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## Cawnpore, Kipling and Charivari: 1857 and the politics of commemoration

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### Abstract

This paper examines the politics of commemoration in colonial India, taking as its focal point the notorious massacres of Europeans at Cawnpore (and subsequent reprisals) during the 1857 rebellion. Arguing for a conceptual understanding of mourning and extreme grief as collectivising, political acts, I trace the discontinuities of remembrance at the site of the Cawnpore *bibighar*, showing how the informal texts of ‘mobilised mourning’ produced there in the immediate aftermath of the massacre, were overwritten in the post-Mutiny period by official monuments and state-commemorative projects. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben’s work on sovereignty and political exception, I suggest that these changing commemorative practices reveal the organising logic of colonial sovereignty, as it negotiates the transition from the exceptional (potentially scandalous) violence of counter-insurgency to the sovereign paradigm of the rule of law. I go on to argue that at Cawnpore colonial state-sovereignty found its inverse figure in the popular sovereignty of Anglo-Indian *charivari* or ‘rough music’ which sanctioned extreme violence against suspected rebels, and could not easily be contained by the juridical framework of colonial government. I conclude by examining Kipling’s largely ignored journalism on the 1857 rebellion, which engages meta-historically with the process of public commemoration. While noting Kipling’s ambivalence towards official remembrance in these texts, I trace the persistence of ‘mournful’ tropes of social exclusion and ritualised banning (as *charivari*) in his fictional work, and argue that these represent a different order of ‘Mutiny’ commemoration enshrined in the popular historical consciousness of the Anglo-Indian community.

### Cawnpore, Kipling and *Charivari*: The 1857 Rebellion and Colonial Commemoration

On the seventeenth of July 1857, exhausted soldiers led by the aged, evangelical Brigadier-General, Henry Havelock, finally arrived in the town of Cawnpore (*Kanpur*)<sup>1</sup>. Havelock’s makeshift army, made up of the 78<sup>th</sup> Highlander regiment, Sikh troops and men from the 1<sup>st</sup> Madras fusiliers, was part of a mobile counter-insurgency force hastily assembled at Allahabad to try to quell the popular rebellion - the so-called ‘Mutiny’ - that had broken out in the East India Company’s armies two months earlier. The 1857 uprising, which had been catalysed by the Company’s annexation of Oudh and fears of forced religious conversion amongst high-caste soldiers, had quickly overwhelmed the (largely unprepared) colonial garrisons in the central provinces, and in towns such as Cawnpore, Lucknow, Agra and Delhi, European survivors had been forced to retreat into fortified buildings and hastily constructed entrenchments.

Havelock’s aim was to relieve the besieged British garrisons at Cawnpore and Lucknow, and his soldiers had already fought three battles against Indian rebel contingents in their advance north. During their march, news had reached Havelock that the defence force at Cawnpore, under General Wheeler, had surrendered to the local noble, Dhoandu Pant, or ‘Nana Saheb’, who nursed long-held grievances against the British and had joined the rebels. The surrender had been negotiated with promises of safe passage for the besieged garrison, which now numbered about four hundred people, but Nana Saheb had subsequently executed several British officers, and over two hundred Europeans had also been killed at the riverside *Satichaura ghat* as they boarded boats to take them down the Ganges (Mukherjee 1990: 108-12). The traumatised survivors of both the siege and the *ghat* massacre - mostly women and children - had been recaptured and imprisoned in an empty house on the outskirts of the town. Anxious to save these remaining hostages, Havelock’s troops endured forced marches through the sweltering, flooded countryside and, alongside another relief force under Major Renaud, led a final attack against Nana’s troops outside Cawnpore. As Havelock’s soldiers broke through the defending lines, Nana Saheb retreated towards *Bithoor* and thousands of Cawnpore’s Indian inhabitants fled into the surrounding countryside in fear of British retaliation (Hibbert 1980: 208).

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<sup>1</sup> Cawnpore is a colonial mistransliteration of the town’s name, and the more phonetically accurate *Kanpur* is now preferred by most historians. The use of *Kanpur* in official and academic texts reflects the wider ongoing linguistic and geographical re-appropriations of place-names by the Indian state, but Cawnpore’s mistransliteration was, in fact, also recognised before Indian independence in colonial reference-texts: in *Hobson-Jobson*, the dictionary of Indian-English, the name is given as *Kānhpur*, even though ‘Cawnpore’ was the conventional spelling. For reasons of consistency, and because I will be discussing the town largely as a *colonial* signifier of atrocity, I will retain the colonial form in this paper.

Entering the town, Havelock's men were about to become the horrified, belated witnesses of what G. O. Trevelyan (one of Cawnpore's most influential contemporary historians) would later call 'the most terrible tragedy of our age' (Trevelyan 2006: 4). The prosaic stage for this tragedy was the *bibighar*, the house in which Nana Saheb had confined the survivors of the *Satichaura ghat* massacre. Here Havelock's men were met not by grateful European and Eurasian hostages, but by the evidence of a terrible massacre. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, two days before the relief force re-took Cawnpore, an execution squad of local butchers and villagers led by Nana Saheb's bodyguard, Sarvur Khan, had entered the *bibighar* and methodically cut down the prisoners with their swords (Ward 2004: 415). They then dumped the stripped and mutilated bodies of the women and children in a nearby well. Like the 'Black Hole' of Calcutta a century before, the site of colonial abjection was an architectural one, but without an authoritative victim-narrator<sup>2</sup> it would become a contested text in its own right. As the horrified soldiers walked into the enclosed courtyard of the *bibighar*, they found numerous traces of the killings: blood covered the floor, and the rooms were littered with pieces of clothing, daguerreotype cases, bonnets, shoes, and other 'unspeakable remnants' of violent death (Robinson 1996: 126).

The traces of the *bibighar* massacre quickly came to signify cruelty taken to oriental excess; the European and Eurasian captives had, it was assumed, been raped or 'dishonoured' in the most brutal way before their deaths. Stories circulated amongst the soldiers of horrifying things found in the *bibighar*, including shoes arranged in rows with severed feet still in them, and children nailed to the walls with bayonets (Hibbert 1980: 213). In the house, the soldiers of Havelock's expeditionary force sifted through the debris of the massacre and agonised over traces of the violence: sabre cuts in the masonry and the hair of the victims recur in their descriptions and in several accounts the floor swims 'ankle deep' in blood (Crump 1858; Holmes 1883: 301). Overcome with 'pity and anger', officers and men paraded day after day through the scene of what was described as 'these most *atrocious, fiendish* of murders'. 'The *poor poor* creatures,' lamented one witness after looking at the bodies that filled the well, 'It was a sight I wish I had never seen, but once seen never to be forgotten' (Hibbert 1980: 209).

It is clearly evident from surviving accounts that the Cawnpore massacre and the inferred rape of women there had a devastating effect on the belated witnesses. As a terrible derangement of the protocols of nineteenth-century warfare, the scene in the *bibighar* appeared to rob Havelock's men of their masculinity: 'stalwart, bearded men, stern soldiers of the ranks ... have been seen coming out of that house perfectly unmanned, utterly unable to repress their emotions' stated one witness, 'From them there will be no mercy for these villainous assassins' (Ward 2004: 437). In this case, what seems to have been a symbolic 'castrating' identification with the victims was a prelude to an immediate uncontrolled counter-violence - as an aggressive compensatory reassertion of gender roles - unleashed upon the local Indian population. The town's name had already started to become a signifier for something more than its own mundane civic status, and the exhortation to 'remember Cawnpore' would soon develop into a battle-cry that not only spurred colonial soldiers on in combat, but also marked a new, exceptional level of violence (recognised as grief-stricken retribution) permissible to them. Discovering a warehouse full of liquor soon after their arrival in Cawnpore, Havelock's soldiers 'remembered' the colonial dead by embarking on a chaotic tour of 'intoxication, plunder and rapine' (ibid.: 439) through the 'native town', a pattern that would be repeated in other cities retaken from the rebels.

