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MEMSAHIBS AND THE "SUNNY EAST": REPRESENTATIONS OF BRITISH INDIA BY MILLICENT DOUGLAS PILKINGTON AND BERYL WHITE

By Renate Dohmen

> Without making huge claims on behalf of nineteenth-century albums, they seem to me objects of particular artistic interest as well as *prima facie* social documents.
>
> —Marina Warner

MILLICENT PILKINGTON, THE DAUGHTER of a Lancashire industrialist in her early twenties, arrived in India in December 1893 and returned to England December 1894. We know about her trip, or her *Year's Frivol in the Sunny East* as she calls it, from the sumptuous album orné or commonplace book she compiled filling it with water colour sketches, photographs, autographs, dinner invitations, newspaper clippings, etc. The material is carefully arranged over forty-five album pages, is often framed by elaborate, hand-painted decorative borders, many of them in an Indian style. We know of the album because it was deposited in the Centre for South Asian Studies at Cambridge University by a descendant.

Beryl White was the daughter of John Claude White, the political officer in Sikkim, a princely state under British paramountcy at the Northernmost border of British India. She lived in Sikkim in her early twenties, but also travelled: between 1901 and 1904 she was a regular visitor to Calcutta and Simla and attended the 1903 Delhi Durbar held to commemorate the coronation of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra as Emperor and Empress of India. She also holidayed in Kashmir with her mother and went to Venice for her honeymoon. We know of these events and travels from two carefully collaged albums which contain a similar mix of carefully assembled water colours, photographs, autographs, and ephemera to the Pilkington album.[1] One of these albums ended up in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military archives at King's College London amongst the private papers of a college alumnus with no connection to her or her family that could be established.[2] The other one is in a private collection in Boston. Both the Pilkington and the White albums are rich and interesting cultural-historical documents and command considerable visual interest. They are

in exceptionally good condition and bear witness to a now mostly forgotten female tradition of album making that thrived in the nineteenth century.

While highly esteemed in their time, there has been little sustained interest in such albums on the scholarly front. This may in part be due to the fact that many albums have remained in private hands or have been broken up. But even albums that have remained intact and are in public collections have gathered dust. This overall neglect of the role albums played in nineteenth-century British visual culture is even more marked when it comes to women's albums. Elite women who whiled away their time in drawing rooms and pored over their albums as leisure time activity, could, after all, not lay claim to works of high artistic merit, nor did they engage formatively in the artistic culture of their time. Their albums hence tend to be considered objects of trivial pursuit of little general interest or merit.[3] However, a budding interest in photographic albums and the contribution of women's albums to the history of photography can be registered of late.[4]

This study aims to contribute to the newly emerging interest in women's nineteenth-century album culture. The argument is that the Pilkington and White albums represent unique and specifically female instances of representations of self in relation to empire, and allow for a detailed examination of how two Englishwomen negotiated the regimes of visibility in late nineteenth-century imperial Britain. This undertaking is argued to be of particular relevance because, as Philippa Levine reminds us, even though women were central to the colonial enterprise, certainly in the latter half of the nineteenth century, they are also notoriously absent from historical records of empire.[5]

Furthermore, the albums represent a rare visual statement of women who remained within the orthodox gender bounds of imperial Britain. In other words, while definitely privileged, neither Beryl White nor Millicent Pilkington qualifies as "intrepid women explorers and travellers who cast off traditional female roles and recognized in Empire the possibility of adventure unattainable at home" (Levine vii). The expectation thus is that examination of Millicent Pilkington's and Beryl White's albums offers perspectives suggestive of what might be called a more ordinary and "gender-compliant" spectrum of middle-class female experience in British India than the more extraordinary, frequently better-documented, and hence better researched, lives of women adventurer-travellers.[6]

But while, as Buzard informs us, the image of the Englishwoman in British India was polarized along the lines of "eccentric traveller and insulated Memsahib,"[7] (453) on closer inspection the memsahib pole to the adventurer-traveller turns out to be of a more complex nature than its ordinary characterisation suggests. In fact, any expectation of normativity soon becomes problematic, as the figure of the memsahib in British India reveals itself as highly conflicted and contradictory. Indrani Sen for example notes how the nineteenth century was obsessed with the figure of the white woman in British India and that, as Kipling's "much maligned memsahibs" attest, dismissive constructions, ranging from frivolous and adulterous to materialistic and racist, were circulating widely.[8] Add Maud Diver's defence of the memsahib as tragic exile, who heroically shouldered her share of the white man's burden, and the perceived equivalence of running a home in British India to commanding an empire, and a highly complex and ambivalent field of "memsahibness" becomes apparent.[9]

But there is a further twist to this tale. Feminist scholarship has sprung to the defence of the denigrated Englishwoman in the colonies and rightly sees this negative image rooted in the gendered, structural disempowerment of the white woman in the cultures of empire. This has given rise to a new trope of the memsahib. She is now defensively cast in the role

of the suppressed white colonial woman who, from her position of relative weakness, is predisposed to empathize with the suppressed colonial other. But, as Indira Ghose reminds us, this is too simplistic an assumption, as it frames her solely as victim, thus disavowing her position of relative power with regard to race, while also effacing her implication in empire (1–18). Ghose warns that "by constructing women as perennial victims in all spheres of life, we support the very male myths that fashion women as perennially passive" (9). And she cautions that if "we [feminist critics] wish to restore women as subjects of their own history, we cannot restrict their responsibility to the aspects that suit us" (9).

Taking these debates into consideration, any discussion of the albums must conscientiously explore their specificity and examine the representations of self and empire they present in relation to the many tropes of "memsahibness" in circulation, while avoiding any tendency to fall for them. The approach adopted in this discussion is therefore based on the premise that both women were inevitably affected by the prevalent notions of gender and femininity in circulation at the time and that both were, equally unavoidably, implicated in empire. The albums are thus assumed to offer a visible trace of the complex, often ambiguous "imaginative landscapes of imperial culture" (Ryan 20) from the point of view of two memsahibs. And while the personal format of these views allows for a close examination of individual negotiations of the trajectories of empire and femininity that intersect in the albums, we must also be aware of the nature of such documents. Visual objects such as these albums will not offer the kinds of insights into an individual's life and outlook which diaries or letters would provide.

The approach taken must therefore reflect this given and follow an indirect route, examining how languages of representation are "invested with meanings framed by and produced within specific cultural conditions and historical circumstances" (Ryan 19). Therefore, while we cannot be altogether certain of the specific and personal meanings invested in the albums, we can examine the kinds of images displayed and their arrangement in view of the visual language employed. And we must cast our net wide and look beyond deliberate representations, that is also take note of "chance residues" and unintended details that are often overlooked by their makers, which give such historical documents their specificity and often hold important clues.[10]

But before a detailed examination of the albums of Beryl White and Millicent Pilkington can be endeavoured, a brief introductory framing of the female tradition of album making will be offered to situate the albums in the larger context of Victorian culture.

