2. The Home and the Bazaar: The Anglo-Indian Novels of Bithia Mary Croker

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In the early twentieth century, interracial marriages and mixed homes appear frequently in writing by women romancers. They explore the permutations of nineteenth-century domestic ideology abroad, and have, until fairly recently, been an unexplored resource for understanding colonial culture.\(^1\) In fact, in 1972, Benita Parry made the following comments about Anglo-Indian romancers: “while they deal in superficialities and received opinions, their fiction innocently reveals the sensations which India could evoke in impressionable British people. The themes they repeatedly use point to the way Anglo-Indians were haunted by Indian sensuality and spirituality” (Parry 70). I show how these romances make a significant contribution to literary history by challenging the conventions of the Victorian domestic novel and by making the non-European woman insistently part of ‘English’ life abroad. The traditional closure of the domestic and adventure novel\(^2\) and its elimination of racial difference are challenged by the appearance of interracial domesticity in these romances.\(^3\)

Given the predominance of the masculine genre of the ‘adventure’ novel as the representative literature of empire, it comes as something of a surprise that in the early part of the twentieth century, Anglo-Indian women writers such as Alice Perrin, Maud Diver, I. A. R. Wylie, Fanny Penny, and Bithia Mary Croker were very popular, often commanding very large audiences all over the world. This body of fiction repre-
resents Victorian experience abroad, and exposes and explores Victorian ideologies of gender, nation, and class when re-created in the colonies. Nancy Paxton offers one explanation for the proliferation of romances after 1857, arguing that “female” Romances describing interracial marriage became possible because the new “racialization of difference acted to eroticize Indian women and men in new ways, thus undermining the dominant rape script of the postmutiny period” (Paxton, “Sects” 193). The romances of Bithia Mary Croker are a particularly rich and provocative example of this genre, enacting both the fascination and the fear of hybrid domestic spaces. I explore the representation of miscegenation and interracial marriage in two of Croker’s Indian romances, *The Company’s Servant* (1908) and *In Old Madras* (1913), focusing mainly on the latter.

In most Victorian novels, the motif of the return to England has meant that miscegenation is their repressed and rejected narrative. Literary antecedents for the interracial marriage between a British man and a native woman can be found in Kipling’s early tales, Conrad’s Malay tales and *Lord Jim*, and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Beach of Falesa*. But in these works, it is depicted either in the register of the dreamlike, unreal, and exotic, or as a repressed and unspeakable transgression. One of Kipling’s early stories, “Beyond the Pale,” might stand as a literary precursor to Croker’s *In Old Madras*. The interracial love between the English hero and a young Indian widow is punished in the end by the gruesome mutilation of the woman and the banishment of her English lover from the Indian spaces in which he had become comfortable. He is wounded in his right leg and returns to his English world with that as a reminder of his transgression. The aberration is covered over and his respectability is re-established with the return to England. In Croker’s Anglo-Indian romances, on the other hand, interracial romances are represented as an unavoidable part of the terrain, and given fuller treatment.

Reading popular literature as a rich source for the social and cultural life of a period is a well-established strategy in literary and even historical studies. In colonial India, romances read in conjunction with ‘official’ sources enable us to analyze those pockets of silence in canonical texts that circumscribe a further and fuller investigation of topics such as miscegenation and interracial romance. Popular forms of writing and representation often express unacknowledged fears, anxieties, and preoccupations by associating in new and original ways different genres of writing. The potential of the popular to open up all kinds of subversive patterns of readerly identification has been the subject of much debate.
in studies of Victorian popular texts. In such discussions, reading is conceived of as an active process which can refuse or transform a text. As Liggins and Duffy write, “popular writers were constantly engaged in subverting expectations about genre while remaining within the broad confines of generic conventions, which helped to give readers more scope for interpretation” (Liggins and Duffy xix). This scholarship provides a useful point of comparison for strategies of reading colonial texts which neither conclusively break away from Victorian ideologies and narrative forms, nor simply mimic them. In my study of the Anglo-Indian romance, therefore, I have focused on unraveling the complex patterns of identification and rejection in the familiar form of the domestic novel that create the texture of its representation of natives, others, and cultural difference.

I. “Astonishingly workmanlike and readable”

Anglo-Indian romances, also called “Indian Romance” (Stieg 2) or “Anglo-Indian domestic novels” (Sainsbury 163), were produced between 1880 and 1930 and were immensely popular with British women readers in India, England, and in British colonies. An early study by Bhupal Singh recognizes the romances as a distinctive genre and classifies them by plot and theme. Within this genre, interracial romances (usually between an English man and an Indian woman) constitute another sub-genre and more often than not end with the death of the Indian woman. Maud Diver is one of the few authors whose three interracial romances, Lilamani (1909), Far to Seek: A Romance of England and India (1921), and The Dream Prevails (1938), have happy endings. At the other end of the spectrum, the theme of Pamela Wynne’s romances, which often narrate the sad fate of English women who fall prey to Indian men, is best described by their titles: East Is Always East (1930) and Ann’s an Idiot (1923). A more typical plot follows the fortunes of an English man or woman of the upper or middle class who travels to India, develops a love for the country, finds an English love-interest of the appropriate class, and returns to England to establish happy domesticity. Often, one of the protagonists falls on hard times and has to struggle to find a place in the upper-middle class society of Anglo-Indians, where he or she is finally restored to a place of honor by inheriting a fortune or a title. Sometimes, as in Alice Perrin’s The Anglo-Indians (1913), the love for India and the fantasy of a pastoral, feudal lifestyle take the happy
couple back to India. Fictional examples of liaisons between English men and Indian women, which invariably end with the death of the woman, make it apparent that such a connection between the two worlds has no narrative or social viability. In Flora Annie Steel’s *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), the young Indian mistress of the English hero fades away into a pale wraith, by her death releasing the hero to marry an English woman. Similarly, the Indian wife of a British official in Philip Meadows Taylor’s *Seeta* (1872) dies in the Revolt of 1857, thereby resolving the problem of finding credible social possibilities for her within Anglo-India. The unofficial status of interracial romance gives it a tragic, Gothic, and subterranean life in the imagination of the Anglo-Indian romancers.

Early-twentieth-century women romancers have not received the same serious critical attention as canonical figures such as Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster, who have always been studied for the seriousness and complexity of their Indian experience. Domestic dramas and romances have been treated as at best a historical curiosity and at worst “bad writing” that would never attain the status of great literature. So it is not surprising that very little is known about Croker except that she was the daughter of an Irish clergyman and married a John Croker who rose to be Lieutenant-Colonel in the Royal Munster Fusiliers posted in India. Even though she wrote fifty novels (twenty of which set in India), she receives only brief mention in dictionaries of Irish writers and *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*. The *Feminist Companion* tells us that Croker spent fourteen years in Burma and India, where in 1880 she began writing as a distraction from the hot season (248)! Croker published some of her fiction in *Cornhill Magazine* and *Belgravia*. Her first novel, *Proper Pride*, had good reviews but was thought to be by a man.