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The 1857 rebellion represented an unparalleled challenge to British colonial authority in India. In the face of such widespread co-ordinated armed resistance, liberal colonial assumptions about entitlement and evangelical mission could not be sustained, nor could Company rule continue unchanged after such a catastrophic reversal. In 1858, following a show trial in which the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah II was convicted of treason, India came under the authority of the British Crown. In the years that followed, the 'Mutiny' would become a defining episode in British colonialism's historical narrative of itself. As a form of epic political rebirth, the 1857 rebellion lent a new sense of the legitimacy and providential entitlement to British rule in India, providing (in its successful suppression) an incontrovertible proof of the essential racial and technological superiority of the coloniser (Chakravarty 2006: 4). Simultaneously, the uprising also persisted in the colonial imagination as a terrifying example of betrayal, vulnerability and fallible governance - an uneasy, irrepressible memory of Anglo-Indian<sup>3</sup> humiliation that revealed how powerless the (outnumbered) coloniser was against organised mass

<sup>2</sup> An interesting comparable text that does provide a figure of the victim-narrator is, of course, John Zephaniah Holwell's account of his experiences in the 'Black Hole', *A Genuine Narrative of the Deplorable Deaths of the English Gentlemen, and Others, who were suffocated in the Black-Hole in Fort William, at Calcutta*, published in 1758.

<sup>3</sup> I use this somewhat old-fashioned term to designate Anglophone Europeans connected with Britain's military or administrative presence and resident in India.

rebellion, and how easily intelligence-failures and policy mistakes could rebound against the British. Both these positions shaped a retrospective culture of ‘continuous commemoration’ and ‘imperial thanksgiving’ that preserved 1857 as: ‘a caesural moment in the history of the Indian empire - replete with signs and wonders [...] - when all was nearly lost only to be regained once more’ (ibid.). The ‘continuous commemoration’ of the rebellion eventually encompassed a vast range of colonial texts and discourses, from memoirs and ‘Mutiny’ fictions to official histories and photographic records. It also inscribed the subcontinent with a new geography of remembrance, transforming towns like Cawnpore and Lucknow into shrines to colonial history, and preserving public memories of the 1857 rebellion in a meticulously maintained heritage-architecture of siege-sites, cemeteries and cenotaphs.

In the following pages we will discuss some of these commemorative practices and their relationship to more personal, traumatised memories in greater detail, but first we must pause in order to consider the formal complexity of colonial memory-cultures. Commenting recently on post/colonial commemorations of 1857, the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty locates three categories of remembrance which are worth further consideration. Relating each category to a specific linguistic-discursive function, Chakrabarty differentiates commemoration into forms of ‘memorialising’, ‘memorising’ and ‘remembering /forgetting’, each of which represent metaphoric, metonymic and ‘extra-representational’ modes respectively<sup>4</sup>. Chakrabarty’s first category, the Mutiny ‘memorial’, includes buildings, images and archival documents that are consecrated through special rituals, thus creating out of ‘a set of events’ a ‘second or higher-order [metaphorical] representation’ (Chakrabarty 2007: 1692). This ‘memorialising’ category corresponds, roughly, to the first type of ‘epic’ national-racial remembrance described above. In contrast, Chakrabarty’s second category, ‘memorising’, is a fearful understanding of 1857 as a metonym for insurgency as a whole, and thus relates more clearly to the second, anxiety-ridden remembrance of the Mutiny noted earlier. Public memory thus shares itself, in this model, between metaphoric and metonymic modes. There is, however, still a third, more personal form of remembrance to elucidate, which Chakrabarty describes as ‘the past as personal grief’. In the painful experience of grieving, the past is ‘commemorated’ subjectively through a combined process of memory and forgetting, and is not readily amenable to conventional forms of historical research. As Chakrabarty cautions: ‘memory-practices to do with [a...] deeply personal sense of loss challenge historical representation [...] because these practices speak often to a level [of ...] existence that is better captured by phenomenological thinking than by the kind of paper-trail that the historian routinely chases’ (Chakrabarty 2007: 1692).

Chakrabarty’s formulation is engaging precisely because it theorises the pain of grief, on both sides of the 1857 conflict, as a stubborn cognitive absence (and therefore as something beyond the politics of representation).<sup>5</sup> But even as we make the ethical acknowledgement that we can never fully *know* another’s trauma or loss, it is important to register the material effects of grief as a type of collective memory and, in order to do so, we need to question any strict compartmentalisation of the categories outlined above. We will see in some of the texts discussed later that colonial commemoration was a more involved process than Chakrabarty’s schema allows,<sup>6</sup> and was rarely contained by or completely restricted to any one category. Indeed, Chakrabarty’s first two ‘memorialising’ and ‘memorising’ functions of remembrance frequently articulate themselves as related or ‘nested’ components of commemoration, evoking the sort of inter-relationship of ‘memory and forgetting’ that Chakrabarty reserves for the third category of grief. The fact that public practices of colonial commemoration operate, at times, like the messier private repressions and instabilities of traumatised memory alerts us once again to the possibility that grief and mourning, while not completely analogous or irreducible to them, might shadow (and even inform) public commemorative modes as their spectral counterpart.

In the rest of this essay we will return to Cawnpore to assess the politics of ‘mournful’ counter-insurgency as the problematic ontological - what Derrida would call *hauntological*<sup>7</sup> - opening point for a longer narrative of colonial remembrance. Rather than being something that discretely marks the start

<sup>4</sup> Chakrabarty’s use of linguistic terms is reminiscent of the structuralist interpretative frameworks employed by fellow subaltern studies theorists like Ranajit Guha.

<sup>5</sup> A problem most notably addressed in various debates over the remembrance culture of the holocaust, but also apposite to the collective postcolonial engagement with the traumatic memory of Indo-Pakistani Partition.

<sup>6</sup> The possibility of a more complex relationship between these modes is acknowledged by Chakrabarty in his opening comments, and in a proviso that they do not exhaust ‘the complex phenomenon of memory’ (Chakrabarty 2007: 1692).

<sup>7</sup> In Derrida’s exposition on the legacy/memory of Marx, for which he invokes the spirit-apparition in *Hamlet*, ‘*hauntology*’ is defined as ‘larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being’. More significantly, for Derrida the figure of the haunting spirit always involves a sense of return or repetition (*revenant* – ‘that which comes back’), and also ‘harbours within itself [...] eschatology and teleology’ (Derrida 1994:10; n.177).

of a more public commemorative process, we will see that forms of grief and mourning persist after 1857 - alongside other forms - as one of colonialism's concealed commemorative possibilities. And while the phenomenological texture of grief may be irretrievable from the archive, or exist at a remove from it, I want to suggest that colonial fiction (in this case Rudyard Kipling's reflexive fictional representations of 1857) provides us with an imaginative textual archive in which 'mournful' rituals of commemoration and the ghostly *revenant* memory of insurgency may still be traced in Anglo-Indian culture.

Reflecting on our qualifications to Chakrabarty's schema, a further point becomes apparent: that as a commemorative form that is both integral and external to the 'public' process of official commemoration, excessive grief may be *political* in a way that (uniquely) reveals the supporting logic of colonial governance. This is because, in instances such as the 'counter-insurgent' mourning at Cawnpore, grief sanctions a suspension of the law, and thus reveals a constitutive ambiguity at the very heart of colonial sovereignty – an ambiguity that involves the latter's problematic relationship with its own 'founding' violence. At a constitutional level, colonial sovereignty was never freely conferred by Britain's Indian subjects (Guha 1997; Dirks 2006), and therefore colonialism's erratic monopoly on violence had to be legitimised through alternatives such as 'dual sovereignty'<sup>8</sup> and the 'rule of law' (Singha 1998). At the same time, colonial government had to be ready to ignore its own contractual and legal frameworks, and enforce military control at times of heightened danger. In such situations, 'the brutality of violating native bodies continually threatened scandal' and excessive colonial violence could easily become morally self-defeating, contradicting the civilising claims of empire (Pierce and Rao 2006: 21). Consequently, at times when British colonialism *did* resort to extreme violence, suspending its legal self-regulation, it often provided justification in back-dated stories about the (illegitimate) violence of the colonised, against which it acted. Cawnpore can be located as one interval in a genealogy of such events, starting with the Calcutta 'Black Hole' in 1756 (an atrocity with which many witnesses of the *bibighar* drew horrified comparisons), which was used to justify Clive's military 'response' at the subsequent battle of Plassey.

