgrace, with the help of John Raby, opportunistic civil servant, who wants to impress Belle. Marsden heads off to find Dick and in the process is believed to have been killed. Grief-stricken, and exhausted by so many deaths and her bewildering family-life, Belle acquiesces in a disastrous marriage to Mr. Raby, who has found out, before Belle does, that she is an heiress by Marsden.

After such tumultuous beginnings, the novel stabilizes somewhat as it follows the worsening relationship between Belle and Raby. He invests her money in an Indigo plantation, constructing a massive dam in the process that antagonizes the local peasant population. Marsden returns from the dead, having been recovering from serious injury among Afghan hillmen. Instead of asking for his money back, he agrees to become Raby's silent partner, and heads off to the frontier again without discovering Raby's bad public relations. All this time Belle is awakening to her position. As she rides through the surrounding countryside encountering the peasant population she comes to the awkward conclusion that Philip Marsden is a much better man than her husband and that she has been gradually transferring her affections to the former. Marsden also realizes that he loves Belle and things come to a head when he returns to tell her so just as the local peasants decide to tear down Raby's dam. The unscrupulous indigo planter is killed, and Marsden saves Belle from being drowned in the torrent set loose by the quarrel over the dam. The novel then jumps ahead seven years and finds Belle in England, where, with the money miraculously recovered from Dick's original legacy, she has opened a hospital for incurably ill children (like the one we find she has had by Raby). Marsden, once again on furlough from the frontier, comes to visit and Belle makes a half-hearted proposal to him.

They talk over the sense of marrying when both their careers are miles apart, and the "romance" ends with these two older and wiser veterans of Anglo-India deciding not to marry.

Several themes which would develop into the sustaining themes of Steel's career are already at work in this, her first venture. One of these themes is ironically the distrust of words and especially of writing. Spoken and written communications continually go astray or disappear in this novel. For example in what forms part of the sub-plot of *Miss Stuart*, an old and noble Mahomedan landowner who has fallen on hard times tries to get his son a government post doing "writing work" (34). In a conversation with Philip Marsden, who has taken up the old man's request, the District Officer responds that the boy will have to pass the Middle School examinations. Frustrated, Marsden identifies himself with what the novel presents as an earlier, less bureaucratic (more symbolic and more Eastern) time in British India's history when he demands accusingly, "And loyalty, family, influence--what of them?" The government official shrugs and responds that he is "only a barrel-organ grinding out the executive and judicial tunes sent down from headquarters" (35). Without a chance at a post, the old Mahomedan's son goes to work for a "radical" Indian newspaper where, the narrator tells us, his "fingers inked themselves hopelessly over the fine words, his mind also bec[oming] clouded by them" (72-73). The boy later dies leading a religious/nationalist rally, the narrative suggesting that such tragedies (and emergent Indian nationalism) could be averted if the English stuck to honourable and unambiguous action instead of "intoxicat[ing]" words. Further, writing and words are identified with those who betray or disappoint Belle, while she and Marsden are identified with quick and wordless action. Words are strangely insufficient in this novel, which often fails to explain or describe details fully. For example, when Belle's father dies suddenly the narrator describes the long process Marsden goes through to find an appropriate woman in the camp to break the news, but the narrator comments

that how such news is broken "does not much matter, for words mean nothing" (115). Part of this wordlessness may derive from the romance tradition, which in its old oral forms often included such stock phrases as this one from the Medieval romance *Guy of Warwick*: "Who so schulde the fayrenes telle,/All to longe schulde he dwelle." As oral forms of narrative typically concentrate on plot-features, and as narrative features are meant to be mnemonic, story-telling which lingers over details interferes with the aims of oral culture (see Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, 1982, for a discussion of the ways in which oral culture persists in the Western world's push for literacy). This "wordlessness" in *Steel* may derive from oral forms like Robert Burns's ballads or Walter Scott's romances, forms which were popular in the Scotland of *Steel*'s girlhood. Part may also come from the emphasis on action both in the romance/adventure tradition and in the tough boys' school ethos of Anglo-India. *Steel* may also be trying to suggest something of the difficulty of maintaining communication in a colonial situation, particularly for white women who were often separated from their husbands and children and isolated by their legendary unwillingness to learn local languages (of which *Steel* was critical).

While encounters between East and West were obviously of importance to a writer who was constructing her ethos from her experiences in India, *Steel*'s purpose in this novel seems to have been to comment on East/West relations within the terms of relations between the sexes. That Englishwomen who went out to India stood aloof from the indigenous people and culture, walling themselves up in imitations of English rooms eating imported food and wearing imported fashions, was at the time and is still a commonplace, fostered in part by novels like Sara Jeannette Duncan's *Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* (1893). *Steel*'s *Miss Stuart*, however, represents India as a challenging place of possibility for white women, who, like Belle, are accustomed to a restricted life of inaction. For the first half of the novel, Belle passively accepts the bewildering circumstances that are forced on her: she attends her father's funeral as though she were a

sleepwalker, she marries John Raby just after she has been imagining herself to be "a disembodied spirit striving after a glimpse of the world whence it had been driven by death," and she testifies against the young son of the Mahomedan landowner because she is told to do so even though she knows that the boy's kind action in helping her outweighs the sedition of his words (242). But her position in India as the wife of a busy planter who all but ignores her also forces on her an awareness of a wider world outside the one she has known. She is intrigued by the sight of the village women who pass her with toddlers in tow on their way to prayer. The narrator writes,

Of all this again Belle knew nothing; but suddenly, causelessly, it struck her for the first time that she ought to know something. Who were these people? What were they doing? Where were they going? One small child paused to look at her and she smiled at him. The mother smiled in return, and the other women looked back half surprised, half pleased, nodding, and laughing as they went on their way. . . Belle . . . felt oppressed by her own ignorance. (55-56)

Belle sets out slowly to correct her ignorance. She nurses a sick Indian child, and ventures out on horseback into the villages surrounding her husband's plantations, becoming aware of how men like her husband are antagonizing the populace. Belle awakens to responsibility in India but translates it to England in taking up a career as hospital administrator after her husband's death, and by refusing re-marriage. Through such events the narrative seems to be suggesting that India represents a call to action for Englishwomen and that this altruistic urge can be gained through making the best of bad marriages like that between Belle and Raby, or Britain and India. It is telling, however, that Flora Steel's narrative, written in Britain, constructs white women's activity as only available there. Ironically, in writing about white women's independence in activity, Steel

reveals their actual dependence, because her text has to remain silent about that large portion of her sex--Indian women--who cannot share in this same call to altruistic action.

Miss Stuart seems to have been in the process of publication while Steel lived at Dunlugas, the fishing lodge she and her husband took in Northern Scotland. As her relationship with Macmillan's deepened, however, Steel's letters began originating from 20A Cheyne Walk, a house in Chelsea she seems to have taken sometime in 1893. 20A Cheyne Walk was an interesting choice of residences for a respectable matron past middle age who had lived quite a retiring life since recently returning from India. On the other hand, Steel was known for her individualism, and Chelsea was an area that might offer cachet and connections to someone aspiring to turn that individualism into authorship.

In the 1890s Cheyne Walk and its surrounding neighbourhood were well-known for their associations with "literary figures who flouted authority" (Davies 23). An enclave of artists, musicians, and writers since Sir Thomas More sang in the choir of Chelsea Old Church, its roll-call of former residents includes Horace Walpole, Jonathan Swift, Tobias Smollett, Leigh Hunt, Thomas and Jane Carlyle, and Karl Marx. Cheyne Walk still stands, forming a sturdy line of Victorian terraces built on the former site of Henry VIII's manor house. Facing the Chelsea embankment across the road, the houses are somewhat sheltered from traffic on the Thames and on Chelsea Bridge by small gardens behind iron railings. Elizabeth Gaskell was born here, George Eliot died here, and Rossetti and Swinburne painted and rhymed just a few doors away from 20A. Around the corner pensioned warriors at Chelsea Hospital provided hours of background material for Thomas Hardy's *Dynasts*, and may have helped Steel with the battle scenes of her "Mutiny" novel. Chelsea was at its most notorious when Steel lived there: Oscar Wilde had lived about a block away since the early 1880s and in 1895 was to be condemned to Reading Gaol for the life he was supposed to have led in Chelsea.

Steel's letters to Macmillan from Cheyne Walk suggest a connection between her decision to live and work in the house and a heightening awareness of her writing as a profession. They also suggest a need to connect herself to a literary and national heritage. A letter in early 1893 in which Steel is negotiating over the publication of *From the Five Rivers*, a short story collection, and *Red Rowans*, a long novel, shows Steel trying to anticipate Macmillan's judgment and that of his readers. Apparently, Macmillan had suggested the novel be published in a two-volume form, which at the time would have been somewhat old-fashioned and costly to the reader. In her letter Steel objects to this because, as she points out, critics of the book have more clearly seen its real purpose, which is to entertain the general public. Steel quotes what is presumably a reader's report which comments that *Red Rowans* is "something that the ordinary untravelled Englishman eating a hasty lunch in Fleet Street would understand" (Steel Letter 7 February 1893). Agreeing that *Red Rowans* is just such an "intellectual sandwich," and that it is "likely to have its greatest success at Sandwich prices," she therefore suggests publishing the book in "cheap form." By distinguishing between *Red Rowans*, that "horrible thing," and *Five Rivers*, Steel acknowledges that literary merit is tied to such things as audience and publishing process, and also signals her growing awareness that establishing a career in a volatile market means writing and publishing in a variety of formats so as to gain an audience. Her "sandwich" volume might thus be seen, not only as an attempt to reach a more popular market, but also as a way of testing whether she could move from her position as "colonial author" to a more mainstream "Home" producer.

Other letters at this early stage in Steel's career express frustration at the growing complications of the 1890s publishing situation. Part of Steel's frustration stems from her need to live for some of the year at Dunlugas. Where previously she had used Dunlugas as a way to bolster her authority as a household manager, now she complains that going there necessitates disruptions and also places her "too far from the hub of the universe to

be able to manage" her increasingly complicated literary endeavors (Steel Letter 7 April 1893). Perhaps she felt as Trollope said he did, when he wrote in his autobiography of contemplating a move from Ireland to London, just as his literary career was taking off: "I thought that a man who could write books ought not to live in Ireland,--ought to live within reach of the publishers, the clubs, and the dinnerparties of the metropolis" (121-22). While Steel mentions with pride the increasing demand for her work, clearly it also provides a further source of frustration as she tries to negotiate agreements. The letters at this period show Steel attempting to use the increased demand for her work to her own advantage as she tries to play Macmillan off against a new upstart rival in the publishing business, William Heinemann.