Responses to Croker’s fiction in the contemporary press ranged from enthusiastic appreciation to faintly derogatory comments about the lack of depth in her characters or worse, her bad punctuation. A satirical and irreverent obituary article in *The Bookman* in January 1921 begins with the unpromising statement that Mrs. Croker “will be missed as a woman, even more than as an author” (Pure 311). Croker, the reviewer says, had “two strings to her bow,” Ireland and India, the first acquired by birth and the second by long residence in India, but “if the patterns she worked with were largely the same,” that would not “displease her patron in the least” (Pure 311). One of her early novels, *Beyond the Pale*, is described as “astonishingly workmanlike and readable.” This shaky edifice of approval is completely destroyed, however, by the remark that Mrs. Croker used the comma to “devastate perfectly clear English”
(Pure 312). But if these reviews did not add greatly to Croker’s reputation as a novelist, other journals did take favorable notice. The Times Literary Supplement in a 1902 book review described The Cat’s Paw as having “abundance of sensation, with unwonted freshness of incident,” while In Old Madras “shows [Croker’s] usual ease and familiarity in picturing Anglo-Indian life” (44). By the end of the century, Croker had reason to feel pleased with her success as a popular author. She wrote to a friend in May 1895: “I get up to 100 pounds for barely 30,000 words now, cash down, and I have promised the back reprints of three novels; so you see I am getting on at last, and time for me, seeing that I have brought out eleven successful books in twelve years—not that any of them were boomed or made a great splash—but they secured the attention of plenty of readers in England, America, Australia, Germany, and side stations” (emphasis in original).

We can conclude that there was a large market for Croker’s fiction from the fact that many of her novels were published by Tauchnitz, one of the largest European publishing houses. Founded by Baron Tauchnitz, this house was one of the leading publishers of English language fiction in the nineteenth century. It was also well known for producing cheap editions of the work of some of the most prominent Victorian novelists such as George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and Wilkie Collins. The Tauchnitz edition of In Old Madras includes on its front and back cover advertisements for other fiction by very popular writers including H. Rider Haggard’s Child of Storm, Jack London’s South Sea Tales, and The Mating of Lydia by Mrs. Humphrey Ward. The continental publication of this edition shows that Croker’s novels had a large audience that extended beyond their obvious constituencies in England and India. Baron Tauchnitz organized a vast distribution system in Europe, where his books were sold in public places like railways stations, stores, and stalls. Tauchnitz books could also be found in the libraries of resort hotels and ships at sea, and “at such remote locales as Algiers, Luxor, Meknes, and Port Sudan, at Buenos Aires, Montvideo, Rio de Janeiro, and Santiago, and at Kobe, Peking, Smyrna, and Teheran” (Todd and Bowden 190).

The expatriate British in India, as they appear in these romances, constitute a small insular community and think of the ‘mysterious East’ and ‘native character’ in fairly stereotypical ways. Englishness is imagined as enclosed towns and houses with neat ordered gardens and cool, well-decorated interiors. In this spatial scheme, Indian spaces such as the jungle and the bazaar are disordered and threatening, although the romances also celebrate the beauty of the hills, valleys, and lush
vegetation. As Allan Greenberger points out, the depiction of India in the romances was largely confined to the frontier, rural areas, jungles or small hill-stations but especially in the novels of Kipling and Croker, “the geographic area itself is looked upon as possessing certain characteristics” (Greenberger 40). The romantic and picturesque depictions of the Indian landscape are posited on a separation of the races and are interrupted by the presence of the Eurasian characters (Greenberger 70).

Set against an exotic backdrop, Anglo-Indian fiction portrays interracial romance either as another thrilling adventure that comes to an end with the convenient death of the native woman, or as a Gothic aberration and an instance of the perils of stepping out of the boundaries of the British and the familiar. As Greenberger’s comment implies, the death of the Indian wife or mistress has been read as a reflection of contemporary social reality. But this view assumes that the imaginative reach of fiction is circumscribed by the available social horizon that it must represent, and that it was the peculiar character of Anglo-Indian fiction to represent official ideology. Such a conception of the formal and historical determinants of Anglo-Indian fiction does not account for the buried, the marginal, the forbidden social phenomena that Croker’s fiction represents. In her novels, normative English domestic values are precarious and beleaguered and the departures from official ideology are as compelling as the pleasures of bourgeois domesticity.

Popular fiction is often read as a transparent reproduction of official ideology and the popular appeal of Anglo-Indian romances did lie in the repetition of certain plots, themes, narrative patterns, stereotypes, each focused on heterosexual romance and the ‘happy ending’ that confirmed imperial power. But as I argue, this seemingly simple movement of the plot is countered by the persistent focus on interracial marriage and its pervasive presence in the romances. Anglo-Indian romances enacted a fantasy of upward mobility in their plot, and, as in other moments of history, created a readership for which a protected domestic sphere constituted the success of Empire.

The efficient management of a European home acquired great significance in the colonies, as Ann Stoler tells us, because it ensured that the men would be protected from contact with native women, and avoiding racial degeneracy would strengthen their imperial ambitions. Stoler’s larger point in her study is that the “arrival in large numbers of European women thus coincided with an embourgeoisement of colonial communities and with a significant sharpening of racial categories” (Stoler 1991 64). Furthermore, these racial distinctions were expressed in the language of class, which in turn underscored colonial authority.
Stoler also points out that in making domestic arrangements between Dutch colonials and Asian women, the Dutch recognized that at stake were critical issues such as the power that native women might exercise over Company officials and how this might affect administration. The progeny of mixed marriages had to be provided for, often through the channels of official employment. If they were to be abandoned, then personal and official duty could clash, thus leading to a disruption of the functioning of colonial rule (Stoler 1990).

The British seemed rather more squeamish than French or Dutch colonials about recognizing liaisons with native women. Given this scenario, and her status as a writer of popular fiction, the foregrounding of interracial marriage and hybrid households in Bithia Mary Croker’s *In Old Madras* is startling and deserving of critical attention. While other Anglo-Indian romance writers also venture into this terrain, Croker’s fiction dwells on transgression and miscegenation with horrified fascination. Her interest, though, is not in celebrating this hybrid domestic space, but in expressing the anxiety that English women’s social options shrink alarmingly when India as a marriage market disappoints their expectations. Many of the women in Croker’s novels, destitute and without alternative social options, represent the large population of educated, middle-class, socially superfluous single women in England who left for foreign parts to seek their fortune. India thus becomes both a place of exotic fantasy where domestic ambition and romantic aspiration are realized, but also a place where Eurasian and Indian women can usurp the place of the domestic angel in the English home.

