

INDIAN MUTINY/ENGLISH MUTINY: NATIONAL GOVERNANCE IN CHARLOTTE YONGE'S *THE CLEVER WOMAN OF THE FAMILY*

By Kate Lawson

IN THE OPENING CHAPTER of Charlotte Mary Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family*, six-year-old Francis Temple, on first having "the pebbly beach, bathing machines and fishing boats" of the English seaside pointed out to him, judges it all to be "ugly and cold."¹ "I shall go home to Melbourne when I am a man," he declares (53; ch. 1). This early and unfavourable contrast between England and one of its colonies exemplifies the novel's larger project of judging England and English society through values established in colonial locales, a project that reaches its apogee when Francis and his older brother Conrade judge the conduct of a cruel and duplicitous Englishwoman to be "as bad as the Sepoys" and thus hope that she will be "blown from the mouth of a cannon" (340, 342; ch. 18). While the narrator comments that here the children exhibit "some confusion between mutineers and Englishwomen," the narrative in its entirety suggests that such "confusion" is founded on a reasonably astute appraisal of colonial history and contemporary English society (342; ch. 18). Published in 1865, with memories of the Indian "Mutiny" of 1857–59 fresh in the public's mind, *The Clever Woman of the Family* is a critique of contemporary England and English values viewed through a colonial and military lens. More particularly, the novel records the after effects of the "Mutiny" – when sepoys were indeed "blown from the mouth of a cannon" – on early 1860s England, as characters shaped by the "Indian war" and bearing scars both physical and emotional flock home to the small English seaside town of Avonmouth (120; ch. 5). These characters, all associated with the British Army, were involved in some of the key events of the "Mutiny," such as the siege of Delhi, and include in their number a young wounded war hero, Captain Alick Keith, winner of the Victoria Cross. The novel's older hero is Colonel Colin Keith, also recovering from wounds sustained in India.² Under his protection is Lady Fanny Temple, widow of General Sir Stephen Temple, with her seven young children born, severally, in the Cape Colony, India and Australia. Together these characters – shaped by their experiences in the empire and the army – confront and then transform the England to which they return.

The Clever Woman of the Family represents an England that is flawed and dangerous in ways that are analogous to India during the Sepoy Rebellion. A record of the intersection of

English and colonial history, the novel represents acts of *English* rebelliousness and cruelty; the intent of these representations, I argue, is to foreground the dangers to English national identity and national security posed by the emergent forces of liberalism and feminism. England in the 1860s is shown to be threatened by an incipient domestic upheaval, making the Indian Mutiny an object lesson for those acute enough to recognize a looming and analogous “English Mutiny.” Although colonial children such as Conrade and Francis Temple exhibit “some confusion” in evaluating the threat, they do sense the danger. The novel’s principal English heroine, Rachel Curtis, does not.

The unchecked actions of Rachel – seemingly the “clever woman” of the title – exemplify the novel’s liberal “English mutiny.” At the novel’s opening, the twenty-five-year-old Rachel declares herself free from the authority of her mother and “In Search of a Mission” (35; ch. 1). She finds two. The first is a charitable mission to relieve local child labourers, lacemakers, who are not only underpaid and overworked but also, she believes, oppressed by an exploitative “system” (50; ch. 1). While Rachel’s charitable impulses are well intentioned, the independent plans she develops to assist the lacemakers go grievously awry, and as a direct result of her intervention the children are subject to cruelty and violence.³ Rachel’s second mission is occasioned by the arrival in England of her cousin Lady Fanny Temple with her seven children. Rachel determines that *she* will guide the upbringing and education of the children since she considers Fanny to be feeble and incompetent. Fanny has been so long absent from England that Rachel believes “her helpless cousin” too must be schooled in the “beginning of English habits” (43; ch. 1). Again, the narrative proves Rachel wrong; Fanny is far from “helpless,” and it is Rachel herself who is severely schooled by ensuing events. Rachel’s twin missions – the reform of a “system” of working-class exploitation and the education of an erring colonial family – both end in failure.

Rachel Curtis’s failures are deeply personal but they are also failures indicative of the dangers inherent in the principles that motivate her missions, liberal feminism and reform. Her actions concomitantly involve resistance to the returning British Army officers whose colonial expertise allows them to recognise the dangers inherent in revolt against established authority. More generally, the entire Curtis family – the strong-willed Rachel, her feeble widowed mother, and her flustered elder sister – comes to represent a dangerously unmoored national family, one that fails to embody patterns of authority and deference and whose failures bring grief through folly, ignorance and self-will.⁴ This weak and feminine national family invites “mutiny.”