1. Albums and the Performance of Femininity in the Drawing Room

WOMEN'S ALBUM MAKING WAS initially an aristocratic affair that soon filtered down the social hierarchy and became a status-enhancing tool firmly anchored in the culture of female accomplishment. This development was facilitated by the rise, from the late eighteenth century, of amateur culture and the increasing number of women who gained access to training in the arts. Drawing was soon considered the perfect accomplishment for a young woman embarking on the marriage market, since the role of an accomplished wife was to be a "civilising and polite influence on men returning home from the competitive world of work, commerce and politics" (Di Bello 41). Furthermore, mediated by the desirable image of the lady and the notion of taste as the measure of true gentility, the artistic proficiency of female members of a household increasingly became a pursuit that could underscore and

enhance a family's status. And while beneficial from a social point of view, amateur arts and album making, even if restricted by social etiquette and conventions, also offered a creative outlet for women.

Women's album culture thus proved a versatile medium that kept pace with technological developments. What began as a common-place book that proffered largely literary fare, sprinkled with sketches and water colours, soon added photographs to the mix in the most creative fashion. Cut up and combined with drawings and sketches, highly idiosyncratic photo-montages were all the rage. With the proliferation of the print industry, a wide variety of ephemera soon found their way into women's albums, highlighting the maker's skill and taste in the artful arrangements of sketches, photographs and ephemera. And as the popularity of album making increased, a commercial album market evolved that supplied ready-to-go visuals for the not-so-leisured or artistically inclined female makers. This led to a further diversification of album making, ranging from well executed and proficient albums such as the Pilkington and White albums, to half-hearted, haphazard assemblages demonstrating little personal interest or skill.

But women's albums were not a private affair. They were intended for the drawing room, that is "the most public of private spaces," (Di Bello 125) where they were "usually presented on a table or console in the parlor" (Higonnet, "Secluded Vision" 179) to be perused by callers. Since Romanticism had established the private sphere as the site of authentic individuality and favoured the parlour as the focus of social gatherings and exchanges, the drawing room was at the core of middle-class sociability. A development which inadvertently foregrounded women and their accomplishments.[11] Reflecting this straddling of public and private worlds, albums offered at least two levels of reading – a mainstream perusal for the general visitor, and a more intimate one for the circle of family and friends. Furthermore, the viewing of an album was frequently accompanied by a verbal commentary that would be adjusted according to the level of acquaintance with the viewer.

Albums thus served as the perfect tool for performing the self and even flirting when, for example, leafing through an album with a male visitor, while ostensibly all demure hospitality.[12] It is thus no coincidence that albums were frequently produced by young unmarried women, as is the case with the two albums that are the subject of this paper. The tasteful arrangement of an album should therefore be seen as part of the showcasing of a carefully choreographed femininity, which was also paraded via the dress code of the woman in question, and the considered arrangement of the domestic interior, especially the drawing room.[13]

Culturally women's album-making activity was a multi-layered affair that veered between social norms and expressivity, but also, and importantly, was constructed around women's self-commodification and a performativity of femininity put on display in the public-private drawing rooms of Victorian households. Women's album culture thus rehearses a new, middle-class feminine ideal of the lady, centered around an oblique self-representation of the "angel of the house" in carefully arranged album pages where the maker negotiated latest trends, demonstrated artistic skill, and showcased individual interpretations, all created for an imagined audience to be entertained in the drawing room.

But what happens to the lady, album culture, and drawing room performativity when she leaves the imperial centre? What can the albums of Millicent Pilkington and Beryl White tell us about the intersection of the domestic drawing room culture of the imperial centre and the discourses and representations of travel and empire?

2. *The Albums and their Makers*

Millicent Pilkington is the daughter of a well-to-do Lancashire industrialist.[14] She is born and bred in England, and spends a year travelling in India as a twenty-one year old, possibly to connect with family history, as her mother was born in Calcutta.[15] The album is mainly a travel album created to record her "sojourn in the sunny East" and has her family and friends back home as intended audience. Beryl White, by contrast, is born in Bengal, and her father is Political Officer in Sikkim.[16] She thus belongs to the upper echelons of society in British India, even if Sikkim is a poor and marginal district. When she starts creating her albums she is twenty-four years old and is permanently resident in British India. Thus, even though it can be assumed that she was sent to England for her education, like most children of the officers and administrators of the Raj, and most likely did not return to India until after the end of her schooling, she can be expected to have a different investment in British India than Millicent Pilkington, who remains a visitor even if she is staying for a whole year.

Millicent Pilkington's album begins in Ootacamund, or Ooty for short, the second most prestigious hill station in British India.[17] On the first pages we are presented with a view of a garden which provides the setting for a majestic driveway flanked by grand, classicizing vases on stone pedestals set against the backdrop of a densely wooded, mountainous terrain. The opposite page of this double-page spread combines a large water colour with a hand written commentary that fills the rest of the page. A most unusual addition which can be interpreted to stand in for the narrative voice of the person presenting the album in person to friends and family and other callers. The water colour is framed by two classicizing pillars on the right, which, as the commentary informs us, belong to the *Hotel de Paris* where Millicent Pilkington and her friends were comfortably installed. The sketch offers a view of an extensive and well kept garden with colourful flower beds merging into rolling hills that melt into a misty blue horizon. Embedded in the hand written commentary we also find a small sketch of the vehicle that brought the luggage up to the hotel, adding local colour to the page (Figure 18).

These initial pages already give us an indication of what the album is going to offer: water colors and sketches combined – most unusually – with writing. The text that runs through the entire album records daily happenings in an amusing manner that never strikes the intimate tone of diary entries. After all, albums are the stuff of parlour entertainment and are intended for collective consumption and public display.

In a similar vein Beryl White's first page sets the stage by declaring her presence in Simla, the summer capital of the Viceroy of India and the most prestigious hill station in British India (Figure 19).The page also showcases the main elements of the album – a mix of photos, water colours, autographs both pasted and original, and ephemera. It does not feature a written commentary and is thus representative of a more customary approach to album making.