On these terms, grief marks a transition from the violence of conventional counter-insurgency, regulated through forms of military law, to a qualitatively different form of violence (as 'vengeance') sanctioned by older community-based narratives of deviance, despoiled innocence and transgressed sexual taboos. As a commemorative practice, it marks the threshold point at which colonial sovereignty defines itself, at its most elemental level, in its decision to move from constituted to constituting power; to switch between what Walter Benjamin terms the 'law-preserving' violence of the state's legal and administrative apparatus to the extra-legal ('mythical') 'law-making' violence that underpins its very existence (Benjamin 1978: 287-8). (Benjamin famously contrasts the latter with his messianic concept of a divine violence - representing the realm of pure means - that supersedes legal violence and becomes, in his work, as much a projection of a political ideal, a world to come, as a category descriptive of particular revolutionary situations.)<sup>9</sup>

### Mutiny and Mourning: Cawnpore and Counterinsurgency

Cawnpore's notoriety as a (memorialised/memorised) master signifier of anti-colonial violence depended very largely on a pre-existing stock of Mutiny atrocity-narratives. These rumoured, formulaic<sup>10</sup> atrocity stories circulated throughout India during the 'crisis months' of the conflict (July to November 1857), and consisted of accounts of European women and children killed by rebel soldiers in various centres of the rebellion, embellished with shocking, often grotesque details of torture, mutilation and rape. Reprinted in the Calcutta and London presses, atrocity narratives transformed the rebellion from an act of armed political resistance into a violent sexual crime against European women. As feminist critics such as Jenny Sharpe claim, the development of a schematised Mutiny 'rape-script'

<sup>8</sup> As Edmund Burke noticed, the important aspect of the *diwani* or mandate given to the East India Company to trade and collect revenue in Bengal was that 'It gave the settlement of Bengal a fixed constitutional form because it arose from the charter of the undoubted sovereign' – moreover, as Burke pointed out, under this dual system the British 'had all the real power without any of the invidious appearance of it; it gave [the East India Company] the revenue, without the parade of sovereignty' (Dirks 2006: 176).

<sup>9</sup> See Benjamin (1978). Slavoj Žižek makes the following point about Benjamin's category of the divine violence: 'Paradoxically, divine violence does partially overlap with the bio-political disposal of [Giorgio Agamben's concept of] *Homini sacer*: in both cases, killing is neither a crime nor a sacrifice [...] one should not be afraid to assert the formal parallel between the state annihilation of *Homini sacer*, for example the Nazi killing of the Jews, and the revolutionary terror' (Žižek 2008: 168).

<sup>10</sup> For a key discussion see Ranajit Guha's essay 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' (Guha and Spivak 1988: 45-88).

preserved colonial authority by displacing attention from threatened *male* bodies: ‘a discourse of rape – that is the violent reproduction of gender roles – helped manage the crisis in authority so crucial to colonial self-representation at the time’ (Sharpe 1993: 67). Developing on these ideas, some critics have read the rape script in similar terms of gender contrast, in which the compromised, ‘emasculated’ masculine honour of Indian men served to bolster colonial masculinities, making British vengeance ‘appear all the more virile’ (Blunt 2000: 408).<sup>11</sup> Others have perceptively traced classical and biblical archetypes of rape in atrocity narratives (notably the rape of Lucrece) in which sexual violation – followed almost invariably by death – was made ‘thinkable’, by its coding as exemplary self-sacrifice (Paxton 1999: 115-6).

Partly because they were so politically charged, these allegations of atrocity soon became the subject of an official enquiry. In the summer of 1857 Lord Canning, the Governor General, commissioned an intelligence investigation into the truth of atrocity narratives, finding, subsequently, little evidence of widespread rape and/or mutilation of European women prior to their deaths (David 2002: 257).<sup>12</sup> By the time the results of the investigation were circulated, however, the British had regained control of Delhi and other key towns, and reprisals had become less frequent. Moreover, atrocity stories (invariably linked to the fearful image of rape) had already become a vital component in colonialism’s collective consciousness, forming a prurient ‘public mythology’ of Mutiny in the subsequent flood of melodramatic memoirs, plays and novels devoted to the conflict (Tuson 1998: 291). The atrocity narrative retained its cultural currency in historical Mutiny-fictions as late as the 1880s and 90s, where it re-affirmed British imperialism’s epic sense of its own mission in the subcontinent, retroactively supporting new ideals of colonial masculinity – emblematised, incidentally, by soldier-heroes such as Havelock (see Dawson 1994: 117-54).

While technologies of colonial gender are key to any critical discussion of the Mutiny atrocity narrative, our focus here is not on rape or rape-allegations, but on the inclusion of rape, as ‘atrocity’, into an integrated commemorative narrative of assault, death and mourning. Here, in these conjoined narratives, which become synonymous with Cawnpore, we can start to theorise mourning as a process that preserves colonial sovereignty in the material differentiation between what Judith Butler describes as the ‘grievable life’ and ‘the life that cannot be grieved’. Questioning concepts of private grief, familiar to us from Chakrabarty’s work, Butler argues that ‘many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order’ (Butler 2004: 22). Butler is, of course, theorising recent instances of ‘mobilised’ mourning here, and we must bear in mind that in the period contemporaneous with the 1857 rebellion, defined by one cultural historian as the zenith of a Victorian funereal culture (Berridge 2001), mourning would have been an even more familiar, elaborate process, promoting considerably deeper community identification.<sup>13</sup>

The political capacity of mourning is something that the philosopher Giorgio Agamben notes in his recent work on sovereignty and legal exception, *State of Exception* (2005). Drawing on the writings of Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt, Agamben’s theorising of sovereignty circles around an *aporia* in which sovereign power expresses itself as a suspension of /exception to the law. As Schmitt states: ‘Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception’ (Schmitt [1922] 2005), and this axiom (which defines sovereignty in terms of its special relationship in and above the law) is developed by Agamben in an earlier work, *Homo Sacer* (1998), where he notes an asymmetrical correspondence between sovereign power and the ‘bare life’ of sacred man or *homo sacer*: ‘*The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere*’. [Italics in original] (Agamben 1998: 83). In *State of Exception* Agamben discusses several instances of the political exception and, for our purposes, the most telling is the paradigmatic case of the emergency declaration issued by the ancient Roman senate, termed the *iustitium*. Here the duties

<sup>11</sup> This is a reading that the ‘neutering’ effect of the *bibighar* on its colonial male witnesses, noted earlier, complicates but does not necessarily contradict.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Debunking’ studies also appeared after the rebellion, such as Edward Leckey’s *Fictions Connected with the Indian Outbreak of 1857 Exposed* (1859), that systematically questioned reports of atrocities involving Anglo-Indian women.

<sup>13</sup> Acts of highly visible collective mourning, and the conventions surrounding public grief were reinforced in nineteenth-century Britain by the significance of widespread mourning for public figures. The Duke of Wellington’s elaborate state funeral in 1852 (Curl 2000: 211) and Queen Victoria’s extended mourning of Prince Albert after his death in 1861 frame the deaths of the rebellion, codifying conventional public grief, and ensuring that ‘more than marriage, death was the axis around which nineteenth-century British society spun.’ (Berridge 2001: 139).

and obligations of public law are suspended because the very basis of legality is under threat – in this situation exceptional (necessary) acts are sanctioned in order to preserve the constitutional authority of the republic.

For Agamben the exception as *iustitium* has a crucial conceptual relationship with collective grief, evolving, in Roman law, into a general state of public mourning that marks the *tumult* at the sovereign's death. In this formulation, mourning coincides with a period of civic *anomie* (evoking an 'anomic terror') and thus takes on a dangerous form: 'If the sovereign is a living *nomos*, and if, for this reason, *anomie* and *nomos* perfectly coincide in his person, then anarchy (which threatens to loose itself in the city upon the sovereign's death, which is to say, when the nexus that joins it to the law is severed) must be ritualised [...] transforming the state of exception into public mourning, and mourning into *iustitium*' (Agamben 2005: 70). Intriguingly, in Agamben's view, the *iustitium* has an 'inverse figure' in another archaic public practice: the saturnalia or carnival in which the political order is overturned, social and gender relations reversed, and 'criminal behaviour considered licit'. Agamben likens the 'anomic feast' to an ancient form of legal suspension that characterised 'archaic juridical institutions': the community ritual of 'rough music' or *charivari*, in which the community expelled the Other - the outlaw or bandit - from its midst. Thus 'in showing the mournful character of every feast and the festive character of all mourning, law and *anomie* show their distance and at the same time their secret solidarity' (Agamben 2005: 73).

The connection between mourning and feasting, and the eruption of festive brutality in *charivari* is significant because it casts a unique light on the interweaving strains of fear and violence that constitute colonial culture under extreme threat. In the extensive existing scholarship, *charivari* is described as a folk practice, recorded throughout western Europe (especially France and Britain) from the middle ages to the early twentieth century, which involved an informal 'neighbourhood' judgement (often involving a mock-trial), and riotous punishment, against a member of the community who had contravened social convention. In Britain, *charivari*, known variously as 'rough music', 'skimmington' or 'hussitting' (see Thompson 1992:7; Seal 1987: 91), was most often an intervention into domestic life, against those who transgressed sexual or marital norms. Old men with much younger brides, men who beat their wives and/or children, and women considered adulterous were all potential targets for *charivari*, which usually involved the immediate community in a noisy 'musical' display outside the victim's house. This might include the wearing of animal costumes, a grotesque pantomimic sacrifice and the 'riding' of the victim on a wooden pole or (backwards) on a mule or horse, all of which was designed to humiliate the victim, and was often effective enough to force their departure from the neighbourhood soon afterwards (see Le Goff and Schmitt 1981; Thompson 1992).