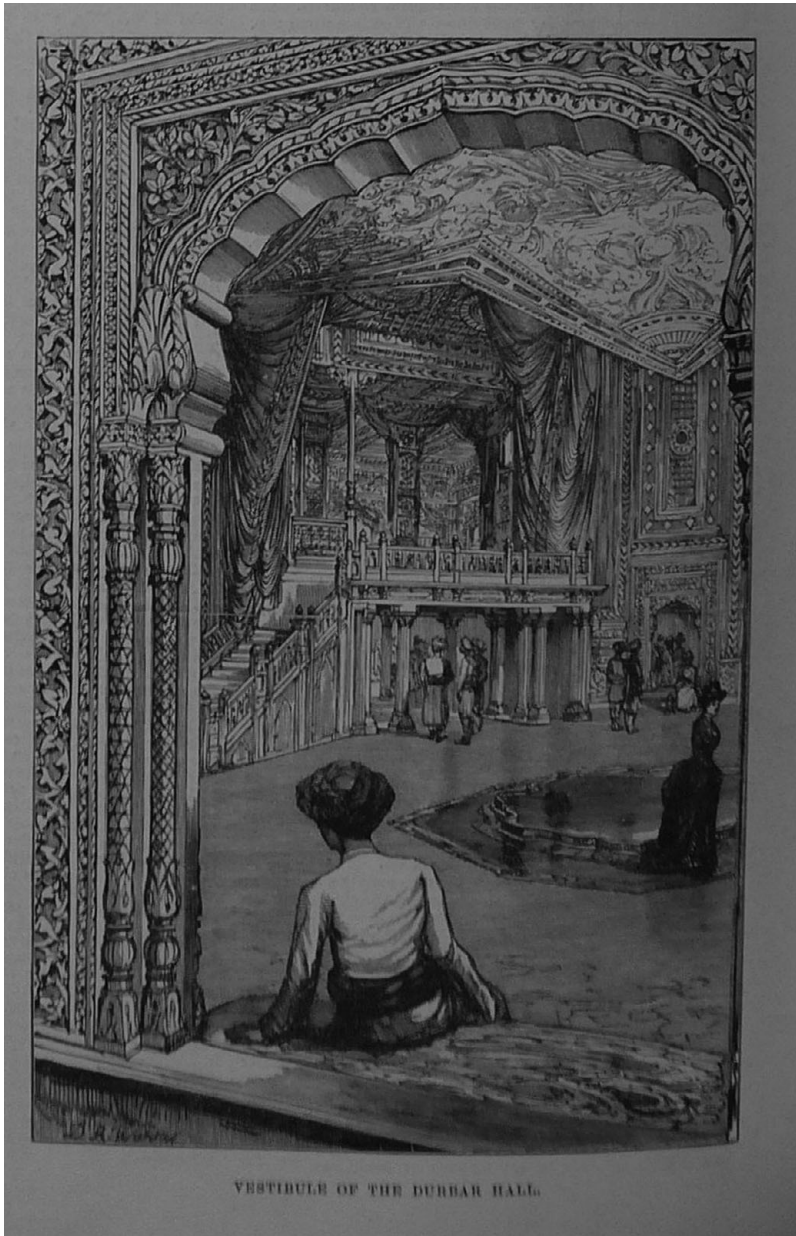
The central struggle in *The Clever Woman of the Family*, then, is between competing versions of English national identity and national governance, one version nurtured at home in England and the other shaped by experiences abroad in the colonies. Ian Baucom argues that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “Englishness has been consistently defined through appeals to the identity-endowing properties of place” (4). Yet because English “place” was located not only at home but also in the colonies, much of “English” identity formation and “English” history “‘took place’ abroad” (Baucom 4). The relationship between England and empire is thus a very curious one, where empire is “less a place where England exerts control, than a place where England loses command of its own narrative of identity. It is the place onto which the island kingdom arrogantly displaces itself and from which a puzzled England returns as a stranger to itself” (Baucom 3). In Yonge’s novel, English arrogance is tamed by the returning British Army; the army represents a colonial “English” experience that is *not* subject to a narrative of Englishness formed “at home” and turns a critical and

estranging gaze back onto England itself.⁵ As England “loses command of its own narrative of identity,” so command is seized by the force that was so recently victorious in India, the army and its governing ethos, a military code of obedience to authority and elite masculine rule. The British Army overcame rebellion and exerted control in India in the 1850s and in Yonge’s novel is given an analogous task in England in the 1860s, but with the uncanny effect of rendering England “a stranger to itself,” a kind of “colonial” English space no longer in control its history or identity.

The Clever Woman of the Family thus exemplifies three intersecting fictional types: the historical novel recording recent events in imperial history, the regional novel of a representative English community, and the political novel in the Tory tradition of investigating England’s political settlement. As a historical novel, *Clever Woman* is aligned with an Indian Mutiny historiography that, as Christopher Herbert argues, may be read “as a defensive, anxiety-driven formation brought into existence to allay as best it could the cultural crisis that the great rebellion left in its wake” (136).⁶ As a regional novel, Yonge’s work belongs to the genre described by Ian Duncan as one where the “imaginary province” comes to represent “a traditional England that selectively absorbs the forces of modernization” or, more pressingly, comes to figure “the ideological crisis of a national history” (326). Finally, as a domestic political novel, *Clever Woman* presents a “anxiety-driven” conservative portrayal of an English “ideological” and “cultural crisis,” and is thus a successor to, for example, Benjamin Disraeli’s Young England trilogy. John Vincent argues that the central question of the second novel of Disraeli’s trilogy, *Sybil*, is “who ought to rule?” (81), a question glossed by Sophie Gilmartin as “who ruled in the past and why these pedigreed, aristocratic families who did rule then should still rule over a modern England” (106). The threat to Disraeli’s England in 1845 comes from working-class radicalism, arguably neutered in *Sybil* when the “working-class” heroine discovers her true identity and role in a revived ruling aristocracy.⁷ Yonge’s novel addresses anew the question of “who ought to rule?” but contextualises English “rule” within imperial history. While the Indian Mutiny clearly challenged British assumptions about the nature of its governance abroad, Yonge’s novel uses the Mutiny crisis to examine assumptions about the nature of English authority at home. The novel’s Curtis family and others of its ilk are shown to be manifestly unfit for rule, whereas the families associated with the victorious British Army embody the values and discipline urgently needed to govern England itself. *The Clever Woman of the Family* thus echoes Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*, where, as Gary Kelly argues, returning naval officers offer their “culture and values” to “regenerat[e]” an England weakened by “decadent gentry culture” (134, 125). In Yonge’s conservative novel, England in the 1860s is in need of such regeneration again, but the threat now comes from an enemy nurtured in the very breast of the imperial centre, liberalism. English adherence to liberal and feminist values comes to be equated with “mutiny” and liberal Englishmen and women with sepoys, Indian soldiers under the command of British officers who took a lead role in the Mutiny. The novel’s answer to liberalism and feminism – to mutiny and rebellion – is an embrace of a military code that values masculine rule and submission to authority.

Liberty and Authority

WRITING *THE CLEVER WOMAN OF THE FAMILY* six years after the publication of J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859), Charlotte Yonge constructs a plot that demonstrates the folly of acting on the



VESTIBULE OF THE DURBAR HALL.

Figure 20. "Vestibule of the Durbar Hall." Illustration from "Colonial and Indian Exhibition of the Indian Empire," *The Illustrated London News* (17 July 1886): 85.

principles of liberty of thought and action that Mill advocates.⁸ Yonge might agree with the assertion that opens *On Liberty*: “The struggle between Liberty and Authority is the most conspicuous feature in the portions of history with which we are earliest familiar, particularly in that of Greece, Rome, and England” (43). Yet the conclusions Yonge would draw from the fact of such a “struggle” could not be more different. She writes in her Preface to *Kings of England: A History for Young Children* (1848), “Faith, loyalty, obedience, reverence; – in these lies the strength of nations” (n. pag.). *Clever Woman* endorses all four of these values, but obedience is particularly stressed. Mill’s “harm principle,” by contrast, states that “the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others” (*On Liberty* 52). Yonge’s novel demonstrates that Rachel Curtis’s “liberal spirit” leads her to refuse to obey or even recognise rightful authority (239; ch. 10); because she is unable to foresee or evaluate risk, “harm to others” inevitably follows. Rachel’s reliance on her own powers of judgement – her “clever”-ness – precipitates disaster.