By mid-December 1893 Steel is embroiled in negotiations with Macmillan over first publication rights to *The Potter's Thumb*. She writes to say she has decided to offer it to Heinemann because she thinks letting another firm pay a higher price for the book would be of advantage to both her and Macmillan in the future (Steel Letter 19 December 1893). Macmillan has apparently accused her of bad faith in "going elsewhere" and in responding Steel demonstrates her growing awareness of her own literary capital and of the distinction between speculative and list publishing in her appeal to a future with Macmillan's house and to her past loyalty and present intimacy (once again she ends a letter to Macmillan with a reference to Mrs. Macmillan -- this time to the possibility of an at-home). Over the next few days, however, the letters to Macmillan indicate that Steel was aware she had committed a serious publishing faux pas in anticipating her own value with a publisher and in going to Heinemann with *Potter's Thumb*. She writes several apologetic letters trying to patch things up, even promising another novel in progress to Macmillan and half joking to him that she is working so hard at it that if "the manuscript finishes me you can have the book out of my executors; if you want it" (31 December 1893; fol. 154). In another letter she tries to reassure Macmillan that *Potter's Thumb* will

be a failure, and that since she has asked no more for it than for her other books she cannot be accused of greed (31 December 1893; fol. 155).

But the damage was apparently done. The MS Steel promised to Macmillan, tentatively titled "A Minor Part" has not been heard of again. *Potter's Thumb* was brought out by Heinemann the following summer, first in the expensive three-volume format and then, as the novel seems to have been a success, in several cheaper editions over the next fifteen years.

The novel that began Flora Steel's long relationship with the house of Heinemann is similar in scope and style to *Miss Stuart's Legacy*. This time Steel employs the same mixture of romance, realism and idealism to chronicle the adventures of two very different Englishwomen in India. One is the feminine, seductive Gwen Boynton, a widow in need of cash to support her rather lavish mode of existence. The other is Rose Tweedie, like Belle Stewart, a Colonel's daughter. Unlike Belle, though, Rose is self-assured, modern (she calls her aged parent "dad"), and when she isn't absorbed in the latest issue of *Scientific American* or the *Saturday Review*, she is out saving encampments from raging infernos or riding hard after partridge on a hunt with the men. She is hostile to a "man's woman" like Gwen, who enjoys keeping herself beautiful so she can be fought over and perhaps maneuver herself into a better financial position. By contrast Rose is Steel's version of the New Woman: Rose takes pride in her own fierce resistance to dissembling and romance, finally choosing, in what must be one of the most equitable and businesslike proposal scenes in the history of literature, to marry a man as square-dealing as herself, whose chief attractions seem to be that he wears spectacles on horseback.

The struggle between Rose and Gwen for the definition of womanhood takes place against the background of other contests. The narrative of *The Potter's Thumb* revolves around an "Ayodhya pot," an ancient piece of pottery given by the Dewan of Hodinugger

as a potential bribe to George Keene, a new recruit, fresh from England. Keene has been sent to Hodinugger to serve as subordinate to Dan Fitzgerald, keeper of the sluice gate of a canal that divides the Dewan's principality. Fitzgerald, a hard drinker who hopes to get promoted so he can marry Gwen Boynton, has been accused of letting the sluice open too freely in the past, so he pins his hopes on the apparently incorruptible Keene. St. George, as he is jokingly called, becomes fascinated by the ancient beauty of India: he neglects his duties to paint a young Indian girl, and his fetish for a piece of ancient pottery closely allied to the girl, coupled with his obsession for Gwen Boynton (who is often compared to a corrupt Indian courtesan), lead to a series of potentially disastrous consequences for Rose Tweedie's father, his entourage and, by extension, British rule. In other words, India seems to represent a powerfully seductive challenge to British supremacy through its "corrupt" attachment to (feminine) sensuality and beauty at the expense of action and reason.

In writing about India as supine temptress, Steel was far from challenging conventional notions about India at the time. In fact, portraying India in this light probably served further to bolster her authority as Indian expert that she had constructed with *Miss Stuart's Legacy*. Her views on romance, marriage, and sexuality, however, did serve to mark her as unconventional. Building on the distrust of words evidenced in *Miss Stuart*, *The Potter's Thumb* expresses a general suspicion of beauty, as a worship of beauty can lead to passion and ultimately to evil. Relationships between men and women, like our relations to art, must be devoid of passion, Steel seems to be saying. Early in the novel we are told that a potter still makes Ayodhya pots. Local superstition has it that the potter puts the mark of his thumb on Ayodhya pots which will crack in the firing, and that this mark can also be found on children born in the village who will later die. The pot's symbolism extends in the narrative to English men and women whose mettle is tested in the Indian heat, and who "crack" when they submit to ennui born of the worship of

beauty. Similarly, art, like the ayodhya pot or the novel must "hold water," in that it should be more practical than passionate, put to the useful ends of instruction on the duties of men and women in relationships. Here the purpose of Steel's novel seems to work against Western cultural, specifically aesthetic, conventions in that it uses conventional notions of Eastern exoticism in opposition to the main currents of artistic expression of its day, prefiguring the pragmatic poetics of Henry James rather than the art for art's sake of Oscar Wilde. While the novel upheld Steel's position as a female novelist of Anglo-India, it also subverts conventional notions of female authorship, teaching women and men their duties toward one another and society through privileging action/adventure over romance. This new venture with Heinemann thus seems to have allowed Steel to figure forth different versions of her own increasingly difficult relationship to her self as woman writer, pulled as she seems to have been between different publishers and publication formats for her work, and different settings in which to produce and position her various narratives.

Negotiations between Macmillan and Heinemann over publication of *The Potter's Thumb* brought Steel directly into contact with a new factor in the late-nineteenth-century culture of which she seemed so critical. In a letter to Macmillan she had complained of having to deal with "the pushing which is the essence of nineteenth century trade & is held to be right by most people" (31 December 1893; fol. 155). Apparently it was at the height of her imbroglio with "pushing" publishers that Steel wrote to the literary agent Morris Colles, asking him, in effect, to rescue her (Steel Letter n.d.). If it is true that in the 1890s "the literary agent represented the demise of the writer as gentleman-author and the institutionalized recognition of writing as business" (Tuchman & Fortin 172) as well as the partial removal of the author from the business end, it is possible to see the literary agent as representing a significant challenge to women writers who could not easily position themselves either as gentleman authors or as businessmen. Flora Steel's letters to

Colles over her quarter-century relationship with him reveal the tensions, obstacles, and opportunities inherent for women writers at this crisis time in the re-definition of the author.

One of those tensions might be a loss of control. Her first letter to Colles emphasizes that Steel is being "somewhat harassed by publishers" who want *The Potter's Thumb*. Her tone is urgent and pleading, asking Colles if she can meet with him "without delay." She concludes, "My only excuse for thus troubling you being the fact that though I believe myself to be a good woman of business I have not a single friend in the Literary world & I know nothing of copy rights & royalties." Thus, while Steel asks to be rescued, her letter also indicates that she wants, not someone who will take over the "business" of authorship, but a "friend" who might show a good business woman how to be a good Literary business woman. At the same time, in thus "troubling" Colles she seems to be battling with the very notion of a Literary friend: someone who brings together the worlds of artistic genius and business, but who by his very presence also threatens to come between them. It does not seem surprising, therefore, that *Potter's Thumb* is about loss of control through a figure (the seductive Indian woman) who mediates artistic impulses. Seen in the light of Steel's battles with publishers, *Potter's Thumb* may represent Steel's own assertion of artistic control.

Her letters over the next year reveal that, as Steel reworked old material and mulled over the plot of a new novel, she was also struggling with what a literary agent meant to her position. While her letters at this time almost always begin with some disclaimer of her authority--she is not a professional, she only tells stories to amuse people on rainy days at Dunlugas, she does not care about money or reviews--they also are almost always devoted to increasingly minute and complex details such as what percentage publishers are offering for various foreign rights, what is the usual length of a one-volume novel, and what kind of publishing house might be interested in particular types of stories.

Although in some other writer's case employing a literary agent might be thought to set a writer's mind at ease about business details, this was not the case for Flora Steel. In addition to badgering Colles about prices and formats Steel's letters voice concern at her need to be up at Dunlugas, away from personally directing her publishing affairs and there is even some worry that she may be cheated by unscrupulous editors of literary magazines like Clement Shorter who she believed was trying to get her stories for less than they were worth (Steel Letter 5 May 1894). Moreover, Steel seems to have been incapable of wholly trusting Colles. At least once she wrote to him to tell him of arrangements she had made through contacting publishers directly

Such insecurities may have been brought about by what Steel recognized as the evil necessity of using a mediator in her literary affairs and they may have been fostered also by reviews of her work. Reviews of later work almost always allude to earlier comparisons to Kipling, and it would seem from these that she was frequently seen as "poaching" on his preserve. Moreover, while reviews of *The Potter's Thumb* praised the book, it was apparently evident to Steel that they also did not take it (or by extension her) very seriously. (She wrote to Colles that she was surprised by the reviews because *she* saw the book as a critique of nineteenth-century culture.) Whatever caused her to have doubts about her authorship, over the next two years Steel would take steps to secure a position as a "great" author on her own terms.

During this period of relative insecurity Steel decided to travel alone to India in order to research the details of her next novel. As recent research has shown (Mills, Pratt, Lawrence), lone women travellers were not uncommon in this period; women travelled to experience adventure, or freedom from the constraints of Victorian ideals of femininity, or even, in some cases, to reassert those ideals. But it was considered quite unconventional behaviour at this date for a forty-seven year-old married woman to leave her husband and travel to India with the specific object of doing historical research.

Writing in her autobiography at the end of her life, Steel could look back on this period as age-defying. She wrote that, as she approached "the great climacteric for most women," she felt "not any diminution of energy, any failure physical or mental; but the exact contrary." She would find an outlet for this surge of energy in travel: "I doubt, in fact, if in all my youth I had ever felt so much alive as the day in the autumn of 1894 when I set sail, alone, for India" (*Garden* 200). Perhaps this age-defying energy defined her travel as well, for Steel not only travelled to another place, but also to another time. Steel travelled to India in order to research an event of her childhood: the Indian "Mutiny," or Uprising as it is now called.