In their influential discussion of the cultural politics of carnival in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's understanding of *charivari* as 'a scapegoating carnivalesque ritual' informs their nuanced response to Bakhtin's reading of carnival as a purely revolutionary force (see Bakhtin 1984). In Stallybrass and White's view, while the 'liberties of the fair could always be articulated *politically* against the propertied and the state' (Stallybrass and White 1986: 42), inverting and/or hybridising the social order, the grotesque force of carnival could also preserve or reinforce existing power-relations through demonising and scapegoating (ibid.: 56). Where the ritual energies of carnival become most relevant to us is the anti-semitic form they take in some instances of Italian *charivari*. In medieval carnivals in Venice and Rome, Jews were cast as the 'Lenten' enemies of the festival, and their religious proscriptions against pork used in a process of 'displaced abjection' in which, like the carnival pig, they became the focus of public hatred and persecution. Building on anthropological studies of pollution taboos, Stallybrass and White relate this custom to the commonplace way in which cultures stigmatise the Other through their (different) food-habits: 'By eliding the Jew with the pig the carnival crowd ... [produced] a grotesque hybridisation of terms expressly antithetical to each other according to the dietary rules of their victims who, at carnival time, would be self-excluded from the great pig feast' (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 53). In this instance the carnival dynamic of *charivari* calls to mind Nietzsche's disturbing perception of cruelty as a Dionysian expression of power, and memory as a form of 'social pledge' intrinsic to blood, torture and sacrifice. Nietzsche reminds us that 'it is not long since princely weddings and public festivals [...] were unthinkable without executions [and] torturings' and goes on to describe cruel punishments as 'one of the oldest festive joys of mankind' and the founding basis for memory, legal obligation and morality (Miller 1990: 475).

How does this normative (folk-)theatre of cruelty translate to a colonial Indian setting? In the subcontinent, both the disproportionate numerical ratio of coloniser to colonised and a critical tendency to overlook political-discursive *discontinuities* between metropole and margin, have, I think, made it difficult to appreciate the way Anglo-India, as a close-knit civil and military community, could enforce a popular sovereign exception and effectively scapegoat the whole Indian population as *homines sacrii*

'beyond the law'. It is also clear that, while the rebellion represented a radical challenge to the wider sovereign sphere of colonial government, Anglo-Indians assumed that the popular sovereignty of their homes, and more fundamentally the sanctity of European women's bodies (and the domestic patriarchal right of European men over them) would be respected. In Agamben's work we find an analogue for this idea of the sovereignty of the *domus* or household in the powers of every Roman father as *patria potestas*, in whose absolute power over the life of his sons wider sovereign power is 'residually and irreducibly' expressed (Agamben 1998: 88).<sup>14</sup>

We know that mid-Victorian metropolitan culture invested heavily in the idea of domesticity, to such an extent that masculinity came to be redefined in this period through familial roles in the home (Tosh 1999), and therefore, as an expression of male violence, colonial *charivaris* must be read as a belated defence of a residual or 'domestic' sovereignty<sup>15</sup>. In India, and especially within a masculine military peer-group like Havelock's relief-force, these principles would have been modified, but men would still have idealised 'home' as a sanctified (ideally 'companionate') space, antithetical to the harsh military-mercantile complex of the colony. The idea of a sustaining 'domestic sovereignty' was also built into Victorian public culture, and its national associations encouraged by the iconographic currency of Victoria as a sovereign *and* an Angel of the House; a monarch and matron (see Wiener 2004: 4). As the contemporary constitutional historian Walter Bagehot stated approvingly, 'a *family* on the throne is an interesting idea [...] it brings down the pride of sovereignty to the level of petty life' (Bagehot [1867] 2001: 41). At the same time, however, the residual sovereignty of the Anglo-Indian home could also countermand colonialism's governmental sovereign power. After 1857, when fearing attack, loss of preferential treatment or other potential threats, Anglo-Indian communities would repeatedly enact rituals of exclusion and judgement that were directed at the Calcutta government and transgressing Anglo-Indians, as much as they were, more generally, against the colonised.

### The Cawnpore *Charivari*

Even though contemporary witnesses and correspondents repeatedly emphasised the unspeakable nature of the crimes at Cawnpore, the *bibighar* was, nevertheless, bizarrely productive as a narrative space<sup>16</sup>. On its walls, Havelock's horrified soldiers found various inscriptions that combined into a tragic textual memorial. As well as sabre-marks and blood-stains, what seemed to be hastily effaced messages and desperate personal chronicles could be made out: 'Arrived here on 4<sup>th</sup> July, Saturday ... 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday up to the 14<sup>th</sup> July' (Ward 2004: 436). Sketchy accounts of imprisonment and brief diaries, written on scraps of paper, were also uncovered in the debris of the massacre 'as though the women had decided among themselves to write their histories' (ibid: 437). However, the messages and brief 'histories' were frustratingly factual and incomplete, and the *bibighar* quickly became a palimpsest on which soldiers co-authored the experiential script of the atrocity. In place of the messages from the captives supposedly effaced by Indian troops after the massacre, soldiers wrote their own graffiti, 'speaking for' the women they had failed to save. Witnesses transcribed the following: 'Your wives and children are here in misery' in theatrical letters [...] 'at the disposal of savages' [...] 'We are at the mercy of savages who have ravished young and old', 'My child my child', 'think of us', 'avenge us' – and in several places in broad clumsy strokes, 'Remember Cawnpore!' (the latter becoming, as we know, the rallying cry of Havelock's troops during later battles with rebel forces) (Ward 2004: 439; Robinson 1996: 128)

Given the implied connection between these written messages and what actually happened in the *bibighar*, it is perhaps unsurprising that the three most authoritative contemporary accounts of the events at Cawnpore (two of which were written by survivors of the siege and the first *Satichaura ghat* massacre) should focus on the alleged inscriptions. In his poignant eye-witness account, *A Personal Narrative of the Outbreak and Massacre at Cawnpore During the Sepoy Revolt of 1857* (1879) Jonah Shepherd, a Eurasian government officer who had lost his family in the massacre, describes his

<sup>14</sup> In a longer study we would be able to explore the differentiation that Agamben makes between the 'right' of the Roman male householder to punish adultery, and the rather different (and for Agamben more obviously sovereign) right of *vitae necisque potestas*. 'This [latter] power is absolute and is understood to be neither the sanction of a crime nor the expression of the more general power that lies within the competence of the *pater* insofar as he is the head of the *domus*' (Agamben: 1998: 87).

<sup>15</sup> The pieces of doggerel routinely published by the Calcutta press during the rebellion attest to this perception of threatened domesticity. The following appeared in the *Bengal Hurkaru*: 'If you value the blessings that shine at our hearth - / The wife's smiling welcome, the infant's sweet mirth - / while they charm us at eve, let us think upon those / who have bought with their blood our domestic repose' (4<sup>th</sup> July 1857).