The popularity of Croker’s romances compels us to question the nature of readerly pleasure in the text. Romances that focus on miscegenation complicate our notion of simple escape, which is now figured as the vicarious transgression of racial boundaries. Did these romances work to consolidate middle-class ideologies that created good wives at home, or did they offer a secret frisson of delight in what lay outside the home? How are English weddings that signal the formal closures of the romance offset by the forbidden pleasures of miscegenation? I will return to these questions to determine the significance of Anglo-Indian romances in the literature of empire.

**II. In Old Madras**

*In Old Madras* is set up as a pseudo-suspense novel with an unresolved mystery providing the motive for the action. The young English hero
Geoffrey Mallendar comes to India in search of his uncle, Captain Mallendar, who has been missing for many years and has been given up for dead. Geoffrey’s suspicions are aroused by the fact that someone draws on his uncle’s bank account regularly, and against the injunctions of his uncle’s business partners and the advice of friends and family, he decides to investigate this mystery. He is duly introduced into Anglo-Indian society and meets a diverse cast of characters: the married Tallboys happily ensconced in upper-class domesticity; the miserable single women Barbie Miller and Ada Sims, seeking husbands or patrons; the ruthless and extravagant widow Lena Villars, also seeking a husband; the malicious gossip Mrs. Fiske; and the friendly, unpretentious cousin Nancy Brander. Geoffrey falls in love with Barbie Miller and after many adventures that take him to the margins of Anglo-Indian society, earns the title to his father’s estate, marries Barbie, and returns triumphant to England. The climactic episode is the discovery of his uncle, the missing Captain Mallendar. Unlike most other romances in this genre, In Old Madras does not dwell on the central love plot between Geoffrey and Barbie, which is given fairly perfunctory treatment. Croker’s imaginative energies are spent in taking Geoffrey and the reader through a tour of the peripheries of Anglo-Indian society, into interracial homes and mixed domestic spaces, and finally to the confrontation with Geoffrey’s uncle. It is only then that the sentimental plot concludes with the wedding of Barbie and Geoffrey. Croker’s preoccupation with interracial relationships in this romance makes the English domesticity of the Tallboys a normative referent, not the center of the action.

We are introduced to this English ideal of domesticity early in the novel in the person of Fanny Tallboys, the perfect hostess, homemaker, and therefore perfect wife of Fred Tallboys, Geoffrey Mallendar’s cousin. Her parties are the most successful and well attended in her circle, and her house is always full of well looked-after guests. At his first dinner in her house, Mallendar and the company are:

... steered successfully into their respective places at an oval table, glittering with crystal and silver and embellished by exquisite flowers and fruit. In the background stood a row of well-drilled attendants, commanded and marshalled by the gold and white butler. ... The new-comer noted the dainty appointments and careful details, painted menus, crested Venetian glass, and three superb epargnes. ... (54)

As one of the guests says to Mallendar, “we’re quite up to date here” (54), pointing to the successful duplication of English upper-class society by Anglo-Indians. Further evidence of Mrs. Tallboys’s skill as a
hostess is provided when Mallendar learns that one of her passions is acquiring antique furniture. This is almost the first thing he notices in her living room, which characterizes her in his mind even before he meets her:

He did not fail to notice the great chunam pillars—gleaming like white marble—the polished teak floors, Eastern rugs, carefully placed screens, and profusion of delicately scented flowers; the whole atmosphere exhaled a cultivated taste, and subdued magnificence. What particularly struck the stranger was the accumulation of old furniture; objects he recognized from seeing their counterparts in great houses—or indeed in a lesser degree his own. Here were chairs, mirrors, settees, and cabinets—enclosing curiosities and old china. Mallender was no judge, but he realized that he was surrounded by many rare and valuable treasures. . . . (50)

The Tallboyses’ residence is a reminder of the British aspirations to an aristocratic lifestyle that India permitted without the privilege of noble birth. Fanny Tallboys does not come from a titled family, though Fred Tallboys certainly belongs to the landed gentry. The political dominance of the British, the comforts provided by a high-paying official position, and servants in the household allowed the upper echelons of the bureaucracy to not only imitate, but recreate on an even grander scale, the lifestyle of titled and landed gentry in England. Describing Hoopers Gardens, the Tallboys’ residence in Madras, Byng explains to Geoffrey that the great houses here are “not like our Grosvenor Gardens or Chesterfield Gardens, at home; these houses—sort of nabob’s palaces—built by merchants in the Fort, were where they took refuge during the long-shore winds . . . ” (31). The extravagance of the Tallboys’ lifestyle is tempered by the fact that they generously share their home with others and that Mrs. Tallboys is active in charitable work—the mark of Victorian upper- and middle-class women.

The markers of the Tallboyses’ aristocratic status such as “rare and valuable treasures” can be easily acquired in India without necessarily inheriting them through the family. This is made evident in Fanny Tallboys’s description of the process by which she acquired her furniture “in the thieving bazaar, or at Franck’s auction rooms in Mount Road” (52):

That lovely Empire Couch he [Fred] rescued from being chopped up for firewood—the poor thing had only two legs. The Chippendale chairs he routed out of a mouldy old bungalow on the top of Palaveram Hill.
discovered that charming satinwood table, in a dirzee’s shop of Black-town; some of the furniture has made journeys all over the Presidency on bullock-carts when regiments were on the move, and has been battered and cracked and auctioned, over and over again, for nearly two centuries!

. . . some invaluable treasures have gone to boil cooltie, or gram, but many fine seasoned travelers still survive. My collection is my craze, my chief weakness, and my tongue once started cannot stop; every bit has its own history. Those Sevres vases I bought from a Toda in the Hills; that ugly gilt jar in the same cabinet, I purchased as an act of charity from a beggar, a poor Eurasian woman, and gave her twenty rupees—believing it was brass. Long afterwards it turned out to be solid gold—a bit of loot from Seringapatam. (52)

Fanny’s list of salvaged furniture shows how the features of an Anglo-Indian home have meaning only when they are assembled and arranged according to the conventions of a bourgeois home. Wrenched from that context, unappreciated, and gathering dust in the shops and houses of Indians, they signify nothing except the failure of cultural transposition and a history of plunder. Significantly, the vase that the Eurasian woman sells is part of the plunder from Seringapatam, sacked by the British in 1799. As relics of a bygone era, they do not impinge on the lives of the natives, which go on regardless of the detritus of past historical moments. When Fanny Tallboys refers to every piece having its own history, she means the history it has acquired when collected by Fanny. The Eurasian woman, dislocated and unmoored from a stable social context as a consequence of mixed blood, does not even know whether she is selling gold or brass. These objects, native and European alike, acquire semiotic significance only when they are arranged in Fanny Tallboys’s living room. They also evoke the time of individual adventurers and profiteers who came to India often in the service of the East India Company, but also as agents of traders or with independent commissions in the army in the second half of the eighteenth century. This was the period that created the nabob whose wealth acquired mythic status in England and India.