Even though the Uprising occurred in 1857, it still held the fascination of the British public, being the topic of more than fifty English novels by 1900. Steel must have been aware that she was entering an already-occupied niche, and this awareness, coupled with her need to position herself in the literary world, seems to have led her to construct her trip to India as a way of validating her authorship as unique, romantic, authentic, and precious. She made a point of writing personally both to Colles (Letter 16 July 1894) and Macmillan (Letter n.d.) to tell them of her impending journey and that she would be a "broken reed" while she was gone. She also emphasized that she was going alone, without her husband's official position to support her this time. In her autobiography Steel expresses pride in her research efforts. She claims to have lived in Delhi among the townspeople on a rooftop dwelling which she took great pride in furnishing and maintaining without a servant. In addition, she says she was one of the first people to be given unlimited access to the huge government archive of the "mutiny." Very typically, Steel notes in her autobiography that this privilege gave her a tremendous sense of power over the past: "there was a breathless haste, an inevitable hurry about [looking through these documents], almost as if the spirit of the times had been caught and prisoned in the papers" (214). Steel also writes, with typical mischievous glee, "I could have burnt the

whole contents of the huge brass-bound chests [of documents] in my sitting-room fire; for it was cold weather, and I had somehow contracted the worst cold of my life" (214). One wonders if she did indeed alter or burn parts of this priceless Western account of history at her discretion, before "imploing the Government to place it in some Museum" (214). In any case, it seems Steel thought such power over the past would lend credibility to her story, and by extension it might strengthen her authorial presence.

No more letters appear to have been sent to Morris Colles until Steel returned from her six-month's "knocking about the bazaars & byways," which seems to have given her the confidence she needed. Steel's letters to Colles in 1895-96 are imperious, demanding, and self-assured, no longer vacillating between indifference to prices and overriding concern for the slightest alteration in a percentage. Instead, as can be seen in a letter from Steel to Colles 13 December 1895, her concern is now for the integrity of her artistic property as an indicator of her own authorial integrity (inappropriate spelling and punctuation are in the original):

Dear Mr. Colles,

I am in a bad temper over the Windsor Magazine. If an editor can pass over such glaring mistakes in spelling as occur in "A Danger Signal" [one of Steel's short stories] he ought to make a point of getting his contributors to do editors-proof. *Maze* for maize *mullet*: for millet--also argue not only lack of spelling but crass ignorance. Then the illustrations! The artist ought at least to read the story and not depict a child of five as something between canibal & a Dutch doll of forty.

So please, I am going to burden all manuscripts of mine in future with the proviso 1st that illustrations, if any, must be submitted to me, so that they shall not outrage all known canons of art, & probability 2nd That I must see the last proof before printing. In regard to illustrations, I will illustrate

the next story I send you myself & I shall always be glad to give outlines of correct dresses etc To draw a Hindoo with a beard, is as bad as depicting Apollo with a negro's head & my poor little Dhurrie in the story, a chubby child of five, with a fuzz of curly hair, a round large-eyed face, & a rag,--long as a petticoat, has nothing to do with this intolerable female--a native Christian fetched from the first page of a Mission report & made shamelessly to dance the can-can. No! As the Americans say, I *pass*.

Yours Sincerely,

Flora Annie Steel

As this letter illustrates, Steel seemed at this time to be positioning her authorship around integrity, which for her derived from the rigid authenticity she would promote in her writing. Her reputation for fidelity was secured that same year when Heinemann published the results of her research, her "novel of the Indian Mutiny," *On the Face of the Waters*.

Steel's version of the Uprising, the result of several weeks of poring over dusty notes and despatches, on one level reads as a rather uneven adventure-romance. It tells the story of two Englishwomen, the matronly Kate Erlton, and the very risqué Alice Gissing, their Government spy-protector and wayward soldier Jim Douglas, and his widowed Indian servant, Tara Devi. By delineating the romantic and financial entanglements of her characters--Kate Erlton becomes attracted to Jim Douglas when she tries to bribe him to ignore the questionable gambling of her husband who spends the family money on his mistress Alice Gissing--Steel builds an atmosphere of intrigue, greed, and decadence in the chapters leading up to the first outbreak of hostilities. What is now known as the Indian Uprising or the First War of Independence, began in Bengal in 1857 when a regiment of Sepoy cavalry refused for religious reasons to use British-issue gun cartridges

which had been smeared with animal grease. Steel adapts this incident, and the violence which then spread to other parts of India, as a way to put her English female characters in need of rescue. Alice Gissing dies beautifully and heroically, while Kate Erlton is hidden by Tara Devi on a Delhi rooftop during the siege of that city, and is finally saved partly due to her own efforts, and partly by the aid of a persistent Jim Douglas.

Steel divides the action of her history into two distinct sections: the first two books follow passionate characters through noisy, colourful scenes at a frenetic pace. By contrast, the last two books grind toward a halting conclusion as increasingly wooden characters methodically discuss, prepare for, and execute strategy. While the first section follows what Bakhtin labels the romance chronotope, in the latter section Steel's narrator makes repeated efforts to situate her narrative along realistic lines in several places, frustrating easy or heroic conflict resolution in favour of strict adherence to details of time and place. In projecting a plot sequence that sets out to be a romance but ends by quelling those romantic aspirations, *On the Face of the Waters* refracts several strands of nineteenth-century intellectual discourse, to become not only a novel of adventure, but a novel of late-nineteenth-century British social commentary as well.

Steel's novel seems heavily influenced by debates among artists and intellectuals in the latter half of the century over whether romance or realism should take precedence in works of art. In positing as her main romantic female characters two "older" women, one who is married and a mother, the other widowed and "fast," Steel seems to be refusing conventional notions of what types of women could be the subjects of "women's fictions". Indeed, as Rebecca Saunders has noted, one of Steel's achievements in her "mutiny novel" was to create a new type of female character in Anglo-Indian fiction. Alice Gissing is a "frank woman [who] is described with frankness" (212). She would not be acceptable in English society and, although she is barely admitted to the social world of Anglo-India, she chooses to remain independent of it. She is undaunted alike by what was

for other English people the "beastly" Indian climate and its "hideous" customs and, as Saunders further notes, she does not participate in the English "cult of home". Saunders views Alice Gissing as Steel's attempt to work through the tensions consequent on India's meaning to white women: it could represent simultaneously immense freedom and stifling restraint.

Urged to legitimate her career, Steel seems not only to have structured her novel so as to crush its romantic possibilities, but also to have framed her narrative to emphasize its position as truth. Almost every reviewer quoted her preface which reminds the reader that Steel had

not allowed fiction to interfere with fact in the slightest degree. The reader may rest assured that every incident bearing in the remotest degree on the Indian Mutiny, or on the part which real men took in it, is scrupulously exact, even to the date, the hour, the scene, the very weather. Nor [had she] allowed the actual actors in the great tragedy to say a word regarding it which is not to be found in the accounts of eye-witnesses, or in their own writings.

Indeed, one complaint from Heinemann's reader, David Conner, was that parts of the book were "dull" because they were thought to follow with excruciating exactness the time frame of the long siege-months in Delhi (4-5).

Moreover, footnotes are inserted into the text so as to anchor the reader's imagination in the author's historical research. And that research overflows the boundaries of the narrative as Steel includes two appendices, consisting of an "official" report on the aftermath of the Uprising, and a letter from a young officer to Mrs. Erlton in Scotland, congratulating her on her upcoming marriage to Jim Douglas. Further, Steel's claim to deal "fairly" and "impartially" with the evidence seems to have found favourable response in her readers and added to her reputation as a faithful observer of life.

Reviewers seem to have found this urge to accuracy the most praiseworthy aspect of the novel, although Heinemann's reader could not allow that a woman should accurately or completely portray battle scenes or male characters (6).

If *On the Face of the Waters* is read in light of the realism vs. romance debate of the 1890s it becomes possible to see the novel and that debate as part of the discourse of British liberalism, specifically Mill's *On the Subjection of Women*. Although liberalism has not been traditionally associated with *fin-de-siècle* culture, studies have shown to what extent the discourse of liberalism, individualism, and "hard-headed, no-nonsense Anglo-Saxon empiricism" (Harris 224) determined late-nineteenth-century discursive practices, including literary debates, and debates surrounding the Woman Question. Indeed, Steel more than once appealed to the principle of individualism in defense of her rights as a woman writer. In an 1896 letter to Colles, she was to write, in reference to a magazine editor's attempt to cheat her, "I am not in the least quarrelsome but my world has always to conform to my notions of honour, or cease to be my world. . . . Honestly life is too short for environments which do not suit the individual." Mill's feminism, firmly situated within liberalism, argued for the treatment of women as autonomous beings. As "free trade" was the mark of a civilized society according to Mill, freedom of opportunity and choice should also extend to women. Consequently, they should be educated to their position and not kept in seclusion and indolence like so many "hot-house flowers" (177). To Mill, instinct and passion fostered in such stifling atmospheres was responsible for the unhappiness of nineteenth-century society. In keeping with his theories on what made for common happiness, he argued for equality for women within the traditional conception of men's and women's destinies as marriage partners. A happy marriage, and by extension, a happy society for Mill, was therefore one in which each equal partner challenges the other to master those passions and instincts which undermine rational leadership. As Mill writes, "the moral regeneration of mankind will only really

commence, when the most fundamental of the social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice, and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal in rights and in cultivation" (211).

By continually challenging one another to cultivate him or her self, Jim Douglas and Kate Erlton enact Mill's theories of marriage. Kate and Jim construct their new relationship in opposition to unhappy ones. Kate is moving away from passive wifely acceptance of her husband's abuse of their partnership's finances. Jim Douglas moves away from his dying Indian mistress whom he treats like a child/slave. The narrator implies that these relationships are uneven because both women have in their own ways been living in seclusion leading to passionate absorption: the thought of Jim's return sustains his mistress Zora through lonely, listless days, and a picture of Kate's son diverts her attention from the state of her marriage, and her determined devotion to him even makes her stoop to tears and bribery. The Uprising serves, among other things, as an occasion for purifying bad relationships between the sexes. Zora and Alice die, leaving the field open for Kate to develop her capacities for courage, perseverance, and rational thought. Both the Uprising and Jim Douglas's realistic, worldly assessment of it challenge Kate to find ways of staying alive and withstanding "feminine instincts" to gossip or to become hysterical during her long period in hiding. Similarly Kate's adherence to the principle of fidelity, displayed for Jim in the way Kate places fidelity to the societal ideals of marriage and motherhood over fidelity to her useless husband, spurs Douglas, who initially leads a shiftless existence devoted to self-interest, to become interested in this challenging relationship, and to commit himself to the "greater" cause of "rational" social order and liberty.