<sup>16</sup> For a relevant critical discussion of the generally rather voluble 'unspeakability' of sexual scandal and sex-crimes in Victorian society and literary culture, see Cohen (1996).



desperate search for signs of their fate. Finding no authentic messages in the *bibighar*, he looked in Savada house, a building in which some European officers had been imprisoned. There he found ‘nothing that could warrant my believing that [any writing] had been traced by the hands of the poor unfortunate captives; they were mostly caricatures and scribblings [...] by the European soldiers who came with general Havelock’s column’ (Shepherd 1879: 147). In his memoir, *Havelock’s March on Cawnpore 1857: A Civilian’s Notes* (1910), John W. Sherer, a magistrate and volunteer in Havelock’s retinue, described the *bibighar* compound as ‘so unspeakably horrible’ that ‘it would be quite wrong [...] to increase the distressing circumstances which already existed’. Sherer assures the reader that he was ‘certainly among the first who saw [...] the place’, and concedes that scattered across the floor ‘there were certainly a few odds and ends of clothing, some locks of hair [...] straw hats, and so on’, but states that ‘of mutilation, in that house at least, there were no signs, nor at that time was there any writing on the walls’ (Sherer 1910: 155-6). The other well-known survivor-narrative of the siege and *Satichaura ghat* massacre, Mowbray Thomson’s *The Story of Cawnpore* (1859), also defers to Sherer’s account of the *bibighar*, stating that no genuine messages from the victims were found there.<sup>17</sup>

At the start of 1858 the writing on the walls of the ‘house of massacre’ was whitewashed over (see Hibbert 1980: 415 n.47), and by the time the Cawnpore massacres had become the subject of official histories like G. O. Trevelyan’s influential *Cawnpore* (1865), the forged pleas and pieces of graffiti in the *bibighar* and elsewhere were routinely (and snobbishly) dismissed as a regrettable weakness of the lower classes: ‘before the month was out, the bad habit, common to low Englishmen, of scribbling where they ought not, here displaying itself in an odious form, had covered the principal buildings of Cawnpore with vulgar and disgusting forgeries, false in date, in taste, in spelling, and in fact’ (Trevelyan 2006 [1865]: 360). Trevelyan’s disgust says as much about the discursive authority of graffiti as the uncensored ‘text’ of the colonial working class as it does about the ethics of this kind of ‘forgery’. What is evident from all these pieces of graffiti, however, is their contiguity with the ‘mournful’ atrocity rumour: as a powerful, pervasive and, above all, anonymous narrative form with the potential to incite exceptional collective action.<sup>18</sup>

The improvised writings on the wall of the *bibighar* anticipated the lapidary inscriptions that would mark a later stage of official commemoration. But in the days following the massacre the subaltern (and here I mean the colonial army subaltern) text, which bizarrely ventriloquises the revenge-pleas of the *bibighar* victims, is still part of a mobilising ‘festive’ mourning. Collecting pieces of paper left by the women of the *bibighar*, along with scraps of dresses and tresses of hair, the soldiers of the relief-force read them as talismans and secular phylacteries, thus extending and sharing a mourning-process that had already been started by the women themselves during the siege and subsequent captivity. The practice of gathering keepsakes, which mimicked genteel fashions of bereavement, placed the soldiers in a more sentimental relationship with the victims of the massacre, and mementoes (especially locks of hair) from the *bibighar* were coded very explicitly as a reminder to ‘show no mercy’ to rebel soldiers (see Robinson 1996: 128). For months after the massacre, the *bibighar* remained a quasi-religious or ritualised site, and in late November *The Mofussilite* correspondent reported from Cawnpore ‘nearly all the vast body of men who arrived with Brigadier Grant ... have visited that horrible little house ... and if they are excited who dares blame them?’<sup>19</sup>

Reminding ourselves of Agamben’s description of *charivari* as ‘a symmetrical and in some ways inverse figure’ of the official emergency ruling of the *iustitium*, we must note here that the mobilised mourning started by colonial relief-forces in Cawnpore had a legal counterpart in an important piece of legislation that could also be said to evoke the ‘the secret solidarity between *anomie* and law’ (Agamben 2005: 71). Passed by Lord Canning several weeks before the massacre at the *bibighar*, Act XIV of 6<sup>th</sup> June 1857 made ‘exciting mutiny or sedition in the army’ a crime punishable by death. The act, which was enforceable for a year, gave the army the power to try civilians and allowed the appointment of special commissioners who could judge and pass sentence of death for ‘crimes against the state’ and offences ‘attended with great personal violence’ (David 2002: 233). In effect, the act empowered army officers and designated civilians to lynch suspected mutineers. As colonial law was exchanged for martial law, the re-assertion of sovereignty through ‘law-making’ violence (as a

<sup>17</sup> Writing from Cawnpore in mid-February 1858, the war reporter of *The Times*, William Howard Russell, commented on the difficulty of ascertaining the exact details of the massacre, but stated: ‘One fact is clearly established; that the writing behind the door, on the walls of the slaughter-house, on which so much stress was laid in Calcutta, did not exist when Havelock entered the place, and therefore was not the work of any of the poor victims’ (Russell 1957: 35).

<sup>18</sup> The insurgent potential of rumour at the start of the rebellion is discussed in Homi Bhabha’s work on the circulation of tokens that operated as mysterious signs of the coming uprising. See Homi Bhabha ‘By Bread Alone’ (Bhabha 1994).

<sup>19</sup> *The Mofussilite* 27<sup>th</sup> November 1857.

response to atrocity narratives) ensured spectacularly brutal forms of punishment. In Benares and Allahabad the arrival of the relief forces that preceded Havelock inaugurated a period of mass reprisals. These were led by notorious figures such as Brigadier Neill, who lynched suspects on the flimsiest pretexts, and Major Renaud who was infamous for his method of ‘tranquillising the country by the very simple expedient of burning all the villages in the line of march and hanging everybody with a black face falling in his way’ (Chunder 1869: 335).

The fact that this policy emptied the countryside of villagers who would normally have been employed as suppliers and carriers for the colonial army was noted by some officers, who worried that the colonial relief forces were delaying themselves by their own terror campaign (Russell 1957: 45). Whether or not this was the case, in Cawnpore the departure of the comparatively moderate Havelock for Lucknow left Neill to formulate what he saw as just retribution for the *bibighar* atrocity. ‘No-one who has witnessed these scenes of murder, mutilation and massacre’, Neill wrote to a friend, ‘can ever listen to the word “mercy” as applied to those fiends ... Severity at the first is mercy at the end. I wish to show the Natives of India that the punishment inflicted by us for such deeds will be the heaviest, the most revolting to their feelings’ (Ward 2004: 454). In a bizarre reflection of the elision of tabooed foodstuffs and victimised bodies in Stallybrass and White’s accounts of *charivari*, Neill’s punishments involved breaking his prisoner’s caste before they were executed by sewing them into pigskins (hybridising them) (Chakravarty 2006: 41; Dalrymple 2006: 315), and forcing tabooed meat down their throats (Hibbert 1980: 210; Ward 2004: 454-6). The appalling theme of bodily ingestion and cannibalism in Neill’s reprisal punishments recurred in his so-called ‘strange law’, which consisted of making suspects lick clean a square foot of the *bibighar*’s floor before execution. According to Neill, this was ‘not a measure to be judged by ordinary rules’ but was, he argued, ‘well adapted to the present emergency’ (ibid.). It was, in fact, well adapted to a deep association in European popular culture between carnival, domestic/sexual taboo and the violent community expulsion of the Other.

The colonial state could not, however, allow this scandalous challenge to its own monopoly on violence to continue indefinitely, even during a period of insurgency. By the end of July 1857, Canning had become worried about the excessive violence of reprisals carried out by military commanders like Renaud and Neill, and issued a controversial ‘resolution’, intended as ‘a series of guidelines’ on how to interpret his emergency act XIV of the previous month. Canning recognised that British rule, as a supposedly ethical project, could not be maintained or justified by exceptional violence for any length of time, nor could he afford the practical costs of such measures (cf Dirks)<sup>\*\*\*</sup>. Renaud’s terror tactics of burning villages would, he feared, lead to ‘distress and even famine’ and might prompt a greater ‘spirit of animosity’ amongst Indian peasants, adding ‘to the other difficulties with which the Government will have to contend’ (cited in Chakravarty 2006: 42). But leaked to the Calcutta press, his resolution, interpreted as a conciliatory tactic, was universally condemned, and he was branded as ‘Clemency Canning’ by a British and colonial public still convinced that extra-judicial powers were essential (Maclagan 1962). Canning would never fully escape the stigma of ‘conciliation’, but in time public opinion (especially liberal metropolitan commentators) also condemned the excessive nature of the reprisals, and even some army correspondents started criticising the brutality of leaders like Neill. The spectacular violence of mobilised mourning and *charivari*, inscribed at the Cawnpore *bibighar*, would, inevitably, have to be replaced by different forms of commemorative text, signifying a reversion to violence as a state-prerogative enshrined in the rule of law.

#### Mutiny and Memory: Cawnpore and Official Commemoration

The *bibighar* did not remain standing long after the end of the rebellion. At a grand durbar in Cawnpore in 1860, Canning unveiled plans for a memorial to ‘honour the unhappy dust he could not save’ (Keene 1896: 26); the infamous ‘house of massacre’ had already been demolished, the surrounding area cleared of trees, and the well bricked over. In its place a new, more decorous architecture of commemoration announced itself in Canning’s choice of a memorial statue to mark the well. Putting the commission out to competitive bids from sculptors, the Viceroy had, initially, been shocked by some of the plans submitted:

A leading contender proposed a sculpture consisting of dead children lying at the feet of an Englishwoman leaning against a cross pierced by a sword. Appalled by this graphic reminder of the ‘horrors of 1857’ which Canning ‘wished to avoid’ the viceroy chose instead a figure sketched by Lady Canning’s girlhood friend, Baron Carlo Marochetti. It began as ‘a sort of Britannia figure’ that reminded Canning of ‘a half penny’ but evolved into a downcast marble angel holding palm fronds in its crossed arms (Ward 2004: 550).