But apart from their formal characteristics the fact that both albums set the stage in a British hill station is significant. Hill stations were highly charged places characterized by Picturesque, green "naturescapes" reminiscent of England, considered "homes from home." This is where the British went to escape the heat of the plains, and where they could entertain the illusion, lulled by the rolling hillscapes and cool mountain climate, of having escaped from India altogether. And since the Viceroy of India declared Simla the official summer

Figure 18. (Color online) Pilkington Album, Ooty. Courtesy of the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

capital of the British government in India,[18] hill stations became firmly associated with British crown rule in the public imagination.

Furthermore, the topography of hill stations reinforced imperial ideologies of British racial difference and superiority by geographically separating the living areas of the sahibs and their native attendants according to altitude: European living quarters were placed above the native areas that were preferably altogether invisible from the terrestrial vantage points occupied by the members of the British Raj.[19]

With regard to Ooty, Judith Kenny for example writes that "the British built superior class residences on the crests of the hills" the altitudinal positions of which were "indicators of the salubrity of residential sites safely distanced from 'unhealthy' Indian settlements" (706). She also reports that "British vantage points opened vistas to the surrounding hills and the lake below while closing off for most part the view of the 'natives'" (706).

This topographical arrangement is borne out by the opening pages of both albums which, despite marked differences in their overall design and layout, do not show any sign of the sizeable native population which ensured that the hill station experience was a pleasurable one for the members of the Raj. The seemingly innocent landscapes presented in the opening pages of both albums therefore need be recognized as highly charged colonial statements. They are firmly rooted in a tradition of the Picturesque which expanded from its initial

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Figure 19. (Color online) White Album (King's) Page 1. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives.

focus on the landscapes of the British Isles, seen as repositories of a national sentiment, to the mastering gaze surveying colonial lands. Ever since Reverend Gilpin's late eighteenth-century illustrated drawing manual-cum-guidebook *Observations on the River Wye*, the art of Picturesque sketching has been closely intertwined with notions of travel and discovery. A trend that was, with the rise of tourism and with colonial expansion, taken ever further afield and received an additional impetus with the arrival of photography and the widespread consumption of photographic images of Picturesque sites it fuelled. Photography thus further naturalized the tourist-spectator experience of the Picturesque as a mode of viewing the world. It conveniently combined

> . . . the learned pleasures of the touristic as defined by the visual objectification or the conversion of the cultural Other into spectacle; the separation of the tourist from the toured; and the identification of the tourist with a figure of mastery such as the explorer, colonialist soldier, or anthropologist. (Strain 72)

It is thus not surprising that the Picturesque became the dominant mode of representing empire.[20] It allowed for the negotiation of proximity and distance by maintaining a safe

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distance of mastery in the face of deep immersion in alien lands such as India. Hill station topography and its differentiation of European and native settlements along a high-low gradient perfectly reflects this Picturesque management of alterity which securely fixed the imperial subject in the position of the sight-seeing spectator who purviews the world from an elevated spectatorial position. In consequence the Picturesque turned the world into a treasure-trove of sights that were safely visitable and ultimately collectable. This view was re-inforced and ideologically underpinned by scientific claims of the essential cultural and racial superiority of the European observer.[21] Now "the foreign context became possible and pleasurable, with the individual tourist's experiences, souvenirs, and postcards then fitted into a personal collection which reflected the culturally-constructed and scientifically-buttressed world view" (Strain 80).

But how do these albums fit into the colonial culture of visual globetrotting and of collecting sights? The initial pages of both albums certainly adopt, as we have seen, the colonial Picturesque by showing hill station views devoid of "India." But is this mode of representation used consistently and what differences, if any, are to be noted between the albums?

3. Two Views of British India

MILLICENT PILKINGTON HAD A great flair for sumptuous decorative borders rendered in an Indian style that give a grand and luxurious setting to a number of her pages (Figure 20). Such framings are mostly absent from Beryl White's albums. She only employs a few minor decorative flourishes which don't particularly reflect an Oriental theme (Figure 21).

Millicent Pilkington also frequently adds small sketches of local color in addition to her text and photographs, featuring snake charmers, elephants, Indian architecture, Indian servants in uniform, and other locals, alongside depictions of hunts and other pastimes such as balls - in short the stuff of spectacle and entertainment (Figures 20, 22, and 24).

Again, such sketches are summarily absent from Beryl White's album. Her watercolours are exclusively devoted to landscapes and there is no reference to snake charmers or smiling sari-clad native women, nor are there references to Picturesque Aboriginals to be found.[22] In other words Beryl White's album features an India devoid of flowery borders, servants in neat uniforms, and sketches of Indian architecture.[23]

But while Beryl White's album avoids references to native India, she is attuned to the wider world of king and country. Her album regularly includes newspaper cuttings about political events relative to empire, such as the end of the Boer War. On another page we find a report about the outbreak of hostilities between Japan and Russia. And she devotes several pages to the so-called Younghusband expedition her father was involved in, a contentious invasion of Tibet driven by fear of Russian influence and a desire to see the forbidden city of Lhasa.[24]

As her album demonstrates, Beryl and her mother were in Calcutta during much of the Tibetan campaign. They were busy having a good time, as dance cards and pasted invitations testify. But Beryl also pastes a telegram from her father on campaign close-by, which reports that he has safely arrived in Khamba Dzong in Tibet, where, so he reports, it is very hot and where he and the troops disconcertingly are having trouble obtaining water. However, her representations of wider political events are highly selective. She fails to mention, for example, the severe famine which racked India in 1903 during the Delhi Durbar which