Each challenges the other to shed an aspect of the "commonplace" and "second-rate" in relationships between the sexes (*OFW* 296-97). For example, in a scene on the rooftop in Delhi where Kate is being hidden, she and Jim egg each other on to be truthful. Jim

challenges Kate to face the full danger of her situation when he tells her about a mixed race man in hiding who has been discovered and subsequently violently disposed of. In turn Kate insists that Douglas tell Tara, his Indian servant, that Kate is not his wife. She insists, she is brought to realize, not because of petty prurience, but because she sees Tara is in love with Jim and rationally concludes that Tara's mistaken assumptions might endanger their situation. As Kate sheds her pettiness and Jim his condescension they gradually shed "feminine" and "masculine" traits Mill might call "instinctual," and might associate with unequal, and therefore unhappy marriages. Thus, Steel brings Mill's treatise explicitly in contact with what it may have been written against. Women are to gain their independence in opposition to "othered," "more dependent" women (and subjected populations) such as Tara, Zora, and the India they are supposed to represent.

In addition to seeing bad or improvident marriages within the terms of liberal individualism, *On the Face of the Waters* makes explicit the extension of Mill's ideas on relations between the sexes into what was known in the 1890s as evolutionary ethics and what would soon become known as the new "science" of eugenics. Principal theorists of evolutionary ethics, including Francis Galton, Herbert Spencer, Karl Pearson, and Havelock Ellis, drew on the earlier work of Mill, among that of other prominent nineteenth-century social theorists such as Malthus and Bentham to argue, as Spencer sums it up in his *Principles of Ethics* (1893) that, "the interests of the race must predominate over the interests of the individual" (II 584) in reproduction and maintenance of society. Like other theorists who were working in an atmosphere of intense international and imperial competition, Spencer positions the English as the most refined and progressive "race." Moreover, by writing in his "General Preface" that evolutionary ethics, an important part of which addresses relations between the sexes, does not apply to "mixed societies, such as that which we have established in India" (28), Spencer fails to create a discursive position in which mixing of the races in a sexual sense

is even imaginable. As a woman writing an historical novel about Anglo-Indian social and sexual relations as they existed thirty years before the eugenicist debates fully emerge, Steel positions herself within these debates as one speaking from their centre in imperialism.

Twentieth-century readers, as Nancy Paxton has noted, have not surprisingly identified Steel's writing as racist. Her novels are in this respect products of their time, as were those of Kipling, Conrad, Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain. In *Delusions and Discoveries* Benita Parry has commented on Steel's conception of Indians. Apparently, for Steel, they suffered from "curious resignation," "placidity," "impassive acquiescence," a total disregard for time of day, "lawlessness," and "ferocious passions" (117). Such thinking, of course, furthered the imperialist project in India and elsewhere since the success of the project depended on a self-perception of Anglo-Saxon superiority. Steel's favourite word for India was "unfathomable," although she apparently felt peculiarly called upon to fathom it for her English audience. She seems to have been fond of stereotyping, and few escaped it: her books are peopled with "excitable," drunken Irish and Scots, "cool," reserved English, and unscrupulous, money-hungry Jews.

What emerges from this identification, however, is not so much Steel's racist discourse, as the ways in which she aligns the construction of her authority with, simultaneously, mainstream racist and feminist positions. Steel's version of the Uprising enacts a steady, methodical eradication of passion in human affairs. As an act of accurate, meticulous research, *On the Face of the Waters* dissociates itself from imaginative writing, structurally crushing romance under the weight of mimetic detail. In one particularly memorable scene near the beginning of the novel, a runaway horse (symbolizing the runaway passions of Alice Gissing and Major Erlton) kills an Indian child. As a slight acquaintance is helping Mrs. Gissing into his carriage to take her away from the accident scene, that lady comments that the child is not worth bothering

about since it is not white. As the man begins "sententiously" to discuss "race antagonism" Alice tries to flirt with him and he responds, partially in the narrator's voice "helplessly," since "the one problem [is] as unanswerable as the other" (64). The implication here seems to be that there is some connection between "race antagonism" and women's absorption in passion. That connection is further strengthened in the climax of the novel, where Steel depicts the immediate cause of the Uprising as lying, not so much in "consideration of caste or religion, patriotism or ambition," as "only [in] a taunt from a pair of painted lips" (191). The narrator of *On the Face of the Waters* tells us that the Uprising begins when a young trooper, intent on forgetting the indignities his imprisoned comrades have suffered at the hands of the English, goes into the bazaar in search of a prostitute. None of the harlots will co-operate, however, because, as one of their number puts it, "We of the bazaar kiss no cowards" (190). Realizing his passion will go unassuaged until his comrades are freed the trooper sets the Uprising in motion. It is not therefore women or "natives" who cause race antagonism figured most explicitly in the Uprising, but the practice in both English and Indian society of making passion a predominant focus of relations between the sexes itself. In this way, race antagonism appears to Steel to arise from the privileging of passion over reason in sexual relations and the inscription of women as necessarily passionate. Opposed to this is Steel's methodical, rational history, which draws for its authority on predominant intellectual texts of its day.

Although accurate sales figures for the nineteenth century are not available (because many records of publishing houses were destroyed during WWII), we do know that after this period Steel was known as "the author of *On the Face of the Waters* " at least in part because the novel was an immediate runaway success. Sydney Pauling, an agent for Heinemann, jubilantly increased Steel's share of the profits based on the novel's large early sales (letter 3 Feb. 1897). As I have mentioned above, public interest in a "mutiny

novel" may have derived in part from the English obsession with this momentous part of Anglo-Indian history, but more recent events also may have sparked interest. The Dreyfus Affair (1897-99) and the Oscar Wilde trial (1895) scandalized and alarmed the public in England by threatening to undermine national health and security (see Barbara Tuchman's *The Proud Tower*, 1967, and "Speaking Its Name," in Alan Sinfield's *The Wilde Century*, 1994). As a novel about treasonous acts incited by sex and crushed by the slow methodical march of history, *On the Face of the Waters* could act as a possible panacea to the threats of social decay assailing 1890s England, and this could explain its apparently wide appeal. Although the reviewers noticed the "sexual question" in the novel, they also felt that the author's fidelity to historical fairness and accuracy were more important than any lasting taint.¹ In other words, the novel seemed to be earning praise for its author as a woman who could invoke and then master the passions of romantic fiction.

Like other novels of the period, "time-travelling" in *On the Face of the Waters* allowed present-day realities to be read as history. Thus Steel's apparent fidelity to history gave her currency as an author, but ironically it also assigned symbolic currency to her as an authority on the "sexual question." As "the author of *On the Face of the Waters*" Steel seems to have exchanged the period of authorial productivity which led to its publication for a long "fallow" period of social and political action. The distrust of words in favour of action which Steel had hinted at in her early fiction thus became an overriding theme of her authorial self-representation in the late 1890s when she was probably at the height of her career.

¹A reviewer writing in the *Athenaeum* for 5 December 1896 commented that, although Steel should be lauded for her accurate history, "we regret to find that the author has been unable to shake herself free from the objectionable habit prevalent among so many lady writers of dragging in the sexual question freely. This blemish renders the work unsuitable for young people" (792). However, the educational quality of Mrs. Steel's work apparently outweighed this "blemish" for some parents. Mrs. Anne Maxwell of Tancook Island, Nova Scotia writes in a letter to this author that as a girl in India she was "permitted" to read Steel's work, but her Anglo-Indian parents were thought to be rather "liberal" because of it.

It was in the late 1890s and early 1900s that Steel seems to have been in demand as a "literary personality" at social and political gatherings. She gave speeches, she became a founding member, along with Jessie Boucherett, Mary Kingsley, Alice Meynell and Mrs. Bertram Russell of the first Women's Institute, she invited Lord Roberts to be her guest at a charity dinner for which "prominent" women of the day were to invite their favourite prominent man, and she visited with Lord and Lady Windsor and was asked to travel with them (but declined). In 1907 she formally voiced support for women's suffrage, and by 1914 she had become president of the Woman Writers' Suffrage League in England. Early in this century she even travelled to Italy, which, as we know from E.M. Forster's example of Eleanor Lavish, was perfectly in keeping with expected behaviour for renowned literary ladies. It was also probably in the late 1890s that Steel joined the Society of Authors, whose professional membership had been open to women only since 1894.

In the same period, however, Steel's productivity as a writer seemed to decline. Her letters to her literary agent from the date of the publication of *On the Face of the Waters* to well into the Edwardian period are characterized by slightly shame-faced responses to Morris Colles' apparent requests for material to offer to publishers. In addition the letters indicate that Steel seemed to be pulled in several directions at once: she is trying out different ideas for new works, she is battling a forger who has blatantly signed her name to several of his stories,² she is submitting the work of aspiring women authors to Colles

² A letter of 26 April 1912 to Colles reveals the level of personal involvement Steel felt called upon to take in the case (lack of appropriate punctuation is typical of Steel's later letters to Colles which have a rushed and harassed tone):

I fear I shall have to prosecute H Gubbins. You know he confessed to the police and asked if an apology would do.

On that I wrote him really a very nice, kind letter I told him what a contemptible thing it was for him to do, asked who he was, if I could help him -- offered to read a story if he would write on his own etc etc I told him it might be his first attempt but that there were several little things which pointed to its not being his first attempt at forgery

Now you can see his letter Its is that of a hardened [looks like criminal] -- I fear The cheek of it almost takes my breath away!!

in order to help them get published, she is again complaining about being away from London to attend to family responsibilities, and, as always, she is arguing with Colles about royalties. Paradoxically, as she was pulled out into the orbit of literary fame, the basis of that fame began to slip away. The author of *On the Face of the Waters* continued to publish novels and short stories until her death in 1929, and many of these were favourably reviewed. However, when Steel earned an entry in the DNB, the writer of the entry could confidently claim that Steel's career was effectively over by 1900.

How does a literary star fade away? In Steel's case, many factors may have contributed to her waning reputation. One of these factors may simply have been lack of an appropriate location from which to conduct her literary business. At the close of the century, for example, Steel apparently gave up her house in bohemian Chelsea, temporarily moved into a flat in Palace Gate, very near to where her father had conducted his parliamentary affairs at the time of her birth, and from that time onward seems to have lived a fitful existence between flats in various parts of London and her lodge in Dunlugas, and later a similar sporting lodge in Machynlleth, Wales. Although other writers of the period, notably Robert Louis Stevenson, seemed able to trade on their nomadic existence, for women writers constant moves could mean interruptions to their work or sheer inability to work. While men like Stevenson could carry on their professional roles relatively without interruption, relying on their wives to manage all the numberless tasks called for in moving a household--arranging for movers, watching over the movers, making sure the china arrived unscathed, counting and re-counting linens and silver, dismissing one set of servants and hiring a new one--women writers like Steel

I have written him saying I place the matter in your hands. I think he must be brought to a sense of his misdemeanors -- don't you?