*In Old Madras* provides several studies in dramatic contrasts. If the happy and luxurious life of the Tallboyces is one end of the spectrum, Croker does not mince her words when representing the extreme economic destitution of lower-middle-class women at the other end who appear on the margins of the social world of *In Old Madras*. The dream of happy matrimony against an exotic backdrop fails more often than
it succeeds and exposes the underside of the fantasy of India as a marriage market for Englishwomen. For many of the women, India fails to fulfill the dream of happy matrimony and upward social mobility against an exotic backdrop. Ada Sim is a grim reminder of the lack of social options for such women in the late nineteenth century. She is introduced to Mallendar at a grand dinner at his cousin Major Tallboys’s house as “a dreadful sponge and not very interesting” (57) by the dazzling Mrs. Villars, a rich widow searching for a second husband. Ada’s friend Barbie Miller, who eventually becomes the hero’s love interest, is also placed in a similar position and is threatened with the prospect of marrying a wealthy bachelor almost twice her age. As the two women exchange confidences, Ada Sim reveals that she has exhausted all her resources and the goodwill of her friends. She cannot pay for her passage back to England, and has been reduced to selling her clothes. Even the possibility of ending it all is denied the wretched Ada as she says with a touch of black humor: “I’d drown myself, only there is no place to do it in—the Cooum is filthy, and off the pier there are sharks” (73). In the depth of her self-hating despair, she points out to Barbie why she cannot find a niche in Anglo-Indian society: “Friends, I have none, those I had are sick of me, and no wonder. I’m not pretty, or amusing, or accomplished, I don’t play bridge for money, I’m not even good-tempered. Just a plain, stupid bore” (73).

Ada is the anti-heroine who is unable to participate in the endless rounds of dinners, bridge playing, singing, dancing, and flirting that characterize Anglo-Indian society. From the account that she gives of her life in England, we learn that she was an orphan who lived with her aunt as maid and governess to her two children. To escape the drudgery of her life, she “devoured every book relating to the East” that she could find. Her sister’s letters from India make it a place of escape, adventure, and romance. Once in India, Ada finds the reality quite different from the romance. Relying on her ability to sing, tell fortunes, and trim hats, Ada enjoys her first few months in India, being “reckless, and happy, and greedy of amusement” (119). As she goes from one friend’s house to the next, she finds herself less and less welcome and slowly turns into an unwanted guest. Her aunt, who thinks Ada had been reckless and unwise, “wild-goosing to India” (118), refuses to help her out of her dire financial distress.

The story of Ada Sim shows that the Anglo-Indian social world, which mostly works as a marriage market, enforces quite rigorously a certain economy of desire. Ada comes to a sad pass because she travels to India, not primarily with the aim of finding a husband, and there-
by establishing stable domesticity, but to have “a ripping time” (118). Added to this situation is the prejudice of Anglo-Indian society which has no place for a single working woman without the privilege of wealth and class. Ada’s ability to provide for herself and the fact that she does not seem to be actively soliciting a husband, makes her social position indeterminate.

This policing of women’s desires takes a similar form in Croker’s treatment of the harsh, uncharitable, but glamorous Mrs. Villars. The author’s unsparing scrutiny of Mrs. Villars makes it quite clear that she is as much of a sponge, to use her own words, as Ada Sim. Unlike Ada, she is looking for a husband who will provide her with the extravagant lifestyle to which she is accustomed. In the moral economy of the novel, Lena Villars comes off worse than anybody else. In trying to be a siren to Mallendar, she is only following instructions from Fanny, who has been asked by her husband to distract Mallendar from his crazy quest for his uncle. But when she decides to woo him with the intention of marrying him, the narrative voice exults over her failure to trap the hero. The harsh judgment of the narrative voice is turned on her only when she begins to play in earnest the part that she is expected to play only in jest. Lena Villars is judged for sins of economic profligacy and moral irresponsibility, both of which are threatening to the Anglo-Indian domestic sphere.

The wish-fulfilling function of the Anglo-Indian romance pushes the plot to a happy conclusion for its economically dispossessed women. But this is only achieved through the intercession of patriarchal figures. Fanny Tallboys finds Major Tallboys, while Ada Sim is rescued by a friend of her uncle who intercedes with him on her behalf. The uncle, ending a long-standing estrangement, turns into her benefactor and gives her a place in his home. Barbie is ‘rescued’ from marrying a much older man by Mallendar, the heir to the Mallendar estate. The formal movement of the romance reestablishes domestic harmony and benevolent kinship relations and India remains a wish-fulfilling land, a place where destitute Englishwomen are rescued and securely placed in the English household.

If a happy ending were all that In Old Madras concerned itself with, it would not distinguish itself in the huge corpus of Anglo-Indian romances. But the romance takes us on a journey away from Anglo-India towards racially mixed domestic spaces and the secret, obscure, or entirely absent social lives of Englishmen who are detached or estranged from the hub of Anglo-India. Their miscegenated relationships are expressed in a vision of Gothic disorder inside the house. If
the romance has earlier been haunted by the possibility of racial contamination, it now boldly goes forth into these racially mixed areas. Furthermore, the rescue motif works now in relation to Englishmen who are saved and provided nurture by women of Indian or Eurasian origin or of the lower class.

In their instructions for household management, Maud Diver and Flora Annie Steel describe the English household as similar to the ‘Indian Empire’ in its organization and management. There is no opposition between the nature and character of the household and the empire, but in fact they exist in the same continuum. Croker’s fiction also establishes the importance of the English household to an articulation of English values, but in an important difference from Diver, Steel, and Gardiner, in her fiction the Indian spaces outside the household are not brought under the purview of British governance. The jungle and the bazaar, in particular, are represented as ‘Indian’ spaces which fill the Anglo-Indian viewer with fear and bewilderment. The protective and nurturing influence of the English household is thus countered by the risk to British men from the India that cannot be understood in the terms of Anglo-India. Croker’s fictional and ideological terrain is thus mapped onto a geography of spaces. The most extreme form of racial and cultural panic occurs when Indian values and sociality invade the English household in the form of Indian wives and mixed children, thereby transforming the domestic space as well.

Croker’s fiction invokes the genre of Gothic fiction in its focus on dramatic eruptions, threatening exotic spaces, taboo themes such as miscegenation, and disordered interiors of homes. It shares with other examples of the genre a bourgeois fear of the cultural other. In an important study of the Gothic, Kate Ellis defines it as “a set of conventions to represent what is not supposed to exist” (7). These conventions are expressed as an intrusion of the spectral or the monstrous into the domestic and sentimental family plot, which is usually eliminated at the end. In the romances, the Gothic makes visible that which realistic or sentimental fiction would repress or erase; for example, miscegenation, a subject actively resisted by the Victorian novel.