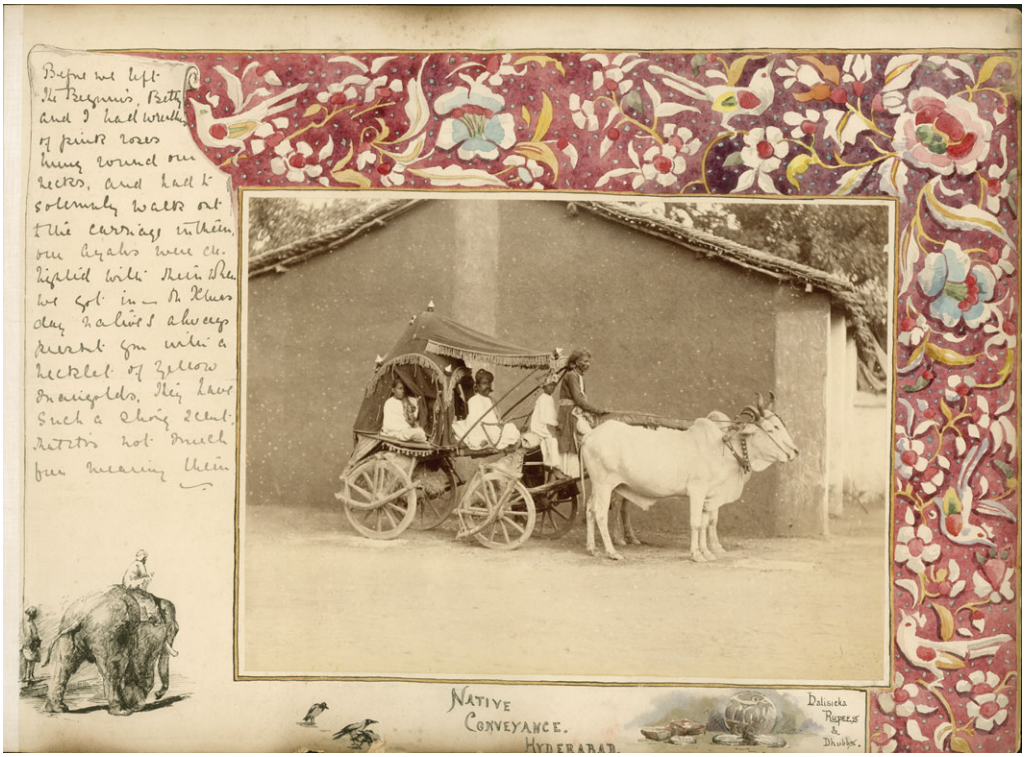

Figure 20. (Color online) Pilkington Album, "Mughal border." Courtesy of the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

features prominently in one of her albums.[25] The extravagance of these celebrations in the face of starvation drew sustained criticism in India and in the international press, none of which she mentions.

Thus despite the noted similarity in approach to representing the hill station experience and the evocation of racing as a prominent hill station entertainment (Figures 23 and 24), the albums show a marked difference with regard to how British India is represented. I want to suggest that this divergence is due to the difference of the makers' relationship to British India. Millicent has a "jolly" time during her year's frivol in the "shiny East," as she describes India in her album pages (Figure 30). She thoroughly enjoys the Picturesque sites and the shopping, and gives us the unperturbed tourist's perspective of the affluent traveller who moves between spectacular hotels and residences, forever caught up in a whirl of pleasurable activities such as hunting, balls and dinners. Her vision of India is one of fun, parties, and Picturesque natives that are entirely unthreatening and entertaining.

Beryl White presents us with quite a different view. While her album documents her participation in the same kind of activities in places of similar repute and grandeur, she mostly omits representations of native India. She also, for the most part, eclipses her everyday existence, that is the life she leads when she is not travelling, and is living with her parents

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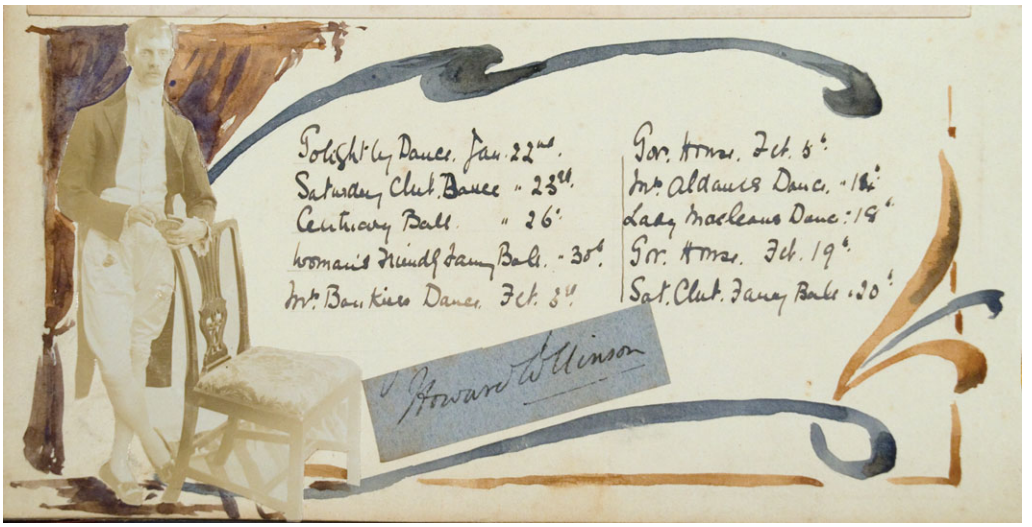

Figure 21. (Color online) White Album (Boston), Border Decoration. Courtesy of the Collection Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA. Photocredit Paul Cyr, Salisbury, MA, USA.

in remote Sikkim. Characterized by an extreme and varied geography, ranging from snow capped mountains to tropical fauna, this northernmost region of India is afflicted with torrential rains for great parts of the year, and is topographically greatly isolated from the rest of British India. Her everyday life is thus lived in the thick of native India and lacks the comforts and glamour of the Raj.

In a letter to his mother Lt.-Col. F. M. Bailey,[26] who, while in Sikkim, enjoyed the hospitality of John Claude White and his family, gives the following account of life at the Residency:

> Yesterday afternoon we called and had tea at the Whites and dinner there. A big dinner party with only four ladies. . .The White's have a lovely garden and beautiful servants with . . . . peacock feathers in their hats. And dressed in gorgeous Thibetan clothes. And they have got six Thibetan dogs. . . . This is a terrible place for leeches but I haven't had any yet. But at tea at the Whites yesterday one was found on a dog and one crawling across the carpet and the men who are sleeping in the ground are covered with them. (Bailey, 22 June 1903, n. p.)

This is the kind of information we do not get in the album which speaks of ballroom entertainment, hunts, and theatre outings. Her everyday life is thus markedly different from the events her albums record and celebrate which underscores our initial framing of women's album culture. As we have seen, albums, even if they come along in a seemingly private and intimate mode, are everything but private diaries. Rather, they are private-public statements aimed at drawing room entertainment, or – in the case of Millicent Pilkington – intended as an *aide-mémoire* for her trip, produced with her family and friends in Britain in mind.