Yoursinhaste,

Flora Annie Steel

were usually called on first and foremost to be wives; they were usually expected to give precedence to their domestic "calling", rather than to their professional "role." After 1900, Steel's letters frequently begin with apologies to Colles for breaks in communication because of a change of address and all the worries and arrangements attendant on settling a new household. As a woman, the duties of household management would fall particularly heavily on Steel. In addition to comments in her letters, an anecdote from her autobiography illustrates the trouble women could have in finding that "room of one's own":

[writing *OFW*] was a strain. I remember one morning--I had been trying to describe Alice Gissing's death, and my head was full of God knows what--when the luncheon bell rang. I had to go; there were eighteen to serve, and though my dear old cook was a pillar of strength, it requires some guiding hand to portion out food for eighteen. I opened the dining-room door. I was a bit late, so the table--it positively groaned with good things--showed its hungry horde already at work. Then my husband's placid voice rose above the babel:

'My dear! why is the cucumber bitter?'

If I had been shot, I could not, at the moment, have told him.

Perhaps, if I had had more leisure, I might have written something worth the subject; but I doubt very much if I ever had more than two hours at it without some quite senseless interruption. (225-26)

This comment is notable also for being one of the few references to Henry Steel that does not portray him as chronically ill. Particularly in the years following 1900, Steel's letters not only describe frequent moves and the distraction these moves caused, but also suggest that the moves may have been prompted by Henry's ill health, which could only have added to Mrs. Steel's duties.

Frequent moves may also have removed Steel from active participation in and/or commitment to the various societies in which she seems to have taken active part at the turn of the century. Steel's letters to Colles from the early part of this century often record her inability or unwillingness to travel to London either to attend to business meetings with Colles, or to attend public engagements. By 1911, Steel had resigned from the Society of Authors, although distance from their headquarters may have been only part of the reason. In a letter (sent from Carbis Bay Hotel, Cornwall) to Sir Squire Sprigge, a copy of which Steel sent to Colles, she lists "an objectionable article on literary agents," appearing in *The Author* and the Society's silence on the article as the main reasons for her resignation. But Steel ends the letter with the comment that "women are most inadequately represented on the Governing body [of the Society]" and so she felt she was not able to give voice to her concerns (letter [November 1911]). Steel's perception of her unfair treatment as a woman professional may therefore have contributed to her decreasing involvement with literary life.

Although much has been written about sexism and authorship, very little has been written about the ways in which ageism may affect our perception of writers. Steel was not only a woman writer, but by 1900, by the standards of the period, she was an "old" woman writer too. In one sense, Steel's apparent age worked in her favour. In a 1904 letter to *The Saturday Review* about literary education and public taste, for example, Steel was able to draw on a perception of herself as "old" in order to make her argument by positioning herself as a kind of sage imparting the "wisdom" and "experience" of the "old days" when mothers read aloud to their children. But that public perception would also work against her. Ten years later Steel was to undergo a rather bizarre incident which illustrates this point.

In March 1914, at the age of 67, Steel sailed on the *Mauritania* to Jamaica with her nephew in order to settle a "legal dispute" over what had been her grandfather

McCallum's plantation. Their ship called at New York and there, on Ellis Island, Steel was apparently detained by immigration authorities because the medical examiner wrote on his certificate that she was suffering from "senile debility." In her autobiography Steel claims to have been so outraged by her treatment that she "summoned" reporters to her stateroom to give them an earful. The *New York Times* gave the incident front-page coverage which acknowledged her position as "author of *On the Face of the Waters*, a novel that has attained a circulation of half a million, and of a dozen other books" ("Noted" 1). The article also positioned her as an authority on women's rights, citing her opinion on "Mrs. Pankhurst," and on militancy in the British Suffrage movement. Yet, while this reportage acknowledged her authority, it also inevitably served to highlight Mrs. Steel's age and apparent lack of judgment. A letter that Flora Steel subsequently sent to the *New York Times* reveals that she was by this time losing any hold she may have had on her sense of audience:

I have to thank you for drawing attention to my disgraceful reception in the States. I am not unreasonable: I fully appreciate your efforts, as a nation to keep your stock pure, but that does not alter the fact that it is quite intolerable in a free country that women should be treated as I have been treated.

I gave the authorities every information. . . . I even offered to run a race with the doctor, who was somewhat corpulent!

But no! Personally, I believe I should have been sent to your Home . . . for Destitute Cripples had not my nephew come along. And he, a charming young rascal who doesn't do a hand's turn for his living, was held sponsor for me, who have earned my own for years. And why?

Because he was a man and I am a woman.

It is the woman's part to forgive the man; so I forgive the United States of America, though in my heart of hearts I believe the President ought to apologize to me. (Letter *NYT* 1914)

Although the letter repeats some of the themes of Steel's career--her awareness of eugenicist arguments and her attempt to make them a part of the campaign for equal rights for women--its aggrieved, demanding tone seems to signal Steel's awareness that her own star had faded, and its allusions to an apology from the President and to running a race with the doctor might seem to her audience to confirm that corpulent man's opinion of Steel's grip on reality. With her public seemingly fixated on her great literary achievement of nearly twenty years before, it seems she was now able only to position herself as an indignant elderly aunt.

Other factors may have contributed to her decline. What stands out are the contradictions of the role for women that she attempted to map in the speeches she gave and in the quartet of historical novels she wrote after the success of her "best-seller." Steel did not see the personal and political realms as at all incompatible for women. Over the "decline" of her career, she seems to have attempted to reconcile this duality, arguing repeatedly for an ideal of what can best be summed up in the term "militant motherhood." Through marriage and motherhood, Steel claimed women could take a vital, central role in determining national destiny. In order to trace this particular aspect of Steel's career, we need to return to the moment of its heyday, just following the success of *On the Face of the Waters*.

In June of 1896, after she had returned to England from India, and had published her "mutiny novel," Flora Steel was invited to give a speech about women's rights at an all-male literary club called the New Vagabonds. Other speakers at the club had included Mark Twain and Eliza Lynn Linton, and among its members and guests the club counted Arthur Conan Doyle, W. B. Yeats, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Olive

Schreiner, Edna Lyall, and Rhoda Broughton. Rudyard Kipling had been a member but was ousted for non-payment of dues. The day after Mrs. Steel gave her speech, the women's literary magazine *The Queen* reported favourably on it, noting Mrs. Steel's dignified appearance in "anemone-coloured silk," and also noting her status as "the most important woman worker of the day." This status seems to have been secure at least until 1898, when *The Queen* reported that "there is no woman in England who can speak with more wit and spirit than Mrs. Steel in response to such a challenge" as the male members of the club had been posing to her over the Woman Question.

In Steel's 1896 speech, a manuscript copy of which remains in a scrapbook kept by the club's president, the speaker positions herself as a "woman's voice," but also as a "grandmotherly chaperone" over the "youthful enthusiasms" toward the New Woman of the '90's. She calls attention to the fact of its being Jubilee Year, so it is almost a "duty" to the Queen to believe that woman's star "is at its zenith." By calling on images of the New Woman familiar to her audience from, among other sources, the pages of *Punch*,³ Steel draws a picture of a young woman in a divided skirt, brandishing aloft a shiny latchkey, about to open "the door of knowledge, the door of liberty--the door of pleasure--"and the "Bluebeard's cupboard" of "vice." About half-way through the speech Steel alters her jocular, confidential tone to "speak in deadly earnest," reminding her audience at the same time that she is addressing, not fiction or history but the exact situation in which "this nineteenth century has placed men and women." She then argues that because men and women are equal "for the first time in history" there seems a chance of "letting in the light of day" to "crumble . . . to dust" the vices of Bluebeard's cupboard. Steel concludes the speech by alluding to the hope that since women have had the "first word" with men, which was also the "first word with evil," they "mean to try" to have the last word also.

³ A *Punch* cartoon from 28 April 1894 had shown a bespectacled, forthright woman, sitting indecorously with her knees wide apart, a book in one hand and a huge latchkey hoisted above her head in another, the dissevered head of "tyrant man" lying at her feet.

When women are finished "flourishing the latchkey like a new toy," according to Steel they will return to the threshold "whence, as the familiar click of the key in the latch brings us the assurance of rest and peace and sympathy awaiting us we can look even on the pleasant gardens beyond the open doors and say to them 'When I was at home I was in a better place.'"

At first, Steel's speech seems to be in keeping with conservative ideology of the Victorian period: we picture an elderly lady demanding that women return to the wiser, purer days of the "Angel in the House." It also reflects the less conservative views of earlier English feminists like Josephine Butler and Frances Power Cobbe. However, this speech could also be heard as quite radical. At a time in which women were repeatedly positioned as irrational harpies tied to their bodies through hysteria, Steel's evocation of women as leaders, as enlightening and as rational enough to make their own *choice* between home and career, stands out as refreshingly oppositional. In Steel's vision, women can use their latchkeys to oppose the reality, their equality, their "light of day," to men's violent closet fantasy lives, their "Bluebeard's cupboard" that threatens to destroy that equality. Aligning men with fantasy and women with reason, reality, history, and the present, Steel manages to assert women's equality by reversing previously "naturalized" categories of gender. At the same time, she appears to poke fun at the New Woman while supporting the power of domesticity thus constructing herself as a reasonable woman. To further complicate matters, her concluding statements mix the discourse of home with Biblical and Shakespearean allusions which suggest that women, in ending speech, have a heroic role to play in action.

Steel was to extend and to consolidate her position as a worker for women in another speech that same year, which was later published along with those of Marie Corelli, Lady Jeune, and Susan, Countess of Malmesbury, in a collection entitled *The Modern Marriage Market*. Steel again condemns the tendency of society to align women with

instinct and passion, arguing that girls should not be taught to put their hopes for the future in "Love with a big L." Echoing Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*--albeit to different purposes--Steel argues that marriage and prostitution as they are practiced in late-Victorian society are identical. She claims that because both are predicated on self-gratification, "the distinction between them is purely arbitrary." In claiming this Steel could be expected to respond by insisting on her own solid, if not exactly passionate at least affectionate, steadfast marriage to Henry. Instead she replaces relationships between people with a vision of love as a "duty" to society. Almost denying her own marriage, Steel moves swiftly to a description of marriage in India:

Women have not so learnt [as to think them a selfish concern] their rights, their privileges, their duties in those Eastern lands with which I am best acquainted. There, hidden under a thousand blemishes, a million abuses, still lingers the great truth--so unpalatable to our Western individualism--that man and woman stand related, not to each other, but to the immortality of their race There, even nowadays, when error has obscured so much, marriage is not a purely personal matter, as it is with us; it is a duty to the race. (118-19)

In addition to calling up this image Steel states explicitly that even with polygamy superadded, "the percentage of rational happiness derived from wifedom is as high in India as it is in England" (119). While her solution for a happy marriage lies in basing it on what she sees as the altruistic aims encompassed by wifedom and motherhood, by aligning these with rational, public duty, she pulls these roles for women into the arena of national leadership. Instead of carrying this solution further into social action, or imagining a workable programme for nineteenth-century English women's active

participation in the state, however, Steel once again turned to historical fiction and to India in order to explore the role of women.