In Croker’s fiction, the Gothic originates not only in easily available stereotypes of the racial other, but also in the Englishwoman’s anxiety about the usurpation of the English domestic space by Indian women. The language of domestic realism mixes with the monstrous forms of hybrid households to produce a new kind of racial Gothic. Yet, as I show, in Croker’s fiction, while the miscegenated households are rejected on the one hand, they are also domesticated and become places of
nurture and sociability.¹³ They do not disappear at the conclusion of the narrative, and even though the narrative effect Croker wants to achieve is horror at the hybrid households of interracial families, this horror is tempered by the survival of these households in defiance of Anglo-Indian norms. Despite the narrative return to England, and Croker’s anxiety about maintaining an English household, her fiction dwells on miscegenated households with a desiring glance that contradicts narrative outcome. Not only are the Indian and/or lower-class women granted representational space in Croker’s romances, they are often the primary caretakers of the English men they marry. Often, a trace of the Indian experience travels back to England, as in the case of the Indian-born golden-haired girls who return to England in triumph with their English foster parents. This return to England suggests the overriding importance of the production and articulation of class in gendered terms in the construction of imperial culture, a subject to which I shall return in my discussion of miscegenated domesticity.

When the young Mallendar goes in search of his uncle, he is provided with many false clues that lead him to other British men who live with Indian or lower class wives and have produced “half-caste” children, and who, as a consequence, are hiding from Anglo-India in the obscure life of some small town. The first of these false leads takes Mallendar to the home of Major Rochfort, who has a wife in England and a second family with a half-Indian wife on a plantation in India. The Major’s second wife has passed away and his household now includes their three children, a daughter “who looks quite Europe” and two sons who, though the image of their father, are “two copies in black” (164). The fair color and golden hair of the girl, Mota, who is beautiful, whimsical and sometimes wayward, extracts tribute from siblings and friends alike, expressing her sense of her racial and cultural superiority.

The climax of this episode comes when the Major’s first wife visits India and discovers his second family. She finds that his second wife, though only half-European, is a beautiful and graceful woman who has kept a lovely home. This fact gives her the narrator’s approval, and unlike other greedy, grasping “Delilah” figures who try to lure British officers into matrimony, she is portrayed as having had a positive effect on the Major’s life. Even Mallendar, who has seen the Major’s English and Indian homes, recognizes this:

Then, he had sat at a table loaded with wonderful old silver and hot-house flowers, and was waited on by powdered footmen, in the company of Rochfort’s prim English wife, and her titled county neighbours.
Now, he was eating curried vegetables, under a slowly moving punkah, attended by black servants, and surrounded by a Madras family—which included a golden-haired imperious hostess, aged nine years. (184)

As Major Rochfort’s first wife takes in the details of the Madras home, she perceives an implied criticism of her domestic life in England. She notices “the homely comfort, the good plain food . . . the bright young people, and their complete absence of self-consciousness” (184). Impressed with this picture of the happy family in a well-appointed home, and the charming Mota, Mrs. Rochfort decides to adopt Mota, make peace with her husband, and return to England. India provides yet another happy resolution as the Major’s empty domestic life in England is enriched by love and affection for the young girl. The golden-haired child redeems the racially mixed households by offering the possibility of assimilation back into British culture. Mota can travel to England and become part of British family because she can pass as white. In its ‘happy’ dénouements, the romance tries to erase traces of the Indian experience and return to pristine English domesticity. The young English girl is a visible symbol of this possibility, though it is significant that she has Indian blood and was raised in India.

A slightly older version of Mota appears in the next episode in the household of General Beamish, a retired army officer who is found in the small town of Wellunga by Mallendar as he continues the search for his uncle. This time, she is called Tara, an adopted child of the General and his wife and described as belonging to “a totally different type and race, evidently a ‘throw-back’ to some of the General’s ancestors” (215). Clearly she does not belong to Mrs. Beamish, who is introduced to Mallendar by the General as “my third wife, country born, country bred, no country blood though—just an apothecary’s daughter, and a trained nurse; but I did not marry her for that” (211). Although Mrs. Beamish is probably white, she is clearly of a lower class than the General. Croker’s representation of her and her children is startlingly similar to her depiction of Eurasian characters—the language of class and race work interchangeably in this fictional universe.

This is transparently evident in Croker’s idiom of domestic interiors which mark racial and class difference through their difference from an ideal of pure English culture. General Beamish’s house is described as a “mixture” in much the same way as the inhabitants:

In fact, the appointments and surroundings were a curious and remarkable mixture; here were rat-tailed spoons, Charles the First Sugar bowls,
superb candelabra, holding cheap candles (twelve to the pound), a coarse mission tablecloth, and bazaar crockery. The aristocratic sideboard, and a bookcase were undoubtedly of the days of Count Lally, and seemed to shrivel up, and hold themselves aloof from the coarse “maistrey” furniture and jail carpets—their associates. (215)

The mismatched interiors reflect a crossing of class boundaries and a falling off from the glamour and harmony of Anglo-India. The company is also “strangely assorted” (215)—Mrs. Beamish and her children Jessie and Tom are described as “a kindly commonplace trio, of the lower middle class,” while the two daughters of a family friend look only half-European. The racial features of General Beamish’s children by a woman of the lower classes are juxtaposed with the “maistry” furniture (furniture made by a local Indian carpenter) and the mismatched china. The interior of the home also acquires the marks of race and class as a reflection of those who constitute the household. It would be difficult to ignore Croker’s racial and racist depiction of the binaries of English and other, but the much-maligned household is a home nevertheless, not a fantastic space that threatens to dissolve with narrative closure as in the case of so many adventure novels. Croker interrupts the progress of exotic adventure and romance with mundane and detailed descriptions of the household. The superb candelabra hold candles that cost twelve to the pound, indicating the contribution of Mrs. Beamish to the household in contrast to the upper-class origins of the General. Significantly, Mrs. Beamish was a trained nurse, and although the General self-consciously claims that he did not marry her for that, she is clearly the manager and caretaker of the home.

Croker’s revulsion from the mixed household at first suggests both her racist and class-centered view of cultural hybridity, and in fact, one is constitutive of the other. Yet her ambivalence towards an aristocratic extravagance and towards the high European culture, marked by French-influenced cuisine, and the latest gowns and dresses that arrive from the continent, are also evident everywhere. Croker’s middle-class gaze satirically cuts down the snobbish and malicious Mrs. Fiske, who would never associate with natives or with people whose wealth and social standing were not apparent. The middle-class virtues of economy and good home management are much valued in this Anglo-Indian world. As Mallendar’s lively, affectionate cousin, Mrs. Nancy Brander points out, “it is a good thing to encourage your cook, put him on his mettle and, so to speak, lard him with flattery” (62). The European treasures in the great house are admired to the detriment of native craftsmen,
who can clearly only produce poor imitations of European furniture or European dresses. But while Croker sneers at Mrs. Beamish’s “maistry” (carpenter) furniture, she also castigates extravagance that amounts to pretension. At Fanny Tallboys’s party, Lena Villers, the high priestess of fashion, compliments Nancy Brander on the “French effect” (68) of her dress and is shocked to discover that it was made by a dirzee [an Indian tailor]. Nancy retorts that she cut it with her own hands, “and my man is an artist” (69) defending her dirzee and her economical use of money and resources. The sympathetic representation of the sensible Mrs. Brander is a foil for the extravagant and self-indulgent Lena, who is punished for her profligacy when she is forced to dupe an older man to marry her and clear her of her debts.