Not surprisingly therefore Beryl White's album chooses to present a carefully orchestrated image of herself that is much grander than her daily existence. And it crucially

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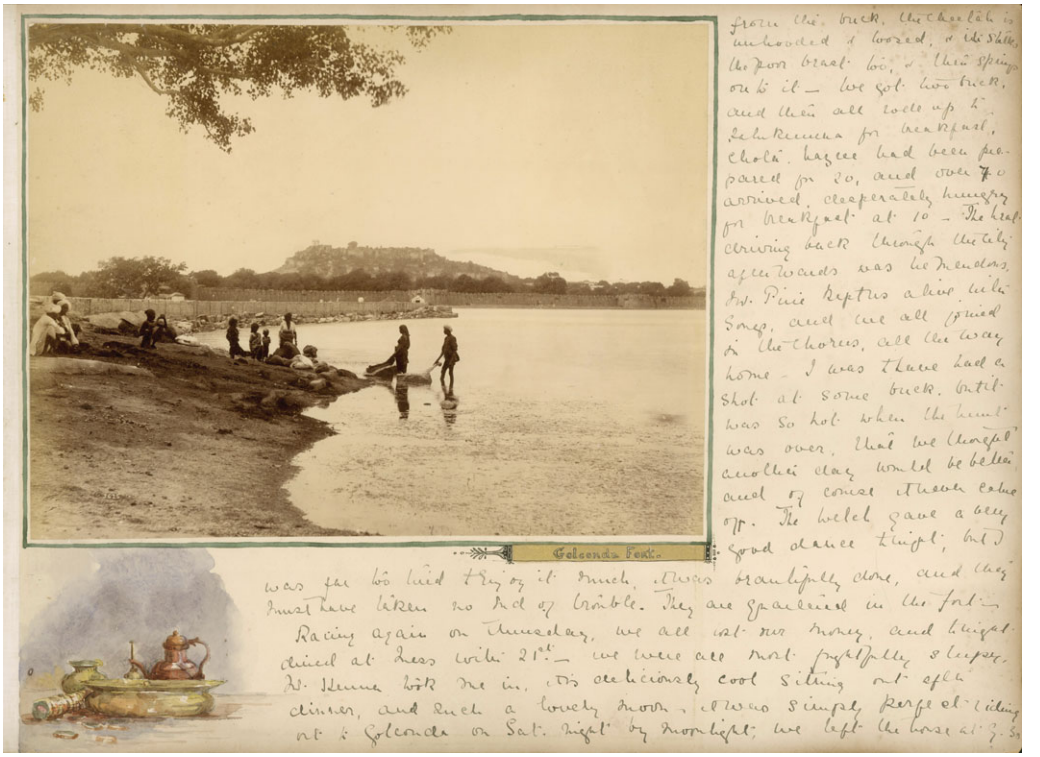

Figure 22. (Color online) Pilkington Album, Picturesque Sketches. Courtesy of the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

reflects her status as a member of the political elite, even if her father's salary, as Political Resident of the poorest of British India's districts, speaks of the marginality of Sikkim in the colonial scheme of things. For her, sojourns in Simla and Calcutta are therefore inevitably highlights and rather different from what can be assumed about her daily life in Sikkim.

And a further context needs to be considered here. Her staged absence of the native environment and the resulting lack of Picturesque representations of India is even more striking given that her father, rather than repeating the usual tropes of the moral depravity and inferiority when referring to the local population, writes of trusted Sikkimese friends in his autobiographical account of his working life in British India.[27] Would it be feasible that this, by the standards of the Raj, unusual stance could have rubbed off on the daughter? Could her album's lack of Picturesque representations of safely distanced natives be more than a talking up of her Indian existence intended to glamourize her everyday life? Should it be understood as a conscious avoidance of a normative view demanded by drawing room etiquette? In other words could this be an expression of discomfort with the Picturesque as a visual mode and the message it entails?

Here Anglo-Indian literature offers yet another point of reference.[28] While this is not the place for an in-depth consideration of the literary production of the Indian Empire, I

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Figure 23. (Color online) White Album (Boston), Races. Courtesy of the Collection Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA. Photocredit Paul Cyr, Salisbury, MA, USA.

want to offer a passage taken from the novel *The Swami's Curse* written by Fanny Penny, a romance writer who frequently set her stories in British India, as possible explanation for this disavowal of the Indian presence in India.[29]

This is how the author presents her fictional character Heather, a young woman who is on her way to India: "Heather knew nothing of how the people of India lived. Like most English girls who go out to their parents in the East, her eyes and ears were, unknown to herself, carefully guarded. She saw and heard nothing of the private life of the Hindu" (Penny 11).

What this passage suggests is that the condition of the memsahib in British India, or, more specifically, the Indian-born offspring of parents living in British India who was sent, as was customary, for education to England and has returned as an adult to join her parents, has learnt to – and must – blank native India to safeguard her moral superiority and purity, in short her femininity.[30] And it seems that while, as Barbara Bush informs us, English women "were seminal in the construction of whiteness and superior gender identities and the policing of sex and race borders," (Bush 90) this applies even more to daughters of empire (Figure 25), who were considered to be particularly at risk from contamination by India

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Figure 24. Pilkington Album, Hill Station Hunt. Courtesy of the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

and needed to be especially on guard. The colonial Picturesque, so far discussed in terms of visual representations of empire and hill station topography, must thus be recognized as more than a regime of vision. Rather it is a mode of cultural perception that also informed "Anglo-Indian" literary production, especially with regard to memsahibs.[31]

But a closer look at Beryl White's album reveals that while she is avoiding Picturesque views of India, native India is not absent altogether. In the margins of the pages recounting her holiday in Kashmir a tentative, slightly out of focus visual encounter with the other India surfaces, suggestive of a questioning engagement, a desire to look and a sense of recognition of this native context.

There is the page decorated with the heading "*Srinagar*" which shows eight photographs mainly of buildings and Dal Lake. While some of these images show members of the local population on boats, they seem more incidental to the image and are, in any case, too small-scale to properly register a presence. But one of the images depicts a street scene and in the centre of this image, right in the foreground, we see an Indian child running towards the camera, looking at the person who is taking the image (Figure 26). The photograph breaks the rules of pictorial convention, and depicts a visual and human engagement from both sides beyond spectacle. In a similar vein, on one of the next pages we find the top half of

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Figure 25. White Album (Boston), Father and Daughter. Courtesy of the Collection Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA. Photocredit Paul Cyr, Salisbury, MA, USA.

the page taken up by a water colour of Dal Lake painted in "wet on wet" technique. The lower half of the page is captioned *To Islamabad*. It shows three photographs of local scenes and buildings. One of these images shows a local male who fills most of the image, looking directly and intently at the viewer. Furthermore, below the figure is a caption with a name (Saboo?) (Figure 27). A further page, again with photographs of local scenes mainly of the lake, also shows one image depicting four Indians in full view, two of whom, a young child and a man, occupy and fill the foreground of the picture. They are not looking at the viewer but are engaged with each other. The child is in the nude, and wet, and must have been bathing in the lake. The man is bending down to the child and attending to it (Figure 28). A very human scene depicted with warmth, devoid of distancing and spectacularizing Picturesque conventions. A further page, called *En route to Kashmir* shows a large water colour and four smallish photographs, one of which features the side of a house boat. Gordon Henry Hyslop, her husband to be, with whom she is holidaying together with her mother, is looking out of the window of the house boat, leaning against the window frame. At the same time an Indian servant is standing on the deck of the boat, directly outside the same window. This positioning visually places both men in extraordinary physical proximity (Figure 29). The