Ostensibly, the four historical novels Steel wrote from 1908 to 1928 chronicle in "gorgeous" detail, as one reviewer put it (Rev. of *A Prince of Dreamers* 127), the fortunes and failures of the male rulers of the Moghul dynasty, revealing Steel's fascination with heredity and power. As Steel had been able to build her reputation by constructing her writing as historically accurate, she attempted to maintain this reputation in the quartet of "Moghul novels," *A Prince of Dreamers* (1908), *King-errant* (1912), *Mistress of Men* (1917), and *The Builder* (1928). For example, Steel's "Preface to the First Edition" of *A Prince of Dreamers* begins with a quotation about the importance of truth from the thirteenth-century Persian poet Nizami, and makes "no excuse" for not appealing to "the man in the street." Similarly, in the preface to *Mistress of Men* Steel warns her readers that she has "adhered in all matters of importance to the evidence of contemporaneous witnesses" in her portrait of Nurjahan. Most reviewers confirmed Steel in her reputation for truth, acknowledging that "no writer living," could write so "convincing[ly]" about India (Rev. of *King-errant* 503). However, the reviewers also commented that Steel had become *too* accurate--that she allowed fact to "fetter" (503) fiction so much so that the "ordinary reader" (Rev. of *A Prince of Dreamers* 127) would not enjoy her work. With the publication of these novels Steel was seen as increasingly removed, and anachronistic. One writer in the Chicago *Bookman* even described Steel as a "small white-haired woman" of "sixty-five" who still "clings to her beloved India" (Rev. of *King-errant* 243).

Yet her histories, or rather biographies, while ostensibly about an India of the past, could also be read as allegories of England's present. While fiction of the Edwardian and early Modern period has often been characterized as utopian, projecting a future ideal onto a present reality, Steel's quartet renders present realities as history. The novels indicate that Steel seems to have shared her compatriots' nostalgic concept of the period

of Moghul rule as a time of grandeur, prosperity, and civilization along Western lines for the sub-continent, before it lapsed into the perceived squalor, anarchy, and sloth which the British saw it was their mission to "cure." In Steel's eyes, the British were a better, stronger re-incarnation of the Moghul dynasty. In *King-errant*, for example, she tells the life of the warrior Emperor Babar, superimposed with images and language from English sporting life: as a boy, Babar's experience "taught him that if you fought fair you failed at times, but in the end you came out top-dog in the general scrimmage of claims and clans" (15). Steel is careful to detail Babar's lineage and to point out that these "paler" conquerors from "North and West" are descended from Ghenghis Khan (279-80) as it was assumed the British monarchs also were. As Steel chronicles Babar's relentless campaign to attack, annex, and subdue the various principalities of India, she pauses to remark about this precursor to British conquerors, "He would seize all; but he would remain a kindly gentleman" (258). When Babar finally conquers India, he is faced with cholera, intense heat, scarcity of provisions, and growing hostility between his own people and the native population they have conquered. One of his advisors counsels "the wisdom of doing as all past conquerors of India had done; that is leaving so soon as the treasures had been divided." But Steel assures her readers that Babar "meant, with all the strength of his vivid vitality, to found a dynasty; he meant that his son and his son's sons should inherit what he had won for them." The implication for her English readers is that true rulers do not give in to India's hardships, or temptations as other Western nations had seemed to do. In chronicling the decline and collapse of Babar's great dynasty, Steel could absorb the apocalyptic fantasies of the Edwardian and early Modern period, transferring them to allegorical territory where they could act as dire warnings about England's waning imperial power.

Steel's quartet could work as an allegory of power on another level as well. While critics saw history as too powerful in these novels, perhaps what they were responding to

was not history overpowering romance, as it had seemed to do in *On the Face of the Waters*, but history being re-written as anti-romance. The Moghul quartet follows, not the progress of women's quests for love, but the progress of women's quests for power. *Mistress of Men*, for example, is ostensibly a life of the "complete lover," the Emperor Jahanghir, but instead it explores one of the main concerns of Steel's life and work: what strong women can make of marriage to passive men (one reviewer called it an "amplified history" of a "masterful" woman [*Punch* 421]). *Mistress of Men* is dedicated, not to Jahanghir, but to his most influential wife, Mihr-un-nissa (later called Nurjahan), a "Great Woman who in turns was Queen O' Women, Light of the Home, Light of the World." The novel is somewhat autobiographical in that it begins as a story of a girl-baby who might never have been. As an infant, the future Empress is abandoned in the desert, as Steel claims was frequently the practice when pregnancy in poorer families resulted in a female child, and is found by a retainer to the Court who decides to keep her when, even in her infancy, she displays what will be her trademark "pluck." Through her cunning use of her beauty, and with the help of a lucky charm, she makes an advantageous marriage, is widowed, and eventually marries the Emperor, a weak man whom she eggs on to conquests and protects from Court intrigues.

But throughout, Nurjahan is aware of her precarious position as a female member of Court. Ruminating on her future after her lucky charm goes missing, Nurjahan recalls that the charm "had been something outside herself, and life had taught her that her only safety lay in self-reliance; that she, and she only made or marred her fate" (258-60). Yet she also realizes that her beauty, and men's responses to it, put her in a double bind: "What had she gained in the past?," she thinks. "Power, it is true; but power gained not so much by talent as by beauty. She felt cribbed, cabined, confined by it; She felt that she could not be true to herself" (182). In the end Nurjahan is defeated by the treachery of detractors who have felt threatened by the spectre of a woman holding the reigns of

power. With the story of Nurjahan, Steel brought before her English readers the spectre of their own now-dead Empress of England and India, a woman who ruled a world where women were not thought fit to venture alone outside their own doors.

Earlier, in the first of the Moghul novels, *Prince of Dreamers*, the future Queen Nurjahan risks impropriety in order to tell one of the King's minions a secret that will save, not so much the Emperor as the idea of Empire. She earns notice from the Court, therefore, for rising above the trivialities of custom, and her woman's place, to uphold the principle of ruling power (209-10). Steel frames Nurjahan's romancing of power in *Prince of Dreamers* by pivoting her narrative on the pervasive presence of Elizabeth I, who sets in motion the chain of events that will end in England's hegemony over the Indian sub-continent. Three English envoys bring a letter to the Emperor Akbar urging that trade be opened between the two nations. The narrator comments that the smooth vellum on which this proposal is transcribed reminds Akbar of a woman's hand stretched out to him. Moreover, by reproducing this letter as part of her text, and by basing her moghul quartet in large part on the memoirs of the Court women, Steel creates a discursive space in which women can gain power and lasting influence, not through their sexual attractiveness, but through their writing. By writing anti-romances based on women's primary written records, Steel was contributing to the writing of women's history. Moreover, where most romances seem predicated on ending women's lives either at marriage or in picturesque death from childbirth, Steel created an imaginative field in which writing can encompass the whole life of women. For example, Nurjahan comes into her fullest power in her fifties (as Steel appears to have done), she lives a long life and reappears as a wise matriarchal power, and an influential figure of memory in other novels of the quartet.

Nurjahan's power may represent Steel's fullest reconciliation of women's sexual and intellectual power. As Queen O' Women as well as Mistress of Men, Nurjahan is figured

as maintaining her power through her devotion to uncompromising ideals which were in Steel's time, as they are today, usually only available to masculine subject positions. As Steel writes about Nurjahan in the last of the Moghul quartet, "above [her] infinite beauty, infinite charm, her grip on truth, her freedom from bias rose predominant" (13), settling into "supreme intellectual balance" (10).

With these romances, Steel re-writes Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-worship & the Heroic in History* for women, adopting the subject position of a chronicler of love and war. In this way she contributes to a trajectory of women's history that has rarely been explored. As Antonia Fraser has shown, this trajectory runs from Baodicea to Margaret Thatcher, including Zenobia and Indira Gandhi along the way, and it has positioned these women as masculine exceptions to the category of the "normal" woman (see *The Warrior Queens* 11-13). Today we might add Benazir Bhutto and the theorist Camille Paglia to this list. These are women for whom societies have no comfortable category--problematic women who, because they appropriate power and map it on to their femaleness, violate society's deeply-held convictions about gender boundaries. For Steel, the anti-romance remained fictional, historical, exceptionally masculine, and ultimately not realizable at a time when masculine women were figures of fun.

The Moghul quartet, and particularly *Mistress of Men*, represents one of Flora Steel's stronger forays in fiction into the realm of women's rights. As allegories of women's social and national struggle to gain power through means other than their sexuality, they attempt to re-write women's history as anti-romance. In her last novel, published posthumously, Steel was to return once again to this theme. Based apparently on what she claimed was research she conducted on human sexuality at the Bodleian and the British Museum, her final novel seems to backtrack on her earlier support of the women's movement.

Tellingly entitled *The Curse of Eve* (1929), this final novel, set in post-World War I England, tells the story of the Graham siblings, George, Eve, and Alan. Alan, a doctor, becomes obsessed by a prostitute/dancer named Lil, whom he meets while tending her dying mother. His sister Eve is equally obsessed with her best friend Margie's fiancé. Margie is heiress to her ancestral seat and wants to keep the estate in the family by marrying her impoverished but very handsome cousin from India. But on his arrival in England, he is mesmerized by Eve who eventually marries him after Margie is killed in an accident. The third Graham, George, is thought by an aging society woman to be intending to marry her, but instead he proposes to the woman's daughter after a rather unsightly contest between the two women. Much sadness and mayhem is consequent upon these entanglements, and blame for the whole must be laid, according to Steel, at the feet of "Woman," the supreme temptress who repeats her original sin in every contact with the male sex. Curiously, *The Curse of Eve* begins in what might now be considered a feminist vein, as a diatribe against overpopulation and the misery consequent upon women bearing too many children. However, Steel concludes that it is women's oversexed nature that is responsible for this. Ultimately the cure her novel suggests for overpopulation is longer skirts and celibacy.