Similarly, Mrs. Beamish, if not quite up to the upper-class lifestyle of the Tallboyses, and “country-born” and “country-bred,” is nevertheless given the respect due to a nurse and pharmacist. Mallendar is astonished to find a large crowd outside the Beamish residence one day, “a multitude of the blind, halt, and lame, all waiting to be treated by the kind hands of Mrs. Beamish” (241). And as Mrs. Beamish, justifiably proud of her clientele says, “Look at my clients—has any doctor in Harley Street such a practice” (242)! [sic].

If the cultural intermixing within households evokes an ambivalent response in Croker, the Indian bazaar seems an even more confused, disordered, unenclosed space that resists British classification. It is a place where people jostle and crowd together in a close interaction with “the low-Other . . . hybrid, heterogeneous, and ambiguous . . . Bourgeois society construes as contamination the mixing of classes and other social and cultural categories that is essential to the marketplace or fair.”

Croker’s Indian bazaar is represented as a place of congenial, if bewildering, abundance:

In the first place, although it was teeming with human life, there was not a single European to be seen, nor even a Eurasian—all were natives of the country. Truly here was “India for the Indians!” The stalls displayed no Western requirements, but grains, condiments, strange sweets, coloured cottons, and muslins, piles of silk of local manufacture in vermilion, orange, indigo, pink and green; also turbans, and tinselled caps of all colours. Here were working jewellers with their little braziers; huka makers, weavers of spells, and public letter-writers. The long narrow streets reeked with the intangible but familiar bazaar odour (a mixture of oil, grain, aromatic spices, and raw cotton). Crowds were chafing, gossiping, or strolling along. Here and there, a tall bold-
looking woman covered with jewellery, and painted with kohl, passed with defiant glare; gaily caparisoned horses with jewelled girths, and head-bands—their manes and tails dyed rose colour—were led snorting by disturbing the little sacred bulls, who were poking wet black noses into the open gram baskets. (245)

India for the Indians is represented by an open-air market where, among the profusion of gorgeously colored objects, we also see a bold-looking bazaar woman. She signals the bewilderment caused to the Anglo-Indian imagination when a woman cannot be placed or understood in terms of the domestic sphere. It is from contact with the bazaar and the bazaar women that Englishmen and English values have to be protected. But even here, the liveliness, color, and smells of the bazaar are portrayed lovingly by Croker. As we see later, the bazaar odors come to define a non-English space in the novel—a smell that is revolting, but also a curious lure to the Anglo-Indian imagination. It is a smell that marks a culture, a way of living and being completely closed off from the British inhabitants of Wellunga. The public letter-writer is also a peculiar institution of the Indian bazaar, his presence a reminder of the unequal distribution of literacy in the culture. In Kipling’s *Kim*, the letter-writer is an important instrument of communication for Kim’s wild plans and schemes. Even his tools signal the difference between the two cultures. When Geoffrey shows Fred Tallboys the old letter from his uncle, Fred recognizes at once the “bazaar paper and bazaar ink” (23) which leads him to conclude that the elder Captain Mallendar had surely “gone native.”

It is in this context that the golden-haired Tara is presented as distinctly different from the rest of the General’s family in terms that invoke the Victorian hierarchy of racial and cultural types:

She carried her slight figure with grace, her small stag-like head was set on a long neck, her little proud face was illuminated by a pair of dark granite-gray eyes; she has beautiful taper hands—whilst those of Jessie looked as if her fingers had been cut off at the second joint. (215–16)

Tara’s siblings worship her and are placed in a distinctly subordinate position to her because she shows her upper-class English pedigree in her looks and manner. Croker dramatizes the threat to English values in an incident in which Tara’s life is threatened by a gigantic man-eating horse which charges at her as she rides through the Indian bazaar. The dangerous Kathiawari horse suddenly decides to attack Tara’s horse:
In a second, the Kathiawari was chasing him open-moutheed, and Tara, frantically lashing her Arab, turned to fly; but Rustum was tired, the pursuer fresh, and full of pride and gram. Scre aming, and open- mouthed, he drove his prey right to the brink of a deep nullah. Here he intended to overtake and destroy him—for the Kathiawari came of old native stock, who were bred and trained to kill, in the hideous horse-fights so popular with the Rajahs of a bygone time. (253)

This horse evokes the danger and fear associated with the India that lies outside British rule. In a sheer act of perversity, the horse has been “trained to kill” and belongs to a primitive, “bygone” time before the civilizing influence of British rule. Yet Tara represents not middle-class English culture, but in fact, nobility. Her upper-class origins place her above the romantic plot as she signifies British values that are to be honored and protected by the Englishmen who come to India. So Mallendar steps in to save Tara from the Kathiawari horse, injuring himself in the process and earning the status of a hero in the British community.

Before turning to the final episode, I would like to trace the development of the idea of an Englishman “going native” in Croker’s fiction through a study of one of her earlier novels, The Company’s Servant (1908), which gives us another version of the spatial mapping of English and ‘other’ values. The figure of the degenerate Englishman appears here in the person of Gojar, whose life demonstrates the negative seductions of India. Croker’s ambivalence towards the concept of ‘going native’ is expressed in a range of attitudes from vague uneasiness to a more precise description that is a satiric counterpoint to the pristine confines of Anglo-India. She inherits a Conradian plot of the slow degeneration of the Englishman in the face of the overwhelming influence of the climate, moral atmosphere, and values of the colonies. Heart of Darkness is the best-known exemplar of this plot. In her Indian romances, Croker develops this into a more precise description of the consequences of “going native,” investing it with gothic horror but not mystic or spiritual degradation, and adding to it either a playful or a sober picture of interracial domesticity. While in the canonical Victorian novel, we never see the culmination of an interracial love plot, Croker imagines the mundane consequences of just such a possibility.