In Canning's memorial scheme, and his horrified rejection of the first proposal, we find a figural expression of the official negotiation with the atrocity-narrative and the 'mobilised mourning' it sanctioned. By memorialising the well, the act of colonial remembrance centres not on the site of the *bibighar*, now completely effaced, but on a less ambiguous sepulchral space *alongside* the former massacre-site.

The surrounding edifice of the Cawnpore well memorial, designed by Henry Yule and completed in 1865, comprised an octagonal stone screen of gothic battlements that bore no relation to its Indian context, but was open to the sky, 'to maintain the sense of a well as much as possible' (Keene 1896: 26). Inside, Marochetti's marble angel stood on a pedestal marking the well, the only references to the violence of the *bibighar* being an inscription over the doorway that read: 'these are they which came out of great tribulation', and one around the capital which stated: 'sacred to the perpetual memory of a great company of Christian people, chiefly women and children, who near this spot were cruelly massacred [and cast] into the well below on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of July 1857' (ibid. 33). Around the monument the 'memorial garden' - a large landscaped park covering thirty acres - was laid out, and one of the veterans of the Cawnpore siege, a private Murphy of the 84<sup>th</sup> (who was soon 'ruined by drink') was employed as its caretaker. Paid for by a fine levied from Cawnpore's native inhabitants, the memorial garden was, for many years, banned to all Indians unless they possessed a special pass. Colonial visitors were expected to slow their carriages to walking pace, and no 'games or amusements' were allowed within the park (Ward 2004: 550).

We have already noted that the commemorative 'memorialising' of the Mutiny after 1860 shaped itself around a number of sacred sites in which a Mutiny-mythology of heroic suffering and courage could be preserved. By the 1880s and 90s, guidebooks to India show that these sites had combined in a popular 'pilgrimage-route', that included Cawnpore, Lucknow, Jhansi and Delhi (Goswami 1996; Baucom 1999). The authors of Mutiny memoirs and histories were evidently equally aware that their works might support this growing Mutiny tourism-industry and, in the case of Cawnpore, both Shepherd's *Personal Narrative*, and Trevelyan's *Cawnpore* include detailed maps and appendix-illustrations of the town's principal tombs and memorials. Indeed, the degree to which colonial historical texts augmented Cawnpore's extensive spatial re-inscription in an ornate geography of commemorative worship is exemplified in another eccentrically hybrid text,<sup>20</sup> Joseph Lee's *The Indian Mutiny and in Particular a Narrative of Events at Cawnpore, June and July 1857* (1893), in which visitors are directed around a circuit of Mutiny monuments that include the foundations of 'Wheeler's entrenchment', the adjoining All Souls Church, *Satichaura ghat*, the memorial garden and the cemetery at the European infantry barracks.

However, not all the sites marking the Mutiny pilgrimage operated in the same commemorative mode - and, in fact, their relative variation helped transform them in the peripatetic journeying of the Mutiny tourist into a progressive narrative trajectory of insurgency and counter-insurgency; betrayal and requital (Chakrabarty 2006: 41). The unspeakable violence of the Cawnpore massacres and the equally horrifying excesses of colonial reprisals that 'met atrocity by atrocity' (ibid.: 44) on the same ground demanded a different commemorative treatment from the equally famous siege-site of the residency compound in nearby Lucknow. In the latter, the process of commemoration involved both careful preservation *and* civic reconstruction: the buildings, scarred by bullets and cannon fire, were maintained intact, and their place outside historical time (in an eternal national-mythic temporality) confirmed by the Union Jack which flew constantly, without being lowered each evening, from the top of the residency building. At Lucknow, commemorative rebuilding also took the form of a defensive clearing operation, overseen by Colonel Robert Napier, in which large sections of the 'native town' were demolished, and straight communication roads constructed (replicating the disciplinary layout of European urban renovation projects such as Haussmann's Paris) (Oldenburg 1984: 31-3).<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, at sites such as the Ridge and the Kashmir Gate at Delhi, large monuments and well-tended graveyards provided focal points for an equally sophisticated and varied Mutiny 'memory culture'.

Recalling our introductory comments on Chakrabarty's three-fold schema of remembrance, we can see in the official memorialising of sites like Cawnpore and Lucknow, and the variation between them, the arbitrary and sometimes contentious nature of commemorative selection. As Chakrabarty notes, 'memorialising' is a historical process constantly open to dispute: 'It is the conversion of an

<sup>20</sup> Lee was the manager of Cawnpore's Railway Hotel, and included testimonials from satisfied customers, as well as directions to all the major memorials, in his historical account of the massacre. The text's subtitle betrays some of its fraught commercial priorities, and the reader is told that Lee is '*Now Proprietor of the Railway Hotel, Cawnpore, Formerly of the 53<sup>rd</sup>, Shropshire Regiment of Foot, Who was present two hours and ten minutes after the butchers completed their sanguinary work in "the house of massacre"*' (Lee 1893).

<sup>21</sup> Napier cleared almost two-fifths of the old city of Lucknow around the Residency site.

event into a metaphor of relevance to public life that makes for a degree of competition [...] as to which event should be memorialised' (Chakrabarty 2007: 1694). Taking into account the thick palimpsest of commemorative inscriptions that we have traced in the aftermath of the Cawnpore massacre, we might add, here, that particular places can become the sites of competing or contradictory commemorative processes over time as well. In the diachronic shifts and revisions of commemoration, official memorialising programmes slip again into a pattern of remembering and forgetting, and a partial repression of the 'memorised' by the 'memorialised' that is evocative of the selections and amnesias of personal grieving memory. A. H. Hallam Murray's account of his Mutiny pilgrimage-tour, *The High-Road of Empire* (1905), which took in the Mutiny-monuments at Cawnpore almost half a century after the rebellion, is strikingly indicative of these variations. Having visited the memorial garden and then *Satichaura ghat*, where he encountered a 'wild looking fanatical yogi' re-telling the story of the 1857 massacre to a crowd of Indian onlookers, Murray worriedly writes: 'We could not feel then that Marochetti's beautiful angel over the well represented the presiding genius of Cawnpore, but rather that the fiendish spirit which had animated Nana Sahib was only smouldering and fifty years of western secular education, as assimilated by the Hindus would not protect us from another outbreak' (Murray 1905: 154; Goswami 1996: 80). In this uneasy account the metaphorical function of Canning's memorialising project spectacularly fails, giving way to renewed fears of another insurgency as a latent metonymic trace of the conflagration of 1857.

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A similar commemorative ambivalence, presented as a need to remember and forget simultaneously, is apparent in the work of the British Raj's greatest literary chronicler, Rudyard Kipling. In fact, it is in the narrative stock of colonial fiction that we can, I think, come closest to an appreciation of the troubled *hauntological* repetitions and re-inscriptions of mournful colonial commemoration. For Kipling, the memory of 1857 was a complex creative problem - contemporary critics assumed he would eventually write *the* historical novel of the 'Mutiny' (Gregg 1897: 231), but Kipling himself resisted these expectations. In *Kim* he treats the rebellion as a distant memory (filtered through the consciousness of a loyal Indian veteran),<sup>22</sup> and in a letter to a friend Kipling stated explicitly that '57 is the year we don't talk about and I know I can't [...] I'd try in a minute if I felt I had a call that way but I'm rather convinced I have not' (Pinney 1990, 2: 219-20; Nagai 2005: 93). Kipling's documented unwillingness to revisit 'the black year' is intriguing, because it somewhat contradicts the fact that he had already published two newspaper articles with the 1857 rebellion as their theme, in the *Lahore Civil and Military Gazette*, in 1887 and 1888. Interestingly, both these examples of Kipling's early journalism anticipate *Kim* in their meta-historical (rather than historical-fictional) treatment of the rebellion, and involve a close authorial deliberation on the process of colonial remembrance. In contrast, some of the short stories collected in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, written contemporaneously with the newspaper pieces mentioned above, describe a different type of recourse to 1857: not as a willed meta-historical return registered on an extradiegetic level, but as a socially-symbolic aspect of their narrative form.<sup>23</sup>

The first of Kipling's articles, titled 'In the year '57' (1887), is set the Lahore records office, where Kipling's journalist-narrator orders a file of Mutiny documents and is carelessly handed 'all that is worth keeping of the Mutiny papers' by a diffident Indian 'Babu': 'The file opened slowly and fell apart into more than a hundred and fifty letters [...] stacked in any order. It was impossible to observe method in dealing with the mass. One was forced to dip as into a luckybag' [sic] (Kipling 1887). Published to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of the rebellion, Kipling's article is actually about the problems implicit in conventional archival historiography; but also reflects, in the trope of the muddled file, his suspicion of the bureaucratic abstractions of colonial rule. In the face of this archival confusion, Kipling reconstructs a myth of Punjab-school heroism that celebrates the deeds of administrators like 'the great John Lawrence', whose autocratic style of rule and untiring charismatic leadership become the standard against which a contemporary bureaucratized imperialism struggles to measure itself. The hallmark of this almost mystical leadership is John Lawrence's handwriting, which represents an unfading inscription of his authority: 'Nothing written by John Lawrence's hand should ever fade, and it seems quite natural, therefore, that the rugged characters should be black and fresh as ever. The ink he used must have been better than the ink powders of a degenerate today' (Kipling 1887: 4).