The question of women’s independent action is a central one in mid-Victorian culture. Rachel’s declaration in the opening chapter of *Clever Woman* is clearly consonant with the emerging liberal feminism of its day: “I will judge for myself,” she affirms, “and when my mission has declared itself, I will not be withheld from it by any scruple that does not approve itself to my reason and conscience” (38; ch. 1). Rachel’s pronouncement is similar to Margaret Hale’s at the end of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855), when Margaret decides to take “her life into her own hands” in order to “settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working” (416; ch. 49). The results of these similar choices could not be more different. Gaskell portrays Margaret as a thoughtful, independent adult woman whose capacities exceed the petty concerns of the aunt to whom she has heretofore deferred; her declaration of independence is just and fitting. Rachel’s analogous declaration in Yonge’s novel is framed as an overstepping of justifiable norms of deference and obligation; her independent judgement proves to be inherently flawed and dangerous.

Yonge arguably structures all her fiction to contain and suppress impulses towards liberty. As Talia Schaffer claims:

The real drama of all of Yonge’s novels is the way that her characters initially fight the ideological vise their author is inexorably closing upon them, and how they subsequently adjust to the cruel necessity of embracing this paradigm. . . . [Her] central project is to depict dissidence for the purpose of subduing it. (246–47)

If taken to an extreme, Schaffer’s argument would tend to reduce a novel such as *The Clever Woman of the Family* to a contrived plot designed to buttress a conservative moral and political stance: rebellious views are represented only in order to be “inexorably” suppressed. Indeed there is an element of truth in such an assessment.⁹ Yet a reading that reduces *Clever Woman* to an exemplum of Yonge’s conservative agenda minimizes the breadth and complexity of the novel’s engagement with a range of characters and locales and its careful representation of the ideological and cultural crisis playing itself out in contemporary English society.

First, the setting and plot of this conservative novel suggest an England that is extraordinarily open to transformation that comes to it from abroad. June Sturrock and Clare A. Simmons both comment on the deceptive “narrowness of Rachel’s circle” (Sturrock,

“*Heaven and Home*” 64) for “replicated in this tiny community . . . are questions of responsibility at all levels: to Empire, to religion, to family, to the poor, to one’s sense of selfhood” (Simmons 26). The imbrication of this “tiny community” within an international context is insisted on; characters arrive in little Avonmouth from travels in the Cape, India, Australia, the “Oural Mountains” and Brazil (*Clever Woman* 125; ch. 5). This circulation of characters opens England to an alterity that challenges and transforms it, so that while India is a particular focal point in the novel, it is only one international context among many.

Second, the novel does represent a successful independent woman, a woman whose capacity for self-regulation challenges the notion that this novel only represents the dangers of autonomous female action. Ermine Williams – invalid, writer, and journal editor – is forced by circumstance to judge and to act independently. She and her sister Alison are utterly alone, their parents dead and their relatives indifferent; their only brother has left England in disgrace and abandoned his daughter to their care. Why Ermine’s independent action is commended and Rachel’s is so stringently condemned is one of the cruxes of the novel.

Third, the novel’s elaborate plotting depicts the attractions of liberalism and feminism as being so real and so powerful that only a force as exacting as the British Army can crush them. The novel identifies women as key players in this mid-century drive towards liberal values and thus punishes overly assertive female characters that much more severely. If the “ideological vise” of this novel is painful, it is because the ideological work of the novel is so strenuous.

Finally, posing liberalism and feminism as problems to which the British Army is a solution draws attention to the long-standing tension in English history between submission to authority and liberty of thought and action. Linda Colley points out that the huge expansion of both the British Army and the British empire in the late eighteenth century highlighted the ideological conflict between the English (and Protestant) national ideal of an unparalleled liberty and the subjugation of others necessary to the creation of that empire itself.¹⁰ She writes:

In what terms could a people who claimed to be uniquely free justify their massively extended dominion to others and to themselves? As Edmund Burke inquired [about the American Revolution], how was “the strong presiding power, that is so useful towards the conservation of a vast, disconnected, infinitely diversified empire” to be reconciled with the preservation of traditional British liberties? (Colley 102, quoting Burke 231).

The Indian Rebellion exemplified this conflict between freedom and subjugation in the middle of the nineteenth century. In order to preserve the empire in India, the British Army had ruthlessly suppressed the freedom of the empire’s subjects – subjects cast as mutineers, disobedient to lawful authority.¹¹ Given the violence attendant on the rebellion, many in Britain lauded the British Army’s forceful suppression of the liberties of these subjects. For example, in December 1857 the anonymous author of “Our Indian Empire” argued that:

The great principle of Indian rule must be strength. . . . This can be shown only by an absolute sway and undivided supremacy. . . . We have incurred the guilt of conquest, and now, before God and in

the face of man, must boldly assume its responsibilities. . . . [B]y the open resolute assertion of our supremacy, and military tenure, we might consolidate our empire. (December 1857. 82: 643–64).

Although expressing qualms about “the guilt of conquest,” this author advocates a consolidation of empire achieved through “military tenure” and a policy of “undivided supremacy.” In Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*, the focus is not on the British Army’s “supremacy” in the empire but on the ideological consolidation required at home. The army “conquers” England through the establishment of what John Peck terms a “military code” of discipline, order, obedience, and masculine rule (50).¹²

Yonge’s task in *Clever Woman* is thus a challenging one: to present a compelling portrait of the British Army so as to promote and justify the key features of its military code: discipline, obedience, and elite masculine leadership. And the novel must do this in an England where liberal ideas are coming to dominate in public discourse, where women in particular are claiming the fruits of liberalism, and where international travel with its circulation of people and ideas is the norm. Yonge’s novel attempts to make a civilian identification with the military code newly relevant through its contrasting portraits of military heroism and the dangerous effects of English feminism and liberalism.