Gojar appears in The Company’s Servant in Indian garb and takes on an Indian name. He lives with an Indian woman and is addicted to marijuana. Narrating to Vernon, the English hero of the novel, his memories of travels in India while “drifting . . . like a derelict for twenty long years,” he describes “not merely its cities, tombs, temples, that
the globe-trotter flashes through, nor the trim military cantonments and hill-stations—[but] I know India under the skin—I have learnt the patience, the repose, the stubborn intractability of the East” (163). Gojar goes into gruesome detail as he describes the sacrifice of buffaloes at a festival, which he observed while he was disguised as a native. He then invokes a familiar Victorian image of horrific heathen practices, in this instance of human sacrifice:

I myself, have seen the dead body of handsome youth, who had been sacrificed to Kali: bled at the wrists and ankles, and disembowelled after the fashion of the ancient augurs; but such a case as that is extremely rare. After human beings, horses were offered, then cattle, as in the Old Testament, and sheep and goats. Now in most instances the sacrifices have dwindled to a fowl, sweetmeats, and flowers; yet at times of great scarcity, or impending famine, the ancient methods are resumed. (164)

Gojar taps one of the most persistent myths about Eastern religions as a way to mark the extent of his departure from a British norm. The idea of human sacrifice, second only to cannibalism as a cultural myth, establishes the anthropological conception of India most favored by the Anglo-Indians. Gojar’s claim that he has encountered, explored, and finally known the unfamiliar marks him as an outcast from his original social group. Croker uses the language of physiognomical transformation, if not the vocabulary of moral shock to convey the consequences of such forbidden knowledge. The transformations wrought by an Indian experience mark the body of the Englishman as surely as they change his character. In a dramatic encounter early in the novel, Vernon saves Gojar from drowning, discovering in the process that Gojar, who appears in every way to be a native, is, in fact, an Englishman. When Vernon visits Gojar’s house, he is unable to distinguish Gojar’s features from that of a native Indian in the dim light of a lantern: “The thin, finely-cut nose, the haughty piercing eyes, the long, thick beard, surely were those of a Mahomedan from the far North? All classes and races of people drifted up and down, and in and out of a great junction like Tani-Kul.” Until Gojar reveals his true identity, Vernon believes he is an Indian. In keeping with its assumptions about the relation between character and land, the novel perpetuates the notion that a certain “native” existence produces its effects on the physiognomy of the Englishman. As Gojar narrates his story, he was once “an officer and a gentleman” (161), but became eventually “the spectacle which people hint at, or discuss with bated breath: an English gentleman who has lost caste, creed, place and
name, who has been swept into the Bazaars—and gone under” (171). Gojar looks old and gaunt and is chronically addicted to marijuana when Vernon discovers him.

As a mockingly inverse portrait of an English marriage, Gojar describes his life with Rajee. This Indian woman who keeps house for him is, like him, a social pariah: “Rajee or Mary Ann . . . a withered old hag, half Christian, half heathen” (161). As Gojar gleefully reveals to Vernon, Rajee “has been to London and loves beer; she even drops her h’s and we speak the language when we are alone” (161). In marked contrast to Anglo-India, this unconventional domestic arrangement is formed by two people who have crossed cultural, racial, and class boundaries: Gojar passes for a native, while Rajee can pretend to be English working class. Gojar’s Indian experiences suggest that the knowledge he gained through contact with sage and charlatan alike took its toll on his restraint and infected him with an addiction to marijuana and a preference for life in the Indian bazaar. Gojar refers to himself as a Satanic figure endowed with forbidden knowledge and lost to the civilized world forever. Croker never makes it clear why Gojar, a brilliant graduate of a British academy, comes to be in this dissipated state, but the reader is given to understand that he was lured by a realm of experience strictly prohibited for the Englishman. However, in the relish with which he presents himself and narrates his experiences we can see Croker advancing to an idea of the pleasures of “going native.”

In Old Madras from the very outset invokes the fear that the story of the missing Captain Mallendar must have something to do with a liaison with an Indian woman. When he hears that Mallendar intends to go in search of his uncle, Mr Fleming rattles off a list of possible reasons for his disappearance. These encapsulate the lure of the East as present to the English imagination:

Oriental life has an irresistible fascination for some natures; the glamour, the relief from convention, and the tyranny of the starched collar, the lure of attractive and voluptuous women, idleness, ease, luxury, drugs! I could tell you of an officer who went crazy about a beautiful Kashmeri, and actually abandoned his regiment and his nationality, in order to live as a native! Twice, his friends came from England to fetch him home, and each time he escaped—even at the eleventh hour in Bombay plunged into the bazaar, hid his identity, and was lost, in every sense! (12)

Croker yokes “luxury” to the lure of Indian women in a way analo-
gous to an addiction to drugs and a forgetfulness of nation and duty. These images of degeneracy associated with a life outside Anglo-Indian society are repeated in a similar sequence in all of Croker’s Indian novels. As I discussed earlier, in the Victorian perception, the bazaar is an open promiscuous place that allows the free mingling of races and classes, quite unlike the order, hierarchy, and discipline of an English home. The Indian woman who lures the Englishman away from duty is also associated with the bazaar. As it happens, Captain Mallendar does fall prey to the seductions of India, but in a fairer guise than the bazaar would allow: he falls in love with an Indian princess. However, this transgression does not go unpunished. The fearful maiming that lies at the heart of the novel forms part of a cautionary tale about the perils of departing from English values enshrined in English domesticity.

The Indian woman seems even more central in the domestic life of Captain Mallendar, the missing uncle of Geoffrey Mallendar, than in all the other episodes of the romance. The startling core of the story of Mallendar’s uncle captures both Croker’s ambivalence towards India and the subversive possibilities of her fiction. Mallendar finds his uncle, disguised as an Indian prince, living with his Indian wife, Alida. Unlike the other Indian women in the story, Alida is not a bazaar woman but a Coorgi princess named ‘Puvaka,’ who is renamed Alida after she marries Captain Mallendar. She is sixteen when the Captain meets and falls in love with her and finding that his feelings are returned, decides to elope with her to escape the wrath of her family. But Alida’s family hear of the plan; ambush the couple; and cut off Captain Mallendar’s nose, ears, eyelids, and upper lip. Alida saves his life and nurses him back to health, becoming “his good angel, a miracle of patience and forbearance” (303). Since then, the older Mallendar has been living a life in obscurity completely away from the hub of Anglo-India.

At the climax of the novel, when, at his request, Mallendar’s uncle finally unmaskes himself before him, we witness the horrible price of interracial love:

What he beheld was a grey old man, wearing a black skull cap; his withered cheeks were deeply sunken, his scanty beard was white, and oh, the awful noseless face, the bare grinning teeth, the lidless eyeballs,—expressing mute agonised interrogation, and years of hopeless anguish. (305)

As punishment for his breach of social taboos, Captain Mallendar is condemned to hide from society. But he has a comfortable life which is a
syncretic combination of British and Indian cultures. The young Mallendar notes that his house is “saturated with novel and aromatic odours” (298). The dark and dimly lit interior of the house has no furniture other than “shadowy divans along the wall, a few rugs on the floor” (298). Captain Mallendar has learned to speak Tamil and Canarese fluently. His English education accounts for his taste in books, choice of food, and his interest in riding, but as he explains to his nephew, he smokes the huka, maintains a royal estate, and has his luxuries “shooting, horses, motors, yes! rupees are a wonderful balm” (304). This version of the romance does not look back to England for its satisfactory conclusion even though for the young Mallendar the price of abandoning England and duty seems almost too great. He thinks of his uncle’s fate in all its loss and deprivation, “a young man of his own age, and profession, full of life, energy and expectation, suddenly shut out from his kindred, friends, and nation” (313).