In as much as the subject position of the un-sexed woman seems to militate against women's sexual freedom, by writing herself as absolutely un-sexed, Steel could regain at the end of her life the power she seems to have believed her mother sacrificed to sex. Thus, we come full circle. Steel was composing her autobiography at roughly the same time she was writing *The Curse of Eve* and it is possible that in positing women's ultimate power in their ability to deny their sex, she had in mind the legend of her own near non-existence. According to the autobiography, Flora was the result of what was apparently an uneasy truce between her parents after her father's "voluntary cessation of marital relations" appears to have succeeded in inducing her mother to give up her inheritance. In

other words, Steel may have translated this legend to mean that her mother's desire for romantic passion outweighed her desire for power. In this way, *The Garden of Fidelity* subsumes romantic passion in the uncompromising erasure enacted by history. Finally, in the ultimate gesture of authorial integrity, Steel the author posthumously erases Steel the woman.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR SUBJECTS OF IMPERIALISM

The purpose of this study has been to examine the ways in which Flora Steel constructed her authority through writing within and against some of the dominant discourses of late-nineteenth-century British imperialism. Examinations of her autobiographical writing, and her professional writing as educator and author suggest that repeated positioning as an independent woman meant constructing a self in opposition to prevalent constructions of gendered and racialized others. In other words, following Toni Morrison's exploration of what othering does to the "minds and behavior of masters" (*Playing* 12), this study has looked at the ways in which positioning gendered and racialized others forced Flora Steel to respond by positioning herself in specific ways. Thus Flora Steel appears between the pages of her writing as fiercely independent: self-generated, self-educated, and self-employed.

The Flora Steel who emerges from her autobiography is a monumental, nationalist self independent of family, because acknowledging family meant acknowledging the "darker" side of the colonialism that sustained her independence. Family history, as my research here suggests, may be predicated on constructions of racialized others as commodities: in order to exploit the labour of racialized "inferiors" whites must demonstrate this commodification in constructing them as without history, without family connections. But to be free of this commodification, in opposition to it, whites must construct for themselves a history rooted in family ties, in the recorded "memory" of genealogy. In writing her autobiography Steel based her success on her control of colonialism: her expertise, her virtuosity, in managing and therefore distancing herself from colonialism are located in an imagined and remote Scottish past. However, her autobiography ruptures when she cannot refer to her family history, because doing so may reveal the "bad fit" between her construction of herself as successful and removed

from colonialism and the attempt to silence her family's close connection to colonialism's failures. As a writer, in order to "make sense" of her life for the reader, Steel must refer briefly to certain key family events. In mentioning her mother's connection to slavery--connected in turn to a vivid image of a captive sea turtle struggling on the floor of the pantry in Scotland before being made into soup--and her brief mention of her father's bankruptcy occasioned by the failure of the Australasian Bank, Steel is forced to signal to the reader the hideous disjunctions her society's construction of others occasions through the colonialism that has rendered her "independent."

Similarly, the Flora Steel who appears through the pages of her reports as Inspector of Schools in Punjab is a self-educated educator, constructed in opposition to Indian women rendered as "ignorant." Strenuously educating women whom she constructed as "needing education" meant not only that she could construct herself as "educated," but also that she would not expose the ways in which white society had denied her the very thing she was promoting. Again, her project comes apart at the awkward seams that the pressures of competing discourses demand. In order to position herself as a reliable witness, an independent, official inspector, Steel must record instances of resistance to the Government's efforts to impose Western-style literacy on the female population of Punjab. In doing so, however, she must reveal the disjunctions between "ignorant" women refusing what an "educated" woman did not have. Steel's brief expression of outrage at a little girl's refusal to attend school signals another "bad fit" between dominant ideology and her positioning within it.

Again, as an author, Flora Steel becomes an independent, professional writer by positioning herself in opposition to Indians and British women rendered as "passionate." Since dominant discourses in Britain viewed Indians and white women as colonized, or dependent on Britain, in order to carve out discursive space for herself in this highly racialized and gendered context, Steel had to construct Indians and white women as

dependent on, as ruled by, something else. In order to distinguish herself from these colonized others, then, Steel rendered them as dependent on passion and constructed herself and the ideal woman as asexual, fiercely maternal, and rational. As an independent author, struggling with those forces of late-nineteenth-century British culture, that would position her as dependent on white men, Steel turned the liberal agenda of the quest for rational man on its ear, consistently positioning herself and the ideal woman as autonomous, self-generating, self-legitimizing through her authority. In this way, this study suggests that Steel's participation in that amorphous phenomenon known as the Women's Movement at the turn of the century can be seen as built on and growing from a process of positioning the self in opposition to othered (Africanist, Indianist, Womanist) constructions.

Throughout this study I have tried to suggest that constructions of Flora Annie Steel are partial, in that our knowledge of her identities is biased, or dependent on other(ed) knowledge, and it is unfinished, or part of a continuing process. What we understand of Flora Steel is also partial in the sense that it forms part of a larger cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary whole which in recent years has come to be called the rhetoric of inquiry, or the discourse of knowledge-making. To question the completeness and self-sufficiency of an imperial subject, throughout this study I have demonstrated the ways in which boundaries, not only between people and cultures, but between genres and disciplines, are permeable and mobile. Thus in Chapter 1 I have demonstrated the ways in which studying imperial subjects blurs the boundaries between who is a scholar of imperialism and who is a participant in it. Chapter 2 enacts a "genealogy of genealogy" in order to question a dominant organizing concept for Western modes of inquiry. This chapter further questions the discursive practice of grounding a life in family history and the ways in which this practice, while posited as a harmless hobby, or as a democratic impulse, may serve to consolidate dominant forms of knowledge-making. In the

Postscript to Chapter 2 I have demonstrated that genealogy is more anecdote than history, more impressionistic than representational, and more porous than absolute. Since genealogical record-keeping is random, haphazard, and unreliable, it can only suggest a pieced-together hodge-podge of details that, taken together with other details, may project a faint, shifting image.

In illuminating and questioning generic constraints, this study also comes into contact with disciplinary boundaries. In trying to open a discursive space for my own scholarly authority in the expanding scholarly and popular work on Steel, I have had to position myself as a researcher, unearthing previously unexamined primary texts associated with Steel. At the same time, however, my own discipline of literary studies does not always encourage archival research (partly, at least, because English departments, where most professional literary criticism takes place, are subject to severe budget restrictions on travel and mailing costs associated with archival research). Further, Susan Peck MacDonald, an expert in the study of disciplinary writing, has demonstrated that the purpose of literary studies may be primarily epideictic, that is, celebratory, rather than investigative (*Professional* 11). Since literary exegesis offers me very few models for discussing empirical research, I have turned consciously toward other disciplinary sites for my methods. Thus Chapters 2 through 4 examine the operations of discourse by moving back and forth among the different modes of inquiry used in history (Chapter 2), and social sciences (Chapters 3 & 4). This cross-disciplinary movement disturbs literary studies' self-sufficient status, placing it in the continuum of the rhetoric of inquiry where it can be examined as one mode among many of making contact.

Thus I have rendered Steel's authority (as well as the rendering of that authority) as part of a larger continuum of cross-cultural power relations wherein members of one discourse community construct positions of dominance over members of another. In this way, following notions of the reciprocal nature of utterances and speech genres found in

work by Bakhtin, Carolyn Miller and Huckin and Berkenkotter, I have also suggested that constructions of Flora Steel continue to invite response. While I have been exploring the ways in which Flora Steel's authority was constructed in response to some dominant nineteenth-century utterances, I would like to conclude by extending this study into twentieth-century responses to Steel. In what follows I will examine three texts: Flora Steel's short story "Feroza" (1893), Attia Hosain's "Time is Unredeemable" (1953), and Meena Alexander's *Fault Lines* (1993). By rereading these texts from the writerly, rhetorical perspective of "response," I hope to analyze their contribution to the contact zone of imperialism, and I hope also to suggest ways in which scholar/participants can position themselves outside and beyond oppositional models that have long been the only stories imperialism can tell.

Steel's short story "Feroza," published in a collection entitled *The Flower of Forgiveness*, tells the story of a young Muslim girl who is waiting for her husband to return from studying for the Bar in England. As the story opens, Feroza has just received a letter from her husband, Ahmed, but she has to wait to hear its contents because she does not know how to read. Disturbed that she has to depend on what her father-in-law will translate to her, and urged to Westernize herself like her husband, Feroza attempts to get English lessons from Julia Smith, an English missionary. Miss Smith at first refuses, because Feroza's father-in-law has stipulated that singing of Christian hymns cannot accompany her tutelage in his house. But Feroza is undaunted. Disguised as a boy, she wins the sympathy of the "mem," who comes to teach on the doorstep of Feroza's house. Feroza's confidence increases as she prepares a "surprise" for Ahmed: she not only learns to read and write, but begins to wear Western dress. Meanwhile, however, the elders of her family have been preparing a surprise for her. Ahmed's brother dies, and their father decrees by "Muslim law" that Ahmed will marry his dead brother's sister. Ahmed returns from England, and when Feroza discovers that he will follow "tradition" instead of the

Western ways to which she has devoted herself, too divided to carry on she commits suicide by flinging herself down the family's well.

Although we cannot be sure that Attia Hosain or Meena Alexander were familiar with Steel's short story, there are so many continuities between the three narratives that it is difficult to believe they never read "Feroza." In any case, points of contact between Steel's short story and Hosain's "Time is Unredeemable" or Alexander's *Fault Lines* indicate more than a traditional notion of "influence." What is interesting about Hosain's and Alexander's stories is the way in which these narratives play with those continuities, responding, if not explicitly, to Steel's story, to the contact between East and West, and the meanings that contact could hold for Indian women.

Hosain's narrative also begins with a Muslim father-in-law reading a letter from his son, Arshad, who is studying in England, to Bano, the wife who has waited at home. Bano also wants to Westernize herself so her husband will appreciate her on his return. Like Feroza, Bano struggles to get English instruction: her lessons, from the English wife of a government official begin, but are interrupted when Mrs. Ram has to travel with her husband. Renewed contact with Mrs. Ram accompanies a bold step out into public space on the part of the heroine. Instead of venturing out as a boy, as Feroza does, Bano goes shopping with Mrs. Ram and, riding in a car, buys an English coat and some cosmetics. Having renewed her English lessons and partially adopted Western dress, Bano feels nevertheless unprepared for Arshad's return; she feels divided between the tradition that she knows and her urge to please Arshad by becoming "Western." When Arshad returns, Bano finds that her efforts to Westernize do not please him. And when Arshad announces that he wants to sleep in another bed, "his words fall into bottomless space" (76), leaving Bano crushed in "crumpled stillness" (77).