<sup>22</sup> For an influential critical discussion of the representation of the 1857 rebellion in *Kim*, see Said (1993: 159-96).

<sup>23</sup> I refer here to Fredric Jameson's concept of the political unconscious in literature as a possible model for the way Kipling registers some aspects of a 'mournful' historical consciousness of the 1857 rebellion in the formal and narrative structures of his short fiction (Jameson 2002).

Kipling's admiration for Thomas Carlyle is clearly evident in both the 'editorial' formal conceit of the article (reminiscent of *Sartor Resartus*) and the imperial hero-cult it subtends (Hagioannu 2003: 21). More pertinent is the fact that towards the end of the article Kipling presents history as a transcendent awareness of colonial masculine will articulated in monumental form:

Everything is incomplete, fragmentary, jumbled, leading nowhere. But after a while, as one turns the letters over the sense of the distance that separates the affable eloquent, impartial educated Present, from the hard-pressed, brutal and sternly practical past dies away. [...] It is no longer the rush of an evil dream that we are looking at, but a length of great living frieze [...] one face recurs and recurs; [that of John Lawrence] and on that face there is no outward sign of trouble, nothing but determination and sleepless vigilance. In the end peace will come back, and then, and not till then those lips will frame the question:- 'Will you be governed by the Pen or by the Sword?' (Kipling 1887: 4)

The rhetorical question with which the article ends refers to a statue of John Lawrence, holding both a pen and a sword, that stood, famously, on the Lahore Mall - thus Kipling's journalistic memorial ends by evoking a monumental counterpart, as it already has in the description of the Mutiny-archive as a 'great living frieze'. Characteristically however, Kipling also *limits* the metaphorical scope of his reflexively memorialising project. The narrative remains sceptical of obsessive concerns with the bureaucratic details of governance, and its preference for heroic personality, embodying an unambiguous sovereign merging of executive and legislative power, is registered metonymically in the strength of John Lawrence's rugged indelible 'writ' - as a grapheme of his sovereignty, and the ultimate letter of colonial law.

Kipling's journalistic thesis on Mutiny commemoration becomes less ambiguous in a second article, 'The Little House at Arrah' (1888), a travel-piece that describes a visit to the siege-site of Arrah. During the 1857 rebellion, a few Anglo-Indian civilians and army-officers and fifty Sikh policemen had barricaded themselves into a billiard room at Arrah, holding out against a much larger rebel force (see Halls 1893). As at Cawnpore, the besieged Europeans tried to produce a written account of their experience, memorialising the siege on the walls of the 'little fort'. The chronicle was written in pencil by the magistrate of Arrah, H. C. Wake and, after the siege ended and the survivors were saved, Wake's diary was whitewashed over, and lost as a historic text. The siege-graffiti at Arrah was not the experiential/forged trace of a massacre of Anglo-Indian women, as it was in Cawnpore, nor could its effacement be construed as an Indian attempt to cover up a 'crime'. Thus, rather than being transformed into a 'shrine' of the Raj, the Arrah house was, for years, used simply as accommodation for visiting officials. However, the site was commemorated retroactively, at the turn of the century, when Lord Curzon - motivated by a renewed imperialist interest in the 1857 conflict - ordered the restoration of Wake's graffiti-diary, and, failing to do so, marked the place with a memorial tablet.<sup>24</sup> As Kaori Nagai argues, 'the wall succinctly reveals that to commemorate is [a] process of erasure and re-inscription: the original text is wiped out and then sought after on the same spot' (Nagai 2005: 86).

In visiting the eponymous siege-site of Arrah in the late 1880s, Kipling's narrator retraces the archetypal journey of the 'Mutiny pilgrim'. Indeed, whatever the authorial voice says about colonial history, the physical act of 'return' to Arrah affirms the validity of the Mutiny-commemoration, whilst also avoiding its more disturbing associations at a site that is, emphatically, not Cawnpore. The book that Kipling had won as a poetry prize in the last term at his British boarding school, the United Services College, was G. O. Trevelyan's *The Competition Wallah* (1866), a chapter of which covers the heroic Arrah siege. Kipling quotes Trevelyan as an epigraph to his article, thus placing himself in a specific literary-historical lineage with the earlier work, and preparing the way for the story's meta-historical theme, in which his narrator is shown the Arrah house by an aged Indian house-servant who had experienced the siege himself. In the article, this 'native' intermediary, like the diffident Babu of 'In the Year '57' is an unreliable witness to (his own) history, and tells Kipling's narrator that he cannot remember the events of the siege exactly. The loyal but amnesia-prone veteran's sub-narrative is glossed, and his mistakes corrected, by Kipling's colonial narrator, and in the process a more expansive statement about the process of memorialising is made:

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<sup>24</sup> As Nagai notes, in Kipling's description of the room it is not a memorial tablet but a full set of the 'Codes of Law' that adorn the mantelpiece above the hearth where Wake's diary was inscribed (Kipling 1965-6 [1888]: 1977).

The French would have covered the building in a glass case, keeping intact each scar of musket and artillery fire. The American would have run a big fence around it and exhibited it at five cents per head – a pensioned veteran in charge. We, because we are English, we prefer to sweep it up and keep it clean and use it as an ordinary house in the civil lines, for the benefit of Her Majesty’s servants; just as if nothing worth mentioning had ever taken place in that unattractive compound (Kipling 1965-6 [1888]: 1977; Nagai 2005: 94)

Kipling’s unusual choice of Arrah (rather than the better-known Mutiny pilgrimage-sites at Cawnpore and Lucknow) as the basis for his narrative now becomes clear. This is because as an *un-commemorated* space it supports an index of national memorial differences in which ‘the English’ [sic] emerge as modestly unconcerned with history’s symbolic possibilities when compared with the commemorative vulgarity of rival French and American powers. We know, of course, that both these supposedly ‘un-English’ modes of remembrance were part of the Raj’s spectrum of commemorative practices: at Lucknow, as we have noted, the bullet-scarred Residency buildings were carefully preserved ‘as if under a glass case’, and at Cawnpore the memorial garden was protectively fenced and entrusted to a pensioned veteran. However, in the emerging formulation of Kipling’s political aesthetic, which depends so heavily on a cult of work as unselfconscious imperial duty, the idea of public ‘memorialising’ commemoration becomes strangely suspect, and must be disavowed. Here, the unwillingness to talk about ‘57’ starts to evoke, once again, the well-known silence of the traumatised or grief-stricken witness, but also anticipates a superstitious fear of imperial hubris and degeneration, articulated as a tragic ‘forgetting’, in later works like the elegiac poem ‘Recessional’.<sup>25</sup>

If Kipling deliberately complicates and disavows traditions of monumental remembrance in his early journalism, does he also deliberately misrecognise the unruly traditions of commemoration as ‘festive mourning’ that were triggered at sites like Cawnpore? Is it possible to trace signs of what Chakrabarty has termed the ‘unreadable’ phenomenological experience of grief in the Anglo-Indian communities of Kipling’s fiction? An answer, or its preliminary outline, can be found in Kipling’s personal experience of an event that many historians have seen as an uncanny ‘bloodless’ repetition of the colonial terrors of 1857 – the Anglo-Indian agitations of 1883-4 against the notorious Ilbert Bill.