The Failure of English Liberal Feminism

THE CLEVER WOMAN OF THE FAMILY begins with Rachel Curtis’s declaration of independence. Heretofore she has always been “tethered down to the merest mockery of usefulness by conventionalities,” “conventionalities” that decree, she says, that as a young single women: “I must not be out late, I must not put forth my views; I must not choose my acquaintance, I must be a mere helpless, useless being, growing old in a ridiculous fiction of prolonged childhood” (38; ch. 1). “Some women have broken through prejudice, and why should not others?” she reasons, and at age twenty-five declares she is finally free to take the “decisive and eccentric steps that she was always feeling impelled to take” and to assume “the privileges of acting as well as thinking for herself” (42, 43; ch. 1). The exact source of her progressive ideas is not named. Colonel Keith declares dismissively that her “principles [are] picked up from every catchpenny periodical, things she does not half understand,” but one journal that Rachel mentions approvingly is the *Englishwoman’s Hobbyhorse*, seemingly a jibe at the *English Woman’s Journal* and its supporters, the liberal feminist Langham Place group (167; ch. 7).¹³ And while Rachel rarely explicates grounding principles, one of her remarks to Ermine Williams is telling: “you belong to the age that was trying the experiment of the hierarchy modified: I to that which has found it [i.e. mere modification] will not do” (104–05; ch. 3). The independent Ermine too has eschewed the “ridiculous fiction” of an adult woman living a “prolonged childhood” and has adopted a career, but she (according to Rachel) is willing only to modify “the hierarchy,” that is, to adapt the degree of her deference to authority and her place in the gender and class hierarchy. Rachel’s “age” has moved beyond the half-measure of modification; for her, “the hierarchy . . . will not do.”

The novel’s glowing treatment of Ermine Williams seems incommensurate with its harsh handling of Rachel. Ermine does all that Rachel does – speaks, acts, and writes independently – but not only is she not humiliated by the events of the novel, she *is* its rightful “clever woman.” The differences between the two women are multifaceted, but a signal example may be seen in their relationship to prayer, construed in the novel as submission and obedience.¹⁴

Ermine has long refused to marry the man she loves, Colin Keith, because of her disability and her perception of a stain on her family name. When she is on the verge of accepting his proposal, she declares to him: “Colin, Colin, my one prayer has been, ‘Make Thy way plain before my face,’” indicating that she must be certain that if she consents to marriage it is only in obedience to God’s will, not for mere self-gratification (522; ch. 29). By contrast, Rachel realises late in the novel, as a “pang struck her to the heart,” that *her* prayers had all been infected by an “unconscious detachment from all that was not visible and material” (434; ch. 23). Where Ermine struggles to determine whether or not an action is truly obedient, Rachel declares her *right* to independent action without (she later realises) devoting “much thought and much prayer” to the choice (434; ch. 23).

In the opening chapters of the novel, Rachel eschews obedience to any hierarchy and claims “the privileges of acting as well as thinking for herself.” Guided by liberal principles and “able and willing,” indeed “longing to task [her]self to the uttermost,” Rachel embraces her two “missions”: the relief of the exploited lacemakers and the education of Lady Temple’s children (38; ch. 1). Rachel finds a collaborator in her project to assist the lacemakers in the seemingly likeminded Mr. Mauleverer. While she worries that the local clergyman might not “be liberal enough to tolerate Mr. Mauleverer” because of his “opinions” – that is, the supposition that his beliefs are not in strict conformity with the Church of England – Rachel defends him by arguing: “Modern research has introduced so many variations of thought, that no good work would be done at all if we required of our fellow-labourers perfect similarity of speculative belief” (263, 211, 226; ch. 7, 9, 10).¹⁵ Indeed Rachel sympathises with Mauleverer’s position: “I can fully appreciate any reluctance to become stringently bound to dogmatic enunciations, before the full powers of the intellect have examined into them” (228; ch. 10). Mauleverer picks up on Rachel’s scepticism about “dogmatic enunciations” and states his “regret that our [church] formularies are too technical for a thoughtful mind in the present age” (228; ch. 10). While seasoned readers of Yonge hear alarm bells at a description of Christian doctrine as “too technical,” this meeting of liberal minds allows Mauleverer and Rachel to work together to set up the “F. U. E. E.,” the Female Union for Englishwomen’s Employment, a training school that will teach former lacemakers “wood engraving and printing” (236, 229; ch. 10). Rachel arranges for two local girls – Mary Morris and the bright and vivacious orphan Lovedy Welland – to be the first pupils at the school, and Mauleverer provides the school matron, Maria Hatherton, a widow with a young daughter.

In reality, however, Mauleverer is an embezzler whose true name is Maddox, Maria “Hatherton” is Maria Rawlins, his mistress and accomplice, and the child is their daughter. Unsurprisingly, Mauleverer/Maddox and Hatherton/Rawlins go on to steal money from the school before being exposed as charlatans who have secretly set the girls to work at – ironically enough – lacemaking. Yonge has contrived a plot to demonstrate the utter failure of Rachel’s reform agenda, but what may be surprising is the degree of suffering these events entail. The school does not merely fail and Rachel Curtis have her money stolen. Maddox starves the children and Rawlins is brutal to them, so that by the time the fraud is discovered Lovedy is so ill with diphtheria and her body so battered and bruised that she dies a few hours later; Rawlins’s daughter also dies, and only Mary Morris is left alive to attest to the abuse.

The death of innocent children under Rachel Curtis’s care constitutes a devastating critique of a liberal feminism that had seemingly underwritten her belief in a woman’s

independent power of thought and action. The narrative indeed emphasises her responsibility. The family lawyer tells her that she herself cannot be excused as a mere “silly girl who has let herself be taken in by a sharper”; rather her freely chosen involvement in and active management of the school have made her, he says, legally “accountable for all this; you have made yourself so” (346; ch. 18). Maddox is found not guilty at trial because Rachel is “shown in open court to have been so egregious a dupe that the deceiver could not even be punished” (387; ch. 21). Rachel accepts that she is “Accountable for all” and identifies the cause of her “failure” as “headstrong blindness and self-will, resulting in the agony of the innocent” (373, 372; ch. 20). Later she is taught – by her new husband, Captain Alick Keith, and his saintly uncle, Mr Clare – that her poor judgement stemmed from being “more than usually removed from the immediate influence of superior man.” She followed a course that “appeared to her the light of her independent mind,” but in reality, “a woman’s efforts at scepticism are but blind faith in her chosen leader, or, at the utmost, in the spirit of the age” (506; ch. 28).¹⁶ Rachel’s *desire* to assist children was a good one, but in developing her plans without the guidance of a “superior man” and under the aegis of a liberal “spirit of the age,” she inevitably errs and causes the death of innocents.