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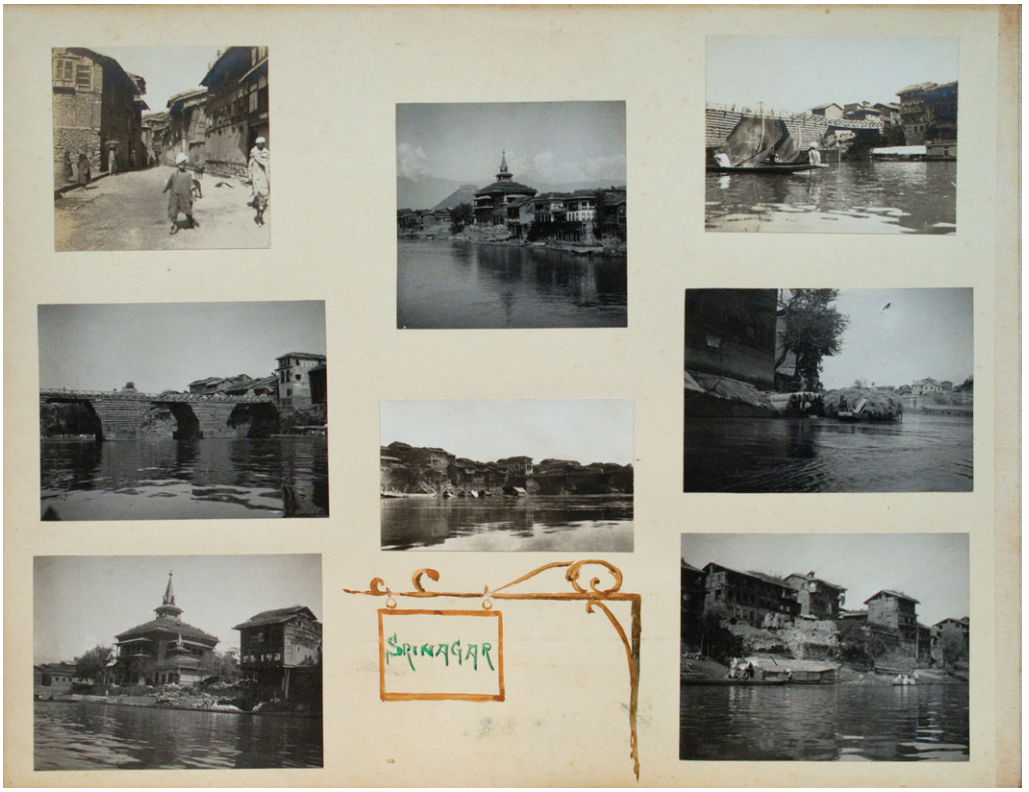

Figure 26. (Color online) White Album (Boston), Upper left corner: A child is running towards the camera. Courtesy of the Collection Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA. Photocredit Paul Cyr, Salisbury, MA, USA.

image thus stages a striking native framing of Hyslop in a manner which suggests a cautious questioning of the nature of the colonial relationship as an undercurrent of the image of her husband to be.

A further point to note is that these unusual images which quietly query the colonial relationship happen in a tourist setting, when, rather than partying in hill stations or in Calcutta, that is at the heart of British India, Beryl White is on vacation, enjoying the sights of Kashmir. It is as if the tourist identity allows her to make these images and to show them to us, the viewer; that is her tourist persona allows her to transcend her conditioning as dutiful daughter of empire who "cannot see," or refuses to see in the prescribed mode of the mastering gaze which disavows the "other." It is as if the tourist experience permits a respite from the learned condition of overlooking the local environment she is immersed in on a daily basis. But tellingly, when native India does creep into her album as part of her tourist experience, she does not opt for Picturesque enjoyment or spectacularization, but strikes a human and tentatively reflective stance.

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Figure 27. (Color online) White Album (Boston), Saboo? Courtesy of the Collection Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA. Photocredit Paul Cyr, Salisbury, MA, USA.

Are we thus seeing a loosening of the memsahib disavowal, a stepping aside from the ideological perspectives expected of a respectable British woman in India? A surfacing of the ambivalences which characterized the position of the memsahib in the colonial context succinctly described by Indira Ghose as "colonized by gender, but colonizer by race"? (5)

Sara Suleri for example articulates a condition she calls the "feminine Picturesque."[32] According to Suleri turning the colonial environment into pretty water colours was not just a way of domesticating the foreign landscape, but it also kept the deep colonial anxiety at bay, which, so the argument goes, women felt more acutely than their male companions. And such accomplished activity also functioned to keep colonial women in their appointed place – at the margins of colonial power while serving as "key cultural signifier for articulating a colonial hierarchy of race" (Sharpe 4). But this studied overlooking, according to Suleri, represented an intolerable psychic burden shouldered by the white female in silent and suffering passivity. Women, she argued, "became the symbolic casualty to the deranging costs of colonial power" (Suleri 75) and suffered under the "psychic strain of self-censorship" (75). Her only release was to sketch in the ambivalent and psychologically charged mode of

Figure 28. White Album (Boston). Image center left: Man and Indian child. Courtesy of the Collection Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA. Photocredit Paul Cyr, Salisbury, MA, USA.

the "feminine Picturesque" where "the Anglo-Indian woman herself attempts both to raise and to repress such questions" (76).

Suleri thus casts the imperial woman essentially as victim, who secretly rattles the cage while conforming to the role of the memsahib. She articulates these thoughts on the basis of autobiographical narratives. As has already been stated, the tendency to posit imperial woman *per se* as more sympathetic to the colonial other due to her own subjection to gendered "othering" is problematic. But should Beryl White's images at the margins of her Kashmiri album pages be seen as the kind of slippage which confirms the existence of such a condition among Anglo-Indian women? Or are we witnessing a purely individual reflection on a lived context in relation to dominant ideologies?

4. Art and Status in British India

SO FAR WE HAVE LOOKED AT the history of women's album culture and the Picturesque in relation to the tourist gaze and have examined Millicent Pilkington's and Beryl White's albums in view of representations of empire. But what about the performativity of femininity

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Figure 29. (Color online) White Album (Boston). Image bottom right: G. Hyslop and native servants on a houseboat. Courtesy of the Collection Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA. Photocredit Paul Cyr, Salisbury, MA, USA.

and the associated claim for social status that is embedded in women's album culture in the colonial heartland? As album culture flourished in Britain it is not surprising that it should have found its way to British India, even if, apart from the two albums under discussion, no further trace of a British Indian album culture seems to have survived. The question is, are we looking at the same tradition when album making finds its way to the colonies? Or has the practice changed in transit? Let us begin to find answers by examining possible motivations behind the making of these albums.