Although Meena Alexander's *Fault Lines* does not begin with a letter, it does begin with an invitation from the West (from the editor of the Feminist Press) asking Alexander

to write in English about her life growing up in the East. This invitation seems to throw Alexander and her subsequent life-narrative into divided confusion (hence the title). By tracing a frequently interrupted, displaced narrative line, Alexander invokes the divisions between her early life in Kerala, her girlhood in Khartoum, and her adulthood, wifehood, and motherhood in America. In addition, Alexander is able to throw into relief those pressures, between East and West, tradition and post-modernity, Malayalam, Arabic, and English, her whiter-than-white husband named Lelyveld and her blacker-than-her-family self, that threaten to pull her apart at the seams. In Alexander's narrative it is not her husband who returns to the East, but Alexander herself. Her renewed contact with her family and native land, however, takes place, like the renewed contact in Steel's and Hosain's narratives, over the image of a well.

Given that wells, springs, and well-water were used as figurative devices long before they appeared in these three narratives, we can view their use here as a response and reworking of a familiar trope. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, wells and well-water have been used in Rebekah's story to signify purity, steadfastness, and free-flowing generosity which Rebekah poisons through her dishonourable actions toward her sons. As Alexander's narrative tells us, reference to wells in Indian cultures has shared features of this use, with constructions specific to those cultures. Wells could symbolize purity, but they could also stand for shame. While she contemplates wearing Western dress and going sleeveless beyond the walls of her family's ancestral compound, Alexander writes, "such things [as stoning] did indeed happen to women in the marketplaces of Kerala, in the inner courtyards of the ancestral houses. And sometimes women took it upon themselves to do away with their own shameful bodies: they jumped into wells. The image of women jumping into wells was constantly with me during my childhood" (106).

Yet, where Steel deploys the trope in "Feroza" simultaneously to position herself as absolutely Western, to criticize evangelical models of Westernization and to suggest that

successful contact between West and East is already poisoned--foreclosed--Hosain and Alexander draw on this construction to respond to it with a more favourable, if still ambivalent, view of its possibilities for women within imperialism. In Hosain's narrative, the well is a self-consciously literary figure; in other words its purpose is not to refer to a "real" well. Here it is not the woman's body, but the mixed sounds and words of the hybrid between English and Arabic, the contact between West and East, that get "submerged in . . . shame" (75), and fall, "empty of meaning," into "bottomless space" (76). To respond to the negative image of well-jumping women, Hosain's heroine lives, and although shamed by contact between West and East, that contact is what drowns when the narrative ends with the husband's disparaging reference to white women, and his rejected wife is "at last . . . able to cry" (77). Hosain's Bano thus resists the message of Steel's text by appealing to a vision of Indian women that positions them as surviving contact, outside the well.

But Indian women can do more than just survive outside the well in Alexander's construction of it. They can use it as a source of strength. In *Fault Lines* Alexander sees women, "saris swept up shamelessly, high above the ankles, high above the knees, women well-jumping: jumping over wells" (107). By jumping into or over wells ("You come from a long line of well-jumped women," Alexander imagines someone telling her), women can free themselves of what others see as their embodiedness; women become "just the clarity of eyes shorn free of the bodies that held them in. Eyes bobbing in well water" (107) These eyes, "fluid, black, precisely as heavy as the water that bears them" can stand outside the well, even jump over it, witness through the power of that "most local, most domestic" well-water (108), through the "Mirror of Ink" as one chapter is titled, to Western, patriarchal modes of containing Indian women's bodies. These eyes can stare back through writing out from the watery, fluid body of the othered woman, "as if the past, released in her, was bubbling out" (219). This final image of the woman's past

bubbling out of Alexander's narrative replaces and writes over an actual well as *Fault Lines* draws to a close. This time Alexander has returned to Kerala. The family well has dried up, but she, her mother and her sisters are overflowing with memories that fill the dry cracks the West forced into East.

The narrative of the West confronting and fracturing the East has been the on-going narrative of imperialism. In "Feroza," Steel depicts Westernization as "fatal" to Indian women: Feroza's suicide is prefigured in her body's reaction to Western dress as "her white stockings and patent-leather shoes [twist] themselves tortuously" around the legs of the chair in which she reads her husband's latest letter (172-73). While at first Feroza's story is told ostensibly from her own perspective, as the narrative progresses toward her death the point of view shifts to that of the white missionary lady, who kneels beside the drowned, veiled, faceless girl and sobs, "My dear! . . . Surely you need not have gone so far, so very far - for help!" (187). Steel's purpose in taking on the gaze of the white missionary, but making the object of her gaze ultimately invisible, seems to be to position herself on the Western side of an absolute division between it and the East. She is critical of Westernization because, in the face of this absolute divide, there can be no such thing.

In "Time is Unredeemable," Hosain draws on this moral condemnation of Westernizing influence. When Bano tries to speak English her words do not fit the occasion. Similarly, her Western clothes and make-up are a bad fit, the coat straining to close across her chest and hips, "the powder . . . too light on her skin, [and] the rouge too pink" (74). But where Steel's purpose in condemning Westernization is to position herself as Western, Hosain's purpose seems to be to position herself on the side of "tradition" and the East. Hosain accomplishes this by constructing her narrative entirely from Bano's point of view. She also responds to Steel's characterization of the Eastern home. Where Steel had positioned Feroza's home as "imprisoned by blank walls," its situation and occupants "listless," "low," "dull," "sullen," "veiled," and "shadowy" (153) to highlight

her own gaze from without, Hosain's vision of the traditional Muslim home is frankly interior, intimate, and nostalgic in the face of Western influence. As Anita Desai has written about Hosain's stories, "To read them is like wrapping oneself up in one's mother's wedding sari, lifting the family jewels out of a faded box . . . [and] inhaling the musky perfume of old silks in a camphor chest. Almost forgotten colours and scents; one wonders if one can endure them in the light of what has come to pass" (Desai viii). Hosain appeals to this kind of intimate mother-love for tradition especially in the detailed, carefully delineated description of Bano and the other women of her household readying her and her apartments for Arshad's return. "The silver-covered ornamental legs of [Bano's] marriage bed were taken out of storage," Hosain writes for example, "and a frame fitted on them. In the plain whitewashed room the bed with its red satin counterpane gleamed when the sun shone through the window, and at night it was warm by lamplight" (70).

Where Steel positions herself as a Western spectator by opposing her gaze to the faceless, veiled silence of a drowned Indian girl, Hosain is able to evoke nostalgia for Indian tradition against a depiction of white women. Mrs. Ram in Hosain's story is positioned as a well-meaning bull in a china shop. Her "bleached, untidy, sagging appearance," "dropped aitches"(60), the way in which a "gleam of prosperity glance[s] lightly over her faded face" (64) while she rides "high on the waves of authority"(68) contrast sharply and unfavourably with the warmth, depth, intimacy, and colour of Bano's "traditional" world. Likewise, Meena Alexander responds to the way in which white women like Steel have positioned themselves against "Indianist" constructions of Indian women, by rendering white women "pallid" "creature[s]," "pale and exotic," "cold," and comfortable only when ensconced in hermetically-sealed "newly furnished suburban split-level" homes being waited on hand and foot (101). By constructing white women as cold and still, Alexander can support her own position as an othered, fractured writer who

celebrates multiplicity by representing more than surface wholeness. As Alexander writes,

Like ethnicity, like the labor of poetry, [the struggle for justice and dignity] is larger than any single person, or any single voice. It transcends individualism. It is shaped by forces that well up out of us, chaotic, immensely powerful forces that disorder the brittle boundary lines we create, turn us towards a light, a truth, whose immensity, far from being mystical -- in the sense of a pure thing far away, a distance shining -- casts all our actions into relief, etches our lines into art. (203)

Thus, despite their apparently great differences, all three authors, Steel, Hosain, and Alexander, respond to the continuing imperial narrative by remaining within the oppositional stances it makes necessary.

By looking at these narratives as part of the discourse of imperialism, scholar-participants can read them for what they may offer us as part of the on-going struggle to come to grips with the pressures imperialism brings to bear. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 1, as scholar-participants in the contact zone, most of us have been in the habit of taking up positions within it. However, more often than not, the positions we take up are ones of retreat from contact. As I have shown, Flora Steel's response to contact was to retreat from it into the fiercely autonomous and Western position of authority. The position Attia Hosain offers is likewise one of retreat, into a nostalgically imagined realm of indigenous "tradition" opposed to Westernization's dislocating energy. Finally, although Meena Alexander's *Fault Lines* seems to offer a position that straddles the boundaries oppositional stances can erect, her solution to contact again offers only retreat, this time to the elitist, exclusionary "solace" of art. By concentrating on locations, on situations, on stances, subjects of imperialism continue to write within the metanarrative of imperialism because our writing is based on the premise that we can describe, depict or

portray what or where people *are*. Subjects of imperialism have yet to examine the metanarrative of *placing* itself as an ongoing operation. It is time to switch the premise. The question scholar-participants need now to ask is, not *who* are we, but *how* are we who we are?

Shifting the premise from the language of ontology of situation (which side of the contact am I on? Where do I or others locate my being?) to the operations of situating, shifts us into making contact and examining how we make contact. It shifts us from the discourse of representation, to the realm of advocacy, where we must constantly examine the ways in which we are positioning ourselves in language in reciprocal, responsive, accountable, speech-actions.

By examining the life and work of Flora Steel this study has suggested that such shifting may imply more inclusive models for working and living in imperialism than the ones we have been using so far. With the study of advocacy--the study of positioning--scholar-participants can move from nominalizations to active verbs, from literature, re-reading the story, to rhetoric, the acts of writing and persuading. Throughout this study I have been referring to several writers from across disciplines who have begun to take on this project of investigating the ways in which positioning of subjectivity recurs across specialized discursive formations (see Bazerman, Peck MacDonald, Morrison). While these investigations continue to develop methods for studying advocacy, they have remained circumscribed within academic ways of producing knowledge and have yet fully to account for non-academic, non-professional, even non-text-based discursive formations. In this way biography as a genre can respond to this challenge by recording and enacting actual sites of advocacy in which, as scholar-participants we teach, write, speak for and about ourselves and others.

By viewing Flora Steel as an advocate for women's activities in households, education, culture, and even imperialism, I have gestured towards various methods by

which scholars may begin to see identity-formation as acts of personal and political advocacy; scholars may begin to examine themselves as scholar-participants. What remains to be done is the study of the work of advocacy across sites not immediately or easily available to the scholar. To remain fully accountable to cross-cultural histories, scholar-participants need now to move from representational discourses of response to realizable discursive practices grounded in homes, schools, marketplaces and theatres of diplomacy. I hope that this study may initiate a partial move in this direction and encourage further moves.

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