Rachel’s failure also indicts England itself; English society has permitted, indeed encouraged, women to act on their own without the check of male authority. The Englishmen who might have provided that check are shown to be incapable: the local curate Mr Touchett is more interested in playing croquet than speaking seriously to Rachel; the Curtis family’s estate agent, Mr Cox, is dim and unhelpful. Worst of all is Edward Williams, the brother of Ermine and Alison. Edward Williams fled England when – also through the machinations of Maddox – he was unjustly accused of fraud, leaving his then-impoverished sisters under a cloud of suspicion, his young daughter as their ward, and Maddox free to continue his depredations. He shows no care for family or honour, returning to England only when forced by Colonel Keith and then leaving after his name is cleared: “his peculiarities,” “the habit of abstraction [that] had become too confirmed to be shaken off” make it impossible to conform to English “social habits” and indeed “testif[y] to his entire unfitness for English life” (527; ch. 29). Civilian Englishmen in general are unfit to guide and to lead.

England in *The Clever Woman of the Family* is thus in the menacing grip of a liberal “spirit of the age” where women assert their right to independent action and men abdicate their responsibilities. Into this cultural crisis step the British Army and its proffered resolution: a code of obedience, discipline and elite masculine rule. Because of its experiences in India, the army is especially skilled at detecting and rooting out dangerous ideas and mutinous behaviour. The initial reception of the army in England, however, is anything but enthusiastic.

Military Rule and “Indian Horrors”

THE BRITISH ARMY IN THE NOVEL is represented by Colonel Colin Keith, Captain Alick Keith, and the other officers and men in their regiment. It is Colonel Keith who thwarts Rachel Curtis’s second “mission,” the training of Fanny Temple and her children in the “beginning of English habits,” for although Fanny seems accommodating when Rachel begins to institute her plans, she in fact refuses to obey any of Rachel’s instructions until she has received approval from the Colonel. This deference to the views of the Colonel – the trusted advisor of the late General Sir Stephen Temple – makes Rachel immediately

“suspicious and jealous of her rival” and she develops “a strong antipathy” to him, sight unseen (52, 45; ch. 1). While Rachel does not wholly object to the army, and indeed claims that “war [is] the great purifier and ennobler of nations, when it is for a good and great cause,” she finds much that is wrong in the army’s ethos: a “confounding [of] mere love of combat with heroism” and an equating of a “hero” with a mere “fighting animal” (147, 148; ch. 6). She is thus prepared to dislike Colonel Keith and the other officers out of hand and finds it “ill luck” that an army regiment is now stationed in a neighbouring town (129; ch. 5). When Colonel Keith arrives, Rachel sits in Fanny’s drawing room with her “teeth . . . set to receive her enemy”; in the combative dinner scene that follows, Rachel’s worst fears are realised as she finds all her attempts at “rational conversation” blocked and the party indulging in gossip that reveals “the frivolity and narrowness of a military set in a colony” (110, 129; ch. 5). Because the “thought of Fanny’s lapsing into military society [is] shocking” to Rachel, she does her best to repel the invaders and to institute her plan for “calling Fanny to order,” for putting “Fanny upon a definite system” (111, 113, 130; ch. 4, 5). Rachel dislikes Colonel Keith and company and in turn Colonel Keith dislikes Rachel, thinking her “A detestable, pragmatical, domineering girl!” (167; ch. 7). The novel initially maintains a comic lightness of tone in depicting the war-like skirmishes in dining rooms and croquet grounds as Rachel and the other civilians clash with the now resident British Army.

Rachel’s concurrent battles with the Temple children epitomize the nature of her battle with Colonel Keith and the army. When she begins to try to teach the children, she decides that the education they received from the Colonel was thoroughly defective: the Temple sons have been taught to “[look] like little gentlemen” when they enter the sitting-room, but Rachel says that this panders to the “cult” of the “drawing-room” (62; ch. 1); they have been taught to be “chivalrous” towards their mother, but Rachel finds them to be “excessively unruly and unmanageable” (127; ch. 5).¹⁷ The children’s criticism of Rachel, in turn, revolves around one theme: “Aunt Rachel is only a civilian, and she hasn’t any sense at all” (87; ch. 3). Indeed for them, all of Avonmouth is equally at fault: the coachman cannot choose the children’s horses because “[h]e is only a civilian”; they dislike “living in a poky place like this, where nobody had ever been in the army, nor had a bit of sense” (64, 133; ch. 1, 18). The children’s comments here are comically prejudiced and they themselves far from perfect in their behaviour. However, their experiences in India give them a framework for the evaluation of violence and cruelty that the English Rachel has never had, making their appraisal of Rachel’s charity school in fact quite telling. After Conrade and the rest of the Temple family return from the charity school – having “saved the two little girls that [Maddox and Rawlins] were whipping to death” – Conrade remarks, “Oh, Aunt Rachel, your F. U. thing is as bad as the Sepoys” (340; ch. 18). Rachel’s willingness to give Maddox and Rawlins authority over children is framed as a repetition of the British error in India of putting too much trust in sepoy; on this occasion at least, Conrade *does* understand the relationship “between mutineers and Englishwomen.”

The figuration of the “sepoy” in *The Clever Woman of the Family* is the novel’s most important link between the Indian Mutiny and 1860s England. While used by Conrade to indict Rachel’s whole school venture, “sepoy” as a term of abuse is most intimately attached to Maria Rawlins, the school matron. Even before the true nature of the school is revealed, Colonel Keith tells Rachel that the matron’s face reminds him of “a very handsome Sepoy havildar whom we took at Lucknow, a capital soldier before the mutiny, and then an ineffable ruffian” (319; ch. 17). Later, with Maria Rawlins’ guilt established at a trial for