We know that Millicent Pilkington came from an industrial family which, according to an unpublished family history, sought to "establish themselves in society" (Pilkington? 86). The same source also tells us that at the turn of the century "those engaged in manufacturing industry were still regarded as beyond the social pale, something which applied to the Pilkingtons as a whole" (Pilkington? 86). Given these social aspirations a family emphasis on female accomplishments and a determined endorsement of female album culture does not seem surprising. As we have seen, women's albums make a persuasive case for social rank and cultural sophistication on behalf of the whole family. The daughter travelling in India

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would therefore very plausibly have been encouraged to keep an album of her journey. This assumption is supported by an inscription on Millicent Pilkington's first page, where she reports that she should have started her album on arrival in India. She confesses to "having put the evil hour off," which suggests an element of obligation with regard to making the album.

Beryl White in contrast did not have a manufacturing background that caused her difficulties being accepted into society. Her father's position securely situated her as part of the "heaven born" – the social elite of British Indian society.[33] But there were status issues at play too. While her father's position placed the family in this societal context, John Claude White had not gone to public school and was not from the right social background to have attained such a position. According to family lore he was made to feel it.[34] There would therefore be an argument from Beryl White's side as well to shore up the social status of her family, also in view of bettering her marriage prospects.

But there is also evidence that she genuinely enjoyed sketching and that this interest in the arts was shared by her aunt Ada Ranken, who also lived in British India.[35] We for example find a water colour by her aunt in the Boston album, indicating their shared interest. There is also a reference in a letter[36] addressed to Beryl's grandmother in Britain describing her frustration at not making much progress in her aesthetic endeavours while in Kashmir. Beryl reports that it was the suggestion of her aunt to take art lessons with a painting teacher that helped her get unstuck.[37] It seems Ada Ranken recommended the teacher based on personal experience, which suggests an interest in amateur artistic activity among the women in her family that was actively pursued in British India.

But enjoying the arts and exchanging images as tokens of friendship does not contradict a desire to gain societal benefit from displaying artistic ambition and ability. But did society in British India operate in the same way as "at home" in Britain? Did the members of the Raj read such displays of artistic skill in the same manner as in Britain? This is a difficult question to answer. British-Indian society resolutely revolved around fine differentiations of status enshrined in a complex "order of precedence" that determined the social protocols in British India, yet the self-identity of the Raj was firmly rooted in athletics rather than aesthetics. The question thus is whether social status and matters of taste were linked to societal status in the same way. While the scope of this question goes beyond this discussion the fact that Beryl White produced two albums between 1901 and 1904 would be a remarkable feat should album culture have been of little relevance in British India.

But let us return to the question of performativity. As we have seen, in the colonial heartland staged artistic arrangements served as indirect representations of self and lay claims to the feminine ideal of the lady. But what about direct representations of the albums' makers? How do both women present themselves to their audiences, and how do their direct representations of self fit in with our theme of women and empire?

Millicent Pilkington opens the album with an image of herself, and we see her in group photos and carried on the back of a porter across a treacherous stream (Figure 30). Other than that she presents mainly group photos, often of such large gatherings that it is nearly impossible to make out whether she is also in the picture. The main focus of the album is on grand houses, impressive landscapes, races, and sumptuous Picturesque views of India and of Indians.

Beryl is equally depicted as part of group gatherings, but also presents herself as loyal daughter, as bride, in eighteenth-century costume and on horseback. In addition she also, and

Figure 30. (Color online) Front page of the Pilkington Album. Courtesy of the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

significantly, presents herself as an exhibiting artist in both the albums that have come down to us, showcasing exhibition announcement cards and newspaper clippings about her work. From these clippings we know that the Darjeeling Fine Arts Exhibition in 1902 "Highly commended" her water colour *Jammoo, Kashmir* and that her water colour of the Sikkimese camp during the Delhi Durbar was singled out "as the most interesting picture" in the 1903 Darjeeling Fine Arts Exhibition even if it did not win one of the coveted prizes. In the 1901–03 album she also presents herself in person on the "exhibition" page. Two photographs show her crouching on the ground outdoors with the family dogs who, in one of the images, are attentively looking at her, and in the other image one of the dogs is performing a trick. This page in addition shows a photograph of a hilltop view of Darjeeling, another, if less prominent, hill station, and a pasted drawing of a pianist at the piano (not by her), suggestive of a piano bar, and of fun and entertainment (Figure 31). This is the only page in the album where she exclusively shows photos of herself rather than a photo of herself and a close-up of sorts surrounded by several photos where she features as part of a group of family and friends. This invites the question whether the identity of the accomplished amateur, like the one of the holidaying tourist, relieves her from the serious duty of being a daughter of empire, and gives her some scope to be herself.

5. Conclusion

AS WE HAVE SEEN, BOTH ALBUMS attest the accomplishment of their makers and show sophisticated arrangements and combinations of photography, water colour sketches and other personalizing touches, with Millicent Pilkington's album particularly rich in decorative

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Figure 31. (Color online) White Album (King's) Beryl White with dogs and the 1902 exhibition announcement. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives.

and narrative detail. The albums can thus be affirmed as successful performances of femininity that satisfy the requirements for genteel entertainment and presentation. When it comes to the representations of empire, however, we noted a marked difference, which we framed in terms of the tourist eye and the India-born daughter of empire who was assumed to have returned to India after her schooling "at home." We thus found that Millicent's engagement with India is a happy tourist affair, whereas Beryl's album presents a more complex picture that reveals a questioning undercurrent in her relations with British India. These differences were held to demonstrate how discourses of gender and femininity that originate in England were variously intersected with notions of race, rank and empire as they travelled out to the colonial periphery and serve as a reminder of the multiple, shifting and often conflicted ways in which identities are constructed.[38] And while these albums allow us an important insight into women's visual culture in British India, they also raise many more questions that are beyond this discussion.[39]