At the heart of the novel lies the body of the mutilated or maimed Englishman, reminiscent of other such figures in English fiction who suffer for their sin of interracial love—Rochester in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Kurtz of the ‘unspeakable’ crimes in *Heart of Darkness*, frail and reduced to a voice by the time the narrator finds him. While the former finds redemption through the kind offices of an Englishwoman, the latter is condemned to lose himself in the depths of the Congo. In both cases, the formal closure of the novel is achieved by the elimination of the racial other, Bertha Mason in one case and the gorgeous African woman in the other. *Jane Eyre* affirms the romance plot of a happy ‘English’ marriage lived out in isolation from English society. The conclusion of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is clearly more ambivalent, but with the lie to the Intended, Marlow pays ritual obeisance to the idea of the noble colonizer who remains ‘uncorrupted’ by his connection to a racial other. Although the racial and cultural other is eliminated, both protagonists have to suffer the tragic consequences of their interracial transgression. Kurtz never returns to Europe, and Rochester and Jane are isolated from English society in Ferndean. Captain Mallender, on the other hand, lives in the same neighborhood as Geoffrey’s better-placed cousin Fred, attends Geoffrey’s wedding disguised as a native prince, and from the confines of his princely home commands economic and social power.

Croker’s fiction depends heavily on similar formal closures: one of the inescapable features of popular romances that is inextricably tied to reader satisfaction. The penniless Mallendar inherits his family estate, marries the pretty, economical, and good-hearted Barbie Miller, and
receives many expensive gifts. As Mrs. Nancy Brander says at the very end, “behold, now, he returns leaving crowds of Indian friends... and carries away with him a sword, a horse, a fortune, and a bride!” (326). The romance thus wends its way not only back to Anglo-India, but to England. It offers its readers the thrill of vicariously experiencing transgression, yet returning to the safe haven of the familiar. Yet I want to argue that in its attempt to represent the unspeakable, despite its final gesture of repudiation, the romance is more subversive than the canonical English novel. At a very basic level, the romance allows the representation of the native woman within the domestic space, in quotidian relationships, not madly raging in an attic or reduced to an inarticulate image of the African continent. Further, as an examination of the concluding chapters of the novel will show, Croker does not present a neat rejection of India and natives and a fading out of the exotic locale, to be replaced by domestic harmony in England. When Mallendar takes leave of Alida, he is moved by her parting comments: “We heard of you up in Coorg, my country, and in beautiful Mysore. I am your Aunt Alida” (310). Mallendar is confronted with having to acknowledge his kinship with an Indian woman, and Croker describes his pausing to consider this fact, and finally, accepting it: “Mallendar bowed his assent, then as he looked into her face, stirred by an inexplicable impulse, he stooped, and lifted her hand to his lips. Why not? She was his uncle’s wife, and she held herself like royalty” (310). This is a critical moment in the romance, when despite the blatant class ideology, Mallendar gives a name to his relationship with this Indian woman who has been the cause of his uncle’s disappearance from Anglo-India. Even though the reader is party to Geoffrey’s conclusion that despite the sweetness and good humor of Alida, the world of Anglo-India was not well worth losing for a grand passion, and his consequent emotional recoil from his uncle’s fate, Croker avoids giving us a pat rejection of India. Alida gets the final words at the parting between her and Mallendar, which establish a kinship between her, the elder Mallendar, and Geoffrey. Looking at his care-worn face and shabby clothes at the end of his adventures, she compassionately comments, “You have had a hard time, but if one leaves the beaten road—one has to pay” (311). In different degrees, they have all left the beaten road, thus establishing kinship with each other.

At Mallendar’s wedding to Barbie Miller, the vitriolic Mrs. Fiske notices his ‘strange acquaintances’ which included “two youths who were almost black” and two other “natives,” “a black-bearded man, wearing spectacles, and an immense turban, and a lady who was closely veiled” (324). Though clearly marginalized and shunned by the racist
gathering, these guests nevertheless mark the bonds that Mallendar has formed with Major Rochfort’s part-Indian family and with his uncle and aunt. The Anglo-Indian romance thus acknowledges the inescapable hybridity of Anglo-Indian life.

III. Readerly Pleasure and the Romance

Most recent studies of Victorian popular fiction emphasize the sheer numbers of novels which are unfamiliar to readers today and which have been neglected by scholarly studies. More importantly, they show the critical consequences of this neglect in our ignorance of the variety of audience response, characters, and themes with which these lesser known authors experimented. There is near unanimity among these scholars that though Victorian popular writers often seem to conform to Victorian narrative conventions, their subversive manipulations or modifications of these norms are equally, if not more significant. Feminist readings of popular fiction point out, for instance, that such fiction could “both endorse and subvert ideological norms in the representation of femininity” (Liggins and Duffy xvii). In the same way, Anglo-Indian fiction both follows and subverts Victorian conventions of representing domesticity. On the one hand it portrays interracial romance as a Gothic aberration and an instance of the perils of stepping out of the boundaries of the British and the familiar; on the other, it dwells in fascination on mixed households and mixed progeny.

We can gather from our reconstruction of the implied readership of the Anglo-Indian romances that like other domestic fiction, these must also have been a powerful method of socialization. As Nancy Armstrong has argued, one of the frames of reference for the domestic novel was conduct books for women, which meant that the novel both produced and represented domestic ideologies (Armstrong 63). Alison Sainsbury describes the novels as seeking to “enfranchise middle-class English women, making them partners—even central agents—in the enterprise of empire” thereby connecting rather than separating public and private spheres (Sainsbury 181). In Croker’s *In Old Madras*, however, the perfunctory nature of the conclusion of the marriage and domestic plot complicates the linear progression of desire and readerly pleasure. It coexists in an uneasy relation to the thrill of vicariously going beyond the racial, geographical boundaries of Anglo-India, even if such an experience is only allowed to the Englishman. In this way, Croker’s
In *Old Madras* works both as domestic fiction that participates in the socialization of its readers *and* a fantasy that explores the forbidden realm of interracial love. The Englishman who goes native is punished severely for his transgression, thereby ensuring that the romance has a ‘conventional’ ending in rejecting miscegenation. However, Croker’s readers are placed in the unusual position of condoling yet condoning the grisly punishment of the racially transgressive Englishman. They are also forced to acknowledge that the homely and domestic atmosphere of the other mixed homes outside the social boundaries of Anglo-India are nevertheless intimately connected to it. In its inclusion of Anglo-Indian life, its critique of upper-class British life associated with England and its praise of homeliness even in a mixed home, Croker’s romance breaches the boundaries of the unspeakable and complicates the satisfactions of romance.