cruelty, Captain Keith remarks that she “had not her Sepoy face for nothing” (352; ch. 19). A physiognomic marker of a racialised evil, Maria Rawlins’ “Sepoy face” is associated with both class presumption and cruelty towards children. The notion that sepoys did not know “their place” may be seen, for example, in an October 1857 article in the *Quarterly Review*: “The Bengal sepoy had become the fine gentleman, the swaggerer, the swash-buckler, and the bully, of the Native population, and the terror of his own officer. To use the expressive English phrase, he was thoroughly ‘spoilt’” (“Indian Mutiny”). The most notorious example of sepoy cruelty was the murder of English children and women in Cawnpore in July 1857 by Indian soldiers under the command of Nana Sahib. In that incident, the bodies of the butchered women and children were stuffed into a well, an event that led to calls for swift and brutal revenge. Maria Rawlins is “sepoy”-like in being both “spoilt” and cruel. Brought up in a very poor family, the young Maria Rawlins “was remarkably intelligent and attractive” and so rose above her station to become a children’s maid in the Williams household (310; ch. 16). Praised and trusted, Maria is secretly cruel to her first charge, the young Rose Williams, so that even when Rawlins’s greater cruelty at the school is revealed, Rose’s aunt finds it hard to believe that “Poor Maria” could have exhibited “such frightful barbarity” (348; ch. 18). Trusted twice with the care of children because of her plausible manner, Maria reveals her “sepoy”-like nature in her secret “barbarity” towards children, in her treachery to her employers, and in her repudiation of conventional class norms.

While the identification of Maria with the “sepoy” seems to quarantine this particular racialised evil in a single working-class Englishwoman, the courtroom scene where she is tried for assault suggests a more complex figuration of the “English sepoy.” As Maria is about to be brought in, the courtroom erupts as if a veritable rebel sepoy were about to be tried:

It was a loud, frightful roar and yell, a sound of concentrated fury that, once heard, could never be forgotten. It was from the crowd outside, many of them from Avonmouth, and all frantic with indignation at the cruelty that had been perpetrated upon the helpless children. Their groans and execrations were pursuing the prison van, from which Maria Hatherton was at that moment making her exit, and so fearful was the outcry that penetrated the court, that Fanny trembled with recollections of *Indian horrors*, [and] looked wistfully for her protector the Colonel. (388; ch. 21, emphasis added)

The evocation of “Indian horrors” is not a representation unique to Yonge. Indeed Christopher Herbert argues that the very “category of ‘horror’” is rooted in the Indian Mutiny: “More than anything else, the Mutiny signified for contemporaries a great collective electric shock of ‘horror,’” and the “category of ‘horror’ should be regarded not as a timeless given, but, rather, as a mode of experience with a specific historical and cultural structure” (25). In Yonge’s novel, Indian horrors are brought home to England, for while the identification of Maria as “sepoy” is clear, what causes Fanny to tremble with “recollection of Indian horrors” is the “frightful roar” and the “fearful . . . outcry” of Englishmen and women in the courtroom. “Recollections of Indian horrors” are produced by English conduct; there is an affinity between the English and the alarming sepoys.¹⁸

A fantasised link between Rachel herself and sepoy-like cruelty is represented in the chapters after the trial when Rachel labours under cruel delusions and sick fantasies, imagining herself as both victim and persecutor, as beaten child and cruel abuser. Not only the content of her fantasies, but the phantasmagoric whirl of real and imagined scenes again

signifies, for a critic such as Herbert, the register of Mutiny writing. Of Rachel's illness, Yonge writes:

Sometimes even her own personal identity was gone, and she would live over again in the poor children, the hunger and the blows, or she would become Mrs. Rawlins, and hear herself sentenced for the savage cruelty, or she would actually stand in court under sentence for manslaughter. . . . Now it was the world of gazing faces, feverishly magnified, multiplied, and pressing closer and closer on her, till she could have screamed to dispel them; now it was her mother weeping over the reports to which she had given occasion, and accusing herself of her daughter's errors; and now it was Lovedy Kelland's mortal agony, now the mob, thirsting for vengeance, were shouting for justice on her, as the child's murderer, and she was shrieking to Alick Keith to leave her to her fate, and only save her mother. (407–08; ch. 22)

Herbert claims that it is “that usurpation of realistic factuality by phantasmagoria that forms one of the leading textual symptoms of Mutiny writing” (21). The insidious effects of the Indian Mutiny in the novel thus extend beyond the wounded British Army officers and their slow rehabilitation in England or the fearful recollections of Fanny Temple; Mutiny horrors invade the sick delusions of Rachel Curtis, one who has had no direct experience of either India or mutiny. Rachel does recover from her illness but retrospectively names her entire adult life a kind of waking nightmare. Her new life with Alick Keith and his uncle, she says, has “made me feel as I used when I was a young girl, with only an ugly dream between. I don't like to look at it, and yet that dream was my real life that I made for myself” (485; ch. 26). What seemed Rachel's “real life” – her liberal plans, her feminist aspirations – is now understood as a long “ugly dream” from which she has finally awoken. The figuration of the long “ugly dream” of Rachel's life suggests its affinity with mutinous desires and rebellious impulses, with a “sepoxy” sensibility that is located in the midst of English life. Her ultimate disavowal of mutinous liberal impulses is signified in her marriage to Captain Keith; with him, she joins the British Army's circulating movement throughout Britain and the empire. Thus by the end of the novel, the Temple children testify to the positive change in Rachel: “‘She is not a civilian now,’ said Conrade, . . . ‘Military discipline has made her conformable’” (543; ch. 30).

From her new perspective, Rachel also learns that Lady Fanny Temple is not, as she had imagined, a colonial subject in need of English training. Instead, Fanny Temple graces England with a regal colonial presence. The British Army had always recognised this semi-royal nature: for Colonel Keith, Fanny “was a sort of little queen” in India “with a colonial court of her own” and for Captain Keith, Fanny was the “Queen of the East, and more, with that innocent, soft, helpless dignity of hers!” (168, 169, 287; ch. 7, 14). Fanny establishes an ideal of queenly power that emulates her fellow widow Queen Victoria, but provides a slight corrective: Fanny's court is a military and colonial one founded on a firsthand knowledge of the empire Victoria rules but has never visited. Though Fanny maintains a feminine “helpless dignity” that makes the soldiers revere and aid her, in one of the novel's most important scenes she shows a domestic martial prowess. The charity school Rachel opened had only ever been visited when the smooth-tongued Maddox was there to make sure that the children keep quiet about the abuse they suffer; those who tried to make unannounced visits were denied entry. Fanny decides that she must make an “assault upon the fortress that had repulsed two such warriors as Colonel Keith and Mrs. Kelland. But timid and tender as

she might be, it was not for nothing that Fanny Temple had been a vice-queen” (335; ch. 18). Backed by her children’s governess Alison Williams, Fanny goes to the school and when the door is opened, “with more audacity than Alison thought her capable of, inserted herself within the doorway, so as to prevent herself from being shut out.” Demonstrating “simple statecraft,” Fanny instructs Alison to divert attention, speaks to the children, discovers their abuse, quickly takes them outside and into her carriage, and then with military precision “faced about to defend the rear.” Vanquishing the matron Rawlins in a few words, Fanny departs “with such a consciousness of power and ease that few could have had assurance enough to gainsay her” (335–36; ch. 18). She has won the field; she has rescued abused and dying English children from Rawlins’s “sepyo”-like brutality. While the novel as a whole celebrates a military code of masculine heroism and elite authority, Fanny Temple tames the army’s aggressive masculinity by providing women with a heroic domestic role, the protection of children.