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NOTES

1. For the purposes of this discussion I will not differentiate between the content of the two albums and treat them as "one."
2. It was found among the papers of Lt. Col. John Arthur Edward Heard (c. 1908 – 1985), who had trained as an engineer at King's College London 1926 – 1929. He was employed as Royal engineer from about the 1940s and had worked as air conditioning engineer in India prior to this appointment. During the Second World War he served in India as commanding officer engaged in counter propaganda. The album is listed in his papers as "Also, photographs and watercolour paintings of India, provenance unknown, 1901–1903." The album is showcased on the Kings College website at http://kcl.ac.uk/about/history/archives/india/.
3. See also Higonnet "Secluded Vision" Expanding Discourse, 171–72.
4. See for example Patrizia Di Bello's *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*. She asks questions about the contribution of women's albums to the history of photography, especially photo montage, and seeks to situate female album making in the contexts of early to mid nineteenth century Victorian drawing room culture. The recent exhibition *Playing with Pictures. The Art of Victorian Photocollage* held at The Art Institute of Chicago October 10, 2009 – January 3, 2010 also demonstrates a new interest. See Siegel.
5. See Levine vii.
6. See for example Casteras.
7. Memsahib was the general mode of address for a married white European woman living in colonial India.
8. See Sen 160.
9. See Sen 12, 16, and 33.
10. See Ryan 17.
11. See Di Bello 40.
12. See Di Bello 64.
13. Di Bello speaks of a "domestic theatre in which ... femininity was displayed as a highly skilled performance" (124).
14. Millicent Pilkington (1872–1960) was the daughter of Thomas Pilkington, son of William Pilkington, one of the founders of the hugely successful Pilkington glass works at St. Helens on Merseyside.
15. The 1881 census lists Millicent's mother Catherine C. S. Pilkington as born in Calcutta.
16. Beryl White was born on 6th June 1877 in Burdwan, a town of British India about 67 miles north west of Calcutta. She died 1954 in Britain.
17. See Kenny 699.
18. Simla was declared the official summer capital of the Raj in 1864.
19. Sahib is a respectful form of address for a European man in British India.
20. But there is already a colonial slant to the Picturesque well before the Picturesque eye roams beyond the British Isles: The framing of the landscapes and monuments of Britain in terms of the national established a hegemonic and colonizing discourse of Britishness which set a precedent for Picturesque travel and the colonial gaze of empire. As Copley reminds us the sentimentalized representation of the Scottish Highlands in the face of political repression and economic exploitation in the early nineteenth century must be recognised as "a hegemonic cultural manifestation of the English colonising presence" (Copley and Garside 6–7).
21. While the Picturesque and its distancing modes were perfectly suited to imperial purposes and hence readily employed, it must not be forgotten that distancing regimes per se have been argued as the core visual condition of modernity. Schivelbusch for example argues panoramatic vision as symptomatic for the modern condition of visuality which separates the viewer from the objects of his/her gaze. See also Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*. And while since Foucault modernity and surveillance have been recognized as closely allied, Suren Lalvani has pointed out how the emphasis on surveillance

has tended to lose sight of the spectatorial dimension of modern visuality. He argues that surveillance and spectacle are both determining poles of the modern regime of the visual. The condition referred to as the colonial Picturesque should therefore be seen as a specific expression of a larger condition of visuality.

22. Milicent Pilkington devoted a page of her album to the Todas, a hill tribe that was integral to the spectacle of the "hill station experience."
23. The only exception here is a water color of Delhi's Kashmiri Gate, an important site of the mutiny, and a drawing of the Taj Mahal by her friend Charles Willoughby Waddington. His line drawings are frequently displayed next to her watercolours, often showing similar, if not the same views, which suggests joint sketching outings. He is also a frequent dance partner of Beryl's as her dance card on page 36 reveals and seems to have stayed with the Whites in the Sikkim encampment during the 1903 Delhi Durbar. But as the "Who Was Who" reveals, the friendship was probably not of a romantic nature, as he married another woman in the same year.
24. The so-called "expedition" lasted from 1903 to 04.
25. Durbar is a Mughal term for "court" which was adopted by the British Government in India. The 1903 Delhi Durbar celebrated the Coronation of Edward VII who was declared Emperor of India on New Year's Day 1903.
26. Frederick Markham Bailey was born in Lahore on February 3, 1882. He was the son of an officer in the British Army. He studied at Sandhurst before returning to India as a member of the 32nd Sikh Pioneers. His knowledge of Tibetan gained him the appointment as British Trade Agent at Yangtse in 1905 and later the appointment as Political Officer of Sikkim (1921 to 1928). He is however mainly known for his activities as a British spy in Central Asia in 1918.
27. His relationship to the various peoples that make up the local population is complex and differentiated, but he never fell into the usual imperial stereotypes. Rather he repeatedly stressed the high esteem he held for those members of the local populace he counted, as he stated in his autobiographical account of his time in Sikkim, as his trusted friends and advisors.
28. The term "Anglo-Indian" has been used in contradictory ways. While it is now used for people of mixed English and Indian ancestry, in the colonial period "Anglo-Indian" almost always referred to British people living and working in India. Here the term "Anglo-Indian" refers to the latter.
29. Fanny Emily Farr Penny lived in South India from 1877 to 1901 and produced forty-five novels, many of which were set in India.
30. A lady travelling in India in the first half of the nineteenth century for example answered the question of what she has seen of the local population as follows: "Thank goodness, I know nothing at all about them, nor do I wish to: really I think the less one sees and knows of them the better!" (Julia Charlotte Maitland, *Letters from Madras, during the years 1836 – 39*, by a lady, London 1843, 53, qtd. Ghose 1).
31. The Picturesque is a multi-faceted mode of cultural production which cannot be fully explored in this context. While in its colonial application the aspect of mastery is paramount, in its domestic application it has been argued as coded in the feminine and associated with emotion and sensation rather than a more stringently rational approach. It is thus not surprising that as a style it was associated with women's fashion. See for example Bermingham and Jones.
32. See Suleri 75–110.
33. The members of the Indian Civil Service were referred to as the "heaven born." The hierarchical ordering of British Indian society has often been linked to the Hindu caste system and the societal position of the heaven born would be equivalent to the rank of Brahmin in the Hindu context. See Collingham 155.
34. Personal communication from Beryl Hartley, grand daughter of Beryl White, also Mrs. Joan Schneider, grand daughter of Mrs Hodges whose husband worked with John Claude White in Sikkim.
35. Ada Ranken was born a Pritchard. Her father was a famous professor of astronomy in Oxford and she grew up on the Isle of White with Tennyson and Julia Cameron as friends and neighbours. She wrote

a biography of her father and in the opening chapters she refers to his marriage (and her childhood), and mentions that she and her sisters were encouraged to sketch on family vacations. See Pritchard 90 and 118.

36. Private papers, family collection.
37. The fact that a painting teacher was ready to hand in Kashmir also suggests that Beryl's artistic ambition was not an isolated affair.
38. See for example Butler 5.
39. The author is currently working on the exhibition culture of British India which shows active female participation in all categories of artistic genres.

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