Proposed during the liberal administration of Lord Ripon, the Ilbert Bill sought to secure the power of senior Indian magistrates to try court cases involving Anglo-Indians. The Anglo-Indian community vigorously opposed the Bill (arguing that unscrupulous Indian magistrates would be able to take advantage of Anglo-Indian women defendants, and thus evoking a ‘mobilising’ Mutiny-fear of Anglo-Indian women sexually threatened by Indian men). The so-called ‘White Mutiny’ included the organisation of an Anglo-Indian Women’s Defence League, and a mass colonial boycott of government functions, and was so effective that Ripon was eventually forced into a ‘concordat’ to modify the Bill, thus effectively annulling its power (Hirschmann 1980). The Ilbert Bill controversy can be located as another of those moments, like the 1836 Black Act agitations or the aftermath of the Cawnpore massacres, in which the normative *imbalance* between the ‘English citizen-subject’ and the ‘Indian subject citizen’ changes (Gopal 1953: 116), and Anglo-India responds by threatening an exceptional, ‘mournful’ departure from the conventional basis of law. ‘I can’t trust myself to write calmly about the “Bill”’, wrote Kipling to his uncle in June 1883, ‘Old stagers say that race feeling has never run so high since the Mutiny’ (Pinney 1990, 1: 35).

Even so, however much he deplored the bill, Kipling’s professional press connection with *The Civil and Military Gazette* meant that he would unwittingly support it, and become the focus of community censure himself. Like their earlier vilification of Canning’s ‘clemency’ resolution, the Anglo-Indian newspapers rigorously opposed the Ilbert Bill and in Lahore, Kipling’s paper, *The Civil and Military Gazette*, ‘began with stern disapproval of the measure’ (Kipling 1937: 50), but then started to support the government. Naïvely unaware that this (highly unpopular) support had been bought with a promise of a knighthood for the paper’s proprietor, Kipling found himself unexpectedly snubbed at the Lahore club: ‘As I entered the long, shabby dining-room [...] everyone hissed. I was innocent enough to ask: “What’s the joke? Who are they hissing?” “You,” said the man at my side. “Your dam’ rag has ratted over the Bill”’ (ibid.: 51). For Kipling, always ready to defend what he saw as a pragmatic, unspoken law of ‘disciplined work’ and social ‘fact’ in the face of (liberal) principle,

<sup>25</sup> Kipling’s ambivalent response to official processes of commemoration, and his displacement of a monumentalising aesthetic onto the masculine work of empire, may also draw on his Wesleyan family background and his familiarity with scriptural fable. His ambivalence towards monuments is reminiscent of the Christian tradition of *memento mori*, which is itself an anti-monumental or anti-decorative aesthetic incorporated into funerary architecture.

this must have been a devastating lesson in the price of community loyalty. In fact in this account of the tense club-room response to Kipling's betrayal we can trace, faintly, the persistence of cultural narratives of extra-judicial violence in the Anglo-Indian community itself.

A number of critics of Kipling's work have noted a strain of cruel slapstick that runs through his fiction (Cornell 1966: 133; Wilson 1977: 105; Paffard 1989: 37),<sup>26</sup> and several have ascribed this keen sense of the dynamics of persecution to Kipling's personal experiences in Lorne Lodge, the Southsea 'House of Desolation' where he boarded as a child, and was bullied by the landlady and her son. Angus Wilson sees 'power preserved by the brutal, irrevocable jesting justice' as a theme that links the schoolboys of the *Stalky and Co.* stories to Kipling's fictions of the North-west frontier: 'where the rough and ready practical joke may put things right in the simple, harsh world of boarding schools, torture and prolonged death agonies are authority's jest in Afghanistan' (Wilson 1977: 105). However, Kipling's experience in the Lahore club points to another, colonial source for his preoccupation with festive, jesting cruelty: the violence of exceptional counter-insurgency, as a form of nascent *charivari* or 'rough music' that has turned inwards to police the conduct-codes of Anglo-India. These forms of justice are prosecuted through the informal community of what Moore-Gilbert calls the Anglo-Indian 'corporation' operating 'in spite of, and sometimes in connivance with the institutional, alienating brutality of the colonial government' (see Moore-Gilbert 1986: 154-155), and are most apparent in the early short stories collected as *Plain Tales from the Hills*, which were written and published contemporaneously with the Mutiny articles discussed earlier.

I want to finish here by mentioning two of these short fictions, keeping in mind throughout the mournful dynamics of the Cawnpore *charivari*. In one of the short stories in *Plain Tales*, 'Pig', the archetypal animal of the inverted world of carnival returns in a colonial guise as the basis of an elaborate practical joke played on an Anglo-Indian official. The hapless official, named Pinecoffin, is tricked into filing numerous statistical and descriptive reports on pig populations in central India by a colleague called Nafferton, whom he has cheated in a horse deal. At last the persecuted Pinecoffin, who works in the 'Department of Castigation', realises, in a phrase that recalls the worst of Neill's reprisal punishments, that he has 'wrapped himself up in a pigskin without need ... and could not well set himself to right with his Government' (Kipling 1928: 230). Pinecoffin is finally forced to apologise to Nafferton, who has managed to manipulate the bureaucratic formalities of late imperialism into a punishment of Sisyphean pointlessness, and has, in the process irrevocably blackened Pinecoffin's professional and social reputation.

The energies of the colonial *charivari* are revived more brutally in other stories<sup>27</sup> from *Plain Tales*, most notably 'A Friend's Friend', in which the collective shaming of the transgressing outsider by an isolated Anglo-Indian community forms the bullying dénouement of the tale. In this story, the narrator curses an acquaintance, 'Tranter of the Bombay side', for asking him to play host to an English tourist called Jevon, who arrives at his station, and seems at first to be well-behaved and remarkably free of the liberal pieties that Kipling habitually ascribes to 'globetrotters'. However, after securing Jevon an invitation to the 'Afghan Ball' through the 'admirable' Mrs Deemes, Kipling's narrator is horrified when the visitor embarrasses both of them, and scandalises everyone, by getting drunk, and insulting the *memsahibs*. The punishment that the enraged men of the station devise for Jevon 'when the ladies had gone' (Kipling 1928: 274) is revealing because it encodes, at the level of slapstick, so many of the characteristic features of political exception as a grim 'festive' delegation of sovereign power: Jevon's face is blackened with burnt cork and tinted with gelatine in suggestive 'colouring' of his racial identity, 'this was punishment, not play, remember' (ibid: 275); his hair is filled with meringue-cream, and in a scene that evokes the bestialising capability of the *charivari* (and its subversive taboo of cannibalism) the hapless outsider has ham-frills tied around his neck and cutlet-frills secured on his wrists. He is then rolled up in red cloth and dumped on an Indian bullock cart leaving the town.

Jevon becomes here what Agamben terms the 'man without peace', the *friedlos*, whose life represents a 'zone of indistinction' (both excluded from and integral to the political) and whose banishment is the 'sovereign *nomos* that conditions every rule' (Agamben 1998: 104-11). As Kipling was painfully aware from his own experience at the Lahore club, the informal sovereignty of the Anglo-Indian community expressed itself most irrevocably in powers to ban, a prerogative frequently exercised across the 'exclusive' threshold of the club (Sinha 2001: 501). In these moments, evoked by

<sup>26</sup> H.G. Wells's review of *Stalky and Co.* is particularly noteworthy: Wells saw in *Stalky* 'the key to the ugliest, most retrogressive, and finally fatal idea of modern imperialism; the idea of a tacit conspiracy between the law and illegal violence' (Paffard 1989: 46).

<sup>27</sup> 'Kidnapped', in which a young colonial administrator called Peythroppe, a 'good young man [and] a first class officer', is forcibly (and violently) prevented from marrying a Eurasian woman, Miss Castries, by his superiors, is another of these texts that reflect an aesthetic of *charivari* and persecution in *Plain Tales*.

the mournful post-Mutiny remembrance of ‘atrocities’, the local playing out of the *charivari* becomes an act of banishment that rehearses and commemorates the more fundamental exclusions of the colonised from full representation in colonial law. In banishment, the figure of the *friedlos* (which can include transgressing Anglo-Indians) is not so much the subject upon whom colonial disciplinary violence is visited, but rather the (prototypically colonised) subject from whom all legal protection can be withdrawn, and who is thus made vulnerable to violent harm by anyone (Agamben 1998: 104-5). Agamben, tracing this figure in medieval European law, describes it as a form of living death, and we can perhaps see this state symbolically figured in Kipling’s naming of Pincoffin in ‘Pig’. An analogous condition of legal (neo-)mortality hangs over the final sentences of ‘A Friend’s Friend’. As Kipling’s narrator says, ‘the most extraordinary part of the tale is that never again did [we ...] see or hear anything of Jevon [...] He just went into the black darkness of the end of the night, and was swallowed up. Perhaps he died [...]’ (Kipling 1928: 276).

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