Fanny’s role as a “Queen of the East” with a “colonial court” also suggests that a subtle relocation of the imperial centre to the colonies takes place over the course of the novel, a relocation that has the curious effect of rendering England itself a periphery, a colony. This displacement of England from its central role in the empire is hinted at early in the novel in the name of Rachel’s family house, the “Homestead” (40; ch. 1). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “homestead” is used in the middle of the nineteenth century to refer the house attached to a sheep or cattle station (Australia and New Zealand) or to a family farm (the United States). As inhabitants of the Homestead, members of the Curtis family seem to be “colonial” English subjects, living in an isolated backwater and removed from the vital intellectual and social movements of the day. Unschooled in the imperial realities of violence and rebellious instincts, Rachel had an easy confidence in a liberal feminist reform agenda and thus could not foresee the crisis of violence that this agenda would unleash.

The Indian Mutiny caused a shift in the English worldview. As Herbert argues, the Mutiny “was a moment when educated Britons suddenly were afforded a deeply disillusioning view into the national soul” (16–17). Yonge’s novel reinforces Herbert’s suggestion that national disillusionment stems in part from an unconscious recognition of English *affinity* with rebellious imperial subjects (Herbert 55). In its weakness and lack of discipline, England is now more like an unruly colony than an imperial centre; it has in Baucom’s words lost “control of its own narrative of identity.” By the end of the novel, that “narrative of identity” is controlled by the British Army, an army ceaselessly on the move throughout the empire, owning no home or Homestead. As Captain Keith says, he is nominally Scottish but has never been to Scotland because “our branch of the family has lived and died in the —th Highlanders for so many generations that we don’t know what a home is out of it. Our birthplaces – yes, and our graves – are in all parts of the world” (164; ch. 7). This international British force seeds itself across the empire and makes narrowly “English habits” appear peripheral, even colonial. Rachel’s marriage into the British Army signals an acceptance of the army’s offer of security for herself, her family, and – metaphorically – for England itself. In the dangerous post-Indian Mutiny world, *The Clever Woman of the Family* casts its lot with the British Army and its values, preferring its offer of security over the dangerous attractions of freedom and liberty. Yet Yonge’s novel thus has the uncanny effect of depicting the British Army as an *un-English* invading force and turns the tables on who is the coloniser and who is the colonised. The safety of what had been the imperial centre may only be secured by a

recognition that this centre has become peripheral, has surrendered control to those schooled in the colonies. Rebellious “sepoys,” it turns out, are English as well as Indian. Thus does a “colonial” England become estranged from its imperial self.

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NOTES

1. Yonge, *The Clever Woman of the Family*. Ed. Clare A. Simmons (Broadview: Peterborough, 2001), 53, ch. 1. All further references to the novel are to this edition and are indicated in the text.
2. The Honourable Colin Keith, colonel of the “–th Highlanders” (108; ch. 4), is perhaps meant to recall the real hero of Lucknow and commander of the British forces in India, Sir Colin Campbell, a colonel in the 93rd Highlanders and a general in the British Army.
3. In *Womankind* (1877), Yonge comments extensively on women’s charitable responsibilities, claiming that “the care of the poor, either by our means or by our personal exertions, or both, is our bounden duty” (89). However, “always the work must be under the rule of the Church and of lawful authority” (89), a stricture at which young women often balk: “Unluckily girls do not like apprenticeship. The younger and more inexperienced they are, the more they want to act for themselves” (86–87). Rachel’s actions in *The Clever Woman of the Family* demonstrate the fatal results of a young woman acting for herself.
4. The narrator states that “Gentle Mrs Curtis had never been a visible power in her house” (42; ch. 1); in *Womankind*, Yonge comments on the problem of the household “where the young people rule, and the old people submit. . . . This is often the fault of the original mismanagement, but it is also the temptation of the age” (128).
5. The loss of control Baucom describes is not, in the case of Yonge’s novel, the result of a power gained by the colony; in the 1860s, the “Empire” does not yet “write back” to the imperial centre. See Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin: “During the imperial period writing in the language of the imperial centre is inevitably, of course, produced by a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power. Thus the first texts produced in the colonies in the new language are frequently produced by ‘representatives’ of the imperial power; for example, gentrified settlers . . . travelers and sightseers” (5). Yonge had no firsthand experience of India, and *Clever Woman* is principally concerned “with the colonizing power,” not the subjects of empire. Yet the fascination with India evident in Yonge’s novel only deepened in Britain in the succeeding decades; see, for example, the illustrations on display at the extremely popular Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886 (Figure 20: Vestibule of the Durbar Hall).
6. Herbert argues that the Mutiny “marked a ‘terrible break’ in Victorian history: it was a moment when educated Britons suddenly were afforded a deeply disillusioning view into the national soul,” occasioned in part by “the shock of finding that they were despised by the supposedly grateful imperial subjects” (16–17). He argues against a historiography that reads for the “the doctrine of ‘the totalitarian character’ of the culture of imperialism” since analyses such as this “foreclose careful close reading of texts of imperial history on principle” (136). He thus challenges claims by other critics about the centrality of racism to British imperialism. For these other views, see, for example, Brantlinger: “Victorian writing about the Mutiny expresses in concentrated form the racist ideology that Edward Said calls Orientalism, the hegemonic discourse of imperialist domination which applies specifically to the Near and Far East” (199). Similarly, Chakravarty argues that the “self-serving, self-congratulatory high talk about civilising and racial missions” in India was merely a cover for a “nineteenth-century globalisation [that] justified multiform violence” (2).

- These three writers agree that a “deluge of eyewitness accounts, journal articles, histories, poems and plays” followed in the wake of the Indian Mutiny (Brantlinger 199); Chakravarty claims that “the rebellion was the single favourite subject for metropolitan and Anglo-Indian novelists” writing on India after 1859 (3). Brantlinger counts “at least fifty” (199) and Chakravarty as many as “seventy-odd novels” (3) published on the topic of the Mutiny. Herbert includes Yonge’s *Clever Woman* in his list of “Mutiny fiction,” a list he characterizes as including novels that are not “particularly distinguished” but “valuable as indices of popular consciousness at the time” (273).
7. Mare and Percival mention Disraeli’s novel in their brief account of *The Clever Woman of the Family*; they argue that if Yonge read *Sybil* “her probable reaction would have been a deliberate closing of her mind to ‘unsafe’ speculations on the social questions raised by this grim picture” (83). My reading, by contrast, suggests that Yonge’s novel is itself a sustained speculation on the “social questions” of the day.
 8. I have found no evidence that Yonge read *On Liberty* but it seems very likely that she would at least have read reviews of it. For example, a long review essay on Mill’s book, entitled “Liberty and Toleration,” was published in the *Christian Remembrancer* (July 1859), a journal that also reviewed some of Yonge’s works and that she mentions reading in her letters (e.g., Letter to Mary Anne Dyson, 20 Oct. 1850. *Letters of Charlotte Mary Yonge* 32).
 9. The treatment of self-willed women in the novel does seem contrived at times. For example, the attractive and lively but morally flawed Bessie Keith flirts with a young man, even though she is married and pregnant. Realising she has gone too far, she tries to get away from him, catches her foot in a croquet hoop, falls and subsequently dies. The death of this ostensible “clever woman” is so manufactured, so extravagant, as to be unintentionally humorous.
 10. According to Fulford, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars with France led to a boom in the size of the army, “from thirteen thousand men at the outbreak of war [in 1793] to two hundred thousand in 1807” (157). Dennis notes that Charlotte Yonge “venerated” the British army, in part because of her family’s long history of service in it (13). Yonge’s father fought at the Battle of Waterloo, and between her father, uncle, and cousins, Yonge had family members who “fought in every war and at every major battle throughout the century” (Dennis 13). See also Walton 31–47 and *passim*.
 11. Mill’s jarring exclusion of “backward states of society” from the scope of his liberal values in *On Liberty* illustrates the same contradiction. He writes: “we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage. . . . Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end” (52). Sullivan argues that “Mill has been the most important intellectual figure in transforming English liberalism from a dominantly anti-imperialist theory to a very sophisticated defense of an expanding British empire” (617). By contrast, Zastoupil claims that in spite of his comments about despotism, Mill “came to believe that Indian participation in government was an essential component of lasting improvement in that part of the world” (87).
 12. Peck claims that early nineteenth-century army novels align “the values and disciplines of army life, including the masculine leadership of an elite” with “the values and disciplines of civilian life” (Peck 50). By the early Victorian period, civilian identification with these values is fading but Peck finds evidence that military novels of the period still “cling” to this “aristomilitary code” (4). He argues that the Indian Mutiny provoked a brief renewed identification with the Army, but in general with the passage of time “the gap between the army and the general body of the Victorian public” only widened (15).
 13. Simmons suggests that the fictitious *Englishwoman’s Hobbyhorse* may refer to the *English Woman’s Journal* (159n). The latter was launched in 1858 and centred at 19 Langham Place, London. Rendall notes the journal’s affiliation with liberal writers – for example, “In July 1864 the journal printed extracts from Harriet Taylor Mill’s article ‘The enfranchisement of women’” – and argues that the Langham Place group as a whole “began to define a cautious liberal feminist politics” (n. pag.).

See Sturrock (“*Emma* in the 1860s” 327) for a more detailed consideration of Yonge’s references to women’s activist groups.

14. For example, in spite of her disability and relative poverty, Ermine takes care of her brother’s delicate daughter, Rose; this care contrasts with Rachel’s badly managed school where children die because of maltreatment. However, Ermine’s actions may be the most admirable in the novel because she most resembles Charlotte Mary Yonge herself: a single woman, a prolific and popular writer, a journal editor. Yonge, like Ermine Williams, has arguably modified “the hierarchy” to suit herself and her career, but she decries the actions of a woman who would rid the world of hierarchy altogether.
15. Mauleverer’s card reads “Rd. R. H. C. L. Mauleverer,” cleverly leaving his exact status unclear: did “the first letters stood for Richard or for Reverend” or “could [he] be unconscionable enough to have five initials”? (210; ch. 9). Rachel’s defence of Mauleverer recalls Mill’s question: “Who can compute what the world loses in the multitude of promising intellects combined with timid characters, who dare not follow out any bold, vigorous, independent train of thought, lest it should land them in something which would admit of being considered irreligious or immoral?” (*On Liberty* 77)
16. For the liberalism perhaps implicit in the phrase “the spirit of the age,” compare Mill’s “The Spirit of the Age” (1831): “The present times possess this character. A change has taken place in the human mind; a change which, being effected by insensible gradations, and without noise, had already proceeded far before it was generally perceived. When the fact disclosed itself, thousands awoke as from a dream. They knew not what processes had been going on in the minds of others, or even in their own, until the change began to invade outward objects; and it became clear that those were indeed new men, who insisted upon being governed in a new way” (n. pag.).
17. In the event, neither Colonel Keith nor Rachel educates the children during the course of the novel and the children themselves are neither paragons of military virtue nor unruly brutes. Alison Williams, sister of Ermine, becomes the Temple family governess and cheerfully quells their youthful “spirit of rebellion”: “Order was wont to come with her presence, and she hardly knew the aspect of tumultuous idleness or insubordination to unenforced authority; for her eye and voice in themselves brought cheerful discipline without constraint, and upheld by few punishments, for the strong influence took away the spirit of rebellion” (87; ch. 3). Alison Williams’s ideal (if paradoxical) “cheerful discipline without constraint” smoothes away the austerity or harshness that might otherwise might cling to the idea of obedience.
18. Herbert goes on to argue that an essential element of Mutiny “horror” is “the discovery of the strain of genocidal cruelty inhabiting humanitarian Christian virtue and linking the British inseparably to ‘those red-handed Sepoys’” (55). It is too much to claim that Yonge’s novel names British violence in India as cruel, but the trial scene shows an England capable of reproducing a scene redolent of “Indian horrors.”

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